

## “Sensation” India: *Gup. Sketches of Anglo-Indian Life and Character* by Florence Marryat

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### Abstract

Florence Marryat was a prolific author, as well as being renowned for both her involvement with spiritualism and her parallel career as an actress. In 1854, she married Thomas Ross Church, an officer in the British Army, with whom she travelled through India for six years. On coming back to England, she began her successful writing career. She specialized in popular (and lucrative) sensation novels, but she also capitalized on her residence in India by penning a travel memoir: *Gup. Sketches of Anglo-Indian Life and Character*, eventually released as a volume in 1868. By engaging in a close reading of the text, this paper sets out to demonstrate that, in crafting her account, Marryat concocted an imaginary, “sensational” depiction of India and its people, to please and entertain her readership, while serving her own social and political agendas.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Florence Marryat, hybridity, India, sensation novel, women’s roles

## FLORENCE MARRYAT: A MULTI-FACETED AND CONTROVERSIAL ARTIST

Harry Furniss's 1923 portrayal of Florence Marryat (1833-1899) proves rather insightful, as it epitomizes the way she was perceived by her contemporaries, while shedding light on the biased reasons commonly adduced for her relative obscurity, which lasted for nearly one century after her demise. By depicting Marryat as "a good-natured, energetic woman, and a prolific writer—but not a great one"<sup>1</sup> (10), the celebrated author and illustrator pointed to her alleged artistic limitations which, nonetheless, he had become aware of from second-hand sources – actually, as Furniss candidly admitted, he had "never read her books" (11). He also mentioned her "eccentricity" (11) as well as two other contrasting features, joining conventionally feminine and unfeminine traits into one person: although she was a "striking-looking woman" (11), in fact, she would straightforwardly address her interlocutors just "like a man" (11). Marryat led quite a remarkable life,<sup>2</sup> becoming "an expert in the manipulation and multiplication of her own identity" (Palmer 141), as Beth Palmer has elucidated. She married, was divorced (on the grounds of adultery), remarried, and separated. She gave birth to eight children, penned countless short stories, 70 volumes (mostly fictional narratives), as well as a few plays.<sup>3</sup> She contributed to periodicals and, from 1872 to 1876, she edited *London Society*, a prominent and best-selling journal. She was involved in the Society of Authors (a group gathering professional writers, like a trade union); furthermore, in her late years, she established her own School for Literary Art. A self-supporting artist and a talented entrepreneur, Marryat also pursued an acting career with the D'Oyly Carte opera company. Finally, she was renowned as a public speaker, a singer, an entertainer, a spiritualist, an anti-vivisectionist, and even a dog breeder (Depledge 306; Hatter and Ifill 10).

Despite her numerous and often transgressive endeavors, she was at pains to cast herself as a model of Victorian domesticity, as she longed to meet the expectations of her diverse readership. Consequently, she concocted a perfectly acceptable version of her first approach to writing, by highlighting its therapeutic value. As she declared in an 1897 interview with *Woman at Home* magazine, in fact, she began scribbling her first novel almost unintentionally, only to distract her mind while nursing her children, affected by scarlet fever (Palmer 118). Despite her protestations of propriety and decorum, however, virtually all of her plots

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1 The emphasis is mine.

2 Sarah Lennox describes it as "full and unconventional" (1).

3 She never assumed her husband's surname, also because, as a writer, she wished to exploit the reputation of her father, Captain Frederick Marryat, a distinguished author of seafaring novels.

