# KIPLING AND THE COLONIZATION OF IMAGINATION

**Nicoleta Aurelia MEDREA**[1]

*Abstract*

This paper presents an outline of the works belonging to the so-called colonizers of imagination and tries to identify R. Kipling's response to the patterns of the colonial literature. His confrontation with this world of imagination springs from one of the most important cultural confrontations in the history of European empires, between imperial Britain and India, a confrontation that acted as an active and transforming force that engaged both Western and Eastern cultures in a process of mutual redefinition. Kipling's representation of India is not only a response to assert the British legitimacy of its hegemonic claims but also the effect of cultural contradictions that 'contaminated' his texts with internal tensions, ambivalences that inevitably produced moments of hybridization.

**Keywords: colonization, identity, hybridity, contextualization, empire**

As history has proved, one of the most influential factors in shaping the world as we have it today was the experience of colonialism. Colonialism not only influenced literature but it created a literature of its own. The question arising here is to what extent literature has reflected and absorbed the social and economic realities of imperialism. How has literature reacted to the ideologies of imperialism? What kind of heroes and heroines has it created? What kind of myths and legends has it drawn upon? How has the world of imagination received its colonizers?

Apart from a theoretical grounding in the postcolonial criticism of the colonial discourse, a better understanding of this literature also involves its contextualisation. By placing the texts into contexts, also by following the development of this literature across time and by analyzing the connections and the interrelations between different writings, we may get a more believable picture of the patterns of perception that Kipling shared along with other colonizers of imagination. Referring to the relation between the colonial discourse and history Said speaks about a certain estrangement of the colonial discourse which is defined as a representation of representations transmitted from text to text producing an unchanging stereotype of an unchanging Orient and affirming the superiority of the Western world. The colonial writer could not escape this pattern, neither Kipling did, and that is why it would be interesting to have an outline of Orientalist writing to see who drew upon who and how closely writers followed or skipped the pattern. Kipling' perception of the Empire is clearly revealed in the relation between his work and other texts of his time, all framed and conditioned by their social, economic and political contexts. Kipling's time inherently had its own mode of power and Kipling's texts, in circulation with other texts came together to form a common discourse of power relations specific to that period.

[1] Lecturer, PhD., Universitatea „Petru Maior" din Târgu-Mureş



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Western creative imagination was deeply affected by the process of colonization; imperialism and its fascination with the exoticism of the Other's territories were never to diminish. The outcome was a literature, which inevitably bore the imprint of the process of colonization, which left its legacy in what is called postcolonial literature. In the 19th century the term imperialism was, as the British liberal J.A.Hobson pointed out, "on everybody's lips…and used to denote the most powerful movement in the current politics of the western world." (Randal, 2000, p.13). The British Empire was at its height and made use of symbols such as Queen Victoria, the Royal Navy, the One Race, or the One Flag. Symbolism penetrated also the texts, which became filled with imperial ideas of race pride or national prowess meant to justify the hegemonic process of colonization.

In the relation with the ideology of imperialism the text became a "a vehicle of imperial authority" (Boehmer, 2005, p.13), an instrument of taking possession of the foreign land where the colonist attempted to construct a new world of stories out of old stories. Faced with the bizarre of the foreign lands the colonist resorted to what Elleke Boehmer calls 'migrant metaphors', namely metaphors familiar to him and to the audience at home applied on other lands. The result was a literature that in its effort to interpret other lands offered a certain perspective to home audience and shaped ideas of those times. This process was not a novelty for the Victorian era, as European exploration had been established several centuries before and had started a tradition of representations of representations. The curiosity of the explorers sprang from tales of earlier travelers, from oral narratives or popular fantasies. When Kipling came to India he was inevitably carrying with him this tradition of representing the Orient, yet his direct contact with the native reality made him slip in many instances the Western pattern of representing the world of the Other.

