

Othering Ourselves: Re-reading Rudyard Kipling and 'The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes' (1885)

Simon Frost, Bournemouth University

Abstract

The reader who turns to Rudyard Kipling with twenty-first political sensibilities finds a work replete with the orientalism and reductionist 'othering' that typifies colonial writing during the period of high Empire. Not least in its superficial treatment of the lives it claims to represent, such reductionism can be traced to the mind of the author and, deeper still, the political-economic culture that structured imperial thinking and informed its actions. Such a view is made possible by our twenty-first century advantage. Even so, clarity in one perspective typically entails indistinctness in another, and for this reason this essay proposes to start from a provocative hypothesis. If we temporarily deny ourselves this interpretative perspective, is it possible for us to learn more about the reading experience of Kipling's contemporaries and their particular role in circulating his texts? What, in other words, do Kipling's short tales reveal about those other readers, the readers who can be considered as actors engaged in creating publishing and reception history? Taking 'The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes' (1885) as its focus, this essay offers a close reading of Kipling's short story within the context of the proliferation of magazine short stories in the late-Victorian period. Rather than seeking to produce a contemporary meaning from the text, it seeks to reveal the less obvious home-grown phantoms which Kipling's story produced for its first audiences.

All good people agree,
And all good people say,
All nice people, like Us, are We
And every one else is They:
But if you cross over the sea,
Instead of over the way,
You may end by (think of it!) looking on We
As only a sort of They!

—Rudyard Kipling, 'We and They'

One of the challenges posed by Rudyard Kipling in the twenty-first century is that his reputation precedes him. As postcolonial critics have often remarked, the story of English-language fiction on India has also been 'the story of a struggle around representational politics: British writers seek to represent the Indian; colonized Indian writers strive for a space in fiction to represent themselves' (Morey 2000: 2). If not false in

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its representations, English colonialism has at the least written 'with a tongue that is forked, [. . .] [because of its desire] for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*' (Bhabha 1995: 85-86, original italics). While Kipling deserves to be held to account for his prominent role in that 'forked' power struggle, it has now become difficult to read him for much else. Even in seemingly-innocent works such as *Kim* (1901), which Robert Fraser observantly calls Kipling's masterpiece of boy-scoutish vigilance (Fraser 2010: 100)—or perhaps more innocently in *The Jungle Book* (1893-94), if disneyfication has not completely erased Kipling—an undertow unfailingly surfaces. It reminds us these representations are voiced from the author who provided the most muscular apologia for the British Empire in poetry, 'The White Man's Burden' (1899), without the slightest trace of irony.¹

Yet this is not the only way to read Kipling. Were that the case, the power struggle identified by postcolonialists would seem to be insurmountable. Rather, we ought to acknowledge the colonialist language of exploitation while at the same time looking for the traces of 'human universality' that lie beyond the inequality naturalised in Kipling's work.² Because when we deny colonising fiction its sovereignty and instead read it within the context of a larger world literature in which other voices resonate, the sound and fury of Kipling's colonialism signifies less and we begin to see other aspects of his writing. In effect, we encounter another Kipling entirely – a writer of ghost stories and of horror who not only contested the imperial rationalism that underwrote colonialism but who had much in common with world-literature voices from the Indian subcontinent.

It is right that all forms of racism should be condemned, including its effects on literary form, and its presence in a writer's *oeuvre* cannot be excused as ignorance that prevailed at a particular time. Kipling's colonialism stands in sharp contrast to the position of George Holyoake, founder of the cooperative movement and the last British man to be jailed for atheism, who argued in 1875 for racial equality among

¹ In Scandinavia, Kipling's 'The White Man's Burden' is readily used in educational materials on British colonial- and post-colonialism. See Finderup and Fog 2011.

² A point made by Khair and Doubinsky 2011.

labouring people in Jamaica and Britain (Holyoake 1908: 13). Similarly, Celestine Edwards, the Dominican-born editor of *Lux*, a Christian weekly published in London, regularly indicted Imperialism, condemning the seizure of Uganda in an editorial of 10 December 1892 as ‘unrighteous deeds as cold blooded murder ... permitted under the British Flag’ (Hoyles and Hoyles 2011: 15). And in 1899, Henry Sylvester Williams helped set up the Pan-African Conference, at whose first meeting at Westminster Town Hall in July 1900 speakers directly condemned pseudo-scientific racism and racialized economic exploitation (Hoyles and Hoyles 2011: 17).³

Patently, there were voices at the turn of the century who did not share Kipling’s enthusiasm for whiteness and Empire. Or, rather, there were readers for whom Empire and racism were not synonymous. Such readers, who numbered in the hundreds of thousands, read Kipling for reasons quite remote from the ‘enjoyment’ of Imperial chauvinism. These other reasons are the focus of this essay, which seeks to avoid the error of projecting twenty-first-century preoccupations onto late-nineteenth-century readers. Such projections, I suggest, run the risk of Othering those historical readers in ways that offer a kind of parallel to the alienated relationship between historical authors and their colonial subjects that this essay began by condemning.⁴ Without a degree of sensitivity for the early material conditions of reception among different reading communities throughout the Empire, we repeat the same pattern of binarisms that once—far-more brutally—divided Kipling’s early readers from the Indian subjects of colonialism. This lack of sensitivity, in effect, leads us to Other *ourselves* with regard to our historical antecedence; when we forget that ‘we’ are also ‘they’.

