

Literary Impressions, Cultural Transfers, and Material Reading: Rudyard Kipling's "An Habitation Enforced" as a French *objet d'art*

Catherine Delyfer

Biography

Catherine Delyfer is Professor of English at the University of Toulouse Jean Jaurès, France. Her publications focus on British *fin-de-siècle* culture, gender, and the interplay between texts and images. She is the author of *Art and Womanhood in Fin-de-Siècle Writing: The Fiction of Lucas Malet, 1880-1931* (2011) and the editor of two recent journal issues, *Gold in/and Art (Polysèmes 2016)* and *Cross-Dressing in Fact and in Fiction (E-Rea, 2019)*. Her latest publications in intermedial studies include "The Illustrator as Critic: Desire, Curiosity and the Myth of Persephone in Jessie M. King's Illustrations for Oscar Wilde's *A House of Pomegranates*" (*The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 28, 2019: 76-93), "Solidarités iconotextuelles, genre et pouvoir dans "The Young King" d'Oscar Wilde illustré par Jessie M. King (1915)" (*Image&Narrative* 19.2, 2018, 5-22), and "Re-writing myths of creativity: Pygmalionism, Galatea figures, and the revenge of the muse in fin-de-siècle literature by women" (in H. Laird ed., *The History of British Women's Writing, 1880-1920*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 111-126).

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Abstract

This essay offers the very first study of the 1921 French luxury edition of Kipling's short story "An Habitation Enforced" published by René Kieffer and illustrated by Jessie M. King. It investigates the reception and transformation of this text, originally produced for an American readership in 1905, as it was translated, edited, reprinted, illustrated and sumptuously bound for the French collectors' market after the First World War. Examining the reincarnation of Kipling's text as a French *objet d'art* implies addressing questions that are central to word and image studies, namely, questions regarding literary and artistic transnationalism and co-authorship across time, space and media. This essay proposes an intermedial, material study of Kipling's short story which ultimately illuminates the power of this little-studied narrative/book-object and its relevance to the post-war era by looking at the context in which Kieffer's 1921 edition was produced, and then by examining the short story itself in relation with its unique embodiment.

Résumé

Cet article propose la première étude réalisée à ce jour de l'édition française de la nouvelle de Rudyard Kipling, « L'Habitation forcée », publiée par René Kieffer et illustrée par Jessie M. King en 1921. Initialement publié dans un périodique américain en 1905, ce texte est-il transformé, dénaturé ou au contraire re-poétisé une fois traduit, édité, ré-imprimé, illustré et relié pour le marché des collectionneurs français de l'après-guerre ? Examiner la réincarnation du texte de Kipling en objet d'art français implique de se poser des questions qui sont au cœur de l'approche intermédiaire, notamment en ce qui concerne la circulation transnationale des motifs littéraires et artistiques et les modalités de co-création d'une œuvre à travers le temps, l'espace et des médias différents. Après avoir examiné le contexte de production de l'œuvre, cette étude analyse donc le texte de

Kipling à la lumière de sa matérialité, afin d'éclairer la puissance singulière de cet objet-livre et sa pertinence dans le contexte de l'après-guerre.

Key-words

René Kieffer – Jessie M. King – Rudyard Kipling – Art Deco – Aestheticism – Arts and Crafts – book arts – illustration

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Kipling's short story "An Habitation Enforced" was first published in the New York *Century Magazine* issue of August 1905. The story was reprinted as the opening tale of a collection of eight Kipling short stories published by Macmillan in London in 1909. The author's chosen title for the volume, *Actions and Reactions*, implicitly invited British readers to look for a thematic link between stories which now appeared to be speaking to one another. Their interpretation was further inflected through the writer's addition of a poem at the end of each tale. In other words, the meaning and status of the narratives were significantly re-oriented in the process of collection, as Kipling critics have noted (Karlin 14; Raimbault 45).

Of course, such authorial changes often occur with successive editions of a literary text. However, other transformations, many of them beyond authorial control, are also constitutive of the life of books as texts are edited, reprinted, translated, illustrated, reformatted and adapted for various publics. Whether we realize it or not, these changes impact our experience of reading, or re-reading, at different points in time, in different cultural or national contexts and via different mediation devices. This essay is concerned with one such pivotal, and rather glorious, moment in the life of Kipling's short story. The date is 1921, and Kipling's "An Habitation Enforced" has been reincarnated as a French *objet d'art* (figure 1). It is dressed in a sumptuous binding by René Kieffer (1876-1963) with patterned endpapers, translated into French by Louis Fabulet (1862-1933) and Robert D'Humières (1868-1915) and illuminated with twenty-eight hand-coloured pochoir illustrations by Jessie M. King (1875-1949) (figure 2).

