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Hybridity, Mimicry, and The Third Space in Rudyard Kipling's 'The Man Who Would Be King' and H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*

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This essay will apply postcolonial theories of hybridity to Rudyard Kipling's 'The Man Who Would Be King' (1888) and H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896). Both texts were written at the height of the British Empire, but I will argue that instead of being celebrations of empire, the two texts point to the anxieties of a failing colonial project. Firstly, I will provide the theoretical framework applied to the texts. After this, I will analyse how these theories highlight and disrupt the colonial settings and structures in the novels.

In examining the postcolonial concept of mimicry, it is vital to form a working definition of it. In helping to achieve this I turn to the scholar Homi K. Bhabha. In his book *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha asserts that 'colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite'.[1] Mimicry occurs, for instance, when the colonised subject imitates the: language; dress; religion; or cultural attitudes of the coloniser. However, their skin colour, for example, is the 'difference' that needs to be continually produced for colonial mimicry to be effective. Indeed, the process of mimicry aims to illustrate the dynamic of the colonial 'civilising mission'.[2] The vision of 'a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in [. . .] morals and intellect'.[3] Thus, colonial mimicry is a process the coloniser can implement to trick the colonised into cooperation.

[1] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), p. 122.

[2] Ibid.

[3] T. B. Macaulay, 'Minute on education', in W. Theodore de Bary (ed.) *Sources of Indian Tradition*, vol. II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 49.

However, Bhabha suggests mimicry can sometimes be subversive. To Bhabha, mimicry is a type of performance that exposes the artificiality of expressions of power. This is to say, if the colonised became obsessed with some code associated with the coloniser, for example, wearing a pith helmet, the colonised might expose the code's hollowness. Under colonialism, mimicry is an opportunistic pattern of behaviour. The colonised mimics the coloniser because the former hopes to gain access to the latter's power. By mimicking the colonial rulers, the process of mimicry puts into question the relationship between Self and Other. A hybrid subject is thus, produced.

An additional theory I will consider is the 'Third Space'. According to Bhabha, the 'Third Space' is the '*inbetween space*' between the position and discourse of the ruling class, and the position and discourse of the subaltern subject.[4] Bhabha's theory focuses on language. Furthermore, Bhabha's theory is adapted by urban geographer Edward Soja in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places.* Soja adapts Bhabha's theory as a way of articulating contemporary Los Angeles, which, he asserts is neither as 'fully American nor as Fully First World' as it's made out to be, because of the number of migrants living there and a proliferation of sweatshops that operate in the city.[5] The city is home to both Hollywood and sweatshops, the ruling class and the subaltern other. This intermixing of people complicates the relationship between the Self and the Other.

The hybrid possibilities for 'The Man Who Would Be King' emerge in the opening sequences. For instance, the narrative begins with the narrator, a newspaper correspondent who is Kipling in all but name, touring various Indian native states. The narrator notes that he is travelling 'not second class, which is only half as dear as First-class, but by Intermediate, which is very awful indeed'.[6] The fact a third class of carriage exists implies there are

[4] Bhabha, *Culture*, p. 5.

[5] See: Sorja, *Thirdspace* (Hoboken, Wiley-Blackwell, 1996).

[6] Rudyard Kipling, *The Man Who Would Be King, 1888,* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc., 1924), p. 5.

ambivalent spaces where the oppressed and the oppressor intersect. Indeed, the narrator states these people are 'Eurasian, or native, which for a long night journey is nasty, or Loafer, which is amusing though intoxicated'.[7] In the intermediate class, those 'Eurasian' people who are a mix of European and Indian descent, and the natives are put in a seemingly equal position with 'Loafers' who are British.[8] In the intermediate class, Kipling can allude to the languages, castes, and religions prevalent in India. The distinctions between carriages and types of people are gone. What emerges is a space where joined discourse could occur. However, the narrator seeks to differentiate the groups by calling the 'Eurasians' and 'natives' 'nasty and the 'Loafers' 'amusing'.[9] The British group is deemed funny, but the Indian group is nasty; despite occupying the same space. I suggest the narrator's comments on the people is a way for him to differentiate between coloniser and colonised. The native's 'nasty' quality is the 'slippage' that enforces colonial power.[10]

