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Introduction

READING FOR HISTORY, CIRCA 1857

RUDYARD KIPLING's *Departmental Ditties and Other Verses* (1886) was an instant hit.[1] Kipling, just shy of twenty-one, had already spent close to four years in India, writing for *The Civil and Military Gazette*, a newspaper with offices in Lahore and Shimla, and a forum for some of his first poems and stories.[2] A slim volume of twenty-six poems, the collection brought together some of Kipling's earliest observations about the social life of the British in the colonial outposts of South Asia, a subject that he would continue to document and satirize mercilessly throughout his literary career. The primary target of his acerbic tongue in *Departmental Ditties* was the institution of the government office—the hub of Britain's administration abroad—and the civil servants who handled its daily business. The government office was ostensibly crucial to the retention of empire, but Kipling's series of comical sketches recasts it as a staging ground for scandal, nepotism, and indolence. Its world is stacked with pompous pretenders with inflated egos, lazy bureaucrats idling away their time with piles of unimportant papers, and unfaithful wives plotting and scheming behind their husbands' backs. This portrait of Anglo-Indian life, in short, is characterized less by colonial might than by dissatisfying marriages, dullness of mind, boredom of routine, and the claustrophobic heat of the Indian subcontinent. The collection helped claim a colonial readership, and ultimately a metropolitan one, for the young writer. It was published in a print run of no more than five hundred copies. Kipling sent out order forms to readers, tracing familiar routes of imperial trade: from Aden to Singapore, from Quetta to Colombo. Within a few weeks, every copy was sold.[3]

In the fall of 2019, I called up a copy from the first run of *Departmental Ditties* to the reading room of the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at
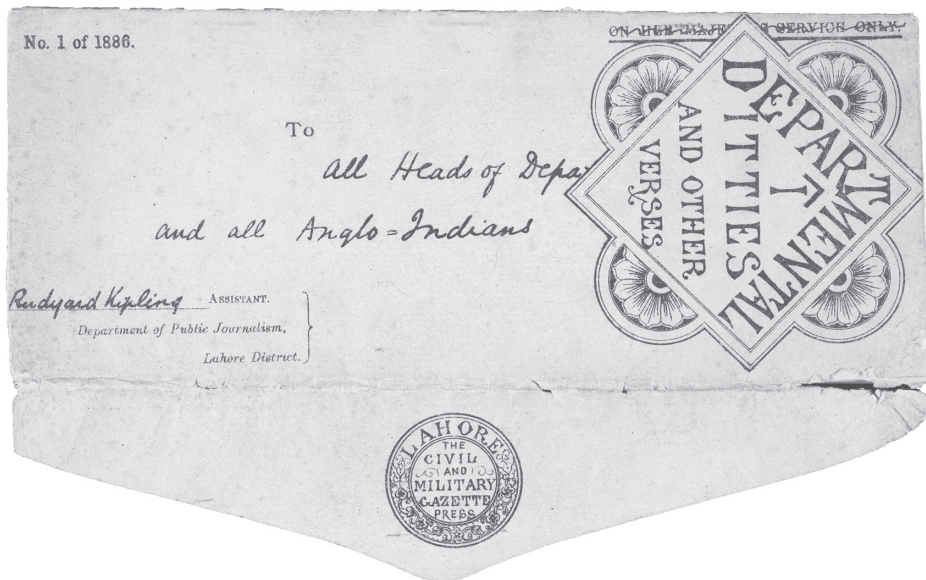
FIGURE I.1. Rudyard Kipling, *Departmental Ditties and Other Verses* (Lahore: The Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1886), David Alan Richards Collection of Rudyard Kipling, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University. Limited First Edition.
The red tape to which Kipling alludes is missing.

Yale University. I laughed when I saw it, not just because the poems were funny, but because the object in front of me was exactly the kind of joke a book historian would appreciate. Writing about the production of the book, Kipling chuckled that the narrow quarto volume was meant "to imitate a D[istrict]. O[ffice]. Government envelope," its light brown wrappers bound together by iconic red tape.[4] A perfect coalescing of form and content, the similarities to an envelope on "official" business continue. The dedication—"To All the Heads of Depar[tments] and all Anglo-Indians"—declares an addressee (or a reading public). The ornate presentation of the book's title transforms what would have otherwise been an ordinary envelope into one holding a governmental missive. Kipling's name, signifying his authorial claim to the collection, doubles up as a return address, muddying the boundaries between poet and clerk. The mock stamp of The Civil and Military Gazette Press, a nod to the fact that the book was printed in the workshop of his employer, replaces a customary government seal on the flap of the envelope. As anyone who has worked with bureaucratic archives will spot, the publication date of 1886

merges with the official document number, No. 1, reminding us that this is just the first of many letters that the office will send as the year progresses, just as it is the first of many works to come from Kipling over the course of his career. Opening the envelope reveals a pamphlet with writing printed on only one side of each page, as per official prescription. We're invited to read the poems as individual sheaves. Tied together in Kipling's docket, they make up a bureaucratic collection. Kipling proudly declared that the imitation was so convincing that "among a pile of papers," it would have "deceived a clerk of twenty years' service."[5]

The poems in *Departmental Ditties* knitted together references to survey maps and charts, official reports and letters, directories, and books of Euclidean geometry. What better to hold a literary rendition of these documents, all part of the professional life of being a servant of empire, than a bureaucratic envelope? I suggest that Kipling's *Departmental Ditties* performs what we might call a material poetics of empire. This is a poetics that not only speaks to the inseparability of the book-as-object and the book-as-text, but also takes seriously the relationship between the literary text and its mundane counterparts, embedding both in colonial networks of production and circulation. The imperial conditions that made literary production possible—Kipling's included—were bolstered by a foundation of thick stacks of everyday books and documents: bureaucratic files and forms, statistical accounts, survey reports, ethnographic compendia, military manuals, and almanacs. Such forms of writing served crucial, functional purposes in the daily life of the colonizers and the colonized. They were also ubiquitous, circulating in unprecedented numbers that dwarfed literary print runs. Kipling's *Departmental Ditties*, a literary portrait of empire bound in a bureaucratic spine, is a material acknowledgment of the mundane textual infrastructure of the colonial world. The imbrication of poem and bureaucratic document can be described in bibliographical terms: the faux envelope is the paratext of *Departmental Ditties*. Attesting to Kipling's familiarity with the colonial institution of the office, the cover of the volume sparks a moment of recognition between the author and reader. Without the framing context of the envelope, the poems and their satire on bureaucratic routine fall flat.

