

KIPLING, WOOLF, AND ORWELL: LITERARY ETHNOGRAPHERS

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Gayanthi Ranatunga

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in English.

Peter Zoller, Committee Chair

Donald Wineke, Committee Member

Wilson Baldrige, Committee Member

DEDICATION

To my family, friends and teachers
for their kindness and patience

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ABSTRACT

The beginning of the 20th century was marked by a need for a departure, for Britain, from the Victorian sentiments of a bygone era, foremost among which were the soon-to-be antiquated thoughts about her colonies and colonial subjects. Because that moment was quite past the high noon of the British Empire, and yet, it was still significant enough geographically for the sun to never have to set on it, its shadows were looming long and haunting. At this juncture, it became the calling of a few to insist on a restatement of what it meant to be British in the larger context of the world, much of which she still commanded.

Some of the more vocal proponents for reconfiguring Britain in the new world context were writers. Among them Rudyard Kipling, Leonard Woolf, and George Orwell are seen as heralds and disseminators of thought prominent from the 1900s till World War II, which resulted in the dismantling of the Empire. *Kim*, *The Village in the Jungle*, and *Burmese Days*, the novels of the respective authors discussed within the following pages, are as much cultural delineations of alterity, as they are portraits of the British entrenched haplessly to their colonial missions.

Using Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Homi Bhaba's theory of hybridity, the point of convergence between the British colonial mission and its subjects coupled with the curious tendency to not see it as a confluence can be seen as the wellspring of most perceptions and misperceptions of the "Other" or the Oriental. This "othering" is seen at various degrees in the three novels, and with the exception of Kipling in *Kim*, Woolf and Orwell in their novels question, rather self-reflexively, the effect on the Briton of this "othering". While Kipling's is the rallying cry to a slowly unraveling Empire, Woolf and Orwell raise their voices in dissent understanding that what is unraveling is not just a geographical mandate but also a moral one.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: LITERARY ETHNOGRAPHERS

Writers are ethnographers whether they like it or not. What anyone writes results from his or her interests, and those interests result from the environment of upbringing. (If one is innately drawn to something, it is because his or her physical surroundings have provided the tools to draw out and manifest interest.) Even as writers write about a people apart from them, they ultimately write about themselves. Ethnography requires objectivity, but there is doubt as to whether true objectivity is ever really mastered, and writers hardly ever do. But entrusted to writers is the task of giving accurate testimony about the world to the world that they inhabit regardless of how post-modernity broaches the relativity of all experiences; we know some experiences, episodes in the history of the world, were truly horrific without having been there. Some such episodes, like the Holocaust, or slavery, need no narrative from the side of the perpetrators because there is no precedence to view those episodes as other than cruel and reprehensible. Imperialism too is one such episode, and it has had more defendants than most other undesirable and untoward episodes of history. Rudyard Kipling's narratives, his various apologias for imperialism, created a canvas that other writers (and critics) after him attempted to paint over with an ascendant duty characteristic of the post-World War One era to accept imperialism as it was, thereby assuaging the weight that Kipling had placed upon stalwart British shoulders. Leonard Woolf and George Orwell, of the opposing, anti-imperialist stamp, approached and observed the "other" with a sensitivity that Kipling either did not have, or did not let show in his writing; their chronicle of the "other", was born out of what *they* (Woolf and Orwell) had observed was being done to *them* (the natives), and what they did. They revealed the possibility of giving true testimony to their own

experience, as well as that of native populations, and without compromising themselves unpardonably.

By the time that Rudyard Kipling was born in India in December of 1865, there was already abroad in the British Empire the sort of man he would become, men to be extolled or excommunicated for touting Empire and her mission, depending on the side of posterity that one looked back from, for there was once two sides to the outlook on Empire – the Victorian Era had its doubts about imperialism; post-World War One Britain became more vocal about those doubts – which has now winnowed to the one in the extreme posterity we inhabit (where post-colonial studies constantly delineate the physical and psychological trauma of formerly colonized peoples). There were such men in the hub of Victorian Britain, whose expertise in Empire was born out of the trickledown effect, from the fringes to the center, and not through direct experience. The Babington Macaulays and John Ruskins had their (now) polemical cultural critiques permeate the British psyche, appropriating the thoughts of the day, infusing generations of public schoolboys with notions of British superiority. Kipling, on the contrary, was quite importantly born into the experience of Empire, and that of it, he fashioned something misshapen and lopsided is momentarily quite beside the point, since as Orwell pointed out, though not entirely accurately, Kipling offers the “the only literary picture that we possess of nineteenth-century Anglo-India.” As such, it can be seen that Kipling created a setting for literary imperialism with which he was able to wield a monopoly on the perceptions of those in Britain. If his had not been the only picture of Anglo-India, having helped congeal her assorted images, his had become quite decidedly the most prevalent. And the prevalent has a tendency to be conceived as the most true. Hence, Kipling furthered sentiments born through the clash of cultures from being trickled into the British to their being somewhat awash in it. He represented a direct conduit

for the “metropole/colony” binary, but his personal circumstances, being a string of rather considerable miseries, rendered his ethnography more amateurish than can be pardoned.

Victorianism rested on an unswerving devotion to Britain and her interests. Kipling subscribed unerringly to this Victorian gazette. Prior to World War One, there had been rumblings of dissent over the regimented men and women that the education system and social norms of the times had produced. Lytton Strachey, on the vanguard of this new ideology, questioned those men and women, and not without a touch of humor.¹ Where Strachey had been outspoken, Leonard Woolf, of the same social milieu as Strachey, of Bloomsbury, quietly ascertained through personal experience in Ceylon the shortfalls of the system of governance that Britain administered to its outposts.

Woolf’s *The Village in the Jungle* narrates not the British mission in a crevice of the Empire, but the lives of people mired there, in dense jungle where their struggle to live exposes the imperial mission’s inability to completely possess its subjects subsumed within a cycle of nature. His autobiography *Growing* illustrates, much in the same way that the natives were mired in their circumstances, the club Sahibs of the administration were ensnared in an imperial trap of sorts that threatened, and in most instances succeeded, in reducing them to a stereotype. Woolf is unlike the natives or his own people; *Growing* and *The Village in the Jungle* are both informed by his thorough observations of the people and their circumstances. He may not have been as astute a chronicler, had he embedded himself in either party. Unlike Orwell, who Christopher Hitchens points out “went native among his own people” in England,² Woolf did not go native among either his own people or the natives. His intelligently aloof but perusing personality allowed him the distance needed to delineate all parties concerned. Not becoming emotionally involved in or

¹ Lytton Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians* delves into the lives of Victorian luminaries such as Florence Nightingale and

² Hitchens wrote *Why Orwell Matters* with a chapter on Orwell and imperialism.

with either camp allowed him a measure of intelligent objectivity that became the crux of his work.

Orwell, more outspoken against imperialism than Woolf and more conflicted about his position as a foreign enforcer of the law in a country that did not want him, dealt with this forced, cold exchange of cultural and political currency appropriately scathingly in his writing. Through his Sahib, John Flory, in *Burmese Days*, Orwell explores not just the trauma of the Englishman displaced through geography, but also through social etiquette, having to constantly shift forms between being of the jolly club set and being an overseer.

Kipling, Woolf, and Orwell all created the avatar of the Englishman abroad, the Sahib with his life adjourned to outlying regions of the Empire. In the authors' texts can be found the causes, and context to imperialism, its subtexts, and the nuances in between; often, it is in what was left out – the account of the overseer's life in Ceylon in *The Village of the Jungle* – that the proclivities of the writers manifest themselves.

Unlike what Kipling would have us believe about the British, as a homogenous mass of “stiff-upper lipped,” world burden-bearers, Woolf and Orwell, who had been Sahibs as well, expose the myth of that creation. Woolf and Orwell, by Kipling's standards would quite easily be un-Englishman-like. All three men however, grappled with what it meant to be in the liminal, intersecting spaces of cultures, and their writings, fraught with the agency of their situations, illustrate characters who either break or stay with conventional standards of British socio-political propriety. Varying degrees of personal motivation, born of their life experiences, caused these writers to choose to reflect their inclinations in their literary works with the ethnography of the “other” ultimately becoming their own.

