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14

‘The Passionless Passion of Slaughter’:

Heroism and the Aesthetics of Violence

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Abstract: Kipling and Yeats led not only parallel but also curiously intertwined lives. Born in a colonial milieu, each was painfully wrenched from his boyhood haunts to be schooled in England, later rediscovering his homeland at the age of sixteen. Besides their interest in the visual arts, both men were similarly preoccupied with heroism, with folklore, balladry and the demotic voice. They were drawn to heterodox religion, and each devoted much time to secretive and hierarchical orders—in Kipling’s case Freemasonry, in Yeats’s Theosophy, and later the Golden Dawn. Most of all, both struck vatic postures, and made bids for public authority premised on an appeal to what they considered the ‘philomythic’, or myth-loving, impulse in fin-de-siècle culture. From the letters and memoirs left by their interlocutors and go-betweens, and from a study of their reception in contemporary periodicals, a picture of Kipling and Yeats embedded within their shared social nexus gradually emerges.

Keywords: violence; heroism; First World War; Second Anglo-Boer War; Cuchulain; Burma; Ulster; Easter Rising

Over the six years running up to 2015, my principal research agenda was attempting to restore two highly dissimilar poets—as Kipling and Yeats are usually considered—to a common frame of reference. Though the sesquicentennial of each man in 2015 was not at first apparent to me, my realization that they were born in the same year did prompt me to reconsider the neglected links between them. Indeed, Yeats and Kipling led not only parallel, but also curiously intertwined lives—born in a colonial milieu, each was painfully wrenched from his boyhood haunts to be schooled in England, later rediscovering his homeland at the age of sixteen. A few years later, each migrated simultaneously back to London, determined to make a literary career founded on their romantic foreign background. For a brief, formative period they moved in close proximity in London, before drifting apart into opposed political camps. Moreover, even

after their mutual alienation they remained tethered by a persistent, and telling, habit of echoing one another in their thought and poetry.

Gradually the notion grew on me of them as paired, antithetical influences, shadowing one another through the literary world; grappling with the same dilemmas, but producing very different responses; each man haunting the other with the example of what he couldn't achieve. My efforts to reacquaint Kipling with Yeats elicited a variety of puzzled responses. More than one person said that comparing two such writers was like pairing chalk and cheese. Another gave me a rather more nauseating analogy: powdered milk and molasses. People were often surprised to be told that the two were born in the same year, and those who were aware of their contemporaneity tended to suspect that they would only ever have encountered one another as enemies. This suspicion, I should hasten to add, was by no means unfounded. In 1903 Yeats arrived in New York, and like many savants on the transatlantic lecture circuit, was immediately asked by an interviewer for his views on the best-known Anglophone author of the day. 'I will not comment on the work of any living writer,' replied the pre-eminent Irish poet. 'If Mr Kipling would have the goodness to die I would have plenty to say.' Of course, the reporter was never going to let her quarry halt on the brink of such a promising diatribe. 'Ten years ago Kipling mattered greatly to men of letters', Yeats finally concluded after a series of acute criticisms, 'today he matters much to journalists' (Kelly 1986-, vol. 3, 467).

Yeats could hardly have phrased his repudiation in stronger terms. However, I couldn't help wondering what lay behind such a relatively sudden, and gleefully controversial outburst. Was this just the Irish nationalist rebuffing the imperialist and Ulster militant? Should we see no more than a Parnassian snob decrying an unscrupulous populist, in the ongoing battle between high and low moderns? Or was there something more intimate about this enmity—was it the

product of prior rivalry, or former friendship? For example, might Yeats's efforts to grab headlines have something to do with the fact that, a dozen years before, he and Kipling had been brought to the notice of literary London in the pages of the same newspaper? Indeed, as editor of the *National Observer*, W.E. Henley had been their mutual patron, welcoming them into his circle of young men. Alternatively, might Yeats have been piqued by his father's habit of harping on Kipling and India, whenever he chose to remind his son of the need to draw inspiration from his native soil (Bubb 2016, 107)? Perhaps even Yeats was embarrassed by the knowledge that in 1897, barely six years prior to his trenchant remarks, he had actually expressed admiration for Kipling in the literary press, praising his renderings of 'the colour and spectacle of barbarous life', and identifying him as a fellow-traveller helping to sweep away the tiresome abstractions of late Victorian poetry in favour of 'passion', 'beauty' and 'imagination' (Yeats 1970–1976, vol. 2, 42).

