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KIPLING AND THE DIALECT OF THE TRIBE

NO EXTENSIVE STUDY of Kipling is necessary to the realization that much of Kipling's most characteristic work employs dialect in one form or another: the Learoyd, Ortheris, and Mulvaney stories, including such major pieces as "On Greenhow Hill", "The Courting of Dinah Shadd" (both in *Life's Handicap*), and "His Private Honour" (*Many Inventions*); *Barrack-Room Ballads*; "M'Andrew's Hymn" (*The Seven Seas*), a work revealing so much of the author's poetic; "A Walking Delegate" (*The Day's Work*)—for most readers too revealing a presentation of the author's social outlook—and ".007" (also in *The Day's Work*) which, for all its childishness, is as illuminating an example as any of the Kipling Gospel of Work.

These are but a few of the obvious instances of the use of dialect. Most of the characters in *Kim*, for example, fail to speak in Standard English, and in such Indian-narrated tales as "Dray Wara Yow Dee (*In Black and White*)" and "In the Presence" (*A Diversity of Creatures*), everyone speaks in an elaborate, stately manner supposed to approximate native speech in the raw. The "point", dubious as it is, of "The Comprehension of Private Copper" (*Traffics and Discoveries*)¹ is that the Anglo-South Africans, under Boer oppression following the British defeat at Majuba in 1878, have acquired the characteristics of a helot race (the term "helot" being Lord Milner's propagandist inspiration in his dispatch of May 4, 1899). And Private Copper begins to sense this upon noticing that his prisoner speaks with what was then termed a "chee-chee" or Eurasian accent. An Englishman has become a quasi-member of a second-rate race.

There are near-dialects among those who speak the same sanctioned *Koiné*. One immediately recalls Kipling's patronizing delight in the Americanism of American speech in the mouth of such a figure as Laughton O. Zigler in "The Captive" (*Traffics and Discoveries*) and "The Edge of the Evening" (*A Diversity of Creatures*). Regionalism can be occupational as well as geographical. Thus Kipling takes pains to catch the drawling, public-

schoolish, Bertie-Wooster qualities of young subalterns' speech in such stories as "A Conference of the Powers" (*Many Inventions*) and "A Deal in Cotton" (*Actions and Reactions*). It has become a commonplace to point out that the soldiers in the Roman stories, which would include the Parnesius narratives in *Puck of Pook's Hill* and "The Church that was at Antioch" (*Limits and Renewals*), speak as British officers of Kipling's day. If indeed they do, it is for a purpose—to re-enforce the theme of the sameness of the problems of preserving civilized life through the ages, of the British Empire as successor to the light-bearing Roman—and not because the author could not have dreamed up some "Romanesque" even as he created a Wardour Street Lupine for the Mowgli stories. The Kipling canon reveals, if not a mastery of dialect (which it would require several authorities to check), at least an extensive and, one would assume, premeditated employment of it over a wide range of character and subject.

The question remains: what does the use of dialect *add* to the works mentioned that could not have been achieved by other means? Is not dialect a rather naïve device for adding verisimilitude to a work? Dialect can be distracting; granting always the importance of verisimilitude to a writer such as Kipling, are there not better ways of achieving it? Questions such as these must be answered, directly or indirectly, in these attempts to explore the implications of Kipling's use of dialect.

One could see the author as a simple soul who took great delight in dialect literature because he enjoyed the funny way foreigners talk. After all, references to the "Hans Breitmann" poems of C. G. Leland crop up in Kipling, while the glories of Uncle Remus are extolled in "The United Idolaters" (*Debits and Credits*). Since dialect humour was fashionable well into Kipling's maturity, the clever author was cashing in on a literary fad. And of course the later works in dialect are another example of Kipling, the boy who never grew up. Unfortunately, it becomes exasperating to explain just who wrote the stories which came from the pen of a mature man, especially when one of them, "On Greenhow Hill", uses so much dialect.

