

A Visitation of Kipling's Daemon?

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Like Longfellow's infant daughter, Kipling, when he is good, is very, very good, but when he is bad, he is *horrid*: the loud jingoist of Max Beerbohm's parodies and caricatures. This disparity between Kipling the hooligan and Kipling the spellbinder is felt by every reader of his short stories—one critic even titles his study *The Good Kipling*¹ and nowhere is it more marked than in the collection he assembled in 1904 under the title of *Traffics and Discoveries*. In the first half-dozen stories of this volume it is difficult to recognise the author of *Kim*, published only three years earlier. Some have the Boer War as their setting, which give the author the chance to trundle out a whole barrow-load of national, racial, and political prejudices. Interspersed with these are the Heavenly Larks, embarrassing practical jokes perpetrated or related by Petty Officer Pyecroft, an Edwardian card if ever there was one. And there is worse to come. The centrepiece of the volume, and according to the writer the chief reason for its publication, is the reprint of a long Utopian vision of an England made unified and formidable by peacetime conscription.

Few readers today, I imagine, get to the end of "The Army of a Dream." Yet this inert lump is flanked by three of the finest tales that Kipling ever wrote. "Wireless," "They," and "Mrs Bathurst," all deal with matters of a tragic magnitude: a poet's hopes frustrated by impending death; the craving for the presence of a child who has died; two lovers destroyed by a casual deception on the part of one of them. Each tale shows great originality in the way it links its perennially tragic theme to some aspect of the young century's nascent technology—radio telegraphy, the automobile, the cinema. Above all, all three are told with that extraordinary,

Ancient-Mariner-like compellingness which places Kipling, whatever faults academic critics may find with his work, among the great exponents of the short story for the common reader.

Kipling had his own explanation for the unevenness of a writer's output, whether his own or that of others. "You did not write *She*, you know; something wrote it through you!"² he told Rider Haggard. According to his unfinished autobiography, that something, which also created his own most successful work, was nothing less than daemonic possession: "When your Daemon is in charge, do not try to think consciously. Drift, wait, and obey."³ Such readiness to surrender to an irrational force is disconcerting, coming as it does from the writer most of us associate with the necessity of keeping one's head. But Kipling also insisted that, once the inspiration had passed, hard thinking had to take over in the toil of repeated revisions, cutting out every word, sentence and even paragraph which might be held to be superfluous, until the story was pared down to its very essence. For those of us who are interested in the procreation of the literary work, this is an explanation of a story's making that deserves fuller investigation. As luck has it, we can discover enough about the origins of one of the three outstanding stories in *Traffics and Discoveries*, "Mrs Bathurst,"⁴ to make it a test case for Kipling's theory that his successful work came to him entire and, as it were, from "out there" so that the artist's labour was primarily a matter of excision.

The setting of "Mrs Bathurst" is a chance gathering of four men on the Cape Peninsula in South Africa, where Kipling and his family were accustomed to spend the first four months of each year. Stranded near the naval base at Simonstown on a fiercely hot day, the narrator runs into an old acquaintance, a railway inspector called Hooper, who offers him refuge from the heat in a brake van pulled into a siding. Here they are joined by two men who have strolled along the beach from the base. The reader's heart momentarily sinks when one of these turns out to be Pyecroft. But on this occasion Kipling's sense of artistic decorum has stripped Pyecroft of his usual tiresome jocularity, so that the story he finally tells, after an exchange of reminiscences between himself and his companion, a gigantic Marine called Pritchard, is a sobering tale, soberly told.

It concerns a shipmate of Pyecroft's, Vickery by name, who has recently deserted or, at any rate, disappeared, thus sacrificing the pension for which he has almost qualified. There is only one conceivable explanation. "Who was she?" asks the narrator. The reply, "Mrs Bathurst," stuns Sergeant Pritchard because, as further exchanges between the two seafarers make clear, this is not the usual kind of desertion in which the deserter jumps ship in pursuit of an unfaithful woman. Mrs Bathurst is a widow of (both men imply) steadfast virtue who runs a small hotel on the other side of the world, in Auckland, New Zealand. They remember her for her generous and trusting nature, and her long memory, but also for what—using a term since vulgarised beyond recall—Pyecroft calls *It*, as he launches into his explanation of why he knows her to be the cause of Vickery's disappearance.

