Geography, Genre, and Narrative in Kipling's Kim

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Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) gives narrative form and novelistic aesthetics to the Great Game, the interimperial rivalry between Russia and Britain that took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. A contest for influence and control over the territories between the Russian Empire's southern border and the northern edge of British India, the Great Game resulted in the curious designation of Central Asia a "buffer zone" between empires, a constructed "empty" space, free from the incursions of either power. *Kim* marks the entrance of this no-man's-land into English popular fiction. This essay explores the narrative problems and possibilities that arise in a novel oriented toward an "empty" space, arguing that *Kim* holds its hero's development in tension with the timeless indeterminacy of the Great Game itself and the spatial evacuation of its buffer zone. The novel therefore puts two developmental narrative forms in tension with each other—the bildungsroman, which accounts for the hero's maturation through time, and the picaresque, which plots the hero's cultural and emotional educations spatially.

Other critics, most notably Jed Esty in *Unseasonable Youth*, have noticed *Kim*'s odd timelessness, an effect Esty calls a "flattened temporality" and an "ahistorical or antidevelopmental logic" that dramatizes its hero's education and subjective development, much as a nineteenth-century bildungsroman would, while keeping the hero in a state of suspended adolescence, out of which he will never progress to a stable state of maturity (10). For Esty, in bildungsromans of earlier literary generations, the emergence of the adult subject allegorizes the emergence of the nation-state and an attendant sense of national identity, whereas *Kim* presents a fantasy of perpetual youth, allegorizing not the nineteenth century nation-state but the "multinational imperial state [or] capitalist world-system" in its requisite state of endless expansion (26). If development is conceived as a primarily temporal category and modernity as a category of historical time, Esty's formulation convincingly accounts for the mutually constitutive relationship between Kim's "endless youth" and the "receding horizon [of] India's political modernization" (11). Indeed, this essay takes the association between youth and the incomplete and, perhaps, unrealizable modernization of colonial life as a starting point. It will also argue, however, that modernity, the development of the colonies, and the expansion of empire, though they are open-ended temporal processes, take place on the background of a planet with limited physical territory, and that part of *Kim*'s narrative work can be understood only if we see development as a spatial, in addition to a temporal, category.

Kipling's novel and his youthful hero, then, represent not only the uneven, unfinished, often disjointed induction of the colonies into European historical time but also the capture of the colonies by the corollary spatial category, which Chenxi Tang calls Europe's "geographic imagination." This geographic imagination both

Novel: A Forum on Fiction 54:1 DOI 10.1215/00295132-8868779

"assert[s] discursive authority over the earth in parallel to asymmetrical power relations between Europe and the rest of the planet" and reflects the moment, around 1800, when "the idea of the nation was joined with that of territorial sovereignty to bring into being the modern nation-state" (15). Just as the distended youth of the colonial bildungsroman challenges the logic of historical development, revealing territorial transformations from nation-state to globalized empire as a series of open-ended and perpetually shifting stages, *Kim*, a novel of the spatialized and politicized buffer zone, elucidates what becomes of the European geographic imagination when both nation-state and boundless "empty" or "other" space begin to lose their meaning. For this reason, *Kim* requires not just British India but also contested Central Asia—a fantasy of impenetrable space paralleling Kim's endless adolescence—in order to represent the shifting "discursive authority" of the European geographic imagination. If the bildungsroman is Kim's genre and his perpetual immaturity represents the genre's transformation for the imperial age, then the picaresque is Central Asia's genre and the region's inscrutability and impenetrability represent *that* genre's similar transformation. And while Kim's *Bildung* can explain the fate of development in an increasingly unbounded temporal realm, Central Asia explains what Kim's adolescence cannot—that is, the fate of spatial conquest as unbounded territory ceases to exist. The novel therefore holds Central Asia at a remove even as the region becomes ever more circumscribed by European geography's discursive authority.

A Territory That Can Never Be Reached

Kim mentions Central Asia only rarely and never represents the region as a diegetic space. Nonetheless, it is indeed central to the novel's aesthetic and political concerns. *Kim* popularized the term "the Great Game" and lent it much of its currency as a signifier of imperial swashbuckling and narrative excitement, a sort of inland version of the high seas adventure tale that accompanied the oceanic expansion of earlier phases of the British Empire.[1] *Kim* furthermore relies on the vision of Central Asia that the novel itself produces, a vision that imagines the region as both an instrumental and a utopian space and that tries to suture these two symbolic functions. In reconfiguring the geostrategic conflict between Russia and Britain for a popular audience in the metropole, *Kim* produces an evacuated, impenetrable space that stands in relatively simple symbolic relation to the interimperial buffer zone, which the Russian and British empires sought to maintain in Central Asia. However, in reifying an imaginative vision of Central Asia as eternally beyond empire's reach, *Kim* simultaneously produces a utopian space in which the conflicts inherent in empire—between East and West, ruling and working classes, expansion and stability—can be permanently resolved.

Born in India but originally of Irish extraction, Kim has a fluid identity in many aspects, including parentage and nationality. The young Kim takes advantage of his unclear origins and lack of firm membership in any single group to become familiar with all facets of society in Lahore, his hometown, earning him the title of

[1] See Percy G. Adams chap. 2 (38–80).

"Little Friend of all the World." Even the one immutable thing about Kim—his whiteness—is easily hidden, making him an ideal yet impossible imperial subject, white and native, with access to both worlds. Before he is granted full access to the world of white Englishmen, however, Kim needs to be discovered. This is achieved first by Teshoo Lama, a Tibetan Buddhist monk who has come to Lahore seeking a river that, according to the lama's mythology, sprang from an arrow shot by Gautama Buddha and is unmarked on any maps of the territory. Proving knowledgeable of his surroundings and willing to guide the lama first into the Lahore Museum and then toward food and shelter, Kim is quickly adopted by the lama as his *chela*, or disciple. This first discovery then sets in motion a convoluted series of other adoptions, in which Kim comes under the protection and service of, among others, Mahbub Ali, an Afghan horse trader and a spy for the British Empire, and Colonel Creighton, a powerful spymaster and Great Game player who poses as an amateur ethnographer in order to justify his keen interest in the details of Indian life and society. Over the course of the novel, Kim matures in the capacity of the lama's *chela* and as a British schoolboy being prepared for colonial service. Even at the novel's end, after Kim averts crisis by stealing a Russian reconnaissance map of Central Asia, the young hero continues to contend with competing, or at least imperfectly aligned, drives—the lama's quest for the river, the Great Game as orchestrated by Creighton, and his own desire for freedom and aimless mobility.

Though Kim never reaches it, Central Asia has much to do with the framing and potential resolution of these conflicting drives. Central Asian space in *Kim* is represented by what are arguably two distinct regions: the lama's homeland in Tibet, beyond the Himalaya; and Mahbub Ali's in or near Afghanistan, beyond the Hindu Kush. Both Central Asias, like Teshoo Lama and Mahbub Ali, draw Kim toward themselves, but neither proves accessible or representable. In fact, it is important that Kim move toward but never fully *into* Central Asia, instead remaining in the plains of northern India, a geography and a landscape that the novel makes distinct from the mountainous Central Asias. The comprehension, representation, and governance of life in India and its borderlands are some of *Kim*'s chief concerns. In this context, the displacement of the unknowable and the anarchic onto Central Asia is significant, as is the fact that this displacement, the imaginative separation of hills from plains, fails to fully cohere.

