

Kipling's Women of Imperial India

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"Whether, as has been argued *The Man who would be King* is a fable of Empire is not so sure You cannot be a god *and* a sensuous human being, the men losing their divine stature when Dravot insists upon acquiring a wife. Its parallel with the the British Empire is the setting of warring tribes to productive work, making some of them into an army, and establishing a central government administering laws . . . It is not to be suggested that the disastrous end of the story in any way pre-figured what Kipling thought would be the final withdrawal of the British from India." ¹

So complacent an account of Kipling's view of the role of women in India cannot, I think, be sustained. With the benefit of E. M. Forster's later account ² at hand too, criticism perforce cannot be so indulgent. At the same time it is necessary to make some discriminations between the two writers to understand better Kipling's distinctive presentation of the romance India had to offer, and the prerequisites for its proper fruition.

In the first place, it should be granted, Forster, was a misogynist, at any rate in the sense in which, if it could have been argued that women had only a negative part to play in the process of Empire, he would have seized upon the argument with relish. More importantly *A Passage to India* is in the end a book that illuminates rather than examines the particular effect of imperialism on relations between the races. Forster was concerned in general in his work primarily with a particular form of relationship between human beings that had, or perhaps could have had, one of its more interesting manifestations in the imperial context, but why this was so or why other relationships were difficult or impossible was not his subject. Thus, though his account of, for instance Mrs Turton, is both horrifying and instructive; though his analysis of the bridge-party shows an appreciation of relevant detail with regard to the cross-currents affecting relationships between races and sexes; though indeed he does in the end suggest through the book what the ideal imperial relationship might have amounted to, for Forster India was not essentially a basic concern. Even if *A Passage to India* is a great political novel, this is almost in despite of itself; its main protagonists are not the political figures, the administrators, or those who lived predominantly with the imperialistic framework, whose predicament is a more fundamental concern in Kipling's work.

1. Bonamy Dobree, *Rudyard Kipling - Realist and Fabulist* OUP, London (1967) p. 156.

2. See my article "Of Love and Development : A Passage to India in Fresh Connection" *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* Vol. VIII (1982) p. 66 - 86.

For the theory then as to why women were unsuitable in the Indian context we have to look more closely at Kipling's work only. My own view is that careful reading shows it up quite clearly, but the very different view expressed in the quotation above suggests that this will have to be argued in detail. In this respect it may be helpful then to place the matter in context, by glancing briefly at one of Kipling's contemporaries who was also particularly concerned with the principles that underlay human relationships in the context of Empire, albeit he did not deal with India in his work. I refer to Conrad.

Conrad indeed is scathing about the destructive effect of women on men in any context, and it should be granted that he too, like Forster, could be accused of misogyny.³ Nevertheless a great deal of his work does examine the role of white men in a colonial environment, and it is the failure of such men due to the effect wrought on them by women that dominates Conrad's early work and, I think, sets the tone for his later reiteration of the theme in different contexts. The reason for this, I would argue, is that in the early imperial context, Conrad's concern with duty could have full play, the distractions provided by women could be seen to be particularly damaging in view of the protagonist's domination of his environment; women were the inspiration for an alternative code of values that could obviously be seen to have no place in the stark situation in which the isolated protagonist had only his personal authority on which to rely. Without wishing to belittle Conrad's later work, I would suggest that the contemptuous attitude he adopts towards women there too is less convincing because there is no such clear-cut choice between an obvious duty and what is equally obviously primarily a destruction.

Happily that attitude of contempt is less obvious in the later work, though that it is still noticeably present suggests that its successful literary presentation in the early work owed as much to Conrad's misogyny as to a considered conviction about the effect of women in the context of the colonies. Kipling's case is quite different, which of course makes what similarities there are all the more significant. In the first place, the attitude is not so much one of contempt as of simple criticism; it is not, after all, their fault that these women are in a situation in which they are quite inappropriate. Secondly, in the later work, the work that deals, not with India but with a British environment the women are treated with love and affection and indeed sometimes even have a positive role to play. As such the fact that the treatment is generally very negative in the Indian writings indicates that Conrad's did have some sort of a point, that the very basis of Imperialism, or rather its underlying aims and ideals, made the position of women and the demands they represented difficult, or even impossible.

There is, however, further difference between the two writers, which may go some way towards explaining and indeed mitigating Conrad's harshness in this later works.

3. See my article "The Horror, The Horror: Conrad's Attitude to Women" in *The Sri Lanka Journal of Humanities* Vol. VI (1980).

as well towards women. Conrad's protagonists are in the end fundamentally individualists, and their emotional commitments are to their private aspirations and ideals rather than to anything or anyone arising from the social circumstances in which they function. As Elliot L. Gilbert says in noting the difference between the two writers,

To put it another way, Conrad apparently felt that in a dark universe, some men have a greater obligation than others to penetrate the blackness that some failures are more terrible than others; while Kipling's special gift was to recognize, and to place at the centre of much of his best fiction, the idea that an obligation to moral consciousness is universal ⁴.

As such, even in contexts more conventional than the colonial, Conrad's characters had to be much more determined in their pursuit of their ideals. As a consequence women could much more easily and perhaps more justifiably be dismissed. At the same time, although it should perhaps be granted that it is this very intensity that makes one feel Conrad to be the greater writer, Gilbert's definition should be modified or expanded to make it clear that the obligations that concern Conrad are those of the individual towards himself. This does not make them selfish; on the contrary, it is often abnegation of the self that is required, and often the virtues Conrad's characters are called upon to display are those that contribute to the well being of society; yet it would be quite absurd to describe the values which they uphold as social values. The dark universe Conrad's heroes inhabit can be illuminated only from within, and in the end it is only the verdict they pass upon themselves that matters.

