

P. BOITANI, S. HELGESSON, P. HORTA,
D. JULLIEN, DJ. KADIR, C. LOMBARDI,
P. MADSEN, F. MARENCO, G. MARIANI,
M. ROSENDAHL THOMSEN,
S. SAÏD, A. YAMINI-HAMEDANI

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Empire of the Mind:

Reading Kipling through Borges's Renunciation Stories

Dominique Jullien

The British Empire (*q.v.*) is, in a sense, an aspiration rather than a reality, a thought rather than a fact; but, just for that reason, it is like the old Empire of which we have spoken
(1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*)¹

I. A Lifelong Companion

Rudyard Kipling was for Jorge Luis Borges a key reference, read and enjoyed from childhood into extreme old age, alluded to and commented on multiple times throughout his work, in both fictions and essays. Borges also translated several of the tales: some of the *Just So Stories*, "The finest story in the world", "The Gate of a hundred sorrows", "The House of Suddhoo", among others². However, the references, although numerous, are dispersed, brief, allusive, with the exception of three book reviews (a review of Edward Shanks's *Rudyard Kipling, a Study in Literature and Political Ideas*, one of Sir George McMunn's *Rudyard Kipling, Craftsman* and one of Kipling's own posthumous autobiography, *Something of Myself for My Friends Known and Unknown*)³. Borges did not devote entire essays to Kipling as he did for so many other writers, despite Kipling's importance for his own creative process, or indeed perhaps because of this. The majority of Borges's comments on Kipling throughout his texts tends to follow a very

1. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition (1911), volume 9, entry "Empire"; Wikisource contributors. "1911 Encyclopaedia Britannica/Empire." *Wikisource*, 24 Dec. 2012. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Empire

2. On Borges's translations of Kipling stories, see Efrain Kristal, *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation*, Nashville: Vanderbilt U.P., 2002, p. 39.

3. Borges's review of Sir George McMunn's biography, *Rudyard Kipling, Craftsman*, appeared in *El Hogar* in 1937. It is published in *Obras completas* (Emecé, 2007), IV, pp. 377-378, and in the Pléiade edition (*Oeuvres complètes*, Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2010), I, p. 1095. The review of Edward Shanks's *Rudyard Kipling, a Study in Literature and Political Ideas* appeared in 1941 in *Sur* and is reprinted in Jorge Luis Borges, *Selected Non-Fictions* (Eliot Weinberger, ed.), Penguin Books, 1999, pp. 250-251. The review of Kipling's autobiography, *Something of Myself for My Friends Known and Unknown*, entitled "Kipling y su autobiografía", appeared in 1937 in *El Hogar* and is reprinted in *Obras completas*, cit., IV, p. 327 and in the Pléiade edition, I, p. 1055.

clear pattern: Borges insists that Kipling's political ideas (his imperialism and racial bigotry) matter less than his craft as a writer, that Kipling should be judged not as a propagandist but as a maker of complex, highly wrought, even secret fictions.

Borges was all too well aware that Kipling's reputation had suffered a precipitous decline, and he wrote to correct what he considered the crude and misleading view of Kipling as the brassy, jingoistic bard of the empire. He wrote in defense of Kipling's artistry, his "craftsmanship" (an ideal common to both writers), and the real complexity of his stories hidden under a deceptively simple surface that fooled inattentive readers. This formal, even formalist line of defense is found everywhere, from his earliest to his latest essays⁴. Here is a typical passage culled from his review of Edward Shanks's book, *Rudyard Kipling, a Study in Literature and Political Ideas*:

In art nothing is more secondary than the author's intentions (...) For glory, but also as an insult, Kipling has been equated with the British Empire. The partisans of that federation have vociferated his name (...) The enemies of the Empire (partisans of other empires) refute or ignore it (...) whether detractors or worshippers, they all reduce him to a mere apologist for the Empire (...) What is indisputable is that Kipling's prose and poetic works are infinitely more complex than the theses they elucidate (...) [Kipling, Borges concludes, was above all] "the experimental artificer, secret, anxious, like James Joyce or Mallarmé. In his teeming life there was no passion like the passion for technique⁵.

That Borges was so devoted to defending Kipling the craftsman over Kipling the ideologue tells us how attuned he was to the current literary debates of his time, for a tide of political hostility had swept over Kipling starting before World War I. Edmund Wilson's essay "The Kipling that nobody read", also published in 1941, which like Borges prioritizes technique over ideology, opens with the acknowledgement of "the eclipse of the reputation of Kipling" after 1910⁶. Here is a sample of a negative review by the Socialist writer George Orwell, showing the disrepute into which Kipling fell: "Kipling is a jingo imperialist, he is morally insensitive and aesthetically disgusting". He is also out of touch: "The mass of the

4. In an interview with Ronald Christ in 1966, Borges insists once again that political ideas are unimportant in a literary work, taking as his example *Kim*, where the British are less likable than Indian and Moslem characters (Ronald Christ, *The Narrow Act: Borges's Art of Allusion*, New York: Lumen Books, 1995, p. 266). He makes the same point in an interview with the magazine *Pulpsmith* in 1981, stressing that Kipling doesn't deserve to be judged on his political ideas: "Kipling's colonialism and style", translated by Anthony Tudisco, *Pulpsmith*, 1.4 (Winter 1981), pp. 32-34 (p. 32).

5. The review was first published in *Sur* 78 (March 1941); it is reprinted in *Selected Non-Fictions*, cit., pp. 250-1.

6. Edmund Wilson's essay was first published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, 167 (1941), pp. 201-214. Reprinted in Andrew Rutherford (ed.), *Kipling's Mind and Art: Selected Critical Essays*, Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1964, pp. 17-69 (p. 17).

people, in the nineties as now, were anti-militarist, bored by the Empire and only unconsciously patriotic". Orwell goes on to define Kipling as "a good bad poet" who "dealt largely in platitudes"⁷. Kipling's celebration of the British Empire seemed at best passé, at worst guilty of collusion with the worst of right-wing politics. Following the decades of independence movements, then the institutional authority of postcolonial scholarship, the stories of Kipling today have come to represent little more than exhibit A, and his name, for the younger generations of politically correct high school students, whose teachers can seldom be accused of complexity or nuance, little more than an unutterable slur.

With characteristic love of paradox, Borges, by defending Kipling, was thus consciously writing against the grain. In his admiration, Borges does not separate the poems from the stories, or the children's stories from the adult ones, or the early tales from the late ones: it becomes clear that, in contrast to critics of Kipling who condemn him without having read him, Borges has read and reread all of Kipling, multiple times (he often acknowledges having read certain favorite stories scores of times over the years). Kipling was indeed for him a "lifelong companion", as Eliot Weinberger puts it⁸. So as often, it all begins in childhood: picture Georgie, the small half-English bookworm, sheltered behind the gates of his suburban Buenos Aires home, reading the innumerable English books amassed by his father's English mother: "I grew up in a garden, behind a speared railing, and in a library of unlimited English books"⁹. Among those books were Kipling's early works. For a boy raised in English in Argentina, who had famously read *Don Quijote* first in English translation, it was not a stretch to identify with Rudyard Kipling the India-born bilingual Englishman who spoke Hindustani before he learned English¹⁰.