Colonialism also involved a mimic process of transferring elements from the metropolis to the periphery. The colonizers mapped the foreign land by using names of the home ground and by creating replicas of the landmarks they left at home: architectural styles, dress patterns, names, scientific understandings, histories. Replicas of the Kentish garden country were found from New Zeeland and Tasmania to Simla or Kenyan Highlands. A relevant example is that of the hill stations in Northern India where the British created their own pinnacles of power, replicas of Home quarters that together with their landmarks were meant to feed their nostalgia and to position them on a distinct, aloof position in relation to the natives.

In his *Plain Tales from the Hills*, Kipling largely drew upon this enclosed society of exiled that nostalgically replicated the elements from Home in their attempt to preserve an unspoiled superior identity. By creating a new history of the foreign places it was possible to subject them. A classical example is Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), a small-scale replica of the colonial adventure into the unknown. However, Robinson's making Friday an image of himself, necessary for the colonial project, for confirming the colonizer's status, also betrays the anxiety that foreign lands cannot be entirely penetrated and despite efforts of translating them into familiar spaces they preserve their unknown



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and subversive character. Such stories were multiplied by other texts and created conventions of understanding the unknown lands.

The image of the empire relied largely on stereotypes, which tended to screen out the indigenous people's diversity, agency and resistance and at the same time it masked the reality which often meant contempt for the native life, even violence. However such generalizations of the Other could not synthesize the difference displayed by vast cultures as that of India for example. Illustrations of resistance are to be found in some of Kipling's writings such as "The Judgment of Dungara" where a priest of Dungara donates itch inducing white shirts to sabotage the plans of the "civilized", in "The Bridge Builders", where an engineer is experiencing an opium induced dream with the coming of new gods of "fire-carriages", images that actually underline the strangeness of the uncanny India.

To escape the danger of subversive forces that contact with other cultures brought about, the colonial authority was in need of energizing myths of its own, of the New World, of the Empire where 'the sun would never set'. Writers such as Philip Meadows Taylor, William Makepeace Thackeray, Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, or Rudyard Kipling were aware that the British Empire was in need of symbols of wide spaces where the torch of civilization was to be brought and they responded accordingly. Empire became a fertile source of inspiration, a land of possibilities and fantasies but also a land of unlawful practices, oppression or social disgrace. Thus everything that Victorian society considered to be improper for its status was dumped into the foreign lands of the Empire. In a way the colonies became Victorian society's unconscious or hidden self. As Kipling notices, it was "East of Suez" where "the direct control of Providence [ceased]" and where the "mark of the beast" (Kipling, *Life's Handicap,* 1891) expressed itself.

The geographic magnitude of the Empire, the mass organization and institutionalization of colonial power, the development of imperial ideologies, especially those referring to race (the Social Darwinist thought), all these made "British national imagination grow extravagantly imperial in its idiom and scope." (Boehmer, p.31). Imperial ideas sold well in music halls or popular press and the readers became more and more interested in travelogues or adventure romances (David Livingstone- *Missionary Travels*, H. M. Stanley- *How I Found Livingstone*, *In Darkest Africa,* or Henty's militaristic boy's adventure tales). These stories created the image of the empire for the public at home and were part of the propaganda that made empire become a style: it had its heroes, it was self-congratulating and showed that eagerness of 'Play Up, and Play the Game' in its stories, songs, verses or games.

However the imperial project was constantly under the impression that what had been gained could be easily lost. The result was a feeling of anxiety that was heightened by the inevitable imperial rivalries, which Kipling called in his 1896 poem, "Hymn Before Action", "Nations in their harness" that go up "against our path." (Kipling, *The Complete Verse*, 2002, p.258). Another threat was that of miscegenation in the colonies, of 'going native'. Contact with the Other was viewed as a destabilizing process which brought



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about degeneration. Kipling depicts such instances of 'going native', yet the outcome varies: in the case of Strickland in "Miss Youghal's Sais", his going native allows him to better serve the empire; in the case of Trejago in "Beyond the Pale" the experience of searching knowledge beyond the pale is sanctioned as he is wounded in the groin, yet he is reintegrated into the colonizers' society; however, in the case of McIntosh Jellaludin in "To Be Filed for Reference" his going native voices the white's fear that one of their own may reject their customs and turn into a native Other.

