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‘If —’ not: poetry in use

ABSTRACT. When students at Manchester University erased a famous poem by Rudyard Kipling and substituted an almost equally famous one by Maya Angelou, what did their action signify? They stated publicly that it was about colonialism. This critical account confirms their reading, but situates it among a set of supplementary oppositions: ease and difficulty, childhood and maturity, power and subordination. It argues that the readily available positions in the argument – literary value, anti-racist principle – are too rigid to do justice to the historical complexity of the dialogue which the action set up. What gives us access to the opposing ideologies, not as inert orthodoxies but as lived cultures, is the poetry in use.

In July 2018, the Students’ Union at Manchester University acquired, as part of a refurbishment, a wall-panel displaying the text of Rudyard Kipling’s ‘If–’. On discovering it, members of the SU executive, which had not been consulted on the choice of poem, decided that it was unacceptable, scrubbed out Kipling’s words (photographs suggest that they left them still faintly legible), and replaced them with Maya Angelou’s ‘Still I Rise’. This piece of local literary activism caught the interest of the national press, and a small controversy ensued.¹

The journalistic debate soon subsided because its conclusive point — that the students were entitled to decorate their building with a poem they admired rather than one they disliked — was too obvious to be interesting: it takes a right-wing opportunist to tell this story so that it is about left-wing intolerance.² But for a literary critic the action itself has something intriguing about it. By making a public decision to reject one text and elect another, the students brought a traditional Eng Lit pedagogy (‘compare these two poems’) to effectual life. As an executive, after all, they considered themselves to be acting on behalf of the union as a whole. They were therefore not just expressing a personal preference, but implementing a judgment which they could present as in some wider sense valid. Their action necessarily constituted an argument; this was, in the full sense of both words, practical criticism. Here, then, I want to ask, not ‘is this critical act legitimate?’ (of course it is), but ‘what does it say?’

1

The two texts invite comparison because they are the same kind of thing. Both the poems are general statements about life, made by authors who were global celebrities at the time of publication, and received by a readership that extends well beyond the confines of the ordinary poetry-reading public.³ Both have appeared repeatedly in educational contexts, both are widely available as wall posters, both have led, as it were, public lives: for example, lines from ‘If—’ are famously inscribed above the entrance to Centre Court at Wimbledon, and ‘Still I Rise’ was read by Nelson Mandela at his presidential inauguration. Both are often praised by their respective devotees as ‘inspirational’, as if a poet is something like a motivational speaker; poetry in this peculiar context of reception is something that *does you good*. In other words it is strictly an ideological discourse: the response it seeks to elicit is not pleasure or interest but assent. This is how the question of which poem to put on the wall comes to matter. The one we choose becomes an official announcement, both for visitors and for ourselves, of the values we aspire to live by.

The values in this case are diametrically and illuminatingly opposed. ‘If—’ consists, for all but its last two lines, of a single conditional clause.⁴ The sheer scale of this construction renders it hyperbolic: reading the poem enacts discouragement, as the list of conditions gets longer and longer, and less and less likely to be fulfilled. This effect is doubled by the internal hyperbole of many of the individual items (‘If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew / To serve your turn long after they are gone’ — *long* after?). The value announced on this particular wall, then, is difficulty. Valuable things are difficult, and the greater the difficulty, the more valuable they are. Registering that insistence highlights the almost equally programmatic way that ‘Still I Rise’ valorises easiness.⁵ The speaker rises like dust, like air, like tides — that is, naturally, irrepressibly, without having to try. Intention and difficulty are all on the side of the poem’s addressee, who is tense and life-denying. He strives to keep her down; she doesn’t strive, but laughs and dances. Valuable things are easy, and the greater the ease, the more valuable they are.

The contrast is substantiated by the poems' respective forms. 'If—' has Kipling's usual metrical facility, exploiting the capacity of the iambic pentameter to combine oratorical and conversational registers, and alternating feminine and masculine rhymes with such assurance that the artificiality of the pattern is barely noticed. It's a worked, finished example of poetic 'craft'. Something comparable is true of its syntax, not only in the long suspension of the 'if—' itself, but also in the antitheses within the individual challenges, for example

**If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;**

or

If you can think — and not make thoughts your aim.

