



The Man Who Would Be King

Rudyard Kipling

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The Man Who Would Be King Details

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From Reader Review The Man Who Would Be King for online ebook

Richard says

Oh my fickle heart. Oh my shifting allegiances.

I find a curious principle at work in my reading. And that principle is that I will often change my mind... with a fervor. To wit: I will love love *love* an author and then years later I will find myself passionately renouncing their writing for absolutely no good reason. I used to love C.S. Lewis and Jack Kerouac. But now Lewis' charming Britishness grates on my reading ear and Kerouac's free-spirited writing just sounds like what it is: the work of a crazed alcoholic hopped up on Benzedrine.

I don't know why this is. I don't know why I will suddenly turn on something I once loved so dearly and attack it. But spurned authors are like spurned lovers. You wish they would drop off the face of the earth. They remind you of a past you want to forget.

Rudyard Kipling is one of my old flames. About five years ago I really got into *The Jungle Books* and *The Phantom Rickshaw* and even read a biography of him. For a few months I lived in and breathed the air of his dark India. But then we drifted apart. I moved on to other authors, other places. After reading heated criticism of Kipling's work in G. K. Chesterton's *Heretics*, I wrote off old Rudyard's work forever.

... or did I?

I picked up this novella this week because I love everything put out by Melville House Publishing. And I read it. And I must admit it was a bittersweet experience, like seeing the face of an old lover on the street. Oh, Kipling! How I remember your sense of adventure. How I remember the sensory details of your exotic locales and now, yes, I remember your strange humor and the dark magic that you saw that drove men to murder.

So, what's wrong with me? Why can I not just wholly embrace this man's writing?

I want to love Kipling, but for some reason I cannot fully commit to him. I think the problem is that I don't understand his Imperialist mindset. That's to say, I don't disagree with it. But I plain don't understand it. I know I'm not supposed to admit that. I know I'm supposed to be Super Reader Who Understands All. But Kipling's books are a hundred years old and a continent removed from mine. So much of his work references this crazy part of England's history when white guys in pith helmets went around shooting tigers. And I can never tell if Kipling is satirizing this era or if he is tacitly backing this jingoistic, racist imperialism. Try as I might I cannot understand exactly what Kipling is getting at in his books. So while I love his adventure (in *The Man Who Would Be King* a guy gets crucified and there's a severed head involved, too) I cannot ever make sense of the point he's trying to get across. A little research on my part would, I feel, remedy this situation. But I want Kipling to communicate his message to me in his work.

Like any relationship, communication is the key, Mr. Kipling. Based on the romance and adventure of this novella I am extending you another chance. I'm going to revisit your work. Talk to me. Make me understand your worldview; perchance to convince me of its validity. Maybe there's something there, still, between us.

Maybe.

Therese says

\$0.0

The reviews on this book very greatly although seemingly more people got something out of it than I did. It is antiquated and without reading other things, I don't know where it is, and it takes a while to figure out the narrator and just what is going on. You don't have that long to set the stage in such a short book.

Peachy Carnehan and Dan Dravot, con artists, decide they want to be king and take off from India for some remote place in what is now North West Afghanistan. Two years later we are told of their escapades, unbelievable as they are. POV was nearly impossible for me to follow and the places were totally unfamiliar to me, and so this still proved difficult to follow along. By reading other reviews, I can see this was made into a movie, and perhaps I will have to check that out one day just so I can understand and appreciate this story better.

I liked The Jungle Book, but this left me wanting something else. I really need to find a book that I will thoroughly enjoy; one where I cannot turn the pages fast enough.

Vicki says

It is sad that I could not make myself love this. I know it is a classic and really who am I to judge a classic. I just did not enjoy it. I found Peachy Carnehan humorous in starts and stops. But I had no love for his companion Daniel Dravo. I did feel compassion towards the end though.

Steven Walle says

I found this book quite boring and feel guilty for the feeling. I have loved most everything else I have read by this author. The charictors hold no appeal for me and the plot just kind of trugged a long.

Enjoy and Be Blessed.

