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in the popular imagination**

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KIPLING, “MANDALAY” AND BURMA IN THE POPULAR IMAGINATION

by

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It is difficult to overestimate the impact on popular perceptions of Burma — indeed, of the ‘Far East’ more generally — of Rudyard Kipling’s poem ‘Mandalay’.¹ It first appeared in the literary weekly *The Scots Observer* on 21 June 1890.² It was subsequently included in the collection *Barrack Room Ballads and Other Verses*, which was published in London in 1892. Given its importance, the poem deserves citing in full:

By the old Moulmein Pagoda, lookin’ eastward to the sea,
There’s a Burma girl a-settin’, and I know she thinks o’ me;
For the wind is in the palm-trees, and the temple-bells they say:
‘Come you back, you British soldier; come you back to Mandalay!’
Come you back to Mandalay,
Where the old Flotilla lay:
Can’t you ‘ear their paddles chunkin’ from Rangoon to Mandalay?
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the flyin’-fishes play,
An’ the dawn comes up like thunder outer China ‘cross the Bay!

‘Er petticoat was yaller an’ ‘er little cap was green,
An’ ‘er name was Supi-yaw-lat — jes’ the same as Theebaw’s Queen,
An’ I seed her first a-smokin’ of a whackin’ white cheroot,
An’ a-wastin’ Christian kisses on an ‘eathen idol’s foot:
Bloomin’ idol made o’ mud —
Wot they called the great Gawd Budd —
Plucky lot she cared for idols when I kissed ‘er where she stud!

On the road to Mandalay ... etc

When the mist was on the rice-fields an’ the sun was droppin’ slow,
She’d git ‘er little banjo an’ she’d sing ‘*Kulla-lo-lo!*’³
With ‘er arm upon my shoulder an’ ‘er cheek agin my cheek
We useter watch the steamers an’ the *hathis* pilin’ teak.⁴
Elephants a-pilin’ teak.
In the sludgy, squidgy creek,
Where the silence ‘ung that ‘eavy you was ‘arf afraid to speak!

On the road to Mandalay ... etc

But that’s all shove be’ind me — long ago an’ fur away,
An’ there ain’t no ‘busses runnin’ from the Bank to Mandalay;
An’ I’m learnin’ ‘ere in London what the ten-year soldier tells:

¹ An early and abbreviated version of this paper was published as Andrew Selth, ‘Rudyard Kipling and “Mandalay”’, *The Kipling Journal*, Vol.88, No.358, December 2014, pp.47-58.

² ‘Barrack Room Ballads’, No.10, *The Scots Observer*, 21 June 1890, p.124.

³ This phrase is usually taken to mean ‘hullo stranger’, *kala* being a common Burmese term for foreigners at the time. It is still used in this sense, but has acquired negative connotations. See, for example, ‘Mandalay’, *Kipling Society*, at http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/rg_mandalay1.htm.

⁴ *Hathi* was the Hindi word for elephant.

'If you've 'eard the East a'callin', you won't never 'eed naught else'.
No! you won't 'eed nothin' else
But them spicy garlic smells,
An' the sunshine an' the palm trees an' the tinkly temple-bells;

On the road to Mandalay ... etc

I am sick o' wastin' leather on these gritty pavin'-stones,
An' the blasted Henglish drizzle wakes the fever in my bones;
Tho' I walks with fifty 'ousemaids outer Chelsea to the Strand,
An' they talks a lot of lovin', but wot do they understand?
Beefy face an' grubby 'and —
Law! Wot do they understand?
I've a neater, sweeter maiden in a cleaner, greener land!

On the road to Mandalay ... etc

Ship me somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,
Where there aren't no Ten Commandments an' a man can raise a thirst;
For the temple-bells are callin', an' it's there that I would be —
By the old Moulmein Pagoda, looking lazy at the sea:
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the old Flotilla lay,
With our sick beneath the awnings when we went to Mandalay!
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the flyin-fishes play,
An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China 'crost the Bay! ⁵

In the years that followed, the poem was reproduced in most collections of Kipling's works. It became well known in the United Kingdom (UK) and United States (US), but was also familiar to many further afield, particularly in the English-speaking colonies. It not only inspired dozens of adaptations and imitations, both in verse and music, but it helped shape Western images of Burma and Burmese society in ways that still resonate today.⁶

On The Road

The history of the poem has been well documented. In March 1889, aged 23 and relieved of his responsibilities to the Allahabad newspaper *The Pioneer*, Kipling set off from Calcutta for London, via Rangoon, Hong Kong, Yokohama and San Francisco. Although at the time the 'pacification' of Burma was far from complete, Mandalay had fallen to British arms and the Burmese king had been exiled to India. On 1 January 1886, the rump of his domain was formally annexed by the UK and added to the Indian province of

⁵ Rudyard Kipling, *Barrack Room Ballads and Other Verses* (London: Methuen, 1892), pp.50-3.

