Kipling's Early Gothic Tales: The Dialogical Consciousness of an Imperialist in India

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In his early literary production, Rudyard Kipling wrote a number of gothic tales the intricate ideology of which exceeds his monolithic image as an imperial writer. Founded on a dialogism that simultaneously promotes and defies imperial discourse, these stories, this article argues, can be read as positioning him among those late-Victorian writers, like Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) or George Eliot in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), who cultivated a critical distance towards the Other and their own culture. T. S. Eliot read that critical distance as 'universal foreignness', 'detachment and remoteness', characteristics that make Kipling a writer 'impossible wholly to understand'.[1] In a similar interpretative line, contemporary critic Stephen Arata reads Strickland — a recurring character in Kipling's stories — as an alter ego of his author, one whose 'detachment' and 'perfect objectivity' allowed Britons to understand Indian culture.[2]

Both Eliot and Arata employ the word 'detachment' in relation to Kipling's critical distance. Amanda Anderson has described Victorian 'detachment' as a modern attitude associated with criticism, self-reflexive character, ambivalence, uncertainty, cosmopolitanism, disinterestedness, and aspirations toward universality and objectivity.[3] Although aspiring to conform to universal values has been frequently considered as a part of hegemonic thinking, or of ethnocentric forms of domination over cultural minorities, Anderson argues that 'detachment' was also a position that encouraged analysis and questioning of traditional norms and conventions.[4] Kipling's view of the British Empire in his early gothic tales contain a number of elements that can be seen as aligning with this ambivalent notion. His conscious support of the imperial project was corroded by tensions that arose, potentially from his unstable ideological position. This article is an analysis of that dialectical structure.

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[1] Quoted in Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 151.
[2] Arata, p. 163.
[3] Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001).
[4] Anderson, 'Cosmopolitanism, Universalism, and the Divided Legacies of Modernity', in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 265-89.

The first section of this article focuses on the way that tales like 'The Mark of the Beast', 'The Return of Imray', 'The Sending of Dana Da', 'In the House of Suddhoo', and 'Bubbling Well Road' suggest an attitude that alternatively supports and undermines British imperialism within the framework of religious and supernatural fields. On the one hand, these tales try to explain Indian culture from a British perspective that serves colonial purposes, seeking to degrade and control that culture. However, they also show how Western rationality is defeated by an esoteric otherness. The Other in these stories keeps a mysterious secret, an inaccessible, supernatural, and menacing power that is wielded against British supremacy. In these tales, such a conception affects the imperial discourse in several ways. Firstly, spirituality functions as sort of a battlefield of cultural Indian resistance, where Britishness is vulnerable rather than omnipotent. Secondly, the stories' attitude towards spirituality is framed in Social Darwinist terms, pitting religion against religion in a struggle for power, thereby insinuating that British religious missions, far from being humanitarian in nature, as imperial propaganda insists, are instead an instrument of politics. Finally, civilisation — often presented as a positive outcome of imperialism — is exposed as another form of barbarism involved in a struggle for power.

In the second section, the ideological tension analysed above is read as an ethical problem in 'The Mark of the Beast', 'At the End of the Passage', 'The Broken Link Handicap', 'The Phantom 'Rickshaw', and several journalistic articles. They are critical of what, from the British perspective of Kipling's Protestant work ethic, is depicted as the general disorder of India. Nevertheless, such a position — which reinforces the necessity for imperial tasks — is imploded by a self-critical consciousness of the abusive excesses of that system of values, for both British pioneers and Anglo-Indians who live in adverse conditions. The last section of this article is centred in the inner Self and two dramatic psychological consequences of the previous problems: guilt and fear of revenge from Indians. Both feelings are intense in 'At the End of the Passage' and journalistic articles like 'The House of Shadows' and 'Till the Day Break', which imply that the British Self's conscious commitment to imperial tasks is devoured by its own deep, tormented ideological ambiguities and uncertainties.

In contrast with the later reactionary position that Kipling developed during the Second Boer War (1899-1902) and intensified during the Great War (1914-1918), these tales present a more critical perspective regarding the British intervention in India. Although there is no doubt about his support for the colonial endeavour, his criticism nonetheless also points

out its mistakes and imperfections. His early gothic creations therefore produce such a polyphonic effect within Kipling's early imperialism, and as such, demand analysis.

A Dialogical Reflection on the Supernatural: Between Indian and British Monstrosities

In two letters addressed to R. L. Stevenson in 1891, Henry James calls Kipling 'enfant monster' and 'little black demon'.[5] Both gothic epithets, far from being derogatory and used to keep a safe distance from his otherness, exalt the talent of a new genius of British literature who came from abroad. However, his monstrosity is not only ironic in literary terms; it could be politically convenient for the establishment too. In an unsigned review attributed to Andrew Lang, a number of comments on Kipling's first short-story collection, *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888), highlight its productive use for the imperial task. The reviewer writes, '[i]t may safely be said that *Plain Tales from the Hills* will teach more of India, of our task there, of the various peoples whom we try to rule, than many Blue Books'.[6] Similarly, in 1890, *The Times* celebrated the potential for using Kipling's stories 'to lift the veil from a state of society so immeasurably distant from our own'.[7] For British readers, Kipling's stories offered a necessary knowledge of an Other who was nonetheless at a safe distance from the Self.

Although they were written from within Indian culture, they reproduced for British readers the problematically distant approach of those contemporary 'armchair anthropologists' like E. B. Tylor and James Frazer, who received information about native peoples from abroad and analysed it in the metropolis, developing their ethnocentric interpretations remotely. However, while these stories indicate a fervent wish to know Indian culture, judging it against British values and maintaining a hierarchical distinction, they also criticise British culture, suggesting a kind of internal critical distance. This ideological perspective evident in Kipling's fiction mirrored his own position in India. As an Anglo-Indian, his education, cultural background, and frame of mind were quintessentially British, but he was also immersed in Indian culture, and that experience had a strong influence on his critical view of the British Empire. In other words, he did not have the clear perspective of a cosmopolitan man, inheritor of the Enlightenment project's defence of universal values, acceptance of difference, and objectivity. Kipling, loyal to his Britishness, developed a

[5] Reproduced in *Kipling: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Roger Green (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 68.
[6] *Daily News*, 2 November 1889, in Green, pp. 47-48.
[7] *The Times*, 25 March 1890, in Green, pp. 50-51.

monstrous image of the Other which was supportive of imperialism.[8] However, in doing so, he also revealed imperial monstrosities.

