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The Residue of Modernity: Technology, Anachronism, and Bric-à-Brac in India

The eighty-day sprint around the globe imagined by Jules Verne in 1873 was enabled by a cluster of transportation breakthroughs. In May 1869, Leland Stanford drove a golden railway spike at Promontory, Utah to herald the opening of direct traffic across the North American continent. Six months later the Empress Eugénie became the first passenger to transit the Suez Canal. The final threshold was attained in March 1870 when, as the *Morning Chronicle* informs Phileas Fogg at the Reform Club, the main trunk line was completed between Bombay and Calcutta.¹ Hastened partly by the demand at Manchester for Indian cotton, this event represented the first large-scale penetration of Asian markets by European-owned railway companies. As he approaches Allahabad three weeks later, however, Fogg discovers that his implicit trust in the London press was misplaced: there is a gap in the line. Separating the two railheads spread fifty miles of jungle, and an interlude in which Fogg enlists the services of an elephant, and his factotum Passepartout rescues a young *sati* from the funeral pyre. Such detours into the picaresque, precipitated by erring machinery, are almost generic to satires of modern travel. Since Verne's protagonist is a fastidiously punctual Englishman, moreover, India is the obvious location in which his elite travellers are to be ejected from the comfort of their Pullman car, and forced to negotiate the old world at its own pace. It is notable that this technical miscarriage, however, not only breaks up a narrative bound by schedule, but triggers a series of anachronistic juxtapositions. Fogg's mount, firstly, provides more than facile local colour. It is a war-elephant, the trained pet of rajas who no longer conduct wars.² Following the disorienting interlude, which thrusts

¹ Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, trans. by William Butcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 19.

² The elephant was, moreover, a common element in the anachronistic heraldry of British India. One was pictured with a locomotive, for example, on the crest of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway. Conflating the two,

the reader into a bygone genre of Indian romance, the fledgling industry and smoking chimneys of Monghyr's foundries are made to appear newly strange. From an Allahabad Jew, Passepartout supplies his *sati* with a second-hand cloak and otter-skin pelisse -- incongruous, lost objects of unexplained provenance. And at Calcutta, charged with trespassing in a temple, he is confronted with his discarded leather boots.³

In this essay, I wish to examine literary passages -- usually carefully-crafted vignettes within larger narratives -- that position European technologies and manufactures within discrepant Indian settings. My argument will take in the large-scale, infrastructural phenomena that have often engaged scholars of empire writing, but will also follow the turn led by David Arnold, in the study of colonial material culture, towards objects of everyday technology. My focus is the anachronism as a device in three Anglo-Indian writers at the turn of the century,⁴ specifically those many appearances of incongruous, often discarded technological paraphernalia that mark the uneven frontier of material progress. Each of these authors was drawn repeatedly to the rough outer edges where western technology is introduced to, and finds a tenuous niche within, narrow localities. Rudyard Kipling's journeys to the edge of the railway and telegraph networks is the focus of the first section, while the second considers Flora Annie Steel's observations of everyday technologies imported into the Indian household. Treated as uncanny or as absurd, it is right to term these encounters anachronistic -- for though they involve *misplaced* items, India is understood as a space in which separate eras jar against one another,

a locomotive fashioned in the shape of an elephant conveys Verne's travelers in his subsequent *The Steam House (La Maison à Vapeur)* -- in which Nana Sahib plots to destroy the G.I.P.R.

³ Ibid., 70, 74, 78.

⁴ By Anglo-Indian, I mean writers drawn from the British community resident in colonial India. Edwin Arnold (b. 1832) and Alfred Lyall (b.1835) were precursors to Steel (b.1847) and Kipling (b. 1865), who casts a long shadow over later authors like Candler (b.1874). Hector Munro ('Saki', b.1870) also had a brief career in South Asia, while Leonard Woolf (b.1880) and George Orwell (b.1903) were outsiders in the British community and grew to loathe its values.

disrupting the order of time.⁵ This is particularly true of Edmund Candler's writings, treated in the third section, which figure modern material culture as jumbled refuse or 'lumber'.

The technologies in question are sometimes integral to plot and action, such as the 'devil-carriage' or tricycle that allows Kipling's all-seeing policeman Yunkum Sahib to stalk his errant native constables with disconcerting quietness in 'At Howli Thana'. More often they are eloquent simply by their presence. Even so, they do not merely populate the material background of the Anglo-Indian sketch, but form points of descriptive focus. As Jeremy Tambling remarks in his essay *On Anachronism*, cultures habitually make use of anachronistic conceits -- neo-Gothic architecture, for example -- either to differentiate theirs from a prior era, or to draw analogies with the past. Of greater significance than the practice itself is whether the discrepancy is occluded and smoothed over, or openly performed. To deploy anachronisms self-consciously, Tambling argues, is the behaviour of a present culture 'confident' in its relationship to the past.⁶ A selective reading of *The Unveiling of Lhasa* (1905) would bear this out, the inventory of stray technologies that Candler accumulates amounting to a deliberate, if grim, tally of material progress. Candler's marked overuse of the word 'anachronism' itself, however, points to a particularly bitter sense of personal alienation, which he understood not in terms of being in the wrong place, but in the wrong time. Viewed in the context of an imperial culture that frequently did draw ingenuous emblematic links with the past (such the medievalist trappings of Lord Lytton's 1877 *Durbar*, itself a colonial outgrowth of neo-Gothic sensibilities), these writers' acknowledged mismatches can be seen to probe sceptically at official myths. Because anachronism can operate both forwards and backwards in time, their tricycles and boots -- modern objects mislaid in the past -- cut against the feudal bric-à-brac unearthed and exported to the present by the 1877 *Durbar*. They disrupt the continuity implied by that glib transition, and put the future in doubt. Lastly,

