

Rudyard Kipling

KIM

EDITED

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

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PENGUIN BOOKS

Introduction

I

Kim is as unique in Rudyard Kipling's life and career as it is in English literature. It appeared in 1901, twelve years after Kipling had left India, the place of his birth in 1865 and the country with which his name will always be associated. More interestingly than that, however, is that *Kim* was Kipling's only successfully sustained and mature piece of long fiction; although it can be read with enjoyment by adolescents it can also be read with respect and interest years afterwards, both by the general reader and the critic alike. Kipling's other fiction consists either of short stories (or collections thereof, such as *The Jungle Books*), or of deeply flawed longer works (like *Captains Courageous*, *The Light That Failed* and *Stalky and Co.*, works whose otherwise interesting qualities are often overshadowed by failures of coherence, of vision, or of judgement). Only Joseph Conrad, another master stylist, can be considered along with Kipling, his slightly younger peer, to have rendered the experience of empire with such force, and even though the two artists are remarkably different in tone and style, they brought to a basically insular and provincial British audience the colour, the glamour and the romance of the British overseas enterprise. Of the two, it is Kipling - less ironic, technically self-conscious, and equivocal than Conrad - who acquired a large audience relatively early in life. But both writers have remained something of a puzzle for readers of English literature, whose scholars have found the two men eccentric, often troubling, figures, better treated with circumspection or even avoidance than absorbed and domesticated.

But whereas Conrad's major visions of imperialism concern Africa in *Heart of Darkness* (1902), the South Seas in *Lord Jim* (1900), South America in *Nostramo* (1904), Kipling's greatest

work concentrates on India, a territory never visited or treated by Conrad. For indeed, India was the greatest, the most durable, and profitable of all British colonial possessions. From the time the first British expedition arrived there in 1608, until the last British Viceroy departed in 1947, India acquired an increasingly massive and influential role in British life, in commerce and trade, in industry, politics, ideology, war and, by the middle of the eighteenth century, in culture and the life of the imagination. In English literature and thought the list of great names who dealt with and wrote about India is astonishingly impressive, since it includes William Jones, Edmund Burke, William Makepeace Thackeray, Jeremy Bentham, James and John Stuart Mill, Lord Macaulay, Wilfred Scawen Blunt, Harriet Martineau, E. M. Forster and, of course, Rudyard Kipling, whose role in the definition, the imagination, the formulation of what India was to the British Empire in its mature phase, just before the whole edifice began to split and crack, is extraordinarily important.

Kipling not only wrote about India, he was o/it. His father, John Lockwood, a refined scholar, teacher, and artist who is the model for the kindly curator of the Lahore Museum in Chapter 1 of *Kim*, was a teacher in British India. Rudyard was born there in 1865 and during the first years of his life spoke Hindustani, and was very much like Kim, a sahib in native clothes. At the age of six, he and his sister were transported to England to begin their schooling; although the experience of his first years in England (in the care of a Mrs Holloway at Southsea) was appalling and deeply traumatic, it furnished him with an enduring subject matter, the interaction between youth and unpleasant authority, which Kipling rendered with great complexity and ambivalence throughout his life. Then Kipling went to one of the lesser public schools designed for children of the colonial service, the United Services College at Westward Ho! (the greatest of the schools was Haileybury, but that was reserved for upper echelons of the colonial elite). Kipling returned to India in 1882. His family was still there, and so for seven years, as he tells of those events in his posthumously published autobiography *Something of Myself*,¹ he worked as a

journalist in the Punjab, first on the *Civil and Military Gazette*, later on the *Pioneer*. His first stories came out of that experience, and were published locally; at that time he also began writing his poetry (or rather what T. S. Eliot has called 'verse') which was first collected in *Departmental Ditties* (1886). Kipling left India in 1889, never again to live there for any length of time although, like Proust, for the rest of his life he lived in his art on the memories of his early Indian years. Subsequently, Kipling lived for a while in America (and married an American woman) and South Africa, but settled in England after 1900: *Kim* was completed in Rottingdean, Sussex, where Kipling lived till his death in 1936. He quickly won great fame, and a large readership; in 1907 he won the Nobel Prize. His friends were rich and powerful; they included King George V, his cousin Stanley Baldwin, Thomas Hardy, and it is worthwhile mentioning that many prominent writers (among them Henry James and Joseph Conrad) spoke respectfully of him. After the First World War (during which his son John was killed) his vision darkened considerably. Although he remained a Tory imperialist, his bleak visionary stories of England and the future, coupled with eccentric animal and quasi-theological tales, forecast also a change in his reputation. At his death, he was accorded the honours reserved by Britain for its greatest writers. Buried in Westminster Abbey, he has remained an institution in English letters, albeit one always slightly apart from the great central strand, acknowledged but slighted, appreciated but never fully canonized.

Kipling's admirers and acolytes have often spoken of his representations of India as if the India he wrote about was a timeless, unchanging, and 'essential' locale, a place almost as much poetic as it is actual in geographic concreteness. This, I think, is a radical misreading of works like *Kim*, *The Jungle Books*, and the first volumes of his short stories. If Kipling's India has qualities of the essential and unchanging it was because, for various reasons, he deliberately saw India that way. After all we do not assume that Kipling's late stories about England or his Boer War tales are about an essential England or South Africa; rather, we surmise correctly that Kipling was

responding to, and in a sense imaginatively re-formulating, his sense of places at particular moments in their histories. The same is true of Kipling's India, which must be interpreted - as we shall interpret it presently - as a territory dominated by Britain for 300 years, now beginning to present the problems of increased unrest which would culminate in decolonization and independence.

Two things, therefore, must be kept in mind as we read *Kim*. One is that, whether we like the fact or not, we should regard its author as writing not just from the dominating viewpoint of a white man describing a colonial possession, but also from the perspective of a massive colonial system whose economy, functioning and history had acquired the status almost of a fact of nature. This meant that on one side of the colonial divide there was white Christian Europe; its various countries, principally Britain and France, but also Holland, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Russia, America, Portugal and Spain, controlled approximately 85 per cent of the earth's surface by the First World War. On the other side of the divide, there were an immense variety of territories and races, all of them considered lesser, or inferior, or dependent, or subject. The division between white and non-white, in India and elsewhere, was absolute, and is alluded to through *Kim*: a sahib is a sahib, and no amount of friendship or camaraderie can change the rudiments of racial difference. Kipling could no more have questioned that difference, and the right of the white European to rule, than he would have argued with the Himalayas.

The second thing is that no less than India itself of course, Kipling was a historical being, albeit a major artist. *Kim* was written at a specific moment in his career, at a particular time in the changing relationship between the British and the Indian people. And even though Kipling resisted the notion, India was already well into the dynamic of outright opposition to British rule (the Congress Party had been established in 1880, for example), just as among the dominant British caste of colonial officials, military as well as civilian, important changes in attitude had occurred as a result of the 1857 Mutiny. The British and the Indians had thus evolved together. They had a common

interdependent history, even though opposition, animosity and sympathy either kept them apart or sometimes brought them together. The complexity of a remarkable novel like *Kim* is that it is a very illuminating part of that history, as full of emphases, inflections, deliberate inclusions and exclusions as any great work of art, made the more interesting because Kipling was not a neutral figure in the Anglo-Indian situation, but a prominent actor in it.

Nor should we forget that even though India gained its independence (and was partitioned) in 1947, the whole question of how to interpret Indian and British history in the period after decolonization is still a matter of strenuous, if not always edifying, debate. Some Indians feel, for example, that imperialism permanently scarred and distorted Indian life, so that even after several decades of independence, and probably for many more years than that, the Indian economy, which had been bled by British needs and practices, would suffer. Conversely, there are British intellectuals, political figures and historians who believe that giving up the Empire - whose symbols were Suez, Aden and India - was bad for Britain and bad for 'the natives' who have declined in all sorts of ways since their abandonment by the white man. One milestone in the ongoing debate about the imperial past was the lively controversy joined in 1984 between Conor Cruise O'Brien writing in the *Observer*² and Salman Rushdie, who in a brilliantly argued essay in *Granta* 11 suggested that the vogue of what he called 'Raj revivalism' occurring in film and television concurrently with the Falklands War was an attempt to restore the prestige, if not the actual reality, of the long-gone Empire. This was the period of television serialization of M. M. Kaye's *The Far Pavilions* and Paul Scott's great 'Raj Quartet', while films like *Gandhi* and *A Passage to India* were also reaching an enormous audience. O'Brien retorted by saying that this was little more than the whining of formerly colonized peoples, trying to get an unwarranted sympathy for their failures to manage in the present.