The ideological tension produced by holding these conflicting positions, alternatively critiquing and defending imperialism, arises in the model of Anglo-Indianness offered by Kipling — his character Strickland. Strickland is a cultural hybrid whose knowledge of native customs, in combination with his stereotyped British analytical distance, drives him to solve problems, preserving colonial order. A good example of the use of this character as such an ideologeme is 'The Mark of the Beast' (1885), a tale in which Fleete, a drunken Englishman who offends native devotees of the Monkey-god Hanuman by grinding the ashes of a cigar-butt into the forehead of the god's image, is supernaturally punished for his behaviour.[9] As a policeman who is an expert in Indian culture, Strickland knows in advance how the devotees of the Monkey-god will react; he knows who can cure Fleete when he is mysteriously punished; and he 'knows as much of natives of India as is good for any man'.[10]

This study of the Other, the better that he might be dominated, is an elementary imperial practice. However, the recurring motif in several Kipling's stories of recommending that colonial authorities and common readers should attain such knowledge demonstrates how far the agents of the British Empire were from the native culture. Two non-gothic tales illustrate how Kipling repeats the same idea with the persistence of an imperial mentor who sought both to reflect and fix this problem. In 'Tod's Amendment', it is said that 'no man can tell what natives think unless he mixes with them with the varnish off';[11] and in 'Miss Youghal's Sais', Strickland has the 'extraordinary theory that a Policeman in India should try to know as much about the natives as the natives themselves'.[12] Knowledge is power. That is the reason why '[n]atives hated Strickland; but they were afraid of him. He knew too much.'[13] Through his works, Kipling strove to help readers avoid those mistakes made by people like Fleete or the missing agent of empire in 'The Return of Imray' (1888), who had mysteriously disappeared for several months and is finally found killed (by his servant, we

[8] 'In general, cosmopolitanism endorses reflexive distance from one's cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures and customs, and a belief in universal humanity [...]. In the Enlightenment, it was defined against the constricting allegiances of religion, class, and the state' (Anderson, 'Cosmopolitanism', p. 267).

[9] An ideologeme is a category defined as 'the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes', in Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 76.

[10] Rudyard Kipling, 'The Mark of the Beast', in *Life's Handicap* (London: MacMillan, 1925), pp. 240-59 (p. 240).

[11] Kipling, 'Tod's Amendment', in *Plain Tales from the Hills* (London: Penguin, 1994), pp. 196-204 (p. 199).

[12] Kipling, 'Miss Youghal's Sais', in *Plain Tales*, pp. 27-34 (p. 27).

[13] Kipling, 'Miss Youghal's Sais', p. 29.

eventually learn) in the roof space of his own bungalow, '[s]imply and solely through not knowing the nature of the Oriental [...]'.[14]

Following the tendency of nineteenth-century anthropology, Kipling tried to explain India to his British readers, and in doing so, operated at the service of the ruling classes, offering knowledge that could be employed against native lepers with magic powers, uncanny priests, and conspiring servants who represented a menacing Otherness that threatened the imperial project.[15] In the shadow of the 1857 Mutiny, British rule in India strongly emphasised duty to the Crown and distrust of the native inhabitants. Kipling's writing undeniably participated in the view of them as inscrutable and sinister, projecting an uncanny image of their country which accentuated the dominant jingoism of the age.

At the same time, it is possible to read his gothic tales as offering a view of India that works against rather than with such ideologies, deconstructing imperial values. In 'The Mark of the Beast', for instance, gothic conventions seem to work at the service of the conservative agenda. Nevertheless, its first paragraph hints at ideological ambiguities, suggesting a certain awareness of the religious and geopolitical complexities of the Indian situation, one that damages imperial propaganda:

> East of Suez, some hold, the direct control of Providence ceases; Man being there handed over to the power of the Gods and Devils of Asia, and the Church of England Providence only exercising an occasional and modified supervision in the case of Englishmen.

Kipling creates an Eastern territory beyond Suez that is outside of *direct*, constant, and unmodified *control* on the part of English spiritual powers. British religious principles *cease* in India, while moral and cultural restrictions are *modified* there. Such a gothic construction of the Eastern world, less enlightened than Protestantism and more inclined to supernatural forms of belief, in many ways appears to conform perfectly to Said's concept of Orientalism as a Western representation of its repressed desires and imperial ambitions.[16] However, I would argue that Kipling is in fact conscious of this process, alternating messages that establish this Orientalising impulse with others that criticise it from a Protestant ethical standpoint. Indeed, his stories frequently display a man-of-the-world cynicism which deconstructs both positions — British imperialism and Indianness — making it very difficult to determine their ideological status.

[14] Kipling, 'The Return of Imray', in *Life's Handicap*, pp. 240-59 (p. 276).
[15] See George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press/Macmillan, 1987).
[16] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).

Kipling's work also employs more direct means than this to undermine the imperial project. The previous quotation indicates that religions are mechanisms of control, in which Gods, Devils, and sacred principles operate as instruments of political power. It insinuates that Eastern and Western Gods are constructed as human creations, central to the struggle for territory. This view has two negative consequences for imperial discourse. Firstly, the implied similarity between Eastern and Western gods destroys the hierarchical relationship created by imperialism, a move which makes possible the colonisation of peoples in the name of an ostensibly superior religious order. Secondly, while imperialism masquerades as a civilising mission, the above quotation exposes Western political-religious power, spread by propaganda, as the real driving force, a point reinforced by the tale's epigraph: 'Your Gods and my Gods — do you or I know which are the stronger? — *Native Proverb*'.[17] These words anticipate the extremely violent behaviour of the story's British characters against native people: in the beginning, Fleete desecrates the Monkey-god, is bitten by a native leper priest, and then behaves as if possessed; at the end, Strickland and the narrator force the priest by torture to remove the spell he has cast on Fleete and the demented man returns to sanity. There is no imperial civilising mission in those behaviours, but plain barbarism. In addition, the epigraph effectively subverts the idea of an omnipotent imperial god by giving the voice of the subjugated culture a position of authority, through using one of its proverbs as a motto and a central motif for the story as a whole. Arguably, the Indian side of Kipling's awareness emerges here, inverting the colonial hierarchical relationship, and his Social Darwinism shows religions struggling for existence, like Nietzschean truths, metaphorical creations which mask a desperate human's will to power.[18] In contrast to the missionary discourse which positions Christian interventions as philanthropic, for the benefit of colonised people, both the epigraph and these tales effectively sabotage the sovereign and pacifying image of Christianity as a quasi-divine decision imposed by Great Britain to civilise those it has colonised.[19]

However, it would be a mistake to take an epigraph or even an individual tale as ultimate proof of Kipling's anti-hegemonic religious cosmopolitanism. In the struggle between cultural forces both in his stories and his own psyche, his declared loyalty to the

[17] 'The Mark of the Beast', in *Life's Handicap*, p. 240.
[18] See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968); and *Beyond Good and Evil* (London: Penguin, 2003). The bellicose conception of religions is reproduced in 'The Lost Legion' (1892), when a native officer asks Lieutenant Halley, 'how can the ghosts of unbelievers prevail against us who are of the Faith?' (Kipling, 'The Lost Legion', in *Many Inventions*, pp. 182-99 (p. 197)).
[19] See Robert H. MacDonald, *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism, 1880-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