The ship in which Pyecroft and Vickery serve has been in dock since before Christmas. The best that Cape Town has been able to offer by way of entertainment over the holiday is a circus at which one turn is the great fairground novelty of the time, a motion picture made up from an assemblage of scenes of everyday life. Having gone ashore to see the first performance, Vickery virtually compels Pyecroft to accompany him to the same show on each of the following five nights, but only to watch one brief episode of the film, the arrival of a train at Paddington station in London. A woman is seen getting out of the train and advancing towards the ticket barrier, and before she melts out of the picture the sailors in the audience recognise Mrs Bathurst. This is the point at which, each night, Vickery stumbles out of the circus tent and takes Pyecroft on a prolonged pub crawl—a wet walk Pyecroft calls it, since after circling the city at speed they end up awash inside and freely perspiring outside from the Cape's hot south-easterly wind. Vickery offers no explanation. Indeed, all Pyecroft hears from him, other than "Let's have another," is the click of the other's ill-fitting dental plate. His one attempt at a question—"Don't it seem to you she's lookin' for someone?" is met by the reply "She's lookin' for me" and the threat of murder if any more questions are asked. Pyecroft realises that Vickery is near to breaking point, and he wonders what will happen when the circus leaves town. What does happen is that Vickery has a long

interview with his captain, and shortly afterwards is sent upcountry alone to collect some ammunition left over from the war. The ammunition comes back to the base, but Vickery himself fails to return.

As the four men sit drumming on their empty beer bottles and pondering this story, Inspector Hooper reverts to an incident he had been on the point of telling the narrator about before the two seafarers arrived. He has himself been upcountry recently, as far north as Rhodesia. There, on a siding in a teak forest, he came across the bodies of two tramps, who had been struck by lightning. Both corpses were reduced to charcoal, but clues to the identity of one man remained in the form of tattoo marks—and a distinctive dental plate. The marks are only too familiar to Pycroft; and the effect this disclosure has upon him and his companion is suggested by the fact that Hooper does *not* produce the denture from his waistcoat pocket, as we have been expecting him to do all along. The thoughts of the Marine, a simple and sentimental man, are with Mrs Bathurst. But Pycroft has the final word: "Well, I don't know how you feel about it, but 'avin' seen 'is face for five consecutive nights on end, I'm inclined to finish what's left of the beer an' thank Gawd he's dead!"

No one could call "Mrs Bathurst" a transparent story. As with any tale presented through a less than omniscient narrator, the reader, in order to complete his understanding of the story, has to make his own deductions about what "really" happened. Three questions in particular present themselves. What has Vickery done? What has happened to Mrs Bathurst herself? And who is the second tramp? Like other readers, on a first encounter with the tale I found myself supplying answers to these questions in a way that filled in the gaps more or less to my satisfaction. So it came as a surprise to discover, years later, how many and how varied have been the inferences made during the course of nearly a century by a host of commentators, some of them very distinguished. But perhaps an advertisement that appeared in *The Kipling Journal* for December 1992 gives a more piquant taste than any critical studies of the atmosphere of controversy that continues to surround the story:

"MRS BATHURST? NO PROBLEM" by Shamus O. D. Wade explains Kipling's "difficult" story very simply in 1,390 words. "Mrs Bathurst? No problem" is sold

in aid of the Commonwealth Forces History Trust (Registered Charity No 1011521). Just send £5 (or US. \$12) to the Commonwealth Forces History Trust, 37 Davis Road, Acton, London W3 7SE. (No. 264, 45)

One can glimpse in this all sorts of fund-raising possibilities. "The Turn of the Screw Unloosed," perhaps, to be sold in aid of the Benevolent Fund for Distressed Governesses . . . But whatever the loss to an appropriate (and no doubt deserving) charity, I am going to proffer, absolutely gratis and in far fewer words than Mr Wade, answers to the three questions just posed, in order to complete the summary I have here attempted.