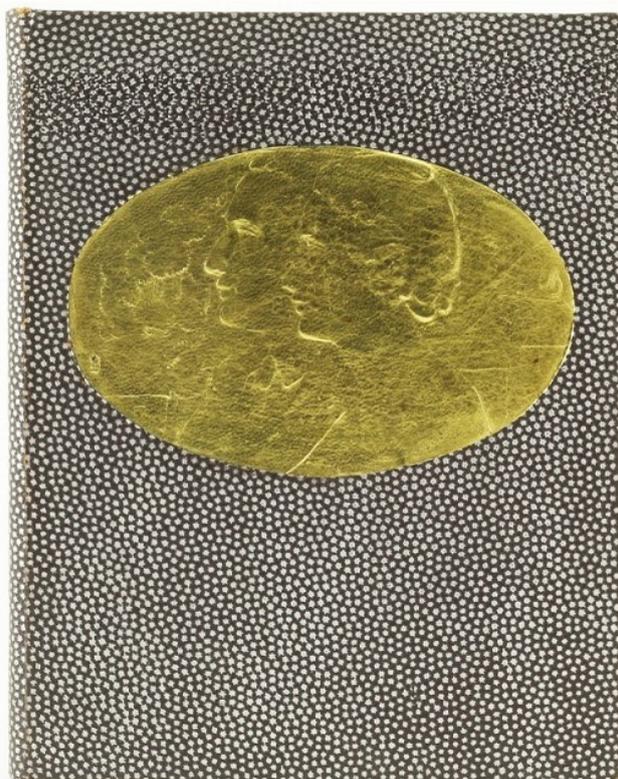


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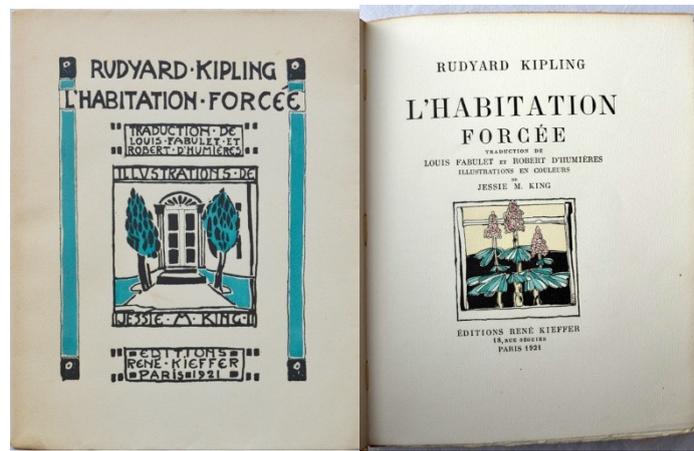


Figure 2: Jessie M. King, cover page and title page. Rudyard Kipling, *L'Habitation forcée* (Paris : Éditions Kieffer, 1921). Photograph courtesy of Jonkers Rare Books.

Today, Kieffer's 1921 edition is recognized by collectors as an exceptional object, a rare and desirable item, estimated to be worth about 5,000 dollars. But this beautiful artefact may also strike the scholar as a puzzle, an incongruous and unlikely achievement, one resulting from the combined efforts of very dissimilar artists and other agents operating together in Paris after the First World War, sixteen years after Kipling's story was first released in New York City.

The questions posed by such an artefact are numerous. Why would a Parisian publisher want to expend so much effort on a controversial British author, and on this particular tale, in 1921? What kind of audience was it for? Considering its modest price (88 francs,¹ according to the *Mercure de France*'s 1921 list of new releases), was the impetus behind Kieffer's production of the book mostly commercial or artistic? Why select a Scottish designer, Jessie M. King, to illustrate it? Why entrust the binding to a different designer, when King herself was a well-known book-binder²? What did the imperialist, masculinist Kipling have in common with the feminist socialist Scottish artist? To what degree did author, translator, editor and artist actually communicate and collaborate? How much remained of Kipling once his initial 1905 text had been translated and transfigured into a French luxury item? In other words, how did such a composite object bolster, challenge, displace or usurp the status of authorship? Ultimately, did the artistry lavished on the text detract from, enhance, distort or eclipse the text? This study will provide a few provisional answers to these questions by first looking at the context in which the book was produced and by then examining the short story itself in relation to its material display, its unique embodiment.