In a sense, though doubtless the predominant reason was that his acquaintance with it was minimal compared with his intimacy with the Far East, this makes it appropriate that Conrad did not deal with India. I do not mean to suggest that natives elsewhere could have been treated as of lesser consequence than the Indians; indeed, as should be obvious, having divided his characters into the chosen and others, Conrad does not distinguish to any appreciable extent as to race in the course of working out his moral perspectives; but in writing about India, the very romance of Imperialism, with capital letters as it were, which is how it was seen in that particular manifestation, made it necessary to look at, or at least assume, some sort of

⁴ *The Good Kipling: Studies in the Short Story*. Manchester University Press (1972) p 197. Gilbert had earlier (p. 102) in discussing Mrs. Bathurst, suggested Kipling's affinities with Conrad in the treatment of women - "Kipling's attitude towards women is idiosyncratic. Women as individuals may be charming and wholly innocent and yet at the same be acting, unconsciously as the agents of a terrible power totally beyond their understanding or control. And though this power may originally have been generated by some overwhelming creative urge, its random mindless application can just as easily be deadly and destructive"; and again, and understanding now the true nature of that blind, corrosive impersonal attraction he had felt and himself almost succumbed to, he "covers his face with his hands for a moment, like a child shutting out an ugliness". Outside the office car, waiting for their train, the picknickers sing of romance in conventional sentimental terms offering an ironic contrast to Pritchard's belated revelation about the true nature of women's love... It makes a properly bitter conclusion to a story which might equally well have ended with Kurtz's despairing words. "The horror, the horror". (p. 112).

relationship between governors and governed as lying at the heart of the aspirations of the former.

At this point it is of course only the aspirations of the former that are important. When Forster wrote, the reactions of the Indians could (though they did not have to as reactions to his book make clear), be taken into account, their attitudes to the British who were trying to govern them, give them laws and spare them, or simply make friends. In Kipling's time such distinctions were unthinkable, or at least were certainly not to be inflicted on readers. Yet the difference between the position presented by Kipling, and that of Conrad's protagonists who are concerned in their particular colonial context with their own exercise of authority only as it affects themselves, is marked. Kipling's administrators, on the contrary, and those who live within that milieu, are always aware that they are under observation. As the Latin tags he uses indicate, and indeed the fact that, having left India long behind he returned to Roman centurions to reiterate the Imperial theme, Kipling saw his colonial heroes as functioning within a tradition, so that the standards they had to uphold were emphatically not their own, but handed down to them to be preserved and passed on in the interests of something that lay beyond and above themselves.⁵

And it is within such a tradition that even Dravot and Carnehan, the disreputable adventurers in *The Man who would be King*, find themselves, in fulfilment it should be added of aspirations the general applicability of which they fully appreciate. Numerous critics have expounded the symbolic relevance of the work to the subject of British rule in India,⁶ and there is no need to go again into what they have made clear. Two points, however, that may have escaped notice are worth stressing. The first is that, uniquely, we are able to see the reactions of the governed to the whole grand process of Imperialism, and to see it in a context in which that process is successfully cast aside. This, as been mentioned above, was not usual, and was doubtless only possible here because of the mythical nature of the work, the fact that it is set outside India proper in a land of fantasy, with two obvious adventurers as its protagonists, not individuals firmly within the tradition, whom it would have been unthinkable to show as being clearly criticized by those over whom they were set. This makes all the more remarkable the second significant point, that the rock on which they capsize, the temptation of women, is set so clearly within the tradition by devices that make clear to all careful readers of Kipling its importance to the writer.

The Biblical overtones alone, in the light of Kipling's use of them elsewhere,⁷ would put beyond a doubt the intensity of his commitment to the point he is making here. After the adventurers have established their kingdom against all odds, Dravot

5. See for instance the discussion in T. R. Henn, *Kipling*, Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh & London (1967) p. 9 - 13. of *imperas* and *parcere subjectis*

6. See for instance, apart from Cornell Louis, L. Dobree *Kipling in India*, Macmillan, London (1966)p. 161 - 4.

7. In addition to Dobree or Henn, see most recently Fr. Martin Jarrett-Kerr "The Theology of Rudyard Kipling". *The Kipling Journal*, (September 1976).

thinks he can now relax and take a wife, it is not only Carnehan who quotes the Bible against this but even the trusty native, Billy Fish : he indeed alludes to the pair as Gods, whereas Carnehan had referred only to Kings, in suggesting that diversions suitable for ordinary men would take away from their capacity as well as their mystique. Certainly both adventurers were aware at the very start of the limitations association with women would place upon their ambitions, as the contract shown to the narrator of the story at the beginning of the quest makes clear -

(2) "That you and me will not, while this matter is being settled, look at any Liquor, nor any Woman black, white or brown so as to get mixed up with one or the other harmful".⁸

And that the female of the species was considered more dangerous than alcohol is apparent from the fact that when Dravot begins to weaken, Carnehan indulges him to the extent of suggesting that they "run in some good liquor; but no women".⁹

The sequel of course proves his point; but even without the melodrama of the chosen woman biting Dravot and drawing blood, so that the spell is broken and the natives, over whom they had managed to establish ascendancy, realize that they are vulnerable and rise up against them, the very act of taking a woman, it is clear from the initial reactions of the natives, has considerably diminished their stature. That it is bound to do so Carnehan indicates he realizes from the start by means of the contempt with which he refers to the proceedings : where Dravot talks about a wife, and then in response to Carnehan's reaction goes on to fantasize about "a Queen to breed a King's son for the King. A Queen out of the strongest tribe, that'll make them your blood-brothers, and that'll lie by your side and tell you all the people thinks about you and their own affairs."¹⁰ Carnehan persists in talking about women. In passing he suggests that women might betray Dravot for people of their own race, but in reply to Dravot's argument that these natives could be identified with, he makes clear that his basic objection is that such a desire for women is a weakness, which will prevent the Kings they have made themselves into from fulfilling their task.

