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# “A VERY ENTERTAINING BOOK”: THE VENTRILOQUISM OF RUDYARD KIPLING’S *THE EYES OF ASIA*<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract: This article is a critical comparison between the text of letters written by Indian soldiers on the Western Front of World War I, and the text of Rudyard Kipling’s The Eyes of Asia. The deployment of Indian soldiers by the British Empire to the Western Front produced controversy, anxiety, and excitement among European observers. Indian soldiers were depicted in a range of representations that reflected a discursive tension between loyal, heroic warriors, and racialized primitives. A number of British authors wrote stories from the perspectives of Indian soldiers built to assuage Western anxieties over the presence of non-white colonial soldiers in Europe. The concept of ventriloquism is used to read these works as reproductions of the imperialist “discourse of the master” through the purported voice of the Indian soldier. The Eyes of Asia, a quartet of short stories by Rudyard Kipling, is the chosen case study for this critical analysis. The Eyes of Asia was a commissioned work of British military propaganda using an archive of letters written by Indian soldiers, gathered by British censors, and provided to Kipling. By comparing Kipling’s stories written from the perspectives of fictional Indian soldiers against the letters by real Indians, the article reveals how Kipling manipulated the voices of Indian soldiers to produce a caricature of their testimony that conformed to British expectations of the men of the Indian army.*

## Introduction

Under the increased academic and public attention given to World War I in recent years, the Indian soldier, or sepoy, fighting for the British Empire has emerged as

<sup>1</sup> This work has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 812764.

a particularly popular subject of discussion. The memorialization of the colonial soldier is not only significant in constructing a historiography of World War I but is also salient within the larger conversation over migrancy, national identity and post-imperial reckoning sweeping across Europe and the United Kingdom today.

Remembrance is a political act. When the British politician Baroness Warsi declared the United Kingdom had a duty to remember that during the war years "our boys weren't just Tommies – they were Tariqs and Tajinders too,"<sup>2</sup> the scholar Santanu Das, a leading figure in the research of the South Asian war experience, pointed out that such platitudes cover up the racial inequalities that divided Tariq and Tajinder from Tommy in the trenches.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Tariq and Tajinder were "imperfect subalterns"<sup>4</sup> of the empire, whose uncomplicated celebration elides their fraught history as not just the subjects of imperial military violence but as its very instrument – a history that has until the Centenary led to a silence in India surrounding the embarrassment of Indians fighting for the British Empire,<sup>5</sup> echoed in similar processes of rejection and opportunistic celebration of colonial soldiers in former French Africa.<sup>6</sup>

There is nothing new about the battle to assign competing, shifting meanings to the figure of the colonial soldier. In the spirit of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's provocative question "Can the Subaltern Speak?," the imperfect subaltern figure

<sup>2</sup> Jane Merrick and Kashmira Gander, "Special Report: The Centenary of WWI – 'Tommies and Tariqs Fought Side by Side,'" *The Independent*, 23 June 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/special-report-the-centenary-of-wwi-tommies-and-tariqs-fought-side-by-side-8669758.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Santanu Das, "Indian Sepoy Experience in Europe, 1914-18: Archive, Language, and Feeling," *Twentieth Century British History*, 25, no. 3 (1 September 2014): 417, <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwu033>.

<sup>4</sup> Santanu Das, "The Singing Subaltern," *Parallax* 17, no. 3 (August 2011): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2011.584409>.

<sup>5</sup> See Thierry di Costanzo for a summary of India's changing attitude to war memorialisation; from post-war disillusionment to nationalist disavowal to a slow acknowledgement in the run-up to the Centenary. Much of the Indian conversation around World War I remains generated by the South Asian diaspora in the United Kingdom. Thierry Di Costanzo, "Memory and History of the Great(er) War and India: From a National-Imperial to a More Global Perspective," *E-Rea* 14, no. 2 (June 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4000/erea.5844>.

<sup>6</sup> Ruth Ginio, "African Silences: Negotiating the Story of France's Colonial Soldiers, 1914-2009," *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Thomas DeGeorges, "Still Behind Enemy Lines? Algerian and Tunisian Veterans after the World Wars," *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, ed. Heike Liebau et al. (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2010) 519-46.

of the Indian soldier has long been spoken for. Not only was the Indian soldier silenced in comparison to his white counterparts<sup>7</sup> through the economic and racial inequities of the empire, but most soldiers were also illiterate and so produced little in the way of surviving testimony. The absence of sepoy speech provides an opportunity for others to step in and imagine the sepoy's voice and speak for him. In an ironic twist, the largest surviving body of sepoy testimony exists in the form of reports collated from letters written from the Western Front by Indian soldiers and then screened by British censor boards.<sup>8</sup> The act of military-colonial silencing gives us what had until recently been the only large body of text written by Indian soldiers.<sup>9</sup>

In this article I examine the first non-military use of these censored letters to imagine the Indian soldier: the short stories in Rudyard Kipling's collection *The Eyes of Asia*.<sup>10</sup> Using the work of Andrew Hill<sup>11</sup> and of Senko Maynard<sup>12</sup> to develop a metaphor of "ventriloquism," I argue that in these stories Kipling ventriloquised the voices of Indian soldiers to reproduce the imperialist "discourse of the master." I provide an overview of the stories and the context within which Kipling wrote them (as commissioned works of imperial propaganda), and I analyse the stories in contrast with the soldiers' letters to identify where Kipling strategically obscured or changed the sepoys' speech in order to create a narrative of uncomplicated colonial loyalty.