The whole episode indicates, it seems to me, a wish on Yeats's part to now distance himself from a man to whom he was briefly very proximate. When Yeats and Kipling had arrived as young writers in London, in 1887 and 1889 respectively, a series opened up to them of interlinked social networks. The fin-de-siècle literary world was a place of cliques and factions, with no acknowledged laureate but many upcoming writers vying for the mantles of the recently-deceased Arnold, Browning and Tennyson. Richard Le Gallienne, the decade's consummate networker, once compared 1890s London to 'a ten-ringed circus, with vividly original performers claiming one's distracted attention in every ring.' The analogy was more apposite than he realized, because like a great Venn diagram, there were pockets of overlap between these multiple rings. This was a fluid era, in which a poet like Ernest Dowson could hear Yeats read his latest lyric at the Rhymers' Club and go home to devour the *Barrack-Room Ballads*; a time in which Henley could be a fervent supporter of Ireland's cultural awakening

yet a bitter opponent of its political autonomy; and in which Kipling could deride Wilde's 'epicene' personality but speak up for Beardsley against his prurient censors (Bubb 2016, 59, 125).

The event that antagonistically realigned these appealingly asymmetric relations was the war in South Africa, which began the very year after Yeats's favourable notice of Kipling's 'colour and spectacle' in the literary press. Britain's ultimatum to the Boer republics prompted divisive splits in London intellectual life, while in Ireland support for the Transvaal became a *cause célèbre* that perhaps for the first time brought anti-imperialism to the activist forefront, giving radicals a way to distinguish themselves from conventional, pro-empire Home Rulers. Thus Yeats, for example, was able to scandalize elite opinion by persuading his theatrical colleague Edward Martyn to ban the playing of 'The Absent-Minded Beggar' in his home at Christmas, and could play to the gallery by telling a Dublin lecture audience that Shakespeare was 'no Rudyard Kipling' (Bubb 2016, 221). In the meantime Kipling himself was at Bloemfontein, networking with old Indian Army friends and helping to run an army newspaper, and this is what Yeats presumably refers to in New York by Kipling's degeneration into 'an imperialist journalist'. Thus it is really the Boer War—Kipling's fierce advocacy of it, and Yeats's active campaigning against Irish enlistment for it—that crucially intervenes between those experimental years in London, and Yeats's trenchant remarks in 1903 about Kipling's betrayal of art for the sake of propaganda. Furthermore, it is with the war that the general tide of critical opinion gradually begins to turn against Kipling, and the canonical split with which we are left today begins to open. While Yeats was recognized for going on to pioneer radical new trends in poetry, his contemporary was repeatedly characterized as a retrograde throwback, who—as Yeats would remark in his preface to the 1936 *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*—never mentally left the nineteenth century (Yeats 1936, xii).

As the combined result of this critical partition, and Yeats and Kipling's own attempts to construct their reputations, much of the rich literary texture that connects these two authors has slipped into a lacuna. We have forgotten that both of their fathers were artists loosely affiliated with the pre-Raphaelite movement, and that both poets were nurtured in a painterly milieu. We have forgotten that both were members of Henley's circle. More importantly, we have lost our ear for the telling echoes that parallel reading will yield. Besides their interest in the visual arts, both men were similarly preoccupied with heroism, with folklore, balladry and the demotic voice. They were drawn to heterodox religion, and each devoted much time to secretive and hierarchical orders—in Kipling's case Freemasonry, in Yeats's Theosophy, and later the Golden Dawn. Most of all, both struck vatic postures, and made bids for public authority premised on an appeal to what they considered the 'philomythic', or myth-loving, impulse in fin-de-siècle culture (Bubb 2016, 154).

