

*Halls of Mirrors:  
Mimicry and Ambivalence in  
Kipling's Boer War Short Stories*

PHILIP HOLDEN

“THE WHITE PEOPLE,” wrote Leonard Woolf of his experiences in colonial Jaffna, were “in many ways astonishingly like characters in a Kipling story. I could never make up my mind whether Kipling had moulded his characters accurately in the image of Anglo-Indian society or whether we were moulding our characters accurately in the image of a Kipling story” (46). Woolf’s observations on the reciprocal relationship between literary and social constructions of reality have resonances in contemporary colonial discourse analysis. If Anglo-Indian social identity is merely performative, a moulding of character after fictional scripts, then the epistemological basis of colonial rule, with its essentialist division between ruling and subject races, is challenged. Homi Bhabha’s work sees all colonial discourse as marked by an effort to manage this contradiction, as an ambivalent reinscription of the colonizer’s identity which attempts to abject, but is paradoxically predicated upon, the figure of the colonized. Building upon Bhabha’s work, Kaja Silverman and Parama Roy have investigated the epistemological underpinnings of texts which might seem initially to challenge imperial binarisms, incidents of “double mimesis” (Silverman 299) in which the colonial observer “assumes the posture of authenticity and seeks to displace the native informant” (Roy 186). Exploits of cultural transvestism by men such as T. E. Lawrence and Richard Burton thus emerge not as transgressions of discursive boundaries, but rather as constituting a “rearguard action” (Roy 196) against the epistemological threat of mimicry by the colonized. Burton’s and Lawrence’s reverse mimicry is made possible, in this reading, by the Englishmen’s deeply-rooted

conviction of absolute cultural difference from their proto-colonial subjects.

Colonial discourse analysis has been enormously helpful in defining the ideological and discursive frames within which texts are written. The technologies of post-Enlightenment rationality used by colonial writers, such as ethnography, philology, and archaeology, can no longer constitute themselves as empirical or neutral, but are bound up with, in Edward Said's words, a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority" (3) over the colony. The psychoanalytic framework in which theorists such as Bhabha, Roy, and Silverman themselves work, however, still maintains a position of neutrality and empiricism: psychoanalysis does not provide a critique of itself. Psychoanalytic critiques of colonialism, of course, do not begin with Bhabha; most psychoanalytically-informed postcolonial discourse analysis acknowledges a debt to Frantz Fanon. Yet Fanon's position as a writer is very different from that of a postcolonial critic at the end of the century. Writing as part of a revolutionary struggle in the 1950s, Fanon uses psychoanalysis to denaturalize "race" and replace it with a historically constructed "nation," employing psychoanalytic categories to stress the universality of nationalist struggles against colonialism. We now live in a postcolonial world haunted by the failures of many anticolonial nationalist projects, and this may cause us to question the initially enabling collapse of historically contingent situations into psychic struggles.

The ambivalence which Bhabha identifies as characteristic of "colonial . . . disavowal" ("Signs Taken for Wonders" 175), for instance, arises from a basic contradiction in colonialism itself. European powers proclaimed their right to colonize because of their civilized status, a status achieved through a practice of the universal Enlightenment values of the Rights of Man. The practice of colonialism, however, resulted in a refusal to apply these universal values to the colonized. Anticolonial movements of native intellectuals were fully aware of and skillfully exploited this contradiction, demanding their rights in the language of nineteenth-century European nationalism.<sup>1</sup> A reworking of Bhabha's theoretical model in historiographic,<sup>2</sup> rather than merely psychic, terminology, and a placing of termino-

logy such as ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity within a precise historical context<sup>3</sup> may thus prove to have more analytical purchase.

Rephrasing Bhabha's psychic categories as historiographic ones is more than a matter of terminology, since it enables precise, historicized readings of a colonial text's production and reception. First, such rephrasing answers Robert Young's objection concerning the retrospective nature of Bhabha's critique, his question whether ambivalence and hybridity, "these apparently seditious undoings[,] in fact remain unconscious for both colonizer and colonized" (152) or whether they are consciously exploited by the colonized. The answer seems to be that they are consciously exploited but not as psychic categories. Moreover, a specific historical location of the categories deals with a further difficulty in postcolonial theory's accounts of colonial discourse which several commentators have noted. Bhabha's representation of colonial discourse in terms of psychic universals encourages its own binary opposition. Critics may either epiphanically celebrate the end of colonialism from a position of privileged postcoloniality,<sup>4</sup> or may mourn colonialism's continued psychic domination. What we are not provided with is a vision of the possibility of evolution and change.

