Was Rudyard Kipling a mongoose?

A query from ODE

It may be that scholars have given insufficient attention to this question. If they have, they have been unsuccessful in drawing the result of their deliberations to my jurisdiction.

So, as the man would say, you shall hear.

To start, apart from Kipling's being a mongoose (or not being, I have no intention of foreclosing prematurely on this discussion, which at least has some merit of originality – how many other writers can you name who might be mongooses or mongeese?) – what else might he have been? As General Editor of the Oxford World's Classics *Kipling* in 1987, Professor Andrew Rutherford of Aberdeen proclaimed Kipling 'for the last decade of the 19th-century and at least the first two decades of the 20th the most popular writer in English, in verse and prose throughout the English-speaking world', and while Edgar Wallace might have crowded him on prose for the end of the period (and try other possible rivals for yourself), Rutherford would seem to have his sums pretty nearly right. A few very dark horses might eclipse him in occasional years but overall, Rudyard held his own. At the same date (Kipling was just out of the 50-year-posthumous-copyright and the 70-year, required by the European Community, was not yet law), Craig Raine selected *A Choice of Kipling's Prose* for Faber and Faber, modestly advertising alongside it Faber's *Choice of Kipling's Verse* (1941) selected by T. S. Eliot. There is only one T. S. Eliot (and by 1987 there were none), while the Raine it raineth every day, but Raine was at least ready to keep flying the Eliot cultural autocracy, opening: 'We need to think again about Kipling. He is our greatest short-story writer ...' – which adds to our problems the question of who the hell are we? On the Rutherford showing we could be every Anglophone in the North Atlantic and Empire/Commonwealth. Confined to the archipelago, England can have Kipling, but Scotland has to slug it out between Conan Doyle, Fred Urquhart and your own nominees, Ireland probably settles for Frank O'Connor, Wales Caradoc Evans. Raine may mean the editorial/royal/Papal we, in which case having confessed his need to think again (modesty again taking for granted an initial ratiocination), he instructs us (or him) that 'In his best work, Kipling extends the literary franchise to the inarticulate', which initially means he thinks Kipling rivals Joyce in giving a voice to machines (what Kipling would think of any thought bracketing him with Joyce is not nice for us to think). Otherwise, Kipling was fascinated by the Irish, and constantly produced Irish heroes – the soldier Mulvaney, the schoolboy McTurk, the boy vagrant Kim – and even the bitterest critic of the Irish (eg. John Buchan) would be unlikely to blame them for inarticulacy.

Admittedly with Raine around to filter the articulation, even the Irish may have problems. Reprinting a story with Mulvaney as narrator, Raine sanitizes it with the clearance that Mulvaney's 'brogue [is] turned down just the requisite fraction from its earlier appearances in *Soldiers Three*. It is still broad, but acceptable – an evocation rather than a phonetically pedantic transcription'. Raine is broad too, as broad as the bristles on pig-ignorance can make him, but be he as deep as a grave, as wide as a barn door, he won't serve. Mulvaney's 'brogue' is as acceptable as a three-pound note. Kipling loved Ireland, but he couldn't pronounce it for the life of him. It has nothing to do with his Toryism, or pro-landlord sympathies: Edith Somerville and her cousin Violet Martin Ross wallowed in both sentiments all the year round instead of occasional moments of recollection, but they caught Irish intonation to a hair's breadth or, given the predatory sports of their class, a hare's breath. They were, in fact, much less tolerant of Irish incorrigibles than was Kipling. They admitted to some affection socially (not politically) for rebellious Irish boys, but they would never have made an impudent scapegrace like Kim the hero of a story, much less of an entire novel.