"What had Vickery done?" an early reader asked Kipling outright. He replied very properly that only Vickery knew that. He did however add "He may have represented himself as a single man and so have won her widow's heart."⁵ Although the original of this letter has been lost, the story's manuscript, of which Dr Richard Virr, Curator of Manuscripts at McGill University, has generously furnished me with a photocopy,⁶ bears out its authenticity, for in a cancelled passage Pyecroft ventures upon the same explanation: "My notion is that he lied to her about being married." By deleting this, Kipling left room for other possibilities and so heightened the element of indeterminacy that, David Lodge has suggested, is a means of deepening a reader's involvement.⁷ It could be that Vickery has not merely told Mrs Bathurst a lie, but actually contracted a bigamous marriage with her. In the end, though, one albatross is very like another albatross: the consequent obsessive remorse is what matters for the tale. As for the mystery of Mrs Bathurst's arrival at Paddington station, Kipling, who loved rebuses and riddles, drops a cryptic clue in the two opening sentences of the story: "The day that I chose to visit H.M.S. *Peridot* in Simon's Bay was the day that the Admiral had chosen to send her up the coast. She was just steaming out to sea as my train came in." The day that Mrs Bathurst, in far-away New Zealand, made her decision to follow her lover to London could have been the day that the Admiralty made its decision to send his ship to sea, so that when her train arrived at Paddington, the *Hierophant* ("Guardian of Mysteries") was patrolling the Atlantic. As for her subsequent fate, she may be dead at the time of Vickery's disappearance; she may be adrift on the streets of London; she may even, *pace* Pritchard,

be safely back in New Zealand. The reader is encouraged to make his own interpretative effort, but once again what matters for the story is the sheer fortuitousness that has caused Vickery to lose her. Finally, there is the puzzle of the second tramp. My conviction is that he is just that: another drop-out, like Vickery, from ordered human life, but one who has no marks of identification because his significance lies in his total anonymity.

With the lesser aim of testing these inferences, as well as the larger aim of testing Kipling's theory that his best work resulted from a kind of daemonic possession, I turn now to what is known about the genesis of "Mrs Bathurst". Here we find that, despite his reputation for reticence, Kipling has left us a surprising number of clues, including two accounts of how the story came to him. The better known but later of the two is in *Something of Myself*:

All that I carried away from the magic town of Auckland was the face and voice of a woman who sold me beer at a little hotel there. They stayed at the back of my head till ten years later when, in a local train of the Cape Town suburbs, I heard a petty officer from Simon's Town tell a companion about a woman in New Zealand who 'never scrupled to help a lame duck or put her foot on a scorpion.' Then—precisely as the removal of the key log in a timber jam starts the whole pile—these words gave me the key to the face and voice at Auckland, and a tale called 'Mrs Bathurst' slid into my mind, smoothly and orderly as floating timber on a bank-high river. (123)

At first reading, this strikes one as an almost perfect account of the procreative act: the chance conjunction of two tiny, cell-like entities that between them contain the potential to form a new, individual work of art. Have we, though, in fact anything more here than a solitary instance of what Coleridge called the hooks and eyes of the imagination? True, the conjunction makes a link between Auckland and Cape Town, and it helps to establish the seamen's view of Mrs Bathurst as at once alluring ("magic" is a transferable epithet) and morally sound. But the idea that such a mental click—to appropriate Vickery's nickname—could somehow conjure into existence a completely shaped story fits rather too neatly with the daemonic theory of the creative process which Kipling is to offer us in the final chapter of his autobiography. All the same, the explanation is worth a closer

look, because its imagery offers a hint that the origins of the story lie further back, and are more complex, than Kipling gives us to understand.

Log-jams belong neither to South Africa nor to New Zealand, but to Canada; and a Canadian episode figures largely in the early pages of "Mrs Bathurst"—too largely for some critics of the tale. Much of the desultory talk in the brake van is about something that happened at Vancouver back in the eighteen-eighties. Pyecroft and Pritchard had then been among eight members of a ship's company who were tricked by a boy sailor into believing that his uncle owned an island off the coast and was bound by law to give a plot of land to anyone who asked for it. He led them round an uninhabited island looking for his uncle's non-existent farm until they had outstayed their leave. Not only did the eight find themselves court-martialled for desertion but, crowning grievance, the Boy Niven persuaded the court that they had led *him* astray.⁸