A reading inspired by Roy and Bhabha can thus successfully open up fissures in the colonial text, but it can do little to exploit such fissures. Texts are set free of historical moorings and become examples of "the teleology of a bourgeois (and colonizing) modernity" (Roy 210), not historically contingent illustrations of how such a modernity was contested and developed. In the analysis which follows, I use the concept of "double mimesis" to open up the fissures in Rudyard Kipling's Boer War stories, but also to illustrate how an exploitation of those fissures necessitates a historically nuanced reading which views psychic elements within colonial texts as specific responses to historically contingent situations. Such a reading leads to an understanding of how colonial discourse develops, of how it may be contested within the colonial state, and how the categories which it utilizes may have a surprising longevity in the postcolonial world.

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Mimicry, ambivalence, and even double mimesis are of course key features of Kipling's work. In *Kim*, the "Wonder House" in Lahore imposes its explanatory frame upon India; its curator, giving his spectacles to the lama, bestows upon him the gift of sight, of seeing his own culture through the more powerful lens of British science (59). Kim's cultural mobility, his ability to imitate Indians, is fine-tuned through the scientific instruments of the Indian Survey: his mastery of these instruments and the resultant transparency of all India to him defend against the threat of native mimesis. The Indian mimic man in *Kim*, Hurree Chunder, in contrast, can imitate successfully only other Asiatics: his impersonation of Englishness, symbolized by his hope of becoming a Fellow of the Royal Society, Creighton intimates, is "curious" (222). Hurree has the knowledge but not the necessary technologies of control. His language is uncontrolled polymorphous babble, English public school slang juxtaposed, often in the same sentence, with elaborately formal diction, in sharp contrast to the terse, clipped instructions of Creighton.

Kipling's Boer War stories are more directly implicated within the politics of colonial governance than *Kim*. The author's visits to South Africa, his personal friendship with men such as Cecil Rhodes, and his experience on the staff of the *Friend of the Free State* in Bloemfontein all contributed to a harsh critique of the manner in which the war was conducted. Seeing in the War the chance of "immense gain both to the land and the Empire" (*Letters* 3.12),<sup>5</sup> Kipling felt that gentlemanly British notions of fair play in what should be a total war only prolonged the conflict. Stories such as "The Way that He Took" and "The Outsider" use the perspective of outsiders to critique the values of the class that conducts the war. They are perhaps rather shrill in tone: Thomas Pinney notes that for the first time the "hortatory, scolding, even Cassandra-like tone in much of this work began to grate on some of Kipling's public" (Kipling, *Letters* 3.6).

However, two of Kipling's Boer War stories, "A Sahib's War" and "The Comprehension of Private Copper," seem more ambivalent in tone and more amenable to a reading indebted to Bhabha and Roy. In these stories, Kipling's rearguard action

against the threat of mimicry seems less successful than it is in *Kim*, turning into a full-scale conflict which threatens to overwhelm the narrative. In the first, "A Sahib's War," double mimesis is extended to ventriloquism. Published in December 1901, "A Sahib's War" is narrated in its entirety by a Sikh, Umr Singh, serving in an Indian cavalry regiment. Told to a presumably sympathetic, entirely invisible, Punjabi-speaking Englishman on a train to Stellenbosch, "A Sahib's War" recounts an intimate homosocial relationship between Umr Singh and his young officer, Walter Corbyn/Kurban Sahib. The relationship has commenced in India where Corbyn, child of the local Deputy Commissioner, has grown up watching Umr Singh's cavalry regiment on the parade ground. Like Kipling himself did, Corbyn has returned to England for a public school education, but unlike Kipling, has, upon his return to India, gained an intimate reacquaintance with Umr Singh and Punjabi culture. Together, Corbyn and Umr Singh come to South Africa. Bound to keep out of the fighting by Corbyn's insistence that the war is "a Sahib's war," Umr Singh serves as his orderly. They join a Canadian cavalry regiment and Kurban is eventually killed in a Boer ambush.

