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An empire of glass: Cracks in the foundations of Kipling's India

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ABSTRACT

Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* is a novel that attempts to reconcile Kipling's love for India, and his knowledge that his presence was undesired. It presents an ideal vision of colonial India, a seductive fantasy that portrays British control as solid and unshakeable, built on foundations of stone. But this empire of stone is an illusion, and the reality that haunts Kipling's fantasy exposes its true fragile nature. This article examines the concept of the Great Game, as well as the players that partake in it, suggesting that these elements betray the unease that haunts Kipling's fantasy—they expose the fact that all is not as it seems. The Game, for example, is concerned with knowledge, with knowing. The knowledge it seeks, however, is so concerned with the Indian people and terrain that it becomes apparent that the Great Game is not about keeping the Russians out, so much as it is about keeping the British *in*. In addition, the players of the Great Game (Kim and Hurree Babu in particular) are riddled with an ambivalence that makes their allegiances unclear, and a mimic nature that makes their identities even more uncertain. These two elements combine, creating a sense that while Kipling attempts to depict India as certain, unchanging and constant in *Kim*, the reality is rather different. As this article argues, *Kim* betrays the fact that the British did not build an empire of stone, but one of glass, and that the hold they had over India—one that seemed so unshakeable—was in fact incredibly tenuous.

When considering the state of affairs in the colonial period, scholars have turned to examine the systems of knowledge that are the cornerstones of such a society. Orientalism and Postcolonialism both seek to navigate the relationship between certain types of knowledge and the inequality that they propagate in countries that have been colonised, particularly when considering that these countries were colonised by others that championed 'freedom', 'liberty' and 'equality'. As Bhabha notes in the essay 'Sly Civility':

What is articulated in the doubleness of colonial discourse is not simply the violence of one powerful nation writing out another. "Be the Father and the oppressor, just and unjust" is a mode of contradictory utterance that ambivalently reinscribes both colonizer and colonized. For it reveals an agonistic uncertainty contained in the *incompatibility* of empire and nation; it puts *under erasure*, not "on trial," the very discourse of civility within which representative government claims its liberty and empire its ethics. Those substitutive objects of colonialist governmentality - be they systems of recordation, or "intermediate bodies" of political and administrative control - are strategies of surveillance that cannot maintain their civil authority once the "colonial" supplementarity of their address is revealed.'

(Bhabha, 1994, p. 136)

There is an incompatibility at the heart of empire, and this resides in the clash of the systems of knowledge used to govern the Western nation and those used to govern the colonies. Rudyard Kipling is a writer whose relationship with colonial India

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was fraught with such complications. On the one hand, he knew and loved India and its people. On the other, he was keenly aware of the dominant colonial discourse of the late Victorian period. He was simultaneously a writer who celebrated the cultures of India, while also disavowing the same in an attempt to rationalise the control the British had. *Kim* is one of his most celebrated novels, and arguably, is one in which lies the 'most perfect example of… "the good Kipling," the writerly Kipling who blesses Allah who "gave me two/ Separate sides to my head"… [in it lies] "the answer to nine-tenths of the charges leveled against Kipling ... a whole kaleidoscope of race, caste, custom, and creed, all seen with a warm affection that is almost unique in Kipling' (Plotz, 2004, p.4). *Kim* is, no doubt, a novel that treats the natives with a respect, and affection, that is not found in all of Kipling's fiction. That does not, however, detract from the presence of empire in the novel, and the sinister implications this has.

The presence of empire is inescapable when one realises that the Great Game, a central element of the novel, is not simply one of espionage. On the surface, it comes across as an attempt to ensure that the Northern provinces do not fall into the hands of 'foreigners' (the French and Russians). But the Game, as will become apparent as this article develops, is not solely about protecting the borders from invasion—it is about keeping certain invaders within them. *Kim* is a novel that attempts to depict British rule as unshakable, but the game betrays that it is anything but. The British must fight for control, and this battle is fought with knowledge—knowledge of the people, terrain, culture—everything is necessary. If one looks at the surface of this game, it would seem that the British are winning, for it is *their* players that succeed in their missions. However, on closer look, even this certainty begins to crumble. As this article will show, while the players of the Great Game, namely Kim and Hurree Mookherjee, seem to support the empire unquestionably, the ambivalence that surrounds their characters suggests otherwise. Both Kim and Hurree Babu have much more complex relationships to the game, and to empire, than Kipling implies. One is faced with the realisation that, if one does not know or cannot pin down the *players* of the Great Game, then the Great Game cannot pin India down for the reader's consumption. It cannot continue as a marker of the native desire to keep the 'Angrezi Sahibs' (Kipling, 2002, p. 204) as the rulers of India when the players themselves betray that British India is not where their loyalties lie.

