



A CRITIQUE OF ALLAN SEALY'S *THE TROTTER-NAMA*

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Genuine “Anglo-Indian” writing is a product of the twentieth century, perhaps even of the post-War years. The corpus is still too meagre to constitute a separate genre, but with the Empire still writing back, it is hoped that the repression and suppression of past times will give way to works that address the real condition.

I Allan Sealy, who gained international recognition for *The Trotter-Nama* (1988), uses the narrative technique of ancient Indian story-tellers to weave a saga that encompasses the history of the unique human species that is now identified as “Anglo-Indian”. This mock-epic in prose is one of the earliest to trace the antecedents of a particular “Anglo-Indian” family to its nitty-gritty beginnings—without shame and without acrimony. It is a story of changes of fortune and even though the novel ends on a desultory, perhaps decadent, note (as far as the “Trotter” family is concerned), it is open-ended about the future.

It is well known that history is often distorted. Indian history has suffered a similar fate, over and over again. There is no denying the fact that “Anglo-Indian” sympathies were, up to the end of World War II at least, by and large, jingoistically pro-British. Frank Anthony does not hesitate to accept this bitter truth; nor does he try to justify it. Even today there are the few who still want to go “Home” to England, if not to some other part of the English-speaking world. But these exceptions only show that the Community—or whatever is left of it—has become an integral part of Indian society while continuing to retain its cultural heritage.

Matters became worse when economic exploitation gave way to political manipulation and the trade-mark British policy of “divide and rule” was brought to

India. The most hybrid of nations—amalgamations of Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Normans, Goths, Vikings, Bretons, Danes, Jews, Celts, Scots, Irish, to name a few—sought, in India, from about the middle of the nineteenth century, when the reins of power had been appropriated by them, to down-play their sexual misdemeanours by withholding recognition to their numerous, out-of-wedlock offspring. Consequently, the “Anglo-Indian” was relegated to the “lowest-of-the-low” status in a country where caste is paramount. When the “memsahib” infiltrated the empire, the “Anglo-Indian” was pushed “beyond the pale”. Not surprisingly, the “Anglo-Indian” community clung desperately to its language—English, however anyone would like to describe it—its religion—Christianity—and its distinctive culture—westernized, but tempered by the rock-solid Indian tenets of family, community and—most of all—large-hearted tolerance. This is why the “Anglo-Indian” has a coveted status in the country: the community has been officially recognized by the law of the land and, by virtue of this, English is today an Indian language!

If history-writers choose to forget, the chroniclers will more than make up for the lapse. *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* is dedicated “To the Other Anglo-Indians” and in the Preface to the book I Allan Sealy rededicates his book to “that protean people”. Hailed as an “epic farce” (Quoted from *Time Out*, on the Front Cover page) and “A Contemporary Classic” (Back Cover), the book can put the ordinary reader off because he comes up against something he has probably never encountered in his life. But that is the amazing conundrum: the “Anglo-Indian” is so everything-and-nothing at the same time that very few people understand him (if they did take the time to do so), including himself. And that is perhaps because the “Anglo-Indian” was both “made” and “born”.

The serious reader, however, will be amply rewarded for his patience, for consternation and confusion are part of the exercise; he must return, again and again, to the family-tree and the map of San Souci—firstly, for guidance, then for confirmation. He must tread those labyrinthine paths and feel the essential difference of the “Trotters”, though there really is none. Only when the reader deciphers the repeated message that the “Trotters” (read “Anglo-Indians”) are the same—with differences—as himself will he grasp the real meaning of the book. If the reader has an existential problem, he has to overcome it by a leap of faith—not the easiest of

tasks.

Not every “Anglo-Indian” family can trace its roots to the very source, but that is not the way of the average “Anglo-Indian”. For him, in general, life is short and the sooner he gets on with the business of living, the better—he will (or would certainly like to) leave the non-essentials to others: they need something to do, surely. The case is and has to be different for the writer of chronicles: Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift marked out the route, complete with geography and genealogy, while on the Indian literary scene, the numerous *Namas* provide guidance and flourish. Sealy also acknowledges the influence of Laurence Sterne’s zany humour, while a commentator points out that Sealy has the “comic genius of a Hogarth” (Quoted from *Sunday Observer*, in the Blurb).