Before turning to the subject of *The Eyes of Asia*, it is necessary to set the stage by providing an overview of the wartime discourse surrounding Indian soldiers on the Western Front, and the ventriloquizing British literature produced during this period.

<sup>7</sup> As Gail Braybon observed, "more words have been written about the great British war poets than about all the non-white soldiers put together." Gail Braybon, *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003) 28.

<sup>8</sup> David Omissi, ed., *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999) 1.

<sup>9</sup> Santanu Das provides an overview of many newly-discovered sources of sepoy testimony in his book *India, Empire and First World Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), but the censor reports remain a crucial source of information.

<sup>10</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *The Eyes of Asia* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1918).

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Hill, "The BBC Empire Service: The Voice, the Discourse of the Master and Ventriloquism," *South Asian Diaspora* 2, no. 1 (March 2010): 25-38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19438190903541952>.

<sup>12</sup> Senko K. Maynard, "Textual Ventriloquism: Quotation and the Assumed Community Voice in Japanese Newspaper Columns," *Poetics*, 24, no. 6 (July 1997): 379-92, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X\(96\)00016-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X(96)00016-2).

## The Indian Soldier as Ventriloquist's Dummy in British Literature

Over the course of World War I, from 1914 to 1918, 1.4 million Indian soldiers and labourers were recruited to serve the British war effort.<sup>13</sup> Of these 1.4 million, 140,000 were deployed on the Western Front.<sup>14</sup> These Indian soldiers were among the very first colonial forces deployed in Europe, and through 1914 and 1915 they filled a manpower gap between the creation of Kitchener's New Armies and the introduction of British conscription in 1916.<sup>15</sup> Though Indian forces played a crucial role in reinforcing the beleaguered British forces and participated in key actions such as the Battle of Neuve-Chapelle, the use of non-white soldiers in Europe against European foes was highly controversial. German sources condemned the use of colonial soldiers in Europe as a betrayal of white imperial solidarity, and even within the British and French imperial and military administrations there were misgivings that colonial soldiers would not contribute enough militarily to be worth the risk of using them against white opponents.<sup>16</sup> Of the various non-white colonial forces deployed by the British, only Indian soldiers were allowed to play an active combat role on the Western Front due to the relative size and immediate availability of the Indian army, and a racialized belief that other "forces of colour" were not suitable to take on European armies.<sup>17</sup>

In the Entente nations, the public reacted to the alterity of Indians in Europe with ambivalent admiration.<sup>18</sup> The Indians were celebrated for their foreignness

<sup>13</sup> Santanu Das, "Indians at Home, Mesopotamia and France, 1914-18: Towards an Intimate History," *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, ed. Santanu Das (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 70.

<sup>14</sup> Santanu Das, "Reframing Life/War 'Writing': Objects, Letters and Songs of Indian Soldiers, 1914-1918," *Textual Practice* 29, no. 7 (10 November 2015): 1269, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2015.1095446>.

<sup>15</sup> A brief overview of British recruitment policy and the phenomenon of volunteer service can be found in John Hartigan, "Volunteering in the First World War: The Birmingham Experience, August 1914 – May 1915," *Midland History* 24, no. 1 (June 1999): 167-86, <https://doi.org/10.1179/mdh.1999.24.1.167>.

<sup>16</sup> Christian Koller, "The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and Their Deployment in Europe during the First World War," *Immigrants & Minorities* 26, no. 1-2 (March 2008): 111-33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619280802442639>.

<sup>17</sup> George Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front: India's Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium in the First World War*, ed. Hew Strachan and Geoffrey Wawro, *Cambridge Military Histories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 151.

<sup>18</sup> Claire Buck described the alienating transformations wrought by the War as the "unhoming of Europe," and the presence of colonial soldiers was one aspect of the

and novelty, and the exoticism of their weaponry and methods of warfare (they were frequently depicted with lances on horseback, or engaging in hand-to-hand combat) juxtaposed them strikingly with the industrial violence of World War I. However, a certain “discursive tension” developed between the representations of Indians as noble, loyal warriors and their simultaneous descriptions as subhuman primitives given to violence and bloodlust. Thus, the very same qualities that were admired turned into proof of their racialized inferiority and the need for the British guidance to channel their instincts positively.<sup>19</sup>

The British wartime novels that sprang up in the wake of the public interest in the Indian army partly responded to this climate of imperial anxiety, and made a point to assuage the fears of the British public and its allies.<sup>20</sup> Within these stories, which include Talbot Mundy’s *Hira Singh: When India Came to Fight in Flanders* (1918) and “Roly” Grimshaw’s *The Experiences of Ram Singh, Dafadar of Horse* (1930), British authors wrote from the perspective of Indian soldiers, ventriloquizing their voices to assert their loyalty and subservience to the British Empire.<sup>21</sup>

The British Raj had a long literary tradition of novels and stories written as genuine testimony from Indian sources. The purpose of this ventriloquism was to legitimise British rule “by having preconceived notions of Indians and Indian society confirmed by the natives themselves – even if those informants were invented,” as Kim Wagner wrote.<sup>22</sup> Gyan Prakash concurred: Orientalism as “a body of knowledge produced by texts and institutional practices” in this context was informed by the apparent internal confirmation of the Orientalized subject – “the Orientalist spoke for the Indian and represented the object in texts.”<sup>23</sup> In a discussion

unprecedented, disorienting nature of the war. Claire Buck, *Conceiving Strangeness in British First World War Writing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) 8-44 (Chap. 1), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=2057850>.

