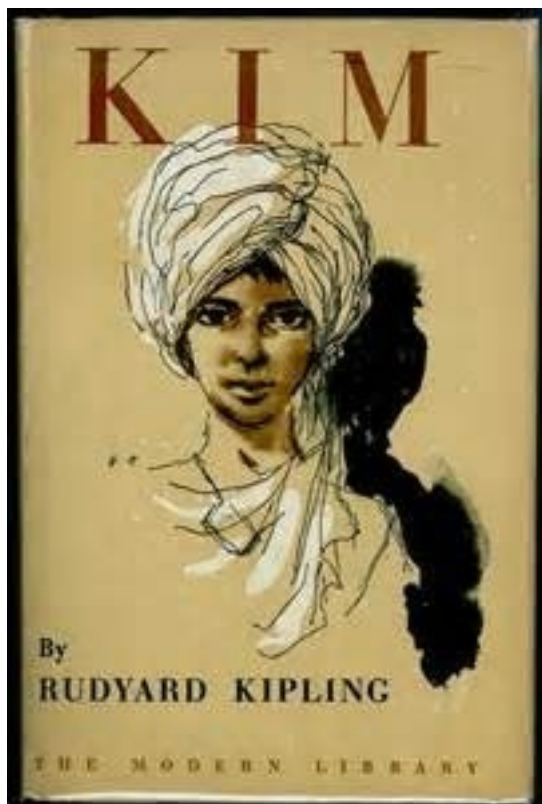

Rudyard Kipling

Kim



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Author: Rudyard Kipling

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Description

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY EDWARD W. SAID

Kim is set in an imperialistic world; a world strikingly masculine, dominated by travel, trade and adventure, a world in which there is no question of the division between white and non-white.

Two men - a boy who grows into early manhood and an old ascetic priest, the lama - are at the center of the novel. A quest faces them both. Born in India, Kim is nevertheless white, a sahib. While he wants to play the Great Game of Imperialism, he is also spiritually bound to the lama. His aim, as he moves chameleon-like through the two cultures, is to reconcile these opposing strands, while the lama searches for redemption from the Wheel of Life.

A celebration of their friendship in a beautiful but often hostile environment, 'Kim' captures the opulence of India's exotic landscape, overlaid by the uneasy presence of the British Raj.

Insightful reviews

Jason Pettus: (Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted illegally.)

The CCLaP 100: In which I read for the first time a hundred so-called "classics," then write reports on whether or not they deserve the label

Essay #51: *Kim* (1901), by Rudyard Kipling

The story in a nutshell:

Rudyard Kipling has taken a big hit in reputation since the rise of Postmodernism in the post-colonial period, becoming in many people's eyes the veritable poster-child for the gleeful embrace of the British Empire seen in the last half of the Victorian Age; so it might come as a surprise to learn that his 1901 *Kim*, which many people consider his undisputed masterpiece, is not a paean to imperialism at all, but rather a deeply complex and surprisingly judgement-free look at Kipling's birthplace of India, set firmly during the "Raj" years of British rule there but with the imperialists often coming off as corrupt buffoons, a deeply spiritual tale that concentrates mostly on the ways that locals tried to live their daily lives back then even with the interference of all the various interloping white people there. It's told mostly through the eyes of our titular hero (full name Kimball O'Hara), who despite being the child of a dead Irish couple has grown up like any other tough Hindu beggar child on the streets of Lahore, albeit an unusually smart and cunning one who at the beginning of the book decides to become the personal assistant of a visiting Tibetan lama, because of his deep superstitious beliefs combining with his fascination over the exotic-looking and -sounding Himalayan monk. While traveling with the lama across the country in his spiritual quest, then, we also have a chance to see Kim act as a low-level informant for various parties involved with the "Great Game," a term for the cold war of sorts that Britain and Russia quietly and unofficially waged against each other during the 1800s in the

rural wilds of eastern Europe and western Asia. (So in other words, if you think of this as the 19th-century version of the fight between the US and the Soviet Union, then the Crimean War would've been their Vietnam. And yes, by the way, it was Kipling who invented the actual term, to describe a group of people and activities that both governments denied for decades even existed.)