While I do not contend that 'The Man Who Would Be King' is autobiographical, I will argue Kipling's use of third spaces is likely a reflection of his own experiences as someone of Anglo-Indian descent. Indeed, in his memoir, Kipling discusses a cross-cultural game he played in which he 'set up business alone as a trader with savages'.[11] The family's Indian servants played the 'savages' in the game. Despite the class difference, Kipling is happy to intersect with the servants. He describes setting up 'a piece of packing-case which kept off any other world'.[12] The need to separate the real world and Kipling's play world, where servant and boy can negotiate space, suggests that even as a child, Kipling recognized an equal relationship between Indian natives and Anglo-Indians is not possible in the real world. Furthermore, the fact Kipling plays the 'trader' and the servants the 'savages' indicates that

[7] Kipling, *King*, p. 5.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Bhabha, *Culture*, p. 125.

[11] Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself*: For My Friends Known and Unknown (London: Macmillan, 1937), pp. 9-10.

[12] Ibid.

even in this third space of play, the positions of the real world still manifest themselves. Kipling is happy to play with the servants, but he maintains the position of power. This third space goes against Bhabha's theory, in that Bhabha maintains the third space is where anti-colonial discourse begins too 'articulate' itself.[13] In Kipling's game, the colonial power structures are maintained.

In 'The Man Who Would Be King', geo-political anxieties bring into question a distinction between who the Self is and who is the Other. Indeed, in his speech about building an empire in Kafiristan, Dravot specifically targets Russia, evidenced in the following quote: "I'll make an Empire! […] Two hundred and fifty thousand men, ready to cut in on Russia's right flank when she tries for India!"'.[14] The narrative's anxiety about Russia likely stems from the so-called Panjdeh Incident of March 1885 which became the reason for the beginning of the Afghan crisis between Russia and Great Britain.[15] Dravot's repeated claim that there are 'two million people-two hundred and fifty thousand fighting men' indicates that he wants the natives to fight with him. If the Kafiristan natives fight for the British, they must belong to the Self. This hybrid army and new enemy puts into question the identity of Self and the Other. If Russia can overpower the British, they may need to reconsider who they consider one of them.

Moreover, a distinction between the Self and the Other is presented in Dravot's empire speech. He says: 'These men aren't niggers, they're English! [. . .] they've grown to be English. […] Two million people-two hundred and fifty thousand fighting men-and all English!'[16] By labeling the Kafiristan natives 'English', Dravot simultaneously dilutes their identities and his power. To be king, Dravot needs to be positioned above the natives, he achieves this through colonial action. However, by categorising the natives as 'English', Dravot is placing them on

[13] Bhabha, *Culture*, p. 122.

[14] Kipling, *King*, p. 21.

[15] For a concise discussion on the geo-political issues between the British Empire, Russia and Asia in the 19th century see: Kees van Dijk 'Great Britain, Russia and the Central Asian Question', *Pacific Strife*, (2015), pp. 147-160.

[16] Kipling, *King*, p. 21.

an equal footing with him and Carnehan. Moreover, Dravot's description of the Kafiristan natives illustrates the threat mimicry poses to the colonial structures. Bhabha asserts that the 'menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority'.[17] In the case of the natives, the fact they are not 'niggers' and have 'fair skin' brings them closer to the colonisers in appearance.[18] If the natives recognise this, they will likely question why they too cannot be king. This sense of equality is of course an illusion. The reason why the natives do not question this is because Dravot tricks them into believing he is a 'god'.[19] The difference between the coloniser and the colonised here is not skin colour or nationality, but God and man. This difference is what causes Dravot's colonial mission to fail. Dravot declares 'I want a wife' and tries to wed a native woman. Carnehan does not support Dravot's proposal and Billy Fish questions how 'can daughters of men marry gods or devils?'.[20] Clearly what Dravot did not consider was the native's religious superstitions. Nevertheless, the native fetches Dravot a woman, but at the marriage ceremony she 'shuts her eyes, gives a bit of a squeak, and downs her face in the side of Dan's flaming red beard'.[21] The bite causes Dravot to bleed and thus, eradicates his God-image. The exposure of Dravot's lie causes a rebellion and his death. This indicates that the 'difference' located in colonial mimicry, is the menace that keeps colonial structures in place. The moment Dravot's difference is exposed, the colonial structures fall.

