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Author(s): Jeffrey Meyers

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The Idea of Moral Authority in *The Man Who Would Be King*

JEFFREY MEYERS

Though Kipling's theme is the need for moral authority represented by the law of the British Empire and the dangers and horrors that would result if the organized governments of civilized powers refused the task of colonialism, he fails to maintain a consistent moral perspective in the story. Kipling's portrayal of Dan's bravery and Peachey's martyrdom shows his sympathy for the roguish and daring aspects of their personalities. This obscures the moral issue of their past behavior as kings—their greed, exploitation, despotism and murder—which he is trying to criticize in the story. Their terrible deaths, which should have been a just punishment for their crimes, become instead an attempt to vindicate their character. The serious flaw of this story is that Kipling is essentially sympathetic to their imperialistic ambitions (that is, the need to replace native anarchy with British order), so that his criticism of their failure to establish progressive beneficent rule and their lack of fidelity to the Law is never forcefully established.

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING, like Shakespeare's *Richard II*, considers the nature of kingship and kingly power, and both works, in different ways, emphasize the human qualities and fallibility of kings who are defeated by their own impetuosity and pride. When Peachey tells the Kafir priest "that the King [Dan] and me are nothing more than two of the finest men that God Almighty ever made. Nothing more, I do assure you," they prosaically and ironically echo Richard's moving and pathetic confession, spoken at a time when kings ruled by divine right:

For you have but mistook me all this while.
I live with bread like you, feel want,
Taste grief, need friends. Subjected thus,
How can you say to me I am a king? (III.ii.174-177)

Surely Kipling's epigraph, "Brother to a prince and fellow to a beggar if he be found worthy"; owes something to

Sometimes am I a king,
Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar,
And so I am. (V.v.32-34)

The most important relationship between the two works is that the tragic mood of Richard's "hollow crown" speech

dominates the atmosphere of Kipling's story, with all its dreadful forebodings:¹

For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings—
How some have been deposed, some slain in war . . .
All murdered. For within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps Death his Court. (III.ii.155-162)

We only perceive how hollow Dan's crown is when Peachey, crazed like "The Man Who Was," returns with Dan's shrunken head and "heavy circlet of gold."

Richard II, "the last king ruling by hereditary right, direct and undisputed, from the Conqueror,"² however deficient he may be in the solid virtues of a ruler, represents a standard of lawful kingship with which Carnehan and Dravot can be measured; and the play provides a touchstone for the characters and themes presented in Kipling's story. Peachey and Dan attempt to transcend the traditional code of the white man in India, but fail as kings because they have no moral standards comparable to the rule of the British Empire. They neglect to uphold what Kipling calls the Law—a somewhat vague but important concept that includes fidelity, loyalty, bravery, generosity, discipline, tradition and honor. Like Henry Bolingbroke, they are usurpers who bring "Disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny" (IV.i.142) into the land, "And lay the summer's dust with showers of blood" (III.iii.43).

Peachey and Dan, when we first meet them in the story, are uneducated and corrupt adventurers, unscrupulous confidence men, common frauds, blackmailers and drunkards, who have spent most of their fifteen years in India as soldiers³ and have knocked about in various odd jobs, both legal and

¹The narrator believes you will be "cut up the minute you set foot in Afghanistan"; the horse-dealer in the Serai predicts Dan "will either be raised to honor or have his head cut off," and both things happen. The narrator again warns "they would find death, certain and awful death"; and Dan tells his people "I'll make a damned fine Nation of you, or I'll die in the making."

²The historian, A. B. Steel, quoted in E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (New York: Collier, 1962), p. 289.

³Charles Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work* (New York, 1955), p. 81: "Socially, the private soldiers were in fact drawn from the unemployed or unemployable, so that 'going for a soldier' was, in the respectable working-class, regarded as the last degradation, analogous with 'going to the bad.'"

illegal, since their release from the Army. Most of their knowledge consists of drill and guns and they intend to put this to practical ends: "in any place where they fight, a man who knows how to drill can always be a King . . . we will show him [the native king] how to drill men; for that we know better than anything else." They successfully utilize their commonplace talents, and do indeed become kings.

