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Re-evaluating Kipling's Indian and Colonial Fiction

Maryem Bouzid
English Department, Higher Institute of Languages of Tunis, Tunisia
m.bouzid.09@aberdeen.ac.uk

Abstract

A few years ago, a columnist in the New Yorker magazine has written that 'in recent years Rudyard Kipling's reputation has taken a beating that it has become a wonder any sensible critic would want to go near him now.'[1] Kipling has been to an extent persona non grata due to his often misinterpreted views that have variously labelled him as a colonialist, a jingoist, a racist, and a warmonger. This article is therefore not an attempt to defend the writer from all these charges as much as an endeavour to show that his views were more complicated and conflicted than he is given credit for. By delving into Kipling's Indian fiction and exploring his pro and anti-colonial approaches, this article aims at re-evaluating Kipling's notorious reputation and showing that embedded in the colonial narratives are dissonant discourses which inspire far more subversive readings than hitherto perceived.

Keywords: Rudyard Kipling; conflict; Indian fiction; Plain Tales from the Hills; Kim; re-evaluation; dissonant discourses; subversive readings.

[1] Charles McGrath, 'Rudyard Kipling in America', (Jul, 2019), https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/07/08/rudyard-kipling-in-america

Introduction

Imperialism is a pivotal phase in the Victorian era and Rudyard Kipling is the icon of this phase. His eminence as a writer coincided with the emergence of Britain as the powerful expansionist force in the world. By the high noon of the British Empire, Kipling had attained his position as one of the most engaged writers in the political and imperial affairs of his country. Throughout his works Kipling distinctly articulates the spirit of the glorious imperial mission and most clearly expresses his unswerving advocacy of colonial values and institutions which has led to his reputation as 'the prophet of British imperialism in its expansionist phase'.[2] Kipling has been widely determined as the bard of Empire whose voice represents the discourse of an entire national experience.

The close affiliation between Kipling and his colonialist home country Britain was, of course, essentially established through the intimate relationship and association with his colonial birth country India. Kipling was born in India of Anglo-Indian parents and had been raised there until the age of five, when he was sent to school in England, but then returned at the age of sixteen to work as a journalist for seven years in Lahore and Allahabad. Thus intimately acquainted with the colony and its society, Kipling had served the British Empire more than any other writer. Salman Rushdie has enthusiastically acclaimed that: 'Nobody can teach you British India better than Rudyard Kipling'. [3] Equally Edward W. Said has unreservedly paid a tribute to the 'force' with which Kipling 'brought to a basically insular… British audience the color, glamor, and romance of the British overseas enterprise'.[4]

Nevertheless, to belong to a powerful, superior country by race and to another presumably weak and inferior by birth, is undoubtedly a very disorienting fact in the life of Rudyard Kipling and can be definitely a crucial dynamic in determining what one may easily detect as a conflict in his imperial world-views and forming what the writer comes to define, in one of his poems, as his 'tow-sided' head. [5] Salman Rushdie gives credence to this idea by arguing that 'the influence of India on Kipling […] resulted in what has always struck me as a personality in conflict with itself, part bazaar-boy, part sahib' (Rushdie 1991, p.74). Rudyard Kipling is certainly a very complex persona whose ideologies are utterly blurred and mired in a state of diaspora more than even are sometimes recognised to be.

Kipling's ambivalent imperial attitudes are quite mirrored in the history of the conflicted critical approaches that have been held towards him. He is, for instance, widely held in contempt by many anti-colonialist critics such as H. E. Bates who likened him to Hitler in his 'love of the most extravagant form of patriotism', [6] and quite loathed by Orwell who finds him a 'jingo imperialist , morally insensitive and aesthetically disgusting' (Orwell,

[2] George Orwell, *The Collected Essays, Journalism & Letters of George Orwell*, Vol. II, (eds.) Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), p.186.
[3] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-91* (London: Penguin, 1991), p.75.
[4] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p.160.
[5] Rudyard Kipling, 'The Tow-Sided Man' in *Rudyard Kipling the Complete Verse* (London: Kyle Cathie Ltd, 1990), p.1990), pp.482-3.
[6] H. E. Bates, *The Modern Short Story: A Critical Survey* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1941), p.111.

1968, p.184). Still, Kipling is also loved by critics like T. S. Eliot who staunchly defends that Kipling 'is not a doctrinaire or a man with programme',[7] and equally sympathized by Bonamy Dobreé who unreservedly acknowledges that Kipling 'has been more grotesquely misunderstood, misrepresented, and in consequence denigrated, than any other known writer'. [8] Such marked variation in responses is of course mainly generated from the multifaceted views and polyphonic voices that Kipling articulates throughout his various Indian writings.

In his well-known volume of prose fiction *Plain Tales From The Hills*, for instance, which was initially published in the Indian *Civil and Military Gazette*, Kipling shows an indeterminacy that makes it almost hopeless for any reader, as Andrew Rutherford rightly argues in his introduction to the volume, to look for 'consistency of attitude or a coherent value system' throughout the whole collection. [9] The stories, on one hand, register Kipling racial and imperial values, his championing of the conquering caste and denigration of the Orient. Yet they reflect, on the other hand, the author's embedded sympathy for the natives and an implied cynicism towards his fellow Englishmen whose presumed moral rectitude and authorised aptitude for governance are strikingly called into question.

The novel of *Kim*, which is Kipling's widely-approved masterpiece, can be also considered a rich site for probing the writer's ambivalence and delving into his conflicted imperial world-views. *Kim* is generally held as a propagandist advocacy to the British imperial system in India and is seen by postcolonial critics such as Said as a 'master work of imperialism, […] and profoundly embarrassing novel'. [10] On the other side of the novel's coin, Kim is acclaimed by many as a love letter to India and to the people among whom Kipling had lived his best days. The novel has been enthusiastically described by Mark Kinkead-Weakes as 'the answer to nine-tenths of the charges levelled against Kipling and the refutation of most of the generalisations about him'. [11] Indeed, Rudyard Kipling is a writer who definitely resists any generalisation for his Indian writing shows more of the complexity and incongruity than his account as the prophet of Empire would make one expect.

