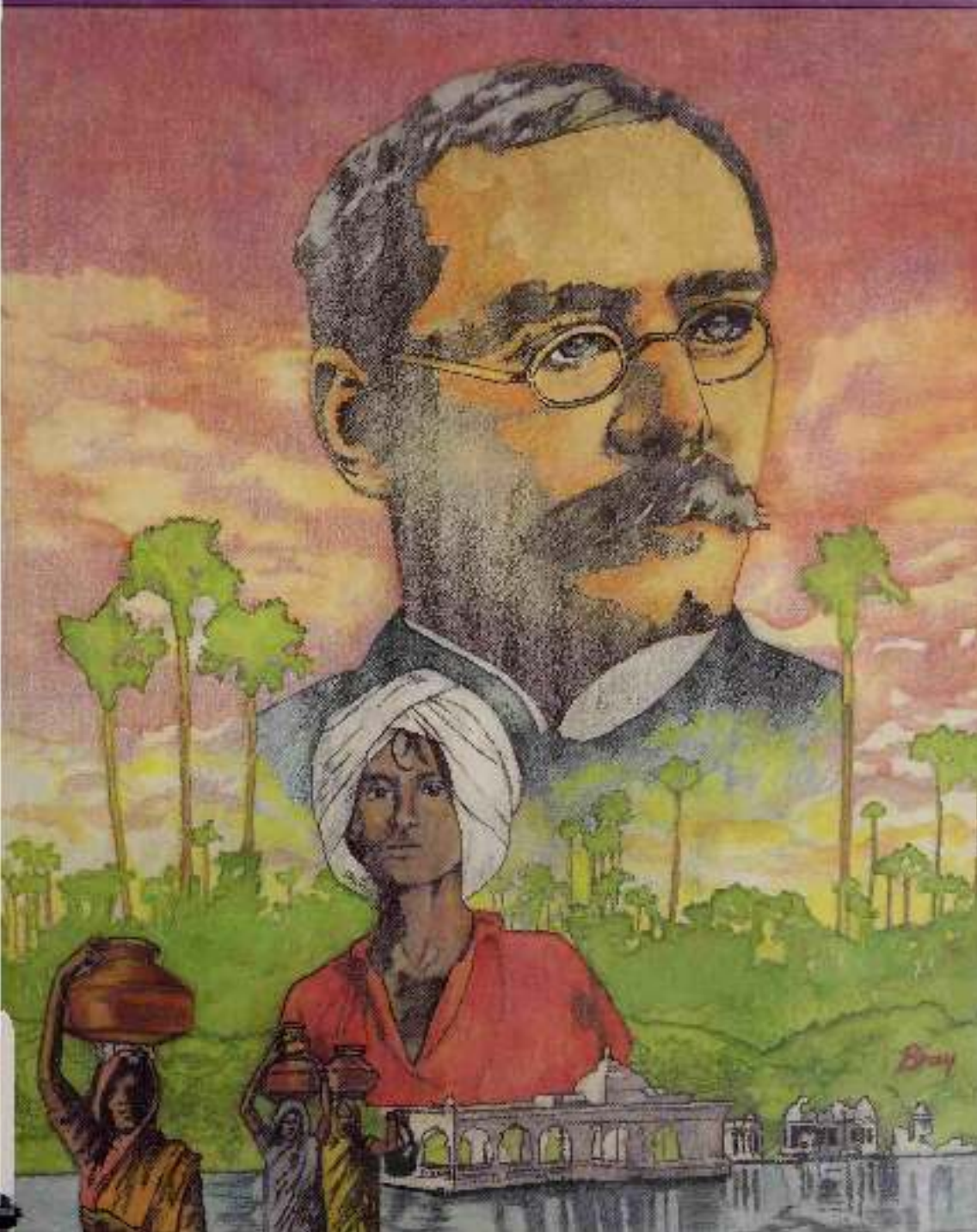


*Modern Critical Views*

RUDYARD  
**KIPLING**

Edited and with an Introduction by  
**HAROLD BLOOM**



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# RUDYARD KIPLING

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*Edited and with an introduction by*

**Harold Bloom**

Sterling Professor of the Humanities  
Yale University

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Editor's Note	vii
Introduction	1
<i>Harold Bloom</i>	
On Preparing to Read Kipling	9
<i>Randall Jarrell</i>	
<i>Kim</i> and the Stories	23
<i>Angus Wilson</i>	
The Measures of <i>Kim</i>	35
<i>Irving Howe</i>	
A Puritan's Empire: The Case of Kipling	45
<i>Donald Davie</i>	
Kipling the Nightwalker	57
<i>Zohreh T. Sullivan</i>	
Kipling's Jest	77
<i>David Bromwich</i>	
Silence and Survival in Kipling's Art and Life	103
<i>Elliot L. Gilbert</i>	
Kipling in the Light of Failure	117
<i>Robert L. Caserio</i>	
Chronology	145
Contributors	147
Bibliography	149
Acknowledgments	151
Index	153

This book brings together a representative selection of the best criticism available upon the writings of Rudyard Kipling. The essays are reprinted here in the chronological order of their original publication. I am grateful to Peter Childers for his skill and devotion in helping me edit this volume.

