

Anikó Beregszászi, Katalin Lizák, Enikő Nagy-Kolozsvári, Anastasiia Hovdi

Reinterpreting R. Kipling's literary heritage: the poem "If" and its feminist parodies

1. Research problem

R. Kipling's name is well known to children and adult readership all over the world. However, it is his adult work for which he is frequently addressed as "imperialist", "sexist" and "racist". As is well known, the figure of the writer is complex and multifaceted. Therefore, Rogers Pat writing about Kipling notes that he is "...another writer who became famous in the 1890s, has long been enjoyed by non-literary readers: liberal intellectuals and academics find it harder to come to terms with him" (Rogers, 2001, p. 400).

No English writer, perhaps, has received so many controversial labels as R. Kipling, the author who immortalized Victorian England. His literary work has been examined by critics for decades and yet remains highly controversial (Sandison, 1967; Meyers, 1973; Gilmour, 2003; Adams, 2012). Along with his works which attracted the attention of a wide readership and critics from his very first steps in literature, his views have also been the subject of discussions in literary studies till present. The evaluation of his literary work, frequently from an ideological and/or political position, has until today remained unambiguous which fact, may also be one of the reasons why he is among the less studied English writers of the late 19th and early 20th century.

According to Gordon Williams (1936, p.70), "Some day there will come one who, with inspired choice will sift from his work the real, the good, the noble and the artistic, and then, and not until then, shall we see him as he should be, and deserves to be, seen... The ages alone can award him his rightful place in his literature".

Thus, the present article is devoted to identifying the root causes of the imposed image of the great poet as "imperialist", "racist" and "sexist". It aims to contribute to a better understanding of Kipling's literary legacy and its impact on the world of literature. Likewise, it aims at either substantiating or refuting allegations that R. Kipling is an imperialist, racist and sexist writer.

Evaluated from different points of view, often only political and ideological, literary critics and writers accuse him of being an imperialistic, racist and sexist writer (Woolf, 1929). Moreover, Pat Rogers even refers to him as an "Anglo-Indian imperialist" (Rogers, 2001, p. 400).

On the other hand, there are biographers who though, in their assessment consider him a controversial author, see in him not only an imperial icon but one of the greatest British writers (Adams, 2012). Other studies, however, devoted to the author are dominated by opinions that reject the existence of such views in Rudyard Kipling's literary heritage (Gilmour, 2003; Raskin, 2009).

Thus, in order to achieve the set aim and shed light on the issue, an analysis of various critical sources is provided. In the study, different points of view have been considered based on which relevant conclusions are drawn.

2. The controversial figure of R. Kipling

At the very beginning of his literary career, Rudyard Kipling enjoyed a renowned reputation among the reading public. In the nineties of the 19th century Kipling was an idol and a national symbol. However, after the First World War he was no longer popular in England. What might be the reasons for such a shift in the assessment of R. Kipling's works? The answer, if there is any, is definitely not simple and may originate in a complex interplay of various factors ranging from the historic events of the time and the status of Britain as the greatest empire in the world, to his personal life and experiences.

Kipling was born in 1865 and completed most of his literary work by the outbreak of World War I. During that half century, Europe, in many ways, reached the climax of the modern phase of civilization. By 1870 Europe was dominated by the formation of large nation-states. Europeans, notably the English, were conscious and proud of the achievements of their civilization and they assumed that all people should share their accomplishments and ideals. All these values and ideals gave Europeans a sense of superiority over non-Europeans and Kipling was inevitably influenced by this attitude (Marcu, 2019, p. 1).

With regard to it, however, Pat Rogers states that "Kipling was convinced that the British Empire was a great force for good, a conviction which separates him from many readers in a post-imperial age. And there is a brutal absolutism about some of his attitudes that can be repellent" (Rogers, 2001, p. 401). The idea of R. Kipling as a controversial figure is supported by Nicoleta Aurelia Marcu (2019, p.1) when she in fact, reiterates the former assertion claiming that "A controversial literary figure, Kipling was both acclaimed and sanctioned for being the voice of Anglo-Saxon imperialism". Likewise, "Max Beerbohm, for instance, savagely caricatured him as a loud-mouthed vulgar patriot" (Rogers, 2001, p. 401).

Despite attempts to stigmatise Kipling as a supporter and promoter of British colonial aspirations, his name and works have remained not only in the history of English and world literature, but in the memory of many reading generations. As David Gilmour (2003), the author of the book *"The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling"* claims, "Kipling's mysterious and enduring works deeply influenced the way his readers saw both themselves and the British Empire, and they continue to challenge our own generation".