The pro-colonial politics of Rudyard Kipling

It is vain to start any article on Rudyard Kipling by defusing the charge of him being racist and imperialist while the man is however quintessentially so. Of course no one would deny that Kipling had relentlessly and vigorously, to use Alan Sandison's words, 'beat[en] the imperial drum',[12] nor will anyone seek to contest the fact that a great number of his Indian

[7] T. S. Eliot, *A Choice of Kipling's Verse* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1941), p.30.
[8]Bonamy Dobreé, *Rudyard Kipling: Realist and Fabulist* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.vii.
[9] Andrew Rutherford, 'Introduction' in Rudyard Kipling's *Plain Tales from the Hills* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.xii-xxii, p.xxi.
[10] Edward Said, 'Appendix' in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (London: Penguin Classics, 2011), pp.291-331, p.330.
[11] Mark Kinkead-Weakes, 'Vision in Kipling's novels' in (ed.) Andrew Rutherford, *Kipling's Mind and Art: Selected Critical Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), pp.197-234, p.233.
[12] Alan Sandison, 'Kipling: The Artist and the Empire' in (ed.) Andrew Rutherford, *Kipling's Mind and Art: Selected Critical Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), pp.146-167, p.147.

stories are rife with prejudice and racism and they promote a highly politicised ideology which serves and supports the British cause in India.

In *Plain Tales from the Hills*, which deals mostly with Simla Life, Kipling's voice is generally that of the chauvinistic and the staunch imperialist whose picture of colony and its natives, to quote Thomas Ward, 'is not altogether a pleasant one'. [13] Louis L. Cornel persuasively argues that in *Plain Tales* Kipling presents a very 'partial and somewhat distorted version of the world of the native Indians'. [14] Throughout the whole collection Kipling does not chronicle the events of his stories from an objective viewpoint but rather through an Orientalist, stereotyping perspective that ideologically frames the indigenous as different and hence inferior. The notions of alterity and racial difference resonate highly throughout *Plain Tales* and are even established from the very first story, 'Lispeth'. Being a Hill-girl and a 'savage by birth', Lispeth becomes the embodiment of all the 'uncivilised Eastern instincts' that presumably set her apart from her racially 'superior' English lover'.[15]Lispeth 'did not walk in the manner of English ladies'; she is ignorant of geography and 'civilisation' since she 'had no ideas of distance and steamboats'; besides she racially belongs to 'unclean people' who do not wash themselves daily and whose dresses are 'infamously dirty' (Kipling2009, pp.8, 10 and 11). Moreover, despite the Christian education that she received in her infancy by the English missionaries, Lispeth cannot overcome her ostensible innate 'barbarity' and 'heathenism' that are further reinforced by her conversion to the indigenous idolatrous gods as soon as she suffers an unrequited love story. This is the overall picture of Lispeth that Kipling draws to establish from the onset the racial and cultural polarities between the coloniser and the colonised, underlining in his way the alleged superiority of the former and the stereotyped inferiority of the latter.

Kipling entrenches this ideologically imperialist doctrine everywhere in *Plain tales* by continually pointing up the strangeness and the 'otherness' of the world that they try to rule. India, Kipling reports, 'is a slack country, where all men work with imperfect instruments' (Kipling2009, p.17); 'and India, as everyone knows, is divided equally between jungle, tigers, cobras, cholera, and sepoys' (p.30); it is in India 'where you really see humanity—raw, brown, naked humanity' (pp.81-2). These are highly Orientalist views that stereotypically depict the East as utterly alien, primitive, and awfully far away from the modernisation and civilisation of the West. In one of his most striking postcolonial books, *Orientalism*, Said has pointed out that the act of Orientalising the Orient is essentially an imperialist tradition and the word Orientalism itself 'connotes the high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century European colonialism'. [16] Thus Kipling's highlighting of the stereotypes with which the Oriental world had long been associated reflects his highly politicised stance. In his work Kipling sustains the prevalent imperial ideology of his time which is to create an irreducible barrier that separates white from the coloured, or Occidental from Oriental, and then maintain a legitimacy to 'control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is manifestly different' (Said 2003, p.12). For this

[13] Thomas Humphrey Ward, 'Mr. Kipling's Writings' in (ed.) Roger Lancelyn Green, *Kipling: the Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp.50-4, p.53.
[14] Louis L. Cornell, *Kipling in India* (London: Macmillan and Company Ltd, 1966), p.144.
[15] Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales from the Hills*, (ed.) Andrew Rutherford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.9.
[16] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p.2.

reason the Orient, as Said puts, is not an 'inert fact of nature' rather it is 'man-made', and more precisely, it is white-man-made (Said 2003, p.4).

John A. McClure unequivocally perceives Kipling an 'imperial artist' whose fictional vision is that of the 'Orientalists'. [17] In several stories of *Plain Tales,* for instance,Kipling deliberately refers to the strange cults and superstition of the Indians. 'In the house of Suddhoo' shows the natives being entirely devoted to necromancy and black magic and in a state of utter submission and subservience to jugglers; after all, they belong, as Kipling asserts in the opening verse, to the 'wild' and 'strange' 'Land/ Wherein the Powers of Darkness range' (Kipling2009, p.108). Similarly, in 'The Bisara of Pooree' Indians are clearly distinguished from the British by their credulous belief in the witchcrafts and magical charms. Thus, Kipling writes: 'All kinds of magic are out of date and done away with, except in India, where nothing changes in spite of the shiny, top-scum stuff that people call 'civilisation' (Kipling2009, p.190). The Eastern world is depicted as being not only different from that of the West but also far less civilised and enlightened.

Generally, the imperialist Western approach to the Orient is built upon the assumption of the former's moral responsibility in polishing and civilising the latter's benighted attitudes and beliefs. Thus Orientalism becomes, as Said points out, a highly political 'Western style for dominating, restricting, and having authority over the Orient' (Said, 2003, p.3). Not unlike many of his imperialist contemporaries, Kipling had keenly believed, as George Shepperson affirms, in the obligation of the Western 'civilising mission',[18] and he passionately and staunchly cried for the 'White Man's Burden' to tame and civilise the darker fellow creature (Kipling 1990, p,261).