The tripartite method adopted by this essay is wholly new.⁵ First, I will look at one of Kipling’s classic early tales, ‘The Strange Ride of

³ For another interesting review of black writers and black culture, in nineteenth century London, see Sanhu 2003 and Rogers 1996.

⁴ For ease of argument, I use a slightly polemical post-colonial understanding of Othering as a process of making the Other, as expressed in Mountz 2009.

⁵ The shift from comparative national literatures to world literature is well documented and its need compellingly argued. (See Prendergast 2004. For future developments see the forthcoming *Journal of World Literature*, BRILL, 2016.) What has not been tried, to my knowledge, is a shift then into book

Morrowbie Jukes' (1885),⁶ published as his popularity spread from India to Anglo-America and beyond, with a view to identifying instances of racial Othering from what was otherwise a popular horror story. Second, following strategies from the field of world literature, a comparative treatment will consider Kipling's thematics of horror in relation to other-than-English Indian literature. An extended reading of 'Garib Ki Hay' (1911) (translated into English in 20015 as 'The Power of a Curse') by the great Indian modernist 'Munshi' Premchand (né Dhanpat Rai Srivastav) will then show the disparity of experience between coloniser and colonised as they address a similar theme. Turning to world literature in this way should be understood as a tactic for denying the colonial canon its power. By recognising what Franco Moretti has called the 'structural inequality' of world literature, we can observe, in deliberately comparative fashion, its operations across unequal cultural capitals.

Third, as a way of working back to the issue of human universality, I will apply some of the methodological innovations developed by contemporary book history, and engage with material hermeneutics. Rather than reiterating world literature's insistence upon the superior literary-aesthetic quality aspired to equally among disenfranchised and enfranchised cultures, I will instead provide evidence of a third interpretative mode available to Kipling's early readers. In Kipling's tale, I believe, such readers found a refuge against Imperial rationalism, a refuge that was ignorant of (or at least oblivious to) its racial implications even as it remained alive to the need for resistance to the crushing forces of modernity. This third mode exemplifies a 'progressive' Kipling who remains key to his extra-literary popularity today in Britain and South Asia.⁷ In requiring what Victor Hugo once memorably called a 'canny

history and material hermeneutics: large macro histories of cultural geography and distant reading are not suited to the specificity of bibliographic detail; while the close reading of world literature supported by David Damrosch posits a form that can be 'distorted', rather than embracing the distortion as part of the reader's experience of the communications circuit (see Damrosch 2003).

⁶ This essay refers to the Wordsworth Classics edition *The Man Who Would be King and Other Stories*.

⁷ Kipling was and still is popular in South Asia. Amazon in India currently returns results for over 4000 entries searching its 'books' alone. [<http://www.amazon.in>]

ignorance’, this mode of reading provides a crucial foundation for reading our commonalities. As Ania Loomba has noted of colonial literature: ‘Literary texts are crucial to the formation of colonial discourses precisely because they work imaginatively and upon people as individuals. But literary texts do not simply reflect dominant ideologies; they also militate against them, or contain elements which cannot be reconciled to them. Such complexity is not necessarily a matter of authorial intention’ (Loomba 1998: 74).



First published in 1885 and a staple of anthologies of Kipling short stories ever since, ‘The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes’⁸ is a horrific tale of a ‘Village of the Dead’ (114) unwittingly discovered by civil engineer Morrowbie Jukes, C.B. (Companion of the Bath). While in a fever, Jukes has attempted to run down on horseback one of the stray dogs that torment him at night. At the height of the chase he topples down the slopes of a steep-sided natural ‘amphitheatre’ into a realm to which those (often cholera victims) are consigned after having revived on the brink of cremation. Having once been pronounced ‘dead’, they can no-longer be counted as living—hence the tale’s epigraph, ‘Alive or Dead—there is no other way: native proverb’. These Hindu victims, numbering some forty men, twenty women, and one child, live a sub-human existence in ‘badger holes’ (100) dug into the sandbank, surviving upon food supplies irregularly thrown in and fought over and the roasted carcasses of captured crows. The sole inhabitant Jukes chooses to communicate with is Gunga Dass, a former Brahmin with whom he develops a tortured relationship based on mutual dependency and mistrust. The inhabitants are prevented from leaving by the precipitous sand slopes as well as by the river Sutlej. The amphitheatre is made doubly secure by a barrier of quicksand and a local boat from which unknown natives—merely ‘They’ (104)—fire upon would-be escapees during daylight. Jukes’s discovery that the place is at least a century old and that no-one has ever escaped causes him uncontrollable panic. After several failed escape bids, he finds a map on the dead body

⁸ See <https://archive.org/details/phantomrickshawo00kiplrich>.

of another *Feringhi*, an Englishman who has partially succeeded in navigating the quicksands. He proposes to complete the map and escape but instead is rescued by his servant Dunnoo.

The tale is presented as a framed narrative, in which Kipling's author-narrator asserts that the village is well known to exist and that Jukes is the only Englishman to ever return. The narrator has heard Jukes's tale repeatedly, noting that Jukes 'never varies the tale in the telling, and grows very hot and indignant when he thinks of the disrespectful treatment he received' (97). Kipling accentuates the horror for readers by couching Jukes' framed narration in the rational discourse of a civil engineer who precisely measures and estimates conditions in a world of waking death.