Kim is Irish, Indian-born, but Kimball O'Hara by name: why Kimball? It sounds like a version of Cam-beal,

also a rendering of Campbell and translatable as 'twisted mouth' which is no bad description of Kim when enmeshed in his high diplomatic intricacies. Kipling used the name Campbell for a bully in his allegedly realistic school series, *Stalky & Co*, published in 1899 while Kim appeared in 1901, although that Campbell and Kim are spectacularly unalike. McTurk in *Stalky* is notoriously based on G. C. Beresford whose Schooldays with Kipling had 'McTurk' bracketed after the author's name when it appeared with suspicious rapidity after Kipling's death on 18 January 1936. But Kim is certainly not founded on McTurk. If he is based on anyone, he is an idealised Kipling, minus the short sight, the spectacles, the premature bodily hair, the legacy of persecution (it is Kipling the Englishman who felt he had been persecuted, not Kim the Irishman). And in fact Kipling was known to some friends (such as W. E. Henley) as 'Kip': Kip and Kim might reasonably be kith and kin, leaving other antecedents to Kimball/Campbell themselves after the initial baptism. Kim certainly sounds as if chosen before Kimball.

We (I mean myself, not Raine) may remark in passing that however proto-Fascist you may feel Kipling was – and you have quite a point in feeling it – try Kim before pitching him to hell, and if you give it half a chance, Kim will get you even if you can't stand Kip.

But Kip wrote Kim. Not entirely or possibly not at all, according to himself. He used to speak of his literary work being taken over by a 'daemon', and he was helpful in saying it, since there are many stories and poems which on any rational reading make no sense at all as products of the imperial ranting super-chauvinist that Kipling wanted the world to know was Kipling. Kim certainly becomes a British spy or as Kipling would say, 'English', a word that in Kim and elsewhere includes 'Irish' as 'British' apparently doesn't. But he also does the very Irish thing of becoming obsessed by the cult of a holy man whom he both venerates and controls. Shaw's real Ireland in *John Bull's Other Island* (1904), presents a characteristic efficient, powerful, shrewd, good-natured parish priest with no religious vocation in Father Dempsey, but for all of Dempsey's control over his flock the unfrocked Father Keegan is clearly and rightly believed by them to be a figure of much more real mystical power and pious character. Shaw may very well have owed Keegan to Kim and his guru. The true piety of the guru and that of Keegan can ultimately see realities of even the profane world at certain moments. Kipling may not have been able to write Ireland in terms of intonation (practically no Englishman can, and practically no Englishman thinks he can't) but he certainly knew how to think Ireland, especially having had the sense to put his Ireland walking along the roads of India at 10 years of age.

So why must Kim be Irish and not English, except in the loosest carpetbag sense? Why should Ireland loom so large in Kipling? Kim is Kipling's supreme Irish challenge to his reader – and has anyone produced a better Irish answer to Huckleberry Finn? Joyce won't do: Kim may be Kip but he is no portrait of the artist as a young man. Kipling's nice Anglo-Indian parents would have had a fit, and in his horrific story of his removal to an English hostile domicile, 'Baa, Baa, Black Sheep', Kipling gave us his self-portrait at age 10, light-years and two oceans and a Mediterranean Sea away from Kim. Kim, like Huck, is fictional, on whatever factual base: Stephen Dedalus is as real as his admiring self-creator could make him. Edmund Wilson, in his revolutionary 'The Kipling That Nobody Knows', wondered, unanswering, about this obsessive Hibernicity. To slake our drouth topically, whence this deviance?

Kim's problematic Irishness preoccupies Dr Kaori Nagai (Leverhulme Research Fellow, Kent) in her *Empire of Analogies – Kipling, India and Ireland* (Cork University Press), an elegant book in design, content and style. Its commanding portrait on the front dust jacket enlarged with somewhat menacing effect on the back strikes a suitably ironic note by reproducing Field-Marshal Sir Frederick Sleigh Roberts, first Earl Roberts (1832-1914) 'and his faithful orderly Dufadar'. Roberts was, like Kim, born in India, but of Irish though not Celtic descent, served as commander-in-chief in Ireland while writing *Forty-one Years*