7. George Orwell, "Rudyard Kipling", in Rutherford (ed.), *Kipling's Mind and Art*, cit., pp. 70-84 (pp. 70; 75; 81; 84).

8. *Selected Non-Fictions*, cit., p. 526. In his preface to Kipling's tales published in *Biblioteca personal*, Borges reveals that he has read each selected tale over a hundred times (*Obras completas*, cit., IV, p. 615).

9. Prologue to *Evaristo Carriego*, quoted in Emir Rodríguez Monegal, *Jorge Luis Borges: a Literary Biography*, NY: Dutton, 1978, p. 3. The statement is repeated almost word for word in the story "Juan Muraña", from the much later collection *Brodie's Report*: "I grew up within the precincts of a long fence made of spear-tipped iron lances, in a house with a garden and my father's and grandfather's library" ("Juan Muraña", *Brodie's Report*, in *Collected Fictions*, translated by Andrew Hurley, London: Penguin Books, 1998, p. 370. Remarkably, the foreword to *Brodie's Report* opens with a discussion of Kipling's craft as a storyteller and the ambition to emulate his early "laconic masterpieces" (p. 345).

10. As noted by Edmund Wilson: "It appears that up to the age of six Kipling talked, thought and dreamed, as he says, in Hindustani, and could hardly speak English correctly" ("The Kipling that nobody read", in Rutherford (ed.), *Kipling's Mind and Art*, cit., p. 18. On "the fascination for multi-lingualism and translation" that both writers shared, see Robin Fiddian, "What's in a title? Political critique and intertextuality in 'El Informe de Brodie'", *Variaciones Borges*, 28 (2009), pp. 67-84 (pp. 83-84).

Another feature that endeared Kipling to the young Borges is that he wrote thrilling children's books¹¹. Along with *Kim*, *The Jungle Books*, and the *Just-So Stories*, some of which he would later translate, Borges devoured Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, and the stories of R. L. Stevenson, who was to become one of his lifelong models as a writer, as is well known. His devotion to Kipling and other authors of adventure stories was very much a sign of the times—a generation of English readers were raised on Kipling and other boys' stories, including, interestingly, Edward Said himself, from whom we had every reason to expect a scathing indictment of Kipling and *Kim*, but who, in his introduction to the 1987 Penguin edition of *Kim*, reprinted in *Culture and Imperialism*, is surprisingly forgiving toward *Kim*, his boyhood love¹².

Much scholarship has been devoted to showing the link between adventure novels and imperialist ideology. In his landmark study *Dreams of Adventures, Deeds of Empire*, Martin Green observes that adventure tales "formed the energizing myth of English imperialism"¹³. For Borges, however, the connection ran deeper, tapping into a major vein of inspiration: the epic, virile, adventurous heroes of so many of his fictions, and the autobiographical connection that gave life to Borges's personal mythology, the admiration for his own military ancestors who fought gallantly in Argentina's historic battles¹⁴. The stories of conquests and victories, no less than those of brave deaths, the archetypal characters of Argentina's violent mythology—the gauchos, the tango dancers, the outlaws such as Martín Fierro, who populate Borges's fictions and poetry—can be traced back, at least in part, to adventure stories and to Kipling. The macho mystique at the heart of both the culture of tango and Kipling's *Kim* is stressed in the 1955 essay "A history of the tango": in *Kim*, Borges reflects, "an Afghan states flatly—as if the two acts were essentially one—"When I was fifteen, I had shot my man and begot my man"¹⁵.

These themes, then, he owed in large part to Kipling, who was, not unlike

11. On Borges's exposure to English writers, Kipling among others, as a child, see Christ, *The Narrow Act*, cit., p. 48. Victoria Ocampo also discusses the child's love for English stories: *Jorge Luis Borges, Cahiers de l'Herne*, Paris, 1964, p. 21.

12. See Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, introduction and notes by Edward Said, London: Penguin Books, 1987. In one late text, Borges deplors the fact that the reputations of both Kipling and Stevenson have suffered because they wrote children's stories: See "Kipling, *La casa de los deseos*", in *La biblioteca de Babel, prólogos*, Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 2000, p. 63. For a critical appraisal of Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, see David Scott, "Kipling, the Orient, and Orientals: 'Orientalism' Reoriented?", *Journal of World History* 22.2, (June 2011), pp. 299-328.

13. Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, New York: Basic Books, 1979, p. 2.

14. On Borges's predilection for the epic and cult of military valor, see Christ, *The Narrow Act*, cit., p. 254.

15. *Selected Non-Fictions*, cit., p. 396.

Borges, a physically unimpressive, weak-sighted intellectual¹⁶ singing of heroic deeds and strong men of action. With this Kipling, Borges could identify, as he could not with either Jack London or Ernest Hemingway: "Kipling and Nietzsche, sedentary men, longed for the action and dangers that their fates denied them; London and Hemingway, men of action, were attached to it"¹⁷. Stories about the conquest of savage lands would also resonate with a particularly acute meaningfulness for Borges. The confrontation of civilized vs. barbaric is one of Borges's key themes, evident in the semi-autobiographical nightmare "The South", in which a bookish man from the city confronts his fate in the brutal, manly South¹⁸. It is evident too in the "Story of the Warrior and the Captive Maiden", a double story pairing a sixth-century Barbarian who dies defending the Roman Empire and an Englishwoman gone native in the wilds of Argentina (I shall return to this parable later on in my essay).

The dichotomy between civilization and barbarism is also a founding topos of Argentina's literature and national identity¹⁹. The dichotomy shaped Argentina's literary canon and its political self-image from its earliest texts, straddling racial, political, social and cultural lines. Esteban Echeverría's 1837 epic poem *La cautiva* tells the story of a white woman taken by Mapuche Indians. In "El matadero" (written in 1839), the chilling story of a political murder, Echeverría recasts the opposition between civilization and barbarism in political terms as the conflict between conservative thugs (the Federalistas) and progressive martyrs (the Unitarios). Domingo Sarmiento's classic, *Facundo, o civilización y barbarie en las pampas argentinas* (1845) describes the essence of Argentina, both naturally and culturally, in terms of the dichotomy. Thus Borges is writing back to this tradition—both within and against it—in his own texts on civilized vs. barbarian²⁰: but he is also,

16. Edmund Wilson mentions Kipling's "bad eyes" that caused episodes of near blindness: "The Kipling that nobody read", in Rutherford (ed.), *Kipling's Mind and Art*, cit., p. 20.