Significantly, to enhance the necessity of the white men's mission and heighten the load of their burden, Kipling ideologically highlights the natives' inability to rule and govern themselves. Throughout *Plain Tales* the Indians are frequently portrayed as being innocent and childlike. Lispeth, for example, is easily deceived by the Chaplain's wife assurance of the return of her departed lover and she is described as 'but a child' (Kipling2009, p.10); similarly, in 'Beyond the Pale' 'poor little' Bisesa is 'as ignorant as a bird' (p.130); and Suddhoo, who is gullibly cheated by jugglers, is described as 'an old child… and is as senseless as a milch-goat' (p.114). Through these depictions, and so many others, Kipling slyly articulates his imperialistic view that the natives are so naïve and inexperienced to be trusted to look after themselves. After all, Kipling keenly perceives that '[f]ate looks after the Indian Empire because it is so big and so helpless' (Kipling2009, p.92). Thus the intervention of 'Our Authority', as Kipling staunchly and openly acknowledges, becomes inevitable since the native is 'as incapable as a child of understanding what authority means, or where is the danger of disobeying it' (Kipling2009, p.61). For Said, Kipling is being an 'Orientalist' and a 'special agent' of Western power not just because of his 'culturally sanctioned habit of deploying large generalizations' by which reality is divided into binomial oppositions of 'ours' and 'theirs', but also for his reinforcement of a putative knowledge that the White Man 'belonged to, and could draw upon the empirical and

[17] John A. McClure, *Kipling and Conrad: The Colonial Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp.29-30.
[18] George Shepperson, 'The World of Rudyard Kipling' in (ed.) Andrew Rutherford, *Kipling's Mind and Art: Selected Critical Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), pp.126-145, p.132.

spiritual reserves of, a long tradition of executive responsibility towards the colored races' (Said 2003, pp.226 and 227). This tradition that Kipling celebrates and tries to entrench in his work is not however drawn from a humanistic viewpoint of helping and offering assistance to those who are underprivileged, rather it is very much stemmed from a profoundly chauvinistic sentiment that observes the duty of the racially superior creatures to control those who are inferior.

Of course Kipling's dogmatic belief in the racial division and his accentuating of the British blood supremacy reverberate highly throughout *Plain Tales.* A certain amount of jingoism can be revealed from overtly racist statements such as 'we are a high-caste and enlightened race', or 'it was improper of Lispeth to think of marriage with an Englishman, who was of a superior clay' (Kipling2009, p.97 and pp.10-11). These views are undoubtedly racially biased and they reflect the traditional imperialist assumption of the putative superiority of the coloniser and the supposed inferiority of the native.

Moreover, Kipling's racial bigotry is further reinforced in his negative attitude towards the issue of miscegenation that is frequently raised in *Plain Tales*. Kipling keenly believes that 'the Black and the White mix very quaintly in their ways' (Kipling2009, p.59). Thus he wholeheartedly pleads that '[a] MAN should, whatever happens, keep to his own caste, race, and breed. Let the White go to the White and the Black to the Black' (Kipling2009, p.127). Here Kipling does clearly articulate an unpleasant racial theory that echoes in sentiment the message of one of his most notorious lines: 'Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet' (Kipling1990, p.190). These perceptions can only be judged as polemical entrenching of irreconcilable racial difference. We may, therefore, go a long way towards agreeing with Cornel's perception that Kipling's experience of India, in *Plain Tales*, is 'sharply limited by being a member of the conquering race' who 'looks across the gulf between the races instead of trying to bridge it' (Cornel 1966, p.144).

Kipling's belief in racial segregation and his denunciation of miscegenation are also highlighted in his depiction of the social and moral deterioration of Englishmen who transgress the racial boundaries and 'go native'. In 'Yoked with an Unbeliever' Phil, who has married a hill-girl and settled permanently in India, is described as 'dropping all his English correspondents one by one, and beginning more and more to look upon India as his home. Some men fall this way, and they are of no use afterwards' (Kipling2009, p.32). Likewise, McIntosh Jellaludin is racked by drunkenness and disease and 'falls very low from a respectable point of view. By the time that he changes his creed […], he is past redemption' (Kipling2009, p.235). Kipling deeply believes that the East and West, with all their racial and cultural polarities, could never meet harmoniously. This undoubtedly echoes one of the Orientalists' colonial world-views for Kipling, as B. J. Moore-Gilbert cogently argues, is being 'typically […] trapped by the political realities out of which "Orientalism" emerged'. [19]

Kipling's political and racial attitudes are equally articulated in *Kim*, though in more subtle and equivocal way. In this novel the writer's colonial and chauvinistic sentiments are mainly expressed through metaphorical and symbolic diction. From the onset, for instance, the superiority of the British race is laid bare by having the protagonist Kim, who is racially

[19] B. J. Moore-Gilbert, *Kipling and "Orientalism"* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p.198.

white, overcome the native children and sit astride the gun Zam-Zammah which is the symbol of power and conquest. Despite being born and bred in India, Kim's racial difference is accentuated for we learn from the very beginning that 'though he was burned black as any native' and 'consorted on terms of perfect equality with the small boys of the bazar; Kim was white'. [20] Moreover, we are told that on grounds of this 'whiteness', and hence superiority, Kim is justified in kicking the Hindu boy off the trunnions and casting all his playmates off Zam-Zammah; Kim perceives that 'all Mussalmans' and 'Hindus' 'fell off ZamZammah long ago' and thus he is the rightful possessor of the gun (Kipling2011, p.6). In his introduction to the novel Harish Trivedi comments on the the sly meaning that seeps through Kim's reaction, stating that it is a 'blatantly imperialist reason' to push the boys off Zam-Zammah just because their parents have lost the power to rule India. [21] Thus from as early as the first couple of pages in *Kim* Kipling subtly establishes two of his most propagandist imperial values which are the British racial superiority and the British aptitude for governance. In fact, Kim is being an emblem of the perfect white sahib who is distinguished by his racial superiority and his power to manipulate this supremacy well among the native subjects.