Church of England undeniably establishes a strong conservative position against all powers of external spiritual resistance.[20] An example of this is 'The Sending of Dana Da' (1888), a parody of Theosophy whose tone of mockery is evident from the first sentence: 'Once upon a time, some people in India made a new Heaven and a new Earth out of the broken teacups, a missing brooch or two, and a hairbrush.'[21] The narrator ridicules here the 'supernatural' materialisations allegedly manipulated by Madame Blavatsky, co-founder of the Theosophical Society, which was wildly fashionable in England during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.[22] In addition, Kipling's critique of non-Christian beliefs is also made clear in the extremely ecumenical character of the creed professed by Dana Da, its spiritual leader. Like Theosophy, '[t]his religion was too elastic for ordinary use'.[23] As the story indicates, it is depicted as a mix of chaotic, flippant, and unconvincing doctrines linked with the dissipated consumption of opium and whisky, tricks to get money, and practices to scare people. Kipling's narrative voice appeals again in this story to the authority of a native proverb, but this time to reinforce the imperial system and dismiss non-Christian religious practices, a strategy that positions the colonised Other in ideological agreement with the imperial Self to which s/he submits. The story's epigraph reads, '[w]hen the Devil rides on your chest, remember the low-caste man'.[24] The reactionary message of this epigraph, in which any evil is categorically attributed to a marginalised, endogamous, and hereditary low social class, is rendered even stronger when the story insinuates that that 'Devil' is Dana Da, called the 'Native', a false prophet who cheats an Englishman. The story, unlike others by Kipling, presents 'native' religion as false and exploitative.

The topic of treachery perpetrated by the natives is taken up again in 'In the House of Suddhoo' (1888), the epigraph of which ironically introduces India as 'the Oldest Land/ Wherein the Powers of Darkness range'.[25] Suddhoo is an old man very anxious about his son, who is gravely ill with pleurisy and lives far away from him. A seal-cutter undertakes to save his son by magic, on payment of many rupees, and Suddhoo accepts it. The story is narrated by his British friend, a potential Lieutenant-Governor who witnesses the clean *jadoo* practiced to remove the pleurisy that attacks Suddhoo's son, and describes this ritual of 'white' magic as oscillating between suspected fraud and credibility. Finally, however, most

[20] See Charles Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 138.
[21] Kipling, 'The Sending of Dana Da', in *Soldiers Three* (London: MacMillan, 1965), pp. 308-21 (p. 308).
[22] See Mark Bevir, 'The West Turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 62.3 (1994), 747-67.
[23] Kipling, 'The Sending of Dana Da', p. 308.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Kipling, 'In the House of Suddhoo', in *Plain Tales*, pp. 144-54 (p. 144).

of the tricks are dismantled and the powers of darkness (with which even this 'white' magic is associated) are illuminated by reason. Once again, Kipling has developed a story which clearly depicts the natives as Orientalised, malevolent tricksters, out to defraud everybody.

In both tales, the resolution of the tension between fraudulence and authenticity, supernatural experience and rational explanation, and believing in the Other and distrusting him/her is clear. Kipling dissolves the tension by giving a reasonable or empirical explanation for strange events. Formally, then, his ends are monologic and conservative, calming British anxieties and preserving the established colonial order. However, ambiguities transcend this apparent drive towards determination in his gothic fiction. Behind the sarcastic tone of his rhetoric decrying false supernatural displays, it is possible to detect a crouching fear of a genuine paranormal Indian culture, impenetrable to the Western analytical mind. It does not matter that he closes 'The Mark of the Beast' by stating that 'no one will believe a rather unpleasant story […] it is well known to every right-minded man that the gods of the heathen are stone and brass, and any attempt to deal with them otherwise is justly condemned'.[26] The doubt previously developed in the story is itself subversive here; specifically, the representation of the imperial project in the story as a whole implies a cracked system, built on shaky convictions, which cannot be repaired by these final, conventional words. Fleete is supernaturally punished for his sacrilegious behaviour against the Monkey-god's image, and the story does not offer any convincing alternative, rational explanation. After the insulting transgression of the Englishman, a leper attacks him and leaves a mark on his breast that, it is intimated, is the cause of his gradual metamorphosis into a beast. 'The affair was beyond any human and rational experience. I tried to say "Hydrophobia", but the word wouldn't come, because I knew that I was lying', says the narrator, accepting that the historic medical name for rabies was a false diagnostic, incapable of explaining such an eerie case.[27] To emphasise further the strength of the supernatural in the text, the same leper who initially attacked him finally cures Fleete and expels the evil spirit from him. By contrast, Dr Dumoise fails in his diagnosis, a failure which underlines the story's insistence upon the impotence of Western rationality as paradigm of civilisation and progress, and the power of the native supernatural culture.

As announced in the tale's epigraph, the supernatural should be read here as standing in for a conflict between cultural forces, a political tension within which a latent indigenous power works in the shadows of British supremacy. Behind the obedient attitude of a leper

[26] Kipling, 'The Mark of the Beast', in *Life's Handicap*, p. 259.
[27] Kipling, 'The Mark of the Beast', p. 251.

priest who is obliged by torture to remove the evil spirit from a British man; a false prophet like Dana Da who pretends to place a curse to an enemy chosen by an Englishman; or the tricky white magic made by an apparently trustworthy seal-cutter before the eyes of an assumed Lieutenant-Governor, is a subversive esoteric force, a code unintelligible to British rationality, and the risk of an unpredictable uprising.[28] The supernatural, then, is a metaphorical representation of a colonised collective might which transcends the sphere of religion and menaces the imperial establishment; it is both epistemological and potentially political. To this end, Kipling's strategy is to animalise and demonise that power. The Monkey-god, the leper mewing before his attack to Fleete, and a group of horses that are frightened by the bestialised Englishman are testimonies of the colonised's animality; the Judeo-Christian figurations of the leper as impurity and the beast as the Devil indicate the colonised's diabolism. Animalised and demonised, the supernatural native force is the manifestation of the imperial fear of popular rebellion, a motif which re-appears persistently in a number of Kipling's tales.

In 'In the House of Suddhoo', for instance, the 'Powers of Darkness' mentioned in the epigraph are linked with a potential subversive act against the colonial system, for 'there was an order of the *Sirkar* against magic, because it was feared that magic might one day kill the Empress of India'.[29] In 'The Sending of Dana Da', the cheating of an Englishman by the Native, a low-caste spiritual leader, should be read as metonymically connoting a wider social scale. All these characters are ideologically built as social bodies. Beyond their individuality, some of their recurrent characteristics embody Indian culture, as is made evident by another outcast, in 'Bubbling Well Road' (1888), who represents a further inversion of power. We are told, '[h]e is a one-eyed man and carries, burnt between his brows, the impress of two copper coins. Some say he was tortured by a native prince in the old days.'[30] Although he is a priest, he is a man socially marked and discriminated against. The villagers stone him. Like the priest in 'The Mark of the Beast', whose body is tortured with red-hot iron gun-barrels by two British men and also has the disfiguring skin sores of leprosy, the priest in 'Bubbling Well Road' bears the mark of Otherness on his body. Both of

[28] Homi Bhabha explains that the 'incalculable native' was a problem in the discourses of the coloniser's literature and legality. The native represented a frustration of that nineteenth-century strategy of surveillance which tried to dominate the 'calculable' individual, but his indecipherability was also useful, allowing him to be depicted as an inverted Other justifying both the imposition of Western progress, and the coloniser's paranoia. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995).
[29] Kipling, 'In the House of Suddhoo', in *Plain Tales*, p. 146.
[30] Kipling, 'Bubbling Well Road', in *Life's Handicap*, pp. 365-70 (p. 364).