When we read it today, Kipling's *Kim* engages much the same set of issues. Does Kipling portray the Indians as inferior,

or as somehow equal but different? Clearly, an Indian reader will give an answer that focuses on some things more than others (for example, Kipling's stereotypical views - some would call them racist views - on the Oriental character), whereas English and many American readers would stress Kipling's affectionate descriptions of Indian life on the Grand Trunk Road. How then do we read *Kim*, if we are to remember always that the book is, after all, a novel, that there is more than one history in it to be remembered, that the imperial experience, while often regarded as exclusively political, was also an experience that entered into cultural and aesthetic life as well?

Some things about *Kim* will strike every reader, regardless of politics and history. It is an overwhelmingly male novel, with two wonderfully attractive men - a boy who grows into early manhood, and an old ascetic priest - at its centre. Grouped around them are a set of other men, some of them companions, others colleagues and friends, who make up the novel's major, defining reality. Mahbub Ali, Lurgan Sahib, the great Babu, as well as the old Indian soldier and his dashing horse-riding son, plus Colonel Creighton, Mr Bennett and Father Victor, to name only a few of the numerous characters in this teeming book: all of them speak the language that men speak among themselves. The women in the novel are remarkably few in number by comparison, and all are somehow debased or unsuitable for male attention: prostitutes, elderly widows, or importunate and lusty women like the Woman of Shamlegh; to be always pestered by women, Kim believes, is to be hindered in playing the Great Game, which is best played by men alone. So not only are we in a masculine world dominated by travel, trade, adventure and intrigue, we are in a celibate world, in which the common romance of fiction and the enduring institution of marriage have been circumvented, avoided, all but ignored. At best, women help things along: they buy you a ticket, they cook, they tend the ill, and . . . they molest men.

Moreover Kim himself, although he ages in the novel from thirteen until he is sixteen or seventeen, remains a boy, with a boy's passion for tricks, pranks, clever word-play, resourcefulness. Kipling seemed to have retained a life-long sympathy

with himself as a boy, beset by the adult world of domineering schoolmasters and priests (Mr Bennett is an exceptionally unattractive specimen of it) whose authority must always be reckoned with - until another figure of authority, like Colonel Creighton, comes along and treats the young person with an understanding, but no less authoritarian, compassion. The difference between St Xavier's School, which Kim attends for some time, and service in the Great Game (British intelligence in India) does not lie in the greater freedom of the latter; quite the contrary, the demands of the Great Game are more exacting. The difference lies in the fact that the former imposes a useless authority, whereas the exigencies of the Secret Service demand from Kim an exciting and precise discipline, which paradoxically he willingly gives in to. From Creighton's point of view the Great Game is a sort of political economy of control, in which, as he once tells Kim, the greatest sin is ignorance, not to know. But for Kim the Great Game cannot be perceived in all its complex patterns, although it can be fully enjoyed as a sort of extended prank. The scenes where Kim banters, bargains, repartees with his elders, friendly and hostile alike, are indications of Kipling's seemingly inexhaustible fund of boyish enjoyment in the sheer momentary pleasure of playing a game, any sort of game.

But we should not be mistaken about these boyish pleasures. They do not at all contradict the overall political purpose of British control over India, and Britain's other overseas dominions. A perfect example of this (to us, perhaps) odd mixture of fun and single-minded political seriousness is to be found in Lord Baden-Powell's conception of the Boy Scouts, which were founded and launched in 1907-8. An almost exact contemporary of Kipling, B.P., as he was called, was greatly influenced by Kipling's boys generally and Mowgli in particular. As we have come to understand his ideas about 'boyology', B.P. fed those images directly into a grand scheme of imperial authority culminating in the great Boy Scout structure 'fortifying the wall of empire'. The recent research of Michael Rosenthal,³ in his excellent book *The Character Factory: Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts and the Imperatives of Empire*, manifestly confirms this

remarkable conjunction of fun and service designed to produce row after row of bright-eyed, eager and resourceful little middle-class servants of empire. Kim, after all, is both Irish and of an inferior social caste; this enhances his candidacy for service in Kipling's eyes. B.P. and Kipling concur on two other important points: that boys ultimately should conceive of life and empire as governed by unbreakable Laws, and that service is more enjoyable when thought of as similar less to a story - linear, continuous, temporal - than to a playing field - many dimensional, discontinuous, and spatial. A recent book by the historian J. A. Mangan sums it up nicely in its title: *The Games Ethic and Imperialism*.

Yet so large in perspective and strangely sensitive is Kipling to the range of human possibilities that he gives another of his emotional predilections relatively full rein. He offsets the regimen of the service ethic in *Kim* by the lama and what he and Kim represent to each other. For even though Kim is to be drafted into intelligence work at the very outset of the novel, the gifted boy has already been charmed into becoming the lama's *chela* (disciple) even earlier in Chapter 1. But this almost idyllic relationship between two male companions has an interesting genealogy. Like a number of American novels (*Huckleberry Finn*, *Moby Dick* and *The Deerslayer* come quickly to mind) *Kim* celebrates the friendship of two men in a difficult, and sometimes hostile, environment. Even though the American frontier and colonial India are quite different, both places bestow a higher priority on what has been called male bonding than on a domestic or amorous connection between the sexes. Some critics have speculated on the hidden homosexual motif of these relationships, but there is also the cultural motif long associated with picaresque tales in which a male adventurer (with wife or mother, if either exists, safely at home) and his male companions are engaged, like Jason or Odysseus, or even more compellingly Don Quixote with Sancho Panza, in the pursuit of a special dream. In the field or on the open road two men can travel together more easily, and they can come to each other's rescue more credibly than if a woman were with them. Or so the long tradition of adventure stories, from Odysseus

and his crew, to the Lone Ranger and Tonto, Holmes and Watson, Batman and Robin, seems to have held.

For his part Kim's saintly guru belongs, additionally, to the overtly religious mode of the pilgrimage or quest common to all cultures. Kipling we know was an admirer of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, though *Kim* is a good deal more like Chaucer's than Bunyan's work. Kipling shares the early English poet's eye for wayward detail, the odd character, the slice of life, the amused sense of human foibles and joys. Unlike both Chaucer and Bunyan, however, Kipling is less interested in religion for its own sake (although we never doubt the lama's piety) than he is in local colour, scrupulous attention to exotic detail, and the all-encompassing realities of the Great Game. It is the greatness of Kipling's achievement that quite without selling the old man short, or in any way diminishing the quaint sincerity of his Search, Kipling, nevertheless, firmly places him within the protective orbit of British rule in India. This is symbolized in Chapter 1, when the elderly British museum curator gives the lama his spectacles. In doing so he both adds to the man's spiritual prestige and authority, and he consolidates the justness and legitimacy of Britain's benevolent sway.

This view, in my opinion, has been misunderstood and even denied by many of Kipling's readers. But we must not forget that the lama depends on Kim for support and guidance, and that Kim's achievement is to have neither betrayed the lama's values nor to let up in his work as a junior spy. Throughout the novel Kipling is clear about showing us that the lama, while a wise and good man, needs Kim's youth, his guidance, his wits; there is even an explicit acknowledgement by the lama of his absolute, religious need for him when, in Benares, towards the end of Chapter 9, he tells the *Jataka*, the parable of the young elephant ('the Lord Himself) freeing the old elephant (Ananda) who has been imprisoned in a leg-iron that will not come off. Clearly, the lama regards Kim as his own saviour. Later in the novel, after the fateful confrontation with the Russian agents who stir up insurrection against Britain, Kim helps (and is helped by) the lama who, in one of the most moving scenes of

all Kipling's fiction, says, 'Child, I have lived on thy strength as an old tree lives on the lime of a new wall.' Kim is reciprocally moved by love for his guru. Yet he never abandons his duty in the Great Game, although he confesses to the old man that he needs him 'for some other things'.

Doubtless those 'other things' are faith and unbending purpose. For in one of its main narrative strands *Kim* keeps returning to the idea of a quest, the lama's search for redemption from the Wheel of Life, a complex diagram of which he carries around in his pocket, and Kim's search for a secure place in colonial service. Kipling, I think, does not condescend to the old man's search. He follows him wherever he goes in his wish to be freed from 'the delusions of the Body', and it is surely a part of our engagement in the novel's Eastern dimension, which Kipling renders with little false exoticism, that we are able to believe in the novelist's respect for this particular pilgrim. Moreover the lama commands attention and esteem from nearly everyone. He is no charlatan, no beggarly impostor, no confidence man. He honours his word to get the money for Kim's education; he meets Kim at the appointed times and places; he is listened to with veneration and devotion. In an especially nice touch in Chapter 14, Kipling has him tell 'a fantastic piled narrative of bewitchment and miracles' about marvellous events in his native Tibetan mountains, events which the novelist courteously forbears from repeating, as if to say that this old saint has a life of his own that cannot be reproduced in sequential English prose.