Obviously, the contradictory and sometimes, even mutually exclusive interpretations of Kipling's work may be explained by many factors, both objective and subjective: mostly, though, by the complexity of the historical and cultural era in which he lived and his views were formed. The formation of Kipling as a person took place in the 70s and the first half of the 80s when England, being the largest colonial power, dominated the world. Since England emerged as the world's greatest power, it developed a certain worldview and social norms which shaped and influenced the whole nation. It was the era of the highest prosperity of Victorian England whose values Kipling fostered in his personal life and his writings.

In view of this, Kipling may be considered a genuine offspring of his epoch, a man whose works serve as a reflection for the entire reality of the era with all its ideas, beliefs and expectations. As Jonah Raskin (2009, p. 52) notes, "More than any other English writer in the last one hundred and fifty years he changed British society's image of itself". Among those who commented favourably on R. Kipling's prose of the 1880s and have been appreciative of his genius were writers who ideologically opposed Kipling, such as the socialist Orwell and the Communist Brecht (Rogers, 2001, p. 401).

In the 20th century, however, the writer fell into disfavour – he was seen as a mouthpiece of colonial politics and a promoter of British imperial ambitions. This assessment of the writer's worldview and political views remained during his lifetime (McClure, 1981). The Second World War caused a rise in patriotic feelings in England and the work of R. Kipling became all the more consistent with the demands of the time. For England, the turning point in the attitude towards Kipling's poetry was a speech by the famous poet and critic Thomas Stearns Eliot, who after a scrupulous study of Kipling's works, highly appreciated the author in his speech delivered in 1958 before the Kipling Society and in March 1959 published in the *Kipling Journal* (Eliot, 1919; Kipling, 1971).

It is only when it comes to Kipling that many in the world remember his views rather than his works. However, Rudyard Kipling like any other poet, turned his own experiences into art. Undoubtedly, it cannot be ignored that the accusations of imperialism and sexist views appeared not only for this reason. One of the possible grounds for them might be such works as "If", "The Man Who Would Be King" and "The White Man's Burden" which directly contributed to the image of Rudyard Kipling as an imperialist and racist. Their themes resonate with what

postcolonial scholars later noted: imperial power sought to control not only territories but also gender roles, consolidating the power of white men over all other groups. It is, the seemingly diminished role of women and the distorted portrayal of representatives of different cultures because of which outraged students at the University of Manchester replaced the text of Rudyard Kipling's "If" painted over a mural, with the lines of Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" (Cox, 2018).

However, a number of academic scholars and literary critics warn against simplistic views about Kipling's poetry. With regard to it, Chr. Benfey (2019) suggests that both the historical context and the writer's views should be considered when he states that "Kipling's morality is imperialist only to the extent that it is closely linked to a specific historical reality, but there are lessons in the poem for any social group struggling for political power" (Benfey, 2019).

Nowadays, there is a new generation of researchers who is returning to Kipling's work. For example, Lycett A. (2016, p. 421) remarks that there is "no doubt" that Kipling's views were reactionary, but the biographer adds, "But he was also a great observer of what was happening in the world. So if you want to know what the world was like in Kipling's time, you want to know about late 19th century India, Kipling's work is a great place to start".

It is interesting that Kipling's admiration for the strong will and the human spirit that overcomes everything peacefully coexists with a love for authoritarian power and a great idea – in his case it was the idea of Great Britain, an eternal unshakeable monarchy, an empire over which the sun never sets.

Consequently, it may be stated that his literary work was a political and ideological response to a historical reality. The writer is representing a reality, or a way reality was seen at the time, given the ideology available to him. Therefore, Kipling's life, attitudes and writings were a fusion of many contemporary currents, which generated the contradictions that enveloped him (Marcu, 2019, p. 1).

Had it been that R. Kipling professed ideas that conflicted with his era, he might have been accused of betraying his country.

3. Is R. Kipling a sexist?

Our contemporary perception of Kipling may differ radically from the one widely spread at the turn of the twentieth century in Britain, in the United States, in India, or elsewhere in the empire. Among his works there are poems and stories that exalt the role of women. For instance, Rudyard Kipling's "They" (1904) demonstrates a complex and ambiguous portrayal of female identity that goes beyond typical Victorian notions of the role of women. Despite the fact that Kipling is often considered sexist due to his conservative views, in this story he portrays women as strong, independent and able to influence the world around them. The

protagonist Miss Florence symbolises an alternative motherhood that is not limited to biological ties. Other female characters also expand the traditional boundaries of female roles and embody spirituality, sense of care and entrepreneurship. In this way, Kipling not only recognises the power of women's identity but also grants them greater autonomy, making "They" (1904) an unusual example to the conventional perceptions of his literary work.

