Rudyard Kipling's eponymous character, Kim, is often taken as a classic example of what Homi Bhabha calls colonial 'hybricity,' or a modified version of the 'not quite/not white' paradigm.¹ Such readings do not always interrogate the assumptions of purity that underlie Kim's supposed hybricity; however, as Gayatri Spivak notes, 'too uncritical a celebration of the 'hybrid' . . . inadvertently legitimates the 'pure' by reversal.'² While Kipling's narrator insistently invokes Kim's whiteness and his 'Englishness' to counterbalance the character's threatening hybricity, that invocation is predicated on the erasure of a third ethnicity – Kim's Irish identity, a self neither 'English' nor, in contemporary usage, precisely 'white.' The elision of the problematic and disruptive presence of Kim's Irishness permits a false perception of purity, both racial and cultural, even in the face of hybricity. That impurity, in turn, is betrayed by what Derrida might call 'linguistic impurities' in the text.³ While Kim's Irishness thus may reflect the fractured identity oft attributed to Kipling, its inclusion simultaneously highlights Kipling's concomitant struggle to counterbalance an imaginary Oriental(ist) identity with a uniform Western one. Kim's Irishness suggests Ireland's awkward place in the coloniser's imaginary, as a Western, white colony problematising racial schemas of difference. I will suggest that, like the Orientalist biases and assumptions that shape Kipling's characterizations, Kipling's introduction of Irish identity into the text betrays the uncertainty of a unitary British identity.⁴

While critics customarily note the threatening quality of Kim's hybricity, they often conclude that it symbolises and even reifies British imperial power/

¹ For his well-known and oft-cited discussion of hybricity, see H. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (New York, 1994), esp. pp. 1–5, 33–6. While Kim is 'white' and therefore does not qualify as a 'mimic man' per Bhabha's discussion of 'black semblance', the threatening aspects of Kim's racial border-crossings are well-documented and speak to the same issues of colonial ambivalence (see Bhabha pp. 85–92). I will suggest, however, that this category of 'white' is far less monolithic than critical apprehension often suggests. ² G.C. Spivak, A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present (Cambridge, 1999), p. 65. ³ J. Derrida, Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin, trans. by P. Mensah (Stanford, CA, 1998). ⁴ A. Nandy argues that Rudyard Kipling 'could not be both Western and Indian' and so was obliged 'to redefine . . . the Indian as the antonym of the Western man . . .' See Nandy, The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism (Delhi, 1983), pp. 76, 79.
knowledge structures. Kim’s ‘hybrid’ nature, as an ‘English’ child raised in and even by a monolithically Orientalised yet paradoxically heterogeneous India, is seen as symptomatic of the English need and ability to ‘know’ India in some fundamental respect in order to govern well. The suggestion that it is possible to know India, as well as the idea that India can be simultaneously foreign and entirely knowable at once, evokes Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism and highlights Kim’s hybridity as both an ideal and a tool of colonial domination. Since his hybrid (i.e. English and Indian) background uniquely qualifies him for participation in the ‘Great Game’ of British imperialism, Kim is thus often considered to represent an idealised embodiment of British colonial rule.

This is not to suggest that critics fail to recognise the complexity of Kim’s positiveness. Judith Plotz notes that, while ‘[i]n some ways he [Kim] is deeply Indian . . . of course, he is not Indian . . .’ While the narrator is at pains to establish Kim’s ‘Oriental’ side, noting ‘the Asiatic side of the boy’s character’ and ‘the Oriental in him,’ he also readily and repeatedly claims Kim as English and notes his destiny to ‘command natives.’ Kim’s alleged Englishness is also countermanded by his Irish heritage: Edward Said calls Kim ‘an Irishman in India,’ and Plotz notes that Kim ‘is not exactly English either.’ The narrative does recognise the Irish element of Kim’s character, by problematically attributing his covetousness, craftiness, sense of humour, and short fuse to his Irish heritage, and Kim himself denies any English identity: ‘[W]e walk as though we were mad — or English.’ The resulting difficulty in labeling Kim either Indian or English is thus often read as symptomatic of his hybridity.

