

Kipling by Philip Mason

(Harper & Row; 394 pp.; \$15.00)

Rudyard Kipling by Martin Fido

(Viking; 144 pp.; \$14.95)

Martin Green

Reading these two books brings us again up against the Kipling problem. Everyone who has read him knows that Kipling deals with major human subjects—notably the problems of responsibility and power—and treats them with complex and insightful sympathy; and it can easily be demonstrated that he is one of the most subtle and ingenious of all literary craftsmen. So why is he left out of the literary histories, out of the literary education of most people today? Why is it so hard even for me, feeling as I do about him, to find the right terms in which to discuss him? Because the Kipling problem is cultural rather than literary. Kipling identified himself with the ruling class of Empire, in opposition to the feeling class, the conscience class; and all his work and persona, every line of his prose and face, bear the stamp of that loyalty. He made himself the Enemy.

But his is a cultural problem in another sense too. Nowadays many of us are concerned about empire, and ruling, and responsibility. We *need* to be able to think clearly about Kipling, we need to make him part of our history, for no other writer bears on these subjects so fruitfully. He was, we should remember, quite extraordinarily popular in the imperialist America of his own day, and is now very popular in Soviet Russia, where literary taste has not been allowed to rebel, as it has with us, against the ruling class ethos.

The solution—I fear it sounds self-evident, though it came to me as a discovery—is to treat Kipling in the context of the class he wrote for. More exactly, in the context of that class's culture. Most of us have a very poor sense of that, of those people's achievements and problems and experience, a sense inadequately sym-

pathetic and so inadequately substantial. I had very much hoped that Mr. Mason's book would prove to be the one I wanted, since he, with his impressive volumes on India's administrators and India's army, is just the man to have written it. But instead he elected to approach Kipling from a literary-critical point of view, which is doubly unfortunate because he is not a literary critic, and by and large asks the wrong questions about the stories.

He does give us something of what I was hoping for, but involuntarily, as it were. He will often say that "any man in India then" knew of cases exactly like the anecdote Kipling is telling, but he does not use that information to our critical benefit, to let us know whether what seems to us exaggerated, or a flight of fancy on Kipling's part, was in fact part of the general myth. The myth, after all, was *their* work, and it is critical nonsense to treat it as Kipling's invention. The great mythic power in his stories is *their* power.

One of Mr. Mason's problems is that he is further inside Kipling's world than he allows for. He tells Kipling's story about a polo pony who "teaches the other ponies to play up in the best public school spirit. It is all rather absurd—but I loved it as a boy and..." and in fact he still loves it. "It is no use telling oneself that it is only a game, that it never really happened...." Fair enough, but Mr. Mason should realize that it is precisely his loving it as a boy, and his general childhood experience (at prep school in the First World War in England) which most of us lack. Few readers today have known that "best public school spirit," and he himself, when he says "it is all rather absurd," turns away from the crux of the problem for us. It is not just time that has passed since then, but a cultural renunciation, a repudiation of that ethos. Even in Kipling's own time the major imperatives of that moral scheme had to remain unspoken. In *Stalky and Co.*, his school story, the visitor who makes a flag-waving speech is immediately detested by the boys. That is another reason why we need a sympathetic explication of Kipling's cruxes.

Let me give just two examples of purely literary features of his work that would yield treasures to knowledgeable investigation. One is the persis-

tent metaphor of horse training—of the young man seen as a colt who needs to be broken in and the older man who has to be cruel to be kind. This is the master metaphor of all Kipling's work, and some of its immense implications—for the importance of discipline, of the primary relationship of man to man (not to woman), and so on—are obvious. But one also needs to see the aristocratic relationship of man-on-horseback to everyone else he addresses; the archaic-military implications of the metaphor; and the sexual implications of the older man's breaking in the younger by mounting him. The other is Kipling's evocation of the great literature of the past—of Keats, of *Antony and Cleopatra*, of Greek epic. Several stories are nothing but ingenious ways to bring those great monuments into relation—necessarily a contrastive relation—to the specifically modern and quotidian, not to say ignominious. A consumptive chemist's assistant, in delirium, starts inscribing lines of Keats, for instance. And Kipling's own style is a continuous evocation of past literature, of the Bible, Shakespeare, and so on. I think it could be shown that these idiosyncrasies add up to a kind of purely literary imperialism—the literature of the past treated as a kind of crown jewels, with the incongruous modern mechanisms of the showcases included as part of the thrill.

Mr. Mason did not, alas, write the book I wanted. But I entirely agree with his major thesis, that Kipling was a very self-divided soul, and the best things in his work emerge intermittently and unpredictably. And with the minor thesis, that one of his greatest strengths is his feel for the primitive and tribal elements in modern consciousness. Indeed, someone who is literally beginning his acquaintance with Kipling might do worse than to read Mr. Mason's book. But I would recommend rather Mr. Fido's.

