Mowgli's Brothers Study Guide

Mowgli's Brothers by Rudyard Kipling

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Introduction

"Mowgli's Brothers" was first published in May of 1894 as one of seven stories included in Rudyard Kipling's collection *The Jungle Book*. Several years after first outlining the traits and personality of his character Mowgli, Kipling published *The Jungle Book*, which was considered "the literary event" of 1894. Kipling is known for his colorful depictions of characters, both human and animal, and for setting, most often the jungles of India, and his predilection for delivering a moral or lesson. "Mowgli's Brothers" is no exception. It is the story of the orphaned boy, Mowgli, who is adopted by a pack of wolves and must learn how to live in the jungle with the pack. The tale is rich in self-exploration and the search for personal identity.

The story exemplifies the struggle between Mowgli's learned traits as a wolf and his innate traits as a man. The two mutually exclusive identities create great difficulty for Mowgli as he attempts to be both what he is by birth and what he has become in the jungle. Through his attention to the Law of the Jungle, Mowgli is proven a worthy member of the pack. Yet, through his innate human faculties, he possesses a power that is enviable among the jungle creatures. In the polar characteristics of Mowgli's complex identity as wolf and man, Kipling constructs a didactic framework from which he delivers lessons and morals.

Author Biography

Joseph Rudyard Kipling, a turn of the nineteenth- century author, was one of Britain's most distinguished writers of novels and short stories. A prolific writer, Kipling achieved recognition quickly, and his works left an impressive mark on the literary world of short fiction and children's literature.

Kipling was born December 30, 1865 in Bombay, India, the first child of John Lockwood Kipling and his wife Alice. Except for a short trip to England in 1868 for the birth of his sister, Kipling lived in India most of his first five years. Kipling's sister appeared to be stillborn, with a black eye and a broken arm, but was revived by the doctor. This event earned her the nickname *Trixie*, for her father's description of her as a "tricksy baby."

During the latter half of his stay in India, Rudyard was considered a tiny despot. He was a rowdy, vocal, and slightly unruly child. He spoke to the servants in their native tongue, loved his ayah (Indian maid or nurse), and was sincerely happy surrounded by India's exotic riches. However, the pleasure he found in India was short-lived, as his parents sought to save their children from the fever-ridden climate and wanted them to acquire English educations. Thus, in 1871, Rudyard and Trixie were sent to be educated at a foster home in Southsea, Hampshire. Rudyard was incredibly forlorn and the experiences of these early years undeniably shaped his writings.

In 1878, Kipling attended a boarding school known as the United Services College at Westward Ho in north Devon. Over the next four years, Rudyard became a voracious reader and his writing skills blossomed. At sixteen, Kipling returned to his parents in Lahore, India and began working for the newspapers, the *Civil and Military Gazette* and the *Pioneer*. Alongside his journalism, Kipling wrote many poems and short stories. These writings were later collected and published, winning him early fame.

During his years with the *Pioneer*, Kipling was able to do a great deal of traveling. In 1889, he went through Asia and the United States, visiting Burma, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, San Francisco, and New York City. By 1890, Kipling made his way to England where he befriended Wolcott Balestair, an American literary agent living in London. The two worked together briefly before Wolcott's untimely death from typhus in 1891.

In 1892, Rudyard married Wolcott's sister, Carrie Balestair, and the two embarked on a round-the-world voyage. During this trip, Kipling outlined "Mowgli's Brothers" and, upon completion of the trip, the couple settled in Brattleboro, Vermont. In Brattleboro, the Kiplings had their first two children, Josephine and Elsie. It is also there that Kipling wrote his most famous work, *The Jungle Book*.

The Kiplings returned to England in 1896, due to a family quarrel, and they quickly had their third child, John. In 1899, during a visit to United States, the family fell ill with pneumonia and Josephine died. During these years, some of Kipling's most famous

works were published. He gained world recognition for *The Jungle Book*, *The Second Jungle Book*, *Kim*, *Stalky & Co.* , and *Just So Stories*.

Although he was content throughout most of his life, Josephine's death had a profound impact upon Kipling. The loss was devastating, and in the wake of his increasing popularity, it was difficult for Kipling to escape tourists and devotees. In 1902 he moved, seeking seclusion, to a home in Sussex where he spent all of his remaining years. However, Kipling continued to write and travel. His works earned him great accolades, including knighthood and the poet laureateship of England, most of which he refused. He did, however, accept one award, the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907.

As his works depict, Kipling was feverishly passionate about travel and dedicated to his children. All of his popular works were filled with lessons to children and inspired adults, giving newfound meaning to the genre of children's literature. On January 18, 1936, Rudyard Kipling died of peritonitis caused by a hemorrhaging gastric ulcer. His work continued to be praised into the early 2000s, its morals and the metaphors of his tales, fables, and novels proving to be timeless.

Plot Summary

The story opens with the presentation of Mother and Father Wolf and the family's necessity for food. Father Wolf is readying himself to begin hunting to feed his mate and cubs when the jackal, Tabaqui, enters their den looking for scraps. Tabaqui finds a bone and is satisfied. After eating the bone, the devious jackal compliments the wolves' children to their faces, which is considered unlucky. Both Mother and Father Wolf are uncomfortable, and Tabaqui revels in his mischief. Amidst the tension, Tabaqui delivers the news that the lame tiger, Shere Kahn, plans to shift his hunting patterns to the wolves' hills. This news angers Father Wolf who knows that the tiger will disrupt the patterns of local game, making his hunt increasingly difficult. The exchange so frustrates Father Wolf that he throws Tabaqui out of his den.