The logic of this repeated figure — 'x, but at the same time not, as it might easily become, y' — sets up a sort of narrow gate which the reading has to squeeze through: the difficulty of what the poem's addressee is being asked to achieve is performed by the words themselves. The poem *does* difficulty as part of its texture.

Consistently, Angelou's poem does the opposite in these respects too. For most of its length it is in quatrains, but the odd-numbered lines don't rhyme, and there is an uncertainty about whether the last line of the stanza has three feet or four, which produces some moments of rhythmic lameness. The writing accepts near-rhymes ('tides'/'rise'), and there are variations in word-choice between the printed poem and some of the live readings that can be seen on YouTube — that is, like a song lyric, the text is not finalised, but free to change spontaneously in performance. The poem's logic is correspondingly open: metaphors attach themselves to concepts sometimes at random, rhetorical questions merge into direct statement so that it's hard to tell where one ends and the other begins. And again like a song, it resolves finally into the simple incantation of its tagline: 'I rise'. In all these ways, 'Still I Rise' takes it easy: it is loose, even amateurish, where 'If—' is professional and tight.

One way of understanding these contrasts is to think about address. As its closing words make clear, ‘If—’ is spoken by a father figure to someone *in statu pupillari*: ‘you’ll be a Man, my son!’. This instructional orientation offers the reader little choice of subject position: to follow the thought is, in effect, to identify with the ‘you’ who is being instructed. ‘Still I Rise’, on the other hand, constructs its ‘you’ as both malevolent and defeated: the reader is clearly being invited to identify *against* ‘you’ and with the liberated speaker, whose cosmic rhetoric equips her to contain multitudes, and so makes identification an easy matter. Considered as messages in the Students’ Union, then, the poems are pointing in opposite directions. ‘If—’ speaks *to* the students, teaching them about life with the authority of age and experience; ‘Still I Rise’ speaks *for* the students, answering back to authority with mockery and defiance. It is easy to see why students in their own union, their own licensed space, would prefer a voice that expresses them to one that lectures them. But it is equally easy to see how that decision looks to their conservative detractors: the feckless young people, given a lesson about difficult choices, rub it out as soon as they can, and replace it with a hymn to effortless self-realisation.

2

The publicly stated reason for the SU action, though, was not hostility to the ethics of ‘If—’, but something more specific: Kipling’s ‘racism’. A statement on Facebook from Sara Khan, the SU’s liberation and access officer, widely quoted in the reports, reads:

We, as an exec team, believe that Kipling stands for the opposite of liberation, empowerment and human rights – the things that we, as an SU, stand for. Well known as author of the racist poem The White Man’s Burden, and a plethora of other work that sought to legitimate the British empire’s presence in India and dehumanise people of colour, it is deeply inappropriate to promote the work of Kipling in our SU, which is named after prominent South African anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko. As a statement on the reclamation of history by those who have been oppressed by the likes of Kipling for so many centuries, and continue to be so

to this day, we replaced his words with those of the legendary Maya Angelou, black female poet and civil rights activist.

Some scholars protested that the description of Kipling as a racist and an apologist for imperialism is reductive, but they couldn't seriously argue that it is inaccurate.⁶ The more cogent objection to the students' rationale was that this particular poem has no racist content, and that it is over-rigorous to treat it as inescapably tainted by association with Kipling's other writings. If a feminist bride were to veto 'Let me not to the marriage of true minds' on the grounds that Shakespeare also wrote *The Taming of the Shrew*, her friends might think she was being a bit of a purist.