The experience of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 was to heighten more the feeling of insecurity and anxiety. As a result, direct British government was introduced and the image of the colonial officer as the guardian of the people, the lord of the district, became central. This was the image that Kipling promoted in his *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888), *Life's Handicap* (1891), *The Day's Work* (1898), where the officer's uncompromising integrity together with his strength is selflessly engaged in the 'day's work', serving as a guarantee of the high virtues of the Empire, providing it with a good management and thus securing its stability.

Such images were part of the highly sophisticated process of validating the imperial rule, which was justified by theories of racial and cultural supremacy of the colonizers. One of the theories that justified expansion was the industry of the colonizer: David Livingstone promoted this ideology of work, Anthony Trollope in his South African travelogue claims that "labor only can civilize" and Thomas Carlyle in his essay "The Nigger Question" (1849) indicates that if labor was invested in land it would create rights of proprietorship and gave the right to the white man to make the black man work "his" land. To sustain these theories, racist oppositions were introduced having the image of the white man as the archetypal worker and on the other side of the binary the degenerate and lazy native. The colonizer built railways, administrative centers, and cities. As Kipling in "The Sons of Martha" (1907) says, the 'white man raised the stone and cleaved the wood.' (Kipling, *The Complete Verse*, 2002, p.258). Work also saved Robinson Crusoe and stood as a guarantee for his appropriation of the island. R. M. Ballantyne's boy heroes in *The Coral Island* (1858) were engaged in building, mapping and exploring from the very beginning of their stay on the island.

Being in charge, the empire developed its own forms of self-validation. As Ruskin said, England's destiny was to rule, so it was like the force of fate. This is what Kipling in "A Song of the White Men" (1899) calls "our chosen star" (Kipling, *The Complete Verse*, p. 225) meant to bring freedom and the righting of wrongs. The white men's work was heroic because it was 'disinterested' as Kipling assures us in his poem "Kitchener's School" (1898): "they (the English) show all peoples their magic and ask no price in return." (Kipling, *The Complete Verse*, p.163). The British went even further with their justifications and labeled their imperial work as having continuity with the past by relating it with the Roman Empire. The same way the Romans laid roads, the British built railways or laid telegraph cables. The British considered themselves as natural imperialists, born rulers like the Romans, having a divine right to rule. Kipling in "Recessional" (1897)



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invokes God "Beneath whose awful Hand we hold/ Dominion over palm and pine". However the same poem warns about the precariousness of the imperial project- "Far-called our navies melt away." (Kipling, *The Complete Verse*, p.261)

The network that supported the perpetuation of colonial literature was based on what Elleke Boehmer called the transferability of the "traveling metaphor" which functioned like "a series of reflecting mirrors which repeated, reinforced and reversed cultural significations coming from England and Europe." (Boehmer, p.52). The tropes that colonial literature drew upon included: Utopia, the lawless wilderness; the Noble Savage or the unregenerate primitive; the Garden of Eden or the Holly City; and Britannica as regnant over all. (Boehmer, p.45). These tropes became repetitive and created a kind of self-enclosed environment for colonial writing, giving it an insular character, which is after all so much an English characteristic. The network of the colonial literature was carefully interwoven so as to place the colonizer on a safe position, whose manliness and knowledge justified his status as a representative of the ruling race.

A prolific book, which became itself a signifier for the exotic, is the *Arabian Nights*. The list of writers who drew inspiration from these stories cannot be exhausted here, but to mention only a few- Wordsworth, Carlyle, Ch. Bronte, Anthony Trollope, J. Ruskin, Dickens, Mary Kingsley, Thackeray, W.E. Henley (who wrote his own version- *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*-1893), Kipling, R.L. Stevenson (who created a dark-mirror image of the original *Nights- New Arabian Nights*-1882). Conrad drew upon Stevenson's subject of colonial bad faith and fear of regression. Rider Haggard found inspiration in the *Arabian Nights,* too and for his novel *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) he resorted to Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), which in its turn was inspired by Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe,* Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* and Captain Marryat's *The Pirate*. Haggard' s *Nada the Lily* inspired Kipling in creating the character of Mowgli. Golding's *Lord of the Flies* was an indirect response to the unrealistic behavior in Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*. All these books indicate the huge capacity of colonial writing to reproduce itself creating thus an enclosed and self-repetitive network of symbols and motifs.

