THE TWO-SIDED MAN

Nicoleta MEDREA

Abstract

A controversial literary figure, Kipling was considered a standard bearer by Imperialists, while others cringed at his jingoism by calling him the 'bard' of Anglo-Saxon imperialism and reacting with critiques of his works and ethical/religious beliefs. Andrew Lyncett, in his biography of Kipling, considers that this complex character represents "a vital figure if one wants to understand how Victorian turned into Edwardian England and came to terms with the modern age."[1]His life and works are pages of history and their reading from this perspective provides us with a better understanding of the contradictions that enveloped the writer.

To adequately interpret the fabric of Rudyard Kipling's personality and work, one must have knowledge of the family ties, environment and experience that definitely exerted impact upon him. Kipling was born in Bombay, India, on December 30, 1865 into a middle-class Protestant family. "Though on several occasions Kipling described himself as a Yorkshire man, his family lineage was a mixture of Yorkshire, Scottish, Irish and Welsh."[1] Rudyard's father, John Lockwood Kipling was intensely interested in the world of art and his particular interest was centred on fostering the development of indigenous Indian art and crafts, a passion that was finally recognized when he became the curator of the Lahore Museum. John Lockwood Kipling was for Rudyard "not only a mine of knowledge and help but humorous, tolerant and expert fellow craftsman."[1] Though Lockwood Kipling's personal qualities exerted a strong influence on his son, a stronger influence came from his mother's family, the MacDonald's. A family of Scottish, Irish and Welsh origins, the MacDonald's were a closely-knit circle of relatives whose members were bound to the artistic and literary movements of the day. Swinburne and Robert Browning were frequent visitors at the family residence. Two sisters of Rudyard's mother, Alice MacDonald, married the Pre-Raphaelite painters Sir Edward Burne Jones and Sir Edward Poynter, while a third married Alfred Baldwin and became the mother of Stanley Baldwin, later Prime Minister of Great Britain for several terms. Alice MacDonald Kipling was a woman of great personality and talent. Friends remembered her for her "sprightly, if occasionally caustic wit, her quickness of intellect and skill in selecting striking phrases."[1] While in India she developed into a woman of charm and wisdom who made a notable impact on the English-Indian society.

Rudyard Kipling developed a close relationship with both his parents: a number of his books contained Lockwood's illustrations while a number of the most frequently quoted phrases, Kipling attributed to his mother. Family relationships left their deep imprint upon Kipling's personality and this chapter is an attempt to demonstrate this.

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Childhood and School Years

The first six years spent in India provided Kipling with a sensuous experience of life. His first memories were of "daybreak, light and colour and golden and purple fruits at the level of my shoulder…and of early morning walks to Bombay's fruit market."[1] The sights and sounds of the East endowed him with a chain of images and impressions that continued long afterward and were to be reflected in his writings. It was also during this period that he was introduced into the English-Indian lifestyle with its values and attitudes. Within this Indo-English society, the British lived as a superior race of conquerors amidst a civilized but alien and inferior subject people. The result of this early Indian experience was a hybrid-like character in Kipling. His parents and his upbringing were English, but as he was born in India and spent his formative years there, he gained what he himself called 'two sides to my head' and saw the world from both an Oriental and a Western perspective. As Andre Lyncett points out "keeping the balance between these two often conflicting tendencies provided the ambivalent dynamic to Kipling's life. At one moment he could be full of energy, an engaging extrovert; the next he was plunged into depression and prey to fanciful notions."[1] The Indian servants dominated the English's child life; they were viewed as both friends and inferiors and were expected to accord loyalty and affection to their young masters. However this close relationship between servant and infant was seen by the English Indian society as unsuitable for the maturing child. English-Indians who could afford the expense returned their children to England to begin their education. The same happened to Rudyard who was brought back from India in 1871 with his sister Trix. Following the custom, the children returned to England to begin their education, and most importantly to learn to be English. This separation from the parents was a traumatic experience which left the children confused and feeling deserted. This fraught period at the 'House of Desolation', in South Sea left Rudyard "wary about the nature of his mother's love"[1] and profoundly affected his personal and professional development. Several accounts describing the five traumatic years at Southsea provide insights into its significance. The experience is depicted in two of Kipling's fictional works, *Baa Baa, Black Sheep* and the first chapter of *The Light That Failed*, as well as in his autobiography, *Something of Myself*. During the early months of his stay, Rudyard's life was brightened by "Uncle Harry" who taught him songs and tales of the sea. But "Uncle Harry" died suddenly and Rudyard soon became the "black sheep" of the house and "Aunty Rosa" with her son "Harry" dominates the story of the South Sea.