For Kipling then it was a sort of principle, this abstinence from women of men who had achieved for themselves authority over subject races; and though *The Man who would be King* is a fantastic story, it is a myth that is clearly applicable to the British Imperial adventure, and for that reason we should attempt to examine what lay behind the establishment of this principle in Kipling's mind. At one level, of course, as Philip Mason suggests in connection with the Freemasonry that also has a part to play in the

8. *The Man who would be King* in *Wee Willie Winkie and Other Stories*, Macmillan Pocket Edition, London (1907) p. 215. All page references to Kipling's work hereafter will where possible be to the relevant volume in this edition, which will be cited without further bibliographical details.

9. *Wee Willie Winkie and Other Stories*, p. 239.

10. *ibid.*, p. 239.

tale, the reasons may have been psychological¹¹, but it seems to me that there is sufficient practical detail in other stories about India to suggest that Kipling had good objective reasons for his view.

There are, it seems to me, several different aspects to Kipling's depiction of women in India, and the effect they have, and though most of these are destructive we should be careful to distinguish between them. At one extreme we have what might be called the dynamic sexual aspect of women, seen at its most vivid in stories such as *Love o' Women* and *Black Jack*, where passion of one sort or another leads to the death of a man. Here of course Kipling makes it clear that the fault is not that of the women, but of the insatiable, even self-destructive men concerned; but the framework of the stories, with their insistence on the endless repetitiveness of what might be called basic tragedy where women are involved sets the tone for the more subtle accounts we find elsewhere

At the next level too the women could be described as guiltless, even though there is a much greater sense of loss with regard to the effect they have wrought. I refer to Kipling's view that a good administrator, able to cope admirably with the people over whom he ruled, was lost from the very highest reaches of Parnassus once he got married. This did not mean that he could not do a relatively good job lower down in the scale - but Kipling was acutely conscious of what had been lost. The most famous example of this is the resourceful Strickland, who after he had won Miss Yougal through disguising himself as her syce, promised in marrying her to "drop his old ways, and stick to Departmental routine, which pays best and leads to Simla . . .;" he has, by this time, been nearly spoilt for what he would call *shkar*. He is forgetting the slang, and the beggar's cant and and marks, and the signs, and the drift of the under-currents, which, if a man would master, he must always continue to learn. But he fills in his Departmental returns beautifully.¹² A measure of the strength of Kipling's feeling about this loss is that twenty years later he reiterated it. Strickland has finished his Indian Service, and lives now at a place in England called Weston-super-Mare, where his wife plays the organ in one of the churches. Semi-occasionally he comes up to London, and occasionally his wife makes him visit his friends. Otherwise he plays golf and follows the harriers for his figure's sake.¹³ And even the

11. *Kipling - The Class, The Shadow and the Fire*, Jonathan Cape, London (1975) p 84-5. There is much that is relevant, but selective quotation will have to suffice here - "Freemasonry, as various people have pointed out, was bound to attract Kipling; he loved to belong to an inner circle, with secret passwords, where he could be safe from women who fascinated and frightened him . . . Freemasonry gave him occasional moments of the assured security he sought, but it was intermittent. Work was central to his view of life, and art was part of work. But work was loveless, art demanded a ruthless discipline, both were competitive. He needed a more sympathetic world of love to fall back on. He insisted, from the upper layer of consciousness, that a man must be independent before all things, but at a deeper level he longed for a warm emotional fortress . . . And, even more than most young middle-class Englishmen of the period who had been to a boarding school, he was in a muddle about women."

12. *Miss Yougal's Syce* in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, p. 34.

13. *A Deal in Cotton* in *Actions and Reactions*, p. 171.

absurd *Story of the Gadsbys*, which begins like something out of Oscar Wilde's as the tale of a smart young man who married the daughter of the woman he had been courting, turns into a dirge about how marriage prevents him from doing his duty properly. One cannot doubt of course that Kipling, unlike Forster or Conrad, did see marriage as generally necessary but this did not prevent him from making clear what he saw as its unfortunate effects.

The reason for this state of inevitable misfortune, I think, was that Kipling was convinced that women were quite incapable generally of understanding or sharing in the world in which their menfolk functioned. Indeed, when they tried to share in that world, the results could sometimes be disastrous, as in *Watches of the Night*, which might be thought merely a funny tale, were it not for the bitterness Kipling summons up against the Colonel's wife who "manufactured the Station scandal, and . . . talked to her ayah."¹⁴ In general however, the ill effects wrought by women are due to their innate separateness from the world in which menfolk they captivate have what seems a more valuable existence.

The examples given above of course are simply sad, or even just regrettable, rather than tragic. There are however other incidents, where the outcome is more unpleasant, and there is therefore a stronger hint of criticism of the woman involved. *In the Pride of his Youth*, for instance, is about a boy who got married before he came out to India, and therefore had a miserable life in trying to live up to commitments he could not properly sustain. Kipling twists the knife by suggesting, not only that the wife left behind cannot appreciate the boy's position out in India, but that she is also gratuitously selfish and takes advantage of him without really loving him. Again, in *Wressley of the Foreign Office*, ostensibly in the comic mode about a man who writes a learned tome, hoping through it to win the heart of a woman, we are fully aware of the absurdity of Wressley assuming his idol will have any interest whatsoever in the Indian customs he finds so fascinating. Yet Kipling does do his best to send the woman down in our esteem. "Miss Venner did not know what *magnum opus* meant; but she knew that Captain Kerrington had won three races at the Gymkhana".¹⁵ All this could be described as cynicism or realism, but I cannot help feeling that in seeking to establish the great divide between men and women, Kipling wished to make it clear that men were much higher up in the social scale.