The design of *Departmental Ditties* also tells us something about Kipling's imagined readers, an anglophone public scattered across Britain's empire. Kipling knew that nothing quite commanded attention like an envelope bearing government insignia. Such an envelope inevitably contained something that *had to be read*: a request, a summons, an official notice. Repositories of

actionable information, such envelopes demanded that recipients open them immediately. Imagine a copy of the book in the hands of a nineteenth-century reader. Our hypothetical reader would have first been worried, then confused, and then amused as the prank was revealed. This progression certainly explains the readers' complaints that poured in about the difficulties the configuration of the book posed. Reports that the "wire binding cut the pages, and the red tape tore the covers" conjure up an image of a panicked reader hastily tearing open the envelope, only to be relieved to find nothing more than a set of poems.[6] *Departmental Ditties* cleverly borrows the urgency of a communication from the government and lends it to a work of literature, intended for leisure and enjoyment. Kipling's gimmick, in short, framed his debut collection of poetry as *required reading*.

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Required Reading recovers the story of how everyday forms of writing, from the bureaucratic report to the almanac, came to dominate the cultural imagination of the British empire in South Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It tracks the journeys of boisterous soldiers posted on treacherous frontiers, bored colonial administrators languishing in colonial outposts, peasants confused by the regulations governing licenses and permits, office clerks racing to catch public transport to work, and lonely women eager to excel in their social and literary circles. For each of these publics, daily life in colonial South Asia was inextricable from a tangled stream of print and manuscript, ranging from instruction manuals to railway timetables, petitions to magazines. Generated both by and in response to colonial institutions such as the army, the bureaucratic office, and the Indian railways, these everyday forms of writing formed a material "contact zone," an uneven playing ground on which both British agents and South Asian subjects grappled with the enormity of empire, acknowledged the challenges it presented, and formulated strategies of self-preservation.[7]

Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, the coupling of the modern state with the widespread availability of cheap printing technologies meant that everyday forms of writing in English, Bengali, Urdu, and other South Asian languages circulated in enormous numbers across colony and metropole to create what I term the *functional archive*. An interface between the British empire and its inhabitants, it was a crucial conduit through which historical readers came to understand imperial relationships as they were made and unmade in colonial

South Asia. Linking acts of reading to actions in the world, the constituents of
the functional archive, ranging from licenses to handbooks, acquired the status
of *required reading*. They were essential practical guides to navigating an impe-
rial landscape. Across their differing goals and audiences, these texts provided
blueprints for an imperial life, working through prescription and proscription
to shape the range of actions possible under the aegis of the British empire.

Required Reading is a history of reading under *duress*. I use *duress* to lay bare
the visible and invisible pressures of the colonial state that coerced readers into
textual relationships that weren't always of their own making. Duress is a con-
stant presence from which there is little respite. It operates in the realm of the
everyday, eroding people's sense of self and well-being.[8] The bureaucratization
of village life, for example, meant that local inhabitants needed to apply for
licenses and permits to engage in age-old agricultural practices. Sometimes
outrightly forced, at other times strongly suggested, to read under duress was
to acknowledge the environments of power in which texts were produced,
circulated, and made compulsory. I uncover the intimate connections that
readers formed with texts, connections that manifested as anger, exhaustion,
helplessness, expediency, and playfulness. The line from requirement to actual
compliance, however, was far from straight. Just because a book or document
was mandated didn't mean that people read it. It also didn't mean that these
texts were even readable. I chart a history of reading under duress that comes
hand in hand with a history of readerly resourcefulness, with readers bending
regulations, deliberately flouting requirements, and finding creative ways to
compensate for the failures of texts and the limits of their own skills.

Required Reading asks: What happens to our histories of empire and our
histories of reading if we route them through ordinary forms of writing? This
book makes two arguments. First: it argues that the functional archive offers
us new ways to think about people's relationships to empire. For the inhabit-
ants of colonial South Asia, empire wasn't an abstract institution of political
authority. Empire had a textual form: the petitions and handbooks they en-
countered in their daily lives. Mandated by professional needs and necessi-
tated by social ones, how readers responded to timetables or account books
provides us with a window into contemporary conversations about the mili-
tary, bureaucracy, and women's rights. It was through these forms of writing
that colonial subjects and colonial agents came to understand themselves as
compliant, dissident, or indifferent imperial actors.

Second: this book argues that the itineraries of the functional archive chal-
lenge our very conception of what interpretative and noninterpretative acts

count as reading. Readers' encounters with an almanac or an account book activated a range of unexpected affective and intellectual responses that borrowed from the feeling and vocabulary ascribed to reading literary texts. Selectively read almanacs and impenetrable account books were springboards for intimate, world-shaping readerly relationships. These relationships deserve attention, not simply to diversify the range of responses we include in a reception history, but rather to acknowledge that these modes of engagement— material, textual, aural, circulatory—had readerly and literary effects.

By foregrounding the functional archive, my aim is not to sideline literary texts or literary methods of reading. I resist the impulse to see the functional archive merely as informational, turning instead to its rich aesthetic life in the colonial world. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century colonial literature, written in English and South Asian vernacular languages, responded to the historical surfeit of paper by folding references to petitions and handbooks into their plots. Even beyond their literary representations, the material and textual forms of the functional archive had literary resonances, carefully deploying metaphors, tropes, and material format to achieve their desired ends. *Required Reading* is committed to reproducing the commingling of the functional archive and its more conventionally literary counterparts that we find in the world of colonial South Asia.

Unreadable Empire

In 1852, John Stuart Mill was asked about the reasons for the phenomenal success of the East India Company. His answer—unequivocal in its emphasis— was that India was governed by writing:

> All the orders given, and all the acts of the executive officers, are reported in writing, and the whole of the original correspondence is sent to the Home Government; so that there is no single act done in India, the whole of the reasons for which are not placed on record. This appears to me a greater security for good government than exists in almost any other government in the world, because no other probably has a system of recordation so complete.[9]

Mill's self-congratulatory opinion highlights an administrative problem at the heart of the British empire: the distance between the colony and the metropole. Any empire, as Thomas Richards argues, is a "nation in overreach," struggling to control seized territory spread across the world.[10] One solution to this

problem was the bureaucratic universalism that Mill echoes: that every single action should have its very own paper trail. Laying bare the inextricable connection between the written word and imperial rule, Mill's response points to an empire of accountability that depended on the mobility of letters, reports, memos, minutes, contracts, and multiple copies of each, across local and international networks of offices and institutions.[11] Office manuals and codes of instruction outlined how and when to draft, copy, attest, and destroy documents. If there was a birth, death, or marriage in a village in South Asia, the local office would have to keep a record of it. Extensive correspondences grew out of the work of setting up reading rooms and libraries for soldiers. J. Emerson Tennent, the colonial secretary of Ceylon between 1845 and 1850, complained about the levels of scrutiny and documentation that even the most trivial tasks required. Official written permission was required for "two skeins of thread to sew [together] the records of a district court" and a single measuring ruler for an assistant agent. The need for one pewter inkstand in a police station generated thirteen dispatches.[12]