Diamond

Lyn says

This is of course the short story from Rudyard Kipling that inspired the 1975 John Huston film starring Sean Connery and Michael Caine.

First published in 1888, and (as in the film) told from the perspective of Kipling as the story is related to him by Peachy, this is about two British adventurers who leave the empire, cross the border in Kafiristan (an actual region of present day Afghanistan) and set themselves up as kings.

There is some suggestion that the populace of that state is descended from Alexander the Great's soldiers and that connection prompted the easy revolution where Peachy and Danny were revered as kings and gods. The possession of a heavy cache of modern rifles certainly helped their persuasiveness as well; but they are, alas, all too human and that is the lesson in colonialism that Kipling imparts.

A short and spirited tale, told by a master, this can nonetheless be somewhat hard to follow as Kipling uses colloquial language and terms that, while certainly accurate, diminishes the enjoyment somewhat.

Roni says

Errrr.....An imperialistic view on an insanely unconvincing event. The writer, Rudyard Kipling, employs heavy usage of 19th Century jargons and idioms unique to England and India which makes the reading a bit challenging and difficult for 20th Century Americans. I am fan of history however, fictionalized history about a soldiering society is foreign to me which I was not prepared to invest in. I noticed there were few typos and misspellings. Not too bad for free book.

There is a movie named, "The Man Who Would Be King", played by Sean Connery and Michael Caine. I think I might will enjoy the movie better than the book.

Alex Bledsoe says

Kipling has become problematic due to his retrograde ideas about race, and his depiction of societies other than English. Both of those issues are present here as well, but more prominent, at least for me, was the fairly explicit critique of the colonialism that created the British Empire. Here two rascals set out for a distant land with the explicit aim of becoming kings thanks to their advanced weaponry and innate "superiority." At first they succeed, but eventually their reach exceeds their grasp, and their adventure ends in death and mutilation.

There's no question that Kipling believed the native societies he depicts, even the one where its people seem to be Caucasian, are innately inferior. He certainly has no explicit criticism of the British role in India. But by both condensing colonialization to the efforts of two men, and then carrying it to its logical end, he does seem to be saying that what's happened under British rule is both wrong, and destined to fail. However, that failure isn't due to comprehending that these native societies are made up of human beings equal to the British: it's because the Brits simply don't know when to stop.

There's also no question Kipling could write, and that his perspective is, from the modern perspective, blatantly racist. Each reader has to decide on their own whether the former in any way outweighs the latter enough that they can enjoy the tale.

Richard says

Kipling's poetry was extravagantly admired during his life time and even for a while after his death. This was certainly because he wrote quite vigorously and was regarded as a great advocate of the great British Empire upon whom the sun never set. While some of his poetry is still appreciated, it hasn't aged well and one can

only read about "The White man's burden" with embarrassment and give him a pardon for being a child of his times.

But the same cannot be said about his prose--the short stories in particular. He had an astonishing versatility and fecundity of inspiration and this frequently includes a darkly cynical edge with the British characters who are neither enlightened nor civilised. This is the case with "The Man Who Would Be King". The two main characters are certainly rogues, swindlers, liars and cheats.

But do they deserve what happens to them?

And what of the strange ambiguous ending?

Indeed who are the villains in this amazing evocative story set in India?

This is the "dark" Kipling at his best.

Hristina says

I have been getting into audiobooks a lot recently, and I tend to enjoy them a lot, but somehow, I got a bit lost with this one. It didn't grasp my attention enough. I struggle when reading classics, because I cannot get into some of them the way I should, I lose focus quickly, which is what happened with this book. Maybe I listened to it at the wrong time. Maybe I'll try again someday, when I've had more than four hours of sleep. Until then, I'm leaving this here as it is.

J.G. Keely says

I must admit I find the modern backlash against colonialism to be somewhat ridiculous; as if colonialism were something new, something purely European, something malicious and unnatural. What else has mankind done since it rose in Africa but displace its neighbors? What else does any animal do but seek to thrive where it can?

