

Norbu's *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*: Neo-Victorian Occupations of the Past

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Abstract:

Focusing on the Tibetan novelist Jamyang Norbu's intertextual appropriation of key Victorian texts such as Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories (1887-1927) and Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), this article explores the ways that binary formations of identity are decentered in the neo-Victorian novel *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* (1999). Via an overt critique of imperial occupation, I argue, Norbu posits an alternative mode of postcolonial 'occupation' as political process.

Keywords: detective fiction, Arthur Conan Doyle, imperialism, intertextuality, Rudyard Kipling, neo-Victorian, Jamyang Norbu, postcolonialism, Tibet.

Over the last decades, scholars have identified the rise of Victorian detective fiction as an imaginative effort to contain and organise the space of empire. One function of the detective is to articulate and valorise the symbolic boundaries of national space (Jann 1995; Reitz 2004). For Carolyn Reitz, "the detective narrative helped change public perception of domestic criminal justice and imperial expansion by producing a figure for the exercise of such power with whom English readers could identify" (Reitz 2004: xiv). Frequently, such studies focus at least in part on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes as a figure who secures and stabilises the disparate spaces of home and empire by affirming what Edward Said characterises as "the panoptical vision of domination – the demand for identity, stasis" (Said 1979: 381). If Holmes offered an imaginative means of soothing late-Victorian anxieties about the permeable relationship between England and its colonies, however, he may also be read as an unsettling presence, who makes visible the fragile distinctions between self and other. Holmes is an outsider who flouts the law when it serves his purpose, rejects conventional notions of profession and domesticity, and whose personal tastes align him with the subversive energies of decadence. Indeed, if Holmes works to secure the imaginative boundaries between empire and colony, he ultimately also disturbs the same, functioning as a

figure who conjoins normative and transgressive impulses, and in doing so upsets the binary logic that underpins the British imperial project.

The attractions of Holmes as a complex, divided and emblematic figure of late-Victorian Britain have not been lost on neo-Victorian novelists, short story-writers, filmmakers, and graphic novelists. Though often the subject of appreciations that reproduce the *fin de siècle* milieu of Doyle's original text – most notably in film and television productions of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* starring Basil Rathbone (1939) and Jeremy Brett (1984) – Holmes has also inspired significant creative engagements with Victorian notions of identity.¹ The imaginative adaptation of the Holmes canon spans diverse genres (including science fiction and the graphic novel) and national contexts (including Greek, Hebrew, and Finnish to name only a few). Amongst these, authors explore divergent aspects of the detective's identity related to family history, personal history, and sexual orientation. Of particular note, however, are works that probe the relationship between Sherlock Holmes and the empire whose dominance he both protects and unsettles. Thus, for example, Fred Saberhagen's *The Holmes-Dracula File* (1978), traces attempts by the book's central characters to protect England from a plot to spread a plague through London during Victoria's 1897 jubilee. In working out a narrative in which an attempt to infect the nation with a colonial disease from within is foiled by these borrowed *fin de siècle* characters, Saberhagen establishes a family relationship between Holmes (England) and Dracula (foreign threat) that challenges the logic of self and other. This exploration of Holmes as a figure of empire explores the nuanced, overlapping, and often conflicted, relationship between imperial centre and colonial periphery.

In linking these specific characters via the gothic, Saberhagen anticipates a central crux of current adaptation theory, which is identified by both Thomas Leitch and Christine Geraghty as invoking an "undead" or "ghostly" presence that, for Geraghty produces "a shadowing or doubling of what is on the surface by what is glimpsed behind" (Geraghty 2007: 195). Though both Leitch and Geraghty focus on adaptation from literature to film, their insights apply equally well to neo-Victorian adaptation as a creative engagement that registers overlapping frames of past and present, history and text via relationships that are often imagined in gothic terms. Elaborating on Christine L. Krueger's suggestion that the Victorians represent "part of who we are and an alien other," Rebecca Munford and

Paul Young note the extent to which a “ghostly register” dominates neo-Victorian explorations of the past (Munford and Young 2009: 5). Such creative superimpositions offer insight into the complex and continuing history of imperial expansion, by highlighting what Mark Llewellyn describes as a “critical f(r)iction” produced by “the knowing and historicised, critical and scholarly perspective contained within the fictional text” (Llewellyn 2008: 170). In doing so, Francis O’Gorman points out, neo-Victorian texts suggest how history “can continue to be ‘alive’ in the most vibrant of ways so that it becomes the present not the past” (O’Gorman 2008: 278). On a similar note, Tracy Hargreaves emphasises the reciprocal relationship between present and past, suggesting that modern intersections with Victorianism not only “recuperate what was not said or sayable in the nineteenth century” but also “flesh out not just the past but the present too, illuminating and troubling our assumptions about periodicity, literary fashions, and modes of conceptual thought” (Hargreaves 2008: 285). Taken together, such critical formulations rewrite the gothic notion of “haunting” as a collapse of boundaries – in which the self encounters an uncanny other – by figuring the relationship as productive. Indeed, such criticism rejects binary formulations such as past and present, or self and other, focusing instead on the ways that Victorianism, to borrow Simon Joyce’s phrase, “forms the horizon for many of our most pressing debates” (Joyce 2007: 16).