How then to recover this shared history? From the letters and memoirs left by their interlocutors and go-betweens, and from a study of their reception in contemporary periodicals, a picture of Kipling and Yeats embedded within the social nexus of the 1890s gradually emerges. But the elucidation of these mutual themes and shared concerns running through their work calls us for us to read each poet against the other, yielding textual echoes and meetings which then might be mapped against the intersections in their lives. For example, having travelled from India and Ireland respectively to make a name in literary London, each man experienced profound culture-shock. Yeats wrote *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, in which he imagines himself restored to the haunts of his semi-mythologized Irish childhood in the rugged western county of Sligo:

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,

Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;

There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,

And evening full of the linnet's wings. (Yeats 1957, 117)

Now in spite of Kipling's reputation for rhetoric, he too betrays a fundamental need of reverie. Making 1860s Bombay into his private imaginative space, he also creates a fantasy of primitive return to a childhood place on the far side of his hybrid nature.

We shall go back by the boltless doors,

To the life unaltered our childhood knew -

To the naked feet on the cool, dark floors,

And the high ceiled rooms that the Trade blows through.

To the trumpet-flowers and the moon beyond

And the tree-toad's chorus drowning all -

And the lisp of the split banana-frond

That talked us to sleep when we were small. (Kipling 2013, 523)

Note the allied themes of innocence and nostalgia. Both poems describe a flight from urban civilization to the whispering embrace of nature—the 'banana-frond' and the enclosing 'purple glow'. The poets are envisaging real places that have become deeply internalized. As their followers would have known, the departure point was exile—in the barbarian province of London. And the destination was the haven of their colonial childhoods.

These are poems in the Romantic tradition—a tradition in which Kipling needs to be reinserted. Both poets are recapitulating into what Wordsworth famously called the 'hiding-places of my power'. But the really important axis of comparison is 'power'. A word that can be traced right

through Yeats and Kipling, it connotes more than just artistic inspiration. These are hiding-places of their political imagination. Their innocent longing for belonging is premised in fact upon laying a claim on their place of origin. This was an attempt to translate memory into identity. Yeats himself spoke of ‘passionate reverie’. While their opinions on Ireland and India were opposed, furthermore, their work proves how nationalist and imperialist politics at the turn of the century could employ the same discourses. The most suggestive illustration of this is when Kipling actually adapts Yeats. His poem ‘Chant-Pagan’ is the monologue of a discontented English labourer. As the speaker resolves to abandon ‘awful old England’ for South Africa, he misquotes the well-known refrain from ‘Innisfree’. The exile’s sigh ‘I will arise and go now’, becomes the emigrant’s slogan: ‘I will arise and get ’ence’ (Kipling 2013, 578). Published in the same year Yeats went to New York, perhaps this poem too, and its borrowed line, contributed to his outburst.

The link between ‘Chant-Pagan’ and ‘Innisfree’ is treated at greater length in my full study of Kipling, Yeats, and their occluded relations. *Meeting Without Knowing It: Kipling and Yeats at the Fin de Siècle* closely compares their early, experimental, formative work—though this focus on the 1880s and 1890s obliged me to reduce the attention I could give to their equally suggestive intersections across the 1910s and 1920s. Let us turn now therefore to that more distant but also more antagonistic relationship in the latter part of their lives, within an era of upheaval and violence. Giving up on the Indian situation, from 1910 Kipling threw himself into Irish politics as though Ulster were the last line of imperial defence, hoping that inflammatory poems like ‘The Covenant’ and ‘Ulster 1912’ would rouse a complacent public to the gravity of the threat. In due course Yeats, after watching his country ravaged by rebellion and civil war, would ask himself whether his drama *Cathleen ni Houlihan* had fired the Easter insurgents with the flame of martyrdom: ‘Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the

English shot?’ (Yeats 1957, 632). He became more than ever convinced of the apocalyptic forebodings that had preoccupied him in the 1890s, while his interest in eugenics and national vigour eventually led him into unsavoury company. How is each man’s grief, and each man’s responsibility, implicated in the other’s? Not through confrontation. Yeats chose not to cross swords with Kipling in these years—unless, as Fran Brearton (2018, 314) proposes, his title ‘Easter 1916’ may be taken as a conscious snub to Kipling’s ‘Ulster (1912)’.¹ Instead, the verbal record of his thought can be seen to collide, and occasionally blend with his adversary’s—especially in his diehard postures; and his sense, or zest, for the recrudescence of primitive brutality. It was a time when political setbacks pushed both men towards bitterness, remorse, fierce prophecies and desperate solutions. It was also a *dénouement* of sorts, when the images each man had summoned during the *fin de siècle*—of heroism, sacrifice and kinship—rebounded upon their creators, and extravagantly proved the old Nineties dictum that life imitates art.

