

“Altogether a Different Thing”: The Emerging Social Sciences and the New Universalisms of Religious Belief in Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*

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FOR much of the nineteenth century, the work of British missionaries was underwritten by the presumption that the expansion of Christianity necessarily entailed the expansion of missionaries’ own cultural norms. Hence when the London Missionary Society (LMS) missionaries brought Christianity to the South Sea Islands, they took for granted that religious conversion meant a “new order of things . . . [and] the subversion of . . . [the Polynesian] system.” From its forms of governance to its forms of housing, from its modes of communication to its fashions and tastes, Polynesian culture was “Westernized” as part of the Christianizing process.¹ While there are important exceptions,

Nineteenth-Century Literature, Vol. 73, No. 3, pp. 293–325, ISSN: 0891–9356, online ISSN: 1067–8352, © 2018 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals.php?p=reprints>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/ncl.2018.73.3.293>.

¹ William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches, during a Residence of Nearly Six Years in the South Sea Islands*, 2 vols. (London: Fisher, Son, & Jackson, 1829), p. vi. See also Anna

of course, one could say that generally the nineteenth-century missionary enterprise took Western culture to be the natural corollary to Christianity.²

In the archival holdings related to the 1910 World Missionary Conference, however, I saw a significant contravening strand of thought—a call for a break between Christianity and the trappings of Western culture. In their reports, several missionaries argued for a genuine Christian “universalism” free from cultural associations, and advocated that Christianity embrace new, non-Western forms, whatever those forms may be. “We have been inclined to identify too much Christ with the forms of Western Christianity, forgetting that our Christianity has its limitations,” declared Rev. James Mathers. “We ought to start out with the fact clear before us, that our Western Christianity is not the final form of our religion.”³ Similarly, the renowned LMS missionary Thomas Ebenezer Slater contended: “We have made the fatal mistake of bringing to India a Christ from outside, a foreign and Western Christ, and one set in *our* theological systems; and not rather an Eastern Christ, as He really was—though He was, of course, the *universal* Christ, in Whom ‘there is no East or West.’”⁴

While those who advanced such arguments were in the minority among missionaries, and mostly based in India, the passion and frequency with which these views were expressed makes them difficult to ignore. Taking these sentiments seriously raises significant questions. Why do we see these assertions of religion’s independence from culture advanced with such vigor at the turn of the century when, just a few decades

Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire, 1800–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 120–24.

² My book-in-progress details a number of these important exceptions, including the not infrequent occurrence of interracial marriages among missionaries, their ambivalence on the issue of colonization, and the debates surrounding the use of “native” clergy versus Western missionaries to make converts.

³ James Mathers, Bangalore, S. India No. 203, MS3291/2, Notes for Commission IV, *The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions—Hinduism*, 1910 World Missionary Conference, Special Libraries and Archives, Aberdeen University, pp. 29, 31. Further references to *The Missionary Message* are to this collection.

⁴ Thomas Slater, Bangalore, No. 229, MS3291/2, Notes for Commission IV, *The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions—Hinduism*, pp. 17–18.

earlier, the conflation of "Civilization and Christianity" was at its peak? How were these views implicitly responding to competing conceptions of the relationship between religion and culture? Why was India at the heart of this movement? And, how might recognition of the efforts to *unyoke* religion from culture among some religious figures prompt us, as literary scholars, to read the appearance of "religion" in fin-de-siècle literature in new ways?

In this essay, I propose that an answer to these interrelated questions hinges on the way in which, at the end of the nineteenth century, the needs of some religious practitioners began to conflict with those of secular scholars—namely, those in the developing social science disciplines such as ethnography, anthropology, and sociology—who increasingly sought to arrogate for themselves the political and epistemological authority once possessed almost exclusively by religion.⁵ In their efforts to claim such authority via the "more scientific" description of social wholes, these secular scholars came to define religion as one of several expressions or markers of a particular culture. According to this scholarly discourse, religion was subordinate to culture; it functioned to delimit one social group from another. In this sense, social scientific discourse was fundamentally at odds with that of prominent religious practitioners of the era, who understood that, were religion to thrive in the modern world, it would need to shed its associations with any one local culture. Faced with an increasingly globalized world, some religious figures understood that the more religion was associated with a particular culture, the more vulnerable its "universalist" aspirations became. The resulting "new universalisms" of religious belief, which seemed poised to challenge the social scientific delineation of religion as particularizing and "cultural," were especially pronounced in colonial India among two groups: Christian missionaries and Hindu reformers.

With the rise of Indian nationalism in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries came to realize that

⁵ See Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 53–58.

a central hindrance to Christianity's propagation was its association with the West. As one Indian missionary reflected, Christianity appeared as "the religion of the foreigner. . . . [It] makes no appeal to our new-born patriotism."⁶ At the same time, Hindu reformers such as Keshub Chunder Sen, Swami Vivekananda, and Parahamansa Yogananda were articulating what Srinivas Aravamudan calls an "alternative modernity" to the "secular rule" of Western cultural hegemony by blending Hindu and Christian, "Eastern" and "Western" idioms to advance its universalism.⁷ Different as the Christian missionaries and Hindu reformers were, they shared in common a conception of religion as universal exactly in its capacity to transcend or be freed from culture. But insofar as they asserted that religion could *break* from culture, these sentiments ran contrary to those influential scholarly discourses of the social sciences, which were working to naturalize an understanding of religion as an *index* of culture.

At the fin de siècle, then, there existed a disjunction between what might be termed the two modern universalisms of the social sciences and contemporary religious belief. I examine the contravening epistemologies of each in the first two parts of this essay. In the final part, I show how this disjunction helps us see the ways late-century canonical texts thematized and worked through the competing discourses of religious universalism and the social sciences, using Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim* (1901) as my case study. To observe that *Kim* evinces awareness of the new religious universalisms of its time and portrays them as not entirely benign to the epistemology of the social sciences is to rewrite much of the criticism on the novel, which has treated the appearance of religion in it as "negligible."⁸ From a starting point of reading the character of the lama not (simply) as Buddhist but rather as representative of contemporary "neoreligious figures" (to borrow Aravamudan's

⁶ N. C. Mukerjee, Allahabad, No. 208, MS3291/2, Notes for Commission IV, *The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions—Hinduism*, p. 3.

⁷ Srinivas Aravamudan, *Guru English: South Asian Religion in a Cosmopolitan Language* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), p. 30.

⁸ J. Jeffrey Franklin, *The Lotus and the Lion: Buddhism and the British Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2008), p. 173.

formulation [*Guru English*, p. 81]), I argue that Kipling's novel organizes itself around the tension between these modern universalisms. It explores the potency of new discourses of religious belief in advancing forms of universalism that challenged and looked to transcend categories of identity as imposed by social scientific thinking.



The discourse of cultural analysis offered by the disciplines that were coming to comprise the area of the social sciences helped naturalize a conception of religion as subsidiary to culture. While these disciplines saw "religion" in its generic sense as a near-universal social phenomenon, particular religions were cast "as primarily a vehicle of membership in a certain collectivity and of participation in 'the main current of national life.'"⁹ For social scientists of this period, the study of "local" religion amounted to an effort to comprehend the "arcane 'prelogical' system of thought" that governed non-Western cultures.¹⁰

Central to instituting this methodological approach in ethnography and anthropology was E. B. Tylor, who aimed "to formulate a system that organized non-physical pronouncements of different societies—such as their religions, customs, and languages—into a developmental scheme."¹¹ In *Primitive Culture* (1871), Tylor made clear his conviction that the very

⁹ Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 56. Herbert locates this view of religion as intrinsic to the discourse of cultural analysis in ethnography and anthropology. But, as Mark Canuel reminds us, this view has precedent in the early nineteenth century among figures such as Edmund Burke who countered attacks on the Anglican church by "articulat[ing] a defense of religion *in general* as the outcome of the customs and traditions of specific nations" (Canuel, *Religion, Toleration, and British Writing, 1790–1830* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002], p. 17). For more on the ways that such social scientific theories of religion attracted and gained traction among liberal thinkers and writers in the 1860s and after, see Sebastian Lecourt, *Cultivating Belief: Victorian Anthropology, Liberal Aesthetics, and the Secular Imagination* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018).