This yarn (to use a favourite word of the time) is, of course, highly relevant to the story of Vickery; so much so that it is surprising to find that two other highly skilled storytellers, P. G. Wodehouse and Angus Wilson, both dismiss it as padding.⁹ Like the men who are court-martialled, Vickery is absent when he is sought for. But he is no deserter from his passion, and it is part of the story's fortuitousness that, by the time of the film show, his wife's death has made it possible for him to remarry. Moreover, the gullibility of the sailors at Vancouver, together with the shift of blame in the judgment, remind us that it takes two to make a deception. Kipling drives home the relevance of this to Vickery and Mrs Bathurst when, in the course of his final revision, he writes in a rejoinder by Pyecroft to Pritchard's remark that they were all very young at the time: "But lovin' an' trustful to a degree." This makes an important connection. It is, perhaps, a little hastily worded; but then how could Kipling foresee the effect that the use of the word 'loving' in such a context would have on critics a century hence, preoccupied as many of them have been with his bisexuality? He could hardly have dreamt that, for one of them, the Boy Niven would actually figure in the body of the story as the second tramp—incited by the ghost of Mrs Bathurst to lure Vickery into behaviour that would draw down the vengeance visited upon Sodom and Gomorrah.¹⁰

The Boy Niven does in fact have a biographical relevance, but it is of a rather different kind. On his roundabout journey from India to England in 1889, Kipling had himself been persuaded by a plausible rogue, whom he called the English Boy, to buy a plot of land in Vancouver. A dispatch from the west coast of America, one of a series in letter form to the paper he had worked on in India, makes clear that even at the time he suspected that he was being duped. More interesting still, this particular dispatch starts with the words "This day I know how a deserter feels."¹¹ Although this statement has nothing to do with the land deal (it has been prompted by bad news from Lahore which makes the writer feel he should be back there with his own people), it suggests that a conjunction of the ideas of deception and apparent desertion was already in Kipling's mind early on in the most turbulent period of his life: a time of great creativity, but also a time of much loneliness, of at least one nervous breakdown, of long sea voyages out of touch with all those he knew; above all, a time of turmoil in personal relationships, including both an enduring infatuation and a broken troth. In later years, he and his family eliminated most traces of this period, and I am not going to try to force open closed doors. But I do want to suggest that a story as powerful as "Mrs Bathurst" is likely to have had its origin in multifarious images linked to personal experiences reaching back a long way into the writer's life; and that the account of its genesis that he offered thirty years later was perhaps a little disingenuous.

Fortunately, there exists a much earlier account of how the story came into existence. Writing to a novelist friend on the very day in 1904 that it was completed, Kipling calls it a tragedy, and continues

It's told by Pyecroft in a guard's brake van on the beach near Simon's Town. I'm rather pleased with it. It came away in a rush—a thing that had been lying at the back of my head [for] three years. "Mrs Bathurst" is its simple and engaging name.¹²

Putting this together with the later account, we get the following scenario. Around 1901, Kipling becomes aware that some half-realised memories of 1891 and earlier are beginning to coalesce; in Dryden's words, a confused mass of thoughts are tumbling over one another in the dark.¹³ As yet there is no story as such, because another three years are required for the tale

to take substance and shape. To Kipling's conscious intelligence, this inchoate raw material for a story continues to lie inert at the back of his head during all that time. Dryden knows better: "the fancy was yet in its first *work*, *moving* the sleeping images of things towards the light."¹⁴ The back of the head is in reality a busy place where Kipling's imagination—Dryden's fancy—goes vigorously to work on many things heard and seen and read about during the course of those three years. Or to revert to the procreation metaphor: the mysterious, unobserved act of conception is followed by development in the biological sense, by a period in which the work of art gestates, nourishing itself from without as it grows in substance and acquires form. In the case of this particular story, we can discover quite a lot about the sources of nourishment that were available to it between 1901 and 1904.