Any successful group soon becomes cramped as their population rises, and hence spreads out to new areas. In this way, each species has developed and then expanded to its limits. Whenever there is a significant change in environment, a new species takes over the place of the old. But this does not in any way lessen the worth of the displaced group.

It is a mistake to see Darwinian evolution as leading towards 'something greater'. Human beings are no better than jellyfish, indeed, place a human being underwater with only small fish for his sustenance, and see how long he lasts. No animal is better, each is specialized for a certain environment.

Mankind has colonized the world, but so have ants, and pound for pound, there are more ants than people. Humans have altered their atmosphere and environment, but so did algae millions of years ago, and they drove most of the other animals extinct. Our ability to affect the world does not make us unique.

Populations of early man expanded across Africa and out into Europe and Asia. Some of these were Homo Sapiens, like modern man, others neanderthals, australopithecines, and other variations. These different groups fought for territory and resources, and one-by-one, wiped each other out. The expansion of animals

across the globe is never one of peaceful balance. There can be no balance in a constantly-shifting environment.

Eventually, we began to develop early cultures, not because any group of humans was 'better', but because of environmental effects (for a theory about what sorts of effects these were, check out *Guns, Germs and Steel*). The populations who developed things like agriculture and tool-use were able to expand, and when they expanded, they ran into the neighboring populations, who they fought, slew, sublimated, and combined with.

Humans moved all around the globe, taking over land from other groups and wiping out the previous cultures. There is archaeological evidence that suggests that when the most recent migration came to America from Siberia, they completely wiped out the previous inhabitants and their culture.

Places like Australia, America, and Oceania are remote, so new waves are infrequent. Africa, Europe, and Asia, on the other hand, have been in a constant state of flux since prehistory. The Indo-Aryans conquered northern India, the Phoenicians founded Carthage, the Trojans founded Rome (on the heads of the Latins), and the Old Testament Jews committed wholesale genocide on the Amalekites and the Midianites to expand the tribe of Israel.

As cultural ties grew stronger and new technologies were developed, larger and larger areas could be taken over and ruled by a single culture. The Roman Empire and China expanded under their technological and social successes, sublimating all the distinct peoples who surrounded them. In Europe, Rome fell, giving way to the North Africans, the Byzantines, and the Normans. Each group took what they could and tried to homogenize the cultures in the territories they controlled.

But they did not destroy the cultures they conquered. Cultures are always in constant flux, growing, changing, mutating, combining, and cleaving. There is no 'pure culture' in the world, nor has there been, and though some have been destroyed, their traditions and practices did not actually disappear.

Take for example the epic of Gilgamesh, the product of a nearly forgotten culture. Though the tradition it comes from is lost to time and its cities are buried beneath the sand, when we rediscovered Gilgamesh, it became clear that the story had influenced many cultures, including the writings of Homer. Forgotten, but not annihilated.

The conquering culture overwhelms some parts of the previous culture, but it adopts others, often without recognizing it, and thus both cultures progress and change. Just as the Indo-Aryans changed Indian culture, which changed Chinese culture, which changed Korean culture, which changed Japanese culture, so was the colonial conflict between Britain and India a cultural exchange. The terms of the exchange weren't fair, but such exchanges rarely are, and it certainly wasn't one-sided.

By the time of colonialism, the geographical space in Europe had reached something approaching equilibrium. The most successful groups had sublimated those around them and expanded to an area of land they could roughly control and homogenize. Many wars were fought over the same pieces of land, which were passed back and forth again and again.

Technologies increase more and more quickly over time, as illustrated by transportation at the beginning of colonialism. Tallships traveled to foreign lands, like America and Japan, and when they arrived, they discovered that the local cultures were not able to contend with the wartime technologies the Europeans brought with them.

The unification of China and remoteness of Japan meant that new technologies, such as navigational aids, water-clocks, and gunpowder, were not widely adopted. The Chinese bureaucracy did not value these changes, because change always means political restructuring, and they had no threat of close neighbors (like

Europe) to drive them to an arms race.

