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PASSING AND THE MODERN PERSONA IN KIPLING'S ETHNOGRAPHER FICTION

By John McBratney

THE TERM "PASSING" usually refers to the experience of light-skinned African-Americans who seek "to cross, or 'pass,' the color line undetected" into the white community (Madigan 524). Such crossings were widely depicted by early twentieth-century African-American authors such as Charles W. Chesnutt, James Weldon Johnson, and Nella Larsen. But passing, in the more general sense of "be[ing] held or accepted as a member of a religious or ethnic group other than one's own" (*OED*), was a theme in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British literature as well.¹ Indeed, passing can be viewed as typical of new ways of negotiating cultural difference in the modern period. In an effort to widen the context in which modern passing is seen, I offer this study of Rudyard Kipling's "ethnographer" fiction, in which Anglo-Indian² ethnographers seek, by way of Indian disguise, to pass as native.

Kipling, like the African-American writers mentioned above, wrote at a time of transition in the thinking about culture, when pre-modernist notions of race were gradually giving way to modernist conceptions of culture that, in a spirit of relativism, challenged received ideas about racial essence and hierarchy. In the second half of the nineteenth century, many Western social scientists believed in the Darwinian idea that the peoples of the world were evolving along a single track defined by the recent economic and political ascendancy of the Northern European races over those of Asia, Africa, and Australasia.³ However, despite their faith in the unilinear evolution of races (according to which the world's less progressive peoples might theoretically one day hope to achieve the civilization of the more highly developed), many of these scientists continued to believe in the earlier and wholly contrary notion that every racial "type" possessed an essence that persisted largely unchanged through time.⁴ This essence was thought to link certain measurable physical attributes to less easily measured

moral and intellectual capacities.⁵ According to contemporary notions of hereditary transmission, this linkage remained intact from generation to generation and, thus, guaranteed the fixity of racial type.

Seen in this light, each race was thought to be more or less predisposed to success or failure in the struggle for existence. The varied fortunes of the world's races seemed to reflect the varied fitness of the racial type. Current racial performance appeared to augur well or ill for the future. While Europeans and Americans might enjoy continued pre-eminence in the world, non-Western peoples, it seemed, had to resign themselves to little or no advance, or even to extinction. Tennyson summed up the notion of differential capacities for progress in "Locksley Hall" (1842): "Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay" (2: 130). Convinced of the permanence of these differences, social scientists came to arrange the peoples of the world in a hierarchy of more or less immutable racial types — with the "civilized" Europeans at the top; the "savage" Tierra del Fuegians, Australian aborigines, South African Bushmen, and Andaman Islanders at the bottom; and the "barbaric" or "semi-civilized" races in between.

At the turn of the century, however, anthropologists like Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski came to challenge the nineteenth-century consensus about race. Where racial type had once been considered the sole determinant of culture,⁶ a range of factors, including history and environment, was now felt to influence cultural practice. Boas in particular cast doubt on the very notion of racial essence. He came to see it as a reification imposed on the diversity of individual human beings rather than a quality inherent in any human group (Stocking, *Race* 183, 194). With the shift from an essentialist to a nominalist definition of race, racial identity came to be viewed as an entity that cultures constructed or manipulated to govern inter-group relations (Banton, *Idea* 110).

As the idea of racial type came under challenge, the concept of racial stratification was also seen as increasingly untenable. If there was no fixed racial essence, there was no necessary permanence to the ranking of races. The arrangement of "dearer" races atop the "cheaper" ones might reflect the vicissitudes of history rather than the inevitable expression of racial essences. The Anglo-Saxons might be the racial front-runners today, but there was no guarantee that they would enjoy supremacy tomorrow. Taking the history of the Anglo-Saxon as the standard against which all other racial histories had to be measured might lead to false comparisons. Indeed, the very act of racial comparison was called into question. If no single narrative could account for the diverse histories of the world's societies, each society then had to be judged on its own terms, independent of the values and achievements of another society.

With this argument, the whole meaning of culture began to shift.⁷ Where "culture" had previously referred to a set of particular humanist values (Arnold's "sweetness and light") possessed by only a few Western or Westernized societies, it now came to mean the body of socially constitutive beliefs and

practices possessed by *every* society, regardless of the degree of its resemblance to the Western model. Where culture had once been spoken of in the singular, as a quality that peoples had more or less of, it now came to be used in the plural, as an aspect equally characteristic of all peoples. Where societies had once been studied by the "comparative method" to determine their rung on the evolutionary ladder,⁸ they were now analyzed as separate cultures, which had to be seen, first and foremost, as individual wholes.⁹ According to Malinowski, students of culture had to "grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, and realize *his* vision of *his* world" (qtd. in Stocking, "Ethnographer's" 106). With this understanding, anthropologists saw (or at least thought they saw) not only the worth of individual cultures but the relativity of all cultural values.¹⁰ With the growing legitimacy of cultural relativism, the notion that racial types might be ranked according to a single scale fell into increasing disfavor.

Cultural relativism, then, ushered in a radical revision of traditional notions of racial essence and stratification. The present-day ethnographer James Clifford has called this paradigm shift the advent of "the ethnographic" (93). According to him, with the coming of this moment in about 1900, the nature of identity in culture was redefined. Individual identity was thought, in the nineteenth century, to fall along a cultural gradient culminating in the ideal of the highly cultivated middle-class European. Subjectivity in the ethnographic age, however, "enact[ed]," in Clifford's words, a "process of fictional self-fashioning in relative systems of culture and language" (110). The idea of a self regulated ineluctably by an innate racial essence gave way to the concept of a flexible, self-invented cultural persona. The notion of a racial hierarchy was supplanted by the idea that the self might fashion itself out of a range of ethnic identities unranked as high or low. Cultural identity came to be thought of as a dynamic entity continually reconstructed by the individual actor on a stage governed by multiple, relative, non-privileged cultural scripts.