In what follows I explore the reciprocal engagements of past and present in the Tibetan novelist Jamyang Norbu’s appropriation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s detective in *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* (1999). Unlike other recent postcolonial engagements with Holmes that align him with the work of empire,² Norbu’s treatment of this figure explores the synergies between past and present modes of colonisation in order to comment on current and residual modes of (neo-)imperialism. At the level of plot, *The Mandala* provides an imaginative account of Holmes’s lost years journeying in Tibet, filling in the most noteworthy gap in the Victorian detective’s chronology: the years bracketed by his ‘death’ at the Reichenbach Falls in ‘The Final Problem’ and his subsequent reappearance in ‘The Adventure of the Empty House’.³ In Norbu’s self-conscious pastiche, Sherlock Holmes arrives in India following the conflict with Dr. Moriarty and immediately connects with a cast of characters borrowed from Rudyard Kipling’s fictions. Among these, Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, the

Bengali spy from *Kim* (1901), becomes a central figure. With Kipling's Babu standing in as an Indian Dr Watson, Holmes dodges attempts on his life, solves an exotic murder, and journeys to Tibet, where he saves the young Dalai Lama from an assassination attempt masterminded by the still-living Moriarty, now an agent for the Chinese. Finally, he returns to England to eradicate the last vestiges of Moriarty's criminal empire and resume his previous life.

In taking up this focus on the past, Norbu diverges significantly from other postcolonial or postmodern authors of neo-Victorian fiction, who have tended to address questions about the past from an Anglophone perspective. Thus, for instance, J.G. Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973) challenges Victorian modes of heroic self-representation during an event that recalls the 1857 uprising, but does not explore significantly the parallel experiences of Indian subjects. More recently, Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997) offers a retelling of *Great Expectations* (1860-61) from the perspective of a British criminal displaced to Australia, while Beryl Bainbridge's *Master Georgie* (1998) traces the experiences of a doctor in England and the Crimea from multiple perspectives. Both Carey and Bainbridge grapple variously with the ways that dominant Victorian ideologies, such as empire, domestic ideals, and gender norms, shape both selfhood and discursive formulations of truth. If these authors offer forceful critiques of patriarchy and imperialism, however, their postmodern tactics for representing identity retain a definitively western cultural framework. As Cora Kaplan suggests, exploring this trend in neo-Victorian literature, "[a]nti-imperial Victoriana of this kind retroactively counters some Victorian prejudices, but leaves others, if only by default, in place" (Kaplan 2007: 155).

Though *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* focuses on Holmes's travels in Asia, by contrast, its narrative is focalised through the eyes of an eastern 'Watson', while its frame narrative and main story situate Holmes in relation to Asian modes of subjectivity. Challenging the boundaries that articulate difference and discursive knowledge in western culture, Norbu's text asks the reader to work within a Tibetan religious, historical, and philosophical framework. In doing so, moreover, he does not focus exclusively on criticism of successive empires as agents of violence, but rather on the contexts of imperial fiction and history that have shaped his own intellectual development. His approach thus recalls a phenomenon Simon Gikandi has documented, in which the colonised subject finds in

imperial Victorianism the tools required for current change (Gikandi 2000: 161). In the hands of the postcolonial subject, Gikandi argues, such conceptual tools show how “the real essence of Victorian culture lay in its subtle connections to the past the pre-eminent Victorians thought they had transcended” (Gikandi 2000: 165). Far from working exclusively to subordinate, he insists, Victorian texts allow colonised subjects to imagine an oppositional mode of selfhood.

Central to the premise of Norbu's novel are Holmes's literary 'resurrection' and the process of reincarnation associated with Tibetan Buddhism. By reframing the gothic 'undead' as a process of becoming, Norbu engages the idea of doubleness central to critical theories of adaptation, but he does so in a way that re-conceives gothic anxiety through an eastern frame of reference. In doing so, *The Mandala* invokes reincarnation as a creative point of reference for historical relations between Tibet, China and Great Britain through the last years of the nineteenth century. Britain's incursions into Tibet in the 1890s were motivated by trade and intelligence issues rather than an overt quest for new colonies; as a result, England pursued its desired outcomes through the Manchu dynasty that ruled Tibet as part of its empire (Grunfeld 1996: 50). By invoking Kipling's formulation of the 'Great Game', Norbu reminds readers of Britain's historical implication in processes of colonisation that continue to affect Tibet today. Further highlighting this historical aspect of the novel is Norbu's representation of the relationship between Tibet and China, which makes a pointed argument against the current political situation. Depicting an aggressively imperialist Chinese influence in *The Mandala*, Norbu comments indirectly on the present occupation. Of particular note is the connection Norbu draws between the thirteenth and fourteenth Dalai Lamas, whose histories are engaged through the novel's fictional frame. When the thirteenth Dalai Lama assumed power in 1893 (an event referenced in *The Mandala*), he began to operate independently of the Manchu emperor, and ultimately to establish claims for Tibetan independence (Grunfeld 1996: 65). Through the first decade of the twentieth century, this Dalai Lama repeatedly fled Tibet under threat from outside powers, only to return to Lhasa to declare independence in 1912 – an act that has underpinned subsequent claims for Tibetan independence (Grunfeld 1996: 65). In the novel, this historical pattern of exile and return invokes Tibet's current political situation even as it endorses its most high-profile dissident, the

thirteenth Lama's successor, who fled Tibet in 1959, following the rise of Chinese communism, and who still resides in exile in Dharamsala, India.