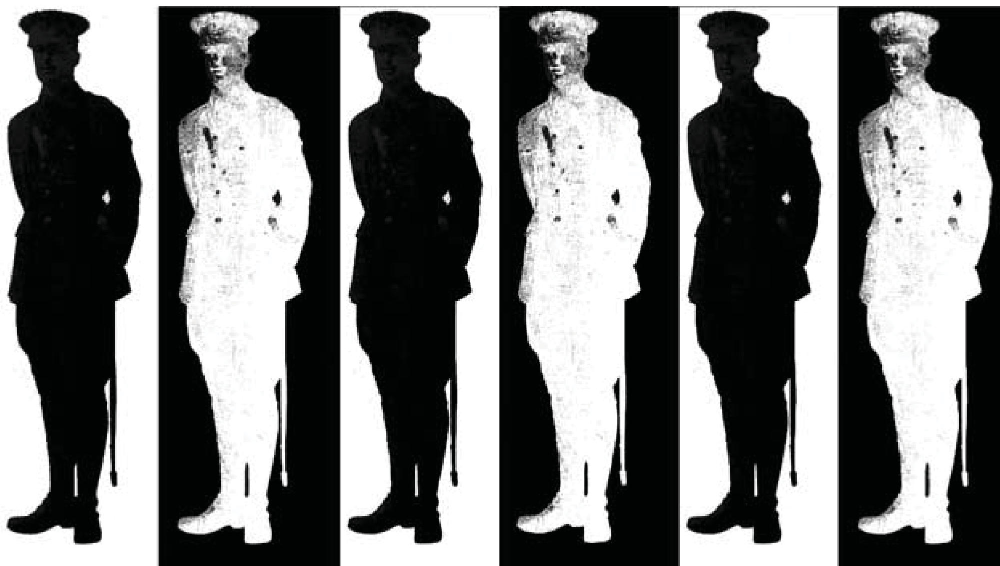
in India (1897) and was widely held to have turned defeat into victory for Britain in the Boer War to the accompaniment of vociferous cheers from Kipling who had already had Mulvaney pronounce 'he's a rale good little man is Bobs' (that reaffirmative final two words being a common English, but not Irish, colloquialism) and some anonymous Barrack-room Balladmonger extol him with the same curiously patronising note. 'Lord Roberts was Kipling's personal hero', notes Nagai at the outset, 'and also embodied his dream of India and Ireland joining together to defend the Empire.' She does some deft work at the end on the Sikh-narrated (another of Raine's inarticulates?) 'A Sahib's War' (in Kipling's *Traffics and Discoveries* (1904)) honouring the dead and glorious Captain Walter Decies Corbyn whom she finds inspired by Roberts, 'Decies' she notes as a Latinised Gaelic 'Déise' (Cork University Press unpatriotically elided the accent) a Waterford barony (but clearly pre-baronial), and Roberts was ennobled as 'Roberts of Kandahar, Pretoria, and Waterford'.

In fact, Roberts's last days had brought his military science and status to the moral support of the Ulster Volunteers threatening war under Sir Edward Carson to take effect when the Third Home Rule Bill became law (save that the law from its first moment was a dead letter, World War I having broken out). Kipling had solemnly appeared (at Tunbridge Wells) to exhort such public as he could get, to the same effect, thus committing treason: and he wrote one of his most lethal demagogic poems 'Ulster' in its support. Once the war was on, Kipling got Roberts to get his son John an officer's commission in the Irish Guards: as Dr Nagai says, 'Kipling's Indian connection eventually brought about John's death' at Loos in 1915, since the boy had been initially excluded from military service for poor eyesight. Kipling duly wrote *The Irish Guards in the Great War* in his memory (the body, incredibly, was only identified in 1992), duly noted in the 1997 edition.

The cult of 'Bobs' was a characteristic Kipling piece of Kipling hypnosis, in which, Kipling having justly emptied the vials of wrath on public contempt for soldiers except in time of war, the chastened public was prepared to accept Kipling's as the authentic Voice Of The Troops, a form of democratic expression appropriate for his own ideologies.