Therefore, it may be noted that Rudyard Kipling portrays women in different ways, reflecting both Victorian ideals and alternative models of women's roles in society. In "The Man Who Would Be King" (1888), women are presented as seductive and dangerous figures, which corresponds to colonial ideas of femininity as something mysterious and threatening. This image is in line with Victorian fears of female independence, which could shake the traditional model of the family and social order.

On the contrary, in "They" (1904), Kipling presents women as independent and self-sufficient individuals who occupy important places in society, although not always traditional ones. The protagonist is a landowner who controls her own life and space, not depending on a man. The other women in the novel also depart from typical Victorian roles: they can be nuns, unmarried mothers, or business owners. What they all have in common is that they redefine motherhood and women's work, challenging the traditional model of the "breadwinner husband" and the "dependent wife". In contrast to the dangerous femininity of "The Man Who Would Be King", in "They", women demonstrate strength and power through care, guardianship and unconventional motherhood.

It is true that the poem "If" is directly addressed to a real person: Kipling's son, Jack. This address was made to his son, for quite objective reasons. Firstly, it is a fact that Rudyard Kipling did not have a daughter. If we assume that R. Kipling had had one and he ignored her mention in his work, then we would have had some basis for clarifying the issue of gender inequality in his worldview. Secondly, it was the post-war period in which the poet lived and worked, which prompted him to write such a poem. Therefore, "If" might be seen as a completely gender-neutral, multicultural call for motivated action in various spheres of life.

Regarding the critical analysis of Rudyard Kipling's works certain scholars and writers are convinced that any stigma imposed by society is just an invention of critics who were influenced by the norms and laws of their time. This applies to his poem "If" as well as to many of his works. For example, Jad Adams (2006, p. 5), R. Kipling's biographer, reminds us that "He has been castigated as a misogynist, though few writers of either sex have written so warmly about middle-aged women. Similarly, he can be criticised for his racial views, but no other artist wrote with such intimacy of native life." Analysing the peculiarities of the writing, the author adds that "If" is "...still widely quoted and it would be more widely quoted still had not Kipling so clearly masculinised it with the last line – you'll be

a Man, my Son! Kipling was insisting on a gender separation when the western world was moving towards an appreciation of the similarities between men and women, not the differences" (Adams, 2006, p. 85).

Thus, from the above mentioned, it may be seen that despite the contradictory opinions of critics, the figure of Rudyard Kipling still resonates in modern society. It is quite interesting that in the early 1900s Frank Crane, an American writer, published a "want ad" "Boy Wanted", which is about the traits and actions that should be inherent in a man. Comparing this poem to Rudyard Kipling's "If", one can see similarities in the instructive tone and the desire to foster the ideal of a strong personality. "If" offers universal guidance on resilience, honour and patience, pointing to the importance of inner balance and self-control. At the same time, Crane's "Boy Wanted" focuses on the characteristics that make a boy valuable to society, emphasising honesty, hard work and responsibility. Both creative works reflect the moral values of their era and set standards for masculinity and personal growth that remain relevant to this day (URL1).

In view of the aforementioned, it may be concluded that the works of R. Kipling, either prose or poetry have certain features that may evoke prejudiced attitude among writers and critics. With regard to it, Frost (2017) noted that it is hardly surprising that any writer, working at the heart of the most significant colony of an empire, the ideological justification of which is based on race, should produce work from which we can now read racial prejudice (Frost, 2017). Therefore, when R. Kipling's works are studied, an unbiased and restrained assessment may be achieved provided not only his stories and poems are analysed but the historical background and the needs of the society of the time are considered.

4. Interpreting nine feminist parodies

The widespread popularity of instructions addressed to men in Kipling's "If", aroused the interest of women. In 1925, the feminist Marie Stopes, addressed Rudyard Kipling with an unusual request. She insisted on changing the last line of his famous poem "If" so that it would cover not only men but also women. Namely, to modify "And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!" to "And you will lead the race o'er ground you've won" (Gibbons, 2000). However, Kipling refused to make any changes to his poetic text, which demonstrated his steadfastness in matters of creative freedom and personal beliefs. The poet's response was quite brief but categorical: "If a precedent of this kind were established, we might end by sanctioning the change of every line" (Gibbons, 2000). This fact demonstrates his principled stance on preserving the authorial integrity of his creative works. Despite the fact that he was open to criticism, he believed that his poetry did not need to be adapted to fit new social attitudes. Broadly known for her persistence and

steadfastness, Marie Stopes certainly did not take rejection lightly, although her reaction to Kipling's response remains unknown. This confrontation between two prominent figures of their time reflects a broader conflict between traditional and progressive views of society, gender roles, and morality. On the one hand, Kipling defended his artistic principles and fidelity to the original text, while on the other hand, Ms. Stopes sought to change the literary heritage to empower women.

