



## Exploring the boundaries of biography: the family and friendship networks of Lady Curzon, Vicereine of India 1898–1905

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### Abstract

This paper presents a biographical analysis of Mary Curzon, Vicereine of India (1898–1905) set within the context of her family and friendship circle. Outlining the archival records that have been used to explore Mary Curzon's family and friendship network, this paper discusses the methodological considerations that face biographical researchers, and presents the recent shifts in the method and theory of biography that have opened new avenues for geographers engaged with life writing. This paper argues that by placing the biographical subject within their friendship networks, the specificity of biography can be combined with greater engagement with the wider, social, cultural, economic and political contexts in which subjects lived. Letters formed the most frequent link to 'home' for those living in the 'empire', links that provided security, but also more practical forms of advice and support. Exploring the ways in which Mary presented her reproductive and 'bodily ills' through correspondence to her family and friendship circle, this paper demonstrates that Mary's friendship network offered avenues for mutual reassurance and advice. Mary Curzon's attempts to control the British and India newspaper press is examined, revealing that she used family and friends to shape representations of her health through the spaces of empire, and also to manipulate newspaper representation of Indian political affairs. This paper argues that biographical approaches offer an important mechanism to combine concerns of the body and the polity when addressing the position of women within the culture of empire.

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*Keywords:* Biography; Political culture; Friendship network

### Introduction

In many ways Mary Curzon can be presented as a conventional life for a geographer to study; a late Victorian woman, who travelled extensively in India, and recorded her observations. Her surname is a familiar one through her husband, George Curzon, who is symbolic of a particular type of imperial figure

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doi:10.1016/S0305-7488(03)00047-1

within the historiography of geography. As an explorer, imperial administrator, politician and later President of the Royal Geography Society, George Curzon has long held a 'legitimate' position in the whiggish history of geography. Ironically, George Curzon was a figure who made other people's place within the history of geography less legitimate. Speaking against the admittance of women as fellows of the RGS in May 1893 he stated:

Their sex and training render them equally unfitted for exploration, and the genus of professional female globe-trotters with which America has lately familiarised us is one of the horrors of the latter end of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Such comments have ensured that women such as Mary Kingsley have held a contested position within the history of geography, positions that are now being addressed to be more inclusive to the different histories of geography that can be told.

Yet where does this place Mary Curzon, who was, arguably, one of the American globe-trotters that George Curzon was so disdainful of? What role does she have in illuminating different histories of geography or of geographical concerns? Mary Curzon never fashioned herself as a geographer, explorer or traveller and I would argue she should not be 'recovered' as such. Yet, Mary Curzon does illuminate an 'unfamiliar history' of geography. She certainly helped to create imagined and popular geographies of empire, her letters, travel narratives and public image within the newspaper press, are testament to that. Rather than focusing on more obviously geographical themes such as an exploration of Mary's travel narratives, this paper demonstrates how life geographies can be unfolded in more subtle ways in the broader context of writing a biography. This paper shifts the focus of the biographical approach to absorb Mary Curzon within the context of her family and friendship network, recognising that too little attention has been placed on the social networks within which the biographical subject existed.

Linking Mary closely within her circle highlights the contribution that geographers can make to the debates which explore new approaches to the method and practice of biography. The records that document Mary Curzon's position within a broader network indicate that her life, became a web, spun over space. The spinning of this web revealed in letters, diaries, photographs, through dress and in newspaper articles reveals the complexities of the negotiation of the culture of empire in both domestic and political terms at the height of the British Raj.

This paper suggests that while geographers have been unwilling to embrace biography as a method of analysis, theoretical engagement with the method and practice of biography in other disciplines have begun to draw on elements of geographical knowledge, to broaden the compass of biography. The embedding of Mary within her friendship circle emphasizes the flows between 'home' and empire, and offers one avenue through which geographers might contribute to a re-configuration of biographical practice. This paper traces the ways in which Mary negotiated her longing of 'home' through her correspondence, examines the way in which Mary discussed and represented her body in her correspondence, and examines her manipulation of the newspaper press through her friendship circle.

### **Geography and biography**

Individual lives and life writing have been widely adopted to illuminate different historical and cultural geographies of empire. Whilst geographers have been happy to draw on individual lives to illustrate their arguments, many would be uncomfortable with using the term 'biographical' in their

work. Thus, Alison Blunt distances herself from the term biography, whilst undeniably working within a biographical framework. Using Mary Kingsley to 'address the construction of subjectivity' Blunt rejects 'any realist claims to biographical authenticity and/or authority'.<sup>2</sup> By considering Mary Kingsley within a biographical framework which adopts a post-structuralist approach, Blunt mediates Kingsley's 'subject positionality in terms of constructions of, primarily, gender, race and class and how she was represented over space and time by her own and other's writings at 'home' and abroad in the context of British imperialism'.<sup>3</sup> As I will state later, scholarly biographers would be receptive and unsurprised by such an approach.

Similarly Morag Bell has called for a change of focus away from a study of travel writers 'as a category' towards a study of 'specific regions in their imperial settings and to the participation of particular women in these regions'.<sup>4</sup> By shifting the focus from the individual to the region, the tension of recovering *heroines* related to the history of geography is removed, thus enabling broader contextual perspectives to be explored. Cheryl McEwan has also placed a priority on the region in her study of the woman traveller and missionary Mary Slessor, locating the 'geographical setting of West Africa during the nineteenth century' as 'fundamental to an understanding of Slessor's career and her acquisition of influence in both Africa and Scotland'.<sup>5</sup>

Felix Driver has used lives of 19th-century explorers to chart connections between geography, exploration and empire, however he rejects the ability of biography to 'meet the requirements of a more contextual perspective, concerned with the wider significance of the ideas and practices of exploration' arguing biography 'of necessity focus on the life and personality of individual explorers'.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere Driver has warned against attempts to 'recover forgotten and marginalized figures from the condescension of posterity, replacing them at the centre of geography's past' arguing that '[w]hile such efforts can certainly disturb received wisdoms, there is a danger that they may leave the notion of a 'tradition' unexamined'.<sup>7</sup> However, Driver uses individuals to explore 'unfamiliar histories' of the Royal Geographical Society—again stressing that 'I am less interested in reconstructing their experiences as individuals, than in tracing the very different ways in which they negotiated (and were negotiated by) the geographical establishment'.<sup>8</sup>

Geographers' unease with the term biography perhaps stems from a lack of interaction with the new theoretical positions within scholarly biography. While distancing themselves from biography, geographers are adopting elements of biographical form. Alison Blunt's work on women's experiences of the 1857 'Indian mutiny', or the British constructions of home in India indicates the strong contribution that a more sustained biographical engagement could make. An awareness of the spatial interactions the biographical subject negotiated should be given greater attention in the writing of biography together with the way in which the representations of the biographical subject were absorbed and created over space. There is a need to cast biography in geographical terms and not to shy away from reconstructing the experience of individual lives within both a historical and geographical context.

Whilst geographers may have been keen to distance themselves from biography, the very concerns that geographers are interested in, such as the construction of identity and space, have been identified as areas needing to be addressed in contemporary approaches to biography and life history more generally.<sup>9</sup> For example, taking note of recent academic publishing within women's history on biography, historian and biographer Nell Irvin Painter has reminded biographers not to forget 'the more complex identities of generation, race, class, and regional identities' alongside that of gender.<sup>10</sup> Linda Colley has critiqued Amanda Foreman's reading of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire for failing to ask 'potentially subversive questions' such as how Georgiana viewed the Begum of Oudh.<sup>11</sup> The observations that

Colley and Painter make fall well within areas of key geographical concern, particularly within the historical and cultural geographies of imperialism informed by colonial and post-colonial theory. If it is 'potentially subversive' to question how an 18th century woman viewed them Begum of Oudh with all the 'orientalist' implications, then geographers who have addressed such concerns in other contexts, have been particularly subversive of late.

A renewed biographical emphasis in geography would derive much from recent work on the method and practice of biography. This work has problematized every quality that David Cannadine stated a biographer should possess in 1981: 'the biographer must also display empathy sensitivity, sensibility, intuition and, above all be prepared to mortgage a large part of his [sic] intellectual and emotional life to understand one particular, defunct figure'.<sup>12</sup> It is striking that where Cannadine speaks of the biographer as male, and the subject as 'the hero' that much of the recent scholarly work on the method of biography has emerged from scholars working within the humanities from a feminist perspective. The qualities, which Cannadine deems essential, have come under intense scrutiny. Questions concerning subjectivity and representation, the authority of the biographer over their chosen subject's life, and what is presented as 'biography' are now being closely interrogated.

