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HYBRID NARRATIVES: THE MAKING OF CHARACTER AND NARRATIVE AUTHORITY IN RUDYARD KIPLING'S "HIS CHANCE IN LIFE"

By Jean Fernandez

> [N]ever lose sight of the fact that so long as you are in this country you will be looked to by the natives round in [sic] you as their guide and leader. Therefore comport yourself as such. This is a solemn fact. If anything goes wrong from a quarrel to an accident the natives instantly fly to a European for "orders." . . . If there's a row in the city the native policeman will take his orders from the first wandering white man he sees and so on ad infinitum.
> —Rudyard Kipling to Margaret Bourne Jones, 28 November 1885

WHEN RUDYARD KIPLING OFFERED his wry observations on officialdom in Imperial India to his cousin, Margaret Bourne-Jones, in 1885, he might have been toying with the kernel of one of his more perplexing stories on race and hybridity, written for his 1888 anthology, *Plain Tales from the Hills*. When Kipling actually came to address this theme fictionally, in his short story entitled "His Chance in Life," he made one crucial change: he substituted a dark-skinned telegraphist of mixed race for an Englishman, thereby engaging with the illogics of character that hybridity posed for narratives on race and Empire. In Kipling's story, his hybrid hero, stationed in the mofussil town of Tibasu, experiences a sudden surge of Britishness in the mixed blood flowing in his veins at the moment when crisis strikes, and leads a group of terrified policemen in quelling a communal riot between Hindus and Muslims. He is found guilty of exercising unconstitutional authority by a Hindu sub-judge, but the verdict is set aside by the British Assistant Collector. As a reward, he is promoted to an up-country Central Telegraph Office, where he proceeds to marry his ugly sweetheart, also of mixed race parentage, and live happily with a large brood of children in quarters on the office premises, a loyal government servant, "at home" with officialdom and Empire.

Kipling's story, with its grotesque caricatures for actants, and its contemptuous narrative voice, might, at first reading, appear no more than a stock sample of an Imperial ethnocentric slander against mixed races. On closer inspection, however, it emerges as a self-conscious critique of the problematics of hybridity and the contending narratives it generated in

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Imperial India. Scholarship has tended to theorize nineteenth-century hybridity as shaped by discourses of Desire and the Other.[1] In doing so it has often overlooked the manifold particularities and interweavings of a plethora of discourses on hybridity as they emerged at differing moments of Empire, and in varying geo-political contexts. I want to trace the specificities of mixed race discourses and their historical contexts in late nineteenth-century India, and to demonstrate that they afforded Kipling the opportunity to address a naturalist aesthetic of *race, moment, milieu*, and its viability for Imperial literature in "His Chance in Life." In viewing biological hybridity through the lens of naturalism, Kipling dramatizes what is at stake in an aesthetic that defines an author in a scientifically positivist light, given the collapse of predictability that threatens the Imperial subject and its concerns with "character." In doing so I hope to show that "His Chance in Life" demonstrates some of the problems of form that hybrid narrative and narrativizing hybridity posed for novelists like Kipling, as the nineteenth century drew to a close.

Critical attention to this short story, while sparse, has in general focused upon Kipling's representations of Eurasians.[2] My own focus on narrative voice and narrative consciousness will draw, instead, upon a Bakhtinian sense of linguistic hybridity, wherein "an utterance . . . belongs, by its grammatical [syntactic] and compositional markers to a single speaker, but . . . actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages,' two semantic and axiological belief systems" (304–05). I hold that the hybrid narrative in "His Chance in Life" undermines the scientific pretensions of a naturalist aesthetic with its foundations in race theory, in order to invoke a dialogical response to Imperialism.

From the very inception of the East India Company's presence, the question of racial taxonomies in India had been a vexatious one. In India, hybridity owed as much to official pragmatism, the inventive valences of bureaucratic discourse, and cultural manipulation by state institutions such as orphanages, and the army; it was, in fact, as much a product of the ideological state apparatus of Empire as it was of desire for the other.[3] The Regulating Act of 1773 that established the two legal identities of "British Subject" and "Native of India" remained silent on the status of the Eurasian. Official confusion over hybrid identity thereafter became a new, but lasting concern in India, especially since the physiognomy of Eurasians in India could frequently result in their "passing" as either British or Indian. In 1883, a fresh controversy regarding the category of "Eurasian" had arisen with the beleagured passage of the Ilbert Bill, under the aegis of Lord Ripon, arguably India's most liberal Viceroy. The Ilbert Bill had proposed to give Indian magistrates and judges jurisdiction over Europeans in rural or mofussil areas and had met with violent resistance from the local British, or Anglo-Indian Community, as they were then termed. Kipling makes mention of such outrage, and the complicity of the Press with such anger, in his autobiography, *Something of Myself*: "A pleasant English gentleman called C. P. Ilbert had been imported to father and god-father the Bill . . . our paper like most of the European Press, began with stern disapproval of the measure, and, I fancy, published much comment and correspondence which would now be called 'disloyal'" (31).

In Calcutta, European anxiety to recruit larger numbers to their side resulted in the co-optation of Eurasians to the cause. Two Eurasian leaders, the Reverend H. Finter and W. C. Madge, were included in their Defence Association, with Madge appointed as assistant secretary. However, the contested-ness of "Eurasian" as category remained vigorously alive, with David S. White, President of the Madras Eurasian and Anglo-Indian Association,

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declaring that as Eurasians were natives of India, as such they should support the Bill.[4] If categories could be flexible, improvised, or blurred in the interests of pragmatism in 1883, it was not for the first time in British-Indian history that such was the case.