Kim presents an idealised, seductive and engaging fantasy of colonial India through its intense focus on the Indian people and terrain (Plotz, 2004, p. 5). This fantasy, however, is haunted by a shadow of doubt, by the possibility that all is not as it seems. Knowledge and surveillance are used in *Kim* as a means of solidifying India, of pinning its borders down (literally and figuratively). But these systems of gaining knowledge, particularly the underlying theme of espionage that is the Great Game, are thoroughly ambivalent. They aim to pin India down and, yet, cannot be pinned down themselves. *Kim* is a novel that is infused with the desire to know, but it is simultaneously plagued by the reality that it never will. Kipling presents us with a solid empire of stone, one that seems unshakeable, its roots of knowledge running deep into the foundations that build it. This 'solid' empire begins to crack when one looks behind the surface and sees the ambivalence of the discourse that creates this idyll—the walls are exposed and they are made not of stone, but of glass. And the glass is cracked.

'Who hold Zam-Zammah, that "fire-breathing dragon", hold the Punjab':
Kim, surveillance and the need to know

Kim is a novel full of intense descriptions which allow the reader to 'see, and smell, the hot scented dust and the people of the land' (Corrington, 1986, p. 279). According to Charles Corrington, this focus on the Indian terrain and peoples means that 'Politics, the Empire, the Law, are taken for granted. It is not 'Kim's' affair, nor the reader's, to question the credentials of the *Pax Britannica*, but to savour life within its borders. Nothing is explained or excused or justified' (1986, p. 279). While it is tempting to be seduced by the beautiful, elaborate descriptions in the novel, this reading of *Kim* fails to note that there is something sinister behind Kipling's ability to recreate India so clearly that one can 'savour' it. As Said states in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993, p. xii-xiii):

The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future—these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative… nations themselves are narrations.

In the context of empire then, the novel is political—within its pages control and ownership over land is negotiated and reaffirmed. Kipling's intense descriptions, his cataloguing of the landscape and populace serve a greater purpose, although perhaps one that Kipling did not

intentionally craft. The 'Great Game' that runs throughout the novel is part of this greater narrative. It was a mode of surveillance used to maintain and expand the border of British India (Kling, 2002, p. 302). This surveillance, however, was not limited to the borderlands—in order to maintain control over India, it was deemed necessary to know *all* of India. The novel is permeated with this intense *need to know* everything about the country, its peoples and customs—for, if one wanted to control India, one had to *know* it. Thus, Kipling's tendency to lay India bare for the reader serves a greater purpose than simply allowing the reader to 'savour life within its borders' (Corrington, 1986, p. 279). Rather, it betrays a desire to know, and to be *secure* in this ability to know the land.

Colonel Creighton is a prime example of this desire. He 'presides over the Great Game' and 'unambiguously embodies power and controls the land along with its diverse peoples… He is symbolic of the larger institutions and powers of empire' (Narayan, 2018, p. 71). And yet, this position of power (over the Great Game and the land itself) is his only because of his detailed knowledge of India. Creighton 'sees the world from a totally systematic viewpoint. Everything about India interests him, because everything in it is significant for his rule' (Said, 1987, p. 339). In order to retain his control, Creighton must continue to gather and collate information about the land he presides over. This power he has, however, is not common knowledge. He helps control India from behind the scenes—to most Indians he is 'a very foolish Sahib, who is a Colonel Sahib without a regiment' (Kipling, 2002, p. 100). More specifically, he is a Sahib who constantly asks 'riddles about the works of God—such as plants and stones and the customs of people.' (Kipling, 2002, p. 100). The information Creighton gathers, while seemingly purposeless, ensures a sense of security. For, if he knows the people, then he cannot be fooled by them, even if *they* believe him to be a fool. Furthermore, Creighton, as Kim notes in one of the later chapters, is 'the servant of the Government. He is sent hither and yon at a word, and must consider his own advancement' (Kipling, 2002, p. 115). The Colonel, as ethnologist and conductor of the Game, is only valuable as long as he can aid the Government of India—this is how he will advance. As he himself notes, 'I have known boys newly entered into the service of the Government who feigned not to understand the talk or the customs of black men. Their pay was cut for ignorance. There is no sin so great as ignorance.' (Kipling, 2002, p. 102). His emphasis on 'ignorance' as sin is key. If there is one thing the Colonel cannot afford to be, it is ignorant—for what power does an ignorant coloniser have? It is significant, therefore, that Kipling repeatedly refers to Creighton's knowledge and his desire for information. Creighton desires to have a 'clear view' of Kim and Mahbub Ali (Kipling, 2002, p. 95), he refers to Kim as a 'discovery' (Kipling, 2002, p. 97) and, perhaps most importantly, his eyes are 'so different from the dull fat eyes of other Sahibs' (Kipling, 2002, p. 101). The Colonel's eyes are not dull because they do not simply see, they observe. And to observe is to obtain knowledge. Creighton is fully aware of the significance of this knowledge in the Great Game—a game that is not solely about keeping the Russians out so much as it is about keeping the British in.

