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HOWARD J. BOOTH

Introduction

There is no other literary career like Rudyard Kipling's. At the end of the nineteenth century he rapidly achieved a level of popularity that remains unique. Modern communications, mass education and a transformed publishing industry meant that he reached a worldwide audience, first in English and then in translation. More than a huge popular success, Kipling's work also received critical acclaim. The high point in terms of recognition came in 1907, when Kipling won the Nobel Prize in literature; he remains the youngest literature laureate. However, Kipling's reputation was already on the turn, mainly because of his strong views on the Empire and a preparedness, especially in his poetry, to use his writing for political ends. Kipling's late career is much debated: for one camp there is a marked decline, for another it benefits from a maturing vision.

Some critics have always simply dismissed Kipling. During the Second World War, five years after Kipling's death, H. E. Bates likened him to Hitler in his 'love of the most extravagant form of patriotism, flamboyant stage effects and sadistic contempt for the meek'. As for his style, that was all 'tinsel and brass'.[1] (Bates made no mention of Kipling's many warnings about German intentions in his last years.) Many, though, have found Kipling a spur to their own imagination and creativity. The French composer Charles Koechlin (1867–1950), who was a communist, first came across the *Jungle Books* in translation. From 1899, he wrote a series of symphonic poems and orchestral songs drawing on the stories. The project was not completed until the premiere of the full cycle in 1946.[2] Such marked variation in response can also be seen among postcolonial writers, who have both condemned and praised Kipling. However, many have refused to see the issue as a simple choice between an imperialist and a great artist whose attitudes and politics do not matter.

From early on it became clear that one-voiced attempts to describe and 'fix' Kipling were not going to work. A long line of major writers and critics – among them T. S. Eliot, George Orwell, Edmund Wilson, Randall

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Jarrell, Edward Said and Salman Rushdie – have worked through their complex responses. The best modern criticism is willing to engage with the complexity and ambivalence found in Kipling. The task, as Jan Montefiore put it in her 2007 study, is to 'clarify its contradictions; not only the contradictions in his writing but in the ways he can be read'.[3] This means, as well, a preparedness to acknowledge all the elements in play in Kipling, whether they attract or shock. It is hard not to be taken over by the way *Kim* portrays the 'Great Game' on the 'Road of Life', but it is also necessary to acknowledge those who are excluded and demeaned in his texts, where this can extend to the people of entire religions, races, nations and continents (including Hindus, Jews, the Irish, Germans and Africans). To read a Kipling text for the first time is often to feel suspense in terms of the attitudes that are about to be expressed as well as the plot. One does not know what is coming next – a negative judgement against an individual and their kind, or a powerful expression of human sympathy from a writer on intimate terms with illness and loss.

Kipling can be used to challenge a popular assumption about literature and colonialism. This is that imperialists were all unthinking and vulgar, where anyone with intelligence, responsiveness and literary talent must always be on the side of the opponents of empire. Would this were so: colonialist writing can be powerful and effective. Like Amit Chaudhuri, many others who have attacked him roundly have had to acknowledge that 'Kipling is a very great writer.'[4]

The tenth and eleventh of Kipling's 'Letters of Marque' can serve as an example here. These were first part of a series of travel letters from the Punjab that appeared in the *Pioneer* of Allahabad between late 1888 and early 1889. Later they were collected together in the first volume of *From Sea to Sea*. The first of these two letters is mainly taken up with the history of Chitor (now Chittorgarh), and the second with an account of Kipling's visit to the ruined city and the recessed spring he called Gau-Mukh. One can alight on the way the text registers feelings of 'desolation',[5] 'an apprehension of great evil' and a sense of the 'uncanny' (102). Along with historical narratives of the inevitable fall of empires, this might lead us to expect the kind of crisis of self and in the authority to govern found later, as Harry Ricketts has pointed out, in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924).[6] Whatever actually happens in the caves in the Marabar Hills, Forster seeks to capture the stripping away, in Indian conditions, of a confident western subjectivity.[7]