17. Prologue to Jack London, *The Concentric Deaths*, in *Selected Non-Fictions*, cit., p. 503.

18. "The South", *Fictions*, in *Collected Fictions*, 1998, p. 174.

19. See María Rosa Lojo de Beuter's seminal study, *La "barbarie" en la narrativa argentina, siglo XIX*, Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1994. Although her study focuses on 19th century texts, she stresses the continuation throughout the entire 20th century of "la 'barbarie', verdadera obsesión argentina que la historia ha encarnado en diversas máscaras" (p. 182).

20. For a reading of Borges's anti-Peronist story "La fiesta del monstruo", co-written with Adolfo Bioy Casares in 1947, as a rewriting of "El matadero", see Jason Wilson, "Writing for the future: Echeverría's 'El matadero' and its secret rewriting by Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares as 'La fiesta del monstruo'", *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 43 (2007): pp. 81-92. For a reading of the late story "The Gospel according to Mark" (*Brodie's Report*) along the same lines, see David Haberly, "The Argentine Gospels of Borges", *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 66.1 (June 1989), pp. 47-54; Nancy Abraham Hall, "Saving the Gutes: Borges, Sarmiento and Mark", *Revista canadiense de estudios hispánicos*, 26.3 (2002), pp. 527-536, and Humberto Nuñez Faraco, "Gauchos and Martyrs in 'El evangelio según Marcos'", *Variaciones Borges*, 34 (2012), pp. 143-

characteristically, complicating the national debate by overlaying it with an entirely foreign historical and cultural context (Kipling's India), and intersecting the foundational Argentine topos with Kipling's portrayal of English imperialism as an attempt to impose civilization.

It is clear that Borges's identification with Kipling is nothing if not complicated. From the point of view of imperialism and colonial discourse, the position of Jorge Luis Borges is richly ambiguous—as an Argentine he is both colonized and colonizer. His historical and cultural situation is postcolonial with respect to the Spanish empire, while as a descendant of white settlers it is that of a colonizer with respect to the native population, which his ancestors helped subdue (and indeed eliminate). In this ambiguity Borges resembles Kim, who, as an Irish character, is also both colonized and colonizer. Analogies were repeatedly drawn between Ireland and India in nineteenth-century imperial culture, where the same decades saw the founding of the Indian pro-Independence Congress party, the debates over the Irish Home Rule Bill, the creation of Sinn Fein and the proclamation of Queen Victoria as Empress of India²¹. Nationalist movements were ruthlessly suppressed by England. Yet as oppressed as they were by the English domination over Ireland, within the context of the British Empire the Irish could become the equals to Englishmen, and enjoy the imperial status of Sahibs, as Kim discovers for himself²².

II. Imperialism vs. Nationalism

I therefore want to make a case for opposing imperialism and nationalism in Borges. As a half-foreigner, English on his father's side, raised for seven formative years in Europe, Borges was attuned to English culture, including to Kipling's celebration of the British Empire, and to European cultural references more generally. Although Borges devoted much of his early poetry to a celebration of Buenos Aires, and although 'typical' Argentine themes were prominent in much of his later fiction as well, his outlook was and remained unmistakably cosmopolitan, and this did not endear him to nationalists. In the often xenophobic cultural climate of Argentina, Borges's perceived foreignness set him apart from and often against his fellow countrymen, whose intransigent nationalism was not receptive to cosmopolitanism, much less to European sympathies²³. The famous essay "The Argentine Writer and Tradition", first

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21. Kaori Nagai analyzes these analogies in detail in her book, *Empire of Analogies: Kipling, India and Ireland*, Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 2006.

22. Gandhi pointed out the privileges enjoyed by the Irish outside of Ireland. See Nagai, *Empire of Analogies*, cit., pp. 7-9.

23. T.S. Eliot's description of Rudyard Kipling as a cultural outsider reads uncannily like what would soon be said about Borges: "A peculiar detachment and remoteness from all environment, a universal foreignness (...) a remoteness as of an alarmingly intelligent visitor from another planet" ("Rudyard Kipling", in *On Poetry and Poets*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1957, pp. 265-294, p. 282). On Eliot's Kipling essay, see

given as a lecture in 1951, was written in the spirit of defending Argentine literature from a narrow nationalism. Borges's strategy in the essay is to rethink the nationalist debate that goes on within Argentine culture through analogies with other national contexts, allowing him to broaden his focus and take things beyond the national. In his essay Borges refers to the 1926 Argentine novel worshipped by nationalists, Ricardo Güiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra*, pointing out its intertextual debts to two famous adventure novels from other cultures, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and Kipling's *Kim*. By mentioning Kipling and Twain in the same breath as Güiraldes, Borges is already making a supra-nationalist point: the comparison is itself a polemical gesture²⁴.

It is easy to account for the comparison in terms of the plot: in all three novels, the protagonist, an orphan boy, is raised by strangers, attaches himself to substitute fathers who are poor, wise and nomadic (Kim's Lama, Jim the runaway slave, Don Segundo Sombra the gaucho), and the narrative follows their wanderings along a sort of road (the Mississippi in Mark Twain's story, the Grand Trunk Road in India for *Kim*, the Argentine pampa in Güiraldes). All three coming-of-age narratives end in an emotional parting of ways between the boy and the old man: Huckleberry heading toward the West and the manifest destiny of the American empire, Kim going into the Great Game as an informant for the British Empire, and the Argentine orphan Fabio belatedly acknowledged as the son of a local land owner who bequeaths his immense estate to him, an ending commonly understood in allegorical terms as the shadow (*sombra*) cast by its gaucho past over Argentina's national identity and destiny. Arguably then, all three stories, which rely on the *Bildungsroman* and the quest romance to convey an image of national identity formation, share an imperial subtext of some sort—I shall return to this point.

Yet Borges's insistent analogy between these three novels—one Argentine, one English, one American—also tells us something else. It is noteworthy that the analogy is most fully developed in one of Borges's most foundational essays ("The Argentine writer and Tradition"), an essay absolutely crucial for the understanding of Borgesian aesthetics. Although it is hailed by Argentine nationalists as the archetype of the Argentine novel, so goes the argument, *Don Segundo Sombra* is indebted to both Twain and Kipling, yet it is no less Argentine for it. Confronting literary nationalism as provincial and narrow-minded, Borges makes a now famous case for Argentine literature's right to tackle any theme or subject it chooses. "I believe that our tradition is the whole of Western culture (...) we must believe that the universe is our birthright (*patrimonio*) and try out every subject" (p. 427). The word *patrimonio* (inheritance, patrimony), here translated as "birthright", is a significant choice since these coming-of-age novels are all stories of inheritance: the outcome reveals what these orphans

note 36.