The 'undertow' of discrimination is evident early on when Jukes' horror is compounded by the discovery that conventional standard social hierarchies no longer hold, and that he must act with uncivil brutality if he is to survive. 'I have been accustomed to a certain amount of civility from my inferiors ... The ragged crew actually laughed at me ... cackled, yelled, whistled and howled as I walked into their midst, some of them literally throwing themselves down on the ground in convulsions of unholy mirth' (100). In response, Jukes commences 'cuffing those nearest to me with all the force I could. The wretches dropped under my blows like ninepins, and the laughter gave place to wails for mercy ...' (100). He subsequently feels shame, not for having inflicted hurt but for uncharacteristically having 'easily given way to my temper' (100).

What is most striking, however, is the imagery, largely animalistic, that describes a scale of condition-of-being, from the highest life forms to the lowest, all subject to entropic forces that drag life towards the bottom. Jukes is at the highest level, of course, but next in the chain, surprisingly, are various animals, only then followed by the Village's human inhabitants. Speaking of these abandoned villagers, Jukes states: 'One does not protest against the doings of a den of wild beasts; and my companions were lower than any beasts' (104). With the sole exception of Gunga Dass, Jukes removes the inhabitants' individuality and objectifies them into a ragged crew: mendicants, loathsome fakirs, and a hideous crowd. Even the servant who eventually rescues Jukes remains 'Dunnoo, my dogboy' (114). Effectively providing a background of atrophied despair, the inhabitants are at no point individualized by Jukes, let alone regarded as companions who could be rallied to a collective

solution: ‘they sat around together in knots and talked: God only knows what they found to discuss’ (106). Instead, Jukes looks for salvation to the insider knowledge, the rationalist key held unwittingly and incomprehendingly by English-speaking Dass; another animalised native figure ‘turbanless and almost naked, with ... deep-set cod-fish eyes,’ to whom Jukes makes clear that he ‘intended to be his master’ (107). At one point, when Jukes reacts to Dass’s attempted manipulation by threatening violence— ‘there is nothing on earth to prevent my killing you’—he reflects upon the slow degeneration and how strange it is that he, ‘an average Englishman, should thus calmly threaten murder’ (107).

Despite his growing ‘un-English’ behaviour, Jukes remains decisively at the top of this evolutionary chain, followed by numerous animals: horses, crows, badgers and cod. After Jukes, the most vital being is his cob horse Pornic, which is invariably personalised and linguistically given more dynamism than the wretched inhabitants: ‘when he was let go, he went quickly ... and we were flying over the smooth sandy soil ...’ (98); ‘Then Pornic blundered heavily on his nose, and we rolled together down some unseen slope.’ (98); ‘Having remounted Pornic, who was as anxious as I to get back to camp ...’ (99). That Pornic is slaughtered and eaten by the inhabitants while Jukes sleeps only reconfirms the inhabitants’ status as inferior pack animals. Explaining the inhabitants’ actions, Dass suggests that ‘greatest good of the greatest number is political maxim. We are now a republic Mr Jukes ...’ (109) – note Dass’s less-than-perfect diction – to which Jukes inwardly replies that they are all now a ‘Republic of wild beasts penned at the bottom of a pit, to eat and fight and sleep until we [die]’ (109).⁹

At some degree lower than Pornic, yet above the atrophying inhabitants, are the numerous crows that populate the narrative. Crucially, the carrion crows provide the most poignant motif of racial self-defeat, emblematic of British colonial attitudes to India. Dass shows Jukes how the inhabitants survive on crow meat, which for a Brahmin is an abject condition, but one that Dass predicts Jukes too will eventually be grateful for. Dass instructs Jukes in how to use a captured crow as a lethal decoy. The captured crow is turned on its back, so that its cries

⁹ Pornic, itself, is the name of a small medieval town in Brittany; in etymological contrast to any South Asian name.

entice other river-crows to the kill, whereby a succession of its fellow creatures become entangled in the prone bird's claws and can be dispatched, roasted and eaten. It is a ritual of survival that Jukes is invited, or rather forced by circumstance, to join; an image of a crow-race betraying itself, not to provide nourishment in developing the inhabitants' lives but as a blind perpetuation. This image of self-defeat is echoed in a passage from John Lane's 1900 guide to Kipling.

We say 'India' ... instead of a congeries of mutually hostile kingdoms, divided broadly, to start with, on the bitter feud between Mohammedan and Hindu, and, after that, infinitesimally complicated in a venomous tangle of race hatreds and fierce ancestral distinctions. To keep the teeth of India from the throat of India is one of the initial difficulties of Indian administration. (Le Gallienne 1900: 77-78)

If we take at face value this image of a self-defeating internal hostility to which British 'progressive' rationality is the answer, and apply it to the framing paragraph that introduces Jukes' narration, 'The Strange Ride' reveals itself as a metaphor for ... India. Discussing the credibility of Jukes' framed tale, Kipling's author-narrator offers a sketch of the apparent anomalies of Indian life: 'A somewhat similar institution used to flourish on the outskirts of Calcutta, and [. . .] in the heart of the great Indian Desert you shall come across not a village but a town where the Dead who did not die, but may not live, have established their headquarters.' And given that—undeniably—in the very same desert, India boasts a wonderful city where the fabulously rich retire from public life to drive barouches and decorate their gold palaces with 'Minton' tiles [high-class ceramics from Stoke on Trent] and mother-o'-pearl, the author professes to see no reason 'why Jukes' tale should not be true' (97). Such a description of curiosities is more than true, it is representative of the nation.