Many further possible intertexts and approaches to these letters can be suggested, however. The number of dead in the historical account – which makes parts of the approach 'a reeking, ruined slaughter-pen' (89) – and the description of approaching the spring ('Oh, horror! in that unspeakable

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Gau-Mukh!' (104)) suggest a comparison with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899, 1902). Kipling's transport to and from the site on a less than well-trained elephant can be compared with the relationship between colonial and animal found in Orwell's famous essay 'Shooting an Elephant', from 1936. There killing the animal, and being observed doing so, is used by Orwell to describe his growing awareness of what maintaining colonial rule really involved. A psychoanalytic reading could do much with the references to gender and sexuality in these two letters. In the historical narrative there are women who are idealised in their beauty and resolve, committing suicide rather than falling into the hands of their enemies. The women who surprise Kipling in the ruins, though, are both disturbed and disturbing, with the entry to those ruins described in a language that suggests both a womb and vagina. The male body is addressed more directly. There is a 'red daubed *lignum* ... It is a piece of frieze, and the figures of the men are worn nearly smooth by time. What is visible is finely and frankly obscene' (94). We learn of the tower that 'most abhorrent of all [was] the slippery sliminess of the walls always worn smooth by naked men' (98), where this is seen in racial terms as 'he felt ... he were treading on the soft, oiled skin of a Hindu' (101). The suggestion of ascents into knowledge and descents into the pit suggest the possibility of a structuralist analysis. These two letters can also be seen in terms of the spatial dislocation that Fredric Jameson noted in modern literature after 1885, in which writing registers the difficulty of representing a global imperial system at the level of form and style.[8] Chitor resembles a 'black bulk' in the 'form of a ship' (82), and the transport to the nearest settlement is a 'railway track running off into the infinite' (91).

And yet the problem is that, with the possible exception of the sexual references, these hardly constitute the 'unconscious' of the text. Kipling is creating these effects and he is not seeking to bring colonialism into question. Order is reasserted and the traveller continues on his way. The (female) elephant is brought to order by beating it over the knuckles, and while the initial explanation of the disturbance in Gau-Mukh is unconvincing – 'choke-damp' (102) – the resolution is formed to go straight back down to the spring again in the moonlight. The tone describing the experiences is knowing, often seeking to turn events to comic effect. Kipling's strategy of calling himself 'the Englishman' and using the third person creates a sense of ironic distance – for example, 'The Englishman endured as long as he could – about two minutes' (101). The references to English poetry, including Browning's 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came' (1855), serve to domesticate the scene. The aim is to craft something Anglo-Indian readers will respond to, and not to seek to overthrow their world.

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When climbing the tower, 'the Englishman' wonders whether his feelings about it are induced by the builder's design:

> The Englishman fancied presumptuously that he had, in a way, grasped the builder's idea; and when he came to the top story and sat among the pigeons his theory was this: To attain power, wrote the builder of old, in sentences of fine stone, it is necessary to pass through all sorts of close-packed horrors, treacheries, battles and insults, in darkness and without knowledge whether the road leads upward or into a hopeless *cul-de-sac*. (98)

Readers, too, must wonder whether they are being led by the writing to take on a related perspective in these chapters. The message seems to be: do not let engagements with cultural difference and the consequences of colonial conquest disturb; if that should happen, then laugh it off, confront it, and most of all carry on and let the future take care of itself. Just because we do not share or are shocked by Kipling's attitudes does not mean that we cannot recognise the force and power of the writing. What is at issue is how these effects are achieved, and how the text resonates with its readers.