¹⁰ Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions; Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 16.

¹¹ Efram Sera-Shriar, *The Making of British Anthropology, 1813–1871* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 148.

discipline of ethnography depended on viewing religion as a *marker* of culture. The “quality of mankind which tends most to make the systematic study of civilization possible,” he wrote, “is that remarkable tacit consensus or agreement which so far induces whole populations to unite in the use of the same language, to follow the same religion and customary law, to settle down to the same general level of art and knowledge.”¹² Tylor’s syntax is noteworthy: not only does he imply equivalence between “religion and customary law,” but he also asserts that there is a “tacit consensus” that precedes “religion and customary law,” a consensus that makes ethnography possible in the first place. In this formulation, religion—alongside language, custom, art, and knowledge—is relegated to that which follows from a prior “agreement” of a social whole. It helps enunciate the otherwise “tacit” social whole as an object of study, becoming one “cultural” category among other “non-physical pronouncements” by which the ethnographer delimits a particular population from another.

Early anthropologists largely adopted this deployment of religion in their analysis of culture. Augustus Henry Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers, a noted ethnologist and archaeologist who was elected to the Ethnological and Anthropological Societies, evinced this view in an 1868 lecture when he declared, “whether we embrace this religion or that . . . is dependent purely on the accident of our birth, which places us in a position to build upon the experience of our ancestors.”¹³ For Pitt-Rivers, religion was a form of cultural inheritance. It transmitted so as to perpetuate the “experience of our ancestors”—an understanding of religion that would anticipate Herbert Spencer’s formulation of religion in his *Principles of Sociology* (1876) as essentially comprised of ancestor worship, which protected and maintained a preexisting social order. James Frazer’s later landmark work *The Golden Bough* (1890) similarly claimed that religion was subsidiary to culture. Religious power (centered in “savage” societies on “the old king, the human god”), wrote

¹² Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1871), I, 9–10.

¹³ A. Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers, “Primitive Warfare II,” in his *The Evolution of Culture and Other Essays*, ed. J. L. Myres (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), p. 90.

Frazer, was in fact constrained and constituted by “the threads of custom,” which “light as air but strong as links of iron,’ . . . cross[ed] and recross[ed] each other in an endless maze [that] bound him fast within a network of observances.”¹⁴ Expressed more or less explicitly in this discursive constellation was an evolutionary schema, in which “pre-rational” belief systems would give way to the enlightened religious sensibilities and accompanying civilizational “gains” of the West. Such a narrative reinforced the notion that religion was a means of assessing “civilizational” development. By understanding the degree to which a belief system was, for instance, governed by a belief in “magic” or invested in an “abstract” notion of a single deity, one could differentiate and categorize various cultures according to their supposed closeness to or distance from some original “ur-culture.”¹⁵

Later anthropologists distanced themselves from the evolutionary narrative of “culture,” preferring instead a pluralist framework, which saw discrete cultures as socio-national wholes unto themselves. Nevertheless, they maintained the understanding of religion advanced by their scholarly predecessors. Bronislaw Malinowki, whose “monograph sounded a death knell for Frazer’s comparativist form of anthropological discourse,” defined religion as that which is essentially “rooted in the way [that] the primary needs of man are satisfied in

¹⁴ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A New Abridgement*, ed. Robert Fraser (Oxford; New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), p. 217.

¹⁵ As Franz Boas noted in a 1904 essay on the history of anthropology, the “underlying thought” that motivated “attempts to systematize the whole range of social phenomena . . . —such as religious belief, social organization, forms of marriage—has been the belief that one definite system can be found according to which all culture has developed” (Boas, “The History of Anthropology,” *Science*, 20 [1904], 516). Some scholars, to be sure, disputed the specifics of these various theses (i.e., that religion boiled down to belief in spiritual beings or the institutionalization of ancestor worship). However, they generally shared the assumption that religion acted to preserve the social norms and orders of a culture or nation. For instance, Lester Ward, a founding father of sociology, argued that religion was a form of psychological restraint to ensure social stability. Individual self-interest, he claimed, “threaten[ed] the destruction of the race,” and the “social mind” developed religion to keep mankind’s destructive propensities in check. In Ward’s sociological approach, then, religion operates as a form of bourgeois ideology to maintain and perpetuate the status quo. See Lester F. Ward, “The Essential Nature of Religion,” *International Journal of Ethics*, 8 (1898), 178.

culture”—a definition that limned religion as being but a function of a culture.¹⁶ No matter whether it adopted the evolutionary or pluralist model of cultural analysis, anthropology, in demarcating collectivities as objects of study, subordinated religion to being a *cultural trait* of that whole, as a “pronouncement” that defined the group’s contours.

Absent from these discourses were any of the epistemological and metaphysical commitments of religious belief itself. While at an earlier moment in time religious belief had a direct impact on ethnographic study (for instance, in missionary ethnographies, which often saw divine logic behind social phenomena, or in James Cowles Prichard’s commitment to monogenism),¹⁷ the institutionalization of the social sciences as academic disciplines involved a concerted effort to divorce “science” from “faith” in order to shore up their scientific bonafides. Tylor, for one, made a point to distinguish the “ethnographic” from the “theological point of view.” When it came to the study of religion, Tylor was convinced that religious rites “may be studied in their stages of development without entering into questions of their authority and value” (*Primitive Culture*, I, 21). Ward, too, was inclined to disregard “teachers of religion,” who, he claimed, were “so muffled” in their own doctrinal concerns that they had only a “faint perception” of religion’s “essential” nature (“The Essential Nature of Religion,” p. 181). In this manner, the nascent field of the social sciences excluded religious voices as equal scholarly participants. Such

¹⁶ Marc Manganaro, “Textual Play, Power, and Cultural Critique: An Orientation to Modernist Anthropology,” in *Modernist Anthropology: From Fieldwork to Text*, ed. Manganaro (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990), p. 4; Bronislaw Malinowski, “The Role of Magic and Religion” (1931), in *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*, 2d ed., ed. William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 112.

¹⁷ Missionaries often credited themselves with helping to create the discipline of anthropology. See Patrick Harries, “Anthropology,” in *Missions and Empire*, ed. Norman Etherington (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), p. 238. By contrast, late-Victorian anthropologists, while acknowledging their indebtedness to missionary texts, sought to distance their discipline from missionary work. George W. Stocking, Jr., dates one profound split between missionary societies and the anthropology to 1865, when the Anthropological Society “devoted four consecutive meetings . . . to often sharply critical discussion of ‘the benefits of missionary work among savage races’” (Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* [New York: Free Press, 1987], p. 252).

voices, blithely entangled as they were in “threads of custom” (to use Frazer’s evocative phrase), could only be data or *objects* of study. Considered mostly blind to the ways that their religious beliefs assimilated them to the needs of their cultural systems, religious believers were cast in the role of “natives” in the dyad of ethnographer-observer/native-observed.



While late-Victorian social scientists argued for religion as a characteristic of national culture, a number of these “teachers of religion” were responding to what they perceived to be a global and globalizing modernity by arguing for new forms of universal religion. For faith to thrive in the modern era, they believed, it had to free itself from the traditions, modes of thinking, and hierarchies of any one national culture. We see this line of argument advanced especially by key figures in two groups: Protestant missionaries in India and Hindu reformers.