⁵ Anne McClintock originally described the colony as 'anachronistic space'. 'Imperial progress across the space of empire', she writes, 'is figured as a journey backward in time'. See *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 40. Rather than the fetishizing of the East's antique curiosities, my focus is on objects from "the future" displaced in the colonial context, and the use of such anachronism as a distinct literary device.

⁶ Jeremy Tambling, *On Anachronism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 9.

the anachronisms of the past that do attract Kipling, Steel and Candler are drawn not from indigenous history, but from their own, eighteenth-century Anglo-Indian heritage. As the final section will discuss, a sense of colonial belatedness affects all three writers. Counter-pointed with the prematurely-decaying, junked residue of the latter-day Raj, the awkward ephemera and obsolete infrastructure of the Company period becomes a touchstone for this nostalgia.

The Gap in the Line: Kipling's Frayed Technological Networks

When the Great Indian Peninsula Railway finally met its counterpart the East Indian line at Jabalpur, Lord Mayo put aside his silver-plated hammer and declared his ambition that 'the whole country should be covered with a net-work of lines on a general and uniform system'.⁷ Like David Lloyd George's metaphor for the Indian Civil Service, 'the steel frame', this remark warrants more than a cursory reference to the *stahlhartes Gehäuse* of Max Weber.⁸ The 'iron cage' connotes above all centralized and comprehensive rationalization, and the Viceroy's implication was that the state-guaranteed Indian lines would contrast favourably with those that emerged from the speculative chaos of Britain's 1840s "Railway Mania", or with the variant gauges used by the poorly-coordinated Australian colonies. The grid was still patchy, however, and solid black ink did not guarantee the existence of what engineers, nudged out to Canada and India by the decline in British construction, called with new, purposeful emphasis 'the permanent way'.

Verne's gap in the line was exaggerated, but by no means unprecedented. Engineers were slow to scale the escarpment of the Western Ghats and, until the end of the century, rail journeys would also have been frequently interrupted by river crossings. The narrator of Kipling's 'In Flood Time' (1888) listens to the tale of an elderly ford-keeper while waiting for high waters to subside, and in one article

⁷ *Times of India*, 12 Mar 1870.

⁸ Quoted in Phiroze Vasunia, *The Classics and Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 193; Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Stephen Kalberg (Chicago: Roxbury, 2001), 123, 245.

he described crossing between two railheads via a pontoon-bridge traversed by a rickety tramway. The core trunk routes had taken shape during Kipling's childhood and, in 1870, his family had made use of the new Bombay-Calcutta line to holiday in Nashik.⁹ Following the Russian attempt on Herat in 1885, bridging the Punjab's eponymous five rivers became a defence priority and, as a Lahore journalist, he was sent to report on these iron statements of a government that 'does not approve of interference with its frontier communications'.¹⁰ In March 1887 he saw the aforementioned tramway replaced by a fixed link over the Sutlej at Ferozepur, and two months later attended the opening ceremony of another crossing on the Jhelum. Both were named for the Queen-Empress.

The first and larger structure left the most abiding impressions. 'The Sutlej Bridge' opens by celebrating the vast scale of an unprecedented, alien object which has transformed the landscape for miles around. Excavators have built up two vast embankments at either bridgehead, and created artificial islands to bear the immense brick piers. The revolution is social as well as physical: cosmopolitan villages have sprung up on the mudflat to house the workmen, who 'hang and cluster like bees' on the superstructure. Rope specialists from Gujarat man the winches, while Caribbean creoles supervise the pile-driver.¹¹ Always capitalized, the Bridge becomes an ungodly idol tended by a vortex of worshippers. As the essay proceeds, however, a harsh, inhuman quality begins to emanate from the ironwork and infect its surroundings.

The inclination to smile does not come over the unprofessional mind till it is out of the range of the influences of the Bridge -- out of the bitter chill shade, the keen dry wind that twangs like a strained wire as it hurries over the sand... out of the hearing of the clang of the riveters, the straining and clanking of the cranes, and the grumble of the concrete-blocks shot over the barge sides into the river -- till it is disconnected, in fact, from the terribly eager, restless, driving life that fills the river-bed, and falls back once more on everyday existence.¹²

⁹ Andrew Lycett, *Rudyard Kipling* (London: Phoenix, 2000), 42-3.

¹⁰ Thomas Pinney (ed.), *Kipling's India: Uncollected Sketches, 1884-88* (London: Papermac, 1987), 207.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 214

¹² *Ibid.*, 212.