This case demonstrates not only the strength of convictions of both sides, but also the importance of authorial immunity in literature. Rudyard Kipling's literary work is a reflection of his time, views and style, which are not subject to editorial changes to suit modern ideologies. His response to the demand of Stopes, full of restraint and reasoning, confirms the ideals set out in the poem "If", "...keep your head when all about you/Are losing theirs..." (Gibbons, 2000). This clash of worldviews is yet another example of how literature and social change can engage in a complex dialogue, leaving a mark on cultural history.

Almost 30 years after the original poem was written, the first reworked versions of "If" began to appear, which can be viewed as parodies. The year 1924, when the first revisions were published, was a period of political change, economic reconstruction after the First World War and social transformation. The society was still recovering from the losses and consequences of the war. Many families had lost their husbands, and this changed the role of women in society who continued to fight for equality after gaining the right to vote in 1918.

In a letter to Walter Hamilton, Oscar Wilde (2000, p. 390) once wrote: "[P]arody, which is the muse with her tongue in her cheek, has always amused me – but it requires a light touch, a fanciful treatment, and, oddly enough, a love for the poet whom it caricatures". Literary critics are still debating the definition of this literary genre.

Each of the authors of the parody of "If" puts their own meaning into the lines, interpreting the advice for daughters or women in general in their own way. As a rule, a poem is adapted to give it a new meaning that corresponds to modern realities. This was the case with various versions of Rudyard Kipling's poem "If", which were created to protest against the stereotypical opinion of society about the role of women.

J. P. McEvoy's adaptation of "If" for Girls" (1924) retains the tone and rhythm of Kipling's original poem, but reinterprets it with a woman's experience and Christian values in mind. The text encourages girls to have inner strength, endurance, and dignity, but emphasises the importance of meekness, moderation, and faith as guiding principles in life whereas Kipling focuses on personal achievements and trials that shape a man. McEvoy offers a more domestic and ethical approach, in which the virtues of kindness, loyalty and resilience become the foundation of female self-realisation. The poem has overt religious overtones, emphasising trust in God as the basis for spiritual balance and life decisions (Grace, 2020).

The parodies "If" with the usual to Kipling" (1924) and "With Apologies to Kipling" (1926), written in the 1920s, mock the social expectations of women at the time (URL2; URL3). The first version focuses on the behavioural standards a woman must adhere to in society in order to balance respect and attractiveness. The poem mocks the double standard of morality, listening to men's boasts and lies, but not expressing doubts. The main message of "If" with the usual to Kipling" (1924) is that society imposes unrealistic standards of behaviour on women, but if they do not take advantage of the opportunity to profit, they will only lose (URL2).

The version of V. L. Shepherd, published in Harpers' Monthly Magazine, mocks the 1920s fashion trend of the bob cut, which became a symbol of female emancipation and rejection of traditional norms. The poem parodies those who tried to keep their hair long despite the new trends. A woman has to "save" her hair when everyone around her is cutting it. She has to endure ridicule, but take it "with understanding". She has to keep her strength of mind and not give up, even if there is no other reason than her own stubbornness.

The final chord is that if she can withstand all these difficulties, she will become a real "lady". This is a mocking allusion to traditional notions of femininity, which were undergoing a transformation during this period. Both parodies sharply ridicule the social restrictions imposed on women in the 1920s, but do so from different perspectives. "If" with the usual to Kipling" (1924) criticises the double standards of women's behaviour and the naive belief in the "correctness" of playing by men's rules (URL2). "With Apologies to Kipling" (1926) mocks conservative women who try to maintain archaic standards of beauty (URL3). Both texts illustrate a transitional period in women's history, when traditional expectations began to clash with new realities marked by changes in fashion, morality, and women's roles in society.