After sending Tabaqui out of their cave, Mother and Father Wolf hear the tiger below in the brush. Father Wolf is angered because the tiger's noise will surely scare away his family's dinner. Mother Wolf realizes that Shere Kahn is not hunting game, but man. The wolves are anxious as they listen to the tiger because the Law of the Jungle forbids killing man, except under certain circumstances. They hear the tiger spring to attack, but none of the villagers is caught. The tiger lands in the fire, burning his paws and scaring the villagers away. The wolves are pleased, but they hear something coming towards their den. Father Wolf poises himself for attack, and just as the creature is about to arrive, Father Wolf leaps to attack. Checking mid-jump, Father Wolf realizes the creature is a small "man-cub." Father brings the boy into the den and the boy pushes his way in between the wolf cubs looking for warmth. Next, Shere Kahn and Tabaqui arrive, blocking the entrance to the wolves' cave and demanding the man-cub. Father Wolf does not comply, and the tiger roars with anger. Mother Wolf leaps forward, threatening and insulting the lame tiger. Shere Kahn, although filled with fury, leaves the den, proclaiming that eventually he will get the man-cub. Shere Kahn knows that tall cubs, man or beast, must be presented to the pack at Council Rock. The tiger believes the pack will reject the man-cub, and he will be able to finally eat the boy.

The wolves decide they must keep the man-cub, and Mother Wolf names him Mowgli the Frog because he is small and hairless. After some time, Mother and Father Wolf decide that it is time to present their cubs to the pack at Council Rock. At the Council Rock, the cubs are all brought before the pack. Akela, the leader, instructs everyone to, "Look well□look well, O Wolves!" If there is a dispute over the right of a cub to be accepted into the pack, then the cub must be spoken for by two members of the pack other than his mother and father. Mother Wolf pushes Mowgli into the middle of the pack to be accepted or rejected. There is a great disturbance, fueled by Shere Kahn's desire to eat the boy. Yet, in the end, two extended members of the back, Baloo the Bear and Bagheera the Panther, speak for Mowgli. Baloo agrees to teach the boy the Law of the Jungle, and Bagheera buys the pack with a freshly killed bull. With this, Mowgli enters the wolf pack.

After Mowgli's first appearance at Council Rock, the story leaps forward by a decade. With the help of his family, Baloo, and Bagheera, Mowgli now understands the Law of

the Jungle. He knows what to eat, how to kill, and how to enjoy the jungle. He understands that Shere Kahn is not to be trusted. Mother Wolf tells him that one day he must kill Shere Kahn.

Akela is aging, and Shere Kahn sees the changing of leadership as an opportunity to turn the pack against Mowgli. He plants the seed of envy amongst the young wolves by reminding them that no animal in the jungle can look Mowgli between the eyes. The tiger challenges the wolves by proclaiming that Mowgli is too powerful, too much like man, and that he does not belong in the jungle. Shere Kahn convinces part of the pack to plot against Akela. Once Akela misses a kill, the Law of the Jungle allows the pack to challenge the leader one-by-one until someone kills the leader, taking his position. With the change of tide, Shere Kahn believes he will finally be allowed to eat Mowgli.

Bagheera is aware of Shere Kahn's devious plan. He informs Mowgli and counsels the boy. The panther tells Mowgli to steal fire from the village and then, at Council Rock when the pack is set to challenge Akela, wield the fire and save the aging leader from the tiger's cabal. Mowgli follows Bagheera's advice. At his final appearance at Council Rock, Mowgli listens to Shere Kahn's attempts to incite his followers to overthrow Akela. Clearly his only motivation is his desire to eat Mowgli. With a large portion of the pack against him, Mowgli begins to understand that he must leave the jungle and return to a human existence. Yet, in a final act of gratitude, Mowgli silences Shere Kahn and his wolves. He ignites a dead branch with the fire he has stolen from the villagers, frightening all the beasts. Mowgli exerts the power of fire, burning Shere Kahn and sending him howling into the jungle. After disposing of the tiger, Mowgli demands that Akela be allowed to live, and he banishes the mutinous members of the pack. With this final show of power, Mowgli knows he must forever leave the jungle and enter an unknown future in the village. He says farewell to his foster family and walks down the hillside toward the village.

Characters

Akela

Akela is the stoic leader of the wolf pack. He is also called The Lone Wolf. At Council Rock, Akela shows no change in emotion as the families present their cubs to the pack. Even when Mother Wolf pushes Mowgli into the moonlight, Akela proclaims, "Look Well, O Wolves!" Akela proves himself a fair leader even when his pack wishes to banish Mowgli. He stands by the man-cub as part of the pack because Mowgli has proven himself. Akela has great respect for the Law of the Jungle and rules his wolves with integrity and justice. Mowgli, recognizing Akela's good and faithful nature, saves Akela from certain death at their final meeting at Council Rock.

