Rudyard Kipling

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CHAPTER 7

Proper Work and “Dayspring Mishandled”

Whatever reasons Rudyard Kipling may have had for choosing the profession of letters—a choice he made consciously and forcefully at an early age—one thing is clear: he was never in the business of writing fiction and poetry for money or for fame although he made much of the one and achieved a great deal of the other. In “Values in Life,” a speech delivered in October 1907 at McGill University in Montreal, he stressed to the students there the importance of being the kind of person “to whom the idea of wealth as mere wealth does not appeal, whom the methods of amassing that wealth do not interest, and who will not accept money if you offer it to him at a certain price.”

Though he did not say so directly (and certainly never would have), he was telling his young audience to be like him, for he was describing himself precisely. Angus Wilson has pointed out that “one of the paradoxes about Kipling is that for a man who disliked public appearances and speaking, he put some of his most deeply personal and revealing statements into his speeches. As a result, A Book of Words, that incorporates them, makes splendid reading. His speech to McGill University is no exception. It is his most direct and fierce attack upon materialism.”

In attacking materialism, however, Kipling made it clear to his audience that he was not averse to the idea of accumulating wealth; it was one’s attitude toward wealth that was crucial, the place of money in one’s hierarchy of values. “It does not pay,” he said, “to be obsessed by the desire of wealth for wealth’s sake. If more wealth be necessary to you, for purposes not your own, use your left hand to acquire it, but keep your right for your proper work in life. If you employ both arms in that game you will be in danger of stooping; in danger, also, of losing your soul.”

That is strong language, a poignant warning meant to pierce to the heart of the matter: if you do not want to lose your soul, determine
while you are young your “proper work in life”; take your identity from that calling, and never betray it. Devote yourself unswervingly to maintaining it and none other. Making money for the sake of making money does not constitute “proper work,” which is deeper and elsewhere. Never forget, he stressed, that the real and only legitimate reason for acquiring wealth is to free yourself up to do your proper work in life. His definitive statement on this point is his essay “Independence,” delivered as the rectorial address in 1923 at St. Andrews University. After a few words of introduction, he quoted a stanza from Robert Burns’s poem “Epistle to a Young Friend” (1786):

To catch Dame Fortune’s golden smile
Assiduous wait upon her,
And gather gold by every wile
That’s justified by honour—
Not for to hide it in a hedge
Nor for the train attendant,
But for the glorious privilege
Of being independent.4

Throughout his talk, he returned repeatedly to the importance of “owning oneself” rather than selling out and thus being owned.

No one was ever truer in this regard to what he believed and advocated than was Rudyard Kipling, not only as manifested in “Independence” but also in several of his other addresses collected in A Book of Words. He never sold out; he never exchanged his soul for money. What he did do was precisely what he counseled his student audiences to do: he made money, but he did not write to make money. Wealth was the by-product of his following his proper work in life.5

If making money was never his underlying and primary motivation for writing, neither was receiving recognition. During his days in India as a youthful journalist who also composed poems and stories, he wished to be read and admired, but his rage was for originality, not for giving readers what they were used to and what they expected. He enjoyed enormously his early meteoric rise to fame as a writer of substance, but such popularity was never his chief aim, which was to devote himself to what he considered his calling and to remain independent in order to do so. In an address delivered in 1907, he praised those writers who “do not very greatly care whether their skill finds immediate favour or not.”6 As time went on, he found that he must reject offers that would have delighted most men, offers that would have enhanced his personal recognition but which in his mind would
threaten his independence. Charles Carrington comments that “There is, among the Kipling papers, a thick file of letters recording his systematic refusal, throughout his whole career, of the titles and offices that were sometimes thrust upon him. He could not and he would not write to order, and he would not accept any public honour which might be construed as limiting his freedom to say what, as he thought, should be said.” Therefore, he was willing to accept such recognition as honorary degrees from universities and the Nobel Prize for Literature (1907), but he steadfastly refused others, such as knighthood, proffered to him on several occasions.8

It was neither general disapproval of such honors—he was delighted when his friend Rider Haggard was knighted—nor political disagreement with whatever government happened to be in power that caused Kipling to reject knighthood and other offers such as the opportunity to run for Parliament (he refused the chance to do so several times). He maintained a strong and consistent political stance, but he clearly recognized that his calling was not as a politician (a type he disliked). As he said and implied on a number of occasions: “I am only a dealer in words.” It seems a modest admission, and in a sense it was, for boasting was foreign to Kipling’s nature although he worried that he might be somewhat arrogant. Rider Haggard found him to be one of the two “humblest” men he had ever known.9

To say that Kipling was not tainted with the repulsive self-importance that manifests itself in an air of superiority and contempt for others, however, is not to say that he was not quietly proud of himself. In actuality, “I am only a dealer in words” is a self-imposed label born of the most profound self-respect. This particular quotation is from another speech, “Growth and Responsibility” (1907), delivered in Winnipeg.10 The words are from the very first sentence, for he wanted his audience to be put at ease immediately by his seeming unpretentiousness. There is far more to “only a dealer in words,” however, than his listeners may have understood. It is remarkable that this one simple statement is both appealingly self-effacing and at the same time honestly self-praising. It is nothing less than a deeply sincere expression of Rudyard Kipling’s considerable self-esteem. In effect, he was saying: “I am a dealer in the most precious commodity in the world. Nothing is more important in human existence than words, not just any words, to be sure, but the right words.” In calling himself a “dealer,” he is referring to what he terms repeatedly in his writings that at which he toils—his work, his calling, his lifework; that which he has put first; that which has been
the most important element in his life; that which he has found savingly
transporting even in times of grief, pain, and sorrow; that to which he
has always returned with dedication. The very title of his collection of
speeches, *A Book of Words*, is an indirect statement of this self-concept,
for it is a reference to himself. It is a book largely about him. He con-
sidered himself a kind of book (or source or reserve) of words.