CHAPTER 2

THE WAY OF THE ORIENTAL, THE WAY OF HIS CHRONICLER: KIPLING'S INDIA

It must admittedly have been hard, to be born in a colony of the Empire, to be raised in its metropolis, and then return to the first only to later leave and travel the world, new and old.³ Britain may have possessed an Empire and been its hub, but there were no swift conduits of information between the two, given the day and age, and imperial power based on a structure that relied very much on mutual anonymity, the “us” and “them” continuum, meant that all connections were also jagged live wires. Kipling, born in 1865 in India, sent abroad to be schooled in England at the age of six, and returning to India as a sixteen year old to work as a journalist, as a result, may not have experienced any smooth transitions between cultures. His experiences, cultural transpositions rather than cultural transitions, shaped the man and writer he was to later become. Edmund Wilson in his book of essays *The Wound and the Bow* writes of Kipling's beleaguered childhood which later influenced his predilections as a writer.⁴ In India, looked after by native ayahs, the child Kipling had known something that resembled happiness. In *Something of Myself*, Kipling wrote that his earliest memories were of the colors and scents of daybreak in the Bombay fruit market where he was taken by his ayah each morning.⁵ That child's world was short-lived. In “The Kipling that Nobody Read,” Edmund Wilson recounts the desolation of a childhood that was nurtured in England by imperious men and women. Parental neglect a fact of life, the children of the overseers of the Empire, for all of its greatness,

³ Kingley Amis's *Rudyard Kipling* is a concise biography of the man with detailed chronicles of these displacements.

⁴ Edmund Wilson devotes a chapter in *The Wound and the Bow* to analyze Kipling's upbringing and the effect of his multiple displacements on his later life and literary career. Other writers Wilson treats to analyses are Charles Dickens, Ernest Hemingway and Edith Wharton.

⁵ Andrew Hagioannu begins his book, *The Man Who Would be Kipling* with what Kipling asserts of his childhood in the author's autobiographical work *Something of Myself*.

languished lonely. While the practice of sending children back to England was common, it is quite curious that there was no system for them to be acculturated into the Empire without undue trauma, that it was not considered. But then the Victorian regimen for raising children was quite well recounted by Dickens and company that, well before Kipling himself would write “If”⁶, his formula for what made one a man, the groundwork was well in place. Kipling with the vagaries of childhood behind him looked at the world through a strange filter, one that would take in the sights and sounds of everything he observed, but registered only the hearts and minds of a few; in his novel *Kim*, he would assemble the most brilliant collages of India’s vibrant way of life and her people, but he would also harbor the staunchest of attitudes as to what light that collage ought to be exhibited in. Swayed indefinitely by the tenor of the sub-continent, he found it rather lacking nonetheless in the manner of character he expected that he needed to pass all-encompassing generalizations about the “Oriental” throughout such works as *Kim* and *Plain Tales from the Hills*. One wonders throughout whether Kipling’s creating the mold of the literary sahib, the man shaped morally and physically to carry the burden of sullen dark peoples,⁷ resulted from what he conceived of as his own shortcoming when it came to an affinity for the country of his birth, from an inability to embrace his hybrid position.

Kipling, like any other child of the Empire, is unlikely to have suffered from any question about national identity, something overarching that engulfed one in a crowd and kept one safe therein. The British Empire, self-assured monolith, and uncontested in earnest until the turn of the twentieth century, inspired and commanded fealty in good measure. It would have been distinctly un-British to not feel this way. Kipling was born to the British; therefore, he was quite decidedly British. But in the cultural transpositions imposed upon him because of that British

⁶ Poem “If” first appeared in Kipling’s *Rewards and Fairies*.

⁷ Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden” is an 1899 poem exhorting the United States to take up her position alongside the British as the empire builders of the coming age.

birth in India, questions of personal identity would surely have arisen. In fact, through his writings one may see that they plagued him. It must be noted that personal identity is not mutually exclusive from national identity; my assertion is merely that in the case of the likes of Kipling, or indeed, Woolf or Orwell, national identity was so pervasively emblazoned into them that their personal identity was thus thrown into chaos. Somewhat akin to the relationship between an imperious father and his son, the latter having a good knowledge of the former, but not so much an understanding of him that allows him to incorporate into his life, the Empire exercised its gravity on both types of its subjects, the British and the natives.

Kimball O'Hara, the street urchin protagonist of his novel *Kim* stands in for Kipling, who opens Chapter 8 with a poem, "The Two-Sided Man" where he writes of "two separate sides of my head" (Kipling 179). This is as much confession as we would get from Kipling, but then he was not given to much musing over this fact. There was indeed a division, but one not highly desirable to dwell on. Most of the confusion of the foment of different cultures seem to have registered in his works from an angle unrealized in any depth by him, or at least unacknowledged publicly. With Edmund Wilson illustrating that childhood trauma sets up the grounds for what authors may or may not do within their created texts, Kipling's texts signify his attempt to discuss his bi-partite condition as an Anglo-Indian, a term that Leonard Woolf uses in his autobiography of his stay in Ceylon to represent sub-continental members of the Civil Service rather than Indian or sub-continent-born Britons. The term has since come to represent a myriad of hybrid British and Indian conditions.

Kipling, as did his parents, embraced this hyphenated appellation although, considering his later inclinations, it could be sensed to imply something undesirable woven into the fabric of what it meant to be British. Hyphenations connote hybridity. On the most basic level it is two entities put together, but as with most elemental concoctions, there is the formation of something

new. So the connection, like the hyphen, jagged and a little unclassified is a live wire charged culturally and politically. It is what Homi Bhaba would call a liminal space, of exchanges and power shifts. A place of much possibility, it is also mired in ambivalence as a consequence. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhaba introduces this space, writing that “It is in the emergence of the interstices--the overlap and displacement of domains of difference--that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender,etc.)?”(2) Homi Bhaba writes with the post-colony and its people in mind; his theory of the middle is the grounds upon which Edward Said’s binary of East and West meet which is as applicable to the imperial subject as it is to the imperialist.

Kipling would famously declare that the East and West would never meet, but the reality was that they did meet and that point of contact became a confluence; it was the bazaar in Madras down the road from the European club or the port city in Kochin where the trade from all over alighted on Indian soil. From this very physical convergence arises the psychological convergence. This convergence is not merely a point of contact that is interesting in the context of that colonizer/colonized binary, it is also one that creates in the colonizer his concept of wielding and yielding power, home (Britain or India), and his general bearing in the world. (Conversely, it also recalibrates the colonized individual’s relation to his own people, about which Homi Bhaba and Gayatri Spivak elaborate.) Leonard Woolf, when he traveled abroad to join the service in Ceylon, experienced fringe feelings of dislocation among his own people and wafted into anti-imperial airs as a result. He was not known to adore the natives either. George Orwell had to contend with whether to shoot or not to shoot an elephant, which I believe was because of what he had been acculturated to in the gulf between *him, his people, and them*, the gulf that was quickly filling up with the silt of conscience fueled by an understanding of cross-cultural differences.

Kipling too was mired in this conflict, but his entrenchment therein was not one that he understood well enough that it manifested in self-reflexivity in his texts. The answer then to Bhaba's question of "How are subjects formed 'in-between' ...?" would provide the reasons for the origin of such prose as Kipling's *Kim*, for it is from this position of cultural and political ambivalence, the "interstices" that Kipling wrote.

Being an entity of the Empire and not under it, Kipling would very much have thought that he wrote from a flourishing, privileged position. Many writers about Kipling would claim that he did so with the privilege apparent in the sort of conceits that he broached. His detractors – it is hard to conceive of admirers of his who, nonetheless, must be there – have indefinitely located him as a mouthpiece of white privilege. It is difficult to discount this. He was a sahib of the foremost order and he embraced every bit of what that meant. He created its present meaning. From his correspondences with his cousin Margaret Burne-Jones, one finds out that he vigorously enmeshed himself in the system as soon as he set foot in India as a journalist. He came to regard the Punjab Club as the "whole of his outside world" (Hagiioannu 7). Lawrence James, in *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of India*, quotes an anonymous writer who explained the significance of the sacramental club engagements: "The English, he wrote, defend themselves from the magic of the land by sport, games, clubs, the chatter of fresh-imported girls and by fairly regular attendance at church, because if they did not the Empire would be lost" (311-312). While this assertion is as enthusiastic as it is absurd, it is probably not without a grain of truth. In it is the embedded understanding of the draws of oriental life that conspire to lure the upright Englishman and woman from their mission. The reason for Kipling's insistence in his literature of the club sahibs and memsahibs, vacationing in Simla, captured quite assiduously in his *Plain Tales from the Hills* – Virginia Woolf in Mulk Raj Anand's *Conversations in Bloomsbury* speaks of how Kipling had

almost a woman's taste for gossip⁸ – which was what he followed through with after his own club commitments, can be seen as an evasion of India and her people. It is highly unlikely an Englishman or woman who reached out to a native on a truly plain field would have affected the collapse of the entire Empire.