them have a kind of stigma, but they also exert an esoteric power from their humiliating positions as pariahs. The narrator states,

> The villagers told me that the patch of grass was full of devils and ghosts, all in the service of the priest, and that men and women and children had entered it and have never returned. They said the priest used their livers for purposes of witch-craft.[31]

However, perhaps the best example of the relationship between paranormal experiences, native submission, and rebellion is 'The Return of Imray'. The mystery of Imray — an employee of the Empire who has disappeared inexplicably — is solved when his loyal native servant, who it is revealed is responsible for his death, confesses the cause of the crime: Imray apparently cast an evil eye upon his child, who died as a result. The native servant's revenge springs from a cultural clash that provokes the narrator to reflect on a similarity with his own situation. As soon as he discovers that the servant had been living for four years with Imray, the narrator remarks, 'I shuddered. My own servant had been with me for exactly that length of time. When I went over to my own room I found my man waiting, impassive as the copper head of a penny, to pull off my boots.'[32] The image of a servant pulling off the boots of the coloniser, after Imray's unexpected murder at the hands of his own faithful servant, hints at a supposedly submissive, unintelligible culture in a germinal state of rebellion. This epiphanic moment suddenly reveals a foreign code in which the word 'impassive', denoting outward submissiveness, does not necessarily imply agreement, acceptance, or capitulation. The narrator recognises it here as a form of resistance and the prelude to an outbreak of violence. At this crucial moment, terror is projected onto British readers and the political significance of the image is experienced through their identification with the narrator and Imray.

However, the conservative construction of a frightening and menacing Other in these tales — which is useful to degrade Indian culture and maintain a hierarchical colonial order — is counterbalanced by constructions of the British Self that undermine the promulgated image of that Self. For instance, the way that the agents of the Empire control Otherness in 'The Mark of the Beast' is even more terrifying and barbarian than the picture of the Other. Fleete is the 'civilised beast' who embodies British arrogance, its abusive, insulting, and hegemonic attitude towards the Other, just as Strickland and the narrator, his friend, perform their own acts of brutality. They torture the leper and oblige him to cure a possessed Fleete:

[31] Kipling, 'Bubbling Well Road', p. 370.
[32] Kipling, 'The Return of Imray', in *Life's Handicap*, p. 276.

> Strickland wrapped a towel round his hand and took the gun-barrels out of the fire […]. I understood then how men and women and little children can endure to see a witch burnt alive; for the beast was moaning on the floor, and though the Silver Man had no face, you could see horrible feelings passing through the slab that took its place, exactly as waves of the heat play across red-hot iron-gun-barrels for instance.[33]

Later, although the narrator says that they 'had [been] disgraced […] as Englishmen for ever', his negative moral reaction is immediately overcome by an atmosphere of joy, in which he 'laughed and gasped and gurgled just as shamefully as Strickland'.[34] Suddenly, they respond frivolously to their own transgressions, and their use of a perverted violence to defend invasive conduct on the part of the coloniser is ultimately legitimised. The story's ending, which expresses a self-critical consciousness, can also be read as echoing the cynical voice of the establishment: 'Some years later, when Strickland had married and was a church-going member of society for his wife's sake, we reviewed the incident dispassionately, and Strickland suggested that I should put it before the public.'[35] In these words, there is no shame at all. On the contrary, Strickland says that the facts can and indeed should be shown to the public. Although Fleete is the first aggressor, the narration shows him as a victim whose suffering vindicates the torture of the Other. It is a position founded on an implicit argument: that British barbarism is justified by the influence of a barbarian context. Consequently, in line with the precept uttered by Strickland, these 'barbarians' are attacked using 'their own weapons'.[36] In addition, Strickland's injunction that the narrator should view the 'incident dispassionately' avoids any moral responsibility on the part of the torturers, recasting an extremely violent situation as an interesting affair from which the narrator must maintain a rational distance. In this case, the use of distance is far from progressive. It operates at the service of the established hierarchy between colonisers and degraded colonised people. Kipling's dialogical consciousness seems to have moved from a cosmopolitan view to a conservative position, in which terror operates as both a warning to protect the imperial status quo, and as a validation of its excesses.[37]

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[33] Kipling, 'The Mark of the Beast', in *Life's Handicap*, pp. 255-56.
[34] Kipling, 'The Mark of the Beast', p. 258.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Kipling, 'The Mark of the Beast', p. 244.
[37] It is perhaps because of that strong message that the tale was initially rejected for publication in England. Andrew Lang and William Sharp read it in 1886. Lang returned the manuscript defining it as 'poisonous stuff' which had 'left an extremely disagreeable impression' on his mind; and Sharp claimed: 'I would strongly recommend you instantly to burn this detestable piece of work.' See Lord Birkenhead, *Rudyard Kipling* (London: Star Book, 1980).

Up to this point, it has been demonstrated how his stories reveal, firstly, a defence of the imperial project of gathering information about the Indian Other, conceived as a subservient, indecipherable, and menacing beast, and of developing a critical representation of its supernatural beliefs; secondly, an analytical approach to religions as instruments of power, which damages the construction of the imperial endeavour as a spiritual mission; and finally, a frank depiction of British abuses against the Indian Other, narrated in such an ambiguous, ironic tone that the stories could be denouncing or confirming a bestial imperial policy. All these aspects are, as the next section demonstrates, part of an ideological conflict.

A Dialogical Reflection on the Productive Order: Between the Indian Social Hell and the Hellish Imperial Work Ethic

Tensions between Kipling's self-critical consciousness and his defence of conservative values in political-religious questions are reproduced in the depiction of moral and economically productive issues in his gothic stories. Like 'The Mark of the Beast', 'At the End of the Passage' (1890) was published in England as Kipling suffered a nervous exhaustion caused by overwork.[38] In this tale, British imperialism in India is examined through the perspectives of a number of agents of the empire who are charged with a number of different tasks: Mottram works on the Indian Survey, Lowndes in the Civil Service, Dr Spurstow is a medical doctor, and Hummil is an assistant engineer. They live at some distance from each other, and meet once a week to enjoy themselves in Hummil's house.