Despite the gradual success of the new paradigm, modern ethnographic thinking by no means put an end to the influence of earlier views of race. Notions of racial essence and stratification persisted, and in some cases gained strength. The literature that treated the phenomenon of passing reflected this tension in conceptualizations of race. In the fiction of Chesnutt, Johnson, and Larsen,¹¹ for example, the attempt to pass testifies both to the ability of blacks to invent new ethnic identities in a post-Civil War period of increasing black self-determination and to the power of a white racism, barely diminished by its supposed defeat during the War, to punish those blacks who tried to pass. Kipling's fiction about ethnographers is also concerned with the ambiguous experience of those who seek to fashion themselves anew in an era of competing understandings of culture. Although he promoted nineteenth-century notions of racial privilege unapologetically in works like "The White Man's Burden," in other writings he presented a more modern view of culture which implicitly questioned the

idea of white supremacy. Several British characters in his Indian fiction are, like their counterparts in early twentieth-century African-American literature, driven by a need to shape their identity unencumbered by traditional notions of racial difference. They are finally quite different from their counterparts in Chesnutt, Johnson, and Larsen, yet they resemble those African-American characters in their use of masking devices to pass. By considering those figures who cross the racial bar in Kipling's ethnographer fiction, I hope to provide a fuller understanding of the link between passing and the self-invented persona in an ethnographic age.

I

IN THE LATTER HALF of the nineteenth century, British readers saw the proliferation of a new kind of literature: "ethnographic" fiction (Street 96). In response to the growth of anthropology as a legitimate scientific enterprise, R. M. Ballantyne, G. A. Henty, H. Rider Haggard, Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, and others sought to render the foreign settings of their fiction with an anthropological verisimilitude. Although this new literature was often avowedly romantic in its rejection of the perceived tawdriness of naturalism, it nonetheless sought to ground the romantic in an ethnographic realism. Disguise received a particular emphasis in this new genre. The romance had always featured masquerade as a prominent aspect. The quester who entered *terra incognita* often went in disguise out of both a need to secure safety in traveling and a desire to experiment with alternative identities. But with the transfiguration of the romance in ethnographic fiction, disguise was treated with a new self-consciousness. During a period of greater ethnographic sophistication, disguise became a matter of mastering — of decoding, imitating, and controlling — aspects of another culture.

Kipling's "ethnographer" fiction illuminates particularly well the uses of disguise. In focusing on ethnographers themselves, it calls attention to the shifts they use, including masquerade, to gain ethnographic information.¹² In their variety, Kipling's amateur ethnographers reflect the diversity of Anglo-Indians — military officers, civil servants, political agents, doctors, clergyman, and policemen — dedicated to the gathering of ethnographic detail. Taken together, his ethnographer writings evoke, with a richness unparalleled in Anglo-Indian fiction, the vitality and earnestness of early Anglo-Indian anthropology, which began with the work of Dr. Francis Hamilton Buchanan in the early 1800s and culminated in the *Imperial Gazetteers* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries directed by William Wilson Hunter, Denzil Ibbetson, and H. H. Risley.¹³ To assess the nature of Kipling's fictional ethnographers, I would like to focus on the representative figures of Strickland, a policeman who appears throughout Kipling's Indian fiction,¹⁴ and on the apprentice spy Kim. For both these figures, their forays into Indian life involve the donning of disguises in an attempt to pass as Indian, a practice that has important consequences for the ethnographic rethinking of identity and culture.

II

KIPLING INTRODUCES STRICKLAND in the short story "Miss Youghal's Sais." Strickland's habit as a police detective is to enter the Indian bazaar under the anonymity of disguise to uncover evidence against criminals.¹⁵ But his real delight in life does not rest in the capture of horse thieves and murderers; it lies instead in "going Fantee" (32), or going native — in passing as a mullah, a fakir, or other figure from his repertoire of Indian roles. The list of his dramatic accomplishments is drolly impressive:

He was initiated into the *Sat Bhai* at Allahabad once, when he was on leave; he knew the Lizzard-Song [sic] of the Sansis, and the *Hállí-Hukk* dance, which is a religious *can-can* of a startling kind. When a man knows who dance the *Hállí-Hukk*, and how, and when, and where, he knows something to be proud of. He has gone deeper than the skin. (32)

Strickland's success depends on an ability to decipher what the narrator elsewhere calls the "marks" and "signs" (39) of the Indian underworld. This decoding of indigenous sign systems informs an encoding of these signs in his own performative self. These performances take him "deeper than [his white] skin," into a realm of racial indeterminacy that troubles his peers.

To upstanding Britons, Strickland "was a doubtful sort of a man [whom they] passed by on the other side" (31). Even the Anglo-Indian narrator, who is a friend of Strickland, finds the idea of going native one "which, of course, no man with any sense believes in" (32). Because of his peers' uneasiness, Strickland has been barred from professional advancement toward a position at Simla, the elite hill-station and hot-season home of the Government. Anglo-Indian reservations are two-fold.

First, Strickland's methods are dangerous. Experience in "the Great Game," the decades-long struggle between Russia and Britain over control of Central Asia, had taught the Government the hazards of sending British spies disguised as Asians across the Indian border to bring back geographical, political, and ethnographic information. The difficulties incurred by such early players of the Game as Charles Christie, Henry and Eldrid Pottinger, Arthur Conolly, and Alexander Burnes convinced officials that it was more safe and effective to send Indians in disguise whenever agents needed to travel into Afghanistan or Turkestan (Hopkirk, *Great* 5). The dangers of masquerade could be just as serious for agents inside India. Strickland, got up as an Indian *sais*, or groom, nearly loses his life when the wife of a fellow-groom falls in love with him and then, in a fit of unrequited passion, tries to poison him with arsenic. Another amateur ethnographer, Trejago in "Beyond the Pale," brings terrible punishment upon his beloved and himself when, dressed in a *boorka*, he approaches her room to make love: she has her hands cut off, and he is knifed in the groin.