In spite of these stipulations, critics often conclude that Kim’s hybridity is ultimately contained and that he is, in the final analysis, English, as the narrator assures us. This acceptance seems to be predicated on a certain slippage in the use of that term. Primarily, ‘English’ and ‘British’ are often used interchangeably in critical readings that identify Kim. As Catherine Hall notes, however, ‘Englishness is an ethnicity, just like any other’, yet the claim that English equals British remains pervasive. To conflate ‘English’ and ‘British’ is to perpetuate the privilege of Englishness over other ethnicities identified as ‘British.’

At the same time, ‘Britishness’ itself ought not to be taken as a monolithic term:

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there is an important need to underscore the multiplicity of Britishness, for while the English proper might perhaps take their identity for granted, those who existed in the margins of this identity could only be integrated into the emerging discourse of conquest and imperial expansion through the invention of a British identity.\textsuperscript{12}

Just as English is one ethnicity under the blanket identity ‘British,’ so one must remember that ‘British’ can connote other identities.

This uncertainty in dealing with the distinction between Englishness and Britishness complicates Kim’s alleged Englishness. While Plotz recognises that Kim is ‘of course not Indian,’ she demurs less securely that he is not ‘exactly’ English either. Given that the narrative indicates, albeit implicitly, that Kim is of entirely Irish descent, her uncertainty seems ill founded. Moreover, later in her reading Kim is unconditionally identified as both ‘truly British’ and as ‘English Kim.’\textsuperscript{13} Plotz’s reading exemplifies the critical uncertainty in dealing with Kim’s Irish heritage, as well as the conflation of English and British that places that Irishness under erasure.

It is clear that Kim’s identity in the text is established less in relation to any particular national identification than by his racial identification as white. ‘The boy’s true nature and identity are secured . . . by the invocation of an essentially racialist notion . . . As the narrator assures his readers on the first page of Kim, Kim is ‘English’ and ‘white.’\textsuperscript{14} The alignment of Kim’s whiteness with an implicit Englishness follows a lengthy pattern of imperial racial thought, and assertions of Kim’s whiteness, not assertions of his Englishness, riddle the text. The narrator suggests that Kim suffers from ‘the white man’s horror of the Serpent’; he flatly asserts that he is ‘white’; and, interestingly, in stating that Kim will be sent to St Xavier’s for schooling and training for imperial service, Father Victor conflates the racial with the cultural: ‘They’ll make a man o’ you, O’Hara, at St Xavier’s – a white man . . .’\textsuperscript{15} It is his whiteness that will ultimately validate and underscore Kim’s imperial authority.

In his study, White, Richard Dyer notes that whiteness has a long history in relation to colonialism, ‘since colonialism is one of the elements that subtends the construction of white identity.’\textsuperscript{16} In order to differentiate between colonisers and the colonised, race became a privileged signifier of difference, in which black and

\textsuperscript{12} S. Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York, 1996), p. 29. Gikandi’s assertion that the ‘Celtic fringe . . . came to have a greater emotional investment in an invented British nationalism’ (29) requires some clarification, in that neither this assertion nor the general taxonomy of ‘Celtic fringe’ seems adequately to capture long-standing resistance to British imperial hegemony, at least for the Irish.

\textsuperscript{13} See Plotz pp. 112; 115; 118.

\textsuperscript{14} D. Randall, in ‘Ethnography and the Hybrid Boy in Rudyard Kipling’s Kim,’ in *Ariel: A Review of International Literature*, no. 27:3 (July 1996), pp. 80–103.