The picture of British authority and native dependency that Kipling tries to propagate from the beginning of the novel is quite reinforced by the entrance of the Tibetan lama to the scene, seeking knowledge and awareness from the learned English Curator. The Lahore Museum, Kipling states, 'was given up to Indian arts and manufactures, and anybody who sought wisdom could ask the Curator to explain' (Kipling2011, p.6). This is certainly infused with an imperialist insight that perceives the natives as unable to fathom their own cultural and historical heritage without the intervention and support of Western acumen. The British agency is further accentuated in the meeting between the Curator and the lama, with the former intellectually patronising the latter. The white Curator has the authority of educating the native lama through 'the labours of European scholars' (Kipling2011, p.10), while the latter stays 'puzzled' and 'reverently' listens to his instructor whom he calls 'O Fountain of Wisdom' (pp.10-11). Once again, Kipling underlines the British supremacy that diminishes the natives' potential and denies them agency and autonomy.

Significantly, Kipling's depiction of the Indians' subordination to the British is dramatically and allegorically illustrated through the lama's relationship with Kim. Zohreh T. Sullivan persuasively argues that what appears to be a boy's adventure story is also a 'complex fantasy of idealized imperialism' in which the friendship between Kim and his lama stands as the author's own 'fable' of the ideal relationship between the active, powerful Englishman and the passive, childlike Indian. [22] This imperial relationship between the two protagonists is established from the very beginning of the novel when Kim, like most of the colonisers, 'purposed to take possession' of the lama because '[t]his man was entirely new to all his experience' (Kipling2011, p.14). This undoubtedly echoes the Western colonial attitude that has as its aim the domination and control of all that is manifestly different and exotic.

[20] Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London: Penguin Classics, 2011), p.3.
[21] Harish Trivedi, 'Introduction' in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (London: Penguin Classics, 2011), pp.xviiii-xlviii, p.xlii.
[22]Zohreh T. Sullivan, *Narratives of empire: The Fiction of Rudyard Kipling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.150.

Trivedi has pointed out that 'the mutual attraction between Kim and his lama is not that of like-minded seekers but rather of opposites, with quite different world-views', adding that the greatest difference between them is not the racial one, that one is white while the other is not, 'but rather the ''Orientalist' one, that one is as worldly and materialistic as the other is unworldly and spiritual' (Trivedi, 2011, p.xxx). The contrast between Kim and his lama is emphasised everywhere in the novel. On the Grand Trunk Road, 'the lama as usual, was deep in meditation, but Kim's bright eyes were open wide' (Kipling2011, p.63); while the latter is depicted as being worldly, knowledgeable and streetwise, the former is presented as spiritual, naïve and inexperienced. Moreover, throughout the novel Kipling is clear to show us that Kim is the guard and the protector of the lama. The latter's childlike dependence on Kim grows even more explicit: ''O Friend of all the World!' The lama had waked, and, simply as a child bewildered in a strange bed, called for Kim' (Kipling2011, p.72). The lama is portrayed as being desperately in need of Kim's youth and guidance not just in providing food and shelter but also in sustaining safety and protection. In one of his most strikingly emotional scenes, the lama confesses to Kim: 'Child, I have lived on thy strength as an old tree lives on the lime of a new wall' (Kipling2011, p.273). This image is certainly charged with Kipling's own imperial sense that India's prosperity is subject to the powerful and modern civilisation of the West. Kipling thus is definitely, as McClure has rightly observed, 'a man projecting fantasies of omnipotence' (McClure 1981, p.81). Like the naïve lama who is seemingly dependent on the lively Kim to survive and, to some extent, to achieve his goal in life, India is allegorically reliant on Britain to flourish and run its own affair.

Kipling's propagandist imperial project in *Kim*, however, is nowhere more exposed than in his polemical legitimisation of the British rule through the tongues of natives themselves. In chapter two, for example, Kipling has the Indian passengers express their gratitude to the unprecedented achievement of the British regiments and railways that have broken down racial barriers and brought the society into 'one brotherhood of caste' (Kipling2011, p.31). Similarly, the native widow of Kulu expresses her view of the English Sahibs in quite a 'judicial tone', stating:

'These be the sort to oversee justice. They know the land and the customs of the land. The others, all new from Europe, suckled by white women and learning our tongues from books, are worse than the pestilence' (Kipling2011, pp.77-8).

To have the natives explicitly acknowledge the advantages of the British rule is certainly a very polemical device in defending and legitimising the Empire. Jan Montefiore cogently argues that Kipling's 'conservative imperialism' is more subtly obvious 'in the vividly realized and sympathetic Indian characters whose assumptions about the benevolence and legitimacy of British rule match Kipling's own'. [23] Similarly Said has commented that Kipling's way of demonstrating the natives' acceptance of the colonial rule 'has always been the way European imperialism made itself more palatable to itself, for what could be better for its self-image than native subjects who express assent to the outsider's knowledge and power?' (Said 1994, p.180). In *Kim*, no one is seen to challenge or even question the imperial rule; most of the characters are portrayed as being happy and satisfied and even,

[23] Jan Montefiore, 'General Preface' in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (London: Penguin Classics, 2011), pp.xiii-xviii, p.xvi.

natives like Mahbub Ali and HurreeBabu are, collaborators with the British Raj. As Montefiore puts it: 'It is unthinkable in the world of *Kim* that nationalist claims or grievances might be justified' (Montefiore 2011, p.xvi). In fact, this view is further illustrated in chapter three of the novel where Kipling has a native old soldier comment on the national revolution of the Great Mutiny as being mere 'madness' (Kipling2011, p.54). The 'loyalist' soldier's version of the events is, as Said points out, 'highly charged with the British rationale for what happened' (Said 1994, p.178). The veteran fervently tells Kim and the lama of the events of the Mutiny, stating:

'A madness ate all the Army, and they turned against their officers. That was the first evil […].but they chose to kill the Sahibs' wives and children. Then came the Sahibs from over the sea and called them to most strict account' (Kipling2011, p.54).