Critical theory has ultimately resulted, as Catherine Hall has noted, in the knowledge that 'we only have access to 'the real' through representation, and that it is language that constructs meaning, rather than reflecting it'.<sup>13</sup> As historian Carolyn Steedman has observed, critical theory and the 'refusal of the real' has given historians of women difficulties in the search for silenced voices in history, that has been such an important part of the feminist enterprise. Although this is not an uncontested position in women's history critical theory has had an enormous impact in the academic study of life writing.<sup>14</sup> Steedman sees the project of life writing as a fulcrum where the intersection of 'rescue and retrieval of real experience is undertaken with the theories of language and identity that eschew the real'.<sup>15</sup>

Kali Israel, followed by Liz Stanley have both adopted the metaphor of the kaleidoscope to explore this new position. As Israel notes:

For the historian, however, no such return to the 'real' is possible; there is no chance to step into the past and see it whole, nor to perceive the 'real' shape and structure of a life outside of representation. Rather we are faced with writing inside the kaleidoscope, of attempting both to discern and describe the images beyond the glass and multiple images caught in the mirrors.<sup>16</sup>

The multiple images which Kali describes are the different representations of a life that emerge from the collected material narratives connected with a subject. These narratives are the beads at the bottom of the kaleidoscope that '[form] patterns that shift with the movement of the viewer'. Kali argues the historian's task must be:

The delineations of these multiple representations in their relations—to each other, to other texts, to the meagre few hard facts of a life, to the subjects self-representation and her reading of others readings of her life, and to our own attempts, individually and collectively, to create images of lives (including our own).<sup>17</sup>

Similarly sociologist Liz Stanley has challenged the conventional 'spotlight' model of biography that is one which adopts a 'linear-jigsaw approach' using a microscope to home in on detail of a life and then bringing each segment together in a whole resulting in the 'real person'. Instead Stanley uses the metaphor of the kaleidoscope to indicate that 'each time you look you see something rather different, composed certainly of the same elements, but in a new configuration'. Stanley has also stressed

the practice of writing biographies of subjects lodged within the context of their community and friendship network.

While this has a traditional place in the canon of biography, friendship circles are often given less emphasis in biography of individuals. Stanley suggests:

The 'spotlight' approach to 'modern biography' emphasizes the uniqueness of a particular subject, seen in individualized terms rather than as a social self-lodged within a network of others. It casts these other people known and liked or disliked throughout the subject's life into shadows; and doing so has interpretative importance for the way we understand 'a life', not only as textually related but also interactionally understood. It essentialises the self, rather than focusing on the role of social process in producing—and changing—what 'a self' consists of.<sup>18</sup>

It is this critique of the conventional 'spotlight' approach that informs this study of Mary Curzon. By placing Mary Curzon within her friendship network it is hoped that the specificity of biography can be combined with a greater engagement with the wider social, economic, political and cultural context in which Mary lived, conveyed through her own writings and those of her circle. It is through such reorientations of the historical record that we can begin to understand how Mary Curzon's life and identity were shaped within and through dynamic sets of social networks.

### **The biographical subject: Lady Curzon and her friendship network**

Born in 1870, Mary grew up in Chicago, and later gained a prominent position in the elite social and political circles of Washington when her family moved there in 1881. Initially educated with her brother's tutor and later at a select seminary Mary was an accomplished lady who had all the advantages of her father's fortune at her disposal. Having gained her position in American high society, Mary travelled with her family to Europe, joining the throngs of the 'new international plutocracy that was clamouring for admission to high society in the world metropolis... the non-landed super-rich [who] used their wealth to buy their way into society'.<sup>19</sup> Her father's fortune (made from his partnership in the wholesale and retail firm Field and Leiter, later known as Marshall Fields) together with the necessary letters of introduction eventually ensured Mary's successful launch into 'high society' in London.<sup>20</sup>

Having met George Curzon, Mary finally married him in 1895, becoming one of many American heiresses to swell the coffers of an economically declining British aristocracy.<sup>21</sup> On her marriage Mary bought with her a settlement entitling her to an annual income from \$7,000,000 (£140,000) worth of bonds which totalled \$33,500 (£6700) per annum and the expectation of a minimum of one million dollars on the death of her father.<sup>22</sup> While Cannadine may be correct in his statement that 'Despite sensational press rumours to the contrary, the majority of these American brides were not especially rich', Mary's settlement was significant, as were the subsequent sums of money which Mary's father often provided.<sup>23</sup> This financial agreement augmented George's personal income of £1000 a year at the time of his marriage, and enabled him consider the appointment of Viceroy of India—a position in which prestige outweighed the salary attached. On marriage, Mary became incorporated into her husband's political career and soon became a mother to the first of their three female children.<sup>24</sup> In August 1898, Curzon was appointed as the Viceroy of India, and Mary accompanied him bearing the courtesy title of vicereine. Mary returned home to Europe in 1901 for 8 months, and again in the spring of 1904 to give birth to her third daughter, before returning to India early in 1905, having partially recovered from a near

fatal infection following a miscarriage in the autumn of 1904. The Curzons' returned to Britain in December 1905 following George's resignation. Mary died in July 1906, following 18 months of sporadic, but weakening illnesses that had plagued her since her miscarriage in the autumn of 1904.

While such a dry chronology allows one to map out the bare details of a life, its very inclusion in this paper is problematic. It immediately sets up a subject position and places assumptions on what is deemed important in a biographical subjects life, here, for example, in the intertwining of public and private concerns mapped out in terms of George's career and Mary's childbearing responsibilities. This paper hopes to demonstrate that by placing a biographical subject within their friendship circle that such assumptions can be problematized in ways that are more revealing of the complex ways in which subjects negotiated their concerns.

Mary's family and friendship network was concentrated in America and Britain. Correspondence that documents this circle reflects patterns of transnational marriage and frequent international travel, whether through leisure or occupational appointments, of elite British and American society at the turn of the century. Mary's own family were based in Washington, but all travelled frequently to Europe and beyond. Mary's younger sisters, Nancy and Daisy made an extended visit to Mary in her first year in India, and Daisy and her mother stayed for many months after the 1903 Coronation Durbar. Weekly letters were exchanged between Mary and her parents while she was in India. While Mary's letters were often addressed to her sisters, Mary complained on occasion that neither her sisters were good correspondents and there is no documentary evidence that survives detailing a close correspondence with her brother.

Before her marriage, Mary had been integrated in the upper circles of American political society. This is reflected in her close friendship with Frances Cleveland, wife of the American President and demonstrated in her correspondence with Theodore Roosevelt and John Hay, the author and American Ambassador.<sup>25</sup> Mary's place in American society is also of note through her friendship with Henry Adams, novelist and social commentator. Mary also maintained links throughout her time in India with an American journalist, G.W. Smalley whom she had known since childhood.<sup>26</sup>

Mary's American based friendships were also found in London. Mary was one of many American heiresses to enter British high society at the turn of the century. Other women in her position such women were amongst her close friends, including, Jennie, Lady Randolph Churchill (nee Jerome) and her sister Leonie, Lady Leslie; Consuelo, The Duchess of Marlborough (nee Vanderbilt); Mary Chamberlain (nee Endicott), and Belle, Lady Herbert (nee Wilson).<sup>21</sup> These women shared similar positions in society to Mary Curzon but were on the fringes of Mary's primary social circle in London: 'The Souls'.

On her marriage to George, Mary had been absorbed into the elite circle of political society in Britain and had become accustomed to the structure of life that this entailed. As a result of her husband's occupation and place within political society, Mary visited the House of Commons to attend key debates, gave dinners and attended weekend house parties. Her circle revolved around the influential set of friends known as 'The Souls', one of the most famous cliques that formed within an increasingly fragmented London Society in the late Victorian and Edwardian period, drawn together around political and intellectual concerns.<sup>27</sup> Mary was incorporated into this group, thereby rubbing shoulders with key political figures of the day including Arthur Balfour, St John Brodrick and Henry Asquith. The Souls was far from being a male bastion. While the male members of the Souls might be formally engaged with politics, the female members such as Margot Asquith (nee Tennant), Hilda Brodrick (nee Charteris), Ettie Grenfell (nee Fane), and, of course, Mary Curzon were active in political society.

Mary's correspondence with both female and male members of this coterie reflects their acceptance of her on marriage to George.

Elements of Mary's friendship circle overlapped with George's but predated their marriage. One such figure is Cecil Spring Rice, who had been an admirer of Mary when serving in the British Embassy in Washington and who George knew from Eton College and Oxford University. Letters exchanged between Mary and Spring Rice, or 'Springy' as he was known, reflected their long and close relationship and were often more intimate than many between Mary and her close female friends.<sup>28</sup> Mary shared the letters received from her friends, both male and female with George.

While many of Mary's London friends visited for the 1903 Coronation Durbar, only two friends from London stayed for an extended period of time with Mary in India: Eve Pelly and Mouche Dunscombe, who later married the Viceroy's Military Secretary Major Baring. There is little documentary evidence that indicates the importance of these friendships to Mary whilst she was in India.<sup>29</sup> The stratified nature of the British society in India meant that Mary was effectively prevented from forming a wide friendship circle as the vicereine. Her position had considerable bearing on her access to close women friends in India. It is noticeable that while Mary carried out social duties, which brought her into close contact with British women of all stations, friendships rarely developed from these meetings. Whilst Mary had contact with women who were within the viceregal household, for example, Mrs Lawrence wife of George's private secretary, there is no indication they were close confidants. Indeed Mary's closest companions in India were the Viceroy's Aide-de Camps which Mary referred to as 'the family'.<sup>30</sup> Mary periodically visited Lady MacDonnell, wife of the Lt Governor of North-Western Provinces, in Darjeeling, although no correspondences detailing their friendship has thus far been found. It is revealing of Mary's position as an American vicereine that the one indicator of a closer female friendship she developed in Simla was with a Canadian novelist, Mrs Coates who wrote under the name of Sara Jeanette Duncan.<sup>31</sup> As will be seen later, Mary developed this friendship initially with a particular goal in mind, although it appears to have developed into a closer friendship through time. The friendship network of a biographical subject, such as that outlined above can be pieced together in different ways. In this study, Mary's social network has been traced through written records.