The story is elaborately framed as an ethnographic spectacle: apart from the appraising eye of the invisible Englishman, the reader also encounters a series of footnotes and parenthetical definitions which attempt to interpret Umr Singh's story in English terms: "*jemadar* of *saises*" (86) is glossed as "headgroom," "Yunasbagh" is interpreted as "Johannesburg" (80), while "a Sahib called Eger Sahib" is speculatively but correctly named as "Edgar?" [80]).<sup>6</sup> As readers, we thus know the events Umr Singh describes better than he can know them himself. Discourse and story work in harmony here, since the central insistence of "A Sahib's War" is that there is a penumbral, incomprehensible, yet incommensurably sacred code of ethics which marks out English masculinity as unique, a code from which Indians are permanently excluded. After Corbyn is killed, Umr Singh and his comrade-in-arms Sikandar Khan resolve to hang the members of the Boer family responsible. They are prevented by the apparition of Corbyn's ghost which mutters "this is a Sahib's War": uncomprehending, yet moved, they feel themselves released from their vow of revenge.<sup>7</sup>

The second short story, "The Comprehension of Private Copper," was written later in the conflict, and represents a hardening of Kipling's views. Mimicry in this story operates at two levels. It is narrated in the third person, but focalized entirely through the consciousness of Private Alf Copper, the son of "a Southdown shepherd" (159) now on active service in South Africa. Straying beyond his regiment's camp, the English soldier is captured by an "intimate enemy," a self-styled "Transvaal Burgher" whose father has been betrayed by the British. The man talks with an upper-class British accent, and smokes choicest tobacco while he patronizes the "poor Tommy": he indulges in an imitation of Englishness which gives him class-based power. Occasional hints in the man's speech, however, remind Copper of "pukka bazar *chee-chee*" (168), and his "dark face, the plover's-egg-tinted eyeballs and the thin excited hands" (166) recall the "saddle-coloured son of a local hotel-keeper" (166) whom Copper has encountered in Umballa, India. Turning the tables on his captor and taking him prisoner, Copper examines the man's fingernails for evidence of racial difference: he can detect none but the suspicion remains. When Copper returns to camp, the prisoner's nerve fails and he starts "kicking, swearing, weeping and fluttering all together" (172). Private Copper's colleagues, however, are more interested in the copy of *Jerrold's Weekly* which the man is carrying and which they read in defiance of the censorship of news imposed by their officers.

In both stories then mimesis introduces anxiety regarding Englishness, particularly regarding the connection between Englishness and masculinity, a connection which founds nineteenth-century imperial narratives. Victorian masculinity, Herbert Sussman has recently written, might be theorized as a series of Foucauldian "technologies of the self" (11) in which a stable subjectivity is formed through certain disciplinary techniques. The Victorian middle classes viewed manliness as the proper management of "an innate, distinctively male energy" (10)—Kingsley's manly *thumos*—and expressed this manliness in a series of technological metaphors concerned with the harnessing of natural energy. Such a harnessing, however, could not be too excessive, in that it should channel but not stop up the

flow of primordial male energy (3). In the fictional representation of Empire, the dialectic of natural forces versus artificial control was played out on a larger scale. On one hand, characters such as Haggard's Alan Quartermain, or their historical equivalents—Stamford Raffles, George Gordon, Robert Clive—were celebrated as operating in a masculine, primitive environment infused with the regenerative possibilities of primordial masculinity. On the other, their success was glossed as being achieved through the utilization of scientific principles and of self-control. Imperial adventure narratives are also tightly controlled in narratological terms, often contained within elaborate frame narratives, beginning with a voyage out and ending with a return home. From these narratives, English masculinity emerges regenerated and yet bound by stronger harnesses.

Bhabha's notion of ambivalence helps to extend this analysis to Kipling's stories and to locate fissures within their presentation of colonial masculinity. Given the importance of English masculinity in the imperial adventure story, the invisibility of English men in both of Kipling's short stories is surprising. In "A Sahib's War," "Sahibs" do possess scientific detachment, a rationalizing gaze which is at once both penetrating and panoptic—"the Sahib looks too closely. . . . [T]he Sahib has sharp eyes" (78-79). The two representative Englishmen in the short story, however, are invisible. We perceive the lieutenant on the train only through Umr Singh's reactions to him, while Corbyn himself is surrounded by a halo of saintliness that dazzles the investigator. The elaborate code of conduct which harnesses the forces of masculinity so successfully in nineteenth-century adventure narratives may, the trajectory of the story suggests, have little relevance in the present. Corbyn admits privately that the English code of practice in the War is unworkable and that "we should have loosed the Sikhs and the Gurkhas" on the Boers (89). The inscription on his grave, "*si monumentum requiris circumspice*," reprises that on Wren's in St. Paul's Cathedral and makes pretensions towards heroic imperial grandeur but, Umr Singh remarks, is in "jest," because the surrounding landscape is "empty" (102).