Indeed, this corresponds exactly enough with what Said has come to consider as 'the extreme British view on the Mutiny' (Said 1994, p.179). Not only does the old soldier reduce his countrymen's resistance to the British into 'madness' but he also morally judges their deeds as being evil that inevitably needed the Sahibs' 'most strict account'. It is thus, as Said writes, that 'we left the world of history and entered the world of imperialist polemic, in which the native is naturally a delinquent, the white man a stern but moral parent and judge' (Said 1994, p.178). Having put all this minatory account of the mutineers' revolt against the British Raj into the mouth of a native himself, Kipling strengthens again his imperialist assumption of the subjects' agreement and satisfaction with their coloniser.

Patrick Brantlinger has rightly commented that 'the India depicted in *Kim* is like Prospero's magic island, an ideal colony' in which the British and the Indians live blissfully together. [24] In a similar vein, Angus Wilson perceives that 'evil … is strikingly absent' from *Kim*. [25] Indeed, the only evil depicted in the novel comes from intrusive forces like the Russian and the French spies who prove to be utterly cruel by attacking a frail old man, like the lama. The lack of chaos or of real conflict that characterises the whole novel has raised many question marks. A struggle between Kim's allegiance to his colonial service and his loyalty to his Indian companions, for instance, was expected to occur, yet it did not. On the account of a rather Freudian analysis of Kipling's turbulent life of dispersion and separation, Edmund Wilson has come to the conclusion that Kipling's fiction 'does not dramatize any fundamental conflict because Kipling would never face one'. [26] On the other hand, Said persuasively argues that Kim's disaporic identities never give rise to any genuine conflict 'not because Kipling could not face it, but because for Kipling there was no conflict'. For Said, Kipling avoided giving us two worlds in opposition because he had not considered India as 'unhappily subservient to imperialism […] for him it was India's best destiny to be ruled by England' (Said 1994, p.176). Thus the elimination of conflict becomes one of the

[24] Patrick Brantlinger, '*Kim*' in (ed.) Howard J. Booth, *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.126-140, p.136.
[25] Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Works* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1977), p.132.
[26] Edmund Wilson, 'The Kipling That Nobody Read' in *The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature* (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1941), p.126.

most deliberate strategies in the novel that not only aim to eradicate the flaws of the imperial mould but also serve to ratify its legitimacy.

In that respect, *Kim* is by far, as Said has persuasively commented, a 'master work of imperialism' (Said 2011, p.330). The novel can only be judged as a major contribution to Kipling's wide determination as the jingoist prophet of Empire. J. H. Millar has cogently observed that *Kim* 'is likely to do so much for the maintenance of our Empire in all its manifold interests', [27] corresponding exactly enough with D. C. Somervell's perceptive insight that:

> Imperialism of the late Victorian period went deeper than any political action or political theory. Its greatest exponent was not Sir John Seeley, nor even Joseph Chamberlain, most notable of Colonial Secretaries. Imperialism was a sentiment rather than a policy; its foundations were moral rather than intellectual; its greatest exponent was Rudyard Kipling. [28]

The conflicted politics of Rudyard Kipling

It is undeniable that Kipling's Indian fiction is highly infused with his imperialist world-views and colonial discourse that unswervingly support the British cause in India. However, if one were to read his works as mere political tracts, or as only a polemical defence of Empire, one would not be reading the works that Kipling in fact wrote. Kipling's fiction is so ambivalent that challenges any generalisation that can be levelled against its author. In one of his most considerate essays on Kipling, Mark Kinkead-Weeks starts off with emphasising the fact that the writer had always had "two separate sides" to his head and his work is 'radically inconsistent and unequal', adding that '[t]o the very end, in every collection and at every stage, the good Kipling lies beside the bad' (Kinkead-Weekes 1966, p.197). In fact, Kipling's conflicted imperial visions and ambivalent ideologies are acknowledged even by his less sympathetic critics. For instance, while Orwell, who so readily labels him as the prophet of Empire, admits that there is a 'neurotic strain' in Kipling (Orwell 1968, p.191), Salman Rushdie unreservedly acknowledges the author's 'almost schizophrenic early stories of the Indianesses and Englishnesses that struggled within him'. [29]

The tension of neuroticism and schizophrenia is of course highly detected in *Plain Tales from the Hills.* Taken as whole, the collection is more a dedication to the Indians and a condemnation of the British than the reverse. David Glamour cogently argues that it is in the Indian stories of *Plain Tales* that 'Kipling most clearly displayed his essential sympathy for

[27] J. M. Millar, '*Kim'* in (ed.) Roger Lancelyn Green, *Kipling: the Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp.269-271, p.270.
[28] D. C. Somervell, *English Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1940), p.186.
[29] Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's last Sigh* (London: Vintage, 1996), p.39.

the peoples among whom he lived'. [30] In 'Lispeth', for instance, while the text is extensively mined with racially offensive remarks and stereotyping demeaning approaches towards the Indians, yet the tale is intrinsically critical of the British. The falseness and duplicity of Englishmen are evident all the way through. Lispeth's rebellion and her abrupt conversion into heathenism are essentially resulted from the heartless behaviour of the superficial English lover and the arrogant and duplicitous manner of the English missionaries. Rao observes that Lispeth's simple yet startling question to the Chaplain's wife reveals both her 'innocence' and the 'falseness' of the Englishman and the missionary: [31]

'How can what he and you said be untrue?' asked Lispeth. 'We said it as an excuse to keep you quiet, child', said the Chaplain's wife. 'Then you have lied to me', said Lispeth, 'you and he?' (Kipling2009, p.11)

Within the bounds of the story, McClure writes, 'there is nothing to contradict the justice of Lispeth's condemnation of the British, or to challenge her right to make it' (McClure 1981, p. 51). The character of Lispeth is deliberately created to claim sympathy and respect more than her English counterparts. Sullivan gives credit to this idea by commenting that '[i]t is Lispeth the hill girl the reader supports and not her English lover or the English missionaries who try to educate her into civilization' (Sullivan 1993, p.24). Indeed, the notions of civilisation and cultivating mission are strikingly called into question in this story. Despite her early abandonment of her 'own people' and wholehearted commitment to the Western ideals, Lispeth is still regarded by the missionaries as inferior and incompatible partner to the Englishman who is of 'a superior clay' (Kipling2009, p.11). Thus '[i]mperialism's promise to educate the colonized for equality', as McClure observes, 'is revealed as a hollow sham' (McClure 1981, p.51). It can be argued that Kipling may not have intended so broad a criticism of the imperial mould as is suggested above, yet what it can never be contested is his deep sympathy for Lispeth and his clear insistence on her ethical and moral superiority to his English fellowmen.

