Mediating Whiteness: Triangular Racialization in the Anglo-Indian Picaresque

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WILLIAM Makepeace Thackeray's 1838 picaresque satire of British India, *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan*, opens with the story of an aborted love affair between its titular Irish braggart and the beautiful Julia Jowler. The putative comedy of the story lies in Julia's racial liminality as the daughter of the commander of a regiment of Bengal cavalry, Lieutenant-Colonel Julius Jowler, C.B., and a "half-caste woman, who had been born and bred entirely in India . . . a hideous, bloated, yellow creature, with a beard, black teeth, and red eyes," "rhubarb-coloured" and surrounded by "odious blackamoor friends."[1] Julia's father first rejects Major Gahagan's suit as an insult, acting appalled that "a pitiful, beggarly, Irish cornet [dared] aspire to the hand of Julia Jowler" (10), but later seems to change his tune, only for Gahagan to discover, in the nick of time, "Mrs. Jow. in a night-dress, with a very dark baby in her arms" (13–14), the "cursed black children" proof that she has become "Mrs. Chowder Loll" (14). This parody of the tragic mulatta trope relies not on Julia's ability to "pass"—her "Eurasian" status is known from the beginning—but rather on the acknowledged relativity of racial categories in Anglo-India. Racist characterizations of Indians as "black" pervade *Major Gahagan*: Julia's mother behaves "like an enraged monkey" surrounded by "black ruffians" (10, 9), while Lieutenant-Colonel Jowler's service is marked by constant floggings—we read that "it was against the blacks that he chiefly turned his wrath," declaring, "D— the black scoundrels! Serve them right" (11). It is the shifting social relations between characters, even more than their physiognomy, that dictate Thackeray's racializations: the "pale" Julia is too good for the lower-class, lower-rank Irish Gahagan until that "now red, now white" heroine is rendered not good enough for *him*—that is, not

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white enough—based on her subsequent, short-lived marriage to the slain Maratha warrior Loll (10). This fluid, relative mode of racialization is literalized later in the *Adventures*, when Gahagan dons blackface as a military disguise only to render himself ashamed to face his subsequent lover Belinda, who is "dazzling as alabaster" (57). *Major Gahagan* is a work both ideologically repugnant and historically minor, but it encapsulates a dynamic of racial triangulation prevalent in nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian writing. *Gahagan* exemplifies the literary troping of Indians as "black" not as a straightforward projection of a presupposed European racial binary, but rather as a strained effort to reproduce it in a context where colonial whiteness was viewed as persistently under threat. In a sociopolitical context marked by obvious, superabundant diversity, Anglo-Indian writers used codes of literary genre to reconstitute and stabilize a hierarchical, binary concept of whiteness.

Thackeray's choice of the picaresque genre for his burlesque on Anglo-Indian racialization is not an accident. Several features of the picaresque made it a particularly important vehicle for theorizing and constructing racial triangulation in British India. Its antidevelopmental, episodic structure allows for plot "resets" that reveal situational shifts in racial characterization; its structural and historical implication with "half-outsider" identities builds in certain modes of triangulation. The *pícaro* figure—often, as for Thackeray, an Irish one—becomes a fulcrum that enables conditional, situated "white/black" paradigms that make narrative sense out of apparently odd racial constructions like *Major Gahagan*'s. The case study of the picaresque, then, reveals an imperialist culture more strategic and more self-aware about its own racial construction than is sometimes supposed. The subgenre served as a key means by which nonmetropolitan colonialist Victorians theorized and constructed their own relation to whiteness.

The use of literary genre in the construction of racial categories is a persistent feature of nineteenth-century life, in part, as Brigitte Fielder explains, because both race and genre are "constructed in the spaces of relation to others' experiences of race, often in relations of kinship. In this dependence upon relation, racialization is very much like literary genre."[2] The picaresque, partly because of its nonmetropolitan nineteenth-century associations, has been seriously understudied relative to nineteenth-century racial construction. Yet the genre is an especially profitable site of inquiry, because it persistently stages an intersection of three key loci of the study of nineteenth-century whiteness: Victorian fiction, Ireland, and India. To take each in turn: Victorian

fiction has been identified as a cultural consolidation of whiteness, providing ideological infrastructure for the alignment of racial identity, bourgeois values, and imperial expansion, both for (global) Victorians themselves and for subsequent scholars of the period.[3] But its overt aspirations to racial binarism sit uneasily with its prominent thematics of racial fluidity, contagion, and mimicry, and indeed with the nineteenth-century precursors to many enduring concepts of race as something like what Stuart Hall famously calls "the floating signifier."[4] Irishness has been a crux for the study of whiteness in part because it stages this tension so completely. The nineteenth century famously saw the historically racialized Irish enter into firmer alliance with transnational whiteness; as scholars have recently emphasized, however, this process, despite popular narratives of the Irish "becoming white," is better understood in terms of the leveraging of a preexisting, acknowledged status of whiteness.[5] The case of Irishness centers the dynamic by which the fluidity of whiteness is paradoxically contingent on a presumption of its absolute stability. British India provides extremely helpful context for theorizing the mechanisms of this seeming paradox. Scholars have long noted the ways whiteness "becomes a shapeshifter, especially in the colonies."[6] This means that whiteness in India meant something different from what it meant in Britain—that "whiteness in the colonies," as Radhika Mohanram explains, "effaces some of the significations that occur in the metropole while creating new ones."[7] It is certainly true that this enabled Irish Anglo-Indians to lay claim to Britishness and its allegedly attendant whiteness in ways not possible elsewhere.[8] But in many fictions of British India, the Irishman, as a figure of racial fluidity, also becomes a figure of racial *triangulation*, one who enables the imposition of a stabilizing black/white racial paradigm while—and, indeed, by—remaining himself outside of it. Understanding the triangular structure of whiteness's "shapeshifting" brings into sharper relief the connections between three important phenomena related to race in India: the ambiguous and fluid boundaries of Anglo-Indian whiteness, the belated assignment of "blackness" to native Indian populations, and the constant resignifications of Irish identity that demographic overrepresentation in India entailed.[9]