### Negotiating the archives of Mary Curzon

The principal written record for a study of Mary Curzon's life is lodged as part of the Curzon Collection at the Oriental and India Office Collection.<sup>32</sup> The 43 volumes of 'Lady Curzon Papers' include letters, diaries, some photographs, newspaper clippings and telegrams. A letter which accompanies the collection, written by George, in January 1925, two months before his own death, tells us something of the collection's conception and the wishes he had for the archive. This letter reveals that the creation of a material archive reflects the discursive practices of the time: what documents were included in and excluded reflects the values George held.<sup>33</sup>

In 1925, the papers of Mary that George chose to keep were placed in a trunk, bundled together with a selection of her clothes.<sup>34</sup> The papers were divided into three parts. The first consisted of a selection of letters that Mary had received from her friendship circle. Tellingly George subdivided these into letters received from 'public men' and 'women friends'. Those who George described as public men fell into a wide category from politicians, journalists, members of the clergy, actors, artists and members of the viceregal household in India. The women friends ranged from members of the Souls, other aristocratic

connections, the Begum of Bhopal, the novelist Pearl Craigie and Mary's dress maker. The second major part of the Lady Curzon Papers contained letters exchanged between Mary and George from their first meeting to Mary's death. The third part contained the correspondence about Mary's illness in 1904 and her death including hundreds of telegrams and letters of condolence, copies of Mary's supposed last words in 1904, a copy of her will and miscellaneous items such as a lock of her hair. Over the course of time a fourth strand has been added, that of letters that Mary wrote to her own parents, and the journals written during the viceregal tours of India.<sup>35</sup> That George did not detail these elements in his note suggests they were added to the archive at a later date. In the 1960s, the letters were bound into 43 volumes at the Oriental and India Office Library, following George's system. The papers were then returned to family members until 1996 when the papers were deposited in the Oriental and India Office Collection following the death of Mary and George's youngest daughter, Lady Alexandra Metcalf.

George's 1925 letter detailed the selection procedure he had followed concerning the letters that they had exchanged:

I had kept all her letters. But by far the greater part of these I have destroyed, feeling that they were not meant for others eyes. Those that I have kept and arranged chronologically relate in the main to public events and to my travels, before we married and to our joint public life after we married.<sup>36</sup>

There is a feeling within this archive that it was always designed to illuminate George's career, rather than Mary's life. George's emphasis on it relating to public life indicates the way in which he wished it to be read, certainly his insistence that he destroyed more intimate letters suggests this. There are echoes of the excluded discourses throughout the papers: although letters were destroyed which contained references to grief, anger, love and sexual practices, the replies have often survived, giving intimations of their contents. While George has protected Mary in certain ways, there are many moments that slipped past the censor's eye. For a set of papers that were meant to exclude familiar practices there are an extraordinary large number of letters that reveal the deep intimacy of their relationship. It is certainly possible to recreate something of the everyday intimacy they shared, something which biographer Richard Holmes considers to be the hardest thing in biography.<sup>37</sup>

The second thrust of George's letter is related to their future publication. He wrote:

If any of the letters be thought to be of real interest and importance I would not object to their judicious and carefully censored publication at some date, possibly remote, in the future. There can be no harm in acquainting the world with the mind and character of so rare a woman... I ask that the contents may be treated as sacred and that they may not be irreverently handled or dispersed.<sup>38</sup>

George is hinting here to the control that families so frequently want to maintain over the presentation of a life. That he desires her letters to be treated as sacred, suggests that the only form of life writing that he would have been happy with would be a hagiography. Although George gave his permission for these letters to be published this lies uneasily with the wishes of Mary herself.

An early letter that Mary wrote to her mother from India indicates that she wished her letters to be private and that she had discounted a suggestion that she might publish them in the future, following a well-established publishing tradition of women travel writers. Telling her to return the letter Mary wrote:

You mention my writing a journal which can be turned into a book this I shall *never* do. I abhor publicity so that I shall write nothing but private letters to you all and regard yours as the same.<sup>39</sup>



It is indicative of George's character that he ignored her desire for privacy, asserting his own authority over her wishes. On occasion Mary herself requested certain of her letters to be destroyed after reading—even these survive, complete with her instruction. That Mary died prematurely, perhaps before she herself had a chance to sort her own papers, is of great benefit to the biographer, but leaves important questions of the responsibility to the biographical subject in presenting the life.

Historians who use women's written records as evidence often note that they are hard to find, have often been viciously pruned, are not labelled and are often subsumed amongst the records of the estate or husband's papers, lost until stumbled across. The Lady Curzon Papers are for many reasons unique in that they offer a comprehensive selection of correspondence, and although it has been put together with a strong hand, in nonetheless offers an extraordinary rich source. There are however clear gaps, most obviously those letters that George destroyed. While George kept a selection of the letters that Mary received from friends many others were disposed of. These letters are a tantalising glimpse of a wide range of correspondence. Letters that Mary wrote to her friends are not in this archive with the exception of letters sent to the novelist Pearl Craigie that were returned to George on her death. Letters that Mary received from her family are also absent.

The quest for biographical material is legendary, and if one is to believe Henry James's evocation of the biographer in the 'Aspern Papers' they are a breed of fanatics who will go to almost any length to hunt down a hidden relic.<sup>40</sup> Certainly the hand that George played in creating this collection demands a search for documents that would supplement the Lady Curzon Papers. Once located, additional documents such as the letters that Mary wrote to Cecil Spring Rice, Jennie Churchill and Queen Victoria alongside journalists such as Lovat Fraser, editor of the *Times of India* can be fused with the Lady Curzon Papers creating the possibility to challenge the representation of Mary that George preserved in the Lady Curzon Papers.

With the documents relating to a life in place, the way in which the life is read through the documents changes according to the reading practices adopted. This is particularly pertinent when documents are fused together, subverting archive structures that give prominence to specific life stories. Once documents have been transcribed, it is possible to materially subvert the archive structure. The subversion of the archival structure removes the suggested reading order prescribed by George Curzon. By reconstructing documents concerning Mary Curzon's life in a chronological order, it is possible to see the written world of Mary as she saw it day by day, rather than as created by George. Thus, in a reconstructed archive letters Mary wrote to her own parents on one day are placed alongside those she wrote to George, or one she received from a friend. It is only when the suggested reading order is ignored that the nuances of the written record can be revealed. Once other texts, whether letters, dress or photographic images are merged with the Lady Curzon Papers new interpretative avenues are opened. This lifting of the boundary, which George placed around the papers, also reduces the 'spotlight' effect which Liz Stanley describes. Mary can only be read in the context of the daily flow of letters, which united three continents. The subversion of the archive structure opens up the kaleidoscope of biography, revealing that there is no one interpretation of a subject but the many refracted frames which cannot be reified into a single interpretation of a subject.

Reading the reconstructed archive enables moments of tension, deviation and contradiction to be exposed in a thematic reading across the archive.<sup>41</sup> It is noticeable that the majority of moments of tension, deviation and contradiction occurred as letters from the friendship network collided with those

which George had preserved. Thus, the importance of collecting supplementary material to the Lady Curzon Papers cannot be over estimated. Although when compared in volume to the Lady Curzon Papers these archives are relatively minor, the role of these letters in challenging the representations of Mary in the Lady Curzon Papers is clear.

### Negotiating 'home' through friendship networks

Of all the texts that linked the empire and the metropolitan centre together personal correspondence provided families and friends at 'home' an intimate understanding of daily life lived in the 'empire'. While women were establishing material homes in the empire, in the imperial imagination, 'home' reflected a nostalgic idea that provided an illusion of security within an alien world. As Blunt suggests 'the clearest and fondest imaginings of home are often located at a distance of forced exile or voluntary roaming—and thus remains a site of continual desire of irretrievable loss'.<sup>42</sup> The desire for the familiarity of 'home' in the imperial imagination took concrete form in the design of homes in India complete with impractical English style cottage gardens, or the delight in places which were a 'mirror of home' such as the Kandyan Highlands which were 'uncannily like highland Britain'.<sup>43</sup> While familiar elements of home might be concretized within the empire, letters and newspapers provided the most frequent link to 'home'. With the opening of the Suez Canal, letters took only three weeks to get to India, and the telegraph, available to Mary at the turn of the century, provided a more immediate form of communication, a message crossed continents within hours.