Assuming that Kipling employs dialect for more than commercial or whimsical reasons alone, the question returns—what, beyond verisimilitude, does dialect add? The first thing it adds is what Duns Scotus was pleased to call *hicceitas* and G. M. Hopkins "inscape", the very thisness of a thing. Verisimilitude convinces us that the elements in a work of art are possible even in our own everyday world; thisness, that the elements are as distinct

in themselves as the individual things we find around us. Verisimilitude urges us to declare that it could happen; thisness, that it could happen in its own way, "saying what I do is me, for this I came". It will be assumed for the present that the stage-Irish (assuming, of course, that the Irish themselves do not speak stage-Irish) of Private Mulvaney is an unsuccessful device for granting particularity to him, though it is probable that in fact the opposite is true. But that this striving for particularity is in fact a major reason for giving him a brogue appears plausible. As the reader proceeds through even so early a work as the *Soldiers Three* volume, he becomes aware that his interest is shifting from the events in which the men are involved to the characters themselves. And as this happens, particularly in the "Soldiers Three" tales in *Life's Handicap* and *Many Inventions*, one learns that the coarse callous unreflecting Tommies are also human beings who have had to endure their share of life's hardships.

More recent writers have shown us ways of exhibiting a character's style more subtly than by attempting to reproduce his peculiar dialect. But all would agree that it is necessary to grasp a character's style, and that it is a mark of craftsmanship for an author to render it without direct intervention. The use of dialect is one means of achieving this. The concluding paragraph of "The Courting of Dinah Shadd" boldly compares Mulvaney to the tortured Prometheus, an unnecessary and unprofitable intervention on the part of the author. Reading some of Terence's words earlier in the tale, however, one is struck by how ably his speech betrays him. He is reflecting upon his failure to be off with the old love before he is on with the new, and is also recalling the anger of his would-be mother-in-law:

"I ran out into the dhark, my head in a stew an' my heart sick, but I had sinse enough to see that I'd brought ut all on mysilf. 'It's this to pass the time av day to a panjandhrum av hellcats', sez I. 'What I've said, an' what I've not said do not matther. Judy an' her dam will hold me for a promust man, an' Dinah will give me the go, an' I deserve ut. I will go an' git dhrunk', sez I, 'an' forget about ut, for 'tis plain I'm not a marryin' man'."

All is here: ironic wit (" 'tis plain I'm not a marryin' man") alongside cliché ("Head in a stew", "give me the go"); the racy sensibility never at a loss for the colourful turn of phrase; the bravado of the final sentence. Kipling is giving us Mulvaney, and this gift would be diminished without the many touches of dialect which make him inescapably Terence.

Dialect, then, has its uses. But assume that Kipling's employment of it is not uniformly successful, that one cannot easily locate numbers of instances where character in all its particularity is revealed as effortlessly as in the passage quoted above. Assume only that the author is trying to achieve this particularity. The reason for it must still be found. How foolish the search appears—what artist has not wanted particularity? Has anyone recently disdained to number the streaks on the tulip? Even with all of this in mind, the reader of Kipling is still faced with an artist who, even for a modern, appears particularly intent upon capturing thissness.

In his distinguished essay on "Kipling's World"² the late C. S. Lewis demonstrated the prevalence of the "inner circle" concept of social relationships throughout the works. There is no need to duplicate Lewis's observations; the reader need only recall some of the many in-groups and the outsiders Kipling posits against them: the unlicked cubs of the regiment—the old sweats who break them in, or maybe break them; the unsung (until R.K.) chaps who carry the Empire—the apathetic, ignorant political nation forever kicking them from behind; the clever fellows who play the Great Game—the ordinary johnnies who never see the underside of a great Empire; the quiet, ironic pranksters who have no self-delusions—the pompous or ignorant or merely dull who will have monstrous jokes played upon them. Lewis's appreciation of Kipling's compulsive establishment of in-out group divisions recalls Chesterton's characteristically half-true, devastating jibe:

Lest they forget, lest they forget,
That you belonged to the privileged set.

Every group will have its passwords, its little mannerisms of tone and phrasing. Thus the extensive use of dialect is an aspect of Kipling's pathetic longing for clubbiness in every aspect of life. Nowhere, seemingly, is this better shown than in the childish trust in the concept of Freemasonry as revealed in "In the Interests of the Brethren" (*Debits and Credits*). In the same volume appears "The Janeites", where even the readers of Jane Austen share a closed circle. It is all very reminiscent of Holden Caulfield's enumeration of all the cliques at Pennsy Prep, where even "the guys in the goddam Book-of-the-Month club hung around together". It may be agreed that the extensive use of dialect is at least partially bound up with the in-group spirit, but this groupiness need not be as snobbish and puerile as some critics would make it.