Picaresque fiction of British India operationalized tropes of Irish "liminal whiteness" to establish the Indian "blackness" against which Anglo-Indian normative whiteness was constructed.[10] Through its fantasies of racial triangulation, the picaresque helped nineteenth-century writers reconcile the acknowledged fact of racial fluidity, particularly in

the imperial space, with a binaristic *political* concept of whiteness. The authors I consider here are infamous for the intensity of their racial anxieties, from Rudyard Kipling's obsessive return to the miscegenation plot to Dion Boucicault's career-long pattern of casting himself in nonwhite roles (including Nana Sahib and the Native American Wahnatee, roles on a continuum with the racialized whiteness of the stage-Irish "shaughraun" Conn) to the Anglo-Indian Thackeray's lifelong fretfulness about his "black niece."[11] How representative these authors are of larger cultural trends is open to debate, though their exceptional popularity is noteworthy. But it is telling that three writers so especially captivated by the problem of fluid whiteness each turned to picaresque form as a possible solution. I argue that the genre's particular appeal to these writers should be connected to both its organizing logic of social triangulation and its episodic emphasis on the impermanence of those triangles. In these writers' Indian picaresques, it is specifically the trope of Irishness that disrupts the threat of miscegenation by presenting a third racial term that pushes whiteness and blackness apart rather than confounding their distinction. It is most of all in the structural manufacture of this third term that the picaresque enabled Victorian racialization.

1. GENRE AND RACE IN BRITISH INDIA

Genre definition is a slippery matter, but Claudio Guillén's classic discussion of the picaresque provides a workable concept: Guillén sees the genre as a fluctuating constellation of key features, including a roguish *pícaro* protagonist who "observes a number of collective conditions," a "loosely episodic" structure, and a "general stress on the material level of existence or of subsistence," along with several others.[12] Most important for our purposes, the *pícaro* is prototypically situated as a cultural "half-outsider," a figure who operates both inside and outside mainstream society, fully in the social world but never sufficiently of it, who can "neither join nor actually reject his fellow men" (80). The half-outsider is a liminal figure, one who combines theoretical cultural access with a more fundamental existential exclusion; this status allows the *pícaro* to, in Guillén's terms, "mov[e] horizontally through space and vertically through society" (84). The picaresque originates in sixteenth-century Spain, and Guillén productively associates its half-outsiderdom with the *converso*, neither the "Old Christian" insider nor the Jewish outsider, but rather neither and both, able to "envisage not only the society of his day, but the values of Christianity itself both from within and from without" (101–2).

In the British uptake of the picaresque, the half-outsider figure was resituated in relation to the so-called Celtic fringe.[13] The English-language picaresque novel originated with the Anglo-Irish bookseller Richard Head's 1668 *The English Rogue*; its popular peak came in the mid-eighteenth-century novels of the Scot Tobias Smollett, alongside Anglo-Irish figures including Laurence Sterne, Oliver Goldsmith, Thomas Amory, and Charles Johnstone and English writers like Defoe and Fielding.[14] The Celtic status of many eighteenth-century *pícaros* is significant to the genre's social criticism because it enables the protagonist to serve as both a representative of the British Empire and as a "foreign" critic of English society. In the nineteenth century, as Scottishness and Britishness became widely perceived as more and more evidently compatible, the picaresque became even more specifically associated with Ireland. From the Anglo-Indian William Makepeace Thackeray's Irish antihero Barry Lyndon to the Anglo-Irish military novels of Charles Lever, the most influential nineteenth-century English picaresques were structured around the "half-outsider" credentials of both authors and characters.[15] Standard literary historical narratives hold that the nineteenth century was a fallow period for the genre, but this is misleading and reflects some familiar metropolitan biases; in Ireland, India, and elsewhere in the imperial diaspora, the picaresque remained a popular and prominent genre paradigm, in part precisely due to its function as a mediating apparatus for the discursive construction of whiteness. The picaresque enables writers to position a "half-outsider" category like Irishness as neither a matter of trajectory (a racial status in the process of a gradual entry into whiteness or, conversely, of degenerative racial contagion) or spectrum (as a place "between" whiteness and a globalized blackness, often in reference to a supposed scale of "civilization").[16] The picaresque exhibits a different way of thinking these racial identities, a kind of relational status of neither/both that enacts a more consciously situational model of race.

The principle of triangulation is firmly embedded in literary studies, particularly in theories of desire, courtship, and class.[17] And the concept of racial triangulation has been theorized extensively, particularly by scholars in Asian American studies.[18] Triangulation is occasionally posited as a means of escaping or transcending binaries, but as often (and as many of these theories acknowledge) the prevalence of the triangle attests to the underlying appeal of the binary; it is certainly a fact of Victorian racism that a key affordance of triangular concepts was their ability to rescript a diverse array of colonial "others" as "black." If

triangulation is a tool of conceptual reduction in the face of infinite real diversity, though, it is important to note that, as Fanon and many since have shown, this rescripting itself reflects a conscious strategy of racial constructivism, not a naïve belief in a superficially dualistic racial paradigm. Thus, the picaresque triangulation of Irishness helped construct whiteness in British India by easing the reintroduction of a racial binary. To understand how this worked, we should first characterize the rhetorical construction of that binary, by which Anglo-Indian colonists (the Thackeray family among them) recast native Indians as "black."