It is no coincidence, then, that contemporary reviewers homed in on the seductive ability of *Kim* and the charm it possessed in 'the wonderful panorama it unrolls before us of the life of the great Peninsula over whose government England has now presided for more than a century' (Millar, 1901, p. 284). *Kim* presents India before the reader through its sprawling descriptions of the peoples and places that Kim visits on his journey with the lama, a journey that, from the beginning, is part of the Great Game. For even when Kim has not been officially deemed a suitable recruit, Mahbub Ali employs his help in conveying a scrap of paper containing the 'pedigree of the white stallion' (Kipling, 2002, p. 21) to Creighton. Thus, from the very beginning, Kim is a colonial agent. In the novel, this career is depicted as 'the maintenance of that minimum of order such as is necessary to prevent foreign intrigue, frontier invasions, and injustice by native princes and to permit the joyous, noisy, pullulating mess of Indian life on the Great Trunk Road to continue' (Annan, 1959-60, p. 326). The Game is not figured as a means of controlling the people of India; it is deemed a mode of keeping them 'safe'. This assessment falls short of the mark—Kipling may not have explicitly referenced the darker side of the Great Game, but that does not mean that it does not rear its head throughout the text. As Tim Christensen notes, 'it is not only 'discourse' in a broad sense, but 'aesthetics' in a narrower and more traditional sense, which are part of a system of colonial control. Said emphasizes the ways that *Kim* provides an effective fictional synthesis between an aesthetic fascination with the colonized and the desire to surveil and control them.' (2012, p. 10). In *Kim*, this synthesis between aesthetic fascination and the desire to surveil (and therefore, control) the colonised is apparent. After all, '[c]omprehensibility is the colonial marker in *Kim*. Watchers and collectors are wiser, more knowing, more important than the watched and the controlled' (Plotz, 2017, p. 7). Kim is always watching and observing—'Kim's bright eyes were

open wide' (Kipling, 2002, p. 54), 'Kim's eye mechanically watched' (Kipling, 2002, p. 57), '[o]ne thing after another drew Kim's idle eye across the plain.' (Kipling, 2002, p. 69). Kim is compelled to watch and take in the new, almost as if he has no say in the matter. He 'mechanically' takes in scenes of people walking, his 'idle' eye must pick up information, for if Kim does not see, then he cannot know. And if he cannot know, then he cannot control. The Great Game, with all its focus on observation, is a means of solidifying colonial power.

The interesting part, however, is that if one considers that the novel was published in 1901, during the height of empire, then it begs the question of what the imperial forces needed to do to solidify their power. In order to answer this, let us turn to Lord Salisbury, who stated: 'Whatever happens will be for the worse, and therefore it is in our interests that as little should happen as possible' (Williams, 1989, p. 424). To solidify control, or rather to *retain* control, the British had to ensure that everything remained exactly as it was. Therefore, when Kim, '[i]n the struggle between action and contemplation,' chooses the former (the Game) over the latter (life as a *chela*) 'it would seem that Kim's choice of the former is vindicated, but it is an action whose aim is stasis, the maintenance of the status quo, rather than change of any sort,' (Williams, 1989, p. 424). The Great Game, therefore, aims to ensure that colonial rule continued, but at the expense of any form of 'progress' or 'change' in India. This is highlighted in the text, which 'produces the state of the Empire as an object for contemplation, a defused, dehistoricised spectacle' (Williams, 1989, p. 424). This idea of empire-as-spectacle is also the 'appropriate aesthetic object for the period of Victoria's Jubilee celebrations, whose central message—we are all one big happy imperial family—finds its echo in Kim's India, where everyone would coexist so peacefully were it not for the trouble-making of foreigners jealous of Britain's achievements' (Williams, 1989, p. 424). This image of stasis, of an unchanging Orient and of 'one big happy imperial family' is apparent throughout the text. One element that sticks out, however, is the journey across the Grand Trunk Road. Kipling himself notes that 'the Grand Trunk Road is a wonderful spectacle. It runs straight, bearing without crowding India's traffic for fifteen hundred miles—such a river of life as nowhere else exists in the world' (Kipling, 2002, p. 51). It was built 'on an embankment… one walked, as it were, a little above the country, along a stately corridor, seeing all India spread out to left and right' (Kipling, 2002, p. 56). The Grand Trunk Road was a communications route built by the East India Company—it ran from Calcutta into northwest India, and then ran south through Agra (Sullivan, 2002, p. 41). This route, which allowed for the eye to travel far and wide across 'all India' paints a spectacle for the implied pro-colonial reader. Through its ability to bring all of India together, this road allows one to 'behold the many-yoked grain and cotton wagons crawling over the country roads… to watch the people, little clumps of red and blue and pink and white and saffron, turning aside to go to their own villages, dispersing and growing small by twos and threes across the level plain' (Kipling, 2002, p. 56). Thus, in reading *Kim*, it is possible to see the 'spectacle' of the happy imperial family that the British wished to see—the road brought everyone together, and in doing so, laid bare for the colonial eye the lack of industrial 'progress', among other things, that they desired to see. It provided an image of a stagnant India, one that would never resist British control.