Elizabeth Lincoln Otis's poem "An 'If' for Girls" published in the anthology "Father: An Anthology of Verse" (1931), reflects traditional ideas about femininity and women's social roles in the 1930s (URL4). While it offers valuable advice on developing versatile skills such as sports, languages, music, and even crafts, its tone remains confined to the conservative ideal of a woman as modest, obedient, and family-oriented. Ms. Otis suggests a balance between activity and grace, knowledge and modesty, but at the same time emphasises that a girl's main goal is to become a model wife and mother. Her adaptation can be seen as a reflection of a time when women were expected to conform to strict social norms. Today, however, its message may seem outdated, as it restricts women's identity to traditional gender roles (URL4).

The parody "If" for the Housewife" (1948) is quite the opposite in its tone. It mocks the stereotypical demands on women who were traditionally perceived as ideal housewives (URL7). The author, Mrs. M. Loader, sarcastically paraphrases the key lines of "If", turning them from advice about strength of mind and endurance into a list of exhausting household duties that society imposes on

women. This parody, although written in a humorous tone, raises a serious topic – the invisible labour of women and the stereotypes that limit their role in society. Unlike Kipling's original "If", which calls for the development of character and endurance in the face of life's challenges, this text demonstrates that women are forced to endure them every day, without choice and without reward.

The following two adaptations, "Nurse's Version of Kipling's "If" (1939) and "The Salesgirl's "If" (1942), both written during the Second World War, are parodic reinterpretations of Kipling's poem created to highlight the difficult working conditions of nurses and saleswomen (URL5; URL6). Both texts use irony and hyperbole to highlight the gruelling nature of professions associated with traditionally female roles.

What distinguishes these two parodies is their tone and the ending. "Nurse's Version of Kipling's "If" (1939) ends with the ironic statement: if you can stand it, you are no longer just a nurse – you are a saint (URL5). This emphasises the almost unrealistic expectations for women. "The Salesgirl's "If" (1942) is more comically fatalistic: her exhausting work is not in vain, because when the tickets finally appear, she will become a real saleswoman (URL6). Through the use of comic elements, these two poems highlight an important socio-historical context. The poem about the nurses reflects the pre-war reality when women's work in medical institutions was perceived as a vocation rather than a profession. The poem about the shop assistants was written at the height of the Second World War. Thus, both texts emphasise that the endurance of women in these professions often borders on the absurd, as they are forced to endure constant pressure without receiving proper recognition.

On 8 March 2017, a video of a reading of Alice Kinsella's adaptation of "When" was released to mark International Women's Day. It featured 16 women poets, such as Kerrie O'Brien, Alvy Carragher, Jessica Traynor, Rosita Sweetman and Clare Rose Thornton among others (Kinsella, 2017). The interpretation of the assistant editor of "Looking at the Stars" is a powerful manifestation of women's experience, echoing the struggle for equality, self-determination and overcoming stereotypes.

In contrast to traditional rhetoric, which often focuses on achievements or calls to action, "When" works with emotional memory and intimate moments that shape a woman's identity. Through its accumulative structure, the poem highlights how women receive unwritten instructions throughout their lives about how they should behave, look, be silent or speak. This gradual accumulation creates the effect of an invisible burden that accompanies women throughout their lives.

Reading this poem on a date such as International Women's Day reinforces its significance. It is not just a piece of literature – it is the voice of those who have faced social restrictions, and at the same time a reminder that women no longer accept playing a secondary role in their own lives. In this sense, "When" can be seen as a modern analogue of Kipling's "If", but adapted to female expectations:

instead of universal life advice, it tells the naked truth about what it means to be a woman in the modern world. Thus, "When" is not just a poem about trials, but about an unbreakable inner strength that does not depend on the approval of society. Ms. Kinsella portrays a woman not as an ideal image, but as a real person who falls, but gets up every time, laughing in response to the challenges that life prepares for her (Grace, 2020).

On the same occasion, in March 2021, Serena Williams recited Deanna Rodger's version of "If" (URL8). These events are significant for rethinking classic poetry in a modern context. In Kipling's original poem, written in 1895, the central motif is courage, endurance and resilience in the face of adversity – qualities that were associated primarily with the Victorian masculine ideal. However, Ms. Rodger's modern adaptation transforms this message by addressing a female audience and emphasising that the same qualities are no less important for women in the 21st century. This demonstrates that the idea of endurance, courage and inner strength is universal, not only for men, but for anyone who wants to change the world by breaking down barriers (URL8).

Kipling, at his best, revealed himself as an inspired artist, as a story teller of genius, and as a technician whose influence will remain for many a day (Gordon, 1936, p. 66).