Kipling's sympathetic approach towards the natives is equally revealed in many other stories in *Plain Tales.* In contrast to the Orientalist views that stereotypically characterise the natives as lazy and inept, Muhammed Din, in 'The Story of Muhammad Din', is portrayed as being creative and intelligent; despite his young age, the boy has excelled in making architectural artefacts that thrills and amazes the English Sahib (Kipling2009, p.215). Similarly, in 'His Chance in Life' the Eurasian Michelle D'Cruze, who 'was a poor, sickly weed and very black' (Kipling2009, p.60), thrives in his work by successfully putting down a religious riot and maintaining control in the absence of the British. Thus D'Cruze positively responds to the taste of 'Responsibility and Success' (Kipling2009, p.63). Pointedly, as McClure argues, this is the very taste that 'imperialism has systematically denied to the colonized peoples, on the grounds that they were incapable of appreciating it' (McClure 1981, p.53). In that respect, in his depiction of a native's success at preserving social order, Kipling is contradicting the traditional imperial assumption of the incapability

[30] David Gilmour, *The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling* (London: John Murray, 2002), p.67.
[31] K. Bhaskara Rao, *Rudyard Kipling's India* (Norman: University of Okhalama Press, 1967), p.100.

of the colonised people to govern and look after themselves. Significantly, D'Cruze's sense of responsibility and success diffuses only at the appearance of the White European:

> [I]n the presence of this young Englishman, Michelle felt himself slipping back more and more into the native; and the tale of the Tibasu Riots ended […] shame that he could not feel as uplifted as he had felt through the night (Kipling2009, p63).

What Kipling projects here with almost a critical lens is the theory of racial superiority that imperialists worked so hard to establish in the world and more specially to entrench within the consciousness of the colonised himself. It is of course odd that Kipling directs such a sly criticism towards an imperialist dogmatic ideology that he himself had been one its staunch promoters. In fact, Kipling betrays his racial insight of supremacy not only through divulging its machinery and highlighting the negative effects that it causes to the natives, but also by revealing its falseness altogether through his disparaging portrayals of the British Raj.

T. S. Eliot passionately defends that Kipling had always been far from uncritical of the defects of the British Empire, stating that 'no attentive reader of Kipling can maintain […] that he was unaware of the faults of British rule' (Eliot 1941, p.29). Similarly, Edward Shanks argues that Kipling 'was, indeed, a severe and penetrating critic of the British regime'. [32] Generally, Kipling's representation of the Raj is more admonitory than laudatory. In 'Thrown Away', for instance, the comic reaction of the Major and his assistant to the terrible suicidal of a soldier reveals how careless and indifferent the representatives of the British regiment are. Besides, their counterfeit of the real reason of death and the 'concoction of a big, written lie, bolstered with evidence', reflect the dishonesty of the British army and its 'professionalism' in lie and deception (Kipling2009, p.21).

Another denunciation of the British governmental affair in India is shown in 'Consequences' where the officers of the Supreme Government are not recruited according to their qualifications and aptitudes but rather in consideration of other deviant accounts. While Tarrion, who has neither skills nor 'a square of interest in all Simla' (Kipling2009, p.76), is given a job by way of blackmailing, the Strong Man, who is 'the biggest and the strongest man that the government owned', was basically appointed through nepotism, given 'the fact of being the nephew of a distinguished officer's wife' (Kipling2009, pp.78-9).

A further and much more vicious indictment of the British practice in India can be detected in 'The taking of the Luntungpen', the story that chronicles the events of the English brutal control of a small, innocent village. It is made clear that the racial attitude towards the natives of the Lungtungpen and the dehumanising of them as 'divils' and 'dacoits' are strikingly undercut by the inhumanity and vulgarity of the English soldiers (Kipling2009, p.87). The latter's vulgar invasion to the village while they are stark 'nakid' and 'sriekinwidlaughin', and their ease at the terrible aftermath of the war, reflect their senseless brutality and uncouth indifference to the feelings of the natives (Kipling2009, P.87).

[32] Edward Shanks, *Rudyard Kipling: AStudy in Literature and Political Ideas* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1940), p.88.

Eliot has pointed out that in *Plain Tales From the Hills* Kipling 'has given the one perfect picture of a society of English, narrow, snobbish, spiteful, ignorant and vulgar, set down absurdly in a continent of which they are unconscious'. [33] This view is further reinforced in 'Tods' Amendment' where Kipling blatantly expresses his bewilderment towards the colonial regime:

Then the Council began to settle what they called the 'minor details'. As if any Englishman legislating for natives knows enough to know which are the minor and which are the major points, from the native point of view, of any measure! […] ethnologically and politically the notion was correct. The only drawback was that it was altogether wrong' (Kipling2009, pp.145-6).

What Kipling ironically questions here, with an unconventional tone, is the legitimacy of the British government to rule people whom they know nothing about their norms of life and belief. In this passage, Kipling not only divulges the reality of the imperial mould but he also strikingly passes his judgment of its wrongness altogether. Here, as elsewhere in *Plain Tales*, Kipling seems to have distanced himself from the politics of the Raj, intensifying by so doing the strain of schizophrenia and deepening the chasm between the 'Two/Separate sides' of his head.