My introduction first suggests that Kipling, despite appearances, had a profound affinity to the aesthetic vision and solipsistic nihilism of Walter Pater, and then traces both these qualities and their antitheses in *Kim*, Kipling's strongest single work. The chronological sequence of criticism begins with Randall Jarrell's overview of Kipling's achievement as a story writer, which is followed here by two loving appreciations of *Kim*, by the British novelist Angus Wilson and by Irving Howe. Donald Davie, poet and critic, reconsiders Kipling's imperialism as a mode of puritanism, while Zohreh T. Sullivan subtly unveils the sexual anxieties and divided loyalties that help to constitute the literary aspects of that imperialism.

In what seems to me a breakthrough into a new mode of Kipling criticism, David Bromwich brings together two of the best stories, "Wireless" and "Dayspring Mishandled," with the best poems and *Kim* so as to illuminate the demonic basis of Kipling's art. Ellior L. Gilbert relates the death of Kipling's son in World War I to the poet-novelist's later art and life, both of which invest deeply in a certain metaphoric silence. In this book's final essay, Robert L. Caserio reads *The Light That Failed* as Kipling's deliberate poetics of failure, and speculates in regard to Kipling's influence upon Conrad. Caserio, like Bromwich and Gilbert, teaches us that there is still a largely unknown and profound writer to be uncovered in Kipling.





Twenty years after writing his essay of 1943 on Kipling (reprinted in *The Liberal Imagination*, 1951), Lionel Trilling remarked that if he could write the critique again, he would do it "less censoriously and with more affectionate admiration." Trilling, always the representative critic of his era, reflected a movement in the evaluation of Kipling that still continues in 1987. I suspect that this movement will coexist with its dialectical countermovement, of recoil against Kipling, as long as our literary tradition lasts. Kipling is an authentically *popular* writer, in every sense of the word. Stories like "The Man Who Would Be King"; children's tales from *The Jungle Books* and the *Just So Stories*; the novel *Kim*, which is clearly Kipling's masterwork; certain late stories and dozens of ballads—these survive both as high literature and as perpetual entertainment. It is as though Kipling had set out to refute the Sublime function of literature, which is to make us forsake easier pleasures for more difficult pleasures.

In his speech on "Literature," given in 1906, Kipling sketched a dark tale of the storyteller's destiny:

There is an ancient legend which tells us that when a man first achieved a most notable deed he wished to explain to his Tribe what he had done. As soon as he began to speak, however, he was smitten with dumbness, he lacked words, and sat down. Then there arose—according to the story—a masterless man, one who had taken no part in the action of his fellow, who had no special virtues, but who was afflicted—that is the phrase—with the magic of the necessary word. He saw; he told; he described the merits of the notable deed in such a fashion, we are assured, that the words "became alive and walked up and down in the hearts of all his hearers." Thereupon, the Tribe seeing that the

words were certainly alive, and fearing lest the man with the words would hand down untrue tales about them to their children, took and killed him. But, later, they saw that the magic was in the words, not in the man.

Seven years later, in the ghastly Primal History Scene of *Totem and Taboo*'s fourth chapter, Freud depicted a curiously parallel scene, where a violent primal father is murdered and devoured by his sons, who thus bring to an end the patriarchal horde. Kipling's Primal Storytelling Scene features "a masterless man" whose only virtue is "the necessary word." But he too is slain by the Tribe or primal horde, lest he transmit fictions about the Tribe to its children. Only later, in Freud, do the sons of the primal father experience remorse, and so "the dead father became stronger than the living one had been." Only later, in Kipling, does the Tribe see "that the magic was in the words, not in the man."

Freud's true subject, in his Primal History Scene, was the transference, the carrying-over from earlier to later attachments of an over-determined affect. The true subject of Kipling's Primal Storytelling Scene is not so much the Tale of the Tribe, or the magic that was in the words, but the storyteller's freedom, the masterless man's vocation that no longer leads to death, but that can lead to a death-in-life. What Kipling denies is his great fear, which is that the magic indeed is just as much in the masterless man as it is in the words.