And yet, the lama's search and Kim's illness at the end of the novel are resolved together. Readers of many of Kipling's other tales will be familiar with what the critic J. M. S. Tompkins has rightly called 'the theme of healing'⁴ and, like those, the narrative of *Kim* progresses inexorably towards a great crisis. In an unforgettable scene Kim attacks the lama's foreign and defiling assailants, the old man's talisman-like chart is rent, and the two consequently wander through the hills bereft of their calm and health. Kim, of course, waits to be relieved of his charge, the packet of papers he has stolen from the foreign spy. For his part the lama is unbearably aware of how much longer

he must now wait before he can achieve his spiritual goals. Into this heart-rending situation, Kipling introduces one of the novel's two great fallen women, the Woman of Shamlegh (the other being the old widow of Kulu), abandoned long ago by her 'Kerlistian' sahib, but strong, vital and passionate nonetheless. (There is a recollection incorporated here of one of Kipling's most affecting earlier short stories, 'Without Benefit of Clergy', which treats the predicament of the native woman loved, but never married, by a departed white man.)

The merest hint of a sexual charge between Kim and the lusty Shamlegh Woman appears, but it is quickly dissipated, as Kim and the lama head off once again. What then is the healing process through which Kim, and the old lama, must pass before they can rest? This is an extremely complex and interesting question and, I believe, it can only be answered slowly and deliberately, so carefully does Kipling *not* herd the plot into the confines of a jingoistic imperial solution. We cannot overlook the fact that because he has spent so much time with them, Kipling will not abandon Kim and the old monk with impunity to the specious satisfactions of getting credit for a simple job well done. This caution, of course, is good novelistic practice. But there are other imperatives - emotional, cultural, aesthetic. Kim must be given a station in life commensurate with his stubbornly fought-for identity. He has resisted Lurgan Sahib's illusionistic temptations and asserted the fact that *he is Kim*; he has maintained a sahib's status even while remaining a graceful child of the bazaars and the rooftops; he has played the game well, fought for Britain at some risk to his life, and occasionally with brilliance; he has fended off the Woman of Shamlegh. Where to place him, so to speak? And where to place the lovable old cleric?

To approach these issues Kipling engineers Kim's illness and of course the lama's desolation. There is also the small practical device of having the irrepressible Babu, Herbert Spencer's improbable devotee and Kim's native and secular mentor in the Great Game, turn up to guarantee the success of Kim's exploits. Thus the packet of incriminating papers that will prove Russo-French machinations and the rascally wiles of an Indian prince,

are safely taken from Kim. Then Kim begins to feel, in Othello's words, the loss of his occupation:

All that while he felt, though he could not put it into words, that his soul was out of gear with its surroundings - a cog-wheel unconnected with any machinery, just like the idle cog-wheel of a cheap Beheea sugar-crusher laid by in a corner. The breezes fanned over him, the parrots shrieked at him, the noises of the populated houses behind - squabbles, orders, and reproofs - hit on dead ears.

In effect Kim has died to this world, has, like the epic hero, descended to a sort of underworld from which, if he is to emerge, he will arise stronger than before.

In short, the breach between Kim and 'this world' must be healed. Now we may not consider the page that ensues as the summit of Kipling's art, but its role in the novel's intentional design by Kipling is crucial. The passage is structured around a gradually dawning answer to the question asked by Kim: 'I am Kim. And what is Kim?' Here is what happens:

He did not want to cry - had never felt less like crying in his life - but of a sudden easy, stupid tears trickled down his nose, and with an almost audible click he felt the wheels of his being lock up anew on the world without. Things that rode meaningless on the eyeball an instant before slid into proper proportion. Roads were meant to be walked upon, houses to be lived in, cattle to be driven, fields to be tilled, and men and women to be talked to. They were all real and true - solidly planted upon the feet - perfectly comprehensible - clay of his clay, neither more nor less . . .

Slowly Kim begins to feel at one with himself and with the world. Kipling elaborates further:

There stood an empty bullock-cart on a little knoll half a mile away, with a young banyan tree behind - a look-out, as it were, above some new-ploughed levels; and his eyelids, bathed in soft air, grew heavy as he neared it. The ground was good clean dust - no new herbage that, living, is half-way to death already, but the hopeful dust that holds the seed of all life. He felt it between his toes, patted it with his palms, and joint by joint, sighing luxuriously, laid him down full length along in

the shadow of the wooden-pinned cart. And Mother Earth was as faithful as the Sahiba [the widow of Kulu, who has been tending Kim]. She breathed through him to restore the poise he had lost lying so long on a cot cut off from her good currents. His head lay powerless upon her breast, and his opened hands surrendered to her strength. The many-rooted tree above him, and even the dead manhandled wood beside, knew what he sought, as he himself did not know. Hour upon hour he lay deeper than sleep.

As Kim sleeps, the lama and Mahbub discuss the boy's fate; both men know that he has been healed, and so what remains is the disposition of his life. Mahbub wants him back in service; with that stupefying innocence of his, the lama suggests to Mahbub that he should join both *chela* and guru as pilgrims on the way of righteousness. The novel concludes with the lama revealing to Kim that all is now well, for, he says:

I saw all Hind, from Ceylon in the sea to the Hills, and my own Painted Rocks at Such-zen; I saw every camp and village, to the least, where we have ever rested. I saw them at one time and in one place; for they were within the Soul. By this I knew the Soul has passed beyond the illusion of Time and Space and of Things. By this I knew that I was free.

There is some mumbo-jumbo in this of course, but it shouldn't all be dismissed. The lama's encyclopedic vision of freedom strikingly resembles Colonel Creighton's Indian Survey, in which every camp and village is duly noted. The difference is that what might have been a positivistic inventory of places and peoples within the scope of British dominion has become, in the lama's generous inclusiveness, a redemptive and, for Kim's sake, a therapeutic vision. Everything is now held together. At its centre resides Kim, the boy whose errant spirit has regrasped things 'with an almost audible click'. The mechanical metaphor of the soul being re-tracked, so to speak, on rails somewhat violates the elevated and edifying situation that Kipling is trying to describe, but for an English writer situating a young white male coming back to earth in a vast country like India, the figure is apt. After all, the Indian

railways were British built, and they did assure some greater hold than before over the place.

But we should also remark, however, that other writers before Kipling have used this type of 'regrasping of life' scene, most notably George Eliot in *Middlemarch* and Henry James in *The Portrait of a Lady*, the former greatly influencing the latter. In each case the heroine (Dorothea Brooke and Isabel Archer) is surprised, not to say shocked, by the sudden revelation of a betrayal by her lover: Dorothea sees Will Ladislaw apparently flirting with Rosamund Vincy, Lydgate's wife, and Isabel intuits the dalliance between her husband, Gilbert Osmond, and Madame Merle. Both epiphanies are followed by a long night of anguish, not unlike Kim's illness. Then the women awake to a new awareness of themselves and the world. Since the scenes in both novels are remarkably similar, Dorothea Brooke's experience can serve here to describe both. She looks out on to the world past 'the narrow cell of her calamity' and sees the

. . . fields beyond, outside the entrance-gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying a baby . . . she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining.

(*Middlemarch*, Chapter 80)

Both Eliot and James intend such scenes as these not only as moral reawakenings, but as moments through which the heroine gets past, indeed forgives, her tormentor by seeing herself in the larger scheme of things. Part of Eliot's strategy here is to have Dorothea's earlier plans to help her friends receive vindication; the reawakening scene is thus a confirmation of the impulse to be in, to engage with, the world. Much the same movement occurs in *Kim*, except that the world is defined as liable to a soul's locking up on it. The whole of the passage from *Kim* that I quoted above has in it a kind of moral triumphalism which is carried by the accentuated inflections in it of purpose, will, voluntarism: things slide into proper pro-

portion, roads are meant to be walked on, things are perfectly comprehensible, solidly planted upon the feet, and so on. Standing above the whole passage are 'the wheels of Kim's being' as they 'lock up anew on the world without'. And the series of motions is subsequently reinforced and consolidated by Mother Earth's blessing upon Kim as he reclines next to the cart: 'she breathed through him to restore the poise he had lost'. Kipling here renders a powerful, almost instinctive desire to restore the child to its mother in a pre-conscious, undefiled, asexual relationship.

But whereas Dorothea and Isabel are described as inevitably being part of an 'involuntary, palpitating life', Kim is portrayed as actually retaking voluntary hold of the life he has been leading. The difference, I think, is capital. What there is in Kim's newly sharpened apprehension of mastery, of 'locking up', of solidity is to a very great extent a function of being a sahib in colonial India. Nature and the involuntary rhythms of restored health come to Kim *after* the first, largely political-historical gesture is signalled by Kipling on his behalf. For the European or American women in Europe, the world is there to be discovered anew; it requires no one in particular to direct it, or to exert sovereignty over it. This is not the case in India, which would pass into chaos or insurrection unless roads were walked upon properly, houses lived in the right way, men and women talked to in the correct tones.