This seclusion of the British in India implies a privilege. The ruling classes in British India wielded power, and if the grounds for claiming Kipling's privilege is the fact that he was part of the ruling end of the Empire, then the same claim must extend to Woolf and Orwell. However, no one (that I am aware of) claims that Woolf or Orwell wrote out of a sense of privilege. This results directly from their anti-imperialistic stances, which are seen by critics as beyond reproach. And they are, so far as imperialism goes. They seem to have eschewed privilege in their adopted philosophies, and hence are looked up to. There is something strangely inconsistent then when considering three writers who wrote from the Raj, from essentially the same place, who are viewed in two different ways in terms of that sort of privilege and agency. Most writers who wrote of the Empire are believed to have written from within the Empire. But this is where a mistake has been made. All of the sahibs wrote from a position where they were straddling two worlds, where they intersected.

This is why I believe that any individual who writes from a cultural and political crossroads is not so much privileged as galvanized to agency in some way. It is the manic insistence on one thing or another, for Kipling the importance of Empire, that appears as a position of privilege. Woolf's or Orwell's anti-imperialism could also have been deemed privilege along those lines; it is always the bourgeoisie that calls for reform. The position of anyone in the trenches of cultural and political warfare is in a precarious situation. The likes of Woolf and

⁸ Mulk Raj Anand's *Conversations in Bloomsbury* contains a very entertaining collage of the various Bloomsbury group members as engaged in conversation and observed by the author.

Orwell did well to understand that and it molded their view of both worlds, and hence, they came not to be reviled, but Kipling wrote without a conscious understanding of being in that mire; he wrote as if he were looking over a fence at both India and Britain.

There is scarcely anything to indicate that there was no such fence either. Kipling's personal identity is a nebulous one. He saw India while he was with the ayahs, which cannot be considered a direct or informed experience (because he was a child under six and not because of the ayahs), and then when he was old enough to directly experience India, he did so through a British education. He was interned first at one Mrs. Holloway's as a six year old and then sent to a school, United Services College run by former Army and Navy men. It was to be a cheaper substitute for the average child of the Empire against the expensive, "tony" public schools. United Services, connoting something more of a shipping corporation than a school, dealt quite fittingly then in producing and shipping back sixteen to seventeen year old "men" ready to take on the burden of his fellow man, as Kipling would later vocalize. Lawrence James, in *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India*, explicates the function of the organ that is the public school in the imperial venture. "The post Arnoldian boys' public schools and their imitators" he writes, "were the nursery of the ICS (Indian Civil Service, which Nehru had famously proclaimed was neither Indian, nor civil, nor a service). The late-Victorian and Edwardian public schoolboy was relentlessly urged to take on board a code of values which exalted selflessness and loyalty to team and institution" (310). George Bernard Shaw had earlier called for these institutions to be burned to the ground.⁹ The camaraderie that was encouraged aside, the British schoolboy, more likely than not, came into contact with the manner of thought and action, and their corollaries, as advocated by the likes of Thomas Babington Macaulay. In his 1835 "Minute on Indian

⁹ Lawrence James' provides some extensive coverage of the British public school system in *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of India*, with the commentary of some of the luminaries of the day attesting to the stagnant, outdated nature of these institutions.

Education”, which was several minutes too long, but which showcased the systematic implementation of alterity with regard to the British and India, he expressed the need to educate the Indian in English because “the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India, contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are, moreover, so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them” (469). The keyword here is “enrich,” the implication being that India stood haplessly upon a leached soil that needed to be so prepared in order to be tilled correctly. Furthering the case for British operations to improve the lot of the Indian, he stated that he had “never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.” This is a rather harsh indictment of India, but one that also indicts him. Among other proponents of British ascendancy was the great art and cultural critic John Ruskin who had such explicit assertions as, “Are you ready, even now, in the height of your morality, to give back India to the Brahmins and their cows, and Australia to her aborigines and their apes?” - to add to what was generally considered to be the moral mandate to rule India (and the rest of the Empire) and her people (Khan 579).

The people who informed the cultural discourse in Britain during Kipling’s boyhood were subsumed thus within a framework that glorified the British mission. They called to moral arms the men and women who were engaged in the mission, and as Kipling set afloat back to India from the United Services College, he was thus infused with a heady dose of that righteous fraternity that is usually engendered by common, albeit mistaken causes. Kipling had thus far been thoroughly physically and mentally infirmed by the establishments he had belonged to, but surprisingly as Edmund Wilson points out, he emerged with a great belief in establishments. He writes of Kipling’s “fundamental submissiveness to authority” (Wilson 98). Either of two things happen where great pains are inflicted: the victim either learns to regard with abhorrence the

perpetrator, or hate the ease with which he or she was victimized while learning to see establishment as teaching a core value indispensable to how life ought to be lived. Kipling saw and followed the latter which informed his voyage back to India.

The India that the young Kipling absorbed as a result of his own predispositions and the cultural currents of the time was a mythic world, which when added to the colour and riot that he had ingested as a child, resulted in creating in him the kindred spirit to Kimball O'Hara. *Kim* can be read as a study of the confluence of two cultures; a study of a rather vast "interstice", but Kipling rendered a comparative aspect to the novel resulting with the concluding sentiment to be the fact of British superiority. Kim, too, within the novel, hears about the greatness of the legacy of being white. An air of expectation hangs around him; he lords over the local boys speaking like a "native" even as they speak a "pidgin". Kipling has created in his depiction of the young Kim as he interacts with the local children a boy who is able to lead and be assertive because he is native to a land that breeds characters of the type. That Kim leads the spiritual lama, he is able to acquire and let go of various personas, that he waxes spiritual in one instance and belligerent or impetuous in another, all point to a tumultuous interior. Character resides in how one navigates the rapids of life, but Kim has character, it seems, because he is British.

In *Kim*, his deceptions, his flattery (to the rich travelling woman) to gain favors and such behavior is due to an inherent ingenuity that has allowed him to acquire them for strategic purposes whereas in the locals they would be attributed to being Oriental in nature and, therefore, reprehensible. It is interesting to note that the reason the spying community reaches out to Kim is because he is a white child who is privy to the ways of the locals, and they are thus able to see a range of applications for him in that capacity. A native child in the same capacity, with the same chameleon attributes would not have done because of his local status; his attributes are innate to his being Oriental and therefore are not as desirable or commendable. They are in any case

attributes that Britons do not normally use, except when they need to operate covertly with natives, play great games. That people anywhere would attempt to extricate themselves from unwelcome circumstances seems to be an intrinsic part of being human, and Kipling seems to have neglected to see it as such. One may here think back to Kipling's school days and how he artlessly navigated his desolate childhood. He had never had a temperament that rebelled, nor had he acquired the tools to rebel; he quite possibly disregarded the natural tendencies in himself to rebel, and he thought something highly of those he thought had *acquired* the tools to do so in adverse circumstances. It is interesting to consider what Kipling's character might have been in this sense.

Apart from what may be read into Kim, he has a set of ideas about himself. Kim may amble about with the local urchin population, but he is aware of the aura of expectation surrounding him. A certain mystique swirls around Kim, and it is definitely the white mystique. Lawrence James in *Raj* writes of this phenomenon which some thought kept the native populations in order: "The white man's omniscience was not just a matter of administrative capability, although this was obviously important. It was his mystique that sustained the Raj" (307). "Prestige of race" alone upheld British rule, thought William Horne, who served in the Madras government between 1882 and 1914. How else, he reasoned, could millions who had never seen a British soldier and rarely a sepoy submit so passively to alien rule?" (James 307). As odd and arrogant as this may sound, Kipling seems to have subscribed to that mystique.

Kim has been prophesied to do well for himself. Since he is white underneath all the street grime, there are aspects of life that Kim, even as poor as he is, should be able to circumvent if he wished to. Poverty is provisional for him. Power of prophesy exists for the British even as they are known to have disclaimed it as superstition for the locals as the sort of thing that kept them back. (In Orwell's *Burmese Days*, Dr. Veraswami defends the British mission to improve the lot

of locals because they themselves are unable to do so because of their superstitions.) There is a lot of talk of kismet, or fate. The woman of the opium den who has raised Kim echoes his father's words, "And some day, there will come for you a great Red Bull on a green field, and the Colonel riding on his tall horse, and nine hundred devils" (Kipling 4). Kim is not expected to forever be on the streets. He is a social chameleon able to traverse society the way people of more fixed position could not. He wears the clothes of a low-caste Hindu boy when he wishes to and stores those clothes in a timber yard. He is able to flit between identities because his designation is utterly unfixated, but the definitive trajectory of his life is to be able to realize that as a white child in India there is nothing else he could ultimately be than being a sahib, a gentleman. The Red Bull and the devils are signs of his ascendancy to that position as the novel progresses.