It was also in the 1880s that petitioning for the economic welfare of Eurasians, and the need for advocacy of their cause, became more insistent. Eurasians had already been disqualified from covenated service in the military in 1791. Following the Macaulay Minute on Education in1835, under the Governor-Generalship of Lord Bentinck, Government policy of employing "native" talent in the Civil Services displaced Eurasians from their clerical and administrative jobs as well. As Indians grew increasingly qualified and efficient in the administration of Empire, posing ever-greater competition to Eurasians, the Eurasian cause was promoted in terms of their racial affinity with the British and their value as loyal subjects. In 1881, a published petition in pamphlet form appears, pleading for greater employment opportunities in Imperial India for them.[5] Its author, S. F. Heron, appears careful to distinguish himself racially from Eurasians, while playing advocate to their cause. His epigraph on the title page, "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth," suggests a radical repudiation of racialism. However, he commences his argument on an ameliorating note, acknowledging, simultaneously, the troubled category of Eurasian, and the distinctness of the British from their inferior, hybrid relations:

> The Anglo-Indian and Eurasian question is of so complex a nature, and is beset with so many difficulties, that to do this class any real good an intimate acquaintance with it becomes a necessity. I do not mean to say that it is essential for our Rulers to mix with them on familiar terms, as I am sensible that to civilized minds such an association would be distasteful. But this is not required. The consideration is, that unless their weaknesses and disabilities are frankly and clearly known and understood, it is an absolute impossibility to apply remedies which will effectually remove them. (1)

Heron then proceeds to advance his argument over the conflicted temper of this mixed-race community:

> They know natives to be shallow and unstable, and that the cardinal object of their ambition is to amass wealth at all sacrifice. Teachings such as this are neither elevating nor ennobling, and cannot be attractive. There is then not much surprise if Anglo-Indians and Eurasians withdraw from such contact. It must not, however, be inferred that, because they refuse to be identified with natives, they do not feel for, or have sympathy with them. To say this would be incorrect and misleading. (2–3)

There follows, however, an appeal to Imperial opportunism and vanity, with Heron subtly invoking Darwinian discourse as he speaks of how Eurasians aspire to scale the evolutionary ladder, through "assimilation" into "Englishness."

> On the other hand, there is much in the English character, which they know, will raise them in *the scale of humanity*, and hence they strive to assimilate themselves to that character. They elect to stand on the side of the English, and are proud of their English blood; and it is the "unkindest cut of all" when they find themselves snubbed or neglected by a people from whom they have descended; to whose ancestors in many a hard-fought engagement they are indebted for the El Dorado of the Indian Empire; and whose character and institutions they love to emulate. This feeling ought to be fostered and encouraged, and there is really nothing in it of which Englishmen should be ashamed. On the contrary, they should be pleased, and, instead of despising, should look upon them as *worthy*

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> *and reliable allies*. The Indian mutiny is proof of the Yeoman service they are capable of rendering in troubled times. At present time the feeling of Anglo-Indians and Eurasians is decidedly strong in favour of the English, and they can now be *led by a silken thread*, and made to do many things that seem impossible, if the government were only moved, by a kindly sympathy and by an unaffected concern for their good, to take an interest in them by initiating measures for their employment in every department of the State. (3; emphasis added)

Heron's semantics are particularly politic: he speaks of character rather than race in defining Englishness, even though Darwinian or naturalist philosophies might have considered this distinction immaterial. If character was a central concern of nineteenth-century realism in fiction, then debates over its manifestations in races, and the unpredictable character outcomes of hybridity would be especially complicated for Imperial reality with its agenda for the control, manipulation, and domination of diverse peoples and newly-formed hybrid communities. Cynicism, calculation, and a canny awareness of hybridity's potential for keeping the imperial machine running smoothly were Empire's need of the hour. As always, the specter of the Mutiny of 1857 could be powerfully invoked in order to persuade an administration of what was at stake.

The utility of the "half-caste," however, was a matter of considerable anxiety and contestation over Britain's two hundred and fifty year presence in India. Polemical narratives of the community, first by Stark and later by Anthony, the community's parliamentary representative in independent India, both concur that Britain's relations with its mixed race community in India was best characterized as an admixture of opportunism and exploitation. As proof of the community's inception arising as much out of British calculation as private libidinal desire, Anthony cites one of the earliest missives from the Directors of the East India Company to the President of the trading factory in Madras, dated 8 April 1678:

> The marriage of our soldiers to the native women of Fort St. George is a matter of such consequence to posterity that we shall be content to encourage it at some expense, and have been thinking for the future to appoint a Pagoda to be paid to the mother of any child, that shall hereafter be born of any such future marriage, upon the day the child is christened, if you think this small encouragement will increase the number of such marriages. (qtd. in Anthony 12)

Thus pragmatically brought into existence by the East India Company, Eurasians would soon be disenfranchised from covenanted service in 1791, in the first of many policy reversals on miscegenation and its value for British interests. The debate was still alive in the early nineteenth century, with Emma Roberts offering what sounds like a common Imperial rationale for the ban in 1835: "It cannot be too strongly impressed upon the reader's mind that these exclusions originated in the prejudices of the natives, who, while professing their willingness to be governed by Europeans, absolutely refused to submit to persons springing from outcast females. Hence, the impossibility of admitting half-castes into the Company's Army" (98).

Eurasians would be reinstated as functionaries of Empire after their "loyalty" was proven in the 1857 Mutiny, especially in the manning of new technologies such as the railways and telegraphs, introduced under Lord Dalhousie's Governor-Generalship and perceived as necessary for the consolidation of British military and administrative control over the sub-continent. Anthony cites Lord Canning's reference to Eurasians in his Minute of October

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1860: "If cared for betimes, it will become a source of strength to British rule and of usefulness to India. The Eurasian class has a special claim upon us. The presence of a British government has called them into being. They serve the Government more efficiently than the native can serve it, and more cheaply and more conveniently than the European can" (qtd. in Anthony 86).

If the utility of Eurasians proved controversial, identifying and labeling them appropriately proved even harder. Heron, in his pamphlet, initially postulates that Eurasians are "of mixed descent from natives of Europe and Asia," while "Anglo-Indian is the appellation preferred as being most distinctive in tracing the races of both the British Islands and India" (5-6). However, he then goes on to acknowledge that such categories prove vexatious. "To ethnographers, therefore" he remarks "it would appear to be an interesting occupation to search after, and arrive at, such a word to represent the mixed races of this country as would be both intelligent and acceptable. But the subject is much too complicated and diffuse for even the most thoughtful labour to be attended with success" (6).