In one of the finest critical accounts of *Kim*, Mark Kinkead-Weekes suggests that *Kim* is unique in Kipling's *oeuvre* in that what was clearly meant as a resolution for the novel does not really work.⁵ Instead, Kinkead-Weekes says, there is an artistic triumph that transcends even the intentions of Kipling the author:

[The novel] is the product of a peculiar tension between different ways of seeing: the affectionate fascination with the kaleidoscope of external reality for its own sake; the negative capability getting under the skin of attitudes different from one another and one's own; and finally, a product of this last, but at its most intense and creative, the triumphant achievement of an anti-self so powerful that it became a

touchstone for everything else - the creation of the lama. This involved imagining a point of view and a personality almost at the furthest point of view from Kipling himself; yet it is explored so lovingly that it could not but act as a catalyst towards some deeper synthesis. Out of this particular challenge - preventing self-obsession, probing deeper than a merely objective view of reality outside himself, enabling him now to see, think and feel *beyond* himself - came the new vision of *Kim*, more inclusive, complex, humanised, and mature than that of any other work.

However much we may agree with some of the insights in this extraordinarily subtle reading, there is, in my opinion, too abistorical an element in it to be accepted. Yes, the lama is a kind of anti-self, and yes, Kipling can get into the skin of others with some sympathy. But no, Kipling never forgets that Kim is an irrefragible part of British India: the Great Game does go on, with Kim a part of it, no matter how many parables the Jama fashions. We are naturally entitled to read *Kim* as a novel belonging to the world's great literature, free to some degree of its encumbering history and political circumstances. Yet by the same token, we must not unilaterally abrogate the connections *in it*, and carefully observed by Kipling, to its contemporary actuality. Certainly Kim, Creighton, Mahbub, the Babu and even the lama see India as Kipling saw it, as a part of the Empire. And certainly Kipling minutely preserves the traces of this vision when he has Kim re-assert his British priorities, well *before* the lama comes along to bless them. Let us now look more closely at *Kim* as an integral part of the history, mutually dependent, of India and Britain in India.

II

Readers of Kipling's best work have regularly tried to save him from himself. Frequently this has had the effect of confirming Edmund Wilson's celebrated judgement about *Kim*:

Now what the reader tends to expect is that Kim will come eventually to realise that he is delivering into bondage to the British invaders

those whom he has always considered his own people [Wilson refers here to the novel's ending, in which Kim returns to the British Secret Service as, in effect, an enforcement officer for British imperialism *against* the Indians among whom he has lived and worked] and that a struggle between allegiances will result. Kipling has established for the reader - and established with considerable dramatic effect - the contrast between the East, with its mysticism and sensuality, its extremes of saintliness and roguery, and the English, with their superior organisation, their confidence in modern method, their instinct to brush away like cobwebs the native myths and beliefs. We have been shown two entirely different worlds existing side by side, with neither really understanding the other, and we have watched the oscillation of Kim, as he passes to and fro between them. But the parallel lines never meet; the alternating attractions felt by Kim never give rise to a genuine struggle . . . The fiction of Kipling, then, does not dramatise any fundamental conflict because Kipling would never face one.⁶

Wilson goes on to say that Kipling's relative failure with novels, his inability to show large social forces in conflict, or 'uncontrollable lines of destiny' opposing each other, are all traceable to this unwillingness to face the reality of what India really meant. Kipling's partisans interpret this unwillingness in *Kim* not as a failure but, in the words of Kinkead-Weekes, as a deliberately unresolved tension between, or a creative synthesis of, different ways of seeing.

Another alternative to these two views is, I believe, more accurate, more sensitive to the actualities of late nineteenth-century British India as Kipling, and others, saw them. There is no resolution to the conflict between Kim's colonial service and loyalty to his Indian companions not because Kipling could not face it, but because for Kipling *there was no conflict* and, one should add immediately, one of the purposes of the novel was, in fact, to show the absence of conflict once Kim is cured of his doubts and the lama of his longing for the River, and India of a couple of upstarts and foreign agents. But that there *might have been a conflict* had Kipling considered India as unhappily subservient to imperialism, of this we can have no doubt. The fact is that he did not: for him it was India's best destiny to be ruled by England. The trouble is that if one reads

Kipling not simply as an 'imperialist minstrel' (which he wasn't) but as someone who had read Frantz Fanon, met Gandhi, absorbed their lessons, but had remained stubbornly unconvinced by both, then one seriously distorts the defining context in which Kipling wrote, and which he refines, elaborates, illuminates. There *were* no appreciable deterrents to the imperialist world view held by Kipling. Hence, he remained untroubled, although it is true to say, I think, that his fiction represents both the Empire and conscious legitimizations of it, both of which, as fiction (as opposed to discursive prose), incur ironies and problems, as we shall soon see.

Consider two episodes in *Kim*, Shortly after the lama and his chela leave Umballa they meet the elderly and withered former soldier 'who had served the Government in the days of the Mutiny'. To a contemporary reader 'the Mutiny' meant the single most important, well-known and violent episode of the nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian relationship: the Great Mutiny of 1857, which began in Meerut on TO May, 1857 and spread immediately to the capture of Delhi by the mutineers. An enormous amount of writing, British and Indian, covers the Mutiny.⁷

What caused the Mutiny directly was the suspicion of Hindu and Muslim soldiers in the Indian Army that their bullets were greased with cow's fat (unclean to Hindus) and pig's fat (unclean to Muslims). In fact the causes of the Mutiny were constitutive to British imperialism itself, to an army largely staffed by natives and officered by sahibs, to the anomalies of rule by the East India Company. In addition, there was a great deal of underlying resentment at the fact of white Christian rule in a country made up of many races and cultures, all of whom most probably regarded their subservience to the British as degrading. It was lost on none of the mutineers that numerically they vastly outnumbered their superior officers.

Without going into the very complex structure of actions, motives, events, moralities debated endlessly since (and even during) the Mutiny, we should acknowledge that it provided a clear demarcation for Indian and for British history. To the British, who finally put the Mutiny down with brutality and

severity, all their actions were retaliatory; the mutineers murdered Europeans, they said, and such actions proved, as if proof were necessary, that Indians deserved subjugation by the higher civilization of European Britain. After 1857 the East India Company was replaced by the much more formal Government of India. For the Indians, the Mutiny was a nationalist uprising against British rule, which uncompromisingly re-asserted itself despite abuses, exploitation and seemingly unheeded native complaint. When in 1925 Edward Thompson published his powerful little tract, *The Other Side of the Medal* - an impassioned statement against British rule and for Indian independence - he singled out the Mutiny as the great symbolic event by which the two sides, Indian and British, achieved their full and conscious opposition to each other.⁸ Thompson quite dramatically shows that the writing of Indian and British history diverged most emphatically on representations of the Mutiny. The Mutiny, in short, reinforced the difference between colonizer and colonized.

In such a situation of nationalist and self-justifying inflammation, to be an Indian would have meant feeling natural solidarity with the victims of British reprisal. To be British meant feeling repugnance and injury — to say nothing of righteous vindication — given the terrible displays of 'native' cruelty. For an Indian, *not* to have had those feelings would have been to belong to the small minority that did exist to be sure, but which was distinctly unrepresentative of majority Indian sentiment. It is therefore highly significant that Kipling's choice of an Indian to speak about the Mutiny - the major historical event that antecedes the action of *Kim* in the 1880s - is an old loyalist soldier who views his countrymen's revolt as an act of madness. Not surprisingly this man is respected by British 'Deputy Commissioners' who, Kipling tells us, 'turned aside from the main road to visit him'. What Kipling simply eliminates is the likelihood that the soldier's compatriots regard him as (at very least) a traitor to his people. And when, a few pages later, the veteran tells the lama and Kim about the Mutiny, his version of the events is highly charged with the British rationale for what happened:

A madness ate into all the Army, and they turned against their officers. That was the first evil, but not past remedy if they had then held their hands. 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.

To reduce Indian resentment to 'madness', to characterize Indian resistance (as it might have been called) to British insensitivity as 'madness', to represent Indian actions as mainly the decision to kill British women and children - all these are not merely innocent reductions of the nationalist Indian case against the British, but tendentious ones. Moreover, when Kipling has the old soldier describe the British counter-revolt - with all its horrendous reprisals by white men bent on 'moral' action - as calling the Indian mutineers 'to most strict account', we have 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. The point about this brief episode is not just that it gives us the extreme British view on the Mutiny, but that Kipling puts it in the mouth of an Indian whose much more likely nationalist counterpart is never seen in the novel at all. (Similarly Mahbub Ali, Creighton's faithful adjutant, belongs to the Pathan people who historically speaking were in a state of unpacified insurrection against the British during the nineteenth century. Yet he, too, is represented as happy with British rule, and even a collaborator with it.) So far is Kipling from showing two worlds in conflict, as Edmund Wilson would have it, that he has studiously given us only one, and eliminated any chance of conflict altogether.