In *Something of Myself*, Kipling encapsulated the terror of his experience in this poignant account: "It was an establishment run with the full vigour of the Evangelical as revealed to the Woman. I had never heard of hell, so I was introduced to it in all its terrors – I and whatever luckless little slave might be in the house, whom severe rations had led to steal food. Once I saw the Woman beat such a girl who picked up the kitchen poker and threatened retaliation. Myself I was regularly beaten. The Woman had an only son of twelve of thirteen as religious as she. I was a real joy to him, for when his mother had finished with me for the day he (we slept in the same room) took me on and roasted the other side."[1]

However when Rudyard came into "Aunty Rosa's" care he seemed to be a somewhat spoiled English-Indian child. In reality, he was simply a restless, talkative six-year old who asked unending questions. The English-Indian discipline and etiquette displayed by Rudyard was apparently foreign to "Aunty Rosa." According to Kipling's

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accounts of the period, she was determined to remould him into a proper English child. She is portrayed in each work as a tyrannical foster-mother. His repeated references to her as "the Woman" epitomize the equally hostile relationship that developed between them.

Kipling's sole respite during these years centred on books: "I read all that came within my reach. As soon as my pleasure in this was known, deprivation from reading was added to my punishments. I then read by stealth and the more earnestly. And somehow or other I came across a tale about a lion-hunter in South Africa who fell among lions who were all Freemasons, and with them entered into a confederacy against some wicked baboons. I think that, too, lay dormant until the Jungle Books began to be born."[1]

This early preoccupation with reading provided Kipling with the germinal ideas for stories which later enriched children's literature. Ultimately, Kipling's love of reading indirectly brought an end to his stay at South Sea: "My troubles settled themselves in a few years. My eyes went wrong, and I could not well see to read."[1] A doctor quickly prescribed glasses, which were uncommon in that period, and forbade him to continue any type of reading. Soon after, his mother arrived without warning from Indian and removed him from "Aunty Rosa's" care.

The impact of Rudyard's stay at Southsea remained throughout his life. In the last paragraph of *Baa Baa, Black Sheep* he wrote: "When young lips have drunk deep of the bitter waters of Hate, Suspicion, and Despair, all the Love in the world will not wholly take away that knowledge."[1] At South Sea he had learned that the mind creates its own happiness and that suffering is tolerable as long as an individual can master the resources to sustain himself. Most importantly, there emerged the conviction that a man's worth is measured by his actions and accomplishments. The antidote for unhappiness is action. In the *Light That Failed*, Maisie in misery says to Dick, "Lets find things to do and forget things."[1]

In the fall of 1878 the twelve year old Kipling was sent to a public school – the United Services College, at Westward Ho, to continue his education. It was a Mid-Victorian public school that prepared young men for entrance into public service. The classics were lightly touched while modern subjects were stressed. Games played a major role in student life. Its spirit was wholly pragmatic: it was to train young men to adult life. The College's headmaster, Cormell Price, was a long-time fried of the Kiplings. He was to play a dominant role in Rudyard's education and preparation. Price had been associated with the Pre-Raphaelites and was an intimate of Edward Burne-Jones, Edward Poynter, Charles Swinburne and Robert Browning.

Rudyard describes his first year at Westward Ho as "horrible" and "not pleasant". In *Something of Myself*, he attributes this condition to bullying and to his own inability to play many of the games. He was the only boy who wore glasses and earned the nickname "Giglamps" or "Gigger." However, by the time Kipling reached his fourteenth birthday, his life had improved considerably. He had physically matured. In addition, Kipling cemented a strong friendship with George Beresford and Lionel Dunsterville. This launched a partnership known as *Stalky and Co.* (1899) which provided one of the classic tales of nineteenth century school life.

Kipling studied Latin, a subject he "loathed for two years, forgot for twenty years, the loved with and abiding passion for the rest of his life."[1] The Odes of Horace provided an influential element in Kipling's education. The Odes also initiated him into the habit of imitating models, a practice that he sustained throughout his life. English literature was a major subject in Kipling's formal education. Crofts, his instructor of Latin, coined for

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Kipling the mane "Gigadibs, the literary man" and by hurling a copy of Browning's *Fifty Men and Women* at his head, sparked the interest of his student into the writings of Browning, Swinburne and Poe. Again, from these authors, Kipling gathered new subject matter and expanded his imitative style.