A good many of the speeches were delivered principally to young peo-
ples, and reverberating through them is his particular fondness for the
young, his conviction that youth offers distinctive insights and imagi-
nation. In speaking to the students of University College, Dundee, he
referred to “that divine spirit of youth.”\(^1\) He told Rhodes Scholars at
a dinner in 1924 that certain vital perceptions about people, a certain
“knowledge” about others, “can only be acquired in the merciless in-
timacy of one’s early days. After that, one has to guess at the worth of
one’s friends or enemies, but youth … can apply its own tests on its
own proving-grounds, and does not forget the results.”\(^1^2\)

Along with his expressions of the high importance of the early years
of one’s life are scattered here and there implications that this spring-
time of existence should not be mishandled. Time is fleeting. The ad-
vantages of youth never return. He did not preach this, but it is difficult
to believe that his youthful audiences did not realize that in telling
them what a special and magical time of life they were currently enjoy-
ing he was also admonishing them not to waste it. Whenever he looked
up from what he was writing during the years he lived in Brattleboro,
Vermont (1892–1896), he could clearly see the following words above
his large fireplace in the study of his home, Naulakha, words that stress
the relentless swiftness of time and the urgency of doing one’s true
work: “The Night cometh when no man can work.” This quotation
from the Bible (John 9:4) his father inscribed in the mantelpiece, per-
haps at Kipling’s own request, for time and its relation to one’s proper
work were never far from his thoughts.

When he praised “the spirit of youth” and delineated some of its
glories in his speeches, he was not doing so to flatter his audience made
up chiefly of young men. Nor was he assuming the position of one who
had himself failed to take advantage of the gifts of youth, regretted it
later in life, and wished to warn others while there was still time for
them to learn from his mistakes. He was, indeed, looking back on his
life, especially in such talks as those he gave in the 1920s, but not with
regret. His stance is that of one who fully realized how important his
youth was when he was experiencing it and mostly did everything right,
that is, in accordance with what he knew to be his lifework. In 1926, he delivered to the Royal Literary Society a speech in which he commented in his introductory remarks upon the phenomenon of an older person’s looking back upon his or her life and comparing early dreams with what was actually achieved:

When the shadows lengthen one contrasts what one had intended to do in the beginning with what one has accomplished. That the experience is universal does not make it any less acid—especially when, as in my case, one has been extravagantly rewarded for having done what one could not have helped doing.  

It is a curious observation manifesting an aspect of personality that can best be described perhaps by the oxymoronic phrase “blushing self-esteem.” He indicates that when the “shadows lengthen,” when one gets along in years, he or she sometimes returns to the time of youth with a sense of sadness and regret that certain early ambitious intentions were never carried to fruition. Such moments of self-examination are “acid” in their effect because they painfully point up that one has failed to follow the famous advice of Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805): “Keep true to the dreams of thy youth.” For Kipling, however, the contrast he mentions is painful for another and quite different reason, for he, unlike most people, had kept true to the dreams of his youth, an allegiance that was always uppermost in his mind.  

When he refers to this particular form of retrospection as “acid,” therefore, the word takes on the meaning of embarrassment—not for failing to do what in his youth he set for himself but for having been “extravagantly rewarded” for doing merely what he should have done, for keeping true to his calling to which he has been so totally devoted that he cannot conceive of having done anything else. In effect, his comment in this particular speech resembles the opening words of his autobiography, Something of Myself: “Looking back from this my seventeenth year, it seems to me that every card in my working life has been dealt me in such a manner that I had but to play it as it came. Therefore, ascribing all good fortune to Allah the Dispenser of Events, I begin.” In other words, he has done simply what he had to do—play the cards that were dealt him. But who was doing the dealing? He attributes that function to Allah, whom he describes as “the Dispenser of Events,” but it is necessary to understand that Kipling used the term “Allah” rather loosely. He probably did not have in mind the Islamic Allah or the Christian God so much as whatever it was that made him do what he felt he had to do in order to keep true to the dreams of his youth, that is, what his calling made imperative for him to do or write.
In this sense, “Allah” and “Daemon” could be synonymous. Therefore, the thrust of his words that open *Something of Myself* is that once he committed himself to his “work,” his proper work in life, it supplied him with the cards he needed to play. All he had to do then was play them. What at first appears a confession of pronounced self-diminishment is really a statement reflecting great satisfaction with what he has managed to do through a long life, namely, put his work first above everything else. It has been his “Allah.”

In this stance, he resembles an admirable battle hero who has been awarded the British Victoria Cross or the American Medal of Honor and who in his remarks during a public ceremony in which he is recognized and praised says that he is in reality no hero but was merely doing what came naturally to him, just doing his duty as a soldier. He does not recognize the high degree of self-praise cloaked in his statement, which is meant to be taken (and as a rule is taken) as a modest claim of his unworthiness for the extravagant reward he is receiving. In truth, however, the heroic soldier could not manifest the sense of his worthiness better than in what he says, for it signifies that he was being true to his calling as a soldier and he realizes with the highest order of self-respect (but without articulating it to himself) that was what he was doing in battle. This soldier and Kipling are brothers in spirit, both deeply proud of themselves though never admitting it.