24. See Beatriz Sarlo's analysis of Borges's writing as "a game on the edge of various cultures" in her landmark study, *Jorge Luis Borges, a Writer on the Edge*, London: Verso, 1993, p. 4. On the "sophistry" involved in Borges's polemic with literary nationalism in this particular essay, see pp. 26-28.

will eventually inherit, in the conclusion of a *bildung* story which is also a story about the outcast finding a place and the dispossessed protagonist coming into his own. Fabio, the Argentine protégé of Don Segundo Sombra, inherits the estate, while Kim and Huckleberry Finn come into possession of their respective territories. Despite being orphans, or indeed perhaps because of it, by virtue of the reverse logic of the rags-to-riches tale, these boys become the rightful heirs, the 'kings' of the land they used to roam as vagrants²⁵.

In Borges's parallel between the *Bildungsroman* and the literary situation of Argentina, the literary tradition is troped as inheritance. The Argentine writer—Borges himself first and foremost—is entitled to 'the universe' as his rightful inheritance precisely by virtue of being an orphan from the cultural periphery, lacking a proper literary pedigree. Not only Argentine authors should not shun foreign themes or influences (as demonstrated by the Güiraldes example, with its intertextual ties to both Twain and Kipling), but furthermore, Borges claims, Argentines are best placed to handle all kinds of foreign themes as a result of their marginal position within—rather, on the remote outskirts of—Western culture. This is what critic Sergio Waisman analyzed as "the irreverence of the periphery"²⁶. Anticipating Deleuze and Guattari's celebrated concept of *minor literature* by a generation, Borges paradoxically upholds marginality as a precondition for creativity, for groups such as the Irish, Jews, or South Americans, whose "irreverence" and lack of "superstition" with respect to the dominant tradition allows them greater creative freedom²⁷.

Literary inspiration, according to Borges, should not be confined within national bounds, but should be allowed to roam freely across national and linguistic borders, just as Huckleberry, Kim and Fabio wander across the immense spaces of America, India and Argentina. Thus the argument in favor of world literature presented in "The Argentine Writer and Tradition" construes the empire as a cultural hybrid, a supra-national or multi-national space that enables the universal circulation of languages, stories and themes. In a late interview, entitled "Kipling's colonialism and style", published in *Pulpsmith*,

25. In part because they are children's books, all three stories share a utopian view of the land they portray, and their respective endings have generated a fair amount of critical controversy. Güiraldes wrote his rural utopia at a time of urban explosion and seismic social change in Argentina; Kipling's India in *Kim*, written long after Kipling's departure, is both idealized and abstracted into a lyrical essence; the antebellum South in *Huckleberry Finn* (written two decades after the end of the Civil War) is seen in a kind of legendary haze.

26. Sergio Waisman, *Borges and Translation: the Irreverence of the Periphery*, Lewisburg: Bucknell U.P., 2005.

27. "The Argentine Writer and Tradition", cit., p. 426. On this aspect of the debate see my earlier article: Dominique Jullien, "In Praise of Mistranslation: the Melancholy Cosmopolitanism of Jorge Luis Borges", *Romanic Review*, 98, pp. 2-3, "Further Inquisitions", special issue on Jorge Luis Borges, edited by S.J. Levine (March-May 2007), pp. 205-223 (pp. 205-209). Ironically, Borges's theory of creative marginality puts Kipling in the same group with his *bêtes noires*, the Jews and the Irish.

Borges states unambiguously: "We are a result of the Roman empire"²⁸. The empire in this case is to be understood as Western civilization as a whole. The corollary of this conception of empire is that once again, marginality is transformed into a cultural advantage. Borges quotes a line from a famous (or notorious) Kipling poem: "I recall now some lines written in I do not remember which Kipling book exactly, where he says 'What do they know of England those who know England only?'" (p. 32). Interestingly, Borges misquotes from memory, which shows the importance of the idea and its degree of assimilation into his own conceptual world. The actual line, from Kipling's poem "The English Flag", first published in 1891, reads "And what should they know of England who only England know?"²⁹. As a nation, England is small, provincial and insignificant (or as Kipling put it in a letter to his friend Cecil Rhodes, "England is a stuffy little place, mentally, morally, and physically")³⁰: but the British Empire is greater than the sum of its parts, it is a universal construct, in time as well as in space. Kipling, Borges continues in the same *Pulpsmith* interview, "looked upon the British Empire as a continuation of the Roman Empire; for him Rome and England were equivalent" (p. 32).

Evidently this is less a political view of empire than a philosophical one, even a metaphysical one, and—as I hope to show—one that is closely connected to Borges's reflections on Buddhism, which he developed in essays contemporary with his essay against literary nationalism. I shall return to this point later, to explore how a political theme is transformed and decontextualized in Borges's reading into a metaphysical one. Before this, however, I want to pursue a highly contextualized reading of empire which has its roots in Borges's wartime essays and articles.

III. In Praise of Empires

Borges's unqualified praise for the British Empire is found in an article for *Sur* dated July 1945, entitled "A Note on the Peace". Celebrating the victory of England, Borges writes "To say that England has triumphed is to say that Western civilization has triumphed, that Rome has triumphed". A footnote further elucidates this analogy between the Roman Empire and the British Empire:

In Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* (so vilified by Arnold), Rome is almost a metaphor for England; the feeling of an identity between the two is the basic theme of Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*. To identify imperial Rome with the momentary and pompous *impero* that Mussolini botched in the shadow of the Third Reich is almost a

28. Borges, "Kipling's colonialism and style", cit., p. 32.

29. "The English Flag", in *Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling*, introduction and notes by R.T. Jones, Wordsworth Poetry Library, 2001, p. 233. On this and other famous phrases coined by Kipling, see Orwell, "Rudyard Kipling", in Rutherford (ed.), *Kipling's Mind and Art*, cit., p. 79.

30. Quoted in Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, cit., p. 286.

play on words³¹.

(The same idea is articulated once again in the same terms forty years later in the *Pulpsmith* interview, as we saw). This analogy between the two empires was of course recurrent throughout the nineteenth century; it could be found for instance in Carlyle (another important reference for Borges who prefaced *The Cult of Heroes* in 1949): "The stream of World-History has altered its complexions; Romans are dead out, Englishmen are come in" ("Chartism")³². Breathing new life into the old metaphor, Borges now recasts it as the opposition between a contrived, unconvincing reenactment (Mussolini's inept and farcical imitation of ancient Rome) and the authentic continuation that was the anti-fascist British Empire³³.