I start with Protestant missionaries. Politically, these missionaries saw that, with the rise of Indian nationalism, Christianity would do well to sever its ties with Western culture. Rev. Charles Freer Andrews of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) (who also became an advocate of the Indian National Congress) broke with predominant missionary thinking of the early to mid nineteenth century to argue that the links between Christianity and European culture be dissolved lest Christianity be implicated in imperial oppression: “The wave of reaction has come and the Church presents the picture, not of ‘emancipation’ but of [Indian] ‘denationalisation.’”¹⁸ Echoing this opinion, Slater noted that because of Christianity’s association with the West, conversion to Christianity in India was considered tantamount to antinational feeling: “Whatever comes, Hindus *must not denationalize themselves* by accepting a religion from the West” (Notes, no. 229, for *The Missionary Message*, p. 15). Fueling these sentiments was

¹⁸ Charles Freer Andrews, SPG and Cambridge Univ. Mission, Delhi, No. 123, MS3291/2, Notes for Commission IV, *The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions—Hinduism*, p. 14.

a growing disillusionment with Western culture. The refusal of the British government to declare India a Christian nation in the mid nineteenth century had convinced many evangelicals that Britain itself was not the Christian nation it claimed, and, by the end of the century, missionary writing exhibited a “sense of betrayal by the Christian state.”¹⁹ Missionaries, moreover, expressed growing unease with what appeared an insuperable divide between Christian values and the seemingly unprecedented materialism of Western capitalist society. It was in this spirit that missionaries such as Rev. Susil Kumar Rudra expressed hope that an “Eastern” iteration of Christianity would address the “limitations” of Western culture: “Perhaps in the unworldliness of their ideals we shall find the antidote to that spirit of worldliness which we all deplore in these days in the life of the West.”²⁰

Theologically, the popularity of “fulfillment theory” among late-nineteenth-century missionaries helped loosen ties between Christianity and Western culture.²¹ Fortified by their confidence that Christianity would “fulfill” and eventually triumph over all other religions, some missionaries argued that non-Christian religions contained elements of the divine, which would contribute to the Christian universalism to come. This “fulfillment” thus necessitated a broadening of Christian thought and dogma to accommodate other national and religious traditions—an accommodation all the more striking when one compares it to the chauvinistic attitude to other religions

¹⁹ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Edinburgh: Orbis Books, 2002), p. 44.

²⁰ Susil Kumar Rudra, Cambridge Mission to Delhi, No. 261. MS3291/2, Notes for Commission IV, *The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions—Hinduism*, pp. 25–26.

²¹ Fulfillment theory provided the theological backbone for the discipline that Masuzawa in *The Invention of World Religions* calls “comparative theology.” Yet there is some confusion surrounding Masuzawa’s term, for what she calls “comparative theology,” missionaries (many of whom subscribed to fulfillment theology) called “comparative religion.” Take, for instance, the Anglican missionary Arthur Lloyd, who defined “comparative religion” as the “duty . . . to separate from the teaching of [the] great non-Christian Saints all that is spurious accretion only fit to be cast away and burned, all that is local and temporary and that will pass away, and to find and gather that precious residuum of Universal Faith” (Lloyd, *The Wheat among the Tares: Studies of Buddhism in Japan* [London: Macmillan and Co., 1908], pp. 16–17).

displayed by early-nineteenth-century missionaries. Andrews, for instance, claimed that understanding “a recognised place for Hindu religious thought and life in past ages” had brought about in him “a weakening (or perhaps the truer word would be a ‘widening’) of the dogmatic side of the faith.” “I have a conscious desire to stretch all dogmas to their widest limits,” he wrote; “I now find the anima Christiana in Guru Nanak, and Yulsi Das, and Kabir (according to S. John, I. 9) in a way I never did before and I cannot use the word ‘heathen’ as I used to do” (Notes, no. 123, for *The Missionary Message*, pp. 19, 22). This “widening” eventually led Andrews to see the Gospels as “exhort[ing] believers to depart from the possessive claims of inherited or received identity and belonging” to embrace more cosmopolitan forms of fellowship.²² Throughout his life Andrews put these theological commitments into action. Meeting Mohandas Gandhi in South Africa in 1914, for instance, Andrews was so impressed by the lawyer that he aided him in organizing an ashram in Natal and publishing his magazine, *The Indian Opinion*.²³

Of course, as Masuzawa notes, fulfillment theory still amounted to “Christian absolutism” (*The Invention of World Religions*, p. 102). Yet it is worth underscoring that “Christian absolutism” was (and is) not homogenous in the forms it takes. Where early-nineteenth-century missionaries saw Christian “truth” inhering in British cultural norms, some late-century missionaries in India preached a form of Christian absolutism distinct from Western (and even moral) absolutism. As the historian Andrew Walls observes, this strain of thinking stressed adaptation and modification on the part of the missionary, who was encouraged to understand Christian affirmations from the points of view of cultural others and to “set [these affirmations] free to move within new systems of thought and discourse” (*The*

²² Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 2006), p. 17.

²³ In fact, the missionaries Andrews and Rudra played a central role in the development of Mohandas Gandhi’s theological and political thought. After Andrews’s death, Gandhi would call Andrews in a speech before the All India Congress Committee in 1942 his “closest friend” (Mohandas Gandhi, quoted in Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, p. 16).

Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History, pp. 40, 42). Slater represents a compelling case of this broadening in missionary thinking. Take, for instance, his position on *sati*. At an earlier time, missionaries had drawn on graphic descriptions of *sati* to demonstrate Hinduism's moral depravity and argue for the necessity of Western Christian intervention. Slater took a different tone. Missionary work, he claimed, had for too long ignored "underlying truth" in favor of "outward expression," which had blinded them to the fact that "it was the belief in a mystic union of souls that was the underlying motive of *Sati*" (Slater, Notes, no. 229, for *The Missionary Message*, p. 54). This attitude permeated Slater's many works on "Indian theism," including his lengthy study *Keshab Chandra Sen and the Brahma Samáj* (1884), in which he claimed that Keshub's Brahma Samaj brought up a series of questions central to Christian theology. "Why should one form of Christian thought and government prevail for the millions of our race?" wondered Slater; "Why may not the Gospel, when it comes to a foreign land, especially to the East, react upon the Christian Church, by discovering to it the many-sidedness of its Divine revelation, by bringing into prominence, points that have been missed or unapprehended in the past?"²⁴ Because we are accustomed to see missionaries as little more than functionaries of British imperialism, it is tempting to interpret these sentiments as but a wish to assimilate the "Other" into British cultural norms. Aravamudan, for instance, attributes missionaries' interest in Keshub solely to their hopes of converting the Hindu reformer to Christianity (*Guru English*, p. 51). But by the time of the publication of *Keshab Chandra Sen and the Brahma Samáj*, Keshub had already been dead for four years—a fact that not only challenges Aravamudan's dismissive reading of missionaries, but also suggests the earnestness with which missionaries like Slater tried to envision a Christian universalism fundamentally comprised of "foreign" religious and cultural influences.

²⁴ T. E. Slater, Preface to *Keshab Chandra Sen and the Brahma Samáj: Being a Brief Review of Indian Theism from 1830 to 1884* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co.; London: James Clarke and Co., 1884), p. iii.

This latitudinarianism extended to Buddhism as well as to Hinduism. Franklin notes that Slater borrowed Buddhist concepts as much as Hindu ones in rethinking Christian theology (*The Lotus and the Lion*, p. 88), a dispensation that was shared by missionaries such as Robert Elliott Speer of the American Presbyterian Mission and Arthur Lloyd, an Anglican missionary to Japan. Buddhism, they believed, was “wonderfully like Christianity.”²⁵ Lloyd, in fact, went so far as to proclaim that “the Eternal Sakyamuni and the Eternal Christ . . . are meant to represent the same person.” Far from seeing Buddhism as a threat to Christianity, he believed that the similarities between the religions meant there would be a “gradual absorption of paganism into the Church,” which would leave “but one religion—‘the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea’” (*The Wheat among the Tares*, pp. 10, 36). If the social sciences saw religion as constrained by “circumstance” and “threads of custom,” these missionaries saw religious belief as “absorbent,” surmounting the barriers of “circumstance” in the manner that rising “waters” surely surmount physical obstacles.

In this scatterplot of missionary writing, then, we see some of the ways that political exigency combined with theological commitments to yield surprising instantiations of religious universalism. This is not to say that missionaries did not concern themselves with nationalism or local culture. Rather it is to emphasize that some prominent missionaries looked to free Christianity from Western culture in order to advance a universal Christianity, the practices, governance, and “points” of which (as they freely admitted) they could neither fully anticipate nor envision. This discourse of Christian universalism thus permitted—indeed, encouraged—culturally recombinant forms of religious thought and practice that were not subsidiary to but instead intended to be transcendent of national identity.²⁶

²⁵ “Report of Commission IV,” quoted in Robert E. Speer, *The Light of the World: A Brief Comparative Study of Christianity and Non-Christian Religions* (West Medford, Mass.: The Central Committee on the United Study of Missions, 1911), p. 116.