The volume builds on the excellent scholarly and critical work on Kipling from the last twenty years. This includes a six-volume selection of his letters, edited by Thomas Pinney; a new bibliography; editions of Kipling's autobiographical texts and his writings on writing; and a remarkable, ongoing online project to annotate Kipling's entire output, *The New Readers' Guide to the Works of Rudyard Kipling*. This Companion has three sections: the first looks at themes in Kipling, the second at texts, forms or chronological periods, and the third at responses to the author.

In the first essay in the collection Robert Hampson looks at the period after Kipling's arrival in London to begin a full-time literary career. His novel *The Light That Failed* examines, Hampson notes, the 'tensions and frustrations' Kipling experienced at the start of the fin-de-siècle and 'explores (though in a much more confused way) tensions and frustrations relating to sexuality and gender that Kipling also encountered'. In his chapter on Kipling, India and empire, John McBratney surveys Kipling's responses to British colonialism over the course of his career. He stresses the significance of analogy to Kipling, where a small group is said to suggest the whole, with all the strains and contradictions that attend on maintaining such correspondences. Making a claim for the significance of America for Kipling, Judith Plotz argues that though Kipling turned against the United States, it had a central role in his main relationships and his writing. It is wrong to say that he ever left the country wholly behind.

Laurence Davies explores Kipling's deep interest in technology and science. He unpacks the apparent paradox of a conservative writer fascinated by

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modernisation and discovery, concluding with an investigation of Kipling's contributions to the genre of science fiction. Science in Kipling is a male world, and Kaori Nagai explores both his interest in homosocial bonds and what she calls 'the role which Kipling assigns to all women'. They support men, indeed make them whole, but they are also expected to leave them free to enjoy the male worlds of work and leisure.

A writing task that the young Kipling could never have predicted he would undertake was the pamphlet *The Graves of the Fallen* (1919), written for the Imperial War Graves Commission. It set out, in a respectful and clear prose, the Commission's initial conclusions on how the cemeteries and monuments to the dead of the First World War were to look. As a member of the Commission, this was for Kipling public work with a very personal motivation. He had lost his son John at the Battle of Loos in 1915. David Bradshaw charts Kipling's changing response to war and conflict in his chapter. The writer who first sought to depict the speech and everyday lives of the ordinary 'Tommy' had later to reflect on the destruction of his kind in the industrialised killing of the Western Front.

Such topics as empire and war seem a long way from the Kipling who is one of the most popular of writers for children. And yet the topics have often been related by those who see Kipling as trying to inculcate in his young readers a sense of duty to both nation and Empire. There is much in this, but if it were all that could be said of these books it would be hard indeed to account for their enduring popularity. Jan Montefiore explores the *Jungle Books* and finds – *pace* much writing on the genre – that they offer a space in which children can discover, through a creative use of their imaginations, both the boundaries and possibilities of life.

Pleasure, energy and sheer memorability are often said to characterise Kipling's poetry. Harry Ricketts surveys Kipling's career and the key responses it has received from, in particular, T. S. Eliot, Craig Raine and Jan Montefiore. He also points out that acknowledging the depth and thoughtfulness of Kipling's reading in English poetry can add much to both the readings of individual poems and our sense of Kipling as a poet. Continuing the section devoted to particular texts, periods or forms of writing, Patrick Brantlinger explores Kipling's most famous novel – and probably his masterpiece – *Kim*, with a particular focus on the novel's Anglo-Indian context. Much less has been written about the short fiction Kipling wrote after the turn of the century than on *Kim*. My chapter looks at Kipling's stories for how they comment on the new and changing world from a position in his extended 'late career'.