On arrival in India in 1899 Mary found herself in an alien environment and at the pinnacle of a social hierarchy that denied her immediate access to a supportive social network outside her own household. She reached to her correspondence for comfort, finding solace in letters which described the familiar patterns of life she had left behind as she negotiated her new imperial identity. Mary's parents provided the immediate reassurance she needed; writing to her father shortly after arriving in India she communicated her sense of isolation to them:

I received a beloved letter from you which has made me so happy, I feel such a long way off from everybody as we only have one post a week and then my letters are limited to yours and Mamma's as the world is a very busy place and only ones own think constantly of me and write faithfully, friends write one in 6 months! I am getting used to the new life.<sup>44</sup>

Mary had only been in India for a three weeks, her feeling of dislocation from her known world is clear, a detachment which can be traced throughout her time in India to varying degrees. When feeling isolated from friends Mary wrote to them asking for news. For example a letter to Jennie Churchill written shortly after Mary retreated for the first time to Simla reads:

What with Municipal bill and sugar bounties and Muscat, but, I shan't begin to bore you with shop but I have no NEWS to substitute in its place. So this won't count as a real letter, but will be just a bait for you which I am laying, so do oh! do write!...Jennie dearest how are you? and what are you doing? And are you well and happy and [busy] with the book? and are you full of interesting occupations? I long to know and don't feel as far away from 35a [Cumberland Terrace] if I do. So bridge over the distance with all your precious news.<sup>45</sup>

Jennie Churchill's response dated 12 May, started with an apology for leaving her 'charming' letter unanswered and finished her letter with a sympathetic request about Mary:

We all follow your terrific progress and rejoice, of course everything has its drawbacks...otherwise it would be Le Heaven—and it must be dreary to see none of your old friends, The Anglo-Indian I an told is not an attractive creature.<sup>46</sup>

While letters to her female friends revealed that Mary was felt detached from her social circle in London surviving letters indicate that Mary did not express her isolation and loneliness directly to her female friends, instead presenting a positive image on her life in India. Mary had different levels of intimacy with her friends and letters she wrote to Cecil Spring-Rice, indicates that he was given a less reserved access to Mary's real feelings about her life in India than she gave to her more female correspondents. Thus, Mary wrote to Cecil in March 1900 declaring:

I am well and interested in everything from Frontier Govts to Assam irrigation it is the only thing that keeps one going, as sometimes this life feels a very isolated one and in spite of the immense amount of social work I hardly see anyone outside our own staff family...I am flourishing and very hard worked toiling over schools, hospitals and institutions of every sort, in spite of all the public occupation I have hours and days to myself so I read and [ring] up the angel babies.<sup>47</sup>

This is an intimate letter, as it reveals Mary's negative thoughts on her role as Vicereine with the attendant isolation she feels and her reliance on her children, the 'angel babies'. In letters to her female friends Mary presents a positive image of her life in India, adding a gloss which did not match the reality.

Friends letters brought news of the Boer War, political activities, together with personal and society news vividly to life. The vision of life in London that Mary imagined was often contrasted by the unreality of her own experience in India which is stressed in a letter to Jennie Churchill in which Mary signs off:

I could go on writing for hours but I hear the rush of London and you just going out and flying through this and looking for the end. India feels the really imperturbable East to me which not even a Mafeking relief ruffles. I can't believe that thousands of miles away Piccadilly is waking and you are just tearing out to multitudinous engagements. Please write when you can and tell me all about my dear Jennie.<sup>48</sup>

If London life seemed thousands of miles away to Mary in India, India seemed equally a long way off to Mary's friends in America, who, unlike those in England were less familiar with the idea of India.<sup>49</sup> Friends, such as Henry Adams, were often quick to express the idea of the spatial dislocation that they felt in relation to Mary. In one of his first letters to Mary in India Adams explores his understanding of the importance of correspondence: 'Still, in the east, letters are something more than in London and Washington is a distant solar nebular from which one is curious to hear news'.<sup>50</sup> Later in the year, Mary received another letter from Adams in which he reflected on the speed with which it was possible to contact friends. Although the content of Mary's letters presented scenes alien to anything Adams had encountered, that the letter had taken only 16 days to reach him, forced a realisation that she was closer than thought:

Honestly you look to us here in this season of fog and smoke and darkness and in these cities of straight universality like a vision. You are unreal. Your letter mailed in the 9th falls on me here the 25th with a rapidity quite bewildering to make me realise that you are not in a neighboring solar system. Strange!<sup>51</sup>

While Mary may have seemed remote to her American friends, she often felt acutely remote from her family in America. Her feelings of homesickness are often expressed in letters to her parents. A typical example comes in a letter written to her Father whilst visiting Dalhousie, September 28, 1900, whom she imagines in Washington about to welcome her sisters home:

I feel very far away from you all now...I think of you all together in Washington and how nice it is that you, Mama and the girls to unpack their things after all their wanderings.<sup>52</sup>

The idea that her family was a stable entity in Mary's life was critical. Yet Mary's family were constantly travelling between Europe, America and beyond and the comforting image of her family together was more often than not, a fiction. Mary was aware of the dispersed nature of her family, and warned her father 'We must not become a family of wandering and footloose Americans'.<sup>53</sup> While letters enabled Mary to link herself with home, they provided other forms of reassurance, particularly in Mary's case concerning her own reproductive health.

### **Representing the body**

As vicereine, Mary Curzon occupied an elite position that entailed demanding elements of public duty, which she shared with the maternal duty of raising a family. She had married into an aristocratic family where the hereditary title was passed through the male line. The desirability of an heir placed a heavy burden on the shoulders of women, like Mary, who did not immediately satisfy this need.

Mary's continued failure to conceive would have caused anxiety in any situation, yet in India was compounded by her position as vicereine. Nupur Chaudhury has noted that one of the most difficult things that western women faced during pregnancy, childbirth and early motherhood when placed in a colonial situation was the absence of a close kin network to rely on for advice, support and reassurance.<sup>54</sup> Mary discussed matters of reproductive health freely with her female friends in Britain whilst in India and these letters reveal a common concern surrounding the 'Baby mystery'.<sup>55</sup> That Mary relied on such reassurance over thousands of miles indicates the sense of isolation that she must have felt over such an issue. The 'Baby mystery' for Mary was not merely about her attempts to have another child but more specifically focused on her desire for a son. This was expressed quite openly to friends. Thus, Pamela Tennant wrote in response to Mary:

You say you wonder if you will ever have the bliss of having a son! Of course you will; and two daughters together in age as you have is really a more perfect arrangement than mine for I shall be very lonely with Clare when both sons go to school.<sup>56</sup>

The clear association in Mary's mind of producing a son being 'bliss' indicates the strength of her longing for a son. George's frequent desire to hear about the 'hypothetical little fellow' in the monthly hope of conception, indicate that Mary and George, having had two daughters, were both increasingly anxious to produce a son, during their time in India.

Writing in the autumn 1900 Alice Cranborne also offered Mary practical reassurance on her failure to conceive:

As for your other trouble, dear Mary don't, don't worry: there is simply oceans of time. You are still so young and [when] one begins life as you did at once it shows the natural condition is to be productive and the change of climate and all the hard work would be sufficient to account of your

not happening at once. I am as sure as I live that you will have as many more as you want and that for your health etc. the great thing is not to worry about it but keep yourself at your highest for when you begin.<sup>57</sup>

Mary had already proven her reproductive abilities by conceiving Irene and Cynthia. That Alice blamed the climate and hard work for disrupting Mary's reproductive condition indicates the strength of contemporary understanding that the women were more prone to abdominal diseases in the tropics. Advice manuals at the turn of the century continued to suggest that women living in degenerative tropical environments would suffer from 'bareness and sterility'.<sup>58</sup>

Letters from other friends such as Lady Poynder, writing to Mary in October 1900, gave Mary less structured advice, but reflected the anguish that the problem caused amongst her friendship network: 'The great mystery to me in this world is the Baby mystery—Why not grant babies to the people who long for them. I am despairing'.<sup>59</sup> Visiting Europe in April 1901 Mary witnessed Lady Poynder's distress after a miscarriage, and wrote to George telling him: 'Poor Anne Poynder after lying up for a month praying for progeny returned to London barren and heart broken'.<sup>60</sup>

Mary was thus by no means isolated in her reproductive difficulties. Whilst Mary used her friendship network for emotional support her friends also used letters in a similar way to express their own sorrows. Amongst Mary's social circle reproductive gossip was circulated that reported both miracles and miseries, allowing the sharing of joy as well as personal loss and grief. Margot Asquith wrote to Mary in August 1900 to tell her of her pregnancy and then consoled Mary, reassuring her in disconnected English: 'I'm sorry you have not begun, but there is no hurry and son [sure] to...'.<sup>61</sup> A month later Margot wrote another letter, which followed the death of her child 6 hours after its birth. Mary had sent a gift to Margot on expectation of the child, and Margot's reply reflects the anguish of loss and the role of letters within the grieving process:

Your darling present made me sob, it came 4 days after and wd [would] have been such a joy it is lovely and I shall always wear it if you allow me to as a memory of this sacred time and almost nameless sorrow.<sup>62</sup>