It is scarcely a denial of Lewis's insight to feel that this longing for

cliques is attributable to another source: the sense of particularity. The human condition rarely permits us to view things as themselves alone. We tend to work through contrasts, instinctively furnishing foils to every jewel. If a poet wishes to convey, for example, the qualities of those who go about their demanding jobs in a cheerful, easy fashion, he may do so by invoking a contrasting sort of personality:

They do not preach that their God will rouse them a little before the nuts work loose.

They do not teach that His Pity allows them to leave their jobs when they damn-well choose.

("The Sons of Martha", *The Years Between*)

It is scarcely an original thought, but learning what things are not is one way of learning what they are. The implicit contrast is always present in Kipling's groups. He is saying that he has placed the characters in the inner circle and emphasized that location because this is an effective way of conveying their particular reality to the reader. These people are not like the others, they are like themselves. Critics may still feel the need to ask just why it is that Kipling appears to be drawn solely to inner-circle types, but the answer cannot be given in terms of literature alone. It becomes a question of how one views the human race, and to view mankind as a gathering of groups, each having within itself an in-group, is to be realistic at least. The use of dialect therefore is an aspect of a larger theme in Kipling, that of particularity, a concept which can be made to explain even the prevalence of cliques in that author.

This sense of particularity manifests itself in many ways, some more palatable than others. But there is nothing *intrinsically* invalid in getting at thisness either through dialect or through the heightened sense of distinction inherent to any observation of an in-group. The absence of proof is in the pudding. There are occasions when Kipling's use of dialect appears ostentatious (as in many of the Barrack-Room Ballads), just as his sense of an in-group seems school-boyish snobbery—"Slaves of the Lamp. Part II" (*Stalky & Co.*). But there are also times—as has already been shown—when dialect is successfully employed, just as the presence of an in-group is in places an artistic necessity, as in "The Village that Voted the Earth Was Flat" (*A Diversity of Creatures*). To employ an example from another area, every reader realizes how insufferable Kipling can be in his glib omniscience:

There are three great doors in the world, where if you stand long enough, you shall meet any one you wish. The head of the Suez Canal is one . . . Charing Cross Station is the second . . . and the Nyanza Docks [!] is the third ("The Limitations of Pambe Serang", *Life's Handicap*).

Yet, he can do the same sort of thing in an entirely different, pleasing spirit:

There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays,
And every single one of them is right!

("In the Neolithic Age", *The Seven Seas*)

The first appears to be glibness for the sake of showing-off, the second an admission of the limitations of rules for poetry. Both statements are made through the device of precise enumeration. There is nothing wrong with the device itself. So with the use of dialect.

This sense of particularity, whatever its relation to Kipling's love for inner circles, does not exist *in vacuo*. It in turn may be viewed as another indication of that abiding sense of society and culture as tribal which stamps the entire Kipling output. By taking the long way round, the use of dialect may be seen as an aspect of this sense. In an essay which time will show to have set the tone of Kipling criticism for years, Lord Annan demonstrated how Kipling shared with such a thinker as Emile Durkheim the vision of the group, the tribe as the weavers of our cultural fabric of assumptions and philosophies.³ Just as Durkheim's *Suicide* contends that the force which fosters or retards its subject is not political or economic but spiritual or ideological (that is to say, a life-style is shaped more by these than by material factors), so Kipling views the group as the inculcator of the habits which will make a person choose instinctively one approach to life rather than the other. It is generally implied in Kipling that while all tribal norms are adequate until wisely questioned, no norms, because of their arbitrary nature, can survive this questioning. This is scarcely a plea for free and total inquiry, for while society (in the sense of "culture") may be arbitrary in its choice of undisputed axioms, it is also an enduring and necessary part of human existence. Nothing is to be gained by wrecking it. Recruits of any sort must be pounded into shape so that their response to the commands given them becomes in time automatic.

An example of this sense of society as an intricate structure sited upon an hypothesis occurs in Kipling's earliest volume; it expresses a way of looking at society that was not to pass:

Life, in India, is not long enough to waste in proving that there is no one in particular at the head of affairs. For this reason. The Deputy is above the Assistant, the Commissioner above the Deputy, the Lieutenant-Governor above the Commissioner, and the Viceroy above all four, under the orders of the Secretary of State, who is responsible to the Empress. If the Empress be not responsible to her Maker—if there is no maker for her to be responsible to—the entire system of Our administration must be wrong. Which is manifestly impossible.

