Abstract

During his own lifetime, Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) went from being one of the world’s most widely read and respected short story writers and poets to being ignored and even despised. The young Kipling was someone that everybody read, while the elderly Kipling was, as Edmund Wilson called his essay from 1941, ‘The Kipling That Nobody Read’. The Danish scholar C. A. Bodelsen stated that unlike the late Kipling, the young Kipling wrote ‘almost completely ‘straight’ stories’. This dissertation investigates the question: What narrative strategies did Kipling employ in his early stories? Were Kipling’s early stories really so ‘straight’? How different is ‘the Kipling that everybody read’ from ‘the Kipling that nobody read’?

The dissertation presents close readings of some early short stories by Kipling and, in order of comparison, a few of Kipling’s late short stories are discussed. The approach is eclectic; the close readings are done with the care of a New Critic, but also employ some of the insights into voices and discourse provided by Mikhail Bakhtin.

The dissertation finds that Kipling’s early stories are not so ‘straight’ as they may appear. Kipling employs narrative strategies that both participate in and undermine a colonialist discourse. The early stories are deliberately ‘artless’, and many of the narrative strategies found in Kipling’s late stories can also be found in the early stories. Kipling’s early stories contain many different voices, often ‘double-voiced’ discourse, and numerous literary allusions are crucial parts of Kipling’s narrative strategies.