Kim himself embodies some of the ungovernability the novel would otherwise attribute to Central Asia. He is initially at ease with every facet of native Indian society without easily resolving into any stable identity and with amusement and survival his life's only apparent motivating forces. In the novel's early chapters he is nearly a force of nature, perfectly suited to his surroundings, but as Kim matures, his natural abilities for disguise and mimicry are channeled into the empire's service as he learns the culture of the English ruling class in India in addition to the codes and skills of Great Game spy craft. Kim's transformation into a servant of empire centers on giving purpose to his innate abilities. This purpose is, in the broadest sense, to ensure the security of the empire's borders against Russian incursion and to produce knowledge of the politically contested or topographically inaccessible territories north of India.

Kim's specific tasks center on taming both of the novel's Central Asias. On one hand, he successfully apprehends would-be Russian invaders in the Himalayan foothills and delivers to the plains the maps, charts, and other documents he has removed from the Russians regarding events in and around Afghanistan. On the other, Kim never physically enters either mountainous region, nor does he grasp the full content or import of the information he bears back to the plains. The novel's telos, which pairs Kim's development into an imperial subject with the subjugation of unruly Russians and local tribes on India's northern borders, is therefore thwarted by the very thing toward which it drives. Meanwhile Central Asia in *Kim* functions as a motivating force that is itself unknowable and impenetrable, thus putting the novel's concern with the acquisition and organization of knowledge into conflict with its own narrative structure.[2] For this reason the novel's structure must always skirt the void of Central Asia, which nonetheless remains at the center of its concerns. Furthermore, the construction of Central Asia as a space of narrative and political importance, toward which the novel's protagonist travels but which he will never reach, allows, and in fact requires, Kipling to defer the resolution of that tension.

Kim poses a problem, then: both its hero and its narrative action progress toward a territory that can never be reached, as the novel attempts to represent both a utopian vision of empire and the realities of its quotidian maintenance. Most critical assessments of *Kim* have found that tension or outright conflict inheres in the novel, though there has been little agreement about the nature of that conflict and the effects it produces in the text. Some situate the novel's fundamental conflict within its hero and his hybrid identities.[3] Others see the novel as primarily an expression of a structural tension between East and West, of irreconcilable differences in the Indian and English experiences of empire and colonization.[4] Yet a third group sees both Kim the boy and the India of *Kim* as a utopian, or nearly utopian, projection in which the coexistence and even mutual understanding of typically antagonistic forces might be realized.[5] Most critical accounts, however, neglect the Central Asian Great Game as a central point of conflict in *Kim*. The endlessly forestalled war on India's frontiers entailed a conflict between martial aggression and calculated passivity, which also characterizes many of the East-West conflicts

[2] While Kim himself functions to dramatize the acquisition of imperial knowledge, a lack of knowledge of the topography and human geography of Tibet and Afghanistan—and occasional wild speculation about the regions—was and continues to be a more general problem for Great Game commentators, including Kipling. A fascinating account of how Kipling, in "The Man Who Would Be King," borrows a real location (Kafiristan, in the northeast corner of Afghanistan) for a setting but makes it both "fictional" and "hypothetical," as well as how critics recapitulate the "loss" of the real places on which Kipling's fictional narratives depend, can be found in Edward Marx.

[3] See Jed Esty, esp. "Introduction: Scattered Souls—the Bildungsroman and Colonial Modernity" (1–38); Suvir Kaul; Don Randall, esp. chap. 5, "*Kim*: Ethnography and the Hybrid Boy" (137–59); and Sara Suleri, esp. chap. 5, "The Adolescence of *Kim*" (111–31).

[4] See Edward Said; Zohreh T. Sullivan, esp. chap. 6, "*Kim*: Empire of the Beloved" (145–80); and Edmund Wilson.

[5] See Bruce Avery 55–70; and Mark Kinkead-Weekes.

appearing in the novel as well as its hero, as if the colonial Indian context and the global strategic conflict of the novel allegorize each other. The issue in *Kim* is not, then, that "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," as Kipling himself put it ("Ballad of East and West," 201). Rather, it is that the stage for the meeting between East and West—and, crucially, the stage for a potential resolution between them—is not India but a Central Asia that is forever out of reach.

Kim's critics have nonetheless identified numerous conflictual elements in the novel. For those assessments that see Kim himself as the locus of the novel's contradictions, Kim's age acquires a singular symbolic significance. Alongside whiteness, one of the few irreducible aspects of the hero's identity, Kim's youth points to other ways in which his identity remains hybrid and fluid. No longer still a child nor yet a man, Kim's life stage evinces a mutability that Suvir Kaul has read as "a supple way of being in the colonial world" in which Kim has full access to the otherwise incompatible experiences of both colonizer and colonized (433). Kim's adolescence proves a useful metaphor not only for his fluid and liminal identities but also for empire as an historical apparatus and conceptual framework. Sara Suleri finds that Kim's position between childhood and mature adulthood parallels *Kim*'s narrative structure both in the novel's "adolescent energy" and in "the immanence of tragic loss, of an obsessively impelled discourse that lacks any direction in which to go" (113). And Kaul sees Kim as the embodiment of an imperial desire for a state of suspended animation, a "man-child who would inherit the empire without boundaries, and live in a time without end" (436). The fact that Kim continues to grow over the course of the novel without ever reaching adult maturity thus makes him a fitting hero for a tale of the Great Game. Kim's incomplete development comes to serve as a synecdoche for empire and its attendant anxieties—the adulthood that Kim never achieves would mean the final geographic and geopolitical delimitation of British India.

The larger conflict between East and West in the novel is, as Edward Said has characterized it, a tension between the long-standing Orientalist trope of an India that is "a timeless, unchanging, and 'essential' locale" and a country that is "actual in geographic concreteness" (9). But it is not only "essential" India that Kipling wishes to represent as timeless and unchanging, as if it could be separated from the realities of imperialism. If Kim's perpetual adolescence symbolizes Kipling's desire for an empire frozen in time, then the novel's white, British India also stands outside the realities of imperialism, challenging an investment in the West as a progressive force on the subcontinent. Perhaps the most surprising conflictual aspect of *Kim* is its simultaneous engagement with the stereotype of the East as permanent, static, and without history and its challenge to the corollary notion of the West as adaptive, progressive, and historical. This desire for fixity and stasis plays out repeatedly in the novel, as Kim's work toward one goal or another is thwarted by the requirements of another character or plot line. Kim is quickly ensnared in the machinations of imperial policy, becoming an agent of imperial expansion, but is never afforded an exhaustive understanding of his own actions in the empire's service: as Suleri observes, once he is fully trained in the imperial idiom, his role in the text changes from that of a skilled interpreter to merely a bearer of messages the content of which is all too often lost on him (122). At the same time, the novel never

resolves Kim's relation to the lama, and it remains unclear whether the boy's Western education has disabused him of any inclination toward the lama's "Eastern" modes of apprehending and interpreting the world or whether Kim has, in fact, had two parallel educations between which he cannot, and perhaps need not, choose.