Genesis of the book

Kipling was, according to Arnold Rowbotham, the most widely read Anglo-Saxon writer in France in the early decades of the twentieth century. For French readers, his works "served to increase comprehension of that enigmatic and somewhat unapproachable type, the modern Englishman" (Rowbotham 365). Published in translation by the *Mercure de France* since 1899, his books were received with enthusiasm, particularly in the *Revue des deux mondes* and the *Revue bleue*. Louis Fabulet, the French translator of H. D. Thoreau and Walt Whitman, was allegedly introduced to Kipling's writings by Oscar Wilde in 1898 (*Mercure* 32), and went on to become Kipling's champion and official translator in France, often working in tandem with Marcel Proust's

¹ Noël Clément-Janin claims that middle-range collectors were likely to pay up to 500 francs for a book limited to no more than 500 or 600 copies. The fact that *L'Habitation forcée* (limited to 550 copies) sold for only 88 francs is therefore unusual. One might speculate that 88 francs was the price of the illustrated paperback edition (with the cover by King), while only a fraction of the 550 copies were additionally graced with a Kieffer leather binding and sold at a price nearing 500 francs (Clément-Janin tome 2, 153). Most first-edition copies available for purchase today are paperback copies.

² In fact, King's international recognition began with her binding for *L'Évangile de L'Enfance* being awarded a gold medal in the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art, held in Turin in 1902.

friend, vicomte Robert D’Humières—and sometimes also with Arthur Austin-Jackson or Charles Fountaine-Walker.³ French readers adored Kipling, despite occasional sneering comments in the French press stressing the irony of awarding the Nobel Prize in literature to the imperialist writer (in 1907). Moreover, the author of *The Jungle Book* was a great Francophile—ever since he first visited Paris with his father, Lockwood Kipling, in 1878—celebrating France in several prose pieces (collected in *France at War* in 1915) and poems (“France” was written in 1913 on the occasion of French President Raymond Poincaré’s visit to England). In 1921, he was made a Doctor of the Sorbonne and, the same year, Anna de Noailles published a long homage to Kipling in the *Revue de Paris*. Bringing out a fine-illustrated edition of one of Kipling’s lesser known later texts was, therefore, a relatively safe venture for a publisher, especially since Louis Fabulet’s translation of “L’Habitation forcée” was readily available in the volume *Actions et Réactions* published by *Mercure* in 1911.

A versatile artist and designer, Jessie M. King was a significant early twentieth-century prize-winning illustrator, quite well-known on the continent, especially in France, Germany, Austria and Italy. Major developments in the Scottish artist’s technique and network coincided with her move to Montparnasse, where she resided from 1910 to 1915, and then again in the early 1920s. In the mid-1910s, she was uniquely poised to enable the transition between continental Art Nouveau and Art Deco, in part because the “Glasgow style” (for which she was famous already) evinced the geometrical, structural approach to design which was to become one of the key characteristics of post-war Art Deco. Accordingly, Noël Clément-Janin includes King as one of the important Art Deco female illustrators in his study, *Essai de bibliophilie moderne de 1900 à 1928*, published in 1931 (she is in fact the only British illustrator to be mentioned). Incidentally, King’s commission for *L’Habitation forcée* was not her first encounter with Kipling’s work. In 1897, as a student at the Glasgow School of Art, she had received a prize from South Kensington for three designs for a nursery frieze based on scenes and characters from *The Jungle Book* (White 21). According to Colin White, King’s watercolour illustrations for *L’Habitation forcée* were commissioned by *Mercure* and executed by the artist before the war (86), but one could argue that stylistic differences between the various illustrations suggest that some of them may have been created at a later date.

Ultimately, however, the book appeared in 1921 under the Kieffer imprint. In the 1910s, Kieffer had worked for publishers such as Georges Crès, Albert Messein and *Mercure*, producing a few volumes for their editions as well as many bindings. It is thus probable that Kieffer’s and King’s collaboration on Kipling’s short story began before 1914. In the 1920s, however, Kieffer became an important and well-connected bookseller who was at the head of a printing and bookbinding firm capable of bringing out up to 2,082 volumes per year by 1928, with modest or luxurious, avant-garde bindings, as Agathe Sanjuan explains (Sanjuan n.p.). He designed the binding of *L’Habitation forcée* himself, possibly in collaboration with Pierre-Emile Legrain, and executed it in 1921.

The aura of the book

That this book demands to be considered as an exceptional, exclusive artefact is ostensibly proclaimed through its glamorous exterior. The binding of grey-star patterned leather and the oval gilt-blocked cameo portraits convey the opulence and extravagance that have become associated with Art Deco design during the roaring twenties with their rich textures, bold colour contrasts and sparkling lustre. Other Kieffer bindings for *L’Habitation forcée* feature brown snakeskin, thus adding an exotic touch (figure 3). Present both on the front and back of the binding, the matched gilt medallions inevitably evoke Ancient Roman gold coins, which were usually stamped with the heads of emperors, conveying both luxury and power.

