



Actions and Reactions

Rudyard Kipling

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The bulk of Kipling's writing consists of his short stories and critics often focus on the most striking ones, on the masterpieces. They thus create or perpetuate a group of "hits" which are collected in anthologies. In *Actions and Reactions*, the most famous stories may be "With the Night Mail" or "The House Surgeon", but certainly not "The Puzzler": what brings them fame is their intrinsic originality and their forceful character but also an interesting critical history. The more a story is analysed, the more interesting it gets – such is the power of criticism. The point here is not to add another layer of criticism on the most successful stories but rather to deal with the collection as a whole, and to analyse the effects of this type of book organisation on the reader. Except for "Garm – a Hostage", the stories were all written between 1905 and 1909. They all appeared first separately in newspapers, showing that they can be read independently. When the collection was published in 1909 it was entitled differently from any of the stories included. An apparently thematic title now tops up these eight very dissimilar stories and appears as a link between them, which means that the stories' status changed in the process of collection. Despite a first impression of disjunction, the reader feels that the collection is more than a mere juxtaposition. The poems did not accompany the stories when they were published in the newspapers, whereas Kipling wrote them for the collection, showing that they have a role to play in its building up. In his stories, Kipling created many characters whose main function is to listen to a narrator telling his yarn: this certainly proves the importance of the question of the horizon of expectation, using Jauss's term, and more generally that of the reader's role. Kipling invented his own type of organization for his collections, and book after book his readers became used to this form. *Actions and Reactions* can be taken as one example of the kiplingian short story collection and of the strategies at work in it.

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