Despite the fact that R. Kipling has been regarded as a highly controversial writer and often addressed as "imperialist", "sexist" and "racist", a new wave of interest has been noted to his works in recent years. The latter does not come as a surprise, given that Kipling was a poet of courage and honour and in his works, he endowed male and female characters with traits of eternal values, which qualities are much needed in the modern world. Just one has to always keep in mind what period the writer lived in and try to learn to see the world through his eyes to get an unbiased insight into his works.

5. Conclusions

Rudyard Kipling, the famous British writer and poet, often faced criticism for his views on imperialism and the role of women in society. While it is acknowledged that his literary works can be perceived in different ways, the importance of the context and time in which they were written should be emphasised. It is quite clear that the author's intention was to reflect the realities of his time, not to propagate certain ideologies. This case illustrates the complexity of perceiving literary works through the prism of modern values. The works of Kipling, like many other authors of the past, reflect the views and norms of their time, which may not correspond to modern ideas of equality and justice.

It is important to note that Kipling was not only a writer, but also an active participant in public life. His views were shaped by the events and ideologies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was a supporter of the British Empire and believed in its civilising mission. This is reflected in many of his creative works, where he describes the life of the colonies and their inhabitants. However, modern readers often criticise Kipling for his imperialistic views and stereotypical portrayal of non-European peoples. Some of his works are considered racist and sexist, which has led to debate about their place in the modern literary canon.

In response to these accusations, Kipling's supporters emphasise his literary talent and contribution to world literature. They argue that his literary heritage should be evaluated in the context of the time in which it was created and take into account the historical circumstances that influenced his views. Thus, this study emphasises the importance of a critical approach to literature and the need to consider the historical context when evaluating works of the past. It also shows that discussions about the role of the writer in society and their responsibility to readers are still relevant today.

As a result, Rudyard Kipling's creativity remains an important part of the world's literary heritage. His writings continue to arouse interest and debate, prompting readers to reflect on history, culture and ethics. It is important to approach them with an open mind, taking into account both their literary merits and controversial aspects. What is also particularly interesting is that his poem "If" has become not only a classic piece of literature, but also the basis for numerous parodies that reflect on social change and ridicule stereotypes of different eras. By analysing nine different variations of this poetic text, we have seen how authors have used its rhythm and structure to satirise gender roles, professional challenges, social expectations and fashion trends. In this way, "If" parodies prove that literature does not exist in a vacuum: it adapts to new contexts, acquires new meanings, and is used as a means of critical reflection on reality. These satirical parodies not only ridicule, but also preserve the source text's original power: they continue to reflect on what it means to be an "ideal" person in a particular society.

Consequently, although Kipling wrote "If" as advice to the younger generation, his parodies show that historical, cultural and social contexts significantly affect the perception of ideals. This proves once again that even the most canonical literary works can be not only revered but also subject to critical rethinking.

For R. Kipling's worldview and his work were fundamentally important both in Victorianism with its triumph, and the crisis of Victorian ideology and the entire bourgeois society that followed at the end of the century and increasingly deepened. At the intersection of these two ideological trends, the phenomenon of Kipling's art and Kipling's worldview was born. Kipling was a citizen of the British

Empire and a patriot of his state, which is why his poems are imbued not with pathos, but with real patriotism, praising not serving the empire, but serving one's homeland. The poem "If", though continuing Stoic ethics of M. Aurelius, which has nothing in common with imperialism, racism, and sexism, acquires quite a new articulation nowadays, especially for Ukrainian people, involved into war conflict. At the same time, feminist interpretations help to emphasize quite a different aspect of this poem – its ability to engender innovative ideas, evoking an entire range of meanings, ambiguous, challenging, and provocative.

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Reinterpreting R. Kipling’s literary heritage: the poem “If” and its feminist parodies

Anikó Beregszászi, habilitated doctor. Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education, Department of Philology, full professor. beregszaszi.aniko@kmf.org.ua, ORCID: 0000-0001-6860-7579.

Katalin Lizák. Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education, Department of Philology, associate professor. lizak.katalin@kmf.org.ua, ORCID: 0000-0002-7873-0535.

Enikő Nagy-Kolozsvári, PhD. Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education, Department of Philology, associate professor. nagy-kolozsvari.eniko@kmf.org.ua, ORCID: 0000-0003-1844-8674.

Anastasiia Hovdi. Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education, Department of Philology, MA student. godianasztazia.b19an@kmf.org.ua, ORCID: 0009-0001-2069-9619.