Kipling went even further and designed his short stories having their own network of cross-references. Characters such as Strickland or Dr. Dumoise appear from one story to another. Situations in different stories are paralleled: "I knew a case once…but that is another story." (Kipling, *Plain Tales From The Hills,* "Wressley of the Foreign Office", 1994, p.312)

His stories also borrow the word of the mouth, anecdotes or rumors that circulated among Anglo-Indian clubs and their use gives the impression of verisimilitude: for instance a story of a white man who appeared in native guise circulated among the British Indian social circles and Kipling used it in several stories of 'going native' such as "The Incarnation of Krishma Mulvaney", "False Dawn", or *Kim*. Kipling also drew upon 'fashionable' anxieties about sexual relations between colonial officials and Indian women in a large number of stories: "Without Benefit of Clergy", Georgie Porgie", "The Gate of Hundred Sorrows", "Beyond The Pale", or "Lispeth". Kipling himself became a creator



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of images that were further used by other writers. For instance, his writings were taken as evidence of the British work in India, Burma, Ceylon and Africa. Maud Diver in "The Englishwoman in India" (1909) drew upon Kipling's portraits of Anglo-Indian women. Leonard Woolf in his *Ceylon Diaries* (1963) recognizes shapes of Kipling's stories. Kipling's view of the empire as a school of practical skills and an non-rewarded duty was expressed in phrases that entered the colonial idiom: "the white man's burden", "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet", "somewhere east of Suez". Such transferability created a kind of homogenous colonial literature across a vast empire.

Such repetitions were meant to support colonial power and consequently multiplied and empowered the colonialist discourse. This literature was read in colonial spaces, in the company offices or in government headquarters. The model of the colonial officer implied that he had to be geographically mobile, a globetrotter, educated and permanently engaged in book learning so as to be able to translate foreignness into comprehensible terms. As Kipling indicated after twenty years of service, a man "knows, or knows something about, every Englishman in the Empire and many travel everywhere without paying hotel bills." (Kipling, *Wee Willie Winkie and Other Stories*, "The Phantom' Rickshaw", 1947, p. 123).

It was with that "knowability" that the colonial officer had to be endowed to keep the bonds of the empire tightly connected. Kipling himself as a reporter traveled widely throughout the empire and was part of the closed system of the colonial project. He praised the men of the empire, such as Cecil Rhodes who was for him the embodiment of his colonial ideal and was praised in his turn by Rhodes who called him a "purveyor" of his vision.

However, the standardized image and the generalizations regarding the empire lead to what Elleke Boehmer calls "colonial drama". Western values were taken as standards for success and applied on a population, which, according to the Orientalist perception, did not change in depth. To this, the self-consciously superior man who believed himself disconnected from the native life (which was again a mistake) was added. The myth of white man's worth (the purveyor of civilization) was created but this idealized selfishness betrayed the weak character of the colonial identity.

The colonizer kept away from the native, even rejected him, but at the same time he needed his presence to define himself as a white colonialist. This hegemonic style carried the label of what was British-made "with a garnish of Red Sauce (Kipling, *In Black and White*, "On the City Wall") and presented British values as paramount. The camera eye of the narrative focuses mainly on spaces of colonial existence, cantonments, hill-stations, civil lines, on the daily routine of the English middle class, teatime, clubs, sports, along with their etiquette and behavior. As Thackeray in *Vanity Fair* put it: "We carry with us our pride, pills, prejudices…making a little Britain wherever we settle down." If there were any conflicts then they belonged to the colonizer because it was after all his drama that mattered. Even where the colonized protagonists are the first person narrators such as in Philip Meadows Taylor's *Confession of a Thug* (1838) or in Kipling's "In Flood Time"



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or in "Dray Wara Yow Dee" (*In Black and White*, 1888), the narrative frame and context belong to the colonizer and the story is designed for an implied European audience. Kipling's Kim is indigenous to India (like the author himself), yet he is kept external to it by the author's artificially imposing of a dominant identity. His omnipotence-"more aware and more excited than anyone" (Kipling, *Kim,* 1994, p.216) -assures his central position which is not shared by his Indian friends, Mahbub Ali or Hurree Chunder, who are important only in relation to their work for the Great Game.