We have seen that there are three constituents to the form the story eventually takes: Pyecroft's narrative; Hooper's narrative; and the integument wrapped round these two stories by the overall narrator. Each of the two tales-within-a-tale has a precise, real-life point of departure. The film itself existed, and still exists. It was "*L'arrivée d'un train en gare*," made by the Lumière brothers in 1896, which was also the year that films were first shown in London.¹⁵ Such innovations took time to reach the colonies, so it is probable that Kipling saw the film, which he anglicises for the purpose of the tale, at Cape Town in the opening years of the century; probable too, since cinemas did not yet exist, that he saw it at Fillis's Circus ("Phyllis's" in the text), which came down to the Cape from Johannesburg every Christmas. His children were at the right age to enjoy a circus. Subtle comments on the narrative technique of Kipling's story deriving from the art of the cinema are, however, anachronistic: he did not, any more than most people at the time, foresee the film as a form of storytelling. Its significance for him is implicit in the term "*biograph*," used in the tale,¹⁶ and even more in the name *actualités* which the Lumières gave to their tiny films. The wonder of the motion picture for its early viewers was that it caught, preserved and re-animated actual moments of human existence. To see a shape move across a screen and recognise it as a double-decker bus was its own reward.

Brief as it is, Kipling's description of the film in "Mrs Bathurst" unites the practiced journalist's excitement over a new form of communication with the technophile's prescience about its future developments and with the literary artist's ability to think—in the writer's own phrase—in another man's skin. At first the skin is Pyecroft's: Pyecroft fascinated in an amused and relaxed way at the authenticity of little details, such as the old man dropping his book as he gets out of the train. But what if the viewer knew someone in that film? asks the probing imagination; and Pyecroft's amusement turns to wonder as the never-to-be-forgotten Mrs Bathurst advances down the platform, invading, as it were, the viewer's space and so filling his consciousness with her presence before she vanishes "like a shadow jumpin' over a candle." The roused imagination—and Kipling is now in Vickery's skin—poses a further question: what if I, the viewer, had prior knowledge of what was to happen next? It is as if the writer could foresee the effect on audiences, only a few years later, of watching Tolstoy's wife trying to peer through the window of the railway waiting room where her husband lay dying, or as if he had foreknowledge of the even more disturbing effect that certain closed-circuit television sequences, themselves jerky and indistinct like an early film, have on us today: a small child being tugged across a Liverpool shopping precinct, a man and woman hurrying through the back door of a Paris hotel, each flickering figure bound for a violent death. Finally, in the story, the imagination strikes home with an overwhelming question: what if that consequence were the result of something that I, the spectator, had done or failed to do? And at this point, an almost faceless man, distinguished for us only by one grotesque detail, is transformed into the bearer of a tragic burden.

The success of Kipling's imaginative effort creates, however, its own problem: how is he to sustain the reader's awareness of the anguish he has so powerfully imagined and at the same time keep within the limits set by Pyecroft's powers of expression and his incomplete understanding of the situation? In the manuscript a third narrative intervened, originally, between Pyecroft's story and Hooper's. Sergeant Pritchard related that, after Vickery has confided in his captain and disappeared, he overheard a conversation in which the captain said that Dante miscounted the circles

of Hell; there was a tenth, and Vickery was in it. This was an elaboration that Kipling did well to cut out. Although Pycroft is unlikely to have read the *Inferno*, his description of a desperate figure circling the dark streets in the hot, dry wind in search of oblivion (never found, as he never succeeds in getting drunk) is all that is needed to convince us that Vickery is his own hell, imprisoned in the depths that Dante reserves for those who have betrayed the innocent. As he says at his final parting with Pycroft, in a strange echo of the word the other has used of Mrs Bathurst: "You've only had to watch; I'm it."

Kipling's imagination, then, is proactive and astonishingly fertile as it works upon his recollection of a minute-long film sequence to create Pycroft's narrative. The second narrative, or more exactly the other side of the story, Hooper's discovery of the two charred bodies, also had its origin in an experience belonging to Kipling's days at the Cape. It did not, however, make such demands of his imaginative powers as did Pycroft's tale. For one thing, it was a listening experience, so that the narrative form was already there. For another, compression rather than expansion was called for if this second narration, which fitted with almost unbelievable exactness into the story as Kipling had developed it, was to bring the whole tale to a dramatic conclusion.

