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"An Unpleasant Book about Unpleasant Boys at an Unpleasant School":* Kipling's Reshaping of the Victorian School Story in *Stalky & Co.*

Abstract: "Slaves of the Lamp, Part One"—the first tale of Rudyard Kipling's *Stalky & Co.*—was published in 1897, forty years after the publication of Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, a book that created a pattern followed by other practitioners of the school-story genre. The aim of the following paper is to discuss the ways in which Kipling challenged the established conventions of the Victorian school story. In contrast to his predecessors, Kipling did not set his tales in an old, established public school; he questioned the importance of sports and games in developing manly character; and refused to idolize the school traditions. His protagonists rebel against authority and do not follow the rules, but are intent on the pursuing their own interests and pleasures, and do not hesitate to venture out to explore and appropriate for themselves new spaces outside of school boundaries. An important feature of *Stalky & Co.* is its rejection of anti-intellectualism that characterizes many Victorian school stories. *Stalky & Co*. abounds in literary allusions, the protagonists are voracious readers; moreover, reading and writing are represented as essential parts of the process by which cultural maturity and authority are attained.

Keywords: Rudyard Kipling, *Stalky and Co.*, Victorian literature, school story, masculinity

For a researcher in the field of Victorian literature, there can be only one choice of a subject for an article intended for a volume commemorating Professor Jan Cygan—it has to be a paper about Rudyard Kipling, Professor Cygan's favorite Victorian author. Kipling's oeuvre encompasses a great number of works in

* This is how George Sampson referred to *Stalky & Co*. in his *Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* (959).

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a variety of genres, but *Stalky & Co*. seems a particularly fitting text because it is a collection of school stories that deal with different aspects of the process of education, and Professor Cygan was not only an eminent linguist but also an esteemed educator who played a crucial role in shaping the English philology curriculum at the University of Wrocław. The study of literature has been a crucial part of this curriculum. My aim in the following paper is to show how Kipling departed from the conventions of a typical Victorian school story and created a one-of-a-kind school where, as one of the teachers observes, "Boys educate each other… more than we can or dare" (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 3245). Kipling's protagonists—the boys who educate each other—although unruly and often intractable, share an interest in literature and read voraciously.

Rudyard Kipling's collection of school tales, *Stalky & Co.*, appeared for the first time in the book form in 1899, following serialization which began with the publication of the first Stalky story "Slaves of the Lamp, Part I" in the April 1897 edition of *Cosmopolis* and continued in *The Windsor Magazine* in Britain and *McClure's Magazine* in the USA. The volume contained nine stories about adolescent boys at an unnamed British boarding school, referred to as the College, or the Coll. Five more stories set in the same school and focused on the same trio of protagonists were published over the period of nine years, from 1917 to 1926, and *The Complete Stalky & Co* appeared in 1929. The 1929 edition included the nine stories from the 1899 book and the five stories which did not figure in the original *Stalky & Co*. Kipling's book is not a novel with a continuous plot, which—somewhat paradoxically—may be the source of its strength. According to Isabel Quigly, *Stalky & Co*. "scores over most other school stories because it keeps up interest and emotional intensity in energetic bursts of narrative, each complete in itself, each worked out to make a satisfactory pattern" (loc. 258). As the dates of publication demonstrate, Kipling's stories of boys' school life appeared at the time when the genre of Victorian school stories was firmly established. In 1857—exactly forty years before Kipling's "Slaves of the Lamp"—Thomas Hughes published *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, an almost archetypal example of the school-story genre, which inspired many imitators such as Henry Cadwallader Adams, the author of, among others, *The White Brunswickers: Or Reminiscences of Schoolboy Life* (1865) or Thomas Street Millington, the author of *Boy and Man: A Story for Young and Old* (1887). Hughes's book became enormously popular: *Tom Brown's Schooldays* ran through 52 editions from 1857 to 1892. In the novel, Hughes draws on his own experiences at Rugby, which he attended from 1833 to 1842, when the school was run by its celebrated headmaster Dr. Thomas Arnold (the father of the poet Matthew Arnold), who radically reformed its curriculum and the organization of the school life.