But after spying a specific British regiment flag (from the battalion of his dead father) that he had been told as a child would be a portentous sign of his destiny if he was to ever see it, Kim does what he was instructed to do as a child and shows its commander his father's old papers, kept in a locket that Kim has worn around his neck his entire life; and that sends Kim on a new journey through the formal educational system of Raj Britain, against his will at first but then with a growing enthusiasm, when discovering that his past and his demeanor makes him a perfect "secret agent" for these Great Game activities, even while being trained on the sly in the eastern versions of treachery within the back rooms of shady local shops during his school holidays. This then gets him sent out on his first official assignment at the end of school, right at the same time that his old Buddhist master has decided to finally revisit the mountainous villages of the Himalayans from where he came; but after a series of violent adventures during the journey there, plus a belated achievement of enlightenment by the Tibetan lama, Kim is left at the end of our book a confused soul, not sure whether to follow the call of Duty and Queen or to strike out and pursue his own Great Wheel of Time.

The argument for it being a classic:

Well, for starters, Kipling was the very first English-language writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature; and many consider *Kim* to be the best of all his long-form work, a fine example to pick if you're planning on reading only one of his books. (Of course, others argue that it's actually his short stories and poems that are better than any of his long-form books, while yet others argue that it's better to primarily think of Kipling as a children's author, although we'll shelve these debates for a later day.) And like I said, that's because this is a surprisingly complex story, a truly sweeping tale that uses the entire vast width and breadth of the Indian subcontinent as its canvas, looking at the complicated mix of cultures, classes and religions that made up this area at the time, which let's not forget had been a whole series of autonomous warring kingdoms (or *rajyas*) before the British came in and arbitrarily made the entire place one big geopolitical state. The self-professed favorite novel of independent India's very first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, this subtle and moving late-career tale is the product of an older and more mature Kipling, able to get across his points in a more nuanced way than the "Rah Rah God And Country" stuff he's best known for, a hyper-realistic look at a specific time and place in history that still easily deserves to be included in the list of the world's classics.

The argument against:

Oh, and did I mention "The White Man's Burden?" DID I, YOU HORRIBLE IMPERIALIST MONSTER?! That seems to far and away be the biggest online criticism of Kipling you find, frankly, much more than any complaints about the quality of *Kim* itself; that the man was the undeniable champion and apologist for the idea of subjugation of native populations by a benevolent yet all-powerful British Empire, with for example the "burden" of his infamous poem mentioned above being that white people have a literal spiritual duty to go to places like Africa and India and keep the bloodthirsty native heathens from all chopping each other up into little

pieces, an attitude that still silently influences a surprisingly large amount of US foreign policy to this day. This pall hangs over Kipling so much, in fact, that many are unable to look past it and judge the man's individual works on their own merits, a case of simply too much baggage which critics say ethically recuse him from being included in any classics lists at all, a writer not to be studied and admired but rather held up in shame as an example of our dark past.

My verdict:

Today's book brings up a topic we're often having to discuss here at the CCLaP 100, of how much a writer's personal life or political views should be tied to his worthiness as a literary figure; because to be frank, everything Kipling's critics say about him is true, and it's in fact hard to find anyone else of his stature and fame who was as such a dyed-in-the-wool fanatic of the idea of Empire and imperial inclinations. And so like I said, that's what makes *Kim's* complexly balanced look at global culture such a shocker, and I think says quite a bit about what exactly audiences most respond to over the long haul; it's gratifying, truthfully, to see that as the decades progress, the public is largely letting Kipling's most pro-imperial work fade into the obscurity it deserves, while it is the fairest and most complex book of his career that a century later is being considered more and more his best. Because I gotta say, for a book that's about to celebrate its 110th anniversary, this still has a tremendous amount of power to suck you right in, and to quickly make you feel like you're right there on an overcrowded train car rumbling its way across the desert along with our traveling heroes, debating the issues of the day with a whole rainbow of other passengers, a book better thought of not as a champion of Empire but simply a great record of what it was like to actually *live* during this imperial age, even as the writing on the wall was first starting to appear regarding this empire's eventual downfall.