In the struggle for the elusive scientific name, Heron concedes the same defeat that characterized the 1871 Census of India. Despite strenuous imperial efforts at managing racial boundaries administratively through reservation quotas for "British," "Eurasian," and "Indian" subjects throughout the nineteenth century, official discourse refused to be purged of paranoia over racial categories, as the language of Census reports indicate. Fear and perplexity over an inability to make populations behave within neat categories would haunt Imperial discourse in India throughout the nineteenth century. Census of India figures in 1871 reveal considerable strain over defining and controlling the formation of Eurasian identity, given the porous nature of social and cultural boundaries. Hence the feeble distinctions attempted officially in that year:

> There are 108,000 of mixed race, such as Eurasians and Indo-Portuguese. Of the 20,000 who are resident in Bengal, many are descended from the Portuguese, whose headquarters were in Dacca and Chittagong. In the minor provinces very few have been returned, they having probably preferred to enroll themselves as Europeans. Of the 26,000 in the Madras Presidency, about half are found in the Madras and Malabar districts. Bombay contains about 48,000, three-fourths of whom are in the island of Bombay or the neighbouring district of Tanna; the number of Eurasians in the Presidency is not quite 3,700, while there are 30,000 Indo-Portuguese, and 14,000 who are entered as "others" without any description of the race to which they belong. (1871 Memorandum 28–29)[6]

By the 1891 India census, Division F that dealt with "Races and Indefinite Tribes" invoked a mélange of physiques with its classifications of Musalman Foreign Races, Himalayan Mongloids, Western Asiatics, Burmese and Mixed Races, Indefinite Indian Castes, Europeans &c., Eurasians, Native Christians, Goanese and Portuguese, and so forth.[7] The slew of labels suggests that "hybridity" as formulated by the term "Eurasian" was proving increasingly unmanageable as meaning, given the wide range of racial and ethnic possibilities it permitted. Heron notes precisely this when he avers:

> Some Eurasians have a monopoly of English blood in their veins, and these in colour are very like Englishmen; others, again, are not one remove from natives, for with marriages and inter-marriages with Native Christian and Portuguese families, the Asiatic blood has been made to predominate,

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> and they have very little, if any at all, of the European left in them. Still, with training with English civilization as a model, they are enthusiastic in their admiration of the English. (6)

It is in light of such discourses on hybridity in the 1870s and the early 1880s that Kipling's mock-heroic narrative of Eurasian romance and heroism needs to be read.

2

THE IMPERIAL MISSION WAS, almost from the outset, presented as a test of character. The Court of Directors of the East India Company, in its Public letter to Fort St. George 25 May 1798 already bears a sub-text that warns against racial and cultural contamination:

> To preserve the ascendancy which our national Character has acquired over the minds of the Natives of India must ever be of importance to the maintenance of the Political power we posses in the east, and we are well persuaded that the end is not to be served by a disregard of the external observation of religion, or by any assimilation of Eastern manners and opinion, but rather by retaining all the distinctions of our National principles character and usages.[8]

Theories of race could offer a consoling myth of biologically-determined and hence predictable "character/istics" at precisely a moment in history when social monitoring, religious influence, and personal judgment were at their weakest as controlling mechanisms for both colonizer and colonized alike. What was at stake in the sexual, cultural, religious, and political trauma of the colonial encounter hinging as it did upon the crucial values of negotiation, compromise, and accommodation was the question of "character." In response to a nation's perturbations over the instability and unpredictability of reputation in foreign climes that could make or mar the individual by imposing altered contexts for behavior, Imperial literature searches for a new logics of narrative, modifies existing rationales for the agency of character in plot and manipulates a fashionable rhetoric of race.

Given naturalism's stress on behavior as the outcome of heredity and environment, and its preoccupation with the working classes, it only followed that in an imperial context, the logical focus for a naturalist aesthetic would be the hybrid as subaltern. Hawes notes that "in British India, those in British society who filled the place of the working-class community in Britain were predominantly Eurasian" (35). However, the unpredictable outcomes of hybridity throw both naturalism and narratives of race into jeopardy, with the narrative voice in "His Chance in Life" observing of his lower-class subjects at the very outset: "The Black and the White mix very quaintly in their ways" (103). "Quaintness" cannot be governed by a plot motor generated by formal logic. The curious workings of hybrid blood with special focus upon the one "White drop" in Michele D'Cruze's veins, and its in/significance for the "rationale" of plot will become the focus of Kipling's story. The riddle of character that endlessly mirrors the riddle of race disrupts the confident operation of a realist plot, where human behavior is conventionally accounted for in terms of motive, rationale, and temperament.

Actants of mixed blood in this instance, produce a hybridized and indeterminate narrative form. Kipling's short story "His Chance in Life" published in 1888, is a self-conscious exercise in the mock-heroic, a narrative of an ugly Indo-Portuguese telegraphist's heroism in a Hindu-Muslim riot, with a conventional topoi of chivalry, courage, and romance undermined,

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in order to demonstrate how the vexatious "character" of hybridity deranges narrative form and authority in imperial story telling. For two hundred years, Eurasian heroism had been both sensationalized and repressed by British historians. James Skinner, in the late eighteenth century, and Colonel Gardner, who followed later, were Eurasian protagonists in dramas of bravery, chivalry, and lawful desire that could even culminate in marriage to Indian princesses.[9]

However, "His Chance in Life" situates heroic hybridity within the more ominous colonial context of racial discord. In Kipling's text, such discord prevails within the Indian polity, between Hindus and Muslims, who were consistently cast as racial enemies in imperial discourse, as well as in the hybrid hero's "blood," blood being, as always, a politically loaded trope for race. Kipling's story is a self-conscious demonstration of how the riddle of race impacts upon the dynamics of plot, narrative reliability, and, by extension, the objectivity of history. "His Chance in Life" both acknowledges narratives of the hybrid heroic as intertext, even as it announces the subaltern status of the Eurasian in late nineteenth century India. Hence, the workings of imperial discourse will not permit for the bypassing of derogatory constructions of hybridity. This must, in turn, warp the trajectory of the heroic narrative into generic indeterminacy.