(“The Conversion of Aurelain McGoggin”, *Plain Tales from the Hills*)

The passage is not as ironic as it appears. Somewhere, someone has to swallow society *holus bolus* and get on with his job if his fellows are to have anything approaching peace, order, and security during their lives. The theorizing Westerner, Kipling would say, has this forcibly impressed upon him in India, particularly if he forms a portion of the British *raj* and represents the sole agency for peace, order, and security in the land. Such an ethic is unabashedly authoritarian, for the tribe cannot function if very many tribesmen think and do as they please (the idea of change and dissent as vital factors in any group's health does not loom too largely in Kipling). But it is also a service ethic which discourages its holders from always asking what is in it for them.

A tribe, of course, must have its particular dialect, a visible reminder of that complex of idiosyncracies forming that tribal style distinguishing it from all others. And inner circles become necessary also, for they are sub-groups whose profound consciousness of tribal *mores* makes them guardians of the tribe's moral strength. Thus Kipling's schoolboys in their maturity (or, as some would say, absence of it) are forever holding reunions, gossiping of one another's exploits, praising the training they received, all because they are conscious of themselves as preservers of the tribal *elan*. If the salt lose its savour. . . .

If the tribe is the all-important social unit, then its dialect (in which must be included ultimately everything in tribal communication marking it as *this* tribe's) is central to the preservation of tribal vitality. For this reason, “The Last Rhyme of True Thomas” (*The Seven Seas*) deals with what J. I. M. Stew-

art has seen as the Yeatsian theme of the artist's possession of a power greater than a king's.⁴ The artisan of its dialect is a necessity for the tribe: "the man with the Words shall wait upon the man of achievement", as Kipling remarked in 1906, "and step by step with him try to tell the story to the Tribe" ("Literature", *A Book of Words*). Even in defeat, a tribe which still believes in itself can be in fact more vital than the victors; at least that is the message of the Parnesius narratives, notably "Winged Hats", where the seemingly impotent Picts are on the verge of a triumph over the glittering Romans who have no cause to fight for other than that of holding on.

Can we not discern therefore a layer of meaning in "A Conference of the Powers" which is not always noticed? Certainly the story can be made to seem the usual deflation of the intellectual by rather inarticulate Boy Blimps. Eustace Cleever, the novelist gazing in awe at the youthful subalterns haw-hawing away so modestly about the horrible sights seen and deeds done in their colonial campaigns, must be the author, hero-worshipping his better-sighted classmates at Westward Ho! As for the story's final sentence—that Cleever blasphemed his own Art (the capital is Kipling's) and would be sorry for it—that is obviously an ironic aside about those pretentious aesthetes. It seems to make much more sense, however, to assume that Cleever, for all his dealings with country life, has become a bit of a lounge lizard. He is therefore at a loss when confronted by men who have looked steadily at the violence and cruelty at the bottom of so much of life. Thus Cleever, in shock, blasphemes the word-smith's art. But the artist dealing with life as it is has no need to take second place even to tough but clean young Englishmen home from a colonial war. Only through the artist can the meaning of their deeds be asserted and communicated. The story is titled "A Conference of the Powers"—a conference of two powers, those of the life of action and of the life of imaginative creation. It is a conference, not a contest. True Thomas would have come off better than Eustace Cleever, but both perform the same vital role in the activation of tribal consciousness.

A final point must be made: the Kipling tribal sense, despite its emphasis on each tribe's particularity and sovereignty, is no anarchic one. At first it seems to posit a war of all (tribes) against all (tribes). Applied to international affairs, the vision seems to excuse all violence there as an outlet for the legitimate self-assertion of independent powers lacking common interests. The question of which tribe is to rule is the only one to be settled, as we may assume that each will try to lord it over the others. While this is not the place

to enter upon a detailed consideration of the role of the Law in Kipling, the writings repeatedly assert the existence of standards to which the tribes must adhere, standards which will restrain the selfishness of individual tribes in the same way that tribal standards curb the desires of members. The penultimate stanza of "Recessional" should be proof enough of this. And in the *Jungle Books*, where the best-known verses on the Law appear ("The Law of the Jungle", *Second Jungle Book*), the reader beholds the union of competing "tribes" of the animal kingdom in the face of a common danger or enemy, as in "Letting in the Jungle" (*ibid*). Though the animals unite there to destroy an offending village, they do so not from a hatred for man, but because the villagers have grossly violated the standards of decency and mutual aid which should govern all. The villagers are dangerous outlaws, and must be driven away.