The female support network also operated at more formal levels of acquaintance, as in the correspondence between Mary and Consuelo, Duchess of Manchester to whom Mary had written in sympathy following the Duchess' loss of a child. The latter's reply, addressed to 'Lady Curzon' thanked Mary for her letter and described the Duchess' heart rendering sorrow.<sup>63</sup>

Rachel Dudley's letter to Mary, following the former's miscarriage that indicates the importance of the friendship circle as a means of sharing emotions of grief. Having been an invalid for five months, Rachel explained her feelings of loss to Mary:

I cannot forget the disappointment of losing my poor baby. It is such a strange mysterious sort of feeling this sensation of loss for a thing that has never had existence. I argue with myself that it should be impossible to grieve for the loss of something one has never possessed but my arms feel so empty all the same.<sup>64</sup>

Mary had also heard of Rachel Dudley's miscarriage from another friend, Alice Cranborne: 'Poor Rachel she had the most perpetual flooding for weeks and weeks; she was never able to move from her bed or see anyone after the poor baby came away'.<sup>65</sup> Rachel Dudley was a close friend of Mary's, her letter can only have made Mary more acutely aware of the lottery of pregnancy and made her more

cautious. Particularly concerning the prevention of miscarriage. There are many occasions in Mary's letters where it is clear she is resting for no apparent reason (and usually sinking into depression). Resting was regarded as the prime action to prevent a possible miscarriage influenced by medical advice contained in handbooks such as Florence Stacpoole's *Advice to women on the care of the health before, during and after confinement 1901*.<sup>66</sup> Hearing friends accounts of miscarriage may have increased Mary's anxiety of complications, particularly in India where she was not guaranteed of the best physicians that England could offer.

While Mary shared her reproductive problems with her female circle, narratives connected to ill health in her correspondence reveal that Mary actively shaped different representations of her body to her circle. The different ways in which Mary sought to present a healthy body displays anxieties about how her body is 'read' by different audiences, whether her family, friends, or the wider public in India, America or Britain through the newspaper press.

Mary shared her experiences of ill health freely with her immediate family. Indeed, receiving her letters must have been a continual source of worry. The occasional week when Mary missed a mail must have caused most anxiety followed by letters written from the sick bed in pencil rather than ink, particularly when the handwriting became large and childlike, rather than the usual regulated script. Yet Mary reassured her parents in letters that conveyed particularly worrying news about her health telling them, 'as you know I have a talent for quick attacks and quick recoveries and long before you have my account of this I shall be well'.<sup>67</sup> The three week period between sending and receiving letters allowed time for the latest fever to be shrugged off before the next attack.

While Mary's letters to her parents give all the information about her illnesses, Mary's other writing, for example, in four journals indicates that she was very conscious of her audience. Mary's journals were written to be shared within an extended family, both her own family and also George's. Mary's journals survive in two different versions, edited in Mary's hand and different editions reveal that the extended audience was presented with a guarded picture of Mary's health. A visit to Agra and Fetehpur Sikri in December 1899 is representative of the small changes that Mary customarily made to her journal to remove references to her ill health:

~~I could not go to the hospital this morning as I was too unwell ... At 2.40 we started in a long drive to Akbar's City, Fatehpur Sikri. It was a 24 mile drive, and I thought it would kill me, but I was determined to go. The drive was through a fine avenues of trees the whole way, and we had changes of artillery teams, so we along, and I felt much better in spite of my remains of chill. We got to Fetehpur Sikri at half past five, and got to Fetehpur Sikri for tea. ... After dinner, which I had in my room we went to see the Mosque illuminated.~~<sup>68</sup>

That Mary was unable to attend her public engagements indicates the severity of her sickness, an admission of failure which she hated making. While her indomitable will forced her to undertake the drive to Fetehpur Sikri, she had no desire for her extended family to read her initial commentary, and changed the text to reveal a dry account of the journey. The removal of the information that she took dinner in the privacy of her room continued the theme of presenting a healthy self.

Mary's tour diaries are consistent in the removal of elements of sickness. While at times Mary removes all elements of her condition, at other times she alludes to a headache, or simply mentions she was ill, giving few details. Mary's underplayed presentation of ill health in letter journals is revealed when letters to her own family or personal postscripts to her journal are read alongside indicating the current malady inflicted on her body. These emphasize the way in which Mary tailored her letter journal

to the wider extended family audience over which she has no control, but still informed her own parents of her actual plight.

During the 1900 Autumn Tour of Southern India Mary arrived in Goa and was accommodated in a sixteenth century nunnery. Mary noted in her journal that the ‘comforts have remained medieval’ but chose to cross out the information that the bedrooms were ‘Swarming with red ants’ and ‘had no Sanitary arrangements of any sort’.<sup>69</sup> At the end of the Goa visit Mary noted that ‘The whole Goanese visit was too much for me and I was ill all night’ and for the next three days.<sup>70</sup> Although her tour diary does not indicate what illness she had a letter to her parents continues her illness narrative:

I have collapsed and have been ill for 24 hours at Goa which is a Portuguese settlement on the coast—The food was so vile that I got violent diarrhoea and am now in bed for days...if I get through without Cholera or dysentery it will be all right. The heat is perfectly terrible night and day nearly 100 and I suffer intensively Oh! I pray that I shan’t die in one of these Southern Indian Furnaces.<sup>71</sup>

Mary was clearly informed as to the severity of the illnesses that she might have been incubating, her journal however reveals nothing of these details. It details instead ironic features such as the white marble seat named in her honour which the Maharaja of Mysore had erected over Gersoppa Falls which future visitors would ‘presume I sat in rapt admiration, whereas I was in a cabin in the Clive’.<sup>72</sup>

The ways in which Mary attempted to shape the wider public perceptions of her ill body reveals the deep concern that she felt in maintaining a healthy body image. Mary’s first attack of fever in February 1899, combined with the first few letters she received from her friends at home, indicated to Mary that her health was of ‘public’ interest in India, England and America.<sup>73</sup> Mary described her first attack of fever whilst in India to her father explaining:

The journal has been quite silent this week as I was seized last Thursday with a bad attack of fever—my temperature flew up to 106 and I thought I was dead but I wasn’t! The pain of the fever was awful as the temperature lasted 36 hours and my poor poor body was burning up—with this I had a violent headache and bad diarrhoea... It is the suddenness of things in India which sweep one into a heap—well one minute and 1/2 dead the next.<sup>74</sup>

This version of events differed markedly from the version she presented to her friends and enquirers. Writing to Queen Victoria on the 14 March 1899, Mary presented a contrasting version of the illness and its impacts on her body:

We deeply appreciate the telegramme which your Majesty so graciously sent to enquire about my slight attack of fever. I was only ill a few days, and I caught the fever by going out in the heat to visit a hospital without being sufficiently protected from the sun. I had been so perfectly well that the doctor thought only a touch of sun could have sent my temperature up to nearly 106 so suddenly and without warning. I was well enough too fulfil all my engagements before leaving Calcutta.<sup>75</sup>

In this letter Mary reduced the severity of her fever passing it off as a ‘slight’ attack of fever and that she had recovered sufficiently to carry out her public engagements. Writing to Jennie Churchill on the same day, Mary was less formal but still economical with the truth:

Our first two months have been splendid and we have done an immense deal in the time. I had the bad luck to get fever for a week from going out in the heat of the day without enough protection

from the Sun and I never mean to get a fever again as I haven't time, and illness even if it only lasts a week gives you such a feeling of hindrance... I am as fit as possible and riding and clambering about these endless mountains.<sup>76</sup>

Two weeks prior to Mary sending this letter to Jennie Churchill, Winston Churchill, Jennie's son, also commented on the aftermath of Mary's attack in a letter to his mother written at the beginning of a weeks stay with the Curzon's at Government House, Calcutta:

You would be shocked to see how Lady C is changed. I was pained to see her. She has had a sharp attack of fever and will not I think stand the climate which will spoil the whole thing.<sup>77</sup>

This letter implies that Mary's physical appearance had altered significantly within three months of being in India which is confirmed by George's letters to Mary whilst she is in Simla indicating that Mary had lost a significant amount of weight.<sup>78</sup> Winston Churchill's letter also tells us that whilst Mary could use her own letters to represent her body in one way, she could not control other peoples representations.

