

Stephen Spender

Poem

If it were not for that
Lean executioner, who stands
Ever beyond a door
With axe raised in both hands—

All my days here would seem
One day—the same—the drops
Of light diffused in light
That no circumference stops.

Mountain, star and flower
One with the eye seeing
Would, gone from sight, melt back again
Into their separate being:

Nor would I hoard against
The obliterating desert
Their camera oscura
Glittering on the heart.

My hand would never move
To follow into stone
Hair the wind lines on a frieze
One moment, and then gone.

What gives edge to remembering
Is death. It's that shows, curled
Within each falling moment
A self, a dying world.

The girl came in the garden
And walking through deep flowers, held up
Our child who, smiling down at her,
Clung to her throat, a cup.

Clocks notch such instances
On time: no time that keeps,
Beyond the eye's delight,
Losses for which it weeps.

I chisel memories
Within a shadowy room,
Transmuting slips of light to ships
Launched into a tomb.

The Kipling Conundrum

By John Bayley

KIPLING was absorbed by—or perhaps rather disintegrated by—his age, with more evident completeness than we can forgive a great writer for being, or accept that he should be, if we are to think of him as a great writer. He did not quite belong to it; for though his temperament and views were those of a great many other persons of his class and kind he expressed with a disconcertingly direct enthusiasm what they took for granted. He was too much for the Group to be of it. And his understanding of a society is masked by the terrible exuberance of his determination not to be outside it. Exile, silence, and cunning were not for him.

He did indeed take *himself* for granted—it was his only kind of reticence—and he lacks the gift that many smaller writers have of apprehending the contradictions in themselves and of imagining them, by this example, in others. He has to schematise such a process (as with the Lama in *Kim*) in terms of a religion to which he can feel wholly and safely sympathetic because it is so far removed from the needs of Sahibdom. The Lama has to be a Tibetan, of an exotically unknown and therefore uninferior race, just as Kim has to be of white parentage on both sides. They are excused that total participation in a society which inspired his real interest, his admiration, or his contempt.

He is a genius who insisted—over-insisted—on being an artist. But it is doubtful if it is worth the critic's while to talk much about his "art," any more than about the art of Dickens or D. H. Lawrence, who make no bones about their disregard for it in Kipling's inkhorn sense. All three were essentially daemonic in temperament (though Kipling preferred to think

his Daemon lived outside him, not inside). Whatever the difference in achievement and outlook this daemonic involvement which they share reveals itself by contrast with the detachment—in their equally varying ways—of a Hardy or George Eliot, a Conrad or Joyce. Appraisal of such daemonic genius can never pretend to detachment either. The subject is too big and too lively: the critic can neither calmly sum up nor incisively pin down. It is as difficult, and perhaps as unprofitable, for him to get outside Kipling as it was for Kipling to get outside packs and societies.

Most of us have been exposed to him young and reacted against him, so that criticism becomes like the record of a family quarrel. There is great charm in watching our eminent men of letters gravely extending the hand of reconciliation to old Uncle Rudyard, the black sheep of their youth. Historians and anniversarists come to bury Kipling, like Lawrence, with modified praise, but love and hate in some ways suit him better than the sensible technical discussion for which Dr. Tompkins's full-length study was notable, as is Professor Bodelsen's more recent book.¹ The instruction they offer is that of the planning clinic rather than the marriage bed. Perhaps indeed the young, if they read him at all—and the evidence suggests some do—will read him in this way, indifferent to the tremors of pleasure and disgust that he once roused. No doubt for many of them Auden's "horrible old Kipling" is merely square—his idiom a curiosity from the quaint past, like Sherlock Holmes. But, as with all daemonic authors, the relation of Kipling to his public does matter. Professor Bodelsen is extremely helpful about how the stories work, and what happens in them, but he does not tell us *why* we respond to them as we do, if we still do.

¹ *Aspects of Kipling's Art*. By C. A. BODELSEN. Manchester University Press, 25s.

² *Kipling's Mind & Art*. Essays edited by Andrew Rutherford. Oliver & Boyd, 35s.

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