²⁶ My argument thus overlaps with Leela Gandhi’s treatment of Andrews, in which she shows how the missionary’s theological commitments to an “affective

The commitment to universalism among some Christian missionaries finds its corollary in some of the Hindu reform movements, including that of Keshub, which were gaining global prominence at nearly the same time. Borrowing from missionaries' theory of "fulfillment," figures such as Keshub, Swami Vivekananda, and Paramahansa Yogananda expressed confidence in the universality and absolute "truth" of their religions, which, they were certain, would "absorb[er] all that is true and good and beautiful in the objective world."²⁷ At first glance, it may seem surprising to stress the cosmopolitanism of these Hindu reform movements, as they appear inseparable from Indian nationalism and a revival (in part) of "original" Indian culture. However, as Aravamudan argues, nationalist fervor and appeals to tradition ultimately were "materials for a responsive and discrepant cosmopolitanism" (*Guru English*, p. 37). They were invoked to the extent that they served a religious doctrine that sought to transcend cultural and sectarian difference. In this framework, one's culture of origin was a starting point for the religious journey, not a determinant of religious identity. Culture, to use Keshub's phrase from an 1881 lecture, was merely an "embankment" to be "swept away by the flood of cosmopolitan truth" (*Keshub Chunder Sen's Lectures in India*, p. 485).

This universalism thus positioned itself as deliberately in conversation with the discourse of division and taxonomy employed by the social sciences. It was certainly in this spirit that Keshub, for instance, criticized the scientific "grammar of modern theology" for "mak[ing] no mention of the copulative conjunction" in its description of the world's religions. "The disjunctive *Or* reigns supreme," he argued, "the copulative *And* finds no place" (*Keshub Chunder Sen's Lectures in India*, p. 486). By emphasizing the "disjunctive" rather than the "copulative,"

cosmopolitanism" led him to adopt an anti-imperialist politics that "eschew[ed] ties of race, nation, class, and religion" (*Affective Communities*, p. 17). The example of Andrews and other like-minded missionaries challenges and complicates Masuzawa's claim in *The Invention of World Religions* that Christian universalist rhetoric amounted to little more than an effort to naturalize European Christian norms under the guise of universalism.

²⁷ Keshub Chunder Sen, *Keshub Chunder Sen's Lectures in India*, vol. 1 (London, Paris, New York & Melbourne: Cassell and Co., 1901), p. 490.

the science of religion, Keshub charged, blinded itself to the universalism of his creed, the “New Dispensation,” which was recombinant, absorbent, and synthetic—entirely *anti*-categorical in its character.

Influenced by his early spiritual tutelage in Keshub's Brahmo Samaj, Vivekananda made these same themes prominent in his speeches before the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions. “To the Hindu,” he contended, “the whole world of religions is only a travelling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal.”²⁸ Religion here is not hindered by Frazer's “threads of custom,” nor does it designate an inherently static institution, which works to ossify social norms and relations. Religion instead is something that entails movement—more precisely, movement *beyond* one's culture: it is a “travelling” and “coming up,” a transcendence of one's original “conditions and circumstances.” Vivekananda's mobile rhetoric—which moves effortlessly between different cultural and religious registers—reflects this key message. For instance, in making arguments for Hinduism, Vivekananda used language resonant of liberal Protestant Christianity. Calling on “a hundred thousand men and women, fired with the zeal of holiness, fortified with eternal faith in the Lord,” he argued for a religiosity that would “go over the length and breadth of the land, preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising-up—the gospel of equality.”²⁹ The passage, as Amy Kittelstrom notes, reads as “quintessential social gospel—except that the letter was not written by a social gospeler. Nor a Protestant. Nor an American” (“The International Social Turn,” p. 243). One imagines that this was a deliberate choice: in “absorbing” (to use Keshub's metaphor) the idioms of other religions, Vivekananda illustrates that Hinduism defies Western “scientific” thought's presumption that it is a discrete, limited, and culturally stable institutional field. Hence his language

²⁸ Vivekananda, “Addresses at the Parliament of Religions,” in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 1, 2d ed. (Calcutta: Sri Gauranga Press, 1915), p. 15.

²⁹ Vivekananda, August 1893 letter, quoted in Amy Kittelstrom, “The International Social Turn: Unity and Brotherhood at the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, 19 (2009), 243.

performs his central argument: Hinduism alone possesses the capacity (rhetorically and actually) to absorb, encompass, and fulfill other religious traditions. If, like the Brahma Samaj, Vivekananda “experiment[s] with the Protestant ethic” to appeal to the Western audience of the World’s Parliament, his language also constitutes a *theologically* driven effort to “conver[t] that ethic away from Protestantism.”³⁰

Yogananda built on Vivekananda’s effort to proselytize Eastern spirituality in the West by establishing the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) in the United States in 1920. Credited as one of the first figures to introduce the philosophy and practice of “yoga” in the West, Yogananda looked to synthesize all religions into a single religion, realized, expressed, and practiced in the system of Kriya Yoga, a philosophy he outlined in *The Science of Religion* (1928). In an obvious allusion to theories of religious “progress” forwarded by the likes of Tylor and Spencer, Yogananda wrote: “It may be argued that particular stages of intellectual growth and special types of mentality belonging to certain nations, owing to different geographical locations and other extraneous circumstances, determine the origin of different religions, such as Hinduism, Mohammedanism and Buddhism, for the Asiatics, Christianity for the Westerners, and so forth.”³¹ However, he continued, such a view blinded itself to the “truth” that “*God is one . . . [and] Religion is one, necessary and universal*. Only the roads to it may differ in some respects at the beginning” (*The Science of Religion*, p. 7). Contending that one’s national culture and geographic location were but the “beginning” of cosmopolitan religious belief, Yogananda, like Keshub before him, drew on the framework of Protestant fulfillment theory to argue that Western Christianity (and to a lesser extent Buddhism) in fact found its fulfillment in the tenets and practices of Kriya Yoga.³²

³⁰ J. Barton Scott, *Spiritual Despots: Modern Hinduism and the Genealogies of Self-Rule* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 113.

³¹ Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Science of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1974), p. 5.

³² See Scott, *Spiritual Despots*, p. 108. Scott notes: “For decades, British missionaries had been spreading a hermeneutic of prefiguration in India, claiming that Indian religions were vague presentiments of a Christian truth yet to come. Keshub lays claim to this discourse, but only to put it to an unforeseen use: as a reading strategy that

Certainly these localized but prominent instances of religion's "new universalisms" were in conversation with the rising tide of modern nationalism. Yet these discourses of belief often positioned themselves as transcendent of this tide, with missionaries advocating the separation of Christianity from Western cultural norms to make Indian converts, and Hindu reformers capitalizing on the Indian and Western fascination with Indian culture to advance their religions globally. In the process, these discourses pit themselves against the social scientific conception of religion, which regarded religion "less [as] a marker of the subjectivity of belief systems than a category of identification" (and which itself was reinforcing nationalism by emphasizing the distinctness of different nations and cultures).³³ By examining these new universalisms of religious belief, we unearth a host of presumptions about the social scientific conception of religion at the time. The "scientific" view regarded religion as a matter of fixed identity, as inherently competitive with other religions, and therefore as being in need of management by the secular "scientific" state. As such, religion is divested of any agency. It cannot determine or influence identity, only mark some preexisting cultural identity. It is to critique these presumptions, I propose, that *Kim* thematizes the epistemic battle between religious belief and "scientific" knowledge, making use of a number of innovative formal strategies to do so.



Kim begins by juxtaposing these two approaches to religion in the figures of Teshoo Lama and the Curator of the Lahore Museum. As Jesse Oak Taylor observes, the initial commonalities of the old men—both scholars who desire the knowledge each believes is contained in the artifacts of the "Wonder House"—give way to a profound "incompatibility of the epistemological frameworks with

effaces the historical particularity of religion in the name of a spiritual universal, it could also be turned against Christianity" (*Spiritual Despots*, p. 108).