The final set of chapters looks at responses to Kipling. Within a wide-ranging though precise piece, Bart Moore-Gilbert explores the responses

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of postcolonial, specifically South Asian writers; one point he makes is that Kipling laid down a powerful image of India as a plural nation. Monica Turci looks at Kipling and the visual, and the relationship between text and image in the illustrations of his texts, focusing on illustrations by Lockwood Kipling and Kipling himself. She also engages with a number of the major film adaptations of Kipling, exploring how Kipling's texts have been re-imagined for different media in new conditions. If the Disney film based on the *Jungle Books* meant that Kipling's creations were widely disseminated around the world, Harish Trivedi concludes the volume by drawing attention to the boundaries of Kipling's readership. While a particular image of Kipling has often stood in for the British in India – indeed, for imperialism as a whole – Trivedi points out that the vast majority of Indians have not read Kipling. Readers of serious literature in English constitute only a tiny percentage of the population, where Kipling is yet to be translated into many of the other Indian languages. While Trivedi's observation that 'interpretation from distinctly "Indian" points of view' is still awaited shows the limits of Kipling's reach, it also reminds us that the story of his reception has not yet ended. New readers will engage with the works in the future, where their reactions will take forms as yet unknown.

Notes

1 H. E. Bates, *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1941), pp. 111, 117.

2 Robert Orledge, *Charles Koechlin (1867–1950): His Life and Works* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood, 1988), pp. 96–7.

3 Jan Montefiore, *Rudyard Kipling* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2007), p. 1.

4 Amit Chaudhuri, 'A Feather! A Very Feather Upon the Face!', *London Review of Books*, 22:1 (6 January 2000), p. 21.

5 Rudyard Kipling, 'Letters of Marque', in *From Sea to Sea and Other Sketches, Letters of Travel, Volume 1* (London: Macmillan, 1900), p. 103. Subsequent references are in brackets in the text.

6 Harry Ricketts, *Rudyard Kipling: A Life* (1999; New York: Carroll & Graf, 2000), pp. 105–6. See also Nigel Messenger, 'Imperial Journeys, Bodily Landscapes and Sexual Anxiety: Adela's Visit to the Marabar in *A Passage to India*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 33:1 (March 1998), pp. 99–110.

7 It is indeed possible to wonder whether, at some level, Forster was thinking of the 'Letters of Marque' when he wrote his novel. There is evidence that Forster knew his Kipling. See E. M. Forster, 'The Poems of Kipling' (1908) and 'Some books: Hilton Brown on Kipling; Keenan, Wilson and Welty' (1945) in *The Creator as Critic and Other Writings by E. M. Forster*, ed. Jeffrey M. Heath (Toronto: Dundurn, 2008), pp. 26–40, 299–302.

8 Fredric Jameson, *Modernism and Imperialism* (Derry: Field Day, 1988).

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ROBERT HAMPSON

Kipling and the fin-de-siècle

‘*Fin de siècle*’, murmured Lord Henry with languid anticipation in the 1891 version of Oscar Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Wilde’s novel first appeared in *Lippincott’s Magazine* in June 1890.[1] Six months later, the same headlining position was occupied by the periodical version of Kipling’s ‘The Light That Failed’. That version and the first English edition of *The Light That Failed* (1891) would seem to be a long way from Wilde’s work and his ‘Wardour Street aestheticism’.[2] However, both novels involve artworks and artists, and both show how sexual identity has become problematic (and a subject for analysis) at the end of the century.[3] Kipling’s novel explores what he calls the ‘good love’ between men and the much more difficult territory of male–female relations. One of the complicating factors, for Kipling, is women’s refusal to play the role that men expect. In Maisie and ‘the red-haired girl’, Kipling presents his version of the ‘New Woman’. At the same time, Kipling’s novel serves to remind us that ‘empire-building’ was also part of the fin-de-siècle. He attempts to project a masculinist ideology within, and as part of, an imperialist vision. However, the attempt to assert a military model of masculinity is constantly subverted from within by traces of homoeroticism within the homosocial bondings, disquieting elements of sadism, and the haunting sense that male separateness might be a limitation rather than a strength.

