Rudyard Kipling

Kipling was one of Britain’s turn-of-the-century writers, and was the first British writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, in 1907. His family belonged to the class of imperial administrators who governed British colonies all over the world. At the turn of the century the British Empire reached its zenith, and its administrators were widely respected people. Kipling was born in India in 1865, and was sent to England to be educated when he was six years old. His stay in England, first with an elderly relative in Southsea, and later at a boarding school, was not a happy time, and he was glad to get back to India in 1882. He worked as a journalist in Bombay for eight years (and four years in the USA) before returning to England to write on a full-time basis.

He was a great defender of the imperial ethic and of the use of military force to establish law and order, and often came into conflict with early-twentieth century pacifists. In his 1899 poem “The White Man’s Burden” he proclaimed Anglo-Saxon racial superiority. His only son was killed in the First World War. Kipling died in 1936 and was buried at the Poet’s Corner in Westminster Abbey.

Kipling’s literary reputation today rests primarily on his books for the young including the animal fables in The Jungle Book (1894, 1895), which he dedicated to this first child, Josephine; Stalkey & Co. (1899), about his school experiences, which reflect the public school ideology of loyalty and commitment to the group which Kipling believed essential to create men who could sustain the British Empire; the playful Just So Stories (1902) which include read-aloud stories with humorous explanations such as “The Elephant’s Child”, which reveals how the elephant’s trunk was formed, or “How the Camel Got his Hump”; two books about England’s deep historical past, Puck of Pook’s Hill (1906) and Rewards and Fairies (1910); and his novel Kim (1901), about an Anglo-Indian boy in colonial India. Kipling’s work has been compared with that of Robert Louis Stevenson and J. M. Barrie, two other popular late-Victorian British writers of books about boys and boyishness.

The Just So Stories are fables, but more specifically they belong to a type of stories found in many cultures, origin stories, creation myths, why stories or porquoi tales. These tales explain, in a fantastic manner, the origins of natural phenomena or animal features. Kipling’s tales include stories such as “How the Leopard Got His Spots”, “How the Whale Got His Throat”, or “How Alphabet Was Made”.

Having been exposed to different cultures, Kipling was influenced by Muslin legends, the Arabian Nights (which contains such well-known stories as “Aladdin”), as well as the Bible and Protestant ethics. “How the Camel Got his Hump” reflects the Protestant work ethic, and is influenced by the following verse found in the Gospel of St John: “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work”. Some of the words of the story, glossed below, are of non-English origin:
**Djinn**: Muslim spirit, lower than angels, able to appear in human and animal forms, and having supernatural power over men. From Arabic *jinni*.

**Indab**: is a Zulu-Bantu word for an important conference held by the principal men of tribe.

**Punchayet**: is the basic form of administration of a village community in India, a council or meeting.

**Pow-wow**: is a magic ceremonial of native Americans.

Each tale is followed by a moral in the shape of a poem. The tales were originally illustrated by Kipling himself in black and white. Each of his illustrations are accompanied with an explanation. The edition you are going to read has modern illustrations.

**Sources:**


**Photograph**: “The British Empire in 1897”. (c) Teemu Romppanen, 2007. In flickr with cc licence.