Plain Tales from the Hills as Emergent Literature

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When Rudyard Kipling made his literary debut in India in the late 1880's, there had been semi-permanent British settlement in India for well over a hundred years. These Anglo-Indians[1] had started to be aware of themselves as a community separate from the British in Britain, but their links with Britain were very strong. Most of them had been born British, and were likely to retire back to Britain when their term of office came to an end. Usually they were also prepared to make considerable sacrifices to send their children to Britain for an education which would prevent them from seeing India as their true home. On the other hand, many Anglo-Indians felt that the politicians and ruling class back in Britain looked down on them as poor cousins, whose views on Imperial politics were not worth having.

In and of itself, this love-hate relationship with Britain was enough to ensure that the Anglo-Indian literary market was a complex one. There was actually a widespread feeling that the Anglo-Indian community had not produced literary talent proportionate to its size. Such dissatisfaction was voiced on several occasions between 1856 and 1861 in the pages of the *Calcutta Review*, where the main problem was diagnosed as writers' reluctance to make use of local conditions and materials. In the words of one commentator, Anglo-Indian literature, "as far as the subjects treated of are concerned, [...] might as well have been written in London by one who had never crossed the Channel".[2] On the other hand, Anglo-Indian writers publishing in Britain had little hope of success if they dealt with daily life in India too exclusively. For readers in Britain, such materials could easily seem difficult and ultimately boring. Nor did it help that in

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[1] I am using the term in its original sense to refer to British people living in India, and not to people of mixed descent. For this British community in India, see Charles Allen (ed.), *Plain Tales from the Raj* ([1975] London, 1976); Elizabeth Buettner *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford, 2004); Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* ([1995] Cambridge, 1997); and Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 39-63.

[2] Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Kipling and 'Orientalism'* (London, 1986), p. 16.

English literature there was already a long tradition of portraying the Anglo-Indians as ruthless opportunists, who came back home only to disrupt the proper workings of society with the huge piles of money they had extorted from the Indian poor.[3]

It is against this background that *Plain Tales from the Hills*, the first collection of stories by Kipling, so often seen as the first, or even the only Anglo-Indian writer of any merit, can fruitfully be discussed as emergent literature.[4] As Roger D. Sell puts it, emergent literature is the literature of a community which is

> emerging from unselfconsciousness into the kind of self-awareness that can attach to a group identity. And always, I would think, emerging from a state of imperceptibility to other groupings, so as to become a grouping whose profile is more widely recognized at large. The emergence of the grouping's literature itself sets a seal on the grouping's very existence and importance.[5]

So emergent literature serves the dual purposes of strengthening the internal cohesion of the community and of differentiating it from all other communities. For the Anglo-Indians, the need was not so much to separate their grouping from the British in other parts of the world, as to be seen and acknowledged as no less respectable than anyone else, and in particular to be recognized as the best authorities in their own field: Imperial politics in India. To spell it out, the self-image to be projected to a British reader was twofold: first, Anglo-Indians were decidedly British, were based in India in order to further British interests, and therefore deserved strong British support; and second, Anglo-Indians knew more than British politicians or any other external experts about India and how to govern it.

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[3] See Renu Juneja, "The Native and the Nabob: Representations of the Indian Experience in Eighteenth-Century English Literature", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 27 (1992) 183-198.

[4] The editions to which I shall be referring are: the first and second editions, published by Thacker, Spink & Co. in Calcutta in 1888 and 1889; the first British edition, published by Macmillan in London in 1890; and the Sussex Edition, published by Macmillan in London in 1937.

[5] Roger D. Sell, "What's Literary Communication and What's a Literary Community?", in Sonia Faessel and Michael Pérez (eds), *Emergent Literatures and Globalization: Theory, Society, Politics* (Paris, 2004), pp. 39-45, esp. 39.

On the other hand, if writers are to be seen as spokespeople for a particular community, they presumably need to have some following within that community itself, since otherwise the community may not endorse their representativeness. If Kipling had seen his role as being solely to enhance the image of Anglo-Indians in Britain, his writings could not only have been as tedious—for any reader at all—as most other propaganda, but could have left Anglo-Indian readers cold. Anglo-Indians could not be expected fully to empathize with readers in Britain even at the best of times, and a text which took the trouble to explain and justify Indian life and conditions for readers unfamiliar with them would have been a real turn-off.

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That Kipling was well aware of the needs of different types of audience is clear from the emendations he made to his stories for different editions.[6] The *Plain Tales* were first published in the Lahore newspaper *Civil and Military Gazette* and then collected as a book published in Calcutta by Thacker, Spink and Co. in 1888. The changes he made between the newspaper versions and this first book edition were mostly stylistic, but he also removed references to issues possibly unfamiliar to an audience not reached by the *Gazette*. For instance, readers of the story "Kidnapped" were no longer expected to know about the bears chained in the courtyard of the Lawrence Hall Gardens, or about "Rukhmabai's case" (a court case involving Hindu marriage laws which was widely discussed in the *Gazette* at the time the story was first published). He also replaced some of the Indian vocabulary with English words. The second Indian edition of 1889 saw some further, though far less numerous revisions, but for the first British edition, published in 1890 by Macmillan, he did still more work on vocabulary, translating Indian words into English or providing some English glosses, and also made a significant deictic shift in the stories' reader- and narrator personae. Phrases such as "out here" were replaced with "in India", implying that the community within which he was writing was no longer quite so

[6] The changes discussed here have been observed by some editors of the *Plain Tales*, most notably Andrew Rutherford for his Oxford World Classics edition ([1987] Oxford, 2001). But Rutherford does not enter into any sustained analysis of their significance.

straightforwardly that of the Anglo-Indians. In this Macmillan edition the *Tales* were presented, not as *by* an Anglo-Indian *about* Anglo-Indians *for* Anglo-Indians, but as very much *about* Anglo-Indians as such people might now deserve the attention of the more influential literary community based in Britain.