\textsuperscript{15} Kipling, *Kim*, pp. 91, 49, 143, 165.

white were fundamentally and essentially juxtaposed. Satya Mohanty notes that this differentiation — what he calls ‘racialisation’ — exerts considerable political and cultural influence:

The analytical concept of ‘racialisation’ suggests . . . that the color line does not merely divide and separate; it also involves a dynamic process through which social groups can be bound, defined, shaped. This process not only creates stereotypes of the colonized as ‘other’ and inferior; . . . the colonizer too develops a cultural identity that survives well past the formal context of colonial rule.

The question of hybridity in *Kim* is ultimately resolved, then, through the assertion of Kim’s racial identity. While his cultural hybridity evokes challenges to his identity as a Sahib (and therefore as an Englishman and a white man), Kim’s ultimate adoption of the role of a ‘white male colonial ruler’ seems to align him with the English imperial project and to secure his white, English identity.

In spite of this alliance, however, Kim’s ‘nature’ and/or hybridity are far from resolved. The narrative’s insistence on Kim’s whiteness betrays an anxiety over the question of purity, which Kim’s hybridity threatens even as his racial and cultural classifications proffer it. Dyer explains that, while ‘eightheenth- and nineteenth-century philosophers and politicians . . . [had] no compunction about detailing the innate quality of white people,’ such categorization simultaneously ‘creates a category of . . . peoples who may be let in to whiteness under particular historical circumstances.’ When whiteness is aligned specifically with colonial privilege, it must be selectively applied, and its purity becomes relevant in order to maintain illusory distinctions between the colonisers and the colonised. For this reason, ‘[r]acialization involves not just the denigration of “black” . . . but also in crucial ways a less obvious definition of “white” ’. L. Perry Curtis’ ground-breaking book, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, has sufficiently traced how selective the apportioning of Irish whiteness could be.

The monolithic use of whiteness in *Kim* parallels textual efforts to place Kim’s Irishness under erasure. Kipling can thereby posit a homogenous image of

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Britishness based on race, which supercedes national distinctions, and counter Kim’s threatening hybridity. Interestingly, all explicit allusions made to Kim’s Irish heritage are derogatory: his father is a drunkard and opium addict, and the several references to his ‘Irish character’ all adhere to fundamental stereotypes of ‘the’ Irish personality. Rather than recognising and interrogating these stereotypes, many critics even apply the very labels that Kipling exploits. Andre Viola accepts that ‘Kim’s Irish descent . . . may explain his ebullience and versatility,’ and Plotz, after recognising Kim’s Irishness, cites that heritage as an indicator of potential sunburn: ‘[Kim] almost moves in and out of his own skin, sometimes as pale as his Irish genes dictate . . .’ Aside from the obvious fact that such stereotypes are fundamental to the colonial process, as Bhabha has shown, they are common colonial generalisations and their presence undermines the narrative insistence on Kim’s fundamentally pure Englishness.

Kim’s Irishness is also repressed in the minimalist way in which it is presented. The narrator’s initial insistence that Kim is ‘English’ is undermined instantly when we learn his father’s clearly ethnic name and of his membership in an Irish regiment: ‘Kimball O’Hara [was] a young colour-sergeant of the Mavericks, an Irish regiment.’ Perhaps, in keeping with other stereotypes that Kipling employs, O’Hara Sr’s drunkenness was intended for another indication. Either way, the reader is left to infer that Kim’s father was Irish.

Interestingly, the same device that is employed with Kim’s father is used in introducing Fr Victor, whose name, dialect, and religious persuasion all suggest that he is Irish. It is notable that, while he is identified as ‘the Roman Catholic Chaplain of the Irish contingent’ and speaks with a phonetically stereotypical Irish accent – ‘they’ll make a man o’ you’ – he is claimed as English shortly thereafter: ‘The two Englishmen sat overwhelmed.’ While the relationship between the two priests highlights Kipling’s implicit suggestion that neither creed nor nationality are as significant as racial identification, and by association their joint cooperation in British colonialism, I would argue that the author’s refusal to identify Fr Victor as Irish explicitly – and his immediate disavowal of that Irishness in identifying the character as an ‘Englishman’ – reflects the ambivalence and uncertainty of this endeavor.