But the more serious ground for objection to disguise has to do with the nature of British imperial identity. In an empire in which the colonized far outnumbered

the colonizer, the British had to govern by prestige rather than force. They had to project a spectacle of power based upon sets of signs that clearly demarcated the ruler from the ruled. One of these semiotic registers was the Anglo-Indian uniform: military dress for the soldier and a carefully assembled outfit, including solar topi, for the civilian. Many of Kipling's Indian tales stress the importance of uniform in the maintenance of a sturdy British identity. In "The Madness of Private Ortheris," the title character proves his temporary insanity by exchanging his uniform for mufti and recovers his wits only after another swap returns him to his original outfit. For Britons who served in India, the uniform signified their place in the Raj and guaranteed the integrity of the Raj itself.

Going about in native dress, thus, seriously violated the official sartorial code. The violation held whether the disguise failed or succeeded. If it failed (that is, were penetrated by an Indian spectator), loss of face might result. If the disguise succeeded, the consequences might be even more dire, for such success might raise unsettling questions about the nature of imperial identity. From the Anglo-Indian standpoint, successful passing by one of its own called attention to the boundary where Indian garb met Anglo-Indian skin. This border area could be seen, figuratively, as the element within which the masquerader moved. Where, in this arena, did the Indian end and the Anglo-Indian begin? One could not be sure, for passing opened up a gap between skin and clothing that confounded the distinction between white and brown, colonizer and colonized. The specter it raised was not the turning of a white man into a brown or into some blending of the two, but the breaching of a space between colors that defied color-coding.

In a work that has deep implications for the study of passing, Marjorie Garber argues that transvestism produces along gender lines a "third term" between the terms of male and female. But this third category, she explains,

is not a term. Much less is it a *sex*, certainly not an instantiated "blurred" sex as signified by a term like "androgyné" or "hermaphrodite". . . . The "third" is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Three puts in question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge. (11)

Strickland's cross-dressing produces in terms of ethnicity what Garber speaks of in regard to gender. In going "deeper than the skin," he embodies a third entity that, by resisting incorporation into a unitary Indian or British identity, upsets the logic of racial categorization altogether. This resistance affords him the piquant pleasure of not being pigeonholed. Before duped Indian spectators, he knows he is not the Indian they take him for. And before his disapproving compatriots, he knows he is seen neither as a "temporary" Indian nor a masquerading Briton. Either of these images would reassure his peers, since either would confirm his essential Britishness. Instead, he defies essentialist logic. He confronts his fellows with a perplexing absence of established racial identity, a

selfhood so slippery it eludes the binarism of white and brown. The advantages of this indeterminacy are profound. Released from the imprisoning gaze of those who would see him as either Indian or Anglo-Indian, Strickland enjoys a freedom of identity remarkable in a land of hierarchy.

Both Indian and Anglo-Indian societies were strongly stratified in the nineteenth century. Hindus ranked their members by caste at birth, and Anglo-Indians ordered theirs by a combination of class and professional distinctions enshrined in the Warrant of Precedence. Both communities were equally quick to exclude those persons who did not belong. Under these circumstances, there was little crossing from one society to the other: Britons were automatically *mlechas*, or outcasts, in Hindu society; and, except for servants, Indians were barred from regular British social life. Perhaps the most egregious instance of British cliquishness was the Anglo-Indian club, where Britons gathered after work to drink, read, chat, play tennis and bridge, and otherwise relax in a world off-limits to Indians.¹⁶ Although the barrier between Indian and Briton was a complex compound of differences in custom, religion, class, and race, the appeal to race, to the obvious difference in skin color, was the easiest means of marking the cultural divide.

Given the importance of color, the magnitude of Strickland's transgression, and of his freedom, is clear. By going deeper than skin color, he puts pressure upon the single point of Indo-British interaction that most sensitively registers the whole difficulty of relations between colonizer and colonized. By pressing upon that point, he calls into question the most salient aspects of the racial ideology upon which the Raj is founded. In his playing off of Anglo-Indian against Indian identity, he mocks the racial essentialism that gives the Briton a clear sense of selfhood. And by subverting the binarism of brown and white, he collapses the hierarchy of color to which Anglo-Indian political authority is pinned. For himself, he achieves a freedom beyond race as great as his trespass is large. In his nonconformity, he has taken as his model the "one man [in India] who can pass for Hindu or Mahomedan, hide-dresser or priest, as he pleases" ("Miss Youghal" 31). The phrase "as he pleases" captures the moral and psychological license that Strickland seeks, and gains, by cheerfully ignoring the demands of conventional racial sentiment. The liberties he has taken and won seem of the completest kind.