<sup>19</sup> Santanu Das, “Writing Empire, Fighting War: India, Great Britain and the First World War,” *India in Britain: South Asian Networks and Connections, 1858-1950*, ed. Susheila Nasta (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 35.

<sup>20</sup> Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, Chap. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Talbot Mundy, *Hira Singh: When India Came to Fight in Flanders* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs Merrill Company, 1918); Captain “Roly” Grimshaw, “Experiences of Ram Singh, Dafadar of Horse: An Echo of 1914,” *Indian Cavalry Officer 1914-15*, ed. J.H. Wakefield and C.J.M. Weippert (Tunbridge Wells: D.J. Costello, 1986).

<sup>22</sup> Kim A. Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010) 15, <http://choicereviews.org/review/10.5860/CHOICE.48-5263>.

<sup>23</sup> Gyan Prakash, “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 2 (April 1990): 383, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500016534>.

of the ventriloquism of the BBC's Empire Service – later its World Service – Andrew Hill argued that the apparently autonomous voice of the subaltern is only allowed to repeat the "discourse of the master."<sup>24</sup> Hill observed that the Empire Service's "ventriloquist" practices were an attempt to hold the Empire together. The ventriloquist act of including the voice of the colonized reveals the ultimate significance of this voice, despite its subaltern status. The imperial subject's loyalty and acquiescence to being controlled are at the heart of the anxieties surrounding empire. Ventriloquism gives the discourse of the master new credence and legitimacy through the illusion of subaltern speech.

While most British authors writing in the "sepooy voice" based their works on news events or their own experiences, Rudyard Kipling was in a unique position to write stories using direct sepooy testimony as his source.

### ***The Eyes of Asia***

By the time of World War I, Rudyard Kipling had a long-established career as a commentator and spokesman for the British Empire, particularly its Indian possessions. The military deployment of Indian soldiers to Europe became of interest to him and he wrote an article on the subject.<sup>25</sup> The article was inspired by Kipling's visit to watch Indian soldiers training in the New Forest, and from the diary entry written by his wife Carrie ("Rud out to inspect the gun battery and to talk with his Indians") we can see how deeply he felt invested in the fortunes of "his" Indians.<sup>26</sup>

In June of 1916, Rudyard Kipling was approached by the British Intelligence Department to find a way to present military intelligence to "neutrals at home."<sup>27</sup> He began to work on a collection of stories based on letters written by Indian soldiers and collected in British censor reports. These were clandestinely provided to him by his friend Sir Dunlop Smith, a retired Indian Civil Service member.<sup>28</sup> Kipling took inspiration from his personal experiences with Indian soldiers, including conversations with convalescing soldiers in Brighton, who

<sup>24</sup> Hill, "The BBC Empire Service" 35.

<sup>25</sup> Part of a series collected and published together the following year: Rudyard Kipling, "Indian Troops," *The New Army in Training* (1915) (Glasgow: Good Press, 2019).

<sup>26</sup> Carrie Kipling, "Kipling Papers, The Carrie Kipling Diaries," quoted in Karen Leenders, "Rudyard Kipling and the Indian Corps," *The Kipling Journal* 90, no. 365 (September 2016): 49.

<sup>27</sup> Leenders, "Rudyard Kipling and the Indian Corps" 49; David Alan Richards, "Kipling and the Great War Propagandists," *The Kipling Journal* 91, no. 369 (2017): 20.

<sup>28</sup> Leenders, "Rudyard Kipling and the Indian Corps" 49.

were also the source of much of the correspondence in the censor reports.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the bulk of the inspiration came from the letters, which Kipling found “a complete revelation.”<sup>30</sup> He showed his stories to Dunlop Smith to make sure there was not any incriminating material that would cause Smith trouble with the India Office; despite attempts at discretion, Kipling wrote “very close to the truth,”<sup>31</sup> and copied the original letters in great excerpts – and for the rest he “somewhat amplified what [he] thought [he] saw between the letters.”<sup>32</sup>

Karen Leenders wrote that Kipling may have extensively quoted from the letters because it was more expedient to paraphrase them, and in any case he felt the letters had literary merit.<sup>33</sup> The Head Censor of Indian mail, Evelyn Berkeley Howell, had written: “If the publication of selections should ever be permitted, a very entertaining book would result.”<sup>34</sup> Howell had an artistic bent, relished the opportunity to translate soldiers’ poetry, and treated the weekly compilation of soldiers’ letters into the censor reports as something of a literary exercise.<sup>35</sup> Given the discretion surrounding Kipling’s project, it is unclear whether Howell was aware that the author had set about the task of producing just such a work of entertainment.

Leenders also suggested that Kipling’s own paternalistic sense of loyalty to the Indian army may have instilled in him a desire to report the actual words locked away in the censor reports.<sup>36</sup> However, this motivation is undercut by Kipling’s selection of the writing that best fit the interests of imperial propaganda to portray Indians as loyal admirers of Europe, leaving out inconvenient material

<sup>29</sup> Letters from Brighton Hospital are prominent in David Omissi’s edited volume of Indian correspondence.

<sup>30</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, ed. Thomas Pinney, vol. 4, 1911-1919 (London: Macmillan, 1999) 374-75, quoted in Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014) 69.

<sup>31</sup> Kipling, *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling* 4:507; quoted in Leenders, “Rudyard Kipling and the Indian Corps” 54.