In the early months of the First World War, a correspondent asked Yeats’s friend George Russell (‘AE’) why he feared for Ireland. ‘I have a conviction deep within me that we are going to have one more heart-searching trial, baring our lives to the very spirit, and that within the next few years.’ An occultist who had been keenly awaiting doomsday for decades, Russell now looked upon its advent with mounting horror. ‘The dragons of the past have not died and were only sleeping’ (Denson 1961, 99). The idea that dormant forces of chaos were about to revenge themselves on a complacent world was mixed in the common murmur of that autumn. It was later given concrete expression in Yeats’s ‘Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen’: ‘Public

¹ Though George Russell did challenge him directly, in his ‘Open Letter to Mr Rudyard Kipling’, published in the *Daily News*, 15 Apr 1912 (reprinted in Russell 1921, 94).

opinion ripening for so long / We thought it would outlive all future days. / Oh what fine thought we had because we thought...' (Yeats 1957, 428). Yet few, perhaps, would have noticed that this rueful note had already been struck in warnings issued on behalf of the Empire, such as the poem Kipling published in Belfast to coincide with a fiercely pro-Union speech at Tunbridge Wells:

We thought we ranked above the chance of ill.

Others might fail, not we, for we were wise—

Merchants in freedom. So, of our free-will

We let our servants drug our strength with lies. (Kipling 2013, 1066)

Republished in 1919, 'The Covenant' shares its narcotic metaphor with Yeats's landmark poem ('the half-deceit of some intoxicant'), while its 'merchants' and their political commerce recall the memorable 'we traffic in mockery' (Yeats 1957, 433). It describes the steady inroads of delusion in the same eight-line, ABAB pentameter stanza—though without the kick of Yeats's terminal couplets.

Another of Yeats's lines tells us how 'All teeth were drawn' and 'all ancient tricks unlearned', while his poem's manuscript title was 'The Things Return' or 'The Things that come again' (Wood 2010, 161). The forgetting, or rather deliberate drilling-out of received wisdom, and the approach of dim, dishevelled fiends also jogged Kipling's admonishing pen. Printed probably for deliberate effect in a placid Sunday morning newspaper, 'The Gods of the Copybook Headings' imagines the ironic vengeance wrought by unlearned maxims. Like 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', on publication it was prominently dated '1919', although in Yeats's case this was a calculated misdating. However, it also bears comparison with a work that *was*

produced early that year: ‘The Second Coming’.² Though Kipling’s vatic posture is not without irony, both are prophecies of coming apocalypse, linked by a grim notion of historic cycles that is reflected in the quite different metre and syntax of each poem. Yeats’s is the more sophisticated philosophy: as one phase of history circles to its climax, the revolving symmetry of ‘turning and turning’, ‘falcon’ and ‘falconer’ and ‘hold’ and ‘world’ gives way to disassociated impressions of chaos (Yeats 1957, 401). Glib were it not expressed so harshly, Kipling’s is a more didactic moral drawn out through successive generations of dreamers undone by ever-defective human nature. By antithetical twists of fate, pacifism results in war and socialism in poverty—reversals embodied in sharp-tongued lines whose rhymes coil reproachfully back on themselves. Some of Yeats’s lyrical quality is echoed, however, in the inexplicable and eerily silent cruelties of history: ‘presently word would come / That a tribe had been wiped off its icefield, or the lights had gone out in Rome’ (Kipling 2013, 1392). The Irish poet aspired, with reservations, to look upon such catastrophes as tragic consummations: ‘Egypt and Greece good-bye, and good-bye, Rome!’ is another line from the poem that heads this chapter. Both poems also imagine sinister harbingers of the coming darkness—the ‘rough beast’ and eponymous Gods, the first of which ‘slouches’ while the latter ‘limp’. The Biblical millennium is evoked, but the destruction that fascinates each writer is wholesale and arbitrary: like Yeats’s ‘Things’ that inevitably come again, the Gods always ‘with terror and slaughter return!’ (Kipling 2013, 1394). The conservative temperament evinced, it is clear, is reflective less of conformity than of deep-seated anxiety, scepticism and disgust.³

² This comparison was originally suggested to me by remarks in Montefiore 2007, 111.