Strickland's freedom lasts only so long, however. His game ends when he falls afoul of the very Anglo-Indian society whose strictures he had tried to ignore. His troubles begin when he falls in love with Miss Youghal, a recent arrival with her parents at the station where Strickland lives. Mr. and Mrs. Youghal disapprove of their daughter's suitor because of his strange "ways and works" (33) and forbid the lovers to meet. Strickland circumvents their ban by posing as Miss Youghal's *sais*. Although his donning of this mask seems congruent with his other charades, it in fact represents a significant departure. Where

he had formerly gone native as an end in itself, he now does so as a means to an end. He has adopted what Garber calls "cross-dressing for success" (51) — here success in love. He has ceased to be the third term and has become an Englishman acting as an Indian, as is clear to Miss Youghal, who is in on his game. The two continue their clandestine courtship until Strickland, having exploded in anger at a general who flirts with his beloved, blows his cover. The good-natured general finds the masquerade charming and rides off to reconcile the Youghal parents to the lovers. In a response that recalls the mad Otheris, Strickland cries out for "decent clothes" (38). His days of delight in racial indecipherability are clearly over. Mr. and Mrs. Youghal consent to the lovers' marriage as long as Strickland promises to "drop his old ways, and stick to Departmental routine" (39). Strickland, for the most part, abides by this contract; as a result, "He is forgetting the slang, and the beggar's cant, and the marks, and the signs, and the drift of the under-currents, which, if a man would master, he must always continue to learn" (39). The narrator, who has been privy to his friend's disguise, ends by noting ironically that, despite Strickland's loss, "he fills in his Departmental returns beautifully" (39).

In his subsequent appearances in Kipling, Strickland lacks the freedom and range of his earlier liminal self. The now respectable official finds that his ethnographic capacities, atrophied by disuse, have become a target of mockery. In "To Be Filed for Reference," MacIntosh Jellaludin, an Oxonian who has married an Indian woman, converted to Islam, and gone even deeper than Strickland into Indian culture, calls the policeman "ignorant West and East" (346). In "The Son of His Father," his obtuseness is even more harshly ridiculed. When Beshakl, Strickland's groom, brings home his master's mare in battered condition, he complains that a gang of dacoits has robbed him and beaten the horse. The now police chief turns much of the government of northwestern India upside down to round up the criminals. Only Strickland's servants and his son Adam know the truth: that having lost all his money to drink, Beshakl had hired out his master's horse to an abusive wood-cutter to recoup his losses. While the police chief had sat god-like in a hill-station office trying to track the robbers, Adam, a juvenile version of his once-skillful father, had roamed the servants' quarters picking up gossip. Strickland is upstaged by his own son and, in an even more galling irony, hoodwinked by a groom, a figure he had formerly impersonated. Where he had once been indifferent to the prospect of high position in the Government, he now resides regularly at Simla. He laments his imprisonment within a system of precedence to which he had previously been oblivious: "[he] used to say, sometimes, that he envied the convicts in the jail. They had no position to keep up, and the ball and chain that the worst of them wore was only a few pounds' weight of iron" (292). His decision to turn conventional has curtailed his freedom to pass as an Indian. He has ceased to embody the ethnic third term.

III

IF STRICKLAND HAS LOST his ethnic liminality, his son has inherited it. Anglo-Indian children in Kipling are often blessed with an uncanny ability to float between British and Indian worlds. Kipling — who was born in Bombay, spoke Hindustani as his first language, and in his early years glided freely between his parents' Anglo-Indian house and the servants' quarters — was himself such a charmed child. He fictionalized this hybrid figure most successfully in the eponymous hero of *Kim*. Like Strickland, Kim is an Anglo-Indian on the margins of respectable society. Kim's marginal status derives from his orphaned condition and his Irish descent. A liminal figure, he, like Strickland, has become comfortable moving among Indians. He finds great joy going abroad in native disguise to gather and transmit intelligence. He begins as a young rake's go-between and graduates to apprentice in the Indian Survey — work which blends together cadastral, ethnographic, and political investigations as part of the Great Game. Again like Strickland, his pleasure lies not in the success of his missions but in the game itself — in the manipulations of identity that, in defiance of conventional ethnic categories, free the individual from the tyranny of racial essence and hierarchy. Even more than Strickland, Kim delights in foiling efforts to pin down his identity. When his mentor Mahbub Ali struggles to define him on his Asiatic side, Kim teases, "What am I? Mussalman, Hindu, Jain, or Buddhist? That is a hard nut" (234). The "hard nut" is precisely that riddle of selfhood that Strickland, in his prime, had posed to his peers. By embodying this riddle, Kim enjoys a fluidity of identity and a range of motion even greater than Strickland's.

Mahbub Ali is not the only father figure whom Kim fools. Abdul JanMohamed has asserted that *Kim* concerns the "prolonged and unnatural recovery of the paternal function" (79). The novel is not so much about a boy in search of his paternity as about a child pursued by father-surrogates who seek to adopt him, mold him to their ends, and thereby tame his wildly polymorphous selfhood. But in the face of these adults, Kim remains, until the end, slyly resistant to their demands and protective of his protean ability to pass as another. His resolve is reflected in the excerpt from "The Two-Sided Man" that heads chapter 8:

Something I owe to the soil that grew —
More to the life that fed —
But most to Allah Who gave me two
Separate sides to my head.

I would go without shirts or shoes,
Friends, tobacco or bread
Sooner than for an instant lose
Either side of my head. (214)

Kim's father-figures break down into two kinds, each appealing to a separate side of his nature. Those players of the Great Game like Mahbub Ali, Colonel Creighton, Lurgan Sahib, and Hurree Chunder Mookerjee enlist him in their spy ring. The Buddhist Teshoo Lama, on the other hand, adopts him as his *chela*, or disciple, in his search for the sacred River of the Arrow. The two types represent not only different careers but, in the tradition of Indian philosophy, divergent epistemologies. The players of the Game move in a sensuous world; the lama seeks, in a spirit of Buddhist non-attachment, to escape the world. These rival philosophies place their special demands on Kim's sense of his own subjectivity. Where the players of the Game try to tailor Kim's costume changes to fit their ends of intelligence gathering, the lama seeks to render the youth's shape-shifting moot. Where Colonel Creighton would like Kim to subordinate his pleasure in cross-dressing to his duties as a British spy, Teshoo Lama wants him to transcend the delights of ethnic self-fashioning entirely. Kim, like Strickland, frets under the trammels these authority figures seek to impose. To him, the regimented world of Anglo-India is especially cramping. Once again, the uniform is a primary locus of conflict: Kim hates the "horrible stuff suit" (158) of the soldier boy into which he is at first thrust and longs to wear the loose-fitting Indian clothes to which he is accustomed.