Kipling in London

In Chapter 4 of *Something of Myself* (1937), Kipling describes his return to England in 1889 and his taking up residence in London. The life he describes operates on a topographical axis that he expresses as ‘from Piccadilly to Villiers Street’.[4] His rooms in Villiers Street, just off the Strand, overlooked Gatti’s Music-Hall, where he listens to music-hall songs in the company of an elderly barmaid, with soldiers singing ‘at his elbow’ (*SM* 85). The ‘primitive and passionate’ demotic life of the Strand (*SM* 82) is not unconnected

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with the 'shifting, shouting brotheldom' (*SM* 85) that characterised the Strand and Haymarket in this period. 'Piccadilly', by contrast, means the Savile Club, a gentleman's club for writers, journalists and publishers, to which he had been invited by Andrew Lang. As Elaine Showalter notes, 'A significant aspect of the construction of masculinity was the institution of "Clubland"': these clubs were 'primarily extensions of the male communities of the public schools and universities' and were predicated on the exclusion of women.[5] Where the 'smoke' and 'roar' of Gatti's represents 'the good fellowship of relaxed humanity' (*SM* 81), the more exclusive world of the club provided 'very good talk' (*SM* 90) with the likes of Besant, Gosse, Hardy and Haggard. Kipling compares this talk to 'the careless give-and-take of the atelier when the models are off their stands, and one throws bread-pellets at one's betters' (*SM* 83). Having demonstrated his familiarity with popular culture, Kipling celebrates his access to the literary establishment, but the comparison he uses asserts intimacy with the more suspect world of the artist's studio, which he then recuperates through the reassuring shared memory of public-schoolboy boisterousness. The artist's studio and the public school, with their very different cultures, were two other axes around which his early life revolved.[6]

Despite this display of his familiar acceptance by diverse communities, the chapter is punctuated by repeated allusions to emotional crises. He notes, for example, how once he 'faced the reflection of [his] own face in the jet-black mirror of the window panes for five days' (*SM* 84), and then adds, without comment, how after the fog thinned he watched a man cutting his throat in the street below his window.[7] Later, he explicitly mentions 'depression', though only glancingly, as part of the breakdown resulting from overwork combined with the excitements and distractions of the city that caused his departure from London. In the latter half of the chapter, after he has left England, he describes himself seeking out male company in the homosocial groupings of empire. In South Africa, he is introduced into 'the Naval society of Simon's Town', and in Australia he interested himself in 'the middle-aged men who had spent their lives making or managing the land' (*SM* 90–1). The chapter concludes with his encounter with General Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, while sailing from Adelaide to Colombo, and an anecdote which ends with the judgement that Booth was 'at sea among women' (*SM* 94). The implication is that Kipling is not, but this serves only to draw attention to the peripheral position of women in the chapter. It had begun with observing the new experience of 'white women' who 'stood and waited on one behind one's chair' (*SM* 79). After that, there was only the company of 'the elderly but upright barmaid' (*SM* 81) at the music hall, the improvised monologues of the female music-hall

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performers, the prostitutes in the streets, and the glimpse of a woman on a boat at Adelaide with her skirt rucked up 'to her knees' (*SM* 94). It is this glimpse of leg that embarrasses Booth and leads to Kipling's judgement on Booth's lack of expertise.

The chapter does refer to one other woman: it begins with Kipling's meeting with the explorer Mary Kingsley, his invitation to her to come up to his rooms, and her realisation that this wasn't permissible in England. Andrew Lycett suggests that the meeting took place some years later – the placing of the memory at the start of the chapter implies that it occurred shortly after Kipling's arrival in England – and that Kipling has turned the story around: 'The local geography indicates that he simply accompanied Miss Kingsley a few hundred yards from Warwick Gardens to her flat in Addison Road where, with his diffidence, he probably declined to go to her rooms because he was a married man.'[8] Kipling also omits any description of his accommodation in Villiers Street. According to Lycett, 'the walls were papered in a dull green, interwoven with a gold that had lost its sheen'; and the rooms were furnished with a white sheepskin rug, Persian carpets, and 'a sofa spread with a large posteen rug, bordered with astrakhan and embroidered in rich yellow silks'.[9] This recalls Captain Sholto's chambers in Queen Ann Street, with their 'big divan covered with Persian rugs and cushions', which are presented as an example of how 'a man of fashion would live now' in James's 1885 novel *The Princess Casamassima*.[10] Kipling masculinised the rooms with military pictures on the walls. However, his tall Japanese screen and morning attire of a Japanese dressing gown suggest other, perhaps unexpected, affinities.[11] Despite this concession to orientalist aestheticism, Kipling famously expressed his impatience with London's aesthetes.[12] However, neither this impatience with London's artistic circles nor his discomfort with educated middle-class women are mentioned in this chapter.