The Europeans were not better or smarter than the Chinese, they were merely adapted to different requirements. It's rather like the case of Tibbles the cat:

On Stephen's Island in New Zealand, there was a species of flightless bird. There was also a lighthouse. The lighthouse-keeper owned a cat, named Tibbles, who hunted the birds. By the time it was recognized that they were a new, unique species, Tibbles the cat had eaten them all. They are the only species known to have become extinct due to the actions of a single animal.

The flightless birds were not 'less advanced' than the cat, they were merely specialized for a certain kind of lifestyle. The cat could not have survived on the island by itself, after all, which the wrens had no problem doing. The wrens were as good as they could be at surviving on a remote island, which meant they didn't waste energy on nonexistent predators. But, when conditions changed, they were overcome.

It is said that the Aboriginal people of Australia have a social system whereby two members meeting for the first time, no matter how remote, can determine their genetic relationship to one another within a few sentences. Their culture is not an inferior one, it merely specializes in different areas.

The Europeans had a different background than the people of Africa or the Americas. They were not better-suited to life in those parts of the world, as the many deaths of the Virginia colony showed, nor were their cultures in any way 'better', but they were specialized in killing people efficiently and holding land.

Since the Europeans had already expanded roughly to their limits in Europe, it produced a great change when trains and steamboats allowed them to access remote areas of the globe. It was easier for them to fight for land in Africa, America, and Oceania than it was for them to fight for land against their powerful neighbors.

They expanded, as humans always have, in waves, the more physically powerful culture dominating the one with other specializations. There is nothing new about this, except the range at which they were able to expand, and there is no 'pure culture' that did not establish itself after the displacement of others.

Colonialism was remarkable because it was unprecedented for people to commit war on others so far away, and because in terms of military technology, it was often one-sided. The extinction rate for animals is at an all-time high right now, but this is chiefly because the variety of animals is at a high. Land has been separating and breaking up since the age of the super-continent, and so there are more islands, more mountains, and hence, more remote areas to produce extra-specialized animals.

In the wake of global travel, many species are finding themselves in the position of the Stephen's Island Wren, as rats, cats, pigs, and rabbits are taking over the world. This is because the specialization only thrives in a closed environment. In open competition, the generalized animal survives. Think of weight classes in boxing.

But it is a mistake to equate one sort of superiority with another. Just because you can kill another man does not make you smarter than him. And yet, for all his knowledge, it avails him not in death. This is the pain we feel from colonialism, that those who 'won' did not do so because they were smarter or better, but merely because they were more skilled at killing.

But people do not kill merely to kill. We kill to propagate ourselves, our ideas, and our cultures. No culture ever really destroys another, and even the culture that 'loses' the war does not lose itself.

The Africans who were enslaved by their fellows, sold to Europeans, separated, and forced to work did not lose their culture, even though they faced as daunting a path as can be imagined. Indeed, their culture

combined with the European cultures in America and blossomed in new and unpredictable ways.

Rome brought back people and culture from all of the lands into which it expanded, and was eventually overtaken by one small, insignificant group, The Christians. Cultural interaction is not a bad thing, and the pure, unadulterated, unchanging culture is a myth.

And this myth is what allows White supremacists, Black nationalists, and Islamic fundamentalists to unite under the same banner of 'racial purity'. The mixing of cultures is natural and produces the most remarkable effects. It is by the transfer of ideas that humanity grows.

Kipling is called an imperialist because he was descended from the most recent wave of conquerors in India. He was born there and worked there, and learned the language before he knew English. The British suffered the same fate under the Normans, who replaced half of the Germanic English language with French.

Kipling claims no moral superiority to the Indians, nor does he pretend to know their culture, inside and out. In this story, particularly, he seems to recognize that even the most foolish, unremarkable man can achieve something when he has guns and other men do not.

He does not claim that it is in the blood of the British to rule, nor the blood of the Indians to be ruled. Even in 'The White Man's Burden', one can see that he is more concerned with the cultural and technological relationship than with some in-born quality.