Peachey and Dan's kingly ambitions are purely materialistic. They want to "work" the country in order to increase their own personal revenue at the expense of their subjects. "If India was filled with men like you and me," Peachey tells the narrator, "it isn't seventy millions of revenue the land would be paying—it's seven hundred millions."⁴ This is the "politics of loaferdom" spoken by a desperate, not a fair man, who sees economics only in terms of immediate results and excludes all political, social and cultural considerations. Peachey would substitute economic anarchy for responsible government and replace state control by independent and unbridled exploiters: "The country isn't half worked out because they that governs it won't let you touch it. They spend all their blessed time governing it, and you can't lift a spade, nor chip a rock, nor look for oil, nor anything like that without all the Government saying, 'Leave it alone and let us govern.'"

In order to free themselves from governmental restraint, the would-be kings go into unadministered tribal lands. For beyond the frontier "were wild tribes and the Queen's writ did not run. Beyond them again came the Amir of Kabul,"⁵ but where exactly his jurisdiction ended or began, no one could say."⁶ Kafiristan, the eastern province of Afghanistan on the south slopes of the Hindu Kush, is, Dan says, the only "place now in the world that two strong men can *Sar-a-whack*."

⁴This speech is based on an actual conversation Kipling had with an "intelligent loafer" while traveling in Rajputana for his Indian newspaper. The "ragged ruffian who conceived that he knew the road to illimitable wealth" told Kipling, "I'd undertake to raise a hundred million—what am I talking of?—a hundred and fifty million pounds from this country *per annum*, and it wouldn't be strained *then* . . . if you just made these 'ere Injians understand that they had to pay an' make no bones about it." ("Letters of Marque," *From Sea to Sea*, I, [London, 1919], 198.)

⁵Peachey and Dan claim they are "going up to Kabul to sell toys to the Amir."

⁶Philip Woodruff, *The Men Who Ruled India*, II (London: Cape, 1965), 140.

Dan's reference is to the northern part of the rich East Indian island of Borneo that became the personal property of James Brooke in 1841. Brooke's motives in undertaking his voyage from England to Borneo "appear to have been partly love of adventure, and largely the desire to introduce commerce, as well as British ascendancy, into Borneo. . . . At the time of Brooke's arrival a rebellion [against the Malay Sultan of Brunei] was in progress, induced by the tyranny of the officials of the Sultan . . . [and] in the autumn of 1840, Brooke took an active part in the suppression of the rebellion."⁷ As a reward for his valuable assistance, the Sultan made him Rajah and gave him Sarawak, and it prospered and remained in the hands of his descendants until after the Second World War.

On the first page of *The Rescue* Conrad also pays tribute to Brooke:

Almost in our own day we have seen one of them—a true adventurer in his devotion to his impulse—a man of high mind and of pure heart, lay the foundation of a flourishing state on the ideas of pity and justice. He recognized chivalrously the claims of the conquered; he was a disinterested adventurer, and the reward of his noble instincts is in the veneration with which a strange and faithful race cherish his memory. Misunderstood and traduced in life, the glory of his achievement has vindicated the purity of his motives.⁸

To Peachey and Dan, however, Rajah Brooke stands for personal and independent, as opposed to national colonialism, and the absolute rule of a private individual by force of conquest. When he is encouraged by his initial triumphs, Dan's vain-glorious ambition is to surpass even Brooke in absolute power, and he ironically proclaims "we shall be Emperors—Emperors of the Earth! Rajah Brooke will be a suckling to us."

The "kings" aspire to Brooke's power, titles, wealth and fame, but cannot support such ambitions with Brooke's genuine concern for his subjects, his pity, justice, chivalry, and nobility. If we compare Lord Jim, who was partially based

⁷*Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee, II (Oxford, 1921-22), 1336.

⁸For a similar view of Brooke see Sir Steven Runciman, *The White Rajahs* (Cambridge, England, 1960), p. 156: "If there is any meaning in the word greatness, James Brooke was a great man."

on Brooke,⁹ with Dravot, we can see how Jim grows in moral stature, earns the title of Tuan, and assumes even unto death, the responsibility for the welfare of his people, while Dravot does none of these things.