Kipling's conflicted views and contradictory ideologies are similarly voiced in *Kim*. While the novel is widely held as an imperialist work, it is also seen as an intimate, picturesque story that is subtly weaved by the author's great love and admiration for the country and its people. *Kim* has long been considered by even Indian critics like Nirad Chaudhuri as the greatest thing any Englishman had written about India. [34] Fred Lerner enthusiastically states that 'Kim is many things […] but above all it is a love letter to India, a celebration of the sounds and smells and colours of the subcontinent'. [35] As Kim and the lama wend their way along the Grand Trunk Road, the wonderful panorama of India unrolls itself enchantingly before us. Throughout the novel Kipling recurrently draws a painterly image of India: 'Golden, rose, saffron, and pink, the morning mists smoked away across the flat green levels. All the rich Punjab lay out in the splendour of the keen sun' (Kipling2011, p.33). This passage would certainly be among those praised by George Moore for being 'so profusely touched with local colour'. [36]

The Kaleidoscopic quality of the Grand Trunk Road, with all its rich and various landscapes and ever-wondrous panoramic views, is further enhanced with the multicultural weave of the nation:

[33] T. S. Eliot, 'Kipling Redivivus' in (ed.) Roger Lancelyn Green, *Kipling: the Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp.322-6, p.326.

[34] Nirad C. Chaudhuri, 'The Finest Story about India—in English' in (ed.) John Gross, *Rudyard Kipling: The man, his work, and his world* (London: Weidenfled& Nicolson, 1972), p.28.

[35] Fred Lerner, 'The Tragedy of Rudyard Kipling', *Kipling Journal*, 82 (September 2008), cited in Patrick Brantlinger, 'Kim' in (ed.) Howard J. Booth, *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.126-140, p.126.

[36] George Moore, 'Kipling and Loti' in (ed.) Roger Lancelyn Green, *Kipling: the Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp.286-292, p.291.

'All castes and Kinds of men move here- Look! Brahmins and chumars, bankers and tinkers, barbers and bunnias, pilgrims and potters- all the world going and coming' […]

And truly the Grand Trunk Road is a wonderful spectacle. It runs straight, bearing without crowding India's traffic for fifteen hundred moles- Such a river of life as nowhere else exists in the world (Kipling2011, p.59).

Thus Kipling captures the richness and diversity of life in India. Angus Wilson puts: 'I know of no other English novel that so celebrates the human urban scene' (Wilson 1977, p.130). India, through Kipling's lens, is the melting pot for many human varieties and the meeting ground for different cultural races. In her striking comparison between Kipling's *Kim* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, the widely-reputed novel as anti-imperialist, Rao deduces the fact that the former 'achieves much more in effective interpretation of India' than the latter (Rao 1967, p.155), culminating her analytical perspective with the statement:

If I were asked to name one novel written by an Englishman which genuinely interprets the India of every-day life, the India of the common people, I would unhesitatingly give that honor to Kipling's *Kim* (p.159).

In *Kim*, India is presented as 'the only democratic country in the world' in which all different races and castes live together tolerably and harmoniously (Kipling2011, p.6). The spirit of unity and brotherhood is reinforced all the way through. Despite their apparent variety and diversity the people of India are bound together by their sense of benevolence and hospitality. The lama, for instance, although he is a stranger who belongs to another faith and country, is treated with kindness and held in high regard from almost everyone. Rao argues that in recognising and presenting this aspect of the Indian society, 'Kipling shows an understanding of India' that is no longer conceived 'in terms of mere black and white, but in terms of synthesis and harmony'(Rao 1967, pp.139 and 141).

Significantly, Kipling has Kim, whose superiority of race is laid bare throughout the novel, avow at the end, after associating with the lama:

'Thou hast said there is neither black nor white, why plague me with this talk, Holy One? Let me rub the other foot. It vexes me, I am not a Sahib. I am thy chela, and my head is heavy on my shoulders' (Kipling2011, p.271).

Indeed, it is through this complex relationship between Kim and the lama that Kipling most clearly shows an ambivalent representation of India. Kipling's ideological portrayal of the lama's dependency and naivety is strikingly contradicted by having him pay for Kim's Western education and get along splendidly in the absence of his white chela. Kipling even has Kim admit his debt to the lama: 'I am still a Sahib—by thy favour' (Kipling2011, p.192). The lama thus appears able enough to take care not only of himself but of Kim, and by so being he contradicts the traditional imperial assumption of the natives' incapability to look after themselves.

Furthermore, Kipling's self-contradictory ideologies of imperialism are also highlighted in his demeaning portrayal of the British missionaries. Not unlike the British army and

government in *Plain Tales*, the Church of England appears in the same ignoble light. The Reverent Arthur Bennett is obviously a very unattractive specimen and can be, as Wilson perceives him, 'the villain of the Book' (Wilson 1977, p.79). Bennett's prejudice and close-mindedness are most shown in his ignorance to the lama's strong feeling towards Kim and reducing their noble relationship into a materialistic pact that can be resolved, in his view, by offering the lama a rupee in exchange for the boy. Moreover, Bennett's change of attitude towards Kim as soon as he knows he is white reveals his embedded racism and ethnic bias which reinforce his unpleasant character. We may, therefore, go a long way towards agreeing with Kinkead-Weekes' view that 'Kipling's anger is not only, or even mainly, anti-clerical. It is unmistakably anti-racialist' (Kinkead-Weekes 1966, p.22).

In fact, Kipling's anti-racialist attitude in *Kim* is further strengthened by his intimate depiction of the natives. Eliot argues that, on the whole, 'it is the Indian characters who have the greater reality, because they are treated with the understanding of love' (Eliot 16, p.23). It is the three great Indian characters in *Kim* who are real: the lama, Mahbub Ali and Hurree Chunder Mookerjie. These are the people who have the most significant imprints in the development of Kim's personality and character: the latter learns wisdom from the lama, love of mystery and intrigue from Mahbub Ali, and he even acquires the inspiration of success from Hurree Babu who, in spite of his ridiculed appearance and behaviour, is presented as a model of unparalleled competence and intelligence at work.

Kipling's sympathy towards the Indians extends to entail even minor characters such as the Woman of Shamlegh. In this episode, Kipling's most sympathetic heroine in *Plain tales*, Lispeth, reappears and the British deceptiveness re-emerges. The native woman, who long ago loved, but never married, by a departed 'Kerlistian' Sahib, bitterly expresses her anger from the British misconduct, stating: 'Thy Gods are lies; thy works are lies; thy words are lies' (Kipling2011, p.265). This is even more intense indictment of the British norms and beliefs than any in the short story 'Lispeth'. McClure perceives that the re-emergence of the predicament of native women being deceived by white men is an emphasis on the British imperial breach of faith for, as he cogently puts, 'the careless betrayal of a marriage pledge suggests the larger betrayal of the Indian people by their English rulers' (McClure 1981, p.75). In fact, such a perspective reveals Kipling's own betrayal of his colonial politics. Here, as in so many other instances in *Kim*, Kipling contradicts his recognised support for the British imperialism and hence accentuates his ambivalent colonial personality that is, to quote Rushdie, 'in conflict with itself' (Rushdie 1991, p.74).