Indeed, Kipling's strongest criticism of women in this respect comes in two works that are not concerned with India which, together with the slightly stronger criticism cited above, may suggest that he was in fact a misogynist, contrary to what I suggested earlier on in this article. I would argue, however, that those two works also deal with men who are special cases, and it is because they are special, though in a sense different from the ordinary chaps who are good at the special roles they fill in India, that women have such a destructive effect on them. I refer first to *The Finest Story in*

14. *Watches of the Night* in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, p. 86.

15. *Wressley of the Foreign Office*, *ibid.*, p. 316.

the World, where the literary inspiration of the young clerk dries up when he falls in love; while I would contest Stewart's view that this doctrine is no part of the essential excellence of the story, his other observations on the subject¹⁶ make it clear that all we have here is the distrust of a man, who feels he has a special task, of what might distract him from it.

The Light that Failed I would grant is a more difficult case. Unlike the girl in *The Finest Story*, who never appears, and who is clearly guiltless, we are meant to feel that there is something wrong in Maisie for so determinedly rejecting Dick Heldar, the painter who is the hero of the novel and who, as is clear from the opening of the novel, has a lot in common with Kipling. More startling perhaps, as Angus Wilson has pointed out, is the gratuitous destruction wrought by the model who, angry because Dick puts a stop to her affair with his friend Torpenhow, cuts to pieces the masterpiece he had just managed to complete before losing his sight. Wilson's thorough discussion however puts in context what he describes as "the blind, self-flattering misogyny of *The Light That Failed*"¹⁷, and to that I think should be added both Kipling's recent disappointment, whatever form it might have taken, with regard to Flo Gerrard, and also his recent association with Wolcott Ballestier, which may have led to greater reliance than the normally realistic Kipling would ordinarily have placed on the the world of men, the 'happy bachelor society' the extravagances of which Wilson criticizes in drawing attention to "the wretched sentimental mothering of each other with which Dick and Torpenhow and the Nilghai assuage each other's wounds received in contact with the deadly other sex." *The Light that Failed*, I would then argue, is very much a special case in which Kipling was working out his own personal problems, albeit in the light of his own artistry, rather than advancing general principles according to which he thought the world at large functioned.

As to those, while accepting that there may have been a particular period in the early 1890s when Kipling was going through a misogynistic phase, I would suggest that

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16. Fatally, he has fallen in love. "Charlie," the last sentence of the story tells us, "had tasted the love of women that kills remembrance, and the finest story in the world would never be written." We feel Kipling's lurking antagonism to women to be at work here; he is expressing the notion - which Bernard Shaw was later to make much of in *Man and Superman* - that there is something in compatible between the demands made on a man by art and sexual love, or at least by art and domesticity. It is a persuasion elsewhere expressed and generalized by Kipling in a single trenchant line: "He travels the fastest who travels alone". J. I. M. Stewart, *Rudyard Kipling*, Victor Gollancz, London (1966) p. 105 - 6.
17. Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling - His Life and Works*, Secker & Warburg, London (1977), p. 156. The extent of my indebtedness to this exciting work, which I first read in its American edition, may be apparent from the similarity of my account above to what Wilson also says about these particular works; although in writing this paper I could not find the passage in the original British edition of the book - "This of course can be explained as arising from a particular individual experience, that had to be catharticised through fiction; but then at around the same time we have the symbolic account in 'The Finest Story in the World', of how feminine romantic interests are quite fatal to inspiration. I do not know whether there is any significance in these being written during the period of his association with Wolcott Ballestier. After Wolcott's death and the marriage to Carrie, Kipling does not reiterate this position, which in fact his own position rendered untenable."

we get a better picture of his views by considering some of the later work, such as *The Wish House* or *The Gardener*, or most remarkably *An Habitation Enforced*. We get there a sympathetic understanding of the sufferings of women, and in the last named a forceful account of the power a woman can possess to recognize affinities that Kipling thought admirable. The story of the Americans who found themselves at home in England is an experience Kipling would have rated very highly, and the vital role the wife plays in the proceedings is, I think, ample evidence that in their proper place Kipling thought there was a lot women could do in the highest league too. In addition, when there are destructive associations, as in *Mrs. Bathurst* or *Mary Postgate*, we are back to the old formula where the woman is guiltless or [even more positively as far as Kipling's attitude to women goes], however upsetting we may find the story in itself, faced with a woman in the grip of an intense emotion which, we see from *Sea Constables*, for instance, Kipling attributed to men too with what seemed a sort of admiration when it finds fulfilment. In effect we can assume from the later work that in general Kipling felt that in England women had an important role to play that came much closer to that of their menfolk than had ever been possible in India; and this is the more impressive in as much as there is little doubt that he did feel in some sense limited by his wife's increasing control over him, and that to some extent his own life exemplified the sad story he had placed on general record in his account of Strickland.¹⁸

My claim, then, is that what I have characterized as the generally negative portrayal of women in the Indian works arises, not from any intrinsic dislike or distrust of women, but from an objective assessment of how difficult it was for them to contribute in the imperial situation. Indeed, though, as I have shown sometimes, Kipling was at pains to establish the inferiority of women, more often than not he is content simply to make clear the basic fact of their alienation from more important concerns. The suspicion of misogyny has arisen, I would argue, primarily due to the English work that has its roots in his personal situation, one that he soon got over. As to the Indian work, on the contrary, it might even be necessary to argue a bit further on behalf of the proposition I have advanced here, since I have so far ignored the works in which there is a very positive presentation of women; and amongst these are the stories about Mrs. Hauksbee, which are doubtless familiar to all devotees of Kipling.