Another significant contribution to the school story genre was Frederic William Farrar's *Eric, or Little by Little*, issued by Adam & Charles Black in 1858. As Farrar explained in the preface to the fourth edition of his best-known novel, "[t]he story of 'Eric' was written with but one single object—the vivid inculcation

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of inward purity and moral purpose" (vii). Farrar's book has achieved a particular significance for the reader of *Stalky and Co*., because in Kipling's stories the word "Ericking" functions as a derisive term the boys use to refer to pious behavior. Kipling's protagonists often make fun of the religious earnestness that characterizes Farrar's novel and mock its priggishness and mawkishness. The boys' disdain for Farrar's books is revealed when Stalky's aunt buys him *Eric* and *St Winifred's: Or The World of School* (another famous school story by Farrar). Stalky and his friends immediately want to get rid of both volumes by re-selling them; however, the local bookseller would "advance but ninepence on the two", since both books are a "great … drug" on the market—that is, a commodity whose supply greatly surpasses the demand for it (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 2012). Through such refences to earlier school stories, Kipling reminds the reader that his tales of school life are different from the ones created by his predecessors.

In a typical Victorian school story which follows the pattern developed by Hughes and Farrar, the events take place in an old established public school, such as Rugby, the setting for *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, or the fictional Roslyn School of *Eric*, the school being a cross between King William's College, which Farrar attended and Marlborough College, where he was employed as the schoolmaster. Such public schools were highly selective institutions which drew their students from the upper stratum of society, and educated the vast majority of future Oxford and Cambridge graduates who would later become members of Britain's ruling elite. The College where *Stalky & Co* is set had different aims: the school prepared its graduates for entering Sandhurst or the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, which produced military officers and civil servants for the British Empire, most of whom would leave Britain for the colonies.

The school was based on the United Services College, Kipling's own school. Founded in 1874 as Westward Ho! in Devon, the United Services College, was an institution "where the sons of officers ... could be given a good education at a moderate fee. … A Company was formed, consisting mostly of army officers, and the purchase of fifty £1 shares enabled the holders to nominate one boy for education at reduced terms" (Tapp 1). The school catered mainly to those who could not afford the public school Haileybury. It is worth mentioning that the three main characters of Kipling's stories—Stalky, M'Turk and Beetle—have their real-life equivalents. They have been identified as L. C. Dunsterville, George Charles Beresford and Kipling himself (Musgrave 172). However, it would be a mistake to treat *Stalky & Co*. as a collection of reminiscences about Kipling's own school life. In March 1984, *The Kipling Journal* published several extracts from the diary of Kipling's school-friend, L. C. Dunsterville, who stresses several times that *Stalky & Co*. is a work of fiction. On January 24, 1923, he writes: "am very tired of this perpetual 'Stalky' business. Am tired of pointing out that I never did any of the things Stalky did and that R[udyard] K[ipling] is a writer of fiction not history" (37). On July 1, 1925, he makes a similar point:

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> It worries me that people think that my nickname at Westward Ho was Stalky. Why? Kipling writes *fiction*. He and I and Beresford were at school together and behaved badly. He writes this up into Stalky and Co., calling himself Beetle, me Stalky and Beresford Mc Turk. As a matter of fact, I was never called anything else than Dunsty, Beresford no nickname, and Kipling Gigger or Giglamps from his spectacles. (38–39)

Kipling attended the United Services College from 1878 to 1882. Recalling his school experience in *Something of Myself*, Kipling wrote that the United Services College was "largely a caste-school—some seventy five percent of us had been born outside England and hoped to follow their fathers in the Army" (72). There is an obvious parallel between the student population of the United Services College and the student body of the fictional Coll. As Don Randall puts it, the "school of *Stalky* is not an insular world susceptible to internal, self-referential definition; it is a carefully delineated microcosm of the British Empire" (91). The boys of the College are well aware of the school's status: "we aren't a public school. We are a limited liability company payin' four percent", notes a schoolboy (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 4169). Another pupil bluntly observes: "We've got to get into the Army or—get out, haven't we? King is hired by the Council to teach us. All the rest's flumdiddle" (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 4169).