When the East India Company transferred its holdings in South Asia to the British Crown in 1858, it also transferred its penchant for paperwork and anxieties about imperial rule. The historian Ranajit Guha traces these proclivities in the writings of the military officer Francis Yeats-Brown. In Yeats-Brown's accounts, South Asia emerges as a claustrophobic presence, a force that is at once inchoate and real. Yeats-Brown "shivered at the millions and immensities and secrecies of India." Its "magical plains" stretching to the Himalayas were both awe-inspiring and wholly indecipherable. Unlike the Anglo-Indian gentlemen's club—"a world whose limits were known"—empire appeared unbounded and unmanageable.[13] Yeats-Brown's sense of alienation was not unique; echoes of it can be found across the writings of colonial administrators of the period. One historical origin for this feeling, what Guha calls being "not at home in empire," is the Revolt of 1857, an unsuccessful military rebellion against the British that was nevertheless significant in precipitating the dissolution of the East India Company. As the newly formed British Raj reflected on the events of 1857, concerns about imperial control escalated to a feverish pitch. Despite a British victory against the rebels, the revolt left the British with a lurking feeling of unease. Stemming from a premise of insurmountable difference between the colonizer and the colonized, the Revolt of 1857 reminded the British that despite their efforts, South Asia remained an unreadable empire. In the eyes of its colonial rulers, its vistas bore marks of the terrifying sublime, its religious practices were wholly inscrutable, its languages

were too numerous to count, much less learn. South Asia, the jewel in the British crown, seemed more like a set of traps, waiting to ensnare the unsuspecting colonizer.

South Asia might have been ultimately unreadable, but that did little to stymie British attempts. The feeling of being not at home in empire came hand in hand with the creation of a surveillance state, built on decades of data collection projects. Intertwined with the birth of modern disciplines like anthropology, archaeology, and geography, these epistemic projects were aimed at collecting, categorizing, and codifying all aspects of South Asia's territorial and cultural histories. Raw, unprocessed data from multiple years of collecting efforts were neatly transformed into different textual forms: official reports, ethnographic taxonomies, directories, geographic compendia, encyclopedias, maps, and dictionaries. As the work of scholars like Bernard Cohn has shown us, these projects didn't necessarily lead to more efficient modes of imperial rule. Rather, the act of building an archive of information allowed the British to entertain fantasies of control that didn't always comport with reality.[14]

The textual projects of control and surveillance, attempting to make the colonies readable, varied in scale and emphasis. There were ones like George Grierson's ambitious *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903–1928), a systematic sampling of over 723 South Asian languages and dialects, which took over thirty years to complete and yielded over eight thousand pages of prose organized in eleven volumes.[15] Similarly, William Wilson Hunter's historical compendium, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, started off in nine volumes in 1881 and morphed into twenty-six by 1909.[16] Majestic in both their scope and material appearance, these authoritative imperial tomes were the definition of a "book": printed and hardbound, and meant to last. In short, these colonial tomes were seen as synonymous with the unflinching backbone of British rule.[17] High profile as they were, such printed projects were elite productions. For the most part, they sat undisturbed on bookshelves, read sparingly and almost exclusively by government officials and scholars.

In this book, I turn instead to the scrappier textual forms spurred on by the informational turn in the colonial imagination. The uncharismatic minutiae of colonial life, these official and unofficial kinds of writing included but weren't limited to permits and licenses, instructional texts and household manuals, and self-help volumes for audiences as varied as soldiers and equestrian breeders.[18] Unlike the impressive *Imperial Gazetteer*, these texts took on a variety of material forms: single sheets of paper, files, pocket-sized paperback

books, and serialized publications. Some, like military handbooks published in London and bureaucratic documents produced on the ground, were linked to local institutions of governance, garnering both British and South Asian readerships.

There were also texts produced by South Asians that catered to predominantly South Asian readerships. If the British collected information to discipline an unreadable empire, that same empire, transformed and reconfigured via foreign intervention, seemed alien and formidable to their colonial subjects. As printing technologies became cheaper and more widely available, colonial subjects turned to knowledge production and data collection endeavors of their own, with local print shops in cities and towns across the colony churning out hastily sewn-together almanacs and directories, periodicals, and anthologies. Rather than merely being statistics listed in the pages of governmental reports, South Asians began to create their own textual tools to navigate a world shaped by colonial modernity. The functional archive of this book was as much a construction of South Asian subjects as it was their colonial overlords.

Defining the Functional Archive

The concept of the *functional archive* underpins this book. Beyond merely providing the raw material for my research, it offers a framework through which to understand the relationship between texts and their circulation in the world. In one sense, the functional archive is a material manifestation of ideology, accreting and diffusing into the cultural milieu and popular imagination.[19]

Here are four concepts that can help us unpack the functional archive:

Network

Much like empire itself, the functional archive was a textual construct, a series of files and folders held together by precarious relationships of reading. More than just a loose agglomeration, it formed a material infrastructure of texts that crisscrossed and networked throughout the space of empire. Texts in the functional archive never worked in isolation; they overlapped and mutually reinforced each other. Obtaining a gun license in Ceylon in 1909, for example, would have required the orchestration of a range of everyday forms of writing: multiple, attested copies of the application form, a copy of the Gun License Ordinance of

1908 (published in the *Ceylon Government Gazette*), the license itself with a counterfoil copy, and the official register in which the details of the license would be recorded. None of these documents could have stood alone; none of them could have performed their roles without the others. These supportive linkages also point to the generative nature of the archive, with written objects mushrooming and multiplying, mandating the creation of more and more texts. My archival research for this book has continuously impressed upon me that even simple bureaucratic infractions—like not having a valid license—could spawn pages and pages of petitions, letters, reports, and investigations. That these texts always worked in concert with each other meant that the functional archive was always an archive-in-process, expanding and buckling—but never collapsing—under the weight of added texts.