The explanation of course for the favourite presentation of these women is that they function in a sphere that Kipling would not have thought of as Imperial in the sense defined above. Simla, as is clear from *Kim*, certainly had its part to play in the Imperial process, but Simla society, as the derogatory reference to it in the passage concerning Strickland quoted above indicates, was not for Kipling the real thing at all. Simla is where the men who run the Empire retreat to relax and recover from the real business of government, and though it may be best for a married man to fit into a routine that will lead to Simla, and though a great many important decisions may be

18. See the account in Lord Birkenhead, *Rudyard Kipling*, Weidenfeld Nicolson. London (1978) p. 323-5. which, though it attempts to preserve a balance, makes clear the intensity at times of Kipling's sense of deprivation.

taken there, which affect the individuals who have to do the work, it is all at a great remove from their true commitments, their absolute devotion to their duty. Mrs. Hauksbee then and A Second-Rate Woman can in their different ways dominate the individuals amongst whom they move, but as Mrs. Hauksbee's friend, Polly Mallowe, makes clear to her and to us when they are discussing the establishment of a *salon*, nothing she can do can have much effect in the great process in which they can never really partake -

“Surely, twelve Simla seasons ought to have taught you that you can't focus anything in India; and a *salon*, to be any good at all, must be permanent. In two seasons your roomful would be scattered all over Asia. We are only little bits of dirt on the hillsides - here one day and blown down the *khud* the next. We have lost the art of talking - at least our men have. We have no cohesions . . . One by one, these men are worth something. Collectively, they're just a mob of Anglo-Indians. Who cares for what Anglo-Indians say? Your *salon* won't weld the Departments together and make you mistress of India, dear. And these creatures won't talk administrative 'shop' in a crowd - your *salon* - because they are so afraid of the men in the lower ranks overhearing it . . . They can talk to the subalterns though, and the subalterns can talk to them.”¹⁹

In short, wonderful companion though Mrs. Hauksbee can be, the support the men who actually run the Empire require in the field of their work has to come from elsewhere, from their subalterns rather than from her.

Apart from in Simla, however, there are a few occasions in which women have a constructive role to play, and these are perhaps more important in considering whether Kipling did think women could contribute to the day to day business of Empire. There is, for instance, heroism attributed to Ould Pummecloe in *The Daughter of the Regiment* which is almost as adulatory and somewhat less irritating than the excellence of Bobby Wick in *Only a Subaltern*; and there is even more importantly the sustained portrayal of Dinah Shadd as understanding and providing some sort of support to her husband, Mulvaney, the most articulate of the Solders Three, over a long period of time. Yet the important feature these two portraits have in common is that they occur amongst Other Ranks; not that that is not important enough, given that in general the women portrayed in the depiction of the lives of Other Ranks have the destructive effects sketched out above; but it does mean that, though their exceptional qualities are to be registered, we should not see them as contributing to the process of Empire, as they might have, had they associated with Imperialists with greater responsibilities.

Again, what little we do see of these women is in terms of them providing creature comforts as required, certainly at moments of great stress, so that their dependability in a crisis or otherwise is never in doubt; but the sort of comradeship that I

19. *The Education of Otis Yeere in Wee Willie Winkie and Other Stories* p. 9-10.

think Kipling would have thought of as the best support possible and which was doubtless essential in conditions of relative isolation, does not seem even in these cases to have been the prerogative of women to provide. Certainly we are told that Dinah Shadd had been the saving of Mulvaney, and doubtless this was true in that it saved him from engaging in the furtive affairs he describes so often, that so often seem to have had disastrous consequences; certainly we see them together later on in life, having come contentedly together through a great deal; but as for the companionship that seems essential during the long, hot, dreary days of an extended Indian service, in the "brooding, sad, lost interior world of the three musketeers: the world of the desolate river bank and idleness and regret and pot shots; the world of the prison cell of the long-term servicemen"²⁰, this is provided for Mulvaney by the other two of the Soldiers Three. I shall return to this later; for the moment, with regard to Dinah Shadd, the point seems to be that, wonderful though she might be, she cannot share in this life and has nothing to contribute, only a presence that can occasionally provide relief, but not of the sort Mulvaney requires day in, day out, from those who do share his life.

So it seems to me that in the end, of all the apparently positive portrayal of women in India, or rather of the British women in India, there remains only one that can be said to be a depiction of an actual contribution to the Imperial process, one that can take its stand next to the achievements of Strickland and the Infant and the British Heads of District and other heroes, military and civil, whose achievements are alluded to, whose authority and effectiveness are unquestionable. I refer of course to William the Conqueror in the story of that name, who assists her brother Martyn and his friend, Scott, to bring a whole district through a famine. As a woman she has to stay in camp with the Head of the Famine and his wife, while the two men travel about doing good; but it is made quite clear that she is worth her weight in gold, and does as much as she can in her own way to avert disaster from the subject races. When, at the end of the story, with emotions perfectly restrained but nevertheless clearly powerful, she and Scott go off to get married, there is little doubt that he has in every sense found a soul mate, who can assist him in every way to continue with his good work.

Yet, had the name not done so, an early description of William gives the game away completely, and we realize that this apparent exception only proves the rule that Kipling prescribed for himself in the description of women in an Imperial context -

"She looked more like a boy than ever when, after their meal, she sat, one foot tucked under her, on the leather camp-sofa, rolling cigarettes for her brother, her low forehead puckered beneath the dark curls as she twiddled the papers. She stuck out her rounded chin when the tobacco stayed in place, and, with a gesture as true as a schoolboy's throwing a stone, tossed the

20. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

finished article across the room to Martyn, who caught it with one hand, and continued his talk with Scott. It was all 'shop'.²¹