The main difference between the Anglo-Indians and the British back home lay in their closeness to the native peoples of India. Theirs was an isolated community in the midst of huge masses of native Indians, which partly explains why they held on to the British side of their identity so compulsively. At the same time, it was of course their direct contact with Indians, and their first-hand understanding of local customs, traditions and mind-sets, which made them, at least in their own view, better placed than an outsider from Westminster to govern the country. But then again, the fact that they *were* there as governors actually somewhat lessened their isolation, in that they did belong to the Empire's world-wide power network.

Kipling explores the close relationship between Anglo-Indians and Indians in several stories, and in the story "Miss Youghal's Sais" he presents a man who might almost be the ideal Anglo-Indian administrator. Strickland is a police officer, whose career development is temporarily halted by his enthusiastic study of native ways of life.

> [Strickland] held the extraordinary theory that a Policeman in India should try to know as much about the natives as the natives themselves. Now, in the whole of Upper India, there is only *one*[7] man who can pass for Hindu or Mahommedan, *chamar* or *faquir,* as he pleases. […] But what good has this done him with the Government? None in the world. He has never got Simla: and his name is almost unknown to Englishmen.
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> Strickland was foolish enough to take that man for his model; and, following out his absurd theory, dabbled in unsavoury places no respectable man would think of exploring—all among the native riff-raff. He educated himself in this peculiar way for seven years and people could not appreciate it. He was perpetually "going Fantee" among natives, which, of course, no man with any sense believes in.
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> (*Plain Tales* 1888, p. 23)

With characteristic irony, Kipling manages to present Strickland as an exemplary figure without making readers instinctively dislike him, as might have been the case had the praise been more straightforward. If

[7] No explanation is given as to who this man might be.

anything, real blame falls on the government establishment, for squeamishness and lack of imagination, and for failing to recognize the administrative value of officers who get genuinely involved in their work. But if so, such blame is not direct and heavy-handed here, and there is still plenty of scope for any kind of reader to side with Strickland.

His superiors' disapproval has not troubled him much so far. But when he falls in love with Miss Youghal, the lady's father, unimpressed by his reputation, will not hear of an alliance. To circumvent the father's opposition, Strickland disguises himself as a native *sais* (a horse-groom) and takes employment in Miss Youghal's service. His disguise is so impenetrable that even the other grooms are taken in by it, and he is not found out until he feelingly reprimands an old general who has been trying to flirt with Miss Youghal. The old general, all astonishment at the extraordinary skill with which he has been impersonating a native, helps the young couple to win Mr Youghal over. The parental blessing is given on the sole condition that the bridegroom shall in future stick to his job as narrowly defined. His more undesirable interests he must leave behind him.

This story would have given Anglo-Indian readers an arresting glimpse of a life they did not know. Although most of them would have been to Simla or other hill stations, what Kipling offered was the Simla dances, rides and flirtations as seen through the eyes of a *sais*, a man whose presence in Simla Anglo-Indians would normally have ignored, as happens even in most of Kipling's own Simla stories. Strickland's experiences as a native horse-groom suggest that being in the service of the Anglo-Indians does nothing to endear that elite, and even less to fuel a servant's self-esteem:

> [H]e had to school himself into keeping quiet when Miss Youghal went out riding with some man who tried to flirt with her, and he was forced to trot behind carrying the blanket and hearing every word! Also, he had to keep his temper when he was 'slanged' in "Benmore" porch by a policeman—especially once when he was abused by a Naik he had himself recruited from Isser Jang village—or, worse still, when a young subaltern called him a pig for not making way quickly enough.
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> (*Plain Tales* 1888, p. 26)

Kipling was offering Anglo-Indians a point of view which made even the familiar seem fresh and thought-provoking, perhaps even in a mildly self-critical sort of way.

In the first British edition of 1890, Kipling adapted this story by altering "the Government" to "the Indian government", *chamar* to "hide-dresser", and *faquir* to "priest". In contexts where their meanings would be hard to guess, he translated a number of other Indian words as well. Nor did he expect readers in Britain to know what the "Benmore" was. Instead, he replaced that name (somewhat inaccurately) by "the theatre"—readers were not to feel that they were hopeless ignoramuses just because they had never heard the names of Simla's places of entertainment. Plenty of other words, though unlikely to be immediately familiar to British readers, were incorporated into the text in such a way that their general sense could be deduced, even if some of their fuller connotations remained vague. Readers were never told exactly what a *sais* is, but by half-way through the story they would certainly have worked out that he is some sort of a groom. Indian names and terms were thick on every page, but readers did not need to know their exact meanings all at once.