England in the 19th century, especially during the early years of Queen Victoria’s reign, stood at the very peak of social and economic development in the Western world, leading it in almost every aspect. Also, this was the age when one of the greatest and most highly controversial writers, Rudyard Kipling was born and came under fire from both critics and contemporary writers who saw in his views and works imperialist and racist motives. On the other hand, there were and still are critics and biographers who though in their

assessment consider him a controversial author, see in him one of the greatest British writers. Thus, the present article is devoted to identifying the origins of the imposed image of the great poet as "imperialist" and "racist" as well as either substantiating or refuting these allegations which in turn, may contribute to a better understanding of Kipling's literary legacy and its impact on the world of literature.

The contradictory – and at times mutually exclusive – interpretations of Kipling's work may be explained by many factors, both objective and subjective. Primarily, however, they stem from the complexity of the historical and cultural era in which he lived and developed his worldview. With this in mind, Kipling may be considered a genuine representative of his epoch: a man loyal to his nation, and a writer whose works serve as a reflection for the entire reality of the era with all its ideas, beliefs, and expectations. In terms of poetry, it is a completely different world, in which one can feel the special vision of the writer, his original talent and experience as a journalist. However, while it is acknowledged that his literary works can be perceived in different ways, the importance of the context and time in which they were written should also be emphasised.

The works of Kipling, like many other authors of the past are embedded in the historical context and reflect the views and norms of their time which may not correspond to modern ideas of equality. It is quite clear that the author's intention was to reflect the realities of his time, not to propagate certain ideologies. Consequently, despite ongoing attempts to stigmatise him as a supporter and promoter of British colonialism, Kipling's name and works continue to hold a prominent place not only in the history of English and world literature, but also in the memory of many generations of readers.

Keywords: *history, historical context, label, imperialist, racist.*

Переосмислення літературної спадщини Р. Кіплінга: вірш «Якщо» та його феміністичні пародії

Берегсасі Аніко, доктор з гуманітарних наук. Закарпатський угорський інститут імені Ференца Ракоці II, кафедра філології, професор. beregszaszi.aniko@kmf.org.ua, ORCID: 0000-0001-6860-7579.

Лізак Катерина. Закарпатський угорський інститут імені Ференца Ракоці II, кафедра філології, доцент. lizak.katalin@kmf.org.ua, ORCID: 0000-0002-7873-0535.

Надь-Коложварі Еніке, доктор філософії. Закарпатський угорський інститут імені Ференца Ракоці II, кафедра філології, доцент. nagy-kolozsvari.eniko@kmf.org.ua, ORCID: 0000-0003-1844-8674.

Говді Анастасія. Закарпатський угорський інститут імені Ференца Ракоці II, кафедра філології, здобувачка другого (магістерського) рівня вищої освіти. godi.anasztazia.b19an@kmf.org.ua, ORCID: 0009-0001-2069-9619.

У статті зазначено, що Англія в XIX столітті, особливо в перші роки правління королеви Вікторії, перебувала на піку соціального та економічного розвитку Західного світу, лідируючи майже в усіх сферах. Це був час, коли народився один

з найвидатніших і найбільш неоднозначних письменників – Редьярд Кіплінг, що потрапив під пильне око як критиків, так і тогочасних письменників, які вбачали в його поглядах і творах імперіалістичні та расистські мотиви. З іншого боку, були і є критики та біографи, які хоч і вважають його суперечливим автором, але вбачають у ньому одного з найвидатніших британських письменників. Таким чином, стаття присвячена виявленню витоків отождолення великого поета з «імперіалістичним» та «расистським» світоглядом, а також обґрунтуванню чи спростуванню цих звинувачень, що, у свою чергу, може сприяти кращому розумінню літературної спадщини Редьярда Кіплінга та її впливу на світове літературне мистецтво.

Наголошено на тому, що суперечливі, а подекуди й конфліктні трактування творчості Кіплінга можна пояснити низкою чинників як об'єктивних, так і суб'єктивних. Насамперед це надзвичайна складність світу в історико-культурному періоді, в якому жив письменник і формувалося його мислення. З огляду на це Кіплінга можна вважати справжнім представником своєї епохи, людиною, яка залишилася вірною своїй нації, письменником, твори якого слугують відображенням всієї реальності епохи з усіма її ідеями, віруваннями та очікуваннями. З позиції поезії – це зовсім інший світ, в якому відчувається особливе бачення письменника, його оригінальний талант і досвід журналіста. Однак, визнаючи, що його літературні твори можуть сприймати по-різному, слід також підкреслити значущість контексту і часу, в якому вони були написані.