If Brooke was a benevolent despot and a considerable improvement over his oppressive predecessor, the rule of the "kings," by contrast, has a disastrous effect on the province, mainly because of their hostility toward their subjects. Their view of indigenous government as practiced in Indian Native States, for example, is grim. Oppression and crime are rampant, and the rulers are "drugged, drunk, or diseased from one end of the year to the other. . . . They are the dark places of the earth, full of unimaginable cruelty."¹⁰ The "kings" also adhered to the traditional imperialist view of native history before the English arrived as one of internecine strife and chaos: "they was fighting one against the other and were fair sick and tired of it. And when they wasn't doing that they was fighting with the Mohammedans."¹¹

The adventurers' view of the natives is that they are meant to fight with, conquer and rule. The natives are expendable, inferior to the white man, easily dominated, and gullible—for after their forceful conquest, as Dravot realizes, "They think we're Gods." The "kings" associate right with might, and believe that the white race is superior and has a right to dominate "inferior" ones. They do not recognize that the hill tribes may have a viable life and culture of their own¹² ("Dravot he goes to the biggest [native] . . . rubbing his nose respectful

⁹John Gordan, "The Rajah Brooke and Joseph Conrad," *SP*, XXXV (1938), 613-614.

¹⁰Compare this with Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, I, 195-196:

There are States where things are done, and done without protest, that would make the hair of the educated native stand on end with horror. . . . A year spent among native States ought to send a man back to the Decencies and the Law Courts and the Rights of the Subject with a supreme contempt for those who rave about the oppressions of our brutal bureaucracy.

¹¹Compare this with Kipling, I.21, on the empty palace at Amber: "The wise man will visit it when time and occasion serve, and will then in some small measure, understand what must have been the riotous, sumptuous, murderous life to which our Governors and Lieutenant-Governors, Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners. Colonels and Captains and Subalterns, have put an end."

¹²For a sympathetic view of these tribesmen, see these early anthropological studies by Kipling's contemporaries: Major J. Biddulph, *Tribes of the Hindu Kush* (Calcutta, 1880) and George Robertson *The Kafirs of the Hindu Kush* (London, 1896).

with his own nose, patting him on the head”), and assume that their rule would be better than what the natives had before. Because there is no cultural dialectic or recognition of cultural values other than the most debased English ones, the relationship of the English and the natives is expressed purely in terms of brute force and military conquest.

The methods that the “kings” use to subvert the rulers and subdue these lesser, albeit Aryan breeds (“boil ’em once or twice in hot water, and they’ll come as fair as chicken and ham”) is the traditional imperialist *divide et impera*. They side with one of the tribes and overwhelm the poorly armed opposition by means of the vastly superior fire power of their Martini rifles, which keeps them beyond the range of their enemy’s weapons:

ten men with bows and arrows ran down that valley, chasing twenty men with bows and arrows, and the row was tremenjus. . . . Says Dravot, unpacking his guns— ‘This is the beginning of the business. We’ll fight for the ten men,’ and with that he fires two rifles at the twenty men, and drops one of them from the rock where he was sitting. The other men begin to run, but Carnehan and Dravot sits on the boxes picking them off at all ranges, up and down the valley. Then we goes up to the ten men that had run across the snow too, and they fires a footy [worthless] little arrow at us. Dravot shoots above their heads and they all falls down flat. Then he walks over and kicks them.

Peachey and Dan consider this battle to be a notable military exploit, and fail to recognize how easy their conquest was and how limited their glory.¹³

Such calculated and brutal forms of conquest, combined with an insatiable desire to rob the land of its wealth, represent the very worst kind of unprincipled colonialism. Peachey and Dan embody what Kipling has called

No law except the Sword
Unsheathed and uncontrolled;¹⁴

¹³For a similar historical incident see Arnold Fletcher, *Afghanistan: Highway of Conquest* (Ithaca, New York, 1965), p. 148: “four Afghan armies were secretly concentrated . . . on the borders of Kafiristan. In the winter of 1896 these columns converged, catching the Kafirs by surprise and winning an easy victory in a matter of forty days. The triumph is rendered less splendid, however, by the fact that most of the Kafirs were still armed with bows.”

¹⁴Kipling, “For All We Have And Are.”

and they prove Lord Acton's maxim that "power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely." The rapacity of the "kings" for the gold that "lies in the rock like suet in mutton," the turquoise in the cliffs, the "garnets in the sands of the river," and the "chunks of amber," recalls Edmund Burke's eloquent condemnation of the East India Company in 1783: "animated with all the avarice of age and all the impetuosity of youth, they roll in one after another, wave after wave; and there is nothing before the eyes of the native but an endless, hopeless prospect of new flights of birds of prey and passage, with appetites continually renewing for a food that is continually wasting."¹⁵

