This talk examines the concept of “hybridity,” its history and contemporary uses, and its overlooked “physical” moment. The term hybridity originated in botany and zoology in reference to mixture between species, and subsequently gained force in debates about race in anthropology and biology. In literary and cultural studies, however, it has been used most successfully to undo the idea of binary differences. This departure from its original usage, stemming from the exposure of race as fiction in the biological sciences and resistance to notions of cultural purity in critical theory, tends to discourage further exploration into the biological aspects of hybridity.

Colonial investment in racial border patrol and categorization was accompanied by imperial designs on impressionable body-minds at the level of ideology as well as the micromanagement of the bodily grammars of behavior. The politics of the imperial civilizing mission, founded in notions of racial and cultural superiority, not only recalibrated knowledge systems, but also bodily aesthetics and comportment in matters as fundamental as how to eat, speak, sit, spit. This project turns to Anglo-Indian characters in literature to explore hybridity as the interplay of biology, culture, and aesthetic norms.

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