Jukes' planned escape from the Village of the Dead relies on the careful maps across the quicksand made by the other nameless *Feringhi*, whom, it turns out, Dass has murdered in a futile attempt to discover his secret—yet more native self-defeating behaviour. The distances on the map are given in lengths of the dead man's gun, measured by the barrels without the stock. Jukes is finally betrayed by Dass, who knocks him unconscious and disappears to an unknown fate. For his part, Jukes is rescued by the barely plausible intervention of Dunnoo, who has tracked Jukes to the village and lowered two leather punkha ropes. Jukes may be

rescued but he does not solve the riddle of quicksands. That key to defeating the diabolic village lies in the white man's plans, in the rational painstaking estimations made by Jukes and his predecessor. The solution to India's ritual self-defeat is the gun barrel, here a symbol not merely of violence but of rational measurement. Jukes' understanding on his predicament speaks for a specific British construction of India where the incomprehensible Indian drive towards degradation can only be resisted by the British example of will-power and careful thinking. At the end of his account, when Jukes feels he has 'left the world, it seemed, for centuries ...', he tellingly appraises what has so far saved him: '[I] had to depend for my own life on my strength and vigilance alone' (107). Robert Fraser's ironic comment about the boy-scoutish vigilance in *Kim* could be aptly applied.



A more pluralistic but no less vigilant view of Indian ritual is offered by a similar horror story written only a few years later by Indian novelist Munshi Premchand. First published in 1911 as 'Garib Ki Hay' (Lament of the Poor) and published in English as 'The Power of the Curse', the short story is one of Premchand's early works about village life, and displays his keen sense for duplicity and double standards. Premchand has been credited as an anti-colonial Indian nationalist, even to the extent of being an extremist, committed to 'the economic liberation of the peasantry' and the writer who, in his over 250 short stories and novels, most developed the literary heritage of Rabindranath Tagore in his formal experiments with a more secular, social-critical realism (Gupta 1998: 5-6).

Written as a third-person omniscient narration, 'Garib Ki Hay' is a canny tale of avarice and of power across the structures of class, privilege and superstition. It concerns Munshi Ramsevak and his formidable wife who make a good living by maximising the opportunities latent in the office of village attorney. One of their 'opportunities' involves an old Brahmin widow, rejected by the villagers, who is so comprehensively swindled that her only effective response is to curl up and die on their doorstep. The scandal of it being a Brahmin who dies on their doorstep results in the Ramsevaks being ostracised and

the family spirals towards destitution and death, sound-tracked by what they imagine is the old women's laughter.

This is a tale of moral double-standards but also of rational irrationality. That unreasonable behaviour should proceed most reasonably creates a double bind, as Premchand reveals most acutely in the narrator's internal discourse: the absent-narrator position is continually threatened by a personalized ironic voice bordering on authorial commentary. The technique lends the story dramatic irony as readers are shown the true standards by which various characters live, and which they endeavour to hide. Thus, Premchand describes how Munshi Ramsevak has acquired considerable wealth while claiming to manage the financial estates of the village's widows and old men:

Widows handed over their money to him for safe keeping and old men who feared their wastrel sons entrusted their wealth to him. But once any money went into his fist it forgot the way to come out again.

Ramsevak supplements this income by borrowing—'he borrowed in the morning to give back in the evening, but the evening never came'—a practice, we are sardonically told, that has been a long family tradition (33-34). One of the widows who entrusts money to Ramsevak is Munga, a Brahmin, who has handed over 500 rupees to Ramsevak in return for regular small payments but who stubbornly refuses to die and thus reduces Ramsevak's potential profit. When Ramsevak therefore suggests she cover her own funeral expenses, the old lady realizes his deception and demands the remainder of her account. Unsurprisingly, the 'proof' that is Ramsevak's ledger shows her account to be already exhausted, but since suing her adversary would be like 'tackling a crocodile in water' (34), Munga has no alternative but to accept. The councillors of a local tribunal, the *panchayat*, also concur with Ramsevak's version of events—'they had had a taste of his money' (35)—and produce his acquittal.

The tone of the tale turns to horror when Munga suffers the effects of poverty. She degenerates into a terrifying half-naked, hatchet-wielding madwoman who terrorizes the neighbourhood, stalks a cremation *ghat* along the river and camps on the attorney's doorstep, refusing to eat and shrieking to drink his blood. By finally dying on his doorstep, Munga accomplishes what she could not when she was alive: Ramsevak is suddenly ostracized, not because he has legally killed an old lady, but