The prevalence of anti-Black slurs in the discourse of British India, where supposedly "biological" blackness was not taken to be operative, has been much remarked. William Howard Russell's 1859 analysis of the response to the so-called "Indian Mutiny" is typical: "The peculiar aggravation of the Cawnpore massacres was this, that the deed was done by a subject race—by black men who dared to shed the blood of their masters and mistresses, and to butcher poor helpless ladies and children, who were the women and offspring of the dominant and conquering people."[19] Russell goes on to emphasize the widespread use of the N-word in reference to native Indian soldiers. I will seek to avoid gratuitously reproducing that word here, but anyone who has read British responses to the 1857 uprising, or indeed the works of writers like Kipling, will remember just how extensively that word is used to refer to Indians and particularly those engaged in active resistance to British rule. "Despite the fact that a majority of high-caste Bengal Army sepoys were traditionally recruited for their tall physiques and white skins," Heather Streets notes, "British sources depicted 'gangs of black satyrs' raping and dismembering British women"; R. Montgomery Martin wrote in 1861 that every native servant in India "hears the word . . . used every time a native is named."[20] Both Russell and Martin, it is worth noting, were Anglo-Irish, and it is not coincidental that the prevalence of this word, so often remarked in "Mutiny fiction," is consistently, and typically negatively, attributed to lower-class and often specifically Irish figures. Philip Meadows Taylor, George Trevelyan, and James Grant all discuss the word as predominantly used by the Irish; in the fiction of Kipling and Boucicault, it often appears in working-class or Irish dialect.[21] For English colonial administrators, this often produced a practical frustration, in the belief that this form of anti-Black racialization pointlessly created resentment among the colonized. Thus the infamous racist Vivian Dering Majendie could nevertheless complain in 1859's *Up Among the Pandies* that, in the massacres following the uprising,

"distinction was not made and the unfortunate who fell into the hands of our troops was made short work of . . . no questions were asked; his skin was black, and did that not suffice?"[22]

A number of caveats are in order. I certainly do not want to diminish either the importance of colorism and specifically anti-African anti-Blackness in nineteenth-century India, nor to deny the dualistic elements of this discourse, which equated blackness with supposed savagery.[23] Furthermore, it is important not to too easily elide the distinction between representation and reality: the kind of racial triangulation I am discussing is a persistent trope in British-centered literary discourse, but any application to people living in nineteenth-century India by no means follows a direct correspondence.[24] Finally, these claims must be historicized: the discourse of blackness in British India shifted after the 1857 rebellion, for instance (though the case of *Major Gahagan* illustrates the limits of taking this as a strict starting point), and moreover, groups in India were differentially racialized both within and outside of British discourse.

Nevertheless, it is significant that prominent nineteenth-century European theorists like Johann Blumenbach and Robert Knox, still often treated as representative of Victorian concepts of race, would not identify Indians as "black" in the ways that dominated Anglo-Indian discourse. Nor is it a coincidence that this practice of racialization was so widely attributed to Irish, working-class, and other Anglo-Indian populations who themselves were complexly racialized within the English imaginary. This discursive difference, then, indexes a political difference in the *function* of whiteness and its negative constructions in British India versus in England. This contextual and functional attribution of blackness underscores the extent to which racialization in British India was contingent, opportunistic, and reversible. The relativity of this rhetoric of blackness placed it at the center of what Satoshi Mizutani calls "differential integration" in British India; Julia Wright has examined how Irish protagonists mediate between "white" and "non-white" to "earn their place on the margins of whiteness."[25] However, this mediation served an important role in the maintenance of non-Irish white Anglo-Indian identity as well. If the guarantor of Anglo-Indian whiteness was Indian "blackness," the guarantor of that blackness was in turn the half-outsider Irish "other." In many cases, the real function of the trope of Irish insistence on whiteness relative to the native is to stabilize the gap between European and Indian by rendering whiteness as unequally "achievable"—and thus, importantly, already-achieved by Anglo-Indians like Rudyard Kipling, to whom I now turn.

2. RACIAL TRIANGULATION IN KIPLING AND BOUCICAULT

The most famous picaresque novel of the British nineteenth century, and certainly of British India, is Kipling's *Kim* (1900–1901). Kim's racial slipperiness—he is referred to in the novel as "English," "white," "Irish," "burned black," "Oriental," "low-caste," "brown," and "a white boy . . . who is not a white boy"—has been widely theorized in terms of hybridity, and more recently and persuasively by Alisha Walters in terms of triangulation.[26] Emphasizing the conceptual gap between Kim's racial characterization and European narratives of Victorian race science, Walters shows that Kim's "whiteness is not *de*generated by, but is, rather, *generated* from the physical and psychical presence of racial Others, and is utterly contiguous with these racialized bodies."[27] His whiteness is relational, constructed, and historical in nature, hence his ability to be described by such a long and seemingly contradictory list of racial descriptors. Walters emphasizes the genealogical diversity of Kim's race; attention to his literary construction as a *pícaro* puts further spotlight on the situational components of his identity. In a much-cited passage, Kim himself emphasizes the relation between his picaresque wanderings and his transient racialization: "'Sahibs get little pleasure of travel,' he reflected. '*Hai mai!* I go from one place to another as it might be a kickball. It is my *Kismet.* No man can escape his *Kismet.* But I am to pray to Bibi Miriam, and I am a Sahib.' He looked at his boots ruefully. 'No; I am Kim. This is the great world, and I am only Kim. Who is Kim?' He considered his own identity, a thing he had never done before, till his head swam" (101).