So H. E. Marshall told her young readers in *Our Island Story* that Roberts's soldiers 'loved to call him Bobs', which put paid by pre-emptive strike to any thoughts about what else they might have liked to call him, from time to time. A little Kipling dropping of aspirates was a sure prescription against the faintest whiff of mutiny (save when the mutineers are supporting Protestant Ulster).

'Bobs' may be Walter Decies Corbyn, aka Kurban Sahib, but he certainly is not Kim. Dr Nagai opens with some useful summaries of the state of scholarship on the Irishness of Kim, and, if accurate, points to some choice specimens of academic gymnastics. One writer decides that '"India" seems to disappear from the narrative altogether', which seems akin to insisting that King Charles's head never had a body, another



that the book is 'a way of containing' 'Irish unrest' and 'Indian unrest' 'by joining Irish and Indian dissents'. She herself proposes 'to see Kim as the personification of the imperial connection between India and Ireland', not, apparently, assuming the work a fulfilment of the apocalyptic 'a little child shall lead them'. Certainly the thought of Kim as infant master of many cultures is both imperial in vision and communicative in voice: if Kipling was giving voice to the inarticulate by the expedient of ventriloquising with his own, he knew better than his masters that imperialism needs some form of communication other than orders from on high bellowed at the, white, brown, black subordinates without the slightest acknowledgment of their humanity.

Dr Nagai is quite right to stress that Ireland had participated in the imperial experience through Roberts (and Dyer of Amritsar Massacre infamy), that we are, so to say, justified in speaking of an Irish Empire, as Keith Jeffery does, with all the bombast Michael Fry brings to what he thinks to be his discovery of a Scottish one. Irish nationalists prefer to limit their country to its admitted links to Indian resistance. As Gandhi put it sardonically (quoted by Nagai), 'The Irish people count for nothing in their own land and are oppressed by their English rulers. But no sooner do they go out of Ireland than they enjoy rights similar to those of Englishmen' (even if the form this might take was, in the case of Patrick Ford, owner-editor of the best-selling New York *Irish World*, to write *A Criminal History of the British Empire*).

But was Gandhi quite right about at least one place outside Ireland, viz. England? If, with respect to Kaori Nagai, we go back to the matter of Kim and Kip, and the amount of Kip that might exist in Kim, or have its yearnings fulfilled by Kim, we are brought back to Kipling's first experience of England, without his parents from six years of age (1871-77) – and that confronts us with an appalling narrative of child suffering which Kipling repeated in three separate works, the short story 'Baa, Baa, Black Sheep' (before 1889), the novel *The Light That Failed* (1890) and the all too accurately-named posthumous memoir *Something of Myself for My Friends Known and Unknown* (1937). Kingsley Amis's *Rudyard Kipling* (1975) is worth a glance, apart from its interesting pictures: when Amis was not enmeshed in his performance of a pub bore his criticism merited some respect. Amis sensibly enough reminds us that while 'much' of Kipling's account 'must be true', 'Baa, Baa, Black Sheep' is a story. (*Something of Myself*, officially, is not, but few autobiographies can rival it in its fidelity to what its author wanted to be the facts). After reciting Kipling's sustained brutalisation at the hands of the English landlady with whom his parents deposited him and his smaller sister, Amis announces:

> The only certain result of these experiences that was certainly bad is 'Baa, Baa, Black Sheep'. It is a sorry tale in all senses, devoid of any conflict or tension, with a stated moral but no real point, and damagingly silent about the motives of Auntie Rosa [in fact, no relation]. Black Sheep [as Kipling insists his counterpart in the story becomes] might well have been unable to understand them, but even a far less skilful writer could have found a way to fill that vacuum. As it is, the story lacks all balance. Trix [Kipling's sister] said Kipling wrote it in a towering rage, not an advantageous state of mind in which to set about producing art.