The overlay of British, Chinese, and criminal empires forms an important focal point in *The Mandala*, suggesting the problems caused by acquisitive modes of selfhood associated with imperial expansion, and offering a simultaneous critique of Victorian and current colonial practices. Moriarty embodies the combined effects of ambition and egotism in the story, and his attempts to usurp the place of the Dalai Lama enact on an individual level the violent effects of the current Chinese occupation of Tibet. If imperial expansion is connected with the impulse to annihilate the other in *The Mandala*, however, Norbu also explores the possibilities suggested by a more complex form of "occupation" as process or engagement. The Oxford English Dictionary identifies "occupation" both with acts of seizure and with actions, activities, or roles one assumes. In *The Mandala*, Norbu's appeal to these divergent meanings of "occupation" re-frames the violence associated with acts of seizure (identified with Chinese and British imperialism) via a model of the self as a layered subject that comprises disparate texts, histories, and experiences. Over the course of the novel, apparently solid and embodied western forms of identity are shown to host multiple subjects that confound attempts to read identity in binary terms.

Central to the text's vision of occupation is the organising metaphor of the mandala: "the place purified of all transitory or dualist ideas" (Norbu 1999: v). Norbu's appeal to the mandala as a figure of infinite complexity moves past binary notions of identity in order to focus on a "creative principle" that suggests a basis for interdependent relationship animated by a range of texts and contexts (Norbu 1999: v). In Tibetan culture, the mandala expresses the interconnection of philosophical, religious and social principles, even as it serves as a meditative focus for transcending the material world. Taking up the significance of the mandala from a cross-cultural perspective, Carl Jung emphasises the ways this symbol encodes a grammar of selfhood related both to individual and collective social development. Insofar as it expresses the ideal of wholeness (self as centre) and the composite (or "conglomerate") character of selfhood, Jung suggests, the mandala represents both the possibility of a transcendent union between opposites and the creative process by which transcendence is sought through acts of integration (Jung 1972: 73). This process, Marie Louise von Franz

notes, is marked by conflicting tendencies: “The mandala serves a conservative purpose – namely, to restore a previously existing order. But it also serves the creative purpose of giving expression and form to something that does not yet exist, something new and unique” (von Franz 1964: 225). Taken together, she suggests, “what restores the old order simultaneously involves some element of new creation. In the new order the older pattern returns on a higher level” (von Franz 1964: 225). In *The Mandala*, this tension between previous order and “new creation” focalises intersections between Victorian and postcolonial iterations of society and self.

Norbu's choice of form, the pastiche, is similarly productive. Though dismissed by Fredric Jameson as a “dead language” in which we lose a connection to history (Jameson 1991: 17), Norbu's use of pastiche is self-consciously political, drawing together literary and historical contexts to connect past imperial cultures to comment on the contemporary situation in Tibet. Indeed, Norbu's use of pastiche engages the postmodern and historical techniques identified by Christian Gutleben and Suzanne Keen respectively in their studies of contemporary neo-Victorian fiction. Working to connect disparate texts and contexts, Norbu creates a text that functions, as Gutleben suggests of neo-Victorian literature generally, “by a process of incorporation”, in which “the new aesthetic practices are achieved by recombining the aesthetic practices of the past” (Gutleben 2001: 223). At the same time, Norbu's appeals to history – via both references to events, and to the hidden “archive” that contains the lost account of Sherlock Holmes's sojourn in the east – reclaim and transform it for the purposes of a post-colonised present. As Keen explains in her exploration of the trope of the archive:

If one of the essential tools of empire-building was the collection of information, one of the characteristic postcolonial strategies is to re-claim, re-examine, and re-situate that information, making the former margin the centre and source of representation, and recasting England's collections and administrative manoeuvres as depredation and manipulation. (Keen 2003: 211)

Such redeployments of the traces of history do not aim merely to offer an alternative truth, Keen suggests; rather, they allow us to “engage with

complications and particularities of a recovered past” (Keen 2003: 214). In *Mandala*, Norbu’s formal invocation of the conjoined pasts of literary technique and historical resonance offer a basis for postcolonial reformulations of institutions such as the novel, which have traditionally been associated with imperial dominance. Like the figure of the mandala, which is both historically specific iteration and transhistoric symbol, Norbu’s text takes up and transforms the aesthetic models and materials of the past, recasting them to serve the needs of the present.

In taking up a religious symbol as his central model for human and social identity, Norbu’s formulation of postcolonial identity differs from most current theorisation. As Robert Young suggests, postcolonial scholars have consistently excluded religions “that have taken on the political identity of providing alternative value-systems to those of the west” (Young 2001: 338). Despite this elision, Young suggests, forms of resistance underpinned by religion are often congruent with theories of hybridity (Young 2001: 346). In *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, Norbu’s focus on Tibet – a country almost never discussed in postcolonial academe – emphasises continuities between religion and politics, since both are embodied in a single figure, the Grand (Dalai) Lama.⁴ This overlapping of religion and politics in an identity defined by successive incarnations of a single being works, like contemporary theoretical articulations of hybridity, as an alternative to “the ‘pure’ and the ‘authentic’” (Ashcroft et al. 1995: 9), challenging the conceptual basis on which imperialism is founded. In *The Mandala*, the identity of the Grand Lama is emphatically “pure” (i.e. Holy), though in a way that clearly upsets western notions of “authentic” selfhood as singular and embodied. The effect of this challenge to western notions of selfhood, as Homi Bhabba suggests of hybridity generally, is to generate “a double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (Bhabba 1984: 129). Unlike the Cartesian self of western discourse, the Lama epitomises a view of identity as a process of becoming that unfolds over many incarnations. If the Lama directs our attention to the ways cultural difference unsettles apparently fixed ideas about selfhood, moreover, his appearance in the novel also suggests the ways that hybridity exists, as Young suggests in a discussion of Indian writing, as a model of “cultural rootedness modified by openness to the available resources of one or more other cultures” (Young 2001: 347). Norbu emphasises this aspect of Tibetan identity in descriptions that revise

historical idealisations of nineteenth-century Tibet as a static culture closed to outsiders. Lhasa, the holy city identified with the rule of the Grand Lama, is thus depicted as “a surprisingly cosmopolitan town” comprised of many races (Norbu 1999: 149), while the Grand Lama’s palace is furnished with an eclectic mix of eastern art and occidental furniture, including Regency chairs, an eighteenth-century ormolu clock, and a Queen Anne sideboard (Norbu 1999: 151).