³³ Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1998), p. xii.

which they approach the various images and objects on display.”³⁴ The Curator is the modern scholar par excellence, the embodiment of an imperial institution devoted to “collecting, depositing, organising, and displaying material knowledge of local culture and economic products . . . from which colonial officers could learn about India’s history, society, and cultures.”³⁵ He values the museum’s religious artifacts not in their capacity as sacred objects, but instead for what they are presumed to index: the inner workings and logic of an individual nation and “the psychical predilections of its individual citizens and subjects” (Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, p. 18). The Curator’s epistemology of “religion” is rooted in *place*; for him, “the artifacts . . . produce ethnographic and geographical knowledge,” which subsequently can be used in the stratagems of the Great Game (Taylor, “Kipling’s Imperial Aestheticism,” p. 51). The lama, by contrast, approaches the same artifacts as a *believer*. Whatever knowledge these religious objects contain of local culture or national “predilections” is only of passing interest to him; he instead prizes their potential to help him transcend such “worldly” concerns and categories. Unlike the Curator’s knowledge, “the lama’s faith is away from the world, social and ethnic categories, knowledge, and [even] the trappings of religion.”³⁶

To see the novel as informed by these rival discourses is to understand *Kim* as trying to capture something more than simply “the clash between Western materialism and Buddhist non-attachment.”³⁷ Instead the novel seems deeply cognizant of how these two modern universalisms—a scientific one and a religious one—were locked in a battle for epistemic authority. This battle has significant stakes. In persuading individuals to prioritize religious belief over national affiliation, local culture,

³⁴ Jesse Oak Taylor, “Kipling’s Imperial Aestheticism: Epistemologies of Art and Empire in *Kim*,” *ELT*, 52 (2009), 51.

³⁵ Shaila Bhatti, *Translating Museums: A Counterhistory of South Asian Museology* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Left Coast Press, 2012), p. 22.

³⁶ Matthew Fellion, “Knowing Kim, Knowing in *Kim*,” *SEL*, 53 (2013), 906.

³⁷ John McBratney, *Imperial Subjects, Imperial Space: Rudyard Kipling’s Fiction of the Native-Born* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2002), p. 122.

or family ties, these religious universalisms threaten established ways of organizing social phenomena. The lama, that is, poses a danger to the Great Game (and imperial governance more broadly) insofar as he claims Kim's loyalties ought to be to the religious "Search" rather than to country, government, or community. Significantly, this is a danger that *Kim* never wholly nullifies or vanquishes. I question, then, critical assessments that have seen the social sciences as wielding extraordinary and "uncontested" power in Kipling's novel.³⁸

In the most prominent of these readings, Edward Said argues that the "alliance between Western science and political power" in *Kim* is so totalizing, so comprehensive, that even the lama's religious visions are subsumed into its framework (*Culture and Imperialism*, p. 153).³⁹ The novel's "anthropologists and ethnologists" are endowed with unrivaled epistemic and political power, and religion becomes just another mechanism of the ethnological project of the British Empire (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp. 152, 142–43).⁴⁰ Critics have since tried to nuance Said's arguments, pointing out that the novel does acknowledge the insufficiencies and limits of Western knowledge.⁴¹ Yet religion and religious belief hardly appear in these accounts; instead, they become incorporated into personal characteristics of individual practitioners. In these readings, the primary challenge to the cold instrumentalism of Western knowledge and power is, for instance, the "bonds of love" between Kim and the lama; the lama's simplicity and unpretending "discourse of ignorance," which lays bare the shaky foundations of Western forms of knowledge; the self-contradictory demands placed on Kim by the Great Game to be both "Sahib" and "Oriental"; the "father and son" relationship shared between the lama and his chela; or the sympathy

³⁸ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 134.

³⁹ In this reading, Said builds on Noel Annan's influential essay on Kipling's profound interest in the social sciences. See Noel Annan, "Kipling's Place in the History of Ideas," *Victorian Studies*, 3 (1960), 323–48.

⁴⁰ See McBratney, *Imperial Subjects*, p. 113; and Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 121–22.

⁴¹ In addition to Taylor, "Kipling's Imperial Aestheticism," see Fellion, "Knowing Kim, Knowing in *Kim*," 903–5; and Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999), p. 97.

Kipling produces between himself (as representative of a Western readership) and foreign “other” in the character of the lama.⁴² In this manner, the vast majority of criticism ingrains the notion that the primary binary of *Kim* is between universalizing, impersonal *institutions* (i.e., ethnography and the state apparatus of British imperialism) and affective, personal *subjects* (i.e., the “love” the lama feels for Kim).⁴³ Treating religious belief as interchangeable with private and subjective feeling, such readings unwittingly bring to bear on the novel one of the normative values of Western secularism: that religious faith—assumed to be comprised mainly of “personal commitment and devotion”—is necessarily divorced from the public sphere and the “domain of power.”⁴⁴ Yet a central theme of *Kim* is that the new universalisms of religious faith represent a significant “domain of power” in their own right, specifically in the challenge they pose to the aspirationally comprehensive approach to religion adopted by the social sciences. Recognizing *Kim* as thematically organized around this tension offers a fuller explanation for why religion saturates this novel, as well as why religious belief seems particularly poised against the ethnographic logic undergirding the Lahore Museum and the “Great Game.”

The novel most fully expresses its cognizance of the new religious universalisms in the character of the lama. In his compelling reading of *Kim*, Aravamudan notes that the lama cannot simply be considered a throwback to some premodern form of

⁴² See Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, p. 126; Fellion, “Knowing Kim, Knowing in *Kim*,” p. 905; Patrick Brantlinger, “*Kim*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling*, ed. Howard J. Booth (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), p. 133; and Mark Kinkead-Weekes, “Vision in Kipling’s Novels,” in *Kipling’s Mind and Art*, ed. Andrew Rutherford (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), pp. 233–34.

⁴³ Franklin’s reading of the novel in *The Lotus and the Lion* marks a significant exception in arguing for the centrality of Buddhism to understanding *Kim*. While I am indebted to Franklin, my own reading emphasizes not the lama’s Buddhism, but instead his resemblance to the “neoreligious figures” of the fin de siècle (fulfillment missionaries and Hindu reformers), who argued for religious universalisms that transcended cultural and national categories.

⁴⁴ Charles Taylor, “Western Secularity,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), p. 37; Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993), p. 29.

Buddhism; rather, in his “cosmopolitan” character, the lama “stands in for other neoreligious figures” of the time (*Guru English*, p. 81). He slides almost unconsciously between languages when asked to explain his religion, beginning the tale of Buddha in Urdu “but, borne by his own thoughts, slid[ing] into Tibetan and long-droned texts from a Chinese book of the Buddha’s life.”⁴⁵ This linguistic fluidity not only suggests the lama’s unconscious belonging to a multitude of cultural traditions, but also evokes how turn-of-the-century missionaries and Hindu reformers cast their own religion in a multitude of vernaculars to make converts. Moreover, the lama’s religious journey, the novel makes clear, is to *overcome* the narrow limits of his culture and country: the lama’s enlightenment depends on the crucial realizations that his love for the “Hills” of his home is but the yearning of his “stupid body,” and that being on the Way means turning away from “the edge of [his] own country” (*Kim*, pp. 309, 310). To draw on the words of Vivekananda, the lama’s religion is rendered here a literal and metaphysical “travelling” beyond his original “conditions and circumstances.” To be religious, as *Kim* depicts it, is to be deliberately uprooted.

Indeed, in the figure of the lama we perceive how imperatives of faith could take precedence over—and, in so doing, render irrelevant—categories of identity such as nationality, ethnicity, social class, and even religious affiliation, as the category was conceived by the social sciences. When Kim in disguise asks the lama to describe his missing chela, Kim automatically resorts to these categories. “His country—his race—his village? Mussalman—Sikh—Hindu—Jain—low caste or high?” he inquires (*Kim*, p. 68). The lama resists this form of thinking: “Why should I ask? There is neither high nor low in the Middle Way. If he is my *chela*—does—will—can anyone take him from me?” (p. 68). To the lama, the religious identity of chela renders other markers of identity irrelevant. No longer can “country,” “race,” or “caste” claim Kim as its own (“tak[ing] him” from the lama). The lama’s claim of religious

⁴⁵ Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, ed. Edward W. Said (New York: Penguin, 1987), p. 80. Further references are to this edition and appear in the text.

possession instead negates these other forms of belonging (“If he is my *chela* . . . can anyone take him from me?”).