³ Rowbotham claims that it was Abel Chevalley who introduced Kipling’s works to D’Humières (370). As for the relations between Kipling and Fabulet, *Mercure*’s 1933 retrospective piece on Fabulet’s career suggests that Kipling was rather indifferent to his French translator. As the person who largely contributed to Kipling’s fame in France, Fabulet identified with Kipling and was, thus, quite offended when he was not invited to attend the 1921 ceremony in Kipling’s honour at the Sorbonne (*Mercure* 498).



Figure 3: René Kieffer, snakeskin binding. Rudyard Kipling. *L'Habitation forcée* (Paris: Éditions Kieffer, 1921). Photograph courtesy of Jonkers Rare Books.

As the viewer opens and closes the book, the flattened oval shape is perceived as round and the subtle contours of the cameo portrait appear and disappear through a process of anamorphosis, giving the illusion of movement and vibrating patterns. Alternately seeing a coin or the profiles of the two lovers of Kipling's narrative, the viewer is visually introduced to one of the main themes of the short story, which is the opposition between the lucrative American world of international business, on the one hand, and the traditional English countryside conducive to romance and marital harmony and equality, on the other.

Importantly, Kieffer's binding immediately signals to the viewer that the book is meant to be an auratic object, one which, in Walter Benjamin's terms, attempts to restore the withered "aura," "authenticity" and "authority" of the work of art, among a sea of modern mass-produced artefacts (Benjamin 4). The inscriptions inside the binding (figure 4) and on the first page (figure 5) further confirm this book's status as art, by reminding the viewers (or buyers) that they are in the presence of a limited edition, printed on hand-made paper, with a unique binding and fashioned by artistic hands.



Figure 4: Kieffer's label pasted inside the cover ("René Kieffer, artistic bindings" followed by his address). Rudyard Kipling. *L'Habitation force* (Paris: Éditions Kieffer, 1921). Photograph courtesy of Jonkers Rare Books.

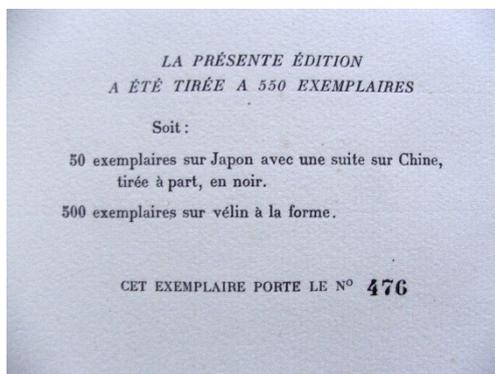


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This is emphatically an artist’s book, in the general sense given to this term by Stephen Bury, i.e. a “book or book-like object over the final appearance of which an artist has had a high degree of control; where the book is intended as a work of art in itself” (Bury 1). In fact, one might suggest that this edition is doubly artistic, insofar as not only one, but (at least) two artists were involved in its making. As we have seen, additional important mediators of Kipling’s text included the author’s translators and the publishing house which was largely responsible for Kipling’s French cult in the early twentieth century, the *Mercur de France*.

The book as value

To a certain extent, then, this book belongs to the tradition of fine book-printing initiated by nineteenth-century British pioneers such as William Morris and Emery Walker (of the Kelmscott Press), Thomas Cobden-Sanderson (of the Doves Press), Ricketts and Shannon (of the Vale Press) and Charles Robert Ashbee (of the Essex House Press). Indeed, as Colleen Denney has demonstrated, the influence of these late-Victorian models on the French book-artists of the twentieth century was crucial. John Rewald further emphasizes the role played by French artist Lucien Pissaro (son of impressionist painter Camille Pissaro), whose Epping-based Eragny Press played a significant role in perpetuating the efforts of Morris between 1894 and 1914 and making his work known in France (Rewald 191). In 1898, Pissaro and his friend Ricketts even co-wrote an essay about Morris’s influence on artistic book-making in French: *De la typographie et de l’harmonie de la page imprimée. William Morris et son influence sur les arts et métiers*. Another early French Morris enthusiast was Marius Michel (1846-1925), one of the most innovative French book-binders of the turn of the century, renowned for his unique attention to the harmony between (visual) form and (literary) content in his bindings of Charles Baudelaire’s or Joris-Karl Huysmans’s works.

As a former apprentice of Marius Michel in the early years of the twentieth-century, Kieffer was indebted to Morris’s high ideals concerning book architecture which the latter outlined in his essay “The Ideal Book” (1893). *L’Habitation forcée*, thus, arguably falls within the category of what Elizabeth C. Miller terms “slow print,” i.e. an approach to book design born of a rejection of the large-scale, speed- and profit-oriented print marketplace which by the end of the nineteenth century had become, to use Miller’s words, “a synecdoche for capitalism, an automatic machine for reproducing the logic of mass production” (Miller 2).

