

ANGLO SAXONICA
REVISTA ANGLO SAXONICA SER. III N. 13 2017
ANGLO
SAXONICA



University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies
Centro de Estudos Anglosicos da Universidade de Lisboa

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REVISTA **ANGLO SAXONICA** SER. III N. 13 2017

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Travelling between Journalism and Literature: Kipling's Art in Crossing Fixed Textual Borders

Isabel Simões-Ferreira

Escola Superior de Comunicação Social – Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa (IPL)

Travelling between Journalism and Literature: Kipling's Art in Crossing Fixed Textual Borders

When Kipling died, in 1936, although the urn containing his ashes was buried in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey, few "men of letters" attended the service. High-imperialism days were over. The world was rapidly heading towards a new ideological and geostrategic order. After having taken the English literary scene by storm at the end of the 1890s and being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1907), many voices would turn against him, because his reputation as a writer was considered to be inevitably linked to a repulsive ideology — an ideology that was jingoistic, ethnocentrist and racist.

His main *sin* as Michel Foucault (1971) would probably have put it, if he had written on Kipling's career — which he didn't —, was very much related to his inability to wake up outside the dominant order of discourse that helped maintain the British empire.

Even though the time-scale enslavement of the self produced by mainstream discursive formations is a decisive force in steering people to interpret the world in which they live in a specific direction, to categorize Kipling's prose as the epitome of imperialistic orthodoxy would be a grotesque oversimplification. Kipling's legacy as a writer is far more complex than we may think of at first sight. So what drives me, eighty years after his death, to evoke Kipling's legacy as a man of letters is his undeniable craftsmanship in journalistic reportage and literary storytelling.

Born in Bombay (30 December 1865), he returned to India at the age of 16, in 1882, to join his parents and started to work for the *Civil & Military Gazette* in Lahore as Assistant Editor. Later, in 1887, he was transferred to *The Pioneer* at Allahabad — "India's greatest and most important paper" (Kipling, *Something of Myself* 77).

Judging by his own words, his job as a journalist was extremely hard:

I never worked less than ten hours and seldom more than fifteen per diem; and as our paper came out in the evening did not see the midday sun except on Sundays. I had fever too, regular and persistent (...). Yet I discovered that a man can work with a temperature of 104, even though next day he has to ask the office who wrote the article. (57)

Covering "visits of Viceroys to neighbouring Princes on the edge of the great Indian Desert (...) reviews of Armies expecting to move against Russia", food supply to the European community of Lahore, outbreaks of cholera and small-pox, floods on railways, village festivals, race-meetings, murder and divorce trials, amongst various other events or occurrences, was part of his daily routine as a young journalist (59).

Despite his work hardships, being a journalist gave him the opportunity of broadening his views on Anglo-Indian life and the subcontinent as a whole. His night wanderings at the back streets of Lahore, namely his visits to "all manner of odd places — liquor-shops, gambling and opium-dens" (64) — and his travels to the Native states near the Afghanistan border in the North-western frontier made him spend a lot of time outside the newswriting office and develop a keen interest towards India. He was not therefore unfamiliar with the bustling and the intrigues of the Great Game on the Grand Trunk Road, masterfully described in *Kim* (1901).

The writer's inspiration, or his *Daemon* as he likes to call it, draws therefore a great deal of force and creativity from his experience as a journalist, in other words, "from the possibilities of common things seen" (71), after all the very stuff of journalism.

Henry Boyton, a contemporary of Kipling, in an essay entitled *Journalism and Literature*, published in 1904, in the United States, raises the question of the specific characteristics of literature as opposed to those of journalism:

Is 'literature' broadly 'the printed word', the whole body of recorded speech? Or is it the product of a conscious and regulated, but not inspired, art? Or is it, with other products of art, due to that expression of personality through craftsmanship we call genius? To the final question I should say yes; (...) The real business of journalism is to record or to comment, not to create or to interpret. In its exercise of the

ABSTRACT

The paper explores Kipling's art and craftsmanship as a storyteller, whether one is talking about real/factual news reporting or imaginary stories. The main focus falls on Kipling's experience both as a journalist and a writer in order to problematize the blurring line that sometimes divides these two genres of narrative regarding their commitment to telling the truth. Three texts were chosen for this purpose: "The Sutlej Bridge", a news article published by the *Civil and Military Gazette* (1887); and two tales "The Man Who Would Be King" (*Wee Willie Winkie*, 1888) and "The Bridge Builders" (*The Day's Work*, 1898). From a thematic perspective, these narratives are linked, on the one hand, by the act of construction — the construction of bridges or empire-building — and, on the other hand, by the role of the journalist in reporting what he sees and/or listens to. The analysis demonstrates that fiction/literature can often supersede in scope and depthness factual accounts of reality, thus aiming to reach higher levels of truthfulness.

KEYWORDS

Journalism; literature; constructivism; truth; British Empire

RESUMO

O artigo explora a arte e mestria de Kipling como contador de "histórias", sejam elas reais/factuais ou imaginárias. A sua experiência como jornalista e escritor é o nosso objeto de análise no sentido de problematizar a ténue linha divisória que, por vezes, separa os dois géneros de narrativa no que respeita o seu compromisso com o contar a verdade. Escolhemos para o efeito três textos: "The Sutlej Bridge", um artigo publicado pelo jornal *Civil and Military Gazette* (1887); e os contos "The Man Who Would Be King" (*Wee Willie Winkie*, 1888) e "The Bridge Builders" (*The Day's Work*, 1898). A unir estas narrativas, do ponto de vista temático, temos, por um lado, o ato da construção — a construção de pontes ou a construção de impérios — e, por outro, o papel do jornalista em relatar o que

vê e/ou o que ouve. A análise demonstra que a ficção/literatura pode muitas das vezes ultrapassar em dimensão e profundidade as narrativas do real, alcançando assim níveis superiores de veracidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Jornalismo; literatura; construtivismo; verdade; Império Britânico

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS
NOTAS SOBRE OS COLABORADORES

ISABEL SIMÕES-FERREIRA is Head Coordinator Professor at Escola Superior de Comunicação Social (ESCS) – Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa (IPL). She teaches Media Discourse Analysis, Culture and Media and English for Journalism. Apart from her teaching activities, she is currently

the President of the Technical and Scientific Council at ESCS and a research collaborator at the Centre for English Studies of Lisbon University (ULICES). She has published on Anglo-Portuguese studies, English literature (especially on the British Empire in India) and the media coverage of events, ranging from the mediatization of the British royal family to the press coverage of Brexit in Portugal.