A critic may object that to inculcate norms of conduct through talking animals is obscurantist, childish, and dangerous, though the beast fable appears a common enough mode of ethical instruction in all cultures. Still, what has contributed more to the confusions of the present than the formation of alliances which *ipso facto* read out of the human compact all other powers, always on the grounds of decency and mutual aid? But Kipling is not speaking on a level of direct political implication; he is instead erecting a myth, a framework for viewing relations between the tribes and showing (as an artist "shows") that certain principles govern man's conduct whether or not he chooses to recognize them. The question is not whether Kipling's views on the higher law that should govern the tribes should have paralleled those of such contemporaries as Gilbert Murray and Lowes Dickinson. It would seem out of character for Mowgli, Baloo, Bagheera, and Kaa to form some sort of Jungle Secretariat with the wolf pack as a UNEF. But the Kipling tribal myth does have room within it for the repression of power-mad tribalism.

Even within the tribe, even within the in-group, doctrines arise which impose restraints and wider responsibilities upon group members. The reason that Orde, in "The Enlightenments of Pagett, M.P."⁵ is a member of an Imperial in-group and Pagett is not, is that Orde works a good deal harder at his job than Pagett at his, and that running an Empire is more difficult than criticizing it. In-groups can also be asylums without becoming country clubs: the meaning of the Masonic stories, particularly of "In the Interests of the Brethren", is not that the Lodge is some self-sufficient enclave of scheming elitists, any more than the Janeites in the same volume are a collection of toffs with mandarin tastes. Instead (remember that these stories are set during

the Great War) Lodge (like the novels of Jane Austen) is a retreat from a mad world of contending tribes, a place where a man may gain some perspective about what lies behind the madness, and what alternatives there might be. One of the members asserts to the brethren that Freemasonry stresses "The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man" (again, the capitals are Kipling's). The War is doing the opposite. Thus even the seemingly elitist echelons of the Kipling world concern themselves with interests wider than those of their own clique. To be sure, ruling elites always claim to govern in the common interest, but the point in Kipling's artistic treatment of them is that they actually do. Few are prepared to jettison the paintings of Tiepolo because they display an immoderate amount of confidence in the selflessness, probity, and moral grandeur of an obscure and declining Venetian aristocracy. In both Kipling and Tiepolo the audience is dealing with the myth, rather than with the reality of an elite.

In Kipling's idealization (the term is not synonymous with falsification) of the in-groups of his world, the principle of community is not forgotten. Speaking in dialect need not render one's speech unintelligible to a good listener, and insofar as they are human, one man's experiences should be communicable to another. But all men are not the same, all groups need not express themselves in the same fashion, because diversity is life. For this reason Kipling took the title for a collection of stories from a sentence in the *Arabian Nights*, "Praised be Allah for the diversity of his creatures". Dialect represents a fundamental human paradox: that men differ, yet form groups of a certain sameness. No matter how closely-knit and inbred these groups, they overlook at their peril the humanity and coherence of other such bodies. This is a theme common to such works as "Recessional", the Parnesius stories, and *Kim*, where a young man learns that not all *babus* have jellied backbones and that the Indian in his blood can be as valuable as the Englishman.

By this date, the literary public surely understands that Kipling is not to be challenged on a surface level. To dispute Kipling's views on liberals requires dealing with his views on such questions as the nature and function of leadership in society, the fragility of civilization, and the role of reason as a solvent of society. It is from such premises as these that the author works, and an argument over say, Home Rule for Ireland would have got nowhere until the basic positions had been made clear. In the same fashion, Kipling's fondness for dialect cannot be explained on a level of craftsmanship alone, but is another instance of a deeper vision of humanity which persists through-

out his work. This essay has attempted to show how the use of the dialect of the tribe links up with that tribal vision.

NOTES

1. For a complete discussion of this story see Carl A. Bodelson, *Aspects of Kipling's Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), 155-65.
2. In his *They Asked for a Paper* (London: G. Bles, 1962), 72-92.
3. "Kipling's Place in the History of Ideas", *Victorian Studies*, III (June, 1960), 323-48.
4. J. I. M. Stewart, *Eight Modern Writers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 293.
5. This story is not available in all Kipling editions. It may be found in *In Black and White* in the "Outward Bound" Edition, and in *Many Inventions* in the Sussex Edition. It first appeared in the *Contemporary Review* for September, 1890.