A similar repression of Kim’s Irishness is emphasised through the remarkable way that Kim’s mother’s heritage is introduced: ‘Kim followed like a shadow. What

he had overheard excited him wildly. [...] The lama was his trove, and he purposed to take possession. Kim’s mother had been Irish too’. While the ‘too’ in this sentence admits to what the narrative only suggests earlier – that his father was in fact Irish – the inclusion of Kim’s mother’s heritage seems sudden and out of place in its introduction into the narrative. With this information, the paragraph ends abruptly and the narrative continues as if uninterrupted: ‘The old man halted by Zam-Zammah and looked round till his eye fell on Kim’. Annie O’Hara’s heritage is thus thrust forward even as it is practically retracted. The unsettling manner in which her heritage is presented, as well as the textual separation of Kim’s parents’ ethnicity, together rupture a clear apprehension of Kim’s heritage and suggest textual resistance to it.

Even when Kim’s heritage is explicitly noted, it is left unhelpfully vague, as when the narrator compliments Kim for a bit of witty repartee: ‘The retort was a swift and brilliant sketch of Kim’s pedigree for three generations’. Given the reader’s poverty of knowledge regarding Kim’s pedigree, the compliment is hardly enlightening, and his Irishness is thus offered and obscured in the same sleight of hand.

Perhaps predictably, a textual interrogation of Kim’s whiteness recurs whenever Kim encounters an Anglicised or English context. The manner in which race and ethnicity complicate and even contradict each other in Kim is then evident. Fr Victor needs to validate Kim’s whiteness by resorting to a memory of Kim’s parents’ whiteness, which only marginally evokes an Irish context: ‘Kimball O’Hara! And his son! But then he’s a native, and I saw Kimball married myself to Annie Shott’. With Fr Victor’s corroboration, Kim seems to both whiten and Anglicise before our eyes: ‘You see, Bennett, he’s not very black’. It is only when Kim admits that his father was ‘Eye-rishti’ – Irish – that Fr Bennett, the Anglican clergyman, admits that Kim is white: ‘It is possible I have done the boy an injustice. He is certainly white...’. Yet that identification is almost immediately put under erasure and transmogrified into Englishness: ‘We cannot allow an English boy – Assuming that he is the son of a Mason, the sooner he goes to the Masonic Orphanage the better’. The English priest cannot finish his assertions on Kim’s Englishness, and is forced instead to resort to Kim’s Masonic heritage as a means of reintegrating Kim into a European community. It is as if Bennett and the narrative would have us forget Kim’s Irishness as soon as we learn of it. While Kim’s Irishness confirms his whiteness and lessens his Otherness by separating him from

26 Ibid., p. 60. 27 Ibid., p. 114. 28 Ibid., pp. 133, 134, 136. 29 The implications of Kimball O’Hara Sr’s association with the Irish Masons could, itself, provide an interesting avenue for consideration but is beyond the scope of this paper. 30 Of course, ‘forgetting’ is fundamental to the illusion of national purity. See p. 11, E. Renan, ‘What is a Nation?’, in H. Bhabha (ed.), Nation and Narration, trans. M. Thom (London: 1990), pp. 8–22.
the ‘natives’, then, his religious and ethnic marginality strain his identification as ‘purely’ English, thereby straining his identification as white.31

In spite of the narrator’s initial insistence that Kim is both ‘English’ and ‘white’, the undermining of one often parallels the other. Notably, when Kim is lonely in the army barracks, a reference to his alienation from ‘white men’ is framed with references to England: ‘Kim of course disbelieved every word the drummer-boy spoke about the Liverpool suburb which was his England . . . [T]his strong loneliness among white men preyed on him’. Similarly, the conflation of Irish and English allows Kim a similar disavowal of whiteness in relation to those who are technically of his own ethnicity. When Kim observes the Irish regiment from a distance, he clearly sees himself as distinct, focusing on their whiteness: ‘“White soldiers!” [. . .]: Let us see.”32 Like the narrator, Kim here fails to distinguish between English and Irish, and race serves as the nodal point of erasure.