It seems to me indubitably significant that this schoolboy vision represents the acme of Kipling's presentation of feminine attractions, not only in the Imperial context, but indeed altogether. There is certainly much more conviction to it than to another ideal presented in a story, also published in *The Day's Work*, which on the surface is meant to be about a far more romantic episode, which in the end does not have anything like the vitality that informs the developing relationship between William and Scott. I refer to the presentation of Miriam Lacy, in *The Brushwood Boy*, who has dreamed about her long before they were ever brought together. The description of her when the boy first sees her provides an illuminating contrast of the portrait of William -

"A tall girl in black raised her eyes to his, and Georgie's life training deserted him - just as soon as he realised that she did not know. He stared coolly and critically. There was the abundant black hair, growing in a widow's peak, turned back from the forehead, with that peculiar ripple over the grey eyes set a little close together, the short upper lip, resolute chin, and the known poise of the head. There was also the small, well-cut mouth that had kissed him".²²

And that is all, except for the account of her lisping as a child in the Boy's imagination, and interminable conversations about Ducks and Policeman Day, which is how they register that they were meant for each other from the start. The difference between William and this is the difference between something real, based on experience, to which there is a forceful emotional attachment and a remote ideal to which one ought to aspire. It is not surprising that it was from Miriam Lacy that T. R. Henn made an envious generalization with regard to which the William depicted in the same book is so outstanding and illuminating an exception -

"But from another angle the heroine, Miriam Lacy, the steadfast companion of the dream, would seem to be Kipling's ideal woman, no more than outlined, for Kipling does not give more than the barest hints of the appearance of his women characters"²³.

21. *William the Conqueror* - Part I. in *The Day's Work* p. 188. I am reminded in reading this of Lord David Cecil's remarks on George Eliot's presentation of Ladislaw in *Middlemarch* - Ladislaw flinging himself down on the hearth-rug with an enchanting impetuosity, wilfully tossing back his charming curls is a schoolgirl's dream; and a vulgar dream at that. *Early Victorian Novelists*, Constable & Co., London (1934) p. 317. It is worth noting on the same lines that Henn *op. cit.*, p. 23, remarks illuminatingly with regard to *Stalky & Co.* that "No one but Kipling would have written of a rugger scrum as "the many-legged heart of things":"

22. *The Brushwood Boy* in *The Day's Work* p. 396-7.

23. Henn, *op. cit.*, p. 58. The artificiality of Kipling's approach in these respects is further pointed out by Henn when he writes *a propos* the travelogues, "In almost every country he falls in love, or pretends to, with one or more girls whom he calls, rather irritatingly. "maidens" . . . We are given the impression of a man who made himself out to be (for journalistic purposes) more susceptible than he in fact was, and there is no mention of a real love affair" (p. 110). Even if we do grant that the description of a real love affair, whatever that might mean with regard to a traveller, was hardly to be expected in that day and age, Kipling's awkwardness, together with the compulsion under which he seems to labour, reinforces my point here.

Yet despite the generally embarrassed reactions to *The Brushwood Boy*, as J. I. M. Stewart puts it, "It is certainly not the work of a naive craftsman, or of a shallow mind"²⁴, and it seems to me we have an obligation to consider seriously the fate of "Kipling's perfect young man," of whom Mason goes on to rub in the point -

"There was never anyone who fitted Kipling's stereotype of the perfect young man so completely as George Cottar. He is like an advertisement for the hire of men's evening wear. Nor is companionship in dream adventures a good recipe for lasting marriage; it is boy's magic - and Kipling who had now lived among folk in houses and under Cold Iron (by which Mason means marriage) for five years, ought to have known better."²⁵

The point, I think, is that in writing a story that skated on the borders of fantasy, when it was not floating within it Kipling saw no reason to be inconsistent. George Cottar is so clearly a schoolgirl's dream, or indeed a schoolboy's,²⁶ so that it makes perfectly good sense that the woman he marries should be a dream as well. What the reality might have been, Kipling makes no bones about, though he makes sure that 'fate' averts this - "There was, indeed, a danger - his seniors said so - of his developing into a regular 'Auntie Fuss' of an adjutant, and when an officer once takes to old-maidism there is more hope for the virgin of seventy than for him"²⁷. Instead fate sends a campaign in which he wins a DSO, and a year's leave, so that he can go back to his ancestral home, which it is clear is waiting for him to take over; all that is required is a wife, which it is made crystal clear he had neither the time nor the inclination to find while he was actively and earnestly employed in fulfilling his duty in India. So he is thrust into fulfilment of the self-proclaimed sort of fantasy, and even though the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow might turn out to be merely paper

24. Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 104. I cannot however agree with Stewart's previous comments: "In fact they share an enormous dream-world in its a minutest detail. And it is a dream world-against the infinite dimensions and mysterious significance of which Georgie's exemplary waking life reveals itself as being as flat as paper. Or say rather that, although Georgie's career truly is honourable and enviable in quite a solid three-dimensional universe, he has access to some other universe where a further dimension is added. It is good to live in an English country house. It is possible to live somewhere else as well" On the contrary the country house goes together with Miriam Lacy; and, in referring earlier to Georgie as a 'dream hero', Stewart touches on the basic question Kipling poses for us, whether the hero's Indian or other experiences are more real.

25. Mason, *op. cit.*, p. 203. Earlier in the paragraph Mason observes that here "Two fantasies have been combined, the perfect school-prefect and subaltern that Kipling would like to have been himself" (which I am not so sure of) "and that not-impossible-she . . . Both fantasies are really more appropriate at eighteen than at thirty-three, in a man five years married."

26. Mason, *ibid.* p 204, makes the historical point, but absurd though it may seem a hundred years later, it is a historical fact that the Empire and the need for an imperial class of rulers - unencumbered by families, hardy of body and selfless in service - had produced this as an ideal picture of what was to be admired. What is more, a great many young men identified themselves with the Brushwood Boy and tried to be as like him as they could. I have spoken to survivors from this period who have told me so."