To attempt a critique of this gargantuan “chronicle”, one must first acknowledge its genius. It is perhaps the first “Nama” to be written in English—an Indian language, by the way—and like all great firsts, it sets very high standards. The scope of its subject-matter, the range and sweep of its language, the seemingly endless fund of its knowledge—sound and not-so-sound, the thrust and parry, the give and take, the exclusiveness of its all-inclusiveness: all this and more begs that it be accepted, approved and accredited. And what does India do? Just that! While the rest of the world is caught off-guard and is bowled over by the rich and variegated panorama put up for display by Sealy—which results in its early banishment from the international scene—the more astute Indian reader laps it up and sees to it that it remains in circulation. Sealy is the first to hail this fact (see Preface to the New Edition); by doing so, he is acknowledging his indebtedness to the Indian reader—a first again, since almost every other modern Indian writer using the medium of English cares little or nothing for the “Home” reading public. Unfortunately, like the majority of Indian stars in the international literary firmament, Sealy talks of “Home” but prefers to stay elsewhere. Perhaps distance gives him a better perspective. As a “globe-trotter” (perhaps the word was coined to describe the “Anglo-Indian”)—or “Gulabi Trotter”, or even “Gulab-Trotter” (of the *Eugenia Jambolana* variety), Sealy has more justification in having and preferring a “home” away from “Home”.

The family-tree indicates a seven-generation, continuing saga that begins on the

longest day of that particular year, 21 June, 1799, A D and ends on the very same day some time in the twentieth century. On that first day, at about noon, the "First Trotter" (earlier known by the French name "Trottoire"), falls to his watery death within hailing distance from his home. The man who had overcome everything that crossed his path and had established a formidable habitation in the garden city of Nakhlau finds himself defeated by one of the simplest laws of Physics. Instead of being interred exactly where he breathed his last, Justin Aloysius Trotter plummets to a fluid end, encircled by the murky waters of the Ganda Nala, with its distinctive ninety-and-nine admixtures. By disappearing in so sudden a manner (not much unlike his arrival), Colonel Trotter leaves—unwittingly—a host of problems that will have to be sorted out by future generations of Trotters.

Justin Aloysius leaves a direct descendant, of course, in a son with no given name, who nevertheless administers—intermittently—the estate, much to the chagrin of the new-found Trotters of San Souci. Son of the Great Trotter, the indigo-hued Mik, accoutred with—apparently—a permanently purple-stained penis, sires a horde of children with the joyful cooperation of the Alexander sisters, these sirens being the breed brought into existence through the liaison between one of the Great Trotter's European architects and a local woman of low caste. However, the chronicle of the age of Legend needs to be dealt with in more detail, before the happenings of the age of Chivalry take over.

As is almost always the case with all patriarchs, there is no conclusive evidence regarding the birth of the First Trotter: one version—that of the Anti-Trotter—has the year 1729, but the narrator pins it down to 21 June, 1719, a claim legitimized by the death of the Great Trotter on the very same day eighty years later and the birth of Eugene Aloysius (Seventh) Trotter on the same day many decades into the future. The mystery is compounded when it is discovered that even the Great Trotter's grave-stone is never completed. It reads simply:

JUSTIN ALOYSIUS TROTTER
WHO

(Sealy 112) and this naturally begs the question: "Who indeed!" (Sealy 113). Yet,

long before such speculation could cross the minds of lesser mortals, Justin Aloysius Trotter, who should, by all purports, have lived and died like other men, had been chosen for some separate dispensation. He had acquired many other names and Sungum, his abode in Nakhla, was the only place where every physical object on earth was faithfully replicated—thanks to the efforts of Sultana, his self-effacing wife and the mother of Mik.

The building up of the legend of the “Trotters” takes over two hundred and fifty pages of the narrative, though this is liberally interspersed with interpolations, notes, words (that often run into paragraphs), definitions, recipes, theses, confessions, commentaries, reflections, journal entries, verses, methodologies, advertisements, jottings, stories (or “Kahanis”), footnotes, preambles, resolutions, commands, grievances, proceedings and rejoinders—the list is not all-inclusive. The reader learns that the hot-air balloon in which the Great Trotter went up on that fateful day came down empty. The mortal remains of the Great Trotter are not discovered, though Elise (also known as “Jarman Begum”) lets it be known that Sungum is indeed his mausoleum and crypt. This she does to foil the Nawab’s plans to make Sungum his summer retreat. The legend of the Great Trotter is so full of juicy detail that any attempt to condense it does no justice to the whole. However, this is inevitable.

The chronicler categorically rejects the account of the historian (Mr Montagu—Anti-Trotter) regarding the Great Trotter’s birth and supplies his own version (see Sealy 113), providing proof in the form of an unmarked grave somewhere in France. Joseph Trottoire, a merchant of Lirey, marries a singer and their son, Justin Aloysius (later to be lionized as the Great Trotter), determines on a career in music. Fate has other plans for the precocious boy: enlisting on a French ship, Justin finds himself in Quebec and thereafter in Madras, India. Expedience results in a change of name—from the French-sounding “Trottoire” to the more acceptable “Trotter”—even as the colour of Justin’s uniform changes, depending on his affiliation at the time. Acquired mastery of guns and military tactics takes Justin to greater and greater success; this results in his appointment as commander-in-chief of the army of the Nawab of Tirnab and the gifting of “San Souci” to him and his in perpetuity. The building of “Sungum” is commenced and the Great Trotter looks around for a wife to grace his court.

