

Analyzing Rudyard Kipling's poem "The Beginnings"

"The Beginnings" by Rudyard Kipling (1917)

It was not part of their blood,
It came to them very late
With long arrears to make good,
When the English began to hate.

They were not easily moved,
They were icy-willing to wait
Till every count should be proved,
Ere the English began to hate.

Their voices were even and low,
Their eyes were level and straight.
There was neither sign nor show,
When the English began to hate.

It was not preached to the crowd,
It was not taught by the State.
No man spoke it aloud,
When the English began to hate.

It was not suddenly bred,
It will not swiftly abate,
Through the chill years ahead,
When Time shall count from the date
That the English began to hate.

The poem above is provided by The Kipling Society
(http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poems_beginnings.htm)

This is my analysis of Kipling's original poem and some speculation as to why it was revised

Rudyard Kipling's poem, "The Beginnings" from *A Diversity of Creatures*, circa 1917, was partly a response to The Great War, perhaps an attempt to express his dislike of Germans at this time

The line, "the English began to hate" repeats throughout the poem, emphasizing that there were some mysterious, inherent, and outside forces and reasons that led to the English beginning to hate. The question also begs, what did the English begin to hate? Perhaps the phrasing was intended to be ambiguous by Kipling

The significance of the imagery in Kipling's original poem creates a picture of rising nationalism in England

For England, the idea of territory (or territories) and the threat from other countries was expanding beyond the more traditional threats such as those previously presented by Spain and France

The methods of war had evolved among civilized and respected nations, changing by the end of the Victorian Era with the further development of machinery created at the start of the industrial revolution and the rise of German engineering, followed by their desire to acquire more territory, thus presenting Germany as a burgeoning imperial superpower

While both Christian nations, Germany and England had their contentions with Catholicism over the centuries, but I am not sure if this contention with religion was enough to fuel English hatred toward the Germans or even other nations with similar or dissimilar religions

In a sense, the English as a people, while fighting off threats and invasions from other countries for centuries, even losing their American colonies, did not develop a strong hatred toward those other countries

War was usually reserved to a country's military or warrior caste as well, not all citizens were aware of or involved in the details of war

The changing nature of war, the industrial revolution, the creation of large-scale cities, and the threat of new superpowers such as Germany created a new dynamic for a country's population to partake in the war effort, especially through the sensationalism presented in print media

So, the superpowers of the 20th century were continuing with their imperialistic tendencies, yet also needing to develop a strong sense of nationalism in order to compete with one another for military superiority, resources, and territories

The revised poem, re-titled "The Wrath of the Awakened Saxon," can be found on the Internet usually associated with white supremacist groups. The Saxons were originally Germanic tribes living on the coast in Germany toward the end of the Roman empire

Some Saxons did eventually settle in England, thus producing the combined group known as Anglo-Saxons, which are credited with creating England as a kingdom. Still, many Saxons stayed in Germany resisting the Frankish Empire

Regarding Kipling's revised poem

The use of the term "Saxon" (singular) refers to the Germanic tribes and the resistance they showed toward merging or blending with other tribes and groups

The "awakened" aspect of the revised poem suggests the Saxon tribe (presumably the original Saxon tribe from the Northern coast of Germany) becoming aware of impending threats that seek not only to destroy them physically, but also change their heritage and lineage inextricably

So, in a way, this alludes to the awakening spirit of such a tribe-like mentality among these white supremacist groups to defend their heritage and ways of life from encroaching forces

The use of the term Saxon also hints at a time when communities were smaller and more strongly knit together through blood and kinship, as well as extended brotherhood

Perhaps the hate the English began to feel Kipling describes in his original poem was their loss or lack of ethnic and cultural purity and recognizing how other countries, such as Germany, were displaying it as a sign of superiority, which was a country not striving to unite a kingdom but instead unite a people

Of course, this last part I am merely speculating and I could be wrong about it

So, here are some heuristics to follow when you come across Kipling's revised poem:

Where is Kipling's revised poem appearing on the Internet?

Who is associated with Kipling's revised poem?

What message or meaning do you think is being associated with Kipling's revised poem?

How are individuals associated with those websites and organizations responding to Kipling's revised poem?

Are the organizations and individuals commenting on Kipling's revised poem aware that "English" has been replaced with "Saxon?"

What is the significance of changing "English" to "Saxon?"

And finally, who revised Kipling's original poem?