Such experiences in India do much to explain the faintly sinister quality, mingled with admiration, which persisted in all of the inscrutable murmuring engines that Kipling later pictured -- universally quarrying, irrigating and levelling the earth. It was, likewise, his colonial upbringing that shaped his peculiarly *networked* understanding of modernity. The impress technology makes on everyday life through generic interlocking structures was a process to which he was acutely sensitive. Moreover, just as in our own time unilinear understandings premised on exploitation and hegemonic knowledge have given way to a more nuanced perception of how colonial societies adapted to and repurposed foreign technology, Kipling did not see modernity purely as a penetrative, despoiling influence. Indeed, as Elleke Boehmer has argued in respect to ‘the te-rain’ in *Kim* (1901), his mature fictions persuasively depict the ‘iron cage’ enmeshed with and undergirding Indian social exchange.¹³ In one of his rare press interviews, in October 1891, Kipling told a New Zealand reporter about the need for swifter express trains to satisfy provincial demand. Pilgrimages were now made by rail, he noted, and extra services scheduled for festivals. Furthermore, the industrial division of labour had been ratified into castes by the Indian labour force, ranging from drivers and brass-fitters to embankment coolies. But while this dynamic adaptation represented what he called ‘a marvellous departure from the old traditions and ways’, the apparatus of the railway remained a strange and ‘monolithic’ imposition.¹⁴ Constructed by a militarist state, its fortified stations were marked by banal precision, Kipling’s imagery recalling the surreal, pinched perspective of a de Chirico painting. His remarks in 1891 closely echoed a scene in his new novel, *The Naulahka*, in which the enterprising American Tarvin arrives dismayed at a dusty railhead in Rajasthan.

¹³ Elleke Boehmer, ‘Global and Textual Webs in an Age of Transnational Capitalism; Or, What Isn’t New About Empire’, *Postcolonial Studies* 7/1 (2004), 11–26. I have discussed Kim’s rail journey in greater depth in ‘The Provincial Cosmopolitan: Kipling, India and Globalization’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 49/4 (2013), 399 and ‘Beneath the Skin: Kipling and Contemporary British Understanding of the Colonial Relationship’, *British Politics Review*, Norway, 8/4 (Autumn 2013), 16-17.

¹⁴ *Otago Witness*, 22 October 1891, 33.

It was final, intended, absolute. The grim solidity of the cut-stone station-house, the solid masonry of the empty platform, the mathematical exactitude of the station name-board looked for no future. No new railroad could help Rawut Junction. It had no ambition. It belonged to the Government.¹⁵

The journey off the rails and across the desert that awaits Tarvin was modelled after Kipling's own Rajasthani assignment of 1887, in which he abandoned the railway and its 'globetrotters' in favour of the overland mail. It was commonplace, in late nineteenth-century India, to equate a visit to the princely states -- realms of anachronism embedded in a modern polity -- with time-travel. To meet an elephant of the royal 'fighting stud' plying the streets here, wrote Candler, is 'an anachronism which no custom can stale', while Kipling described the kingdoms in one story as delicately poised between non-contiguous centuries, 'touching the Railway and the Telegraph on one side, and, on the other, the days of Harun-al-Raschid'.¹⁶ But although Lord Lytton's Durbar was largely the design of his own father Lockwood, the princedoms' superannuated trappings typically operated less strongly upon Kipling's imagination than anachronisms projected in the opposite direction: that is, modern technology displaced, or dumped, into the past. On reaching his destination, Tarvin sets about dispatching a telegram home to Colorado and is directed towards a 'desecrated mosque'. Looking about dispiritedly for the blue and white sign of the Western Union, he tries an unmarked door, 'disclosing a flight of steps eighteen inches wide.'

Up these he travelled with difficulty, hoping to catch the sound of the ticker. But the building was as silent as the tomb it had once been. He opened another door, and stumbled into a room, the domed ceiling of which was inlaid with fretted tracery in barbaric colours, picked out with myriads of tiny fragments of mirrors. The flood of colour and the glare of the snow-white floor made him blink after the pitchy darkness of the staircase. Still, the place was undoubtedly a telegraph-office, for an antiquated

¹⁵ Rudyard Kipling and Wolcott Balestier, *The Naulahka: a Story of East and West* (London: Macmillan, 1915), 57.