Kipling, with his burly imperialism and his indulgences in anti-intellectualism, would seem at first out of place in the company of Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and William Butler Yeats. Nevertheless, Kipling writes in the rhetorical stance of an aesthete, and is very much a Paterian in the metaphysical sense. The "Conclusion" to Pater's *Renaissance* is precisely the credo of Kipling's protagonists:

Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening. With this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch. What we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions.

Frank Kermode observed that Kipling was a writer "who steadfastly

preferred action and machinery to the prevalent Art for Art's Sake," but that is to misread weakly what Pater meant by ending the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* with what soon became a notorious formula:

We have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among "the children of this world," in art and song. For our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested or otherwise, which come naturally to many of us. Only be sure it is passion—that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake, has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.

Like Pater, like Nietzsche, Kipling sensed that we possess and cherish fiction because the reductive truth would destroy us. "The love of art for art's sake" simply means that we choose to believe in a fiction, while knowing that it is not true, to adopt Wallace Stevens's version of the Paterian credo. And fiction, according to Kipling, was written by daemonic forces within us, by "some tragic dividing of forces on their ways." Those forces are no more meaningful than the tales and ballads they produce. What Kipling shares finally with Pater is a deep conviction that we are caught always in a vortex of sensations, a solipsistic concourse of impressions piling upon one another, with great vividness but little consequence.

## II

Kipling's authentic precursor and literary hero was Mark Twain, whose *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer* are reflected inescapably in *Kim*, certainly Kipling's finest achievement. "An Interview with Mark Twain" records Kipling's vision of the two hours of genial audience granted him, starting with Twain's:

"Well, you think you owe me something, and you've come to tell me so. That's what I call squaring a debt handsomely."

*Kim*, permanent work as it is, does not square the debt, partly because Kim is, as David Bromwich notes, both Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, which is to confuse essentially opposed personalities. Since *Kim* is founded upon *Huckleberry Finn*, and not on *Don Quixote*, the mixing of Huck and Tom in Kim's nature brings about a softening of focus that malforms the novel. We cannot find Sancho Panza in Kim, though there is a touch of the Don, as well as of Nigger Jim, in the lama. Insofar as he is free but lonely, Kim is Huck; insofar as he serves the worldly powers, he is Tom. It is striking that in his "Interview with Mark Twain," Kipling expresses interest only in Tom Sawyer, asking Twain "whether we were ever going to hear of Tom Sawyer as a man." I suspect that some anxiety of influence was involved, since *Kim* is the son of the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and not of the lesser novel.

*Kim* is one of the great instances in the language of a popular adventure story that is also exalted literature. *Huckleberry Finn* is too astonishing a book, too nearly the epic of the American consciousness, together with *Leaves of Grass* and *Moby-Dick*, to be regarded as what it only pretends to be: a good yarn. *Kim* stations itself partly in that mode which ranges from Rider Haggard, at its nadir, to Robert Louis Stevenson, at its zenith: the boy's romance crossing over into the ancient form of romance proper.

There are many splendors in *Kim*, but the greatest is surely the relation between Kim and his master, the lovable, half-mad Tibetan lama, who proves to be Kim's true father, and to whom Kim becomes the best of sons. It is a triumph of the exact representation of profound human affection, rather than a sentimentality of any kind, that can move us to tears as the book ends:

"Hear me! I bring news! The Search is finished. Comes now the Reward: . . . Thus. When we were among the Hills, I lived on thy strength till the young branch bowed and nigh broke. When we came out of the Hills, I was troubled for thee and for other matters which I held in my heart. The boar of my soul lacked direction; I could not see into the Cause of Things. So I gave thee over to the virtuous woman altogether. I took no food, I drank no water. Still I saw not the Way. They pressed food upon me and cried at my shut door. So I removed myself to a hollow under a tree. I took no food. I took no water. I sat in meditation two days and two nights, abstracting my mind; inbreathing and outbreathing in the required manner. . . . Upon the second night—so great was my reward—the wise Soul loused itself from the silly Body and went free. This I have never before attained, though I have stood on the threshold of it. Consider, for it is a marvel!"

"A marvel indeed. Two days and two nights without food! Where was the Saliba?" said Kim under his breath.