Sultana, daughter of one of the Nawab's courtiers, takes the bold step; in time, the couple is blessed with a son. The father's prior commitments and the mother's ethereal character result in the boy's association with the daughters of one of Justin's architects; all of them become darker shades of blue because of their frolicking in the indigo-baths. On the death of the saintly Sultana, Justin acquires, over a period of many years, three more "wives", though the final "marriage" remains un-consummated. Farida Wilkinson "Bibi" and Elise "Jarman Bibi" become "Begums" or "wives", especially after the accidental death of their "husband". But all this happens long after Justin Aloysius entrusts the education of his nameless son to his Tibetan plinth-master.

The estates of the Great Trotter are finally settled on the prodigal Mik Trotter, later to be identified as "Gypsy Trotter". He returns to San Souci at the most opportune time, putting paid to the wiles of the three "widows" of his father, since each of them claims to be with child. Matters are better understood some months later, when Farida gives birth to an ebony-hued child that shows resemblance to the "Ice Manager", Wilfred Fonseca and Elise bears a child sired by the Steward, Yakub Khan. Rose Llewellyn "Bibi", just into her teens, goes about sleep-walking, until she is "blessed" with a son—Mik's, through one of the Alexander sisters. Rose, perhaps secretly in love with Mik (the feeling appears to be mutual), devotes all her time to her "son" Charles Augustine Pote Trotter and is—later—foster-mother to Charles's son, Thomas Henry (Middle Trotter).

Since the education of Mik is entrusted to the elusive Tibetan, it is no wonder that teacher and taught suddenly disappear. Their journeys, along the roads of North India, lead them to a boarding school, but Mik opts out and the two take the road south. All through the journey the Tibetan teaches Mik the way to "enlightenment" and consequently a great number of government buildings are torched all along their route. Mik is finally settled in Dr Bellow's School in Madras, where he is trained to be a surveyor. The training is cut short, but Mik finds himself gainfully employed in Persia. His inherited knowledge of guns brings him to the notice of certain Indian chieftains and Mik settles down to a military career not quite comparable to that of his illustrious father. The inevitable showdown occurs when the Great Trotter's expertise is sought by John Company to curb the menace of certain "mountain rats".

In the heat of battle, Mik is left for dead, one of his arms blown away, but he is nursed back to health. Mik spends ages learning how to adjust to the new circumstances of his life, but by the time he is ready to take on the world again, his father falls to his death from a hot-air balloon. Mik arrives just in time to disrupt the proceedings at San Souci and when the Great Trotter's will is found, the hullabaloo dies down because it proclaims Mik the sole heir. Two weddings are quickly arranged and Mik returns to the arms of his childhood lovers; Charles (A-Trotter) is the result and he is claimed by Rose.

All this is what is given to the reader in *The Trotter-Nama*. There is so much more to be read between the lines. Justin Aloysius (the Great Trotter) is the son of Joseph and Miriam Trottoire. Justin settles down in India and marries Sultana, said to be of the Prophet's line. Neither Christian nor Muslim, Justin Aloysius goes on to establish a religion of his own—the “Din Havai”, or “Religion of the Winds”. While the Prophet Noah brought together—and thereby saved for the future—a pair of every living creature, Sultana gathered everything else, mostly inanimate, duly depositing her finds in Sungum. All this strengthens the claim that Justin Aloysius (and through him, all Trotters) had (and still has) a lineage that could (and still can) withstand the closest scrutiny, though such ancestral claims are peremptorily scotched by the popular claim that all Trotters have a “touch” of the “tar-brush”. Justin could not have foreseen the doubt and despair that overtook later generations of Trotters, for he had the “sagarpaysans” (or “ocean of peasants”) on his side—what more could anyone need: “As for the common people, they were awestruck: who but a pir or saint could move rivers?” (Sealy 229) Also, Munnoo (again possibly an avatar of Mulk Raj Anand's Munoo—with the extra “n” in his name to satisfy currently-popular astrological compulsions) is determined that the Great Trotter is nothing if not divine. Munnoo explains to Charles, Justin's grandson, the changes he has been witness to:

Your grandfather (peace be His) would not recognize the place if he were to come back,” Munnoo said. “I can hardly keep up with it [Trotterpurwa] myself—and I live here. Not that He came this way often. Once or twice to inspect the mine. And then ... the last time ... to go up. (Sealy 280)

Further, Justin's claim to an “Indian” identity is strengthened by his adoption of local dress, something made more poignant by the reverse process witnessed in the Nawab of Tirnab. This shift in the sartorial preferences of Justin Aloysius allows the

Great Trotter to overcome any objections to his taking more than one “wife”, the shift to Indian ways of dressing coinciding with the Nawab’s preference for western attire. For all his skill—in and out of bed—the Great Trotter is responsible for the birth of only one child and, by a bizarre twist of fate, almost responsible for that son’s death, years later. The prodigal Mik returns to claim his right, but wanders off, time and again, in search of more adventure.

