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AFTER 15 YEARS: A LOOK BACK AT GLENN D'CRUZ'S *MIDNIGHT'S ORPHANS: ANGLO-INDIANS IN POST/COLONIAL LITERATURE*

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ABSTRACT

This article locates Glenn D'Cruz's Midnight's Orphans: Anglo-Indians in Post/Colonial Literature (2006) against the greater backdrop of Anglo-Indian Studies. Sketching an outline of the field in extremely broad strokes, it claims that D'Cruz's text helped Anglo-Indian Studies navigate across a moment of scholarly stagnation that set in during the late 1990s, marked by a spiraling reiterative decrying of certain pejorative stereotypes associated with Anglo-Indians since at least the nineteenth century. Outlining the arguments that D'Cruz's text makes, I show that it breaks free from this stagnation by calling for an examination of the contextual truth-effects that the stereotypes produce, as opposed to iterating the stereotypes themselves.

D'Cruz's claim in Midnight's Orphans, that the racism Anglo-Indians face changes with shifts in sociopolitical coordinates, holds good to the present. In addition, the text's performative quality sets an example for scholars to move away from institutional scholarly objectivity toward greater emotional gains. These and other factors help Midnight's Orphans maintain its position as a seminal work with enduring relevance to the field of Anglo-Indian Studies fifteen years after its publication.

Fifteen years have elapsed since the publication of Glenn D'Cruz's *Midnight's Orphans: Anglo-Indians in Post/Colonial Literature* (2006). As a scholar of Anglo-Indian studies, I do not think the book has received the credit which is its due—not least, perhaps, because it was not sufficiently circulated within the hallowed confines of American academia. Looking back on my days as a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I still remember how I hunted across the libraries of the state of Illinois for the book, only to find myself faced with a dead end. So, fifteen years later, prospective readers may well ask why—if at all—the book matters to Anglo-Indian Studies. Quite simply put, I would argue that it matters greatly because it helped open the then somewhat stagnating field of Anglo-Indian Studies to the need to stop repetitively interrogating socio-politically generated stereotypes about Anglo-Indians—as it was doing *ad nauseam* by the late 1990s (Williams, 2002, pp. 87-96; Sen, 2002, pp. 16-20). Further, by putting literary texts in dialogue with postcolonial studies, *Midnight's Orphans* made a clarion call for the exploration of how these stereotypes contextually generated certain truth-effects (D'Cruz, 2006, p. 23; pp. 29-40). While Jenny Sharpe had made a similar call about the need to understand and examine stereotypes according to their truth-effects in the context of the aftermath of the First War of Indian Independence of 1857 (1993, p. 127), the context D'Cruz discusses at length is that of multiculturalism in Australia. Until D'Cruz penned *Midnight's Orphans*, the field, in the fin-de-siecle, seemed somewhat reluctant to engage with the matter of truth-effects generated by the pejorative stereotypes head on, although it had already assumed a continuous loop that reiterated how the stereotypes had been produced by British colonial imaginaries in India, and how these had been exploited and reproduced by colonial and postcolonial literary and cinematic productions (Chew, 1997; Mills, 1996, 31-49; Williams, 2002, pp. 87-96).

Before the reader accuses me of making what may seem to be a tall claim in favor of *Midnight's Orphans*, permit me to make an assessment of Anglo-Indian Studies as it stood toward the late 1990s, and how this position made the recurrent study of the re/production of the stereotypes almost inevitable.

Anglo-Indian Studies came into its own as a nascent but recognized field of study with the publication of Kenneth Ballhatchet's 1979 magnum opus *Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and Their Critics, 1793-1905*. In it,

Ballhatchet (1979) explores the equation of sexual immorality with British colonialist determinations of 'impurity' of race and class in nineteenth-century India, and the prohibitions instituted accordingly by British administrative policy to delineate demarcations of British behavioral patterns in the colony (p. 8). Taking Ballhatchet's scholarship a step further, Christopher Hawes' 1996 book *Poor Relations: The Making of a Eurasian Community in British India 1773-1833* delved into the subject of how these restrictive colonial policies concerning interracial sexual relations between British men and Indian women ironically paved the way for the forging of an 'impure' Eurasian community in India (p. x).

Both Ballhatchet and Hawes provided insights into how colonial policies discursively racialized Anglo-Indian bodies through the conduits of sex and class (Stoler, 1995, pp. 3-11) to construct them as stereotypically hypersexual, lacking in the 'manly spirit' of the British empire financially and otherwise. These 'impure' bodies were inhabited by figures perpetually aspiring toward 'Britishness' because of a sense of insecurity and powerlessness inherent to them, born as they often were into poverty. In this way, these scholars historiographically codified *how* the negative stereotypes of Anglo-Indians were generated.