Bagheera

Bagheera, a cunning, terrifying black panther, is known both as a smooth talker and a wild, reckless assailant of the jungle. At the first Council Rock, as the pack circles hoping to kill Mowgli, Bagheera offers a recently killed bull to the pack in exchange for the child's life. This, coupled with Baloo's offer to teach the boy the Law of the Jungle, saves Mowgli's life. Bagheera plays an important role in Mowgli's development. Bagheera lived among men as a young panther and, thus, knows the character of man, and he recognizes them in Mowgli. Most pervasive and devastating to Mowgli's future in the pack is his ability to stare down any animal in the jungle, even the fierce Bagheera. Bagheera's explanation of Mowgli's place among men and his power over the animals helps guide Mowgli in his final appearance at Council Rock. Bagheera is Mowgli's mentor, his most trusted guide as Mowgli makes his final maneuvers before leaving the jungle.

Baloo

Baloo, a quiet, brown bear, is responsible for teaching wolf cubs the Law of the Jungle. Although a famous character from other stories, Baloo is only briefly mentioned in "Mowgli's Brothers." At the first meeting at Council Rock, Baloo speaks for the man-cub and promises to teach him the ways of the pack. Baloo and Bagheera the panther are responsible for saving Mowgli from the wolves at this first meeting at Council Rock.

Father Wolf

Father Wolf is Mowgli's surrogate father in "Mowgli's Brothers." Father Wolf nearly kills Mowgli as he rustles out of the bushes, fleeing from a tiger. Father Wolf checks his lunge, just as the boy ambles out. Mother Wolf and Father Wolf decide to raise the boy alongside their cubs and, when the time is right, bring Mowgli before the pack at Council Rock.

Mother Wolf

Mother Wolf is Mowgli's surrogate mother in "Mowgli's Brothers." She is also called Raksha, The Demon, because of her prowess as a hunter and devoted mother. Mother Wolf is responsible for naming Mowgli and convincing Father Wolf to raise him with their other cubs. At Council Rock when it appears the pack may not accept Mowgli, Mother Wolf shows devotion to her man-cub as she prepares to fight to the death to protect him from Shere Kahn and the naysaying members of the pack. She is deeply devoted to and proud of Mowgli and incredibly saddened by his decision to leave the jungle.

Mowgli

Mowgli, the main character of "Mowgli's Brothers," is first named by Mother Wolf as Mowgli the Frog when he wanders into their den after a narrow escape from the tiger, Shere Kahn. Although a human, Mowgli, with the help of Baloo the Bear and Bagheera the Panther, is accepted at Council Rock by the pack as one of their own. Because of his innate human traits, Mowgli is able to stare down and intimidate the animals of the jungle. Mowgli does not recognize this as an enviable skill; he simply finds it amusing that the animals will lower their eyes when he stares at them. Unfortunately, this creates a division among the animals□those who are friendly with Mowgli and those who are envious of Mowgli. Eventually, Mowgli recognizes that his inclusion in the pack is disrupting the Laws of the Jungle and that many wish to banish him from the jungle. Yet before his departure, Mowgli takes it upon himself to right several wrongs, punishing Shere Kahn and the wolves that turned against him and saving Akela from an unjust death. His self-realization as a man and the division among the pack members lead Mowgli to his voluntary exile from the jungle and his return to the world of man.

Shere Kahn

Shere Kahn is the tiger responsible for scaring a human family who, in their retreat from the tiger, abandon their young son. The young child, Mowgli, wanders into a wolves' den. Shere Kahn looks eagerly for the easy meal, but it is to no avail because Mother and Father Wolf refuse to give the boy up. Shere Kahn, also referred to as the Big One, Lungri, and the Lame One (due to his lame paw), is most noted for disrupting the Laws of the Jungle. Because of his lame paw, Shere Kahn preys too frequently upon man and domestic cattle. Shere Kahn's choices disturb regular movements of game and have even brought men into the jungle, bearing torches and guns. Later, when Mowgli is brought to Council Rock, the pack's decision to accept the man-cub angers Shere Kahn who vows to avenge his lost meal and someday eat him. However, his plans are foiled because Mowgli grows up with great prowess, and his skill becomes the envy of the jungle. Eventually, Mowgli is the avenger, burning Shere Kahn's brow and sending him howling into the jungle.

Tabaqui

Tabaqui is a mangy, untrustworthy jackal referred to as the Dish Licker. He is Shere Kahn's sidekick. Tabaqui directs Shere Kahn to Mother and Father Wolf's den as the tiger searches for his lost meal, the child later named Mowgli. In the den, Tabaqui comments about the Wolf's cubs, making them both very uncomfortable. Eventually, because of Tabaqui's deviousness and Shere Kahn's tyrannical requests, Mother and Father Wolf scorn them both, driving them from their den.

Themes

Nature versus Nurture

The nature part of the story pertains to Mowgli's innate classification as a human. His body is human, hairless and upright. The nurture part of the story pertains to his learned traits and characteristics. His extended foster family teaches him everything he must know to be a wolf. He hunts when he is hungry; he sleeps in a cave with his family. Mowgli understands and lives by the Law of the Jungle. Mowgli's identity grows based on both his innate nature and the conditioning he receives from his surrogate family. Although he never breaks the Law of the Jungle, he continues to develop his prowess as a human being. This fact is evident in his ability to stare down any animal in the jungle. In addition, Mowgli grows as a human even though he follows the jungle code. He understands and recognizes himself as being like the villagers even though he feels as if he could live as a wolf for all of his days.