³ For an argument that the modernist apocalypticism exemplified by ‘The Second Coming’ derives from the sensibility of imperial romancers like Kipling, see McClure 1994, 51.

‘Now days are dragon-ridden’, Yeats tells us in ‘Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen’. But something that particularly distinguishes his and Kipling’s responses to the European war, the 1916 Rising and subsequent Irish Troubles is their suspicion that AE’s dragons may have been creatures of their own making. Once decorous shapes in a Nineties frieze, like Yeats’s Japanese horses they had now awakened and thundered down from the wall. The symbolic elision of the Easter martyrs with Cuchulain, most notably, became such that Yeats later imagined the mythic hero not limping, or slouching, but ‘stalking’ through the scene of their last stand (Yeats 1957, 611). Heroic legend had always been the alternative to folklore, as Kipling was reminded in 1911 when he watched a Belfast cinema audience applauding a production of Scott’s *Rob Roy* (Pinney 1990-2004, vol. 4, 60). The previous year Yeats had published *The Green Helmet*, the second of his Cuchulain plays. This five-play cycle had been in his mind at least as early as 1897, and was no doubt given impetus by the poet Alice Milligan, who urged both Yeats and Hyde to abandon folklore and instead produce ‘modern versions’ of the Irish epic corpus (Kelly 1986-, vol. 2, 75, 413). Yeats’s long-time collaborator Lady Gregory was another influence, overseeing a marked new emphasis on the ‘hero tale’ when he reissued *The Celtic Twilight* one month after the end of the Boer War, as was the inspirational historian Standish O’Grady who in 1896 had published Cuchulain tales in Henley’s *New Review* (Thuente 1980, 152).⁴ It was ultimately in *The Green Helmet* (1910), however, that the legendary warrior emerged as the embodiment of Yeatsian tragic joy:

... I choose the laughing lip

That shall not turn from laughing, whatever rise or fall;

The heart that grows no bitterer although betrayed by all;

⁴ See *New Review* 14 (80): 93-102 and 14 (81): 202-214.

The hand that loves to scatter; the life like a gambler's throw; (Yeats 1966, 453)

This gallant nonchalance was very much in keeping with Kipling's heroes, starting with the Colonel's son who saves his life with a witticism in 'The Ballad of East and West'. Most comparable is Corbyn in 'A Sahibs' War', the boyish subaltern who makes his way to the front by a japing ruse and who, turning in his saddle at the fated moment, meets his bullet with a smile (Kipling 1916, 94). Yet the link between the two authors runs deeper and still earlier. Propelled by the late Victorian impulse to make society *fit* for poetic ideals, they equated literary influence with the force of action, and valued decisive deed over passive thought—'I delight in active men', Yeats wrote in an introduction to his plays, characteristically justifying his remark with a gnomic 'Indian tale' (Yeats 1986, 530). Taken to its extreme, what excited this logic was not just valour or will, but the deed itself in its absolute quality. One acquaintance, the French aristocrat Robert d'Humières, regarded Kipling as a Nietzschean in the making, losing his pity and 'scruples' as the conviction grew on him that men attain identity through struggle.

[I]f we dared to question Mr. Kipling as to what is at the back of his thought, I believe that he would answer: "Yes, I consider that the aesthetic enjoyment resulting from the performance or the spectacle of an heroic deed is such as to permit us entirely to disregard its ethical significance." (d'Humières 1905, 249)

Kipling had never disguised how India was governed, and as early as 1888 campaigns against Burmese dacoits had given him matter for a consciously *aesthetic* treatment of violence. In 'The Ballad of Boh Da Thone' lads from Galway and Meath go 'to their death with a joke in their teeth', flesh puckers blue at the bayonet's kiss; and for years Captain O'Neil's wife embraces him without an inkling of his elemental self.