In H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, the disruptive possibilities of mimicry are highlighted through the different skin colours of the Beast Folk. When Prendick initially encounters M'Ling he is disturbed by him, but because of M'Ling's dark skin, he becomes less afraid and refers to him as 'the black faced man', 'black-faced creature', and 'the black-faced

[17] Bhabha, *Culture*, p. 126.

[18] Kipling, *King*, p. 21.

[19] Kipling, *King*, p. 22.

[20] Kipling, *King'*, p. 22.

[21] Ibid.

cripple.'[22] While these names describe the colour of M'Ling's skin, and arguably have little to do with race, as Prendick calls him 'black' his internalised racism is highlighted.[23] From the outset, Prendick associates M'Ling with a racialised Other that, no doubt, has experienced the brutal effects of colonialism. Moreover, Prendick describes M'Ling in animalistic terms. M'Ling is swift like an 'animal' and has 'thick coarse black hair' not unlike a heavy horse.[24] Thus, M'Ling is represented as a racialised Other and someone who is animalistic. Timothy Christensen notes that 'race provides a structured series of reference points regarding the evolution of society'.[25] Indeed, contemporary science distinguished a narrative of human progression from primitiveness to civilisation. Therefore, in combining racial and animalistic features, in the representation of M'Ling, Wells aligns his novel with the theories of evolutionary scientists like T. H. Huxley who saw non-white people as 'primitive'.[26]

Likewise, the Ape-Man is racialised and animalised through the description of him. The Ape-Man is said to be 'a fair specimen of the negroid type'.[27] His 'black negroid face' is 'unnatural' and he is, to Prendick 'little better than an idiot'.[28] Thus, the Ape-Man's 'negroid face' is associated with intellectual inferiority. Gustavo Generani contends that the link between race and intelligence imitates colonial power within the novel.[29] The Beast Folk's intellectual inferiority to Prendick and Moreau recreates the 'master-slave' relationship, that successful British colonial power structures relied on.[30] Through M'ling and the Ape-Man's

[22] H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau, 1896*, ed. by Patrick Parinder (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 13: p. 14: p. 26.

[23] Wells, *Moreau*, p. 15.

[24] Wells, *Moreau*, p. 13.

[25] Christensen, 'The Bestial Mark of Race in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*', *Criticism*, 46:4 (2004), pp. 575-595 (p. 583).

[26] For a linking of non-white people to primitive animals see: John McNabb, 'The Beast Within: H. G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, and Human Evolution in The Mid-1890s', *Geological Journal*, 50 (2015), pp. 383-397.

[27] Wells, Moreau, p. 102.

[28] Wells, Moreau, p. 56.

[29] Generani, '*The Island of Doctor Moreau* by H. G. Wells: A Pre-Freudian Reply to Darwinian Imperialism', *English Journal of the English Association*, 67:258 (2018), pp. 235-261.

[30] Generani, *'A Pre-Freudian Reply*', p. 250.

black skin colour, which associates them with animalism and as intellectually inferior, Wells presents a recognisable Other to a British colonial audience.

If colonial mimicry desires to locate 'a recognisable Other, as a subject of difference, that is almost the same, but not quite', then M'Ling and the Ape-Man fit that desire.[31] The two Beast Folk's black skin colour is the 'difference' that colonial mimicry needs to produce to be successful.[32] Indeed, it is said that Moreau does 'not feel the same repugnance' to the Ape-Man as he does for the other Beast Folk.[33] Likewise, Prendick soon becomes more comfortable around the black-skinned Beast folk. Thus, due to a clear racial distinction, Prendick can separate himself from M'Ling and the Ape Man. However, the non-black Beast Folk, in contrast, unsettle Prendick.