This quiet self-respect is penetratingly illustrated throughout his writings but especially in *Something of Myself*. The book has frequently been described as distinctly atypical as autobiographies go inasmuch as it omits some of the most trying and crucial events of the author’s life, for example the deaths of two of his children and the traumatic break with his wife’s brother in Brattleboro, Vermont. Thomas Pinney points out that “one wit among the reviewers” wrote that “it was not in fact *Something of Myself* but *Hardly Anything of Myself*.” Though lacking in important details of Kipling’s life and sometimes inaccurate, *Something of Myself* is, as Pinney convincingly argues, a literary work in itself, “in fact, Kipling’s final work.” Besides that, “within the limits of its carefully determined reticence, it provides a fascinating view of a remarkable life.” Kipling’s known abhorrence of the public display of emotions has somewhat obscured his true motive for writing his autobiography as he wrote it, that is, his leaving out so much of what are ordinarily considered seminal events. An often expressed opinion is that his love of privacy dictated that he omit such details as those dealing with his courtship of Carrie, his long marriage to her, and the extended suf-
fering he endured as the result of a duodenal ulcer. The truth is, however, that there was something in his life more deeply essential to him than even these things. His autobiography, as he conceived it, would be about that and mostly nothing but that. *Something of Myself* (the “something” in the title being the most important part of himself) was thus written with the unannounced but predetermined intention to concentrate on the very center of his being: his lifelong devotion to his calling, to what he knew to be his proper work in life. That is the heart and soul of this most unusual and brilliantly revealing autobiography.

Toward the end of his life, the self-respect that he felt for the way he spent his youth, working in India on the *Civil and Military Gazette* and the *Pioneer*, is especially apparent in the third chapter (“Seven Year’s Hard”) of his autobiography. He wishes it clearly understood that the springtime of his life was far from mishandled. His devotion to hard work gave him all the discipline and training that he needed for the work he was called to do. He stresses that life was far from easy there, filled as it was with death and disease and with challenging periods of darkness that tested him mercilessly. Sometimes ill with fever, he had to carry on, often working up to fifteen hours a day. Looking back, he must have considered it an extraordinary feat to have stuck tenaciously to his work and to have authored in such a short time a vast body of writing that startled the world.¹⁸

His self-satisfaction deriving from the way that he spent his youth, however, was not merely retrospective, for he clearly possessed the same attitude toward proper work and felt the same compulsion to pursue it above all else while he was still young. He was only twenty-four, in fact, when he was living in the Embankment Chambers of Villiers Street in London and wrote to an unidentified recipient a letter that clearly expresses his determination to pursue his calling as he perceives it rather than to write for money, fame, and success. Apparently, the person receiving this letter had written that Kipling’s writings would earn for him those particular rewards. Kipling responded to that person’s letter in a tone close to angry rebuke at the very suggestion of such a thing: “‘Money fame and success’ are to remain unto me? Surely ’tis just as selfish consciously and deliberately to work for that trinity as to lay siege to a woman or a glass of gin and porter!... The only human being to whom a man is responsible is himself. His business is to do his work and sit still.”¹⁹ He continues in something of the same instructional and annoyed tone that reflects an intention to correct, pointing out that “power” is fleeting, that the yearning for recognition is destructive:
“No man can be a power for all time or the tenth of it…. Surely the young man does best to pray to be delivered from ‘the public demand that walketh in the noonday and the cheque-book that destroyeth in the study.’… No hawking or clutching for fame or any other skittles is the least use.”

Toward the end of the letter, he drives home the point that he is working neither for fame nor wealth but for the satisfaction of doing his proper work in his own manner: “If the success comes my father’s delight will be greater than mine. If the money comes my mother will be more pleased than I. The two together may spoil my work and make me think less of waiting than getting more little pieces of newspapers and little cheques…. I must do my own work in my own way….”

The strong belief in himself and in doing his proper work in life reflected in this letter of his youth and his retrospective self-satisfaction that he has done so in his long career as illustrated in _Something of Myself_—the satisfaction derived from having used his time as he should in order to be committed to his work above all else—is evident in numerous other places in his works. It lies, for example, at the very heart of one of the major stories of his later years, “Dayspring Mishandled.” It is a much-admired work, but one area—its reflection of the author’s high satisfaction with the way he has devoted himself to what he should have devoted himself to—is still in need of exploration. He apparently began composing the story on 16 December 1926. It was first published in 1928 in magazines in three different countries, _MacLean’s_ (Canada) in March, the _Strand_ (Britain) in July, and _McCall’s_ (America) also in July. It was included in his final collection of stories, _Limits and Renewals_ (1932). In a letter of 29 December 1926 from France to his daughter Elsie, he remarked: “I have finished the larger half … of a tale that I began at Bateman’s not a fortnight ago. It is not at all a nice tale, but it came by itself, and it called itself, ‘Dayspring Mishandled,’ which, at least, is a pretty title.”