One final instance betrays the instability of Kim’s identification as English, and the tenuous erasure of Irishness under a broader, whiter Britishness. When Kim is in the midst of a delicate and deceptive plot, the narrator notes that ‘[t]he humour of the situation tickled the Irish and the Oriental in his soul’.33 This alliance of Irish with the radically Other Oriental undermines the narrative insistence on Irish/English homogeneity and the racial delineation upon which it seeks to rest. Rather than elaborating a greater sense of pure units composing the whole, then, Kim illustrates the instability of such categorizations even independent of hybridity.

I have suggested that Kim’s identification with Englishness is predicated on the textual erasure of his Irish identity and the alignment of whiteness with Englishness. While Irishness is problematically positioned, in a nineteenth-century context, against whiteness, this is clearly an instance in which one ethnicity – here, Irishness – is utilised as a ‘“buffer” between the white and the black or indigenous.34 Kipling’s decision to complicate Kim’s ethnicity by rendering him Irish, only to undermine it repeatedly, suggests the type of fetishisation of the stereotype that Bhabha has elaborated. By proffering an Irish Kim who is readily assimilated under a broader Britishness – itself a conflation with the category of Englishness – Kipling recognises and yet disavows the distinction between English and Irish, based on an imaginary ‘purity’ represented by whiteness. As Bhabha notes, ‘the stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive . . . The myth of historical origination – racial purity, cultural priority – . . . functions to “normalize” the multiple beliefs and split subjects that constitute colonial discourse as a consequence of its process of disavowal.’35 Yet, while this conflation can be seen to reassert Kim’s alleged Britishness and to celebrate a model of contained hybridity, the ambivalence of that representation ought

31 Not surprisingly, ‘white’ of itself carries a specific connotation of purity: ‘white. . . signifies and represents innocence, purity.’ See Sloan cited in Dyer p. 73. 32 Kipling, Kim, pp. 151, 127. 33 Ibid., p. 297. 34 See Dyer p. 19. 35 Bhabha pp. 70, 74. For Bhabha’s elaboration on fetishism and the racial signifier/stereotype, see pp. 75–84.
not to be undervalued. The dubious success of the alignment of Kim’s whiteness with Englishness is evidenced by Kim’s refusal of, alternatingly, white and/or English identity, his cultural unlocatability, and the inconsistency with which Kipling treats Kim’s ethnicity in the narrative, as we have seen. All of these factors serve to challenge the illusion of purity that the text seeks to promote. The tremendous linguistic variation in Kim serves as a final indicator of resistance to any textual suggestion of purity. Randall notes that ‘Kipling’s text, as it develops, registers a multiplicity of competing codes – English, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Pashto – none of which is clearly constituted as definitive and authoritative’. At the same time, there seems to be difficulty in tying down Kim’s mother tongue. This linguistic indeterminability parallels the ethnic and racial indeterminacies that riddle the text. If Kipling seeks to assert Kim’s fundamental Englishness, one would expect Kim to show the protagonist’s linguistic flexibility subsumed under the rubric of beneficial colonial flexibility. And indeed, when endangered, it is through thinking in the English language that Kim is able to find relief: ‘[H]is mind leaped up from a darkness that was swallowing it and took refuge in – the multiplication-table in English!’ Such instances seem to suggest some innate alliance to English as a mother tongue and to reinforce the suggestion that Kim’s other linguistic dalliances are merely practical. In his study, Monolingualism of the Other, however, Derrida notes that such a belief in a natural language is merely an illusion:

For contrary to what one is often most tempted to believe, the master is nothing...Because the master does not possess exclusively, and naturally, what he calls his language, because, whatever he wants or does, he cannot maintain any relations of property or identity that are natural, national, congenital, or ontological, with it,...he can...pretend historically...