Perhaps the first pivotal book to bring postcolonial studies to bear upon colonial and colonialist literary texts in order to discuss aspects of the topics Ballhatchet and Hawes touch upon (albeit before Hawes' time) was Jenny Sharpe's *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (1993). Sharpe (1993) astutely demonstrates the British colonial administration's discursive construction of Eurasians/Anglo-Indians as figures who, by dint of their racialization and the stereotypes that this racialization shored up, bore the power to disfigure the British 'civilizing' mission in India (p. 73). Sharpe (1993) shows how stereotyping—specifically the stereotyping of the 'mild Hindoo' as in fact the savage rapist of British women—sharpened its focus after the First War of Indian Independence. In concurrence with this honing of the stereotyping process, the British fashioned Eurasians/Anglo-Indians as having inherited the worst qualities of both the British and the Indians (p. 19-20). This construct helped separate a biologically superior 'pure English race' (1993, p. 46) from 'Asiatics' whose inferiority and depravity had apparently manifested itself through Indians having raped numerous British women in 1857 (1993, p. 91).

By the time we come to Nancy Paxton's use of literary texts to conduct what she evidently intends should be an equally ambitious project, the trend of reiteration I have spoken of had begun to set in. Dealing with how the post-1857 period 'orientalized' a dominant rape script in India—with the script of consensual interracial sex functioning as one of the rivals to this dominant script—a page of Paxton's *Writing Under the Raj: Gender, Race, and Rape in the British Colonial Imagination, 1830-1947* (1999) examines a handful of now proto-canonical colonialist novels to at best reiterate the claim that race, class, and gender went hand-in-hand with the imperialist discourses that hierarchized them (p. 194). The implication is, of course, that the racial stereotypes these discourses bolstered were also left intact.

That one page of Paxton's book testifies to the main contention that D'Cruz voices in *Midnight's Orphans*—that discussing or alluding to how the adverse stereotypes about Anglo-Indians were produced, leaves reams of scholarship mired in the trap of image criticism. Not surprisingly, this brand of image criticism, D'Cruz argues, manically reiterates how a dominant discourse disparagingly 'fixes' the identity of Anglo-Indians into otherness by assuming the form of a stereotype, if only to sociopolitically regulate Anglo-Indians.

Nevertheless, because stereotypes carry fluid significations in various cultural and historical contexts, D'Cruz, pushing to its limit Sharpe's claim that "racial and sexual typing has no meaning outside of its conditions of existence" (1993, p. 127), proposes to move away from image criticism to examine this multiplicity of significations. To do so, he draws upon French philosopher Michel Foucault's brand of discourse analysis. This, he suggests, will help him examine the varying truth-effects that these stereotypes produced in multiple settings (2006, p. 16-17). D'Cruz's call to examine these truth-effects is what constitutes *Midnight's Orphans* as a turning point in the field of Anglo-Indian Studies. The genres that D'Cruz uses to examine these truth-effects and how they should be treated critically and interrogatively, range from examinations of administrative policy and sociological studies to postcolonial literary texts, films, and even a photograph of D'Cruz's family. I cannot and will not pretend to do justice to all the incisive ideas and insights dotting *Midnight's Orphans*—a matter I caution the reader about before plunging into an extremely rough sketch of the book's contents.

Outlining the time-tested stereotypes used to pin Anglo-Indians into fixity, D'Cruz, in the first chapter of his book—titled "Seven Deadly Stereotypes"—provides an overview of how his scholarly predecessors in the field use Raj literature merely to delineate the attitudes and prejudices contextually produced and manifested against Eurasians/Anglo-Indians from the middle of the nineteenth century to the 1970s. However, as he rightly points out, these predecessors do not necessarily challenge the accuracy of the stereotypes, thus bearing out how they are mired in the stasis of image criticism as they merely decry the mis/representation of Anglo-Indian characters through the lens of these stereotypes. Disavowing their path, D'Cruz calls for an examination of how social, political, and cultural life discursively taxonomized Anglo-Indians as aberrant figures through regimes of truth—regimes functioning through specific technologies of subjugation. A representative example of such a taxonomic technology is the British East India Company's gradual withdrawing of covenanted posts for Eurasians through the association of Eurasians with bodily degeneracy, as D'Cruz discusses in the chapter that follows.