It is Cormell Price, however, who over-shadowed the whole fabric of Kipling's education. He seemed to recognize Rudyard's innate abilities as a writer. Accordingly, he took steps to provide the skills and tools necessary for such a profession. He instructed Kipling in précis-writing, a discipline necessary to both soldier and author. In 1881, Price re-established the school newspaper, *United Services College Chronicle* and appointed Kipling its editor. Price's most definitive step occurred when he gave Kipling complete use of his study: "There Beetle (Kipling) found a fat armchair, a silver ink-stand and unlimited pens and paper. There were scores and scores of ancient dramatists. There were Hokluyt, his Voyages; French translations of Muscovite authors called Pushkin and Lermontoff; little tales of a heady and bewildering nature, interspersed with unusual songs – Peacock was that writer's name; there were…hundreds of volumes of verse… Then the Head, drifting in under pretence of playing censor to the paper, would read here a verse and here another of these poets, opening up avenues."[1] Kipling became totally saturated in reading while at Westward Ho. While at Southsea, he delved into the works of Dickens, Defoe and Thackeray. American writers also intrigued him: the works of Walt Whitman, Edgar Allen Poe and Mark Twain and his early work reflects influences from these authors.

Kipling's literary interests at this time were not confined wholly to reading; writing too, was a significant venture. In 1881, totally unknown to Rudyard, a volume entitled *Schoolboy Lyrics* were collected by Mrs. Kipling and was printed for private circulation. In 1882, Kipling published in the College Chronicle, "Ave Imperatrix," an imitation of an Oscar Wilde piece published earlier that year. Kipling wrote the patriotic ode to Queen Victoria after an attempt on her life. Some controversy exists as to whether the tone of the piece is serious or facetious. However T.S. Elliot classified this early work as a great poem in including it among his selections for an *Introduction to a Choice of Kipling's Verse.*

Kipling's literary experiences were not limited to his school life. Holidays from school divided his time between his MacDonald relatives and family friends such as Carlyle, Morris, Swinburne, the Rossettis, Browning and members of the Royal Academy. By the time his school years drew to an end, he had become steeped in reading, writing and editing and had met some of the foremost artists of the period.

During the summer of 1882 Cormell Price informed Rudyard that he was to return to India where he would assume an assistant editorship on a local Lahore newspaper. Kipling was not enthusiastic over the news as he believed that the future of a writer laid in England and London rather that Lahore, India. In addition, Kipling desired to continue his education at a university. Family finances, however, made this wish impossible. The lack of such an education haunted Kipling throughout his lifetime. He internalized a pervasive dislike for scholars and earned a reputation as a proponent of the anti-intellectualism growing in Europe at that time.

The Indian Experience

Kipling reached India in October of 1882. In November he began his journalistic work at the *Civil and Military Gazette* in Lahore. First he monitored reports from news

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agencies and convert them into copy for the monitoring edition. Soon afterwards, he began covering special assignments; including travel with political figures, social and political occasions, and minor military expeditions. He became acquainted with the inner workings of the caste-like structure that comprised English-Indian society which became a source of rich material that was stored away for later stories.

In 1886 Kipling began working under a new editor, Kay Robinson. Together, they attempted to brighten the format of the *Gazette* with a series of 'turn-overs' – 2000 word topical tracts written in the fashion of a gossip column. The 'turn-overs' were immediately successful. In 1888, they were complied and published as *Plain Tales From the Hills*. Kipling wrote for the paper a series of verses called '*Bungalow Ballads*.' These were also collected and published in book form as *Departmental Ditties* (1886). A number of copies of these verses were sent to England and Kipling's reputation as a writer began to emerge in India as a result of these two works.

This growing popularity provided the basis for Kipling's promotion to the *Pioneer*, a newspaper at Allahabad which had a much wider circulation. Here, he served as a reporter who was to supply fiction. Publishing rights to many of these stories printed in the *Pioneer* were obtained by A.H. Wheeler and Company and they were quickly released in 1888 as the first six volumes of the *Indian Railway Library*. The stories were published under the titles of *Soldiers Three* and *Wee Willie Winkie*. The stories, which provided the public with an intimate view of British life in India, were soon the daily reading of traveller and tourist alike. The name Kipling was quickly carried to Asia, America, and the Continent.

Kipling's return to India also reunited him with his parents and his sister Trix. The family provided Kipling with support and a great deal of professional stimulation. Drafts of his verse and stories were routinely reviewed by the family members. A number of Kipling scholars believe that Rudyard was motivated to produce several of his finest short stories during this period. This positive family relationship continued throughout his adult life.

