

Hatred in Kipling's *The Beginnings*

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(Received on October 26, 2021)

Abstract

Hatred is universally recognised as a biproduct of war. This paper attempts to answer the question whether the hatred projected from one epoch in history can be transmitted and felt in another. To that end, this paper analyses the perceptual and temporal deixis in one instance of Rudyard Kipling's poetry. The poem entitled, "*The Beginnings*", creates the notion of the start of countable occurrences that find their genesis in this poem. However, to comprehend the multitude of occurrences, the question must be posed if they can still be felt and experienced by a reader who did not belong in the historical period when the poem was composed.

1. Introduction

This paper explores the theme of hatred in Rudyard Kipling's "*The Beginnings*". This paper utilises the linguistic concepts of "perceptual deixis"¹ and "temporal deixis"² that attempt to justify the hatred of the English toward Germany during the period of the early 1940's. These two concepts were chosen as the analytical method because they allow the reader to extract the human perceptions of the English out of their historical context. In doing so, the reader is allowed to experience such emotions in the *present*. Hence, when the speaker's motifs are articulated, the reader is simultaneously experiencing them. To note, other works of Kipling such as "*Swept and Garnished*," also typify the attitude of the English at this time, however, the deixis of "*The Beginnings*" offer a view that the former is unable to. This is because the latter represents the manifestation of hatred of the English on a collective level. Furthermore, in looking at the collective nature provided by the poem, we can gain a greater consensus about the perceived sentiments of the entire nation that the speaker is projecting through the medium of poetry.

1 Alison Gibbs and Sara Whitely, *Contemporary Stylistics: Language, Cognition, Interpretation*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p. 162.

2 Alison Gibbs and Sara Whitely, p. 162.

2. Historical importance

In her lecture, Margaret Macmillan refers to how we interpret the emotions of war. She notes that in history the importance is not in the conclusion itself but the feelings that led to the formation of the conclusion.³ One way in which Kipling represents the process of war in the poem is via the speaker's use of impersonal pronouns in the opening lines:

It was not part of their blood, (1)

It came to them very late (2)

Instead of using the object pronoun of us, the speaker elects to use "them" (2), which removes the speaker's emotional influence over the object making them an impartial observer. Thus, the object is influenced by the internal force of "It", omitting external factors. The advantage of not having the speaker as an active participant allows the reader to build and determine their own opinion within the text.

However, the speaker does still purposefully guide the reader, but not down the avenue of judgment. But in the same manner, the speaker does not push the reader towards ignorance. This occurs with the mapping of a *before* time and an *after* time in the first quatrain. The past continuous of "was" (1) and the completed action of "came" (2), both indicate a changed attitude of the "English" (4), and the genesis of their "hate" (4). Interestingly, the reason for this change is itself omitted and summarised simply as "It" (1). Although "It" has some relevancy, Kipling places a higher importance on the subject rather than the object. This makes the "English" (4), themselves, the holistic centre of the poem. The phrase of "came to them" (2), determines the nature of "It", but this revelation is only made possible because of the disclosure of the English unwillingness to accept "It". According to Angelis, "It" could refer to the German policy of Schreckenfreit⁴. If this is the case, Germany and England are polarised. Hence, Germany is the villain, and England is the virtuous. Yet in historical terms it leaves no space for the creation of a senti-

3 Margaret Macmillan, *War Studies; Event: Engelsburg Applied History* Annual Lecture with Margaret Macmillan, podcast, Soundcloud, 21 October 2019, <https://soundcloud.com/warstudies/event-engelsberg-applied-history-annual-lecture-with-margaret-macmillan> [accessed 14 November 2019].

4 *Schreckenfreit* is described as the German policy of "frightfulness" in World War 1. It is a policy which is described in the context of Belgium by Kipling in other works such as *Swept and Garnished*. See Irene De Angelis, 'From Propaganda to Private Grief: Rudyard Kipling and World War I', *Le Simplegadi*, XIV (2016), 74–81 (p. 76).

mental middle ground.