¹⁶ Edmund Candler, *The Mantle of the East* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1910), 38; Rudyard Kipling, *Wee Willie Winkie and other stories* (London: Macmillan, 1895), 198.

instrument was clamped upon a cheap dressing-table. The sunlight streamed through the gash in the dome which had been made to admit the telegraph wires, and which had not been repaired.¹⁷

Rather than pursuing romantic, antique purity, Kipling is attracted by places to which modern technology has just partially penetrated -- not as fully as Jaipur's street-lighting and hydraulic cotton-press, which he termed 'raw' and 'aggressive', but in an attenuated form that has been untidily subverted to local conditions.¹⁸ The frayed edge of a finespun, tenous network seems to particularly engage him, and to epitomize his ever-ambiguous attitude toward imperial modernity. Enabling rapid global communication, the telegraph testifies to the modern project of bringing India up-to-date, uniting the regions of the world in homogeneous time. As a token of what Trotsky termed uneven development, however, the episode undermines this project, implying that Rajasthan will remain at a chronological remove which technology will serve only to emphasise. The province's continued isolation today from India's centres of commerce notwithstanding, Rhatore's 'antiquated instrument' is a specimen of a technology that was still expanding in South Asia, but which in the West was undergoing the accelerated obsolescence characteristic of mass-production. *The Naulahka* was published in the same year that Alexander Graham Bell made the first New York to Chicago telephone call, while telegram services were finally suspended in India only in 2013.¹⁹ Anticipating the industrial nostalgists who hunt out rusty tramcars and Clyde-built steamboats in today's South Asia, therefore, in 1891 Kipling began to perceive deposits of residual modernity. Already tarnished, the Rhatore telegraph has commenced its own long, colonial obsolescence. It is undergoing the same dusty, premature decay that afflicts the English salesmen who await Tarvin at the *daak* bungalow, or

¹⁷ Kipling and Balestier, *The Naulahka*, 77-8.

¹⁸ Rudyard Kipling, *From Sea to Sea and other sketches: letters of travel*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1900), I, 23.

¹⁹ *Times of India*, 14 July 2013.

the sleepy clerk whom he takes initially for a corpse. A visitor from the future in 1890s Rajasthan, the ‘ticker’ will survive to be an anachronistic relic of the past.²⁰

Flora Annie Steel and the Anachronistic Object in Indian Material Culture

‘Clamped upon a cheap dressing-table’, the nondescript instrument also recalls another mechanical import which, if not yet ubiquitous, had attained its distinct niche within the cottage industry of urban India. The first Singer sewing-machines were imported in 1875, although as David Arnold points out its impact was felt in the domestic sphere often as absence rather than foreign presence, as the stitching once carried out by the household *darzi* was increasingly executed in local workshops.²¹ Hence it is to the familiar whirr and odour of ‘the sewing-machines of the bazar’ that Kim compares the unfamiliar gadget -- a phonograph -- with which Lurgan Sahib attempts to frighten him during his first night at Simla.²² The shift in recent scholarship towards the ‘everyday technology’ manifested in such objects has been, in part, a turn away from a prior fixation on railways, industry and other ‘big technology’. A more malleable understanding of colonialism, furthermore, less constrained by Marxist economics and by the hegemonic paradigm established by Said, has fastened on European mechanical commodities as sites for the negotiation and domestication -- or, as Frank Dikötter terms it in his study of modern China, the ‘appropriation’ -- of European products by their colonial customers.²³ In their introduction to a 2012 special issue of *Modern Asian Studies* devoted to the topic, David Arnold and Erich DeWald propose that ‘technological modernity might be -- and often

²⁰ The moment at which American time and Indian time are made, comically, to jar is the delivery of Tarvin’s stray telegram (its addressee -- whose purpose in Rhatore to loot a necklace -- has been mistranscribed as ‘Turpin’). Resembling recent films in which a time-travelling hero pre-empts disaster by depositing a warning message for himself further back in history, the clerk ‘dive[s]’ into his drawer and excavates from it an envelope ‘covered with dust’.

²¹ David Arnold, ‘Global Goods and Local Usages: the Small World of the Indian Sewing-Machine, 1875-1952’, *Journal of Global History* 6/3 (2011), 412-14.

²² Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 151.

²³ Frank Dikötter, *Things Modern: Material Culture and Everyday Life in China* (London: Hurst, 2007), 9.

was -- something far more pragmatic, mundane, and experiential than many current and rather grandiose interpretations of modernity would seem to suggest.²⁴

Like Kipling, the author and educationist Flora Annie Steel was attentive to the eloquence of objects. The masterful opening scene of *On the Face of the Waters* (1896), her novel of the 1857 Rebellion, imagines the British annexation of Awadh as the public dismemberment of one material culture by another, as the Nawab's chattels are auctioned for a pittance on the riverbank at Lucknow.

“Going! Going! Gone!” What was going? Everything, if tales were true; and there were so many tales nowadays. Of news flashed faster by wires than any, even the gods themselves, could flash it; of carriages, fire-fed, bringing God knows what grain from God knows where! Could a body eat of it and not be polluted? Could the children read the school books and not be apostate?²⁵

This broad sweep of transformation and derangement, news-wire and fire-carriage, is of a piece with the authoritative vista of the grand historical novel, with its 1850s setting and its dramatic antithesis of clashing civilizations. Steel's own Indian career, however, spanned the years 1867 to 1889, during her husband's tenure in the Indian Civil Service. This was a period in which, following the opening of the Suez Canal, the Anglo-Indian family unit girded itself with modern conveniences, medicines and wistful décor (Steel was perhaps best-known in her lifetime as author of *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*). More pertinently, through her teaching, folklore-collecting and interviews with Punjabi women Steel became a close observer of the integration, and even repurposing, of European manufactures within Indian domestic economy and social practice.