The second example confirms the first. Once again it is a small moment in *Kim*, but a significant one just the same. Kim, the lama, and the widow of Kulu are en route to Saharunpore in Chapter 4. Kim has just been exuberantly described as being 'in the middle of it, more awake and more excited than anyone', the 'it' of Kipling's description standing for 'the world in real truth; this was life as he would have it - bustling and shouting,

the buckling of belts, and beating of bullocks and creaking of wheels, lighting of fires and cooking of food, and new sights at every turn of the approving eye'. We have already seen a good deal of this side of India, with its colour, excitement and interest exposed in all their variety for the English reader's benefit. Somehow it seems, however, that Kipling also felt the necessity for some authority over India, perhaps because only a few pages earlier he had sensed in the old soldier's minatory account of the Mutiny the need to forestall any further 'madness'. After all it is India itself which is responsible both for the local vitality enjoyed by Kim, and the threat to Britain's Empire. A district superintendent of police trots by, and his appearance occasions this reflection from the old widow:

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. They do harm to Kings.

Doubtless some Indians believed that English police officials knew the country better than the natives, and that such officials - rather than Indian rulers - should hold the reins of power. But note that in *Kim* no one is seen who challenges British rule, and no one articulates any of the local Indian challenges that must have been greatly in evidence - even for someone as obdurate as Kipling - in the late nineteenth century. Instead we have one character explicitly saying that a colonial police official ought to rule India and in saying that also adding that she preferred the older style of official who, like Kipling and his family, had lived among the natives and was therefore better than the newer, academically trained bureaucrats. Not only does Kipling reproduce a version of the argument of the so-called Orientalists in India, who believed that Indians should be ruled according to Oriental-Indian modes by India 'hands', but in the process he dismisses as academic all the philosophical or ideological approaches contending with Orientalism. Among those discredited styles of rule were Evangelicalism (the

missionaries and reformers, parodied in Dr Bennett), Utilitarianism and Spencerianism (who are parodied in the Babu), and of course those unnamed academics lampooned as 'worse than the pestilence'. It is interesting that phrased the way it is, the widow's approval is wide enough to include police officers like the Superintendent, as well as a flexible educator like Father Victor, and Colonel Creighton.

Having the widow express what is in effect a sort of uncontested normative judgement about India and its rulers is Kipling's way of demonstrating that natives accept colonial rule, so long as it is the right kind of rule. Historically this 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, while implicitly accepting European judgement on the undeveloped, backward or degenerate nature of native society? If one were to read *Kim* as a boy's adventure story, or as a rich and lovingly detailed panorama of Indian life, one would not be reading the novel that Kipling in fact wrote, so carefully inscribed is the novel with such considered views, suppressions and elisions as these. As Christopher Hutchins puts it in *The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India*, by the late nineteenth century, an

. . . India of the imagination was created which contained no elements of either social change or political menace. Orientalization was the result of this effort to conceive of Indian society as devoid of elements hostile to the perpetuation of British rule, for it was on the basis of this presumptive India that Orientalizers sought to build a permanent rule.

Kim is a major contribution to this orientalized India of the imagination, as it is also to what historians have come to call 'the invention of tradition'.

There is still more to be noted. Dotting *Kim's* fabric is a scattering of editorial asides on the immutable nature of the Oriental world, particularly as it is distinguished from the white world, no less immutable. Thus, for example, 'Kim could lie

like an Oriental'; or, a bit later, 'all hours of the twenty-four are alike to Orientals'; or, when Kim pays for train tickets with the lama's money he keeps one anna per rupee for himself which, Kipling says, is 'the immemorial commission of Asia'; later still Kipling refers to 'the huckster instinct of the East'; at a train platform, Mahbub's retainers 'being natives' had not unloaded the trucks which they should have; Kim's ability to sleep as the trains roared is an instance of 'the Oriental's indifference to mere noise'; as the camp breaks up, Kipling says that it is done swiftly 'as Orientals understand speed - with long explanations, with abuse and windy talk, carelessly, amid a hundred checks for little things forgotten'; Sikhs are characterized as having a special 'love of money'; Hurree Babu equates being a Bengali with being fearful; when he hides the packet taken from the foreign agents, the Babu 'stowed the entire trove about his body, as only Orientals can'.

Nothing of this is unique to Kipling. The most cursory survey of late nineteenth-century culture reveals an immense archive of popular wisdom of this sort, a good deal of which, alas, is still very much alive today. Furthermore, as John M. McKenzie has shown in his valuable book *Propaganda and Empire*,*⁰ a vast array of manipulative devices, from cigarette cards, postcards, sheet music, music-hall entertainments, toy soldiers, to brass band concerts, board games, almanacs and manuals, extolled the late nineteenth-century Empire and often did so by stressing the necessity of Empire to England's strategic, moral and economic well-being, and at the same time characterizing the dark or inferior races as thoroughly unregenerate, in need of suppression, severe rule, indefinite subjugation. The cult of the military personality was prominent in this context, usually because such personalities had managed to bash a few dark heads. Different rationales for holding overseas territories were given during the course of the century; sometimes it was profit, at other times strategy, at still others it was competition with other imperial powers - as in *Kim*. (In *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling*, Angus Wilson mentions that as early as sixteen years of age Kipling proposed at a school debate the motion that 'the advance of Russia in Central Asia is

hostile to British Power'.)¹ * The one thing that remains constant, however, is the inferiority of the non-white. To this view everyone, from the ordinary lower-middle-class jingoist to the highest of philosophers, seems to have subscribed.

This is a very important point. *Kim* is a work of great aesthetic merit; it cannot be dismissed simply as the racist imagining of one fairly disturbed and ultra-reactionary imperialist. George Orwell was certainly right to comment on Kipling's unique power to have added phrases and concepts to the language - East is East, and West is West; the white man's Burden; somewhere East of Suez - and right, also, to say that Kipling's concerns are both vulgar and permanent, of urgent interest. Now, one reason for Kipling's power is that he was an artist of enormous gifts; what he did in his art was to have elaborated ideas that would have had far less permanence, for all their vulgarity, without the art. But the other reason for his power is that he was also supported by (and therefore could make use of) the authorized monuments of nineteenth-century European culture, for whom the inferiority of non-white races, the necessity for them to be ruled by a superior civilization, and the absolute unchanging essence of Orientals, blacks, primitives, women were more or less undebatable, unquestioned axioms of modern life. The extraordinary status of racial theory, in which it was scientifically proven that the white man stood at the pinnacle of development and civilization, is a case in point.

It would be tedious here to run through the arguments and the names: I have discussed these notions in *Orientalism*.¹² Suffice it to say that Macaulay, Carlyle, Arnold, Ruskin, J. A. Froude, John Robert Seeley, even John Stuart Mill, plus every major novelist, essayist, philosopher, and historian of note accepted as fact the division, the difference and, in Gobineau's phrase, the inequality of the races. Moreover these views were regularly adduced as evidence for the desirability of European rule in less-developed regions of the world. Much the same situation obtains in France, Belgium, Germany, Holland, and the United States. True, there were debates about how the colonies were to be ruled, or whether some of them should be given up. Yet no one with any power to influence public dis-

cussion or policy demurred as to the basic superiority of the white European male, who should always retain the upper hand when dealing with natives. Statements like 'the Hindu is inherently untruthful and lacks moral courage' were the expression of wisdom from which very few, least of all the governors of Bengal, dissented; similarly when a historian of India like Sir H. M. Elliot planned his work, central to it was the notion of Indian barbarity.¹³ An entire system of thought clustered around these conceptions. Climate and geography dictated certain character traits in the Indian; Orientals, according to Lord Cromer, one of their most redoubtable rulers, could not learn to walk on sidewalks, could not tell the truth, could not use logic; the Malaysian native was essentially lazy, the way the northern European was energetic and resourceful. V. G. Kiernan's book *The Lords of Human Kind* gives a remarkable picture of how widespread these views were.¹⁴ Disciplines like colonial economics, anthropology, history and sociology were built out of these dicta, with the result that almost to a man and woman the Europeans who dealt with colonies such as India became insulated to the facts of change and nationalism. Even Karl Marx succumbed to thoughts of the changeless Asiatic village, or agriculture, or despotism. And as colonial work progressed in time it became specialized. A young Englishman sent to India would belong to a class whose national dominance over each and every Indian, no matter how aristocratic and poor, was absolute. He would have heard the same stories, read the same books, learned the same lessons, joined the same clubs as all the other young colonial officials. Ronnie Heaslop in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* is a well-known portrait of such an official.

All of this is absolutely relevant to *Kim*, whose main figure of worldly authority is Colonel Creighton. This ethnographer-scholar-soldier is no mere accidental creature of invention, sprung fully grown and ready from Kipling's imagination. He is almost certainly a figure drawn from Kipling's experiences in the Punjab, and he is most interestingly interpreted both as an evolution out of earlier figures of authority in colonial India as well as someone whose role answered to Kipling's own needs.