because she is Brahmin: ‘If a cow in somebody’s household dies while tied to a peg, then that man goes around for months begging from door to door; no barber will shave him; no water-carrier bring him water’ (39). As the Ramsevak family – Munshi, his wife Nagin, and his son Ramgulam – cope with the disgrace, their powerful legalistic logic that hitherto has quelled any threat is slowly supplanted by logic of another kind. In rationalising their situation, they now ask ‘What if the barber wouldn’t shave him? ... The beard is a lovely thing, the very glory and embellishment of a man’ (39) and ask why should the Ramsevaks have their clothes washed, since the *dhobi* only rents out the family’s clothes before returning them. Their income dwindling, they continue to ‘console themselves with such reasoning. But as soon as it was evening their rationalization petered out, [and] ... Fear took hold of them when darkness fell’ (40). Every shadow and night-sound now comes from Munga. A mouse moving in a pile of rags becomes ‘Munga’s skinny legs’ (40) and, as they descend into paranoia, their fear transforms itself into a ghost with active power. In commenting on Nagin’s loss of mind and her collapse into a fatal fever, the narrator remarks ‘While Munga had lived, she feared Nagin’s hissing. But by sacrificing her own life she could now take Nagin’s’ (41). After Nagin’s death, the fear that has been given body as Munga’s ghost is now written as an active subject: ‘Having done away with Nagin, Munga was not going to leave Munshiji alone’ (42).

Ramsevak eventually disappears and Ramgulam is taken in by an uncle, but, after burning down a neighbour’s granary, he is committed to a reformatory. After a long absence, Ramsevak returns to watch his house, which is also ablaze: ‘All the villagers came running – not to put the fire out but to see the fun’ (43). Premchand leaves some ambiguity about whether the watching figure is Ramsevak, as the narration’s final act of cosmic humour is to make the watcher a half-naked *Sadhu*, sporting ashes on his forehead and matted dreadlocks but with Ramsevak’s speech and manners.

The rational irrationality, the place where rationality breaks down into what we better understand as a paradox, lies in the fact that Munga can acquire only real power by becoming utterly powerless. Juridical process, not Munga’s ghost, is the true phantom, a sentiment that makes a mockery of positivistic rational progress. In Premchand’s India, social ascent is no more associated with merit than decline is with anti-social

behaviour. Ramsevak is a very rich and selfish man, who, the narration ironically notes, 'was full of all the qualities of a very rich man' (33). In the village, injustice is wedded to respect for privilege and tradition. The villagers deny the old woman *panchayat* out of respect for Ramsevak; a figure not of pity but mockery, she '*earns the title of madwoman*' [my italics] (36). Ramsevak is ostracized not because of his mal-practice but because he violates tradition. As Francesca Orsini puts it, 'Premchand's attitude to the villagers is no less critical than it is to Munshiji' (Premchand 2004: 259). In the India that Premchand wants to change, the forces governing social success are not based on positive justice but on vengefulness, obstinacy, and surgically cruel fate.

In this sense, Premchand would seem to be in agreement with Kipling about the existence of a self-defeating tradition that only encourages degeneration. In 'Garib Ki Hay', there is no emancipation for the poor, just fire and mockery. Unlike Kipling, however, Premchand evokes a world that will not be conquered by muscular rationalism or legal process, which are mere synonyms for exploitation and the abuse of privilege. For Premchand, the night is too strong; Kipling's strength and vigilance would do little in this realm of black irony.

So far this comparative treatment of Premchand and Kipling has served to highlight Premchand's modernism, and provide other criteria by which to measure Kipling's colonialism. What it has not yet begun to do is enfranchise Kipling's early readers. To achieve this third aim, we need to engage with the methodological resources of Book History and trace the circulation of Kipling's fiction, beyond its author, back in Britain. This essay presupposes that the text always exists in an embodied form and, following a precept first devised by Donald McKenzie, that form effects (not affects) meaning: meaning is what results from a formal encounter between the embodied text and the embodied reader (McKenzie 1999: 13). In this sense, reading or what takes place 'between the ears' is always conditional on the material at hand in an historic time and place. The Kipling we read today is not the same Kipling who was read at the turn of the twentieth century in Britain, in the United States, in India, or elsewhere in the empire.

Kipling's initial audience was colonial India. He published with Indian-based presses, The Civil and Military Gazette Press, and then for A.H. Wheeler and Co.'s Railway Library, a series that Kipling himself proposed, in part as a vehicle for his work. Only later did he make the

transition to the mother country and beyond, when those same stories were published in book volumes by Sampson Low and literary magazines such as *Macmillan's* and *Harper's*. By the time Kipling reached America, he had already been consecrated the unofficial poet of the Empire, as can be seen from the appearance of William Robertson's *The Kipling Guide Book* (1899). Addressing himself to fellow 'Kiplingites', Robertson suggested an explanation for why Kipling had become 'an immense favourite with the American people [. . .]':

At the time of his arrival [in New York in 1899] the Americans had not yet recovered from the emotional ferment which had been caused by the victories over Spain in Cuba and the Philippines, and the excitement was still kept up by the hostile attitude of the insurgent Filipinos. Annexation was in the air, yet many shrank from the responsibilities which added empire would mean for the white man. The stirring poem, 'The White Man's Burden', which appeared in the February number of *McClure's Magazine*, and which contained a direct appeal to the United States to enter upon a 'forward' colonial policy, therefore made a profound impression. (Robertson 1899: 17-18)

Regardless of the merits or even the plausibility of a 'forward' colonial policy that stopped short of complete withdrawal, it seems certain that for a section of his readership Kipling's appeal lay in its resonance with a specific set of private needs; in this case a need to justify a particular set of colonial attitudes, met through the framing of Kipling's poem by a specific magazine. In support of his assertion, Robertson cited an editorial in the *Review of Reviews* by publishing entrepreneur W.T. Stead (the magazine was of global importance, published from London, New York and Melbourne): 'The poet has idealized and transfigured Imperialism. He has shown its essence to be not lordship, but service. We can recall no nobler setting forth of the intrinsic ministry of empire' (qtd in Robertson 1899: 18). When framed by such a jingoizing cultural investment, readers would have difficulty interpreting Kipling's short stories for *anything but* redemption through colonial 'sacrifice': precisely the sacrifice that post-colonial studies demonstrate to be a self-aggrandising myth. But did all readers from every social corner and period of Kipling's reception suffer from such a frame? If other material cultural forms took precedence, then presumably other kinds of reading might have been – to use McKenzie's term – effected.