"Yea, my Soul went free, and, wheeling like an eagle, saw indeed that there was no Teshoo Lama nor any other soul. As a drop draws to water, so my soul drew near to the Great Soul which is beyond all things. At that point, exalted in contemplation, I saw all Hind, from Ceylon in the sea to the Hills, and my own Painted Rocks at Such-zen; I saw every camp and village, to the least, where we have ever rested. I saw them at one time and in one place; for they were within the Soul. By this I knew the Soul had passed beyond the illusion of Time and Space and of Things. By this I knew that I was free. I saw thee lying in thy cot, and I saw thee falling down hill under the idolater—at one time, in one place, in my Soul, which, as I say, had touched the Great Soul. Also I saw the stupid body of Teshoo Lama lying down, and the *bakim* from Dacca kneeled beside, shouting in its ear. Then my Soul was all alone, and I saw nothing, for I was all things, having reached the Great Soul. And I meditated a thousand years, passionless, well aware of the Causes of all Things. Then a voice cried: 'What shall come to the boy if thou art dead?' and I was shaken back and forth in myself with pity for thee; and I said: 'I will return to my *chaka*, lest he miss the Way.' Upon this my Soul, which is the soul of Teshoo Lama, withdrew itself from the Great Soul with strivings and yearnings and retchings and agonies not to be told. As the egg from the fish, as the fish from the water, as the water from the cloud, as the cloud from the thick air, so put forth, so leaped out, so drew away, so fumed up the soul of Teshoo Lama from the Great Soul. Then a voice cried: 'The River! Take heed to the River!' and I looked down upon all the world, which was as I had seen it before—one in time, one in place—and I saw plainly the River of the Arrow at my feet. At that hour my Soul was hampered by some evil or other whereof I was not wholly cleansed, and it lay upon my arms and coiled round my waist; but I put it aside, and I cast forth as an eagle in my flight for the very place of the River. I pushed aside world upon world for thy sake. I saw the River below me—the River of the Arrow—and, descending, the waters of it closed over me; and behold I was again in the body of Teshoo Lama, but free from sin, and the *Aakim* from Dacca bore up my head in the waters of the River. It is here! It is behind the mango-tope here—even here!"

"Allah Kerim! Oh, well that the Bahu was by! Wast thou very wet?"

"Why should I regard? I remember the *bahin* was concerned for the body of Teshoo Lama. He baled it out of the holy water in his hands, and there came afterwards thy horse-seller from the North with a cart and men, and they put the body on the cart and bore it up to the Sahiba's house."

"What said the Sahiba?"

"I was meditating in that body, and did not hear. So thus the Search is ended. For the merit that I have acquired, the River of the Arrow is here. It broke forth at our feet, as I have said. I have found it. Son of my Son! I have wrenched my Soul back from the Threshold of Freedom to free thee from all sin—as I am free, and sinless. Just is the Wheel! Certain is our deliverance. Come!"

He crossed his hands on his lap and smiled, as a man may who has won Salvation for himself and his beloved.

This long passage builds, through radiant apprehensions, to an extraordinarily controlled and calm epiphany of parental love. The vision of the lama, though it presents itself as the wise soul's freedom from the silly body, is clearly not dualistic, but is caused by the lama's honest declaration: "I was troubled for thee." Caught up in the freedom from illusion, and free therefore supposedly of any concern for other souls, since, like one's own, they are not, the lama is close to the final freedom: "for I was all things." The voice that cries him back to life is the voice of his fatherly love for Kim, and the reward for his return to existence, negating mystical transport, is his true vision of the River, goal of his quest. It breaks forth at his feet, and is better than freedom, because it is not merely solitary, but is Salvation for his beloved adopted son, as well as for himself.

Certainly this is Kipling's most humane and hopeful moment, normative and positive. *Kim* is, like its more masterly precursor work, *Huckleberry Finn*, a book that returns us to the central values, avoiding those shadows of the abyss that hover uneasily elsewhere in Kipling. Yet even here the darker and truer Kipling lingers, in the sudden vision of nothingness that Kim experiences, only a few pages before his final reunion with the lama:

At first his legs bent like bad pipe-stems, and the flood and rush of the sunlit air dazzled him. He squatted by the white wall, the mind rummaging among the incidents of the long *doali* journey, the lama's weaknesses, and, now that the stimulus of talk was

removed, his own self-pity, of which, like the sick, he had great store. The unnerved man edged away from all the outside, as a raw horse, once rowelled, sidles from the spur. It was enough, amply enough, that the spoil of the *kiltu* was away—off his hands—out of his possession. He tried to think of the lama,—to wonder why he had tumbled into a brook,—but the bigness of the world, seen between the forecourt gates, swept linked thoughts aside. Then he looked upon the trees and the broad fields, with the thatched huts hidden among crops—looked with strange eyes unable to take up the size and proportion and use of things—stared for a still half-hour. All that while he felt, though he could not put it into words, that his soul was out of gear with its surroundings—a cog-wheel unconnected with any machinery, just like the idle cog-wheel of a cheap Bettesa sugar-crusher laid by in a corner. The breezes fanned over him, the parrots shrieked at him, the noises of the populated house behind—squabbles, orders, and reproofs—hit on dead ears.

"I am Kim. I am Kim. And what is Kim?" His soul repeated it again and again.