Experience and Knowledge

Mowgli develops an understanding of the jungle based on his experience. Interacting with the jungle and the teachings of Baloo, Bagheera, his family, and the pack shape his experience and develop his knowledge of the jungle. In this regard, Mowgli is an example of empiricism. With his accumulation of knowledge through experience, Mowgli is able to develop the skills necessary for survival and pleasure in the jungle. Experience provides him with knowledge, both of the jungle and of himself as a wolf.

Reason and Knowledge

Mowgli develops his knowledge of humans through his reasoning faculty. It is from within that Mowgli is able to grasp his identity as a human. He is able to see the similarity between himself and the villagers, but it is his deduction that leads him to the knowledge of his inborn nature. Reason compels Mowgli to grasp the universals that mandate his power over the animals. Even Mowgli's dear friend and mentor, Bagheera, the most feared animal in the jungle, cannot withstand the stare of the boy. Mowgli does not learn the power of the stare. He grows to understand it through the rationalist process of deductive reasoning. This power, in turn, helps Mowgli to understand the determined laws that dictate his nature as a human being.

Abandonment

In "Mowgli's Brothers," Mowgli faces abandonment twice: first, he loses his family in the tiger attack, and, second, at the end of the story, he is cast out by the pack. Both events are compensated by victories. When Mowgli loses his family, he is embraced, protected, and accepted by a team of foster parents: Mother and Father Wolf, Akela, Baloo, and

Bagheera. His extended family loves him deeply, but they are also aware and leery of his power. The boy's strength as a human being lessens his vulnerability. This circumstance mitigates the trauma of his separation from his birth family. In the other instance, when most of the pack wishes to banish Mowgli, he defeats his enemy, the lame tiger, Shere Kahn. Mowgli overcomes the banishment by singeing the tiger, sending him fleeing into the jungle, and by exercising his will over the pack to save Akela and get rid of his saboteurs.

Laws and Codes

Kipling's story is based on laws and codes. He constructs a strict Law of the Jungle that mimics the strictness of the code Mowgli's foster family makes Mowgli follow as a youth. Within a framework of codes, Kipling creates the complicated title character. With the Law of Jungle and the Law of Man, Mowgli faces two systems that are intended to dictate his decisions. However, these codes clash, so Mowgli is pulled in opposite directions.

Discrimination and Envy

Kipling explores both discrimination and envy in "Mowgli's Brothers." In the beginning of the story, Mowgli is treated differently than the other wolf cubs because his appearance is different than theirs. Because Mowgli is a member of another species and looks different, and the wolf pack wants nothing to do with him. He is different. He cannot be accepted as a member because he does not look like the group. Luckily, Baloo and Bagheera are able to save Mowgli from certain death. Later, as the boy grows and learns, discrimination and envy become linked. Mowgli learns the Law of the Jungle, and it directs his decisions. At the same time, because he is human, he is able stare down the animals. While Mowgli sees this trait as humorous, the animals see it as proof that he is superior to them. The animals see his stare as proof that he is wise beyond their comprehension. Shere Kahn and the wolves are jealous of Mowgli's stare, so they work together to banish Mowgli from the pack. Their envy of Mowgli's apparent power causes them to want to drive Mowgli from the jungle.

Mowgli as a Jungian Archetype

Psychologist Carl Jung used the term archetype in connection with his description of the unconscious. He argued that the unconscious is composed of two parts: the personal, consisting of an individual's own memories and repressed information; and the universal or archetypal, consisting of those patterns and symbolic elements that all human beings inherit from a shared racial past. The content an individual shares with all other members of the race Jung called the collective unconscious. The archetype is prototypical or original material. This content surfaces in literature in the form of the recurrent story, myth, or character type. It causes strong emotional response because it

is universally relevant. Literary criticism can apply the term archetype to a given story or character that illustrates a paradigm or recurrent pattern.

Mowgli's story echoes the myth of Romulus and Remus, the twin boys who were taken from their mother and thrown into the Tiber River. The brothers were discovered by a female wolf, who suckled them. In this myth, Romulus grew up to become the founder of Rome. The character of Mowgli and his story repeat some features of the Romulus myth. Mowgli, a human child, is reared among wolves and then leaves the animal kingdom to return to human civilization. In this sense, then, one might say that Mowgli is archetypal. In terms of Jung's idea of the collective unconscious, one might interpret the end of Mowgli's story, his departure from the jungle and return to the village, as a reenactment of a memory stored in the vague recesses of the unconscious of a time when human beings stood upright and "left" the animal kingdom. Something distinguished these very early human-like beings from the animals around them (perhaps their ability to stare down the animals), and this difference caused them to separate from jungle existence. The remembered moment is itself a construction or distillation of a developmental process that occurred during the development of the human race. That extremely slow process is compressed and dramatized succinctly in Mowgli's departure from the wolf pack.