About a month later in another letter to Elsie, he referred to the same story as “simply beastly.” To date no adequate explanation has been offered for this extraordinarily odd authorial appraisal of “Dayspring Mishandled.” The story has been interpreted in various ways, but with few exceptions it has been regarded as one of Kipling’s most moving and accomplished works. J. M. S. Tompkins set the tone for a generation of critics when she pronounced “Dayspring Mishandled” simply
“superb.” She was referring both to its technical excellence and to its thematic depth. She believed it to be a masterpiece. “There are no flourishes in it,” she admiringly pointed out. “Every sentence tells and matters. The writing is of that ‘infolded’ sort which, at first reading may seem to present a crumpled mass, but which gradually fills and spreads and tightens with the fullness of and tension of its meanings.” Those meanings swell until the story becomes, in her words, “a House of Life itself, a tent covering the erring and suffering spirit of man.”

Other critics may not have waxed quite so eloquently as Tompkins in praise of “Dayspring Mishandled,” but it is generally considered one of the author’s best stories. How, then, can we account for Kipling’s own estimate of it as “not at all a nice tale,” one that he found “simply beastly”? To be sure, it seems unlikely that he actually considered the story to be inferior to his other work. All evidence points the other way, namely, that he held “Dayspring Mishandled” in the highest regard. His sending it to magazines in three countries suggests that he wished it to have wide exposure, but more important, his conviction that “it came by itself” and titled itself is a sound indication of his true attitude toward the work. He would say that about only the best of his writings. Any work that came by itself was in his estimation truly inspired.

He was obviously pleased with “Dayspring Mishandled,” then, but he still felt somewhat sheepish about some aspect of it as indicated by his private remarks to his daughter. There was something about the story that was not “nice,” something even worse than that, truth be known. What that was was his impetus for writing it. In a sense, the work was a violation of one of the most important elements of his code of behavior, his guiding principle of modesty. It was not at all nice of him to be writing a story in which he himself is the standard by which the principal characters in the work are judged and fail, a work in which the characters are, in a sense, the antiKipling (“anti” in the sense of “opposite of”). It was, he admitted, a beastly thing to do, that is, to write a work of fiction in which he essentially pats himself on the back, but he did it, he was not really sorry, and he considered the story a triumph, in fact, Daemon inspired. His derogatory remarks about the work to Elsie, therefore, should be read as a somewhat humorous and mischievous confession, but a confession nevertheless that throws light on what lies at the center of “Dayspring Mishandled.”

It is a story about how not to be a writer, how not to be like him, how one can go wrong and mishandle the precious time of youth, which Kipling called “dayspring,” a term that he possibly derived from some
translation of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) with whom he was familiar and whom he depicts as the idol of a character in another of his stories, “The Bold ’Prentice” (1895). Swedenborg was convinced that when people die and go to heaven, they change but do not get older. Instead they move steadily to youth, there to remain forever. Youth was a kind of idealized state for Kipling as well, and the fact that in contrast to what may happen in heaven (at least, according to Swedenborg), youth is lost to us forever when in our earthly existence we move past it. Botching it is an error beyond calculation, a conviction of Kipling’s effectively articulated by the speaker in “Gertrude’s Prayer,” an eighteen-line poem that accompanies “Dayspring Mishandled” and encapsulates the story’s theme that as the poem’s refrain indicates, “Dayspring mishandled cometh not agaime!” The speaker, Gertrude, is painfully aware that she bungled and wasted the precious time of her youth, and agonizing over her irrecoverable mistake, she asks God to take pity on her and ease her pangs of regret.

It is too late for Gertrude of the poem, but “Dayspring Mishandled” begins when James Andrew Manallace is still in his youth. He is gifted, but he makes a serious mistake: he sells his talent. He writes for money. He becomes part of a syndicate the purpose of which is to turn out as quickly as possible novels suited for the masses. He and other young men join this group, the “Fictional Supply Syndicate,” because “a few days’ work … brought them more money than a week’s elsewhere.” What they produce is similar to those writings Kipling spoke of to students at Wellington College: “It’s hard to realise that there is a mass of modern stuff which is practically no more than Deadwood Dick and the penny dreadful disguised and flavoured to modern taste.” He went on to warn the students that reading such writings tended to promote a distorted vision of life.

That Manallace is betraying his calling as “genuinely a man of letters” in favor of becoming a hack who is writing to order (the orders of Graydon, head of the syndicate) is suggested by an early episode that is of central importance. Graydon passes on to Manallace a number of illustrations from a children’s book with instructions to construct a novel using whatever ideas he might derive from the prints. Instead of composing a popular romantic novel set in the time of the Crusades, which he is supposed to do, Manallace finds that something has taken over his writing, and that “the stuff had turned into poetry on his hands.” In other words, as Kipling said about “Dayspring Mishandled” itself, what Manallace wrote “came by itself.” It was Daemon inspired.
When Graydon exclaims, “Bosh!” Manallace replies with conviction: “That’s what it isn’t…. It’s rather good.”

For a short time, he feels the exaltation that comes from an act of genuine creativity, the inexpressibly sublime lift that results from having been true to one’s “proper work in life.” Yet what flowed from his pen in this early episode becomes the basis for forgery, an irony of the most revealing sort: the only thing that Manallace ever wrote that is not a forgery, that is, that comes from his innermost genius, is fraudulently made to appear it came from someone else, the undisputed genius Geoffrey Chaucer, in order to satisfy a desire for petty revenge on an enemy. The mishandling is unspeakably profound, for that “forgery” is not actually a forgery but in a sense the real thing. It is part of a longer work composed by a genuine man of letters, Manallace, in a moment of inspiration.