In *Rudyard Kipling: A Criticism* (1900), Richard Le Gallienne noted not merely the 'progressive' aspect of Kipling's colonialism – 'to celebrate the romance of commerce throughout the world: generally speaking the heroism of modern life' – but also something more disturbing: 'loom[ing] vast in the background the image of an old Sphinx of the Plains complete in mystery as no other writer has ever been able to suggest her. A Sphinx, too, of so many meanings' (Le Gallienne 1900: 72, 77-78). This mystery, I believe, was a challenge to rational colonial order and in Kipling's early works it was most forcibly present in his expressions of the horrific.

Kipling's 'Strange Ride' first appeared as one of sixteen items of prose and verse in *Quartette*, the 1885 Christmas Annual of the *Civil and Military Gazette*, published in Lahore and authored by 'four Anglo-Indian writers', i.e. Rudyard, his sister Alice Beatrice [Trix] and his parents, Alice (né MacDonal) and John Lockwood Kipling [Fig.1]. The collaboration was not unusual for the Kiplings and indeed John Lockwood provided illustrations for several of Rudyard's publications. Besides 'The Unlimited Draw of 'Tick' Boileau', Rudyard's quirky tale of a man whose marriage proposal is accepted by a girl who dies before their betrothal can be confirmed, the *Quartette* also contained 'The Phantom Rickshaw', perhaps Kipling's most famous horror story, about a man trailed by the ghost of his jilted lover in a distinctive yellow carriage. Other tales included 'The Haunted Cabin' by 'Trix' and 'An Anglo-Indian Episode' by Alice.¹⁰ Trix's story turns on the proposition that a ghost need not be ghoulish but, more-disturbingly, can be a 'rosy smiling spectre' – here a golden-haired little girl who has slipped from a cabin porthole (Alice Kipling 1885: 41-48, 41). The setting is reminiscent of another cabin-ghost classic, 'The Upper Berth', written in 1886, by Francis Marion Crawford, whose bestselling status Kipling would soon come to contest (see Frost 2015: 43). Alice Kipling's contribution is about simultaneous death; mysteriously contrived between a husband and wife, when the wife dies of 'sun fever' as she sails for England to escape the cholera that we discover simultaneously kills her husband. While *Quartette*'s advertiser announces the 'romance

¹⁰ Some confusion exists about who wrote each of the unsigned pieces. From examining the British Library copy, my estimate is corroborated in Flanders 2001: 203n.

of commerce' in the Punjab General Trading Company price lists, and its ads for pectoral balsam, life insurance and photographic chemicals, or what in terms of this essay is colonial rationalism, the annual's narrative prose has its other eye fixed on sphinx-like mystery (see Alice Kipling 1885: i-xiii).

Continuing its journey, 'Strange Ride' then appeared in Number 5 of Wheeler's Railway Library Series, published in Allahabad and priced at one rupee. Titled *The Phantom Rickshaw and Other Eerie Tales*, the volume has stripped away any extraneous verse and other Kipling family contributions to leave four tales about ghosts, crucifixion and death: 'Phantom Rickshaw'; 'Strange Ride'; 'My Own True Ghost Story'; and 'The Man Who Would be King'. The cover's lithographed design by John Lockwood emphasized the collection's Indian origins with images of native figures, a Jinn, an elephant, and a warrior's shield. This peritextual cover, including the Indian price in rupees, remained in place even after the volume reached London, being supplemented only by the publisher's name, Sampson Low, and its new price of one shilling added below John Lockwood Kipling's lithograph. [Fig 2]. Retaining the Indian iconography and price was apparently a strategic choice made by the publisher in order to underpin an exoticism that is emphatically 'eerie'.

And yet the stories themselves are most striking in their studious avoidance of sensation. These narratives are presented not as pure horror but as facts that simply are irreconcilable with dominant rationalism. Kipling's Preface is worth citing in full:

This is not exactly a book of downright ghost-stories as the cover makes belief. It is rather a collection of facts that never quite explained themselves. All that the collector is certain of is, that one man insisted upon dying because he believed himself to be haunted; another man either made up a wonderful lie and stuck to it, or visited a very strange place; while the third man was indubitably crucified by some person or persons unknown, and gave an extraordinary account of himself.