Prendick is unsettled with the Beast Folk that do not have black skin, but are instead closer to Prendick in colour, for instance, the Swine folk. In his first encounter with the Swine folk, Prendick describes them as having 'skins [which] were of a dull pinkish colour, such as I had never seen before in savages'.[34] The Swine folk's 'pinkish' skin suggests they are white-skinned or Caucasian, like Prendick and unlike M'Ling and the Ape-Man. Given that Prendick states he has never seen white-skinned 'savages' until now, this, disrupts Prendick's definition of a 'savage', and thus his definition of the colonial Other is brought into question. If M'Ling and the Ape-Man's 'black' skin colour is the 'difference' that colonial mimicry produces, do the white-skinned Swine folk fit into the colonial figure of the Self? Furthermore, Prendick continues to note a description of the Swine folk, seemingly to establish what race they are:

> As I watched their grotesque and unaccountable gestures. I perceived for the first time what it was that had offended me [.] The three creatures […] were

[31] Bhabha, *Culture*, p. 126.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Wells, *Moreau*, p. 102: p. 72.

[34] Wells, *Moreau*, p. 54.

> human in shape, and yet human beings with the strangest air about them of some familiar animal.[35]

Prendick is unsettled by the Swine Folk, evidenced by the verb 'grotesque', but what 'offend[s]' him is that despite their 'strangeness' they remain 'familiar' to him.[36] Now, M'Ling and the Ape-Man are familiar to Prendick, in that they are a recognisable Other, but he is not offended by their familiarity. Therefore, the 'familiar[ness]' that startles Prendick is their 'pinkish' skin that identifies the Swine Folk with Prendick, a white man and thus, the British colonial Self.

Moreover, Alexa Wright notes that the term 'savage', meaning 'uncivilised' first appeared in the English lexicon in the late Middle Ages, 'although some notions of wildness and savagery were used by Europeans to distance themselves from people of other 'uncivilised cultures long before that'.[37] This distancing is what Prendick attempts to do in his encounters with the Island's Beast Folk. Indeed, the French zoologist Georges Cuvier declared that Caucasian people are 'the most highly civilised nations and those which have generally held all other in subjection, are indebted for their origin'.[38] In contrast, Cuvier theorises that the 'Negro race' have always existed 'in the most complete state of Barbarism'.[39] Concerning M'Ling and the Ape-Man, the distancing works because the contemporary evolutionary theories suggest that black-skinned people are 'uncivil' compared to white-skinned people. By contrast, the Swine Folk are harder for Prendick to distance himself from because their 'pinkish skin' correlates with his. Thus, the Swine Folk 's pink skin produces a hybrid subject that disrupts Prendick's definition of the Other.

[35] Wells, *Moreau*, p. 55.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Wright, *Monstrosity: The Human Monster in Visual Culture* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), p. 33.

[38] Cuvier, *The Animal Kingdom: Arranged in Conformity with its Organization*, trans. by H. M. Murtie (New York: Carvill, 1832), p. 52.

[39] Ibid.

In both texts I have examined, theories of hybridity prove to reinforce and disrupt colonial structures of power. In Kipling's narrative, a third space emerges in the intermediate class, where natives and the British come together. This intersection of people indicates that positions of power can be negotiated because there is no clear hierarchy. The narrator's comment that natives are 'nasty' and 'loafers' are amusing, however, reduces the possibility for negotiation and instead reinforces colonial power structures. By contrast, the threat of a Russian Empire brings into question how the colonial Other is categorised. If the Russians can overwhelm the British, does the British Empire need to side with the colonial Other to form an army? If so, an army formed of British and native soldiers points towards a hybrid force. In Wells's novel, the disruptive possibilities of mimicry are highlighted through the different skin colours of the Beast Folk. The racialised M'Ling and Ape-Man reinforce colonial structures of power because their 'black skin' categorises them as a recognisable Other. By contrast, the Swine Folk's 'pink skin' disrupts the relationship between the Self and the Other because Prendick can recognise his ethnicity, in the beast.

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