Such challenges to western notions of self and culture are extended in Norbu’s treatment of the novel’s primary character, who disturbs ideas about English identity from within. Sherlock Holmes is a figure notoriously difficult to situate in relation to binary notions of identity in Doyle’s fiction, and this difficulty is compounded in *The Mandala*’s Asian setting. In England, Holmes is a figure simultaneously identified with dominant masculinity (he is educated, athletic, and patriotic) and its other (he has decadent tendencies, and rejects conventional domesticity and conventional patterns of work). As a figure positioned to defend the centre of empire from dangerous colonial influences, moreover, Holmes is curiously permeable. This aspect of his character, Chris Keep and Don Randall point out, is connected with habitual drug use that suggests “an implicit homology between the punctured body of the great English detective and the body politic of England itself” (Keep and Randall 1999: 208). In *The Mandala*, these aspects of Holmes’s character are framed in significantly less anxious terms than they are in Doyle’s fiction. In India, for example, Holmes appears in an entirely different light than he does in London. Surrounded by civil service bachelors, his aversion to domesticity and his ‘aesthetic’ interest in esoteric artefacts do not seem unusual. As Holmes’s relationship with Hurree Mookerjee develops and the two begin to travel in Tibet, moreover, the Bengali offers a cross-cultural reading of the detective that situates his apparent eccentricity in relation to eastern codes of Buddhist asceticism. Early in the novel, Mookerjee worries about Holmes’s drug use. Unlike Doyle’s Watson, who regards Holmes’s reliance on cocaine and morphine as a “passing pleasure” that is “pathological and morbid” (Doyle 1981: 89), Mookerjee speculates that the detective engages in this behaviour because “the cruel clarity” of his vision “denied him the comfort of those illusions that permit most of humankind to go through their short lives absorbed in their small problems and humble pleasures, oblivious of the misery surrounding them” (Norbu 1999: 96). This view redefines self-

absorbed hedonism as spiritual awareness, a point Mookerjee makes directly when he describes Holmes's character as "lofty and spiritual": "he was celibate, did not seem to have any desire for such human foibles as wealth, power, fame or comeliness. He could have been an ascetic in a mountain cave, for the simplicity of his life" (Norbu 1999: 96). What reads as outré in an England preoccupied with material wealth and imperial ideology thus decodes in notably different terms in India and Tibet. Indeed, such textual moments ask us to engage in a process of comparative reflection about imperial and colonised perspectives. In doing so, they suggest the means by which textual strategies of adaptation recall us, as Peter Brooker suggests, to "broader and long-term relations of cultural dominance, dependency, and subordination" (Brooker 2007: 109). The respective foci of western and eastern readings framed by Norbu's literary adaptation of Holmes suggests, in effect, the possibility that imperial anxiety may represent a projection of English fantasies about a colonial other.

Such tactics of situational and spatial repositioning work in concert with other techniques in Norbu's novel to question the logic of self and other at work in processes of imperial expansion. The text itself offers a complex intermingling of 'realities', blending history, fiction, and contemporary experience. Thus, for example, the meeting of Holmes with key Kipling characters adds a deliberately intertextual focus that is complicated by references to real and fictional texts, histories, and people that criss-cross the story and are cited in marginal notes. Norbu himself appears in the story as a metadetective, whose search for evidence of Holmes's travels in the east culminates in the discovery of a manuscript penned by Mookerjee: a fictional character who is himself a tribute to Sarat Chander Das, the real historical person referenced by Norbu in the acknowledgements (Norbu 1999: 267). Taken together, these references ask the reader to reflect on the relationship between different texts and histories as they inform the present. At the same time, in tracing these points of contact between texts and their contexts, the reader is led to examine ambiguities and ambivalences already present in apparently confident texts of empire.

Such entanglements of fact and fiction both challenge and render porous the boundaries by which knowledge becomes power in western registers of meaning. As part of this process of unsettling, or de-centring, Norbu also references western science in order to question readings of the

east. Early in the novel, Norbu frames a Sherlock Holmes adventure in the classic mode. Holmes's method is recognisable as that central to the Conan Doyle stories, with intensive analysis of crime scene minutiae, research into specialised knowledge of local flora and fauna, and a dramatic unveiling of the solution to the mystery. If the episode ends with Holmes successfully explaining the crime, however, *The Mandala* uses the answer to comment indirectly on the connection between western science and the orientalist assumptions that underpin rationales for colonisation. In Norbu's framing of the mystery, the leech that has been used to commit the murder has both a factual, scientific identity (successfully decoded by Holmes) and a symbolic one that references western horror of the east. The species in question, *Hirudinea Himalayaca Giganticus* (Giant Red Leech), is a rare and deadly species that kills by releasing a powerful cocktail of anti-coagulant, histamine, and speed into the bloodstream of its victims, who bleed to death through their own pores within minutes (Norbu 1999: 56). As with the Asian other of imperial discourse, the leech threatens to dissolve the Cartesian/embodied boundaries of identity that structure western norms of embodied subjectivity.

