

International Yeats Studies

Volume 2 | Issue 1

Article 6

November 2017

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Recommended Citation

Mohite, Ragini (2017) "A Review of *Meeting Without Knowing It*," *International Yeats Studies*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34068/IYS.02.01.05>

Available at: <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/iys/vol2/iss1/6>

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A REVIEW OF *MEETING WITHOUT KNOWING IT*

Alexander Bubb, *Meeting Without Knowing It: Kipling and Yeats at the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), hardback and ebook, pp. xv+272, ISBN 9780198753872.

Reviewed by Ragini Mohite

Alexander Bubb's monograph, *Meeting Without Knowing It: Kipling and Yeats at the Fin de Siècle*, is a detailed study of two authors with striking similarities. Born six months apart in 1865, William Butler Yeats outlived Rudyard Kipling by three years. Both were recipients of the Nobel Prize in Literature, with Kipling receiving it in 1907, and Yeats in 1923. Despite having never interacted with each other personally, Yeats and Kipling make good subjects, due to the commonalities in their artistic upbringings, their interest in folklore, their preoccupation with image, heroism, and mythologies, their shared acquaintances, and their certain knowledge of the other's literary and cultural standing. Compelling and conscientious, the chapters of Bubb's book follow a roughly chronological pattern, beginning with the authors' childhoods and concluding when the two men were in their mid-thirties and established writers of the fin de siècle. These imposing figures are situated within the fabric of artistic and political debate during the final decades of the nineteenth century, highlighting the often-obscured connections among its cultural voices. This book carries out a reappraisal of the lives and oeuvres of both Yeats and Kipling using a rich archival apparatus and a keen historicist approach. Bubb's methodology allows him to connect the fin de siècle and its literature to both its Romantic predecessors and its modernist inheritors such as T. S. Eliot and James Joyce.

The early chapters are concerned with the provincial beginnings of Yeats and Kipling in the landscapes of Ireland and India respectively. Posed between Sligo and Dublin, and Bombay and Punjab, the Anglo-Irish Yeats and the Anglo-Indian Kipling were "marginalized within marginal communities" (89). Bubb discusses the processes by which Yeats and Kipling write their home spaces, throughout their own periodical and geographical distancing from these spaces. In doing so, they engage with the Romantic lyric, and Bubb examines their reworking of this genre, especially how their use of reverie is influenced by their predecessor, William Wordsworth. Identifying Yeats and Kipling as "border writers," Yeats's tower home in "A Prayer for my Daughter" becomes the site of reverie similar to Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," therefore, "to possess border vision is to be habitually self-reflexive, self-examining,

and both Kipling and Yeats used confession or monologue to dramatize their liminal nature” (91). Yet, both authors face the tensions of making such private spaces public.

Upon their arrival in London, Yeats and Kipling become intricately bound in the web of acquaintance and influence that prevailed in the fin de siècle, most strikingly through G. K. Chesterton; through Richard Le Gallienne’s novel *Young Lives* (1898); and through the powerful facilitation of W. E. Henley, who in his role as editor of the *Scots* (later *National Observer*) published several works by both authors including Kipling’s *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1890) and Yeats’s *The Celtic Twilight* (1893) and *The Secret Rose* (1897), thus playing an important role in their rising literary fame. Henley recognized both authors’ ability to be “purist and populist, combining elite standards with social influence” (143), and he held Yeats’s Celtic work in high esteem for its engagements with the supernatural, its “heroic accent” (quoted in Bubb 144), and its imagery. Bubb not only navigates these literary networks in detail, but is also attuned to the number of echoes and tensions in the literary works of his subjects. Yeats and Kipling’s works reflect a concern with “the power and influence of concrete symbols,” dreams and the occult, and with notions of manhood and action (92). In discussing Theosophy, Bubb acknowledges that Kipling shares in Yeats’s use of the Blakean term “Daemon” and while his approach was more straightforward than Yeats’s conflict-based dualism, “the impact esoteric religion made upon Yeats was fundamentally Kiplingesque” (103). And while reviewers and critics had an impact on the public image particularly of Yeats the poet, these authors display a preoccupation with image, each dedicating their autobiographies to readers and friends. These notions of image-making are subtly crafted through the voyages taken by them. Kipling’s sea voyage around Asia not only gave him a larger perspective on India but also charted the shift from being a provincial colonial to an ideological imperialist, fearful of rootlessness. It was upon arriving in the United States in November 1903 that Yeats spoke about Kipling.