revolve around taboo topics, thrilling crimes drawn from newspaper articles, the gratification of sexual impulses, the blurring of social and gender lines, and the resulting need to redraw the boundaries of femininity, beyond restrictive conventions. Hence, her novels have been easily ascribed to the fashionable and lucrative genre of sensation fiction.<sup>4</sup> While recent scholarship has devoted increasing attention to her fictional works (Lennox 1-13), Marryat's non-fictional texts are still largely overlooked, set apart from the rest of her oeuvre, and relegated to a marginal position. Conversely, as this article sets out to demonstrate, *Gup. Sketches of Anglo-Indian Life and Character* (1868), which is a travel memoir focused on her six-year stay in India, is perfectly consistent with both the bulk of her output and the skillful performance of her contrasting identities as a respectable Victorian lady and an outspoken champion of women's rights. As demonstrated below, since Marryat aimed to serve the same personal and social agendas, the author observed her host country and its inhabitants through the very lens of sensation fiction she adopted in crafting her novels. Indeed, she delved into contemporary anxieties (in this case, stemming from the colonial encounter), while fostering a necessary reassessment of gender roles and prerogatives. A brief account of the reasons that prompted Marryat to spend such a prolonged time in India will precede the textual analysis of her memoir.

## **MARRYAT'S INDIA IN GUP. SKETCHES OF ANGLO-INDIAN LIFE AND CHARACTER**

In June 1854, Marryat married Thomas Ross Church, Ensign in the 12<sup>th</sup> Madras Staff Corps. She immediately joined him in India, spending most of her time in Bangalore, Mysore, the Neilgherry Hills, and Rangoon (Burma), which are locations that furnished the background for her later recollections. According to colonial ideology, children born in the Subcontinent had to be sent back to Britain when they reached the age between five and seven, to enhance their education in a *healthier* – in all respects – environment (Ghose 116). Pregnant with her fourth

4 According to Catherine Pope, the first sensation novels were published in the 1850s, even though the genre reached the peak of its popularity one decade later, when the subordination of women in society began to be more openly questioned (4-5). With their lurid and scandalous plots, these novels aroused hostile reactions on the part of several critics, who lamented their corrupting influence on the reading public. Henry Mansel, for example, blamed their lack of moral purpose, their "preaching to the nerves" (482): "excitement, and excitement alone, seems to be the great end at which [sensation writers] aim—an end that must be accomplished at any cost by some means or other" (482). Margaret Oliphant also thundered against "the school called sensational" (258), made up of writers with "no genius and little talent" (258) who, in their novels, clearly displayed "their acquaintance with the accessories and surroundings of vice" (258).

child,<sup>5</sup> therefore, in 1860 Marryat returned to her motherland, together with her two daughters and a son, thus leaving her husband behind. Ross Church visited her occasionally,<sup>6</sup> but biographers are unsure as to whether he continued to regularly provide for his family (Palmer 117; Pope 16). Financial insecurity might have pushed young Florence to start her multiple careers, besides urging her to capitalize on her extraordinary experience in a distant and mysterious land by composing a marketable account. *Gup. Sketches of Anglo-Indian Life and Character* was first successfully serialized in *Temple Bar* (November 1866–November 1867), and then published as a volume by Bentley, in 1868.

A possible connection between her travel memoir and the sensation genre has been suggested by Beth Palmer, who has noticed how the author “relish[e]d” telling the most sensational and shocking episodes of the life she led” (125), adding that “the exotic incidents she recount[ed], often of a violent or vaguely erotic nature” (125), added to her growing reputation “as a sensationalist” (126). Unquestionably, the narrative abounds in exciting episodes, electrifying her (as well as her readers’) “nerves” (Marryat 67), as when she spotted a fierce tiger hiding amidst the foliage (67), when she was almost sexually assaulted by a crowd of impudent men, “touching [her] clothes with their hands” (119), or when she inferred – “knowing what [she did] of the eastern character” (164) – that some of her acquaintances had been cunningly poisoned by the natives. Nevertheless, the most profoundly transgressive and “sensational” element in the text may be identified in the description of the extraordinarily active and *public* life led by Anglo-Indian<sup>7</sup> women. As readers gather, in fact, in India Marryat seldom maintained a subaltern stance, nor did she restrict herself to the private sphere, whose invisible borders she actually crossed the very moment she undertook her journey. On the contrary, she felt entrusted with the same colonizing and civilizing mission as her male counterparts, thus turning herself and the other *memsahibs* into “indirect agents of empire” (McInnis 379). Accordingly, if, on the one hand, she seemingly downplays the scope of her own volume to fit Victorian ideals of female modesty and reticence – as she clarifies, *gup* “is the Hindustani for ‘gossip’” (Marryat 283) –, on the other hand she forcefully appropriates the language of power, while offering a performance of her own superior Britishness which somehow legitimizes even her violation of gender rules.<sup>8</sup>

5 She gave birth to a daughter, rumored to be the result of an extra-marital affair; due to her physical disabilities (she probably had a cleft palate), the child survived only ten days (Palmer 123; Pope 16).

