

Beyond Mowgli: The Tragic Heroism of the Jungle in Kipling's *The Jungle Book*

Perhaps influenced by popular culture, academic criticism of Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* has often followed a trajectory similar to popular filmic adaptation, often creating androcentric readings and sometimes placing the stories which concern Mowgli into a critical vacuum and neglecting the true protagonist of Kipling's work. The jungle's character progression from an independent ecological force and into an enslaved force parallels the downfall of a heroic character, and, therefore, introduces questions of environmental justice to the reader without explicit environmentalist language (which did not yet exist in the Victorian vocabulary). Therefore, *The Jungle Book* should be read in a jungle-centric manner which may educate child-readers about landscapes beyond their sphere of reference, teaching them to be like the author himself, who Judith Plotz describes as "boundlessly curious and perennially empathetic" (vii).