Arnold and DeWald suggest that the hitherto prevailing focus by historians on ‘big technology’ was prompted in part by passages like that above, or more particularly by Kipling's use of infrastructure to aggrandize or justify paternalist, utilitarian rule.²⁶ Scholars, they note, have not been ‘altogether immune’ from a tendency to follow the authors of empire and ‘identify technology in its grander

²⁴ David Arnold and Erich DeWald, ‘Everyday Technology in South and Southeast Asia: An Introduction’, *Modern Asian Studies* 46/1 (January 2012), 9.

²⁵ Flora Annie Steel, *On the Face of the Waters: a Tale of the Mutiny* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), 11.

²⁶ Arnold and DeWald, ‘Everyday Technology’, 3-5.

forms with the ideological aspirations, the political priorities, and economic exigencies of the colonial state'. If so, this susceptibility has been insensitive to Kipling's ambivalence, as well as to Steel and Candler's pronounced interest in the everyday technological object. By following the same lead, however, we can also perceive why commodified technologies -- sewing-machines, bicycles and phonographs -- have also been viewed chiefly in unilinear terms that describe the capture of colonial markets as outlets for European products. Steel shared with Kipling a concern for artisanal traditions and their erosion by cheap imports, a process on which her much more prolonged residency in India gave her a fuller perspective.²⁷ Her contribution, in 1905, to a series on foreign countries and industry published by Adam & Charles Black laid particular emphasis on crafts. If the domination of the cloth market by Manchester imports was a matter of common knowledge, Steel identified mass-produced aniline dyes as more effectively fatal to inherited finesse in Indian fabric-making, while the Nasmyth steam-hammer put its uniform stamp on cheap jewellery.

In the old days, from one end of the village street to the other, in house and workshop, nothing was to be found save village manufactures. Now it is otherwise, and, even in the most remote, Birmingham and Berlin is writ clear on many things exposed for sale, paraffin is burnt everywhere, and the peasant going to his fields lights his *hukka* with matches.²⁸

'Writ clear', the Berlin trademark typifies Edwardian anxieties: to use once again the example of the sewing-machine, the German firm Pfaff more than quintupled its Indian market share between 1900 and the First World War. 'Our rivals in commerce' are likewise stealing a march in cottons, Steel noted, explaining the Indian customer's preference with the tellingly emphatic phrase 'because the *measure is always right*'.²⁹ The use however, or re-use, of European containers for Indian consumables was already a well-established trope in her fiction. In the 1893 story 'Gunesh Chund', a village headman celebrates the birth of his child by distributing 'a few flat baskets of sweets, covered with penny-halfpenny Manchester pocket-handkerchiefs printed in the semblance of a pack of cards'.

²⁷ Thomas Pinney (ed.), *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, 6 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1990-2004), II, 56.

²⁸ Mortimer Menpes and Flora Annie Steel, *India* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1905), 106, 117, 15.

²⁹ Arnold, 'Global Goods and Local Usages', 412; Menpes and Steel, *India*, 94-5.

When an unwanted girl is delivered, the handkerchiefs are presumably among the betrothal gifts which the doomed Gunesh packs for his second wife, committing them ‘to the broad white road that carried Western civilization, in the shape of a post-bag’. In Steel’s domestic fictions, incongruous details like these are carefully staged and embroidered with minute ironies. The playing card motif counterpoints Gunesh Chund’s marital tragedy with the trivial complacency of English households and, and as an omen of the fatal dynastic game subsequently played by his scheming mother, associates the cheap English product with bad faith and false fronts. The echo of prevailing trade patterns (Indian staples exported in foreign vessels) is stronger in ‘At a Girls’ School’ (1893), in which the sisters Fâtma and Hoshiaribi drink tea from ceramic basins emblazoned ‘with an English flag, and “Union is Strength” upon them in gay colours’. Once again, the product’s charmless ornament glibly predicts the discord and separation that is to follow, although the ‘sickly sweet, cinnamon-flavoured’ tea the sisters pour into their cups, accompanied by a vernacular proverb, highlights Indian adaptation of Europe’s imports and sublime indifference to the cruder messages encoded within them.³⁰

‘In a Citron Garden’ (1893) also describes orient liquor decanted into base vessels, by an aged parfumeur who harvests shaddock blossom under the eyes of a young girl.

The first time she saw the yellow mash which was left after the sweetness had trickled into the odd assortment of little bottles the old distiller brought with him, she had cried bitterly. But a whole bottle of orange-flower water as her very own had been consoling, and the fact that the label proclaimed her treasure to be “*Genuine, Old, Unsweetened Gin*” did not disturb her ignorance.