English manhood in "A Sahib's War" seems similarly empty. Kurban Sahib is physically almost invisible and subordinated in

his relationship to the older Sikh, whom he addresses as "father" in private (80). Corbyn's masculinity is expressed only insofar as he identifies with Sikh martiality: he is, Umr Singh remarks, "a Sikh at heart" (80). English identification with other nominally martial peoples such as Sikhs, Pathans, and Gurkhas is a common feature of colonial fiction. In Corbyn's case, however, English masculinity seems drained of primordial male energy, submerged beneath other, more primal masculinities. Kurban is insubstantial, seen only as a ghost appearing to Umr Singh and Sikandar Khan, as Christ to Thomas, his hand held to a wound in his side yet, unlike Christ, making a meaningless sacrifice in a minor skirmish of a futile war. Like the actions of a ventriloquist's puppet then Umr Singh's narrative pulls our attention away from the speaking subject: if we turn to look at Englishness, we find only an absence, a series of prohibitions or restraints.

English masculinity as expressed through imperial adventure is also thrown into question in "The Comprehension of Private Copper." What enrages Copper so much about his captor is paradoxically his successful impersonation of upper-class Englishness. Copper's "intimate enemy" speaks "in precisely the same offensive accent that the young squire of Wilmington had used fifteen years ago when he caught and kicked Alf Copper, a rabbit in each pocket, out of the ditches of Cuckmere" (160). In part, of course, the story represents Kipling's growing disenchantment with the English establishment at home, the "flannelled fools" of "The Islanders." Yet it is also important to emphasize that the administrative services of most British colonies were largely staffed by middle class men who often expressed their responsibilities in terms of those of British aristocrats: the Residency became a manor house, the District a feudal domain. Copper's interlocutor's impersonation of aristocratic English masculinity thus suggests ultimately that such masculinity, foundational both to the maintenance of colonial communities and the effect of adventure narratives, is nothing more than a repetitious performance. Yet Copper's own response suggests that a glance elsewhere—to the "primitive" masculinity of the working-class British Tommies—is also for Kipling problematic.

A reading of this kind then opens up fissures in Kipling's texts and reveals their epistemological contradictions. If not historically located, however, fissures remain merely fissures; having shown how the colonial text unravels, the critic turns her back. In a recent article, Catherine Hall argues that "new notions of twenty-first century British cultural identity" (69-70) may be realized by a reinvestigation of how colonial "interdependence and mutuality as well as patterns of domination and subordination" (69) have historically structured British identity. "Men were made white by the Empire," Hall notes, "in a way that was never articulated 'at home'" (76): the task of the cultural critic is thus to make this articulation, to discover the manner in which metropolitan and colonial discourses were mutually reliant. Kipling's stories do contain significant refusals to see which are directly a result of imperial polemics: his mystification of Englishness as a spiritual calling in "A Sahib's War" and his celebration of a brutalized, working class masculinity in "The Comprehension of Private Copper" are written after the British forces began indiscriminate burning of Boer farmsteads in late 1900 (James 203). Yet the anxiety and ambivalence in the stories about the imbricated concepts of class, masculinity, race, and nation, the way Englishness itself is imagined in the stories, can be related to a specific contemporaneous issue: the fear of racial degeneration.

Theories of racial degeneration date back to the middle of the nineteenth century: Francis Galton's *Hereditary Genius* was published as early as 1869, Max Nordau's *Degeneration* in 1895. They were given a new impetus during the Boer War, however, by the high rate of rejection of potential recruits for military service. Of the 12,000 men who volunteered in Manchester, 8,000 failed a basic test of physical condition and only 1,200 were eventually accepted for recruitment (James 222). The poor physical condition of the troops seemed a fulfillment of Galton's prophecies concerning "race suicide" and genetic degeneration. Galton had argued that the fertility of the "abler classes" was declining, and that the English race would thus degenerate over generations as the progeny of the "improvident and unambitious" multiplied. If corrective measures were not applied, this would lead to imperial decline, since the "races best fitted to play their part on the stage

of life" would be "crowded out by the incompetent, the ailing, and the desponding" (343). In 1900, "the spectacle of Boer armies resisting an Imperial Army which had conquered half the world" produced an "extraordinary panic . . . within the educated classes" (Nye 65): Galton's predictions, it seemed, were coming true.