Their rambling conversation alights on the native ineptitude for administration and the extreme social inequalities resulting from an Indian archaic system of taxation exerted on the poor for the benefit of a minority: 'The state of the people is enough to make you sick. I've known the taxmen wait by a milch-camel till the foal was born and then hurry off the mother for arrears.'[39] India, as these men depict it in their conversation, is a hell on earth. Its tremendous social inequality, human exploitation, and rampant illnesses 'don't incite a man to shoot anything except himself'; its excessive hot weather and resultant sleeplessness drive men mad; and its allegedly deceitful, unreliable natives multiply dangers everywhere.[40] No-one wins in this situation, not even the coloniser. All these reasons work as implicit arguments to explain the possible suicide of Jevins, a sub-contractor mentioned during the conversation between the four men, which seems to anticipate Hummil's mysterious death at the end of the story. Both are victims of their context. Their alienating solitude is the result of

[38] Carrington, p. 164.
[39] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', in *Life's Handicap*, pp. 183-212 (p. 187).
[40] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 188.

a complex, confusing, and indefinable natural and cultural environment summarised in another story, 'Thrown Away' (1888), in these words:

> Now India is a place beyond all others where one must not take things too seriously […]. Good work does not matter, because a man is judged by his worst output […]. Bad work does not matter, because other men do worse, and incompetents hang on longer in India than anywhere else […]. Sickness does not matter, because it's all in the day's work, and if you die, another man takes over your place and your office in the eight hours between death and burial.[41]

The narrator reinforces the image of India as a general chaos that affects Anglo-Indians educated in Great Britain if they take it too seriously. Here, critique centres on Indian inefficiency in a context of sickness and death which tacitly seems to contrast with the esteemed British work ethic. But furthermore, many of Kipling's gothic tales focus on what they see as the general moral corruption of India. In 'The Broken Link Handicap' (1888), we are told that 'all racing is rotten […]. In India, in addition to its inherent rottenness, it has the merit of being two-thirds sham.'[42] 'The Bisara of Poree' (1887) describes an amulet that has to be stolen to give good luck, otherwise it has the opposite effect. All these episodes are used to construct an Otherness whose hyperbolic disorder, inefficiency, illness, and immorality perturb most of Kipling's British narrators and characters. From their imperial conservatism, the Other appears as a sign of some kind of evil. And although that evil sometimes acquires the form of paradisiacal landscapes, these landscapes also harbour typhoid fever and cholera, sinister places for the agents of Empire.

The gothic sublime therefore operates in Kipling's work as a rhetorical figure of the rejection of Indian nature. In 'At the End of the Passage', the 'winds of Hell' in the Himalayan epigraph connote death.[43] 'In Error' (1887) shows the jungle as the cause of insanity. Through the image of a man lost in a jungle-grass inhabited by a menacing priest, 'Bubbling Well Road' condenses the paranoid fear of the British, self-immersed and disoriented in the indecipherable Indian universe. A similar feeling is confessed by Kipling in *Something to Myself* when he says, 'I have always felt the menacing darkness of tropical eventide, as I have loved the voices of night-winds through palm or bananas leaves, and the song of the tree-frogs'.[44] Fear in these stories comes from his impression of India as a country

[41] Kipling, 'Thrown Away', in *Plain Tales*, pp. 15-26 (pp. 16-17).
[42] Kipling, 'The Broken Link Handicap', in *Plain Tales*, pp. 163-70 (pp. 163-64).
[43] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p.183.
[44] Carrington, pp. 13-14.

in which 'the bounds of the Possible are put down'.[45] This theme is also explored in 'The Phantom 'Rickshaw' (1888), where a ghostly story of love and guilt is used to portray the country as saturated with death and unreasonableness. As depicted in all these stories, a lack of order and logic reaches deep into the culture, torturing the impotent British rationality, making the main characters yearn to escape back to the homeland.

As these examples indicate, Kipling's early gothic fictions develop an image of India as a Dantesque nightmare, a chaotic, confusing, irrational, corrupted, unhealthy, and unjust milieu. In his work as a journalist, Kipling often enlarged the same hellish picture in more realistic — though no less intense — ways. Some sketches written for the *Civil and Military Gazette* exemplify this tendency. In 'The City of the Evil Countenances' (1885), he describes Peshawur in the following terms:

> you shall see a scene worthy almost of a place in the Inferno, for the city is unlovely even beneath bright sunshine […] everywhere repulsive to every sense […]. Faces of dogs, swine, weazles [*sic*] and goats, all the more hideous for being set on human bodies, and lighted with human intelligence, gather in front of the ring of lamp-light where they may be studied for half an hour at a stretch. Pathans, Afreedees, Logas, Kohistanis, Turkomans, and a hundred other varieties of the turbulent Afghan race, are gathered in the vast human menagerie between the Gate and the Ghor Khutri. As an Englishman passes, they will turn to scowl upon him, and in many cases to spit fluently on the ground after he has passed […]. The main road teems with magnificent scoundrels and handsome ruffians; all giving the on-looker the impression of wild beasts held back from murder and violence, and chafing against the restraint. The impression may be wrong […] but not unless thin lips, scowling brows, deep set vulpine eyes and lineaments stamped with every brute passion known to man, go for nothing.[46]

This passage is loaded with strong ideological assumptions. Peshawur is described here as a repulsive 'Inferno' in order to highlight the chronicler's British good sense and subtly to associate Indian evil with another kind of Otherness: that one represented by hell in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In addition, the intertextual relationship between this journalistic sketch and the creation of an Italian Catholic of the Middle Ages is also useful to mark an ideological and temporal distance between two archaic cultures — the here-related Catholic and Indian ones — and modern, evolved, imperial values represented by a rational Protestant Englishman of the nineteenth century. Very quickly, his initial sensation of repugnance for the environment is emphasised by an awareness of social disorder and a derogatory view of

[45] Kipling, 'By Word of Mouth', in *Plain Tales*, pp. 318-24 (p. 318).
[46] Kipling, 'The City of the Evil Countenances', in *Kipling's India: Uncollected Sketches 1884-88*, ed. by Thomas Pinney (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 81-85 (pp. 83-84).

the Other, articulated via animalistic descriptions. Afghans are not recognised here as complete human beings. Linked to animals associated with 'darkness' — which connotes immoral behaviour — they are studied under the light of a lamp, and revealed in all their supposed ill-mannered repulsiveness. The journalist's light of reason teaches the reader that 'the turbulent Afghan race' is dangerous not only in its multiplicity, but also in its behaviour. In the clash between natives and an Englishman synthesised by the act of spiting, the journalist, with his civilised eyes, scrutinises and studies the resentment and 'brute passion' of the barbarian Other, the signs of which are evident on the latter's body. The journalist's physiognomic discourse thereby reduces natives to the category of 'wild beasts'. They are part of a melting pot of races and cultures whose disordered plurality makes British management an ongoing difficulty. It is clear how this journalistic piece reproduces the same extremely conservative, derogatory view of Indian culture already analysed in his early gothic fictions.

Other sketches add further to the sense of repugnance evident in the picture of India built up across Kipling's writings. 'Typhoid at Home' (1885), for example, is about the unhealthy conditions in which milk is collected.[47] 'A Week in Lahore' (1884) is a complaint about the incompetence of railway Indian workers, for '[n]ative passengers are stupid, troublesome — anything you like — but they ought to be treated more like human beings than they are'.[48] 'The Epics of India' (1886), another journalistic piece, is a furious attack against Hindu mythology, whose creations are 'monstrous, painted in all the crude colours that a barbaric hand can apply; moved by machinery that would be colossal if were it not absurd, and placed in all their doings beyond the remotest pale of human sympathy'.[49] Finally, in 'Anglo-Indian Society' (1887), he asserts, '[t]here is not society in India as we understand the word. There are not books, no pictures, no conversations worth listening to for recreation's sake.'[50] There is no doubt, therefore, that a Eurocentric perspective on Indian cultural manners is the dominant discourse both in Kipling's fictions and non-fictions.