Discovery of the leech's first victim occurs almost immediately in the novel. Upon arriving at his hotel in India, Holmes encounters "the shape of a man", which is "covered so entirely in blood that not a single detail of apparel or anatomy could be distinguished" (Norbu 1999: 18). Tracing the dead man's footsteps to his own room, Holmes begins to piece together an explanation: the leech has been concealed in an intricate brass lamp hanging over his own bed. The steps that lead to this conclusion offer science as a controlling discourse, the means by which an attempt to literally erase the boundaries constitutive of physical selfhood in the body is contained and explained. If the entire episode seems to highlight stereotypes of a dangerous colonial other embodied variously in the exotic fauna and cultural objects that constitute threat, however, it soon becomes clear that, though the east is the site of the murder, the threat is European, as are the latent meanings the event evokes. On the most basic level, the trap has been set by a Portuguese hotel clerk at the command of Colonel Sebastian Moran, Professor Moriarty's British sub-commander. Moran, the son of a decorated imperial statesman and a product of England's most elite schools, is not described directly in *The Mandala*. In 'The Adventure of the Empty House', however, Watson connects him with Victorian theories of degeneracy:

Moran has “a tremendously virile and yet sinister face,” with “the brow of the philosopher above and the jaw of a sensualist below” (Doyle 1981: 492). Insofar as it embodies both sides of the binary logic of empire, Moran’s face suggests the threat of imperialism, rather than the degeneracy of the east. In his commentary, moreover, Holmes extends the implications of Moran’s degeneracy via the hypothesis that the individual represents “the whole procession of his ancestors” and is “the epitome of the history of his own family” (Doyle 1981: 494). In Moran’s case, such history is explicitly connected to the related processes of imperial expansion and British education that produce the unsettling mixture of “virility” and “sensuality” that together constitute criminality.

The leech itself is a figure of colonial gothic that engages western fears of dissolution. Despite the fact that it is “no longer than six inches and about the thickness and shape of a piece of garden hose,” the tiny creature is a terrifying predator. Having fallen onto the coverlet of the bed “the thing stopped swaying, stiffened for a moment, and then with remarkable speed, began to move towards us” (Norbu 1999: 54). Though it is connected, like the threat of Thuggee also referenced in the novel, with imperial fantasies, in which commonplace “invisible” entities comprise horrific threat, the novel makes clear that the leech is really an imported ‘weapon’, a species dislocated from its natural context in the Himalayas to serve European ends. On a symbolic level, moreover, the details associated with the leech align the creature with objects central to colonial trade. Initially misrecognised at the crime scene as a piece of India rubber (Norbu 1999: 23), Holmes later neutralises the threat of a second leech/murder attempt with an application of salt. Taken together, these elements of the leech’s identity reference not eastern threat, but rather western concerns with trade and control of Asian subjects. (‘India rubber’ was an abundant and profitable natural resource, and salt was connected both with British abuses of power in India and with Indian bids for independence from colonial rule.)⁵

If the leech suggests a violent deconstruction of a bounded subject, invoking the binary relationship of parasite and host, it also effectively suggests the limits of western modes of identity: for in the dissolution of the body’s physical boundaries the leech ‘occupies’ the subject to annihilate it. Though it is an effective and nuanced figure for critique, then, the leech itself offers no way of moving beyond oppositional confrontation with the other. This moment in the text thus signals an important dead end that is

followed by a second, parallel exploration of 'occupation' as a more productive conjunction. To facilitate the intellectual act of attempting to think identity in a different way, the novel shifts from India to Tibet, as Holmes and Mookerjee undertake a journey into 'forbidden' territory. Though both India and Tibet are loci of imperial occupation – India by the British and Tibet by the Chinese – the turn in the narrative towards the latter shifts the terms of detection from a material to a spiritual plane. Indeed, though Holmes continues to function as problem solver and to utilise the powers of ratiocination and disguise central to his original character, these aspects of his identity are realigned in a way that radically challenges and unsettles western rationalism.

The mode of subjectivity introduced in the second and third sections of the novel explicitly reframes western binaries in eastern terms. Central to this dynamic is Holmes's confrontation with his old nemesis, Professor Moriarty. In the original series, the Holmes/Moriarty relationship was intended to bring an end to a character Conan Doyle had tired of writing. 'The Final Problem' thus culminates in a confrontation between Holmes and Moriarty, a criminal double who shares the detective's genius but uses it for personal advancement. Within a Victorian register of knowledge, the two are distinguished by physical features that underscore their fundamental difference from each other. While Holmes's decadent tendencies appear as eccentricity, Moriarty (like Moran) is explicitly degenerate. Describing his nemesis, Holmes suggests: "the man had hereditary tendencies of the most diabolical kind. A criminal strain ran in his blood, which, instead of being modified, was increased and rendered infinitely more dangerous by his extraordinary mental powers" (Doyle 1981: 471). Though gifted with a high cranium (a signifier of intelligence), Moriarty's face "is forever oscillating from side to side in a curiously reptilian fashion" (Doyle 1981: 472). The professor thus combines aspects of self and other via the coexistence of rationalism (he is a mathematician) and the "reptilian" quality that connects him to fears about de-evolution and species atavism.