As the shape of a corpse dimmers up through deep water,
 In his eye lit the passionless passion of slaughter. (Kipling 2013, 255)

Superbly graphic, the ballad is however not wholly a colonial spectacle. Its very luridness betrays its kinship with fin-de-siècle writing, including elements of the Celtic lobby. When Yeats refused Milligan's request for heroic material in 1899 he suggested Fiona Macleod (*nom de plume* of William Sharp), who had recently published her *Barbaric Tales*. The American critic Cornelius Weygandt was at a loss to explain such stories as 'The Song of the Sword'—all sex, blood, mass blindings and a title shared with a Henley poem—though he tentatively suggested the influence of Yeats's *Dhoya* (Weygandt 1913, 286).

The all-sufficiency of action would have lasting consequences, not least in Yeats and Kipling's mutual attraction to Mussolini. In a final irony, each man would project his most intemperate fantasies not onto the degraded metropole both had resented, but on the other's homeland. To the dismay of the Indian student Abhinash Chandra Bose, who called on him at Rathfarnham towards the end of his life, Yeats recommended that Hindus and Muslims settle their grievances with a 200,000-man battle royale: 'Shanti? Life is a conflict' (Dasgupta 1965, 22). Kipling had often faced criticism for his obsession with militarizing the young. But after Easter 1916 itself, he paradoxically wished to punish Ireland by *not* enforcing conscription, thus depriving her of cathartic violence. 'I want Ireland to die' was an unguarded remark reported by Moira Somerville to her sister Edith, the novelist, in Cork (Rauchbauer 1995, 172). Kipling by this point had already suffered the personal cost of war, and his statement to Somerville coincided with the most excoriating phase of his mourning: the composition of a series of terse, undemonstrative, and sometimes harrowing 'Epitaphs'.

If any question why we died,

Tell them, because our fathers lied. (Kipling 2013, 1144)

An officer in the Irish Guards who had passed his medical only through his father's intercession, John Kipling had disappeared at the Battle of Loos in 1915. Kipling made no direct allusion, though he wrote of the comfort afforded by his conviction, arrived at through painstaking researches, that 'My son was killed while laughing at some jest' (2013, 1140).

At the close of the war, it had evidently appeared to some that the literary response called for would not be forthcoming from the spent forces of the 1890s. 'From Mr Kipling and Mr Yeats', the *London Mercury* commented in 1920, 'we do not now expect the unexpected' (1920, 259). Instead each would make dramatic—in Yeats's case revolutionary—departures while recapitulating, and reassessing, their perennial themes. Remorseful enumeration of the dragon's teeth they had sown would become a prominent motif, as would a sense of finality. If commentators like Israel Zangwill had, in 1916, begun already to lay blame for the Somme on a generation of 'Ruined Romantics', then the Nineties' two foremost survivors wondered whether their poetic was incapable of assimilating the postwar world (Zangwill 1916, 93). In 'The Fabulists', published in 1917, Kipling meditated on the impossibility of fantasy—and the obsolescence of the imaginative writer—after 'the groaning guns' of war had done their work.

When each man's life all imaged life outruns,

What man shall pleasure in imaginings? (Kipling 2013, 972)

What Yeats regarded as the squalid impressionism of the war poets, meanwhile, contributed to his view of the ebbing away of comprehensive vision. Acknowledging Matthew Arnold's lifelong influence, he mourned the passing of the 'Grand Style' with a direct allusion to 'Dover Beach' in 'The Nineteenth Century and After'.

Though the great song return no more

There's keen delight in what we have:

The rattle of pebbles on the shore

Under the receding wave. (Yeats 1957, 485)