Even so, Kipling and his contemporaries did not know what the source of European power was. They had the technology, but it would be many years until academics began to theorize why this inequality in technology developed.

At the time, Europeans traveled around the world and found that no one else had developed steam power or guns, and surely they wondered why. The more simplistic stated it was the will of god, or some innate superiority of their evolution. But we still don't know what it was, for sure.

We still don't know how racial difference affect the mind. We can all interbreed, which means we are all the same species, all related that closely at least, but beyond that, it is difficult to say just what our in-born differences may be, or how strong they are.

While many cling to the ideals of egalitarianism, 'all men are born equal', this is clearly not true at all. Some are more mathematically-minded, some are taller, some stronger, some cannot parse words, some sickly, some attractive. It is almost impossible, at this point, to separate genetic elements from cultural elements, but slowly, we are learning to do so to some degree.

Kipling does not put forth the ignorant ideal that 'Europeans are better', and even if some authors do, it is no more true than the ideal 'humans are equal'. Though just because we are not equal does not mean some are 'better', like animals, our differences specialize us for different tasks and different environments.

Morality is a small and personal game. It is not the source of culture, it is the result of culture. Trying to fit human society into any ideal, from 'fairness' to 'equality' to 'superiority' is just mincing words. Colonialism is merely a new word to describe the balance of power between the physically dominant and those they overwhelm.

I don't suggest that we ignore or excuse this unequal balance merely because it is ancient, natural, and as far as we know, inescapable, any more than I would suggest we stop fighting against death and disease because they are ancient, natural, and inescapable. I would only suggest that we try to look at the situation as a dynamic of political power.

Colonialism was not a conspiracy, it was not a small, deliberate decision made by some few people. It was the predictable outgrowth of the interactions between states and people.

When Kipling makes his most damning remark in 'The White Man's Burden', that English culture has become parent to the Indian culture's 'half-devil, half-child', he is describing the eternal relationship between any government and people. The populace is ignorant and violent everywhere, and they are the burden of the government, but also its supporters.

Britain took on this burden willfully, sensing that the economic benefits it would bring would counterbalance the difficulty of maintaining it. Compounding this was the sense that India could be 'educated', pulled up into the 'modern world', as the West is still trying to do all over the world today.

This sense that First World powers can and should transfer knowledge to the rest of the world does reflect the roles of child and parent, doubly so because the rest of the world at once resents and desires it.

They desire the knowledge, production, and technology of the First World, but to get it, they must create an economic agreement. The First World trades what it has as dearly as possible, using the economic ties to increase their influence and their profit.

It is not a new, remarkable, personal state of inequality, it is the same state we have been living under since culture developed, and the same state we're living under today. If there were a good pejorative definition of colonialism, it is that people in power feel they deserve to be in power, and people under their power resent that they are not in power. It is this unwarranted sense of entitlement which should chafe, not the facts of power dynamics.

We are not created equally, we are not treated equally, and those of us who attain power feel entitled to use it. Demonizing this ancient, ever-repeating relationship isn't going to change anything, and it won't help us to better understand the world, ourselves, or power. Like many social debates about inequality, 'colonialism' boils down to entitlement vs. resentment, and neither stance is of any use to ideas or discourse.

Travelin says

Perhaps this was shocking or surprising to empire builders in Kipling's era, but to this modern reader, the troubles of two idiot chancers/minor empire builders in Afghanistan seem slightly obvious. I remember it worked exceptionally well, visually, as a movie with Michael Caine.

Nor do I see much transparent chauvinism. On the contrary, it appears to be a warning to self-centred empire builders. Also, the tribe who caused them the most trouble were "British" and already knew the ridiculous symbols of empire.

It seems to go some way towards revealing how the Brits, including the narrator, adapted to a certain amount of chaos and social preservation. I've sometimes wondered if some of the energy and class-based excesses of the Victorian era owe their origins to adaptations developed in the Jewel of the Empire -- India.