Given the "quaint" singularity of the hybrid, the narrative can only remain silent on naming or categorizing the community to which Kipling's hero and heroine, Michele D'Cruze and Miss. Vezzis, the nurse girl, belong. "Half-caste," "country-born," "Eurasian," or "Indo-Portuguese" are completely missing from the narrator's vocabulary. Kipling's willful refusal to employ categories of race is at variance with his standard fictional practice. In most of his stories and novels, Pathans, Bengali babus, tribals, Tibetans, and Irish are delineated with a rigor that would put an ethnographer to shame. Instead, Kipling's nameless community attests to the abyme of character that hybridity poses to Imperial logic.

Un-nameable and unidentifiable, hybridity cannot be fully articulated by the Imperial voice. The hollowness of hybridity as sign suggests that its equivalencies and significances are impossible to scientifically calculate or quantify, so that its trials of character are beyond prediction or classification. Indeed, Michele D'Cruze confounds the tabulations of social scientists. He is a man with "seven-eighth's native blood," more a fiction and a rumor, since a "compromising legend" brought back from Poonani by Dom Anna the tailor circulates that "a black Jew of Cochin has once married into the D'Cruze family" (106). His sweetheart's family "traced their descent from a mythical platelayer who had worked on the Sone bridge when railways were new in India, and valued their English origin" (105–06). Purist discourse is a ridiculous fantasy, but imagined origins, genealogies, and bloodlines are willfully and pridefully constructed in defiance of hegemonic official discourse. Such fanciful narratives are "mythical" rather than realistic, and the identities they invent defy historical or scientific discursivity.

The spaces of hybridity resist the best mapping efforts of Imperial cartographers. The story begins by addressing a "lost" Imperial reader: "If you go straight away from Levees and Government House Lists past Trades' Balls – far beyond everything and everybody you ever knew in your respectable life – you cross, in time, the Borderline where the last drop of White blood ends and the full tide of Black sets in" (103). Kipling's ironic deployment of abhorrent discourses of racial essentialism resonates throughout his opening sentence. In venturing into this realm one "crosses the line," transgressing boundaries between the

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respectable and taboo, to encounter the engulfing deluge of darkness that is suggestive of both opacity and death.

Borderline is a world over-run by bricolage that renders both realism and rationality inconsequential. Miss. Vezzis's mother lives in "a rabbit warren of a house full of Vezzises, Pereiras, Ribeiras, Lisboas, and Gonsalveses, and a floating population of loafers; besides fragments of the day's market, garlic, stale incense, clothes thrown on the floor, petticoats hung on strings for screens, old bottles, pewter crucifixes, dried immortelles, pariah puppies, plaster images of the Virgin and hats without crowns" (105). Amidst such assemblage, the European eye sees only cultural debris and disorder. The underground character of this society is reinforced by the "rabbit-warren" image of its extended, inter-related households shared by an endlessly proliferating, and transient population of "floating loafers" that, significantly, must evade official enumeration. Unemployed in the service of Empire, hybridity is menacing. It must be suitably relocated within the appropriate spaces of Empire, as is Michele D'Cruze at the Central Telegraph Office.

As for Michele D'Cruze himself, he is "a poor, sickly weed, and very black" (105). In 1862, W. J. Moore had argued in *Health in the Tropics* that in India, "the European race dies out," and that in the event of miscegenation, "the remoter the descendants of an European ancestor become rapidly feeble . . . as any of the darker races around them" (277). Denied the physiognomy of a heroic protagonist, Michele must be assigned a ladylove who is also the very antithesis of a conventional heroine. Miss. Vezzis is "as black as a boot, and to our standards of taste, hideously ugly" (104). In this story, Indian-ness is stripped of its associations with delicacy, romance, or beauty. Nor are the apologies of eighteenth-century Orientalists such as William Jones, who sought Caucasian status for descendants of an ancient civilization, remembered. However, it becomes evident that this is a self-consciously ironic exercise, for Kipling begins his story by countervailing his own narrative authority, when discussing race and its essentialist theories. "One of these days, this people – understand they are far lower than the class from whence Derozio, the man who imitated Byron, sprung – will turn out a writer or a poet; and then we shall know how they live and what they feel. In the meantime, any stories about them cannot be absolutely correct in fact or inference" (104). In doing so, Kipling casts himself not just as unreliable narrator, but also as one who mocks the slanderous Imperial voice. The narrative voice numbers itself among the guilty, who mouth an all too familiar rhetoric of racial prejudice. A lyric voice may explain the subtleties of mixed races better than an aesthetic of scientific naturalism that cannot explicate the puzzles and complications to meaning posed by hybridity.

And, indeed, Kipling's allusion to Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809–31) is central to his reading of hybridity's ironized functions. Derozio, who was of Indian, Portuguese, and British ancestry, was a poet, teacher, and activist of the Eurasian community during the 1820s. In the tradition of Romanticism, he died early at the age of twenty-two, of cholera, leaving behind a corpus of poetry on Indian themes and subjects, such as "The Hindustani Minstrel" and "The Fakeer of Jungera." Kipling's differentiation of him from his anti-hero is a subtle yet powerful narrative aside to what the text will repress in the act of telling: the lie of racial theories of identity. As hybrid, Derozio was no less "mixed" than Michele D'Cruze. As for class, he, unlike Michele D'Cruze, was Protestant by persuasion, and part of a Eurasian elite. Kipling's distinctions of class offer a sophisticated nuance to his representations of Eurasian-ness. But such distinctions also insinuate the sub-text embedded within a narrative

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that evolves out of a rationale of character determined by the instinctual promptings of race and "blood." The figure of Derozio, the intellectual, must undermine narrative authority in what can be no more than a fable of biological determinism. In an even more specific irony, Derozio was reputedly dark complected, so that his presence at the unacknowledged center of Eurasian life provides for a further twist to narrative logic.[10] The "black" hybrid poet already exists, but the rhetoric of exceptionalism will allow for the Imperial voice to appropriate narration of Michele D'Cruze's story. The lyric impulse of a Eurasian sensibility as of every other "vernacular" literary tradition in India must struggle with a strident Imperial literary establishment, invested, since Macaulay, in promoting the English literary canon over all other native literatures, classical or otherwise.