Kipling's textualities have been suggestively discussed by Lionel Trilling:

> That gnomic quality of Kipling's, that knowing allusiveness which later came to seem merely vulgar, was, when first experienced, a delightful thing. By understanding Kipling's ellipses and allusions, you partook of what was Kipling's own special delight, the joy of being "in." […] It was very baffling, and certainly as an introduction to literature it went counter to all our present educational theory, according to which a child should not be baffled at all but should read only about what he knows of from experience; but one worked it out by a sort of algebra, one discovered the meaning of the unknowns through the knowns, and just as one got without definition an adequate knowledge of what a *sais* was, of a *dâk*-bungalow, and what the significance of *pukka* was, so one penetrated to what went on between the Gadsbys and to why Mrs Hauksbee was supposed to be charming and Mrs Reiver not. Kipling's superior cryptic tone was in effect an invitation to understand all this – it suggested first that the secret was being kept not only from oneself but from everyone else and then it suggested that the secret was not so much being kept as revealed, if one but guessed hard enough. And this elaborate manner was an invitation to be "in" not only on life but on literature, a Past Master, a snob of the esoteric Mystery of the Word.[8]

[8] Lionel Trilling, "Kipling" [1943], in his *The Liberal Imagination* (New York, 1950), pp. 118-128, esp. 119-120.

To a degree, this effect was probably unintentional. After all, if Kipling had explained every single detail, at least Anglo-Indian readers would have felt they were being treated like imbeciles. And although Trilling seems to think that stories which give readers a chance do some detective work will mostly appeal to adolescents, adults, too, surely relish the experience of being able to decipher something that is not self-evident. Still more to the point, although Trilling himself is an American, and is here writing long after Kipling's reputation was firmly established world-wide, his comments can perhaps suggest something of the process by which the very first non-Anglo-Indian readers became engrossed in Kipling's Anglo-India. Kipling's tales gave the British reader a chance to indulge in what we might call a new type of snobbery, precisely thanks to the initiation it offered into the world of the Anglo-Indians, which in Kipling's hands became a most fascinatingly superior world indeed. Not only did the writing present a stimulating challenge to British grey matter, but a reader who rose to that challenge was, as it were, rewarded by honorary membership of an exclusive club. This was emergent literature with a vengeance, tending to make the Anglo-Indian community not only visible but respected and even envied.

An added lure for the English reader might have been that Kipling was not trying to present this exclusive community as faultless. In "Miss Youghal's Sais" the needless humiliation suffered by native grooms at the hands of their Anglo-Indian masters is firmly etched. Kipling strongly conveys exactly what it feels like to be standing out in the rain or the cold, being chided for getting in the way, and generally being treated like dirt. Granted, some of Strickland's discomfort stems from the fact that he is in love with the young lady he is serving. But being insulted and ordered about by young subalterns would have been hurtful for anyone, not just for an Englishmen disguised as a native. The clearly hinted sense that an Englishman would not normally have taken such treatment lying down only emphasizes that a native servant's lot is not a happy one.

Despite such rather embarrassing revelations, Anglo-Indian readers could certainly feel that the story as a whole was on their side. Strickland's Englishness is emphasized throughout, so making clear that he has not really gone native, and apparently conceding that, if he had, this would certainly have been most regrettable. His only wrong-doing—though the narrator ostensibly agrees that it is of course quite bad

enough—has been to *pretend* to be a native. Anglo-Indian hearts might well soften towards a man whose taste for English tobacco is so strong that he has to send a note to the narrator requesting some decent cigars, and obviously no true *sais* would have blacked the hooves of Miss Youghal's horse "like a London coachman" or, while standing aloof from the dancing in Simla, would have found "his toes tingling for a waltz".[9] Living as a native, though amusing enough at first, is clearly much more trying when it has to be kept up for any length of time. And as to Strickland's excellence as a police officer, the *sine qua non* is clearly his English blood. His intimate knowledge of Indian ways, a somewhat extreme version of the first-hand expertise for which Anglo-Indians valued themselves above British politicians back home, merely makes him a little more excellent still, as long as he is not carried away by it. Even though he does take things too far, he is a hero with whom Anglo-Indians could identify. He is just as soundly British as any reader in Britain, and from an administrative point of view actually better than your regular Brit. Here again, then, the thrust of an emergent Anglo-Indian literature is unmistakable.

As a pioneer within that literature, Kipling on the one hand had to respect Anglo-Indian sensitivities for fear of losing his first readership, but on the other hand could not afford to idealize Anglo-Indians for fear of being uninteresting, and not only to Anglo-Indians themselves but to the other readerships on which he was setting his sights. Roger D. Sell has suggested that, in one way or another, all literary communication has to tread a knife-edge between offensiveness and condescension.[10] But in the case of emergent literature, politeness considerations are clearly especially complicated, which helps to explain the behaviour of Kipling's intradiegetic narrator. Sometimes the narrator plays Mrs Grundy, making sweeping denunciations of Strickland's overindulgence in things native. Sometimes this same narrator is an accomplice to the crime, since he not only fixes the small matter of the cigars but never reports Strickland's irregularities to his superiors. A rather unreliable narrator all in all, then: either he is pandering to some sort or moral police by voicing opinions that he does not really have; or, if his

[9] *Plain Tales* 1888, pp. 26, 27.
[10] Roger D. Sell, *Literature as Communication: The Foundations of Mediating Criticism* (Amsterdam, 2000), pp. 207-230.

condemnation of Strickland is serious, he fails to see how what he tells readers about himself can undermine their confidence in that judgement. As Peter Morey puts it, Kipling's narrative technique is one which, "while obeying the imperatives of power-knowledge, distances the putative narrator from both reader and an author who appears often to be laughing behind his hand."[11] Although, thanks to this technique, the writing never damns the Anglo-Indians outright, it does challenge the complacency of the Raj, and does reveal some chinks in its armour, as when this particular story taunts the Anglo-Indian phobia about officials who immerse themselves in native culture.