Like 'The Final Problem', which pits Holmes and Moriarty against each other in a battle between good and evil, Norbu aligns the two enemies with forces of light and darkness central to Buddhist spirituality. Unlike western frames of reference that privilege one term in the pair over the other, however, Norbu's Buddhist frame of reference connects the clash of light and dark with the worldliness one must transcend in the quest for

spiritual enlightenment. Rather than expressing an opposition that must be resolved by annihilating the other, Holmes and Moriarty thus express the position of humanity caught between spiritual and animal tendencies. Placed in an eastern philosophic context, the binaries of good/evil, or light/dark, direct our attention to a space beyond conflict – a space indicated by the title of the novel’s third section ‘And Beyond’. This final section of the novel introduces the mandala directly as Holmes and Moriarty compete to locate an actual parchment delineating the Wheel of Time. Though not valuable in material terms, this mandala encodes a map that reveals the hiding place of an occult stone offering absolute power and immortality. At stake in the conflict between Holmes and Moriarty is the dispensation of this power. During their first meeting, Moriarty celebrates the virtues of Napoleon: “he knew power; crude as his notions of it may have been, he knew how it had to be wielded – with force and ruthlessness” (Norbu 1999: 199). Though symbolically connected with western imperialism, however, Moriarty is also associated with Chinese empire-building and an attempt to assume control of Tibet by murdering the vulnerable Grand Lama, before he can come of age and assume his position as the country’s spiritual and political leader.

If Moriarty and Holmes are aligned with forces of good and evil, the mode of subjectivity connected with their struggle complicates the standard opposition between self and other that structures western identity. During the climactic physical confrontation between Holmes and Moriarty, the professor explains his identity: he is not really Moriarty, an Englishman, but rather “the Dark One”, a Tibetan accomplished in occult science who has attempted in the past to murder a previous incarnation of the Grand Lama. Shattered mentally by the powers of his adversary, the trulku (white) lama, the Dark One escaped to China and then England where he was re-embodied as Moriarty. Ironically, it is his struggle with Holmes at Reichenbach that has restored Moriarty’s eastern identity and powers through the trial of his physical body (see Norbu 1999: 236). The layered complexities of this identity – Moriarty is both eastern and western, bodied and disembodied, past and present incarnation – are complemented by a second revelation that takes place at the moment he seems finally to triumph. “You are not Sherlock Holmes” announces one of the older lamas:

you are the renowned trulku, a former abbot of the White Garuda Monastery one of the greatest adepts of the occult

sciences. The Dark One slew you 18 years ago, but just before your life force left you we were able to transfer it – by the yoga of Pho-wa – to another body far away. (Norbu 1999: 242)

Contemplating this announcement, Mookerjee reflects that Holmes has devoted himself to acts of altruism and compassion in aiding the helpless against the powers of evil, and has powers of concentration “that would make many a practicing yogi look like a rank novice” (Norbu 1999: 244). Moriarty's ‘evil’ amalgamation of western and eastern modes of subjectivity is thus balanced by Holmes's embodiment of altruism and compassion as simultaneously occidental and Asian traits (Norbu 1999: 244). If their layered, and now connected, identities render Holmes and Moriarty more powerful, however, they remain caught within a cosmic opposition that still threatens annihilation and violence.

While Holmes and Moriarty come to represent the deadlock of confrontation, despite their mutual identification with east and west, a third character becomes important to the resolution of their conflict, insofar as he offers a different ‘answer’ to the problem of occupation. Prostrate on the floor and injured, Hurree Chunder Mookerjee crooks Moriarty's leg with his umbrella and breaks his concentration, allowing Holmes to gain control of the crystal. The final resolution of this co-habitation of western and eastern modes of identity is thus resolved by Mookerjee, the apparently disempowered servant of colonial rule, who comically uses the material paraphernalia of the British empire to upset the balance of darkness and light. The scene that ensues takes up the question of layered identity by shifting attention from the dramatic polarisation of good and evil to an alternate focus on ‘occupation’ as an accommodation of multiple histories and contexts within the individual. Blasted by Moriarty/the Dark One, the dying Mookerjee's last words recall the final lines of Kipling's ‘Gunga Din’: “I trust that my services have proved satisfactory, Sir” and “I only ask you to give a full report of my service to Colonel Creighton” (Norbu 1999: 249).⁶ This double evocation of Kipling in Norbu's text joins two characters that seem to be ideally colonised subjects. Though apparently a simple servant, however, Gunga Din's heroism eclipses that of his ‘masters’; in doing so, to borrow Simon Gikandi's formulation, the colonised servant “reinvents” the idea of heroic sacrifice as a core component of English

character, casting it as an Indian quality (Gikandi 1996: 11) – analogous to the way that Holmes’ altruism has been re-configured as an inherent eastern as much as western trait on account of his revealed origins.