And yet Amis is best remembered for his first novel, *Lucky Jim*, which so much enjoys itself contrasting the unreality of academic studies with the world's gross intrusions. There were other results than the story and its literary echoes: Kipling was almost blind when parental contact was resumed, and 'Auntie Rosa', otherwise Mrs Holloway in Southsea, Portsmouth, had done nothing to heal him, even if she had not exacerbated his condition; he emerged with a curious sado-masochistic streak, worshipping force and power while deeply alive to their cruelties (in *Stalky & Co*. when the heroes rescue a small boy from the bullying by Sefton and Campbell, does Kipling enjoy the subsequent bullying of the bullies more for its own sake or for its righting of wrongs, rescuing of the innocent, fitting the crime, &c? – and does he expect his audience to homologate his emotions?); he became a truly loving parent (although one who looked forward to spanking his son as appropriate) but his fiction sometimes offered a secret partnership with children, of the Blytonian kind – the realisation that it is 'Us' vs. 'Them', for all of Kipling's judicious festoons of Boy Scout stoical moralities, literally as well as figuratively.

And then, to play back on Amis his own self-indulgent pub-bore, although he is behaving himself so well as a pattern of academic objectivity, my own first experience of 'Baa, Baa, Black Sheep' I can recall with all of the horror the story induced when I read it at about 10, roughly the age when 'Punch' aka 'Black Sheep' enters into the worst of his ordeal.

A child wants to know if a story is true, as Belloc in 1908 told his readers of *Cautionary Tales for Children*:

And is it True? It is not True.
And if it were it wouldn't do,
For people such as me and you
Who pretty nearly all day long
Are doing something rather wrong.
Because if things were really so,
You would have perished long ago,
And I would not have lived to write,

The noble lines that meet your sight ...

But however he did it, Kipling got it across to me that Black Sheep really and truly had suffered like that, even if his suffering is somewhat embarrassingly frozen and iconified in its last lines after the return of his Mother (is the reader intended to pass a much severer verdict on her absenteeism and apparent indifference while away than the rescued Punch will do?):

'It's all different now, and we are just as much Mother's as if she had never gone.'
Not altogether, O Punch, for when young lips have drunk deep of the bitter waters of Hate, Suspicion, and Despair, all the Love in the world will not wholly take away that knowledge; though it may turn darkened eyes for a while to the light, and teach Faith where no Faith was.

The other thing I knew from the story was that it was autobiographical. The effect was the stronger because I found the story in a Kipling collection called *Wee Willie Winkie* and assumed from its title and the story's that these were amusing send-ups of nursery rhymes I pretended I had outgrown.

It was as though the horror was waiting for me inside the familiar rhyme, that the nursery favourite suddenly proved toxically lethal. One might accuse Kipling of undue contrivance, or of obvious pupillage to Dickens's supposedly autobiographical miseries reworked to open *David Copperfield*, but the answer to Amis – even if the answerer is more a laboratory experiment than a critic – is that it works.

Behind the story was the humiliation of rejection, not simply from parents in India (and Kipling seems to have been at peace with his, giving his father a cameo in Kim in his own profession as museum curator), but from his mother's sisters in England, all of them Macdonalds from mid-Ulster. Kipling said they were Scots Jacobite refugee descendants but it seems more likely that they were Protestantised Macdonnells whose apostasy had made emigration from Catholic north Antrim desirable. An Irish Celtic ancestry, however concealed for socio-political status, would enhance Kipling's interest in Kim and immersion in his idealised person. But however covertly Celtic the aunts opened no doors for a child up to now the spoiled darling of an Indian household whose native servants leaped to his every whim. Dr Nagai quotes Jacques Derrida (with undue humility since her beautifully lucid prose makes far more sense than his oracularities):

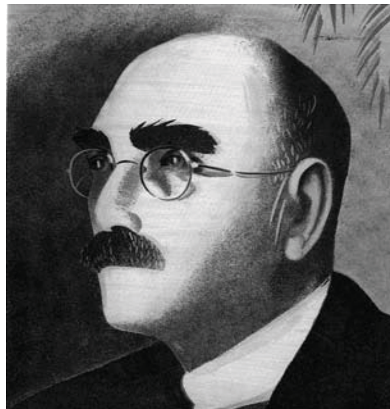
> *Hospitalitat* [hospitality], a word of Latin origin, of a troubled and troubling origin, a word which carries its own contradiction incorporated into it, a Latin word which allows itself to be parasitized by its opposite, 'hostility', the undesirable guest which it harbors as the self-contradiction in its own body.