6 Apparently, the couple generated four more children.

7 This term is used in its nineteenth-century acceptation, meaning British women living in India.

8 As S. Vimala maintains, English women in India performed “a distinctive identity embodying the essential Englishness” (285).

Through her imperial gaze, the Indian landscape is seldom perceived as worthy of contemplation. Even though the Seegoor ghauts are a sight that "almost reconciles you to India" (81), with their "rocky precipices, romantic waterfalls, and lovely eastern vegetation" (81), most of the times, the only views she genuinely enjoys are those that remind her of her country of origin, from which she cannot mentally separate. Consequently, Bangalore is a fine place so long as "it is very like England, both in climate and productions" (3); moreover, observed from afar, the cantonment she is quartered in reassuringly resembles "an English village on a large scale" (6): as a result, it looks welcoming and inviting. Yet, she soon finds out that this striking likeness with her cherished birthplace is a sheer delusion: in fact, if the presence of English fruit and vegetables contributes to recreating the impression of spatial continuity, their "stunted and sickly" (5) appearance, "like an embodiment of cholera morbus" (5), serves as a clear warning against a potentially harmful self-deception. Hence, Marryat carefully balances her scant words of praise for the novel environment, with copious considerations that betray her deeper scorn and mistrust. For instance, the "enchanted ground" (260) in the Rangoon jungle, full of flamboyant flower beds and scented bushes of pink roses, is equated to the "garden immortalized in the fairy tale of Beauty and the Beast" (260): one would almost expect "to see some hideous figure" (260) lurking behind the lush vegetation, ready to "punish [visitors] for [their] temerity" (261). The calm and outwardly beautiful lake in Ootacamund is actually "useless except to look at, as no fish live in the water" (91): reduced to a mere object of aesthetic appreciation lacking any practical value, it does not live up to her standards of perfection.

In her seminal 2002 volume, Indrani Sen investigated the complex construction of the *memsahib* – a cultural icon in colonial literature – "as a tragic exile, shouldering hardships, discomforts, tragedies" (28), while also functioning as a fully-fledged "membe[r] of the ruling race" (33), eagerly involved in the British imperialistic venture. Acting as a model embodiment of the *memsahib*, in the initial pages of *Gup*, Marryat openly refers to her itinerant and displaced condition, often mentioning the long, unpleasant years "passed in exile" (Marryat 1; 9) in the Subcontinent. Her sense of loss and nostalgia, however, proves short-lived, soon replaced by the deliberate development of Orientalizing strategies, aimed at widening the gap between herself (the representative of a righteous and domineering elite) and the natives. Indeed, in order to stress her own preeminence, the writer lingers on derogatory and stereotypical descriptions of the locals' depraved nature and habits. As she underlines, "[t]heir characters may be summed up in a word: the men are cruel, crafty, and indolent; the women notoriously vicious; and the consequence is that such a thing as natural affection is little known amongst them" (35). To support her thesis, she shares the alleged story of a woman who

had callously sold her own child for a few shillings. The author does not inquire into the real reasons for such a desperate act: possibly, both mother and infant were starving to death; albeit painful, their separation would therefore increase their chances of survival. Instead, she manipulates incidents and colors her memories to suit her narrative purposes. In truth, Marryat exhibits no compassion for the Indians, dismissed as a bunch of “inveterate liars” (36), willing to commit any disgraceful deed for the sake of “the magic rupee” (37). Unsurprisingly, she even condones the use of violence against them: for example, she feels “the keenest sympathy” (35) for an officer who, exasperated by the indolence of his “tardy domestic” (35), had eventually reacted with “an energetic kick” (35).