The spatial organization of the College of *Stalky & Co*. also foregrounds the difference between the Coll. and an established elite public school typically envisioned as a picturesque campus consisting of ivy-covered ancient buildings, spacious quadrangles with majestic trees, green cricket fields, and a beautiful chapel. In contrast to such idyllic surroundings, the College is located in a row of seaside boarding houses on the wild North Devon coast. The buildings had been adapted for the school use, and the main setting of *Stalky & Co*.is described by Kipling in the dedicatory verses to the book as the "twelve bleak houses by the shore", (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 794). The school is further described in "An Unsavoury Interlude": "each House, in its internal arrangements—the College had originally been a terrace of twelve large houses—was a replica of the next; one straight roof covering all" (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 2112). While Kipling's predecessors represent the school as a self-contained microcosm and rarely show the world outside school, he blurs the boundaries between school and the outside world. Stalky and his friends often spend time in the surrounding countryside and get to know local inhabitants of various social status, from a landowner, Colonel Dabney, who figures prominently in "In Ambush", to the dairywoman Mother Yeo, and her daughter, a pretty dairymaid Mary, who plays an important role in "The Last Term". Linguistically, the boys belong to both worlds: at school, they use standard English, but they are also fluent in the broad Devon dialect. Kipling makes explicit the difference between the College and other public schools a number of times; for example, the tale "The United Idolaters" begins with the arrival of a temporary replacement teacher, Mr. Brownell, who "came from the Central Anglican Scholastic Agency" but "his reign was brief", for he could not adapt himself to the life at the

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Coll. He was surprised at the level of freedom the boys enjoyed and was critical of the school’s lax discipline. Other masters resented his opinions, which led to a quarrel and resulted in his resignation. “Looking back at the affair, one sees that the Head should have warned Mr. Brownell of the College’s outstanding peculiarity, instead of leaving him to discover it for himself the first day of the term”, writes Kipling (*Stalky*, loc. 3281). The difference and oddity of the College becomes both a recurrent motif in the stories that make up *Stalky & Co*. and a source of certain kind of pride felt by the protagonists.

Although in the four decades that separate the publication of *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* and *Eric, or Little by Little* from the publication of *Stalky & Co*. the style of Victorian school stories was moving away from “old didactic moralizing” towards a “fiction of implicit values”, encoded within the conventional features of the school-story genre, such as house rivalry, the outwitting of the bully or the climactic school match (Scott 5), readers accustomed to often-sentimentalized images of school life were surprised or even shocked by the trio of Kipling’s central figures: Stalky, M’Turk and Beetle. As Ulrike Pesold puts it, “Little is left of muscular Christians like Tom Brown or his chums East and Arthur.” The three protagonists of *Stalky & Co*, “in contrast to the ordinary school boy who is a character with rather mediocre intellectual abilities, but good-natured and physically fit … were described by critics as unpleasant and even as beasts” (65)[1]. Stalky and his friends do not share the typical schoolboy interests: they do not care for sports, they do not aspire to achieve the prestigious position of a school prefect, they do not cheer at games and matches between the houses. Instead, they lead a private life at school, often defying authority, and securing for themselves a secret hiding place outside of school grounds where they read what they want, smoke pipes, and escape the pressures of enforced togetherness that school life imposes on its pupils. “In Ambush”, the first story of the 1899 collection, opens with a passage that emphasizes the importance of a private, personal space out of school bounds: “In summer all right-minded boys built huts in the furze-hill behind the College—little lairs whittled out of the heart of the prickly bushes, full of stumps, odd root-ends, and spike, but, since they were strictly forbidden, palaces of delight” (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 1165). Kipling uses the phrase “right-minded boys” in reference to those who rebel against authority and do not follow the rules, but are intent on the pursuing their own interests and pleasures, and do not hesitate to venture out to explore and appropriate for themselves new spaces outside of school boundaries.