And this translated from the French! How much more satisfactory the etymological musings of Captain W. E. Johns in *Biggles Charter Pilot* when Biggles having captured a Mexican bandit hands over his share of the reward 'to the local hospital. After that the local hospitality became so embarrassing that we wound up the engine and set a course for home'. Another superiority may be found in Joyce's 'The Dead' when Gabriel Conroy, wishing to show his contempt for hectoring Gaelic revivalists, makes a speech about princely hospitality, evidently unaware that the same word covers that adjective and that noun in the Irish-Gaelic language. The Derrida duopsychosis takes a pratfall on a banana skin in the case of the Kipling aunts. Their diagnosis of their nephew as an agent of hostility – ie. infant mayhem – made them implacably opposed to any incorporation of hostility in hospitality. And they were ladies of English consequence. Two were married to famous painters of the day, Edward Burne-Jones, and Edward Poynter. A third was the mother of a future Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin: in future times, Baldwin was ready to make considerable use of kinship to his more famous relative, but no risks were taken when little Stanley was four that he would be exposed to the dubious influence of his six-year-old cousin Ruddy.

In plain language, he came 'home' to England, and England both rejected him as kinsman, and imprisoned him with hard labour as human being. The result was simple enough. He hungered for acceptance, by his mother, by his family, by his England. But he could never trust them again, although his quest for their trust demanded that he never question their authority. He must serve in the hope of acceptance. But, translating the fate of Black Sheep into its universal implications, Kipling, having taken his six-year-old welcome from England as automatic, ate what ever after he considered the bitter bread of humiliation, ill-treatment, damnation (Auntie Rosa was very clear on that point), ending up eyeless in Gaza in the mill with slaves, himself lower than any. He was, in fact, a despised white colonial, whose other representatives were constantly to find their confident expectations of warm acceptance frozen on their lips when confronting denizens of the top drawer which would never domicile them. His pathetic courtship in

chauvinistic ditties and ballads fixed him all the more firmly below the salt – or worse, condescendingly a few places above it as a special treat, by grace but never by right.

After the House of Desolation vomited him forth, he went to the school affectionately described in *Stalky & Co*. Some authorities seem to assume his account was one describing deplorable conditions: to me it is a hymn of praise, certainly by contrast with 'Baa, Baa, Black Sheep'. He made good friends and was happy. But the friends he made were significant. One was the original of Stalky (shrewd enough for potential sales of his memoirs, which he would entitle *Stalky's Reminiscences* (1928): the future Major General L. C. Dunsterville. He rejoiced in his Englishness, which he thought he could trace back 'for 857 years', but he was born in Switzerland, saw little of his parents, and had difficulty in getting official acceptance of his nationality. The other, G. C. Beresford, was descended from Marquises of Waterford and Earls of Tyrone, Archbishops of Armagh, admirals and generals, but they remained irredeemably Irish in England, while the growing electoral power of Catholic Ireland was fast estranging them from the land which had fed them so well. He settled in the end for becoming a photographer, and by the 1920s meant so little to Kipling that he declined to be photographed by him. But in January 1878 the new recruit, to be known from his spectacles as 'Giglamps' or 'Gigger', was ready to accept friendship where he could get it. England had rejected him. Ireland did not:



> Gigger's first signals for a craft of similar, or nearly similar, build were soon hung out. A mention of some author or some books not of the kind that catered for the tottering simplicities of tender youth was made and a response awaited. I remember the day, perhaps the second day after his arrival, when Gigger suddenly became aware that I shared his interest in this matter, or business, of letters and books. How his eyes brightened and his giglamps glittered! And thereupon, without many words, our alliance was struck up.
> To me, Gigger was quite a find. What an extraordinary specimen to get into one's net! I had dragged through two other schools (preparatory ones); but here was a sample of something different in kind and not merely in degree. What a luxury to find one who had something to tell, who roamed in regions that were misty but interesting, and where there were exciting puzzles!
> The few well-meaning boys that I had been mentor to could drop out and amuse and interest one another. This air was not for them to breathe. It was not nice to throw them off, but Gigger was too good to lose. Here was someone with something to give away instead of standing rather dumbly and slackly around and waiting to be entertained and amused. I felt properly fixed up with a chum like Gigger. He was always interesting. [Beresford, *School days with Kipling*]

This is not the voice of the inarticulate, but it is a voice which told Kipling he could rely on an Irish welcome. It followed that he went below the top drawer for security. Irish (with rebellious mien, as Beresford seems to have had, but ultimately loyal to the adored but austere Authority), non-commissioned soldiers (ditto), certain non-whites (ditto, ditto), wolves (ditto, ditto, ditto ...). To return to Beresford:

> When you looked more closely at this new boy, you were astonished to see what seemed to be a moustache right across the smile; and so it was – an early spring moustache just out of the ground of his upper lip. Kipling's hair being dark, the moustache was visible, when you really had twigged it was a moustache, from quite a number of feet off. It was not actually against regulations for lower-schoolboys to wear moustaches, but it looked like trespassing on the privileges of the prefects and the upper sixth, who could – if able and so disposed – display some faint pencilling on the upper lip. However, it was not advisable to order the new arrival to shave, so the matter was passed over ...
> The modelling of his head was peculiar. His skull appeared of moderate size in relation to his rather large face; his forehead retreated sharply from a heavy brow-line – in fact, so sharp was the set-back from the massive eyebrow ridges that he appeared almost 'caveboy'. His lower jaw was massive, protruding and strong; the chin had a deep central cleft or dimple that at once attracted attention. Owing to its width, his face appeared rather Mongolian, and, bar the specs, he looked rather more formidable than he was. His complexion was dark rather than pale; the darkish hair was always close cropped.
> His mouth was wide, with very well-shaped lips ...

The Mowgli stories began to appear in 1893 and were collected (bar the adult 'In the Rukh') over the next two years in *The Jungle Book* and *The Second Jungle Book* (edited inspirationally by W.W. Robson for Oxford World's Classics, 1987). To identify Kipling with Mowgli, or at least to see Mowgli as appropriate costume for Kipling to make his fancy-undress, is both obvious and daunting. Wolf companions might be one stage farther than *Stalky & Co.*, or Mulvaney and his fellow-soldiers, or – later on – Kim and his guru, but the protective environment Kipling found among rejects, aliens, social undesirables (except when the state may require them) does the same work here. There is a level of allegory, certainly.

Mowgli's bear teacher, Baloo, and panther godfather, Bagheera, are deliberately reminiscent of human instructors, all the more in that they dominate and discipline Mowgli but the ultimate authority will be his. Kipling was fond of both the headmaster and the school chaplain at his school, both appearing in *Stalky & Co.* – he had disliked the first school chaplain, whose name really was Campbell, and who seems to be caricatured in Kim where his colleague, the Irish Catholic priest Father Victor, is likeable (and Kipling knew enough about Irish priests to realise they did not like to call themselves Roman Catholics – few Roman Catholics do). There is a clever thimblerigging in the Mowgli-wolf identification for Kipling: he may have had more hair than Mowgli, making him more wolf than the wolf-boy in appearance if not in context. Equally Kim's ability to pass for native may have been one that Kipling liked to imagine for himself, and perhaps, 'bar the specs' as Beresford would say, he might have done. One suspects he might never have been able to lose his air of authority among natives, though it is equally clear, not only from *Kim*, that he would have been reverential enough towards holy men whose sanctity he could recognise. He was genuinely fascinated by the idea of Indians of power and achievement, recognised by the English rules as such, one day relinquishing all, to become holy hermits. One of his finest non-Mowgli stories in *The Second Jungle Book*, 'The Miracle of Phurun Bhagat', is a beautiful vision of just such a figure who ultimately reasserts his old authority to save the people he had found, devoted to his holiness and ignorant of his past politics.

