

The New Criterion

Features

April 2008

Rudyard Kipling unburdened

by [Roger Kimball](#)

On the much-abused imperial poet.

It is no use pretending that Kipling's view of life, as a whole, can be accepted or even forgiven by any civilized person.

—George Orwell, 1942

My childhood home did not boast many literary accoutrements. Apart from an imposing set of “World’s Classics,” what I chiefly remember is a framed copy of (Joseph) Rudyard Kipling’s poem “If—.” It was printed with impressive gilt filigree on a sheet of foolscap and, together with a portrait of my Guardian Angel, it presided in quiet admonition on my bedroom wall.

I never memorized the poem, though I internalized its cadence while nervously savoring the impossible combination of virtues it pleaded:

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 ...

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This article originally appeared in *The New Criterion*, Volume 26 April 2008, on page 22

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