Even Kim’s identity as a “sahib,” which initially seems to be the one category of identity that trumps Kim’s role as *chela* (“He must go back to his own people,” the lama muses, before sending Kim to St. Xavier’s for his education [*Kim*, p. 139]), is absorbed into the framework of the lama’s religious belief. “I sent thee to the Gates of Learning,” remarks the lama about Kim’s time at the Catholic St. Xavier’s; “Thou didst return, I saw even now, a follower of Sakyamuni, the Physician, whose altars are many in Bhotiyal. It is sufficient. We are together, and all things are as they were—Friend of all the World—Friend of the Stars—my *chela*!” (p. 241). As though riffing on the missionary belief that the “Eternal Sakyamuni and the Eternal Christ . . . are meant to represent the same person,” Kim’s time as a Christian “sahib” praying to “Bibi Miriam” only fulfills his religious destiny to become a better *chela* (p. 165). Indeed, the lama’s conviction that all of Kim’s experiences are ultimately in service of his “Search” evokes the rhetoric of fulfillment theory as deployed in the universalism of missionaries and Hindu reformers. Thus when Kim says to the lama, “I am a Sahib,” the lama corrects him: “To those who follow the Way there is neither black nor white. . . . We be all souls seeking escape” (p. 261). Kim himself internalizes this view when he is with the lama. He “forget[s] St Xavier’s; forget[s] his white blood; forget[s] even the Great Game” as he “touch[es] his master’s feet in the dust of the Jain temple” (pp. 237–38). While this is a scene of mutual love between Kim and the lama, no doubt, it also captures how religious belief could eclipse cultural and ethnic affiliations.

Reading the lama as representative of “neoreligious figures” instead of “Buddhism” also helps explain the curious syncretism of the lama’s religion. As critics have noticed, despite his insistence that *his* Buddhism follows the “Old Law,” free of the various devils and rituals that have “overlaid” the religion in recent years, the lama borrows symbols and concepts from Hinduism and Christianity (*Kim*, p. 57).⁴⁶ In fact, the

⁴⁶ See Benita Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries: Studies on India in the British Imagination, 1880–1930* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1972), p. 213; Corinne McCutchan,

central object of his search—the salvific river that washes away sin—is not Buddhist but deeply Christian (Franklin, *The Lotus and the Lion*, p. 145). Moreover, the “river” which “close[s] over” the lama in the moment of his Enlightenment appears to literalize those metaphors of “absorption” and rising waters used in missionaries’ language of “fulfillment” and Hindu reformers’ promise of a “universal faith” (i.e., the “gradual absorption of paganism into the Church”; “the knowledge of the Lord [that] shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea”; the New Dispensation, which “absorbs all that is true and good and beautiful in the objective world”). In the particular object of his search, his Christian-Hindu-Buddhist religious hybridity, and his insistence that religion trumps cultural and social indices of identity, the lama evokes those new religious discourses, which preached “spiritual assimilation” and predicted that petty cultural affiliations were destined to be “swept away by the flood of cosmopolitan truth.”

The players of the Great Game are also multilingual and peripatetic, of course. But where the universalism of the lama’s belief tends to obliterate ethnographic categories of identity, the “Great Game” participants rely on and reinforce those categories. Thus when Lurgan Sahib teaches Kim the skill of disguise, he “explain[s] by the half-hour . . . how such and such a caste talked, or walked, or coughed, or spat, or sneezed” (*Kim*, p. 207). Colonel Creighton’s work on the Indian Survey dovetails with his ethnological interest in local cultures (he “bombard[s]” the Royal Society “with monographs on strange Asiatic cults and unknown customs” [p. 223]), and Hurree Babu, an ethnologist like Creighton and self-described devotee of Herbert Spencer, capitalizes on ethnic stereotypes to ingratiate himself to foreign agents and carry out his spywork (p. 288). As adherents to “disciplines like colonial economics, anthropology, history, and sociology,” the spies of the Great Game, as Said observes, “never tampe[r] with the hierarchies, the priorities and privileges of caste, religion, ethnicity, and

“Who Is Kim?” in *Transforming Genres: New Approaches to British Fiction of the 1890s*, ed. Nikki Lee Manos and Meri-Jane Rochelson (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), p. 140; and Franklin, *The Lotus and the Lion*, p. 145.

race” created by those categories (*Culture and Imperialism*, pp. 151, 155). For them religion is an index of cultural identity, akin to categories such as ethnicity and race.

Nowhere is this approach to religion better articulated than in the moment when Mahbub Ali discusses his philosophy of religious tolerance. He tells Kim:

This matter of creeds is like horseflesh. The wise man knows horses are good—that there is profit to be made from all; and for myself . . . I could believe the same of all the Faiths. Now manifestly a Kathiawar mare taken from the sands of her birth-place and removed to the west of Bengal founders—nor is even a Balkh stallion (and there are no better horses than those of Balkh, were they not so heavy in the shoulder) of any account in the great Northern deserts beside the snow-camels I have seen. Therefore I say in my heart the Faiths are like the horses. Each has merit in its own country. (*Kim*, pp. 191–92)

Some critics have seen this passage as describing a sort of “universal religion.” James Thrall in particular advances this reading, claiming that Mahbub’s sentiments, which refuse “to ascribe universal supremacy to any specific system of belief,” constitute a religion based on “a loosely bounded brotherhood of moral responsibility.”⁴⁷ Yet Thrall’s interpretation is not fully satisfying. He ignores the fact that Kim, acting as a proxy for Teshoo Lama, immediately undercuts Mahbub’s philosophy: “But my lama said altogether a different thing” (*Kim*, p. 192). Moreover, Thrall overlooks the fact that Mahbub’s primary allegiance is to the ethnographic power plays of the imperial Great Game, not to the Muslim faith he professes—an allegiance made clear when, to avoid being detected as a spy, Mahbub “drink[s] perfumed brandy against the Law of the Prophet” and “pursue[s] the Flower of Delight with the feet of intoxication” (p. 71).

But in arguing that each religion has particular utility in its country of origin, Mahbub’s philosophy most closely resembles “religion” as it was understood by social scientists such as Tylor, Spencer, and Pitt-Rivers, who saw religious affiliation

⁴⁷ James H. Thrall, “Immersing the *Chela*: Religion and Empire in Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*,” *Religion & Literature*, 36, no. 3 (2004), 49, 48.

as determined by (and therefore as an expression of) the peculiar geographic and cultural needs of where one was born. Just as a "Kathiawar mare" would fail to thrive in "the west of Bengal," so, too, would a religion from one part of the world "founder" were it uprooted from its geographic home. Moreover, the comparison of "creeds" to "horseflesh" suggests that religious affiliation is something one is born into, somehow encoded into one's "flesh." For Mahbub, it is a *static* category of identity. A Kathiawar mare, after all, could never be anything but "Kathiawarian."

Significantly, this conception of religion is also held by a character in the novel that otherwise shares nothing in common with Mahbub. The Anglican Mr. Bennett also believes that nationality and race must determine religious belonging, exhibiting a particularism at odds with the universalism of the lama. As though embodying that strain of thought that is the subject of Yogananda's critique—that is, the strain that regards "Hinduism, Mohammedanism and Buddhism for the Asiatics, Christianity for the Westerners, and so forth"—Bennett states, "We cannot allow an English boy—" (*Kim*, p. 136). Almost certainly he intends to say, "We cannot allow an English boy to become a Buddhist" or "follow a *faqir*," but he never finishes the thought. Instead, he seems to realize mid-sentence that there is something not quite right in forbidding Kim from following the lama (and the lama's religion) on the grounds of Kim's "Englishness"—a sign, perhaps, that Bennett's particular brand of particularism is no longer acceptable or in vogue. The novel intimates in other ways, too, that the time for Bennett's narrow-minded religiosity has passed. Kim imbibes nothing of "Church of England" Christianity, suggesting Bennett's failure as a proselytizer in contrast to the lama's relative success. Moreover, where the lama achieves a degree of immortality in finally being freed from the Wheel, the novel symbolically punishes Bennett (perhaps, even, sending him to his death) in having him sent "to the Front" (*Kim*, p. 153). Yet we should not mistake *Kim's* criticism of Bennett as criticism of Christianity. As Franklin notes, it is significant that "Kipling chose . . . to Christianize the Lama" (*The Lotus and the Lion*, p. 145). That the Christian doctrine of redemption is made central to the

lama's religiosity, as I discuss above, suggests the universality of Christian belief when freed from the trappings of dogmatism and cultural chauvinism.