As Nupur Chaudhuri maintains, “1857 was a watershed year” (556) for most British settlers in India. Although atrocities were committed on both sides, sensational and upsetting accounts of the Indian Mutiny published in Britain tended to justify the brutal retaliation colonists enacted against the insurgents, by highlighting white women’s extreme vulnerability. The savage mutilations and the sexual abuses the “Angels of Albion”<sup>9</sup> suffered on the part of the Sepoys ignited public outrage, while feeding imperial ambitions (Agnew 3; Ghose 111). Since Marryat was a resident in India during the height of the turmoil, readers would have expected at least a cursory reference to the uprising; conversely, she deliberately omits any allusion to the Mutiny, thus distancing herself from the dominant narrative of female victimization and sacrifice. The only historical event the writer associates her travel memoir with is the Siege of Seringapatam<sup>10</sup> (1799), which marked a decisive victory of the British troops against the mighty ruler of Mysore, Tippoo Sahib. Once again, she opts for a cleverly crafted representation of her experience abroad, designed to emphasize her active participation in the sphere of politics and power, from which women were normally excluded. Her British superiority is also manifested through her portrayal of the current Raja of Mysore, whom she meets during one of her inland travels. To her judgmental eyes, accustomed to the highest standard of dignity and grandeur in her country, his palace looks ridiculous, nothing more than a gaudy puppet theatre; the building itself is “mis-shapen” (Marryat 128) and its front “is painted in the most glaring colors,

9 The siege of Cawnpore (a crucial garrison town for the East India Company) was one of the most gruesome; as Jane Robinson has argued, it was “not merely a matter of military affront” (98): it was “the first time the women of England had ever been slaughtered in the history of battle. The British response was a tribal one – even atavistic” (98).

10 The taking of Seringapatam is mentioned three times in the narrative (122, 131, 142). The author even describes the fort, which she visits before leaving Mysore, thus demonstrating her patriotic commitment even when sightseeing: “The fort is still standing, with the huge breaches made in it every here and there by the English shells; and the spot where Tippoo Sahib fell was pointed out to us by our native cicerone” (142).



giving it the appearance of a large Punch and Judy show, or a travelling caravan, or anything but a king’s dwelling” (128). She focuses on the “dirty huts and shops” (128) that surround it and, once inside its walls, she explores the “badly-lighted and ill-ventilated stable” (129) where, to her dismay, the Raja’s holy cows are kept, with their piles of dung. The farther she penetrates into the palace, the more filth and litter she notices. For Victorians, cleanliness and hygiene stood for moral integrity, discipline, rationality, and industry (McClintock 171, 211, 217).<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, the Raja’s authority and supremacy are downgraded and disparaged to such an extent that she expects him to be “seated on a dunghill for a chair of state” (129). On the other hand, his alleged subordination to the Crown is signified through the portrait of the Queen and Prince Albert, hanging in his reception chamber (132).

Marryat also dwells upon the physical description of the natives, only to prove their inferiority to the northern races and their resulting need for (British) guidance. The Raja is “a little shriveled-up man” (123), while the local people are frequently compared to brutes, as if they had fallen behind in the evolutionary struggle.<sup>12</sup> A group of men “grin[s] and jabber[s] like a set of monkeys” (119); Burmese workers are “agile as monkeys and lithe as snakes” (209); the younger monkeys engaged in games, “look quite as pretty and as cunning as little native children” (148). These *Othering* and dehumanizing practices persist even when the author seemingly spares words of praise; in voicing her admiration for the attractiveness of some workmen, in fact, she concentrates on their sturdy limbs – “[they] had the most wonderful arms and legs to look at” (208) –, thus transforming human beings into commodities, into coveted collector’s items.<sup>13</sup>

Marryat’s “sensation” India is also connected with contemporary fears of miscegenation and atavism, the staple features of colonial gothic.<sup>14</sup> Far from offering secure shelter, her “hybrid cantonment” (150) is viewed as a disquieting twilight zone, as a place which is “English, and yet not English, Indian, and yet not Indian” (150), where one’s subjectivity is liable to transformation or effacement. The

11 According to McClintock, soap embodied “the spiritual ingredient of the imperial mission itself” (211).

12 In the *Temple Bar* version of chapter XII, she even contemptuously calls the natives “niggers,” adding the following comment immediately afterwards: “I know they are not really ‘niggers,’ but I like to call them so” (180). This controversial passage was expunged in the 1868 publication.