Style

Beast Fable

"Mowgli's Brothers," as well as the other short stories in Kipling's collection, is a beast fable, a story in which the characters are animals with human faculties. Kipling's fable teaches lessons. The fable is effective in "Mowgli's Brothers" because it creates a world beyond human civilization, the jungle, which is governed by a different set of rules. The animals are expected to follow the Law of the Jungle. Within the fable, animals are able to reason and speak within a set of laws similar to man's laws but still outside them. The fable form allows the mutually exclusive laws of man and beast to be dramatized. Even if the Law of the Jungle is similar to the Law of Man, the distinction between animals and humans makes clear the differences between their codes. Thus, the fable, which puts forth these two codes, provides the stage for Mowgli's conflict of identity.

Point of View and Narrative Voice

Kipling uses the third person in "Mowgli's Brothers." The third-person narrative defines the contrasting laws without bias. However, the narrative is sometimes emotional. The narrator describes lawbreakers, like Shere Kahn and Tabaqui, negatively. These characters are unattractive, while kindly characters, such as Bagheera, are described in positive terms. This helps to create the tone needed to develop the plot and conflict between the characters.

Historical Context

Born in India in 1865, Kipling was a product of late nineteenth-century British imperialism, an expansionist policy that justified the economic benefits to be had in conquering undeveloped lands with a language of paternalism and benevolence. In 1899, Kipling's poem, "White Man's Burden" (which was in fact addressed to Americans as they took control of the Philippines) revealed the racism inherent in imperialism and, historically, did much to tarnish Kipling's reputation.

The purpose of British imperialism in the second half of the nineteenth century was to find a solution to longstanding economic depression in England. The answer seemed to lie in the previously untapped natural and cultivated resources of other countries. Many people shared Kipling's belief that the British were racially superior and that this supposed superiority obliged the British to impose their culture, government, and education system on other countries. The propaganda of the day, openly attacked in Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* (1902), claimed that the dark races in non-industrialized regions of the Earth would be given the lamp of progress. In truth indigenous cultures were destroyed, natives were often virtually enslaved, and local resources were exploited. However this situation was not initially the perception back home. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the British Empire controlled one-fourth of the inhabited land on the Earth. In 1877, Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India. When she celebrated her fiftieth and her sixtieth anniversaries as queen (in 1887 and 1897), Victoria was heralded as the greatest of monarchs.

Kipling believed in imperialism; he believed in the responsibility and duty of spreading British laws and their administration and enforcement. In stories, like "Mowgli's Brothers," the effect of British imperialism on Kipling's storytelling is evident. He created stories and characters that are ruled by laws. While creating entertaining plots, Kipling used these rules to create tension, cause conflict, and provide a means for expressing lessons and morals.

Critical Overview

Unlike many authors, Kipling received praise early in his career and consistently throughout his life. In 1894 when it first appeared in print, *The Jungle Book*, however, received both praise and criticism. Some viewed the publication as one of the greatest literary events of the year. Several publications lauded Kipling's work. For example, according to Harry Ricketts in his biography of Kipling, the *Athenaeum* gave its praise: "our sincere thanks to Mr. Kipling for the hour of pure and unadulterated enjoyment which he has given us, and many another reader, by this inimitable 'Jungle Book.'"

Yet Kipling and *The Jungle Book* were criticized, too. According to Ricketts, the American Henry James wrote to English writer, Edmund Gosse:

He sends me too [James told Gosse] his jungle book which I have read with extreme admiration. But *how* it closes his doors & sets his limit! The rise to 'higher types' that one hoped for□I mean the care for life in a finer way□is the rise to the mongoose & the care for the wolf. The *violence* of it all, the almost exclusive preoccupation with fighting & killing, is also singularly characteristic.

The Jungle Book was intended for children, not adults. Yet it was full of warring creatures, savage beasts, and conflict resolved by force and fire. But despite the more brutal elements, the morals of the stories remained central, and the book was propelled into the spotlight, for both juvenile and adult readers.

Even though some authors expressed criticism, Kipling's importance was acknowledged by some of his peers. Mark Twain, for example, according to Ricketts, stated that Kipling as "the only living person not head of a nation, whose voice is heard around the world the moment wit drops a remark." Other authors, both British and American, agreed; Kipling was held in high regard, both as a writer and a public figure.

In 1927 several enthusiasts founded the Kipling Society. The literary society, which still existed as of 2006, published a quarterly magazine, *The Kipling Journal*, containing literary criticism, historical information, and biographical information.

In fact, Kipling's fiction and his message were interesting enough to stimulate much detailed, academic discussion. M. Flint states in his article in *Studia Neophilogica*, "Mowgli's cognitive development can be seen in the way his focalization of the world, while remaining restricted, ultimately allows him to realize that the code of signification, the paradigms, of the animal world are no longer adequate to explain and understand his own world. . . ." Flint's analysis of Mowgli dissects the character's struggle with his own identity amidst the contrasting codes of man and beast. Beyond Mowgli, this struggle connects to the search for identify and community in a context large enough to confront the individual with difference and exclusion.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Martinelli is a Seattle-based freelance writer and editor. In this essay, Martinelli examines the identity of the main character, Mowgli, through rational and empirical philosophical doctrines.