Mik (Gypsy Trotter) has his own fair share of fame and fortune. Of course, Mik is an earlier avatar of Kim—the prototype Trotter (“Anglo-Indian”, Trotter, one and the same). Unusual skin colour also links Mik to one of India’s favourite Gods, an identity validated by the number of supposed “god-sightings” as Mik and his “Lama” walk the great road. Naturally, the Tibetan plinth-master is also an avatar of Kim’s Lama; Mik’s “Lama” is not yet free from the wheel of life and therefore teaches passive pyromania. Later, Mik is also identifiable as James Skinner, one of the “mountain rats”. Mik goes on to live by the sword, but he dies by the bullet, the world having passed on to the next level of armaments. However, Mik’s death is a heroic one, the consequence of a brief but decisive encounter with Mahavir Pandav, a clone of the Mutiny “hero”, Mangal Pandey.

As the proportions of the legend expand in all directions, the reader is also given a fair bit of information about the adopted land of the Great Trotter. Writing to his step-mother, Justin declares that: “This country is old and feeble, being hot and wet and hot and dry by turns. It is everything we are not, so that any object you are like to touch upon at home might be fairly argued to have its opposite here” (Sealy 118).

Writing in one of his “Journals”, Justin reveals his utter defencelessness in the land of his adoption:

But what is this India? Is it not a thousand shifting surfaces which enamour the newcomer and then swallow him up? It allows him the many titles of victory while obliging him to accept a single rigid function, that of conqueror. The very divisiveness that allowed him in enmeshes him. How is he to grasp what cannot be held—what in fact holds him fast? (Sealy 134)

In the same “Journal entry” Justin foretells the coming of the “Anglo-Indian”:

The British will simply invert the proposition, substituting order for

enjoyment, but their control will partake of pleasure for all that. After the first spoliation will come restraint, regulated pleasure, a profitable deferring of the moment—and postponement is the strictest bliss. But what child will come of the union? (Sealy 135)

The narrator allows himself what he calls a “meditation on Indo-Greek sculpture” (Sealy 110-111) which can be read as a not-too-fantastic speculation of the origin and establishment of the ancient “Gandhara” school of art.

The Great Trotter's fears regarding “Trotter” legitimacy are not unfounded. His son, Mik (Gypsy Trotter) discovers that not even full-fledged training at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich qualifies him for an officer's position in India, the Company and the Governor-General concluding—in an order dated April 21, 1795—that persons with Indian blood could only serve as fifers, drummers and farriers. All the discharged officers, “a Skinner, a Powell, a Hearsey, a Gardner, a Gray” (Sealy 202) converge on a certain house in Calcutta and unanimously decide to switch loyalties. Numerous wars involving their former employers force the Company to re-think, but once victory is achieved:

Anglo-Indians were publicly warned that they must never again serve Indian princes without the Company's permission. They agreed. As soon as they did, the irregular units they commanded were disbanded. In view, however, of the useful services rendered by the irregular corps it was thought that one such body of horse should be maintained on a permanent footing. (Sealy 273)

Returning to claim his inheritance, Mik is unaware that: “Primogeniture counted for nothing: the son-and-supposed heir was a country-born and as such had no rights. An entire class of persons like Mik, sprung equally from Europeans and Indians, was altogether destitute of law” (Sealy 253). The will is miraculously discovered in the unused dumb-waiter and Mik gets a reprieve. Sons and daughters are conceived with gay abandon, the Alexander sisters still ready and willing to satisfy Mik's passion. Charles Augustine Pote, the foster-child of Rose, takes pride of place, not only because of Rose, but also because he is the first-born. Unfortunately, Charles shows no interest in arms and ammunition; his sole interest is art, especially painting. His inclinations take him to Trotterpurwa, the place where he purchases his paints. There he chances upon Bulbul, the adopted daughter of a “bird-doctor” and their mutual interest in one another's anatomy leads ultimately to their marriage.

Charles continues with his painting while Bulbul cares for their son, Thomas Henry (Middle Trotter). When Mik returns to San Souci after yet another of his “wars”, he finds the indigo-trade in disarray. Not willing to accede to the “nilchis”, Mik deprives them of their livelihood and when they retaliate by targeting the indigo-baths, Mik decides to exterminate the lot. The ensuing no-holds-barred feud results in a tragic defeat for Mik—that too at the hands of a non-professional force. Charles is one of the casualties and this precipitates the derangement of Bulbul. The upbringing of Thomas Henry therefore passes to Rose.