It was not, of course, Kipling's intention to attack colonialism as Burke did, but rather, as Edmund Wilson believes, to present "a parable of what might happen to the English if they should forfeit their moral authority."¹⁶ The story of Carnehan and Dravot represents the dangers and horrors that would result if the organized governments of civilized powers refused the task of colonialism. Hobson quotes this familiar argument for responsible colonialism, which is very close to Kipling's theme in this story and which also describes with remarkable exactness and accuracy the reprehensible actions of the adventurers:

a horde of private adventurers, slavers, piratical traders, treasure hunters, concession mongers, who, animated by mere greed of gold or power, would set about the work of exploitation under no public control and with no regard to the future; playing havoc with the political, economic and moral institutions of the peoples, instilling civilised vices and civilised diseases, importing spirits and firearms as the trade of readiest acceptance, fostering internecine strife for their own political and industrial purposes, and even setting up private despotisms sustained by organised armed forces.¹⁷

Though Peachey and Dan are private despots, they are not entirely lacking a code of moral restraint, which, in so far as they have any at all, is embodied in their "Contrack." This

¹⁵Edmund Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," *Works*, II (Boston., 1869), 462.

¹⁶Edmund Wilson, "The Kipling That Nobody Read," *The Wound and the Bow* (New York: Galaxy, 1965), p. 130.

¹⁷John Hobson, *Imperialism* (London, 1902), pp. 242-243.

"Contract" is a magnificent example of elaborate form and insubstantial content, a ridiculous and mock-heroic statement of self-encouragement, and a revelation of the weaknesses that will cause their downfall:

This Contract between me and you pursuing witnesseth in the name of God—Amen and so forth .

(One) That me and you will settle this matter together: i.e. to be Kings of Kafiristan.

(Two) That you and me will not, while this matter is being settled, look at any Liquor, nor any women, black, white or brown, so as to get mixed up with one or the other harmful.

(Three) That we conduct ourselves with dignity and discretion and if one of us gets into trouble the other will stay by him .

This grandiloquent and ungrammatical "Contract" is clearly derived from the one Tom and Huck signed in the tenth chapter of *Tom Sawyer*: "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer swears they will keep mum about this [Injun Joe] and they wish they may drop dead in their tracks if they ever tell and rot." Huck and Tom do "keep mum" and remain faithful to their oath sealed in blood, while Peachey and Dan, who in many respects are grown up versions of Huck and Tom, break their "Contract."

The strong influence on Kipling of Twain, whom Kipling met in America and called "a revered writer¹⁸ . . . [whose] keen insight into the souls of men¹⁹ . . . I learned to love and admire fourteen thousand miles away,"²⁰ has rarely been noted and never sufficiently been emphasized.²¹ Twain's fake Duke and Dauphin, his use of vernacular dialect, his mixture of sentimentality and sadism, his lowbrow philistinism,²² his heavy-handed use of farce and taste for practical jokes, and especially his admiration for ingenuity and resourcefulness (in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*), his respect for expertise and excellence in work and his use of technical

¹⁸Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, II. 186.

¹⁹Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, II. 193.

²⁰Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, II. 196.

²¹Henry Varley, "A Study in the Career of Rudyard Kipling," *Summaries of Doctoral Dissertations, University of Wisconsin*, XIV (1953), 453: "The only clearly evident influence on Kipling's writing is Bret Harte."

²²Compare the parody of Hamlet in *Huckleberry Finn* and "The Courting of Dinah Shadd."

description²³ (in *Life on the Mississippi*), and his reverence for men who are "honest, trustworthy, faithful to promises and duty,"²⁴ are all reflected throughout Kipling's work. A fundamental weakness of both writers, as Eliot has noticed of Twain and Forster²⁵ has remarked about Kipling, is that they "never became in all respects mature."²⁶ Kipling's boyish love of adventure for its own sake helps to explain why he minimizes the brutality of Peachey and Dan in favor of their daring. The "kings" have the true stuff of Empire builders, but lack the moral restraint of the Law.

Peachey and Dan must be judged, ultimately, not only by their aims and methods of conquest, but also by the nature of their kingship. Both Brooks and Warren, and Fussell, in the two most careful considerations of this story, admire the kings. Brooks and Warren state rather warily,

There is a growing sense of responsibility for, and pride in, the people that they rule. Dravot begins to talk about bringing in skilled administrators, recognizing with an unexpected kind of humility that the business of kingship is more complicated than he had thought. He even begins to dream of turning his kingdom over to Queen Victoria—of taking his place in history as one of the Empire builders.²⁷

But this statement begs the question of Dravot as king. Dan may "begin to talk about" and "begin to dream of" doing positive and beneficial things, but the only things he actually does, apart from killing the people and looting the land, are bring in guns and repair the bridges, the usual accomplishments of fascist dictators.