Kim tries to preserve his chameleon nature by achieving a rapprochement between the Game and the Search. This balancing act culminates in Kim's journey with the lama into the Himalayan foothills, in which he helps both his master in his quest for the River as well as Hurree in foiling a Russian and a French spy who have sneaked into India. This attempt at reconciliation, however, proves disastrous: the Russian tears the lama's mandala; a fight ensues; the lama, as a result, weakens; and Kim falls sick. The two paths, the profane business of spying and the spiritual search for wisdom, are revealed to be fundamentally in conflict. Kim's ethnic identity is seen as similarly divided. Under the terms of the Great Game, he is, though disguised as an Indian, essentially British. With Teshoo Lama, he is, though vaguely Indian, remote from his British side. As his selfhood is subjected to increasing polarization, he finds it more and more difficult to maintain the non-dual state of the ethnic third term. As a youth just shy of adulthood, he is placed under greater and greater pressure, particularly by those who play the Game, to declare his full allegiance to the British half of his ethnic make-up. Kim's illness at the end is symptomatic of the deepening tension in his ethnic condition.

The novel ends ambiguously. Kim awakens from his sickness to feel "the wheels of his being lock up anew on the world without" (462). This moment of re-engagement with the material world contrasts with the lama's flash of enlightenment upon falling into the River of the Arrow, which allows him to float, in non-attachment, above the very earth Kim has rejoined. In affirmation

of Kim's reintegration into the world, Hurree and Mahbub express their expectation that Kim will later join them in espionage. Yet other signs point to a very different future for the youth. The lama's memory of his still worldly disciple brings him back from nirvana to work *Bodhisattva*-like for the salvation of his charge. The lama, moreover, remains the most loving and beloved of Kim's father figures. The last words of the novel are his — a signal, it seems, of Kim's future as a Buddhist seeker after the Truth. Kim himself offers no clear sign of *his* sense of his fate, whether it lie with the Game or the Search. His silence at the end seems to imply his unwillingness, still, to settle on one future or one ethnic identity over the other. In this, we are meant to be consoled. If by the end of the novel Kim's polymorphous self-fashioning has been curbed, he has not yet been boxed into a single future or an exclusive ethnicity.

IV

IN KIM, KIPLING FOUND an apparently foolproof method for preserving ethnic indeterminacy. By continually delaying the moment at which he must choose either an Indian or British identity, the narrative postpones indefinitely the cracking of the "hard nut" of ethnic ambiguity that Strickland's life-story enacts. Kim is, in Garber's term, "the changeling" (92), a figure whose economy is a continual changing or exchanging of ethnicities, a boy who is always "on [his] way to becoming" (85) but who never finally arrives at a fixed adult identity. But Kipling ensures this freedom for Kim at a price. By suspending the action of the novel just short of Kim's choice of a single career, Kipling stretches the fantasy of his liberty to the point of thinnest credibility. Given Kim's return to the world and his deafness throughout the novel to the lama's spiritual message, it is hard not to see him as poised, if not committed, to pursuing a future in the Great Game. Assuming this, it is hard not to suppose that his powers of impersonation will, like Strickland's, decline with official promotion.

The cases of Strickland and Kim point up the limited conditions within which Kipling could represent passing. In their defiance of conventional ethnic definitions, the young Strickland and the boyish Kim mock the central myth of progress that shaped the Victorian conception of the self. Against the prevalent understanding that all Western identity unfolded along the single, rising line traced by a training in European culture, their cross-dressings represent a sly divagation from that path — not a "reeling back" into the Indian "beast" but an evasion of all stories of progress or regress. They frame, in place of the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman*, the narrative of a new selfhood, one that involves the free negotiation of different cultural systems across the gap that these differences define. Their impression management implicitly challenges nineteenth-century assumptions of racial essence and hierarchy. In this sense, they inhabit Clifford's ethnographic moment.

Yet Kipling's characters can remain in this moment only as long as they preserve a child's or a child-like resistance to the respectable adult world's calls

to conformity. There is something willfully adolescent in Strickland's fantasies of plunging deeper than the skin; and there is, in *Kim*, a good deal of Peter Pan. Both figures represent an ethnographic version of a motif that runs through much Victorian literature: the child who refuses to grow up. This figure, particularly as represented by the orphan, embodied most completely a Victorian society's desire to escape its own ideology of lock-step progress. Kipling's child represents a particular form of the late Romantic rebellion against the "Shades of the prison-house" of adult being — a rebellion fought on the new ground of the ethnographic, in the no-man's land between relative cultures, and in the refuge of "exotic" Oriental disguise.

The fragility of this refuge is clear. The skeptic in Kipling was aware of the fantastical nature of Romantic escape. He knew that, realistically, boys must grow into men to do a man's proper work. He also knew that, in order for such labor to be proper, it had to be worthy of the "race" (understood in its most conventional sense) to which the worker belonged. "The White Man's Burden" says all this. But nostalgic for the joys of childhood, Kipling found it difficult to trade these delights for the burdens of empire. That difficulty is felt in the ambiguous tones of the narrator of "Miss Youghal's Sais," who at once mocks Strickland's eccentric cross-dressing and satirizes his ultimate conformity. It is also suggested by the unstable mood of the ending of *Kim*, with its desire to preserve Kim's protean identity and, conversely, its implication that his identity has already been shaped in preparation for the Great Game. Given this ambivalence, Kipling keeps alive the possibility of indeterminate selfhood by carefully narrowing the range of conditions within which it can unfold. He accomplishes this narrowing in two ways: by creating enclosed theaters of ethnic performance and by excluding all but the Anglo-Indian from acting out a plurally ethnic persona.