Kim is, therefore, a novel that attempts to truly know India. Ranging from his depictions of Colonel Creighton for whom '[t]here is no sin so great as ignorance' (Kipling, 2002, p. 102), to the Great Game and the desire to control, Kipling presents an India that the reader feels like they *know*. One that Kipling, too, believed he knew. As Edward Said states, '[t]he ultimate analogy is between the Great Game and the novel itself. To be able to see all of 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 in the centre of the novel… Kipling can *have* and enjoy India in a way that even imperialism never dreamed of.' (1987, p. 343). However, while the novel attempts to create this knowable and enjoyable India, the extent to which Kipling succeeds is debatable. For, if one delves into the novel, these attempts to pin India down begin to fall apart. Kipling's characterisation, though seemingly foolproof, is riddled with ambivalence and mimicry. Thus, while Kipling attempts to paint India as unchanging, the reality is different—the implication is that one can know India, but the reality is that one never can; the Indian populace and landscape is forever changing, and it resists the boundaries that are imposed upon it.

'The Sahibs have not all this world's wisdom': ambivalence, mimicry, and the impossibility of knowing.

Surveillance is depicted in various ways in the novel, and it serves to reveal an unease at the heart of colonial enterprise. The British in *Kim* clearly have

control, and yet they constantly watch and categorise the behaviours, mannerisms and activities of the native people, almost as if they fear that a lack of knowledge could result in a loss of control. The same goes for the foreign presence in India; the Great Game betrays the pervasive fear that British rule was unstable. However, the Game itself is not the only element of *Kim* to betray this knowledge—its players, too, are sites of this uncertainty. Both Kim and Hurree Babu are prime examples of this. They are characters whose very beings are sites of ambivalence—Kim with his uncertain whiteness, and Hurree Babu with his uncertain Indianness. While *Kim* is a novel riddled with the desire to know, it is just as riddled with an ambiguity and ambivalence that makes it clear that the British can never truly know, nor control, India.

Kim is a character who is incredibly difficult to place—neither the reader nor the characters, whether British or Indian, can categorise him. He is neither Indian, nor European, but inhabits a grey area *in-between* the two. This ambivalence that surrounds Kim lasts until the final pages, where Kim still echoes 'I am Kim. I am Kim. And what is Kim?' (Kipling, 2002, p. 234). The novel operates under the assumption that Kim is white. Indeed, it anxiously repeats the fact, almost as if not repeating it would mean losing Kim to his native side. From the very first pages, we are told:

'Kim was English. Though he was burned black as any native; though he spoke the vernacular by preference, and his mother-tongue in a clipped uncertain sing-song; though he consorted on terms of perfect equality with the small boys of the bazar; Kim was white—a poor white of the very poorest… his mother had been nursemaid in a Colonel's family and had married Kimball O'Hara, a young colour-sergeant of the Mavericks, an Irish regiment.'
(Kipling, 2002, p. 3)

The opening passage fluctuates between these identities, stating that Kim was white, only to acknowledge that he was also Indian. Kipling's choice to characterise Kim as a child of Irish descent, and a 'poor white of the very poorest' to boot, complicates the matter further. This is because, '[a]long with the working class, the Irish were the group most frequently conflated with black by imperialists…' (Williams, 1989, p. 422). Kipling's decision to make Kim Irish and working-class work almost as disclaimers, implying that he is able to act Indian so well (prior to his 'English' education) because he is susceptible to degeneracy. The Irish and working classes were often depicted as degenerate, with the same stereotypes that were applied to native peoples also being applied to them. The only difference was that the Irish and the working classes could be redeemed because they were *still white*. A degenerate white man is *still* a white man. Thus, Kipling's choice to depict Kim in this manner is key—he may act degenerate, but he still has white blood—he can be saved. This is emphasised by Father Victor when he states '[y]ou see, Bennett, he's not very black', and Father Bennet responds, confirming that he 'is certainly white' (Kipling, 2002, p. 75). This certainty is a result of their knowledge that he has white blood, and as the saying goes, 'once a Sahib… always a Sahib' (Kipling, 2002, p. 77). Yet, irrespective of this intense faith in his white blood, it is apparent that Kim can never truly be white. He is '*culturally* Indian and *naturally* British' (Williams, 1989, p. 422). Through this strange 'in-between' space that he inhabits, Kim becomes a strange, almost inverted example of Bhabha's concept of mimicry. This concept is most applicable to the native who becomes anglicised, who repeats Englishness. Kim, however, seemingly engages in mimicry in his adoption of Indian personas—his entire existence is built on this mimicry.