In "Mowgli's Brothers," Rudyard Kipling tells the tale of his celebrated "man-cub," who is rescued from certain death as an infant and raised by a pack of wolves. Although a human being, Mowgli effectively becomes a "wolf cub" in nearly every other respect and grows to adopt the Law of the Jungle as his code of behavior. However, through his innate ability to reason, Mowgli soon recognizes the existence of the Law of Man as a distinct code of behavior, a recognition that immediately gives rise to a conflict between codes, sending Mowgli into an existential crisis. Mowgli is, essentially, a character trapped between the Law of the Jungle and the Law of Man. Mowgli's struggle to resolve this crisis represents the tension between the opposed philosophical doctrines, empiricism and rationalism. Mowgli makes choices, defines his being, and is an existentialist as he exercises his will outside the structure of a particular dogma, making Mowgli a prototypical existentialist.

The Law of the Jungle, as explained explicitly in the story, is the set of rules that dictates the education, movements, and interactions of different groups of animals within the jungle and animals' relationships to humans outside the jungle. While an important part of the communication between the beasts in the jungle is each animal's need for food, the most important code pertains to killing man. The Law of the Jungle greatly limits an animal's right to kill man because frequent hunting of humans brings "the arrival of white men on elephants, with guns and hundreds of brown men with gongs and rockets and torches" and disrupts the balance of the jungle.

The Law of the Jungle also imposes rules that are particular to classifications of animals. On a wider scale, cubs are taught the Law of the Jungle through experiences within the jungle. With the help of elders and friendly beasts, such as Baloo the Bear, Mowgli develops his understanding of the Law of the Jungle and is able to build his position in the jungle through experience. Through this empirically gained identity, Mowgli is able to adhere to the Law of the Jungle and see himself as part of the pack.

An analysis of Mowgli's position as "Mowgli the Wolf" and his realization of "self" through his interactions with the jungle creates an empirically determined identity. As a philosophical doctrine, empiricism is defined by the contention that all knowledge of matters of fact (e.g. the jungle or the village) distinct and separate from the relation of concepts (e.g. mathematics or philosophy) is based upon experience. In short, all knowledge, outside purely conceptual relations, has its source in what is experienced, not what is simply imagined or thought. John Locke, often considered the father of British empiricism, argued in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* that in experience "all our Knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself." Therefore, Mowgli's knowledge of the jungle and of what it means to be a wolf comes from the empirical data that bombard his senses through his interactions with the jungle.

The Law of Man does not necessarily contradict the code followed in the jungle, but it certainly occurs exclusively and separately from the Law of the Jungle. Man, after all, exists outside the jungle, just as beasts exist outside the village. In the story, the codes of man, unlike the codes of the jungle, are revealed through negation and rational deduction. The Law of Man is not explained in the text like that of the Law of the Jungle; instead it must be understood through the way Kipling and other British people lived during the Victorian period. It is reasonable to assume that the codes humans follow in Kipling's stories are the same codes that dictate human interactions in his era. A code of man, for instance, can be deduced as follows: when beasts from the jungle kill man with too great frequency, the Law of Man dictates that the jungle should be torched and that animals should be killed or driven deeper into the woods. The code followed by man is, in the broad sense, about self-preservation.

The Law of Man during this late-Victorian era is primarily commanded by rules established by courts and by ethical and moral codes outlined by the church. The courts mandate that certain crimes, such as murder, are illegal. These types of actions are in opposition to the Law of Man and are, thus, punishable. The church defines moral human behavior with rigid statements about family values and individual obligation to God: fathers are expected to provide for their children and wives; mothers are expected to raise their children and support their husbands; and all of mankind is expected to respect God and his creations. Although there is little interaction with humans in the story, Mowgli does come into contact with one group of humans when he is attempting to acquire fire. It is Mowgli's first exposure to a nuclear family, and he comments, "they are very like me." The description of the family, although brief, suggests the importance of family and its place in the code of man.

Mowgli does not live under the Law of Man, yet it is apparent to the inhabitants of the jungle that he is different. It is not his sheer physical appearance that dictates this determination; it is something additional, something in Mowgli. During a conversation with the panther Bagheera, Mowgli has his first revelation. Bagheera, like Mowgli, spent his earliest years outside his inborn identity; men raised Bagheera, just as beasts raised Mowgli. Everyone in the jungle fears "Bagheera□all except Mowgli." Kipling writes:

"Oh, *thou* art a man's cub," said the Black Panther, very tenderly; "and even as I returned to my Jungle, so thou must go back to men at last,□to the men who are thy brothers,□if thou art not killed in the Council."

"But why□but why should any wish to kill me?" said Mowgli.

"Look at me," said Bagheera; and Mowgli looked at him steadily between the eyes. The big panther turned his head away in half a minute.

"*That* is why," he said shifting his paw on the leaves. "Not even I can look thee between the eye and I was born among men, and I love thee, Little Brother. The others they hate thee because their eyes cannot meet thine□because thou art wise□because thou hast pulled thorns from their feet□because thou art man."

"I did not know these things," said Mowgli sullenly. . . .

In this exchange, Kipling presents the rational, innate beings of Mowgli and Bagheera: Mowgli's innate being, regardless of the wolf identity he has gained through experience, is that of man; Bagheera's innate being, regardless of the understanding of man he gained through his captivity, is that of the beast. The Black Panther, although feared in the jungle and aware of the code of man because of his upbringing, is still unable to withstand the power of the stare of "Mowgli the Man."