As Kim's suspended adolescence becomes a metaphor for the desire for an eternally expanding "empire without boundaries," one that, in other words, has no final geographic or territorial state, his competing educations too are metaphorically projected onto the geography of the Subcontinent as an inherent conflict between Western cartography and its Eastern counterparts, embodied by the nomadism of Kim's childhood and the lama's "spiritual geography."[6] Mark Kinkead-Weekes finds the English desire to know India both reflected in and stymied by the novel's geography. Kim as a child in the plains and bustling cities of India "embodies . . . the urge not merely to see and know from the outside, but to *become* the 'other,'" and in the first part of the novel, on his home turf, he succeeds (217). Kim's natural way of encountering and becoming "other" than his white self is already in contrast to the English mode, as Kinkead-Weekes observes: "Confronted by a city, Kim's instincts would be to plunge into its human heart, [whereas] Creighton wants a map and a report" (223). However, both ways of apprehending and interpreting the world are ultimately stymied by the Himalayan landscape, which "make[s] manifest a vision of the world as inhuman, incredible, unintelligible" (228). This then is the novel's geopoetics: a symbolically charged landscape in which the plains are contrasted with the mountains, just as the imperial fantasy of total access is juxtaposed with an anxious suspicion that comprehension is ultimately impossible. Colonel Creighton's demand for "a map and a report" is one attempt to mediate between those two possibilities. The lama's Wheel of Life, an illustrated allegory of reincarnation and a representation of the geography of the Tibetan Buddhist spiritual landscape, is another kind of spatial mediation between comprehension and ignorance. The novel leaves unresolved the tension between those two maps or their attendant interpretive modes.

Edmund Wilson suggests that *Kim* stages a meeting of East and West but then indefinitely staves off a confrontation between them. Wilson sees this deferred confrontation as *Kim*'s major flaw: its lack of "antagonistic impulses of the human spirit, struggling with one another" prevents the novel from seeming like either a jingoistic apology or a critique of empire. Instead, "both sides"—that is, East and West, the lama and the Great Game, India itself and English India—"are sympathetically presented, [and] the battle is not allowed to occur" (32). For Wilson, Kipling is too evenhanded about British India, failing either to make the British morally questionable or to make the lama or other aspects of "native" India viable courses for Kim's life. Scores of critical responses to *Kim* and to the rest of Kipling's oeuvre have interrogated the ethics of his representations of the British Empire and

[6] On Kim's nomadism and the threat it poses to Western modes of knowledge production, especially cartography and anthropology, see Ian Baucom. The novel's "spiritual geography" is discussed in Sullivan 170–80.

of India.[7] Most have found that while Kipling's personal politics are remote from any contemporary consensus regarding empire, his fiction nonetheless merits attention for its revelations about the dominant imperial psyche or because it comprises some of the best artistic prose produced in English about India. I wish to suggest that this conflict—the tension between East and West, the question of where Kipling's sympathies lay and where he expected his readers' sympathies to lie—is by no means a problem that *Kim* fails to resolve. On the contrary, it is the very essence of the novel, a trait that appears embodied in its hero as well as in its geopoetics, its generic form, and its utopian thematics.

Geopoetics

Said wrote in his introduction to *Kim* that "Kipling could no more have questioned . . . the right of the white European to rule, than he would have argued with the Himalayas," asserting that for Kipling colonial rule was as evident as the most iconic feature of the region's landscape, as immutable as a force of nature (10). Kipling may not have argued with the Himalayas, but he did engage them dialogically, deploying them as a symbol of India's frontier. The mountains guard the subcontinent from the Russians who would have to cross them to reach India, but they also serve as the gateway to a utopian space that Kipling imagines beyond the empire's frontiers. In fact, *Kim*'s geography and the symbolic weight borne by its various regions and topographies are closely related to the novel's complexities and contradictory drives. The fundamental geographic distinction in the novel is between hill and plain, and it allows Kipling to set the specificity and particularity of India proper apart from the largely imaginative, symbolic significance of Central Asia. Save one protracted episode in the hills, during which Kim encounters the novel's only Russians and the novel's only physical maps, the narrative action takes place entirely on the plains of northern India. Over the course of the novel, and as his secular, religious, and specialized instruction progresses, Kim traverses these plains, albeit with several sidetracks and backtracks, beginning in the northwest and moving generally east. In many ways hill and plain are in binary opposition. The hills appear empty while the plains teem with life; the hills are inaccessible because of challenging climate and terrain, in contrast to Kim's uncanny ability to enter any physical place or social situation in the plains. Similarly, Kim grasps the internal logic of life in the plains but says of the hills, "This is not my country" (233). In short, the various locations Kim visits in the plains have all the specificity of place, while the hills exist largely as abstract space—a concept or an imaginative projection.[8] The topographic binarism of hill and plain masks another important aspect of the novel's geography. *Kim* treats not two but three geopolitical and

[7] See, in addition to Wilson and Said, Benita Parry; Patrick Williams; and Bart Moore-Gilbert.

[8] Here I draw on Kate Brown's distinction between discourses of "empty" or "vacant" space and the historical processes that "emptied" and "vacated" them. Another useful construction is Avery's description of how a vacated, abstracted space is reinvested with meaning via "the kind of vision engendered by geography and imperialism, where the landscape lies passively awaiting the surveyor's signifying gaze" (67).

cultural regions: British India proper, which the novel associates with the plains; the border territories of Afghanistan and Russian Turkestan beyond the Hindu Kush; and Tibet beyond the Himalaya. Both of the latter are hill territories. Afghanistan, Turkestan, and Tibet bore different symbolic valences in the British imperial imagination, and *Kim* reflects, while also eliding, a number of those differences. In part because of these inherited imperial imaginaries and in part because the novel generally associates the hills with abstract space, both Afghanistan and Tibet in *Kim* become spaces of fantasy, in contradistinction to the realism of India. Both also stand in for the novel's crucial but absent Central Asia.

The play in *Kim* between absence and presence, between conceptual or abstract space and material place, exemplifies an essential link between the period's geopolitics and the novel's geopoetics. The geostrategic incentive for keeping Central Asia remote and inaccessible lay in its role as a buffer zone between imperial frontiers. In the novel, this is reflected as a sharp contrast between a Central Asia that is ill-defined and unplaceable and an India that is both visible and knowable in its diversity. At the same time, Russia and Britain shared a strategic incentive to attempt to penetrate and map the regions between their imperial frontiers, a framework in direct conflict with the desire to keep Central Asia an untouched buffer zone. This second impulse is heavily reflected in *Kim*'s thematic concerns with cartography as well as in its narrative structure, in which the capture of a Russian map in contested hill territory and its conveyance to the safety of India proper constitute the novel's only real denouement. *Kim* therefore must represent the peripheries of empire as agents of narrative motion and, simultaneously, as static receptacles for familiar myths of the Orient, the wild lands beyond imperial frontiers. The conflicting functions and mythologies that Central Asia bears point both inward, to the novel's poetics and the ways that its narrative both requires and resists movement toward the frontier, and outward to the geopolitics of the late nineteenth century, in which Central Asia's strategic role—to say nothing of its significance in the European imaginary—was ambiguous. *Kim*'s treatment of Central Asia reflects the region's shifting significance in the imperial imaginary—a long process that would first produce the imperial borderlands as empty or, better still, evacuated spaces and then invest those spaces with cultural meaning appropriate to their geostrategic roles. Both *Kim* and the empire it represents, in other words, require the surety of stasis and the uncertainty of mobility.