This is one of Viking's Studio books, and very lavishly illustrated with photographs, cartoons, and portraits, several in color. Most of these are interesting and throw some light on Kipling's life and friends, though too many are quite marginal—e.g., a sketch of a battle in which the husband of Kipling's boardinghouse keeper took part forty years before Kipling was born. Luckily the text was written

with a much surer sense of relevance. Mr. Fido is of Anglo-Indian descent, and has Indian friends, and particularly his account of Kipling's early environment (in Bombay and Lahore) and his early stories is very knowledgeable. But he is also able to make some valuable critical points about Kipling's verse, and in general, though his monograph is short, it is quite substantial. Above all, it is lively, and even at points where I couldn't disagree more—when, for instance, Mr. Fido says that Kipling's *Kim* is a better novel than Forster's *Passage to India*—still I was stimulated.

Another, less heated, disagreement is aroused by his chapter IV, "The Creation of Kipling," where the thesis is that Kipling would have become a liberal if he had gone to Oxford as a student instead of to India as a journalist, in 1882, when he was seventeen. This thesis brings out the interesting and important facts that Kipling had been his school's intellectual and aesthete, and that his family tradition was liberal and artistic. His father was a friend of the socialist, William Morris, and himself an artist-craftsman, and a lover of Indian folk art. His mother's sister was so liberal that she hung out black banners when England won the Boer War and refused to read her nephew's newspaper dispatches about it. This is true, and though the family gradually became more conservative—their style was after all subsidized by the Empire—still Rudyard was its only outright reactionary. But surely the explanation for that is to be found in experience that preceded his return to India in 1882.

He had been a noisy and difficult child, apparently undisciplined by his mother, and he had been left in England at the age of six, without any explanation from his parents, to live six years with a woman who treated him cruelly. He became extremely depressed, though he continued to behave wildly, began to suffer hallucinations, and ever after had a fear that he might go mad. When his parents again visited England and took him away from Mrs. Holloway, they put him in the Devonshire boarding school he described in *Stalky and Co.* There he gradually won a place for himself among the other boys, enjoyed him-

self, became proud; and it is surely discernible that all his later attitudes bear the imprint of that great experience. He had saved himself from loneliness, misery, and horror, by proving himself a true boy by the appropriate tribal ordeals, and his prime loyalties forevermore went to "the boys" of this world, the manly men. (His manliness was essentially a matter of being accepted in a male group; it had nothing to do with sexual relations, for instance.) It is true that Anglo-India was a society dominated by such male groups—administrators, huntsmen, bachelors, living in clubs staffed with native servants—which much reinforced this tendency in Kipling. But he would have found the equivalent types in Oxford, to judge by the way he found them on ships, in armies, on newspapers, on railways, and elsewhere.

Going to India meant, after all, being readmitted to family life, which Mr. Fido might have expected to exert a contrary influence, if Kipling had still been influenceable. Though Lockwood and Alice Kipling had so long, as it were, abandoned their son, they made a great deal of "family" feeling, and from 1882 on Rudyard was fathered and mothered much more intensively than most writers. They (and Rudyard's sister) all wrote themselves, and criticized and admired everything he wrote; they brought out a family magazine, and had conferences to decide Rudyard's titles; his sister wrote some of the *Plain Tales* for his newspaper, and his father contributed much local color to his stories and later the illustrations to the American edition. But this family closeness seems to have cooperated with, rather than contradicted, the set of his character; for instance, he escaped his mother's possessiveness only by marrying a woman equally possessive and protective, and three years older than himself, and his work shows a notable inability to deal with the erotic. His ardent emotional relationships—though there is no need to evoke the specter of "homosexuality"—were with men, as they had been with boys. His wife was the sister of his deceased best friend, and it seems likely that he felt he was carrying out the dead friend's wishes in marrying her.

Kipling's was a clever, successful, and competitive family, and it

mediated between him and the public world of Victorian England in ideological as well as emotional ways. Though his mother's family had been poor, one of her sisters married the Pre-Raphaelite painter, Burne-Jones, another the President of the Royal Society, a third the rich Alfred Baldwin, whose son was to become prime minister. While Lockwood Kipling (whose kin were *not* counted as family, because they were "dull") carried out the application of the arts-and-crafts tradition—so cottagy in England—to the pomp of Empire in India. He fostered Indian arts-and-crafts, but he also designed the banners for the Durbar that celebrated Victoria's assumption of the title Empress, and supervised the Indian exhibit at the Paris Exposition of 1878. Rudyard's work can be said to be powered by the drives of both his mother's social ambitions and his father's artistic tastes. His work and Morris's, together, represent the whole polarity of the arts in England at the height of Empire.