But of course there is more to the unity of an *oeuvre* than just the attribution of responsibility. The different things that a poet writes are not inseparable, but they are not simply discrete either. The most notorious instance of Kipling's racism, invoked as evidence in the statement, is 'The White Man's Burden'. This poem, unlike 'If—', was a political intervention of a deliberate and immediate kind. It appeared in the American press in February 1899, when Congress was in the process of deciding what to do about the Philippines.⁷ The archipelago had long been a Spanish colony, but Spain gave it up after losing to the United States in the war of 1898. The USA was therefore in de facto control, but there was an independence movement under arms, prepared to fight the Americans as it had already fought the Spanish. The American government had to choose, then, whether to take over from Spain as the colonial power, or to use its temporary dominance to facilitate the birth of an independent Filipino nation. Kipling's poem is an attempt to swing American public opinion towards the colonial option — that is, to press the USA to accept its destiny as an imperialist state.

Given this brief, the poem's characterisation of the project it proposes is surprisingly negative. The first stanza famously reads:

**Take up the White Man's burden —
Send forth the best ye breed —**

**Go bind your sons to exile
 To serve your captives' need;
 To wait in heavy harness,
 On fluttered folk and wild —
 Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
 Half-devil and half-child.⁸**

Understandably the last couple of lines have stuck in the memory — and the throat — of many readers in former British colonies. But after one's initial shock at the brutality of the description, it becomes apparent that its rhetorical context is an attention-grabbing paradox. Kipling is saying to the American public, in effect, that acquiring an empire will be a gruelling and unrewarding business. They have captured a wild people, but contrary to what they might expect, it is the captors who will be bound, and the captives who will be served. Later in the poem, the thanklessness of the task is even more bitterly insisted upon:

**Take up the White Man's burden —
 And reap his old reward:
 The blame of those ye better,
 The hate of those ye guard.**

Imperialism, it seems, will begin in violence, continue in drudgery, and end in recrimination. Altogether it seems a strange way to sell a policy.

Admittedly, an explanation for the anomaly lies ready to hand: namely, that the negativity is a strategy of legitimation. According to this interpretation, many Americans saw the annexation of the Philippines as advantageous but shameful — an un-republican lapse into the monarchical rapacity of Europe. There was consequently an ideological opening for a narrative that would represent it precisely not as greedy, but as self-sacrificing. The poem's gloomy tone thus provides the ethical reassurance that US expansionism needs. Any 'profit' that Americans may in fact be seeking on their own

account disappears behind the warning that they are acting against their own interests. ‘Kipling published his “White Man’s Burden”, and what to millions had seemed a national crime appeared as a national duty.’⁹ If the poem is indeed propaganda, then, it is *smart* propaganda.

This may well be how the political logic worked in 1899, but it does not oblige us to read the poem itself as disingenuous. We can choose simply to read it at face value, as the timely expression of an idealism. It does not therefore become more defensible (its racism is hardly extenuated by the assurance that it was sincere), but it does become more interesting — not least because if it is read in this way its emotional shape emerges as similar to that of ‘If—’.

At the centre of the shape is the Man who is common to both poems — the ‘White Man’ in one, and in the other the Man that ‘you’ will become if you satisfy all the conditions. The portentous capital M moralises the word: one becomes a man simply by being male and reaching a certain age, but it takes more than that to become a Man. This higher category is gendered, obviously, but more than that, and more deliberately, it idealises adulthood: in both the poems, the decisive opposite of ‘Man’ is not ‘woman’ but ‘child’. We have already seen that the captured peoples of the first stanza of ‘The White Man’s Burden’ are ‘Half-devil and half-child’, and the image of childhood returns at the end:

**Take up the White Man’s burden —
 Have done with childish days —
 The lightly proffered laurel,
 The easy, ungrudged praise.
 Comes now, to search your manhood
 Through all the thankless years,
 Cold-edged with dear-bought wisdom,
 The judgment of your peers!**

Ungrudged praise is what a child gets from its parents; cold-edged judgment is what a man gets from other men. The specific implication, resented by at least some American readers as patronising, is that in shouldering responsibility for the Philippines, the USA will cease to be a young country and join the global grown-ups.¹⁰ But the connection between imperialism and maturity is not confined to this one political situation. It is felt for example in the way both poems project the *others* — the people the Man has to deal with. Their voice is derisively sounded in ‘The White Man’s Burden’ —

The cry of hosts ye humour

(Ah, slowly!) towards the light: —

“Why brought ye us from bondage,

“Our loved Egyptian night?”