Consider, first, the isolation of theaters of ethnic self-dramatization. As I have suggested, Kipling permits passing only within imaginative realms cordoned off from the "real world" of Anglo-India. These are sealed off in time and space — temporally, because they represent hiatuses in a person's maturation into a workaday adult, and spatially because they lie at the margins of proper society, the Indian underworld in Strickland's case and the open road in *Kim*'s. But what sets these enclaves off most definitively is their theatricality. This quality begins in disguise and extends to pose. In his description of Strickland's *Háli-Hukk* dance, the narrator's tongue-in-cheek tone captures the staginess of Strickland's achievement. Likewise, when *Kim* taunts Mahbub Ali about his amorphous Asian identity, he has an actor's self-consciousness about his effect on an audience.¹⁷ This self-consciousness is characteristic of the ethnographic moment as Clifford describes it: "ethnographic discourse . . . works in this double manner. Though it portrays other selves as culturally constituted, it also fashions an identity authorized to represent, to interpret, even to believe — *but always with*

some irony — the truths of discrepant worlds” (94; emphasis added). This irony is the sign of dramatic distance. By treating the “truths” of rival Indian and British worlds ironically, Strickland and Kim stake out for themselves a stage between cultures on which they can perform their indeterminate ethnicity.

Elsewhere, I have called these spaces “felicitous” because they grant to their occupants a happiness in self-authenticity largely free of the constraints of race and caste (278). As Clifford suggests, however, this happiness is a value found not in the transcendence of culture but in the pitting of one culture’s constraints against another’s. Indeed, for the individual who seeks a Romantic autonomy beyond “the iron cage” of modern life, these charmed circles are in part constituted by the very modernity they are ostensibly free of. This imbrication does not empty them of meaning; rather, it produces a worth that is self-consciously bracketed, or that is, as Chris Bongie has suggested in his work on exoticism, deliberately “rhetorical” (23). Kipling is, at some level, aware of the rhetorical nature of his felicitous enclaves, but to quote Bongie again, he “engag[es] in a renewed, and strategic, dreaming of what [he] know[s] to be no more (but no less) than a dream” (23).¹⁸ By setting these dream-spaces apart from a world of hard-and-fast ethnic difference, he is able to conserve the illusion of independence. By giving felicitous spaces the fiction of separability from the real world of Anglo-India, he can clear a stage upon which passing becomes a means to enact a multifaceted persona.

Kipling also preserves the power of passing by excluding all but the Anglo-Indian from the benefits it confers. Another way of putting this is that no Indian is allowed to masquerade successfully as an Englishman. He depicts two groups of Indians who wish to be seen as Anglicized: the middle-class, English-speaking, and English-imitating Bengali, often referred to pejoratively as “the *baboo*”; and the Eurasian, the person of mixed British and Indian descent. Toward both groups, Kipling is openly disapproving. In such stories as “Without Benefit of Clergy,” “The Head of the District,” and “The Enlightenments of Pagett, M.P.,” the Bengali who seeks to emulate his British “superiors” is presented as effete, sycophantic, craven, socially disruptive, and politically seditious. The “brown-skinned Englishman” is viewed above all as spurious, a would-be arriviste whose aspirations to speak, dress, act, and govern like an Englishman betray his “innate” inferiority at a moment of crisis. Eurasians are depicted with little more sympathy. In “His Last Chance in Life” and “Kidnapped,” biracial characters are inevitably victimized by their “taint” of black blood. Although they may wish to pass as pure-blooded whites, they manage to transcend the impurity of their mixed lineage for only a moment. In the end they, like Michele D’Cruze of “His Last Chance in Life,” break down and find “the White drop in [their] veins dying out” (91). The efforts of both *baboos* and Eurasians to pass only prove their unworthiness to be anything but Indians. In depicting them in this way, Kipling was pandering to the coarsest racial stereotypes.¹⁹

Only the Anglo-Indian, then, has the power and the privilege to impersonate another successfully. Unlike the Bengali or the Eurasian who wishes to assimilate into English culture, neither Strickland nor Kim wants such absorption into the Indian. They seek to avoid the fate of those Britons who go native without the will or opportunity to return to their British identity; these figures are, in Kipling, always contemptible. Instead, both pass safely as Indians within the scope of the third term. The Bengali and the Eurasian, contrarily, rarely want to enact the part of the changeling. The pleasures of that performance are too rarified for one bent on real social gains.²⁰ *Baboos* or Eurasians who try to pass are intent on crossing for success, in Garber's sense. Invariably, they fail, for their deceptions are always exposed.²¹ Thus, while Kipling's Anglo-Indians may pass "down," Indians may not pass "up." Britons, like Strickland and Kim, may augment or transform their racial capital through the changeling's exchange of identities; however, Bengalis and Eurasians, seeking to gain a racial and social cachet, are made to feel their abasement all the more by their failure to assume a British identity.

For Kipling, then, disguising oneself successfully as another is a freedom reserved only for Anglo-Indians — and only within the cordoned-off theaters of ethnic performance. Taken together, these two strategies for limiting the practice of passing point up the riddle of Kipling's role in the new understanding of ethnicity inaugurated by the ethnographic. If the enclosure of spaces of ethnic self-fashioning celebrates the advent of the ethnographic, the barring of Indians from these same realms squarely opposes the relativism of the new ethnography. Kipling comes down, paradoxically, on both sides of the paradigm shift marked by the innovations of Boas and Malinowski. As such, he awkwardly straddles the modernist ideological divide instead of boldly crossing over it.