Despite the Indian imagery and the characteristic obsession of Kipling with machinery, the mark of Walter Pater's aesthetic impressionism, with its sensations beckoning us to the abyss, is clearly set upon this passage. Identity flies with the flux of impressions, and the dazzlement of "the flood and rush of the sunlit air" returns us to the cosmos of the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*. Kipling's art, in *Kim*, is after all art for art's sake, in the dark predicate that there is nothing else. The extravagant fiction of the great love between an Irish boy gone native in India, half a Huck Finn enthralled with freedom and half a Tom Sawyer playing games with authority, and a quixotic, aged Tibetan lama is Kipling's finest invention, and moves us endlessly. But how extravagant a fiction it is, and had to be! Kipling refused to profess the faith of those who live and die for and by art, yet in the end he had no other faith.





*On Preparing to Read Kipling*

Mark Twain said that it isn't what they don't know that hurts people, it's what they do know that isn't so. This is true of Kipling. If people don't know about Kipling they can read Kipling, and then they'll know about Kipling: it's ideal. But most people already do know about Kipling—not very much, but too much: they know what isn't so, or what might just as well not be so, it matters so little. They know that, just as Calvin Coolidge's preacher was against sin and the Snake was for it, Kipling was for imperialism: he talked about the white man's burden; he was a crude popular—immensely popular—writer who got popular by writing "If," and "On the Road to Mandalay," and *The Jungle Book*, and stories about India like Somerset Maugham, and children's stories; he wrote "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet"; he wrote, "The female of the species is more deadly than the male"—or was that Pope? *Somebody* wrote it. In short: Kipling was someone people used to think was wonderful, but we know better than that now.

People certainly didn't know better than that then. "Dear Harry," William James begins. (It is hard to remember, hard to believe, that anyone ever called Henry James *Harry*, but if it had to be done, William James was the right man to do it.) "Last Sunday I dined with Howells at the Cludds," and was delighted to hear him say that you were both a friend and an admirer of Rudyard Kipling. I am ashamed to say that I have been ashamed to write of that infant phenomenon, not knowing, with your exquisitely refined taste,

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*From Kipling, Auden & Co.: Essays and Reviews, 1933-1964. © 1961 by Mrs. Randall Jurell. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1961.*

how you might be affected by him and fearing to *jar*. [It is wonderful *to have the engineer hoist with his own petard*.] The more rejoiced am I at this, but why didn't you say so ere now? He's more of a Shakespeare than anyone yet in this generation of ours, as it strikes me. And seeing the new effects he lately brings in in *The Lights That Failed*, and that Simla Ball story with Mrs. Hauksbee in the *Illustrated London News*, makes one sure now that he is only at the beginning of a rapidly enlarging career, with indefinite growth before him. Much of his present coarseness and jerkiness is youth only, divine youth. But *what* a youth! Distinctly the biggest literary phenomenon of our time. He has such human entrails, and he takes less time to get under the heartstrings of his personages than anyone I know. On the whole, bless him.

"All intellectual work is the same,—the artist feeds the public on his own bleeding insides. Kant's *Kritik* is just like a Strauss waltz, and I felt the other day, finishing *The Lights That Failed*, and an oration to be given at Yale College simultaneously, that there was no *essential* difference between Rudyard Kipling and myself as far as that sacrificial element goes."

It surprises us to have James take Kipling so seriously, without reservations, with Shakespeare—to treat him as if he were Kant's *Kritik* and not a Strauss waltz. (Even Henry James, who could refer to "the good little Thomas Hardy"—who was capable of applying to the Trinity itself the adjective *poor*—somehow felt that he needed for Kipling that coarse word *genius*, and called him, at worst, "the great little Kipling.") Similarly, when Goethe and Matthew Arnold write about Byron, we are surprised to see them bringing in Shakespeare—are surprised to see how unquestioningly, with what serious respect, they speak of Byron, as if he were an ocean or a new ice age: "our soul," wrote Arnold, "had felt him like the thunder's roll." It is as though mere common sense, common humanity, required this of them: the existence of a world figure like Byron demands (as the existence of a good or great writer does not) that any inhabitant of the world treat him somehow as the world treats him. Goethe knew that Byron "is a child when he reflects," but this did not prevent him from treating Byron exactly as he treated that other world figure Napoleon.