An analysis of Mowgli the man through his revelation near the end of the story creates an identity founded upon rationalism. Rationalism states that all knowledge can be obtained from reasonable deduction, from thought alone, independent of that which is experienced. Benedictus Spinoza, a seventeenth-century rationalist, argued in *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* that "the natural light of reason does not demand anything which it is itself unable to supply." Essentially, Spinoza states that everything people know is determined by and springs forth from universal laws and exists and acts in a certain and determinate way. Thus, Spinoza would see Mowgli's return to the Law of Man as a self-determined necessity□Mowgli is man, he is not beast□it is mandated by universal laws that he returns to the Law of Man.

During his final visit to Council Rock, Mowgli finds himself in a difficult situation. Here both Mowgli and Akela are to make a last stand before the pack. Mowgli is to be banished from the jungle, and old Akela's position as leader is to be challenged by the pack because he missed a kill. Both situations arise from Shere Kahn's hatred of Mowgli and from his manipulation of the wolf pack. Both Mowgli and Akela can expect death as the outcome of their situations. However, because he is privy to Shere Kahn's devious intention, Mowgli has other plans. Upon his arrival at Council Rock, "more than half the Pack yelled: 'A man! a man! What has a man to do with us? Let him go to his own place.'" Shere Kahn responds, "No, give him to me. He is a man and none of us can look him between the eyes." Akela then outlines Mowgli's empirically understood identity as a wolf by saying, "He [Mowgli] has eaten our food. He has slept with us. He has driven game for us. He has broken no word of the Law of the Jungle." The argument within the pack, between Shere Kahn and Bagheera, exemplifies Mowgli's conflict. He is both man and wolf; he is a construct of two mutually exclusive beings.

At this moment Mowgli begins to accept his future as man. He proclaims to his naysayers, "Ye have told me so often tonight that I am a man (and indeed I would have been a wolf with you to my life's end), that I feel your words are true. So I do not call ye brothers any more, but *sag* [dogs], as man should." Interestingly, though, Mowgli is neither man nor wolf in this instance; instead, he takes on a separate being in the revelation that his being is based on neither the empirically gained knowledge of wolf nor the rationally gained knowledge of man. Here Mowgli is not of a particular system; he is separate from the codes of the jungle and the codes of man; he is distinct and separate from any one dogma. In this momentary separation from the Law of Man and the Law of the Jungle, Mowgli is a unique creation: he is an existentialist.

Existentialism has its roots in the first half of the twentieth century, an era much later than Kipling's. Existentialism is in opposition to empiricism and rationalism. For the empiricist or rationalist, knowledge gained through experience or reason can be obtained by any contemplative observer. However, the existentialist view of the problem of being is separate from and must take precedence over the philosophical investigation of knowledge, its acquisition, and its relation to being. For the existentialist, being cannot be an object of simple inquiry. Being is only *revealed* to the individual. It is not mandated or determined by laws or natures; it cannot be acquired through experience or through reason. Mowgli's existence at Council Rock is basic: he is present at that moment in a volatile world. He understands his being in terms of the moment of his existence, not in terms of his significance as abstraction. This is apparent because Mowgli makes decisions in terms of their impact on that particular existence. As he stands at Council Rock, naked and longhaired like a wild animal but wielding flame like a powerful man, Mowgli is aware of his freedom of choice, but he is ignorant of his future. At Council Rock, after sending Shere Kahn whimpering into the jungle with a singed brow, Mowgli demands of the pack that wants to banish him that "Akela goes free to live as he pleases. Ye will *not* kill him, because that is not my will. Nor do I think that ye will sit here any longer, lolling out your tongues as though ye were somebodies, instead of dogs who I drive out□thus! Go!" Here Mowgli is not bound by a code or by a predetermined duty to save Akela but is compelled to assume the responsibility of making choices.

In these final moments between the Law of the Jungle and the Law of Man, Mowgli anticipates a philosophical trend that followed Kipling's time. Perhaps it is unintentional on the author's part, but Mowgli is a character of great complexity, so much so that Mowgli's pursuit of being connects the philosophy of Kipling's predecessors and the great thinkers who followed his era.

Source: Anthony Martinelli, Critical Essay on "Mowgli's Brothers," in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006.

Adaptations

The stories of Mowgli from *The Jungle Book* have been adapted for the screen. Most notable is Disney's 1967 animated feature staring Phil Harris as the voice of Baloo and Bruce Reitherman as the feral man-cub, Mowgli.

In addition to the animated feature, Disney produced a second adaptation in 1994, called *Rudyard Kipling's "The Jungle Book."* Stephen Sommers directed Disney's return to the tales of Mowgli, setting aside animation in favor of live action.

In 1942, Zoltan Korda directed a rough rendition of *The Jungle Book*, starring the young Indian actor, Sabu. The movie does not follow the text exactly, but the movie's Technicolor and exotic setting are effective.

Topics for Further Study

When he returns to his family and the village after being away in the jungle for a decade Mowgli is not prepared for human lifestyle. How would you expect Mowgli to interact with his father? What would be some possible arguments Mowgli might face living in a house as opposed to a cave? Are there any lessons that would cross over or possibly even benefit his human family?