Galton's views, of course, were not uncontested at the time of the Boer War, nor is it certain that Kipling would have supported them, although many colonial officials and writers clearly did.<sup>8</sup> The issue of degeneration, however, formed a basic grammar through which issues of nationalism, class, masculinity, and race might be discussed—a linking clearly shown by Galton's original name for what later became eugenics, the science of race improvement, "viriculture" (Soloway 63). Britain in the 1890s and early 1900s was losing its once supreme position in international trade to a rapidly expanding Germany and calls were made for increased national efficiency. At the same time, the issue of class became important. The electoral reforms of the nineteenth century had culminated in the granting of the vote to rural householders in 1884, but some 40 percent of men and all women remained unable to vote: a widening of the franchise seemed inevitable, but this was accompanied by middle class anxieties about the fitness of working class voters to make policy decisions.<sup>9</sup>

The discourse of degeneration provided a way of linking these seemingly disparate issues. While the genetic foundations of decline were subject to much dispute—the Government's Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration, set up in response to post-Boer War anxiety, avoided the word "degeneration" to emphasize that it reserved judgement on this point—the facts of decline themselves were rarely questioned. Perceived racial decline was a response to and a way of conceptualizing "concern about the economy and Britain's status as an imperial power" (Berridge 217), and sutured these sources of insecurity neatly to the issue of class. Somewhat surprisingly, few commentators argued that Britain's aristocracy were an example of eugenics at work,<sup>10</sup> most instead producing blueprints for a future utopia based upon positive selection of "measurable he-

editary qualities" contributing to "civic worth" (Soloway 65). Eugenics and racial regeneration thus emerge as very much middle-class projects, balanced between the poles of aristocratic decadence and proletarian degeneracy. The idea was to bolster middle-class English values against the internal threat of universal suffrage and the external ones of imperial and economic competition.

Kipling's own personal history as a middle-class Anglo-Indian and his development of a populist imperial literary vision to appeal to a middle class audience at home indicate that his fiction manages many of the contradictions which contributed to social anxiety about degeneration. "A Sahib's War," indeed, is clearly marked by eugenicist discourse. The ventriloquized narrative subscribes to the nineteenth-century hierarchy of races, which underlies Galton's theories of race suicide. Umr Singh tells the lieutenant who denies him access to the railway carriage not to "herd me with these black Kaffirs. I am a Sikh" (77). Later he reminisces on his arrival in South Africa with Corbyn:

Kurban Sahib appointed me to the command . . . of certain woolly ones—*Hubshis*—whose touch and shadow are pollution. They were enormous eaters; sleeping on their bellies; laughing without cause; wholly like animals. Some were called Fingoes, and some, I think, Red Kaffirs, but the were all Kaffirs—filth unspeakable. (84-85)

"Hubshi" has already been glossed as "nigger" (82): through the ventriloquized voice of Umr Singh the hierarchy of races is presented as a universal norm. Singh's Kaffirs are governed wholly by appetite and inhabit a world of pre-Symbolic babble and laughter, poles removed from the elaborate, transcendent Symbolic code which governs the conduct of the Sahib.

Against the background of a hierarchy of races, Kipling then proceeds to demonize the Boers as racially degenerate. In "A Sahib's War," the Boer family who provides cover for the ambush exhibits the features of Nordau's degenerate types:

There was . . . an old man with a white beard and a wart upon the left side of his neck; and a fat woman with the eyes of a swine and the jowl of a swine; and a tall young man deprived of understanding. His head was hairless, no larger than an orange, and the pits of his nostrils were eaten away by a disease. He laughed and slavered and he sported sportively before Kurban Sahib. (92)

Here imbecility and physical degeneration are linked to moral deficiency. Reminiscing about Johannesburg on his first visit to South Africa in 1898, Kipling noted that "the white man there is slave to the Boer" (*Letters* 2: 337). The implication here seems clear: the hierarchy of races may be revised or even overturned by climatic or moral influences. In Transvaal and the Orange Free State, the descendants of Dutch settlers have degenerated to the point at which they are no longer white.