An intelligent man said that the world felt Napoleon as a weight, and that when he died it would give a great *oof* of relief. This is just as true of Byron, or of such Byrons of their days as Kipling and Hemingway: after a generation or two the world is tired of being their pedestal, shakes them off with an *oof*, and then—hoisting onto its back a new world figure—feels the penetrating satisfaction of having made a mistake all its own. Then for a generation or two the Byron lies in the dust where we left him: if the old

world did him more than justice, a new one does him less. "If he was so good as all that, why isn't he still famous?" the new world asks—if it asks anything. And then when another generation or two are done, we decide that he wasn't altogether a mistake people made in those days, but a real writer after all—that if we like *Cordite Harold* a good deal less than anyone thought of liking it then, we like *Don Juan* a good deal more. Byron *was* a writer, people just didn't realize the sort of writer he was. We can feel impatient with Byron's world for liking him for the wrong reasons, and with the succeeding world for disliking him for the wrong reasons, and we are glad that our world, the real world, has at last settled Byron's account.

Kipling's account is still unsettled. Underneath, we still hold it against him that the world quoted him in its sleep, put him in its headlines when he was ill, acted as if he were God; we are glad that we have Hemingway instead, to put in *our* headlines when his plane crashes. Kipling is in the dust, and the dust seems to us a very good place for him. But in twenty or thirty years, when Hemingway is there instead, and we have a new Byron-Kipling-Hemingway to put in our news programs when his rocket crashes, our resistance to Hemingway will have taken the place of our resistance to Kipling, and we shall find ourselves willing to entertain the possibility that Kipling *was* a writer after all—people just didn't realize the sort of writer he was.

There is a way of traveling into this future—of realizing, now, the sort of writer Kipling was—that is unusually simple, but that people are unusually unwilling to take. The way is: to read Kipling as if one were not prepared to read Kipling; as if one didn't already know about Kipling—had never been told how readers do feel about Kipling, should feel about Kipling; as if one were setting out, naked, to see something that is there naked. I don't entirely blame the reader if he answers: "Thanks very much; if it's just the same to you, I'll keep my clothes on." It's only human of him—man is the animal that wears clothes. Yet aren't works of art in some sense a way of doing without clothes, a means by which reader, writer, and subject are able for once to accept their own nakedness? the nakedness not merely of the "naked truth," but also of the naked wishes that come before and after that truth? To read Kipling, for once, not as the crudely effective, popular writer we know him to be, but as, perhaps, the something else that even crudely effective, popular writers can become, would be to exhibit a magnanimity that might do justice both to Kipling's potentialities and to our own. Kipling did have, at first, the "coarseness and jerkiness" and mannered vanity of youth, human youth; Kipling did begin as a reporter, did print in newspapers the *Plain Tales from the Hills* which ordinary readers—and, un-

fortunately, most extraordinary ones—do think typical of his work; but then for half a century he kept writing. Chekhov began by writing jokes for magazines, skits for vaudeville; Shakespeare began by writing *Titus Andronicus* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, some of the crudest plays any crudely effective, popular writer has ever turned out. Kipling is neither a Chekhov nor a Shakespeare, but he is far closer to both than to the clothing-store-dummy-with-the-solar-topus we have agreed to call Kipling. Kipling, like it or not, admit it or not, was a great genius and a great neurotic; and a great professional, one of the most skillful writers who have ever existed—one of the writers who have used English best, one of the writers who most often have made other writers exclaim, in the queer tone they use for the exclamation: "Well, I've got to admit it really is *written*." When he died and was buried in that foreign land England, that only the Anglo-Indians know, I wish that they had put above his grave, there in *their* Westminster Abbey: "It really was *written*."

Mies Van Der Robe said, very beautifully: "I don't want to be interesting, I want to be good." Kipling, a great realist but a greater inventor, could have said that he didn't want to be realistic, he wanted to get it right: that he wanted it not the way it did or—statistics show—does happen, but the way it really would happen. You often feel about something in Shakespeare or Dostoevsky that nobody ever said such a thing, but it's just the sort of thing people would say if they could—is more real, in some sense, than what people do say. If you have given your imagination free rein, let things go as far as they want to go, the world they made for themselves while you watched can have, for you and later watchers, a spontaneous finality. Some of Kipling has this spontaneous finality; and because he has written so many different kinds of stories—no writer of fiction of comparable genius has depended so much, for so long, on short stories alone—you end dazzled by his variety of realization: so many plants, and so many of them dewy.