Manallace’s exaltation at having composed poetry that he knows to be far better than anything he has been writing for Graydon comes from the intoxication of true creativity, which is symbolized by his literally getting drunk. That exaltation, however, is short-lived. He has terribly mishandled his youth by accepting during that formative period a lifetime role as a writer for money: “As he once said when urged to ‘write a real book’: ‘I’ve got my label, and I’m not going to chew it off. If you save people thinking, you can do anything with ’em.’” That label, the author of superficial popular novels, and that philosophy, save people from thinking, were both anathema to Kipling. Manallace makes a kind of reputation for himself, “and, more important, money.”

In the characterization of Manallace, it is clear that it is not so much his having gone to work writing to order for Graydon and his Fictional Supply Syndicate that marks him as a pronounced mishandler of his life as it is that throughout his youth and later life, he continued to ignore his proper work, his calling, and to waste his talent composing essentially junk literature. If he at some point had abandoned such writing and fully devoted himself to pursuing his real calling as a serious author, life could have been far different for him. Indeed, many writers noted for the depth, perception, and originality of their works started as Manallace did. It is not surprising, then, that a man of talent such as Manallace would begin his career in a situation like that which Graydon offered: “He drew many young men—some now eminent.”

These important writers moved on to a different kind of outlet for their creativity. Manallace did not.

A principal reason for his having made such a colossal mistake as to devote all his talent throughout his life to turning out popular, superfi-
cial novels is to make easy money. To be sure, he does not accumulate wealth for its own sake, against which Kipling warned his young audiences so vehemently, but he does it for an equally pernicious reason, his obsession with a woman. She remains nameless in the story. He has taken on the responsibility of supporting her. Kipling indicates in numerous places in his works that nothing is more toxic to the creative impulse than total devotion to a woman, devotion that amounts to an obsession. It is not what is generally called normal love that Kipling found perilous but an emotion that enslaves and distorts reality. In the letter quoted earlier, written when he was twenty-four to that unidentified recipient, he asks the person he is writing to pray that he, Kipling, does not become obsessed with a woman (a “sickness,” he calls this spell) because to do so would make him subservient to her and cause him to abandon his proper work in life: “Pray for me … that I do not take the sickness … I should call love. For that [form of “love”] will leave me somebody else’s servant—instead of my own. My business … [is] to speak whatever may be given to me.” Faithfulness to one’s calling, Kipling insisted, is not compatible with obsessive attraction to a woman. What might be termed normal love is one thing, but total preoccupation with another person is something very different and pernicious as Kipling made abundantly clear in “‘Wireless’” and “Mrs. Bathurst.” It not only shuts down the voice of one’s creative Daemon; it also cripples the faculties of reason and understanding.

In contrast to Manallace, Alured Castorley at a fairly early age does leave Graydon’s employ in order to follow his calling as a literary critic. He is able to do so financially because of an inheritance, a legacy that, as the narrator of the story puts it, “freed him from ‘hackwork.’” If Manallace is “genuinely a man of letters” who pathetically wastes his substantial talent, Castorley is genuinely a brilliant critic: “He was no impostor,” the narrator emphasizes, but the leading authority on Geoffrey Chaucer in the world. Few characters in all of Kipling’s fiction, however, are as truly repulsive as Alured Castorley. Manallace is preoccupied with and totally devoted to a woman even when she becomes hopelessly paralyzed, a woman who is not in love with him; Castorley, on the other hand, is preoccupied with fame. From the beginning of his new career as a critic, he appears to have only one goal in mind, “recognition,” as he calls it, an obsession no less destructive in life than that of Manallace but a good deal more disgusting:

He was shameless, too, as regarded self-advertisement and “recognition”—weaving elaborate intrigues; forming petty friendships and confederacies, to be
dissolved next week in favour of more promising alliances; fawning, snubbing, lecturing, organizing and lying, as unreistically as a politician, in chase of the Knighthood.\textsuperscript{38}

It is particularly significant that his goal in life is to be knighted, for it is this very recognition and honor that Kipling himself rejected on several occasions as deleterious to his independence as a writer, as an allurement tempting him away from his proper work. That Castorley is desperate in his grasping for knighthood marks him indisputably as an anti-Kipling.

Just as Manallace briefly experiences what it means to be true to one’s calling—in those moments when he composes the poetry that he says is “rather good” and in that period of writing his “forgery” when he feels that he has somehow become Chaucer—so does Castorley sometimes “break from his obsession” with fame and “prove how a man’s work will try to save the soul of him.”\textsuperscript{39} On such occasions, he is capable of self-abnegation, forgetting for a moment “self-advertisement” and exhibiting wide knowledge and scholarly insights. These times are rare, however. They reveal that Castorley is “no impostor,” but he totally capitulates to the allurement of fame (his first name is Alured—“allured”). His hunger for “recognition” twists his personality, misdirects his life, obscures his perception of truth, and makes him into something of a pathetic and disgusting fool. “Recognition” is the poison that destroys him.

“Dayspring Mishandled” is possibly Kipling’s most vehement warning (he was a preacher at heart though certainly not in his literary artistry) against the powerful and always destructive desire to be famous. Castorley’s physical illness that plays a major role in the development of the story, “malignant kidney-trouble” as the attending physician Dr. Gleeag calls it, is a metaphor for the underlying cause of his deterioration and destruction, a metaphor for the basic reason that his motivation for working as a literary critic goes awry. His raison d’être is not to work devotedly at that particular pursuit, his proper work in life, for its own sake and for the creative delight its accomplishment results in but to be widely praised and loudly applauded. He has allowed himself to become addicted to the drug fame, which produces in him hallucinations of the utter and effable grandeur of “recognition” and causes a yearning for it that dominates his life completely.