The peculiarity of ghost stories is that they are never told first hand. I have managed, with infinite trouble, to secure on exception to this rule. It is not a very good specimen, but you can credit it from beginning to end. The other three stories you must take on trust; as I did. (Kipling 1890: Preface)

In the volume, accompanying 'Strange Ride', 'My Own True Ghost Story' draws on Kipling's personal experience with several billiard-playing ghosts in a wayside station. But it is important to note that the experience is carefully impossibly to verify. Its narrative constantly

fluctuates between truth and falsehood, asserting that both are possible or that, in another cultural setting, truth and untruth are fully compatible. Kipling compares the frivolous treatment of ghosts in London by writers such as Walter Besant to the proliferous Indian ghosts in every village and dak-bungalow. They haunt remote byways, their feet turned backwards so they can be recognised, or at water holes, the ghosts of dead children thrown into wells, grabbing the wrists of passing mothers and begging to be taken home. But they also thrive in the stations of white men, and are regularly part of the sober testament between Sahibs.

Before encountering his 'own true ghost', Kipling confesses, he had sympathised with Besant's treatment of them, notably in Besant's 1875 tale 'The Strange Case of Mr Lucraft' whose first lines insist that the narrative is a record of truth (Kipling 1890: 39).¹¹ Reversing this emphasis, Kipling insists that his own tale may well be a delusion, thereby avoiding making a claim that begs to be disproved. To quote George Gurdjieff, 'every stick has two ends': by grasping the end of scepticism the reader is more firmly pushed towards credulity (Gurdjieff 1985: 11). This same tension within the possibility of the impossible, of rational irrationality, chimes well with Premchand. In 'Strange Ride', it can be seen in the epigraph, 'Alive or Dead – There is no Other Way': whereas the story unequivocally demonstrates that there *is* another way, if we only shift our understanding beyond Imperial culture. According to this other kind of logic—not positivistic and physical but discursive and social—the villagers *are* both dead and living. The story captivates not because of the 'outrage' caused by a line between Gunga Das and Morrowbie being crossed, but because it suggests the possibility of a world in which the differentiating line makes no sense.

That the dominant order might be exploded was a proposition both enthralling and horrifying to Kipling's contemporaries. In creating pleasure in such horror, these thoroughly popular tales thus produced an experiential paradox. This much was known to Kipling, who struggled to bring the realities of irreconcilable Indian life to English readers and to present a level of mystery that would stop Imperial rationality in its tracks. As he declares to the reader in *My Own True Ghost Story*: 'I had

¹¹ Kipling misquotes the correct title to Besant's story. See Besant and Rice 1876.

my ghost—a first hand, authentic article. I would write to the society for Psychical Research—I would paralyse the Empire with the news!’ (95). But Kipling would shortly compose ‘The White Man’s Burden’, his most notorious poem, which was to appear alongside his paralysing ghost stories. In the larger picture of colonial expansion, India’s ghost were not wanted, but in the even larger picture, they were and still are. As Tabish Khair has acutely observed of *Kim*: ‘Kipling starts with the colonialist language of differences and naturalised inequality but is forced to address the material reality of human universality. Finally of course, Kipling is a colonialist – he mostly believes that the twain can never meet – but he is also a man who has seen the twain meet at times’ (Khair and Doubinsky 2011: 26).



In the archives of known and often lesser-known short stories from the turn of the century, there are a wealth of supernatural short stories in the vein of Kipling’s ‘Strange Ride’. Alongside well-known short stories by Sheridan Le Fanu, Henry James, O. Henry, Saki, and Walter de la Mare sit countless works the legion of neglected writers who once flourished in the magazine press: F. Marion Crawford, Algernon Blackwood, E.F. Benson, Oliver Onions, and Robert Hitchens, to name but a few. Collectively, these works created a market that, under the right framing conditions, satisfied a demand for anti-rationalism as a remedy against rampant modernity or what George Simmel in 1903 called ‘the resistance of the individual to being levelled, swallowed up in the social-technological mechanism’ (Simmel 1903: 324). It was a market that included Kipling, of course, as well as drawing in a prolific horror and crime short writer such as Bernard Capes, whose ‘The Sword of Colonel Lacoste’ nestled in the covers of *Blackwood’s Magazine* alongside Joseph Conrad’s now-canonical ‘Heart of Darkness.’ It encompassed works by Kipling’s friend, Arthur Conan Doyle, whose many horror stories expressed the very irrationalism to which Sherlock Holmes was invented to disprove. In ‘The Horror of the Heights’, for example, modern technology merely brings Doyle’s protagonist into a realm of aerial monsters, just as his ‘The Brown Hand’ relates the haunting of a surgeon by a Kaffiristani tribesman whose hand has been amputated and kept for the surgeon’s advanced pathological collection. These stories

negotiated a line between the rational demands of modernism and the need for an alternative irrationality. The market they created derived its value from the same revolt that would lead the creator of Sherlock Holmes to insist upon being buried in an upright position.

It is hardly surprising that any writer, working at the heart of the most significant colony of an empire, the ideological justification of which is based on race, should produce work from which we can now read racial prejudice. But it should also be remembered that Kipling, understood as an embodied text, creates meaning only when he is read: both then and now. Alongside the market that looks to justify various positions on colonialism, past and present, there exists another market whose readers, also past and present, read Kipling in search of something more progressive.