The "kings" pride in their people is dubious, for they merely use the people as tools for their own ends, and wantonly attack and kill their own defenseless men in the same way they once killed their enemies.²⁸ When they first conquer the land

²³The details of the Indian railroad and newspaper are examples of Kipling's technical description in this story.

²⁴Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (New York: Signet, 1961), p. 24.

²⁵E. M. Forster, "The Boy Who Never Grew Up," *The Daily Herald* (London), 9 June 1920, p. 7.

²⁶T. S. Eliot, "Introduction" to *Huckleberry Finn* (London: Cresset, 1950), p. ix, quoted in Dwight Macdonald, *Against the American Grain* (New York: Vintage, 1965), p. 92.

²⁷Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *The Scope of Fiction* (New York, 1960), pp. 29-30.

²⁸The slaughter of the camels and then the mules en route to Kafiristan

"Carnehan sights for the brown of the men" and "fires into the brown of the enemy." When Dan is bitten and bleeds, "I tried to give some sort of orders to my men—the men o' the regular Army—but it was no use, so I fired into the brown of 'em with an English Martini and drilled three beggars in a line." Peachey and Dan view the undifferentiated brown natives as cannon fodder and unworthy recipients of the white man's bullets. Dravot's kingship is based only on power and fear, for once his mortality is exposed, his most loyal followers attack him. As for the skilled administrators, "to help us govern a bit," Dan intends to bring in his old cronies, the flotsam and jetsam of British India, men as unworthy and unfit to rule as he is: "Mackray, Sergeant-pensioner of Segowli—many's the good dinner he's given me, and his wife a pair of trousers. There's Donkin, the Warder of Tounghoo Jail" in Burma.

The central speech in the story to which Brooks and Warren refer, "'I won't make a Nation,' says he. 'I'll make an Empire! . . . I'll treat with the Viceroy on equal terms,'" is not, as Fussell claims, "Kipling's delighted mimicry of the standard British imperialistic posture,"²⁹ but, through deliberate exaggeration and comic irony, a revelation of how a glorious ideal sounds when presented by an unworthy man. The "imperialistic posture" is one which Kipling himself frequently and seriously assumed. "For Kipling the Empire was not merely an idea," writes Eliot, "a good idea or a bad one; it was something the reality of which he felt."³⁰ In "Ave Imperatrix!" Kipling proclaimed

And all are bred to do your will
By land and sea—wherever flies
The Flag, to fight and follow still,
And work your Empire's destinies;

and he wrote of Malaya, "Into this land God put first gold and tin, and after these the Englishman who floats companies, obtains concessions and goes forward."³¹

foreshadows the slaughter of the natives. Even the name Carnehan suggests carnage.

²⁹Paul Fussell, Jr., "Irony, Freemasonry and Humane Ethics in Kipling's 'The Man Who Would Be King,'" *ELH*, XXV (1958), 231.

³⁰T. S. Eliot, ed., *A Choice of Kipling's Verse* (New York: Anchor, 1962), p. 28.

³¹Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, I, 253.

This divine right of colonists was sustained by the idea of progress, European cultural superiority and ethnocentric nationalism, the most characteristic ideas of Victorian England;³² and was popularized principally by Kipling and his mentor Carlyle. Carlyle wrote that "two tasks disclose themselves: the grand industrial task of conquering some half or more of this Terraqueous Planet for the use of man; then secondly, the grand Constitutional task of sharing, in some pacific endurable manner, the fruit of said conquest, and showing all people how it might be done." "Sugar Islands, Spice Islands, Indias, Canadas,—these, by the real decree of heaven, were ours."³³

This religious conception of Empire is reflected in the "kings'" constant reference to the Bible, in their assumption of godlike qualities, in their plan of sending "twelve picked English" 'Apostles' to treat with the Viceroy, in the identification of Peachey with Christ in the closing hymn (Christ is called "The Son of Man" in the Gospels), and finally in the crucifixion of Peachey. But the Christ symbolism is wantonly thrust upon Peachey and fails artistically because he is no more like Christ than the heathens of Kafiristan. Many of his actions, like pagan blood sacrifice, blasphemy and murder, are a complete repudiation of Christian principles. Peachey's crucifixion, like the early references to a Rajah beating his mother to death and the decapitation of Dan, reveal only the "unimaginable cruelty" of the natives, and Kipling's predilection for horrible details.³⁴

Freemasonry, like the "Contrack," provides another system of values in this story, but it is as specious and false as the "kings'" version of Christianity. Freemasonry intrudes unduly in the story, and diminishes its credibility. The incident of the mark on the stone, for example, is childish and trivial. Fussell, who seems to have accepted Kipling's valuation of Freemasonry, writes unconvincingly that the elements of Freemasonry that influence the story are "its emphasis on

³²James Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley, 1958), p. 98.