Mimicry refers to a mode of being that arose out of the complex relationships of the colonial system. In Bhabha's terms, Mimicry lies:

[w]ithin that conflictual economy of colonial discourse which Edward Said describes as the tension between the synchronic panoptical vision of domination—the demand for identity, stasis—and the counter-pressure of the diachrony of history—change, difference—mimicry represents an *ironic* compromise… colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.
(Bhabha, 1994, p. 122)

Kim is a character that is riddled with mimicry, but the form of mimicry he takes shifts depending on how one views him. Kim can be seen as 'a shape changer of Protean identity: mastering multiple dialects and donning multiple disguises: "Isabella-colored clothes" of [the] low-caste Hindu, the badly fitting suit of [the] Eurasian, the robe and rosary of a monk, the wedding garments-complete with little gun—of [the] Pathan bridegroom'(Plotz, 2004, p. 6). If one considers Kim in the light of the above, as an individual whose natural state of being is European, then the mimicry present in his character arises from his adoption of Indian personas. This view is credible—as Parama Roy argues:

'[m]imicry and exchange are key to the Great Game: the exchange of messages and information, the exchange of clothing, and the mimicry of "Indian" identities (and "English/"Anglo-Indian" ones).' (1998, p. 402). Kim's adoption of Indian identities embodies this dual-existence of the 'demand for identity, stasis' and the simultaneous need for 'change, difference' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 122). As the lama notes, Kim was 'a boy in the dress of white men—when I first went to the Wonder House. And a second time thou wast a Hindu' (Kipling, 2002, p. 79). Kim's ability to simultaneously, and fluently, embody both the European and Indian presence presents the impossible hybrid of change and stasis that is characteristic of the colonial state. He is 'a white boy… who is not a white boy,' (Kipling, 2002, p. 8). Those who are aware of Kim's heritage—including the readers, who are placed in this position from the beginning—are confronted with an uncomfortable image when Kim adopts the disguise of a 'native'. For, in these disguises, Kim embodies both the white man (and, in doing so, the belief that history is a march of progress, that the world is constantly changing) and the native (the image of a people frozen in time, an unchanging other). This alone is subversive, but there is a reading of Kim's character that makes his acts of mimicry all the more uncomfortable—if we turn the tables and see Kim as a character who is more Indian than English, then Kim's acts of mimicry have a new significance.

William Morton Payne, a contemporary reviewer, noted that '[a]lthough he [Kim] speaks English, he prefers Hindostanee, and the racial traits that are his by inheritance seem to have been almost wholly submerged' (1901, p. 285). When Kim is introduced, we are told that he is white; if we were not assured of his heritage from the first page, Kim would *not* come across as European. There is no marker of whiteness on his person—those traits are 'wholly submerged' (Payne, 1901, p. 285). Kim acts, speaks, thinks like a native and for all intents and purposes, he *is* a native—the Indian culture and its people are all that he has known. Kim speaks in the 'tinny, saw-cut English of the native-bred' (Kipling, 2002, p. 74), he thinks 'in Hindustani' (Kipling, 2002, p. 36) and he acts so much like a native that the lama is convinced that he 'wast a Hindu' (Kipling, 2002, p. 79). Until his education at St Xavier's, Kim does not know anything more about the English than the average native. He knows the Virgin Mary as 'Bibi Miriam' (Kipling, 2002, p. 101), and we are told that the English must 'make… [him] a Sahib' (Kipling, 2002, p. 81). The fact that Sahibness is something that Kim must be 'made' to embody implies that, rather than mimicking the identities of the natives, Kim is mimicking a European one. Native behaviours come naturally to him, European ones do not. He learns and mimics Englishness. Kim embodies Bhabha's concept of mimicry 'almost the same, but not quite/white' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 122/128) once the knowledge that he is white becomes known by the European characters in the novel. On learning of Kim's heritage, Father Victor asks Kim if he is 'a *lusus naturae*?' (Kipling, 2002, p. 85), a 'freak of nature'—Kim becomes the object of the colonial gaze: he 'found himself an object of distinguished consideration among a few hundred white men. The story of his appearance in camp, the discovery of his parentage, and his prophecy, had lost nothing in the telling.' (Kipling, 2002, p. 85). This awareness that Kim is European by blood, but not by nature, is what leads to the mimicry and ambivalence that surround his character. Up to this point, it has only been the reader and the native peoples who knew the truth. Now, the powers of colonial India (literally, if one considers Creighton) know. This knowledge means that the 'true' Sahibs in the novel look at Kim with new eyes; Kim somehow becomes a 'son' and simultaneously a 'wild animal' (Kipling, 2002, p. 89). Thus, when Kim learns how to be European, how to *act* European, the knowledge that he is not fully so affects the way he is viewed. When Kim is at St Xaviers, and he hears the others tell their tales of childhood, the reader is told that Kim refrains from 'sweep[ing] the board with his reminiscences; for St Xavier's looks down on boys who 'go native all-together.' One must never forget that one is a Sahib, and that some day… one will command natives' (Kipling, 2002, p. 107). Kim's silence means that we are faced with the awareness that Kim *did* go native, that he *does* go native, and that he knows it. He himself admits that he is not like other Europeans when he states that '[t]hey say at Nucklao that no Sahib must tell a black man that he has made a fault', going on to insist that he is '*not* a Sahib,' and admitting to the mistake he made: 'I made a fault to curse thee, Mahbub Ali, on that day at Umballa when I thought I was betrayed by a Pathan' (Kipling, 2002, p. 115). Kim is thus a character in whom the native and the European stand side by side, and we never forget that he embodies both at once. In fact, Kim intentionally inhabits both identities at the same time, as highlighted by his behaviour with the Woman of Shamlegh. The Woman believes him to be a lama's *chela*, and asks him the question 'if thou wast a Sahib, shall I show thee what thou wouldst do?' (Kipling, 2002, p. 221). Kim anticipates her actions, and responds by 'putting his arm round her waist,' continuing on to 'kiss… her on the cheek, adding in English: 'Thank you verree much, my dear' (Kipling, 2002, p. 221). Kipling notes after the encounter, via his narration, that '[k]issing is practically unknown among Asiatics' (Kipling,