Kim's superpower, as it were, is the ability to fit in among whatever groups he encounters; this fluidity, he recognizes, also involves a certain rootlessness, what Guillén calls the picaresque "razor's edge between vagabondage and delinquency" (80). Understanding the picaresque model of identity at work in *Kim*—a model deeply connected not just to Kim's Irish parentage but also to Kipling's own Anglo-Indian background—helps rule out the dyadic theory of racialization implied by the familiar notion that Kim is educated into his own whiteness. Kim does not come to inhabit whiteness through a contrastive relationship to native "black" subjects; on the contrary, the fact that Kim is *not* consistently affiliated with whiteness is the precondition of his extraordinary access. His usefulness as a spy in service of the British imperial apparatus is predicated on his racial triangulation: "Kim's not-quite-white Irishness is part of the *racial indeterminacy* that makes the boy especially fit to be an *active agent*, not a passive subject, of Empire."[28]

Kipling portrays this triangulated model of racialization as accepted by Indians as well as colonists. Thus, when Kim refers to Mahbub Ali as a "black man," "Mahbub's hand shot into his bosom, for to call a Pathan a 'black man' (*kala admi*) is a blood-insult. Then he remembered and laughed. 'Speak, Sahib. Thy black man hears'" (115). What Mahbub is "remembering" is that Kim is by this point acting on behalf of the imperial service: Kim's "right" as a Sahib to see Mahbub as black is determined not by his biological makeup, which has not changed, but by his situational role. Indeed, Kim responds: "'But,. . .I am *not* a Sahib" (115), going on to apologize for an earlier offense. Kim reminds Mahbub that he is an agent of whiteness rather than its substance. Even in the absence of a "properly" English character, Kim maintains his triangulating role: as Jennifer DeVere Brody notes, "what occurs in *Kim* is not an opposition between English and Indian per se, but rather, and more significantly[,] between English and un-English."[29] Radhika Mohanram associates the opposition with "the unlinking of whiteness from power"; I suggest, rather, that the imperial picaresque uses the triangulating trope of the (implicitly or explicitly Irish) half-outsider to unlink whiteness from the racial instability pervading the experience of European empire.[30]

Thus, when an English drummer boy sees Kim squatting "as only the natives can" to speak to an Indian letter-writer, he asks: "What were you bukkin' to that n[——] about?" "I was only talkin' to him," Kim replies. "You talk the same as a n[——], don't you?" "No-ah! No-ah! I onlee speak a little" (88–89). Kim performs whiteness by taking on an exaggerated "native" dialect, but only moments after performing his Indian-ness through his posture. Kim's function in the scene is not to "become white"; neither is he white relative to the native and native relative to the European, as might be expected, but almost the reverse. The half-outsider, Irish orphan instead *triangulates* the scene's racial relation: by standing *outside* that relation—what the lama later calls "neither black nor white"—Kim is the one who situates the drummer boy as "white" and the "bazar letter-writer" as "black" in relation to *one another* (178, 87). Walters is again instructive: "Kim forms a tenable connection between the racial presence of the black subject, and the fluid subjectivity of the white Briton. Kim's body is a metonymy of this linkage."[31] Importantly, however, this metonymic function is *unstable*: if, per Mohanram, Kim's "postwhite body" "dislodges black and white identities, both of which are entangled within fixed and primordial binarities," it does so only provisionally.[32] Kipling emphasizes this provisionality, not only through Kim's successful performance *as* either "white" or "black"

elsewhere in the novel, but also by insisting on the temporariness of the racial identities Kim's presence in this scene constructs. We read that the letter-writer is a so-called upper-caste "Kayeth" (87), whereas the drummer boy is a "freckled person" for whom Liverpool "was his England" (86, 89), both racializing details in a Victorian context; Kim later refers to the latter as "that low-caste drummer boy" (115). Rather than Kim's Irishness clarifying a stable racialization, then, his picaresque presence establishes a triangulated racial relation *for the situation*—within the picaresque episode—that is more about the immediate practice of imperial power than any long-term cultural or biological determination.

If racial triangulation is situational in this way, in what situations does it arise? As the "freckled" drummer boy indicates, it is often when racial binarism has become destabilized, anxious, or uncertain in some other way (from interracial sex to racially stratified colonial administration to, simply, the obvious and extraordinary diversity within and among the subcontinent's population). Kipling's own fascination with racial liminality is inextricable from both his Anglo-Indian anxieties about being a kind of junior partner in Britishness and his journalistic self-presentation as speaking to the supposed "reality" of British India in a way neither the English imperialist nor the "native informant" could access. But the triangulating function of Irishness in the construction of a black/white racial binary was also clear to writers less personally invested in the Raj, as we see in a text like Dion Boucicault's 1858 melodrama *The Relief of Lucknow*. The Anglo-Irish Boucicault, known for his own performances as nonwhite characters, was closely attuned to the commercial possibilities of the anxieties of whiteness, as most famously illustrated in his transatlantic smash *The Octoroon* (1859). It is unsurprising, then, that when Boucicault took on one of the most sensational scenes of the 1857 rebellion just one year later, he turned to the popular myth of Jessie Brown, a narrative of whiteness besieged and ratified.