Where does the emphasis fall finally for Kipling: on the guardian of old ways of defining race or on the pioneer of new means of constructing ethnicity? I think it lies with the conservative, for in Kipling the cultural relativism ushered in by the ethnographic is relevant only to that culture that is socially, politically, and economically dominant to begin with, and then only within realms that do not really threaten that dominance. A genuine, full-blown relativism, in which the negotiation of cultural power would be truly dialogic and in which both the Briton and Indian would be equal actors in a theatre of self-invention with real consequences for the political status quo, is impossible for Kipling to envision, for it threatens too baldly the racial hierarchy upon which the empire depends.

This is not to suggest that Kipling's notion of passing, albeit restricted, did not disturb the Raj's self-perception. Ironically, the staunchest literary advocate of empire was also the first writer to betray the artifice of the imperial actor and, thus, expose "the illusion of [imperial] permanence" (Hutchins). But by restricting this actor to the theatrical spaces of the third term, Kipling kept at bay the doubts about the legitimacy of empire this figure connoted. Indeed, one

can see the Anglo-Indian who passes as a figure "containing" cultural anxiety in both senses of the word — at once embodying *and* limiting the spread of British ruling-class fears. Although Kipling was acutely receptive to the revisionist energies of the ethnographic, as a loyal proponent of empire he had to hedge this receptivity carefully. Only those figures, like Strickland and Kim, whose fidelity to their racial kin is finally clear, are allowed the brief happiness of passing as Indian and, thereby, fashioning, for a time, their own personae out of the plural cultures of India.

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NOTES

1. In the British case, the increased treatment of passing coincides with the expansion of the British Empire and those phenomena associated with it: travel, espionage, exploration, Orientalist scholarship, and archaeological and ethnological study, to name just a few. In his preface to *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836), Edward William Lane describes how he passed as a Muslim to enter a mosque (Said 160). By disguising himself as an Indian Muslim doctor, Sir Richard Burton was able to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, as told in his 1893 *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to al-Madinah and Meccah* (Said 195). In *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1935), T.E. Lawrence records his experience in the Middle East during World War I as a British political agent posing as an Arab.
2. As I use the term here and throughout the essay, "Anglo-Indian" means what Kipling and his readers would have understood by it: a Briton who resides in India. In the 1911 census, "Anglo-Indian" was used for the first time officially to designate persons of mixed British and Indian parentage (Lewis 127, n. 2). To avoid confusion, I use the pre-1911 term "Eurasians" to refer to these persons.
3. For a discussion of the effect of evolutionary theory on thinking about race, see Burrow 98 and Penniman 152.
4. For commentary on the persistence of racial typology in a period of evolutionary thought, see Banton, *Idea* 8; Banton, *Racial* 5, 46-47; Biddis 16-17, 19; Lorimer 144-49; Stepan 83-86, 110; Stocking, *Race* 42-68; and Stocking, *Victorian* 182.
5. For commentary on racial linkage, see Biddis 11 and Stepan 86.
6. Robert Knox, the leading British proponent of the theory of racial types, asserted, "Race is everything: literature, science, art — in a word, civilization, depends on it" (v). Sidonia in Disraeli's *Tancred* expressed his racial views with equal absoluteness: "All is race; there is no other truth" (1: 191). For commentary on the idea of racial determinism, see Banton, *Idea* 33, 100; Biddis 12; and Bolt 9.
7. For much of the following analysis of culture, I rely on Clifford 92-95 and Stocking, *Race* 195-233.
8. For a discussion of the comparative method, see Burrow 87, 155, and Stocking, *Race* 80.
9. For commentary on cultures as integrated wholes, see Stocking, *Race* 155-56.
10. In *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911), in which he described his stay among the Inuit of Cumberland Sound, Boas declared passionately his conviction of the need to think about culture relativistically:

Is it not a beautiful custom that these "savages" suffer all deprivation in common, but in happy times when someone has brought back booty from the hunt, all join in eating and drinking? I often ask myself what advantages our "good society" possesses over that of the "savages." The more I see of their customs, the more I realize that we have no right to look down on them. . . . As a thinking person, for me the most important result of this trip lies in the strengthening of my point of view that the idea of a "cultured" individual is merely relative and that a person's worth should be judged by his *Herzenbildung*. This quality is present or absent here among the Eskimo, just as among us. (qtd. in Stocking, *Race* 148)