Since the words of *Angels* are taken as a theory, we must look at further textual examples that help to increase our awareness of the overall context. From the pronoun, “they” (5), there are three examples of possessive pronouns in the poem that pertain to the English. The nouns of these possessives are “blood” (1), “voices” (9) and “eyes” (10). The first example, “blood”, shows a unity in identity between the individuals and communities of England. The example of “voices” shows mutuality in how the English share their mutual concerns. Notably the third, “eyes”, shows a singularity in vision and outlook that transcends “blood” and “voices”:

No man spoke it aloud, (15)

When the English began to hate. (16)

So, the “hate” (16) has the critical value of a non-verbal truth, which strengthens the singular outlook of England because it has been internalised. Thus, we are led to believe that the feelings of the English are authentic and justified. However, to arrive at that conclusion we are using the speaker’s “perceptual deixis” as gospel. “Temporal deixis” on the other hand possesses a more objective quality in the poem, as we assume that all are equally subject to the passing of time. Furthermore, “temporal deixis” offers an alternative approach to “perceptual deixis”. To perceive something, one must already have knowledge, which is why our perception builds throughout the poem. But “temporal deixis” allows us to trace backward, evaluating the poem in reverse. In the final quintet, the prepositional phrase; “When Time shall count from the date” (20), anchors the transformation of the English to real time. The poem reinforces this with the structural change from quartet to quintet. After the four chimes of the quartets, the final and echoing chime shows the final straw. Consequently, the apparent stoic attitude of England ends abruptly. Lieutenant Dawson reveals that Tommy no longer saw “Hans”⁵ as simply an enemy, and Tommy “had learned to hate, thwart, and ultimately defeat him not as a man, but as a consciousness power of destruction”⁶.

5 “Hans” is used to give a human dimension to the common German soldier. Refer to Lieutenant Conings by Dawson, C.F.A. Underwood and Underwood. International Film Service, ‘GERMANY RE-VISITED; In a Land Without Visible Signs of Want or Suffering, the Teutons Continue to View Life and Conduct in the Same Old Way Germany Re-visited’, *New York Times* (1857–1922), (17 August 1919), p. 69.

6 Lieutenant Conings by Dawson, C.F.A. Underwood and Underwood. International Film Service, p. 69.

3. Temporality

From the temporal markers of the poem, the reader is led to believe that the ultimate virtue of the English is patience. The view that the English “were icy willing to wait” (6) gives the reader an insight into the instantaneous shift towards complete hatred. Although patience is not something that we may associate with hatred, as it usually manifests early, the patience of the English had allowed them to still see the Germans as human up to that moment. Therefore, we can say that English will not rescind their hatred without good reason. And much like their patience, their “hate” (21) will also be “icy willing to wait” (6). Freud typifies this attitude in saying that war “cuts all the common bonds between the contending peoples, and threatens to leave a legacy of embitterment that will make any renewal of those bonds impossible for a long time to come”⁷.

From the varying examples of “perceptual deixis” and “temporal deixis” in the text we can discern the nature of the Germans, as they are the presumed opposite of the English. However, like the speaker we must remain impartial, and interpret “The Beginnings” as a representation of the emotional devastation left by war. Yes, the speaker does not offer the perspective of the Germans and only concentrates on the English, but we assume that Germany will have had similar sentiments. Hence, hatred is a natural consequence of war, one that is felt by all its participants. The power of the poem lies in Kipling’s ability to paint the impact of war in a very human way. It is human because we can aptly conclude on the situation through the “perceptual” and “temporal” elements of the poem, which highlight the process of war. Therefore, “The Beginnings” transcends the needs of jingoism and recruitment because it does not work towards those ends. To conclude, the poem communicates the perceptions of the English during the war on a human level that allow the reader to take the teachings of the poem out of their historical context. Thus, the focus is not on the perceiver or the perceived because they are transitional elements. Instead, the poem rests on the foundation of universal human emotion.

7 Sigmund Freud, ‘I. The Disillusionment of the War’, in *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*, PDF chapter scan, (1915), pp. 275–286 (p. 279), http://www.columbia.edu/cu/arts/vad/critical_issues_on_art/thoughts_war_and_death.pdf [accessed 13 November 2019].

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