Steel’s interest in incongruous branding is particularly clear in this story and, by the age of sixteen, the girl has collected a row of bottles ‘labeled “*Encore,*” “*Dry Monopole,*” “*Heidsiecker,*” and “*Chloric Ether Bitters*”’.³¹ Rendered meaningless in their new surroundings, the garish labels are subject to a gross bathos: perfume sharpens and refines desire (pleasure and its deferral is the chief theme of the story), but the bottles formerly contained no such aphrodisiac for the benumbed Western

³⁰ Flora Annie Steel, *From the Five Rivers* (London: Heinemann, 1893), 12, 40, 162.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 186.

sensibility. For the reclusive inhabitant of the citron garden, fated to a lifetime of widowhood, they are also receptacles for unfulfilled desire. The reposing of cloistered, often female longings in a foreign, half-understood object of dubious provenance is a theme that recurs in 'Music Hath Charms' (1897). Steel's most eloquent study of modern technology describes a crowded family mansion, where the widow Râdha gazes on her dead husband's photograph, hanging between two German prints of the Madonna and Salome (substitutes for the infant Krishna and demon-slaying Durga). The story hinges around a second-hand church harmonium -- an anachronism of the future when housed beneath the parlour's smoke-blackened beams, but a wheezing relic in the eyes of the London-returned barrister. The latter eventually breaks the instrument while attempting to play *God Save the Queen*, thus forever depriving the family's blind music-master of 'a noise which somehow or other seemed to set you free, and yet kept you longing for something more.'³² The scenario is highly reminiscent of Tagore's novel *Ghare Baire (The Home and the World)*, in which so much hangs on the imported furniture which cumpers an ancestral Bengali home -- not least the shrill gramophone by which the Bara Rani, a widow who sublimates her frustrated motherhood into worship of the infant Krishna, dwells on the lewd ballads of the Calcutta stage. In both works, the domestic modernity and Victorian companionate marriage promised by these acquisitions -- values imaged in the products' Indian advertisements -- remain unconsummated or, like the economic modernity heralded by Kipling's telegraph, are betrayed into insubstantiality.³³

Edmund Candler and Imperial Detritus

³² Flora Annie Steel, *In the Permanent Way* (London: Macmillan, 1897), 392-93, 289-90.

³³ Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World* (London: Macmillan, 1919), 298; for advertisements picturing the gramophone within the Indian bourgeois household, see Gerry Farrell, 'The Early Days of the Gramophone Industry in India: Historical, Social and Musical Perspectives', *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 2 (1993), 46.

In keeping with Tambling's proviso, it is not the mute testimony of European objects in the texture of Steel's fiction, but their deliberate staging -- sometimes merely as ironic incongruity, but often within the conventions of anachronism -- which is significant. This trope becomes especially pronounced in the work of Edmund Candler, the schoolmaster and journalist best known today for his novel *Siri Ram – Revolutionist* (1914). As one of the last authors of note to spend their writing life in colonial India, Candler knew himself inescapably overshadowed by Kipling, and hampered in his social reconnaissance by the nationalist animosity of which his predecessor had suffered only a foretaste. Candler's years in India (1895-1921) coincided with the large-scale import of everyday mechanical commodities -- the bicycle from the 1890s onward, the gramophone after 1902. Moreover, their enumeration -- often, indeed, listing -- in his stories bears out Arnold and DeWald's remark that such technologies should be understood as arriving and functioning in 'clusters'.³⁴ In respect to British residents, the Anglo-Indian domesticity that Steel had observed was, with the lapse of another twenty years, ripe for anachronistic satire. In 'The Testimony of Bhagwan Singh' (1911), for example, the engineer Carpendale brings his bride home to an appropriated Mughal tomb. He has defaced the building with wooden partitions and a veranda roofed with galvanized iron, and fitted the interior with bells, electric light, and 'an ice and a soda-water machine'.³⁵ Candler often substitutes for the unseen British their lumpen material culture, using this device to imply a creeping decadence and widening insulation of the sahibs from the people whom they administer. In one sketch he contrasts the 'intricately involved' alleyways of Benares's old city with the gridwork streets of its cantonment, where 'detached from one another by walled compounds, live that other half of the Aryan stock whose practical evolution is symbolised by the club, the Spectator, the bicycle, the galvanised iron bath, and the Bible.'³⁶

³⁴ David Arnold & Erich DeWald, 'Cycles of Empowerment? The Bicycle and Everyday Technology in Colonial India and Vietnam', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53/4 (October 2011), 974; Farrell, 'Early Days of the Gramophone', 34; Arnold and DeWald, 'Everyday Technology', 15.

³⁵ Edmund Candler, *The General Plan* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1911), 191.

³⁶ Edmund Candler, *The Mantle of the East* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1910), 6.