Jessie Brown (or sometimes Jessie Campbell), the heroine of Lucknow, was the supposed Scottish wife of a British corporal trapped during the siege. Brown is the first to hear the bagpipes of Colin Campbell's Scottish regiment as they arrive to deliver the captives. No such person as Jessie Brown existed: the story was entirely fictional, despite its initial circulation as an authentic narrative of the Mutiny in the London press. Nevertheless, it became a defining myth, celebrated in plays, novels, songs, engravings, poems, and the larger cultural repertoire. But why? The story has often been interpreted as a vindication of whiteness, and Boucicault cannily recognized the specific anxieties

around racial boundaries that undergirded the wide popularity of this story.[33] The racialization of Scottishness is beyond the scope of this article, but as Boucicault's drama makes clear, nineteenth-century audiences would have readily understood the tension between the widely recognized "whiteness" of the Scottish and the simultaneous perception of their racialized alterity, itself a key topic in debates around the constitution of *British* identity.[34] Thus, the Jessie Brown story has rightly been seen as a way of bringing Scottish and English identities closer together in a contrastive whiteness.[35] But in the Indian context in particular, some rhetorical work was necessary to make English audiences contextualize the whiteness of the Scottish as their *salient* attribute, partly because such an association was in tension with a preexisting cultural association of Highlanders with *Indians*.[36] Boucicault's play turns to picaresque triangulation in response to the crisis of whiteness at the heart of the Jessie Brown myth. It does so through the familiar figure of the "stage Irishman."

Boucicault introduces a comic underplot featuring an Irish corporal named Cassidy competing for Jessie's affection; he acted as Cassidy himself in both of the play's London productions. Narratively insignificant, Cassidy is necessary to Boucicault's drama because he mechanizes the play's racial triangulation. "I was born under a haystack," says Cassidy, "me father and mother had crossed to England for the harvest. My mother died of me and my father bruk his heart wid drinkin', so when they set me home to Ireland, my relations wouldn't own me, bekase I was an Englishman."[37] Cassidy is a classic picaresque half-outsider: an orphan caught between cultures yet legible within multiple (much like Boucicault himself). He is also a classic stage Irishman, an insulting stereotype intended as comic relief—and this function too is of interest. Cassidy uses the N-word several times in the play and is its only character to do so. This enunciation seems intended to emphasize the contrast between the Irish servant's devotion and the perfidy of the Indian servant Achmet, who declares, "We are to you a thousand to one—a thousand black necks to one white foot" (I.i). Like Kipling's freckled boy, Boucicault's Scottish heroine has her whiteness affirmed through the mediating presence of Cassidy: it is the triangulation of Irishness that affirms the white/black racial binary *as* a binary, rather than the insecure spectrum it threatens to become.

Irish triangulation is thus the precondition for the play's much-remarked emphasis on the English assimilation of Scottishness (the play closes with a rendition of "Auld Lang Syne" followed by "God Save the Queen"). Jessie can unironically sing the Jacobite anthem

"Charlie is my Darling" (I.iii) while condemning the Indian "rebels" because of how the play enacts a shift from religious and national to racial identities. This shift applies to both European and Indian characters, whose Muslim and Hindu identities get utterly confounded; Boucicault's *dramatis personae* notes specifically that the play's "Natives" "all have dusky complexions." Scottishness, in this shifted framework, becomes a fully co-optable cultural force. Jessie herself becomes a kind of code talker, avoiding Indian surveillance by speaking "in broad Scotch" and passing messages "in Gaelic, the native tongue of Scotland" (III.i); her apparently innate ability to hear the bagpipes before anyone else is only a symbolic corroboration of this role. But like other code talkers, Jessie's labor situates her alongside whiteness at the moment of a specific enactment of power while simultaneously foregrounding her *difference* from—or better, within—whiteness. Boucicault uses the mediation of a racialized Irish other to construct and legitimate this act of racial re-situation.

3. The Imperial Picaresque in the Metropole: *Vanity Fair*

Thus far, my discussion of the picaresque genre and its affordances for theorizing racial triangulation has focused specifically on the role of Irishness in nineteenth-century India, and it is important to reemphasize that these modes of racialization were situational—not only to the Indian context but, as we have seen, sometimes to the specific scene in a literary work. At the same time, racial triangulation was a widespread and portable discursive strategy in nineteenth-century imperial culture, and to limit its conceptual application to India is to misunderstand the mobile and networked quality of nineteenth-century empire. Anglo-Indian cultural life was distinct but not separable from the cultural life of Britain itself. In this article's closing section, then, I will return to the case of Thackeray, whose 1847–48 *Vanity Fair* exemplifies a metropolitan resituation of the triangular dynamics discussed so far. *Vanity Fair* does not share the racial paradigms that link *Major Gahagan*, *Kim*, and *The Relief of Lucknow*. For one, the novel's Irish plot (centered on the marital designs of Glorvina and Peggy O'Dowd) is not central to its racial dynamics; attention to this London-based novel is a corrective to any misconstruction of racial triangulation as implying any ontology of Irishness.[38] This is not because Thackeray did not understand the literary effect of Irish racial triangulation in India (we have already seen that he did); rather, in *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray sets aside the Irish plot, consciously and legibly

reconstituting Anglo-Indian racial triangulation within London's metropolitan racial logic through an implicit racialization of Anglo-Indianness itself. Whereas in the India-based texts discussed above, the Irish half-outsider constitutes Anglo-Indian racial whiteness, in Thackeray, the Anglo-Indian (transplanted back to London) takes on the mediating half-outsider role.