For a boy who comes from a long line of Victorian orphans, no British orphan has ever had it quite so good as Kim. He is a child, an orphan, apart; it is quite decidedly because he is foreign in a country other than his own. While the quintessential British orphan has had to undergo the usual list of deprivations at the hands of the evil uncaring world, having to show great will power and endurance to overcome various obstacles, Kim is in a world that has few obstacles for him even as he is an orphan. This is undeniably because of his foreignness, his racial difference, and the superiority that Kipling has imparted to him that where foreigners would fare rather badly in places unfamiliar to them, especially as orphans, Kim is able to manipulate any situation to his advantage and transform any older man to a parent, father-figure for himself. Where in England he would have made the ranks of the workhouse poor, or been the Artful Dodger, Kim in India is a little prince of the streets. Even as Kipling wrote of the inherent superiority of the British, he unwittingly created a place where the Victorian downtrodden, the silent other of British industrialization, could have a safe haven; only in India could this be so for Kim, and it may not please Kipling that this may be seen as such. Another notable aspect is that

the white chaplains who discover Kim cannot wait to civilize and domesticate him, breaking him away from the childhood idyll; Kim who was essentially masterless acquires masters only when the British bring him under their wing. So the native part of him here is subjugated to fuel the British in him.

Much in the same way that Kipling repeatedly generalized about the Oriental – the Oriental dealt violently with transgressors, had no conception of time and, therefore, tuned everything to a different clockwork than the British – thus creating an anonymous being, he unwittingly also exoticized Kim, creating an anonymous race of superior beings of whom Kim was a representative. One saw Kim’s reaction to certain things and could know, for instance, that the white man could never be inured to snakes – “No native training can quench the white man’s horror of the serpent” that money for the Irish is never the end of a transaction – “... [H]e was Irish enough by birth to reckon silver the least part of any game” and that “The English do eternally tell the truth” (Kipling 54, 45, 168). The last of these assertions vocalized by the Afghani horse trader Mahbub Ali, an instance of having a native wonder aloud about one of the great merits of his colonizer, the same mechanism which Orwell would later use ironically, Kipling uses with full belief in his own people’s greatness. One is now aware that the English do not eternally tell the truth, and Kim certainly does not. Despite what Kipling would like to have presented his readers with, in Kim he has created a character who is replete with the resultant fissures of being the result of a confluence of two different cultures even as he aspires to be a sahib, as Kipling aspires him to be a sahib.

Kipling has created for the reader this sahib, the avatar of the Englishman in British India. He posed it as an absolute. India filtered to him while in Britain under Mrs. Holloway’s and at United Services College much in the same way that it did for a majority of those in Britain. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt in their seminal treatise *Empire* insist how “The colonial

construction of identity rests heavily on the fixity of the boundary between metropole and colony” (124). The foundations of alterity rested on this. The British at home were known for their apathy for what went on in the fringes. So the knowledge of the people who populated its halls of learning could not have been as informed. Besides, the parts of Indian life orchestrated by the British Civil Service did not make up the totality of India, but it was always assumed to be so. “The Orient... at least as we know it through Orientalism,” Negri and Hardt contend further, “is a creation of discourse, made in Europe and exported back to the Orient. The representation is at once a form of creation and a form of exclusion” (125). Conversely, then, there was a reverse process of this occurring where the tennis-playing sahib was created in India and exported to Britain, the way the Oriental was. The representation of the sahib was never contested because he was never a discourse for the British, but a state of being, an entity that Leonard Woolf and later, post-colonial theorists would question. When Kipling was writing for the Raj, he was doing so with a nebulous understanding of what it meant to be a Briton because of his dual citizenship, which shaped what he must convey to the Briton at home since he wished for their apathy and the gap between metropole and Empire to end. But he had taken on too much, with little understanding of where the two converged.

Kipling wrote from the interstices. Born in one place, educated somewhere else, he was mired in that space in between cultures where various entities met and clashed (usually at night, as Arnold would have put it). He was animated from the energy of that position, the possibilities. Although this place may be termed “privileged”, it is not. It is one that gives the agency to various curious, hitherto unrealized modes of behavior in those who are subjected to it. In the way that it poses a space where things can be created, positive or negative, it is a deeply ambivalent place. Kipling exhibits this ambivalence in his texts even as he intercedes on behalf of the Empire for Empire. But his texts do not meditate on that ambivalence because he is too sure of the good of

what he preaches. He is unaware of the process of filtering and sedimentation that occurs in the intersecting spaces. Kipling has Kim wonder “Who is Kim?” within the novel; the question for himself, as for us, is its echo: Who *is* Kipling?

CHAPTER 3

SOUTH OF THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN: WOOLF IN CEYLON

The location with a fabled draw for those who wished to either engage in her administration or her salvation (two interchangeable terms in the imperial vocabulary), India may have been the jewel in the British crown; however, not 20 miles away from that fabled land's southernmost tip, Ceylon languished very much an epitome of the malarial jungle outpost of a bustling Empire. Then, it is no wonder that when this outpost beckoned to one Englishman on account of a lowly Cambridge Second Class honours, it caused him both "astonishment" and "dismay" (Woolf 211). In his autobiography *Growing*, Leonard Woolf arrives in the then Ceylon without much expectation, and quite assuredly not with the temperament of a bounding imperialist – no bounding imperialist makes an entrance with either ninety volumes of Voltaire or a fox terrier, not to mention both – but that of an inexperienced youth with aspirations to grow. If his Ceylonese sojourn was indeed the "growing" phase of his then inexperienced life, the novel he wrote upon his return to England, *The Village in the Jungle* is proof of his having grown in his ability to perceive alternate worlds reflected in its keen observations of the Ceylonese, and indeed of his own people.

For Woolf to have left as soon as his Cambridge education was over, his friendships made and cemented, meant his "second birth," an irreparable departure, from a life that was both privileged and prescribed (11). *Sowing*, the volume of autobiography preceding *Growing* illuminates the extent of his attachment to his family in London and friends at Cambridge. However Woolf, who had with a great sense of presage mastered something very early on in life, "to make up my mind quickly, and not to waste one's energies and emotions in regrets," – quite

possibly a determinant of his long life – appears to have weathered well the change of climates both social and geographical.

This rupturing of all that moored him to familiarity as occasioned by his transition, seems to have created in Woolf a certain aversion to all *representations* of familiarity to that former life he left behind. Perhaps it was the foreignness of the landscape in which English practices were performed with something of a sacramental devotion to keeping up a façade of Britain – the liturgy of tea and tennis in the macrocosm of the microcosm Woolf spoke of on the *P & O Syria* – that galled Woolf; perhaps the monotony of islanded lives could only be alleviated by such ritual and Woolf’s growing inclinations against the absurdity of imperialism clouded his ability to see thus; but he was nonetheless much unimpressed with the “touch of unreality and theatricality” in the lives of imperial overseers. The seclusion that Kipling had encouraged earlier, Woolf conceived of as missing the point of overseeing a people. “In Cambridge or London,” writes Woolf at the onset of *Growing*, “we were undergraduates or dons or barristers or bankers; and we *were* what we were, we were not acting, not playing the part of a don or a barrister. But in Ceylon we were all always, subconsciously or consciously, playing a part, acting upon a stage” (Woolf 24-25).

That stage was imperialism. All its adherents, whether they were like Sir Henry Dowbiggins, both cause and corollary of imperialism, or Leonard Woolf, the new turn of the century breed that lacked the gene that insisted on reverence to doomed monolithic structures, nevertheless, performed on this stage, for there is no such thing as a minor role in imperialism. Quite conceivably the fact that Woolf identified himself within that structure as one of its performers might have been a reason for his wish to distance himself from the little Britain of the various social scenes he was thrust into, the good fellow that he was: if he was going to be an imperialist, he was going to do something substantial for the people that he oversaw, and indeed,

later on in Hambantota, he devoted himself to work, depression and not much else. Quite importantly, that breach with familiarity which he wished to effect in all aspects of his life, not just the personal, caused him to observe more the “native” world. A stage is nothing if not a platform where while performing and being watched, one also has the precarious privilege of observing while still in character. And Woolf did this quite assiduously because for his performances, the lights were never dimmed over the audience. He observed keenly both his fellow countrymen and his subjects.