Candler takes a largely one-sided view of what Arnold and DeWald term the ‘mobility’ of the sewing-machine or bicycle which, ‘weaving its way between the native town, the cantonment, and the civil lines’, tends to elide rather than reify racial difference.³⁷ The aspirational meanings it may have held for its Indian users do not interest him. But its undetected, insinuating movement through the subcontinent is a mystery on which he dwells repeatedly -- made more mysterious by fact that the bicycle which he meets in *The Unveiling of Lhasa*, gone to ground on the city’s outskirts, is without wheels. Candler spent 1904 in Tibet as the *Daily Mail* correspondent attached to the Younghusband Expedition, and his account abounds with incongruous manufactures which, by crossing the Himalayan threshold, have also travelled in time. Like the bicycle which rusts nearby, ‘a sausage-machine made in Birmingham’ appears to have found its way to Lhasa of its own accord. Such anomalous scraps have filtered into Tibet haphazardly, squeezed through its closed borders as if by the sheer pressure of modernity in British Bengal. Younghusband’s oversized column also leaves in its wake a trail of miscellaneous refuse. In the Chumbi Valley local women scavenge their camp site for tin cans and old newspapers, giggling over the fashion plates in Oscar Wilde’s magazine *The Lady*.³⁸ Candler’s attitude to all this discarded and reharvested bric-à-brac is one of ambivalent disgust and periodic self-loathing.³⁹ The opening of Tibet to free trade was the expedition’s stated objective and, as a literary carpetbagger bent on ‘romance’, Candler too is guiltily implicated in the country’s despoil and disenchantment. Lashing out in other passages, technological anachronisms become instruments of his own vengeful antipathy to the xenophobic and backward lamas, who (the refusal of dialogue always infuriates Candler) decline to parley with ‘the mission’.⁴⁰

³⁷ Arnold and DeWald, ‘Everyday Technology’, 16.

³⁸ Edmund Candler, *The Unveiling of Lhasa* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1905), 339, 60.

³⁹ For David Trotter’s argument that litter in modern fiction signifies contingency, chance, and regret in human life, see *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 110, 26.

⁴⁰ In his autobiography, for instance, Candler resents the sullen reserve of his politicized Bengali students. See *Youth and the East: an Unconventional Biography* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1924), 224.

In the most carefully-rehearsed of his vignettes, Candler relishes the blasphemous whine of a soldier's gramophone. 'It is destined, I hope, to resound in the palace of Potala, where the Dalai Lama and his suite may wonder what heathen ritual is accompanied by "A jovial monk am I," and "Her golden hair was hanging down her back."' ⁴¹ In the event, upon reaching the holy city he discovers that the Nepalese Ambassador has already presented a so-called 'voice without a soul' to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, who is said to have found it distinctly unappealing. ⁴² Once again, Candler could not even begin to consider the significance sound recording might hold for the Indian drawing-room. Only fifteen months beforehand, Fred Gaisberg had made his first recordings in Calcutta on behalf of 'His Master's Voice' -- a cultural transaction which also began with a grating rendition of 'And her Golden Hair was Hanging Down her Back', but which ended with the voice of the *tawaif* Gauhar Jaan, whose mother had sung for the deposed Nawab of Awadh, being pressed onto shellac at a plant in Hanover. Lurgan Sahib is similarly short-sighted in dismissing Kim's phonograph as a raja's toy, when rather it was into the urban bourgeois home that records transmitted the courtly music of a vanishing era. ⁴³

Nonetheless, it is notable that Kipling, Tagore and Candler were all drawn to the detached babble of the record-player -- for children a repository of spirits, for adults of displaced longings. Candler chose again to deploy the gramophone, in gothic mode, in 'The Testimony of Bhagwan Singh'. Pleased with his other improvements, Carpendale too amuses himself by profaning a hallowed space with English popular songs (the tomb is that of a Mughal poet). Instead, the uncanny machine brings the living into rapport with the dead, ghost summoning ghost.

Then he felt the urge to do something absurd, something which sensible folk would laugh at.... He turned on the gramophone. He put it on a chair by his side so that he might keep it going. But the awe of the moment cowed the thing. Its silly jokes appeared to come from infinitely far off, its humour was a child's profanity. The cracked laughter mocked his precautions, not his fear. The earth-walker appeared in the

⁴¹ Popular numbers from *La Poupée* (1897) and *The Shop Girl* (1894), respectively. For the latter, see Sos Eltis's chapter in this volume.

⁴² Candler, *Unveiling of Lhasa*, 54, 321.

⁴³ Farrell, 'Early Days of the Gramophone', 32-34, 39.

whir between two recitations. It passed solemnly by Carpendale's chair without regarding him. Its passage was a long-drawn wound; it left a great cicatrice. The roof and floor of his faith fell together, Alpha upon Omega.⁴⁴

It is, appropriately, to the railway tracks that the restless shade of Bhagwan Singh leads the white man, indicating the spot where his murdered lover lies buried. The simultaneous cutting and clapping-together of a wound, leaving a scar, is an image which testifies to the disorienting potential of anachronism. The man who thinks himself custodian of the past is instead made its instrument, in an experience which renders not merely his lightbulbs and ice-box papery and superficial, but also the bloodless marriage which they prop. Like the pages from *The Lady* scattered on the Tibetan steppe, records are the facsimile product of a replicatory culture, caught in the imitation of itself and beset with an anxiety of running out of time. Steel's photographs in 'Music Hath Charms' perform the same function, as does indeed the sausage-machine at Lhasa, and when buried in the midden such objects amount to perhaps the most radically cynical thought in Candler's oeuvre: the use of rubbish as a synecdoche for empire.