Similarly, though Mookerjee is a character whose infatuation with western knowledge borders on a mania (in *Kim*, he lectures the young hero on western education as a means to advancement and aspires to be a Fellow of the Royal Society), his engagements with empire suggest that he, too, is able to work creatively within the field of imperial occupation. As a spy, for example, Mookerjee undertakes the work of empire, but his skill in doing so leads Lurgan, in *Kim*, to praise him in terms that set aside race as a controlling factor. Of the men who take up the Great Game, he tells Kim “not more than ten are of the best. Among these ten I count the Babu” (Kipling 1987: 209). Notably, Mookerjee’s greatest skill is impersonation, the ability to seamlessly assume a range of disguises and identities that allow him to pass even into forbidden territories. Though this capability connects him to Holmes, who dramatically impersonates a hill-man early in the novel in order to make a case for his ability to travel Tibet in disguise, the Babu’s assumption of disguise goes beyond an ability to manipulate appearances. Indeed, Mookerjee’s performance of “oriental” identity for the benefit of westerners approximates what postcolonial theorists would identify as the “sly civility” of mimicry, connecting him with a moment of colonial encounter that Benita Parry suggests highlights “ambivalences of the colonialist text and deny it an authorizing presence” (Parry 1995: 42). “It is always an advantage for a babu to try and live up to a sahib’s preconception of the semi-educated native,” Mookerjee announces early on (Norbu 1999: 6). Later, he extends this control of surfaces when he uses his position as narrator to shape and limit what others know, both through acts of omission in reports to Colonel Creighton and in ellipses that exclude the reader (see Norbu 1999: 259). This aspect of control inflects the entire ‘manuscript’ of Holmes’s sojourn in India and Tibet, which is filtered through the Babu’s perspective. In doing so, it draws our attention to the ways that the original tales are mediated by Watson’s normative English/imperial sensibilities, unsettling the centrality of Watson’s ideological position. As a double adaptation – of Kipling’s character and of Watson’s perspective – the Babu thus focalises the novel’s political ideology by highlighting acts of appropriation and redirection. Though apparently a comic foil to the ‘serious’ figures engaged in apocalyptic

struggle, Mookerjee's gigantic body suggests the possibility of the colonised subject engaging in creative dialogue with his circumstances.

Given the multiple cultural identities and histories Mookerjee embodies, it is significant, in the context of Norbu's text, that the Bengali – not Holmes – receives the transcendent vision of the mandala central to the symbolic resolution of the text. Unlike Moriarty, who seizes the occult stone in order to wield its power, the lamas who heal Mookerjee turn to it as a more disinterested mode of power. The dying Bengali narrates that when he looks at the stone, he first beholds an “endless and wonderful night sky, unlimited by any horizons, or the usual restrictions dictated by the limitations of the human eye” (Norbu 1999: 250). Having transcended the physical limits of space and body, he receives a vision of the mandala as a celestial city, the dwelling of the Lords of Shambala who, the Lama tells him, will usher in the dawning of a new age beyond the struggle of good and evil.⁷ This access to the mandala's creative, non-dualistic power remains a vision, since the text thereafter returns to the ‘reality’ of colonisation. Nonetheless, Mookerjee's connection with this vision informs the novel's final commentary on imperialist practice and the historical space “beyond” which it posits.

The final sections of *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* address the problematic character of colonial activities directly, folding together the geography of home and away in a manner that recalls the decentring of binaries explored through the body of the novel. Holmes himself criticises the effects of “man's blind worship of money and power”, through which

the green and fertile land is destroyed to build dark satanic mills wherein underfed children and consumptive women are made to slave; when artless primitives armed with bows and spears are converted to our ideas of commerce and civilization through the hot barrels of gatling guns [sic] (Norbu 1999: 256)

Though marked by imperial attitudes towards “artless primitives”, this characterisation confounds the fates of India, Tibet and England (as Holmes's layered identity conjoins east and west), via an echo of Blake's ‘Milton’ that casts these spaces as related casualties of imperialism.⁸ At the same time, Holmes's use of Blakean language suggests a western

counterpart to Mookerjee's utopian vision of Shambala, with both spaces expressing the possibility of a place beyond worldly conflict. The epilogue extends this critique to contemporary China, currently bent on eradicating Tibetan identity. Tracing the course of refugees like himself, Norbu situates India as a place where cultural identity has been creatively reconstructed despite recurrent imperial interruptions. In this context Mookerjee – like Norbu himself – indicates the possibility of creating a new identity from the host of cultural palettes that offer a different model of occupation as process or engagement. Having lost their material belongings as refugees, Norbu suggests, exiled Tibetans have worked “to re-create in exile a part of their former lives” (Norbu 1999: 262). What is produced, notably, is not a copy of the past, but rather something new: forms of cultural expression that register the interplay of past and present, cultural text and context. What is denied, equally notably, is a vision of Tibetans caught between the dualism of a ‘fixed’ or static cultural past and the progressive forces of modernity.

As a frame for the story of Holmes's sojourn in Tibet, Norbu's quest for the lost documents of Sherlock Holmes is realised, significantly, through the textual and ancestral traces of Mookerjee, the ‘author’ of the manuscript that forms the body of the novel. Norbu's account of his search for this document interweaves personal history, including his family's flight from Tibet in 1959 and his boyhood infatuation with the western experience represented in works by Doyle and Kipling. Norbu's ‘real’ life coalesces with fiction in the search for evidence of Sherlock Holmes's travels when he connects with a retired tea planter, Sid, who is Mookerjee's great grandson (Norbu 1999: xiii). Surveying the Mookerjee “archive” of correspondence and private papers, Norbu and Sid fail to locate evidence of Holmes's travels, until an earthquake collapses the back wall of the family home, revealing a “rusty tin dispatch box” containing the narrative (Norbu 1999: xiv). The box, which doubles the battered box containing Watson's English tales, offers an eastern counterpart to the Victorian Sherlock Holmes even as its location, an apparently solid wall that crumbles to reveal a hollow space, suggests how the truth may lie between the apparently solid partition of inside and outside. This postcolonial version of an imperial archive functions, as Suzanne Keen suggests of the archive as trope, to “create a sense of connection and belonging” that “becomes a realm of memory in its own right” (Keen 2003: 214). This collapse of a partition that has operated as a bar to knowledge of a crossing between east and west is echoed in the

final paragraphs of the epilogue, when Norbu visits monks from the White Garuda monastery at their place of exile in Dharamsala in order to see if any remember Sherlock Holmes's brief tenure as abbot. In response, one of the monks produces yet another container for the tales, a "decrepit tin dispatch box" that holds "a chipped magnifying glass and a battered old cherry wood pipe" (Norbu 1999: 264). Excited by this discovery of iconic material objects connected with Holmes's identity, Norbu makes "a very ill-mannered and ill-considered request" that they sell him these articles (Norbu 1999: 264). The monk's refusal underscores the novel's interest in setting aside the material basis of identity: these objects have religious significance and have played a part in the ritual associated with locating the Abbot's reincarnation. In fact, Norbu's monk is Holmes himself.