2002, p. 221). In inhabiting both (opposing) identities at once, Kim performs what *should* be impossible according to colonial discourse. He has a split self, and this is what Bhabha refers to as the '*menace* of mimicry'—it conceals no 'presence or identity behind its mask'—its double vision discloses 'the ambivalence of colonial discourse' while 'also disrupt[ing] its authority' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 126). Kim highlights that colonial discourse requires an ambivalence to survive, while also suggesting that, perhaps, there is a lie to its rhetoric. If one considers Kim to be more native than he is white, then Kim's nativeness, and his ability to mimic whiteness when he chooses, in turn highlights that those born and raised in India are not degenerate. They can act European, even if they never can quite *be* European, and this suggests that perhaps the English presence in India is not so necessary after all. Kim is a character whose existence shows that the British did not know, nor could they pin down, the native people. They would forever resist categorisation.

Hurree Chunder Mookherjee, or Hurree Babu, is another character who is riddled with the ambivalence that is characteristic of colonialism. He, too, is a spy and active member of the Great Game. He is, however, Bengali, and is thus subjected to the stereotypes of his people. Blair Kling, in an essay on the historical context of *Kim*, notes that:

Bengalis had been the first to grasp the importance of learning English and western sciences. They were the most politically active, professing loyalty to the queen and her viceroy and demanding freedoms of British citizens… By the last decades of the nineteenth century the western-educated Indians began to pose a threat to British rule far more serious than the Mutiny. They mastered the very tools that had made British hegemony possible—western organizational skills, nationalism and national identity, and western science and technology.'
(2002, p. 299)

Bengalis were the ultimate threat to colonial discourse—in adopting the tools, knowledge and discourses of the West, they undermined one of the central tenets of colonial enterprise: the view that the colonised were stagnant, unchanging, degenerate. In their beings, Bhabha's 'mimic men' are born—those 'monstrous hybridism[s] of East and West' (Kipling, 2002, p. 199). In *Kim*, this anxiety around the ambivalence of the Babu is controlled via the use of the stereotype, rendering Hurree Babu 'untrustworthy, obese (not sporty like the colonial sahib), slimy, comical, effeminate etc' (Khair, 2000, p. 7). These depictions of the Babu as ineffectual counteract the revolutionary characters of the Bengali upper classes in Kipling's India. Hurree Mookherjee is seen as 'whale-like' (Kipling, 2002: p.136), 'fearful' (Kipling, 2002, p. 189) and 'oily, effusive, and nervous' (Kipling, 2002, p. 189). This comic depiction of Hurree Babu implies that he is not a threat: he is useless and ineffective. In fact, not only is the Babu completely ridiculed, he is also *supportive* of the system that treats him as such—'Hurree Chunder Mookerjee is thoroughly co-opted both as a cracker-jack secret agent and a devotee of the Royal Society. He retains some of the fatuousness that goes with the Babu stereotype but none of the political animus' (Plotz, 2004, p. 8). However, the emphasis on the 'fatuous' elements of the Babu's character, the constant repetition of them, has a purpose. As Homi Bhabha states, 'the stereotype… is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated... as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof can never really, in discourse, be proved' (1994, p. 94-95). The constant repetition, the figuring of the Babu as weak, as ineffective, as fearful are repeated in order to shift the focus away from the possibility that he is perhaps the opposite.