In the 1960s the premier of Thailand Thanom Kittikachorn packed the whole thing in, American allies, Siamese subjects, neutralist and Communist enemies, and became a holy man unknown to all. To identify Kipling's interest with such figures with the Irish 'Druidic, Celtic heritage' as Dr Nagai notes some scholars do, seems excessive: she rightly takes the cautious logic that:

> Kipling seems to make full use of the supernatural legacy of both India and Ireland in order to forge a natural connection between the two countries.

He was not tapping on Yeats's door for bootleg quarts of Celtic twilight. He wanted his mystics here and now, and saw the power of renunciation as modern in its most striking epiphany.

And he himself had stooped to conquer, whether as Irish, wolf-boy, or even the holy ex-statesman Phurun Bhagat. To go higher, he must go lower. That he could write hilarious stories about animals all sensible readers of *Just So Stories* might agree, and no doubt he could see some fond likenesses in his domestication by his American wife and his own yearning for the life of heroic adventure (permanently closed to him by his eyesight) when he portrayed the Cat that Walked by Itself ultimately captured by the Woman but retaining some times to walk on its wild lone. But I rather think his absolute achievement was in a splendid story for persons of any age, the non-Mowgli tale 'Rikki-Tikki-Tavi' in *The Jungle Book*, beloved of Kipling's better critics, adopted by Shaw for the nickname of a character in *Man and Superman* (1903), and probably inspired by the mongoose Teddy in the Sherlock Holmes story 'The Crooked Man'.

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi is an intensely loveable mongoose, cut off from his family by natural disasters, and ultimately winning a revered place in an English family by saving its child – Teddy – and then the entire family from a family of neighbouring cobras, who make impressively real enemies, all the more because as Robson says in editing, the female cobra is the nastier and yet the stronger partly because of the maternal instinct to set her brood up at the expense of the humans. Auntie Rosa is zealous, at Punch's expense, for the welfare of her bullying son Harry. Ultimately, when he has been beaten yet again by Harry and Auntie Rosa, she stitches a placard with the card 'Liar' on it (too many shades of David Copperfield?) and tells him to go for a walk wearing it:

> 'If you make me do that,' said Black Sheep very quietly, 'I shall burn this house down, and perhaps I'll kill you. I don't know whether I can kill you – you're so bony --but I'll try.'
> No punishment followed this blasphemy, though Black Sheep held himself ready to work his way to Aunty Rosa's withered throat, and grip there till he was beaten off.

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi kills both cobras, but we only see his kill of the male (shrewd economy from Kipling):

> Nag was asleep, and Rikki-Tikki looked at his big back, wondering which would be the best place for a good hold. 'If I don't break his back at the first jump,' said Rikki, 'he can still fight; and if he fights – O Rikki!' He looked at the thickness of the neck below the hood, but that was too much for him, and a bite near the tail would only make Nag savage.
> 'It must be the head,' he said at last; 'the head above the hood; and when I am once there, I must not let go.'
> Then he jumped. The head was lying a little clear of the water-jar, under the curve of it: and as his teeth met, Rikki braced his back against the bulge of the red earthenware to hold down the head. This gave him one second's purchase, and he made the most of it …

Kaori Nagai has written a work of delicacy, strength, insight and vast research, which enormously advances our understanding of Kipling, Ireland and India, but she needed a little more about Kipling himself as an oppressed person, and hence why he became a mongoose.