At the same time, one is forced to acknowledge that this glamorous object is a far cry from the sober, often deliberately archaic- and medieval-looking books produced by William Morris. It would be hard to claim Kieffer’s edition of *L’Habitation forcée* as an anti-capitalist gesture. On the contrary, it is a book which asserts itself as a glittering brand new object of consumption, conveying status, connoisseurship and cosmopolitan taste among a modern community of discerning collectors. Interestingly, the coin-like medallion serves as a

marketing ploy, intended to promote the *livre d'art* as an alternative hard currency, a safe investment, in a post-war period marked by the weakening of the gold standard, drastic inflation and financial speculation. As Gordon N. Ray explains, “[l]ike other valuable objects, *livres d'art* in the 1920s could be seen as a hedge against inflation. Even if their possessors were not conscious speculators, they went on collecting in part because they had more faith in their books than in the declining franc” (Ray 23-4).

Indeed, the decade of the 1920s was the heyday of the Art Deco book in France. Ray reminds us that this period saw the reemergence of the fine-illustrated book on an unprecedented scale. Though speculation on fine books was real after the war, it was only one factor in their success. Another factor was the post-war emotional, moral and aesthetic craving for fine books. As might be expected, the restrictions imposed by the First World War had brought the production of illustrated books to a halt. The apparatus that produced such books had collapsed, the collectors that usually acquired them had other concerns and the fine paper and other materials necessary to their making were not easily available. Consequently, as Ray explains,

by Armistice Day, four years of scrubby volumes on bad paper had built up a powerful longing for decently produced books of any sort. Looking back in 1929, Georges Grappe remembered how “a sort of mysterious enthusiasm seized upon the elect and made them cherish the Book with an almost ferocious tenderness, that symbol of ‘values’ which, more than all others, were at risk during the bitter conflict”. Among bibliophiles this passion took the form of a hunger for *livres d'art* (Ray 21-22).

In this context, it is difficult to know whether the appeal of such an edition as *L'Habitation forcée* was intellectual or material, aesthetic or speculative, literary or financial for 1920s buyers. After all, as Noël Clément-Janin soberingly remarks, in his *Essai sur la bibliophilie contemporaine*, book collectors love book-objects, but do not usually read (Clément-Janin tome 1, 42).

Reading Kipling materially

Whether buyers went to the trouble of reading *L'Habitation forcée* or simply gazed admiringly at its glorious embodiment, one may argue that by the 1920s this modest short story had acquired renewed and heightened relevance to the contemporary European context. Amongst modern critics, Kipling's late career is much debated, marked either by decline for some or by a deeper maturity of visions for others (Booth 1). “An Habitation Enforced” was a story which had been written in 1905, when Kipling was recovering from the personal trauma of his daughter's death. He had moved from the United States back to England and had just purchased Bateman's, a seventeenth-century house in East Sussex where he was to live until his death in 1936. Yet the interest of the tale resides elsewhere and exceeds its autobiographical subtext.

Kipling's narrative is a vivid, condensed and almost telegraphic text, while its tone is light-hearted, humorous, often ironic or parodic. It is full of “syntactic and semantic gaps”, like several of his 1900s short stories, which Richard Menke has linked to the writer's innovative rendering of the accelerations of modernity and the impact, on language and individuals, of late-Victorian information systems such as telegraphy, the wireless and other electrical communication technologies (Menke 218). At the same time, however, the story's preoccupation with the past and its reflection on loss, exile and homecoming, as well as on renovation, regeneration and reconstruction, lend a powerful tinge of nostalgia to this tale. Visually and materially, this dichotomy is sustained via the obvious (deliberate) clash between Kieffer's use of metallic gold on his ornate binding versus King's radical choice of tonal green as the dominant hue in her series of images—with various shades of peat, moss, fern, seaweed, cerulean and forest green evoking nature.⁴ The tale's contradictory pull between the lures of globalized, business-driven, fast-paced, technology-oriented modernity and the longing to return to, or recreate, the idealized past of Merrie Old England—which Kipling was to explore further in

⁴ Though green is not often used in King's other illustrated books (at least not in such a startling way), it was her colour of choice for her own studio and home at Greengate Close in Kirkcudbright, Scotland, after the war.

his next 1906 fantasy short stories in *Puck of Pook's Hill*—appears singularly germane to the immediate post-war climate. Rowbotham is, therefore, entirely correct when he suggests that this particular short story's appeal for a French readership was that by focusing on “the breath of England's soil,” “the magic of her countryside,” and the “spiritual inheritance of her people,” Kipling recaptured something of “the ‘douce France’ of the poet of the Chanson de Roland” (368). “The Recall,” the poem which Kipling added as a coda to the short story in 1909, encapsulated the nostalgic mood that suffused the tale:

I am the land of their fathers
 In me the virtue stays.
 I will bring back my children,
 After certain days.