Although the toponym *Central Asia* appears only once in *Kim*, it is fitting that the novel popularized Arthur Connolly's older term, "the Great Game," making the geographic region synonymous with all that the Great Game connotes: spy craft, intrigue, remote and dangerous landscapes, and the infiltration of empire into even the last and least accessible frontiers. It is appropriate, too, that in *Kim* the phrase "the Great Game" is most often uttered by Afghan horse trader and British spy Mahbub Ali, the novel's key to Central Asia beyond the Hindu Kush. "When he comes to the Great Game he must go alone—alone, and at the peril of his head," Mahbub says to Creighton, discussing Kim's propensity for unaccompanied wandering, reassuring the colonel that Kim has a natural gift for the Game while also making clear the danger the boy will face as an operative (129). He uses the phrase again to Kim himself, as he deposits Kim in Simla to learn the advanced arts of spy

craft from Lurgan Sahib: "Go up the hill and ask. Here begins the Great Game" (147). Simla, colonial India's summer capital, is indeed in the hills—the foothills of the Himalaya. The fact that Mahbub, a hillman from another mountain region, has the authority to first invoke the Game in *Kim*, and that he then sends Kim uphill toward the Game, has a rich symbolic significance. Though the instruction to "go up the hill" refers literally to the approach to Lurgan Sahib's house, where Kim will learn the emotional fortitude his service will require, we might also read it as Mahbub's invitation to Kim to enter the field of the Great Game, where Afghanistan and Tibet, the Hindu Kush and the Himalaya, are all part of the novel's imagined hill space.

Central Asia in *Kim*, then, is both Afghanistan and Tibet. Both border regions function as symbols of emptiness, illegibility, and danger. At the same time, the novel's two Central Asias can be so fundamentally distinct that, when more closely examined, they almost constitute another binary pair like that formed by hills and plains. To the extent that it ever had a physical location, the Great Game had begun in Afghanistan. It was through Afghanistan that Russians hoped to find an overland route to India, and it was the pacification of Afghanistan—in the form of Anglo-Russian agreement on the nation's borders through the establishment of the Durand Line and the installation of a compliant Afghan monarch—that finally brought about interimperial detente in Central Asia.[9] Even before Kipling takes up the cartographic fixing of Afghanistan in *Kim*, he points to its symbolic role as "that mysterious land beyond the Passes of the North" (18). Through the token Afghan Mahbub Ali, Kipling associates the region with stereotypes of both the East and the road. When Kim finds Mahbub at the Kashmir Serai, the Afghan horse trader is "lying on a pair of silk carpet saddle-bags, pulling lazily at an immense silver hookah," the very picture of Oriental decadence (18). The scene at the serai underscores the sense that Afghanistan and Central Asia beyond it are spaces in constant motion, the domain of nomads who funnel their goods and information, and perhaps, their new Russian masters, into India. The Kashmir Serai furnishes the first and only mention of Central Asia in Kim ("where camel and horse-caravans put up on their return from Central Asia"), and it is rich with symbols of mobility and transit: "Here were all manner of Northern folk, tending tethered ponies and kneeling camels; loading and unloading bales and bundles . . . piling grass before the shrieking, wild-eyed stallions; cuffing the surly caravan dogs" (17). Moreover, the serai abuts the train station, and the two spaces, separated by the definite yet permeable boundary of a tall cloister, represent the cultural and political interface between an orderly colonial India and the chaotic elements on its peripheries. Mahbub is an interpreter between these two worlds. He lives, when he is at the serai, on the edge nearest the train station, facilitating his connections with people and information coming up from India on the train. But he wears a "Bokhariot belt," marking his access to and affiliation with the people of Bukhara—in Kim's time, a protectorate of the Russian Empire. Mahbub's cover as a horse

[9] For the history of the Durand Line and Anglo-Russian competition over Afghanistan, see Robert Crews 70–71; and Peter Hopkirk, *Great Game*, esp. chap. 36, "The Beginning of the End" (502–12).

trader is as richly metaphorical as it is convenient. As he breaks wild steppe horses for proper polo, he translates the inscrutable events of Russian-indigenous encounters in Central Asia for the British in India.

If Kashmir and the lands of Afghanistan and Central Asia beyond it are characterized by chaotic, irrepressible motion, intrigue, commerce, and worldly, material concerns, Tibet and the Central Asia *it* signifies are static, immutable, timeless, utopian, and spiritual. Like Afghanistan, Tibet is a symbol rather than a setting—though Kim and the lama walk in the hills on India's northeastern frontier; "[T]hese are but the lower hills," as the lama puts it: the approach to the Himalayas, in and beyond which lies Tibet itself (231). Nonetheless, they are in view of "the true Hills," which Kim, chastened by cold and altitude, calls "no place for men" and of which the lama commands, "[L]ook, and know illusion, *chela*!" (235). The hills challenge the mobility to which Kim is accustomed, a challenge due only in part to their vast distances and difficult terrain: "Here one day's march carried them no farther, it seemed, than a dreamer's clogged pace bears him in a nightmare" (234). The comparison to the temporality of dreams—the contrast between the realism of Kipling's Indian plains and the surrealism, unreality, or fantasy of the hills lurks here too—indicates not just the slow and arduous pace of travel in the hills but also the sense that in Kipling's Himalayas, time literally does not pass. The highest peaks are mystical and suprahistorical, "changeless since the world's beginning, but changing to every mood of sun and cloud." They are blanketed in "the eternal snow" and so offer, as does the lama, an alternative to the entire dialectic of colonial order and native chaos presented by the tension between the train station and the serai (235). The fact that the novel's action never reaches Tibet is thus not only appropriate but crucial to the region's role in Kipling's imperial imaginary: if Afghanistan poses a challenge to the colonial logic of organization, comprehension, and control, Tibet offers an alternative to that logic, a utopian space set apart from the strategic anxiety and anarchic volatility of Afghanistan.

Still, Tibet as utopia is, it turns out, structurally similar to Tibet as geopolitical buffer. In response to the competition for knowledge and access to all of the territories to India's north, Tibet, the last holdout against the incursions of the Great Game players, was codified into international law as a utopian "space apart" by the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. The convention barred any scientific expeditions to the Tibetan territory, with the goal of also putting a halt to Russian and English information gathering and espionage there. As Thomas Richards astutely points out, with the Anglo-Russian detente, Tibet, having already been surveyed and mapped in the last years of the nineteenth century, "had been formally relegated to the horizon of knowledge, 'lost' by fiat . . . [and] transformed into an international reservation for potential knowledge" (31). In other words, Tibet became what Richards terms an "archive-state" (11). If Afghanistan was the Central Asia where the Great Game began, and if its function as a buffer was to keep the frontiers of Russia and British India physically separate, then Tibet was the Central Asia where the Great Game ended, with the final establishment of a buffer zone that not only separated imperial frontiers but also cordoned off an important site of imperial knowledge production, stymying the very process that fueled the Great

Game while also producing a *terra nullius* and enforcing its inaccessibility—in other words, preserving the structure on which the Anglo-Russian rivalry depended.