Since language is not a ‘given,’ Derrida explains that a colonial culture can and often does ‘pretend’ to some façade of cultural purity for legitimisation: ‘this last will [of language], in its imperative and categorical purity, does not coincide with anything that is given...’ In Kipling’s Kim, the falsity of linguistic purity parallels the illusion of racial purity. Critics have widely noted Kim’s ‘sing-song’ English – what Said calls ‘a superbly funny, but gentle, mockery of the boy’s stilted Anglo-Indian’ – and Plotz notes ‘the “native English” (“oah yess”) of Kim before his St Xavier’s training...’ The plurality of languages works insistently to counter and undermine Kim’s identification as English.

Along with Kim’s lack of proficiency in English, we must consider the narrator’s own hybrid language. Randall has noted that the narrator identifies with Kim in his alienation from the English – ‘[he] speaks of “the English”...as if referring
to an alien group’ — and that alienation is paralleled by the use of linguistic indeterminability, a sense that the narrator, too, is alienated from the language and culture of the English:

The language of *Kim* is necessarily hybrid; yet — this must be stressed — it is *more hybrid than it needs to be.* By mimicking the forms and figures of subcontinental languages, the dialogue recalls that English is very rarely the spoken language of the world of *Kim.*

While Randall reads the narrator’s comments as highlighting his Anglo-Indian sympathies, I think rightly, I would suggest that the linguistic indeterminability also highlights *cultural* dislocation. As an Anglo-Indian himself, Kipling would have been well familiar with the marginal place an Anglo-Indian held in relation to an Englishman. This marginality highlights Derrida’s discussion of individuals who are isolated from their presumed mother tongue: ‘[It is] a language supposed to be maternal, but one whose source, norms, rules, and law were situated elsewhere.’ Like England — ‘the Metropole . . . at once a strong fortress and an entirely other place’ — English is familiar and yet strange, purely the narrator’s and yet never his. Thus, rather than the language of the narrator being ‘more hybrid than it needs to be’, as Randall asserts, I would suggest that the language merely represents the text’s hybridity — not in excess, but in impurity.

If the narrator betrays signs of cultural impurity and hybridity, *Kim* is even more alienated. Although Kim’s hybridity is frequently used in attempts to categorise him, Derrida notes that ‘as soon as one is dealing with questions of culture, language, or writing, the concept of group or class can no longer give rise to a simple topic of exclusion, inclusion, or belonging.’ Kim’s alienation from English, culturally, linguistically, and even racially, can be traced not only to his residence in India as an ‘Indian’ or his membership in a community of Anglo-Indians, but also to the erasure of his Irishness, and to the Irish language itself. The expectation that Kim will resort ultimately to English is itself a displacement that places his ‘own’ mother tongue — Gaelic Irish — under erasure.

Understanding that Kim is radically displaced — as an Anglo-(Irish-) Indian, deepens our understanding of his linguistic, racial, and ethnic indeterminability. His

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41 See Randall, pp. 94; 92–3, my emphasis. 42 I am reminded here of Benedict Anderson’s discussion of the Creole and his perceived inferiority. See pp. 47–65, esp. 58–60, in B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Revised edition (London, 1991). 43 See Derrida pp. 41–2. 44 Derrida p. 52. 45 Of course, the concept of the ‘naturalness’ of any mother tongue is itself a misnomer, as ‘[t]he language called maternal is never purely natural, nor proper, nor inhabitable’ (58). Thus the expectation that Irish would be his ‘natural’ tongue is also false. While I recognise that Irish had been eradicated in many parts of Ireland through English colonialism by the nineteenth century, a Derridean reading suggests that even those who are dislocated from birth from their ‘own’ culture are subject to a ‘negative heritage’ (53).
linguistic fluency and his radical unlocatability highlight his dislocation: 'a new-comer without assignable origin, would make the said language come to him, forcing the language then to speak itself by itself, in another way, in his language.'