“An Habitation Enforced” tells the story of George Chapin, a ruthless and successful American financier, who has suffered a brain aneurysm from overwork while conducting an important transaction over the telephone. A victim of the intense technological environment in which he operates, he fears the moment when another “brain-surge of prickly fires [might] drive his soul from all anchorages” (n.p.). Threatened with death if he does not change his lifestyle altogether, he is sent abroad by his doctors. George crosses the Atlantic and wanders listlessly across Europe with his cheerful wife Sophie, who decides to consider this trip as a fresh start and new “honeymoon”—the first one having been disappointingly “business-like” in her estimation. Together, they visit the large cosmopolitan cities of Europe, drifting aimlessly, anonymously, until they land in an apparently desolate corner of southeast England, which feels wilder and more remote than anything they have ever encountered. At the instigation of a fellow American traveller, Mrs Shonts, George and Sophie are driven “into that wilderness which is reached from an ash-barrel of a station called Charring Cross, in order to experience the genuine England of folklore and song” (n.p.). One of Jessie M. King's humorous illustrations (figure 6) represents the two wide-eyed protagonists dressed in colonial hats, losing themselves in the woods and discovering what they, as Americans, designate as quaint “colonial houses” (n.p.).



Figure 6: Jessie M. King, “Ils furent à l’abri parmi les troncs de hêtres et les houx désordonnés”. Rudyard Kipling, *L’Habitation force* (Paris: Éditions Kieffer, 1921), p. 12. Photograph courtesy of Nocloo Gallery of Golden Age Children’s Book Illustrators. <www.nocloo.com>

Though they are portrayed by King as modern-day adventurers, Kipling’s text emphasizes that Sophie and George have the impression of going back in time, experiencing something akin to the disorientation and

delight felt by William Morris’s time-traveller in *News from Nowhere* (1890): like William Guest, when they wake up after their first night at Cloke’s farm, the American couple marvels at the freshness of the air, the beautiful weather, the chirrup of birds and the elemental smells of earth and lavender. As they explore the countryside and discover the uninhabited seventeenth-century house of Friars Pardon, pictured in King’s stylized images (figures 2 and 7), they are charmed by its pre-industrial architecture, its handcrafted mantelpieces, the wide oak staircase, the perfectly proportioned rooms, and the large windows which frame views reminiscent of John Constable’s painted landscapes and George Morland’s rustic scenes.

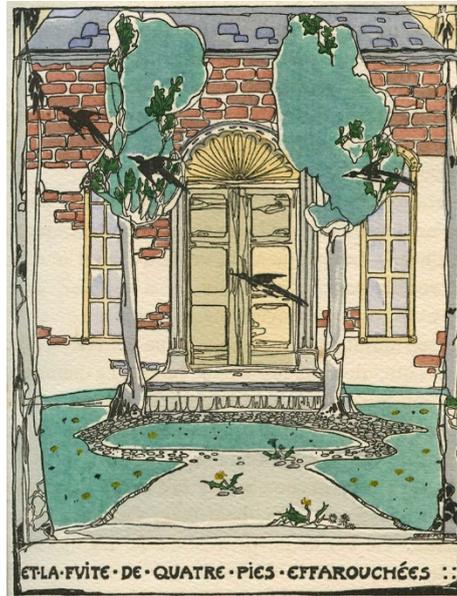


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Thrilled and amused to realize that they are encountering “authentic” English landscapes and “original” decorative work, instead of the commercial “copies” to which they are used, they feel a sudden craving to recover, preserve, and memorialize the past. The old cottages, the wild scenery, and the villagers’ simple way of life quickly prompt Sophie to associate her new surroundings with the “Vale of Avalon”—that legendary island peopled by women where King Arthur is taken by barge by Morgan le Fay in order to recover from his wounds in Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* (1485). Perhaps building on this reference to one of the legends most cherished by the Pre-Raphaelites, King chooses to start her series of illustrations with an image of the ailing George Chapin which is reminiscent of Edward Burne-Jones’s *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* (1881-1898) (figure 8).⁵ This scene, which does not exist as such in Kipling’s text, should be understood as King’s own expansion of George’s characterization, in keeping with the medievalist spirit of the tale—and also perhaps in accord with her own experience of the war.

⁵ See Burne-Jones’s canvas here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Last_Sleep_of_Arthur_in_Avalon#/media/File:Edward_Burne-Jones.The_last_sleep_of_Arthur.jpg (page accessed 23 October 2019).