The second chapter, "Regulating Bodies: Dangerous 'Others' and Colonial Governmentality," draws upon how the theme of the admixture of British and Indian blood spelt doom for Eurasians/Anglo-Indians, cautioning against them because they were born of interracial marriage. This discursive marginalization of Anglo-Indians is bolstered by and reinforces the stereotypes in question, as Henry Bruce's 1913 novel *The Eurasian* attests. Bruce's novel is about the marriage between a Eurasian clerk and a poor working-class English woman, in which the woman eventually determines to kill her child of mixed blood because the child is constituted of miscegenative 'taint.' Drawing upon points from Ballhatchet's and Hawes' work, D'Cruz examines some of the policies that perpetuated this sense of taint to, among other things, control the sexual behaviour of British civil servants. This, as D'Cruz points out, ties up with Foucault's argument that Victorian sexuality could not be best understood in terms of repression—that is, in terms of a lack of overt discussion—what with the era seeing an explosion of discourses about sexuality and perpetuating tropes of racial degeneration through manic pathologization. Additionally, it resonates with Ann Laura Stoler's assertion that Foucault's genealogy of sexuality cannot be understood without references to European imperialism and its production of racialized bodies—bodies bearing a stark contrast to the sound European body.

In the third chapter, "Beyond the Pale: Imperial Power and Scientific Regimes of Truth," D'Cruz discusses Rudyard Kipling's 1887 short story "His Chance in Life" and Stephen Alter's 1979 novel *Neglected Lives* to show how miscegenation, and—tautologically—notions of taint of blood, perpetuated themselves to produce a racial science of sorts vis-à-vis Anglo-Indians. This, D'Cruz points out, assisted the emergence of the stereotype of the Anglo-Indian as a wastrel or ditherer. Demonstrating how Cedric Dover was opposed to notions of miscegenative taint in both India and the United States while paradoxically being sometimes committed to certain social 'truths' that racial science associated with miscegenation, D'Cruz discusses how racial hybridity had unfortunately moved from the realm of biology into that of sociology through a prism of Social Darwinism.

The fourth chapter, "The Poor Relation: Social Science and the Production of Anglo-Indian Identity" examines how the stereotype of the Anglo-Indian as financially destitute in social scientific studies of the community, had been configured by British administrative policies, with opportunities for the education and employment of Anglo-Indians in colonial India having been curtailed greatly after the late 18th century, and only partially alleviated by jobs in the railways into which they were recruited from the late 19th century. Furthermore, British colonialist social sciences helped propagate the stereotype of the Anglo-Indian as mimicking the British in his psychological and biological aversion to manual labor. This discourse of aversion helped provide support for a 'scientific' racialization of Anglo-Indians as innately stricken by a 'fatal flaw,' while sociologically Anglo-Indians were produced as a marginal ethnic minority by studies such as Noel P. Gist and Roy Dean Wright's *Marginality and Identity* (1973). More recent integrationist sociological surveys, such as V. R. Gaikwad's study of Anglo-Indians, and Shiva Kumar Gupta's anthropological study of marriage among Anglo-Indians—both motivated by a desire to contribute to a sense of Indian national solidarity and a more tolerant Indian national identity—would suggest that the stereotype of the destitute Anglo-Indian has been supplanted by a more 'positive' one. However, D'Cruz claims that it is impossible to make absolutely 'positive' or 'negative' comments on Anglo-Indians, though postcolonialism, globalization, and multiculturalism at times uncritically valorize hybrid cultures, fluid identities, and porous boundaries.