Bubb focuses on the complementary trajectories of both authors but also powerfully investigates the specific moments of creative and ideological divergences. The most significant ideological divergence that emerges is during the Boer War (1899–1902), which had an impact on the anti-imperialist movement in Ireland and was a period that sparked fiery political involvement by Yeats alongside the pro-Boer Maud Gonne and Lady Gregory. Kipling, on the other hand, undertook the role of an active British propagandist upon his arrival in Cape Town in 1900. These ideological differences between Yeats and Kipling are foregrounded through the Irish Question, alongside the recognition that Henley’s “Tennysonian hatred of the ‘mob’ and opposition to universal franchise” were “in principle attractive” to both authors (147). The

book increasingly recognizes the interweaving of artistry and political impact, and identifies both authors' desire for their lyrics to be communally sung as part of this intervention. The penultimate chapter, "Plotting and Scheming: Experiments towards a Modern Mythology," makes apparent the authors' shared interests in folklore made modern and their innovations in bardic ballad traditions, through Kipling's short stories and Yeats's prose work *Mythologies*. Their novelistic endeavors—Kipling's *The Light that Failed* (1891) and Yeats's *John Sherman* (1891)—are distinct in their demand for climactic resolutions and the dissolution of antinomies. These literary efforts reflect their concerns with Ireland and India's fraught relationship to Empire, but also that of pre-modern cultural histories to modern polity. Bubb manages to connect these discourses on art, political affiliation, and social networks across his chapters while identifying their temporal specificity. He further writes: "as translators, their work is premised on cultural authenticity, but as romancers in their own right their concern is with the evasive truth of art. The political projects that they were steadily shaping would depend on both techniques" (171).

The final chapter, "Authority: 1896–1906," also discusses the political commitments that divide these two authors irrevocably. However, Yeats's and Kipling's political approaches share an element of ambivalence, and Yeats particularly frequently took on a political voice while disavowing politics. Significant to this discussion are Yeats's reaction to the death of Charles Stewart Parnell and Kipling's friendship with Cecil Rhodes, two figures who helped identify the authors' differing notions of heroic figures. Kipling may have perceived in Rhodes an expression of the maternal, Celtic quality, and Bubb anticipates Yeats's twentieth-century work in writing that "this identification with authoritarian personalities ties in with each man's growing anti-democratic bias" (213). The satirical periodicals and caricatures such as Max Beerbohm's caricature of 1913 (which features on the cover of this book) also had a role to play in the publicized rivalry of Yeats and Kipling, in addition to impacting their individual posturing in the publicity machine. The two authors ultimately become figureheads for the critics' aesthetic debates and are posited as the harbingers of cultural renovation and literary modernization. Bubb argues that this tactic is exacerbated by the recognition of their obvious similarities. Instead, he contends: "comparison was never the object in a discussion that was not really about poetic worth, but instead concerned with the position of authority for which each author was implicitly competing" (218). The end of the Boer War in 1902 and the Liberal electoral victory of 1906 are the markers of Kipling's movement to the political margins, while Yeats would go on to scale further artistic and political heights as a Nobel laureate, author, and Free State senator.

Lastly, Bubb remarks that each of the authors located their "most intemperate fantasies not onto the degraded metropole both had resented, but onto the

other's homeland," and their fraught relationships with place and politics speak through the literature that he closely examines (240). Highlighting the under-acknowledged yet evidently important dynamic between Yeats and Kipling in their capacities as authors and public figures, this monograph is rich in content and expression, and is a welcome addition to the study of Yeats and Kipling as part of the intricate fabric of fin de siècle cultural production.