⁶ See, for example, Andrew Selth, *Burma Watching: A Retrospective*, Regional Outlook No.39 (Brisbane: Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University, 2012).

British Burma, which had been created in 1862 after two earlier Anglo-Burmese wars. Kipling was familiar with all these developments. Indeed, one biographer has suggested that his early collection *Departmental Ditties* (1886) was put together at the urging of British soldiers and civil servants in Burma.⁷ Also, he had already written at least three short stories and three ‘newspaper verses’ which specifically referred to events in Burma. The stories were ‘The Taking of Lungtungpen’ (1887), ‘Georgie Porgie’ (1888) and ‘A Conference of the Powers’ (1890).⁸ The verses were ‘A Nightmare of Names’ (1886), ‘The Grave of the Hundred Dead’ (1888) and *The Ballad of Boh Da Thone* (1888).⁹

Kipling’s one and only visit to Burma was brief, but it made a profound impression. After a couple of days spent in Rangoon, where he visited the ‘beautiful winking wonder’ of the Shwedagon Pagoda, he made an unscheduled stopover at the southern town (and former British administrative centre) of Moulmein.¹⁰ There he went to see ‘a large white pagoda surrounded by scores of little pagodas’. As described by Kipling years later:

I should better remember what that pagoda was like had I not fallen deeply and irrevocably in love with a Burmese girl at the foot of the first flight of steps ... Leaving this far too lovely maiden, I went up the steps only a few yards, and, turning me around, looked upon a view of water, island, broad river, fair grazing ground, and belted wood that made me rejoice that I was alive ... Far above my head there was a faint tinkle, as of golden bells, and a talking of the breezes in the tops of the toddy-palms.¹¹

When Kipling visited Moulmein there were 78 pagodas in the city and suburbs. It is not known which one he visited, but popular tradition favours the 46-metre high Kyaikthalan Pagoda, on the ridge overlooking the harbour. According to contemporary accounts, the view from the pagoda was ‘unsurpassed in all Burma’.¹²

Kipling arrived back in the UK in October 1889 and took rooms in Villiers Street, which ran between The Strand and The Embankment, in central London. Not long afterwards, he wrote ‘Mandalay’, a poem of six stanzas in which a former British soldier, discharged from military service and working in a London bank, reviews his experiences during the

⁷ A.P. Cooper, ‘Rudyard Kipling — A Biographical Sketch’, in *Around the World With Kipling* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1926), p.27.

⁸ ‘A Conference of the Powers’ was first published in *The Pioneer* on 23 and 24 May 1890, but was probably written earlier. ‘The Taking of Lungtungpen’ appeared in *The Civil and Military Gazette* in April 1887. ‘Georgie Porgie’ first appeared in *The Week’s News* in November 1888.

⁹ ‘A Nightmare of Names’ was published in *The Civil and Military Gazette* in December 1886 and ‘The Grave of the Hundred Dead’ was published in *The Week’s News* in January 1888. ‘The Ballad of Boh Da Thone’ was included in *Barrack Room Ballads and Other Verses*, but also dates from 1888. See G.H. Webb, ‘Kipling’s Burma: A literary and historical review’, *Asian Affairs*, Vol.15, No.2, June 1984, pp.163-78; and Andrew Rutherford (ed), *Early Verse by Rudyard Kipling, 1879-1889: Unpublished, Uncollected and Rarely Collected Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

¹⁰ Rudyard Kipling, *From Sea to Sea* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1909), p.203.

¹¹ Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, pp.203-4.

¹² R.R. Langham-Carter, *Old Moulmein (875-1880)* (Moulmein: Moulmein Press, 1947), pp.33-6. See also *A Handbook for Travellers in India, Burma and Ceylon* (London: John Murray, 1918), pp.639-42.

recent Burma campaign. He expresses his longing for a young Burmese girl, who is described as waiting in idyllic surroundings for her sweetheart to return.

This poem, with its timeless themes of idealised romance, cultural fusion and exotic locales, was in large part a reaction to Kipling's new life in the UK, which he found in stark contrast to sunlit India. As he wrote in the poem 'In Partibus', in 1889:

The sky, a greasy soup-tureen
Shuts down atop my brow.
Yes, I have sighed for London town
And I have got it now:
And half of it is fog and filth,
And half is fog and row.¹³

This sombre mood informed 'Mandalay', which reflected Kipling's nostalgia for 'a cleaner, greener land', 'somewheres East of Suez', where he could escape the gloomy weather.¹⁴ He was also reacting to the condescension of the local literati (whom he dismissed as 'long-haired things / in velvet collar rolls') and the strictures of Victorian morality.¹⁵ It is also worth bearing in mind that, after an unhappy childhood in the UK, separated from his family, his six or so years as an adult in India were the happiest of his life, to that date.¹⁶