The fifth chapter of D'Cruz's book, "Midnight's Orphans: Stereotypes in Postcolonial Literature," views how three postcolonial novels attempt to move away from the pejorative stereotypes in question and use them with a degree of strategic plasticity. In the process, these novels, D'Cruz argues, invert theories of racial and sexual degeneracy even as they insert new problems into the picture. For example, while Salman Rushdie's 1981 novel *Midnight's Children* portrays an Anglo-Indian protagonist as a sign of a fecund and critical hybridity, the fact remains that "*inversion does not necessarily constitute an act of subversion*," as D'Cruz so aptly puts it (2006, p. 169; emphasis in the original). In other words, a positive figuration of an Anglo-Indian need not mark a ridding of the colonial discursive baggage historically associated with Anglo-Indians. In keeping with this inseparability of the 'positive' and 'negative' as absolutes, Saleem Sinai, the protagonist, has an evil twin, and is sterilized, with his body disintegrating and degenerating even as he narrates the story. Evidently, the old racial science that D'Cruz speaks of in the third chapter of his book, haunts the novel. With Hari Kunzru's 2002 novel *The Impressionist* categorically locating Anglo-Indians as characters who are unable to cut their ties to the British Raj even in multicultural societies, thus perpetuating some of the negative stereotypes in the process, 'hybridity' evidently always carries marks of the racist history it attempts to leave behind. I. Allan Sealy's 1988 novel *The Trotter-Nama,* however, rewrites the knowledge of racial origins by writing about Anglo-Indian lives across generations as fragmentary miniatures that distort reality, so that stereotypes will find themselves caught in what D'Cruz fittingly describes as a hall of mirrors—a hall that refuses to yield a picture of an 'authentic' subject. In the final reckoning, D'Cruz deliberately leaves his position vis-à-vis the three novels liminal, neither uncritically celebrating Anglo-Indians as global citizens nor denigrating the literary representations of Anglo-Indian characters in the novels since either position would repress Anglo-Indian diversity by an essentializing logic. This essentialism, hints D'Cruz, is a risk to be avoided in an era of multiculturalism.

The sixth chapter, "The Good Australians: Australian Multiculturalism and Anglo-Indian Literature," examines the influx of Anglo-Indians into Australia in the aftermath of the repeal of the White Australia Policy, with multiculturalism in this setting maintaining white normativity while ambivalently celebrating diversity. With Anglo-

Indians not being welcome in the era of the White Australia Policy, the pressure on them to become 'good' Australians was always lurking in the background. After all, as D'Cruz points out, multiculturalism calculatedly articulates cultural difference to control it, propagates diversity, and recognizes separatist ethnic structures, which burdens Anglo-Indians with the cultural baggage of the stereotypes in terms of 'difference.' Demonstrating his point, D'Cruz reads Patricia Pengilley's publication "The Case of the Vanishing Princess: Sally's Tale" (1988). He asserts that Pengilley is forced to contend with memories of her land of birth—India—and the curse of the 'taint of blood' she consequently carries with her, while other Anglo-Indians born in Australia—such as second-generation immigrants to Australia—have to struggle with the issue of hybridity through second-hand accounts.

In the conclusion to the book, which he tellingly names "Bringing It All Back Home," D'Cruz articulates the problematic character of Gloria Jean Moore's brand of image criticism vis-à-vis diasporic Anglo-Indians in the age of multiculturalism. To do so, he reads a photograph of his father's family which, by Moore's standards, would be deemed a 'positive' image when in fact the photograph, in its performative quality, may be trying to maintain a posture of 'respectability' in intended opposition to that of a family associated with the Eurasian Question. This posture, suggests D'Cruz, would help the family legitimize itself as bearers of all the markers of whiteness and its discursive synonyms. Breaking away from this brand of image criticism to read Keith Butler's 1998 short story "Sodasi" through the application of a Foucauldian lens, D'Cruz asserts that Anglo-Indians in multicultural Australia largely constitute an invisible model minority. Anglo-Indians in Australia, according to D'Cruz, constitute a minority that is constantly trying to redefine itself generationally and in terms of gender, and that need not try to pin itself down through 'positive' images because while stereotypes deal in the language of racism, and 'positive' images try to fight racism, the coordinates underpinning racism are extremely complex and perpetually shifting. These coordinates cannot merely be reduced to the logic of individual prejudice, as image critics would have it.

What makes D'Cruz's book stand out even now is, among other things, how spot on he has been about the fact that the racism Anglo-Indians face shifts with changes in political coordinates and terrains. I will take just one example of this racism to back my