The structure and the process of the Great Game were therefore in constant contradiction. Structurally, the entire era depended on the preservation of "empty" space between imperial holdings, but procedurally, for both Russia and England, colonial administration required the expansion of knowledge about Turkestan, India, and all the territories in between. That requirement tended to entail territorial incursions that in turn threatened the interimperial buffer status of said region. This is why the physical location of the buffer often shifted or became in some sense immaterial. The Great Game's incursions into Central Asia were largely about knowledge and knowability and about modalities of cataloguing and transmitting information. *Kim* reflects and challenges these processes by taking up cartography as a major thematic and narrative concern and by making cartography a multivalent and diverse enterprise that includes British and Russian military maps, the lama's Wheel of Life, the main subject of Kim's British education, and the Buddhist maps collected in the Wonder House of the novel's opening scenes.

What would it mean to call each of these things cartography? The dichotomy staged in the novel between hill and plain, and the slipperiness of the location and meaning of Central Asia in the novel, all point to the importance of symbolic geography in *Kim*. Anarchy and utopia; treachery and security; scientific knowledge and spiritual fulfillment—these are the symbolic meanings with which *Kim*'s marginal landscapes are invested, especially the hills, the high mountains beyond them, and the ill-defined space of Central Asia beyond the mountains. The various maps that are presented, made, and destroyed in the novel are another kind of symbolic geography, functioning not only, as all maps do, to offer an encoded spatial representation of a set of places but also to reveal *Kim*'s aesthetic and ideological orientations toward the spaces they represent.

In the novel's very opening pages, local ways of knowing are already imbricated with European knowledge production. Having wandered into the Lahore Museum (the Wonder House), the lama pores over "a mighty map" showing the sites important to the history and practice of Buddhism, aligning this spatial representation with his own knowledge of the Buddha's life. "For the first time he heard of the labours of European scholars, who by the help of these and a hundred other documents have identified the Holy Places of Buddhism" (8). In return for this aid, the lama promises to bring the museum's curator "a written picture" of the Wheel of Life, a symbolic representation of the continuous cycle of rebirth to which, in Buddhism, all life is subject (12). "Local" and European cartographic modalities coincide again, though in a different way, in Kim himself. When Kim learns the trade of surveying—of charting and representing previously unmapped landscapes, a skill that will be both his cover as he enters the world of espionage and a form of espionage itself—his "native" knowledge of the lay of land will prove his most useful asset. The European method of surveying he learns is, in some senses, secondary in importance to his innate abilities. The first map Kim makes, of the "mysterious city of Bikaneer," is produced in hybrid fashion. He is able to access the city only as a "native," traveling with Mahbub Ali's caravan, disguised as a

"Mohammedan horse-boy and pipe-tender," using a beaded rosary rather than typical survey instruments to measure his paces, and taking out his compass only under cover of darkness (169–70). In a later instance, when Kim preserves the Russians' captured map but destroys their surveying tools, he neuters them as effective imperial knowledge producers, but he also takes revenge for their destruction of the lama's map, in some sense replacing the lama's torn map with the stolen Russian one.

The lama's Wheel, however, maps not physical territory but the course of a life, arranging space allegorically, where Western maps are mimetic, a quality it preserves even when Russian agents largely destroy the physical paper on which it is drawn. Fittingly, the lama, seeing that the Russians have left only a finger's width section untorn, interprets the torn map as a symbol of his own death: "So much, then, is the span of my life in this body." Kim's own interpretation, when he surveys the damaged Wheel, aligns with the lama's: "From left to right diagonally the rent ran—from the Eleventh House where Desire gives birth to the Child . . . across the human and animal worlds, to the Fifth House—the empty House of the Senses. The logic was unanswerable" (261–62). From the perspective of a colonial map, the journey from Shamlegh, where the map was torn, to Saharunpore, where the novel ends, traverses from left to right diagonally, like the tear in the lama's Wheel—and this shorter journey is an echo of another left-to-right diagonal trip, from Lahore to Benares, during which Kim and the lama first become acquainted.[10] The lama doesn't die in the hills but finds his river near Saharunpore where Kim, meanwhile, recovers from the journey and divests himself of the Russian map booty. Again it is as if, in the ecosystem of the novel, the stolen Russian map has replaced the Wheel, finally freeing the lama from reliance on his one treasured possession.

As for Western cartography, it exists in *Kim* as scientific praxis, ethos, and mode of knowledge production. It is embodied by Colonel Creighton and manifested in the institution of the Survey of India. Ian Baucom assigns such importance to the Survey that he calls the Great Game the colloquial term for the "immense, protracted, and varied task" of mapping the Subcontinent (93). For Baucom, Creighton manages a process whose object is "not the production of knowledge in a pure, disinterested state but the production of an ordered, demarcated, and fixed terrain" (94). The Survey and its Russian counterpart, then, come to occupy the term *cartography* in a way that the lama's map never can: the Survey becomes an abstracted space of its own, dependent upon but seeking ultimate mastery over the territory it charts, in which Kim and the other agents effect a conceptual distance from the places they pass through. In part because the lama ultimately becomes free of the Wheel but also because the Wheel is a "native" form of spatialized and archived information, it does not serve the political and ideological purposes of empire in the same way as a Western map. That the lama's Wheel, the British Survey, and a Russian

[10] I make an educated guess, based on Kim's itinerary into the hills, about the location of the village of Shamlegh, sometimes referred to in the novel as Shamlegh-under-the-snow. Hopkirk, who traced Kim's journey in person and in archival materials from colonial India, believes that Kipling invented the village (*Quest* 253).

map all converge in the foothills of the Tibetan Himalayas points to the significance of that region, in particular, as both the object of and the foil to cartography.

Genre

Kim requires different genres and different narrative styles to express a contradiction that lies at its heart. This fundamental conflict is, as Hannah Arendt herself once put it, between the "purposelessness [which] is the very charm of Kim's existence" and "imperialist notions like expansion for expansion's or power for power's sake" (217). It is a reflection of the same conflict that, in geopolitical terms, would have Central Asia both cordoned off as a permanently nonimperial buffer zone and viewed as a region to be intimately explored, mapped, and subjected to the full force of imperialist control. In the novel, this conflict appears chiefly as a tension between the picaresque novel and the bildungsroman. More precisely, the picaresque novel's episodic purposelessness and the bildungsroman's teleological drive toward maturation and its attendant wisdom appear as the apparently antithetical ends toward which the novel mobilizes and employs Central Asia as a space outside history.