13 Marryat’s tendency to objectify living creatures and the environment is discernible in two other passages of her travel memoir; black bears are appreciated because of their skin, which would “mak[e] a very handsome rug” (112); the picturesque Coonoor landscape proves “most desirable for the study of an artist, and would have made a glorious picture” (94).

14 Colonial gothic elements are also present in Marryat’s 1897 novel entitled *The Blood of the Vampire* (Edmundson 73–94).

author feels threatened by the numerous contagious diseases – such as cholera, leprosy, and smallpox (175) – which might pollute her body; nonetheless, her emotional stability and physical integrity are more deviously undermined by the detrimental effects of the climate. Indeed, she feels “enervated” (39, 58) by the intolerable heat, which affects not just the physical appearance of British ladies, but also their customs, which grow dangerously relaxed. To explain the harmful influence of the Indian weather, she resorts to a botanical metaphor: “you might as well transplant a mountain daisy into a hot-house and expect it to thrive, as look for an English complexion to last beneath the sun of India, or English customs to hold good in a climate so different from that for which they were instituted” (40). Marryat succeeds in defending her body’s boundaries from any form of foreign intrusion; for instance, in her Indian version of the Garden of Eden, she refuses to eat the fruit picked for her by her servants, namely “gentlemen who never wear any clothes” (6) – a sentence fraught with evident sexual overtones. However, due to the heat, her stamina and willpower (the two leading attributes of a conquering and dominant race) visibly fail her; initially, she cannot sing, nor can she embroider: “after a short time the needle would so dull in my hot hands, that the exertion of pulling it through the cloth was too much for me” (58). Her reference to traditionally *feminine* activities should not mislead the reader; actually, a few lines later, she restores the balance between the sexes by observing that the torrid climate produces similar outcomes in men as well: “the men who have not appointments waste their days quite as much as the women; for they smoke their lives away”<sup>15</sup> (59). Corrective measures must be enforced to prevent further degeneration. As Éadaoin Agnew has argued, in fact, “because indigenous women were consistently characterized as idle and indolent, imperialist women [...] demonstrated a real anxiety about not being sufficiently and appropriately engaged” (16). Hence, the writer meticulously describes her rigidly organized and intense routine, made up of activities to be performed, including horse-riding, cold bathing and light dining (to practice restraint), and dressing up to meet fellow-countrymen and women (Marryat 56). On the contrary, those who lower their cultural defenses, thus definitively relinquishing their wholesome habits, are doomed to “degenerate almost into a state of idiocy” (220, developing a condition of apathy and mental derangement which she calls “the Burmese Ennui”<sup>16</sup> (220). Contamination fears also involve British children fed by their native wet-nurses. According to Indira

15 In another passage, Marryat relates with horror her visit to a British family who received her “without stockings” (40): “in they came, as if it was the most natural thing in the world to go bare-footed in the hot season, and dressed in the most astonishing of costumes, with their hair done ‘anyhow’” (40-1). She is appalled at their lack of propriety, at their dangerously *going native*.

16 One of her acquaintances, affected by the disease, “would neither eat nor drink, but sat all day doing nothing, with the tears rolling almost insensibly down her cheeks” (221).



