

# Findings

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**Topic: Imaging the Subcontinent: Colonial Realism and the Ethnographic Writing of British India**

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This thesis studies representative Victorian adventure writing on the Indian subcontinent in order to read the generation of ethnographic verisimilitude as a factor of the colonial inflection of realism in this canon. The authors it has selected—W.H.G. Kingston, G.M. Fenn, and Thomas Reid—had never visited India, but they convincingly evoked its people, cities, landscape, and plant and animal life in their novels on key events and tropes in Victorian Anglo-Indian contact—such as the Mutiny of 1857–58 and the ethno-biological conquest of India. The truth claims of these fictional texts are premised on similar strategies of narrative verisimilitude—aestheticization of Indian places and peoples; stereotyping of Indians as stock character types; and commodification of Indian products and artefacts—which made believable the experiential accounts of the British who had lived and worked in India. Following are the primary findings of this thesis:

Even as ethnography came to be allied with the creation of totalizing, universalist .1 conceits of racial and national identity, it is important to emphasise that neither in its theory nor in its practice did it draw inspiration exclusively from colonialism. It was only by the second half of the nineteenth century that some cohesion appeared in British attitudes to the meaning and place of the ethnoscience in the study and classification of human cultures.

Though understood for the most in opposition to realism, romance in colonial .2 contexts was also informed by the techniques and politics of ethnographic verisimilitude which so vitally shaped colonial realism.

In focussing exclusively on written material in a historical context of disproportionate literacy, literary research risks not taking into its ambit large sections of the population who did not have the wherewithal and leisure to pursue reading as an activity. .3

By drawing freely upon historiographic and journalistic comments on the Mutiny and popularising their narratives with stereotypes about India and Indians, these novels are able to successfully claim an experiential credibility for their presentation of the events of 1857–58. .4

In foregrounding scientific expertise as a cornerstone of British society and its liberal and progressive achievements, these texts draw upon not just popular travelogues but also the network of ethno-botanical research being sustained by metropolitan and colonial amateurs and institutions. .5