In *The Tales* as a whole, that phobia touches on the community's most sensitive nerve. If one countenanced a policeman with Strickland's innerness to things native, one seemed to be saying that for the sake of good administration a certain hybridity might even be in order. But what kind and degree of hybridity? Did one have in mind cultural hybridity only? Or could one even risk a certain amount of miscegenation? At this point some of the stories seem to draw a very sharp line, for this, it would appear, is where a taboo must be upheld. Every drop of Indian blood that intermingles with British blood weakens the British virtues. Conversely, every drop of British blood that intermingles with Indian blood alleviates the Indian failings.

This is most clearly seen in the story "His Chance in Life". Here Michele D'Cruze is a Eurasian man in love with a Eurasian lady, and promises her that he will achieve the enormous salary her mother is demanding before allowing them to marry, even though, as a telegraph signaller, he has little apparent hope of success. But then, having taken a job in a remote village far away from any English settlement, he gets a golden opportunity when a local riot blows up. The unrest is presented as largely due to the absence of the English Collector, which is alleged to have led to a slackening-off of discipline. The narrator comments:

> Never forget that, unless the outward and visible signs of Our Authority are always before a native, he is as incapable as a child of understanding what authority means, or where is the danger of disobeying it.
>
> (*Plain Tales* 1888, p. 69)

[11] Peter Morey, *Fictions of India: Narrative and Power* (Edinburgh, 2001), pp. 21-22.

The village natives start fighting, not against the British authority, but against each other, Hindus looting Muslim shops and vice versa. The Hindu Sub-Judge, utterly incapable of calming things down, quietly disappears. But the native police officer, "afraid, but obeying the old race-instinct, which recognizes a drop of White blood as far as it can be diluted, said:– 'What orders does the *Sahib* give?'"[12] Addressed in this honorific manner, Michele decides to let his whiter blood take charge, and having shot one rioter dead, persuades the village elders that he is the government's representative and must be obeyed. With the later arrival of the white Assistant Collector, he somewhat loses his nerve, but his accomplishment has already been enough to win him the promotion he needs in order to marry his ladylove.

To present-day readers, this story will be one of the most distasteful, clearly binding the Anglo-Indians together with regular Brits through the medium of blood. Its original address was apparently to the sort of reader who is not quite sure what the British are actually doing in India, its implication being that, but for the British, the subcontinent would descend into senseless violence and sectarian strife. Readers needing to learn this lesson could apparently be based in Britain or India alike. The narrator simply speaks of "our authority".

He also says that, if and when the Eurasian community one day produces writers of its own, "we" shall know more about their lives and feelings. As far as Anglo-Indians were concerned, Eurasians were indeed something of a mystery, and a problem as well. What attitude should one adopt towards them? Kipling's own views must have been quite complex, especially since he had to bear in mind the strong prejudices of some of his readers. In 1890 a critic in *The Times* commented that Kipling "deals also with that unfortunate result of our settlement in India, the Eurasian, and some of the most brilliant of his tales have this seldom successful growth for their topic".[13] Though Kipling does not exactly praise the Eurasians, he would hardly call them just a "seldom successful growth". He really does seem to be waiting for the emergence of a Eurasian literature, and concedes that in the meantime any stories about them should be taken with a pinch of salt. Perhaps because his

[12] *Plain Tales* 1888, p. 70.
[13] Anon., "Mr. Kipling's Writings". *The Times*, 25th March, 1890.

knowledge of them really is rather patchy, his own writing portrays them as slightly scary and unattractive.

> If you go straight away from Levées and Government House Lists, past Trades' Balls—far beyond everything and every-body you ever knew in you respectable life—you cross, in time, the Borderline; where the last drop of White blood ends, and the full tide of Black sets in. It would be easier to talk to a new-made Duchess on the spur of the moment, than to the Borderline folk without violating some of their conventions or hurting their feelings. The Black and the White mix very quaintly in their ways. Sometimes the White shows in spurts of fierce, childish pride—which is Pride of Race run crooked—and sometimes the Black in still fiercer abasement and humility, half-heathenish customs, and strange, unaccountable impulses to crime.
>
> (*Plain Tales* 1888, p. 66)

Kipling's irony at the expense of "respectable people" who would benefit from a broader view of India is clear enough. But he himself still seems to be seeing the Eurasians from the outside. In his pages they do not get to speak of their own concerns directly,[14] and he seems to think that this is actually impossible in a text by a non-Eurasian. Since he wrote several stories with a wholly native first-person narrator, his inability or refusal to give a voice to Eurasians seems the more remarkable. Perhaps he felt that the emergent Anglo-Indians could not afford to let their own community become too fuzzy at the edges. Now it was the Anglo-Indians' turn to emerge. The Eurasians' turn might follow.

Eurasians also figure in the story "Kidnapped", where an Anglo-Indian administrator by the name of Peythroppe decides to marry one, but is kidnapped by some friends for long enough to miss the marriage ceremony. On his return from captivity, he is abused by the girl's father, and as a result his eyes are opened and the wedding plans forgotten about. Yet the story's narrator expresses some of the actual objections to the marriage in a curious way which seems to underline their hollowness:

> Understand clearly that there was not a breath of a word to be said against Miss Castries—not a shadow of a breath. She was good and very lovely—possessed what innocent people at Home call a "Spanish" complexion, with thick blue-black hair growing low down on the forehead […]. But—but—but—. Well, she was a *very*

[14] The exception to this rule is in the story "The Gate of a Hundred Sorrows", where the narrator is indeed a Eurasian. But his story is less representative of Eurasians than of the international community of opium-smokers.