However, the allusion Borges makes in the article "A Note on the Peace", to the 1906 children's book *Puck of Pook's Hill*, written by Kipling five years after *Kim* to inspire in young readers love of and duty toward the Empire, is interesting because it showcases once again the essentially hybrid and supranational nature of the imperial condition. The hero, Parnesius, is a third generation British-Roman soldier, who despite having never been to Rome, feels a sense of duty toward her as he commits to defending an increasingly unraveling Roman Empire and Hadrian's Wall against both the local Picts and the "Winged Hats" (the Viking invaders). His peculiar predicament is articulated in the poem "A British-Roman Song, AD 406" which accompanies the narrative:

My father's father saw it not,
And I, belike, shall never come,
To look on that so-holy spot—
The very Rome—

Crowned by all Time, all Art, all Might,
The equal work of Gods and Man,
City beneath whose oldest height—
The Race began!³⁴

Two important themes are connected in the character of Parnesius. On the one hand, Parnesius is loyal to Rome yet culturally very removed from it; on the other hand, his heroism lies in a duty to defend, not in a greed to conquer. As

31. *Selected Non-Fictions*, cit., p. 212n (first published in *Star* 129, July 1945).

32. Quoted in Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, cit., p. 288. Borges wrote the preface to an edition of Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History*, underscoring the affinities between Carlyle's ideas and the theses of a recently defeated Nazism: see *Selected Non-Fictions*, cit., pp. 413-418.

33. On Borges's ideological reorientation of the symbolism of empire against its Fascist reappropriations, see Annick Louis, *Borges face au fascisme, 2: Les Fictions du contemporain*, La Courmeuve: Aux lieux d'être, 2007, pp. 37-40.

34. "A British-Roman Song", in *Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling*, cit., p. 572.

late as 1981, in the *Pulpsmith* interview, Borges once again develops the greed vs. duty dichotomy, defending Kipling's ardent love for the British empire as stemming from a sense of duty, which differentiates it from both fascist empires, Mussolini's Impero and Hitler's Reich: Kipling, Borges writes, "did not see that Empire as an embodiment of greed but rather as a duty" (p. 32). If empires can be good, for Borges, it is clearly because they act as historically creative forces, and they create something worth defending. The same idea is articulated one last time in one of Borges's very last texts, dated 1986, shortly before his death, which is a Prologue to Virgil's *Aeneid* published in *A Personal Library*: "Virgil. Of all the poets of the earth, there is none other that has been listened to with such love. Even beyond Augustus, Rome, and the empire that, across other nations and languages, is still the Empire"³⁵.

Not coincidentally, this assimilation of the two empires—Roman and British—and beyond both, of "The Empire" with Western civilization itself, brings us closer to another important Borges intertext, T.S. Eliot. During the war years, Eliot published both an essay on Kipling (1941) and his celebrated wartime essay on Virgil, "What Is A Classic?", a lecture initially delivered to the Royal Virgil Society in 1944 as German bombs were falling on London. The political line Eliot takes in his Kipling essay is identical to Borges's: it is a defense of Kipling's imperialism as antithetical to totalitarianism. It involves, he claimed, "an awareness of grandeur certainly, but (...) much more an awareness of responsibility"³⁶. This defense of Kipling's imperialism dovetails exactly with Eliot's defense of *latinitas* in "What Is A Classic?". There, Eliot equates *latinitas* with civilization itself: modern European cultures are the beneficiaries of Rome, its language, and its poets, especially Virgil as the most "universal" poet, by which Eliot means the poet who best understood and articulated Rome's imperial destiny³⁷. The civilized world in general, and England in particular, are indebted to Virgil for his comprehensiveness, "due to the unique position in our history of the Roman Empire and the Latin language: a position which may be said to conform to its destiny" (p. 70). In the final pages, Eliot underscores the relevance and vital importance of Virgil's *Aeneid* to the current time: "The maintenance of the standard is the price of our freedom, the defence of freedom against chaos" (pp. 73-4). Just as Aeneas fulfilled his imperial destiny out of a sense of pious duty, not out of powerlust, Europe had a spiritual obligation toward Virgil and Virgil's sense of empire. In his pursuit of empire, Aeneas looked beyond any personal success or happiness, intent on fulfilling a duty greater than himself, self-sacrificially compliant to his destiny: "His reward was hardly more than a narrow beachhead and a political marriage in weary middle age"³⁸. The

35. *Selected Non-Fictions*, cit., p. 520.

36. T.S. Eliot, "Rudyard Kipling", initially published as the introduction to *A Choice of Kipling's Verse*, reprinted in *On Poetry and Poets*, cit., p. 284.

37. Eliot, "What Is A Classic?", *On Poetry and Poets*, cit., pp. 69-70.

38. *Ibidem*, p. 73. Eliot's melancholy view of Aeneas anticipates by two decades Adam Parry's seminal essay, "The Two Voices of Virgil's *Aeneid*" (1963), reprinted in Steele

character of Aeneas the duty-bound, the image of Rome as uniquely central to European civilization, the figure of Virgil as "the consciousness of Rome", the writings of Kipling the resigned imperialist, are all interwoven in Eliot's defensive view of the Empire: the Empire (Britannia, heir to Rome) stands for the defender of the civilized world, in opposition to the barbaric Fascist empires built on greed and conquest.

This view of England as the spiritual continuation of Rome, revived so critically in the context of World War II where it would serve to redefine the conflict between liberal forces and totalitarian forces along literary and cultural lines, would align Borges with T.S. Eliot and supporters of the Allies, and also, once again, in opposition to many of his fellow Argentines, many of whom sympathized with the Axis. (The irony of enlisting the notoriously right-wing antisemites Kipling and Eliot in a cultural war against Mussolini and Hitler is an additional benefit of Borges's complex and shifting alliances; another irony is the fact that Borges's enthusiastic defense of the British Empire in the 1981 *Pulpsmith* article was published just months before the Falklands War, which Borges famously derided as a fight of two bald men over a comb)³⁹.

IV. King and Ascetic

Clearly, then, Borges's take on Kipling and Kipling's imperialism needs to be read in its historical context. And yet, at the same time, I would now argue, it goes far beyond cultural politics, it is also, more profoundly, a view of empire abstracted from historical particulars, a decontextualized, ahistorical view of empire *sub specie aeternitatis*⁴⁰. This is where I want to take my argument now, returning to the dichotomy at the heart of *Kim*, the tension between the Lama's quest for his river, which will free him from the Wheel of Things, and Kim's adventure story in the Great Game that pits the British Empire against Tsarist Russia for the control of Asia. Praising Kipling as the inventor of "extraordinary plots", Borges singles out the masterful interweaving of the two main plotlines, Kim's destiny and the Lama's destiny, culminating in "the Lama's vision in which he perceives that both of them have been saved: one through a life of contemplation and the other through a life of action"⁴¹.

Notably then, what Borges finds most remarkable is the ending that has divided and/or baffled critics ever since *Kim*'s publication, the fact that the dichotomy between the Lama's choice and Kim's choice never results in an open conflict. In Edmund Wilson's critical reading: "What the reader tends to expect is that Kim will come eventually to realise that he is delivering into

Commager (ed.), *Virgil: a Collection of Critical Essays*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1966, pp. 155-167.