In spite of the theatrics associated with the high imperialist stage, those who ought to be the audience to that stage, the imperial subjects, in the case of Ceylon were strangely unenthralled by its proceedings. The performance that Woolf speaks of finds no reciprocal performance in people who eerily flit on and off stage playing little parts as they settle land disputes at the *kachcheri* or come to report a malignant village headman; they have little regard for the appearance of stock Kiplingesque figures. Woolf marks out the disparateness of two modes of civilization, the European one whose divorce with nature is all but complete with, “Our life is dominated by machinery, material...and social...” and the non-European one with, “They live so close to the jungle that they retain something of the litheness and beauty of jungle animals”(54). There is more despair in both appraisals than hope for conciliation. However, what makes Woolf different from others of his stamp is that he understands the two modes of life and he does not wish for the tradition he hails from to infiltrate the other to which he is foreign before its time. This is in contrast to the likes of Dowbiggins and company, who are on a civilizing mission, attempting to expedite a process of change that has begun with the initial contact of jungle with industrialization.

That jungle is not merely the physical presence of it but also a metaphor for all that is pre-industrial, pre- or non- Christian about imperial subjects. Where Kipling found much that could

be improved upon on the body and mind of the native, Woolf has no major objection to the way that they are. All human advancement being the accumulation of ability to ever so cunningly veil primitivism and not subvert it, the charge of primitivism Woolf levels against the “people on the verandah,” he counters by stating that, “Of course, very deep down under the surface of the Northern European the beliefs and desires and passions of primitive man still exist...” (53, 54). Perhaps Woolf moved also with the liveness of a wild animal, albeit a British one – (he very carefully maneuvered himself socially in his various stations) there is definitely anxiety over his Jewishness and his education; he was most careful with his own people.

Of the Jaffna Sinhalese, Woolf wrote how “They do not conceal their individuality any more than their beggars conceal their appalling sores.” Of Tamils he writes that they were “generally darker and dourer than the Sinhalese” (32-33). In Woolf’s prose, as he describes the Ceylonese, there is something endearingly unsaccharine and honest that tames all adherents to the binary of the colonizer and the colonized; his British readership cannot accuse him of having “gone native,” nor can his post-colonial readership dismiss him as a racist. In observations such as those, Woolf is the consummate foreigner, but he is not merely one with the Sinhalese or the Tamils; he is as much foreigner to them as he is to the plantation and civil servant sahibs.

If one were swayed to think that the reason his autobiography from 1967 showed distaste for the British imperial mission was because imperialism had by that time been dismantled and he was no longer under any obligation to be subtle, one needs only to read his short stories. In one titled “A Tale Told by Moonlight” first published in 1921, Jessop, a former Civil Servant, who “many people did not like” for the brutal way in which he phrased his observations, shows the ropes to a newcomer to Ceylon, an introverted writer. “I began to show him the life in the East,” recounts Jessop, “I took him to the clubs, the club where they play tennis and gossip, the club where they play bridge and gossip, the club where they just sit in the long chairs and gossip”

(Woolf 7). Because of the incestuous nature of the British civil service commune, its workings have become predictable clockwork. Woolf thus captured early on the redundancy and desolation of civil servant life whereupon the only intimate, original, contact with the natives took place in the brothels. When sexual intercourse is the most innovative thing one can go through in a foreign land, it speaks to how starved for originality in action the British were in their new Eastern habitats bound to unspoken codes of behavior.

Woolf is eerily similar in real life to both the seasoned Jessop and the novice Reynolds, who are quite opposite in their ways. While Woolf was not as outspoken a speaker about his grievances against his fellow countrymen, which he had amassed through careful observation, he harbored for them a secret disdain that became fodder for his novels and non-fiction. Where Jessop is outspoken in person, Woolf is so in his writings. Reynolds, who is new to life in the tropics, whose life has been burning like a slow painful flame, ignites with the passion of a love found on the margins of colonial life. This again correlates with Woolf's apparent naiveté – in his case self-reflexive – when he arrives in Ceylon; his Cambridge education, like Reynolds', does not serve him in the practical sense. And like Reynolds, Woolf's first sexual encounters were with prostitutes in Ceylon (viii). So Woolf's many avatars appear in his fictions, and one may see many disparate personalities inhabiting one person. In *Growing*, Woolf further exhibits the various selves that he was meant to represent but at times was unable or unwilling to.

In *Growing*, Woolf's encounter with the Arab pearl fishers is one of the key sections of the book which helps to separate one individual of a colonial force from that collective entity by placing them on a platform where their condition, set against exotic backdrops, appears as stark as those of the individuals who he is charged with overseeing. Unlike others of the British camp, Woolf is constantly measuring up against not just his fellow civil servants but also the "natives". "The Tamil," he differentiates again between peoples, "treated one as someone apart....The

Arabs, on the other hand, although extremely polite, treated me as a human being” (Woolf 94). Here Woolf’s British sensibilities play on his understanding of a people. Woolf, who wrote his biography many years after both his civil servant days and imperialism were over, still languished in that very British mire that is the idea of politeness.

“Politeness”, the British vehicle for rendering that very stiff upper lip which is besides the English language their greatest claim to fame, through Woolf’s words conveys the notion that it is a tool to communicate to somewhat lesser beings. Politeness in the quote is implied to be an agent of social demarcation; with the very familiar one need not be polite, politeness and familiarity are incompatible. “It was this attitude of human equality which accounted for the fact , oddly enough,” Woolf admits, “ that I hit them [the Arabs] with a walking stick, whereas in the whole of my time in Ceylon I never struck, or would have dared to strike a Tamil or a Sinhalese” (94-95). That those who treated him as a fellow human being should make it easier for him to be less of one to them, and that people who kept their distance made it easier for him to have some form of respect for them show the arbitrary nature of how he, and ultimately all people, dispense good will. That Woolf recognizes it *is* odd does him credit.

As astute a recorder of events as Woolf was, while writing his autobiography, even he may have seen through the limited lens offered by the tangle of letters and other correspondence from years ago. His letters to Lytton Strachey may accurately have rendered the events described, but the fact that he refers back to them saying “The following extracts...recall the place and my mood in it...”or, “Here is another letter...which recalls very vividly the atmosphere and savour of those early days in Jaffna...,” (Woolf 84, 58) is testament to the fact that Woolf was grasping for concretes (as concrete as a letter can be in this context) so as not to recreate from memory what seemed to have happened. Woolf thus reached out through the dense fog of years to offer as accurate a rendition as possible. “I spent the night in a tent or circuit bungalow – I forget

which...” writes Woolf in *Growing*, and we are aware, as surely he must have been, that there is a difference (191).

The Village in the Jungle is not prose distilled through the fog of years. There is a lushness to the dense greenery in *The Village in the Jungle* that there is not in *Growing* where, though it is most definitely not all dull foliage, the discrepancy between what was invoked and when that had happened is evident. One can surmise that the painstakingly unearthed, honest commentary from *Growing* is not new to Woolf; after reading *The Village in the Jungle* and the short stories one can see how his capturing of that oddness in being has carried over to *Growing*.

Unlike in his “A Tale Told by Moonlight”, in *The Village in the Jungle*, the white sahib is very inconsequential. Here it is more so through circumstances that the sahib has been thrust into, the jungle, than through his voluntary seclusion in a foreign land. While in Orwell’s *Burmese Days*, where he illustrates the hapless condition of Flory battling all possible elements, the weather, the natives, and his own people, showing how a conglomeration of forces render imperial rule absurd, Woolf has written of the singular, secluded lives of the majority of imperial subjects who subsist on a plane that cannot even spare the luxury of understanding that such absurdity exists.

Published in 1913, *The Village in the Jungle*, was a work completed in under two years after his return to England upon leave. He did not return to Ceylon again until it was post-imperial Sri Lanka, but in his novel he was able to recreate without the need for corroborative letters and other correspondence the Hambantota of his years there. The novel is about an impoverished village in that district. At the beginning of the Hambantota chapter of *Growing* Woolf explains, “When I got to Ceylon, I found myself back at school.” That there was not much license to exercise his intellectual abilities there, he duly noted – what with the little outpost seemingly populated by the pen of Kipling himself.

He was “embittered and disappointed,” but he used his intellect later to fashion the Kaburupitiya of *The Village in the Jungle*, and we understand through *Growing* that his schooling in Ceylon was thus a very organic process. Unburdened from the social obligations like the ones he had in Kandy, Woolf was able to measure himself against the natural calamities of rinderpest, and social isolation, and the part of his job that was not the “white sahib side” (178).