Coming from the position of authority that can be attributed to Kipling's British background, his fictions and sketches attest that his approach to India is fervently critical, and imperialism, these writings suggest, is a necessary humanitarian action to secure its progress. On this point, Dr Spurtsow's remark about the hopeless situation of people with black cholera in 'At the End of the Passage' is significant for its imperial connotations. He states, 'the poor

[47] Kipling, 'Typhoid at Home', in Pinney, pp. 69-77 (p. 71).
[48] Kipling, 'A Week in Lahore', in Pinney, pp. 31-36 (p. 34).
[49] Kipling, 'The Epics of India', in Pinney, pp. 175-70 (p. 177).
[50] Kipling, 'Anglo-Indian Society', in Pinney, pp. 184-93 (p. 186).

devils look at you as though you ought to save them'.[51] This implies an assumption of British superiority by the colonial subject, who sees the coloniser as a saviour, bringing salvation to suffering people, and establishes a mission for the coloniser (in this case a medical doctor) that transcends the limits of his specific duties — here, medicine. Pictured as a humanitarian cause, colonised people who trust its guidance and power demand that imperialism improve their lives, and those demands are, we are told, met by the colonisers, which means a hard moral duty for colonisers and a reinforcement of colonial hierarchical relationships. These writings imply a belief in a world separated and ranked, where Britons join Britons, and close (and therefore inappropriate) relationships between colonisers and subjects are punished by poetic justice. This ideological position is clearly evident in the first two lines of 'The Ballad of East and West' (1889), in which Kipling writes, '[o]h, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet/ Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat'.[52]

Both 'The Mark of the Beast' and 'At the End of the Passage' exemplify this attitude. They focus on Britons who come together from remote places to share a small part of Western life in uncomfortable India, and represent the British Self isolated within a submitted foreign culture, where their relationships with natives are developed on the basis of irreducible conflicts. In 'At the End of the Passage', British citizens make nostalgic references to Great Britain and sing songs with ironic allusions to their distressing experiences far away from home, as a way of recovering the past and imposing it upon the present. Beyond the hint of parody of this kind of attitude in the narration, the characters represent the collective reaction of a minoritarian hegemonic social group surrounded by an overwhelming and intimidating Otherness. Other gothic tales present the British community as a circle of self-protection, which results in the imperial bureaucratic system. In 'The Return of Imray', for instance, the 'Indian Empire' is a network of information from which it is difficult to disappear without leaving tell-tale signs. This theme is taken up again in 'The Phantom 'Rickshaw', in which the narrator announces that '[o]ne of the few advantages that India has over England is a great Knowability'.[53] After twenty years, says the narrator, a man 'knows something about every Englishman in the Empire'.[54] Within the Dantesque Indian inferno of illness, ugliness, disorder, inefficiency, and mysterious and treacherous religious

[51] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', in *Life's Handicap*, p.188.
[52] Quoted in Carrington, p. xix.
[53] Kipling, 'The Phantom 'Rickshaw', in *Indian Tales* (New York: Dodge Publishing Company, 1899), pp. 609-47 (p. 609).
[54] Ibid.

practices, the British community has developed a system in which everyone is seen by everyone, and sees everyone in turn.

This social behaviour is much more than a mechanism of control produced by a bureaucratic system, however. Kipling also conceives it as *esprit de corps*, a collective moral attitude that allows the English in India to overcome adversity. That said, even such cultural and emotional support is not enough for Britons seeking to live in India. Individuals must develop a psychological strength without emotional sensitivity, and even lose their sense of human values, it seems, if they want to survive there. In 'At the End of the Passage', for instance, the context of spiritual and physical death represented by black cholera and suicides that arises from the chat between the four agents of Empire seems to have generated a state of indifference, a desire to ignore any emotional implication. After Dr Spurstow narrates what seems to be Jevin's suicide, Mottram says, '[y]ou're a queer chap […]. If you'd killed the man yourself you couldn't have been more quiet about the business', to which Hummil calmly responds, '[g]ood Lord! What does it matter? […] I've got to do a lot of his overseeing work in addition to my own. I'm the only person that suffers.'[55] Spurstow and Hummil's egotism in the face of their friend's death can be seen as a mechanism of self-defence, helping them shore up a moral fervour that encourages them to face harsh environments, difficult conditions, and extreme loneliness. We get a sense of this attitude towards living and working in India when Spurstow asks Mottram,

> 'What are you doing with yourself generally?' 'Sitting under a table in the tent and spitting on the sextant to keep it cool', said the man of the survey. 'Washing my eyes to avoid ophthalmia, which I shall certainly get, and trying to make a sub-surveyor understand that an error of five degrees in an angle isn't quite so small as it looks. I'm altogether alone, y' know […].'[56]

At the core of Mottram's words is an imperialist ethics founded on Darwinist rhetoric. The idea of the survival of the fittest is transplanted here into the moral domain, where barbarism is a positive challenge that strengthens civilisation, and life in the British dominions is a reinforcement of 'the moral fibre in little matters of life and death'.[57]

An intense autobiographical experience mirrors the attitudes on display in Kipling's gothic fiction in this regard. Toughened by the cruelty of the Victorian public school he attended, Kipling sought to prove his 'moral fibre' by working as a journalist in India. There,

[55] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', in *Life's Handicap*, p.191.
[56] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 189.
[57] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 201.

surrounded by outbreaks of cholera and typhoid, suffering gastric pains, fever, and the effects of drugs compounded from opium, he worked seven hard years for the machinery of Empire, defending that most imperial of virtues — duty. Kipling recalls this time in *Something of Myself*, in which he writes,

> the work was heavy. I represented fifty per cent of the 'editorial staff' of the one daily paper of the Punjab […]. I never worked less than ten hours and seldom more than fifteen per diem; and as our paper came out in the evening did not see the midday sun except on Sundays. I had fever too, regular and persistent, to which I added for a while chronic dysentery.[58]

Kipling transforms this account of hardship into a moral message by asserting that he was 'spared the worst horrors, thanks to the pressure of work, a capacity for being able to read, and the pleasure of writing what my head was filled with'.[59] In his code of values, work is salvation, a form of action that he opposes to scepticism and nihilism. On this principle he establishes the other foundation of his ethics, which is *order*. By means of his actions, man should cooperate in the development of a moral order, which will then, ideally, lend support to the imperial project. If India is a mess, as the gothic tales imply, then the British Empire represents civilisation as a project defined by *order* and *progress*.