A letter from G.W. Smalley in 17 June 1899 indicates that Mary was an item of 'news' in America:

The telegrams have [illeg.] had you ill and well again. Have you really been ill? Do somehow find the strength and impulse to tell me something of yourself.<sup>79</sup>

By the time this request had arrived to Mary, she had already written Smalley a letter to which he replied instantly:

I am so glad to have your delightful letter of May 23 that, though I wrote you not many days ago, here is another line. You answer the [illeg.] of my questions about yourself and your health and it is a comfort to know that you have not had influenza but only made it fashionable for other people to have it. I hope the other people will keep their monopoly.<sup>80</sup>

While Mary was better again by late May 1899, from the beginning of May she had been, in her own words 'ill and well in turns'.<sup>81</sup> On the 3rd May Mary wrote to her parents that she had been 'in bed for four days with fever and cold.' However, she reassured them that 'I am much better but still cough and [illeg.] a good deal—no blood with mucus—I shall be alright again soon'.<sup>82</sup> However by 17 May Mary was again reporting her ill health to them.<sup>83</sup>

Despite these experiences of extreme ill health, Mary told Smalley that she was well, and his response indicates that she told him nothing of her recent physical discomforts. Mary's way of dealing with the first attack of fever she experienced in India set a pattern for her way of hiding her ill health to friends and being suspicious of newspaper inquiry. An element that Mary had not anticipated when she went to India was the newspaper speculation about her own health. Mary's first attack of fever was widely reported in the newspapers in America, India and Britain, a letter Mary received from Consuelo, Duchess of Marlborough confirmed the 'journalists search light' on the Viceregal pair: 'I am so sorry to hear that you have been ill and only trust you will keep well now and not do too much again. We read of you both constantly'.<sup>84</sup>

Mary actively attempted to control newspaper representations of the viceregal household, and this included representations of her own body. For example in 1901 while Mary was in Europe she was asked to supply images for an article on viceregal wife in India for the *Lady's Realm Magazine*. Mary asked to read the article before publication and described her own input in the piece:

I also found plenty of gush in the Ladys [sic.] Realm you enclosed—a woman by the name of Willocks had written an article about us and asked me for photos to illustrate it with. I asked her to



let [me] see her notes for article wh. she did. She had the most absurd ideas I ever heard in her head and she willingly changed the whole.<sup>85</sup>

The changes that she made were clearly gratifying to Mary, particularly those that concerned her own health. As the article informed its readers:

Two rumours concerning the Viceroys and Vicereines of India are almost of a weekly nature, and have been during the last hundred years. One is that the Viceroy is about to resign; the other, that his wife's health has failed in the Indian climate. It is true that in the latter case this has sometimes happened; but as regards Lady Curzon, no report could be wider of the mark, she has enjoyed splendid health in spite of all her marches, travels, and arduous work, and not a little of her time at home last summer was taken up explaining how she came to look so well when the newspapers had been killing her for two years.<sup>86</sup>

Mary's own sense of humour is echoed in the last sentence but the content is blatantly misleading when read alongside Mary's letters to her family. The newspapers had been 'killing' Mary for a very good reason.

Mary's second device for attempting to maintain a healthy body image in the newspapers concerned the American papers. Mary directed her parents to refute stories about her ill health:

If the papers print any more about my health will you [say] just this: 'The reports about Lady Curzon are entirely incorrect and she is very well indeed'. I imagine they will soon begin their yearly report about some illness.<sup>87</sup>

This letter indicates that these reports of ill health had a regularity that Mary was attempting to disrupt. In August 1902, Mary wrote to her parents again from Kashmir, ordering them to deny any rumours:

The American papers are full of reports of my health breaking down and my coming to Bar Harbour—will you contradict these reports whenever they appear.<sup>88</sup>

Considering that Mary's letters to her parents before her Kashmir trip were indicative of her usual fluctuating health, Mary's request smacks of desperation. Shortly before leaving Simla for Kashmir Mary had written in depressed tones to her father:

My strength holds out and while I live I shall fight to be strong and never complain. I think we live at such a pace in these days that no one is really as strong as they ought to be. We ought to lead simpler primitive lives and not artificially exhausting ones. The next letter will be from Kashmir.<sup>89</sup>

Mary's strength clearly didn't hold out as the journey to Kashmir was fraught with health problems:

We left Simla yesterday at 11—I went with an awful headache and from the awful pain I became unconscious and remained so for two hours in the train. I have had to drive in the heat all day and have arrived at [Murree] half dead and too ill dine with the Bloods. We drive again at 7 tomorrow...<sup>90</sup>

On arrival in Kashmir Mary was coerced into attending many functions which she complained of bitterly to her father, arguing that she had come away to rest. It was at the bottom of this letter that Mary ordered her father to deny all rumours of ill health in the American newspaper press.<sup>91</sup>

While Mary did all she could to manipulate public opinion in Britain and America, her principal means of maintaining a healthy body in image was to undertake her public duties and show her body to the public in India, minimising cancellations which caused rumour of ill health. Mary's letters record several occasions when she performed duties even when ill. At the beginning Mary sent her parents heroic description of the willpower she used to overcome her illness and perform her public duty. Over time this was superseded by a sense of resignation to the trials of duty that were imposed on her body.

### Friendship, politics and the newspaper press

Although the political culture was changing by the end of the nineteenth century, it still revolved around the traditional nexus of aristocratic society and the role of women within this political culture was central. The framework of 'separate spheres', the division of the male 'public' world outside the home from the female 'private' world based within the home, has come under intense scrutiny from historians in recent years. This is particularly true of recent analysis of aristocratic political culture in Victorian Britain. K.D. Reynolds has gone so far as to say that 'to few circumstances can the concept of separate spheres have been more inappropriately applied than that of Victorian political society' and draws on the political culture of early and mid-Victorian political society to illustrate her argument. Reynolds observations are equally valid for the female members of the Souls. These political wives provided spaces for entertainment; received 'political confidences from husbands and friends' and actively 'engaged in political discussion and manoeuvring'.<sup>92</sup>

Mary's first two years in India were spent absorbing imperial political culture. Mary read avidly and discussed politics with George. In April 1901, Mary left India to go 'home' to Europe for six months with her children and was able to use the political knowledge she had acquired in India. Although Mary was accustomed to metropolitan political society she immediately found that she negotiated it differently through her viceregal role. In many ways, Mary's imperial subjectivity became more strongly displayed at 'home' than it had previously been in India, giving her opportunities to display her knowledge on Indian politics. Mary's position within the culture of political society in the summer of 1901 was that of a pivot between 'India', which to Mary's circle was synonymous with 'George', and those at home in government or closely connected with it. In addition to her political role whilst in England Mary attempted to exercise power over newspaper reportage of the Viceroy's work within India.

As vicereine of India visiting Europe for a short period of time Mary was caught up in an intense social whirl. Mary was invited to join King Edward VII for a weekend at Windsor and she was eagerly drawn by the Souls into the social and political circuit of weekend house parties, dinners and visiting. These activities enabled her to listen to opinions of those around her, informing and advising, whilst reporting everything back to George. Mary's letters during this time are 'voluminous', the content, referred to as 'tittle tattle' by Mary and 'gossip' by George reveals the wide ranging discussions that Mary enjoyed.<sup>93</sup> Mary told George that 'My thoughts never leave you and I find that my whole interest in people is what they may tell me which is of interest to you!'.<sup>94</sup> The flows of information regarding the reception of Indian policy and George's position at home were directed back to India through Mary. George may have dismissed her letters as gossip when cataloguing them, but he asked repeatedly for increasingly lengthy letters describing everything she heard and did. This task filled up Mary's time so completely that she told her own parents she could not write much to them because of this demand.<sup>95</sup>

Having been immersed in the politics of India for two years, Mary was astounded by the lack of knowledge about India in Britain. While everyone agreed George was doing wonders, Mary's own in-depth appreciation of Indian politics was not generally shared. Mary suggested that general ignorance could be attributed in part to the lack of information in the newspapers. She commented to George:

The cessation of the long 'India Hunter' letters in the Times is really a calamity as they did jog ignorance of the Times readers at least, now George, India is the great unknown. The moon seems nearer to the majority, Indian isn't more than a huge troublesome [illeg.] that spells famine and plague.<sup>96</sup>

In an attempt to rectify this situation Mary suggested to George that he should instigate a series of informative articles on India to be published in the newspapers at home citing topics such as railroads and famine as possible topics:

I am sure it would be enormously appreciated as I have heard many complain that people wanted to know more of your Indian work. Any paper with a big circulation would do—[the] Daily Telegraph or Standard would gladly do it if the article could be only arranged. Is it possible?<sup>97</sup>

These comments reflect the value that Mary placed on sympathetic press coverage. She sought to manipulate such coverage in two ways: the first by befriending influential journalists, the second in asking friends with appropriate contacts to assist her. Mary developed relationships with, and offered patronage to journalists and newspapers editors whilst in India, such as Lovat Fraser, Editor of the *Times of India*, and Percival Landon, special correspondent to the London Daily Mail, in the hope of sympathetic coverage.<sup>98</sup> One of Mary's first attempts to quell critical journalists was in the befriending of Mrs Coates, which quickly ensured the cessation of hostilities from her husband's pen, and the friendship blossomed to the extent that Mrs Coates was given letters of introduction to several of Mary's friends in London.

Although George and Mary were first met with great adulation by the newspapers in Indian and Britain, criticism followed and stories spread that were in Mary and George's eyes mis-representative on a personal and political level. By 1901 stories were circulating in the press that poked fun at the pomp and ceremony of the Viceregal establishment. Termed by Mary the 'Etiquette stories' these suggested amongst other things, that Mary curtsied to the Viceroy when she woke up in the morning.<sup>99</sup> Whilst not damaging India's interests these stories infuriated Mary and George.