In the first place, although Creighton is seen infrequently and his character is not as fully drawn as either Mahbub Ali's or the Babu's, he is nevertheless very much there, a point of reference for the action, a discreet director of events, a man whose power is eminently worthy of respect. Yet he is no crude martinet. He takes over Kim's life by persuasion, not by imposition of his rank. He can be flexible when it seems reasonable - who could have wished for a better boss than Creighton during Kim's footloose holidays? - and stern when events require it.

In the second place, what makes Creighton especially interesting is Kipling's rendition of him as a colonial official and scholar. This union of power and knowledge is contemporary with Conan Doyle's invention of Sherlock Holmes (whose faithful scribe, Doctor Watson, is a veteran of the North-West Frontier), also a man whose approach to life includes a healthy respect for, and protection of, the law, allied with a superior, specialized intellect. In both instances, Kipling and Conan Doyle represent for their readers men whose unorthodox style of operation is rationalized by relatively new fields of experience turned into quasi-academic specialities. Colonial rule and crime detection appear now to have almost the respectability and order of the classics and chemistry. When Mahbub Ali turns Kim in for his education, Creighton, overhearing their conversation, thinks 'that the boy mustn't be wasted if he is as advertised'. Creighton sees the world from a totally systematic viewpoint. Everything about India interests him, because everything in it is significant for his rule. The interchange between ethnography and colonial work in Creighton is fluent; he can study the talented boy both as a future spy and as an anthropological curiosity. Thus when Father Victor wonders whether it might not be too much for Creighton to attend to a bureaucratic detail concerning Kim's education, the colonel dismisses the scruple. 'The transformation of a regimental badge like your Red Bull into a sort of fetish that the boy follows is very interesting.'

Two further points should be made about Creighton the anthropologist. Of all the modern social sciences, anthropology is the one historically most closely tied to colonialism, since it

has often been the case that since the mid-nineteenth century anthropologists and ethnologists were also advisors to colonial rulers on the manners and mores of the native people to be ruled. Claude Levi-Strauss's allusion to anthropological investigations in *The Scope of Anthropology* as 'sequels to colonialism' is a recognition of this fact;¹⁵ the excellent collection of essays edited by Talal Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, develops the connections still further.¹⁶ And, finally, in Robert Stone's recent novel on United States imperialist involvement in Latin American affairs, *A Flag for Sunrise*,¹⁷ its central character is Holliwell, an anthropologist with ambiguous ties to the CIA. Kipling was simply one of the first novelists to portray a logical alliance between Western science and political power at work in the colonies.

Secondly Creighton is always taken seriously by Kipling, which is one of the reasons the Babu is there. The native anthropologist is clearly a bright man whose reiterated ambitions to belong to the Royal Society are not entirely unfounded. Yet he is almost always funny, or gauche, or somehow caricatural not because he is incompetent or inept in his work - on the contrary, he is exactly the opposite - but because he is not white, that is, he can never be a Creighton. Kipling, I think, is very careful about this. Just as he could not imagine an India in historical flux *out of* British control, he could not imagine Indians who could be as effective and as serious in what Kipling and many others of the time considered to be exclusively Western pursuits. Hence, lovable and admirable though he may be, there remains in Kipling's portrait of him the grimacing stereotype of the ontologically funny native, hopelessly trying to be like 'us'.

I said above that the figure of Creighton, is, in a sense, the culmination of a change taking place over generations in the personification of British power in India. Behind Creighton are late eighteenth-century adventurers and pioneers like Warren Hastings and Robert Clive, men whose innovative rule and personal excesses required legislation in England to subdue the unrestricted authority of the Raj. What survives of Clive and Hastings in Creighton is their sense of freedom, their

willingness to improvise, their preference for the informal over the formal. Standing behind Creighton, also, are the great scholar figures for whom service in India was an opportunity to study an alien culture - men like Sir William ('Asiatic') Jones, Sir Charles Wilkins, Nathaniel Halhed, Henry Colebrooke, Jonathan Duncan. But whereas such men belonged not to a national but to a principally commercial enterprise, they seemed never to have had what Creighton (and Kipling) had, the feeling that work in India was as patterned and as economical (in the literal sense of the word) as running a total polity. What distinguishes Creighton from the Clives, the Colebrookes, and the Halheds, is that his norms are those of disinterested government, government based not upon whim, or personal preference, but upon laws, principles of order and control. Creighton embodies the notion that you cannot govern India unless you know India, and to know India means understanding the way it operates. This immediately sets the governor apart from the ordinary human being, for whom questions of right and wrong, of virtue and harm are both emotionally involving and important. To the government personality, the main prerogative is not whether something is good or evil, and therefore must be changed or kept, but whether something works or not, whether it helps or hinders one in ruling what is in effect an alien entity. Thus Creighton satisfies the Kipling who had imagined an ideal India, unchanging and attractive, as an eternally integral part of the Empire. *This* was an authority one could give in to.

In a celebrated essay, Noel Annan presented the notion that Kipling's vision of society in his novels was similar to that of the new sociology - as put forward by Durkheim, Weber and Pareto.

[The new sociology] saw society as a nexus of groups; and the pattern of behaviour which these groups unwittingly established, rather than men's wills or anything so vague as a class, cultural or national tradition, primarily determined men's actions. They asked how these groups promoted order or instability in society, whereas their predecessors had asked whether certain groups helped society to progress.¹⁸

Annan goes on to say that Kipling was similar to the founders of modern sociological discourse to the extent that he believed efficient government in India depended upon 'the forces of social control [such as religion, law, custom, convention, morality] which imposed upon individuals certain rules which they broke at their peril'. In the late nineteenth century it had become almost a commonplace of British imperial theory that the British Empire was different from (and therefore better than) the Roman Empire in that the latter was just robbery and profit, whereas the former was a rigorous system in which order and law prevailed. Cromer makes the point in *Imperialism Ancient and Modern*,¹⁹ and so does Conrad's Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. Creighton understands this perfectly, which is why he works with Muslims, Bengalis, Afghans, Tibetans without appearing ever to belittle their beliefs or slight their differences. It was, I think, a natural insight for Kipling, to have imagined Creighton as a scientist whose speciality included the minute workings of a complex society, rather than as either a colonial bureaucrat, necessary but dull, or a rapacious profiteer. Creighton's Olympian humour, his affectionate but detached attitude towards people, his eccentric bearing, are Kipling's embellishments of an ideal Indian official, whose genealogy is a long one, but whose present state is the refinement of many costly antecedents, numerous failures, and a fair number of major achievements.

But Creighton the organization man not only presides over the Great Game (whose ultimate beneficiary is of course the Kaisar-i-Hind, or Queen Empress, and her British people), he also works hand-in-hand with the novelist himself. If there is a consistent point of view to be ascribed to Kipling, it is in Creighton, more than anyone else, that it can be found. Like Kipling, Creighton respects the distinctions within Indian society. When Mahbub AH tells Kim that he must never forget that he is a sahib, we should remember that, in a sense, he speaks as Creighton's trusted, experienced employee. Creighton, again like Kipling, never tampers with the hierarchies, the priorities and privileges of caste, religion, ethnicity and race; neither

do the men and women who work for him. By the late nineteenth century the so-called Warrant of Precedence which began, according to Geoffrey Moorhouse in *India Britannifu*,²⁰ by recognizing 'fourteen different levels of status' had expanded to 'sixty-one, some reserved for one person, others shared by a number of people'. Moorhouse speculates that the special 'love-hate' relationship between the British and Indians derived from the complex hierarchical attitude present in each people - class for the British, caste for the Indians. 'Each grasped the other's basic social premise and not only understood it but subconsciously respected it as a curious variant of their own.' One sees this everywhere in *Kim* - the patiently detailed register of different races and castes, the acceptance by everyone (even the lama) of the doctrine of racial separation, the lines and the customs which cannot easily be traversed by outsiders. Everyone in *Kim* is therefore equally an outsider to other groups and an insider in his.

Thus Creighton's almost instinctive appreciation of Kim's abilities, his quickness, his capacity for disguise and for getting into a situation as if it were native to him, is like the novelist's interest in a complex and chameleon-like character, who can dart in and out of adventure, intrigue, episode. The ultimate analogy is between the Great Game and the novel itself. To be able to see all India from the vantage of controlled observation: this is one great satisfaction. Another is to have at one's fingertips a character who can sportingly cross lines and invade territories, a little 'Friend of all the World', Kim O'Hara himself. It is as if by holding Kim at the centre of the novel (just as Creighton the spy master holds the boy in the Great Game) Kipling can *have* and enjoy India in a way that even imperialism never dreamed of. What does this mean in terms of so codified and organized a structure as the late nineteenth-century realistic novel?