<sup>32</sup> Rudyard Kipling, “Kipling Papers, Tyler Gift,” letter dated 10 or 13 July 1916; quoted in Leenders, “Rudyard Kipling and the Indian Corps” 54.

<sup>33</sup> Leenders, “Rudyard Kipling and the Indian Corps” 54.

<sup>34</sup> Omissi, ed., *Indian Voices of the Great War* 22.

<sup>35</sup> Claude Markovits, “Indian Soldiers’ Experiences in France during World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front,” *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, ed. Heike Liebau et al. (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2010) 39.

<sup>36</sup> Leenders, “Rudyard Kipling and the Indian Corps” 54.



even within the letters he chose to quote from.<sup>37</sup> In this respect, *The Eyes of Asia* only produces an illusion of authentic quotation. Senko Maynard observed that while quoted speech gives the impression of accurate reportage of someone else's utterance, "what is generally meant by 'reported speech' is spontaneous speech creatively constructed by the speaker at the time of talk."<sup>38</sup> Through the use of quoted speech Kipling himself appears mute, letting the dummy figure of the Indian soldier to seemingly speak instead. The quoted speech "deflects attention from the manipulating source,"<sup>39</sup> as Maynard suggested later in his article, and adds legitimacy to Kipling's speech act by disguising it as the subaltern's own.

Between May and June of 1917, Kipling's stories appeared in American, British and French newspapers. They were then collected and printed as a booklet titled *The Eyes of Asia* by Doubleday in the United States in 1918. The American audience was intentionally targeted, with the stories acting as a propaganda counterweight to the growing influence of US-based Indian nationalists.<sup>40</sup>

The four sections of *The Eyes of Asia* are titled "A Retired Gentleman," "The Fumes of the Heart," "The Private Account," and "A Trooper of Horse."<sup>41</sup> The writers are respectively a Rajput Hindu, a Punjabi Sikh, a Frontier Muslim, and a Punjabi Muslim – all classic examples of India's so-called martial races.<sup>42</sup> The contents of "A Retired Gentleman" and "A Trooper of Horse" are the letters themselves, whereas the other two sections have their letters embedded in a narrative. "The Fumes of the Heart" is presented as a dictated letter, with a short preamble where the Sikh narrator has a conversation with his British doctor and scribe about what message to send to his brother, interrupted by interjections from the narrator towards his "sahibs." "The Private Account" is structured as a theatrical script, with the letter being read out by the writer's family at home.

In David Omissi's edited volume of letters from the censor reports, we learn that the general illiteracy of the soldiers and their families made scribes and letter-readers necessary.<sup>43</sup> Omissi acknowledged the essential problem of reading the letters as authentic sepoy testimony; not only were they circumscribed by

<sup>37</sup> Élodie Raimbault, "Conflating Points of View on Europe in *The Eyes of Asia*: Kipling's Fiction of Reverse Orientalism," *Kipling Journal* 91, no. 369 (2017): 28-29.

<sup>38</sup> Maynard, "Textual Ventriloquism" 381.

<sup>39</sup> Maynard, "Textual Ventriloquism" 390.

<sup>40</sup> Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers* 69.

<sup>41</sup> Kipling, *The Eyes of Asia* 1-22, 23-46, 47-74, 75-101.

<sup>42</sup> Sir George Fletcher MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., 1933) 236-37.

<sup>43</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* 5.

what was possible to say under the attentions of the censor boards, but the need to rely on a scribe to write (and as shown in *The Eyes of Asia*, the scribes may well have been British officers themselves) and someone literate to read out the letters further curtailed what could be said – for letter dictation and letter reading were semi-public affairs – and we cannot in any case account for the degree to which scribes may have intervened in the actual text of the letters. Taking into account these limitations, Omissi argued that the letters are still an invaluable resource:

the historian must always be alert to the impact of scribal intervention, censorship and self-censorship. Certainly, the uncensored record of the troops might have been different; but, equally, most soldiers had no other means of communicating with their families [...] The crucial issue is, surely, less what we cannot learn from these letters, than what we can learn from them.<sup>44</sup>

Claude Markovits concurred that the censor reports, despite their flaws, are a valuable collection because of the rarity of testimony from the illiterate soldiers of the Indian army.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the censor reports can be said to provide a representative sample of what the Indian soldier wished to communicate, as this was the reason that they were compiled in the first place – so that the mood of the army could be gauged.<sup>46</sup> By reading the letters, Kipling had as good an opportunity as any Englishman of his time to gain insight into the mind of the Indian soldier, into what Santanu Das has called “the sepoy heart.”<sup>47</sup>

Kipling’s awareness of the semi-public nature of sepoy correspondence adds a layer of authenticity to the work. It also allows him to disrupt the one-to-one relationship between the singular narrator (the letter-writer) and the addressee of the letter (who acts as the in-fiction stand-in for the reader). By incorporating other characters such as scribes and family members, Kipling adds heterogeneity to the stories. Maynard describes such “interanimation of voices – of the writer, the quotee, the reader, and of the society in general” as a technique that further hides the presence of the ventriloquising writer.<sup>48</sup> By splitting the narrative of *The Eyes of Asia* across so many voices, backed up by quoted excerpts from a multiplicity of letter-writers, Kipling is able to create the illusion that his stories authentically represent the worldviews of Indian soldiers – and even their families and communities.

<sup>44</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* 9.

<sup>45</sup> Markovits, “Indian Soldiers’ Experiences in France” 39.