39. *Time magazine* (14 February 1983).

40. Compare T.S. Eliot's description of Kipling's "larger view" of empire as "almost that of an idea of empire laid up in heaven" ("Rudyard Kipling", *On Poetry and Poets*, cit., p. 286).

41. *Pulpsmith* (1981), cit., p. 35.

bondage to the British invaders those whom he has always considered his own people, and that a struggle between allegiances will result (...) but the parallel lines never meet, the alternating attractions felt by Kim never give rise to a genuine struggle"⁴². Conversely, for Irving Howe who defends *Kim*, "The parallel lines cannot meet because they are not two systems of political beliefs but two ways of apprehending human existence (...) [the concluding chapters are] a climax of rhapsodic union, but only of the boy and the old man, not of the two Ways"⁴³. For Borges, whose reading is metaphysical rather than political, there is no conflict but a brilliant interweaving of the two life choices, and a dual salvation⁴⁴.

Another Kipling story where this choice between two lives is dramatized is of course "The Miracle of Purun Bhaghat", another children's story included in *The Second Jungle Book* (1895). It tells the story of a Westernized Indian official, Sir Purun Dass, who at the height of his power in the colonial administration decides to leave everything behind, takes up the walking stick and begging bowl of a wandering mendicant, and disappears into the Himalayas, leading the life of an ascetic under the name of Purun Bhaghat. His solitary hermit's life ends abruptly when he decides to come down and warn the villagers below of an impending flood. Although by Hindu standards he has failed to free himself from the Wheel, this ultimate display of empathetic attachment to his fellow men is a triumph by Western standards, since he dies a heroic, sacrificial death, saving the villagers' lives at the price of his own. Similarly in *Kim*, the Lama's failure to sever emotional ties to his disciple — "What shall come to the boy if thou art dead? (...) I will return to my *chela*, lest he miss the way" (p. 337) — jeopardizes his quest for freedom from the Wheel of Things but endears him to his readers, ultimately ensuring that he finds his River and achieves salvation after all, while also looking out for Kim. In "Purun Bhaghat", anticipating *Kim*, a happy balance is achieved between "the Hindu way of life and the Western code of action"⁴⁵. Edward Said

42. Wilson, "The Kipling that nobody read", cit., p. 30. By the same token, Borges would also be completely at odds with Martin Green's stridently negative appraisal of *Kim*'s ending as "quite unsatisfactory and merely tricky" (*Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, cit., p. 271).

43. Irving Howe, "The pleasures of *Kim*" (from *Art, politics and Will: Essays in honor of Lionel Trilling*, ed. by Quentin Anderson, Stephen Donadio and Steven Marcus, Basic Books 1977), reprinted in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Rudyard Kipling: Modern Critical Views*, Chelsea House 1987, pp. 35-44 (pp. 41-43).

44. Close to Borges's view is Angus Wilson's emphasis on the reconciliation of spiritual quest and worldly involvement in *Kim*, which he describes as "an allegory of that seldom portrayed ideal, the world in the service of spiritual goodness, and, even less usual, spiritual goodness recognising its debt to the world's protection" ("*Kim* and the Stories", *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling* (1977), reprinted in Bloom (ed.), *Rudyard Kipling: Modern Critical Views*: cit., pp. 23-33 (p. 32).

45. Angus Wilson calls "The Miracle of Purun Bhaghat" "a curtain raiser to *Kim*, in which the Lama's Wheel and the Great Game (East and West) meet in one man, Purun Bhaghat"

draws an interesting parallel between the lama's "encyclopedic vision" of all the land in his epiphanic moment (in Borgesian terms, an aleph-like vision), and Colonel Creighton's Indian Survey in which every camp and village is duly noted⁴⁶. Kim too—this is a children's book after all—gets to have it both ways, since there is barely a trace of conflict between his allegiance to the Lama and his allegiance to the Empire. Just as there is no oppressive heat, disease or squalor in Kim, written ten years after Kipling left India, in the idealized afterglow of memory⁴⁷, there is no agonizing conflict, no wrenching identity politics. "I am not a Sahib, I am thy *chela*", Kim cries at a climactic moment (I am not a white man, I am your disciple, p. 319): but this anguished cry of self-discovery does not lend itself to painful inner conflict—unlike say Rabindranath Tagore's 1910 novel *Gora* where a less fortunate Kim figure, an Irish orphan whose father was killed in the Great Mutiny of 1857 and who was raised by natives, becomes a fervent Hindu nationalist, only to be faced with agonizing mental chaos when his identity is revealed to him. For Kim the pain is short-lived; the resolution, unproblematic⁴⁸.

The intertwined narratives of an imperial boy, Kim the Irish orphan raised as a native, who grows up to serve the Empire, and of a Tibetan Lama who professes the renunciation to worldly power, would prove powerfully appeal-

(*Kim* and the stories", in *Rudyard Kipling: Modern Critical Views*, cit., p. 24). For a critical appraisal of "The Miracle of Purun Bhaghat", see Cynthia Carey, "'The Miracle of Purun Bhaghat' and the Anxieties of Empire", *Commonwealth* 25.1 (2002), pp. 89-96, and Harish Trivedi, "'Arguing with the Himalayas'? Edward Said on Rudyard Kipling", in *Kipling and Beyond: Patriotism, Globalisation and Postcolonialism*, Caroline Rooney and Kaori Nagai (eds.), Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 12-143.

46. Said, introduction to *Kim*, cit., p. 19.

47. On the idealization of India in *Kim* in contrast to the early *Plain Tales From the Hills*, see Nagai, *Empire of Analogies*, cit., p. 12. On the "edenic balance" achieved between East and West in both *Kim* and "The Miracle of Purun Bhaghat", see James Harrison, "Kipling's Jungle Eden", in Harold Orel (ed.), *Critical Essays on Rudyard Kipling*, Boston: G.K. Hall, 1989, pp. 77-92 (p. 91).

48. Kaori Nagai briefly discusses the relationship between *Kim* and *Gora* in the context of Kim's Irishness: see *Empire of Analogies*, cit., p. 9. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak takes issue with the comparison: "The heroes of both novels are Irish orphans of the Indian Mutiny, turned Indian. But there the resemblance ends" ("The Burden of English", in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds.), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, p. 143. However, many critics have argued against Spivak that Tagore's derivative hero is not simply different, but a reversal of Kim, an anti-Kim figure: see for example Jaya Mehta, "Some imaginary 'real' thing: racial purity, the Mutiny and the Nation in Tagore's *Gora* and Kipling's *Kim*", in *Rabindranath Tagore: Universality and Tradition*, Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit (eds.), Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), pp. 199-212. For a comprehensive discussion and survey of the rewritings of *Kim* in postcolonial Indian fiction, see Bart Moore-Gilbert, "Kipling and Postcolonial Literature", in Howard J. Booth (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling*, Cambridge U.P., 2011, pp. 155-168.

ing to Borges, in whose writings the ascetic choice is a prominent theme. The figure of the Buddha and the core story of Renunciation at the heart of the Buddhist doctrine (the story of a king leaving his kingdom to become a hermit) is found in many variants throughout Borges's work, both in essays and in fictions. During the very productive decade of the fifties, Borges published a cluster of essays on Buddhism, which had always been of great interest to him (this is another point of contact with Kipling, who was also drawn to Buddhism, to which he had been introduced by his father, John Lockwood Kipling, a scholar of Buddhism and real-life model for the Curator of the Lahore Museum in *Kim*)⁴⁹.