> sweet girl and very pious, but for many reasons she was "impossible." Quite so. All good Mammas know what "impossible" means. It was obviously absurd that Peythroppe should marry her. The little opal-tinted onyx at the base of her finger-nails said this as plainly as print.
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> (*Plain Tales* 1888, pp. 112-113)

By our standards today, the narrator's innuendoes are clearly racist. And to these must be added a further, allegedly still more important objection to the marriage: it would be the ruin of Peythroppe, both professionally and financially. He would be marrying Miss Castries' whole family as well, who would expect the new son-in-law to contribute to their upkeep.

This same story also illustrates the stifling hierarchy which operated in the Anglo-Indian community and which even affected the Kiplings personally. At one point the Viceroy's son had become interested in Kipling's younger sister. But since the Kiplings were far too low in the pecking order, it was "suggested" that Alice should in future spend her holidays at some other hill station. The narrator of "Kidnapped" proposes as the only viable solution to the problem of unsuitable marriages a centralized department of marriage, which would allocate everyone a suitable spouse. This suggestion is obviously ironic. But is the irony aimed at the Anglo-Indian establishment's stuffiness, or at young imperial administrators in danger of making rash choices when they tire of loneliness? Thanks to such double-edgedness, even here the emergent Anglo-Indian community is not condemned outright.

In many of the stories, then, Anglo-Indians' attitudes towards other Anglo-Indians who dabble in things native, and also towards Eurasians, are apparently partly endorsed and partly questioned, in ways which would make the texts acceptable and interesting both to Anglo-Indians themselves and to readers in Britain. Some stories, however, include a type of character towards whom both Kipling and his Anglo-Indian readers would have had altogether less ambiguous feelings, and who for readers in Britain would have come very close to an affront. This is where the book is emergent Anglo-Indian literature at its most aggressive, through most strongly underlining a perceived Anglo-Indian superiority in matters Indian. The character type serving as the straw man here is the English tourist in India. During the cool season such individuals are said to descend on helpless Anglo-Indians in hordes. Their manners are atrocious, and they often plan to write a book about

their travels, in which they will insult their hosts and propose a total reform of imperial administration.

The story "A Friend's Friend" tells of Jevon, a "very English" gentleman who has turned up at the narrator's house with a letter of introduction from a friend. He acts pleasantly enough for a time, but then gets abominably drunk at a party and insults everyone. By way of punishment, the Anglo-Indians roll him up in a carpet, which is then dispatched a horse-cart. Letters of introduction, the narrator reflects, are one of the facts of social life in India.

> You know the casual way in which men "pass on" acquaintances in India? It is a great convenience, because you can get rid of a man you don't like by writing a letter of introduction and putting him, with it, into the train. T. G's[15] are best treated thus. If you keep them moving, they have no time to say insulting and offensive things about "Anglo-Indian Society."
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> (*Plain Tales* 1888: 226)

Readers here are addressed as people who are themselves well acquainted with this type of communiqué, and who might well take offence at scandalous remarks about Anglo-Indian society. Readers are also warned about "Tranter of the Bombay side", the "friend" who lumbered the narrator with Jevon. This creates a curious sense of community, as readers are apparently taken to be people who well might know this particular Tranter, or could easily bump into him some time. Such readers are obviously Anglo-Indian, and the story has every concern for their well-being. As for readers in Britain, there is clearly a lesson to be learnt. At all costs avoid repeating Jevon's mistakes! Even if Jevon is not really so bad as some of the other T.G.'s, even if he took the narrator off-guard by actually being rather different from the rest of his tribe—

> He was lint-haired, fresh-coloured, and very English. But he held no views about the Government of India. Nor did he insist on shooting tigers on the Station Mall, as

[15] Travelling Gentlemen. It is only in the 1937 Sussex edition that Kipling felt his readers would no longer be able to understand this term. He then changed it to "Globe-Trotters", with the abbreviation "G.T's". In the earlier editions, English as well as Indian, the term Travelling Gentleman is never written out in full.

> some T.G's do. Nor did he call us "colonists," and dine in a flannel shirt and tweeds, under that delusion, as other T.G's do.
>
> (*Plain Tales* 1888, p. 227)

—his behaviour is quite enough to make Anglo-Indian readers feel a bit superior and British readers a bit ashamed. Given the British literary tradition of presenting home-coming Anglo-Indians as vulgar boors, Jevon's ghastly *faux pas* in drinking too much and offending the ladies at a civilized dinner-party would have been diversely piquant for both kinds of reader.

English travellers are a burden not only to their reluctant hosts. Common soldiers detest them as well, being just as sensitive to breaches of etiquette. Kipling's famous "Soldiers Three", Mulvaney, Ortheris, and Learoyd, are first introduced in the story "The Three Musketeers", where they confront a Lord Benira Trig. Trig, the narrator tells us, is a Radical politician and "was out here for three months collecting materials for a book on 'Our Eastern Impedimenta,' and quartering himself upon everybody, like a Cossack in evening dress".[16] The soldiers doubtless find the idea of somebody like Trig writing a book about India rather difficult to stomach, especially if there is a chance of its being read by somebody in Westminster. But what really riles them is that Trig insists that the garrison turn out for parade on a Thursday, the day of the week which by ancient custom is set aside for drinking. So the wily trio trick the noble lord into taking a ride in an *ekka*, whose native driver is privy to their ruse. They then fake an attack on the *ekka* by native insurgents, and Trig is so grateful when the trio "rescue" him, and so shaken and exhausted, that the parade is cancelled.