<sup>46</sup> Markovits, “Indian Soldiers’ Experiences in France” 37.

<sup>47</sup> Das, “Indian Sepoy Experience in Europe, 1914-18” 398.

<sup>48</sup> Maynard, “Textual Ventriloquism” 386.

Kipling's stories in *The Eyes of Asia* are thick with Orientalist detail that teeters dangerously from exotic scene-setting to mockery. The Indian characters exemplify behaviour stereotypical of Western imaginings of the East, ranging from the Sikh reflexively bargaining with his British scribe,<sup>49</sup> characters dispensing wisdom through verse proverbs,<sup>50</sup> the belief that photographs steal souls,<sup>51</sup> mistaking English aristocratic titles for caste names,<sup>52</sup> and cumbersome writing styles beginning with florid addresses, "exoticizing the manner in which *sipahis* conveyed names and a sense of time and space."<sup>53</sup> Kipling's characters reproduce what Claude Markovits called "Occidentalism from below." Markovits defined Occidentalism as "any body of knowledge and any representation concerning the West developed by non-Westerners."<sup>54</sup> The actual letters written by the Indian soldiers on the Western front are in Markovits's analysis examples of "Occidentalism from below" because their representations of the West have little in common with the "Occidentalist" discourse produced by Indian elites.<sup>55</sup> As Santanu Das wrote, *The Eyes of Asia* is "predictable in its parody of 'Occidentalism from below.'"<sup>56</sup>

"The Fumes of the Heart" is particularly rife with such mockery. It is full of asides where the narrator, the unnamed Sikh, speaks directly to the silent figure of the English "sahib" who acts as his scribe. These asides are not just further commentary on the events being narrated ("We exacted a payment, but she was slain – slain like a calf for no fault.");<sup>57</sup> they are also conspiratorial, with the soldier deriding his brother's ignorance at every turn ("Not one word of this will he or anyone in the villages believe, Sahib. What can you expect? They have never even seen Lahore City! We will tell him what he can understand.").<sup>58</sup> Instead of being directed to the brother, the story becomes one told to the scribe, whose whiteness and hegemonic position over the subaltern colonial soldier make him the mute embodiment of the Western audience. The soldier relishes

<sup>49</sup> Rudyard Kipling, "The Fumes of the Heart," *The Eyes of Asia* 25.

<sup>50</sup> Rudyard Kipling, "A Retired Gentleman," *The Eyes of Asia* 6.

<sup>51</sup> Rudyard Kipling, "A Trooper of Horse," *The Eyes of Asia* 92-93.

<sup>52</sup> Kipling, "A Retired Gentleman" 10-11.

<sup>53</sup> Singh (*The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers* 193) employed the term "sipahi" instead of the anglicized "sepooy" which I prefer to use because the soldiers themselves at the time would have used it.

<sup>54</sup> Markovits, "Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France" 40.

<sup>55</sup> The cleavages between Indian soldiers and the Indian intelligentsia will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>56</sup> Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture* 188.

<sup>57</sup> Kipling, "The Fumes of the Heart" 33.

<sup>58</sup> Kipling, "The Fumes of the Heart" 31.

displaying his newfound worldly knowledge,<sup>59</sup> which he feels puts him closer to the level of the white sahib and farther away from the ignorance of his brother and the elders of his village, who must be enlightened. This provides ironic humour both at the expense of the soldier's brother and the soldier himself, whose self-aggrandizing language is undercut by the implicit power distance between himself and the man he calls "Sahib."

The Indians in *The Eyes of Asia* are staunch imperial loyalists. Consider the first of the stories, "A Retired Gentleman." The protagonist, Bishen Singh, is convalescing in England. He writes to his friend, a retired cavalry officer drilling new recruits back home, ribbing the younger man for thinking himself too old to have joined the war directly. Bishen Singh invokes a "proverb" that an upper caste Rajput who avoids battle is "only fit for crows' meat."<sup>60</sup> Bishen Singh's mockery of his friend for not joining him at the front is matched by Abdul Rahman, narrator of "A Trooper of Horse," when he writes to his mother about the necessity of getting more of the right sort of soldiers at the front ("We Mussulmans should have at least two troops out of four").<sup>61</sup> He is enraged that in India "the idle assemble in thousands begging and making sickness and polluting the drinking-water," insisting that their rightful place is at the Western Front, acting as "sieves for the machine guns"<sup>62</sup> – a jarring, callous note in an intimate message.

The fictional Abdul Rahman's zeal for getting more Indians into France stands in stark contrast with the words of a real-world sepoy from the censor reports also named Abdul Rahman: "For God's sake don't come, don't come, don't come to this war in Europe [...] I am in a state of great anxiety; and tell my brother Muhammad Yakub Khan for God's sake not to enlist. If you have any relatives, my advice is don't let them enlist."<sup>63</sup> Kipling's Abdul Rahman is not just a ventriloquist's puppet reproducing the "discourse of the master," but one that explicitly contradicts the words of the genuine person.

*The Eyes of Asia* reproduces entire extracts from the censor reports, but even the near copies from the letters show crucial differences that highlight the warping of the subaltern testimony. An excellent example is a passage in "A Trooper of Horse"<sup>64</sup> that is an almost verbatim copy of one of the letters.<sup>65</sup> The

<sup>59</sup> Kipling, "The Fumes of the Heart" 31.

<sup>60</sup> Kipling, "A Retired Gentleman" 6.