Two more significant omissions are his engagement to Carrie Taylor and his renewed acquaintance with Florence Garrard. He had become engaged to Carrie Taylor, the sister of his friend Edmonia Hill, during his 1889 visit to America, but by early 1890 this unofficial engagement was over. He had first met Florence Garrard when he had visited his sister at the 'House of Desolation' in Southsea in 1880. He had fallen in love with her then, and she had been the inspiration for some of his early verses. In 1887, she had finished her final year at the Slade and had then moved on to another art school, the Academie Julian in Paris.[13] After their chance meeting in London early in 1890, Kipling's interest in her revived and he visited her in Paris, where she was living with Mabel Price, another painter at the Academie Julian. This became the basis for his novel *The Light That Failed*.

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The Light That Failed

The Light That Failed was written in 1890 and first published in *Lippincott's Magazine* in a short version of twelve chapters. The first English edition was published by Macmillan in March 1891 (in a longer version of fifteen chapters).[14] The opening chapter is very reminiscent of Kipling's earlier work 'Baa Baa, Black Sheep' (1888), which was a fictional account of his early years at Southsea. The novel introduces Dick Heldar as an orphan staying with a young widow, Mrs Jennett, and his friendship with another orphan, Maisie. In Chapter 2, Dick is taken on as a war artist with the Nile Expedition of 1884–5. He then moves to London and sets himself up in chambers in Villiers Street, in the same Embankment Chambers that Kipling was actually living in at the time of writing. He then sets about building on the success he has had as an illustrator in magazines. This part of the novel is quite clearly a transposition of Kipling's own success as a writer and a fictionalisation of his own move to London.

The rest of the novel is divided between Dick's relationship with Maisie (who now reappears in his life) and his work as an artist. Maisie, by this time, has also become a painter, and Dick has apparently determined to court and marry her. As he puts it later, 'whether she liked it or not she should be his wife' (*LTF* 176). Maisie herself, however, shows no interest in marriage: like Dick, she is committed to her painting. In the context of what is presented as Dick's unhappy love for Maisie, he paints his masterpiece, his *Melancolia*: a work on which he expends the last of his failing sight, the result of the head wound he received during the Nile expedition. Unknown to Dick, this masterpiece has been comprehensively defaced by Bessie, a servant-girl cum prostitute whom he has used as a model, to avenge herself on Dick for preventing her relationship with his friend Torpenhow. Kipling, in other words, has produced a kind of sex-war version of Balzac's 'The Unknown Masterpiece' (1831). In the magazine version, the story ended with the tearful return of Maisie to Dick's rooms and their imminent marriage. In the book version (where the brief Preface asserts that it is the story as 'originally conceived by the Writer'), Maisie refuses to give up her painting to become Dick's nurse; Dick takes in Bessie for a while as a substitute for Maisie – until she confesses that she destroyed the painting; and Dick then goes on one last campaign, despite his blindness, to die in the arms of his friend Torpenhow.

The two versions of the novel have a curious counterpart within the novel itself. In Chapter 4, Dick offers his conception of 'Art': 'Give 'em what they know, and when you've done it once do it again.' He offers, in illustration, the story of the two versions of his sketch 'His Last Shot'. In the first version,