At that moment the manly Englishmen Kipling loved were of course at the zenith of their world-historical course, and his audience was very responsible to his praise of them. Up to about 1920 it was a very broad audience—he was fantastically widely read and highly paid—but also a selective one in that its most fervent members were also men of power. One of the fascinating aspects of Mr. Fido's story is the sequence of figures from other spheres of life who became Kipling's allies in the Imperial enterprise: Cecil Rhodes, who gave Kipling a house in South Africa and made him a trustee of the Rhodes scholarships intended to assemble the best of Anglo-Saxon manhood at Oxford; Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts, who came to live near Kipling and shared his dream of a series of militias to keep Englishmen in training all their lives long; Theodore Roosevelt, to whom Kipling sent his "White Man's Burden" poem, as propaganda to help make America an imperialist nation; and, during the 1920's, the king and the prime minister. By then Kipling was an exploded myth to intellectuals and literary men, but among politicians he exerted real power to shape national pieties, like the official monuments to the War. His lifetime was a crucial moment in the spread of

Western (primarily Anglo-Saxon) power over the rest of the globe, and Kipling was the greatest agent of that power's coming to self-consciousness.

Both these books are very welcome, for Kipling has never been treated as seriously as he deserves. Liberal intellectuals have disliked him too much to read him carefully or respond generously. There are, of course, critics who praise Kipling the *artist* for his technical virtuosity, and he certainly was a brilliant literary intelligence. But still that is not why he is impor-

tant. And there are those, like Orwell, who acknowledge in him a power of realism and responsibility most literary intellectuals lack; again true, but again not the main point—after all, his realism is often mere cynicism. The important Kipling is the writer who served the cause of empire (naming its technology, its cadre, its pains and pleasures) with such extraordinary devotion that even the flaws in his work speak eloquently of the political reality behind it and make that more than just a "political" reality.

attack antipolitical attitudes and emphasize politics itself as essential to democracy: "The Congressmen and aldermen and mayors and city chairmen whom we knew conveyed to us a definite endorsement, in the teeth of the culture's prejudice, of 'politics,' understood in the narrow modern sense, as a positive good."

Reading this work, which includes in revised form a number of essays previously published in various journals, brought back to this reviewer memories of those lively late-afternoon discussions in a graduate seminar on ethics and politics in a small semibasement room in Morse College at Yale a decade ago. As was true in that seminar, Miller is concerned here not so much with a defense of "politics" as with deepening our understanding. He accepts the realist's assumption that power will always be a central and perennial concern of politics, but he cautions us that justice should nevertheless remain the primary theme. Though some romantic moralists may still need to be reminded of the limitations inherent in politics due to groups and their interests, "high politics is not the art of the possible; it is the art of enlarging what is possible, and of making what had hereto been impossible come into the range of what can be considered."

This may represent a subtle shift in Miller's writing from previous books. There are passages in this volume reminiscent of his critique of the simplistic, absolutistic moralism in the politics of the fifties in *Piety Along the Potomac*, especially when he attacks the New Left and antiwar movements of the late sixties; but he seems much more concerned to point out the limitations of the "realism" that is characteristic of his own generation of thinkers and teachers. "We overdid it," he confesses. In one chapter, for example, he uses John F. Kennedy—the Irish Catholic whose religion ironically had little effect upon his approach to politics—as an example to demonstrate the inadequacies of "tough-minded, technical, hard-nosed, pragmatic" politics that does not reflect carefully upon fundamental moral values. In another chapter he focuses on Henry Kissinger in arguing for "the overwhelming importance of purpose over technique." He clinches his argument concerning the disastrous

Of Thee, Nevertheless, I Sing: An Essay on American Political Values by William Lee Miller

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Merle Longwood

Even those readers who reject William Lee Miller's conclusions in his sprightly *Of Thee, Nevertheless, I Sing* will have to confess that it is an impressive essay on American political values. During this bicentennial season when a lot of Americana is being turned out by the presses it is refreshing to have a book such as this which is serious in purpose and yet written with journalistic skill and literary grace, with appropriate dashes of wit and humor, that make it both interesting and instructive. In this work Miller provides an extended analysis of America's "defective political culture," but he does not end on a gloomy note; rather, he suggests that there are values in the culture that can be used to provide a corrective to the basic flaws.

Because his arguments are presented in a simple style with a commonsense approach, a casual reader not well acquainted with the author might not appreciate the sophistication with which Miller adjudicates both data from social scientific studies and questions posed by historic political philosophy. Those who do not know the author personally may also miss the significance of the brief autobiographical allusions to the "citizens of Laramie, Wyoming," the "Eagle Scouts in the

Southwest Kansas Council of the Boy Scouts of America," the "voters on both sides of Orange Street in the old fifteenth ward of New Haven, Connecticut," and the "senators, mayors, and assistant secretaries" that are among the citizens who have helped shape Miller's understanding of the political culture of America. Formerly a faculty member at Yale and now Director of the Poynter Center on Public and American Institutions at Indiana University, Miller brings an unusual breadth of experience to his study of the interaction of moral values and the political process. In addition to spending years teaching and writing about ethics and politics, he served as a speech writer for Adlai Stevenson's second Presidential campaign, was elected three times as an alderman in New Haven, and has maintained contact throughout his adult life with political figures at every level of government. Thus Miller's discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the political culture is no "ivory tower" assessment; his experience *in* politics informs his interpretation of theories *about* politics. In criticizing the common disapproval of "politics" and "politicians," for example, Miller points to the politicians he has known, in addition to referring to writings that