<sup>61</sup> Kipling, "A Trooper of Horse" 86.

<sup>62</sup> Kipling "A Trooper of Horse" 81.

<sup>63</sup> Havildar Abdul Rahman, France, 20/5/1915, quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* 61.

<sup>64</sup> Kipling, "A Trooper of Horse" 83-84.

fictional Abdul Rahman, and just like a real Indian soldier named Mirza Ahmed Baig in 1916, reported having a dream on the night before an offensive. In this shared dream, a snake appears in the trenches, but is quickly killed by a local priest from the soldier's native village, who materializes to save the day. Following a deadly skirmish where, as Mirza Ahmed Baig calmly put it and Kipling copied exactly, "those who were fated to be the victims of death were taken and those who were fated to be wounded were wounded," the real and fictional soldiers returned to safety. Where the accounts diverge is in the follow-up.

Abdul Rahman adds an aside that he has seen the family priest twice before in his dreams but gives no further detail, and only tells his mother to ask the priest for an interpretation. "I am not conscious of any wrong-doing, and if it is a sign of favour to me, then the shape should speak."<sup>66</sup> Mirza Baig's letter ended on a much more melancholy note, as he dreams of community and celebration and asks the priest's dream "shape" to tell him when he could return from the war:

Subsequently, I had another dream. I dreamed that the assembly of people was being held and that songs were being sung. I was also present in the assembly and I went up to the Pir Murshid and said to him "two years have passed, what is going to happen now?" The Pir Murshid [the priest] regarded me with a sorrowful look, but gave no reply.<sup>67</sup>

It is significant that Kipling leaves out the sharp question regarding the length of the original writer's war service, stripping the letter of its pathos. The seeming endlessness of the war was a shock to the Indian soldiers and a common cause for complaint in the correspondence in the early years on the Western Front.<sup>68</sup> Kipling's soldiers speak of how well they are fed and watered and taken care of, but the pathologically loyal fictional sepoys do not reproduce even the mildest grumblings of their real-world counterparts – much less the depths of despair evident in certain extracts of the reports. The sepoys in *The Eyes of Asia* may at times refer to the war in its enormity as "a world-destroying battle,"<sup>69</sup> but there is nothing in Kipling's stories to match the apocalyptic trauma of passages such as: "The battle is beginning and men are dying like maggots. No one can count them – not in thousands but in hundreds and thousands of thousands. No one can count them."<sup>70</sup> Such passages from colonial soldiers' correspondence sit

<sup>65</sup> Mirza Ahmed Baig, France, 2/8/1916, quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* 214-15.

<sup>66</sup> Kipling, "A Trooper of Horse" 84.

<sup>67</sup> Mirza Ahmed Baig, France, 2/8/1916, quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* 215.

<sup>68</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* 10.

<sup>69</sup> Kipling, "The Fumes of the Heart" 42.

<sup>70</sup> A wounded Sikh to his brother, England, 21/1/1915, quoted in Omissi 31.

neatly alongside the richness of misery expressed within British trench literature, which according to Paul Fussell captured the pivotal loss of modern innocence<sup>71</sup> – and yet Kipling would have us believe that Indian peasant-soldiers emerged from trenches that traumatized the industrialized British clamouring for their friends and relatives to join them.

Kipling's soldiers explicitly praise Western civilization. European prosperity impressed the narrators of *The Eyes of Asia*, just as it impressed the real soldiers in their correspondence. As Sardar Bahadur Gagan wrote to a friend from Brighton in January 1915:

Everything is such as one would not see even in a dream. One should regard it as fairyland. The heart cannot be satiated with seeing the sights, for there is no other place like this in the world. It is as if one were in the next world. It cannot be described.<sup>72</sup>

Also in January 1915, a Parsi on a hospital ship wrote:

I am not in a position to write adequately about the people and the country here. What beautiful cities, pleasant gardens, rivers, streams, houses, shops, roads, carriages, cows, horses, fowls and ducks! Whatever one sees is different from our country. What manners, what conduct, what discipline, etiquette and energy!<sup>73</sup>

The rapturous detail in which the soldiers often described Europe is a striking example of "Occidentalism from below" and is captured in *The Eyes of Asia*. The Sikh in "The Fumes of the Heart" is astonished by the architecture of the hospital: "This hospital is like a temple. It is set in a garden beside the sea. We lie on iron cots beneath a dome of gold and colours and glittering glass work, with pillars."<sup>74</sup> However, Kipling's narrators are in contrast with the real soldiers in having less of an interest in the spectacular. His narrators marvel at the British subway system,<sup>75</sup> but they are just as impressed with washing tubs<sup>76</sup> and French economy with manure use.<sup>77</sup> Analysing the letters as examples of travel writing,

<sup>71</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 3-35 (Chap. 1, "A Satire of Circumstances").

<sup>72</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* 27.

<sup>73</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* 28.

<sup>74</sup> Kipling, "The Fumes of the Heart" 28.

<sup>75</sup> Kipling, "A Retired Gentleman" 14.

<sup>76</sup> Kipling "A Retired Gentleman" 18.

<sup>77</sup> Kipling, "The Fumes of the Heart" 33.