27. *The Brushwood Boy in The Day's Work*, p. 381.

currency, a bundle of images without body, it is clearly all that is required for a country gentleman.

What is inconceivable is that Miriam Lacy should return to India, to what "was not a married mess, except for the colonel's wife."²⁸ The two dreams were not meant to mix, and Cottar, like Strickland, will find a new role, though another ideally beautiful one, since he is after all perfect. The other sort of perfection, which of course Kipling valued highly too, even higher, I would suggest, given its practical applications, was not for Cottar, for there is, in the end, about William a slight trace of vulgarity. The companion who could share one's work and roll cigarettes for one and toss them accurately across the room would not have done at all for the Brushwood Boy; nor indeed someone capable, as William was, of looking at her loved one and beholding "with new eyes, a young man, beautiful as Paris, a god in a halo of golden dust, walking slowly at the head of his flocks, while at his knee ran small naked cupids."²⁹ That sort of practical and earthy appreciation of reality was not for the ideally beautiful who lived in a land of dreams or in England; but there seems to me little doubt which Kipling thought superior, as a glance at any page of *William the Conqueror* will indicate –

"and above, immeasurably above all men of all grades there was William in the thick of the fight, who would approve because she understood . . . 'I've given the Government the impression – at least, I hope I have – that he personally conducted the entire famine. But all he wants is to get on to the Luni Canal Works, and William's just as bad. Have you ever heard 'em talking of barrage and aprons and wastewater? It's their style of spooning, I suppose'."³⁰

Yet though William then is the only woman in the Indian tales to have proved satisfactory in every way, this is with regard to British women; and with regard to the Indian women, on the few occasions on which they are shown as romantically involved with their governors, there is surely a case for suggesting that they are not only vividly real in a way Miriam Lacy is not, but also that within the limitations under which they function they provide an extremely satisfactory sexual relationship. My argument, of course, in accordance with the thesis I have been developing, is that the limitations are such that we cannot speak here of romance in the sense in which I have defined it as lying at the heart of the Imperial relationship; but before considering that aspect, we should first register the tremendous sexual fulfilment that Kipling appears to record, and try to understand why this seems much more satisfactory than in the case of the British women whose involvement with men we have looked at before.

An interesting feature in this respect, I believe, is that a far more vivid sense of sexual satisfaction than in cases involving only the British is conveyed even when the final outcome is not a happy one. I refer to two stories, in addition to the classics about

28. *ibid.*, 373.

29. *William the Conqueror* – Part II in *The Day's Work*, p. 205.

30. *ibid.*, p. 219, 225.

inter-racial affairs. *Without Benefit of Clergy* and *Beyond the Pale*, namely *Lispeth* and *Georgie Porgie*. They are different from each other, in that the first is about not really an affair but a flirtation, while the second records a protracted relationship, at the conclusion of which Georgie marries a British woman and abandons the native Georgina, who is left to weep for him, just as *Lispeth* grows bitter waiting for the Englishman who never comes back. The stories therefore are in essence tragic; but what strikes one about them is the very free and easy relationship that does develop between the couple, the tender feelings of the woman that are very movingly conveyed, and the satisfied response to them of the man. The same thing strikes one about a similar story that has a comic conclusion, though doubtless many of Kipling's readers at the time would not have thought so. *Yoked with an Unbeliever* is about a man who married a hill girl while in India, and when his fiancée, who married someone else when it was clear he was not going to send for her, goes out to him after her husband died, she joins the menage. Kipling does not have very much to say here about the relationships, but what he does say is symptomatic -

"Dunmaya was a thoroughly honest girl, and, in spite of her reverence for an Englishman, had a responsible estimate of her husband's weaknesses... Now the particular sin and shame of the whole business is that Phil, who really is not worth thinking of twice, was and is loved by Dunmaya, and more than loved by Agnes, the whole of whose life seems to have spoilt"³¹

In short, what we have here is an assertion of adoration, which we had in the two minor stories mentioned above, and which we see also in the two major stories as well as in *William the Conqueror*, who is permitted to adulate, physically and otherwise, her companion and mentor in a way that is not permitted to the standard British woman functioning within conventions of restraint. The response of course is not always certain or secure; but when it is satisfactory, the result is a sort of bliss that leaves an enduring impression. It is for this reason that, though fate or the society in which the liaison takes place disrupts the idyll, I referred to the final outcome of the affairs in *Without Benefit of Clergy* and *Beyond the Pale* as happy: though Ameera dies, and Bisesa is mutilated and Trejago can never see her again, the relationships that Kipling depicted have a much more forceful quality than anything he had written before or was to write since about relationships between the sexes.

That having been said, there is of course nothing more to these relationships except reciprocal sexual bliss - which is doubtless the reason we are not materially affected by their unfortunate conclusions, for there is no further really that they could have gone. Much as we might for instance love Ameera, there is nothing more that she could have done for Holden, and though he could conceivably have been satisfied

31. *Yoked with an Unbeliever* in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, p. 39. 41.

with that, the chances are that at some stage he would have wanted something more.³² The basic point is that an idyll is all very well, and the devotion between the couple as depicted by Kipling is a necessary part of an ideal romance; but apart from anything else, there is also necessary some form of communication, a capacity to share ideas and experiences that arise out of other aspects of the individual's existence, and this the women of these episodes cannot provide. Indeed, perhaps the reason Dunmaya survives is that she can, and that is because Phil Garron is merely a planter, not really worth very much, who requires a great deal of improvement which she is apparently in a position to provide. For characters in whom Kipling was seriously concerned, on the contrary, a native attachment was clearly inadequate, for it precluded the sort of constructive spooning, if one might coin a term, in which William and Scott indulged.