The Village in the Jungle is about the “tikak pissu” Silindu and his family’s attempt at survival in dense uncaring jungle, and their ultimate failure in it. In the traps that Silindu’s detractors, the village headman, Babehami, the village healer Punchirala, and Fernando, the money-lender devise for him and his daughters, Woolf demonstrates his grasp of the nature of complaints brought before him in the various *kachcheris*. The land disputes, licenses to buy land, protection against a malignant village headman, or ruining a hated neighbor, all reasons for seeking the white “Hamadoru’s” swift verdicts, which Woolf in *Growing* writes of, are translated as the methods in which Silindu is destroyed (52). Perhaps it was the distaste that Woolf had for such pettiness in people that made him subject Silindu such tortures, but then there is the sense that this was the natural progression of Silindu’s life, a life in which he faces these catastrophes. Baddegama was one more instance of that microcosm of the macrocosm of which Woolf would write later in *Growing* (when explaining the social situation aboard the *Syria*). The poor and the helpless are always swayed precariously by the wealth (or relative wealth in the case of Babehami) and the relentless resourcefulness of those in power; Silindu is no exception to this sadly rather universal rule.

In *Growing* Woolf mused on how although “It is difficult to know exactly why I found the jungle so fascinating...I could not keep away from it” (211). This marked fascination for the jungle is evident from the first page of *The Village in the Jungle*. Of the jungle which would “creep in and smother and blot out the village itself,” Woolf writes with an awe that he does not

bestow on the very artificiality of Empire which works roughly the same way as does the jungle, by always threatening the dissolution of cultures and then by affecting it. The litheness of the people which Woolf wrote about in *Growing* as a result of their living in the jungle is also portrayed in *The Village in the Jungle* in the way that Silindu hunts and his daughters move about in it. But just the fact that they have kinship with the land does not ensure that they survive it. There is something to be said about all terrain being foreign by virtue of the fact we are all in it and not of it just by being human.

Finally, in the scene where Silindu, brought before the magistrate for the second time charged with murder, feels “vaguely encouraged by the white Hamodoru,” because he speaks Sinhalese and did not seem angry, shows the futility of the charges that the order of law might impose on people in that impoverished condition (Woolf 142). The magistrate bemoans that it may have been better for Silindu had he been convicted earlier by him for the theft (Woolf 142). There is helplessness all around with a design to the order of life which exemplifies that. That Woolf has nature ultimately destroy people is interesting in that it illustrates how even in the very regimented order of the Empire, the pathos of just *being* can override all artificially enforced law and order.

Woolf, unlike Orwell of later years in Burma, never experienced the outright hostility of his colonial subjects, nor did he wish to twist bayonets into them while still feeling that imperialism was wrong. Woolf had no interest in prolonging his colonial encounter and no ambitions thereof. He was sure of his impending success in it, but was dismayed that he should think of it. In having written a novel where the primary focus was on the people who he had overseen, Woolf escapes the polarity that would have resulted from the clash had it also contained much of the overseers (not that there is not any polarity engendered by writing as he did, directly). Unlike Kipling who would use quite accurate descriptions of his birthplace, India and her peoples

to construe the elevated nature of the British enterprise, Woolf unequivocally leaves the stage to the natives. In his novel he has done what he wished to do in real life in Ceylon with his white sahib status and his (anxious) familiarity with whiteness: he wrote about what was unfamiliar and what he wished to understand. In pursuing that line of education he discovered how chance intermingles with people's designs and everyone is delivered to forces that are beyond them, a theme that Orwell explores with his British protagonist in *Burmese Days*. The ivory towers of Cambridge may have taught him the theories, but his self-education through isolating himself on an island taught him their application.

CHAPTER 4

“TO BE A PUKKA SAHIB OR DIE”: ORWELL’S BURMA

While Woolf’s foray to a corner of Empire had been prefaced by university in Cambridge, some years of theoretical knowledge before letting loose in the world, Orwell’s imperial adventure in Burma was never punctuated by such a safe interlude. Despite his being of aristocratic stock, Orwell’s education thus far had always been arranged by precarious scholarships because of his family’s monetary plight. This impoverished aristocratic condition, though common in the day and age where the influence of the aristocracy was on the wane, quite possibly resulted in conflict over his social designation: he once described himself as “lower-upper-middle class,” in which whimsically conceived appellation there is more uncertainty than security.¹⁰ Woolf, who was anxious over his staunch middle-classness offset slightly perhaps in his mind by his Jewishness, Cambridge education, and many volumes of Voltaire, had a successor through Orwell in terms of social anxiety, even awkwardness. But that anxiety would manifest differently in Orwell. Eton was as tony a life as Orwell had known before he ventured out to Burma as a nineteen year old. Unlike Woolf, who was blessed with longevity and a certain quiet tenor to his life, Orwell’s was brief and its tenor fast. His novel *Burmese Days* and essays “Shooting an Elephant” and “A Hanging” recount his emotionally tumultuous experience in the Indian Police Service. Considering his rather varied oeuvre which dealt in different subjects, this is a rather substantial amount of work upon one giving a replete account, as replete as such an account can be, of the tone of Orwell’s disdain and despair over British imperial ambitions.

¹⁰ This is from *Road to Wigan Pier* where Orwell recounts his life among the poor in his own England. Hitchens quotes, “He went native in his own country.”

Where Woolf had situated his novel in a jungle village as far from the prying eyes of his representative government, populated by locals who only met their overseers during brushes with the law, we find in Orwell's Burmese outpost a heady mix of the locals and their imperial overseers. In the country club set of Orwell there is not the assuredness that Kipling promised us was the natural condition of the Englishman, but desperation born out of clinging to that idea of a racial superiority. This desperation, and ultimate anxiety, about racial superiority does not stop with the club tennis players of Kyauktada. In a more pervasive turn, it has washed over the natives.

In Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, he writes of the native elites doctored by the imperialists to help their cause. To have natives govern according to the doctrines of imperialism could, in the view of the imperialists, ameliorate them (the imperialists) by making a (false) show of letting go of power. Merely, it is a more insidious indoctrination and indirect rule whose barbarity, if barbarous acts came to pass, through a chain of command that could not be traced back to the imperialists. Responsibility could always be forfeited in such instances; (the explanation would be that) the locals are surely not as elevated of mind as the colonialists, and Western educations can only do so much to temper tropical constitutions. Sartre writes of the surprise of the colonialists when their subjects realized their voices in dissent. The surprise, then, must be even more considering how without direct indoctrination some natives came to embrace British superiority as an aspirant condition pivotal to their very existence, if they were to live with them. In *Burmese Days* we see that they began to identify with white power, creating a hierarchy where although the summit of it is white, enables a fairly fluid social ascent, as well as descent, depending on how the scaling was performed.

In *Burmese Days* the crux of the colonialist/subject encounter has been predetermined by the conceptions, on either side of the binary, of white superiority. The locals are referred to as

“blacks” by the imperialists although the majority of Burmese people are closer to the other end of the colour spectrum. A clear black and white demarcation as expressed by language, which runs counter to what must clearly have been perceived in reality as otherwise, accords with the process of “othering”. Registering such a marked difference allowed to attribute to the Burmese characteristics that were the polar opposite of what the British thought were the high points of their hyper-civilized being. They, on the other hand, were given such epithets as “most holy god,” which phrase distances them from the speaker and evokes reverence. (However, U Po Kyin, the rich and scheming Burman, is also called as such by his minions who recognize his position and even his ambitions to be on level ground with the British.)

Among all the characters, the white protagonist Flory is the least encumbered by the superficial difference that has come to symbolize a right to dominate. Unlike his other colleagues, he is less assured of himself as an agent of civilization. He even has an appreciation for the Burmese culture, as when he sits with Elizabeth watching the Burmese dance. But that part of him is considered as black and ugly as the birthmark on his face by his colleagues, all of whom are very unsympathetic toward the natives. They mostly lounge and pout in their club chairs, and the only time they display any passion at all is when they vilify the natives. They appear on the surface quite assured of their status as anointed creatures, but it must also be understood as anxiety over that assuredness as times change. It seems that to people who were promised so much in Victorian times, reality is unable to deliver.

If confidence in British identity is fluttering, in *Burmese Days* the native identity is showing a strange pulse. The imperial stage, like any other form of theater, acts as a social organ in any environment it is embedded into. Social organs dispense social values regardless of whether they are worth valuing or not. The natives, U Po Kyin, his wife, Ma Hla May, and Dr. Veraswami all suffer from that idea of whiteness which means civilization, as does the colonial

elite. The former group's ideas of superiority and class have come from the latter's mannerisms. It must be noted, that since the native ideas of social ascendancy are a corollary of what they have observed at the hands of their overseers, it later contributes to the problematic of post- Second World War, post-colonial discourse, as former colonial people still considered their being in relation to their former occupiers.