A letter from G.S. Smalley, indicates that Mary asked him how to quell the stories. While Smalley suggested a 'contradiction in the Times' would 'more [than] likely cure that evil', he was uncertain as to the value of disabusing the American public, drawing attention to the pride that American had in her career. Mary took matter into her own hands when she discovered that such stories formed part of the article to be published in the *Lady's Realm Magazine*. As Mary told George, the journalist had changed the content on consultation and noted: 'The story of Mil. Sec [Military Secretary] behind your chair, our never shaking hands with guests she thought gospel!'.<sup>100</sup> The resulting article stressed the normality of the viceregal household and emphasized the extent of social mingling with guests, suggesting that the Curzon's occasions looked grand compared to the previous Viceroy, who had a retiring disposition and an ill wife.

These forays led Mary to tackle a larger concern during the summer of 1901. Mary used her friendship networks to take on the hostility of the *Pioneer Newspaper*, George's harshest critic in the English language Indian press. During a meeting with Clinton Dawkins, a former Finance Member of the Viceroy's Council, Mary questioned him about *The Pioneer*. He told her that he was 'powerless to

alleviate' the Pioneers attitude. The 'chief proprietor' of the paper was a Sir W. Ratigan, an 'ex Punjab judge' who had a 'grudge against the India Gov' was 'a violent radical' who cared 'nothing about the scandal of an English papers disloyalty so long as it discredits circulation'.<sup>101</sup> As Mary told George 'this looks badly'.<sup>101</sup>

However disheartening this information was, Mary approached Sir Alfred Lyall to coordinate a meeting with the Ratigans, who were resident in Britain. Mary told George that although she would not be capable of conquering 'his policy as I did Mrs Coates dislike of us both' she thought he might be 'more human' after a meeting with her.<sup>102</sup> Here Mary draws on the precedent set by her befriending of Mrs Coates, hoping that by meeting the Rataigans she could also quash some of the opposition. To Mary's disappointment she was not able to meet the Ratigans and informed George 'I am so sorry but I could have done nothing I fear and only seen what kind of man he was'.<sup>103</sup> George, however, had no doubt of Mary's ability charm recalcitrant people and before he received knowledge of her failed plan he wrote: 'Darling, how good of you to take all that trouble about the Ratigans...whatever hostile inclinations he might have I know that you would soften them down'.<sup>104</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper has drawn from recent scholarly work on biography to place Mary Curzon within her friendship network, a method which challenges the conventional 'spotlight' approach, and allows an engagement with the cultural context in which Mary lived. This reveals that Mary not only relied on her friendship network for vital emotional support and reassurance in an alien environment, but that she also used her network to exert her own agency in shaping the representations of her body and that of the viceregal household.

This paper has indicated that the placing the biographical subject within their friendship circle in a spatial context offers a new departure in the writing of biography. This paper has emphasized the ways in which Mary and her correspondence circle formed part of the flows of knowledge between 'empire' and 'home' and that correspondence was actively used to shape representations across the spaces of empire. This paper has revealed that Mary used her correspondence in different ways, sometimes seeking reassuring support from friends, at other times manipulating what she told her network to hide her bodily ills. Mary was actively creating representations of her own body, long before she was read as a biographical subject.

This paper has given glimpses of a larger debate which gives credence to Amada Vickery's call for close examinations of individual lives to question the framework of separate spheres.<sup>105</sup> I would argue that this study of Mary Curzon indicates that the biographical method can offer an important mechanism for revealing the subtle nuances of women's lives which challenge the basic dialectic of public/private. However, I would also argue that the biographical method reveals that corporeal concerns such as child bearing must be incorporated into new frameworks of analysis if the dangers of reifying women's position in political culture are to be avoided. The biographical method used in this paper indicates that concerns of the body and the polity are placed side by side in the letters of Mary's circle and indicates that the former should not be ignored in the 'recovery' of the later.<sup>106</sup>

## Notes

1. M. Domosh, Toward a feminist historiography of geography, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 16 (1991) 95–101. It is fruitful to remember that George Curzon was an ardent advocate against women becoming members of the Royal Geographical Society, only to see the full admittance of women as fellows of the RGS during his times as President of the Society in 1913.
2. A. Blunt, *Travel, Gender and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa*, New York, 1994. 4.
3. A. Blunt, *Travel, Gender and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa*, New York, 1994. 5.
4. M. Bell, *Citizenship not charity: violet Markham on nature society and state in Britain and South Africa*, in: M. Bell, R. Butlin, M. Heffernan (Eds), *Geography and Imperialism 1820–1940*, Manchester, 1995, 189.
5. C. McEwan, The mother of all the peoples: geographical knowledge and the empowering of Mary Slessor, in: M. Bell, R. Butlin, M. Heffernan (Eds), *Geography and Imperialism 1820–1940*, Manchester, 1995, 125.
6. F. Driver, Henry Morton Stanley and his critics: geography, exploration and empire, *Past and Present* 133 (1991) 134–135.
7. F. Driver, Sub-merged identities: familiar and unfamiliar histories, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20 (1995) 411.
8. F. Driver, Sub-merged identities: familiar and unfamiliar histories, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20 (1995) 412.
9. L. Colley, Why Darcy would not have married Elizabeth Bennet, *London Review of Books* 3 Sep 1998; 11.
10. N. Painter, Writing biographies of women, *Journal of Women's History* 9 (1997) 158.
11. L. Colley, An icon of fashion, *Times Literary Supplement* 29 May 1998; 16.
12. D. Cannadine, *The Pleasures of the Past*, London, 1989. 286–287.
13. Catherine Hall cited in C. Steedman, Difficult stories: feminist auto/biography, *Gender and History* 7 (1995) 322.
14. Kathleen Barry rejects the place of critical theory in the telling of women's lives, although her voice is an important one in advocating the place of biography as a mechanism of reconceptualising the categories of history. See K. Barry, The new historical synthesis: women's biography, *Journal of Woman's History* 1 (1989) 75–105.
15. C. Steedman, Difficult stories: feminist auto/biography, *Gender and History* 7 (1995) 322.
16. K.A.K. Israel, Writing inside the kaleidoscope: re-representing Victorian women public figures, *Gender and History* 2 (1990) 40.
17. K.A.K. Israel, Writing inside the kaleidoscope: re-representing Victorian women public figures, *Gender and History* 2 (1990) 40–41.
18. F. Driver, Henry Morton Stanley and his critics: geography, exploration and empire, *Past and Present* 133 (1991) 214.
19. D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, London, 1990. 345–365.
20. It should be noted that high society was not easy to crack without the necessary letters of introduction. Mary's first European tour turned into a tourist holiday rather than a society launch owing to an underestimation of the requirements for admission. Mary's first dance of her society launch in London was with the Prince of Wales.
21. M.E. Montgomery, *Gilded Prostitution: Status, Money and Transatlantic Marriages 1870–1914*, London, 1989; P. Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860–1914*, Oxford, 1986.
22. D. Gilmour, *Curzon*, London, 1994. 118.
23. D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, London, 1990. 347.
24. K.D. Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain*, Oxford, 1998.
25. Lady Curzon Papers, European Manuscripts, Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library (hereafter LCP): 32/219–220 December 28 1901 T. Roosevelt to Mary.
26. G.W. Smalley formed a corner stone of Mary's reading community while she was in India. He was asked to send her books by American authors. This can be seen as one of the ways in which Mary maintained her American sense of identity but which is beyond the scope of this paper. See N. Thomas, *Lady Curzon, Vicereine of India 1898–1905: negotiating the boundaries of gender and empire*, Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2001.
27. N.W. Ellenberger, The souls and London 'society' at the end of the nineteenth century, *Victorian Studies* 143 (1982). It should be noted that Consuelo Marlborough and Jennie Churchill were important members of another dominant coterie in late Victorian and Edwardian London that of the Marlborough House Set which revolved around Edward The Prince of Wales, later Edward VII.