The terrible power of seductive and hypnotic obsessions—with money, with fame, with a woman—to poison one’s life and career is of primary importance, then, in “Dayspring Mishandled.” Kipling sets up
this idea by including as its heading a brief quotation from “La Fée aux Miettes” by Charles Nodier (1780–1844):

C’est moi, c’est moi, c’est moi!
Je suis la Mandragore!
La fille des beaux jours qui s’eville a l’aurore—
Et qui chante pour toi!40

One of the most influential studies of Kipling’s artistry, that of J. M. S. Tompkins, makes a great deal of this quotation. She indicates that the mandragora of the quotation is symbolic of “revengeful hatred,” and she discusses it as if it has application only to Manallace.41 The symbolism of the mandragora, however, is more complex than Tompkins suggests. As a truly effective symbol should in the hands of genuine artist, it represents different things to different characters in the story.

Without question, acting on his vengeful hatred of Castorley does become to his fatal detriment Manallace’s “real life-work,” as the narrator of the story terms it.42 It is not his “proper” work in life but something entirely opposed to that. It should be noted, however, that his desire for revenge is but the offspring of an earlier and even more consuming emotion, his obsession with a woman. His thoroughly unreasonable, even somewhat crazy, determination to destroy Castorley simply because he made some insulting remark—we never know what it is—about the mother of Vidal Benzaquen is evidence of the depth and sickness of his obsession with the woman. She does not love him, but he nevertheless hears her singing to him seductively like the sirens of the Odyssey. He readily surrenders his heart and soul to her, abandoning forever any possibility of pursuing what should be his proper work in life. She is his tempting mandragora, not by her intent, to be sure, but because he allows himself to listen to the wrong calling within him.

Clearly, though, it is not only Manallace who is under the influence of a strong and poisonous narcotic, in his case the all-consuming preoccupation with a woman, but also Castorley, who has heard the song of the mandragora as well and who and has fallen under its fatal enchantment, although seducing him with a different lure. Much of “Dayspring Mishandled” deals with a certain effect that the spell of the mandragora, as it might be called, has on all those who possess one kind of gift or another and who betray that calling and thus botch their lives.43 Subtly, Kipling suggests that both Manallace and Castorley are suffering from this particular effect of the mandragora, namely, the tendency to distort and misinterpret reality, to see what is not really there (the mandragora is a hallucinogen as well as a poison).
The focus of the story with respect to this theme is on Manallace, who because of the spell of the mandragora is incapable of making rational judgments. His perception distorted, he sometimes is convinced that certain things are happening for which there is no convincing evidence in the story. For example, he is positive that Lady Castorley knows that the poetry her husband has authenticated as being authored by Chaucer is a forgery and that he, Manallace, is the forger. Critics writing about “Dayspring Mishandled” by and large have accepted Manallace’s paranoid deductions as accurate descriptions of what actually is taking place in the story. To do so, however, is to ignore completely the unstable state of mind of the character who reaches these questionable conclusions. Always a deft ironist, Kipling placed “Gertrude’s Prayer” after the conclusion of the story and attributed the authorship of the poem to Manallace (as part of his Chaucer forgery) because he doubtlessly wished to call attention to the absurd situation in which a man who has totally mishandled his youth has written a poem about a woman who has mishandled her youth, realizes what she has done, and is tormented by her error while Manallace himself is totally blind to his tragic mistake in not following his proper work in life.

Regarded from this angle—from the perspective that Manallace is not thinking straight and consequently what he believes and what he does may result from the effect of a kind of narcotic no matter how sane and reasonable such thoughts and actions are from his own viewpoint—the work seems suddenly and surprisingly saturated with absurdity passed off as intricate cleverness and keen perception. Everything he says and does consequently has to be reexamined through a different lens, not his or even that of the narrator but the lens of realism. Is it not absurd, for instance, that a man would go to such lengths as does Manallace, such highly complex and time-consuming detail that takes several years, to prepare a revenge of the nature of that he plans? He believes that he is thoroughly justified in seeking such revenge. Is it not absurd that he would think such a thing when all that his enemy—who has no idea that he is his enemy—has done is make a remark about the woman he loves? A character in a short story by Edgar Allan Poe might plan an elaborate revenge on another man who has simply made an offensive remark and probably does not even realize the degree of the offense, but that character, as every reader of Poe immediately realizes, is certifiably insane. Poe makes it abundantly clear that the character is, indeed, crazy; Kipling, on the other hand, presents his character through the eyes of a narrator who apparently believes, except for a few
lapses, that his talented friend Manallace is perfectly sane and “entirely justified” in seeking vengeance on the insensitive and egomaniacal Castorley.45

To be sure, the narrator does question on occasion whether Manallace is getting carried away with his suspicions and is misjudging, but in the main he is sympathetic with what Manallace is doing, and he is greatly fascinated with the way the revenge is unfolding. He obviously views the meticulous care and long study that went into the forgery as evidence of his friend’s remarkable genius. What the average person of good and common sense would probably view as wondrously ridiculous and as the product of a sick mind, though admittedly ingenious to an extraordinary extent, the narrator apparently sees in a different light. He thus becomes a kind of coconspirator in the execution of an absurd revenge. Certainly one of the most telling single remarks in “Dayspring Mishandled” is what the narrator says when he is recounting how he finds his friend Manallace one day in his “toolshed-scullery, boiling a brew of slimy barks which were, if mixed with oak-galls, vitriol and wine, to become an ink-powder.” He continues, shifting to the first-person plural pronouns “we” and “us” from the third-person pronoun “he” with which he began the passage: “We boiled it till the Monday, and it turned into an adhesive stronger than birdlime, and entangled us both.”46 He is referring merely of ink making, but through him Kipling is speaking of much more. In terms that hint at witches at work concocting some weird brew, the narrator is describing without realizing it his and Manallace’s brewing up the ingredients for a bizarre revenge scheme, and what is truly telling is that the narrator admits that it has “entangled us both.”