If I had to pick one writer to invent a conversation between an animal, a god, and a machine, it would be Kipling. To discover what, if they ever said, the dumb would say—this takes real imagination; and this imagination of what isn't is the extension of a real knowledge of what is, the knowledge of a consummate observer who took no notes, except of names and dates: "If a thing didn't stay in my memory I argued it was hardly worth writing out." Knowing what the peoples, animals, plants, weathers of the world look like, sound like, smell like, was Kipling's *métier*, and so was knowing the words that could make someone else know. You can argue about the judgment he makes of something, but the thing is there. When as a child you first

begin to read, what attracts you to a book is illustrations and conversations, and what scares you away is "long descriptions." In Kipling illustration and conversation and description (not long description; read, even the longest of his descriptions is short) have merged into a "toothsome amalgam" which the child reads with a grown-up's ease, and the grown up with a child's wonder. Often Kipling writes with such grace and command, such a combination of experienced mastery and congenial inspiration, that we repeat with Goethe: "Seeing someone accomplishing arduous things with ease gives us an impression of witnessing the impossible." Sometimes the arduous thing Kipling is accomplishing seems to us a queer, even an absurd thing for anyone to wish to accomplish. But don't we have to learn to consent to this, with Kipling as with other good writers?—to consent to the fact that good writers just don't have good sense; that they are going to write it their way, not ours; that they are never going to have the objective, impersonal rightness they should have, but only the subjective, personal wrongness from which we derived the idea of the rightness. The first thing we notice about *War and Peace* and *Madame Bovary* and *Remembrance of Things Past* is how wonderful they are; the second thing we notice is how much they have wrong with them. They are not at all the perfect work of art we want—so perhaps Ruskin was right when he said that the person who wants perfection knows nothing about art.

Kipling says about a lion cub he and his family had on the Cape: "He dozed on the stoep, I noticed, due north and south, looking with slow eyes up the length of Africa"; this, like several thousand such sentences, makes you take for granted the truth of his "I made my own experiments in the weights, colors, perfumes, and attributes of words in relation to other words, either as read aloud so that they may hold the ear, or, scattered over the page, draw the eye." His words range from gaudy effectiveness to perfection; he is a professional magician but, also, a magician. He says about stories: "A tale from which pieces have been raked out is like a fire that has been poked. One does not know that the operation has been performed, but everyone feels the effect." (He even tells you how best to rake out the pieces: with a brush and Chinese ink you grind yourself.) He is a kind of Liszt—so isn't it just empty bravura, then? Is Liszt's? Sometimes; but sometimes bravura is surprisingly full, sometimes virtuosus are surprisingly plain: to holl a potato perfectly takes a chef home from the restaurant for the day.

Kipling was just such a potato boiler: a professional knower of professionals, a great trapeze artist, cabinmaker, prestidigitator, with all the unnumbered details of others' guilds, crafts, mysteries, techniques at the tip of his fingers—or, at least, at the tip of his tongue. The first sentences he

could remember saying as a child had been haltingly translated into English "from the vernacular" (that magical essential phrase for the reader of Kipling!), and just as children feel that it is they and not the grown-ups who see the truth, so Kipling felt about many things that it is the speakers of the vernacular and not the sahibs who tell the truth; that there are many truths that, to be told at all, take the vernacular. From childhood on he learned—to excess or obsession, even—the vernaculars of earth, the worlds inside the world, the many species into which place and language and work divide man. From the species which the division of labor produces it is only a step to the animal species which evolutionary specialization produces, so that Kipling finds it easy to write stories about animals; from the vernaculars or dialects or camps which place or profession produces (Kipling's slogan is, almost, "The cam is the man") it is only a step to those which time itself produces, so that Kipling finds it easy to write stories about all the different provinces of the past, or the future (in "As Easy as A.B.C."), or Eternity (if his queer institutional stories of the bureaucracies of Heaven and Hell are located there). Kipling was no Citizen of the World, but like the Wandering Jew he had lived in many places and known many peoples, an uncomfortable stranger repeating to himself the comforts of earth, all its innumerable contradictory ways of being at home.

Goethe, very winningly, wanted to have put on his grave a sentence saying that he had never been a member of any guild, and was an amateur until the day he died. Kipling could have said, "I never saw the guild I wasn't a member of," and was a professional from the day he first said to his ayah, in the vernacular—not being a professional myself, I don't know what it was he said, but it was the sort of thing a man would say who, from the day he was sixteen till the day he was twenty-three, was always—"luxury of which I dream still!"—shaved by his servant before he woke up in the morning.

This fact of his life, I've noticed, always makes hearers give a little shiver; but it is all the mornings when no one shaved Kipling before Kipling woke up, because Kipling had never been to sleep, that make me shiver. "Such night-wakings" were "laid upon me through my life," Kipling writes, and tells you in magical advertising prose how lucky the wind before dawn always was for him. You and I should have such luck! Kipling was a professional, but a professional possessed by both the Daemon he tells you about, who writes some of the stories for him, and the demons he doesn't tell you about, who write some others. Nowadays we've learned to call part of the unconscious *it* or *id*; Kipling had not, but he called this Personal Demon of his *it*. (When he told his father that *Kim* was finished his father asked: "Did