Ghose, during the nineteenth century, "colonial doctors forbade breast-feeding as too debilitating" (175); for this specific reason, therefore, local *amahs* were employed. Nevertheless, their physical intimacy with babies, their dangerous transgression of class and racial boundaries, were perceived as profoundly disturbing (Dussart 713). Moreover, as Marryat ominously reports, this widely-diffused practice was frequently exploited by Indian women to exercise their power over defenseless British mothers, whose dear progeny was liable to be cruelly starved. Unnatural and perverted *amahs*, in fact, were actually capable of "retain[ing] all [their] milk" (Marryat 166) at their will and pleasure, with tragic consequences on the survival of the British presence in India. As the writer dolefully remarks, "I have known several cases in India, where English children have been lost from the desertion, or constant change, of their 'amah'" (166). The corrupting exposure to autochthonous languages also raises concerns: since "the conversation of the natives, as a rule, is too filthy to be imagined" (55), children must be forbidden to pick up even a few foreign words from their *amahs*. Likewise, she is not allowed to study Hindustani, to preserve the purity of her mind from immorality and sin.

The violation of holy domesticity is undeniably one of the core traits of sensation novels; only this time, the menace is not posed by the usual female impostor, who shrewdly rises to a position of prominence within a respectable household.<sup>17</sup> In truth, what frightens both the author and her reading audience is the difficulty in clearly determining the line between the outside and the inside, while striving to recreate the illusion, at least, of a familiar environment in an alien context. According to the rhetoric of Victorian colonial discourse, the concept of *home* appeared to be highly politicized, almost synonymous with *homeland*, to be guarded against enemy attacks (Ghose 118). Once more, therefore, in *Gup*, the *memsahib* is assigned a key and active role, for the protection not just of traditional values (like the Angel in the house) but also – albeit symbolically – of British extended territories abroad. Marryat explicitly underlines the connection between public engagement and private sphere in her description of the "travelers' bungalows" where she often resides, i.e., the dwellings built by the Government for "the enterprising Briton" (Marryat 64), "for the use of the defenders of our country's possessions" (66). However, even though she enjoys the freedom of movement they guarantee, by providing comfort and shelter wherever possible, she laments their lack of individual character, the loss of authenticity that building a transient British abode (almost an oxymoronic phrase in itself), with indigenous materials, in such a different climate, necessarily implies: "No favorite pictures hanging around the room; no cozy spring-stuffed armchairs; no soft carpets in which to lose one's

17 This is the case, for instance, of the leading characters in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and Wilkie Collins's *Armada* (1864-66).

footfall—above all, no mantelpiece! No fire-place; no dear old English poker and tongs” (173). Consequently, in her dual capacity as a British vestal of the hearth and a loyal Royal subject, she tries her utmost to support the British mission by attempting to appropriate and domesticate the place she inhabits. The typical verandah, a “contentious space” (Agnew 118) given its liminal position, is therefore *anglicized* by means of carpets, settees, little tables and chairs where ladies “might at any hour call for tea” (Marryat 118), a quintessentially British habit. Settled in her new house in Rangoon, Marryat first of all arranges the beds she had tellingly brought with her from her mother-country (203); then, she devises a way to safely hang familiar pictures on the bamboo walls, by means of colored strings. Finally, she wages war against all “unwelcome intruders” (204), starting from the dozens of rats living under the thatched roof, thus eventually managing to safeguard the outpost. *Gup* abounds with passages relating “the attacks of the insects” (276), as if the writer and her family were constantly under siege in the hostile surroundings. Lying in her cot, her baby-girl is frightfully bitten by hundreds of voracious ants (204); later on in the narrative, the same ants are compared to an “army” (274), ready to perforate and devour her British cushions and clothes, thus annihilating the material indicators of her own identity.<sup>18</sup> The language of the battlefield is yet again employed to depict their destructive fury against her husband’s boat-cloak, “made of stout military cloth” (277): after one week, in fact, “it was riddled through and through in every direction as though it had been planted as an ensign on the ramparts of a besieged town” (277). Through the precarious fate of their belongings, Marryat provokingly suggests that both men and women are equally vulnerable in India; hence, joining forces against common enemies is a pressing need that overcomes any form of gender asymmetry or prejudice.