The facts behind this part of the story have been corroborated by an independent witness, the railway engineer who was actually in charge of the Rhodesian line in the early nineteen-hundreds. The bodies of two tramps, he recalled, had been found by—he "rather thought"—a locomotive inspector called Teddy Layton, seconded at the time from the Cape railways. "They were trekking up to the Falls for work," he wrote, "or else were returning without having found it, when they were caught in a thunderstorm and instead of keeping out in the open went and leant up against the buffer block in the dead end, and as that was almost entirely built of rail, it naturally attracted the lightning."¹⁷ Since Layton knew Kipling well enough to have been given several autographed copies of his books, we can be confident that he was the source of this part of "Mrs Bathurst," and if he himself found the bodies, then Kipling indeed got the story from the horse's mouth.¹⁸

Either way, Layton's anecdote was a godsend. It had everything Kipling needed, and only fine tuning was required. Even the railway siding was there, to establish a connection with the main narrative and with the Cape suburban line of the overall setting. Beside its buffers, Vickery is to be found waiting at last: waiting to all eternity for Mrs Bathurst. Kipling even learnt that trains were liable to derailment on this stretch of the Rhodesian line, despite its straightness,¹⁹ and this detail ensures that, riding on the footplate with Hooper, we make a very slow approach to the figures ahead—as slow as if we were Mrs Bathurst scanning the platform for Vickery. And if there is rather too much of the whiff of spontaneous combustion about the two corpses—like Dickens, Kipling found the macabre irresistible—their condition is necessary if one of them is to be identified by what, for the reader, is his only recognisable feature. Moreover, death by lightning, through its association with the idea of divine retribution, accords perfectly with the tragic issues that the story has already raised.

There remains the question: why two tramps? It is of course no answer to say there *were* two; Kipling was at liberty to cut out the second one, and had he realised that half the commentators on the story were going to decide that he was Mrs Bathurst in disguise, he might well have done so. Instead, he puts him to masterly use. Whereas Vickery, who wants to die, courts destruction by standing up against the metal barrier, the other man, who has the natural human desire to survive, crouches down for safety.²⁰ In spite of this the charge goes through him as well, and in so doing transforms him into one of the marginal figures who, in tragedy after tragedy, are caught up in the fall of princes and destroyed. His fate also sends our thoughts momentarily to another innocent victim: Vickery's fifteen-year-old daughter, now orphaned and, since her father has forfeited his pension, left without worldly provision.

The setting that gives rise to these two narratives regarding Vickery and Mrs Bathurst, a damaged brake van on the edge of False Bay, may have come to Kipling late in the three years during which the story was developing. We know for a certainty that he visited Simonstown in February of 1903, and there was plenty of time for him to do so in 1904 between his arrival at the Cape and his writing of the tale. Certainly the

extreme heat of that January (Fillis was advertising his big top as The Coolest Resort in Cape Town)²¹ has got into the story. The heat broods over a physical setting that is one vast emptiness. As the men gaze seaward, nothing other than the breadth of the Indian Ocean lies between them and Australasia. Behind them, the land is made to appear equally desolate; Kipling, as he writes, cuts out any hints of the beautiful, leaving only a barren landscape of dunes and rocks skirted by a single-track railway. The finale of the tale will be an equally deserted scene, and one also bisected by a precarious line of communication: seventy miles of teak forest with two dead men for inhabitants.

We are, in short, in the heart of darkness. Conrad's story with that title, published in book form in 1901, has indubitably left its mark on Kipling's story, not least in the device of having its journey to the interior evolve out of the talk of four men facing an empty horizon and each in his way deeply aware of that sense of human isolation which John Bayley has emphasised in his discussion of "Mrs Bathurst."²² Although the global village may be portended by the way the camera in London links the man in South Africa with the woman from New Zealand, today's powers of instant communication were still, in 1904, a long way in the future. Ships at sea, as the companion story "Wireless" stresses, had no direct communication with the land. In "Mrs Bathurst," HMS *Hierophant* has arrived at Cape Town from Tristan da Cunha, reputedly the loneliest place on earth, which at the beginning of the last century did not even have a submarine cable. Kipling's fascination with new means of communication in all three stories in the group masks the anxieties felt by the solitary long-distance traveller a hundred years ago, and like Conrad he recognises the serviceman's sense of solidarity—exemplified by Pritchard's resentment of Hooper's curiosity about Vickery—as the best safeguard against the existential loneliness which is experienced by the man who breaks ranks.