There are multiple instances of Kim shifting language positions in order to make himself understood, such as in the scolding of the rude taxi-driver who disrespects his whiteness. Kim literally speaks 'for the other' as there is no place from which to speak for himself.

Kim's insistent and oft-cited questioning — 'Who is Kim?' — also reflects his cultural and linguistic dislocation. Derrida notes that cultural dislocation is married to linguistic disruption:

> For him, there are only target languages [langues d'arrivée], if you will, the remarkable experience being, however, that these languages just cannot manage to reach themselves because they no longer know where they are coming from, what they are speaking from and what the sense of their journey is.

It is just this sense of dislocation, culturally and linguistically, that leads Sara Suleri to call Kim aphasic. The multiplicity and hybridity of his language position leaves no stable, 'pure' ground from which to speak.

The thickness of Kim's Indian accent is a final indicator of his linguistic and cultural impurity. While critics have read Kim's accent as a sign of Anglo-Irish presuming in the text (Randall) or even as a delightful narrative device (Said), it is important to note that accents, too, reflect linguistic impurity. 'The accent indicates a hand-to-hand combat with language in general; it says more than accentuation.' Far from a mere rhetorical device, Kim's accent, like his polylingualism, betrays his radical unlocatability, both culturally and linguistically, and the narrative's inability to contain him under the pure label of 'English.' We are never able to 'hear' either of Kim's parents, but rather only hear the echo of their Irish accents through the identification and reassurances of the implicitly Irish Fr Victor. Similarly, Kim's accent obscures his heritage and displaces his Irishness with an Indianness that can be explained away. His accent thus highlights the obscurity of Kim's Irish identity, even as it betrays the impurity of his Englishness.

The narrative attempt in *Kim* to identify the protagonist as English is ultimately doomed to failure. The effort to erase Kim's Irishness in favour of a whitened and monolithic Britishness is undermined by eruptions of Irishness and its stereotypes in the text, which highlight the constructedness of Britishness in relation to the identities it sought to dominate. That Kipling includes Irishness, only repeatedly

to undermine it, suggests the type of fetishism of the stereotype that Bhabha has elaborated and perhaps highlights the particular difficulty Ireland posed for the nineteenth-century colonial imagination in seeking to classify the colonised Irish as white. The uncomfortable resonances raised by the introduction of Irishness into the text reminds the reader that, just as Kim's 'Oriental side' cannot be dismissed on the basis of race or pleas to some innate purity, so too must the text's ultimate reassertion of Britishness be suspect. Rather than supporting a hierarchised but containable hybridity, Kipling's inclusion of Irishness renders Kim's supposed Britishness all the more illusory and ironically undermines the appeal to racial superiority it is tacitly meant to reinforce. This failure is exasperated by the collapse of linguistic purity in the text: Kim's heteroglossia, his lack of a mother tongue, and his cultural displacement from English and Englishness emphasise the very impurity that the text seeks to repress and countermands the suggestions that Kim will ultimately, always resort to English under duress.

Kipling's appeals to Anglo-Indianness and a British India based on harmonious heterogeneity falter because the premise is unstable: linguistic and ethnic indeterminability collapse the racial distinction he hopes will buffer the Oriental/English divide. Perhaps readings of hybridity in Kim will be more effective when we realise that the combinations which constitute hybridity cannot be hyphenated into categories of purity. When Kim agonisingly asks, 'And what is Kim?', his answer is not a categorisation, but an echo of the uncertainty that haunts Kipling's text and the imperial project he supports. It is that echo which attunes Kim to his entire world, in all its multiplicity and impurity.

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