Here the colonised people are the Children of Israel, led by Moses out of Egypt, but lacking the steadiness of purpose to get themselves to the Promised Land. Progress makes them anxious; they whinge and panic, and the harassed White Man has to coax them back into line. That figure — the one who takes responsibility — is recognisably the same as the ‘you’ of ‘If–’, who can ‘talk with crowds and keep your virtue’, and ‘keep your head when all about you / Are losing theirs and blaming it on you’. And the crowds, milling ineffectually about, are child-like, excitable, in need of paternal care. They are essential to the characterisation of the Man because it is in governing them that his Manhood is realised.

In a word, the ideology the two poems share is patriarchal. In both, a paternal governor advises a filial interlocutor that it falls to him to govern the silly children around him. So the essential gesture is that of passing something on — a father is teaching a son how to be a father in his turn. And of course that too is a patriarchal conception: what entitles the Man to assume authority is what his fathers have handed down to him. Insofar as this inheritance is genetic, and the silly children are implicitly ‘natives’, the Manchester students are evidently right in saying that the pattern is imperialistic and racist as well as patriarchal. But that is not always or inescapably how it works. For example, there is a

superbly laconic instance of the trope in one of the World War I epitaphs, ‘Convoy Escort’:

**I was a shepherd to fools
Causelessly bold or afraid.
They would not abide by my rules,
Yet they escaped. For I stayed.¹¹**

Here the heroic father is the Royal Navy, and the foolish children are merchant ships. The structure of feeling is effectively identical, but it is not racialized; the binary opposition ‘white / non-white’ is replaced by ‘Service / civilian’.

However, that very substitutability illuminates the real point here, which is that the imperial theme of ‘The White Man’s Burden’ is *at home* in the ethical environment of ‘If-’. Imperialism is not an autonomous value which is simply present or absent; rather, it is embedded in the images of masculinity, adulthood, responsibility and virtue that make up Kipling’s distinctive poetic. Consider for example the poem’s closing quatrain:

**If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it,
And – which is more – you’ll be a Man, my son!**

The third line can be read as a general hyperbole of worldly success; when combined with the twist in the last line, it vaguely echoes Mark, 8.36: ‘For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?’ But addressed to an upper-middle-class English boy in 1910, it has a more literal sense too. Britain at that point, if it did not actually own ‘the Earth and everything that’s in it’, was closer to doing so than any previous empire had been. So the phrase is not as casual as it sounds: it speaks to a class of young men for whom, collectively, the grandiose promise is a fact. This political

capaciousness is typical of Kipling's public manner: it may not be quite inescapably 'an imperialistic poem', but it belongs integrally to an imperialistic discourse.

As it happens, the integration is biographical as well as discursive. As the USA embarked on its war in the Philippines, the most immediate issue facing the British Empire was its deepening confrontation with the Boer republics in South Africa. Kipling had already spent time in the Cape, and when war eventually broke out in October 1899, he embraced it as a test and focus of British imperial will.¹² Part of the political force of 'The White Man's Burden' the previous February, then, was a unifying 'Anglo-Saxon' vision, according to which Britain and the USA would recognise one another as partners in a common enterprise. The two simultaneous wars — both lasting from 1899 until 1902, and both in practice turning into vicious counter-insurgency campaigns — were ideologically complementary. It is not clear at what point in these developments 'If—' was written, but Kipling himself records that the 'character' he had in mind was that of Leander Starr Jameson.¹³ Jameson had become famous in 1896 as the leader of a paramilitary foray, the 'Jameson Raid', which was intended to prompt an uprising against the Boer government of the Transvaal. The attempt was a fiasco, and Jameson was prosecuted and briefly imprisoned, but the incident hardened attitudes, making the war more likely and, when it came, appearing in retrospect as its first action. The somewhat masked hero of the poem, then, is an imperialist figure so extreme that many other imperialists regarded him as a reckless adventurer.¹⁴