In this manner, Mahbub's and Bennett's understandings of religion stand as foils to the lama's faith. Indeed, it is impossible to imagine the lama—dedicated as he is to what he firmly believes are the universal truths offered by the “Way”—asserting that his religion has merit *only* in its own country or to his own countrymen. His religion is not bound by culture or geography, for if his religion is true, it must also be cosmopolitan. No wonder, then, that he would say “altogether a different thing.”

The battleground on which these two modern universalisms compete is Kim himself. To borrow John McBratney's formulation, if Kim's time at St. Xavier's and his induction into the Great Game work to “restrict his liminal identity and aggregate him more strongly to white society,” then his exposure to the lama works to “stall” the formation of that identity (*Imperial Subjects*, pp. 116, 118). As a result of these split loyalties, Kim experiences an identity crisis that curiously takes the form of a chant: “Who is Kim—Kim—Kim?” (*Kim*, p. 233). In their preface to the Longman Edition of *Kim*, Paula Krebs and Tricia Lootens argue that this is a question Kim “never does answer.”⁴⁸ In a sense, Krebs and Lootens are right, for never does Kim proclaim definitive fealty either to the Game or the Search. Yet the particular *form* of Kim's identity crisis as a religious chant suggests that Kim perhaps is more inclined to follow the religious path than critics such as McBratney give him credit. Hindu reformers including Keshub, Vivekananda, and Yogananda made meditative chanting central to the practice of their religion. If “religion is really nothing but the merging of our individuality in universality,” to use Yogananda's formulation, then meditation was the process by which one arrives at “knowledge of [one's] true being [which] brings [one] eternal freedom” (*The Science of Religion*, pp. 82, 83).

“What is Kim?” “Who is Kim?” These are Kim's questions with his “hands folded in lap, and pupils contracted to pin-points”

⁴⁸ Paula M. Krebs and Tricia Lootens, “Introduction,” in Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, ed. Krebs and Lootens (Boston: Longman, 2011), p. xi.

(*Kim*, pp. 331, 233). He throws himself into “a mazement” repeating these questions, and the narrator remarks “many Asia-tics . . . by repeating their own names over and over again to themselves, [let] the mind go free upon speculation as to what is called personal identity” (p. 233). As Deanna Kreisel notes, Kim’s identity crisis bears resemblance to meditation.⁴⁹ Indeed, a Hindu “*bairagi* [holy man]” even recognizes his chanting as “one of the Gates to the Way” (*Kim*, p. 233). There can be little doubt that Kipling was familiar with meditation. He displays this familiarity in his rather precise description of Kim’s chanting, but one imagines he was also aware of Keshub’s popular lectures in England, which had extolled the practice of meditation, as well as Vivekananda’s copious writings on the subject. In an 1870 lecture in Islington delivered before a packed congregation, Keshub, for instance, described the “ancient” Hindus, who would “soa[r] into the ethereal regions of meditation, [where] they often lost their own personality in the immensity of God’s personality.”⁵⁰ Moreover, the specifics of Kim’s meditative practice mark him as a religious neophyte, someone perhaps just starting on the path to “merging [his] individuality in universality.” In his guide to Raja Yoga, Vivekananda identified “meditations with question” as “*Savitarka*,” distinct from the “higher and higher *Dhyanas*”; “In these that are called ‘with question,’” writes Vivekananda, “we keep the duality of subject and object.”⁵¹

Yet the particular questions that Kim asks hints at the eventual dissolution of the “subject” in the meditative practice, thus also hinting that Kim might reach “higher” levels. In the questions “Who is Kim” and “What is Kim,” we recognize that Kim struggles with the issue of identity on two levels. First, he grapples with these questions on the level of the individual, caught between choosing “white or brown, the Survey or the Search” (McBratney, *Imperial Subjects*, p. 126). Second—as though cognizant of the new religious movements of the fin

⁴⁹ Deanna K. Kreisel, “The Psychology of Victorian Buddhism and Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 73 (2018), 229.

⁵⁰ Keshub Chunder Sen, *The Brahma Somaj: Keshub Chunder Sen in England*, 3d ed. (Calcutta: Brahma Tract Society, 1897), p. 202.

⁵¹ Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga*, in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 1, p. 249.

de siècle—he looks to answer these questions *theologically*. By engaging in meditation on his own identity, the very question of whether he is “native” or “sahib” is rendered moot: the point of the practice, after all, is to lose one’s “personality in the immensity of God’s,” to experience the dissolution of the subject altogether.

This dissolution finds formal expression in the manner that the novel plays with the multiple meanings of Kim’s name. Of course, Kim is short for the Irish name, “Kimball O’Hara.” But, as Kreisel demonstrates, the novel mobilizes a second meaning of “Kim” in these moments of meditation. Noting that “*kim*” in Sanskrit functions as “a general interrogative particle that means ‘what? how? whence? wherefore? why?’” and as an “express[ion] of ‘inferiority, deficiency, &c.,’” Kreisel argues: “It is thus implied that Kim is ‘belittled,’ his unitary identity called into question through the sheer linguistic operations of the question itself” (“The Psychology of Victorian Buddhism,” pp. 236, 237). Understanding Kim’s self-questioning as “esoteric practice,” Kreisel suggests, opens a new understanding of Kim’s psychological journey: the dissolution of Kim’s identity is no expression of helplessness in the face of insuperable, destiny-controlling forces; rather, it is a deliberate “act of intense *will*,” in Kreisel’s phrase (“The Psychology of Victorian Buddhism,” p. 256). This reading is key to my own: that Kim’s self-questioning deliberately takes this form suggests the degree to which Kim in fact embraces the spiritual practices of the lama. Moreover, the syntactic loss of the “subject” in the translingual play on the word “*kim*” (as the subject of the sentence is transmuted into an interrogative) evokes those neoreligious figures who preached meditation as the vehicle by which the individual subject could be “lost” in “universality.”

Kim’s potential rejection of his identity as “sahib,” British spy, and colonial agent in favor of the lama’s “Way” runs counter to what the Great Game wants of him. As Kim comes more and more under the sway of the lama (so much so that Kim has an emotional and physical breakdown, prompting the lama to recognize that he has “stolen strength” from Kim [*Kim*, p. 321]), Mahbub feels more urgently the need to intervene. In the final pages of the novel, Mahbub admits that to break Kim

free from the lama's influence, he was prepared "to cut, rob, kill, and carry off what he desired" (p. 335)—a rather dire measure to deal with a religious "madman," who before was interesting only insofar as he provided to Hurree Babu ethnological "information on lamaism, and devil-dances, and spells and charms" (pp. 334, 222). That Mahbub abandons his plan for violence is mostly a result of learning that the lama is indifferent as to whether or not Kim participates in the Great Game after completing the "Search." But we should also heed what Mahbub ends up admitting. "Some men are strong in knowledge, Red Hat," says Mahbub in his last words to the lama. "Thy strength is stronger still" (p. 335). Though Kim might ultimately work for the Great Game, the novel here insists that religious belief has its own "strength" that exceeds that of the social scientific "knowledge" underlying the Great Game. That the lama—not Kim or the Great Game participants—gets the last word in the novel (in the command, "Come!" [p. 338]) reinforces the seriousness with which we should take Mahbub's admission. The strength of the lama's universalizing religion, an epistemology that regards the world as "one in time, one in place" (p. 338), proves itself more than able to compete with the "social and ethnic categories" of social scientific knowledge.



This leads me to a final reflection on the ways that the form of *Kim* seems determined by—and determined to comment on—the discourses of new religious universalism in its time. Critics have rarely made note of the epigraphs of *Kim*, especially those for the novel's last two chapters. Yet they deserve our attention. Not only do they suggest the potency of the new religious universalisms, but they also make *Kim* itself *formally* "universalizing" in positioning each chapter to be read in conversation with different geographies and cultural subjectivities.