This final location of Holmes as an archive of selfhood in an exiled eastern body suggests a basis for continuity that challenges modes of postcolonial identity associated with opposition. In *The Mandala*, ultimately, Holmes is neither a figure connected inexorably with "European societal norms that ultimately speak for imperial expansion" (Roy 2008: 5), nor a vehicle for reverse appropriation. Far from representing an undead or haunting presence, this reincarnated Holmes emphasises continuities without invoking gothic anxiety about the collapse of self and other. In doing so, he situates knowledge of the past alongside the possibility that shared struggle – and choice – might produce something new. This struggle is connected to the ongoing histories of China and Tibet in the final lines of the text, which record the date of Norbu's manuscript: 5 June 1989. This contemporary historical reference relates rather than opposes the Tibetans and Chinese by invoking the Tiananmen Square protests against the Communist regime, in a year also marked by declaration of martial law in Tibet and international recognition of the Dalai Lama with a Nobel Peace Prize (see Goldstein 1997: 91).

In the 'Acknowledgments' that follow the epilogue, Norbu suggests that in his work as author of *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* he "has drawn life and substance" from the work of Doyle and Kipling, "much the same way as did a species of fauna mentioned in the story" (Norbu 1999: 266). Self-identification as a leech aside, however, Norbu's creative querying of the binary formations, which continue to structure and 'fix' postcolonial as well as colonial identities, suggests a more productive relationship than opposition based on absolute difference or outright

annihilation of the other. Indeed, by drawing on a metaphor that transforms gothic fears about the dissolution of identity into an acknowledgement of cultural interconnectedness, Norbu formally and thematically suggests the historical interweaving of sameness and difference central to *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*. Just as the leech may function as a figure of Asian otherness, in fact, it is also, crucially, a species associated with processes of healing that emphasise the positive relationship between parasite and host. As with metaphor itself – a figure that suggests both connection and difference – Norbu’s identification of authorship as a quasi ‘leeching’ sets aside binary notions of identity in favour of a complex acknowledgement of shared history. Similarly, the metaphor of the mandala is both the object at the centre of Norbu’s mystery of identity and a symbol of the process by which it is realised. Taken together, these figures offer alternatives to the traditional narrative model associated with Sherlock Holmes mysteries, unsettling and redrawing boundaries in a way that recalls Linda Hutcheon’s view of adaptation as a decentring acknowledgement of the lateral relationships between various versions (Hutcheon 2006: xiii).

Norbu’s use of organising metaphors as a strategy for unsettling and complicating the linear, answer-focused structure of the classic Victorian detective narrative is shared by other neo-Victorian mystery novelists. In Tom Holland’s *Supping with Panthers* (2000), Peter Ackroyd’s *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1994), and Margaret Atwood’s *Alias Grace* (1996), for example, metaphors of vampirism, ventriloquism, and quilting, respectively, work in creative friction with the mystery novel’s traditional concern to reveal truth via a linear story. Like Norbu’s text, these novels abandon the concern of traditional Victorian detective fiction to contain and organise truth, instead highlighting neo-Victorian interest in resonances between competing or overlapping versions of history. In the case of *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, Norbu invokes and engages the previous century’s *fin de siècle* from the perspective of the *fin de millennium*. In doing so, and in taking up and reformulating a figure and a genre associated with anxieties about closure, Norbu offers an alternative openness that offers a different model for occupying both past and present.

Notes

1. According to *The Universal Sherlock Holmes*, there are at least 25,000 texts and products offering adaptation and speculation related to Doyle's detective (de Wall and Vanderbough 1995: 4).
2. One recent example is Vithal Rajan's parody *Holmes of the Raj* (2006).
3. In 'The Adventure of the Empty House', Holmes tells Watson that following his apparent "death", he "traveled for two years in Tibet" under the name Sigerson (Doyle 1981: 488).
4. Though identified as the Dalai Lama outside Tibet, I use the term 'Grand Lama', which more closely approximates Tibetan usage, in discussions of the novel.
5. Though the national protests associated with the salt tax occurred in the twentieth century, this historical context informs the association for a late twentieth-century reader whose own knowledge forms part of the context for understanding imperialism as a continuous process.
6. The final stanza of 'Gunga Din' pairs sacrifice and duty: "'E carried me away / To where a dooli lay, / An' a bullet come an' drilled the beggar clean. / 'E put me safe inside, / An' just before 'e died, / 'I 'ope you liked your drink', sez Gunga Din." (Kipling 2006: 1882)
7. See Norbu 1996: 251 and 177 for explanation of this mythology.
8. Holmes's reference to "dark satanic mills" is Blakean, as is his echo of Blake's *Milton* (1804-1810): "I will not cease from mental fight, / Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand, / Till we have built Jerusalem / In England's green and pleasant land." (Blake 1982: 94-95)

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