III

Along with Conrad, Kipling is a writer of fiction whose heroes belong to a startlingly unusual world of foreign adventure and

personal charisma. When we think of Kim or, say, Lord Jim and Kurtz, we immediately bring to mind creatures with a flamboyant will who presage later adventurers like T. E. Lawrence in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and Malraux's Perken in *La Vole royale*. Conrad's heroes, I said earlier, have been bitten by an unusual power of reflection and cosmic irony, but they remain in the memory as strong and often heedlessly daring men of action. Like Conrad, Kipling had difficulties with romantic love, with women, with domesticity.

The interesting thing about the two men is that although their fiction belongs to the genre of adventure-imperialism (along with Rider Haggard, Conan Doyle, Charles Reade, Vernon Fielding, G. A. Henty, and dozens of lesser writers) they are nevertheless writers with a claim on serious aesthetic and critical attention. True, their world was the world of heroes like 'Chinese' Gordon, Cecil Rhodes, Lord Curzon, Livingstone and Stanley, Richard Burton - a world brilliantly described in Martin Green's *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*,²¹ which he correctly traces back to *Robinson Crusoe* - and yet there is in the writing of Conrad and Kipling an additional complexity that makes them more interesting than all their other contemporaries, whom we only read today as sociological or perhaps historical exhibitions.

One way of grasping what is unusual about Kipling's best work of long fiction, *Kim*, is to recall briefly who his other great contemporaries were. We have become so used to seeing him alongside Haggard and John Buchan that we have forgotten that, as an artist, he can justifiably be compared with Thomas Hardy, with Henry James, George Meredith, George Gissing, the later George Eliot, George Moore, Samuel Butler. In France, Kipling's peers are Flaubert and Zola, even Proust and the early Gide. Yet the major difference between all these writers and Kipling is that their works are essentially novels of disillusion and disenchantment, whereas *Kim*, for instance, is not. Almost without exception the protagonist of the late nineteenth-century novel is someone who realizes that his or her life's project - the wish to be great, rich, or distinguished - is mere fancy, illusion, dream. If we think of Frederic Moreau in

Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*, or Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*, or Ernest Pontifex in Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, we will bring to mind a young man or woman bitterly awakened from a fancy dream of accomplishment, action or glory, forced instead to come to terms with a considerably reduced status, a betrayed love, and a hideously bourgeois world of crass mammonism and philistine taste.

This awakening is by no means to be found in *Kim*. Nothing brings the point home more powerfully than a comparison between Kim and his nearly exact contemporary Jude Fawley, the 'hero' of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1896). Both are eccentric orphans, objectively at odds with their environments: Kim is an Irishman in India, Jude a minimally gifted rural English boy who is more interested in Greek than he is in farming. Both imagine lives of appealing attractiveness for themselves and both try to achieve this life through apprenticeship of some sort, Kim as chela to the wandering abbot-lama, Jude as a supplicant student at the university. But there the comparisons stop, and the contrasts begin. Jude is ensnared by one circumstance after the other; he marries the ill-suited Arabella, falls in love disastrously with Sue Bridehead, conceives children who commit suicide, ends his days dying as a neglected man after years of pathetic wandering. Kim, on the other hand, graduates from one brilliant success to the other. By the end of the novel he is at the beginning of a new and satisfying life, having helped the lama achieve his dream of redemption, the British to foil a serious plot, the Indians to continue enjoying prosperity under Britain.

Yet it is important to insist again on the similarities between *Kim* and *Jude the Obscure* the better to appreciate the difference in tone between these two striking novels by two great writers. In each case we have an odd or somehow eccentric young man who is compelled, like Robinson Crusoe or Tom Jones, to make his own way in the world. Both boys, Kim and Jude, are singled out for their unusual pedigree; neither is like 'normal' boys whose parents and family are there to assure a smooth passage through life. Central to their predicaments as individuals is the problem of identity - what to be, where to go, what to do.

Since they cannot be like the others therefore, who are they? Impelled by these questions they are restless seekers and wanderers. In this they are like the archetypal hero of the novel form itself, Don Quixote, who, according to Georg Lukacs in *The Theory of the Novel* decisively marks off the world of the novel in its fallen, unhappy state, its 'lost transcendence', from the world of the epic, which is happy, satisfied, full. Every novelistic hero, Lukacs says, attempts to restore a lost world of his or her imagination which, particularly in the late nineteenth-century novel of disillusionment, is shown to be doomed everlastingly to wish unsuccessfully for an unrealized dream. Clearly Jude, like Frederic Moreau, like Dorothea Brooke, like Isabel Archer, Ernest Pontifex, and all the others, is condemned to such a fate. The paradox of personal identity is that it is implicated in that unsuccessful dream. Jude would not be who he is were it not for his futile wish to become a scholar. What promises him relief from his mediocre existence, therefore, is an escape from his identity as a social nonentity. The structural irony that is basic to every late nineteenth-century realistic novel is precisely that very conjunction: what you wish for is exactly what you cannot have. Hence the utter poignancy and defeated hope that by the end of *Jude the Obscure* has become synonymous with Jude's very identity.

It is exactly in getting beyond this paralysing, dispiriting impasse that Kim O'Hara is so remarkably optimistic a novelistic character. Kim's search for an identity that he can be comfortable with by the end of the novel is successful. Like many of the other heroes of imperial fiction (as we read about their exploits in Conrad and Haggard, for example) Kim's actions result in victories not defeats. He restores India to health, as the invading foreign agents are apprehended and expelled. And, indeed, throughout *Kim* itself we are impressed with the boy's resilience, his capacity for standing up to extreme situations such as those trials of identity engineered for him by Lurgan Sahib. Part of the boy's strength is his deep knowledge, almost instinctive in its wellspring, of his difference from the Indians around him; after all he has a special amulet given him during infancy, and unlike all the other boys he plays with -

this is established right at the novel's opening - he is endowed, through natal prophecy, with a unique fate of which he wishes to make everyone aware. Later this develops explicitly into his awareness of being a sahib, a white man, and whenever he wavers there is someone to remind him of the basic fact that he is indeed a sahib, with all the rights and privileges of that quite special rank. Even the saintly guru is made by Kipling to affirm the difference between a white man and a non-white.

But that fact about Kim does not by itself impart to the novel its curious sense of enjoyment and confidence. Compared to James or Conrad, Kipling was not an introspective writer, nor - from the evidence that we have - did he think of himself like Joyce, as an Artist. The force of his best writing comes from his ease and fluency, his seeming naturalness as narrator and master of characterization, where the sheer variousness of his creativity rivals Dickens and Shakespeare. Language for him was not, as it was for Conrad in particular, a resistant medium; it was transparent, capable of many tones and inflections without too much trouble, all of them directly representative of the world he explored. It is precisely this aspect of Kipling's writing that gives Kim his sprightliness and wit, his energy and attractiveness. In many ways Kim resembles a character who might have been drawn much earlier in the nineteenth century, by somebody like Stendhal, for example, whose vivid portrayals of Fabrice del Dongo and Julien Sorel have the same blend of adventure and occasional wistfulness, which Stendhal called *espagnolisme*. We can speculate, I think, that the reason Kim is so unlike Hardy's Jude is that for him, as for Stendhal's characters, the world is full of possibilities, much like Caliban's island, 'full of noises,/Sounds, and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not'. Certainly danger threatens from time to time, but we never seriously doubt that Kim will somehow wiggle out or that he will outsmart his opponents.

At times, that same world is restful, even idyllic. So not only do we get the bustle and vitality of the Grand Trunk Road, but also the welcoming, gentle pastoralism of that scene *en route* with the old soldier (Chapter 3) as the little group of travellers reposes peacefully:

There was a drowsy buzz of small life in hot sunshine, a cooing of doves, and a sleepy drone of well-wheels across the fields. Slowly and impressively the lama began. At the end of ten minutes the old soldier slid from his pony, to hear better as he said, and sat with the reins round his wrist. The lama's voice faltered - the periods lengthened. Kim was busy watching a grey squirrel. When the little scolding bunch of fur, close pressed to the branch, disappeared, preacher and audience were fast asleep, the old officer's strong-cut head pillowed on his arm, the lama's thrown back against the tree-bole, where it showed like yellow ivory. A naked child toddled up, stared, and moved by some quick impulse of reverence, made a solemn little obeisance before the lama - only the child was so short and fat that it toppled over sideways, and Kim laughed at the sprawling, chubby legs. The child, scared and indignant, yelled aloud.

On all sides of this sort of Edenic composure there is the 'wonderful spectacle' of the Grand Trunk Road where, as the old soldier puts it, 'all castes and kinds of men move here . . . Brahmins and chumars, bankers and tinkers, barbers and bunnias, pilgrims and potters - all the world coming and going. It is to me as a river from which I am withdrawn like a log after a flood.'