Yet in the large body of critical commentary on “Dayspring Mishandled,” he is consistently seen as a thoroughly reliable narrator. That is, what the narrator says is accepted as unreservedly as it would be if the story were told from the omniscient point of view. If, for example, the narrator believes that Manallace is entirely justified in seeking revenge on Castorley because of his insulting remark, then he must be entirely justified, although the narrator never reveals what Castorley said. In another area of consideration, if the narrator comes to accept what Manallace believes with regard to Castorley’s wife and Dr. Gleeag, namely, that they are secretly carrying on a passionate affair, then they must be doing so, though actual evidence for such a relationship in the story is thin at best and perhaps nonexistent except in the distorted
perception of a man, Manallace, who is under the influence of an obsession that is as hallucinative and as poisonous as the mandragora.⁴⁷

To conclude that Manallace is seeing things as they really are, therefore, is to overlook the precariousness of his judgment, which is clearly suggested by the extremely long time and the supreme effort that he invests over a period of years in his intricate scheme of revenge on a man who, according to ordinary standards of behavior (and not the standards imposed by a man whose mind is twisted by an obsession) has done so little against him, though that offending person is a disgusting self-server. Manallace believes that when he reveals that the newly discovered part of a Canterbury Tale, which Castorley has authenticated, is a forgery and when he publicly explains how he managed to fool the premier Chaucer specialist in the world, this admission will completely destroy Castorley’s reputation as a critic and scholar, put an end to what Castorley most craves—recognition—and thereby devastate and probably kill the man.

Is that theory not in itself somewhat shaky? Is there not a good chance that if the truth were revealed, the person who is most blamed and shamed would not be the scholar who was fooled by such a splendid forgery but the forger and that Castorley, who admittedly is over-praised for his part in the “discovery,” would be forgiven on the principle that sometimes a clever forger can deceive even the best experts? There is little chance that Castorley would be stripped of his cherished knighthood even if the truth were to become known because officially it was not awarded on the basis of his part in the uncovering of a previously unknown Chaucer work but, as clearly specified in the story, on the basis of his contributions in an entirely different area. On these matters and others, Manallace’s reasoning and judgments are suspect when viewed away from the story’s narrator and in the cold light of reasonableness.

An analysis of Kipling’s handling of point of view suggests that he seems to have deliberately created the situation that has led to such a fundamental misreading of the narrator’s role in the story—that has resulted in the narrator’s being viewed as simply a mouthpiece for the author. Of notable importance is the fact that “Dayspring Mishandled” begins as if an omniscient narrator were speaking, that is, as if Kipling himself were telling the story. In the first several pages, there is no sign whatsoever of a first-person narrator. Only on the seventh page does the pronoun “I” appear, and it does so significantly in the passage quoted above in which the narrator comments on how both he and
Manallace were “entangled” in an adhesive ink that is to be an important part of the forgery. On the heels of that provocative comment, the narrator makes an equally suggestive remark that Manallace would, as he puts it, “carry me off.”

He has, indeed, become entangled and carried away by Manallace’s misdirected and mishandled genius, but since Kipling has set the narrator up in the first several pages of the story as if he were a thoroughly authoritative and reliable omniscient presence, his being carried away seems to have escaped notice, and his version of Manallace’s behavior and of events has been generally received as if it is what Kipling intended.

It is not surprising, however, that this assumption is widespread, for the narrator is an inconsistent and enigmatic character who does sound on occasion very much like Kipling. At times, the voice speaking is that of reason questioning Manallace’s perceptions and judgments. For example, after Manallace reveals his conviction that Lady Castorley knows all about the forgery and its intent and wants him to hurry up and cause her husband’s death so that she will be free to marry Dr. Gleeag, the narrator replies: “You’re mad. You’ve got this thing on the brain.” The narrator also disagrees with Manallace’s opinion that “Gleeag’s willing to wait. He knows Castorley’s a dead man…. Both of them know it. But she wants him finished sooner.” The narrator’s response appears to embody the position Kipling wished his readers to take about what Manallace has declared as the truth: “I don’t believe it.”

In such moments, the narrator seems in his observations and judgments to manifest the authorial point of view in regard to Manallace’s fantasies, and here and there he makes comments such as Kipling himself would make, for example when he remarks how a person can sometimes “break from his obsession and prove how a man’s work will try to save the soul of him.” If through such statements he appears to be a foil to Manallace, at other times he seems to share Manallace’s viewpoints, especially his loathing for Castorley. He is anything but objective in certain passages such as his initial description of Castorley:

There was, also, among the company a mannered, bellied person called Alured Castorley, who talked and wrote about “Bohemia,” but was always afraid of being “compromised” by the weekly suppers at Neminaka’s Café in Hestern Square, where the Syndicate word was apportioned, and where everyone looked out for himself. He, too, for a time, had loved Vidal’s mother, in his own way.