conviction about D'Cruz's argument—an example involving Indian filmmaker Anjan Dutta's 2004 multilingual film *Bow Barracks Forever*. The film deals with the inhabitants of Bow Barracks—an actual housing complex in Central Kolkata that had been constructed during the First World War to house American troops, and that currently houses a number of largely Anglo-Indian families. As I have described in my 2014 article "Outside in the Stereotype: Anglo-Indians' Passage from Community to Singularity," barring its setting, Dutta's film is fictional. It unfortunately portrays the Anglo-Indian characters inhabiting the Barracks as destitute wastrels, smugglers, frauds, and hypersexual mistresses to non-Anglo-Indian men, giving yet another lease of life to the stereotypes. However, there is a twist to this politics of representation. With the Government of West Bengal then planning to tear down the Barracks and using the thugs at its disposal to coercively evict the Anglo-Indian inhabitants, a non-Anglo-Indian character in the film conjectures that the inhabitants can make a plea to the Government to conserve the Barracks as an 'authentic' Anglo-Indian heritage site for cultural consumption by audiences across communities. In this way, the inhabitants can apparently ensure that they are not evicted. Pandering to this predilection for the consumption of some 'authentic' brand of Anglo-Indian culture, the inhabitants of the Barracks, seized by a sudden spurt of industry, inexplicably turn a new leaf and start diligently catering to a non-Anglo-Indian clientele at Christmas time, this clientele being interested in the Barracks as a fleetingly 'authentic' Anglo-Indian site with specific cultural attractions, such as Anglo-Indian foods and the celebration of Christmas, shaping its inhabitants' lives (Chanda, 2014, pp. 53-56). With Dutta claiming knowledge of Anglo-Indian "lifestyle and culture" (qtd. in Chanda, 2014, p. 53), he keeps the stereotypes and the racism attached to them intact. Additionally, there is nothing authentically Anglo-Indian to the foundation of the Barracks, so that the attempt to pass it off as an originary Anglo-Indian heritage site reiterates the stereotype of impoverished Anglo-Indians as frauds. Nevertheless, Dutta's film perpetuates a workable means for the conservation of the Barracks and, by extension, for the halting of the eviction of its inhabitants. Indeed, this ploy has been put into action and has worked to the present day, with *Bow Barracks Forever* having given birth to a problematic Anglo-Indian culture industry of sorts—an industry that has unwillingly catered to an audience of bourgeois Kolkatans even on Christmas Day of 2020 amidst a raging pandemic (Gangopadhyay, 2020). Evidently, even as the stereotypes have held sway in Dutta's film, the film itself has shifted political

coordinates in favor of the Barracks' Anglo-Indians inhabitants, deferring their eviction as much in fact as in fiction. On a note we cannot dismiss, D'Cruz has, in his book, justifiably criticized Dutta's 1998 film *Bada Din*—a more simplistic film—for its perpetuation of some of the "deadly stereotypes" that Anglo-Indian Studies scholars decry.

Another of the multitude of the virtues of D'Cruz's book is its abjuration of scholarly 'objectivity,' the issue of objectivity being something D'Cruz treats with some disdain. This is a feat of necessary courage for an academic, with D'Cruz setting an example for the overlapping of intellectual gains with emotional gains for humanities scholars in academia. (Let us not forget that even in her updated 1999 version of her seminal 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?," star postcolonial studies critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak refrains from specifying that the protagonist of the piece is in fact her great-grandaunt, and that the philosopher and Sanskritist with whom she has a "failure of communication" about Bhaduri's suicide, is her cousin Tara Chatterjea (1999, pp. 306-08)). Indeed, D'Cruz never refrains from allowing the authoring self to surface from amidst the interstices of his academic prose—something that Euro-American academic institutions have traditionally tried to prevent scholars from doing, crippling their aspiration to reap more rewarding academic experiences in the process. By writing about how his father decided not to buy into Frank Anthony's position that Anglo-Indians assimilate into the Indian nation and chose instead to retain his identity through an alternative act of assimilation into multiculturalist Australia, D'Cruz brilliantly captures the ambivalence of migration and multiculturalism in a way that 'scholarly objectivity' cannot. Similarly, when he chooses to read the photograph of his father's family and argues for its effort to pass for a 'white' brand of respectability, he clarifies with baffling infallibility his point that absolutely 'positive' or 'negative' comments on Anglo-Indians are exercises in futility. Such autobiographical acts as D'Cruz's are, then, perhaps necessary not merely to Anglo-Indian Studies but also to the institutional humanities as such. Indeed, this scholarly stance connects seamlessly with D'Cruz's current scholarly position—a position founded on an exhaustion with the institutional theoretical frameworks that D'Cruz (2020) used in *Midnight's Orphans*, finding as he does greater affinity with Rita Felski's irreverent and iconoclastic brand of postcritique, as he reveals in an article that awaits publication. From that point of view, perhaps he would be the first to find fault with me for lauding his work—and I will

laud it nevertheless because the contributions *Midnight's Orphans* made to Anglo-Indian Studies still hold good. Indeed, scholars are still writing articles that find their cues in points that D'Cruz had articulated in passing in *Midnight's Orphans* all those years back. Evidently, then, burgeoning specialists in Anglo-Indian Studies could not do worse than ignore *Midnight's Orphans*.

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