And in fact, I think it's no coincidence that this came out right at the beginning of what I call the "Interregnum" of contemporary literary history, the twenty-year period between the end of Victorianism in 1900 and the mainstreaming of Modernism in 1920, a period of stagnation in Western Europe in which every project in the arts seemed to be either a fluffy piece of Genteel Edwardianism now largely forgotten, or a daring underground experiment not yet recognized for the brilliance that we now see it contains; and much like the US in the 1990s and 2000s, this also was the period when the first truly serious grumbings about the limits of the British Empire started appearing, not nearly as pronounced here specifically in *Kim* but certainly with that kind of darker tone flavoring the book's entire mood. It was only a hop, skip and jump from a novel like this to Joseph Conrad's much more damning *Heart of Darkness*, which was in bookstores at the exact same time; and of course just a few years away from World War One and the Suez Crisis and all the other disasters that led to the actual demise of the British Empire, all of it just starting to come to a head when a revered, elderly Kipling died in the 1930s, and was promptly interred in Westminster Abbey, one of the highest and rarest honors an artist can receive in Western civilization.

While I certainly understand why the post-colonialists of the 1960s through '90s tended to have such a tough stance towards Kipling as they did, in order to break some of that automatic fawning he received from general society in the first half of the 20th century, I also think it's high time that we in our 21st-century "post-racial" society do a close re-examination of Kipling yet again, and to understand when exactly he was an obvious supporter of imperial stereotypes and when he was a sly breaker of them; because when all is said and done, Kipling has a lot to

teach us about the history of that age, especially now that his attitudes can be placed better in a historical context instead of being automatically seen as an extension of the current status-quo. I encourage you to read through this rousing adventure tale, proto-spy-thriller and deeply informative history book whenever you have a chance, and without hesitation I call it as a classic that deserves its second moment in the sun.

Is it a classic?Yes

(And don't forget that the first 33 essays in this series are [now available in book form!](#))

Stela: I can see why this novel is considered a classic, but reading *The Jungle Books* first and liking it a lot in my childhood I couldn't help thinking that *Kim* is another Mowgli, exploring another jungle, but without the same magic.

Or maybe, just maybe it is a question of wrong time for reading. How was that Gigliola Cinquetti's song - *Non ho l'età...* for I honestly have to say that, in spite of the picturesque descriptions and of some interesting characters, I was often bored with the whole story. Damn, I'm growing old!

Laurie: *Kim* served as inspiration for my novel ["The Game"](#), the seventh entry in the Mary Russell series. Feel free to come and join in the discussion, even if you come across this after December has passed--the discussion will remain open indefinitely for new thoughts and comments. Click for more information about the [Virtual Book Club](#)

Oh, this is such a wonderful book. Coming-of-age tale and historical treatise; spy thriller and travel narrative; rousing adventure coupled with a sleek and subtle tale of the meeting of ancient traditions—and all of it told in a rotund and glorious English that would make Shakespeare feel right at home.

Read it aloud: "He sat, in defiance of municipal orders, astride the gun Zam-Zammah..." The short patter of a two-word phrase: when used to open a book it is a vigorous and active statement, not some paired monosyllable made feeble by surrounding text. The phrase, tucked apart by the comma, is followed by the perfect juxtaposition of defiance and municipal orders: the mind's eye is immediately shown a small brown urchin facing down the cumbersome, pale, foreign tools of white authority. Then comes the drawn-out adverb astride: a mere eight words into the story, and we receive our first intimation that this creature who sits will turn out to straddle much more than the barrel of a big gun. And then the personification of that gun, Zam-Zammah, a name that fills the mouth from teeth to soft palate.