Transaction

The purpose of the functional archive was to broker transactions made necessary by the institutional structures of the colonial state. I use the word *transaction* because it captures the dynamic nature of these interactions, the push and pull, the give and take.[20] After all, what makes a transaction a transaction is that all parties involved aim to get *something*, whether material or ideological, out of the exchange. Each node in the functional archive was the result of multiple interconnected transactions between subjects, agents, and intermediaries across the spectrum of colonial society. In this way, the functional archive's textual network overlaid a social one, reflecting the conflicts and contracts that made up colonial South Asia.

Most of the transactions I narrate in this book were not among equals. They were negotiated along very steep power gradients, determined by an individual's racial and occupational proximity to the colonial state. For disenfranchised colonial subjects, to participate in a transaction was to participate in a system that was slated against them and to their disadvantage. More often than not, they found themselves in transactions not of their choosing, just one of the many consequences of living in a violent empire. The costs of engagement were unequally distributed and were often magnitudes higher for parties not acting on behalf of the state. This isn't, of course, to suggest that the disenfranchised party in a transaction had no levers to pull. Some of the most meaningful moments in my research for this book were discovering how people triumphed despite the odds being against them, finding loopholes and fixes by which to tilt situations in their favor.

Dispersion

Studying the functional archive poses a unique challenge. How do we reconstruct its networks and connections, its linkages and iterations? One of the singular features of the functional archive was that it defied the logics of site. It wasn't designed to be a single physical repository, to be housed in a university library or a government institution. As a networked formation, its scattered nature enabled its primary role: to connect different institutions and individuals. To an extent, this dispersion was built into the mechanics of colonial offices, which tracked correspondence through "despatch diaries," creating a record of all official letters sent, tagged by date and branch.[21]

But the generative nature and staggered growth of the functional archive means that its scope is undefined. It would take a real feat of the imagination to truly conjure up the functional archive—nodes, branches, and all—in its entirety. As researchers, we encounter its parts scattered across the world, filling up cupboards and shelves in storage facilities. Transnational, multi-sited archival research is necessary, but not sufficient, to trace the functional archive's ever-expanding networks. Each chapter of this book provides a snapshot of a small part of the functional archive, stitched together from collections in South Asia (Kolkata, Colombo), the United Kingdom (London, Brighton, and Oxford), the United States (New Haven), and numerous digital repositories. In the process, I have learned to think of archival research not in terms of narratives, but in terms of constellations, following the discontinuous growth of parts of the functional archive in its historical moment and beyond.

Ephemerality

The historical incarnation of the functional archive was characterized by paper excess and information overflow. Yet the functional archive that I see, as a scholar in the twenty-first century, is chronically fragmented. Historians have always had to work around the problems posed by incomplete archives. In the postcolonial world, this challenge presents itself in an extreme form. As Ulrike Stark has pointed out, historians of the book in South Asia are faced with the lack of reliable empirical evidence about every stage of a book's lifecycle.[22] Paucity is a result of material degradation, the result of natural processes and human neglect. White ants, silverfish, and humid weather have systematically contributed to the rapid disintegration of physical evidence, often misstored in damp, overcrowded rooms. Facing storage crises, bureaucrats have

ordered files deemed unimportant be burned to make room for others. Sometimes, with insidious intent, they also have burned important files to hide crimes. One way or the other, the texts of the functional archive were likely to vanish into the proverbial and literal dustbins of history. While the historical value of the functional archive was predicated on its ability to help readers do things, the conditions of its physical storage have jeopardized that very purpose for its unintended audience of scholarly readers in the present.

But even in its time, most of the functional archive wasn't built to last. Its constituent texts tended toward the cheaply produced: printed on poor quality paper, hastily bound together in files and folders, or clumsily sewn together between paper covers. These were mobile, traveling texts, shunted between bureaucratic offices and railway station platforms. Linked to the repeated performance of daily activities, these material objects bore the brunt of frequent use in the form of torn pages, frayed edges, and ripped covers. Even when copies escaped wear and tear, there was little reason for a reader to preserve them. These texts expired and became outdated; they needed to be revised and reissued regularly. For this reason, most had a short shelf life. Almanacs were useful for a single calendar year, newspapers for a single day. Replaced by new and improved editions, they met a destructive fate: up in flames as tinder or turned into wastepaper.[23] One of the paradoxes of the history of the book is that the examples of everyday writing that *do* survive were probably those that were least consulted.[24]

A progression from plethora to paucity characterizes the functional archive over time. Lamentations for the loss of materials and gaps in the historical record are appropriate. After all, what we have access to today is minuscule when compared to historical circulation. Digitization, too, doesn't promise unregulated access to what does remain. Laurel Brake notes that a decade of digitizing efforts has opened up access to less than 1 percent of surviving nineteenth-century newspapers.[25] Nevertheless, my research for this book has been made possible by acts of preservation that render the functional archive's ephemerality moot. It has relied on official archives, public institutions, and digital repositories, but it has just as often been enriched by the efforts of individuals to preserve the functional archive's ephemeral components. Victorian readers, like Garnet Wolseley in chapter 1, pushed back against the ephemerality of print objects, ranging from newspapers to greeting cards, by creating archives of their own, cut and pasted into scrapbooks. Similarly, chapter 3's discussion of almanacs was made possible by the collecting efforts of one contemporary almanac publisher in Kolkata.

Empire's Histories of Reading

Histories of reading, whether in empire or beyond, have tended to be histories of reading literary texts.[26] Since Thomas Macaulay infamously declared that the value of a "single shelf of a good European library" far outweighed the "whole native literature of India and Arabia," postcolonial scholars have suggested that the ideological underpinnings of literary texts were the connective tissue holding the British empire together.[27] Following Macaulay's blueprint, colonial rulers conceived of reading works of English literature as an act of imperial interpellation, creating a class of indispensable native informants, "Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."[28] As we know from Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest* (1989), these historical forces led to the institutionalization of English literature as a discipline: first in South Asia, then in the metropole.[29] Through the 1990s, postcolonial scholarship, most notably, Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), has explored how the historical condition of empire was inextricable from the rise of the novel, even as the form worked to make this interdependency invisible.[30] Though from opposing sides of the political spectrum, Macaulay and Said build their arguments on a shared assumption. English literature—its valuation, its weightiness—was both an instrument and measure of colonial power relations. The literary text, in short, is framed as an apparition of colonial desires and cultural capital.