To some extent, Kipling is successful in his portrait of the Babu. In the novel, there *seems* to be 'no atmosphere of government oppression in *Kim'*, on the contrary, there is '[e]vidence of a great deal of freedom—freedom of movement, freedom of expression, and a more or less easy relationship between the people and the police.' (Kling, 2002, p. 298). If one looks closely, however, it becomes apparent that Kipling's 'happy' Babu is a lie. Hurree Mookherjee evades Kipling's grasp, and repeatedly criticises the system. On one occasion, when explaining the events that have led up to the current moment, he critiques the actions of the Sahibs. He then assures Kim that he tells him this 'unoffeecially to elucidate political situation, Mister O'Hara. Offeecially, I am debarred from criticizing any action of superiors' (Kipling, 2002, p. 185-6). At a later point, Mookherjee feigns intoxication, and spouts words that are 'thickly treasonous,' speaking 'in terms of sweeping indecency of a Government which had forced upon him a white man's education and neglected to supply him with a white man's salary. He babbled tales of oppression and wrong till the tears ran down his cheeks for the miseries of his land. Then he staggered off, singing love-songs of Lower Bengal, and collapsed upon a wet tree-trunk' (Kipling, 2002, p. 198). This episode could be seen as an act, as the Babu feeding the foreign spies what

they want, but there is more to the action than this. Hurree Babu himself earlier states that '[i]t is all your beastly English pride. You think no one dare conspire! That is all tommy-rott' (Kipling, 2002, p. 187). While his outburst in the company of the Russian/French spies may have been a performance, there are pointers in the text that imply that there is some truth to what the Babu states. Not only does he criticise the governance of India, as mentioned above, but he is keenly aware of the injustices he faces. He mentions, in passing, that he had contributed 'rejected notes To Whom It May Concern: Asiatic Quarterly Review' (Kipling, 2002, p. 153). He also wants to be a member of the 'Royal Society by taking ethnological notes' (Kipling, 2002, p. 147) even though he knows that he will never manage it—and yet, he *continues* taking his notes. Not only this, but there is a point in the novel where he recites an 'Arya-Somaj prayer of a theistical nature' (Kipling, 2002, p. 153). This prayer has importance as the Arya-Somaj (the Noble Knowledge) movement was a Hindu reformist movement, many of whose followers were anti-British (Sullivan, 2002, p.153). Thus, while Kipling's treatment of the Babu depicts him as a native that is happy with his role in British India, there are moments where this is refuted. These moments are brief, fleeting, and vastly outnumbered by the elements of the text that depict the Babu as a grinning, content fool, but they exist. The novel may end with the British in control, it may even present an India that is happily subordinated, but hidden within the novel are roots of discontent from which trees can spring. The Babu is content, he does not revolt, but there is a sense within the novel that it is simply because he does not choose to revolt *yet*. There is a lingering uncertainty as the novel closes that, perhaps, the India that Kipling has presented—the knowable, controllable India—is a farce, and that lying beneath its surface is an India that is beginning to resist.

Kim seems to present India to the reader as a consumable, knowable entity, but the reality is quite the opposite. Kipling's characters themselves betray this truth, as none are quite what they seem to be. Both Kim and Hurree Babu resist the pro-colonial stances that they are made to embody. The apoliticism of the novel, too, is a farce. Kipling's weak attempts at denying the discontent of the Indian peoples through his characterisation of the old soldier who condemns the Mutiny are overridden by the existence of the Babu. Hurree Mookherjee's words and actions betray his discontent and, while they do not smash the illusion, they create cracks in the castle of glass that is Kipling's India. *Kim* is a novel that explores—in the folds of its pages, in between its words—the state of an India which was beginning to realise that it was 'once independent, that control over it was seized by a European power,' (Said, 1987, p. 350) and that it had the capacity to revolt and regain power over its own destiny.

Conclusion:

Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* presents a fantasy of an ideal British India, one in which the English know what is best and the people are content with their rulers. This India, the India that *needs* to be controlled, is built on foundations of knowledge and systems of knowing. We see India through the eyes of the anthropologist, the spy, the curator, and we see an image of India that *seems* foolproof. There are no overt politics in the novel, the natives seem happy with the English presence—to the extent that they denounce the mutineers—and the only 'threats' to this contentment are the pesky foreigners who cannot keep out of territory that is not theirs. However, if one reads the novel with a critical eye, then these walls, these barriers of (false) knowledge expose their weaknesses. These are not the solid walls of stone that Kipling posits them as—they are walls of glass. The discourse of empire is fragile, it is riddled with an ambivalence that shakes the foundations of knowledge that builds it. The possibility of the malcontent Babu, of a boy of European blood who feels more loyalty to the Indian people than he does to the Sahibs, are present in the novel if one looks hard enough. And once this step has been taken, there is no stepping back. We see colonial India for what it truly was—a farce. This ambivalence that resides at the novel's core is only emphasised by the ambivalent ending of the narrative, where Kipling resolves nothing. The text ends with Kim at a (figurative) crossroad, with the choice to pursue the path of the Sahibs and the path of action (the Great Game), or to follow the path of the lama (the Way).