The degeneration of the Boers is further emphasized by the conflation of their Protestantism with Islam. Umr Singh's contemptuous comments about Sikandar Khan's faith relate religion to ethnicity and thus universalize the hierarchy of races. "The Koran" is seen as an open text, subject to arbitrary interpretation by a man who holds it to be "his Book" (86). Yet in Stellenbosch Umr Singh encounters "many *mullahs* (priests) . . . [who] preached the Jihad against us" (85). In drawing together Boer and Islamic men of God, Kipling is here drawing upon a European tradition of Islam as a decadent or degenerate Christianity, a "repetitious pseudo-incarnation" of a "great original" (Said 62).

Kipling's various levels of mimicry in "The Comprehension of Private Copper" also register the threat of degeneration, although in a more complex manner than "A Sahib's War." Copper's captor, we have seen, is marked by the suspicion of miscegenation: his skin and eyes are dark, and his speech bears a "clipped cadence" which stirs in Copper "vague memories of Umballa" (160). His panic when the realization of his capture sinks in (172) seems a crudely racist reversion to type: again, Boers are associated with racial admixture and degeneracy. Yet the association Kipling's short story makes between the English "squire" and the Boer points the finger of degeneration closer home. Watching his comrades fighting to read the newspaper, Copper makes a remark to his prisoner which shows an awareness of the discourse of degeneration:

"They're only po-ah Tommies," said Copper, apologetically, to the prisoner. "Po-ah, unedicated khakis. *They* don't know what they're fightin' for. They're lookin' for what the diseased, lying, drinkin' white stuff they come from is sayin' about 'em!" (170)

Anxieties regarding degeneration, we have seen, largely focused upon the conditions of the working class in cities, the class from which the "Tommy" originate. Through mockery, the Tommys reject eugenicist classifications of themselves as degenerate: there is a suggestion that the possibility for the future of empire may lie in their regeneration on the frontier, through the creation of a new masculinity which does not stop at gentlemanly niceties. Yet the Tommys are shown to be drinking and lying, if not diseased; they scarcely seem unproblematic representatives of a new masculine national order.

The contradictory nature of Kipling's critique can, I think, be understood by a return to eugenics' roots as a middle-class concept, based upon a notion of meritocracy. Although expressing itself through scientific discourse, as we have seen, eugenics and its associated rhetoric of degeneration and regeneration were based upon the management of class and the protection of class interests in a period of change. Class, notes Richard Solway, was so much part of the mental furniture of eugenicists that when deciding upon desirable characteristics which should be transmitted to the next generation, they

consciously and unconsciously attached to it projective qualitative concepts of social and moral value, fitness and unfitness, or worthiness and unworthiness. These concepts often said more about the men and women sharing them than they did about objective reality.  
(62)

Eugenics thus forms a rearguard action against threats to middle class predominance, and Kipling acts out this rearguard action upon the terrain of Empire.

A reading which locates the presence of discourses of degeneration in Kipling's short stories can explore further the invisibility of middle class, masculine values noted earlier, and the ambivalence which surrounds the performance of English masculinity. For revitalization and regeneration of the English nation, Kipling need look not at the English Sahib himself but elsewhere. In "A Sahib's War," Sikhs and Pathans are contrasted to Corbyn's Englishness: continuously active, they seem to represent the potential for racial regeneration through a return to a primal masculine energy. Their worlds are completely mas-

culine and public, cut off from the nominally private and feminized world of the home. Sikandar Khan is discovered in South Africa by Corbyn and Umr Singh; his family background is not mentioned. Even Umr Singh, whom the story describes in much greater detail, tells of his own origins only in terms of his father's martial exploits. In contrast, the two Englishmen in the short story are much more closely associated with femininity and the private world of women. The nameless Sahib to whom Umr Singh talks in the carriage mentions his "Surtee" nurse (78), while Umr recalls Kurban as a child "sitting upon a wall by the parade-ground with his ayah" (79) and upon his death finding silk handkerchiefs "given to him by a certain woman" (101) among his belongings.

Yet if the figures of the Sikh and Pathan represent a primal masculinity in "A Sahib's War," they clearly need management by the code of manliness personified by Kurban Sahib; his prohibition of their attempted revenge murders of the Boer family clearly shows this governing function. In themselves, they seem to have no regenerative function: English masculinity speaks to the reader through the ventriloquized voice of Umr Singh but the movement of the puppet fails to animate the puppeteer. In "The Comprehension of Private Copper," the working class masculinity of Copper and his fellow soldiers is more vital than the pretentious mimicry of the Boer, yet it is scarcely a substitute for the codes of manliness which enable imperial governance. The ending of "The Comprehension of Private Copper," in which the British soldiers consume bootlegged alcohol, indicates incomprehension rather than comprehension, degeneration rather than regeneration.