Born and raised until the age of seven in Calcutta, and then in London's extensive Anglo-Indian "repatriate" community, Thackeray understood firsthand that community's role in importing certain cultural logics "back" to Britain. Thackeray most famously portrays this world in *The Newcomes* (1854–55), but it provides important ideological context for his entire corpus—a context that helps make sense of Thackeray's exceptional (among popular metropolitan Victorian novelists) reliance on picaresque genre conventions and structures.[39] But Thackeray also understood that in London, race and genre alike meant differently. Becky Sharp is rightly seen as the primary picaresque figure in *Vanity Fair*, and her status as a half-outsider—connected to her foreign origins, her efforts at class passing, her bohemian upbringing—is evident. But she is far from alone in this status: the novel is rife with such figures, from Anglo-Indian returnees to broke aristocrats to Rhoda Swartz, "the rich woolly-haired mulatto from St. Kitts" (4). As Sheila Lahiri Choudhury has shown, the colonial relation provides a structuring logic behind all these metropolitan dynamics.[40] Thus, these figures' portrayals are consistently marked by racializing language, and the constant renegotiation of racial status in *Vanity Fair* is presented through Thackeray's authorial and narratorial racism as a sign of cultural degeneracy.[41] But it also reflects a clarity—and, significantly for our purposes, a presumption of cultural legibility—regarding the situational nature of racial relation.

Although *Vanity Fair* is often noted as unusual among canonical Victorian novels for its direct and relatively extensive engagement with racial blackness, the Anglo-Indian context of this treatment has been underemphasized. *Vanity Fair* uses the term "black" in both its standard and its Anglo-Indian senses, and plays the two off against each other. This interplay is emphasized early on in the novel, particularly in the fourth chapter, where the wealthy Mr. Sedley, father of the Indian returnee Jos, at whom Thackeray's *pícara* Becky Sharp has been setting her cap, declares, "It's a mercy he did not bring us over a black daughter in law. . . . The girl's a white face at any rate."[42] Mr. Sedley uses "black" to mean native Indian—but he does so in the midst of a chapter that has substantially focused on Sambo, the Sedleys' "black footman" (10),

describing his delight at Rebecca calling him "Sir" and depicting him prominently in Thackeray's original illustration, one of several that renders the non-Indian nature of Sambo's blackness apparent (25).[43] Just paragraphs before Mr. Sedley's racist comment, the same character teases Jos by ordering Sambo to "send to Exeter Change" for Jos's "elephant" (27): the joke, this context indicates, is on not only Jos's braggadocio but also the shifted racial paradigm mechanized by his relocation to London from India. This moment of relative racialization is underscored by the reference to Exeter Exchange, which for Thackeray's Regency characters refers only to Edward Cross's menagerie and its star elephant, but to his Victorian readers would have evoked the famous antislavery activism based at Exeter Hall.[44] *Vanity Fair* is insistent, in other words, on the fluid meanings of blackness, in a way far more recognizable when read through the author's Anglo-Indian background.

Read in this way, we can see that *Vanity Fair*'s picaresque architecture serves a double function: implicitly referring readers to a literary tradition already associated with liminal whiteness while also enabling the kind of repeated plot "resets" that dramatize the temporary, situational nature of its racializations. Jennifer DeVere Brody's virtuosic chapter on *Vanity Fair* foregrounds this clarity and situates it explicitly in terms of racial triangulation. Brody emphasizes the role of Rhoda Swartz as a racial mediatrix, describing her "intermediate" position as one that "'whitens' Amelia and 'blackens' Rebecca" (30). Brody shows how Rhoda's own racial ambivalence, as a Jewish-coded "mulatto," can both shore up and undermine whiteness at different moments—if Rhoda's racial submissiveness makes her "an object that enables the 'white' [Amelia] to perform femininity properly and with impunity" (38), her narrative presence also "haunts" the representations of Rebecca, orienting readers towards Thackeray's "subtle, subtextual references to Rebecca's 'blackness'" (39). Becky Sharp, Brody concludes, "is a kind of white-black actress, whose hybridity is hidden"—paradigmatically a racial half-outsider (39). Yet the doubling of Rebecca and Rhoda through what Brody calls "the parallel representation of two types of 'black' women" also relies on a ghostly third, Mr. Sedley's hypothetical "black daughter in law." Rebecca's vexed whiteness is situationally stabilized into a binary through the certifying psychic presence of a racial third. This third is invoked through the novel's Anglo-Indian plot and background as combined with its recognizably picaresque genre structure itself.