Frank Anthony's book claims that the real Charles Pote (an “Anglo-Indian” who lived in the first half of the nineteenth century) was to art what Henry Derozio was to poetry. The book also states that: “Pote was a free-thinker and was laid to rest without the rites of a Christian burial. Our artist sleeps in a nameless and forgotten grave” (Anthony 63; see also Sealy 312). In like manner, Charles Augustine Pote Trotter has no memorial, for the chronicle records that his mortal remains were never found. But, as *The Trotter-Nama* continues, it seems that legend has been caught up by history—chronicle and factual detail unfold in real-time, notwithstanding minor name-changes.

The branch lines of the Great Trotter have also been busy contributing to the Trotter heritage; Farida's marriage to Fonseca finds fruition in the birth of three children—Henry Luis Vivian, Luisa and Ferdinand Fonseca-Trotter. Elise (Jarman Begum), who marries Yakub Khan, has a son, Jacob Kahn-Trotter, who, much later, goes on to marry his “cousin” Luisa. While Henry Luis Vivian makes a name for himself as a poet and scholar, Jacob is the representative chosen to take the “Anglo-Indian” “Petition” to London. The poet succeeds in sufficiently annoying the orthodox circles in Calcutta and this culminates in him being sacked from his teaching position. Jacob has the privilege of witnessing the proceedings of the parliament of England, but is too naïve to understand the prevarication and fence-sitting for which the Houses are justifiably famous. By the time he returns to India, the poet has been carried away by cholera and the time is ripe for revolution. Thomas Henry (Middle Trotter, later known as Nakhilau Trotter) is certain that he is no ordinary “cranny”, or clerk, or writer and Mik (Next Trotter, also known as Gypsy Trotter or Topsy Trotter) predicts that wars are a thing of the past, since the whole world is tired of them. Little does he

realize that a single action will plunge India into the maelstrom of Mutiny (or War of Independence):

When they drew near the quarter-guard, the sight of a soldier drunk in uniform drove all thoughts of peace from Gulabi Trotter's head. He dug his spurs into the mare and charged, mouthing foul oaths and waving his sabre above his head as he used to many years before when only a cadet. Mahavir Pandav stopped his harangue and turned to meet the attack, snatching the sentry's musket. (Sealy 327)

Mik breathes his last on the day that Mahavir Pandav is executed and it is only a matter of time before wave after wave of violence is unleashed all over India. It is time therefore for the telegraphist, Cyril Brendish Trotter, to send off his Empire-saving message and for Thomas Henry (Middle Trotter) to volunteer his services to warn the relieving forces of Porlock and Feverfew about the pitfalls awaiting them in Nakhlau.

A "note" on "ghi" is enough to introduce the subject of the "Mutiny", but since that period of history has been so exhaustively covered, the narrator, at the instance of the "cup-bearer", fills in details that pertain only to the involvement of the "Trotters" in the imbroglio. The heroics of "Nakhlau Trotter", outlined in his version of the Mutiny in Nakhlau, are penned while sitting in the British Museum, with Karl Marx and Charles Darwin in the premises (See Sealy 356). But perhaps the greatest contribution of the Middle Trotter to posterity is "Trotter curry"—(the complete recipe to be found in Sealy 363-64)—a concoction put together by his wife Philippa to tide over some pressing culinary problems. Not long after, since the main "Trotter" profession changed from "writer" to "railwayman", it was popularly believed that "the trains of India ran to time on goats' feet" (Sealy 364).

Thomas Henry (Nakhlau Trotter) had another reason to celebrate—his daughter, Victoria, named after the Queen (later to become Empress). The girl grows up with so much "modesty" that she leaves no table or chair uncovered; the proprieties are strictly followed and prudery reaches the final frontier. But then, in the wake of a storm, a man selling rain-gauges appears at the door. Theobald Horatius Montagu finds acceptance by the family when he expresses his delight to be talking to "Nakhlau Trotter". The attraction that Victoria feels for Mr Montagu is something that she herself cannot understand, but the end-result is that, while the Trotters sail to

England on furlough, Victoria conceives miraculously. Nakhlau Trotter returns to San Souci alone, to find visible evidence of his daughter's changed condition. The disappearance of his sons does not affect him much, now that he is a widower, but he is very annoyed to find that Montagu is not a Catholic. Four months after the marriage, the couple is blessed with a baby boy and, at about the same time, they alter their name to Montagu-Trotter. This is co-incidental to Alina, Thomas Henry's cousin, deciding to "go native" and so insisting "on being called not Aunty Alina but Alina Aunty" (Sealy 385). An attempt is made to set up a sugar factory, but Nakhlau Trotter is wheedled into putting up an ice factory instead. The gigantic Victoria is content to suckle her first-born, Peter Augustine, but even she discovers something—albeit through a lens, darkly—that assures her of a place in posterity:

The object was, as Victoria had described it, a brilliant, almost blinding white—it was a plain unadorned chamberpot. It was not supported, for behind the object was a subject, and it was this that was especially blurred. All the same, through the smudge of ghostly waving lines there shone a face which for the first time in its life was made visible. It was Jivan, the sweeper-and-emptier, Budhiya's son, a man of so degraded a caste the very untouchables lorded it over him. He was, or had been until now, an unseeable. (Sealy 392)

It takes a Trotter ("Anglo-Indian", same thing) to find a species beyond the pale of humanity. This is surely an "Anglo-Indian" "first", even if Victoria sees the chamberpot before she recognizes that there is a man carrying it! Victoria's humanism is very simply put: "I'm telling you, it's there, men" (Sealy 392). The master-stroke is in the use of "men", that colloquial expression that is synonymous with "Anglo-Indian" speech.

Alex Kahn-Trotter, son of Alina and Philip, makes a name for himself in Nakhlau as a free-lance photographer, showing up at every place where two or three were gathered. His coverage of a national convention of the party provoked a review "by one R.K." (Sealy 401)—the reviewer (in see-through, fictional disguise) being none other than the Nobel Prize winner and hard-core imperialist, Rudyard Kipling. Alex's furious reaction only lands him in gaol, but when he is released, Alex has his repartee ready—a poem (or verse, same thing) that is entitled "—Chorus to 'Arrack Room Ballad'" (Sealy 402).

Mr Montagu then draws a perfect picture of British foreign policy by calling for a

geometry box:

When it came he selected two instruments and held them up by turns, gesturing.

“Divide. And rule.” . . .

It was to seal his favoured son's esteem that Mr Montagu yielded to the shameful encore, fishing out still another instrument and adding: “That is how you encompass the world.” (Sealy 404)

When Thomas Henry (Nakhlau Trotter) finally passes on, he is immortalized in “*A memoria*” (Sealy 430).

The book then outlines some of the achievements of the Trotter clan. During the years of the Great War: “A Trotter accounted for the first zeppelin brought down in England while another brought down the first zeppelin in France; fatal balloons, one way or the other, seemed to run in the Trotter blood” (Sealy 431). When Young Paul, favoured son of Mr Montagu, returns from the ravages of the War, he finds that things have changed: “Under the leadership of a man called Gidney-Trotter, the various Anglo-Indian associations around the country had agreed to come together” (Sealy 432). Not one to be left behind, Young Paul acquires a wife and proceeds on a whirlwind tour of the country in order to garner support for his cause. The energy he exhibits stands him in good stead and:

The next year he was elected without serious opposition and his acceptance speeches showed his syntax had not changed. In the years to come his speeches were so liberally laced with /'s that a disgruntled faction from Calcutta began to call him the I-Specialist. It was a label that caught on just when Gandhi arrived on the scene. (Sealy 433)

Young Paul ultimately relinquishes the reins of power to his son, Marris, but not before he tries to make his dreams come true. He disagrees with the Mahatma's plan of civil disobedience as the means to oust the imperialists, but unsure of whether his community will gain recognition in free India, he decides: “Better to start anew, somewhere else. It was then that he hit upon the Nicobar scheme” (Sealy 456). If the Trotters were allowed to take over the administration of the islands, Young Paul imagines that “they could become a seafaring nation (there were precedents), and under the right leadership they would take their place among the nations of the world” (Sealy 457). Of course, other Trotters had their own dreams.

In the mean time, Philip Augustine, the first-born of Victoria and Theobald Horatius, instead of embarking on a career in the church, gets married to Lucia in Rome and returns to San Souci. Their son, Eustace Montagu-Trotter (Sixth Trotter, Fore Trotter) goes on to marry Queenie, originally a lodger in Victoria's home. The child of their union is Eugene Aloysius Trotter (Seventh Trotter, Chosen Trotter), born on the same day (21 June) as his illustrious ancestor and in much the same manner, for: "He enters the world with a laugh, like Akbar, like Zoroaster, like the Great Trotter (*that he is*)" (Sealy 478). The re-incarnation now an established fact, Eugene Aloysius straddles the world, with the arch-villain Carlos ever on his tail.

Other important things are happening in other places at other times. Mr Montagu-Trotter thinks that: "in the hunger strike, was a useful political instrument" (Sealy 437), long before it becomes the trusted tool of the Mahatma. Also, if "the Gujaratis, renowned throughout India for adding sugar to their curries, could produce a champion of salt, who was he, Theobald Horatius Montagu, to lag behind. He would go on a salt march of his own" (Sealy 455). On the other side of the planet, Mr Montagu-Trotter's daughter Pearl, a clone of the Hollywood star Merle Oberon, trans-created into Michael Korda's "Queenie", is getting rave reviews for her performances, while another daughter, Dulcie (the Diva) enthralled London audiences with her voice. When, at last, Young Paul dies, his son Marris decides to follow his father into the murky world of politics:

He was elected without opposition—or none that he couldn't crush with a battery of *whereases* and a ready stock of legal phrases weighted, as *per consuetude*, with italics. And years later when he had consolidated his position and was the unchallenged leader of the community, with his own magazine and a seat in Parliament, he would speak with a kind of mystic awe of that moment when "*the mantel descended on me*". (Sealy 502-03)

With a note describing "*How the Raj is done*" (Sealy 560), the chronicle concludes with a revelation: Eugene (Seventh Trotter, Chosen Trotter) is devouring his second tray of food, high up in the skies in an airplane, when he is granted a vision of the future of the Trotters (Sealy 561). The chronicle ends in truly unspectacular literary fashion, with "DA! –*boum!*" (Sealy 562) being replaced by "a fathomless tintinnabulation, -NYA –NYA –NYA" (Sealy 562). The genesis leads to an exodus

and after the Trotter chronicle runs its full course (up to the present day), it ends in a revelation: the book suggests that the end is in the beginning, just as the beginning is in the end. What does it really matter if the summation is “DA”, or “OU-BOUM”, or “-NYA”: these are simply expressions of futility. The “Trotter” (read “Anglo-Indian”) story goes on and on and on.

The naïve and postured modesty of the book does not conceal the fact that it brims over with practical wisdom. For example, there are many hints about how to get a new book on its way. The librarian in the Great Trotter's employ, Munshi Nishan Chand, knows that: “Any ass can write a book, but only its dispenser can direct its fate: bind it, catalogue it, translate it if need be, and above all place it in fit hands. Writing—ha!” (Sealy 57) The formula for a “chronicle” is described in precise detail: “A record of the past set down with genius and sang-froid, not to speak of afflatus and Nakhavi brio. And if a soupcon of coincidence (so-called) enliven the brew, what of it?” (Sealy 261) Towards the end of the chronicle, Sealy pleads: “And can we here and now and once and for all abandon the fetishism of the Original? All art is imitation—the point is to make the imitation sing. And sell” (Sealy 513). To conclude the lesson, a special—“Anglo-Indian” (Trotter—same thing)—twist is provided: “The thing, as I've said before, is to prepare the *artist*. The art takes care of itself. You fatten the fingers, they do the rest” (Sealy 513).

The Trotter-Nama is literary enough for anyone who has some knowledge of literature, but the writer wants to indicate a page: “*In which I introduce literary echoes*” (see Sealy 484). The “I” does not reveal whether it is the author Sealy, or the narrator, who is responsible for the introduction, but the contextually-relevant sounds of *The Waste-Land*, *A Passage to India* and *The Trotter-Nama* formalize the literary background of the chronicle.

The book has its own share of literary nuggets; one example describes the march of the monsoon: “The first patter comes, of pearls, then a drumming of diamonds. Earth's cracks heal, wineskins mend, and lovers put tiffs away” (Sealy 225). There is also: “*A sermon—cut short*” (Sealy 498-99) that analyzes the political and social vision of Indian polity from the time that the country became independent—an analysis that needs to be looked at with all seriousness by the people who make

plans for the world's biggest democracy. And there are at least two instances of deliberate malapropism. In the explanation about how jaggery (or gur) is made, the narrator cautions the good, sweet adept: "Best produce your own and have done with adultery" (Sealy 389). Much later in the narrative, when cholera is threatening to carry away a great number of Trotters and has indeed succeeded in carrying away one more victim, "Reuben sealed the door and said a prayer on the outside. 'That will have to be our moratorium,' he said darkly. 'Mortuary,' said Hope" (Sealy 531).

There are some genuine pieces of down-to-earth, practical wisdom in the book, too. The narrative confidently asserts that: "The number of those who happily surrendered responsibility was always greater than those willing to take it up" (Sealy 166) and one has only to look around to realize the veracity of the statement. A little later, the narrative dictates that: "Men go to battle for four reasons: to escape their wives (or concubines), to escape themselves (or the wheel of life), to earn their bread (or loaf), and as military advisers" (Sealy 220). Though the last-mentioned reason is the one that resurrects the Great Trotter's military career, the other three have a ring of truth that belies the mock-seriousness of the message. In a "kind" of aside, the book narrows down the source of all the world's pain: "(All the world's sorrows stem from envy; let us have done with it; other notable sins being covetousness, pride, anger, and lechery)" (Sealy 221). Contemplating the possibility of tampering with facts, one of the characters in the book concludes that: "There were some truths you could create if you simply believed in them hard enough" (Sealy 446). Finally, the narrator, from some hidden fund of knowledge, declares that: "the very young can smell death" (Sealy 459), a hypothesis that needs further verification.