And, indeed, without the mediating voice of the poet, an incoherent, hybridized language seems the curse and the doom of all those who must deal with and dwell on the fault lines of Imperial India. The language of the Borderline used by Miss. Vezzis to abuse her wards as children's nurse is "part English, part Portuguese, and part Native" (104). Creolized speech has its own intrinsically Calibanized functions. In "murdering the Queen's English" Miss. Vezzis not only enunciates the hybrid's curse upon her racially pure social superiors, but also upon her progenitors, whose servant she has become. The nonsensical character of language in Imperial contexts is what hybridity foregrounds in this story. Miss. Vezzis swears fidelity to Michele D'Cruze "by her Honour and the saints – the oath runs rather curiously; '*In nomine Sanctissimae*' – (whatever the name of the she-Saint is)" (107). Hybridized language acquires its own mantric significance, even if its valences are deemed so esoteric as to render meaning impenetrable. In enacting out a sacred ritual of courtship, the Eurasian couple parody an already maligned Roman Catholicism, that Protestant British India had long associated with a further threat of "mixing." East India Company officials had raised the bogey of papist marriages with local Indo-Portuguese communities already in existence in Madras before the advent of the British.[11] However, "His Chance in Life" significantly refrains from inscribing the *chee-chee* accent that Kipling finds so irresistible in putting into the mouths of his other Eurasian characters. If divergence from the standard is a pronounced sign of cultural pathology, then a story that affirms poetic possibilities for Eurasians must necessarily avoid representing their speech as anything more than hearsay. Hence, neither Michele D'Cruze nor Miss. Vezzis is afforded the opportunity of direct speech in the text.

If Eurasian speech is never heard directly, the babble of an Indian polity is an equally hybridized incoherency. Transferred to the non-descript town of Tibasu, "a forgotten little place with a few Orissa Mahommedans in it" (108), the telegraphist Michele is present at the time of a communal riot between Hindus and Muslims. Of the riot, the narrative says: "Michele was working in his office when he heard the sound that a man never forgets all his life – the *ah-yah* of an angry crowd. (When that sound drops about three tones, and changes to a thick, droning *ut*, the man who hears it had better go away if he is alone.)" (108). The melee of agitated Hindu and Muslim voices terrorizes the British imagination. Its orchestrations of tone and mood are delicately shaded to the uncomprehending colonial ear, but its meaning is at once indecipherable and unequivocal: it announces death to the solitary representative of Imperial authority. The primordial rage of the colonized subject can never be named in Hindustani or Urdu. In an amazing synthesis, the two communities mingle and merge into a common, strangely harmonized yet hybridized chorus of violence.

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Kipling then segues into a crisis that addresses the problematic of character that lies at the heart of imperial discourse on race and hybridity. Michele D'Cruze's act of heroism, as a civilian leading an outnumbered band of native police constables, resonates to countless narratives of Eurasian courage in times of Imperial crisis – most notably those of Todd and Brendish, who manned the Delhi Central Telegraph Office during the Mutiny of 1857. Todd went out to repair the cut wires, in the face of danger from the mutineers, and was killed. Brendish continued to send out signals of the revolt to Lucknow and the Punjab, and was subsequently awarded the Victoria Cross.[12]

To every Anglo-Indian reader of Kipling's *Plain Tales*, Michele D'Cruze would have immediately evoked memories of trauma where an Empire's fate and the lives of British men, women, and children hung in the balance, and had depended, in no small measure, on the gallantry, resourcefulness, and sacrificial loyalty of the scorned, Eurasian, hybrid. However, in keeping with the mock-heroic strain of the "plain" tale, Michele D'Cruze deals, not with an armed mutiny, but with a communal flare-up, described as "an aimless sort of Donnybrook," "a nasty little riot, but not worth putting in the papers" (108). The editorial voice, assumed at this point by the narrator, carries a sly irony of its own. In his autobiography, *Something of Myself*, Kipling wrote with some contempt of the limitations and lethargy that characterized his own experiences of the Anglo-Indian press. Censorship of civil discord was a common strategy of Imperial governance[13] The press and British records may turn a "blind eye" to the crises that routinely erupted in British India. The "plain tale," however, will address what was often deliberately unrecorded: the failure of Imperial administration and civil anarchy.

In doing so, the narrative grows more self-conscious in investigating the relationship between race, character, and genre. If British blood makes for cool-headedness and bravery in crisis, while natives find "lawlessness pleasant" (108) and are "curs to the backbone" (108) as they flee in cowardice, how might such conflicting instincts commingle in the "character" of the biological hybrid? Hawes notes the popular debate waged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries over the supposed lack of initiative in the Eurasian temperament. However, as most scholars agree, when in the employ of native princes, Eurasians, such as Skinner, were afforded opportunities to excel in leadership, even as they were excluded from such positions of authority in British India.[14] In addressing the crisis of the plot as hinging on the trials of character, Kipling's ironic deployment of the rhetoric of race builds, in order to narrate what becomes a dramatic moment in the rhetorical construction or deconstruction of racial identity that transpired everywhere in Imperial India. The decisive moment is one of disarray and confusion, as the Imperial machine grinds to a halt, under the threat of native violence. Subordinate native officials unceremoniously desert ship, English superiors are nowhere to be seen, and terrified native police are panic-stricken without directives required for law enforcement. Kipling offers a droll description of the inefficiency of Empire, shorn of all mystique, with its prestige at stake:

> The Babu put on his cap and quietly dropped out of the window; while the Police Inspector, afraid, but obeying the old race-instinct, which recognises a drop of white blood as far as it can be diluted, said, 'What orders does the *Sahib* give?'
>
> The 'Sahib' decided Michele. Though horribly frightened, he felt that, for the hour, he, the man with the Cochin Jew and the menial uncle in his pedigree, was the only representative of British authority

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> in the place. Then he thought of Miss. Vezzis and the fifty rupees, and took the situation on himself. (109)

Michele D'Cruze finds the nerve to act, on being interpellated as British. Addressed as "sahib," he may display initiative, cool-headedness and heroism. Rhetoric, rather than genetics or "blood," determines behavior and identity. But, in seeking to undo the knotty question of character in the Imperial context, the narrative must interrogate its own assumptions, by addressing the misrecognitions of race and its illogical postulates that transpire within Imperial India's social and official worlds. The "single white drop of blood" is a phantom sign, imagined and not empirically visible. Diluted, it may still remain pure in its significance of racial superiority and authority. The black hybrid may signify Britishness, in what proves to be a ridiculous, if expedient fiction in the interests of Empire. Earlier, the narrative voice addresses its intended imperial reader with the caveat: "Never forget that unless the outward and visible signs of Our Authority are always before a native he is as incapable of understanding what authority means, or where is the danger of disobeying it" (108). But the sign of Imperial authority is arbitrary, rendered simultaneously visible and invisible by the hybrid, who may represent whiteness to an interpretive community of colonized subjects, all of whom willingly practice a hermeneutics of race that deranges realism and its mimetic doctrines of verisimilitude.

If Michele D'Cruze, with "the menial uncle for pedigree," may debase Britishness as its only handy sign in an hour of crisis, he also interrogates its prestige, since British imperialism searches for the adhoc, the improvised and the tawdry, in order to cope with the emergencies of constructing Britishness under duress. Contrary to Roberts's rationale that hybrids command no respect with natives, Kipling's story stages the rhetorical instabilities of racial identities, before he reverts to the notorious orthodoxy of the supposed volatility of hybrid races being attributed to the biological instabilities of blood. In doing so, his narrative turns double voiced, contesting its own authority, rendering its own deficient and trite vocabulary on race suspect.

Michele D'Cruze's moment of whiteness is also a hybrid moment of opportunism and idealism. Fifty rupees, and a revisioning of the topoi of chivalric romance all play their part. The fair lady of his inspiration is Miss. Vezzis, the nurse-girl, who is "black as a boot" wears "cotton-print gowns and bulgy shoes" and "to our standards is hideously ugly" (104). Exiled from her in his mofussil post, he has, unlike Derozio, practiced a ridiculous lyricism, writing her "foolish letters with crosses tucked inside the flaps of envelopes" (107–08). Michele's Christian knightliness and oaths are not evidence of authentic literariness, but rather the manifestations of a despised Catholicism with its primitive, talismanic practices. Heroic action in this case is performed by a protagonist "sweating with fear," who leads seven gray faced constables to dispel a fleeing mob, "curs to the backbone" (109), leaving one man dead and another injured. Despite his newfound role of representing "whiteness," Michele is marked by signs of fear, an index of a "black" character that he shares with the other natives.

The proliferation of indecipherable and contradictory racial signifiers by Michele continues to complicate the emplotment of narrative and the reading of character. A deputation of "elders" from Tibasu report that the Hindu sub-judge, whom he rescued from the hands of the Muslim mob, has ruled his actions to be "unconstitutional." The unconstitutionality of Michele's act has multiple valences. A pettifogging legalism may

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well cavil at a civilian leading a police force. However, as hybrid, Michele is also the impostor, the native subject and pseudo-sahib who performs Britishness. Legal discourse may reverse racial categories in an instant. Most ironically, contradicting all claims of naturalism, Michele's acts of bravery and leadership confound arguments of biological determinism: it is not in the constitutional make up of a "poor sickly weed," a product of miscegenation, to possess the stamina and nerve to lead men to victory. The telegraphist's scorn for the authority of the Hindu Sub-Judge, if judged by the tenets of naturalism must attest to a magical metamorphosis, since "the heart of Michele D'Cruze was big and white in his breast, because of his love for Miss.Vezzis, the nurse-girl, and because he had tasted for the first time Responsibility and Success" (103).

Transformed by his new role in Empire, the hybrid morphs into British subject. Hence, his lofty and dismissive rebuttal that "the Sub-Judge might say what he pleased, but until the assistant Collector came, he, the Telegraph Signaller, was the government of India in Tibasu, and the elders of their town would be held accountable for further rioting" (110). In confidently appropriating the rhetoric of his rulers, the hybrid proceeds to command civilian authority as well, with the elders bowing their heads and murmuring, "'Show mercy!' or words to that effect" (110). The crisis in reportage suggests a narrative floundering under the pressures of both naturalism and realism, where the blend of the hyperbolical and the ironical registers contribute to the general indecisiveness of voice and perspective.

Later, the young Assistant Collector will remonstrate with the Hindu sub-judge until "that excellent official turned green," (111) before he drafts an official letter commending Michele's loyalty and initiative. The resolution to "His Chance in Life" devolves upon the confusion of racial identities that bedeviled not just Kipling's hybrid subject, but also administrative thinking and native perceptions alike. "His Chance in Life" resonates to the Ilbert Bill controversy in the fortuitous outcome of judgments ruled and over-ruled, suggesting the absurdity that resided at the very heart of a system that could not determine what should, in fact, have been a self-evident phenomenon – the presence or absence of hybridity. In rhetorically constructing himself as British, Michele D'Cruze places himself above the juridical powers of the native judge, so that a combination of insubordination and loyalty make his hybrid action legally illegible.