Зазначено, що твори Кіплінга, як і багатьох інших авторів минулого, тісно пов'язані з історичним контекстом і відображають погляди та норми свого часу, які не обов'язково відповідають сучасним настановам та ідеалам. Цілком зрозуміло, що наміром автора було відобразити реалії свого часу, а не пропагувати певні ідеології. Але навіть попри постійні спроби затаврувати його як прихильника і пропагандиста британського колоніалізму, ім'я та твори Кіплінга продовжують займати належне місце не лише в історії англійської та світової літератури, а й у пам'яті поколінь читачів.

Ключові слова: історія, історичний контекст, тавро, імперський, расистський.

Rudyard Kipling irodalmi örökségének újraértelmezése: a „Ha...” című vers és annak feminista paródiái

Beregszászi Anikó, habilitált doktor. II. Rákóczi Ferenc Kárpátaljai Magyar Főiskola, Filológia Tanszék, professzor. beregszaszi.aniko@kmf.org.ua, ORCID: 0000-0001-6860-7579.

Lizák Katalin. II. Rákóczi Ferenc Kárpátaljai Magyar Főiskola, Filológia Tanszék, docens. lizak.katalin@kmf.org.ua, ORCID: 0000-0002-7873-0535.

Nagy-Kolozsvári Enikő, PhD. II. Rákóczi Ferenc Kárpátaljai Magyar Főiskola, Filológia Tanszék, docens. nagy-kolozsvari.eniko@kmf.org.ua, ORCID: 0000-0003-1844-8674.

Gódi Anasztázia. II. Rákóczi Ferenc Kárpátaljai Magyar Főiskola, Filológia Tanszék, MA-hallgató. godi.anasztazia.b19an@kmf.org.ua, ORCID: 0009-0001-2069-9619.

A 19. századi Anglia – különösen Viktória királynő uralkodásának korai éveiben – a nyugati világ társadalmi és gazdasági fejlődésének csúcspontján állt, szinte minden területen vezető szerepet töltött be. Ebben az időszakban született meg az egyik legnagyobb és egyben legvitatottabb író, Rudyard Kipling, aki számos kortárs író és kritikus célkeresztjébe került, mivel műveiben és nézeteiben „imperialista” és „rasszista” motívumokat véltek felfedezni. Másrészt azonban olyan kritikusok és életrajzírók is voltak – és ma is vannak –, akik bár elismerik, hogy ellentmondásos szerzőről van szó, mégis a brit irodalom egyik legnagyobb alakjaként tekintenek rá.

Ezért jelen tanulmány célja az, hogy feltárja a nagy költőre ráragasztott „imperialista” és „rasszista” címkék eredetét, illetve, hogy alátámassza vagy éppen megcáfolja ezeket a vádakokat. Ezáltal az elemzés hozzájárul Kipling irodalmi örökségének és irodalomtörténeti hatásának átfogóbb megértéséhez.

Kipling munkásságának ellentmondásos – sőt néha egymásnak is ellentmondó – értelmezései számos tényezővel magyarázhatók, mind objektív, mind szubjektív szempontból. Elsősorban azonban azzal, hogy abban a történelmi és kulturális korszakban, amelyben élt és gondolkodásmódja formálódott, rendkívüli összetettség jellemezte a világot. E tekintetben Kipling valóban korának hiteles képviselője: hazájához hű ember, valamint olyan író, akinek művei az adott korszak teljes valóságát tükrözik annak minden eszméjével, hiedelmével és elvárásaival együtt.

Ami a költészetét illeti, az egy egészen más világ: érezhető rajta az író egyedi látásmódja, eredeti tehetsége és újságírói tapasztalata. Ugyanakkor, bár elismerik, hogy irodalmi alkotásai különféleképpen értelmezhetők, hangsúlyozni kell annak fontosságát is, hogy milyen történelmi és társadalmi közegben születtek az adott művek.

Kipling művei – sok más múltbeli szerzőhöz hasonlóan – szorosan kötődnek történelmi kontextusukhoz, és koruk szemléletét, normáit tükrözik, amelyek nem feltétlenül egyeznek a mai egyenlőséget szorgalmazó eszmékkel. Nyilvánvaló, hogy a szerző szándéka az volt, hogy korának valóságát ábrázolja, nem pedig meghatározott ideológiákat népszerűsítsen. Ennek ellenére, noha folyamatosan igyekeznek megbélyegezni őt a brit gyarmatosítási törekvések támogatójaként és népszerűsítőjeként, Kipling neve és művei továbbra is meghatározó helyet foglalnak el nemcsak az angol és a világirodalom történetében, hanem olvasók nemzedékeinek emlékezetében is.

Kulcsszavak: *történelem, történelmi kontextus, megbélyegzés, imperialista, rasszista.*