The language spoken by the three musketeers is very liberally peppered with Indian expressions they have picked up—though some of them are glossed or replaced in the Macmillan edition of 1890—and Kipling also uses unconventional spellings for English words, to suggest their pronunciation in appropriately Irish, Cockney and Yorkshire accents. The resultant text would not have been very easy to read for either Anglo-Indian or British readers. But those who persevered could have found it very entertaining, which is why it raises the question, familiar from criticism of much other work by Kipling, of how he

[16] *Plain Tales* 1888, p. 59.

positions common soldiers *vis à vis* his readers. Is he patronizing them and merely making them figures of fun for readers who are probably middle-class or higher? Or are the stories also aimed at readers from social backgrounds similar to those of the soldiers themselves? Or is there even some sense in which the common soldiers and their social superiors might actually be at one? Here it could easily be argued that the soldiers are rather clownish and small-minded. The problem presented by Lord Trig, after all, is merely that they will have to go on parade rather than get drunk. Yet many of the problems faced by the stories' upper-class Anglo-Indians can also seem rather trivial—is it such a crime, for instance, to come to dinner inappropriately dressed? And in point of fact, all Kipling's Anglo-Indian readers do seem to be invited to regard the common soldiers as belonging to their own community, not least by virtue of their exposure to the whims of English travellers and Westminster politicians. The soldiers' ploy for deceiving Trig is actually more sophisticated than the action of their social superiors in bundling off Jevon in a carpet. And if middle-class Anglo-Indian readers happily admired them for it, and if British middle-class readers were more hesitant to empathize with soldiery, this would merely have given a further edge to Kipling's aggressiveness on behalf of his emerging community.

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Careful reflection on the stories themselves is more than enough to suggest their significance as emergent literature. What I have been trying to show is the relevance of certain themes and character types, and above all the ways in which themes and character types also relate to features of address: to the writing's construction of its own writer and readerships as regards life-experience, attitudes, and even vocabulary. When account is taken of such details, it becomes very clear that the stories were indeed fulfilling the two functions of emergent literature mentioned at the outset: of consolidating the emergent grouping's sense of identity; and of differentiating the grouping from other groupings, by inviting such other groupings to become its readers as well.

But how does this picture tally with other, extratextual kinds of evidence? What did Kipling himself say about the stories? And how did different kinds of reader actually respond to them?

Kipling's letters give no clear impression of his thoughts about the potential readers of *Plain Tails*. This must be partly because most of his letters from 1887, when composition was in full flow, have been lost. But he was already working on some stories in 1886; in writing in April of that year, to his friend, the English journalist E.K. Robinson, he mentions "Section 420. I.P.C.", which was to be published in *Plain Tales* under the title of "The House of Suddhoo". And he tells Robinson that "I look forward to nothing but an Indian journalist's career [.] Why should I? My home's out here; my people are out here; all the friends etc. I know are out here and all the interests I have are out here. Why should I go home?".[17] In itself, this remark does not confirm that he nourished an ambition to be the foundational figure within an emergent Anglo-Indian literature. But it does clearly suggest that he thought of himself as very much an Anglo-Indian, perhaps even to the extent of wanting never to return to Britain. An emergent literature was unlikely to get under way unless Anglo-Indian writers felt precisely some such powerful communal bonding, and it seems reasonable to suppose that the sense of communal identity would have had to come first. The desire to place that identity in relation to other communal identities could have come somewhat later, and in Kipling's case might have strengthened as he continued to work on the stories. By 1890 he had revised *The Tales* for the edition by Macmillan, thereby confirming a now fully-fledged interest in the further, British readership. He could well have hoped that one of the new audience's reasons for reading him would have to do with his depiction of the community represented by his first readers in India.

To some members of that community itself, his name would already have been familiar when *Plain Tails* first appeared, since in the previous year he had published *Departmental Ditties* (Calcutta, 1886), a collection of poems which received favourable reviews in India (as well as a couple of mentions in England) and sold rather well. Writing to his aunt, Edith Macdonald, he commented that the "little booklet just hit the taste of the Anglo-Indian public for it told them about what they knew".[18] Telling the Anglo-Indian public about what they knew was also, we have seen, his goal in the stories he was writing, and through the medium of

[17] Rudyard Kipling, *Letters, vol. I*, ed. Thomas Pinney (Basingstoke, 1990), p. 126.
[18] Kipling, *Letters*, p. 139.

newspapers many of these, too, had been published before the collected edition in book form. When the book itself appeared, Anglo-Indian reviewers do not seem to have felt that Kipling was in any way remarkable, but for the pioneer of an emergent literature this was perhaps just as well. If they had found him weird and wonderful, Anglo-Indians would have been that much less likely to identify with him and to let him be their representative. As things were, he presumably seemed simply truthful to the world they knew. That the book did give them something they more or less expected did not prevent the general tone of the reviews from being favourable.[19]

As for Kipling's reception in Britain, London reviewers of the first Indian edition of 1888 were not slow to point out faults, but were on the whole supportive. The *Saturday Review* found the title impenetrable: "to the untravelled inhabitants of London and the United Kingdom it would seem almost as hopeful to undertake the perusal of a volume entitled *Straight Talks from Beulah*."[20] But the same reviewer seems to have found the stories themselves less difficult, and mentions the soldier stories as his favourites. In such a response, we can see how British readers, while registering that Kipling was a bit exotic, nevertheless found sources of pleasure. Albeit somewhat patronizingly, they were also prepared to put up with one or two things that at first seemed rather baffling. At this early stage, there was no sense that a whole new literature was possibly about to emerge here, and by the same token no suggestion that British superiority might in any way be questioned.