But the issue of "fluid identities" as the outcome of miscegenation will be developed to its fullest ironic potential as the narrator enlarges upon the popular trope of blood for race, if only to derange its rhetorical operation. Narrative focus proceeds for this reason to the miniscule "white drop" within Michele D'Cruze's veins, magnified now to become the locus of character. The full tide of Black that engulfs and overwhelms the last drop of White blood at the Borderline applies not just to liminal geographic and cultural spaces, but also the mixture of hereditary strains that make for the "temperamental" hybrid, ungoverned by rationality. Hence, on the morning after the riot, Michele D'Cruze strolls down the road, "musket in hand, to meet the assistant Collector" (111), the epitome of phallic power, the manifest fulfillment of the epigraph's declaration that "love hath made this thing a Man." However, he is literally and metaphorically deluged by blackness immediately thereafter, on encountering authentic Englishness.

> But, in the presence of the young Englishman, Michele felt himself slipping back more and more into the native; and the tale of the Tibasu Riots ended, with the strain on the teller, in an hysterical

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> outburst of tears, bred by sorrow that he had killed a man, shame that he could not feel as uplifted as he had felt through the night, and childish anger that his tongue could not do justice to his great deeds. It was the White drop in Michele's veins dying out, though he did not know it. (111)[15]

Unselfconscious, and doomed to the instinctual promptings of blood, Michele D'Cruze is now the emasculated native subject, weeping womanish tears, his loyalties as unstable as his racial category, suspiciously close to empathy with the Indian victims of Imperial power. The hybrid's tale of the Tibasu Riots must ultimately elude narration, since the tongue of the hybrid is infantilized, unmanned by remorse and moral panic at the exchange of identities effected from subject to ruler. A narrative of triumphalism is an impossibility for him to articulate, its heroic topos undermined and interrogated by the inability of the hybrid to own to an inhuman imperial standard, overwhelmed as he is by simple, violent grief. The white drop "dying out" in Michele D'Cruz's veins makes for the moment of extinction. Englishness is finally overwhelmed, bred out of existence, ironically, as the weaker strain. Given the representation of the hybrid character as perennially in flux, Michele D'Cruze must forever elude the controlling mechanisms of the generic, a maverick figure that can never be cast in roles or plots that will play out to a predictable conclusion. The promptings of race and blood are as ungovernable as India, and, in this Kipling story, the Imperialist as administrator shares in the same predicament as the Imperialist as narrator.

The resolutions of plot are therefore mocked at, as the Eurasian dream is fulfilled. The promoted telegraphist, on an "Imperial salary of twenty six rupees a month," (104) is co-opted into Empire, but on an ironically modest wage. In what sounds suspiciously close to free indirect discourse, given its vehement use of negatives, the narrator however adds that "if the whole revenue of the Department he serves were to be his reward, Michele could never, never, repeat what he did at Tibasu for the sake of Miss. Vezzis, the nurse-girl" (104). Loyalty, in his case, is neither racially nor materially motivated and narratives of hybridity are doomed to be radically inconclusive.

Hence, the tale of Michele D'Cruze "proves that, when a man does good work out of all proportion to his pay, in seven cases out of nine there is a woman at the back of the virtue. The two exceptions must have suffered sunstroke" (104). The pseudo-scientific statistical "findings" hint at absurdity, since imperial insanity is sometimes troped as heatstroke in Kipling.[16] Statistics, an emerging science at the time, performs an odd arithmetic of random sampling that testifies further to the defeat of science in explicating Imperial reality. The hybrid defies statisticians and census takers, but heatstroke and love are universal predicaments. The narrative illogic of "His Chance in Life," its display of a narrative voice plagued by self-contradiction, inconsistency, and irony, all suggest that in India, hybrid/ity narratives could expose the irrationality of the Imperial project. By the end of the 1880s, official discourse on hybridity in India remained fragile in the face of the hybrid's resistance to legal, scientific, and administrative controls, despite increasing claims and displays of loyalty and obedience to British governance. Having negotiated his civilian niche in Empire, Michele D'Cruze passes out of history. The nemesis of conjecture threatens any Imperial narrator who seeks to inscribe him into the grand narrative of empire. The hybrid behaves out of character and resists being subjected to Imperial discourse. "His Chance in Life"

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describes the triumph of Michele D'Cruze in more senses than one: it describes his humbling of Imperial fictions.

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NOTES

1. Theorizing hybridity has frequently fallen to post-colonial rather than Victorian scholarship. Bhabha's theory of hybridity as cultural mimicry notes that colonial discourse and its authority are undermined by the operations of hybridity, while Young observes that "'hybrid' is a nineteenth-century word, but it has become our own again. In the nineteenth-century it was used to refer to a physiological phenomenon; in the twentieth century it has been reactivated to describe a cultural one" (6). As Young notes, nineteenth century "scientific" theories of hybridity could posit it to be an infertile state (Josiah Nott); a threat to "pure" races, producing chaos and degeneracy (J.A. Gobineau, Louis Agassiz); it could suggest that its outcomes were different between "proximate" and "distant" species (Darwin, Spencer); or that mixed breeds either "die out" or revert to one of the two species from which they are descended (Edwards, Thierry). Stoler, in *Race and the Education of Desire* has noted that scientific claims for race theory came to organize "the grammar of difference" in Imperial contexts. See also additional work by Stoler in *Carnal Knowledge*.
2. D'Cruz focuses upon stereotyping and representation in his article "My Two Left Feet: The Problems of Anglo-Indian stereotypes in Post-Independence Indo-English Fiction." McBratney in *Imperial Subjects, Imperial Space*, sees this story as adhering closely to Victorian theories of hybridity, with all good attributed to the minimal presence of the "white drop" of English blood in the Eurasian hero's veins. See McBratney 80–81. Sullivan briefly mentions that this story deflates faith in English schoolboy codes of manliness, sportsmanship and honor. See Sullivan 8. Regarding semantic confusions, it must be noted that in the nineteenth century, the term "Anglo-Indian" described the British community in India. It later became the term applied to Eurasians in the twentieth century, and after 1947, in Independent India.
3. For a history of the construction of Eurasian identity and the formulation of Eurasian culture by East India Company officials, who administered orphan asylums in Calcutta and Madras, their deliberations regarding appropriate clothing, diet, occupational skills, and religion for the offspring of company soldiers and native women, and the investment that British interests had in such cultural control, see Hawes's excellent study of Eurasians in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, *Poor Relations*. See, for instance, Rev. Bell's *Report of the Military Male Orphan Asylum at Madras* (London: John Murray, 1812) that suggests Indian fare for weekdays and roast mutton, vegetable, and bread for Sundays.
4. For a detailed study of the Ilbert Bill see Hirschman's *White Mutiny: The Ilbert Bill Crisis in India and Genesis of the Indian National Congress*. See Hirschman 144-45 for a detailed account of the coalition of interests and the choosing of sides by Armenians, Jews, and Eurasians in Calcutta.
5. Histories of Eurasians, latterly known as Anglo-Indians, have been few and far between. Two polemical historians of the community, Stark in *Hostages to India*, and Anthony in *Britain's Betrayal in India*, address the checkered fortunes of Eurasian employment under the British, beginning with their ban from military service in 1791 and their gradual elimination from positions of clerical service after 1815. Stark and Anthony both view the debate over the suitability or exclusion of Eurasians from military service as stemming from panic over the mulatto rebellion in Haiti. Hawes, however, points out that the ban predates the rebellion by several months and that Governor General Cornwallis's defeat at the hands of American colonists might have fuelled fears over native colonial populations. See Hawes