Over the last two decades, a pioneering body of revisionist scholarship on the history of reading in South Asia has emerged. These works center the figure of the colonial reader and transform literary taste into an expression of readerly agency. For example, Priya Joshi's *In Another Country* (2002) draws on extensive library circulation figures from nineteenth-century South Asia to show that the English novel of "serious standards" had a less successful career abroad than arrogant administrators would have us believe. Canonical nineteenth-century novels faced stiff competition from sentimental novels by the likes of Marie Corelli, F. Marion Crawford, and G.W.M. Reynolds.[31] While such writers were relegated to insignificance in Britain, as Stephanie Newell shows, they were also popular in West Africa.[32] This revisionism about what was being read, however, doesn't shift the overall literary bent of these histories of reading. Reframed instead as a debate between the highbrow and the lowbrow in which the lowbrow wins, the literary text remains the primary object under scrutiny.

This also holds true for scholarship on print cultures in South Asian languages. Anindita Ghosh's *Power in Print* (2006) undoes the image of

nineteenth-century Calcutta as a city occupied exclusively by the Bengali *bhadralok* (literally "genteel folk"). Underneath its surface teemed subversive pockets that churned out *Battala* books, ephemeral genres of literature named after the part of the city where they were produced and sold. These included sentimental novels, books of black magic, satirical farces, detective stories, and pornographic writings. Challenging "respectable" literary tastes with colloquial language and tackling subjects considered obscene, such texts catered to the emergent middle and lower classes, functionally literate in the vernaculars, overworked and in need of entertainment. On the sly, elite readers read them, too.[33] Francesca Orsini's *Print and Pleasure* (2009) sketches a similar landscape for Hindi and Urdu publications in North India. In her account, pulpy genres such as the detective novel and romance were the common reader's daily go-to books, not canonical literary masterpieces.[34]

I share with this body of scholarship an investment in archival recovery, a commitment to foregrounding readerly agency, and a strong belief in the power of material and textual history to uncover the many fractures under the surface of the colonial world. I turn this commitment to the functional archive. Incorporating these forms of writing into our histories of reading allows us, I argue, to think of textual relationships more expansively. The people who read detective stories and sentimental fiction *also* read almanacs and instructional manuals. Literary readers were embedded in and influenced by the messy, entangled print world that this book uncovers. The relationships that those readers forged with everyday forms of writing elicited contradictory feelings of anxiety, compliance, resistance, and wish fulfillment. Magazines were described as friends; account books denigrated as enemies. Even the absence of a traditional literary text—whether a novel or a volume of erotic poetry—didn't stop readers from forming intimate relationships with their everyday reading material.

Not Really Reading

All histories of reading rely on the responses of readers. Most scholars rely on textual evidence: detailed marginalia in a novel signal deep engagement; a letter sent to a friend recommending a book (or suggesting that it's a waste of time) answers questions about a reader's taste. We take *Things Fall Apart* as confirmation that Chinua Achebe read Conrad and Yeats, just as *Midnight's Children* tells us that Salman Rushdie read García Márquez and Grass. Textual evidence is paired with material details. Food stains on a page indicate multitasking;

torn pages represent the frequency and carelessness with which readers approached a book. Taken together, these textual and material clues are the smoking guns of book historical research. Because they exist, we know that someone performed an act of reading.[35] Many of the readers I study left these kinds of crumbs for me to find: dated notes in the margins of bureaucratic files, additions and corrections to their almanacs, short stories complaining about handbooks, and book reviews lauding literary texts. For the most part, these precious forms of evidence were created by elite and, it goes without saying, literate readers. Individuals of this sort dominate histories of reading, as if the only people who had thoughts or feelings about a text were the people who were capable of—and willing—to read it.

I collect responses to the functional archive from individuals ranging across the literacy spectrum. A key thread through the book is illiteracy, most prominently discussed in chapter 2. Scholars have always grappled with the ineluctable gaps illiterate subjects leave in the historical record. In his account of the experiences of Indian soldiers in World War I, Santanu Das laments the lack of extensive literary works from the soldiers themselves, overwhelmingly due to their lack of literacy skills.[36] Elizabeth McHenry's hunt for black readers presents the stumbling block of Anna Murray Douglass, Frederick Douglass's wife, who never learned how to read or write. "Without the ability to write letters or otherwise create a lasting record of her experience," McHenry notes, it's difficult to understand what her experience as an illiterate member of a literary club, the East Baltimore Mental Improvement Society, might have been like.[37]

One way in which historians of colonial South Asia have included the region's unlettered population in their accounts is by exploring practices of reading aloud. A familiar scene is a literate person, book in hand, surrounded by a mass of illiterate people hanging on their every word.[38] In this scenario, an illiterate person's only access to the content of a text is by listening to it, read out in the voice of another. In these relationships, texts are disembodied objects reconfigured as aurality.[39] But this approach doesn't encompass the full range of ways in which illiterate subjects came to interact with forms of writing.[40] While the aural experiences of illiterate subjects are an important part of the puzzle, they're not the only part. Despite their lack of reading abilities, illiterate people in colonial South Asia came into frequent and direct contact with many kinds of written and printed materials, demanding that we develop a more nuanced vocabulary with which to describe their textual interactions. One avenue is to explore moments in which the book-as-object presses in on

the book-as-text. While for the illiterate, a text's content could only be mediated through the voice of others, the rest of the text—its appearance, its size and weight, the feel of its paper, the arrangement of writing—was up for grabs. After all, not being able to read doesn't preclude tactile, material relationships with books and documents, whether as fetish objects or dead weight.

For historians of the colonial and postcolonial book, an emphasis on the material life of writing is a much-needed course correction for a literary field saturated in discourse analysis.[41] My inquiry extends recent scholarship that takes seriously the meanings that books make as objects, even in opposition to those they make as texts. Representative of this body of work is Leah Price's *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (2012), which urges us to turn our attention to the ways in which books were repurposed as physical things: screens and shields, grease paper, and interior decoration.[42] In a similar vein, the medievalist Mark Amsler argues for what he calls affective literacy, an economy of reading driven by somatic and emotional responses to texts that could subvert lettered, literate ones.[43] In *Dockside Reading* (2022), Isabel Hofmeyr shows us how customs officials in Southern African ports treated imported books as "a form of miniature cargo," one item among a consignment of many.[44] For these bureaucratic readers, books were "cargo to be moved, objects to be classified and taxed, and items to be checked for potential danger, whether ideological or epidemiological."[45] Across these three works of scholarship, reading the content emerges as just one way—and not necessarily the predominant way—of engaging with a text. In the course of my own research, this point has been driven home by the marks of illiterate subjects that I see creeping into books and documents. Petitions, written by official scribes, are "signed" by the thumbprints of their illiterate petitioners. Bureaucratic reports describe how, during the Deccan Riots of 1875, the anger of farmers found a material target: the account books of their moneylenders, which they burned to erase any trace of their debts.