So, after three years of embryonic development in which a great deal was absorbed, Kipling's story comes to full term. There follows procreation's third stage: the pangs of birth, the story's delivery to the world in a printed form. In Dryden's account of the creative process, this is the stage at which the judgment labours over what it should accept and what reject.

Kipling, however, would have us believe that a good story had an easy birth and that only afterwards would the writer have to undertake the arduous process of what he calls the Higher Editing, the blacking-out of everything that might be considered superfluous. Readers who are creative writers themselves have tended to blame this process for whatever they find elliptical or enigmatic in the tale. C. S. Lewis thinks "Kipling used the Indian ink too much"; Kingsley Amis, more severely, argues that, out of sheer "authorial self-indulgence," he left out the bits that bored him even if they contained necessary information—"rather like a trendy film-editor today."²³

The appearance of the manuscript, however, serves to refute these theories. It shows that Kipling's judgment was hard at work during the actual process of getting the story down on paper: the many running deletions, followed by substitutions, reveal a continual watchfulness over the effect of his wording. Some other alterations appear to have been made after he had reached the end of the story,²⁴ but actual excisions, other than Pycroft's speculations on what Vickery has done and the conversation about Dante, which have already been alluded to, are very few indeed, and after the opening sentences, which Kipling was at particular pains to get right, virtually nothing is heavily deleted. Subsequent revisions (distinguishable because they are made with a different pen), far from rendering the story obscure through excision, consist largely of additions either to the manuscript or to the printed tale. They include an intensification of Hooper's verbal tic, "You see," and of his gestures towards his waistcoat pocket, and clearly are meant to deepen and clarify the story's import. In point of fact, they leave the reader with the sense of something over-elaborated. This is particularly the case with the epigraph that Kipling added in the volume of collected stories, a maddeningly opaque pastiche of a scene from an Elizabethan play, from which the reader, if sufficiently patient, may succeed in extracting the statement: "She that damned him to death knew not that she did it, or would have died ere she had done it. For she loved him." Eager to get to the stories, most readers skip Kipling's epigraphs. The result of this one being more than usually skippable has been its failure to prevent a number of critics interpreting the tale that follows as being about the revenge taken by a woman scorned.

Interpretations such as this reflect the way that comments upon "Mrs Bathurst" have tended to focus upon the eponymous character. So it is perhaps worth recording that "Mrs Bathurst" was not the title under which Kipling wrote the story. The original title had three words, the last of them short. Kipling vigorously deleted it, substituting "Mrs Bathurst" at (it would seem) the last minute, since beside the title and written with the same pen is a note to his secretary in England requesting her to type the story and send it on to his agent. But the new name has proved altogether *too* simple and *too* engaging. It obscures the fact that the tale is, after all, Vickery's story: a story not of martyrdom or vengeance but of a destructive obsession. His behaviour may seem to others that of a man possessed, but Pyecroft for one knows that he has built his own hell in heaven's despite in a moment of tragic error. Likewise, Kipling himself knows that, whatever his ability to think in another man's skin, the substance of such thoughts could only come from his own experiences and the emotions they generated. And here we have perhaps a clue to the attractiveness, to Kipling, of the account of the creative process that he expounds in *Something of Myself*. Possession by an outside force offers him a convenient way to distance himself from familiarity with mental states—in this case, compulsive obsession—that he would rather not admit, even to himself, to having at one time known, while at the same time his insistence on the conscious effort of careful revision enables him to sustain the self-image of one who is fully in control: in short, *self*-possessed. It in no way detracts from the achievement of "Mrs Bathurst" and comparable stories that an enquiry into their origins throws doubt on both parts of this account, since such an enquiry reveals a creative process that is both more complex and more interesting.

NOTES

¹Elliot L. Gilbert, *The Good Kipling: Studies in the Short Story* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1972).

²Rudyard Kipling to Rider Haggard: *The Record of a Friendship*, ed. Morton Cohen (London: Hutchinson, 1965) 100.