Whereas the turn of the century Ceylonese in Woolf's *The Village of the Jungle*, had had little to do with that imperial stage, the Burmese living well into the twentieth century, in the post-World War foment, were more inculcated to the staged way of elite colonial life, who rose through its ranks, what constituted those ranks, and how those ranks were maintained. They now understood a form of white privilege that they strove to acculturate in their lives. The British in turn understood the trajectory of the native aspirations, which they felt threatened and slighted their position as superiors. The conflict, then, of the locals with the club set in *Burmese Days* results directly from the locals' aspirations to power.

Capitalism not having caught up as famously as it would later in the post-Second World War order of world proceedings, money was still not the great consolidator of status. There was yet something to be said for elevated positions which called for respect, if only for the prestige of the elevation and not the persons elevated; U Po Kyin, the morbidly obese, impeccably groomed Subdivisional Magistrate of Kyauktada, understood this. He is introduced to us as the man who as a pot-bellied child saw the British march victorious into Mandalay. Orwell, writing with an understanding of the pathology of those who have carefully observed people with brute power, explicates the origins of U Po Kyin's progress oriented (for him) world view: "He remembered the terror he had felt of those columns of great beef-fed men, red-faced, and red-coated; and the long rifles over their shoulders, and the heavy rhythmic tramp of their boots. He had taken to his heels after watching them for a few minutes. In his childish way he had grasped that his own

people were no match for this race of giants. To fight on the side of the British, to become a parasite upon them had been his ruling ambition, even as a child” (Orwell 5). U Po Kyin has been enthralled since by the sound of marching boots, fresh from the mulch of war, the impregnable picture of the British military mission instilling in him a sense of the outwardly indissoluble nature of the British and their scope. Rather than try to fight against them, U Po will employ people less perceptive of the workings of the Empire as pawns in his cause, be they local or British.

At the outset of the novel, he is seen setting in motion actions that would help him consummate the ultimate aim of his life: make the rank of “acting Deputy Commissioner, with Englishmen as his equals and even his subordinates” (Orwell 6). By operating daring political intrigues, he has risen to his current status, but his thirst for greatness has yet to be satiated. Not even the Buddhist doctrine of acquiring merit can keep him from the character assassinations and blackmails that he orchestrates. His intention is to be the sole Burman member of the British club, but in his way is the doctor, Veraswami and John Flory, who has befriended him.

Dr. Veraswami is an educated man, but he suffers from the malady of thinking that all that is British epitomize greatness. He is one of Sartre’s locals formally educated by the Empire in Empire. He will hear no evil about it; his understanding of the British then comes not from acculturation of their mannerisms as for U Po Kyin from observation but from his education. When Flory complains of his club mates – “Ellis with his “dirty nigger”, Westfield with his jokes, Macgregor with his Latin tags and please give the bearer fifteen lashes.” – Dr. Veraswami returns with a volley of various Empire builders, citing Clive, Warren Hastings, Dalhousie, Curzon as examples of British greatness. It is interesting he quotes Shakespeare to cement them to history, that “we shall not look upon their like again,” unconsciously admitting to the sort of degeneracy that Flory recognizes (Orwell 38). One could have expected the doctor to name writers and poets

to personify British greatness, but somehow reality and nation-building take precedence over art, its use being limited to frame greatness. Dr. Veraswami, then naively upholds the British mission; his relationship with Flory, the Englishman will eventually destroy him, but he would never not be assured of the sahib that Kipling created.

Much in the same way the British have “othered” their subjects, Dr. Veraswami has done similarly with the British; he has attributed to them great qualities that he does not believe are in the Oriental repertoire. Far from demonizing them, he has deified them. The othering that marginalized entities bestow on their superiors is somewhat more benign than the orientalisering that Edward Said speaks of in his groundbreaking *Orientalism*. “Could the Burmese trade for themselves? Can they make machinery, ships, railways, roads. They are helpless without you,” he asks Flory (Orwell 40). The answer which is expected of him, Dr. Veraswami never gets, for Flory, perceptive and conscience-stricken, levels charges against the British who after hundred and fifty years in India, “can’t make so much as a brass cartridge case in the whole continent” (Orwell 41). This Dr. Veraswami counters with a resounding “My friend, you are forgetting the Oriental character. How is it possible to have developed us, with our apathy and superstition?” Here he might as well be one of the sahibs or the memsahib from the club bemoaning the Oriental constitution – think Mrs. Lackersteen’s “Really I think the laziness of these servants is getting too shocking” (Orwell 29). According to Dr. Veraswami, the British have “a magnificent track record of self-sacrifice,” and of having “brought to us law and order” (Orwell 40). Dr. Veraswami acts as a foil to Flory’s anti-imperialism. Once an occupying country has managed to get their local subjects to commend their deeds so endearingly as “valorous”, psychological control over them is complete: it is unlikely that the likes of Dr, Veraswami or U Po Kyin would ever take up arms against the British, but this is the limit to any similarity between the two men.

By having Dr. Verswami and Flory take opposing views on Empire, Orwell points out the absurd nature of its reach and its ability to warp perception. The transformations that occur within the confines of imperialism impair both the colonizer and the subject. Alan J. Greenberger in his book *The British Image of India* argues that “Men such as (Forster and) Orwell who attacked the Raj did not do so basically because of what they felt the system was doing to the Indians, but rather because of what the situation of forcibly ruling over aliens was doing to the British” (84). In Flory’s diatribes against the British is his insistence that Britishness has winnowed away to forced polite banter in the clubs, with “Booze as the cement of empire,” which makes each other tolerable in their collective tropical exile (Orwell 35). That the young Maxwell could one day transform to an alcoholic Mr. Lackersteen in the slowly turning gyre of imperial rule, not that Maxwell has many redeeming characteristics in his youth, reeks of the corruption wrought by living in such strange climes.

The voice of Orwell, as of Woolf before him, is a more exacting and questioning progression of the thought introduced by late Victorian writers. Kipling had assured the generation of Orwell that the “dark and sullen peoples, half devil half child” were indeed the white man’s burden. Kipling’s unforgiving minute however required too much ground to be covered that the generation he wrote for could not understand the importance of such rabid perseverance that would lead to war and general calamity. Greenberger specifies that “Whereas to the more confident English writers of the Victorian period rule of any kind, absolute rule in particular, was good because it gave Englishmen the opportunity for self-development, these writers (Orwell, Forster) believed that such a position destroyed the British” (84). Who was going to bear the burden of the white man bearing the white man’s burden? Character building, the discerning expatriate discovered, did not go hand in hand with Empire-building.

Flory, a confluence of the contradictions of imperialism, is thus caught between the club set and the locals. While for Dr. Veraswami he has a certain fondness, for he is able to be frank about his own people to him without fear of reprisal, he still harbors for locals a certain distaste. He is struck by their grotesqueness, as he is struck by the grotesqueness of his own people. He has a sense of general disgust for any form of pettiness, and he sees plenty on either side. This was a peculiar characteristic in him. Even Ko S'la, Flory's manservant, disapprove of his eccentricities, such as reading a book in time that could have been more appropriately spent drinking. "He hated to see his master behaving differently from other white men... getting drunk was normal and pardonable in a white man" (Orwell 60).

Where the British and the Burmese come together in a very intimate manner is again like in Woolf's "A Tale Told by Moonlight" through prostitution of a sort. But where Reynolds dealt with a woman who was quite content to kill herself out of love (or nostalgia) for him after his desertion, in Flory's case, he deals with a woman so malignantly afflicted with the same form of imperial disease that U Po Kyin suffers from. Upon being cast out, which Flory does with great conviction since he wishes to have a relationship that would lead to eventual marriage with Elizabeth, Ma Hla May will not leave without having exercised her full measure of power. Reynolds' relationship with Celestinahami, passive despite all the passion, contained an episode in the life of the Englishman that because of their basic intellectual differences was incompatible with the rest of his life. Overall this is a sort of metaphor for early imperial rule, had the British left early on. Between Flory and Ma Hla May, we see a progression of this metaphor, but in their relationship some power has transferred over to the latter. She recognizes this; Flory recognizes it; U Po Kyin recognizes this and utilizes Ma Hla May to his ends. Unlike Celestinahami, Ma Hla May does not kill herself; instead, it is Flory who has to kill himself in order to obliterate his past. A man of his position, however nebulous he has rendered his social designation in Burma, still

has appearances to keep that will not have been kept should he have lived. It must further be noted that Ma Hla May's insistence on reconnecting with Flory is not out of any affection for him. She, like U Po Kyin, had long since understood the sort of remuneration to be had out of any arrangement with the imperialists; she likes the money to keep herself made up, to gamble and appear superior to her fellow locals because of her being the kept woman of a white man.