Prose that swells the chest and engages the mind. And I'll bet the bastard didn't even fiddle endlessly with that line in order to get it right.

Rudyard Kipling breathed the air of India for his formative years. He was an Englishman, who never doubted the superiority of the British way of life, or of the British person. And yet, *Kim* is infused with the opposite, the native's good-humored willingness to go along with the Sahib because after all, the poor white man needs to think himself superior, and it doesn't hurt to permit him, does it?

Thus, Kipling's characters are both caricature and fully realized individuals: his Babu is every upstart Bengali who came up against the Raj and failed, although not quite utterly—and his Babu is a man with enough stout self-regard to play the role of an upstart Bengali who came up against the Raj and failed, because that role is a most useful disguise when dealing with men of the West, who see the world in two dimensions.

Kim is both easy to read and hard to digest. Kipling's world view was that of the English Imperialist, with Victoria on the throne and God in His place. I don't know that I would call Kim a "profoundly embarrassing" novel, [but it does without a doubt open a rich vein of discussion on colonial responsibilities, just as Mark Twain's novels open up discussions on American racism.](#)

[Anyone interested in the background of the story, particularly the real life paradigms for Lurgan Sahib and Colonel Creighton, would do well to look at Peter Hopkirk's excellent Quest for Kim. It will have you eyeing the cost of travel to Simla...](#)

Matt: It's been decades in view that I've graduated legislation school, an extended time for college, and one million years (give or take a year) for the reason that excessive school. that implies it's been decades given that I've been pressured to learn a selected book. I've continually enjoyed to read. And I've consistently hated assigned reading. I've despised books I'd differently get pleasure from just because I'm informed to learn it on a closing date and think a specific highbrow response. So, ever given that my final diploma, I've been interpreting no matter what I want. when you examine my bookshelf, you could tell. The Civil struggle correct here. A becoming shelf of global battle I over there. My assortment at the Plains Indian Wars taking over approximately a whole miniature bookcase from Ikea. There's not anything mistaken with studying what you want. in particular as you get older, you could have much less time; if you're going to dedicate it to reading, you have to benefit from the book. on the comparable time, I've continually believed in interpreting as an exercise, and sure books a helpful challenge. if you happen to visit the gymnasium on a daily basis and do a similar regimen on the comparable depth level, you finally cease seeing results. It's a similar with reading. That's the place my e-book membership comes in. a gaggle of my man friends, encouraged by means of our wives, made up our minds to shape our personal literary society, dedicated to ingesting beer, consuming apps, and speaking in regards to the published word. a facet benefit, along with the beer and mini tacos, is that I've needed to learn books I wouldn't in a different way choose, and thereby use my mind for anything except meditations at the conflict of Gettysburg. this can be how – I got here to learn Rudyard Kipling's Kim. Kim is a kind of books, established virtually completely at the title, that I by no means may have learn and not using a little push. It's famous as a classic, yet occasionally will get left off the record of all time greats. The titular Kim is Kimball O'Hara, an orphaned Irish boy residing in India within the past due 1800s. he's a beggar who has turn into so acquainted with existence in Lahore that he's seldom taken for a white boy. he's a puckish, plucky protagonist, with a mischievous experience of experience that makes him consider just like the hero of a Boy's personal tale. in the novel's first few pages, he meets a Tibetan Lama (not a llama, which might were a wonderful twist) who's trying to find the River of the Arrow to unfastened himself from the Wheel of Things. This ridiculous suggestion appeals to Kim, who instantly deals his prone because the Lama's chela,