There are quite a few excerpts that visibly make *The Trotter-Nama* a uniquely "Anglo-Indian" book, perhaps the first of its kind and, because of this, a trend-setter that may be hard to match. To start at the very end of the narrative, the *Nama* points to a debatable failing; it says: "*Favourite Anglo pastime—smile at you then stab you in the back*" (Sealy 574). There may be many takers for this assertion, but backstabbing is not confined to the "Anglo-Indian"; it is a much more common human vice than it used to be. Related to this half-truth is the feeling that: "People said a lot: it was the Anglo-Indian vice" (Sealy 447). It is common enough for people to talk about

their achievements, especially when nobody else does; but this, too, may be a more common human feeling than is realized.

More to the point and one that has to be conceded—for the “Anglo-Indian” world as it used to be—is the edifice around which all its social life was built: “In the centre of the colony there rose, like a church without a steeple, the Railway Institute, edged with dahlias and complete with bar and billiard room, badminton court and bandstand” (Sealy 398). The Institute precincts were indeed an exclusive preserve for the “Anglo-Indians” of old, but there were genuine reasons for this. Shunned by the British clubs and derided by his fellow-Indian for aping the mores of the West, the “Anglo-Indian” built and maintained for himself a club that allowed him to spend an evening (or more) in surroundings that were congenial to his temperament. Recourse to such exclusiveness was not necessary in the age of diaspora, for the narrative correctly identifies that: “Perth was the beginning of the end of the White Australia Policy” (Sealy 503).

More pertinent—because the same happens on an everyday basis in modern India—is this excerpt:

An advertisement had appeared in the *Nuntio* for a clerk in the Nakhlau waterworks. Reuben took him [Eugene] there himself. The interviewer, Mr Mathur, a handsome man with a slight onset of leucoderma, said without raising his eyes: “But what is this *Trotter*? It is not an Indian name.” It was the standard response. Nowadays if you were a Trotter you might as well not bother applying. (Sealy 521)

The same (but different) predicament is what crosses Thomas Henry's (Nakhlau Trotter's) mind before he goes on to make history: “After all, you have no concern with either: the one will kill you and yours if he could, the other would chain you to a desk, an uncovenanted one at that” (Sealy 343). Being neither black nor white, the average “Anglo-Indian”, like the Middle Trotter, tries to tread the middle path, but is never allowed to do so because of the antagonism surrounding him. Not unjustifiable, therefore, is the comment of the chronicler on the “*well*-atrocities” that took place in Nakhlau during the Mutiny: “The well, whose horrors, unlike those of the Black Hole of Calcutta, were real, would one day disappear from Indian history, proving that while Britons were skilled at seeing what was not there, Indians would become adept at not seeing what was” (Sealy 338).

The mindset has not changed in one hundred and fifty years: shunned by his paternal forbears and stigmatized by his maternal lineage, the “Anglo-Indian” has had to manoeuvre with skill; no wonder, then, that he has sought haven in countries where skin colour and familial ties are not very over-riding factors. The fact that “Anglo-Indians” are thriving in every part of the world shows that they have all the strengths of their mixed parentage and very little of their venality.

A critique by Maria Couto—“Half in Love: *The Trotter-Nama*, An Anglo-Indian Saga”—associates Sealy’s book with Desani’s *All About H. Hatterr* and Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. It correctly emphasizes the importance of the early part of the book, for the opulence and abandon of the first two Trotters prepares the reader for the decline of the generations that follow. “Legend” and “Chivalry” give way to more mundane life-styles, but at the end of the saga, “Diaspora” is replaced by “New Promise”, where, even though “Trotter” is not a name that will guarantee a job and a comfortable living, it is still a name, a recognizable entity. In the future, perhaps, national identity will become achievable. That is the hope that the Seventh Trotter (who is the narrator of the *Nama*) carries with him.

In *The Trotter-Nama*, Sealy paints a more familiar “Anglo-Indian” picture, using a very unfamiliar format. Right from the beginning, the exclusive world of the “Anglo-Indian” is built into the narrative. The dubious establishment of the Trotter homestead in Nakhlau includes the blending in with the outside world, as the First Trotter acquires a number of wives and hordes of hangers-on. The halcyon days of doing things only when one wanted to do them are repeated in the life of Mik—Second—Trotter, but thereafter the respectability of monogamous relationships takes root. Succeeding generations of Trotters become more and more insular as less and less opportunity comes their way in the land of their birth—they are found to be fit only as railway workers, teachers, nurses and machine operators. From a relatively comfortable life-style in the past, many Trotters now live hand-to-mouth, forcing many of them to seek greener pastures. For those who stay, the mother-country turns into a land of opportunity, but with a name like Trotter, the chances of making it to the top—except to the very top—are not encouraging. The chronicle envisions a bleak future for all Trotters, but the reality does not support this dismal

prediction. For Trotters, there may well be rough times ahead, but that is the case for the rest of the world, too. And only a later chronicle will be able to document what transpires then.

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