Illiterate readers present a limit case. They challenge our understanding of how people can form relationships with written material even when they can't literally access the content for themselves. Methodologically, illiteracy serves as a starting point for thinking about moments in the archive in which the ability to read doesn't neatly map onto understanding. It sits alongside other barriers to reading: the refusal to exercise one's literacy (discussed in chapter 1), the realization that literacy isn't a guarantee of understanding (chapter 2) or social acceptance (chapter 4), and the inability to read, stymied by the inhospitable material trappings of a text (chapter 3). Collectively, the read-

ers in my book make us pause to ask: What counts as a response to a text? Holding it? Owning but never opening it? Never reading the whole, but only bits and pieces, extracts, and summaries? Listening to someone else talk about it? These questions push me to take into consideration the full range of responses that readers, irrespective of their literacy skills, generated to make sense of the forms of writing they encountered every day. By exploring the varied ways in which people from across the literacy spectrum dealt with books and documents, my aim is to expand the kinds of evidence we use to construct histories of reception. Rather than confining ourselves to lettered communities who leave traces of their intellectual work in the margins of pages, in diaries, and in literary works, I demonstrate how even readers who teeter on the brink of illiteracy had meaningful, world-shaping encounters with texts. Readers, not-readers, book handlers, selective readers, and sometimes-readers all come together to populate my history of reading for colonial South Asia.

You may have noticed that I use the term "illiterate reader." I am fully aware of the implications of this oxymoronic construction, and I want to embrace them in the spirit of expanding our disciplinary categories. To this end, my book is a small stab at a big question: What, exactly, is reading? My aim is not to provide a counterdefinition, but to claim the label of "reading" for the range of affective and intellectual responses that people had to the functional archive: an acknowledgment of what I see as the porousness of reading, its ability to encompass an array of different practices, values, and effects. In this light, I claim practices of half-reading, not reading, and handling, not simply as reading adjacent, but as integral to how we understand our interpretative methods of meaning-making.

Reading, as Leah Price writes, is an "activity that's too close for critical distance, and perhaps for comfort."[46] Our own proximity to the functional archive makes this statement even more true. While ordinary forms of writing, from petitions to handbills, lurk in the margins of scholarly works, they aren't seen to require histories of reading of their own. Lisa Gitelman, for example, puts the job-printed bureaucratic form center stage in the history of printing and reproduction, but separates these material developments from developments in reading by arguing that the writing on such forms becomes "naturalized" through the tasks we use them to perform.[47] Put differently, we know what these documents say without having to read the fine print. In these accounts, novels acquire readers; documents acquire users.[48] Extending this vocabulary of pragmatism, it could be said that we don't really read bureaucratic

documents or refer to instruction manuals, and that we only superficially consult almanacs.

Where the functional archive does make an appearance, it's to lay the ground for future literary relationships.[49] In Richard Altick's landmark study, *The English Common Reader* (1957), for example, nineteenth-century English children could only become "regular readers" when they moved past mundane acts of literacy, such as "deciphering handbills and legends in shop windows."[50] This tendency is indicative of, to borrow Daniel Henkin's words, "the disproportionate weight" given to the novel as the "paradigmatic object of literate consumption."[51] As a result, what historical readers—or even contemporary ones—do with the constituents of the functional archive appears as a foil to acts of "really reading."

The overdetermination of the novel form has also led to a narrower understanding of the many different kinds of reading practices a text can elicit. I share Peter Stallybrass's frustrations: "The novel has only been a brilliantly perverse interlude in the long history of discontinuous reading."[52] The novel is synonymous with continuous reading; thrilling stories and detective fictions are driven by the linear consumption of a plot and, by extension, the linear navigation of a book. Yet, as Stallybrass notes, the technology of the codex— the material format of most novels—was developed precisely to encourage modes of *discontinuous* reading. Unlike a scroll, which needed to be rolled out to be read, the codex form allowed readers to move randomly across a text, skipping and skimming as they so chose.[53]

If scholars agree that there is no singular normative reading experience, the dominant portrait of the reader is still a portrait of a reader lost in a book.[54] Literature, especially the form of the novel, drowns out the world around us; the more we read, the less we notice it.[55] To read a novel is to enter another consciousness, to "read as though we were someone else."[56] These ideas draw on a phenomenological approach to reading, exemplified by the work of Georges Poulet. In his "Phenomenology of Reading" (1969), Poulet describes reading as a concatenation of the twin processes of identification and transformation:

> Reading, then, is the act in which the subjective principle which I call *I*, is modified in such a way that I no longer have the right, strictly speaking, to consider it as my *I*. I am on loan to another, and this other thinks, feels, suffers, and acts within me.[57]

In Poulet's account, we step into the mind of another—the book, the author— to identify with the fictional characters about whom we read and, in turn, reflect on ourselves.[58] This is what is at the heart of reading: its capacity to

enthrall us, its ability to change us, its potential for community both within and outside of the covers of the book.

My intention isn't to contest Poulet's description of reading, but instead to extend his characterization of reading to the functional archive. The relationships that readers formed with the functional archive were intimate and transformative, rendering distinctions between reading and use irrelevant.[59] Circulating as affectively charged objects, the functional archive and its offshoots generated responses in readers that hewed closely to those generated by their more recognizably literary counterparts. While the readers of the functional archive may not have used the word "literary" to describe the forms of writing with which they interacted, they experienced their entanglements with the archive as an intimate literary phenomenon. Collectively, the chapters of this book show that what we might call the literary *effects* of reading can crop up even in response to the most mundane of texts, with no aspirations or pretensions to the literary. Put boldly, *Required Reading* is a literary history of reading that is anchored in the functional archive.