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Appendix: Figures

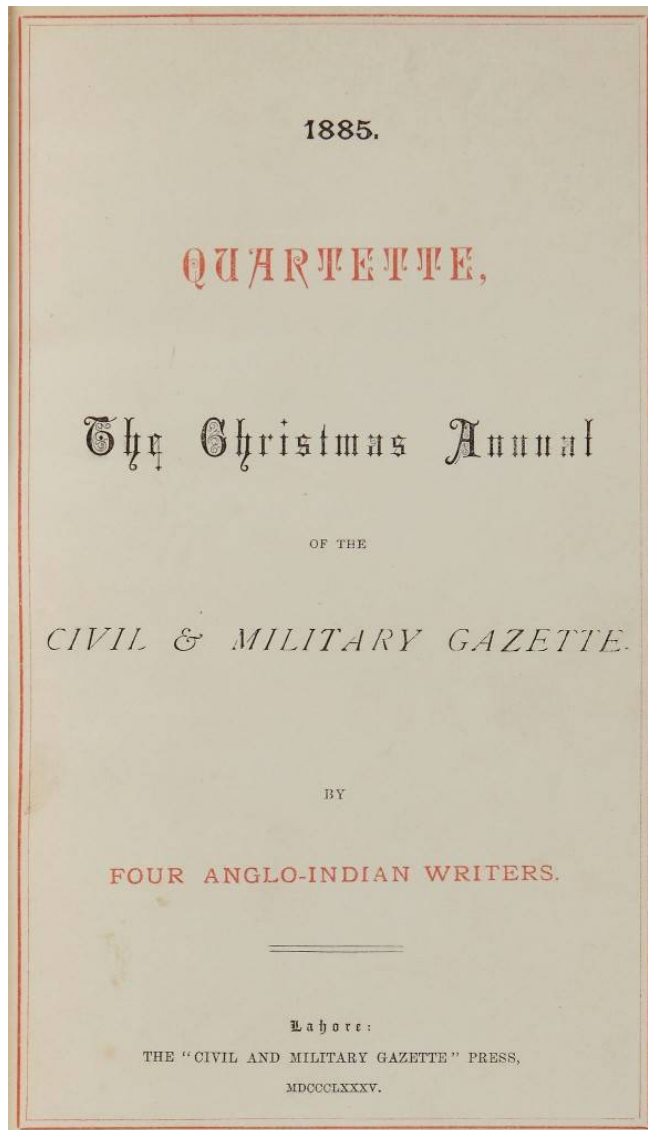


Figure 1. *Quartette: The Christmas Annual of the Civil and Military Gazette by Four Anglo-Indian Writers* (Lahore, 1885). Source: The Internet Archive (public domain)

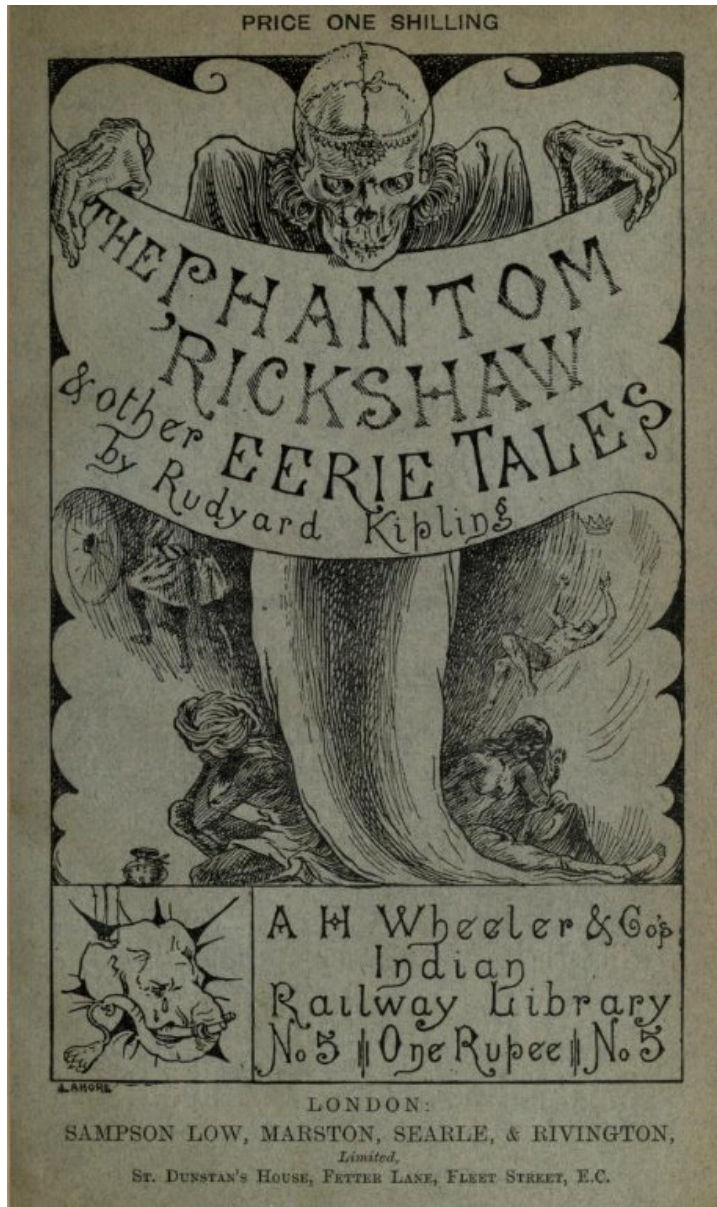


Figure 2. Rudyard Kipling, *The Phantom Rickshaw and Other Eerie Tales* (London, 1888). Source: The Internet Archive (public domain)