This ambiguous ending is one that Kipling did not take responsibility for. He claimed in his autobiographical endeavour 'Something of Myself' that the novel was not penned alone, insisting that a Daemon possessed him as he wrote. Due to this external influence, 'when the books were finished they said so themselves with, almost, the water-hammer click of a tap turned off' (Kipling, 1990, p. 277). Here, Kipling depicts the novel as a perfectly finished entity. Contrary to Kipling's statements, however, *Kim* is a novel that does not feel finished. Its ending comes across almost as a cop out, as a means of having two irreconcilable views of India that cannot be resolved and refusing to choose between them. Kipling leaves his protagonist at this crossroad, between the path of the Sahibs and that

of the lama. Kim thus remains the chameleon-like figure that he has always been in the imagination of the reader, unchanging (ironically, for such a shape-shifter) and apolitical. Kipling does not choose, Kim does not choose, no decisions are made.

There is, however, an implication that Kim will follow the path of the Sahibs. When Mahbub Ali asks the lama if he will allow the boy to 'to be a teacher' because 'he is somewhat urgently needed as a scribe by the State' (Kipling, 2002, p. 236). The lama responds, stating '[l]et him be a teacher; let him be a scribe—what matter? He will have attained Freedom at the end. The rest is illusion' (Kipling, 2002, p. 236). Kim's role as a 'scribe' or a 'teacher' is code for his career as a spy (for the lama would not approve of such a profession—violence is not 'the Way'). Thus, the lama's response seems to indicate that Kim will follow the path of action, of the Great Game. This conclusion, however, is undermined by Kim's last thoughts and feelings on the matter. The lama makes a passing comment while they are leaving Shamlegh, stating that: 'I look upon thee often, and every time I remember that thou art a Sahib. It is strange.' (Kipling, 2002, p. 224). Kim responds, reminding the lama that he had once 'said there is no black nor white. Why plague me with this talk, Holy One? … It vexes me, I am not a Sahib. I am thy *chela'* (Kipling, 2002, p. 225). Kim expresses his discontent at being labelled a 'Sahib' because of his blood. He claims instead that he is the lama's 'chela', insisting that he should be seen in the light of what he chooses to be. The lama then asks Kim: '*Chela*, hast thou never a wish to leave me?' (Kipling, 2002, p. 225). This is key, as the lama is not simply a person, he is symbolic of a path. Leaving or staying with the lama is a decision, a choice. When asked this question, Kim thoughts travel to the 'oilskin packet and the books in the food-bag' (Kipling, 2002, p. 225) which contain the documents necessary for the Game. Kim thinks '[i]f someone duly authorized would only take delivery of them the Great Game might play itself for aught he then cared' before responding, telling the lama that 'no' he was not a 'dog or a snake to bite when I have learned to love.' (Kipling, 2002, p. 225). Kim's desire to wash his hands of the Game continues into the final pages, where he asks Hurree Babu if the papers were 'in thy hands?' … It was all he cared for' (Kipling, 2002, p. 232). Once again, Kim showcases a desire to escape the Great Game. This could be an implication that Kim will choose the Way over the Game, but there is more to Kim's statements than this. As readers, we do not know if Kim is tired of the Game as a whole, or of that specific moment within it. Furthermore, Kim has just recovered from a fever and, thus, his words are not entirely reliable. The possibility of his following the path of the Way or the path of the Great Game present themselves at the end of the novel, and we are not given a clear indication as to which he will choose. Matthew Fellion emphasises this state of matters in his ruminations on the ending, where he concludes that the 'ending of *Kim* is not a victory for imperial forms of knowledge or the lama's ignorance, but neither is it a synthesis of conflicting epistemologies. Kim slips through the cracks of the dialogue between them, and we do not know the outcome of his education' (2013, p. 910).

In fact, the novel ends with another nod to Kim's ambivalence—on his journey to find the lama, Kim asks: 'I am Kim. I am Kim. And what is Kim?' and '[h]is soul repeated it again and again' (Kipling, 2002, p. 234). Judith Plotz notes '[t]o emphasize the problem of his identity, the word "Kim" itself is an interrogative: in Turkish meaning "Who?" and in Sanskrit meaning "What?" or "Why?" Kim is thus an apt name for an adolescent and cultural go-between' (2004, p. 6). This repetition of his name as an interrogative, as if he himself does not know who he is, highlights the confusion that characterises the end of *Kim.* At the end of the novel, we are no more able to pin down Kim's path, character, alliances or politics any more than we could at the beginning. He interrogates his own identity in the final pages and we interrogate it along with him. The focus is on Kim himself, and his ambiguity—his ambivalence. Kim's colonial education at St Xavier's in Nucklao and his wanderings with the lama across all of Hind are neither privileged nor disavowed. We do not know what he prefers, we simply know that he inhabits a liminal space in-between. Kim interrogates his entire being, but leaves us without an answer. We do not *know.* And this is the largest novelistic irony: in a book that is built on knowledge, the reader is left *not knowing.* The foundations of certainty, of foolproof knowledge crumble. We are left with an uncertainty, a glimpse of glass peeking through walls of 'stone'.

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