Verral, who is foil to that amorphous social quandary that Flory is thrust into with the arrival of Elizabeth, is self-assured, peer-endorsed, and hence endlessly spoken for wherever he goes. He is above reproach; his ultimate desertion of Elizabeth by flouting train schedules and general decency garner from Mrs. Lackersteen, hitherto enamored of him and his polo-playing ways, merely the phrase "a most *odious* young man" and the assertion that she had always known this to be true about the said man (Orwell 268). Mrs. Lackersteen, vulgar and unself-reflexive, like the Empire at its height, switches nonchalantly to Flory again as a match for her hapless niece. While Verral's social caste prevents his being seeing as a villain of any sort, the likes of Flory remain open to censure from all and sundry, the natives and his own people, whose anxiety over being precariously middle-class spills over in hatred for anyone who might act in ways unbecoming. It is not reprehensible for an Englishman of the upper-class to use and discard an English mistress, but it is unpardonable for an English timber merchant to have a local mistress, (and discard her, but for the wrong reasons). Thus, Flory becomes a martyr, barely an instance after he was a hero by saving the club members from the local mob, to save whatever was left of the face of the British community.

Orwell's indictment of the British is searing. The natives, at the edges of that searing spotlight appear as phantasms that threaten to invade and contest that light, even as they pay deference to their masters. Not content with merely attending *kacheri* sessions and waiting on the building steps for the white Hamodoru to make his appearance to have their land disputes

unraveled, they have begun the slow pilgrimage to the European Club in the town. Native lives have been galvanized by the idea of social mobility via, even, at the cost of, the British system of social designation. While this progression has been a theme for the post-Great War milieu of imperial subjects, the imperialists themselves have stagnated considerably, soaking in the gin and gossip of their clubs. The few who recognized the shortfalls of the Empire, such as Flory, are condemned to the fringes as is the doctor educated in Western thought who broaches Empire without accepting its downfalls. The Lackersteens, morally dissolute and clutching at the straws of Empire somehow eke out a living, while Verral, his peerage attributing to him romanticized qualities that he clearly lacks, is just as callous as U Po Kyin when it comes to the using and disposing of people. Elizabeth, who at the outset was to Flory the person whose presence could salvage him in his condition of despair, in her memsahib-in-training persona, wreaks further havoc to his sensibilities. She represents a continuation of the old order struggling to keep a foothold in the world. One of the early critics of *Burmese Days* said of it that it is populated by stock characters. But then the colonial encounter, it must be understood, was gauged in terms of stock characters, Orientals and Occidentals, with barely anything in between, in a perpetual standoff. With such stock characters, Orwell has managed to paint in the ground between the two that always existed from the point of contact but was excluded. What Orwell has achieved through stock characters is thus no less scintillating than if he had made Elizabeth the widowed niece of the Lackersteens instead of the orphaned one.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: COLONIAL SOCIAL INQUIRY

V.S. Naipaul, in *India: A Wounded Civilization*, his dirge for the country, which can (arguably) be extrapolated on to the subcontinent because of shared histories, writes that the novel is a form of social inquiry. Modernism and post-modernism may have done their best to rid the novel of any such office involving a social mandate, but there remains an undercurrent of its nascent purpose in the way we tend to look at them from the present. *Kim* was written on the eve of the British modernist movement, *The Village in the Jungle* sometime during its heyday and *Burmese Days* after its initial output of literature. None of the three novels can be considered modernist; all three are written in prose that highlights the subject rather than the craft, and for the latter two novels highlighting the subject was quite possibly the reason why they were never considered to be great by the modernist mandarins who held court. *Kim*, pro-imperial in days when imperialism was still quite in vogue, was accepted as great at the time, but later dipped in its renown, because it failed in its estimation of non-British humanity. Perhaps by virtue of having been recast as a children's tale to make it more palatable, it still endures as a polemical text. This is so while the social inquiry of both other novels no longer registers on the cultural scale. Obscurity appears to be the lot of the man or woman once in a minority camp of history (who, once a majority has been established therein, are swept up into the prevalent discourse); antagonists live on. Leonard Woolf has been installed as the care giver – respected or reviled as he may be in that capacity – to modernist maven wife Virginia, and George Orwell was adopted by the British only when the audience and he seemed to share common intentions following *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four*.

If a novel is to fulfill a social function, it needs to address itself to a particular problem of society. In *Kim*, one may see how for Kipling there were no social problems; his world, though he may have seen the vibrant colours of India, languishes still in a spectrum of black and white. His readers have to read into the grey scale that he was incapable of articulating in the open. As Edmund Wilson points out, with the good and the bad apparent from the beginning in *Kim*, there is no struggle where ultimate personal trajectories are decided. Kim begins as a “Britisher” with others around him deferring to that fact and believing in some ultimate destiny for him, and the novel ends with Kim as a “Britisher” and believing in his destiny. There has been no great vacillation in character, and one wonders why or how the book was some three hundred pages long. The Sahib’s character is so preordained that he can only attempt to further satiate a need (whose need, I am uncertain) to prove it to himself. When reading Kipling, then, the element of social inquiry is left to the reader to concoct, and it is not difficult considering how jarringly Kipling sets up the power alignments.

All three novels delineate in various measures the Briton, and the Sahib, in the subcontinent. *The Village in the Jungle*, born out of Woolf’s hand at imperial overseeing, projects the Sahib to the verdant jungles to disseminate an artificial law that easily subordinates to the natural laws of the tropics. It is in how much of the Englishman that Woolf leaves out – in *The Village in the Jungle*, the white Hamodoru is like a reclusive, forlorn insect coming out only to dispense some justice to a person who has no need to understand that justice because of where he is situated in the world – that one realizes the argument Woolf raises.

From reading Kipling’s *Plain Tales From the Hills*, the European club set in Simla, where the Mrs. Hauksbees of the world balance the fates of hapless men in office, could be seen, rather unfortunately, as the control room of the Empire – and it may well have been to an unflattering degree; who knows how else one could extend the hand of British law to such out of the way

places. The sahib does little besides drink gin and tea, play tennis and croquet, and wax belligerent complaining of natives that when Woolf encounters their real life counterparts, of which he is part, he is uncertain of his own characterization as a Civil Servant. Thus he plunges to work, while several decades later, an even more dismayed Orwell recreates and reveals the club and the British commune oversees as the undoing of Empire. His sahib, John Flory, is too self-reflexive to ever be the vacuous Briton of some nebulous unerring purpose who also incidentally lacks interiority.

Because Kipling's sahibs looked outside of themselves, they only saw the native (the other) who was not like them, and a civilization that was at odds with theirs. Woolf, as well as Orwell looked inwards and saw shards of others reflected in them, their civilization a less than desirable progression of what they beheld in the foreign; while they may not have appreciated the fact, or that they could see it, they acknowledged them both nonetheless. Woolf, especially, who had heard the disappearing noise of horse hooves on London streets, who harbored a nostalgia for it throughout his life, saw the engulfing nature of civilization as his people saw it (Grossman).

All civilization is veiled primitivism. All perceived primitivism is transitory, influenced and changed by contact with the outside influence of "advanced" technology – railways and guns – and dominant ideologies – capitalism and Christ – and thereby any bemoaning of the state of the barefooted savage is premature on the part of one from an "advanced" status. All conversions happen in good time. The initial contact zone created by the friction of the colonial encounter slowly but surely sweeps over and engulfs the rest of the geography. This friction that engulfs cuts both ways; much in the same way no colonial subject is ever the same again, no colonialist escapes being the subject of colonialism. What the colonialist decides to do with how he or she is subjected to it is theirs to choose, and what Woolf as well as Orwell did to a degree was to circumvent the system from within it by realizing the personal license they attained by their

experience to depict what they witnessed before them. They knew of a process that could not be expedited by creating a seemingly perfect representation of British manhood.

Woolf had fewer contradictions than Orwell and less angst and bravado – he admits to cowardice more than once in *Growing*, but Orwell is very much a progression of Woolf and the anti-imperialist thoughts represented by him. The subjection of the British Civil Servant to the prolonged exposure of Empire breeds two types of officers: its naysayers, thankfully, and its gatekeepers. The troubled conscience of Empire after the First World War and the displacements of power and class structures it affected, all contributed to the making of Orwell; and the dismantling of Empire was also the effective dismantling of Kipling as a social enquirer and the unveiling of his caricatured Briton for posterity.

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