Not unlike Kim, Kipling is split by irreconcilable allegiances and devotions. Indeed, Kim's awareness of his conflicted identity, 'I am Kim. I am Kim. And what is Kim?' (Kipling2011, p.283), echoes Kipling's divided sense of self. As Moore puts it: 'it is impossible to read *Kim* without saying to oneself: 'Kim is Mr. Kipling'' (Moore 1971, p.286). Rao has even gone further to suggest that 'the yearning of Kim for the open road, for its smells, sights and sounds is part of the longing of Kipling himself' (Rao 1967, p.126). Actually, the strong nostalgic quality of *Kim* echoes in sentiment Kipling's intense wistful feeling that he articulates in a letter to his old friend Mrs Hill, speaking of his visit to Egypt in 1913, the closest and the most comparable to India that he never visited again:

> [N]othing I could write would give any idea of the effect of the land which is so like India in aspect and smell and association […]. I felt as though I was moving in a sort of terrible, homesick nightmare and as though at any moment the years would roll away and I should find myself back in India.[37]

Kipling's intimacy with India and his great love for the land and people are exceptionally evident in *Kim*. Here, as Rao persuasively argues, Kipling 'is not the propagandist, but a sympathetic reporter, recalling his Indian days in fond memory' (Rao 1967, p.125). In its humanity, sympathy, and its in-depth interpretation of life along the vast tracts of India, *Kim* not only can be, as Kinkead-Weakes enthusiastically argues, 'the living contradiction of nine-tenths of the charges ever levelled against its author' (Kinkead-Weakes 1966, p.197), but also the surviving truth of the existence of a brown side within Kipling's self-divided head that loved and appreciated India highly.

Conclusion

Kipling's Indian narratives are essentially marked by conflict. Throughout *Plain tales* and *Kim* Kipling articulates multiple voices and conveys different views that are in stark opposition with each other. In fact, these works presents us with, in Rushdie's words, 'two Kiplings [that] are openly at war with one another' (Rushdie 1991, p.78). The writer's evident pro-colonial politics are at odds with his equally obvious sympathy and intimacy with the colony and its subjects. As Gilmour rightly puts: 'No doubt most people have two sides to their heads but few keep them as separate and inimical as Kipling managed to do' (Gilmour 2002, p.54).

Of course no one would deny that a good part of Kipling's fiction is politically motivated to serve the British cause in India for, as Shanks who is Kipling's most sympathetic critic admits, 'it would be quite impossible not to make politics a great part of any book about Kipling' who strictly 'adhered to a political doctrine which was the mainspring of his work' (Shanks 1940, pp.7-8). Kipling's political programme is certainly revealed through his articulation, corroboration, and manipulation of an Orientalist tradition that was essentially created by Western imperialists to impose control and domination over the Orient. Significantly, such an imperialist attitude inevitably generates nothing but prejudice and racism towards the Oriental and these sentiments are to be found everywhere in Kipling's fiction. Throughout *Plain Tales* and *Kim,* Kipling explicitly as well as implicitly reiterates his dogmatic beliefs in the British racial supremacy and the superiority of the conquering race. Kipling's endeavour to support and defend the colonial programme is similarly detected in his ideological and propagandist legitimisation of the British rule in India, either by depicting the natives' inability to take the burden and rule themselves or through highlighting their happiness and satisfaction with the British governance. Thus, as Said puts it, Kipling's 'fiction represents the empire and its conscious legitimizations' (Said 1994, 176).

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[37] Rudyard Kipling, *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling,* vol.4: 1911-19 (ed.) Thomas Pinney (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999), p.231.

It is made evident, however, throughout Kipling's Indian fiction that such generalisations would not do justice neither to the author nor to his work for, as Gilmour rightly observes, 'a great deal that Kipling said and wrote can be contradicted by other things he said and wrote' (Gilmour 2002, p.39). Kipling's deep love for India and intimacy with its people are remarkably evident in both *Plain Tales* and *Kim*. The author's sympathetic depictions of the native characters and his emphasis on their moral and ethical rectitude stand in stark opposition with his hostile advocacy to the imperial system and his staunch endeavour to entrench the theory of racial division. Moreover, the picture that Kipling gives of the British official, soldier and clergyman is not altogether a pleasant one and strikingly calls into question their aptitude for governance. Sullivan has cogently commented that Kipling not only perceives the East from a Western lens that disparages, stereotypes and orientalises the Orient, but 'he also sees the West from the vantage point of the internalized Other, the underground Indian who is always and undeniably within him' (Sullivan 1993, p.49).

Kipling is by far a very complex persona and a writer, in Eliot's words, 'impossible wholly to understand' (Eliot 1941, p.22). His identity is eternally split by irreconcilable longings for both his colonial service and personal affection and his work is consequently divided by conflicted visions and dissonant voices. Indeed, Kipling's ambivalence and indeterminacy are essentially generated from his inability to secure some absolute ground for either of his longings. Like his fictional character Kim, Kipling wanted to be at once 'Little Friend of all the World' and possessor of the gun. He believed, in Gorra's words, 'in both an essential India and an essential England'. [38] Thus it may be true to presume that Kipling's notorious colonial hostility towards India was essentially, and paradoxically, stemmed from his great love for the country; Kipling supported the British rule in India because the latter had occupied a crucial side in his head and formed an indispensable part of his identity that he would not let to disperse: In keeping the British cause in India, Kipling was in fact keeping his own complete, yet terribly diasporic, self.

[38] Michael Gorra, 'Rudyard Kipling to Salman Rushdie: Imperialism to Postcolonialism', in (ed.) John Richetti, *The Columbia History of the British Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp.631-657, p.633.

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