Literature and the Uses of History

I take seriously Ben Kafka's assessment that many scholars have "discovered all sorts of interesting and important things looking *through* paperwork, but seldom paused to look *at* it."[60] That is, old-school historical research mined paperwork for content—the raw materials required to write other histories— without necessarily thinking about the histories of paperwork themselves.[61] Over the past decade, historians and anthropologists have become increasingly self-reflexive about their sources, turning them into objects of scholarly inquiry, too.[62] Consider a petition about a land dispute between two groups in early-twentieth-century Ceylon. Looking *through* this document, we could glean evidence for a study of agricultural practices or notions of private property. Looking *at* it, the petition becomes a catalyst for thinking about the readers and texts entangled in the bureaucratic process of petitioning, the details of its content aside. As Ann Stoler argues in *Along the Archival Grain* (2009), a study of colonial documents from nineteenth-century Indonesia under Dutch rule, we should take archival forms "less as stories for a colonial history than as active, generative substances with histories, as documents with itineraries of their own."[63]

Taking inspiration from Kafka (a media historian) and Stoler (an anthropologist), what do these challenges look like for me (a book historian and a literary critic)? They lead me to a series of interconnected questions: How can

we look at the functional archive, not simply through the eyes of scholars, but through the eyes of historical readers? What does this tell us about the reading practices they cultivated? How might my own disciplinary practices be deployed as tools of reconstruction and recovery? For me, these questions are methodological. As a scholar trained in literary studies, I am in the habit of performing close readings, paying attention to the linguistic structure and detail of a text. As a historian of the book, I think beyond a text's content, turning instead to how the material shape and form of a book or document might impact how it was read (or not). Stemming from the acknowledgment that every form of writing has generic conventions that generate aesthetic effects in the hands of readers, *Required Reading* is the result of my two disciplinary homes, mobilizing the productive overlaps between their different models of close attention, and considering what these can reveal about how a text generates social and cultural effects in the world.

The history of the functional archive is closely imbricated with questions of its materiality. After all, texts don't exist outside of their physical forms, which actively shape readers' responses. Kipling's *Departmental Ditties* might have made a much smaller splash if it first appeared as a standard print volume instead of a novelty envelope. But even more fundamental things like the size of a bound book or the presence of an authorized signature on a government document are meaningful signifiers of how a text was expected to circulate in the world. To this end, I use bibliographical tools to identify the physical features of the functional archive and to understand how these features structured the interactions readers had with it. I think of the constituent texts of the functional archive as evolving technologies, their material characteristics adapting in response to evolutionary pressure. Many of the material developments recorded in this book were the result of historical shifts. The widespread availability of cheap printing technologies, for example, propelled almanacs from handwritten scrolls to mass printed volumes. Audience feedback from sales figures and reviews drove changes to size and layout. Sometimes readers made corrections and additions to texts themselves, in an effort to make their reading material more accessible.

Alongside my close readings of the functional archive as an object, I present close readings of the functional archive as a textual construct, grafting the literary critic's methodological toolkit of close reading onto this unlikely recipient. I read for metaphors, tropes, and descriptions, all of which feature across a range of even the most ordinary forms of writing. In this light, a petition complaining about the confiscation of a farmer's buffalo herd in early-twentieth-century Ceylon is less a document about animal husbandry than it

is a complex drama, replete with characters, plot, and dramatic tension.[64]
Often, rhetorical flourishes were established parts of a specific genre. Petitions
filed in colonial South Asia, for example, began and ended with florid, self-
abasing addresses and pleas from petitioners. The presence of these patterned
beginnings and endings across the official archive transforms them into part
of the bureaucratic infrastructure of the petition. They were practical devices
mobilized as part of the affective apparatus of the genre, a conventional way
through which the petitioner sought to generate sympathy and pity in the
person reading their appeals. That these elements were carefully crafted and
repeatedly deployed reminds us that the aesthetic tropes and effects of the
functional archive were crucial, rather than incidental, to its role.

Recall that the bulk of the functional archive is composed of informational
texts: how-to manuals, reports, almanacs. In the hands of its scholarly readers,
its status as information has obviated the need to explore its aesthetic value.
Bluntly, the functional archive has been framed as all surface, no depth. It has
no hidden secrets to plumb; it wears its intentions on its sleeve. Its iconic in-
carnation, the bureaucratic form, relies on blanks, a universal technology of
limiting expression.[65] (Chapter 2's discussion of the bureaucratic document
might leave you with second thoughts about this.) At best, the functional ar-
chive is considered "historical." At worst, it's considered "nonliterary." But
whether the functional archive says what it means or means what it says, I
show that it has undeniable aesthetic effects that are worthy of literary atten-
tion and that help us understand how these objects worked in the world.

If I am intentional in matching one discipline's methods to another disci-
pline's objects, my approach is necessitated by the historical context of late
nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asia. Policing the boundaries
of the literary is antithetical to the spirit of the colonial archive, where bureau-
cratic forms, novels, and instructional manuals comingle, bleeding into each
other in surprising and powerful ways, as the example of Kipling's *Departmen-
tal Ditties* shows us. Similarly, policing the boundaries of our methods would,
too, be antithetical to the spirit of the objects I encounter. It is my hope that
this book will provide some impetus and inspiration for others to turn to their
functional archives and think about their methods of reading.

A Reader's Guide

To uncover how the functional archive circulates in the hands of its readers in
colonial South Asia, I have organized *Required Reading* into four chapters.
Each shows the reach of the functional archive in a different domain of colonial

life under the British empire: the military, the bureaucratic, the temporal, and the literary. Each focuses on a different bibliographical object: a military hand-book, a sheaf of bureaucratic documents, a cupboard of almanacs, and the print run of a magazine. I position these objects as nodes in the functional archive, starting points from which to track the relationships they form with other texts and the networks in which they participate.

Required Reading probes the relationship between the functional archive and its more conventional literary counterparts. In some chapters, I place the functional archive in conversation with how it is depicted in literary texts. This allows me to show how literary representations can drive historical reception (chapter 1) or to remark on the artificial separation of the functional and liter-ary archives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (chapter 2). At other moments, the functional archive eschews its informational role to take on literary qualities (chapters 2 and 3). Occasionally, the functional ar-chive performs the role of the literary text better than the text itself (chap-ter 4). The aim of these pairings is to insist on the literary value of the func-tional archive, which resonates in its form, content, and reception.

The functional archive's organic quality—its persistent ability to bring together a multitude of different texts from unlikely places—has determined this book's geographical focus. Simply, I have followed the functional ar-chive's paper trail wherever it has taken me. While all four chapters are grounded in the British empire's territorial holdings in South Asia, they also roam widely across it, from the barracks of the North-West Frontier Provinces and Burma, and jungles and back offices of district magistrates in Ceylon and Orissa, to the households of the aspirational middle-classes in Calcutta, and the drawing rooms of newly literate, elite women in Madras. Occasionally, they also roam beyond South Asia, taking us to nineteenth-century Boston, London, or China.

This book cannot serve as a comprehensive history of reading for South Asia; the region's linguistic and cultural disjointedness would make that a fool's errand. At the broadest scale, my focus on the British empire means that I cannot take into account the role that South Asia's other European empires—the Portuguese, the Danish, the Dutch, and the French—played historically in the dissemination of print technologies and books. Conversely, by not fo-cusing on the ramifications of reading in one particular part of South Asia, my research doesn't fit area studies models either.[66] I have been inspired by the careful and ambitious work such studies contain, even as I ultimately depart from the regional foci that have shaped their arguments about print. Rather,

by offering a series of comparative snapshots, I aim to register what is similar across all of my examples: the entanglement of self and book within the institutional frameworks of the British empire.