The tales of *Stalky & Co*. center on the conflict between the trio of ingenious and sometimes devious protagonists and the forces that represent authority: schoolmasters, prefects, a Member of Parliament visiting the school. The importance of cleverness and wiliness is emphasized by the very nickname of Stalky, whose given

[1] It was A. C. Benson who described Kipling’s protagonists as “little beasts”; see Hay (318–326).

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name is Arthur Lionel Corkran, called Corky by his friends. In the story entitled "Stalky", Kipling describes how Corkran gained his nickname. The story was first published in *The Windsor Magazine* and *McClure's Magazine* in December 1898. It was intended to introduce the three protagonists,[2] but it was withheld from the 1899 publication of *Stalky & Co*. because some reviewers complained that it appeared to endorse cruelty to animals (Harbord, Vol. 1, 423). It was restored as the introductory story in *The Complete Stalky & Co*. published in 1929. In the story, Corkran achieves his nickname when he comes up with a clever plan to free the schoolboys, who planned a cattle raid against the local farmer, were caught in the act and locked in a barn by the angry farmhands. Corkran uses his catapult to shoot at the cows in order to make them run amuck and, in the ensuing chaos, shows the boys how to escape. What is more, he manages to lock up the farmers, who hid in the barn from the enraged cows, and then reveals himself to the farmers, offering to rescue them, thus earning their gratitude. Corkran is "henceforth known as Stalky" (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 1138), and the narrator explains that "'Stalky' in their school vocabulary, meant clever, well-considered and wily, as applied to plans of action; and 'stalkiness' was the one virtue Corkran toiled after" (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 888). It is worth noting that the cunning and survival skills developed by Stalky and his friend both at the Coll. and in the world outside of school will be useful in their later life. In "Slaves of the Lamp II", the last story in *The Complete Stalky & Co*., a reunion of alumni, twelve years after their graduation, brings together Beetle, M'Turk and others, who talk about an absent Stalky, now an imperial officer in India. M'Turk gives an account of Stalky's exploits in India, showing that Stalky has used the same trick he used in "Slaves of the Lamp I" to out-maneuver renegade colonial tribesmen, who outnumbered his men. He set the tribes against each other, exactly as he had done with Mr. King and the local carrier in "Slaves of the Lamp I". Stalky manages to accomplish his goal because he has learned to speak the language of both tribes, just as he mastered the broad Devon dialect when he was a pupil at the Coll. The message of "Slaves of the Lamp II" appears to be that the British Empire is better served by men like Stalky, with his openness to new experiences coupled with cleverness, deviousness and willingness to subvert the rules rather than to obey them—the qualities that he developed at the College. As Isabel Quigly has noted in her book *The Heirs of Tom Brown*, *Stalky & Co*. "is the only school story ... in which school is shown as directly parallel with life in the Empire; a training directly related to the life that lay ahead for many public schoolboys at the end of the nineteenth century" (116).

[2] "Stalky" was included in the 1923 collection *Land and Sea Tales for Scout and Guides*, and was headed by Kipling's note: "This happens to be the first story that was written concerning the adventures and performances of three schoolboys—'Stalky', McTurk and 'Beetle'. For some reason or other, it was never put into the book, called *Stalky and Co*." (https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/readers-guide/rg_stalky1.htm).