The pairing of a wise ascetic figure with an orphan boy who will eventually inherit wealth and authority can therefore be read in the light of the discussion of empire *sub specie aeternitatis*. Kim, Huckleberry and Fabio all embody variations on the Siddharta figure; they are so to speak reverse Siddharts: instead of being raised in luxury and privilege which they leave behind to follow an ascetic mentor and embrace a life of renunciation, their ascetic life is a precondition of their inheriting wealth and status—the Empire—which they only accept reluctantly since it inevitably means parting ways with the fatherly ascetic. Perhaps this ensures that their sense of empire rises above the political level to achieve the metaphysical level, so that their grasp of *imperium* is mediated and relativized by an awareness of illusion and impermanence. If Aeneas is the reluctant emperor, solely motivated by a sense of duty, so the three young heroes are immune to individualistic greed. The Roman soldier in Kipling's poem "A centurion of the Thirtieth", from *Puck of Pook's Hill*, expresses a similarly skeptical view of the empire:

Cities and Thrones and Powers
Stand in Time's eye,
Almost as long as flowers,
Which daily die.⁵⁰

V. From Kipling to Kafka: from Order to Chaos

I want to return to the formalist line of defense that Borges pursues in all his comments on Kipling—the argument that the ideologue is less important than the craftsman, that Kipling must be judged on the basis of his technical complexity rather than his political simplicity. In order to praise Kipling's complexity, Borges compares his art with that of other famously difficult writers: Mallarmé and James Joyce (as quoted earlier), the Spanish baroque poet Góngora, Henry James, and Franz Kafka. To quote from the

49. See Bruce Shaw, "The Tibetan Wheel of Life versus the Great Game in Kipling's *Kim*", *Kipling Journal*, 69.276, (1995), pp. 12-21, as well as James H. Thrall, "Immersing the *chela*: religion and empire in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*", *Religion and Literature*, 36.3 (Autumn 2004), pp. 45-67.

50. "Cities and Thrones and Powers", in *Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling*, cit., p. 504.

foreword to the late collection of stories, *Brodie's Report* (1970): "Kipling's last stories were no less tortured and labyrinthine than Franz Kafka's or Henry James's, which they unquestionably surpass"⁵³. My hypothesis is that the unexpected connection Borges makes between Kipling and Kafka goes deeper than technical complexity, and in fact informs (and transforms) the very notion of empire. In an essay on Argentine individualism, "Our poor individualism", written in the aftermath of the war (1946), the same intriguing pairing of Kipling and Kafka comes up again. The main subject of the essay is a discussion of Argentines' essential distrust of the State, which makes Argentine nationalism a contradiction in terms. Argentines, Borges contends, do not believe in the order of a Hegelian state; for them the universe is not a cosmos but a chaos; their heroes, "lone men who quarrel with the group". Against this background, the comparison between Kipling and Kafka is a sort of subplot:

Consider, for example, two great European writers: Kipling and Franz Kafka. At first glance, the two have nothing in common, but Kipling's subject is the defense of order, of an order (the road in *Kim*, the bridge in *The Bridge-Builders*, the Roman wall in *Puck of Pook's Hill*); Kafka's the unbearable, tragic solitude of the individual who lacks even the lowliest place in the order of the universe⁵².

Kipling and Kafka, the writer who extolled the imperial order and the writer who exposed the empire's nightmarish face of chaos, Borges implies, are two sides of one coin. In this intriguing paradox, we sense that Borges's Kipling, the craftsman of complex stories, the "secret artificer", is not the brassy imperialist reviled by superficial critics but a skeptical imperialist, whose vision of empire incorporates the Kafkaesque potential for chaos at the heart of order.

The very examples Borges gives in this passage (*Kim*, "The Bridge-Builders", *Puck of Pook's Hill*) lend themselves to overlaying one over the other. In *Kim*, as we saw, the imperial story, the story of the imperial grip over the native land—through British road, rail network, surveillance—is inseparable from its flip side, the heroes' haphazard meandering through "great, grey, formless India", the lama's renunciation to worldly empire as one of the illusions of the Wheel of Things. In the early story "The Bridge-builders" (from *The Day's Work*, 1898), the plot hinges on a similar tension between the imperial order of the bridge and the chaotic power of the river. The British engineer Findlayson is building the giant Kashi bridge over the Ganges, when his work is threatened by an early monsoon flood; in the terrifying night that follows, he is tormented by opium-induced nightmares of "Mother Gunga's" anger against his aggression and of Hindu gods destroying his bridge, as he himself nearly drowns in the Ganges. In the end, the flood destroys the village but not the bridge: arguably then (if we read this as an

51. Foreword to *Brodie's Report*, *Collected Fictions*, cit., p. 345.

52. *Selected Non-Fictions*, cit., p. 310.

imperialist story), imperial order triumphs over the chaos of Indian nature. But what to make of the chaos of floodwaters roaring through the tale? What of the opium given to the Englishman by his Indian assistant Peroo, which almost kills him, yet the same Peroo also saves him from drowning? What to make of the Englishman's fall into the Ganges—are we to read it as an accident due to drugs, or as an unconscious immersion into Indian ritual which enables his salvation⁵³?