Élodie Raimbault argued that under Kipling's hand the rapturous detail in which the soldiers often described Europe is mediated by the demands of imperial propaganda.<sup>78</sup> This rather boring, materialistic sepoy figure appears to genuinely represent what Kipling saw "between the lines" in the censor reports. Commenting on the constant praising of European education in sepoy correspondence, Kipling had written to Sir Dunlop Smith, "What they mean by 'education' is, I think, capacity to use and profit by the material of the civilization they have seen – such as churches, ploughs, washing tubs and so on [...] here you have hundreds and thousands of men who have gone abroad and discovered the nakedness of their own land."<sup>79</sup>

All of Kipling's narrators make references to education, acknowledging this to be the source of European material superiority. There is an important distinction though between these fictional Indians and how the sepoys in the censor reports speak on the subject. The sepoys in their references to education admire European systems and wish that they would be replicated back home, urging their families to take the schooling of their children seriously.<sup>80</sup> In *The Eyes of Asia* education is the source of Western civilization and white racial superiority. Kipling presents his thesis most strongly via Bishen Singh, who says of the British, "we are nothing beside them,"<sup>81</sup> with Abdul Rahman echoing: "We in India are stones besides these people."<sup>82</sup> British imperial hegemony is described as the natural outcome of such greatness. Such abjectly self-denigrating sentiments may be glimpsed in the real letters, as in one Shah Nawaz's belief that "the Creator has shown the perfection of his beneficence in Europe, and we people [Indians] have been created only for the purpose of completing the totality of the world"<sup>83</sup> – but they are rare.

Kipling's stories capture a fascinating aspect of the Indian soldiers' attitude towards education in the West. His soldiers – themselves illiterate – do not just advocate education, but they to a man champion the cause of *female* education. Even Ahmed the Pathan in "The Private Account" believes girls should be educated so that they can keep track of the body counts in tribal vendettas.<sup>84</sup> The real writers of the letters in the censor reports were impressed by the education

<sup>78</sup> Raimbault, "Conflating Points of View on Europe" 23.

<sup>79</sup> Kipling, "Kipling Papers, Tyler Gift," sec. SxMs54/3/1/1, letter dated 10 or 13 July 1916; quoted in Leenders, "Rudyard Kipling and the Indian Corps" 51.

<sup>80</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* 129, 166, 258, 316, 356.

<sup>81</sup> Kipling, "A Retired Gentleman" 14.

<sup>82</sup> Kipling, "A Trooper of Horse" 94.

<sup>83</sup> Shah Nawaz, Marseilles, 1/9/1915, quoted in Omissi 96.

<sup>84</sup> Rudyard Kipling, "The Private Account," *The Eyes of Asia* 22.

of Western women and girls and saw this seeming gender equality as the root of Western prosperity.<sup>85</sup> Equally operationalized is the respect for European women's self-sufficiency and stoicism in the face of loss that is evident in the sepoy letters.<sup>86</sup> These passages must have struck Kipling's imagination, for all his protagonists admire these qualities in the French and British women they encounter; Indian women seem pitiable in comparison, and it is up to the men to improve their lot so that they can model themselves after the European women<sup>87</sup> and so that India herself can "awake from her hare's dream,"<sup>88</sup> as one real sepoy put it. Abdul Rahman in "A Trooper of Horse" even tells his mother that he wishes to marry a woman educated at an English school.<sup>89</sup> As Markovits pointed out, it is impossible to tell if "this construction of gender relations as a crucial marker of difference between France and India was simply a function of the hegemonic power of colonial discourse over the minds of colonized subjects, or whether it reflected at some level lived experience and an independent assessment based on empirical observation."<sup>90</sup> Kipling's usage of these experiences in his propaganda emphasizes the subaltern position in the imperial relationship within which the real soldiers perceived Europe.

The script of imperial propriety prevents a full, honest representation of the source material of the letters when it comes to other ways sepoys regarded European women. Kipling is noticeably silent on the intimate matter of sex, though many letter-writers boasted of their sexual liaisons with white women, or reassured their families that they would not commit such a sin.<sup>91</sup> Interracial sex was a source of great anxiety within the British imperial administration, affected by imaginations of Indian sexual violence against white women during 1857.<sup>92</sup> References to sex with white women, especially British, were one of the subjects in the correspondence which the censors actively sought to stifle.<sup>93</sup> A frequent

<sup>85</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* 18.

<sup>86</sup> Markovits, "Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France" 45.

<sup>87</sup> Kipling, "A Trooper of Horse" 98.

<sup>88</sup> Khalil Ullah, France, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1918, quoted in Omissi 356.

<sup>89</sup> Kipling, "A Trooper of Horse" 100.

<sup>90</sup> Markovits, "Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France" 46.

<sup>91</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* 7, 18.

<sup>92</sup> Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) 18-51 (Chap. 1, "The Transformation of the British and Indian Armies in the Rebellion of 1857"); Robert McLain, *Gender and Violence in British India: The Road to Amritsar 1914-1919* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 91.