Scholarly monographs, too, are part of our functional archive, and I understand that readers will come to this book for different reasons and with different interests. To help you quickly find what you are looking for, here is a short breakdown of the stakes of each chapter. If you would like to learn more about British soldiers posted in colonial South Asia, Rudyard Kipling, and vicious book reviews, turn to chapter 1. If you'd like to know about the long history of bureaucratic frustrations, illiteracy, and some stolen buffalo, start with chapter 2. Chapter 3 is for enthusiasts of the Indian Railways, schedules, and doodling. Chapter 4 is for the most literary-minded reader, with an investment in the histories of gender, loneliness, and the English canon. If you are bored, there are puzzles to solve.

Chapter 1, "Reading for Survival," is about the refusal to read. It tracks the reception history of Garnet Wolseley's military handbook, *The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service* (1869), to unpack the relationship between reading, education, and print in the making of the British army at the end of the nineteenth century. Despite its widespread circulation and ostensible success, the *Pocket-book* had a controversial life. It was a book much talked about but little read. Rejected by professional readers and zealously discussed by lay ones, the handbook was accused of being incorrect, ineffectual, immoral, as well as long and boring. By tracking how the *Pocket-book* became entangled in relationships of refusal, denial, and misappropriation, I argue that moments of not reading determined the purposes to which readers put a technical manual. In turn, this challenged the moral and military imperatives of empire. The chapter uncovers the responses of historical and fictional readers to Wolseley's manual, reconstructed from letters, antiwar pamphlets, newspaper articles, scrapbooks, and short stories by Rudyard Kipling.

Chapter 2, "Reading for the Record," is about not being able to read. I turn to a range of bureaucratic documents—account books, licenses, and petitions—to explore the relationship between reading, bureaucracy, and local authorities. Set in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka), "Reading for the Record" focuses on the nonelite, barely literate section of the Sinhalese population, for whom daily life was inseparable from written documents that they couldn't read. I show how in moments when content eluded them, these readers fell to alternative practices of meaning-making—ranging from the tactile, material feeling of paper to outsourcing their reading and

writing to professionals—to yield interpretive outcomes. I juxtapose these responses with those of highly trained, professional readers, such as colonial officers and scribes. Even for elite readers, bureaucratic writing presented difficulties of volume, clarity, and falsification. Taken collectively, I argue that elite and nonelite readers' responses challenge the distinction between the literate and the illiterate. I show how readers nevertheless harnessed the impenetrability of the bureaucratic form to their own profits and ends, learning to work the system by manipulating practices of reading and duplication. The chapter's material and literary analysis draws from archival research in the Sri Lanka National Archives, anchoring them in readings of Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle* (1913) and H. E. Beal's *Indian Ink* (1954), which formally and thematically engage with the unreadability of colonial bureaucracy.

Chapters 1 and 2 explore the relationship between the functional archive and colonial institutions, focusing on readerly engagements with texts produced by the colonial state as part of its daily official business. Chapters 3 and 4 take us into the world of commercially produced forms of print published for and by South Asians, aimed at guiding them through a landscape modified by colonial rule.

Chapter 3, "Reading for Time," is about trying and sometimes failing to read. It takes as its focus the form of the *panjika*, a Bengali Hindu almanac, among the best-selling books of the late nineteenth century. These volumes contained astrological guidelines, directory-style bureaucratic information, and advertisements. I argue that we should read panjikas, which were guides to organizing time efficiently and auspiciously, as life-writing manuals that helped readers align their traditional routines with the temporal transformations of capitalist modernity. Drawing on close examinations of Bengali-language panjikas, I explore how even as these volumes encouraged selective, repetitive reading, they thwarted readers with the poor quality of their print, ungenerously spaced layouts, and cramped tables of information. I study marginalia as crucial evidence of readerly attempts to navigate the unreadability of these essential texts and, more broadly, the unreadability of empire. I suggest that while the panjika was a genre almost exclusively associated with women, its printed nineteenth-century form opened it up to an English-educated Bengali male readership navigating between astrological time and the fast-paced demands of the imperial bureaucracy. My readings draw primarily on the archives of the offices of the Gupta Press, a Kolkata-based publishing house, but I have also examined almanacs in the National Library

of India, the Bodleian Library, and the offices of P. M. Bagchi, another publisher of the genre.

Chapter 4, "Reading for Company," examines the functional archive of English literature in colonial South Asia through an exploration of practices of reading together. Consequent to Thomas Macaulay's 1835 "Minute on Indian Education," English literature's role as an instrument of colonialism was inextricable from debates about education in South Asia. The chapter explores how *The Indian Ladies' Magazine*, Kamala Satthianadhan's Madras-based, English-language monthly (est. 1901), placed English literature at the heart of questions about gender reform, education, and nationalism. Even for elite, English-literate women readers, English literature felt like a daunting object, stirring up deep feelings of inadequacy and provinciality. By publishing literary puzzles, lists of reading suggestions, and literary essays, the magazine provincialized English literature for South Asians, offering it up in bite-size and manageable pieces. Through these different genres, the magazine offered a helping hand, assisting readers as they made their way through difficult texts or, alternatively, congratulating them on their knowledge. Reducing the English literary canon to a functional form aided in the political project of the magazine by allowing women to construct intellectual and affective relationships with other readers through the shared consumption of its thin printed pages. I end the chapter with a discussion of Rabindranath Tagore's Bengali-language novella, *Nashtanirh* [The Broken Nest] (1901), in which literary magazines become functional props for forging intimate relationships, but ultimately fail miserably.

The epilogue examines a photograph from Dayanita Singh's *File Room* (2013) to show that the functional archive is as much a contemporary presence as it is a historical one. I return to the central questions that animate this book, highlighting how the anxieties that surrounded the history of writing and imperial rule continue to percolate through postcolonial life in South Asia. The history of any text is the history of different readers with widely varying literacy skills seeking different outcomes for different reasons. A re-attunement to the circulatory patterns of the functional archive shows us that our histories of reading do not have to be divided into demographic siloes, but rather can be characterized by an unequal simultaneity. The epilogue ends by claiming a literary methodology for a historical archive. It is my belief that close reading—its capacity to parse metaphor and form—is an indispensable tool to understand the loaded ways in which a text works and fails in the world.

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Page numbers in *italics* indicate illustrations.