The rhetoric of black and white in British India, then, is not just an export from British discourses of Atlantic slavery: the racial discourse of

nineteenth-century London was also an *import* from an India that consti-
tuted British whiteness from within and from without. In *Vanity Fair*, the
echo of Anglo-Indian strategies of racial triangulation is enough to mobi-
lize a version of their function: it is able to do so because white British
conceptions of blackness took into account its status as a constructed cat-
egory of imperialism. Periodizing race is a fraught exercise, and it is
important to avoid either projecting any form of race-innocence onto
the past or presupposing a teleological trajectory that naturalizes modern
racial paradigms.[45] The texts I have considered here cannot themselves
be periodized neatly, nor do they reflect a clear chronological trajectory,
but I think this is to the point: imperial racialization itself involved a kind
of picaresque episodicity, rather than simply a sustained cultural develop-
ment. If racialization changes gradually across the nineteenth century, it
also took on countless ad hoc, situational formations, the precise func-
tion of which was not to partake in any larger narrative of cultural racial
development. One benefit of a focus on the picaresque in nineteenth-
century British India is that it helps foreground the conscious, self-aware
nature of these Victorian racial constructions as stratagems of power.

It is still sometimes suggested that retrospective analyses of shifting
nineteenth-century racial categories might undermine Victorian racial
illusions. But for nineteenth-century imperialists, racial fluidity was not
some inconvenient truth but rather a recognized aid to racial consolida-
tion. When Thackeray's elderly Miss Matilda Crawley deems "honest
Sambo, the black footman of Bloomsbury, as one of the queer natives
of the place" (145), she is engaging in a racist derision of an unfashion-
able neighborhood—but she also unknowingly anticipates the queer
nativity of her creator's Anglo-Indian racial logics. Black Sambo becomes
a "native" of Thackeray's Bloomsbury through the triangulation of racial
half-outsiders. In the same paragraph, Miss Crawley wonders "that such a
thing [as Amelia] could come out of Bloomsbury" (145)—that is, how an
admittedly racialized environment could produce an idealized paragon
of whiteness. In Thackeray's domesticated imperial picaresque, the
answer is clear: through triangular racialization.

NOTES

1. Thackeray, *Major Gahagan*, 7, 8. All subsequent references to this edi-
   tion are noted parenthetically in the text.
2. Fielder, *Relative Races*, 8.

3. See, e.g., Chatterjee, Christoff, and Wong, "Introduction"; Freedgood, *Worlds Enough*; Burton, *Empire in Question*; and McKee, "Racial Strategies in *Jane Eyre*."

4. Hall, "Race, the Floating Signifier." On constructivist conceptions of race as a legacy of nineteenth century discourse, see Tucker, *The Moment of Racial Sight*, as well as her "Historicizing the Theorization of Race."

5. On the proleptic whiteness of nineteenth-century Irish racialization, see O'Malley, "Irish Whiteness"; O'Neill, *Famine Irish;* and Martin, "Victorian Ireland." On Irish self-constructions as white, see, e.g., Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*.

6. Mohanram, *Imperial White*, 51.

7. Mohanram, *Imperial White*, xxiv.

8. See, e.g., Maurer, "National and Regional Literatures."

9. On the first, see, e.g., Mizutani, *The Meaning of White*; and Fischer-Tiné, *Low and Licentious Europeans*. On the second, see, e.g., Herbert, *War of No Pity*; Trautmann, *Aryanism and British India*; and Khan, "Abolition as a Racial Project." On the third, see, e.g., Wright, *Ireland, India and Nationalism*; and Streets, *Martial Races*.

10. This is not, obviously, to credit nineteenth-century literature as the origin of these racial categories, but rather to identify one way racial tropes were disseminated in the period. As Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields have shown, both embedded and novel practices of racism tend to antedate the racial suppositions used to justify them; the rhetoric of blackness in British India follows this pattern as a kind of strategic rationalization of standing structures of oppression. See Fields and Fields, *Racecraft*. I use the phrase "liminal whiteness" in the sense of Murray, *Liminal Whiteness*.

11. William Makepeace Thackeray to Edward Fitzgerald, March–May 1848, in *Selected Letters*, 146. Thackeray's racial fantasies reach perhaps their most extreme pitch in an 1853 letter wherein he imagines his then-thirteen-year-old daughter having been "married to the black footman," leaving "the little tawny graces of my infantile grandson" to "reconcil[e] me to his mother's choice and the bandy legs and woolly head of his father." Thackeray to Elizabeth Strong and Lucy Baxter, 17–18 October–3 November 1853, *Selected Letters*, 260. For Kipling's fascination with the miscegenation plot, see McBratney, *Imperial Subjects, Imperial Space*. On Boucicault's racial drag (related to that of his wife, Agnes Robertson, who famously played Boucicault's titular *Octoroon*), see Boltwood, "'The Ineffaceable

Curse of Cain,'" and Chiles, "Blackened Irish and Brownfaced Amerindians." On the relevance of Thackeray's Anglo-Indian biography to his depictions of race and empire, see Ray, "Thackeray and India," and (forewarned of its seemingly uncritical adoption of racist language and attitudes) Davies, "The Miscegenation Theme."

12. Guillén, *Literature as System*, 79–84. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.

13. See Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*.

14. The biographical and literary implication with India of eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish and Scots-Irish picaresque writers like Johnstone and Elizabeth Hamilton is clearly of interest for my claims here. For a trenchant analysis of this period's Anglo-Indian writing, albeit with only indirect attention to the questions of Ireland and the picaresque, see Soni, *The Anglo-Indian Novel*.

15. Many of the genre's major non-Irish practitioners, such as the Ottoman-born Huguenot expatriate James Justinian Morier, author of the popular Persian picaresque *Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (1824), are highly amenable to analogous arguments.

16. For analyses of two different logics of racial mobility that the Victorian picaresque was sometimes used to counter, see Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*; and Makdisi, *Making England Western*.