The death of imagination is seen as concomitant, moreover, with the wasting of gentility and manhood by vulgar democracy. After Conservative defeat in the 1906 General Election, Kipling wrote of a national conspiracy by 'every form of unfitness, general or specialised' (Kipling 1920, 119); and though Home Rule was brought nearer by the Liberal Party's landslide victory, this too found its eugenic echo in *The Green Helmet*, the giant addressing his tribute to Cuchulain's laughter to an age 'When heart and mind shall darken that the weak may end the strong' (Yeats 1966, 453). Yeats had already harangued Dublin with 'Romantic Ireland's dead and gone' in his polemic 'September, 1913', and in 1931 Yeats elegized himself and his colleagues as 'the last romantics'—the last to lay demotic claim on 'what poets name / The book of the people' (Yeats 1957, 122, 492). Whatever follows is illegitimate. If Kipling had ever needed any reminder that it is the fate of all sages to be ignored, the bleak outlook of the 1920s and 1930s drew him towards the gesture Yeats had long been rehearsing: if only in the cold rapture of death, the visionary must finally awaken from his illusions into 'the desolation of reality'. One of his last poems is voiced by St Paul who, having spent his ministry 'being all things to all men', prays at the scaffold before his execution: 'Restore me my self again!' (Kipling 2013, 1043).

Following their lead, many younger critical voices felt the Romantic legacy itself, and its attenuation, suggested a line to be drawn under both Yeats and Kipling's chequered careers. They were charged not merely with insincerity, but with bad faith or even conscious duplicity. In 1911, E.M. Forster wrote to Malcolm Darling of the wickedness of instilling in children identities based on national difference. 'Kipling and all that school know it's an untruth at the

bottom of their hearts—as untrue as it is unloveable. But, for the sake of patriotism, they lie’ (Lago and Furbank 1983, 123). Forster had long resented Kipling, but he also noted in his commonplace book that Yeats was a ‘dishonest bard’ (1985, 234)—an opinion echoed by Robert Graves and by W.H. Auden, who in 1964 told Stephen Spender that Yeats’s poems ‘make me whore after lies’ (Carpenter 1981, 416). When Yeats died in 1939, three years after Kipling, Auden produced an elegy that vouchsafes both men the forgiveness of Time. It is a somewhat bathetic commemoration, with a credo (‘poetry makes nothing happen’) with which both the deceased would have thoroughly disagreed (Auden 1977, 242). But it reflects a plain appetite shared by many following a second world war. Few poets would now advocate a career so powerfully devoted to artifice as that for which Yeats made apology in one of his last poems: ‘Players and painted stage took all my love / And not those things that they were emblems of’ (Yeats 1957, 630).

My aim has been to bring Kipling and Yeats back into critical contemporaneity. At the centenary of their births in 1965, the critic Cyril Connolly remarked on how his and Auden’s generation had witnessed one man eclipsed, in the literary pantheon, by the other:

It is significant that Yeats was born in the same year as Kipling. Who could foretell, when both attained their half-century in 1915, the reversal of fortune which would relegate the universally-acknowledged laureate (in prose and verse) of the world’s greatest empire to semi-oblivion when his hundred was up, while the long-haired floppy-tied survivor of the Celtic Twilight... would have amassed a twenty-page bibliography... solely of books about him since 1950? (Connolly 1973, 244)

Another half-century has now come round, and if Yeats’s pre-eminence remains justified, we must remember that the two authors were perceived for much of their lifetimes—not least by

Nobel prize committees—as *the* two major representatives of Anglophone literature. They interacted obliquely, but no less potently, within a cultural nexus that their comparison helps to reanimate. Their discursive intersections reveal, moreover, why imperial and anti-colonial movements might echo one another. ‘We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric,’ wrote Yeats, ‘but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry’ (Yeats 1969, 331). Yeats’s quarrel with Kipling, and Kipling’s with Ireland, certainly produced rancorous rhetoric, but their subjective writing often effected the continuation of politics by other means. This year’s anniversary is a useful prompt to students, who are often given anthologies in which Kipling and Yeats are assigned to different eras. It is also a salutary reminder to critics, some of whom have dismissed very peremptorily any possibility of comparing the first two Anglophone Nobel laureates (Regan 2000, 79). Much can be learned by restoring to dialogue two writers who actually met only in the pages of satirical sketches of Nineties life like Richard Le Gallienne’s 1897 novel *Young Lives*, or in cartoons like Max Beerbohm’s ‘The Academic Committee’ of 1913. What we stand to gain from such an exercise is best stated, it is humbling to note, by a seemingly chance editorial comment in an American reference work: ‘Mention of Yeats and Kipling in the same sentence, suggests a different way of defining the Victorian era’ (Flesch 2010, 417).

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