Thanks to this book for the reminder regarding how damn hot India can be. Was nearly there just about now and the heat has been killing Indians by the thousand. Not much pity reserved for Peachy, though. He blithely went shooting whatever natives seemed least important at first.

Maryam says

the first book of Kipling I got to read after Mowgli (*The jungle book*). very interesting and breathtaking story. always loved Kipling, he basically made me dream of India, hope one day I will get to visit it. Just as usual the atmosphere is very realistic, the story is simply crazy, but good crazy, if you know what I mean. I think it is a must read.

Sara says

Brilliantly told. The ending gives me shivers. Wild and unsettling.

Libros Prestados says

Este libro contiene dos relatos de Rudyard Kipling, uno de los reyes de la novela de aventuras.

El primero es el afamadísimo "El hombre que quiso ser rey" que fue adaptado por la igualmente afamada "El hombre que pudo reinar" de John Huston. Nos cuenta la arriesgada (y loca) aventura de dos buscavidas ingleses que pretenden ser coronados reyes en un lugar llamado Kafiristán, que al parecer se halla al norte de Afganistán. Combina muy bien aventuras y cierto suspense, porque el desarrollo de la historia se nos cuenta poco a poco, desde la perspectiva del narrador, que se va topando con ellos en diferentes momentos. Y también consigue que empatices con el personaje de Peachey al final. Por supuesto, al ser un relato corto, cosas como una mayor profundidad en los personajes o su desarrollo, se ve disminuido, pero la historia es muy dinámica y sale airosa sin ello. Otra pega son los ramalazos de racismo y la flipada esa de que pueda haber masones al norte de Afganistán (porque son descendientes de Alejandro Magno y bla, bla, bla). Es un relato de aventuras de Rudyard Kipling, es lo que hay.

El segundo relato, "Al final del camino", no es una historia de aventuras, sino un relato inquietante sobre las consecuencias en varios hombres de su estancia en un país extranjero, en pleno bochorno. Me ha resultado interesante, y tenía cierto aire a los relatos de terror clásico, con ese final intrigante y dado a múltiples interpretaciones. Como pieza ambiental, es interesante.

En definitiva, una edición sencilla (y barata) de historias de Rudyard Kipling que puede merecer la pena para aquellos que no conozcan al autor o les apetezca leer una de sus más famosas historias.

Zella Kate says

In the 1880s in British India, former British army sergeants Daniel Dravot and Peachy Carnahan are convinced that the Empire does not properly appreciate their talents, which range from soldiering to smuggling to blackmailing. The two embark on a journey to remote, unexplored Kafiristan, in modern-day Afghanistan/Pakistan. Their retirement plan? Use their skills to convince the locals to hire them as mercenaries, then stage a coup to install themselves as kings so that they can rob the countryside blind. What could possibly go wrong?

For years, my father tried to convince me to watch the 1975 movie *The Man Who Would Be King*. I didn't

get around to it until recently, which now makes me angry at myself because it was a fantastic movie.

Since it is based on a Rudyard Kipling story, I decided to read the original text. It's written in a quaint 19th century style, which I enjoy when I am in the right mood, and for the most part the story is the same as in the movie.

The biggest strength is probably the characters. Danny and Peachy are terrible (but entertaining) people. Kipling's attitude toward colonialism in the story are murky, but it's pretty clear he doesn't condone what they're doing. (Though that's probably more to do with how they're going about it than anything else.)

Nonetheless, the tone isn't preachy, so the story ends up serving as a greater cautionary tale than if Kipling had turned it into a sermon. (Personally, I suspect the message has less to do with colonialism than Freemasonry, but I can't find anyone else talking about that.)

In any event, the story builds to a memorable, haunting ending.

I liked the book, but I honestly think the movie is better. If you haven't seen the movie, you should watch it, even if you don't read the book. It alters a few things, but the changes work really well. It probably features the best performances of Michael Caine and Sean Connery's careers and manages to be a lot darker, funnier, and more thought-provoking than your standard buddy adventure story. It also has one of the most intense final 15 minutes of any film I've watched. Oh and there are impeccable pith helmets throughout! What more could you want?