a follower or disciple. therefore starts off their event – an episodic road-trip, during which colourful characters are met, after which left behind. given that this can be a plot-light novel, to bare even more may most likely provide too much. unnecessary to say, Kim and the Lama turn into entwined in “the nice Game,” the normally British, regularly understated identify given to the contest among Britain and Tsarist Russian for regulate of imperative Asia.(Kim got here to the eye of my booklet membership because of our dialogue of colonialism. within the novel, however, that topic exists merely within the background. Kipling by no means makes any critique, optimistic or otherwise, approximately nice Britain’s rule of India. the facility constitution is just authorized for what it is, with none mention. This, I suppose, could be a assertion in and of itself). Frankly, i used to be underwhelmed through Kim. It was once okay. a part of this response has to do with Kim’s appellation as a classic, and all that implies. A booklet that’s on sleek Library’s most sensible a hundred should still do a section extra to snatch you via the lapel and demand upon its personal worth. The reality, though, is that Kim isn’t world-changing. it's not a very demanding read. It lacks the ambition or scope of Melville or Tolstoy, or the mental excavation of Dostoyevsky, or perhaps the seat-of-your-pants story-spinning of Dickens. It relatively boils right down to a YA novel, the place a lively boy unearths a mentor (the Lama), units out on a trip (to the mythical, sacred river), and usually outwits all of the adults he meets. Still, I mostly came upon Kim a delightful sufficient read. Kipling lived in India, and it indicates in his superb descriptions of the bustle, the attractions and smells, the colors, the mishmash of peoples and cultures and practices. He in actual fact has an intimacy with the place, the roads his characters walk. And he has a keenness also, that comes via his protagonist. The lama by no means raised his eyes. He didn't notice the money-lender on his goose-rumped pony, hastening alongside to assemble the harsh interest; or the long-shouting, deep-voiced little mob – nonetheless in army formation – of local infantrymen on leave, rejoicing to be rid in their breeches and puttees, and announcing the main outrageous issues to the main good girls in sight. Even the vendor of Ganges-water he didn't see, and Kim anticipated that he could at the least purchase a bottle of that valuable stuff. He appeared gradually on the ground, and strode as gradually hour after hour, his soul busied elsewhere. yet Kim was once within the 7th heaven of joy. The Grand Trunk at this aspect used to be equipped on an embankment to protect opposed to wintry weather floods from the foothills, in order that one walked, because it have been a bit above the country, alongside a stately corridor, seeing all India opened up left and right. It used to be attractive to behold the many-yoked grain and cotton wagons crawling over the rustic roads: it is easy to listen their axles, complaining a mile away, coming nearer, until eventually with shouts and yells and undesirable phrases they climbed up the steep incline...It was once both appealing to monitor the people, little clumps of purple and blue and crimson and white and saffron, turning apart to visit their very own villages, dispersing and transforming into small via twos and threes around the point plain. Kim felt those things, even though he couldn't provide tongue to his feelings, and so contented himself with purchasing peeled sugarcane and spitting the pith generously approximately his path. Another pleasure, on the topic of the first, is Kipling’s exploration of the various diversified religions bumping opposed to one another in India. the radical is pushed by way of religion and spirituality, and Kipling exhibits a real curiosity in these, in addition to a undeniable open-heartedness to all beliefs, as expressed during this speech from Mahbub Ali, a Pashtun horse dealer and erstwhile British spy: “Thou paintings past query an unbeliever, and for that reason thou wilt be damned. So says my legislation – or i believe it does. yet thou artwork additionally my Little buddy of the entire World, and that i love thee. So says my heart. This topic of creeds is like horseflesh. The