Kipling's hope for the regeneration of imperial manliness in these stories seems to lie not in the working class nor in martial subject races, but in the new children of Empire, Canadians and Australians. Canada impressed Kipling as a frontier society in which nonetheless there was a stress upon "Safety, Law, Honour and Obedience" in contrast to the "brutal decivilization" of the US (*Something of Myself* 116). In letters at the time of the war in South Africa, Kipling praised the deeds of troops from Australia and Canada, dominions which produced "a man who has been

born in a big country and not sent to school between fences" (*Letters* 3:16). In his story "The Way He Took," the Boer commandos are fearful of "an incomprehensible animal from a place called Australia across the southern seas who played what they knew of the war-game to kill" (*War Stories* 136).

Australia and Canada thus hold out the hope, for Kipling, of racial and masculine revitalization. In "A Sahib's War," Kurban and Umr Singh are adopted by a troop of rugged Australian cavalry, who are "hot and angry, waging war *as war*" (87). Sikandar Khan, himself a Pathan, swears that a Pathan is "a babe" beside an Australian (87). The Australian *Duro Muts* and the Canadian troops whom Umr Singh also mentions approvingly are a "hard-bitten," exclusively male "congregation" (86), living a wholly masculine, frontier lifestyle. In "The Comprehension of Private Copper," Copper's captive turns away from the brawling English soldiers:

The prisoner set down his tin of coffee and stared helplessly round the circle.

"I—I don't understand them."

The Canadian sergeant, picking his teeth with a thorn, nodded sympathetically.

"If it comes to that, *we* don't in my country." (170-71)

Canadians and Australians apprehend neither Kipling's brutalized English working class in "The Comprehension of Private Copper," nor the penumbral vision of chivalric English masculinity in "A Sahib's War." They stand aside, torchbearers perhaps for an expanded England which has moved beyond the shores of an island, fulfilling John Seelye's vision of England as a world state.

Kipling attempts to manage these contradictions in a third story written about the same time, "The Army of a Dream."<sup>11</sup> Sitting in comfort in a London club, the narrator meets 'Boy' Bayley, an old acquaintance who is now commander of an "Imperial Guard Battalion." He takes the narrator across the road from the club to the "vast four-storied pile" of his barracks. The narrator then enters a re-made society in which everything is focused towards efficiency and preparation for defence. Women are regulated to a subordinate role, while all men participate in

militias from boyhood onwards. Militia and full-time regiments spend time conducting competitive war-games in specially designated "Military Areas"; some of these are in Britain but "the real working Areas are in India, Africa, and Australia, and so on" (248). The militarized society which Kipling envisages is egalitarian—the Guard is "allowed to fill up half our commissioned list from the ranks direct" (278)—and its efficiency, sober uniforms, and lack of class divisions are reminiscent of Cromwell's New Model Army. This vision, however, cannot be sustained: the story ends when the narrator recollects the war in South Africa. His interlocutor, he remembers, is dead, and looking directly at him he notices "the three-day-old wound on his left side," which he last saw when Bayley's body was brought back to camp. The dream ends, replaced with the reality of the club.

Crisis can, it seems, be managed only by fantasy. Roy's use of the word "rearguard action" to describe the uses of double mimesis implies stability, the detachment of a small cultural task force to neutralize a perceived threat which, if quickly dealt with, has little potential to disturb the larger army of the nation. Kipling's various uses of mimicry and ambivalence in the two short stories discussed at length above to paper over the crisis provoked by the spectre of racial degeneration seem—just like the ambush of the *Duro Mutts* by the Boers—not merely a series of containable local actions but rather a series of skirmishes which are inextricably linked to a larger struggle. Kipling's double mimesis in "A Sahib's War," and his ambivalent constructions of class and race in "The Comprehension of Private Copper," do not proceed directly from a psychic problem of "colonial masculinity" but are rather an attempt to manage a specific discursive crisis at a particular historical moment.