This story does not prove that 'If—' is 'really' about Jameson: the poem is distanced from its specific origin by its generalising rhetoric. But it does confirm that 'If—' and 'The White Man's Burden' are connected by more than the fact of authorship. Empire is the soil in which the values of both are planted. Jameson's close ally, and collaborator in the Raid, was Cecil Rhodes, the imperialist multi-millionaire whose own fame was recently revived by controversies about his legacy at Oxford University.¹⁵ Kipling knew and admired both of them. Rhodes died in 1902, leaving the ambitious and elaborate will that created, among other things, the Rhodes scholarships by which students from the English-speaking world were to be financed to study at Oxford; this was part of his vision

for ‘the furtherance of the British Empire, for the bringing of the whole uncivilised world under British rule, for the recovery of the United States, for the making the Anglo-Saxon race but one Empire.’¹⁶ This programme is precisely the transatlantic racial and imperial axis that we saw informing ‘The White Man’s Burden’. Thus the two symbolic texts — Rhodes’s statue in Oxford and Kipling’s poem in Manchester — speak to us out of a single history, which is the history at once of Africa, Britain, and North America. When students today confront the racist past, what they encounter is not a charge-sheet of miscellaneous offensive items, but a coherent, intelligible culture.

3

To become conscious of this coherence cuts both ways. On the one hand, it has the effect of undermining the air of universality which was, presumably, one of the things that recommended ‘If-’ as a wall decoration in the first place. The poem is not a general human statement, or at any rate not only that: it is also one fragment of a definite ideological structure, whose markings are legible on this particular piece, and which can fairly be named as British imperialism. That identification is not a vague attribution of guilt by association; it is part of what the poem means, and, therefore, part of what it means to display it or to erase it. On the other hand, there is more to imperialist culture than a simple retrospective guiltiness. It positively existed — by which I don’t mean that ‘there were good things about the British Empire’ (that is a different question), but that, like any historically actual culture, it had its established and functioning institutions, doctrines, relationships, emotions, debates, and so on. To say that it ‘sought to dehumanise people of colour’ is not so much untrue as disabblingly thin: it fails to register the solidity and geopolitical scope of imperialism, fails to take the measure of its exploitation and its deadliness as well as its legality and prosperity. Real people *lived* this system of thought and action; that it often looked right to them is a fact to be reckoned with; understanding their writing today requires a scale of values more versatile and responsive than a campus code of conduct.

Something of that pragmatic weight is registered at the end of Orwell’s classic essay ‘Rudyard Kipling’, first published in February 1942, when the Empire Kipling idealised

was collapsing across the globe. Orwell takes it for granted that Kipling's imperialist rhetoric is deluded and destructive, but adds:

He identified himself with the ruling power and not with the opposition. In a gifted writer this seems to us strange and even disgusting, but it did have the advantage of giving Kipling a certain grip on reality. The ruling power is always faced with the question, 'In such and such circumstances, what would you *do*?', whereas the opposition is not obliged to take responsibility or make any real decisions.¹⁷

This way of putting it illuminates our comparison by flatly introducing the issue of power. Look what happens, for example, if we apply it to the opening of 'If-':

**If you can keep your head when all about you
 Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
 If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
 But make allowance for their doubting too;
 If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
 Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
 Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
 And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:**

This directs our attention to the successive contingencies, the various things that are hard to get right. But if we resist that, and look instead for the 'ruling power', we immediately see a person in the public eye. People blame him, doubt him, lie about him, make judgments about how he looks and talks. And he, in turn, is in a position to manage his relationship with these people – to calculate the impression he makes on them, and factor their doubts into his decisions. In other words, although the poem is explicitly about the daunting challenges 'you' will face, what it more implicitly communicates is 'your' privilege. That 'you' are destined for a life of what private schools call 'leadership' goes, revealingly, without saying. The poem's pedagogic tone, then, is not addressed to everyone; it reverberates, definingly, in public schools, or in the colleges

which, like Kipling's own, trained colonial officers, or in the Oxford to which Rhodes envisaged sending the future masters of the English-speaking world. Putting it up in the Students' Union starts to look like a quite specific kind of mistake: whoever chose it was behaving as if English higher education were still – as it was until relatively recently – an institution for the education of the ruling class.