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In many of the stories, the adult authority figures are represented as getting their comeuppance. The housemasters—especially the strict and demanding Mr. King—are treated as adversaries who deserve retribution. For example, “In Ambush” has the boys luring Mr. King into trying to catch them trespassing. Mr. King follows Stalky, M’Turk and Beetle to their hideout on Colonel Dabney’s grounds, but he does not know that the boys have been given the landowner’s permission to freely access his land, and thus he is maneuvered into trespassing himself. Mr. King is apprehended by Colonel Dabney and severely upbraided by the landowner, who tells the housemaster that he has “no shadow of a right here, cornin’ up from the combe that way, an’ frightenin’ everything in it. … If the masters trespass, how can we blame the boys” (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 1466). The threesome, who eavesdrop on the exchange, are overjoyed. “An Unsavoury Interlude” provides another example of a challenge to the housemaster’s authority. When Stalky and his friends are unfairly accused by Mr. King of being dirty and smelly, they put a dead cat between attic floor boards and the ceiling of his House, which results in an unbearable stench when the cat’s body begins to decompose. It leads to Mr. King’s boys being called stinkers and him bearing the financial burden, for he “had himself expended, with no thought of reimbursement, sums, the amounts of which he would not specify, on disinfectants” (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 2371) to get rid of the offensive smell. The boys gloat over the downfall of Mr. King by ridiculing his pompous rhetoric and his fondness for biblical turns of phrase in the mocking speech delivered by M’Turk: “Now in all the Coll. There was no stink like the stink of King’s house, for it stank vehemently and none knew what to make of it. Save King. And he washed the fags *privatim et seriatim*. In the fishpools of Heshbon washed he them, with an apron about his loins” (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 2397).

Kipling’s fictional images of boys behaving badly met with a hostile reception. In “The Voice of the Hooligan”, the 1899 article for the *Contemporary Review*, Robert Buchanan makes his dissatisfaction with Kipling’s book abundantly clear:

> Mr. Kipling obviously aims at verisimilitude; the picture he draws is at any rate repulsive and disgusting enough to be true. … Only the spoiled child of an utterly brutalized public could possibly have written *Stalky & Co.* … It is simply impossible to show by mere quotation the horrible vileness of the book describing these three small fiends in human likeness; only a perusal of the whole work would convey to the reader its truly repulsive character. … The vulgarity, the brutality, the savagery … reeks on every page. (244–45)

Buchanan’s essay is but one of numerous voices that produced the outcry which greeted *Stalky & C.* stories upon their publication; as Robin Gilmour maintains, such a reaction “is a sign of how thoroughly Kipling subverted … [the] genre [of the Victorian school-story], and by doing so challenged a particular social and ethical code—the Arnoldian[3] code of Christian manliness—which the school-story had enshrined and promoted since *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*” (19–20).

[3] Thomas Arnold (1795–1842) served as headmaster of Rugby School from 1828 to 1841. Arnold described Rugby’s mission in the following words “What we must look for here is, 1st,

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The notion of Christian manliness was rooted in the movement known as muscular Christianity,[4] which emerged in England in the mid-nineteenth century, and which maintained that there existed a significant link between Christian faith and the cultivation of a muscular body, and emphasized the connection between a healthy body and sound morality. Muscular Christians considered sports, especially team sports, to be a direct and effective way of instilling in boys the sense of importance of duty and obligation to family, school, country, and ultimately God. The importance of sport in shaping the manly ideal manifested itself in the games-playing cult of the 1850s and the 1860s, inspired by the belief that exercise not only promoted health but helped with character development (Park 10). The ideas of muscular Christianity became popular and influential in the sphere of education and found their reflection in Victorian novels of school life. Many school stories, Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* being the best-known example, presented team sports such as football or cricket as indispensable agents in the development of an upright moral character and in turning unruly adolescent boys into honorable men. Hughes places particular emphasis on the development of a code of honor among the schoolboys which arises out of their participation in sports. Tom's first significant learning experience at the school is his playing in a football match. Football is a team sport in which cooperation, fair play and following the rules are crucial. During the game, every player can test his mettle, practice his leadership and demonstrate his loyalty to his school. The football or cricket field becomes a metaphor for the battlefield. Thus, the public-school cult of athleticism contributed to the formation of the British man who begins his conquests on the playing field and goes on to fight for the Empire on the battlefield. The saying "Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton", attributed to the Duke of Wellington, and popular in the Victorian period, is an apt reflection of the belief in the significance of sports in shaping imperial masculinity. Moreover, as John R. Gillis argues in *Youth and History*, in the Victorian public schools, sport took on many of the functions of the rites of passage between boyhood and adult masculinity, where boys could demonstrate that they possessed appropriate manly qualities and could in time become successful adults (95).