Many critical accounts have noticed *Kim*'s generic complexity. Zohreh Sullivan calls the novel "at once a spy thriller, a picaresque adventure story, a maturation story, and a quest romance" (148), while Suleri finds in the novel echoes of journalism as well as "nineteenth-century adventure and detective fiction" (111). The generic terms most commonly associated with the novel are *picaresque*—based on Kim's nomadism, a lifestyle that is both in his nature and, perhaps, encouraged by his association with the lama—and *bildungsroman*—based on the narrative of Kim's Western education and induction into the world of imperial spy craft. Most often, however, the "picaresque" and the "bildungsroman" are invoked only in passing—as with Kaul, who notes, in parentheses, "and this novel is a *bildungsroman*" (427). I would argue that the novel's genre, like its hero, is hybrid. It is *both* a picaresque novel *and* a bildungsroman and is therefore at once and, in its very form, aimlessly nomadic and in search of narrative resolution. This contradiction can reveal much about the ways in which *Kim* both stages and refuses conflict. Indeed, the novel's form provides a unique way of rendering the conflicting desires of the imperial subject with regard to India and to the imperial rivalry of the Great Game.

Kipling himself called *Kim* "a nakedly picaresque and plotless" story (*Something* 228). The remark indicates his awareness of the quality that has preoccupied critics of the novel since its publication in 1901. Some have called the novel admirably open, while others have found it frustratingly unresolved. Kipling probably had in mind its episodic narrative structure, the formal feature with which the genre has become most closely associated since the twentieth century. However, for scholars of early modern Spain, where the genre arose, the episodic plot is rarely considered a defining feature of the picaresque, and when it is, it is only as a trait that arises incidentally from more important generic features, namely the presence of the picaro (the lonely hero) and the social critique that a picaresque novel necessarily advances. Form, in other words, follows from content. In the strictest historical definition, the picaresque genre is limited to those works, beginning with the

anonymously authored *La Vida de Lazarillo de Tormes* (c. 1554), that appeared in Spain in the middle of the sixteenth century and faded by the middle of the eighteenth. The core canon of picaresque works are autobiographical narratives (though occasionally biographical narratives in the third person are included in this corpus) that follow the exploits of a main character—a picaro, or rogue—as he moves from town to town, profession to profession, and crisis to crisis. Born in the lower ranks of society, often of uncertain parentage, the picaro's poverty and lack of social standing cause him to reject the norms of polite society: he is classically a trickster and a petty criminal who gets by on his wits and whose crime is driven by self-preservation rather than malice. His lowly origins are also responsible for the instability of his situation and livelihood. He continually tries new ways to improve his lot in life.[11] As he attempts to trick and thieve his way into favorable social and economic situations, the picaro quickly "exhaust[s] his welcome in all but the largest towns" (Monteser 3). These, then, are the circumstances that correspond to the picaro's itinerancy and the picaresque's episodic narrative structure.

Kim resembles a picaresque not only because it is episodic, an issue to which I shall return, but also because Kim himself may be understood as a classic rogue. With his low-life origins (as the progeny of an Irish sergeant who "fell to drink and loafing" and, for most of his young childhood, the charge of a "half-caste woman" who "smoked opium" and "told the missionaries" that she was Kim's aunt [1]), Kim is subaltern in every sense of the word except, crucially, in terms of race. The innate instability of his position (an orphan who is unclassifiable by race, caste, or national origin) reinforces a sense of his openness and flexibility. The clearest resemblance to the picaro as he originated in sixteenth-century Spain is Kim's familiarity with and inextricability from the "Asiatic disorder" of his native environment (64). Kipling's phrasing—"*Asiatic* disorder"—is marked, displacing disorder from the natural state of society, as the picaresque would typically have it, onto an environment that is foreign to someone—author, reader, or Colonel Creighton—even as so much of the novel emphasizes Kim's nativeness.

This foreignness points not to the picaresque but to a related form, the adventure tale, which takes place explicitly outside the hero's native society and in which the episodic style of narration developed beginning in antiquity. The adventure plot is, as Northrop Frye puts it, "naturally a sequential and processional form . . . in which a central character who never develops or ages goes through one adventure after another until the author himself collapses" (186). M. M. Bakhtin characterizes the adventure tale as an episodic narrative structure marked by "the *reversibility* of moments in a temporal sequence, and by their *interchangeability* in space" (100). While at first glance this formulation is in contradiction to Frye's "sequential and processional form," both accounts make the distinction between the narrative of each individual episode and the absence of progressive linear development, either temporal or spatial, in the larger narrative arc of the adventure tale.

An episodic structure is indeed fundamental to *Kim*. Kim insists on periods of freedom from his training and on the freedom to wander alone and without any

[11] These historical generalizations come from the first, and still standard, study in English of the picaresque novel, Chandler's 1907 *Literature of Roguery*; and from J. A. Garrido Ardila.

governing mission or goal beyond life on the road. He asserts this freedom at exactly the moment Mahbub Ali begins to reveal Kim's potential utility to Creighton. "He'll run back to his dinner. Where has he to run to?" asks Creighton when he first encounters Kim, mistaking him for a typical boy. "He was born in the land," answers Mahbub, "He has friends. He goes where he chooses" (108). Mahbub's assertion, it might be argued, defines Kim (and *Kim*'s narrative structure) even after the boy comes under the control and sometime protection of headquarters. Kim will wander outside the bounds of Creighton's plans for his training and eventual official work. This Kim himself asserts three times: once in writing to Mahbub Ali after his first year at school ("*The Friend of all the World takes leave to go his own places*"); once in person to Mahbub, after a scolding for his first disappearance ("To the *madrissah* I will go. At the *madrissah* I will learn. In the *madrissah* I will be a Sahib. But when the *madrissah* is shut, then must I be free and go among my people. Otherwise I die!"); and a third time, after his second year of school, while negotiating the terms of his employment ("I have said that my holidays are my own. I do not go to school twice over. That is one part of my bond" [128, 135, 147]). After the first assertion, Creighton grudgingly agrees that freedom might benefit the boy, "'but it is great insolence on his part'" (129).

Reading *Kim* as at least in part an adventure tale, then, accounts both for the apparent aimlessness of its episodic structure and for the fact that Kim exists in an extended adolescence in which he, like the picaro, must "fall afresh" to an endless series of new tasks, experiences, locations, and identities (Wicks 244). This picaresque-adventure mode might be the generic framework most suited to the novel's representation of the Great Game as a series of encounters whose ultimate goal is obscure and, ultimately, not the point for a novel interested, as *Kim* is, in a fantasy of the quotidian and personal rather than the historical and global experience of empire. This framework, however, does not adequately account for two other major aspects of Kim's life: his discovery of his own racial origins and his coming to white *sahib* consciousness, on one hand, and his evolution as the Teshoo Lama's *chela*, or disciple, on the other. As Esty observes, the "ideal of self-possession" at the core of the white Great Game player's identity is irreconcilable with the Buddhist self-abnegation the lama teaches (11). Both ideals, however, are bound up with teleological development, with the pursuit of definite ends, in ways not accounted for either by the adventure tale or by the picaresque. The bildungsroman, which is the other major generic category frequently invoked in scholarship on *Kim*, then, can provide a framework for narrative elements other than the episodic.