By way of contrast, here is the opening stanza of 'Still I Rise':

**You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.**

One way of reading this language would be to go back to Kipling's opposition between the adult and the children. The openings of both poems refer to lies, but whereas Kipling accepts that lying is something people do, and that you have to live with it and try not to lie yourself, Angelou denounces the lies and attributes them to malice (they appear as bitter and twisted rather than, say, casual, or self-serving). The voice, naively revelling in its own 'sassiness' and 'sexiness', is that of a child who supposes that if she is hurt, the pain must have been intended by a bad person who hates her, whereas 'If-' is voiced for an adult, who has a securer centre of self, and can 'make allowance' for the imbalances of other people. Or again:

**You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.**

The verbs channel a material history: victims of colonial and racial oppression have indeed been shot, cut, killed, over and over again. But the clumsy metaphors drag the violence into the sphere of hurt feelings: what this is directly about is explosive speech,

cutting looks. The extreme vocabulary is in the service of a hyperbolic declaration of the courage and vitality of the 'I': unlike Kipling's addressee, who is warned not to 'look too good, nor talk too wise', this speaker places no limits on how good she wants to look. The exuberant preening is as childlike as the earlier petulance: this is a voice that defies adult authority, but doesn't claim to possess any. The writing is not 'mature'.

But that kind of dismissal overlooks, among other things, the uses to which poetry (or at least this kind of poetry, public, sententious, 'inspirational') may be put. As it happens, both the stanzas I have quoted can be seen in current cultural operation. The first one is the epigraph, and evidently the source of the title, for Gina Miller's memoir-cum-self-help-guide *Rise*.¹⁸ And the later one was used by the National Union of Students in a message of solidarity when the Manchester executive received unpleasant online abuse.¹⁹ In both these instances, the poem's *users*, so to speak, are non-white women whose boldness has placed them in exposed public positions; and Angelou's unironic assertiveness helps to see them through. In effect, the poem says, *for* them, 'I am strong, I have agency, I have the right to speak', and this message is semantically rich because of the long history of suppression and disenfranchisement which it is (explicitly) designed to negate. Kipling's implied addressee, his colonial administrator in the making, has no occasion for such a message because his agency has never been in question: as we saw earlier, he was literally born to it. You could therefore say that the reader of 'If-' is ill equipped to read 'Still I Rise' because he doesn't need it. It looks to him like a weak poem – needy, indiscriminating, immature. I have probably said enough to indicate that it looks like a weak poem to me too. That judgment, however, implies a conception of strength and maturity which is not innocently artistic, or even personal, but is grounded in huge inequalities of social and political power. In all the circumstances, simply rubbing the older poem out, and writing the new one over the top, hardly an unreasonable critical response.

Concluding the argument there, however, will not quite do. It places the old poem in its historical conditions while accepting the new one as an unconditional affirmation of freedom. And in reality, of course, the new poem is part of a historical culture too, one

that can be identified quite crudely. The students were making a point of replacing a racist white man with an anti-racist black woman. But what they were also doing, without making a point of it, was replacing a conspicuously English text with a conspicuously American one. It is not only that the diction of Maya Angelou's poem is recognisably founded in American colloquial speech and American song, and not just that it culminates in the speaker claiming her inheritance from slaves — a genealogy that answers more directly to the racial history of the USA than to that of the UK. It is more essentially that 'Still I Rise', as its title and its repetitions make clear, attaches its affirmation of black identity to that radiant sense of upward mobility that permeates American mythology way beyond the lines of race. The poem's triumph over racism is aligned with personal success, and its celebration of success is racialised. Strikingly, its taunting images of black self-confidence are commodities: oil, gold, diamonds. That is a politically deliberate reversal: these are the things that white men have historically extracted from non-white people's land, and now the speaker (re)claims them as inner wealth. But it works on the basis that being unlimitedly rich is an instantly readable metaphor for joy. The speaker feels like a million dollars. Her colour in the poem, then, doesn't detach her from the prevailing language of her society; rather, it is the accent in which she speaks it.