clever guy understands horses are strong – that there's revenue to be made of all; and for myself – yet that i'm an outstanding Sunni and hate the lads of Tirah – i'll think an identical of the entire Faiths. Now obviously a Kattiawar mare taken from the sands of her birthplace and got rid of to the west of Bengal founders – neither is even a Balkh stallion... of any account within the nice Northern deserts beside the snow-camels i've got seen. as a result I say in my center the Faiths are like horses. every one has advantage in its personal country. It's reasonable to assert that my major response is to haven't any robust response at all. As I famous above, Kim isn't really demanding to read, apart from the dialogue. The discussion is swollen via colloquialisms and native idioms, packed with vague allusions and references (that can basically be deciphered through the endnotes), and studded with adequate "thees" and "thous" to sink the Mayflower. the single hassle in Kim is determining what everyone is asserting during this seriously stylized demeanour of speaking. Unfortunately, lots of the exposition occurs in dialogue, so knowing is critical. the true downer of Kim is its ending. The road-trip of Kim and the Lama builds to a climax after which fizzles out like an inexpensive sparkler. The finishing is abrupt and disappointing, which would've intended extra to me had I had extra invested within the first place.

Margaret: i made a decision that earlier than analyzing Laurie R. King's the sport again, I may still learn Rudyard Kipling's Kim, as King calls the sport "a humble and profoundly felt homage" to Kim. Besides, i would by no means learn it, and it really is a kind of classics I felt I should still get round to someday. Kimball O'Hara is the orphaned son of an Irish soldier who was once stationed in India; whilst his father died, Kim was once raised through a half-caste girl and discovered to survive the streets of Lahore. the tale starts off whilst Kim meets a Tibetan lama who's looking for the magical Buddhist River of the Arrow; Kim turns into the lama's chela, or disciple, and travels with him via India. the opposite part of Kim's history tugs at him too, though, while he's chanced on by means of a few English squaddies and finally pulled into Britain's espionage community in India. The tale is extra a sequence of episodes than a tightly plotted narrative, set opposed to the colourful historical past of Kipling's India. The characters are as memorable because the setting: the light lama, the pony dealer Mahbub Ali, the British-educated Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, the mysterious Lurgan Sahib, and so much of all, Kim himself, in the entire complexity of his nature and upbringing. it isn't a singular to be learn at breakneck speed, yet one to be savored, as Kim and Kipling appreciate the range and color of 19th-century India.

Erin: precise fact: Kipling gained the Nobel Prize! In 1907, six years after the serial e-book of Kim ended. additionally true: Kipling used to be a raging racist and sexist. he's remembered for those features virtually up to for the book of The Jungle e-book and simply so Stories. Now that i've got learn Kim, i'm going to attempt to take into account him as an outstanding novelist as well. Kim is the tale of a white orphan (Irish soldier father, British maid mother) raised by means of an Indian lady as, essentially, an Indian. He meets a Tibetan Lama, whose non secular trip turns into intertwined with Kim's look for id and purpose. Their grandfather/grandson dynamic is touching with out being sappy-sweet. And it is a undercover agent novel. And it is a remark on colonialism. As spoken by way of a white guy touring via India: "'Why does [the lama:] make one consider that [Europeans:] are so younger a people?' The speaker struck passionately at a tall weed. 'We have nowhere left our mark yet. Nowhere! That, do you understand, is what disquiets me.' He scowled on the placid face, and the enormous calm of the pose." (289) Much of the

booklet is anxious with "making your mark". This sahib (white man) desires to make his mark, which exhibits the colonial wish to triumph over and subdue local culture, during this context. Colonialism creates wealth and army strength for the conquering nation, yet in a fashion it simply makes the nation's mark. The solar by no means units at the British Empire since it is simply too tremendous - the form of it really is constantly below the sun. Meanwhile, Kim does not even comprehend what his form is, less what sort of mark he will make. The lama believes and constantly reminds us that "the foolish Body" is an illusion, so he is attempting to absolutely discover that nobody makes a mark. To him, the actual is (or should still be) meaningless. Even so, he has to fight to recollect this, and hence he's additionally preoccupied with creating a mark. It's too undesirable Kipling has fallen out of favor. With the present acclaim for postcolonial studies, this article will be on much more syllabi.

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