17. René Girard is the paradigmatic theorist of triangulation and is particularly useful here for his insights into how triangulation can surprisingly serve the ends of binarism. Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. Mikhail Bakhtin associates the novel with the "third-person," prototypically a servant, who can access but not participate in the "private" life of elite society. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 122ff.

18. Claire Jean Kim's influential article identifies a twofold mechanism of triangulation, first "relative valorization" and then "civic ostracism," working to render Asian Americans both a pretext for the oppression of other minority groups and also as an unassimilable, foreign "other." Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans." Among the extensive scholarship responding to Kim's intervention, particularly useful here is Nadia Kim, "Globalizing Racial Triangulation," who adds an axis of "visibility" to Claire Jean Kim's analysis, one of particular relevance to the imperial picaresque, which insists on the unfixed status of racialization at difference sites within fluid contexts.

19. Russell, *My Diary in India*, 1:164.

20. Streets, *Martial Races*, 43; Martin, *The Mutiny of the Bengal Army*, 124.

21. See Meadows, *Seeta*; Trevelyan, *Cawnpore*; and Grant, *First Love and Last Love*. For further citations and a fuller analysis of this phenomenon, see Herbert, *War of No Pity*, chapter 4, on which this paragraph draws heavily.

22. Majendie, *Up Among the Pandies*, 196.

23. On more "standard," anti-African forms of anti-Blackness in India, see Burton, *Africa in the Indian Imagination*—or, as the Gurgaon printing far more provocatively titles it, *Brown Over Black* (thanks to Oishani Sengupta for calling this to my attention).

24. For an illuminating discussion of the racial self-conceptions of late Victorian Irish soldiers stationed in India, see Bubb, "The Life of the Irish Soldier."

25. Mizutani, *The Meaning of White*, 220; Wright, *Ireland, India, and Nationalism*, 121.

26. Kipling, *Kim*, 3, 34, 184, 23, 115, 87. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text. On Kim's racial liminality, see also Mohanram, *Imperial White*; Wright, *Ireland, India, and Nationalism*; McBratney, *Imperial Subjects*; and Barat, "White Man's Burden."

27. Walters, "A 'White Boy,'" 335.

28. Walters, "A 'White Boy,'" 335 (my emphases).

29. Brody, *Impossible Purities*. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text. For a reading of Kim as Kipling's effort to hybridize distinct discourses around India and Ireland, see Nagai, *Empire of Analogies*.

30. Mohanram, *Imperial White*, 164.

31. Walters, "A 'White Boy,'" 342.

32. Mohanram, *Imperial White*, 172, 164.

33. The scholarship on "Mutiny Fiction" as a site of racial realignment is extensive, and it is widely accepted that the association of Indians with blackness expanded rapidly after 1857. On the reach of the Jessie Brown story, and its implication in a range of racializations, see Mukharji, "Jessie's Dream at Lucknow."

34. These two facts are by no means in conflict: in fact, the perception of shared whiteness was one of the most important mechanisms by which Scottish identity was made compatible with Britishness during this period. See Kidd, "Race, Empire"; and Dyer, *White*. On the discourse of Scottish alterity as itself a mechanism for shoring up a concept of white culture, see Samara, "The Appropriation of the Scottish 'Other.'"

35. See in particular McNeil, *Scotland, Britain, Empire*, chapter 4; and Gould, *Nineteenth-Century Theatre*, chapter 10. McNeil cogently emphasizes that, even in such narratives, Scottishness is persistently *distinguished* from Britishness, partly as a way of outsourcing self-identified "savagery" to an "internal other"; this dynamic further raises the salience of whiteness as bridge.

36. See Streets, *Martial Races*; and Metcalf, *Imperial Connections*.

37. Boucicault, *The Relief of Lucknow*, IV.i. All subsequent references to this edition are cited parenthetically by act and scene in the text.

38. On Thackeray's subordination of Irish themes in the aftermath of the Great Famine, see Berol, "The Anglo-Irish Threat."

39. For a thorough elaboration of *Vanity Fair*'s "picaresque formula" (101), see Hartveit, *Workings of the Picaresque*, chapter 5.

40. "What, in fact, actually takes place beneath the counter-discourse of parody on the genteel London society is the transference of a powerful colonial discourse based on the master-slave economy to a domestic situation." Choudhury, "Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*," 129.

41. Especially instructive on these features of the novel are Zoli, "'Black Holes' of Calcutta and London"; and Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*.

42. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 28–29. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text. Mr. Sedley's later reiteration of this point—"Better she, my dear, than a black Mrs. Sedley and a dozen of mahogany grandchildren" (53)—elaborates the racial targeting of his attack without entirely clarifying it.

43. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan has noted the prevalence of depictions of Black *rather than* Indian servants working for Anglo-Indian returnees, while Nupur Chaudhuri emphasizes the use of anti-Black rhetoric to refer to Indian servants by Anglo-Indians in India: it is as though the servant always had to be black, but the Anglo-Indian knew that the demographic makeup of that blackness had to shift in the Indian versus the English social context. Rajan, "'The Shadow of That Expatriated Prince,'" 548; Chaudhuri, "Memsahibs and Their Servants." On the importance of illustrations in identifying Thackeray's racializations (and his racism), see Geracht, "Race in W. M. Thackeray."

44. By the end of the novel's events, Exeter Hall has opened, and its associations with evangelical activism are lightly mocked in chapter 61 (613).

45. On the problems of race and periodization with reference to still earlier histories, see the 2021 special issue of *New Literary History* of that title, particularly Chakravarty and Thompson, "Race and Periodization."

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