Conclusion: Eighteenth-Century Relics and Anglo-Indian Belatedness

Candler's volume of travel sketches *The Mantle of the East* (1910) ends, like Fogg and Passepartout's adventure off the rails, in a junk shop. Sheltered by a 'web of suspended telephone wire', he surveys 'shredded horse-hair chairs', once-garish ottomans and a miscellany of untraceable -- possibly colonial -- objects littering a Covent Garden side street. While the discarded 'lumber' of the West is immediately contrasted with the unencumbered lifestyle of the tropics, however, this passage was published only a few years after a more disconcerting encounter with Indian bric-à-brac.⁴⁵ In his autobiography, Candler describes his short-lived appointment as private tutor to a wealthy zamindar's

⁴⁴ Candler, *The General Plan*, 194-95.

⁴⁵ Candler, *The Mantle of the East*, 298.

son, who inhabited a frayed and faded palace stuffed with ‘glazed oleographs’ and ‘cut-glass chandeliers of a distressing brilliancy’, housing in its magenta-cushioned reception room ‘a museum of antiquated clocks’. Most ‘*criard*’ of all, however, was the family coach.

...if it was less like the ark, the reason was that it was *ante-diluvian*. It was embarrassing to drive in it through the streets of Calcutta behind the Kumar’s coachman in his bright orange turban and his parroquet-coloured livery. The anachronism filled the Chowringhee.⁴⁶

‘Anachronism’ is a somewhat over-used word in Candler’s oeuvre, appearing three times in *The Mantle of the East* alone. He uses it nearly always to denote a relic of the past lingering into the modern day, such as the aforementioned war-elephant (which he mentions directly after discussing gnomons, yantras and other venerable technologies with Jaipur’s royal astronomer). He was instead drawn at least as frequently, as we have seen, to modish gadgets abandoned in the past. But to conclude, it is worth enquiring why the antediluvian coach should be a source of personal embarrassment to Candler. Clearly he was reluctant to advertise his employment in an Indian household, lacking even the semi-official position of schoolmaster. Was this anxiety not accentuated, however, by being thus pantomimically cumbered with the trappings of the eighteenth century?

The carriage was presumably of a similar vintage to the high dog-cart driven by Alice Gissing in Steel’s *On the Face of the Waters*. The brewer’s wife climbs into her vehicle attended by an ostentatious crowd of grooms, ‘old-fashioned’ even in 1850s Lucknow, ‘with silver crests in their pith turbans and huge monograms on their breastplates’. Steel devotes careful description to the up-to-date Anglo-Indian home of the time, with its prim nostalgia and painstakingly-cultivated English annuals. But the boxwallah Gissings are, like Candler, of nebulous standing, and in their home ‘there was no cult of England. Everything was frankly, staunchly of the nabob and pagoda-tree style; for the Gissings preferred India, where they were received into society, to England, where they would have been out of it.’ The heavy furniture favoured by bellicose and gluttonous East India Company

⁴⁶ Candler, *Youth and the East*, 229.

merchants, it is made clear, owes nothing to Eastern design. Nonetheless, newcomers to the household find them un-English. In an odd phrase, Mainwaring is struck by ‘a strange unkenness about their would-be familiarity’.⁴⁷ His surprise is prompted firstly by anachronism, but secondly by the success with which the deployers of that anachronism have drawn an analogy with the past. In contrast to the wilting pansies and other fetishes of English authenticity, nabobish taste bespeaks a more adaptive, Indianized sensibility. The vignette anticipates the distinction the novel goes on to draw repeatedly between those characters, like Alice Gissing, who are able to face the Mutiny with a command of “vernacular” languages, and those who are not.

Nostalgia for the technologies, infrastructure and household lumber of the Company period runs through late Victorian Anglo-Indian writing. In Kipling’s networked imagination, this meant the Grand Trunk Road he evoked in a much-quoted passage from *Kim*, and the overland mail -- slenderest and yet most dependable bar of the colonial iron cage -- that traverses it. A grimy authenticity even clung to the fetid daak bungalow -- like that haunted, in ‘My Own True Ghost Story’ (1888), not by long-dead billiard players but by the writer’s own phantom nostalgias. In Steel’s closely-textured domestic scenarios, such objects exist in a state of prolonged concurrence. They are touchstones harking back to an era of coeval time, when Indian and European encountered one another as contemporaries. For Candler, however, the sense of discrepancy was too pronounced to permit of such affect. In place of the incipient techno-nostalgia that enfolds Kipling’s telegraph, ranged eighteenth-century clocks only intensify his sense of alienation. Reduced to rubbish, eloquent objects are not allowed to speak. Understanding his geographical and social displacement always in terms of temporal miscarriage, he is the most solipsistically acute witness to Anglo-Indian belatedness, and hence the most sceptical augur for the future of British India. When he chose to apply the word so often at the tip of his pen to a latter-day item dropped into a bubble of past time, it was at a place -- Angkor Wat -- which testified to the fatuity of all imperial projects, and it was to himself.

⁴⁷ Steel, *On the Face of the Waters*, 57, 52, 55.

For this place, so peaceful and remote, is haunted more than any other place on earth with the sense of dead strife, titanic labourings to no lasting purpose, it seems, save a casual holocaust of human lives... With these epic fragments in my head and confused moralisings I fell asleep, a huddled anachronism, on the *zayat* floor.⁴⁸

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