One especially fascinating index of Kim's way with this teeming and yet strangely hospitable world he lives in is his remarkable gift for disguise. We first see him perched on the ancient gun in a square in Lahore (where it still stands today), an Indian boy among other Indian boys. Kipling carefully differentiates the different religions and background of each boy (the Muslim, the Hindu, the Irish) but is just as careful to show us that none of these identities, though they may hinder each of the other boys, is a hindrance to Kim. He can pass from one dialect, from one set of values and beliefs, to the other. Throughout the book Kim takes on the dialects of numerous Indian communities, Muslim, Hindu, northern and southern. He speaks Urdu, English (Kipling does a superbly funny, but gentle, mockery of the boy's stilted Anglo-Indian, which he rather finely distinguishes from the Babu's orotund verbosity), Eurasian, Hindi, Bengali; Mahbub speaks Pashto, and Kipling, so to speak, gets that, as apparently does Kim; the lama speaks

Chinese Tibetan, and he can be understood too. As orchestrator of this Babel of tongues, this veritable Noah's Ark of Sansis, Kashmiris, Akalis, Sikhs and many others, Kipling also manages Kim's progress through it all, chameleon-like in his gift for dancing in and out of it, like a great actor who passes through all situations, at home in each of them.

How very different this is from the dull, mediocre and lustreless world of the European bourgeoisie, whose ambiance as it is rendered by every novelist of importance reconfirms the utter debasement of all contemporary life, all dreams of passion, success and exotic adventure. Hence the antithesis offered by Kipling's fiction: his world, because it is set in an India dominated by Britain, appears to hold nothing back from the expatriate European. *Kim*, therefore, is expressly designed as a novel to show how a white sahib can enjoy life in this lush complexity; and, I would argue, the apparent absence of resistance to European intervention in it -- symbolized by Kim's abilities to move relatively unscarred through India - is due precisely to the imperialist vision of the world. For what one cannot do in one's own Western environment, where to try to live out the grand dream of a successful quest is only to keep coming up against one's own mediocrity and the world's corruption and degradation, one can do abroad. Isn't it possible in India to do everything, be anything, go anywhere with impunity?

Consider, also, the pattern of Kim's wanderings as they affect the structure of the novel. Most of his voyages within the Punjab, occur around the axis formed by Lahore and Umballa, an Indian Army (hence British) garrison town on the frontier of the United Provinces. The Grand Trunk Road, built by the great Muslim ruler Sher Shah in the late sixteenth century, runs from Peshawar to Calcutta, although the lama never goes further south and east than Benares. There are excursions made by Kim to Simla, to Lucknow, and later to the Kulu valley; with Mahbub Kim goes as far south as Bombay and as far west as Karachi. But the overall impression created by these voyages is that of a relatively carefree meandering. Occasionally Kim's trips are punctuated by the requirements of the school year at St Xavier's but the only serious agendas in the novel, the only

equivalents of temporal pressure on the characters, are, firstly, the abbot-lama's Quest, which is fairly elastic and, secondly, the pursuit and final expulsion of the foreign agents trying to stir up trouble in the North-West Frontier region. There are no scheming money-lenders here, no village prigs, no vicious gossips or unattractive and heartless *parvenus* as there are in the novels of Kipling's major European contemporaries.

Now contrast *Kim's* rather loose structure based as it is on a luxurious geographical and spatial expansiveness, with the tight, relentlessly unforgiving *temporal* structure of the European novels contemporary with *Kim*. Time, says Lukacs in *The Theory of the Novel*, is the great ironist, almost a character in these novels, as it both drives the protagonist further into illusion and derangement, in that with the passing of time the illusions grow, and contact with reality decreases, and at the same time reveals his or her illusions to be groundless, empty, bitterly futile. In *Kim*, you have the impression that time is on your side, because, I think, its geography to an English reader as India might be to a modern Western tourist - is yours to move about in more or less freely. Certainly Kim feels that, and so, too, in his patience, and the sporadic, even vague way in which he appears and disappears, does Colonel Creighton. The opulence of India's space, the commanding British presence there, the sense of freedom communicated by the interaction between those two factors: this adds up to an overwhelmingly positive atmosphere irradiating the pages of *Kim*. This is not a driven world of hastening disaster, as in Flaubert and Zola.

Kipling's rather unique geographical and spatial preference in *Kim* over the temporal element governing metropolitan European fiction, is, of course, a privileged aesthetic fact. But I would want to insist that it expresses an irreducible political judgement on Kipling's part. It is as if he were saying that India is ours and therefore we can see it in this mostly uncontested, meandering and fulfilling way, rather than as a narrow little site of class conflict and hopelessly middle-class values. India is 'other' and, importantly, for all its wonderful size and variety, it is safely held by Britain. There is, however, another

aesthetically satisfying coincidence that Kipling arranges, and it, too, must be taken into account. This is the confluence between Creighton's Great Game and Kim's inexhaustibly renewed capacity for disguises and adventure. Kipling keeps the two things tightly connected in the novel. The first is the device of political surveillance and control; the second, at a much deeper and more interesting level, is the wish-fantasy of someone who would like to think that everything is possible, that one can go anywhere and be anything. T. E. Lawrence in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* expresses this fantasy over and over, as he reminds us how he - a blond and blue-eyed Englishman - moved among the desert Arabs as if he were one of them.

I call this a fantasy because, as both Kipling and Lawrence endlessly remind us, no one - least of all actual whites and non-whites in the colonies - ever forgets that 'going native' or playing the Great Game are facts built on rock-like foundations, those of European power. Was there ever a native fooled by the blue or green-eyed Kims and Lawrences who passed among the inferior races as agent adventurers? I doubt it, just as I doubt that there existed any white man or woman within the orbit of European imperialism who ever forgot that the discrepancy in power between the white rulers and the native subject was absolute, intended to be unchanging, rooted in cultural, political, and economic reality.

Kipling never lets us forget that Kim, the positive boy hero who travels in disguise all over India, across boundaries and rooftops, into tents and villages, is everlastingly responsible to British power, represented by Creighton's Great Game. The reason we can see that so clearly is that since *Kim* was published, India did become independent of Britain and was partitioned, just as since the publication of Gide's *The Immoralist* and Camus's *The Stranger*, Algeria became independent of France. To read these major works of the imperial period retrospectively, then, is to be obligated to read them in the light of decolonization, but, we must immediately add, it is neither to slight their great aesthetic force, nor to treat them reductively as imperialist propaganda. It is a much graver mistake, never-

theless, to read them stripped of their countless affiliations with the facts of power which inform and enable them, to interpret them as if the many inscriptions of race and class in the text were not there at all.

Thus, as I have been saying, *Kim* is a master work of imperialism: I mean this as an interpretation of a rich and absolutely fascinating, but nevertheless profoundly embarrassing novel. The device invented by Kipling, by which British control over India (the Great Game) coincides in detail with Kim's disguise fantasy to be at one with India, is a remarkable one precisely because it would not have occurred without British imperialism. As such, then, we must read the novel as the realization of a great cumulative process, which in the closing years of the nineteenth century is reaching its last major moment before Indian independence. On the one hand, surveillance and control over India; on the other, love for and fascinated attention to its every detail. What Kipling also saw is what makes possible the overlap between the political hold of the one and the aesthetic and psychological pleasure of the other, British imperialism itself; yet many of his later readers have refused to see his implicit recognition of this troubling and embarrassing truth. And not just Kipling's recognition of British imperialism in general, but imperialism at that specific moment in its history when it had almost completely lost sight of the unfolding dynamics of its own human and secular truth: the truth that India was once independent, that control over it was seized by a European power, and that, over time, Indian resistance to that power had grown so much as inevitably to struggle out from under British subjugation.

The variously qualified pleasure we can derive from reading *Kim* today, therefore, is that in it we can watch a great artist blinded in a sense by his own insights about India, confusing the realities before him, which he saw with such colour and ingenuity, with the notion that these realities were permanent and essential. What Kipling takes and adopts from the novel form he tries to bend to this basically obfuscatory end. But it is surely one of the greatest of novelistic ironies that not only does he not truly succeed in this obfuscation, but his very attempt to

use the novel for this purpose reaffirms the quality of his aesthetic integrity. *Kim* most assuredly is *not* a political tract. Kipling's choice of the novel form to express himself, and of Kim O'Hara to engage more profoundly with an India that Kipling obviously loved but could never properly have, this is what our reading should keep resolutely as its central strand. Only then will we be able to see *Kim* both as a great document of its historical moment, as well as an aesthetic milestone along the way to midnight 15 August, 1947, a moment whose children have done so much to revise our sense of the past's richness and its enduring problems.

Edward W. Said

Note on the Text

This text of *Kim* is taken from the American Burwash Edition of Kipling's works in twenty-eight volumes (1941). The Burwash Edition was based on the definitive Sussex Edition of 1937-9, which includes all of Kipling's own revisions, and contains all of his works without exception.