³*Something of Myself and other Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Thomas Pinney (Cambridge: CUP, 1990) 123.

⁴Quotations of the published text of "Mrs Bathurst" are from *Traffics and Discoveries* (London: Macmillan, 1904).

⁵E. Harbord, Letter in *The Kipling Journal* 163 (September 1967): 14. The letter he quotes is to a Mrs Tulse.

⁶MS 201, Rare Books and Special Collections Division, McGill University Libraries. Kipling presented this manuscript of *Traffics and Discoveries* to the University.

⁷See "'Mrs Bathurst': Indeterminacy in Modern Narrative," in *Kipling Considered*, ed. Phillip Mallett (London: Macmillan, 1989) 71-84.

⁸The MS has a deleted sentence referring to the narrator having heard the tale from a coastguard in England.

⁹Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1977) 223; *The Letters of P. G. Wodehouse*, ed. Frances Donaldson (London: Hutchinson, 1990) 185.

¹⁰Nora Crook, *Kipling's Myths of Love and Death* (London: Macmillan, 1989) 71.

¹¹*From Sea to Sea* (London: Macmillan, 1911) 2: 53-65.

¹²*Letters of Rudyard Kipling, Volume 3: 1900-10*, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Macmillan, 1996) 147. In the same letter, which is a copy, Kipling calls the story a 'rather ghostly tragedy,' but Pinney considers this may represent a misreading by the copyist of 'ghastly.' A transcript from Caroline Kipling's diary confirms that February 24, 1904 was the date on which Kipling finished "Mrs Bathurst." I am grateful to the University of Sussex for giving me access to their copy of transcripts made from the diary.

¹³I am grateful to Christiane Bimberg for reminding the Halberstadt seminar on "Poetry as Procreation," in her paper on "John Dryden's Creative Concept of Poetry and Imitation," of the relevance Dryden's compelling account of the creative process in the Epistle Dedicatory of *The Rival Ladies* (1664) had for all our discussions of poetry as procreation. (See now *Connotations* 8 [1998/99]: 304-18, esp. 305-06.) At the same seminar, Matthias Bauer put forward the very interesting idea that "Mrs Bathurst" is in itself, to some extent, *about* the birth of a story, though it proves a still birth, since the relationship of Vickery and Mrs Bathurst is cut short—which gives point to Pycroft's mystifying comparison of Vickery's stricken face to a foetus.

¹⁴*Essays of John Dryden*, selected and ed. by W. P. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926) 1: 1. My italics.

¹⁵Robert Sclar, *Film: An International History of the Medium* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993) 29.

¹⁶Through most of the last century the cinema was known to South Africans as the bioscope.

¹⁷Letter from F. W. Mackenzie-Skues, quoted by L. H. Chandler, "Notes on 'Mrs Bathurst,'" *The Kipling Journal* 43 (September 1937): 72-75.

¹⁸H. G. Wilmott: "Kipling and South Africa," *The Kipling Journal* 48 (December 1938): 112-25, esp. 123.

¹⁹J. Cunningham, Letter in *The Kipling Journal* 215 (September 1980): 43-44. In the manuscript Hooper explains "It's all black boggy soil."

²⁰Gilbert, 111 note: "The function of the second tramp, then, as he squats beside the tracks looking up, is to call our attention, by contrast, to Vickery's dangerous gesture."

²¹R. E. Harbord, *Reader's Guide to Kipling, Section IV* (privately printed, 1965/6) 1789.

²²John Bayley, *The Short Story: Henry James to Elizabeth Bowen* (Brighton: Harvester, 1988) 97-108, esp. 101.

²³C. S. Lewis, "Kipling's World," *Kipling and the Critics*, ed. Elliot L. Gilbert (London: Peter Owen, 1966) 99-117, esp. 100; Kingsley Amis, *Rudyard Kipling and his World* (London: Thames and Hudson) 97.

²⁴Minor variations between the manuscript and the text of the story in *Traffics and Discoveries* are presumably due to changes, omissions and additions made on the typescript, or on a proof. Some of the variations between the text as published in *The Windsor Magazine* in September 1904 and as it appeared in book form in December of the same year are the result of the magazine editor's intervention.