Earlier epigraphs in the novel reflect the "Great Game" plotline: for example, the epigraph of chapter 10, in an obvious allusion to Kim being freed from his schooling to spy for the

British government, describes a trained hawk being loosed for the hunt (*Kim*, p. 216). By contrast, the novel's final two epigraphs allude to the power of religious belief and its claims to universalism, reinforcing Mahbub's remarkable admission that religious universalism could prove "stronger" than "knowledge." The epigraph to chapter 14 is in the voice of Kabir, a fifteenth-century religious reformer and poet whom nineteenth-century scholars considered as having pioneered a form of Islamic-Hindu syncretism. In this snippet of poetry, "Kabir" identifies the "heathen" as his "brother," for, in his spiritual anguish, the heathen's prayer is the same as "all the world's" (p. 300). Universal fraternity in this manner is born of the common experience of spiritual longing. Even more significant is the fact that Kabir is named as the author of these sentiments. Among the subset of Christian missionaries who wished for Christianity to break from Western culture, Kabir was admired for his undogmatic religious morality (as mentioned above, Rev. Andrews named him as one of the figures who evinced the "anima Christiana" in his works). Linking the teachings of Kabir with those of the Brahmo Samaj, some British Christians saw the poet as representative of longstanding Hindu efforts to create a multicultural "pure Theism."⁵²

The final epigraph in *Kim* goes on to depict religious power as martial and even menacing. Taken from the last stanza of Kipling's poem "The Fairies' Siege" (1901), it is told from the point of view of a warrior trying to hold a besieged castle. The speaker has recognized that despite repelling earlier attacks from mortal foes, he eventually will be defeated by the "Powers of Air" led by "the Lord of us all—/ The Dreamer whose dream came true!" (*Kim*, p. 316). The "Dreamer" of the epigraph refers to the lama, whose pilgrimage to find a sacred river was prompted originally by a "dream," which, as he declares from the beginning, shows him a "true thing" (p. 57). Reading the conclusion of the novel through the lens of this epigraph, then, hardly leads one to the conclusion that the lama has been incorporated into the mechanisms

⁵² Sophia Dobson Collet, "Indian Theism, and Its Relation to Christianity," *Contemporary Review*, 13 (1870), 243.

of the "Great Game," as Said claims, or, as Sara Suleri argues, of "the futility of the lama's intervention" in "saving" Kim from the impassive utilitarianism of the British government (*The Rhetoric of English India*, p. 127). At odds with the lama's benign and absent-minded demeanor, the "Dreamer" turns out to be a conquering "Lord" of all, and his dream, the reader is informed (or warned), is indeed "true." Thus the epigraph is positioned to help resolve the question "whether the lama is ultimately deluded or genuinely enlightened" in favor of enlightenment (Aravamudan, *Guru English*, p. 87). Even more significant, it suggests that there are no *earthly* barriers that can check his potent spiritual power: "Sentry, pass him through" and "Drawbridge let fall," cries the speaker (*Kim*, p. 316). Thus both of these final two epigraphs depict seemingly insurmountable boundaries—the gulfs between the different religions, or the defenses that protect the borders of some dominion—only to have these boundaries dissolved or overcome by virtue of religious faith.

But why explore these themes by epigraph? If, as Gérard Genette notes, paratexts represent a "privileged site . . . of an action on the public in the service . . . [of] a more pertinent reading," then what more "pertinent reading" could this interplay between epigraph and chapter encourage in the case of *Kim*?⁵³ While epigraphs are notoriously resistant to interpretation (Genette writes that the epigraph is "souvent énigmatique"),⁵⁴ two characteristics of *Kim*'s epigraphs provide a hint of why they open each chapter. First, the epigraphs are international in scope: they cast the reader's gaze away from the scene of action in India to Kamakura in Japan; to Diego Valdez's post-Spanish Armada explorations to Africa, "ten thousand leagues to southward"; and to Ireland and North America, in the form of an American Indian myth relayed by the Irish playwright Dion Boucicault. Where the realism of the main text would have faced difficulty in representing the "world" at large (restricted by the impossibility of having character inhabit more

⁵³ Gérard Genette, "Introduction to the Paratext," trans. Marie Maclean, *New Literary History*, 22 (1991), 261–62.

⁵⁴ Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987), p. 139.

than one geographic space at a time), the epigraphs face no such difficulty. Perhaps, then, the epigraphs accomplish what the text of the novel cannot, reminding the reader that although its plot unfolds in India, *Kim* nevertheless should be read as global in its scope. In this sense they might be akin to the "Powers of Air" mentioned in the final epigraph: they "pass through" or transcend the geographical limitations imposed by the material realism of the main text.

The second key feature of the epigraphs is that they are all authored by Kipling, who uses them as an opportunity to ventriloquize a diverse array of people, from Kabir to Boucicault, from an unnamed Muslim to the Prodigal Son of the Bible. If most epigraphs in novels are dialogic, forcing the reader to interpret the text through the views of other texts and authors, the epigraphs in *Kim* represent a curious form of monologism. Specifically, they suggest that the more "pertinent reading" of *Kim*'s third-person narrator is *not* to consider him a coherent or unified subject reducible to a single cultural identity. Instead (to borrow the clichéd phrase from Walt Whitman), he should be seen as containing multitudes. In this respect, the narrator and Kim share a key similarity. Donning an array of cultural identities and vernaculars, both refuse to adhere to a single, stable, and categorizable identity over the course of the novel. Hence *Kim*'s epigraphs exist, perhaps, to enact formally the novel's key themes. They provoke the reader to read *Kim* as being not just about India, but also about the universal resonances and repercussions of religious movements in India. Moreover, they undermine the notion of a fixed, knowable subjectivity rooted in any one single cultural or national affiliation.

For all that Kipling disliked Hinduism and Christian missionaries (Brantlinger, "*Kim*," p. 134), *Kim* nevertheless is alive to the new universalisms born from Hindu reform and Christian fulfillment theory. Moreover, the novel displays cognizance of the attractiveness of these new religious universalisms at a time when social scientists (such as Creighton) took for granted the "uncontestable" and universal applicability of the "scientific" view. In the charismatic appeal of the lama's all-encompassing universalism and Kim's own, ultimately unconcluded, journey

toward adopting a religious identity not subordinate to racial, ethnic, or social markers, *Kim* reflects the ways that these discourses of religious belief defied the narrow categories to which the emerging social sciences had relegated religion. And, more profoundly, *Kim* perhaps anticipates how today religion has proven itself, to use the sociologist Craig Calhoun's articulation of the problem, to be "not just one among the various sources of diversity to be recognized and accommodated," but in fact one of the "direct competitors to secular cosmopolitanism" today.⁵⁵

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ABSTRACT

Winter Jade Werner, "Altogether a Different Thing': The Emerging Social Sciences and the New Universalisms of Religious Belief in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*" (pp. 293–325)

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the needs of some religious practitioners began to conflict with secular scholars in the developing social science disciplines. According to the secular scholars of these disciplines, religion was subordinate to culture; it functioned to delimit one social group from another. A number of religious practitioners, including Protestant missionaries and Hindu reformers, challenged this scientific delineation of religion as particular and "cultural," asserting instead what I call "new universalisms" of religious belief. I contextualize Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) within this historical moment. *Kim*, I argue, thematizes and works through these competing discourses. In particular, the novel suggests the enormous potency of the new discourses of religious belief in advancing forms of universalism that challenged and looked to transcend categories of identity as imposed by social scientific thinking. I conclude with an examination of *Kim's* epigraphs, showing that their relationship to the main narrative formally enacts the agonistic relationship between the two modern universalisms of religious belief and social scientific thinking.

Keywords: Rudyard Kipling; *Kim*; Religion; Ethnography; Universalism

⁵⁵ Craig Calhoun, "Cosmopolitanism and the ideal of postsecular public reason," *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere*, 11 February 2008, available online at <<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2008/02/11/cosmopolitanism-and-the-ideal-of-postsecular-public-reason>>; accessed 13 April 2017.