*it stop, or you?*" Kipling "told him that it was *It*." "When your Daemon is in charge," Kipling writes, "do not try to think consciously, Drift, wait and obey." He was sure of the books in which "my Daemon was with me . . . When those books were finished they said so themselves with, almost, the water-hammer click of a tap turned off." (Yeats said that a poem finishes itself with a click like a closing box.) Kipling speaks of the "doom of the makers": when their Daemon is missing they are no better than anybody else; but when he is there, and they put down what he dictates, "the work he gives shall continue, whether in earnest or jest." Kipling even "learned to distinguish between the preemprory motions of my Daemon, and the 'carry over' of induced electricity, which comes of what you might call mere 'frictional' writing." We always tend to distrust geniuses about genius, as if what they say didn't arouse much empathy in us, or as if we were waiting till some more reliable source of information came along: still, isn't what Kipling writes a colored version of part of the plain truth?—there is plenty of supporting evidence. But it is interesting to me to see how thoroughly Kipling manages to avoid any subjective guilt, fallible human responsibility, so that he can say about anything in his stories either: "Entirely conscious and correct, objectively established, independently corroborated, the experts have testified, the professionals agree, it is the consensus of the authorities at the Club," or else: "I had nothing to do with it. I know nothing about it. *It* did it. The Daemon did it all." The reader of Kipling—this reader at least—hates to give all the credit to the Professional or to the Daemon; perhaps the demons had something to do with it too. Let us talk about the demons.

One writer says that we only notice what hurts us—that if you went through the world without hurting anyone, nobody would even know you had been alive. This is quite false, but true, too: if you put it in terms of the derivation of the Principle of Reality from the primary Principle of Pleasure, it does not even sound shocking. But perhaps we only notice a sentence if it sounds shocking—so let me say grotesquely: Kipling was someone who had spent six years in a concentration camp as a child; he never got over it. As a very young man he spent seven years in an India that confirmed his belief in concentration camps; he never got over this either.

As everybody remembers, one of Goya's worst engravings has underneath it: *I saw it*. Some of Kipling has underneath: *It is there*. Since the world is a necessary agreement that it isn't there, the world answered: *It isn't*, and told Kipling what a wonderful imagination he had. Part of the time Kipling answered stubbornly: *I've been there* (*I am there* would have been even truer), and part of the time he showed the world what a wonderful imagination he

had. Say *Fairy tales!* enough to a writer and he will write you fairy tales. But to our *Are you telling me the truth or are you reassuring yourself?*—we ask it often of any writer, but particularly often of Kipling—he sometimes can say truthfully: *Reassuring you*; we and Kipling have interests in common. Kipling knew that “every nation, like every individual, walks in a vain show—else it could not live with itself”; Kipling knew people’s capacity not to see: “through a” this shifting, shouting brotcheldom the pious British householder and his family bored their way back from the theaters, eyes-front and fixed, as though not seeing.” But he himself had seen, and so believed in, the City of Dreadful Night, and the imperturbable or delicious or dying men who ran the city; this City outside was the duplicate of the City inside; and when the people of Victorian Europe didn’t believe in any of it, except as you believe in a ghost story, he knew that this was only because they didn’t know—he knew. So he was obsessed by—wrote about, dreamed about, and stayed awake so as not to dream about—many concentration camps, of the soul as well as of the body; many tortures, hauntings, hallucinations, deliria, diseases, nightmares, practical jokes, revenges, monsters, insanities, neuroses, abysses, forlorn hopes, last chances, extremities of every kind; these and their sweet opposites. He feels the convalescent’s gratitude for mere existence, that the world is what the world was: how blue the day is, to the eye that has been blinded. Kipling praises the cessation of pain and its more blessed accession, when the body’s anguish blots out for a little “Life’s grinning face . . . the trusty Worm that dieth not, the steadfast Fire also.” He praises man’s old uses, home and all the ways of home: its Father and Mother, there to run to if you could only wake; and praises all our dreams of waking, our fantasies of return or revenge or insensate endurance. He praises the words he has memorized, that man has made from the silence; the senses that cancel each other out, that man has made from the senselessness; the worlds man has made from the world; but he praises and reproduces the sheer charm of—few writers are so purely charming!—the world that does not need to have anything done to it, that is simply there around us as we are there in it. He knows the joy of finding exactly the right words for what there are no words for; the satisfactions of sentimentality and brutality and love too, the “exquisite tenderness” that began in cruelty. But in the end he thanks God most for the small drugs that last—is grateful that He has not laid on us “the yoke of too long Fear and Wonder,” but has given us Habit and Work: so that his Seraphs waiting at the Gate praise God

Not for any miracle of easy Loaves and Fishes  
 But for doing, ’gainst our will, work against our wishes,  
 Such as finding food to fill daily emptied dishes



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