The protagonists of *Stalky & Co*. have little interest in sport and games. In the summer, they cut cricket, preferring to spend their time in the wild furze-hills. They choose not to participate in House-matches and show no concern for the honor of

religious and moral principles; 2ndly, gentlemanly conduct; 3rdly, intellectual ability" (Stanley 108). Under Arnold's rule, Rugby became a morally serious school, where religion played an important role in shaping pupils characters, and where "character building" was seen as the main objective of education.

[4] For a detailed discussion of muscular Christianity and its literary representations, see Vance, who links manliness with physical prowess, which combines strength and courage and was linked with a valorization of sport.

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their house. Mr. Prout, their housemaster is clearly dismayed at their unwillingness to uphold the school tradition:

> Boys that [Mr. Prout] understood attended House-matches and could be accounted for at any moment. But he had heard M'Turk openly deride cricket—even House-matches; Beetle's views on the honour of the House he knew were incendiary; and he could never tell when the soft and smiling Stalky was laughing at him. (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 1326)

Mr. Prout is frustrated by the fact that the trio does not "take any interest in the honour of … [their] house"—they do not want even to watch the games. At some point, he tried to force them to attend the match, and decided not to do it again: "He had tried the experiment once at a big match, when the three, self-isolated, stood to attention for half an hour in full view of all the visitors, to whom fags, subsidized for that end, pointed them out as victims of Prout's tyranny" (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 2040). Although some house masters at the Coll. believe that "by games, and games alone, was salvation wrought" (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 2042), Stalky, M'Turk and Beetle successfully resist any attempts to turn them into competitive athletes. It does not mean that they are not physically fit. As Terence Wright has noted, "In fact, they are good at sports, but they will only play when they choose, and certainly not for an abstract *esprit de corps* concept such as the 'Honour of the House'" (67). When Mr. King, one of the school masters, keeps "talking round and over the boys' heads, in a lofty and promiscuous style, of public-school spirit and the tradition of ancient seats", he does not get the expected response: "Beyond waking in two hundred and fifty young hearts a lively hatred of all other foundations, he accomplished little" (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 4132–45).

The prefects and housemasters who explicitly invoke such notions as 'the honor of the house' are depicted as pompous and foolish, but the character who becomes an object of the most intense ridicule and contempt is Tory MP Raymond Martin, who plays a central role in "The Flag of Their Country". He comes to the Coll. to deliver a public speech on the subject of 'patriotism': "In a raucous voice, he cried aloud little matters, like hope of Honour and the dream of Glory, that boys do not discuss even with their most intimate equals, cheerfully assuming that, till he spoke, they had never considered these possibilities" (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 4763). His audience—the sons of serving army officers—are appalled by his insensitive references to relatives who have lost their lives in the service of their country. The boys feel that he "profaned the most secret places of their souls" with his crude talk and experience profound outrage when he starts waving "a large calico Union Jack", expecting "the thunder of applause that should crown his effort" (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 4764). However, no applause is coming:

> They looked in silence. They had certainly seen the thing before—down at the coastguard station, or through a telescope, half-mast high when a brig went ashore on Braunton sands; above the roof of the Golf Club, and in Keyte's window, where a certain kind of striped sweetmeat bore it on paper on each box. But the College never displayed it; it was no part of the scheme of their lives; the Head had never alluded to it; their fathers had not declared it unto them. It was

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> a matter shut up, sacred and apart. What, in the name of everything caddish, was he driving at, who waved that horror before their eyes? (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 4778)

For the boys of the College, true patriotism has nothing to do with the flag-waving and loud but empty declarations. Stalky calls the MP a "Jelly-bellied Flag-flapper" (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 4793), and in response to M'Turk's sarcastic question, "Don't you want to die for your giddy country?", Stalky replies: "Not if I can jolly well avoid it" (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 4623). He repudiates not patriotism as such, but rather its jingoistic version as embodied by Raymond Martin.