³³Quoted in Carl Bodelsen, *Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism* (London, 1960), p. 28.

³⁴The identification of Dravot with Prometheus, "his body caught on a rock," like that of Mulvaney at the end of "The Courting of Dinah Shadd," forces a mythical significance on the characters that is not justified in the story.

universal brotherhood; its search for the common element in mankind; its disinclination to quarrel over politics and religion."³⁵ On the contrary, none of these elements are reflected in this story or in Kipling's other writings, which in fact, betray these principles. The Lodge shows the same hierarchy, rigid ranking and subordination of men that Kipling so much admired in the Army and the public school. As Robert Graves states, "the craft merely affirms caste by allowing a temporary relaxation from caste while the Lodge is in progress."³⁶ Peachey and Dan merely use Freemasonry as another means of tricking the natives and gaining power. Their godlike relation to the natives, whom they slaughter indiscriminately, can hardly be called one of "universal brotherhood." Rather than manifesting a "disinclination to quarrel over politics," the "kings" simply kill any natives who oppose them.

Finally, we must consider what kind of heroes Peachey and Dan are, unrestrained by their "Contract," Christianity, or traditional Freemasonry. Brooks and Warren write of Dravot, "it is he who rises to the heroic gesture at the end and who dies like a king. Yet one could at least argue that this is Peachey's story since he too learns the nature of kingship through witnessing Dravot's heroic action, and since, magnificently loyal to the memory of Dravot, he acts out a heroic role himself."³⁷ And Fussell agrees that "Dravot performs the act of magnanimous personal sacrifice by which *alone* kingship is to be defined."³⁸ When Dan volunteers "I'll go and meet 'em alone" and dies "like a gentleman," it is a "heroic gesture" but not genuine and sustained heroism. If there is any sacrifice involved, it is for Peachey and not for his people (many of whom have been killed on his account), and surely his attitude toward his subjects is another valid and essential way to define kingship.

Though Kipling's theme is the need for moral authority represented by the law of the British Empire,³⁹ he fails to

³⁵Fussell, p. 227.

³⁶Robert Graves, "Rudyard Kipling," *Scrutinies*, ed. Edgell Rickword (London, 1928), p. 83.

³⁷Brooks and Warren, p. 151.

³⁸Fussell, p. 219. Italics mine. But before his sacrifice Dan ignobly and unjustly blames Peachey for their downfall: "'It's your fault,' says he, 'for not looking after your Army better. There was a mutiny in the midst and you didn't know.'"

³⁹Carrington, p. 208, quoting a letter by Kipling written in 1897: "We're about the only power with a glimmer of civilization in us. I've been

maintain a consistent moral perspective in the story. Kipling's portrayal of Dan's bravery and Peachey's martyrdom shows his sympathy for the roguish and daring aspects of their personalities. This obscures the moral issue of their past behavior as "kings"—their greed, exploitation, despotism and murder—which, as Wilson has pointed out, he is trying to criticize in the story. Their terrible deaths, which should have been a just punishment for their crimes, become instead an attempt to vindicate their character. The serious flaw of this story is that Kipling is essentially sympathetic to their imperialistic ambitions (that is, the need to replace native anarchy with British order),⁴⁰ so that his criticism of their failure to establish progressive beneficent rule and their lack of fidelity to the Law is never forcefully established.

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round with the Channel Fleet for a fortnight and any other breed of white man, with such a weapon to their hand, would have been exploiting the round Earth in their own interests long ago."

⁴⁰The narrator speaks for Kipling when he says of Afghanistan, "no Englishman has been through it. The people are utter brutes," and also when he disagrees with the "politics of loafersdom." He tries to discourage Peachey and Dan from going to Kafiristan, not on moral grounds, but because of the great danger involved. For the most part the narrator is morally neutral and outside the action of the story. His main function is to lend a sober reliability to the otherwise fantastic tale.