The Indian experienced also brought changes into Kipling's youthful idealism. He found himself in a minority of Anglo-Indians. The fact that they were rulers of a vast country did not stop them feeling threatened by Russian encroachments in Central Asia, indigenous political agitation on the sub-continent and the official myopia in Britain. Kipling's reaction was to develop a "raw tribal attitude to society. Influenced by the Hindu concept of maya (or illusion), he came to regard civilization as a fragile edifice; temporal powers could easily be overthrown; those that survived enjoyed order and cohesiveness, often as a result of some shared belief or religion."[1] Given these circumstances, he glorified the professional expatriates- the engineers, the doctors and even the soldiers- who brought real benefits of water and transportation to India. He was convinced that they were doing something selfless and worthwhile, and he was proud of his own country's imperial role. Kipling's vision of the Empire was idealistic as he considered it mainly humanitarian in nature and service-oriented. In a discussion with his cousin Margaret Mackail, Rudyard argued that "Indian culture suffered from a basic inertia that prevented it from tackling social or economic issues. So it was left to his real heroes-British men working in the field as doctors, engineers and administrators- to show what could be done through practical, replicable measures."[1]

Kipling ended his Indian stay in March of 1889 and sailed for London. The voyage was a long one since Rudyard had chosen to return to England by way of America. Stops

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were made in Burma, Malaysia and Japan before docking in San Francisco. Kipling's reaction to America was one of ambivalence. He appreciated the independence, self-reliance and directness of the American character. He did not receive well the traits of lawlessness and brashness as he perceived them. The negative side of these views forever alienated a portion of his American audience.

The Adult Years

After spending the summer travelling in America, Kipling sailed for England arriving there in October 1889. He was quickly introduced to the Saville Club, a meeting place for writers, critics and publishers but "he couldn't abide the egocentricity of the aesthetes who had grown up in the wake of his uncle's pre-Raphaelitism. After a short crisis he took on the role of literary exponent of action and empire."[1] Rights to the first six volumes of the Indian Railway Library were transferred to an English form and reissued in London. In March of 1890, Kipling's entire collection was reviewed in *The Times*. Critics immediately acclaimed his literature for its "brilliance of vision, the mastery of words, and the compact, concentrated impact." The reading public was intrigued by his candid portrayal of the harshness of life in India and frank treatment of extra-marital love affairs. Publishing firms and newspapers asked for more material from him.

He composed a series of verses which were later collected as *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1890). Four of his most masterful works were also released: "The Head of the District," "Dinah Shadd," "The Man Who Was," and "Without Benefit of Clergy." *The Light That Failed*, an autobiographical novel, was finished in August of 1890. Though 1890 can be termed "Kipling's Year," it came at a price. Physical exhaustion and influenza drained the young man of his strength. On doctor's advice, he embarked on a long vacation.

Upon his return, *Life's Handicap* (1891), a collection of short stories inspired from his Indian experience, was released. This was followed by another novel, *The Naulahka: A Story of West and East* (1892) and *Many Inventions* (1893). *The Jungle Book* went to press in 1894 and was immediately followed by *The Second Jungle Book* (1895). *The Seven Seas*, a book of verse, was published in 1896. *Captains Courageous* (1897), a full lengthy novel, *The Day's Work* (1898), and *Stalky and Company* (1899), both short story collections, rounded out his principal pieces during this decade.

In January of 1892, Rudyard Kipling married the sister of Wolcott Balister, his American publisher friend. Kipling's "willingness to allow his wife to run his day-to–day existence while he attended the calls of his imagination and of his adopted imperialistic ideal"[1] was to offer him a marriage that lasted for some forty-four years and provided him with the firm emotional base he long desired. Within two weeks the Kiplings left on a journey that was to take them around the world. The voyage was briefly interrupted by a stop a Brattleboro, Vermont, so that Carrie could visit her family. While there, Rudyard became enthralled with the Vermont countryside. He and Carrie quickly resolved that they would return after their voyage to take up residence in Brattleboro. In December of 1892, their first child, Josephine, was born. During this year, Kipling was occupied with providing a home for his family. It was here that the ideas for the *Jungle Books* began to be penned. The Kiplings began building a new home in Brattleboro called the "Naulakha" during 1893. It was at "Nautlakha" that Rudyard's second daughter, Elsie, was born. This period was one of the happiest of his life. Kipling lived on the assumption that Vermont had become his permanent home base. It was here that he collected material and wrote

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The Day's Work (1898) and *Captains Courageous* (1897), the latter his only book set entirely in America. *Many Inventions* (1893) was published during this period and the two *Jungle Books* were completely written and released as well.

His happiness was shattered in 1896 by a dispute with Carrie's brother, Beatty. As a result of this dispute, Kipling chose to leave the country. Kipling's years in America, 1892-1896 were a strange mix of frustration and affection. He desperately sought permanence in his life and yet wandered in his decision to settle in Brattleboro. He could not reconcile his admiration for the Americans' love of independence and their disrespect for privacy, their esteem for the successful, self-made man and their disdain for those whose customs were different from their own. They were not, however, futile years. It was a time in which Kipling gathered a mosaic of ideas for future works. His friends included the future President Theodore Roosevelt, author and scholar, William James, and publisher, Frank Doubleday.