Another feature that differentiates *Stalky & Co.* from other school stories is the multitude of literary allusions. Stalky, M'Turk and Beetle are voracious readers: in addition to the required classical Latin texts, they read not only Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Johnson, Pope and Dickens, but also the works of Ruskin and De Quincey, not to mention such popular books as *Uncle Remus*, or adventure novels. Books become sources of ideas for the tricks they play on their adversaries; for example, Margaret Oliphant's *Beleaguered City* becomes an inspiration for misleading Mr. Prout in "The Impressionists" while the works of Eugène Viollet-le-Duc teach them how the house is constructed, so they know where to hide the dead cat—the episode which figures so prominently in "An Unsavoury Interlude". References to Homer or the Bible or Latin and French phrases are common throughout the text. As Kimberley Reynolds has noted, anti-intellectualism played an important role in late-Victorian school stories that aimed at turning boys into men: "a consequence of this determination to produce more masculine boys is a decidedly anti-intellectual strain in their fiction: muscle and morality are celebrated over intelligence and inspiration." (59). In contrast to such anti-intellectualism, in *Stalky & Co*. the boys read prose and poetry, discover new ideas through reading, and actively engage with what they read. Kipling prioritizes intelligence and inspiration, and valorizes reading as well as writing; in the world of *Stalky & Co*, reading functions as an important process by which cultural maturity and authority are attained.

The importance of reading is clearly visible in the character of Beetle, short-sighted and thus disqualified from a career in the army, whose high standing among his peers is due to his interests in literature and his literary endeavors. As an avid reader and an editor of the College paper, he is granted "the run of [the Head's] brown-bound, tobacco-scented library; prohibiting nothing" (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 5573). Having free access to a wide variety of literary texts, Beetle acquires the kind of knowledge that goes beyond the school curriculum. In "The Propagation of Knowledge", Beetle shares the results of his extensive reading with other boys, disseminating amongst them many anecdotes from Isaac D'Israeli's *Curiosities of Literature*, which they include in their test papers. The teacher, Mr. King is duly impressed. From Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Authorship of Shakespeare*, Beetle learns of the Baconian theory—a theory that Mr. King wholeheartedly rejects and refuses to mention in class. The boys discuss the question of Shakespeare's authorship with

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a visiting examiner during their *viva voce* examination. The examiner, who subscribes to the theory, gives them high marks for their knowledge and praises them for “a genuine and unusual interest in English Literature” (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 5202).

The authority of Beetle comes from both his wide reading and his writing. He is referred to in the third person in throughout the text of the tales; however, in the final story, “Slaves of the Lamp II”, he refers to himself in the first person. He reveals himself as the narrator, not just of the final tale, which focuses on recounting Stalky’s military successes in India, but as the teller of the whole story. As a man of letters, a creator of texts, Beetle is the one who has preserved the exploits of boys at school and of men out of school for posterity. In Kipling’s world, Beetle is as important as Stalky. Stalky is a military hero who achieves his heroic status not only because of his actions, but also because they have been recorded in writing by Beetle. In the closing lines of *Stalky & Co*., Beetle points out that “India’s full of Stalkies ... that we don’t know anything about”. It is thanks to Beetle, the maker of narratives, that Stalky’s deeds are known and will be remembered, and it is thanks to Beetle that the spirit of the Coll. will be represented for future generations. “Ain’t I responsible for the whole thing?”, he asks, and when challenged by his colleagues to “Prove it”, he triumphantly answers “And I have!” (Kipling, *Stalky* loc. 6331) referring to the book that has ended with these lines. In the final tale of *Stalky and Co*. Kipling implies that maturity and manliness are demonstrated not only by heroic deeds on the battlefield, but also by contributions to literary and cultural heritage. Kipling’s repudiation of anti-intellectualism, his appreciation for intellectual pursuits, together with his valorization of writing is what makes *Stalky and Co*. different from other school stories, and what may make the book still relevant for the twenty-first-century reader.

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