In *Puck of Pook's Hill's* "On the Great Wall"⁵⁴, the wall is a symbol of the increasingly shaky hold on the land by the Roman empire. The Anglo-Roman soldier Parnesius, caught between Picts and Scandinavian raiders, carries out his futile duty, defending Hadrian's wall, a lonely outpost of *pax romana* in a savage land where Barbarians may well prevail in the end. The mood is melancholy, even pessimistic: Kipling, in his later imperial stories, "introduc[es] an elegiac tone into his tales that muffles his imperial point"⁵⁵. Time and again, in the Kipling stories that Borges singles out for special admiration, we discern the same features, the same skeptical view of empire, which I propose to call the Kafka side of Kipling. In the late story "The church that was at Antioch", from Kipling's last collection *Limits and Renewals* (1932), the Roman officer Valens, sent to Syria in 49 AD, dies trying to mediate between Jews and Christians. The analogy with the early story about English soldiers trying to intervene in a Sikh-Muslim riot, "On the city wall" (from *In Black and White*, 1888), was not lost to readers, not for that matter the analogy with Parnesius guarding the wall from Picts and Vikings. In "The gate of a hundred sorrows" (from *Plain Tales From the Hills*, 1888), an early story translated by Borges⁵⁶, the narrator's dying rant tells a tale of lost empire—a tale of an Englishman brought low by opium, whose ambition extends only to the next pipe. In "To be filed for reference" (from the same collection), the hero, McIntosh Jellaludin, is both a Kim figure gone bad (he is Irish like Kim, has gone entirely native, knows his India inside and out, and lives with an Indian wife in squalid poverty) and

53. "The Bridge-Builders", *The Day's Work*, reprinted in *Rudyard Kipling: a Critical Edition of the Major Works* (edited with an introduction by Daniel Karlin), Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1999, pp. 163-190. The ambiguity noted by some critics with regard to "The Man Who Would Be King" also applies to "The Bridge-Builders". The story, like so many of Kipling's stories, "changes its prevailing colour, like an opal, whenever it is read" (J.M.S. Tompkins, *The Art of Rudyard Kipling*, London: Methuen, 1959, p. 234).

54. All of Kipling's stories and poems can be found online, on the Kipling Society website, along with notes, summaries, introductions and other critical data. In the absence of a recent scholarly edition of Kipling's complete works, the Kipling Society website remains the best resource for the Kipling scholar: <http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/>. All the stories and poems discussed in this essay can be found there, although some are also collected in the Oxford anthology.

55. John McBratney, "India and Empire", in *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling*, cit., pp. 23-36 (p. 33).

56. See Efrain Kristal's analysis of the translation in *Invisible Work*, cit., pp. 34-35.

the flip side of Richard Francis Burton, another one of the great Victorian figures that haunt Borges's imagination⁵⁷. McIntosh Jellaludin was, earlier in his life, an Oxford man of high prospects, a brilliant scholar and a proud Sahib, but opium and alcohol have robbed him of his empire, of which the only trace left is an unfinished manuscript. This he bequeaths to the narrator on his deathbed: but his great novel about India turns out to be a hopelessly illegible chaos of mixed-up pages that will be "filed for reference" by the authorities⁵⁸. It is difficult to miss the resemblance to Borges's own iconic story, "The Garden of Forking Paths", which also features an apparently illegible manuscript held in contempt by Ts'ui Pen's heirs as "a contradictory jumble of irresolute drafts"⁵⁹.

Cross-reading Kipling and Kafka, as Borges proposes in an interpretive gesture reminiscent of his famous essay "Kafka and his Precursors" (1951), exposes an unexpectedly elusive and skeptical view of empire. Indeed, one could argue that the 'wall stories' bring together Kafka, Kipling and Borges in an exemplary display of Borgesian triangulation. Kafka's famous parable "The Great Wall of China" tells of the wall built to contain the barbaric hordes from the North; but this giant undertaking, consuming thousands of lives and millions of acres of forests and mountains, was built on a "principle of piecemeal construction", so that "naturally in this way many great gaps were left", some never to be filled at all⁶⁰. As a result, the Great Wall is ultimately, absurdly, ineffectual. Stories about walls that try but fail to contain chaos are prominent in Kipling as well—Hadrian's wall in *Puck of Pook's Hill*, or the wall that runs around Lahore in "On the city wall", from which the haplessly naïve British narrator fails to master, or even understand the Muslim-Sikh riot⁶¹. Borges's own parable "The Wall and the Books" is a meditation on Emperor Shih Huang Ti's contradictory acts: he built the Great Wall to protect China against the barbarians, but he also ordered all the books destroyed, both preserving civilization and destroying it.

"That these two vast undertakings—the five or six hundred leagues of stone against the barbarians, and the rigorous abolition of history, that is, of the past—were the work of the same person and were, in a sense his attributes,

57. See Borges's extraordinary portrait of Sir Richard Burton in the famous essay "The Translators of the *1001 Nights*", *Selected Non-Fictions*, cit., pp. 92-101.

58. Intriguingly, McIntosh Jellaludin's unfinished manuscript bears the title of Kipling's own first abandoned novel, *Mother Maturin*, which tells the story of an Irish woman who ran an opium den in Lahore. See Kaori Nagai's analysis of McIntosh Jellaludin as Kipling's "sinister alter ego", *Empire of Analogies*, cit., pp. 33-34.

59. "The Garden of Forking Paths", *Collected Fictions*, cit., p. 124.

60. Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, edited by Nahum N. Glatzer, New York: Schocken Books, 1971, p. 235.

61. Salman Rushdie claims the story "leaves us with an image of the inability of the sahibs to comprehend what they pretend to rule" ("Kipling", in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, London: Granta Books, 1991, p. 80).

inexplicably satisfied me and, at the same time, disturbed me", Borges begins⁶².

The meaning of this double and incompatible legacy baffles the mind: the parable, Kafka-style, receives no simple moral, remaining enigmatic.

Let us return, to conclude, to Borges's own imperial parable, "The Story of the Warrior and the Captive Maiden". In form and spirit, it is appropriately kafkaesque: an enigmatic first story (the story of Droctulft the sixth-century Barbarian who experienced a moment of conversion upon discovering the city he had come to destroy, and died defending Ravenna against his own fellow Barbarians) leads to a second story misleadingly presented as an elucidation of the first one ("I was struck by the sense that I was recovering (...) something that had once been my own", p. 209), the story of an encounter between Borges's English grandmother and an English woman taken in an Indian raid as a child and raised by the tribe, who resists the grandmother's entreaties to return to civilization. The Barbarian is "blinded" by the revelation of imperial order ("an aggregate that is multiple yet without disorder"), and conversely, the Englishwoman has made hers the "savage and uncouth life" of the Indians. The two stories are paired up as mirror images of each other, undermining any real explanatory efficacy. Instead, Borges concludes, they are interchangeable *sub specie aeternitatis*: "The figure of the barbarian who embraced the cause of Ravenna, and the figure of the European woman who chose the wilderness—they might seem conflicting, contradictory (...) It may be that the stories I have told are one and the same story. The obverse and reverse of this coin are, in the eyes of God, identical"⁶³. A story of loss is contained in a story of tenure, conquest is read as the flip side of dispossession, renunciation as the other face of entitlement, the king and the ascetic as fundamentally interchangeable, chaos as the mirror image of order, imperial civilization and barbarian wildness as two sides of one coin, and in the eyes of Jorge Luis Borges, Franz Kafka is the dark twin of Rudyard Kipling.

62. "The Wall and the Books", *Selected Non-Fictions*, cit., p. 344.

63. "Story of the Warrior and the Captive Maiden", *Collected Fictions*, cit., p. 211.