11. Charles W. Chesnutt (1858–1932), a teacher, newspaperman, lawyer, and writer, was called "the first American Negro novelist" (F. C. S.). James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938) was a lawyer, diplomat, songwriter, and poet; he published one novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, which dealt with the problem of passing. Nella Larsen (1893–1963), a writer of the Harlem Renaissance, wrote two novels: *Quicksand* and *Passing*. All three authors wrote with unprecedented sensitivity about the plight of African-Americans of mixed race who sought to pass as white.
12. The term "ethnographer" is something of a misnomer. Kipling commonly referred to ethnologists rather than ethnographers, ethnology being the comparative study of cultures and ethnography the study of "the culture of a single tribe or society" (Driver 178–79). In using the term "ethnologist," he reflected current scientific practice, which was predominantly comparative in kind. I have used the anachronism "ethnographer" in reference to Kipling's protagonists for simplicity's sake.
Kipling's ethnographers are not to be confused with modern-day professional ethnographers, whose history begins with Boas and Malinowski (Stocking, "Ethnographer's"). Kipling's students of culture are servants of the Raj who do their ethnography on the side. They belong to the period before Boas and Malinowski when anthropology required the cooperation of two different kinds of practitioners: the amateur who gathered data in the field and the armchair ethnologist, often teaching in a university, who arranged the data in meaningful patterns. Kipling's ethnographers more closely resemble the former than the latter figure. Boas's and Malinowski's ground-breaking contribution to anthropology was to combine the two figures in the work of a single participant-observer.
13. Kipling seems to have been intimately knowledgeable about mid- to late-nineteenth century Anglo-Indian ethnography. He certainly read Anglo-Indian histories that drew upon ethnology. In an 11 March 1896 letter to an unidentified recipient, he recommended Sir William Wilson Hunter's *Annals of Rural Bengal* (1868–72) as an introduction to the state of the British empire in India (Pinney 2: 235). He also seems to have known several Anglo-Indian ethnologists personally, as his 5 September 1889 letter to Edmonia Hill indicates. There, he describes a meeting with Captain John Gregory Bourke, an American soldier and ethnologist of southwestern Native American tribes: "I unloaded little scraps of Indian folk lore; found he had been corresponding with some men in India that I knew (so small is this big world of ours), put him on the track of other men who would ethnologically be of use to him and altogether had a very delightful time . . ." (Pinney 1: 337). (I have been unable to identify who these other, ethnologically useful men were.) *Kim* represents the most full and direct fictional embodiment of his familiarity with Anglo-Indian anthropology. Historians have linked the spy-cum-ethnographer network of the novel with the secret school for explorers at Dehra Dun founded in 1862 by Captain Thomas

Montgomerie to train native agents ("the Pundits," as they were called) in the gathering of political and military information in Central Asia. Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, Kim's Bengali associate, appears to have been modeled after the agent Sarat Chandra Das (Edwardes 127; Hopkirk, *Trespassers* 27; Mason 91), while Colonel Creighton, the head of the novel's spy ring, resembles Montgomerie himself (Hopkirk, *Trespassers* 27).

14. Strickland appears in "Miss Youghal's Sais," "The Bronckhorst Divorce Case," "To Be Filed for Reference," "The Mark of the Beast," "The Return of Imray," "The Son of His Father," and *Kim*.
15. Strickland illustrates the powerful connection between detection and ethnography. The detective thrives in solving the "mysteries" of foreign cultures. Conversely, as the French anthropologist Marcel Griaule has pointed out, the ethnographer must also be involved in detection: "The role of the person sniffing out social facts is often comparable to that of a detective or examining magistrate. The fact is the crime, the interlocutor the guilty party; all the society's members are accomplices" (qtd. in Clifford 73).
16. After World War I, the color-bar in Anglo-Indian clubs began to fall (Allen 103). George Orwell's *Burmese Days* concerns such a change. Flory's suicide is prompted by his failure to help his friend Dr. Veraswami enlist as a rightful member of the Kyauktada Club.
17. Kipling calls attention repeatedly to Kim's dramatic talents. He is seen as the consummate magpie, capable of mimicking the tones and gestures of a wide range of social types. At Lurgan Sahib's school for spies, he delights in the games of "dressing-up" in costume so crucial to intelligence work: "a demon in Kim woke up and sang with joy as he put on the changing dresses, and changed speech and gesture therewith" (260). Kipling's depiction of Kim at these moments falls in with the nineteenth-century stereotype of the Irish as a people of dramatic gifts. In *The History of England*, Macaulay observed: "The Irish . . . were distinguished by qualities which tend to make men interesting rather than prosperous. . . . Alone among the nations of Northern Europe they had the susceptibility, the vivacity, the natural turn for acting and rhetoric which are indigenous on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea" (qtd. in Curtis 77). Here as elsewhere, Kipling's handling of the Irish aspect of Kim's selfhood cobbles together concession to received racial views and experimentation with new, unorthodox ways of conceiving ethnicity. It is because Kipling sees Kim in essence as Irish that he can endow him with an actor's capacity to play with essentialist definitions of race. No wonder, as I will show, it is so hard to place Kipling in the history of shifting attitudes toward race.
18. Bongie has written that Kim represents "Kipling's awareness of the impossibility of that 'authentic experience' that he nonetheless continued to desire" (22). I would agree.
19. Robert Knox wrote, "I saw two . . . young persons — Brahmins I think they were, or of that race, who were educated lately in London by the India Company at a heavy expense, merely by way of experiment. The result will, simply, I think, amount to nothing. . . . They wore, if I recollect right, their native dress, showing that on their return to India they would once more sink into the vast gulf of non-progression" (247-48). Both Knox and Kipling repeat a commonplace of nineteenth-century racism: that any attempt by a "lower" race to rise results finally in its falling back to its original place in the racial hierarchy.
20. Hurree Chunder Mookerjee is an exception, but his case is too complex to study fully here. Briefly, he is self-conscious about playing the *baboo* in ways that no

other Bengali is in Kipling. By manipulating the cliché of the *baboo*, that is, by assuming and departing from the stereotype at will, he is able to achieve a freedom from prejudice and a scope of being unprecedented in turn-of-the-century depictions of Bengalis.

21. In this, they resemble the would-be "passers" in African-American fiction. Although light-skinned blacks, like Rena in Chesnutt's *The House behind the Cedars* and Clare in Larsen's *Passing*, are viewed much more sensitively and sympathetically than their counterparts in Kipling, they share the fate of the Bengali and the Eurasian: the destruction of their hopes of rising socially. The mixed-race narrator in Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* represents an interesting exception in the African-American tradition, perhaps because he is a man. However, although he passes successfully, his good fortune — in the form of a white wife, family, and wealth — brings him little real happiness. Having chosen a white identity, he is debarred from participating in the black struggle for freedom. In this, he concludes, "I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage" (511).

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