Over the following five or six decades, the patronizing tone was often heard again, and sometimes it was almost as if British commentators were trying to keep both Kipling and Anglo-Indians in general in their place. The early perception that his work gave a voice to hitherto uncharted varieties of life later came to be used rather disparagingly, and as his political views became less fashionable his status as a writer of universal interest also suffered. Tribute continued to be paid to his innovativeness and stylistic flair, but these qualities were sometimes seen as merely the skills of a clever journalist. In 1936 such

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[19] Roger Lancelyn Green, *Kipling: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1971), pp. 12-14.

[20] Anon., "Novels and Stories", *Saturday Review*, 8th June 1888, pp. 697-698.

faint praise was to be heard even in one of the main obituaries, the lecture by W.L. Renwick.

> [W]hether we like Kipling's verse or not, there is half a world of Dominions for which he found a voice. The only voices they have found for themselves are, with faint and few exceptions, echoes of his: a fact that proves at once his authenticity and his power. This is—or may become—a matter of importance. The Dominions may some day produce arts of their own, though they seem slow about it; whatever they do in time produce, Kipling gave them a lead, at least, and told them, as well as us, of some of the things they might write poetry about.[21]

Renwick's observation of the Anglo-Indian emergence is accurate as far as it goes, but does not recognize the full extent of Kipling's achievement. By underestimating his rapid rise to international importance, Renwick reveals a heavy politico-cultural bias.

Another line of British commentators were much more open-minded, and from very early on. Reviewing the second Indian edition in 1889, Andrew Lang is already finding Kipling's exoticism, not so much a minor handicap as a positive attraction, as long as English readers can be coaxed into overcoming their fundamental aversion "to the study of Indian matters".

> There is nothing ordinary about [... the stories]. The very scenes are strange, scenes of Anglo-Indian life, military and official; of native life; of the life or half-castes and Eurasians. The subjects in themselves would be a hindrance and a handicap to most authors because the general reader is much averse to the study of Indian matters, and is baffled by *jhairuns,* and *khitmatgars*, and the rest of it. Nothing but the writer's unusual vivacity, freshness, wit, and knowledge of things little known—the dreams of opium smokers, the ideas of private soldiers, the passions of Pathans and wild Border tribes, the magic which is yet a living force in India, the loves of secluded native widows, the habits of damsels whose house, like Rahab's, is on the city wall—nothing but these qualities keeps the English reader awake and excited. It may safely be said that *Plain Tales from the Hills* will teach more of India, of our task there, of the various peoples whom we try to rule, than many Blue Books.[22]

In this comment we can see Anglo-Indian literature in unmistakable emergence. Not only is Kipling said to reveal a whole new world. It is a world which "we", the British, ought to learn about so that we shall

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[21] W. L. Renwick, 1964 [1936] "Re-reading Kipling" [1936], in Andrew Rutherford (ed.), *Kipling's Mind and Art* (Stanford, 1964), pp. 3-16, esp. 7.
[22] Andrew Lang, "An Indian Story-teller", *Daily News*, 2nd November 1889, p. 4.

better understand "our task" India. And then comes the *coup de grâce*: Kipling, an Anglo-Indian writer, can tell "us" more about all this than many of the Westminster government's official Blue Books about India. The Anglo-Indians have not only arrived, then, but made their point!

The emergence is strikingly consolidated in *The Times*'s review of the Macmillan edition of 1890, a review which also covered the nearly simultaneous British editions of the two further volumes, *Soldiers Three* and *Wee Willie Winkie*. Not only does the reviewer think that the stories' exoticism will decidedly appeal to readers in England. He even goes so far as to say that the stories of native life "appear to lift the veil from a state of society so immeasurably distant from our own and to offer us glimpses of unknown depths and gulfs of human existence".[23] Here already, then, a British critic is saying (a) that Kipling is a writer with interestingly Anglo-Indian credentials and (b) that he is actually of universal human significance. True, the review's precise wording might have left the Anglo-Indian intelligentsia rather uneasy. Although they had always been concerned that their writers did not fully exploit the potential of local materials, they had also resented the liberties taken by European writers in ascribing to Indian life all manner of fantastic excess.[24] But to have such positive endorsement from the London *Times* was obviously a huge triumph. A literature so successfully emergent could easily afford to take the rough with the smooth.

In any case, even if the stories' exotic and fantastic elements still retained some power to puzzle Brits and embarrass Anglo-Indians, Edmund Gosse soon came up with a new argument for admiring Kipling, and one which could appeal to some members of both readerships. In a 9-page essay on Kipling for *The Century* in 1891, he observed that

> [t]he fiction of the Anglo-Saxon world, in its more intellectual provinces, had become curiously femininized. Those novel-writers who cared to produce subtle impressions upon their readers, in England and America, had become extremely refined in taste and discreet in judgment. People who were not content to pursue the soul of their next-door neighbour through all the burrows of self-consciousness had no choice but to take ship with Mr. Rider Haggard for the "Mountains of the Moon". Between excess of psychological analysis and excess of superhuman romance, there was a great void in the world of Anglo-Saxon fiction. It is this void which Mr. Kipling, with something less than one hundred short stories, one novel, and a few

[23] Anon., "Mr. Kipling's Writings", *The Times*, 25th March 1890.
[24] Moore-Gilbert, *Kipling and 'Orientalism'*, pp. 30-31.