28. Names such as Springy reflect the public school atmosphere of Mary's friendship circle. Mary and George developed many such familiar names for members of the viceregal household.
29. I am grateful to the families of Eve Pelly and Mouche Dunscombe for their assistance in tracing documents. Unfortunately Eve Pelly's letters were lost in a war time bomb raid and no documents have been found by Mouche Dunscombe's family.
30. Mary spent a lot of time accompanied solely by ADC's. This companionship was important to Mary in India and it can be suggested that she sought to normalize these relationships removing possible suggestions of impropriety by using the term the family. Mary was quick to establish in letters to her parents that she was Queen of her Court, thus placing members of viceregal household, in a subservient position to herself.
31. For critical study of the novels of Sara Jeanette Duncan, see J. Hubel, *Whose India? The Independence Struggle in British and Indian Fiction and History*, Leicester, 1996.
32. The Lady Curzon Papers, European Manuscripts, Oriental and Indian Office Collection, British Library.
33. The creation of the material archive is closely linked to a Foucauldian notion of the archive, not in this case as a material set of documents but the archive as the locus of the rules and prior practices forming the conditions of inclusion and exclusion that enable certain practices and prevent others from being accepted as scientific or moral or whatever other social rubric may be used at a particular epochs. See T. Flynn, Foucault's mapping of history, in: G. Cutting (Ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, Cambridge, 1994, 30.
34. Mary Curzon's clothes were given to the Museum of Costume, Bath by Mary's daughters.
35. Taking place in the spring and autumn months the Viceroy's Tours of India acted as a link between the winter season spent in Calcutta and the summer season spent in Simla. The main areas of visitation within the Viceroy's tours were the princely states of India which constituted about one third of India's land mass.
36. LCP: 16 January 1925 Introductory letter to Mary Curzon's papers written by George Curzon.
37. R. Holmes, *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer*, London, 1995. 143–144; see also 173–174.
38. LCP: 16 January 1925 Introductory letter to Mary Curzon's papers written by George Curzon.
39. LCP: 8/72-73, 29 December 1898 Mary to Mother.
40. H. James, *The Aspern Papers; and, The Turn of the Screw*, Harmondsworth, 1984.
41. This approach can also be found in the analysis of focus group transcripts in, for example P. Jackson, N. Stevenson, and K. Brooks, Making sense of men's lifestyle magazines, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 17 (1999) 353–368.
42. A. Blunt, Imperial geographies of home: British domesticity in India 1886–1925, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24 (1999) 421–440. see also 421.
43. J. Duncan, Dis-orientation: on the shock of the familiar in a far-away place, in: J. Duncan, D. Gregory (Eds), *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*, London, 1999, 152; See also D. Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, Berkeley, 1996.
44. LCP: 9:6-14, 17 January 1899 Mary to Parents.
45. Jennie Churchill Papers (hereafter CHAR) at Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, 28–66.
46. LCP: 33:40-41, 12 May 1899 Jennie Churchill to Mary.
47. Cecil Spring-Rice Papers (hereafter CASR) at Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College Cambridge, 1/30/5.
48. CHAR 28/66/28-29, 28 June 1900 Mary to Jennie Churchill.
49. For work on the place of India in the American imagination, see B.G. Gokhale, *India in the American Mind*, Bombay, 1992.
50. LCP: 31/208-215, 13 January 1899 Henry Adams to Mary.
51. LCP: 31/224-231, 28 November 1899 Henry Adams to Mary.
52. LCP: 10/62-65, 28 September 1900 Mary to Father.
53. LCP: 10/72-74, 10 December 1900 Mary to Father.
54. N. Chaudhuri, Memsahibs and motherhoods in nineteenth century colonial India, *Victorian Studies* 1988;
55. LCP: 33/119-123, 15 October 1900 Lady Poynder to Mary.
56. LCP: 33/24-31, 7 March 1899, Pamela Tennant to Mary. Pamela Tennant's letter also indicates the culture of the time in which boys were sent to school whilst girls stayed at home, acting as companions to their mothers, before their own marriages.
57. LCP: 33/107-112, 4 October 1900 Alice Cranborne to Mary.

58. See M. Bell, The pestilence that walketh in darkness: imperial health, gender and images of South Africa, c. 1880–1910. *Transaction of the Institute of British Geographers*, 18 (1993) 327–341; See A.W. Edis, *Sterility in Women including its Causation and Treatment*, London, 1890. for contemporary advice for women in the tropics. This is also reflected in George and Mary's decision to send Mary to Europe to regain her health in 1901 hoping that she would be fit to conceive on her return to India six months later.
59. LCP: 33, 15 October 1900 Lady Poynder to Mary.
60. LCP: 15/59-62, 10 April 1901; LCP: 15/71-72, 18 April 1901 Mary to George.
61. LCP: 31/30-33, 9 August 1900 Margot Asquith to Mary.
62. LCP: 31/34-35, 6 September 1900 Margot Asquith to Mary.
63. LCP: 33/80-81, 19 March 1900 Consuelo Duchess of Manchester to Mary.
64. LCP:33/92-97, 1 July 1900 Lady Dudley to Mary.
65. LCP: 33/99-103, 22 July 1900 Alice Cranborne to Mary.
66. F. Stacpoole, *Advice to Women on the Care of the Health Before, During and After Confinement*, London, 1901.
67. LCP: 9/20-21, 23 February 1899 Mary to Father.
68. LCP: 42, 7 December 1899 Mary's Tour Diary. The strike through indicates what Mary crossed out by hand. The italicized words were added by Mary in hand.
69. LCP: 43/77, 12-17 November 1900 Tour letter Diary.
70. LCP: 43/78, 12-17 November 1900 Tour Letter Diary.
71. LCP: 13b/322-323, 13 November 1900 Mary to Parents.
72. LCP: 42/78, 17 November 1900 Tour Letter Journal. The Viceregal Party sailed on the Clive during this tour. The building of a marble seat overlooking a Gersoppa Falls, arguably a sublime landscape, indicates the continued power of the monarch of all I survey tropic at the turn of the century. Mary would have been able to claim the landscape from a seat designed for her. This is a materially gendered viewing position as Mary's seat would have been made to help her rest after the exerting climb. Mary enjoyed the idea that because of the material reality of the chair people would assume she had enjoyed the view. This is a pertinent message for biographers who seek to trace the biographical subject through the re-tracing of their footsteps.
73. Mary's illness narratives offer an important indicator of the colonial discourses of disease and health at the turn of the century from a non-medical perspective. These indicate that whilst Mary was on the cusp of new understanding of the causes of tropical diseases, climatic and environmentally determined tropical disease discourses continued to dominate her own understanding of illness.
74. LCP: 9/20-21, 23 February 1899 Mary to Father.
75. Royal Archives, Windsor: 14 March 1899 Mary to Queen Victoria.
76. CHAR 28-66-22, 14 March 1899 Mary to Jennie Churchill. In fact Mary was suffering badly when she wrote this letter.
77. CHAR 28/26/11-12, 2 March 1899 Winston Churchill to Jennie Churchill.
78. LCP: 20/9-12, 9 March 1899 George to Mary.
79. LCP: 32/29-34, 17 June 1899 G.W. Smalley to Mary.
80. LCP: 32/53-42, 22 June 1899 G.W. Smalley to Mary. Such crossing in the post indicates the difficulties of lag time in the postal system.
81. LCP: 9/43-45, 20 May 1899 Mary to Parents.
82. LCP: 9/36-77, 3 May 1899 Mary to Parents.
83. LCP: 9/39-40, 17 May 1899 Mary to Parents.
84. LCP: 33/32-38, 10 May 1899 Consuelo, Duchess of Mariborough to Mary. Reference to 'journalists search lights' is taken from a letter Mary wrote to Jennie Churchill CHAR, 28 66 (22), 14 March 1899.
85. LCP: 16/187-201 Undated, but written between 22 and 28 November 1901 Mary to George.
86. Anon, The viceroy of India and Lady Curzon by 'an Anglo-Indian', *The Lady's Realm* 11 (1901) 3–13. see also 13.
87. LCP: 13b/318, 29 October no year, Mary to Father.
88. LCP: 43/166, 9 August 1902 Mary to Father.
89. LCP: 13b/304-305, 31 July 1902 Mary to Father.
90. LCP: 11/137, 2 August 1902 Mary to Parents.
91. LCP: 42/43/165-166, 2 August 1902 personal letter from Mary to Father.

92. K.D. Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain*, Oxford, 1998. 157. It is beyond the scope of this paper to draw in depth on the ways in which Mary operated in the political sphere. This reflects a complex negotiation of social networks while in India through correspondence and also in England acting in person. The growth of Mary's own understanding of her political agency can be charted through her correspondence and also in England acting in person. The growth of Mary's own understanding of her political agency can be charted through her correspondence network.
93. George's note on an envelope containing letter dated 18 May 1901 in LCP: 15/138-165 reads 'Gossip about London, Roberts, Kitchener, Milner, AJB [Balfour] G Hamilton, G Wyndham'. In this letter Mary refers to her 'voluminous letter' as 'tittle tattle'.
94. LCP: 15/138-165, 18 May 1901 Mary to George.
95. LCP: 11/50-51, 24 May 1901 Mary to Father.
96. LCP: 15 98-101, 6-9 May 1901 Mary to George.
97. LCP: 16/80-89, 9 August 1901 Mary to George.
98. Lovat Fraser's archive at Abersywith University contain correspondence with Mary Curzon.
99. D. Gilmour, *Curzon*, London, 1994. 118–210.
100. LCP: 16/164-171, 10 November 1901 Mary to George. This letter is referenced in Anon, The viceroy of India and Lady Curzon by 'an Anglo-Indian', *The Lady's Realm* 11 (1901) 3–13, see also 13.
101. LCP: 15/138-165, 18 May 1901 Mary to George.
102. LCP: 15/30-31, 21 July 1901 Mary to George.
103. LCP: 16/80-89, 11 August 1901 Mary to George.
104. LCP: 22/73-84, 14 August 1901 George to Mary.
105. A. Vickery, Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history, *The Historical Journal* 36 (1993) 383–414.
106. These arguments are expanded in N. Thomas, *Lady Curzon, Vicereine of India 1898–1905: negotiating the boundaries of gender and empire*, Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2001.