However, at the same time as fortifying the British Empire's pristine image, Kipling also illuminates its disturbing side, especially in his fictions. The dialogic structure of 'At the End of the Passage' effectively critiques the imperial task, within the framework of the 'approved' ethics of work and order outlined above. The story levels disapproval, not only at the native feudal system, which is presented as a form of exploitation, but also at imperialism, which is depicted in a fictional English newspaper article as a sham operation designed purely for abusing Indians so that the English aristocracy might benefit. The article states,

> I assert unhesitatingly that the Civil Service in India is the preserve — the pet preserve — of the aristocracy of England. What does the democracy — what do the masses — get from that country, which we have step by step fraudulently annexed? I answer, nothing whatever. It is farmed with a single eye to their own interests by the scions of the aristocracy […] they themselves force the unhappy peasant to pay with the sweat of his brow for all the luxuries in which they are lapped.[60]

[58] Kipling, *Something of Myself and Other Autobiographical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 27.
[59] Kipling, *Something of Myself*, p. 39.
[60] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 186.

This 'unhappy peasant', and the young prince who has 'been taught all the vices of the English' and irresponsibly wastes the money earned by his subjects, represent the imperial alliance between a native traditional feudal system and the British dominant classes.[61] Specifically, Kipling's social concern focuses on the system of exploitation of British workers. When Hummil says that a 'man hasn't many privileges in this country', justifying the decision of a man to commit suicide, his generalisation denounces a system in which he is also a victim.[62] The ghost who appears, significantly, before Hummil's mysterious death, is rationally explained, since the spectre behaves 'as is the use of all spectres that are born of overwork'.[63] Death by overworking is, we are being told, common in India. The case is echoed by 'The Phantom 'Rickshaw'. According to Doctor Heatherlegh, Pansay — a man who sees the phantom of a lover he has abandoned — is another victim of the system: 'Overwork started his illness, kept it alight, and killed him, poor devil. Write him off to the System — one man to take the work of two and a half men.'[64]

It is unquestionable, then, that Kipling was aware of the terrible consequences of imperialism as a part of the machinery of capitalism. His stories demonstrate how human beings are used as instruments of control and production, as gears of a system of exploitation fuelled by a brutal work ethic that is buttressed by the very attitudes that Kipling himself espouses in his non-fiction. However, it is also important to consider Hummil's assertion in 'At the End of the Passage': 'It's an insult to the intelligence of the Deity to pretend we're anything but tortured rebels.'[65] He pronounces it at a crucial moment in the story, after saying he has not slept properly for days and has been afflicted by fearful dreams, just before his mysterious death. His self-critical consciousness here assumes his responsibility in the imperial task, and reveals the false heroic image reified by the colonisers, which ultimately leads to their own victimisation. Nonetheless, despite this critical approach to imperialism, the tale finishes by defending a system of exploitation based on constructing the work ethic as salvation. After Hummil's death, Dr Spurstow says, 'Go back to work. I've written my certificate. We can't do any more good here, and work'll keep our wits together.'[66] His words indicate a fundamental ambivalence at the heart of Kipling's writing, which consists in the defence of a work ethic that sustains the imperial endeavour, but which he also criticised because it negatively affects its workers.

[61] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 188.
[62] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 191.
[63] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 206.
[64] Kipling, 'The Phantom 'Rickshaw', in *Indian Tales*, p. 611.
[65] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 195.
[66] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 211.

A Dialogical Reflection on the Unconscious: Between Escapism and the Nightmare of a Sleepless Awareness

Despite the ideological commitment evident in some of his writings — in which the work ethic was fundamental for the development of imperialism — Kipling's work also offers corrosive critiques of mistakes committed by the British establishment. 'At the End of the Passage', for instance, can be read as containing some signs of the coloniser's guilty conscience, since he is aware of his role in a wider system which harms both him and the colonised Other. Apparently, Hummil's sleeplessness is a result of a personal conflict silenced by the story. However, significantly, the 'return of the repressed' is associated with a specific place, which emerges as the source of his torment:

> 'A place, — a place down there', said Hummil. '[…] Good God! I've been afraid of it for months past, Spurstow. It has made every night hell to me; and yet I'm not conscious of having done anything wrong.'[67]

If people's hard lives in the story are considered, then that place 'down there' could be a representation of India, as it appears in Hummil's hallucination. The 'hell' suffered by him 'every night' is the guilt implied when he says he is 'not conscious of having done anything wrong'. Hummil's insomnia can therefore be read as a manifestation of an awareness of wrongdoings on the part of the colonisers in general, an awareness which makes him feel alert, culpable, and from which it is impossible to escape — except through death. He has, in effect, become a collective body. Jevin's suicide can thus be seen as anticipation of Hummil's death, and Spurstow's identification with the warnings signs observed in the latter make possible the projection of the two men's situations and sensations onto a broader social scale. When, after the first dose of morphia (*sic*) given to Hummil, he says that he can't get away from his nightmares, and Spurstow says to his patient, 'I've felt it myself. The symptoms are exactly as you describe', it becomes clear that Hummil's culpability transcends his individuality, and that this tragic situation, which always implies sufferings, is a collective feeling experienced by many the agents of the Empire in the story.[68] This idea is immediately reinforced when, in the same dialogue between Spurstow and Hummil, the doctor says,

[67] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 202.
[68] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', p. 203.

> 'The man has been rowelled like a horse! Ridden by the nightmare with a vengeance! And we all thought him sensible enough. Heaven send us understanding! You like to talk, don't you?'
>
> 'Yes, sometimes. Not when I'm frightened. *Then* I want to run. Don't you?'
>
> 'Always […].'
>
> 'Put me quite to sleep; for if I'm caught I die, — I die!'
>
> 'Yes, yes; we all do that sooner or later, — thank Heaven who has set a term to our miseries', said Spurstow […].[69]

Spurstow is identified with Hummil's remorse in two instances here. Firstly, the doctor recognises that he himself always wants to run away when suffering similar nightmares, a recognition that is more than a simple strategic concession to please his patient and calm him down; it is a genuine point of agreement. Secondly, his reference to 'our miseries' suggests a shared life-experience. Thus, Hummil, 'rowelled like a horse' and 'ridden by the nightmare with a vengeance', is the social body of the agents of the Empire troubled by a guilt complex and a system of duties in a traumatic colonial context. His insomnia is, as suggested above, a state of awareness about his participation in an imperial failure; consequently, the 'vengeance' referred to can be read as a displacement of the fear of a potential Indian uprising. His wish to sleep is a way of escaping from that consciousness, an attitude remarkably consonant with that of the narrator of 'By Word of Mouth', who eloquently asserts (in a move that directly counters the imperial will-to-knowledge), 'I have lived long enough in this India to know that it is best to know nothing'.[70]

This topic of native vengeance, already observed in several of his early gothic tales, reappears as a psychological problem in 'The House of Shadows' (1887), where a house which is presented as a symbol of India is inhabited by a sole tenant, who symbolises the coloniser. As when Kipling criticises India profusely in his journalistic sketches, the narrator of this tale asserts that his 'complaint is against the whole house'.[71] However, the allegory initially draws a distinction between the house's positive and negative sides. Within the house, there are two rooms where the feeling of life is never far from the feeling of death. In those rooms, a 'woman has died and a child has been born […]. I sleep in the room of the death and do my work in the room of the birth', says the occupant.[72] Metaphorically, the image refers to a coloniser divided in two, able to work despite his tortured awareness of the dramatic, deadly environment that surrounds him.