The bildungsroman, like the picaresque, has both a historically specific definition and a more diffuse modern application. Generally considered to have been born with the publication of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* in 1795, the bildungsroman details the young hero's simultaneous personal maturation and socialization into the environment in which he must live and work as an adult. While a strict generic definition has proved elusive, a number of scholars have seen the bildungsroman's developmental narrative as an allegory for the sociopolitical or geopolitical environment out of which the genre emerged. Tobias Boes, in *Formative Fictions*, ties the genre to modern nationalism, finding that novels of *Bildung*

represent the development of national consciousness through the development of their protagonists. Franco Moretti sees youth as "modernity's 'essence'" and the bildungsroman as modernity's "symbolic form," an attempt to attach narrative development and meaning to modernity itself by use of a hero who embodies the longed-for harmony and purpose that Europe lost with the rise of modernity (5). Finally, Esty reads *Kim* in particular as a "metabildungsroman" of imperial time, in which "Kim's promise of endless motion thwarts the logic of closure," and "neither the hero nor the nation emerges into history as a self-possessed entity." Rather, Kipling produces "a distended plot of adolescence, frozen at the moment of Raj ascendancy" (9). It seems clear that the major generic tension in *Kim* revolves around whether the novel presents a narrative of progressive development and whether its narrative drives toward any form of closure or is at core suspended in an unstable, open state.

The question of narrative development in *Kim* is really the question of the maturation, education, and socialization of its young hero, a question inextricable from a consideration of the larger historical and political forces that act on Kim despite his remarkable self-sufficiency and freedom of mobility. The novel's generic hybridity, then, can be seen as nothing other than the formal expression of the relationship between Kim's restless subjectivity and the constraining imperatives of empire and the Great Game. While some, such as Patrick Brantlinger, have read *Kim* as primarily a novel of the road, a narrative that is at its core about the character of a protagonist who moves "from scene to scene in episodes that don't lead anywhere in particular, except to the next episode," others reject the notion that Kim is free and aimless, finding instead that the novel addresses the competing structural forces at work on him (128). In an insightful analysis of the relationship between fiction and imperial governance in British India, Richards allows that *Kim* is structured episodically but calls its episodes "random and accidental in name only, because, no matter how far they may seem to veer from the presence of a plan, they always take place in exact accordance with the dictates of headquarters" (22). My contention here is that both major elements—aimless freedom and developmental focus—obtain in the novel and that, moreover, it is precisely their simultaneous presence in *Kim* that reveals the Great Game's central dilemma: empire's inevitable confrontation with its own limits; and Kipling's solution: a utopian, supraimperial space, for which Central Asia comes to stand.

Let us consider the characters who stand in as paternal figures or mentors for Kim and the genres in the novel with which they are most closely associated. The list is surprisingly long: Kim's late biological father O'Hara; Teshoo Lama; Mahbub Ali, the horse trader; Father Bennet, who sends Kim to school; Colonel Creighton; Hurree Babu, the erudite Bengali; and Lurgan Sahib, the spymaster. But for the purposes of a generic analysis, the lama, Mahbub Ali, and Creighton are Kim's three crucial mentors and father figures. Mahbub Ali is most closely associated with the picaresque, and he fosters the picaro in Kim. It is Mahbub who teaches Kim the picaro's trick of social climbing by trading masters, delivering him to Creighton and persuading him to accept a white boy's education. It is also Mahbub who eventually argues for Kim's liberation from school, saying to Kim, "Son, I am wearied of that *madrissah*, where they take the best years of a man to teach him what

he can only learn upon the Road" (171). Creighton is most closely associated with Kim's *Bildung*—in his few appearances in the narrative, he frets over Kim's preparation in spy craft. "But he is so young, Mahbub," he worries, before sending Kim out as a spy, "Besides, he knows no Turki" (172–73). Mahbub prevails, aiding Kim's ascent to employment by his final master, the British Empire, and telling Creighton, "The pony is made—finished. . . . Drop the rein on his back and let go" (172). The Afghan horse trader's confidence in Kim arises from his own native familiarity with the culture in which Kim operates—he trusts that Kim has the picaro's wits and ease with the whole breadth of life in India. Creighton, on the other hand, worries about Kim's acquisition of the requisite surveying skills and his socialization into the bureaucratic and official cultures of the imperial service. The lama, Kim's third paternal figure and, incidentally, the one who is with him for the entirety of the narrative, cannot be closely associated with either the episodic picaresque or the developmental bildungsroman. Abiding by spiritual rather than worldly time, associated with the impenetrable and inscrutable Central Asian region of Tibet, the lama's movements and concerns are governed neither by the aimlessness of the road nor by the imperatives of the survey but by the symbolically charged universe depicted on the circular Wheel of Life. Still, the lama's movements do have the linear telos of a quest: he travels in search of his holy river and, in contrast to Kim's perennially incomplete *Bildung* and permanent adolescence, he finds it.

When the three figures come into conflict, it causes Kim to "[consider] his own identity, a thing he had never done before, till his head swam" (118). The crisis that Kim confronts when these three paternal influences collide has its roots in multiple aspects of the novel's imperial reality. For one, Mahbub Ali, Teshoo Lama, and Creighton represent places that, though they exert great influence on Kim's life, Kim himself never knows: Afghanistan, Tibet, and England, respectively. Second, Kim struggles to assimilate the competing ideological influences wrought on him by the requirements of the Great Game and by the lama's spiritual education. As Esty puts it, "Kim never reconciles the competing logic of commerce and culture; he cannot achieve the fundamental synthesis of action (espionage) and contemplation (Buddhism) that was the hallmark of the bourgeois hero" (11). Kim himself seems to attempt a resolution, or at least a conjunction, of these two modes when he thinks, for example, "How can a man follow the Way or the Great Game when he is eternally pestered by women," setting his two modes of education—and his two modes of employment—against the leisure and fun of his boyhood (257). Kim's remark, finally, points to his age. Maturing over the course of the novel from a child to an adolescent, Kim is only in a position to contemplate pestering women at a point when his romantic life has already been circumscribed by the Way and the Game. As with Kim's cultural origins and his ideological orientations, his adolescence is a state of irresolution. It is unclear whether he progresses toward a final mature state in which he will synthesize all of his identities or whether he will remain in a state of unresolved multiplicity. The novel's complex generic landscape reflects these competing, and perhaps incompatible, forces as they act on Kim and on his imperial world.

Kim's contradictions are also part of a utopian vision that could contain East and West, the movement characterized by the lama's pilgrimage and that of the Survey, the episodic structure of the picaresque and the progression of the bildungsroman. For this feat of synthesis, Kipling requires a utopian space, empty or evacuated, that stands apart from the real, material conditions in colonial India as he knew it. Central Asia fulfills that role in *Kim* precisely because it is marginal or absent in a way that the plains of India are not. The fact that the novel's narrative drives toward Central Asia—even encountering characters who have come from there—but never reaches it is of a piece with the many other kinds of contradictions it sustains. *Kim*'s relationship to Central Asia is, furthermore, emblematic of the novel's geopoetics, the way that, in its orientation toward the territories it describes, it both mimics and exceeds geopolitics of the era. *Kim* is invested in preserving Central Asia as an evacuated place, one that is perhaps structurally similar to a buffer zone but that, I would argue, reveals imaginative and affective concerns that go beyond a merely strategic desire to prevent a meeting of imperial frontiers. An empty Central Asia means something specific to *Kim* and to the period in which the novel appeared that is related to but cannot be reduced to an interimperial buffer.