Just like in her later sensation novels, even in *Gup*, the author devotes numerous pages to the condition of women in the nineteenth century, by openly challenging the conception of ideal femininity the Victorians were so obsessed with – the very model she was allegedly complying with, to please the most conservative among her readers. Firstly, she demonstrates that modesty, submissiveness, and propriety are not *innate* qualities in her sex, but the mere result of a Darwinian adaptation to external circumstances (or a performance, one may be tempted to add). Indeed, while in Britain women dramatically outnumbered men, the situation was reversed in India (Sen 19), where their chances to flirt and be actively involved in the selection of their partner obviously multiplied. As she observes, therefore, “I believe the charge of extra levity against ladies in India to be unfounded, and to have taken its rise simply in the reason that there are, comparatively speaking, so

18 Her precious Broadwood piano, her guitar, and her cherished English books are also endangered by the mold that spoils everything, including furniture and clothes (219).

few of them” (Marryat 38). In addition, as she explains, given “the spirit of patriotism which draws people of one nation so strongly together” (11), in India morning calls are more frequent, with no need of any preliminary introduction. The love of one’s country (certainly a commendable feeling) serves as the perfect excuse to justify a conduct that, in Britain, would be deemed promiscuous if not scandalous. Taken out of this context, in fact, the following sentence would be thoroughly unacceptable, if uttered by a *lady*: “In this manner I have received and conversed with as many as a dozen men in one morning, whom I have never had the pleasure to see again” (12). Finally, she also ascribes the newly-developed *predatory* behaviour of Anglo-Indian women to their husbands’ hazardous neglect, as wives are left “alone and unprotected for months and even years” (10), while their spouses are away on service.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the Neilgherry Hills, where ladies spend long periods, unchaperoned, are ironically presented as their sexual hunting ground:

There are always plenty of females on the hills, consequently the hills are dangerous to an idle man. There are the wives who *can’t* live with their husbands in the plains; the “grass-widows” (or widow put out to grass), as they are vulgarly termed; and as *won’t* might very often be read for *can’t*, perhaps they are (without any reference to the amount of their charms) the most dangerous that the idle young man could encounter. (101)

## CONCLUSION

In the very last paragraph of her memoir, Marryat described her narrative as “harmless” (284). Even though it proved to be a best-selling volume (Black 87), *Gup. Sketches of Anglo-Indian Life and Character* stirred harsh criticism among contemporary commentators. *The Calcutta Review* blamed the “objectionable tone” (195) of the text, as well as its exaggeration. In her 1868 essay entitled “The Position of Women in India,” Mrs. Bayle Bernard identified Marryat with a “superficial woman of the world” (471), whose work was replenished with “frivolous details” (472) and written in a “slipshod slangy style” (472). Even *The Athenaeum*, while praising the “amusing and not uninteresting” (419) character of the account, questioned some of its most controversial passages which, according to the reviewer, were far from “harmless” (419), as they might increase “that feeling of dislike between the Indian and the European which [was] already too rife” (419). Whether it was acclaimed or censored, when it was released, Marryat’s collection of travel sketches did not pass unnoticed. As this article has tried to demonstrate,

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19 It could be argued that, by so writing, Marryat longed to condone her own-extra-marital liaisons.

the author's "sensation" India was the perfect setting on which to stage British colonial aspirations and anxieties, while eventually granting Victorian women the possibility to write History, and rewrite a more realistic and complex version of their own story.

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### “Senzacionalna” India: *Gup. Sketches of Anglo-Indian Life and Character* Florence Marryat

Florence Marryat je bila plodovita avtorica in znana po svoji vlogi v spiritualizmu ter vzporedni igralski karieri. Leta 1854 se je poročila s Thomasom Rossom Churchem, oficirjem britanske vojske, s katerim je šest let potovala po Indiji in zapisovala svoje vtise, ki so bili kasneje z uspehom objavljeni.

**Ključne besede:** kolonializem, Florence Marryat, hibridnost, Indija, senzacionalni roman, ženske vloge