Figure 8: Jessie M. King, “Dans une chambre aux rideaux tirés”. Rudyard Kipling, *L’Habitation forcée* (Paris: Éditions Kieffer, 1921), p. 8. Photograph courtesy of Nocloo Gallery.

According to Penelope Fitzgerald, Burne-Jones’s very large canvases generally hung in the painter’s home studio at “The Grange” (28). The imposing *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* (110 in × 260 in), which remained unfinished at the artist’s death in 1898, is a painting which Kipling would have often seen when he visited his favourite uncle and aunt at “The Grange” as a young man, and then again when the writer and his wife returned from the United States and lived with the Burne-Joneses during the renovation of their newly acquired house. King knowingly incorporates decorative elements which belong to the aesthetic culture of the Arts and Crafts championed by the Burne-Joneses and their circle of artistic friends in several of her illustrations: stained glass windows, painted ceramic tiles, handcrafted artefacts and even some of her own pre-war decorative work for Liberty’s and for Palais Galliera, such as silver hair brushes, artistic posters, colourful printed fabrics, modern doll houses and interior design (figures 9 and 10). Attention to the decorative arts is similarly emphasized in the short story: Sophie’s very specific ideas for the selection and arrangement of furniture, such as the two Hepplewhite sofas she dreams of acquiring for Friar Pardons, align her tastes with those of female aesthetes like Rosamund Marriott Watson, author of *The Art of the House* (1895). Despite their political divergences, Kipling and King thus appear to have shared a common Aestheticist idiom, which served as their vantage point to consider the new challenges of modernity and modernism with a certain distance and humour.



pouvez pas le manquer... si vous ne vous écarterez pas du sentier. C'est ma sœur, la télégraphiste. Mais vous êtes dans le rayon de trois milles, monsieur. Le gamin dis-

Figure 9: Jessie M. King, “Sophie... sa brosse à tête en main ». Rudyard Kipling, *L’Habitation forcée* (Paris: Éditions Kieffer, 1921), p. 15. Photograph courtesy of Nocloo Gallery.

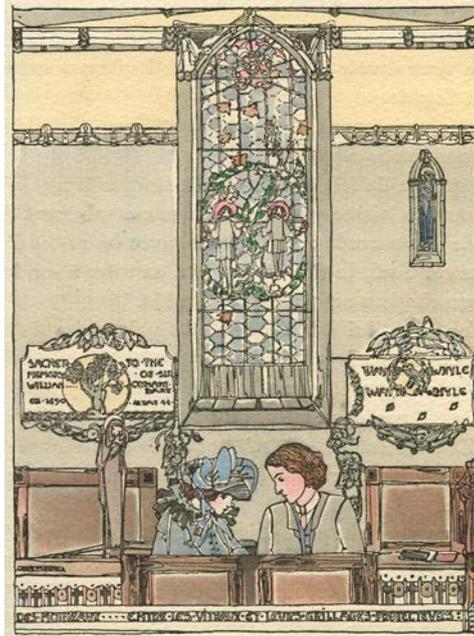


Figure 10: Jessie M. King, “Des moineaux... entre les vitraux et leurs grillages protecteurs”. Rudyard Kipling, *L’Habitation forcée* (Paris: Éditions Kieffer, 1921), p. 76. Photograph courtesy of Nocloo Gallery.

During the first half of the tale, George’s major concern is to be within reach of the telegraphic network of communication that sustains his sense of identity and status, at the risk of endangering his health. However, as he and his wife start imagining how they might acquire, renovate and decorate the derelict house of Friars Pardon, with its attendant farms and woods, George’s health gradually improves. So does his relationship with his wife. In Kipling’s story, the characters are restored back to health (for George) and maternal bliss (for Sophie) via a return to the architecture of the past, while their marital relationship is mended through their shared therapeutic involvement in house renovation and interior decoration. This theme revives John Ruskin’s and William Morris’s ardent belief in the restorative power of beautiful buildings, as well as more general late-nineteenth-century ideas concerning the beneficial impact of house design on psychological balance, physical well-being, and familial happiness (in Clarence Cooke’s popular 1878 *The House Beautiful*, for instance). In the 1920s, such notions about what constituted a healthy house remained relevant and quite influential, as Annmarie Adams has shown in her study of the design of medical spaces in the early twentieth century.