His language clearly reveals a dislike of this “mannered” (affected or artificial) man whom he refers to as a “bellied person” and whom he
takes to task indirectly for his fear of being “compromised” by being in the company of such men as the narrator. He explains a page later that “Castorley had gifts of waking dislike.” To be sure, he does make it clear that Castorley in his knowledge of and writings about literature “was no impostor,” but he cannot hide his personal abhorrence of the man.

At certain points in “Dayspring Mishandled,” the narrator curiously avoids using the first-person pronoun, yet in these instances he appears to be speaking of himself. He is probably the unnamed person who “suppressed” Castorley in the following account, but he does not wish to say so: “Graydon … advanced Manallace a couple of sovereigns to carry on with, as usual: at which Castorley was angry and would have said something unpleasant but was suppressed.” When he is relating how Manallace celebrated too much on the one occasion when he wrote something truly worthy of him, he explains: “Manallace, who had arrived a little exalted, got so drunk before midnight that a man had to stay and see him home.” Why did he not say, “I had to stay and see him home,” for, as we learn later, he was, indeed, that “man”? Is it merely modesty that prevents him from inserting himself into the picture? He knows precisely what was in a letter that Castorley wrote to “a friend” about reviewing a book by Manallace “for old sake’s sake” (he quotes Castorley’s very words from the letter). The “friend,” then, is most likely the narrator. After encountering several of these vague references early in the story to some unknown person, one tends to believe that all such allusions are actually to him.

The reason for this odd behavior on the narrator’s part, or to be more accurate on Kipling’s part in manipulating the narrative voice, is probably twofold. First, at the points where the passages quoted above appear in the story, Kipling has not yet revealed that the work has a first-person narrator. He wished to delay that revelation until establishing an omniscient-like quality for the narrative voice (although the narrator is anything but omniscient). Secondly, the narrator’s sometimes avoidance of the pronoun “I” is a telling aspect of the kind of person he is. In other words, in having the narrator avoid revealing just what a major player he has been from the beginning in this elaborate psychotic revenge plot against the much-loathed Alured Castorley, he is endeavoring to come across not only as modestly self-effacing but also as just a sideline observer and thus an objective, credible, and reliable witness who is only tangentially involved. Judging from the considerable body
of commentary on the story that appears to cede to him that role, he has been largely successful, but in truth, that is not at all what he is.

Rather than merely an unbiased observer, he is deeply involved—"entangled" and "carried off"—and is, if anything, as disgusting a figure as is Castorley himself, for he is clearly a deceiver. Pretending to be Castorley's rather close friend, he secretly despises him, and after learning what Castorley has said about Vidal's mother, he comes to believe that Manallace is justified in seeking to destroy him. In his narrative, he reveals little about his own background, but it is clear that he was very much a part of Graydon's syndicate made up of men who wrote to order, that is, who wrote strictly for money. That he becomes so deeply involved and engaged in the progress of Manallace's rather crazy revenge scheme sacrificing his honor in pretending to be the victim's friend is fairly strong evidence that he is not one of Kipling's heroic figures or, indeed, even a reliable narrator.

Much in "Dayspring Mishandled," then, is not what it may seem. The story may appear, as it has appeared to a good many readers, to be fundamentally about a forgery, which gave Kipling the opportunity to showcase his ability to furnish an impressive display of technical details as if he were an expert in that particular field of faked literary documents. It has been pointed out, for example, that he took the trouble to create a kind of forgery himself before undertaking to describe how one could be effectively produced in "Dayspring Mishandled." Although Kipling no doubt cherished the opportunity to exhibit what he had learned about literary forgeries, his pleasure in doing so was merely the by-product of his principal motivation for writing "Dayspring Mishandled." The same could be said of the theme of revenge, which has sometimes been identified as Kipling's main interest in the work. Revenge does play a major role in the story, but it is difficult to take Manallace's rationale for it seriously.

The very center of Kipling's interest, what he desired most to portray, is what can result from one's failure to devote himself fully to his proper work in life. If James Andrew Manallace had committed himself totally to that, he could not have committed himself to a woman, an obsession that produced all his other courses of action including his desire for revenge. If Alured Castorley had given himself over, heart and soul, to his proper lifework as a literary historian and critic, he could not have fallen for the lure of fame and become preoccupied with "recognition," an obsession that marked him with dishonor and made him the object of revulsion. The third major character of "Dayspring
Mishandled,” the narrator, is obviously a gifted creative artist, but he, too, has become enthralled with something other than pursuing his proper work in life. His words indicate that he has become entangled in Manallace’s revenge plot to the extent that he begins to perceive as distordedly as does Manallace himself. He, too, is a willing victim of the song of the mandragora. Kipling had heard that seductive melody himself. He was aware of its terrible power to attract and distract, but unlike the characters he portrayed in “Dayspring Mishandled,” who are intended as contrasts to him, he was too busy with his proper work in life, too totally devoted to it, to be lured away. He knew this, and he was quietly proud of himself. From his youth onward, his God was the “Master of All Good Workmen,” and his heaven was the place where eternally he could do his proper work without distractions and without ever becoming tired or pained, where harping critics had no place and where

… no one shall work for money, and no one shall work for fame,
But each for the joy of the working, and each, in his separate star,
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the God of Things as They are!