British imperialism played an important role in Kipling's writing and life. The social codes he felt compelled to follow were directly related to his fevered defense and support of spreading justice. However, it is apparent his wishes were not fulfilled as many Indians suffered great injustice and dehumanization. Research another example of imperialism during the last two centuries, explaining the impact on literature and politics.

Charles Darwin was a British naturalist who lived during the nineteenth century. In his work *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin constructs a scientific theory of evolution, concluding that variations within a species occur at random and that survival of each organism is dependant upon that organism's ability to adapt to an environment. In light of this theory, examine Mowgli as an evolutionary human organism. Is Mowgli still human? Is he a wolf? Has he undergone a specialization that sets him apart from all humans and all animals, thus creating a new organism? If he is not a new organism, what can be made of his adaptation to the jungle environment?

Compare and Contrast

Late Nineteenth Century: Kipling and other British imperialists staunchly believe in the benefits of colonization and its positive effect on economy, justice, and public health worldwide.

Today: Historians and modern politicians alike are quick to note that imperialism, regardless of the era, has a dire impact on indigenous cultures.

Late Nineteenth Century: Conservatism dictates the social code under which men and women interact. Women and men are expected to remain reserved under all social circumstances.

Today: Men and women alike are believed to be empowered with creativity and are encouraged to show their individuality and to think "outside the box." Television shows featuring extreme behavior and achievement are popular.

Late Nineteenth Century: Strict adherence to code and law is imperative to being a good, upstanding citizen. There is little flexibility in conservatism and the Victorian order must be upheld at all costs.

Today: Adherence to the law is presented as essential for the proper functioning of society, but this is balanced with an awareness of the weaknesses of the legal system. In addition, in the United States, the more conservative Republican party and the more liberal Democratic party vie for political control of the country, so the country may alternate between a period of greater conservatism and a period of greater liberalism.

What Do I Read Next?

The Second Jungle Book, the second and final installment, was published in 1895. Much like *The Jungle Book*, the second consists of poems and short stories about the jungle, animals, and, most important, the man-cub Mowgli.

Captains Courageous, published serially in *McClure's Magazine* in 1897, is the story of Harvey Cheyne, the pampered son of a millionaire, who falls overboard from an ocean liner. He is rescued by a fishing vessel where he must work, initially against his will, to hold his place aboard the boat. Like Mowgli, Harvey is inadvertently thrust into a completely foreign world where he is forced to adapt in order to survive.

Stalky & Co (1899), based upon Kipling's experience at the United World College Westward Ho!, is a collection of short school stories. Kipling appears as the main character, Beetle, who learns lessons about imperialism, warfare, and becoming a man of service.

Kim, published serially in *McClure's Magazine* in 1901, is often called Kipling's finest work. This is the story of an orphan born in colonial India who is torn between his love of India's culture and vitality and the demands of British imperialism.

Kipling's *Just-So Stories* (1902) is a well-known collection of short stories giving imaginative answers to questions like "How did the whale get his throat?" and "Who invented the alphabet?"

Heart of Darkness (1902), by Joseph Conrad, is a complicated adult novel. It is the tale of Marlow, a seaman, who makes a journey up the Congo River. In part the novel is Conrad's attack on imperialism and the abuses of Leopold II who regarded Congo as his personal resource.

Anne of Green Gables (1908), by Canadian author L. M. Montgomery, is a children's classic from Kipling's era. *Anne of Green Gables* captures the hopes and struggles of childhood and is considered Montgomery's most famous work.

Peter Pan (1911), by J. M. Barrie, is another children's classic from Kipling's era. Similar to "Mowgli's Brothers," the story of Peter Pan contrasts good and evil and is intended to teach lessons and morals.

Volume 2 of *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling* (1995) covers the years between 1890 and 1899. This was a pivotal time in Kipling's life when he first becomes a celebrity and when he lost his beloved daughter to pneumonia.

Further Study

Bauer, Helen Pike, *Rudyard Kipling: A Study in Short Fiction*, Twayne, 1994.

Bauer explores the themes and morals of Kipling's short fiction. The book includes essays on the Mowgli tales and other short works.

Cain, Peter, and Tony Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688—2000*, 2d ed., Longman, 2001.

Critic R. D. Long calls this book "the standard work on British Imperialism and may remain so for the foreseeable future."

Gilmour, David, *The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling*, Farrar, 2003.

Gilmour focuses on Kipling's political life and his pessimistic approach to the colonization that made him a rare human and British imperialist.

Mallett, Phillip, *Rudyard Kipling: A Literary Life*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Mallett studies the influences on Kipling's work, including his family, his laureate status, and his relation to the literary world.

Orel, Harold, *A Kipling Chronology*, G. K. Hall, 1990.

Orel provides an excellent reference outlining Kipling's life and career in a timeline with short, insightful descriptions of all major events in his life.

Orel, Harold, ed., *Critical Essays on Rudyard Kipling*, G. K. Hall, 1989.

This collection of essays establishes the complexity of Kipling, his characters, and his contribution to British and children's literature. The collection contains essays dedicated to poetry, short fiction, and other writings.

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Locke, John, "Book II□Of Ideas," in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 105.

Spinoza, Benedictus, "Theologico-Political Treatise: Chapter IV: *Of the Divine Law*," in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, translated by R. H. M. Elwes, Dover, 1951, p. 61.