The fundamental contradiction in the novel can thus be described as a conflict between a teleological drive toward Central Asia—the final edge of empire—and an "antidevelopmental temporality" that would keep the world in which Kim finds himself in a state of suspension, despite the apparently productive, developmental survey work in which he himself participates (Esty 3). This fundamental tension can account for the role of Kim's multiple identities, the presence of conflicting genre categories within the novel, and the competing valences of travel and exploration in the narrative. Kim is adamant for much of the narrative that his personal mobility not be fully constrained by the requirements of Creighton and the Great Game. In addition to his insistence, discussed earlier, that his summers should be his own to wander, Kim comes into himself first, and perhaps most fully, when he and the lama start their journey on the Grand Trunk Road. Ostensibly on the move in search of the lama's river, it is the road itself that delights Kim, who "dropped into . . . that indescribable gait of the long-distance tramp the world over" (61). Kim is immediately at home on the road and happily unconflicted in a way that his further encounters, especially with the Great Game and his Western education, will challenge: "This was seeing the world in real truth; this was life as he would have it" (73). These early examples of Kim's natural inclinations and desires make clear that the novel is, at its core, a road novel—one that will ramify into the lama's quest and the Great Game's Survey, both modes of travel toward an ultimate end point. But for Kim the original point is merely to be in motion and to see, in a more or less disinterested way, what he can of his world.

Gradually, Kim's natural inclinations are appropriated by the forces of empire. Mahbub Ali, the figure who does the most to orchestrate and further Kim's induction into imperial logics of travel and mobility, understands that Kim's "native" traits will make him a useful asset to the empire but also that he and Creighton must proceed with caution in turning this young wanderer into a

surveyor and spy. As Mahbub puts it, "[W]hen a colt is born to be a polo-pony, closely following the ball without teaching—when such a colt knows the game by divination—then I say it is a great wrong to break that colt to a heavy cart" (113). Mahbub is uniquely positioned to understand how best to appropriate Kim's talents and "break" them to the "heavy cart" of imperial service. As an Afghan and a horse trader, Mahbub himself has transformed native modes of travel and transportation into mobility in service of the Great Game. We might say that he has broken the ways and practices of nomadism—a native Central Asian form of mobility and travel—to the cart of the British Survey, the Great Game, and the imperial confrontation with its final physical frontier.

Many scholars have read the novel as a confrontation between nomadism as an apparently free and disinterested form of mobility and more politically circumscribed patterns of motion. Richards, in *The Imperial Archive*, sees the novel as structurally mimicking the assimilative and totalizing forces of empire and as an instantiation of the archive whose ultimate objective was to collect and organize every element of colonial life in the Subcontinent: "The novel performs a work of assimilation: it codifies the wanderings of the many nomadic forces it contains, allowing them extraordinary latitude even as it adjusts them to accord with the implied decrees of the high command" (22). Others, however, find *Kim* less than totalizing in its representation of nomadism and alternative mobilities. Indeed, the appropriation of a nomadic style of movement to the ends of the Great Game does not necessarily resolve the problem of whether *Kim* itself works toward any resolution. Kim's endless motion is the one constant in his life, whomever he serves. It seems possible, therefore, that the very trait that allows for Kim's induction into the narrative of the Great Game also, inevitably, stymies the Game's ostensible end goal of victory for Britain. Baucom articulates this conflict most directly, writing that "maps adore boundaries, and the argument of the boundary is the argument of territorial fixity. . . . The wanderings, displacements, and spatial uncertainties of nomadism . . . articulate a direct threat to the spatial and temporal permanencies of cartography" (94). This, then, is the problem of motion: the novel depends on it, as the Great Game did, but motion itself always threatens to undermine the fixity and stability imperialism sought. For this reason, Kim's eternal adolescence resembles structurally the conflict between the mobility of nomadism and the fixity of the Survey. A liminal state that promises arrival at full maturity, Kim's adolescence is prolonged because to reach the end of his story of development would imply the end of the Great Game, a meeting of the imperial frontiers, and a cartographic collision. Kim's suspended adolescence, like the evacuated buffer zone of Central Asia, became the less frightening prospect. It is this void that Kipling works to preserve, though it makes only one appearance in *Kim*. After Kim steals the Russians' luggage, he separates their maps and documents from their surveying tools, throwing the latter out the window of a local hut and into a deep, inaccessible chasm in the hills: "The wheeling basket vomited its contents as it dropped. The theodolite hit a jutting cliff-ledge and exploded like a shell; the books, inkstands, paint-boxes, compasses, and rulers showed for a few seconds like a swarm of bees. Then they vanished; and, though Kim, hanging half out of [the] window, strained his young ears, never a sound came up from the gulf" (254). Having enacted the

metaphorical transformation of Russian instruments of the survey into a weapon (a shell) and a natural element (a swarm of bees), Kim watches them vanish without a trace, witnessing as literal a representation as the novel can provide of the Central Asian void, the "gulf" that, as it swallows the mapping instruments, always exceeds in its unknowable emptiness the knowledge the West can produce about it. The gulf is not only a threat, however. Only the continued existence of the Central Asian void could ensure the continuation of imperial India. It, and not Kim, Hurree Babu, Creighton, or any of the other Great Game players neutralizes the Russian threat by destroying their ability to gather information. That it is a presumably indiscriminate void and could have consumed Kim's survey instruments just as effectively as those of the Russians is exactly the quality that can guarantee a static, stable empire, frozen, like Kim in his enduring adolescence, at the historical moment just preceding confrontation with its own final frontier.

Yet it must be acknowledged how the lama's own quest falls outside the mobility-stasis dialectic on which so much of Kim's identity is formed. "So thus the Search is ended. . . . Certain is our deliverance. Come!" the lama says to Kim at the novel's end (289). The very picture of closure and reconciliation, the lama represents a real alternative to both the aimless mobility of Kim's youth and the driving demands of imperial reconnaissance and statecraft. The thing left unresolved at the novel's close, then, is the question of Kim's affiliation. The lama has the final word, and Kim's response to his own and his master's deliverance is unknown. The only solution to this set of problems—the question of *Kim*'s telos and of whether it even has one, the impossibility of endless imperial expansion and the relation of expansion to other forms of mobility, the question of *Kim*'s genre and whether Kim's story is one of maturation or merely one of ever more circumscribed wandering—is the creation of a utopian space that could contain, without reconciling, Kim's hybrid identity, his multiple mentors the lama, Creighton, and Mahbub Ali, and all the antagonisms and contradictions of colonial India. This, then, is the function of Central Asia in *Kim*. An impenetrable void, it parallels and ultimately exceeds Central Asia's contemporaneous geopolitical function as a buffer, guaranteeing not only the physical safety of the imperial frontier but also the imaginative possibility of empire in perpetuity. As Mahbub Ali advises Kim when Kim is just learning to draw maps and make reports, "It must hold everything that thou has seen or touched or considered" (170). The impossible space that can hold all of the contradictions Kim embodies and encounters is, finally, the object of the Great Game: Central Asia revealed in its full conceptual and symbolic significance.

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