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64–65. Regarding such Eurasian exclusion, Roberts may have been parroting a commonplace justification that was still current as late as 1835 in *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan, with sketches of Anglo-Indian Society* III, footnote to page 98.

6. See *Memorandum on The Census of British India 1871–71* by Eyre and Spottiswoode (London: Her Majesty's Stationery, 1873). Dover's *Half-Caste*, is a work by a Eurasian biologist that addresses the question of mixed race issues as they arose within a community that was more than a simple by-product of a union between British colonizer and Indian native.
7. See Baines, *General Report on the Census of India 1891*, 188.
8. Public Letter to Fort St. George, 25 May 1978, BC, F/4/512 No.122299, IOR. For a more general manifestation of anxiety over hybridity's unpredictable and ominous outcomes one is reminded of Maggie Tulliver in Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. In childhood, Mrs. Tulliver refers to her as a "mullatter" (13), while Mr. Tulliver muses on his offspring: "It seems a bit of a pity . . . as the lad should take after the mother's side istead o' the little wench. That's the worst on't wi' crossing the breeds: you can never justly calkilate what'll come on't" (12).
9. For more on this romantic narrative of a Eurasian offspring of a British father and Rajput mother, see Holman's *Sikander Sahib; The Life of Colonel James Skinner 1778–1841*. Skinner joined the Mahratta Army but was later allowed to raise an irregular unit for the British army called Skinner's horse, or "Yellow Boys," for the British Army. Parks records her conversations with Colonel Gardner on zenana life in *The Wanderings of a Pilgrim in search of the Picturesque*. See Parks 1: 382-88. Also, Dalrymple's *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-century India*.
10. See Anthony's description of a photograph of Derozio: "The photograph shows that he had a round face and long black hair which was parted in the middle. He was slightly built and had the reputation of dressing not only carefully, but foppishly. Some commentators referred to him as very dark, but others have questioned this description" (61–62). Derozio as Eurasian bard poses an especial problematic for Imperial literature. Regarding Kipling casting himself as unreliable narrator, Hai has addressed Kipling's own obsession with lies as Imperial narrator in "Truth and Lie in a Colonial sense; Kipling's Tales of Tale-telling," while Schwarz has addressed the role of literature in Empire in "Aesthetic Imperialism: Literature and the Conquest of India." Certainly, Kipling's textual repression of Derozio resonates to Spivak's famous query: "Can the Subaltern Speak?" For a contemporary article on Derozio that Kipling may very well have read, see Edwards. See also Viswanathan's *The Masks of Conquest* on the Macaulayan agenda and English education in India.
11. On the question of Portuguese men in Goa, whose behavior involved "concupiscence on a grand scale," see Pearson, *The Portuguese in India* 102. Hawes notes that the official encouragement of marriage to native women by the East India Company in 1688 stemmed from the fear of a mixed race community arising out of inter-marriage with Portuguese women at San Thome near Madras, and that there was a need to "limit the growth of a Eurasian population which might prove disloyal to British interests" (4). Viswanathan's study on conversions in nineteenth-century India addresses the ways in which Christianity and modernity were conflated. Kipling's story reminds us that these discourses could be nuanced in regard to denominational identities, and often distinguished "superstitious" Roman Catholicism from progressive missionary enterprise by Protestant missions from England, Scotland, Germany, and Denmark.
12. For a Eurasian perception of heroism during the Sepoy Mutiny see Stark's *The Call of the Blood*. More official histories of the Indian Mutiny would include Hibbert's study, *The Great Mutiny: India, 1857*. New York: Viking, 1978. More recently, Dalrymple focuses on jihadi rhetoric and the mutiny, in *The Last Mughal: the Fall of a Dynasty: Delhi 1857*, 2007.
13. See *Something of Myself* 28, for his descriptions of newspaper stories and his discovery that "crude statements of crude facts are not well seen by official authorities."
14. See Hawes, "On the evidence, it was easier for Eurasian elites living in Indian states to be accepted on their own merits, whether within the resident European community or the upper strata of Indian

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society. Unlike British India, there were no formal restrictions on their employment whether in the civil service of Indian rulers or as military officers" (109).

15. Michele's "heroism" might have been more problematic to the imperial reader since Kipling has this account to offer on the reporting of communal riots: "I described . . . communal riots under the shadow of the Mosque of Wazir Khan, where the patient waiting troops lay in timber yards or side alleys till the order came to go in and hit the crowds on the feet with the gun-butt (killing in Civil Administration was then reckoned confession of failure), and the growling, flaring, creed drunk city would be brought to hand without effusion of blood, or the appearance of any agitated Viceroy)" (28).
16. See, for instance, Kipling's much anthologized short story, "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes," also published in the 1880s.

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