Thus to substitute Angelou for Kipling is not quite the act of cultural dissidence that both its supporters and its critics appeared to think it. If anything, it is a conformist move, bringing the literary decor of the Students' Union into line with the surrounding American domination of popular culture in music and film. The rhythms and sentiments of 'Still I Rise' seemed spontaneously right, not so much because they are transhistorically true as because they are immediately familiar. It can happen that people are too taken up with the iniquities of the fallen empire to notice the operation of the one that is still in business. Affirming one's anti-racism is a great and serious object, but one drawback of erasing the ambiguous utterances of the past is that it makes it harder to see where the certainties of the present have come from.

¹ The story was covered in the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Independent*, 18.07.18; the following day it was picked up by the *Daily Express*, *Guardian*, *Daily Mirror*, *Standard*, *Sun*, *Times*, the BBC news site, and many others including the *New York Times*.

² E.g. Dominic Sandbrook, review of David Gilmour, *The British in India*, *Sunday Times*, 26 August 2018: 'It takes guts these days to say anything positive about the British Empire.... When Manchester University put up a mural of Rudyard Kipling's poem *If*, hysterical students defaced it.'

³ 'If-' first appeared in *Rewards and Fairies* in 1910. 'Still I Rise' was first printed in *And Still I Rise* in 1978, when Angelou was already the internationally known author of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969).

⁴ Text in *Rudyard Kipling's Verse*, Definitive Edition, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940, p. 576.

⁵ Text in *And Still I Rise*, London: Virago, 1986, p. 41.

⁶ For example, the *Guardian* quoted Janet Montefiore and Amit Chaudhuri in nuanced mitigation (19.07.18).

⁷ The political operation of the poem is traced in John Lee, 'King Demos and his Laureate: Rudyard Kipling's "The White Man's Burden", Transatlanticism, and the Newspaper Poem', *Media History* 20 (2014), 51-66.

⁸ Definitive Edition, p.323.

⁹ Editorial in the *San Francisco Call*, October 1899, quoted in Lee, 'King Demos and his Laureate', p. 61.

¹⁰ The implication and the resentment are both explored in Patrick Brantlinger, 'Kipling's "The White Man's Burden" and its Afterlives', *English Literature in Transition* 50 (2007), 172-91.

¹¹ Definitive Edition, p. 391.

¹² For Kipling and the South African crisis, see David Gilmour, *The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling*, London: Pimlico, 2003, pp. 133-46.

¹³ Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself*, London: Macmillan, 1951, p. 191.

¹⁴ Jameson's *DNB* entry is rounded and fully referenced. A populist biography, Chris Ash's *The If Man*, Pinetown, South Africa: 30° South Publishers, 2012, represents him as a far-sighted patriot stabbed in the back by British politicians. This provided the basis for a detailed right-wing press attack on the Manchester SU, Guy Adams, 'Why Rudyard Kipling's classic poem 'IF' so vilified by Snowflake students is rightly revered by tennis star Serena Williams', *Daily Mail Online*, 20.07.18. The continuing vitality of a debate about the events of 1896 is striking. The *Mail's* position within it is apparently unchanged.

¹⁵ For an efficient brief account of the Rhodes controversy, see Amia Srinivasan, 'Under Rhodes', *London Review of Books*, 31 March, 2016, p. 32. A book-length collection of writings by the campaigners was published in August 2018: Roseanne Chantiluke, Brian Kwoba and Athinangamso Nkopo (eds.), *Rhodes Must Fall: The Struggle to Decolonise the Racist Heart of Empire*, London: Zed Books, 2018.

¹⁶ *The last will and testament of Cecil John Rhodes*, edited by W.T. Stead, London: "Review of Reviews" Office, 1902, p.59.

¹⁷ George Orwell, *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, 4 vols, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968, vol 2, p. 228.

¹⁸ Gina Miller, *Rise: Life Lessons in Speaking Out, Standing Tall & Leading the Way*, Edinburgh: Canongate, 2018.

¹⁹ Reported in the Manchester University student paper, *The Tab*, 20.07.18.