[69] Ibid.
[70] Kipling, 'By Word of Mouth', in *Plain Tales*, p. 318.
[71] Kipling, 'The House of Shadows', in Pinney, pp. 246-48 (p. 246).
[72] Ibid.

Life and death are as adjacent here as they are in Freudian theory — where the impulse to embrace death implies a search for an incessant reinstatement of life as a form of symbolic rebirth.[73] The cycle insinuates a hidden wish to maintain life indefinitely; Kipling's story transmutes this into the desire to maintain imperial power. This desire, however, is subverted. The occupant feels observed and invaded by a crowd of ghosts, fictional constructions of Indian people trying to recuperate their places in society from beyond the grave. They are the invaders, performing a ghastly reverse colonisation: 'They take up no space and are almost noiseless […] but they are there and they trouble me [...]. Quitting the house [...] it is at once taken possession of by the people who follow me about.'[74] Invisible and silenced, the Other is a ghost to British eyes, a rhetorical figure of the Indian people incomprehensible to colonisers. Although this Other is so close to the colonising Self — who feels intimidated by him — they do not commingle. They just coexist and avoid each other. As we are told,

> he will never face me and tell me what he wants. He is always in the next room […]. When I enter, I know that he has just gone out […]. And when I go out I know that he is waiting, always waiting, to slip into the room I have vacated, and begin his aimless stroll among the knicknacks. If I go to the verandah [*sic*], I know that he is watching me from the drawing-room.[75]

Between these lines, the tale plays with the terrified, paranoid British fantasy of a native insurrection similar to the Mutiny of 1857. Ghosts in 'The House of Shadows' are a manifestation of that fear, figuring as impenetrable, sinister, and mysterious natives constantly suspected of planning rebellion. However, a question asked by the occupant implies that the Other functions here as a displacement of the Self, as its double, and the mirror of its imperial policy: 'What pleasure can he find in prowling thus about another man's premises? I asked him the question last Sunday, but my voice came back to me from the high ceiling of the empty room next to my room, and that was all my answer.'[76] That question coming back to him, in solitude, can be seen as representing the coloniser's self-questioning — his guilty conscience — about his own pleasure when he invades other countries, perhaps providing a rationale for why, at the end of the story, the narrator does not offer any resistance to the ghosts' advance. Hummil's double in 'At the End of the Passage'

[73] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology, and Other Works* (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955).
[74] Kipling, 'The House of Shadows', pp. 246-47.
[75] Kipling, 'The House of Shadows', pp. 247-48.
[76] Kipling, 'The House of Shadows', p. 248.

should be considered from the same analytical perspective. His state of alienation is an effect of his self-reproach displaced onto the figure of himself-as-Other:

> Hummil turned on his heel to face the echoing desolation of his bungalow, and the first thing he saw standing in the verandah was the figure of himself […]. When he came in to dinner he found himself sitting at the table. The vision rose and walked out hastily. Except that it cast no shadow it was in all respects real.[77]

The doppelgänger is 'summoned' here by Hummil's awareness of the imperial nightmare, reinforced by the fact that he dies with his eyes open, as if to see Indian reality is to succumb to insanity. On this point, it is significant that Lowndes strongly demands to cover Hummil's face and close his eyes. They have seen what Lowndes does not want to see. It seems that, for the agents of the Empire who have not experienced this terrible awakening, the corpse on which a hum(m)iliating reality is written should be covered, its eyes concealed from those who do not wish to see.

This theme is also broached in an autobiographical sketch entitled 'Till the Day Break' (1888), where sleeplessness is caused by a torturing reality that, like Hummil's eyes, should be kept hidden:

> the brain full of sick fancies. The outside world is worse than indoors […]. Not to think of nothing means that the uncontrolled brain will tie itself up in a helpless knot of doubt, perplexity, argument, re-argument, wonder and pain […]. The Brain-fever Bird is up and across the lawn, stammering the secret that he is forbidden to divulge.[78]

The phrase, 'the secret that he is forbidden to divulge' brings to mind the never-revealed enigma of Hummil's death. Both the sketch and the tale hint at mysterious reasons behind the sleeplessness of the main characters, but the texts never disclose them. Perhaps exposure of the naked truth would reveal a level of responsibility in the imperial mess too high for social palatability and force the texts to confront the dominant ideology. Instead, Kipling's works play with the seductive art of implication and silence. Like the 'impassive' servant who silently removes Imray's boots every evening, Kipling as author 'impassively' presents these stories to the reading audience, tempering his complaints in accordance with his conservative view of history, in which deep changes are impossible.

[77] Kipling, 'At the End of the Passage', in *Life's Handicap*, p. 206.
[78] Kipling, 'Till the Day Break', in Pinney, pp. 285-88 (pp. 287-88).

Conclusion: A Power 'Eternal as the Seasons'

In *Something of Myself*, Kipling asserts that '[m]en and things come round again, eternal as the seasons'.[79] The same circular pattern — a covert ideological support for the established order — can be identified in 'The Lost Legion' (1892), where a rebel 'Hindustani' regiment at Peshawur, during the Indian Mutiny, seeks the support of some Afghan tribesmen in the insurrection against Englishmen. However, the Afghan tribesmen massacre the Hindustani regiment. More than thirty years later, troops of Ghurkas and English soldiers, whose mission is the capture the leader of a rebel Afghan tribe, receive the unexpected supernatural help of that old Hindustani regiment of ghosts. The legendary lost legion returns from the past to reinforce a system in which everything seems to be part of an immutable historic performance, repeated again and again: the Indian Government is incompetent; Afghans are unpredictable, indecipherable, materialistic, and sadistic; and British rule arises as the best alternative for India. The plot reveals Kipling's conservative and pro-imperialistic ideology, a defence of the status quo based on the idea that everything is cyclical and order remains stable. Nevertheless, his analytical and questioning spirit undermines his own political position. Cynically or not, the organisation of 'picnic-war[s]' as parodies of the real ones on the part of the Government and 'the British taxpayer at home, who insisted on regarding these exercises as brutal wars of annexation' are denounced by the narrator.[80] Once again, then Kipling's imperialism is exposed and weakened by his own critiques and ideological ambiguities.

In his early gothic tales, Kipling supported the imperial project, developing a monstrous image of the Other to justify imperialism as the right way to ensure order and progress; he inculcated an endogamic Britishness, an ethics of sacrifice and work that expedited the system of production; and finally, he employed all these elements to create an image of British superiority that supported and maintained a segregated order. Dialectically, the same fictions were used to show the tragic consequences of British ignorance regarding Indian culture; British complicity with the Indian feudal system of exploitation; abusive working conditions established by and for the agents of the Empire; and the guilt complex resulting from keen awareness of the dramatic Indian context.

In spite of his imperialistic intentions, therefore, Kipling's professed critical distance can be seen as a dialogical, destabilising, and deconstructive instrument in breaking down the circular walls of history that he endorsed via the eternal return of imperialism.

[79] Kipling, *Something of Myself*, p. 130.
[80] Kipling, 'The Lost Legion', in *Many Inventions* (London: MacMillan, 1923), pp. 182-99 (pp. 186, 185).