The interesting point here however is not that these Indian women cannot communicate with their loved ones, for naturally there was a great gulf, linguistic and intellectual as well as social, between them and the men to whom they were attached, but that all the British women we have seen, apart from William, cannot communicate either. As the case of William indicates in theory, they might have been able to communicate, and therefore the fact that they do not arises either because Kipling was a misogynist who did not want them to share in the great process of Imperialism or because in actual fact they just did not do so. I have shown already that the first quality cannot readily be attributed to Kipling; but as Kipling is much more obviously depicting things as they really are, we must assume the second of the alternatives. For Kipling of course this does not really present a problem, and we have to look elsewhere for the reason insofar as it is possible or necessary to find one. Forster suggested later that it was due to a need on the part of the memsahib to preserve her own identity, which may have been a function of preserving the racial sanctity of a family that would continue to have its roots in England, a phenomenon that developed in the 19th century with steamships and the regular conveyance of women to and from India; it may on the other hand have been in response to what was seen as the need of their menfolk to preserve something on a pedestal, untarnished by their own involvement in this strange land. I do not myself think it necessary to go further into the question here, so long as we register that alienation from Imperial concerns insofar as they affected the natives - which of course according to my definition of Imperial

32. George Eliot in *Middlemarch* presents an incisive analysis of the inadequacy of the sort of satisfaction Ameerah had to offer as a basis for protracted or permanent companionship. The story of Lydgate's tragic failure is of course well known, but it may be worth quoting here from the passage in which George Eliot first shows him inclined to reject Dorothea, who might have proved the ideal choice, for frivolous reasons - "To a man under such circumstances, taking a wife is something more than a question of adornment, however highly he may rate this; and Lydgate was disposed to give it the first place among wifely functions. To his taste, guided by a single conversation here was the point on which Miss Brooke would be found wanting notwithstanding her undeniable beauty. She did not look at things from the proper feminine angle. The society of such women was about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form instead of reclining in a paradise with sweet boughs for bird-notes and blue eyes for a heaven." *Middlemarch*, Pan Edition, London (1973) book I, ch. II, p 83. Kipling, like George Eliot, one trusts, would have found teaching the second form paradise.

is what it was all about – was in effect a sort of principle as far as the women were concerned.

But what the depiction of Indian women and their relation to their loved ones shows is that this failure of communication ought not to have precluded some sort of close personal relationship. I would suggest that the sort of Imperial romance I believe was all at for Kipling, involved certain relations between individuals that arise from the Imperial situation, parallel to all this – however, arising from the very usage of the word romance, is the concept of – whether it comes before or after or is sublimated – sexual passion. This we find where Indian women are concerned, but not with regard to white women – or rather not in a state of grace: we have lot of tales of adultery which lead to catastrophe, but there is never any sense of sanctity, of what might be called the satisfaction of the wedded wife syndrome which Kipling manages to convey romantically only in the cases involving Indian women mentioned above. I would suggest therefore that for Kipling, where his Imperial administrators were concerned, for this aspect of romance to be present there had to be the relationship of patronage that came naturally in the Imperial context.

This of course could not have been a principle based on observation, and the fact that it is apparent in Kipling's work tells us more about his attitude than about the situation as it was. However what arises from this factor of patronage and its concomitant dependence rouses conviction, for it allows for much more emphatic assertions of devotion than might otherwise have been possible. Bhesa, and even Lisbeth and Georgina, can show themselves so absolutely committed, fully absorbed in the men for whom they live, that the impact of the relationship while it lasts comes across much more powerfully than would have been possible with a white girl who had her own distinct view of herself. Ameera's reaction when Holden tries to send her away from the cholera that finally kills her is only the most extreme manifestation of an attitude that, rash though it was, would certainly have provided more satisfaction in terms of sexual identity than the reaction of a British wife who would doubtless have gone away to the hills and whom her husband surely could not have kept behind in the face of peer group pressure –

“Thou art only all the desire of my soul to me. How shall I depart when I know that if evil befall thee by the breadth of so much as my littlest finger-nail – is that not small? – I should be aware of it though I were in paradise . . . My lord and my love, let there be no more foolish talk of going away. Where thou art, I am. It is enough.” She put an arm round his neck and a hand on his mouth.³³

This, in the ordinary sense of the word, is romantic in the extreme; and it is also not unreal as the ostensible romance of the Brushwood Boy is, because once again we feel the reasons for the commitment, the relations between the couple have been visibly constructed for us. As I mentioned before, since they cannot share each other's lives more fully, the idyll cannot last: the minor tales make that clear, as do the hints of

33. *Without Benefit of Clergy in Life's Handicap* p. 175.

what is inevitable that arise in the conversation of the couple; yet, by killing Ameera off, Kipling manages to convey an illusion of permanence so that *Without Benefit of Clergy* remains as far as the orthodoxies go, the most romantic piece he wrote.

Yet, as I have suggested, the orthodoxies were certainly not enough, not as far as Kipling was concerned, and not as far as the depiction of the most satisfactory sort of romance with regard to India. We touched on the question of communication above, and examination of Kipling's treatment of it in wider contexts may make clear how important a part it plays in the ideal relationship that could be constructed. We should begin by establishing a distinction between communication in Kipling and what occurs in Conrad, who is as definite as Kipling about the general incapacity of women to understand or appreciate the finer aspirations of the men with whom they are connected. This distinction arises from what was mentioned above, Conrad's concern with man as an isolated individual; his men come together to discuss the experiences they have been through as individuals, and though they can supply sympathy and understanding to each other, what they have been through are private rather than public concerns. With Kipling, on the other hand, it is the sharing of experience that makes men able to comprehend and thus support each other. This of course is why the incapacity of Conrad's women to understand is culpable, whereas in Kipling it is not; it is because the women cannot in practice share the experience that they are so hopeless, whereas with Conrad there is the suggestion that they could try, were it not that they inhabited a totally different moral - rather than merely physical, as is the case with Kipling - universe.