Such a reading does not lead to a jettisoning of the tools provided by Bhabha or Roy but rather, initially, to a more specific insight. Umr Singh's ventriloquized voice speaks from a position of primal manliness in need of the restraining technologies of English masculinity, yet the personifications of these technologies, Corbyn and the anonymous lieutenant on the train, are never looked at directly. With English manliness numinously blurred, anxieties about racial and cultural identity are displaced

onto a series of racially degenerate (Boers, "Kaffirs") and regenerate (Canadian, Australian) types. The almost successful impersonation of aristocratic English masculinity by the racially ambiguous "Transvaal burgher" in "The Comprehension of Private Copper" interjects doubts about the status of values associated with Englishness, doubts which Copper's cheerfully degenerate working-class masculinity does little to dispell. Caught in a hall of reflecting mirrors, we cannot distinguish original from fake: turning from the ventriloquist's dummy to the puppeteer himself, we find him strangely, surprisingly absent. Far from constituting a successful rearguard action, Kipling's stories generate a series of unanswerable questions: like the Canadian sergeant, readers find it progressively more difficult to comprehend what Kipling's construction of imperial, middle-class masculinity is all about.

As the analysis above demonstrates, the fissures opened up by deconstructive, psychoanalytic analysis of the type advocated by Bhabha and Roy need to be supplemented with an understanding of the historical contingency of conflicts and ambiguities which are more than merely psychic. I am not here making a simple binarism between history and theory, or rejecting theoretical models because of their lack of historical specificity, but rather pointing to the fact that a historically nuanced reading using postcolonial theory may paradoxically enable wider application. The management of class, race, and gender through the scientized mechanism of eugenics, for example, does not end in the 1900s, but has a lineage that extends into the postcolonial world. Eugenics and the discourse of racial degeneration did not die in the pyre of the holocaust but continue to re-emerge as techniques of management of national contradictions in the postcolonial state. In the 1980s, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, who probably read Rudyard Kipling as a student at Raffles Institution in the late 1930s, and who became a leading anti-colonialist nationalist, instituted eugenicist policies in the Republic of Singapore.<sup>12</sup> Specific exploration of the fissures that colonial discourse analysis opens up, then, enables a genealogy of colonialism and of colonialism's place within modernity. It also enables an understanding of the profound and paradoxical interdependency of the colonial and postcolonial worlds.

## NOTES

- 1 See Prakash for a cogent summary of this process.
- 2 Bhabha does address specific historical situations. Many of his articles, however, follow a distinct pattern of analysis. They begin with a specific historical incident, often represented by a single text, and then move to a generalized analysis of colonial psychic categories based upon this reading. The text becomes an example of the psychic conflicts described, but often its historical context vanishes or becomes peripheral.
- 3 My concern here is not to attempt to write a genealogy of the origins of Bhabha's terminology within colonial discourse, as Robert Young attempts with the term "hybridity" in *Colonial Desire*. Rather, I wish to identify the specific ways in which mimicry and ambivalence were articulated both consciously and unconsciously in colonial discourse at precise historical moments.
- 4 An example of this is Christopher Lane's call to "decode these condensed meanings and to unravel their drives if we intend to shatter Britain's colonial legacy, once and for all" (13), a call which is, to be charitable, utopian. Ella Shohat provides a clear critique of such "celebratory clearing of a conceptual space" (106).
- 5 In a letter to William Charles Scully, 14 Feb. 1900.
- 6 The catalyst for the Boer War was the death of British workman Tom Edgar at the hands of the Johannesburg police in 1898, and the subsequent acquittal of the policeman responsible by a Boer jury (Havely 16-18).
- 7 My initial interest in this short story was sparked by teaching it in the Open University Course AZS 319, Literature in the Modern World. In the course guide, Cicely Palser Havely reads the story in terms of post-Althusserian notions of ideology and notes its Machereyan silences regarding Corbyn.
- 8 Hugh Clifford, for instance, who was both a popular writer and a successful colonial administrator, wrote admiringly to Galton and commended him for his "genius" (Galton Papers, University College London, Letter from Sir Hugh Clifford, 14 Jan. 1909).
- 9 For a discussion of the gradual widening of the franchise, see Thane 44-45.
- 10 One of the few was W. C. D. Whetman. See Soloway 75.
- 11 I am grateful to *ARIEL*'s anonymous reviewer for bringing this story to my attention.
- 12 See Heng and Devan for a discussion and theorization of Lee's eugenicist views and policies.

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