> poems, has filled by his exotic realism and his vigorous rendering of unhackneyed experience. His temperament is eminently masculine, and yet his imagination is strictly bound by existing laws.[25]

Gosse does not see Kipling as an exotic writer at all. Nor does he attribute his rising popularity in Britain to a sudden partiality towards the Empire or its ethos. What he finds in Kipling is not macho heroes and jingoistic chauvinism. Not himself a fan of Rider Haggard, he believes that Kipling appeals to readers of considerable brain-power. Because masculine intelligence has been, he thinks, neglected by recent English and American literature, Kipling's timing could not have been better, and in English literature he actually has no predecessor. The closest comparison, says Gosse, is with Pierre Loti.

So Gosse was not only alerting readers to a particular aspect of Kipling's work. Even more emphatically than the *Times* review of the previous year, he was saying that Kipling is of universal interest. Kipling has actually brought about a revolution in English literature world-wide, and is comparable with representatives of world literature in other languages. Here we can already begin to observe the great paradox of emergent literature: as Roger D. Sell puts it, "on the one hand, the emergent literature defines and gives a voice to the particular grouping of people from within which it emerges; but [...] on the other hand, that very voicing can simultaneously undermine the boundary it defines, by improving audibility, as one might say, between one grouping and another."[26] The early London reviews of *Plain Tales* show Kipling, within the space of three short years, rocketing from the status of representing an emergent literature to being a figure of world literature. Together with him, the community he represented achieved international recognition of a new order as well. But the more he was thought of as an international eminence, the more his community was taken to be on a par with, and ultimately indistinguishable from, other communities. When the literary pioneers of emergent communities have individually emerged to the point of becoming international names, they become citizens of the world, and thereby less distinctively members of their original community, which in turn loses something of the high profile it had

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[25] Edmund Gosse, "Rudyard Kipling", *The Century* 42 (1891) 901-910, esp. 901.

[26] Sell, "What's Literary Communication...?" p. 41.

during the most aggressive phase of emergence, especially in the case of the Anglo-Indian community, the days of whose political survival were also numbered. Perhaps Anglo-Indians' only consolation lay in the sheer suddenness of their emergence. Certainly the vernacular literatures of early modern Europe, including English literature, had had to struggle far longer—for centuries even—before achieving world status, another point which commentators like Renwick were slow to concede.

Kipling himself could envisage other literary emergences, particularly, as I have noted, a Eurasian one. And his own rise to prominence, as the most extraordinary instance of the Anglo-Indian emergence, needs to be seen in relation to writing in India more generally. Native responses to his work were for a long time disapproving, his reputation as a firm believer in the British Empire making him the common enemy for many Indian writers involved in the struggle for independence. Rabindranath Tagore was apparently furious at having been described as "India's Kipling", and Indian writers were also far less impressed than British commentators by Kipling's attempts to get under the Indian skin. Often they found his character portrayals highly insulting, in itself an understandable reaction, since Kipling did little to conceal his contempt for educated Bengalis, the class from which many Indian writers hailed. In 1934 their views were aired in an extensive survey of Anglo-Indian fiction by Bhupal Singh, who, though acknowledging Kipling's artistic merits, felt that his stories "neither show much knowledge of, nor sympathy for, Indian life and character. They at best touch the outskirts of Indian life, often in its abnormal, crude and unimportant aspects."[27] Singh was particularly annoyed that Kipling portrays native scenes associated with savagery and madness, such as the chopping off of a young widow's hands in revenge for her relationship with an Englishman. That Kipling also showed Anglo-Indians doing some pretty strange and horrible things was evidently, for Singh, no mitigation.

As the memory of the struggle for independence has become more distant, and as Indian and postcolonial literatures in general have emerged to assume international status, Indian commentators have softened in their attitude towards Kipling. Salman Rushdie says that "no other Western writer has ever known India as Kipling knew it, and it is

[27] Bhupal Singh, *A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction* ([1934]London, 1974), p. 70.

this knowledge of place, and procedure, and detail that gives his stories their undeniable authority".[28] Although, for Rushdie, Kipling is still an arrogant imperialist who thinks nothing of making a laughing-stock of native Indian characters, his

> Indian *banias*, policemen, miners and whores sound Indian in a way that—for example – Forster's never do. This is because they think like Indians, or at least they do when Kipling lets them. [...] It is impossible not to admire Kipling's skill at creating convincing portraits of horse-thieves, or rural policemen, or Punjabi money-lenders. [29]

Even for readerships which dislike his politics, Kipling's stories have strength. As Rushdie puts it: "There will always be plenty in Kipling that I will find difficult to forgive; but there is also enough truth in these stories to make them impossible to ignore."[30]

Today, then, the literature initiated by *Plain Tales* would seem to have arrived at a new historical phase. First, it emerged, and with it emerged the Anglo-Indian community, into both self-consciousness and visibility to others. Next, within the three-year period 1888-1891 the boundary between the emergent Anglo-Indian literature and English literature and even world literature in general started to dissolve. While Kipling was still often seen as an Anglo-Indian writing from within the Anglo-Indian community, he was also increasingly perceived as an international writer of major importance. Neither the faint praise of British commentators like Renwick nor the downright disapproval of Indian critics like Singh could ultimately alter this. And lastly, Kipling is now still seen as a major world figure, but the community he originally represented is no longer one with which many people can, or want to be associated. Both the community and its literature did emerge. But since then, only its literature, or perhaps only its literature in the shape of Kipling, has sustained much visibility, within an international community of readers that is increasingly heterogeneous.

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[28] Salman Rushdie, "Kipling", in his *Imaginary Homelands* (London, 1991) pp. 74-80, esp. 75.
[29] *Ibid*, pp. 77-78.
[30] *Ibid* p. 80.