Yet the story’s twist hinges on the fact that the social and aesthetic efficacy of old architecture conspires with an ancient invisible network of communication more powerful than the telegraph or any other modern-day devices, in order to compel the American couple to remain in this traditional corner of England and discover their true identity. Indeed, older but swifter than Marconi’s invention, “farm telegraphy”—i.e. local word of mouth aided by the postal service—ultimately enables the villagers to find out that Sophie is, unbeknownst to herself, the last descendent of the former generation of owners of Friars Pardon. Moreover, Mrs. Cloke’s telepathic intuition warns her that George’s wife is pregnant before Sophie even realizes it. As Sophie and George gradually understand, the house of Friar Pardons does not belong to them, it is they who “belong to it”: Sophie and her husband have been subjugated by the call of her ancestors’ land. The organic community which nurses the couple back to health, familial bliss and a sense of belonging is visualized by King in the illustration below (figure 11): its tight-knit composition foregrounds the villagers’ solidarity, the paths and structures linking the various farms together, the rootedness of their houses (recognizable only from their roofs) and their closeness to nature (their resemblance to winged and dotted insects is striking).

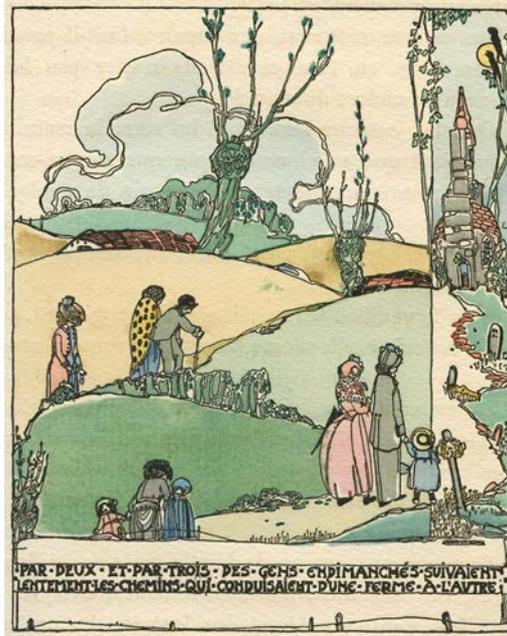


Figure 11: Jessie M. King, “Par deux et par trois des gens endimanchés suivaient lentement les chemins qui conduisaient d’une ferme à l’autre”. Rudyard Kipling, *L’Habitation forcée* (Paris: Éditions Kieffer, 1921), p. 80. Photograph courtesy of Nocloo Gallery.

Eventually reclaimed by the land of her ancestors, and in compliance with the feudal obligations that are now devolved to her, Sophie elects to remain in Sussex permanently and George is, thus, forced to stay with her—hence the title of the story. Even though Kipling’s vision of “Merrie England” is not entirely devoid of ambivalence, the story’s outcome and King’s final illustration celebrate the triumph of feminine values and female lineage, as the new-born Chapin son and heir is given his mother’s family name and presented with the long-forgotten ancestral silver christening mug.⁶ Whether or not the worn and dented mug/chalice should be construed as a parodic reworking of Malory’s Holy Grail, Kipling’s concluding poem “The Recall” insists on the compelling magic wrought by the maternal homeland:

Under their feet in the grasses
 My clinging magic runs.
 They shall return as strangers.
 They shall remain as sons.

Conclusion

In articulating the present and the past, modern communication technologies and the mysterious call of the land, masculine virtues and feminine values, speculation and reconstruction, Kipling’s short story was more generally articulating the continuities and discontinuities the author saw between the late-Victorian Aestheticism and Arts-and-Crafts philosophy of his youth, on the one hand, and the early modernism of his mature years, on the other. In 1921, this cultural tension was sustained and amplified through the combined artistic styles of Jessie M. King and René Kieffer, while the ironic inflections of the narrative were refracted in the illustrator’s humorous or parodic personal additions. More importantly, perhaps, is the fact that the 1921 edition of *L’Habitation forcée* offered a timely balm to its select readership, revealing that, by building as it did on the legacy of *fin-de-siècle* Aestheticism, self-culture and the House Beautiful, Kipling’s light-hearted short story anticipated something of the profound malaise experienced by its belated post-war readers, something that had to do with what Walter Benjamin and Martin Heidegger were later to identify as the plight of human “dwelling,” described as follows:

⁶ For an in-depth study of gender in Kipling’s work, see Kaori Nagai, “Kipling and Gender” (Booth 66-79).

The proper plight of dwelling is indeed older than the world wars with their destruction, older also than the increase of the earth's population and the condition of the industrial workers. The proper plight of dwelling lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the essence of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*. (Heidegger 141, emphasis in the original)

Through its unique embodiment, the 1921 edition of Kipling's short story illuminated the author's aesthetics/poetics of dwelling—of turning being into belonging, space into place, land into soil, habitation into home, thing into object. In itself a house of sorts—encasing, harbouring, and distilling the literary substance—this artist's book provided for Kipling's tale a dwelling in which reading itself could be identified with a form of shared belonging, and *take place* across time, languages and cultures.

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