<sup>93</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* 18.



matter of sepoy dissatisfaction in the letters was the curtailing of their movement in the British hospitals in order to restrict their unsupervised encounters with white women. In *The Eyes of Asia*, the narrators, unlike their real-world counterparts, display no sexual interest in the women of Europe. Kipling, mindful of the delicacy of the subject, skips over references to sex in the correspondence and even the codes with which sepoys tried to relate their experiences.<sup>94</sup>

In Santanu Das's estimation, Kipling failed to honestly depict the nuances of the Indian soldiers' experiences, possibly finding the act of balancing propaganda against literary depth too challenging – or perhaps he simply failed to relate to the soldiers.<sup>95</sup> However, the intimate bonds between young sepoys and *older* European women as expressed within the letters are reproduced quite faithfully by Kipling. Ahmed the Pathan in "The Private Account" writes admiringly of the woman he calls his "French mother" – much to his real mother's jealous chagrin.<sup>96</sup> The Sikh in "The Fumes of the Heart" talks about a widowed woman who took care of him, washing his clothes, making him his breakfast, polishing his boots, and so on.<sup>97</sup> The extract is copied exactly from a sepoy letter. In the end, both the real sepoy and the fictional one part from the widow. As the genuine letter says, "When we had to leave that village the old lady wept on my shoulder. Strange that I had never seen her weeping for her dead son and yet she should weep for me."<sup>98</sup> As Markovits commented, the censor reports reveal that many sepoys billeted in France became the objects of such maternal affection – women who had lost children to the war touchingly formed such an intimate bond with young men themselves far from home and family.<sup>99</sup> Santanu Das argued that the mother-son relationship in the sepoy correspondence struck a chord with Kipling, who had himself been separated from his parents when sent to India – a cause of trauma from which he never recovered.<sup>100</sup> Kipling may have failed to relate to the sepoys as colonial soldiers, but he understood them as sons who missed their mothers.

Kipling also tragically lost his son in the war, and Das argued that this made him attentive to the love for children described in Indian correspondence.<sup>101</sup> Several were fathers and wrote home asking after their children's welfare or

<sup>94</sup> Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture* 190.

<sup>95</sup> Das *India, Empire, and First World War Culture* 190.

<sup>96</sup> Kipling, "The Private Account" 60.

<sup>97</sup> Kipling, "The Fumes of the Heart" 36.

<sup>98</sup> Sher Bahadur Khan, France, 9/1/1916, quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* 135-36.

<sup>99</sup> Markovits, "Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France" 48.

<sup>100</sup> Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture* 191.

<sup>101</sup> Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture* 191.

longing to see them again.<sup>102</sup> Some grew quite fond of European children, as in the following letter: "It is impossible to describe the beauty of the children [...] I wish only that I had such a child."<sup>103</sup> The narrators of *The Eyes of Asia* are similarly taken with European children. The Sikh narrator of "The Fumes of the Heart" describes a French child "the child of us all" before avenging her death.<sup>104</sup> The episode does not just portray a fantasy of martial race violence but represents the forging of an intimate, familial link. Abdul Rahman in "A Trooper of Horse" describes with genuine affection the antics of a French little boy at his billet, whom the soldier comes to look on just as his own son – the boy in turn referring to Abdul Rahman's child as "my brother who is in India" and praying for him.<sup>105</sup> Just as Kipling read the letters and related to the soldiers as sons, he appears to have related to them as fathers separated from their children.

Kipling's personal loss during the war brings us to his later work with the Imperial War Graves Commission, which he served as its literary advisor.<sup>106</sup> In *The Eyes of Asia*, the sepoys comment on death and its commemoration. Abdul Rahman in "A Trooper of Horse" pays respect to the dead when he reburies – according to Muslim rites – the body of a Frenchwoman whose grave was disturbed by shelling.<sup>107</sup> European practices of mourning and commemoration fascinate the narrators, with Ahmed the Pathan describing at length the funeral of a French girl<sup>108</sup> and Abdul Rahman assuring his mother that the graves in France are well-maintained and free of ghosts. Mortality is a recurring theme in Abdul Rahman's account, which begins with an assurance to his mother that he would be buried where he is fated to die. Such a possibility is clearly on his mind, having already once been reported "missing, killed or believed taken prisoner" – unlike John Kipling, the fictional Abdul Rahman was found alive after all.<sup>109</sup> Death and tragedy seemed not far from the author's mind. In *The Eyes of Asia*, Kipling reveals moments of genuine affect where the mockery of Orientalism is pierced – and Kipling finds an outlet for his own traumas through mimicking the beating of the sepoy heart. As Das gently commented, "European art does not always or exclusively have to do with power relations [...] even subaltern lives can occasionally move under an [sic] European artist's touch."<sup>110</sup>

<sup>102</sup> A few examples are quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* 30, 134, 328.

<sup>103</sup> A Parsi on a hospital ship, 16/1/1914, quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* 29.

<sup>104</sup> Kipling, "The Fumes of the Heart" 32.

<sup>105</sup> Kipling, "A Trooper of Horse" 30.

<sup>106</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* 278.

<sup>107</sup> Kipling, "A Trooper of Horse" 100-101.

<sup>108</sup> Possibly the same child described in "The Fumes of the Heart."

<sup>109</sup> Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture* 191.

<sup>110</sup> Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture* 137.

It is in the movement under the artist's touch that Kipling's ventriloquized soldiers reveal little of the subaltern lives they mimicked; rather they open for us the opportunity to dissect the worries of the imperial master. They also show how in the encounter between Kipling and the soldiers – an encounter unknown and unconsented to by the soldiers themselves – Kipling saw his own emotions reflected back in the words of men whom he otherwise misrepresented. As Andrew Hill wrote: "Ventriloquism is a practice riddled with anxieties that centre on the identity of the ventriloquist and their ability to control that aspect of their self, which finds an outlet in the ventriloquist's puppet."<sup>111</sup> *The Eyes of Asia* may be one of Kipling's weaker efforts as Markovits pithily observed,<sup>112</sup> but it is proof of how much the ventriloquist reveals of himself through his imposture.

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<sup>111</sup> Hill, "The BBC Empire Service" 36.

<sup>112</sup> Markovits, "Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France" 40.

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