The Kipling family left America for England in August, 1896. In August of 1897, their son, John, was born. Because of business and personal affairs, the entire family returned to the United States in February, 1898. Shortly after their arrival in New York, they contracted pneumonia. Kipling struggled for his life. His first born, Josephine, died. After a recuperative period, Kipling returned to Britain and he never visited the States again.

Each winter for the nest ten years, the Kiplings journeyed to South Africa. Here they established and intimate friendship with Cecil Rhodes. Rudyard quickly became an ardent admirer of Rhodes. He regarded him as a man of action, of law and order, a leader of men. Both men exerted strong influence on each other. Kipling came to believe that South Africa would have a great future only if it became an independent country linked to England. He viewed all other South African nationals as enemies of progress – detriments to commercial and material growth. He portrayed the Dutch as backward – looking people who opposed the coming of civilization.

The African or Boer War erupted in 1899 as a struggle to unite all of the country under one flag. Kipling believed that this war fought for control of a country. It was not, according to him, a question of white supremacy. His loyalty to England coupled with his outspoken reporting of the War consolidated his reputation as an imperialist author. During the war years, Kipling became the bard of the British Army and Navy. His central theme was a doctrine of defence. He stated that the high quality of life and the period of peace that England had experienced during the nineties had been bought by men of courage and action. He maintained that the English way of life could only be preserved if men were prepared to defend this life. Young men of England had to be trained physically and intellectually to rise up in her defence: self-reliance, confidence and readiness were to be the trademark of the English servicemen.

Unfortunately, Kipling soon realized that these qualities were lacking in the young British soldiers. Three thousand British casualties were suffered during the first three battles of the Boer war. Kipling began organizing a chain of rifle clubs throughout England. He visited the front and wrote realistic accounts of the battles. He glorified soldiers and preached war. *The Five Nations* (1903) is a collection of his Boer War verse. The bard of the Boer War emerged as the bard of the Empire.

Kipling published several other works during the war years. *Kim,* his last novel, was published in 1901. The *Just So Stories* were released the following year. Kipling's world reputation continued to increase. Ironically, however, his prestige within the literary world

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began to decline. A number of liberal writers and critics found Kipling's support of the Boer War intolerable. They questioned its justice and attacked Kipling for his emotional rather than intellectual assessment of the causes.

Other early supporters asserted that Kipling was not maturing as an author. Henry James, a long-time friend, best stated Kipling's limitations as he saw them: His talent I think diabolically great; … But my view of his prose has much shrunken in the light of one's increasingly observing how little of life he can make use of. Almost nothing civilized save steam and patriotism… He has come down steadily from the simple in subject to the more simple – from the Anglo-Indians to the natives, from the natives to the Tommies, from the Tommies to the quadrupeds, from the quadrupeds to the fish, and from the fish to the engines and screws.

Kipling believed firmly that each man had to measure his own art. He continued drafting works of realism rather than following the fashionable "arts for arts sake" mentality of that time. As a reaction against wartime patriotism began to grip England, Kipling popularity continued to wane. Carrington notes, "It was an end of an epoch for him as for the Empire."[1]

In 1902, the Kiplings purchased a home in Sussex. Kipling's life centred around his home, his family and his writings. From the family and his friends he received the emotional support he needed. The world outside became irrelevant. During these quiet years he penned *Traffics and Discoveries* (1904*), Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), *Actions and Reactions* (1909), and *Rewards and Fairies* (1910).

In 1907, Kipling became the first Englishman named to receive the Nobel Prize for literature.

The tranquillity of Sussex was shattered by the outbreak of the World War I. Kipling was urged by government officials to write "propaganda." He refused the task. His son, John, then seventeen, quickly enlisted in the Irish Guards as a second lieutenant. A telegram, arriving on October 2, 1915, announced that John was missing in action.

After the death of his son, failing health began to overtake Kipling. Though his international popularity continued, he published fewer and fewer works. A book of verse, *The Years Between* (1919), *Land and Sea Tales* (1923), *Debits and Credits* (1926), *A Book of Words* (1928), *Limits and Renewals* (1932), and his autobiography, *Something of Myself* (posthumously, 1937), culminated his literary career. Rudyard Kipling died on January 18, 1936, at the age of 71. He was buried in Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey. Ironically, because of an eclipse of reputation, no member of the literary world attended the funeral.

NOTES

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