Although contact with the world of the Other is viewed as compromising, it can also have creative potential and inspire colonial writers. For example, in Kipling's "False Dawn" (*Plain Tales From The Hills*), the picnic in an Indian hot weather takes place at night and the characters' identities suffer confusing changes in the manner of a midsummer night's dream: "It was like a scene in a theatre", "I never knew anything so un-English in my life." (Kipling *Plain Tales From The Hills, "*False Dawn", p.52). However, only in this confusion the colonizer's choice of the beloved one was possible. At the end of the story, "as the sun rose", the veil of mystery is raised but the narrator "felt tired and limp and a good deal ashamed of myself." (Kipling *Plain Tales From The Hills, "*False Dawn", p.53). Although the crisis is resolved in the world of the Other, the conclusion of the narrator reinforces the Orientalist idea that such experiences are not good as they can subvert the energy so much needed for the colonizer to be in full control. To assure control, the colonizer adopted what Kipling called knowability, a knowledgeable position from where the whole world becomes the object of his scrutiny. This was the colonial gaze that gave the colonizer a panoptical vision of the world he mastered. The colonial authority justified itself by using motifs such as research, scientific study, documentation, and the colonizer took the pose of a disinterested scientist, rational and neutral. Colonel Creighton in *Kim* has the official status of a researcher for the Ethnological Survey, yet unofficially he works for the Great Game. The same happens with Kim whose job is to gather information while accompanying his lama, information that makes him an invaluable instrument for the British secret service. He is on a privileged position and he represents British authority signifying and comprehending all India.

Another characteristic of the empire that proved for its energy and strong character was its association with masculinity. While in the colonial binary the colonizer is the masculine, virile, rational element, the colonized is viewed as feminine, lacking force and confusing. The British Empire was the man's world. While in Lahore Kipling commented that the Raj was filled with "picked men at their definite work" (Kipling, *Something of Myself*), or as Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* observed, "women were out of it" (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*-Empire service). Empire fed newspapers with real-life accounts of colonial experiences and inspired boy's adventure fiction (Captain Marryat, R.M. Ballantyne, Henty). The pattern of these stories includes a hero that undergoes a quest, a rite of passage with some final reward such as victory against the natives, wealth, and achievement of identity, personal or national honor. The woman was not present, only probably as a trial or as a reward. She is viewed as something polluting for those who fell



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under her spell such as Ustane in *She* (Rider Haggard), the Woman of Shamlegh in *Kim,* or Kurtz's African woman. What was important happened between men. Even in the process of self-mirroring, doubling, the pairing is made between males: Kim and the lama, Holly and Leo (*She*), Charlie Marryat and Tim Kelly (*With Clive in India,* Henty). The exclusive treatment goes even further if we are to consider Haggard's dedication of *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) to "all the big and little boys who read it." (Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*). Therefore the audience that these colonial stories were addressing to was male. Was the fear of the 'female' unknown so big that even the relation between the text and the reader had to be colonized? These were nothing but parts of a design which needed an ideological support for a male-led Empire that had to provide its promoters, and not only, an image of a self-confident British manliness and robust character.

The position that Kipling assumed in the process of shaping what Benita Parry calls "England's mysterious imperialist identity and destiny" (Parry, 2004, p.61) was an active one. He was inevitably swept into the workings of colonialism and imperialism that worked together serving one another, created their own world, insular as their breeders' own world, self-repeating, self-congratulating, yet inevitably shaped by reference to the world of the Other. However, when evaluating Kipling's relation with the ideology of the Empire we should consider that he was also what Zohreh Sullivan called him, a "quintessentially divided imperial subject." (Sullivan, 1993, p.6). His confrontation with the imperial project left him on the way between the two cultures, a liminal figure whose mind belonged to England but whose soul longed for the scents of his birthplace.

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