Academic observers have dissected Kipling's poem and come up with some interesting interpretations. Sharon Hamilton, for example, has suggested that the passivity of 'the Burma girl' symbolises not only the accepting nature of all Burmese women but also the country's weakness in the face of the UK's imperial power. The girl is described as 'lookin'', and 'a'settin'', as she 'thinks' of the British soldier. She waits and waits, apparently no longer caring for the Buddhist philosophy to which she once subscribed. Her other actions, like 'a'smokin' and 'a'wastin' kisses, have negative connotations, but end when the British soldier arrives on the scene. The sequence of events outlined, in which the soldier first 'see'd her', then 'kissed 'er' is seen to correspond neatly with 'the dynamics of imperialism: he came, he saw, he conquered'.¹⁷ The girl's later position 'With 'er arm upon [his] shoulder an' 'er cheek agin [his] cheek', confirms the transfer of her loyalty. Nor does Hamilton see the choice of the girl's name as a coincidence. It is

¹³ Rudyard Kipling, 'In Partibus', in Rutherford, *Early Verse by Rudyard Kipling*, pp.470-2. See also Andrew Lycett (ed), *Kipling Abroad: Traffics and Discoveries from Burma to Brazil* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2010), pp.152-4. 'In Partibus' is an abbreviation of the Latin tag 'in partibus infidelium', meaning 'in the lands of the unbelievers'.

¹⁴ Kipling, 'Mandalay', *Barrack Room Ballads and Other Verses*, pp.50-3.

¹⁵ Kipling, 'In Partibus', in Rutherford, *Early Verse*, p.472. Kipling's prickly relationship with the Aesthetic Movement is discussed in W.B. Dillingham, *Rudyard Kipling: Hell and Heroism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.23-6.

¹⁶ Although born in Bombay in 1865, Kipling was sent back to the UK for schooling when he was five years old. He did not return to India until he was nearly 17 and remained there until he turned 23.

¹⁷ Sharon Hamilton, 'Musicology as Propaganda in Victorian Theory and Practice', *Mosaic*, Vol.31, No.2, June 1998, pp.35ff.

Supayalat, 'jes' the same as Theebaw's Queen'.¹⁸ Winning the Burmese girl is thus seen to mirror the UK's overthrow of the Burmese monarchy five years earlier.

It is debateable whether any of Kipling's contemporaries, or indeed many people since, saw the ballad in such esoteric terms, but even so it met with an enthusiastic reception. Disseminated through both the printed word and recordings of various kinds, it had an extraordinary impact on the popular imagination throughout the English-speaking world.¹⁹ To that point, the duration of British colonial rule in Burma had been relatively short (barely 65 years from the first Anglo-Burmese War and annexation of much of the country's coastal territory). Also, the European presence there was always quite small, compared with India, never rising above 12,000 and largely concentrated in Rangoon.²⁰ As a result, the country itself was little known or understood back in the UK, a situation that some Old Burma Hands believe persisted until the 1930s.²¹ There were books and news reports, but the information provided by these sources tended to be limited and not always very accurate, leaving a gap in the public mind that Kipling's ballad soon filled.

At the same time, 'Mandalay' attracted a range of criticisms. Reflecting the contemporary mood in the UK and elsewhere in the Western world, few were aimed at the poem's implicitly imperialist, Orientalist, sexist and racist content.²² There were concerns in some circles, however, about Kipling's vernacular style and innovative use of colloquialisms. He claimed to be using what William Wordsworth had described 90 years earlier, in a preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), as 'the real language of men'.²³ Indeed, the entire collection of *Barrack Room Ballads* was a conscious attempt by Kipling to convey the feelings of the common soldier on a range of issues, in part by mimicking his vocabulary and accent.²⁴ Even so, reservations were expressed about what the committee

¹⁸ The American historian John Christian has suggested that, 'except for Kipling's famous song', Thibaw and Supayalat 'would have been almost forgotten'. Christian felt 'They were after all but tinsel rulers of an unstable throne'. J.L. Christian, 'Thebaw: Last King of Burma', *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol.3, No.4, August 1944, p.309.

¹⁹ For example, Victor recorded 'On the Road to Mandalay' ten times between 1900 and 1929. The first was a recitation by George Broderick, the last a version by the Associated Glee Clubs of America. See 'Rudyard Kipling (author)', *Victor: Encyclopaedic Discography of Victor Recordings*, at <http://archive.is/v6LJJ>. This list does not include the recording of a recitation by Dan Quinn issued by Edison in 1899. See D.J. Steffen, *From Edison to Marconi: The First Thirty Years of Recorded Music* (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2005), p.197.

²⁰ According to the 1931 census, there were 30,851 Europeans and Eurasians in Burma that year, of whom 7,819 had been born in Europe, the UK, Australasia and North America. Of that number, 6,426 had been born in the British Isles. See R.H. Taylor, *The Relationship Between Burmese Social Classes and British-Indian Policy on the Behaviour of the Burmese Political Elite, 1937-1942*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Cornell University, 1974, p.21; and *Census of India, 1931, Vol.XI, Burma: Part 1 – Report* (Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing and Stationery, Burma, 1933), pp.52-3.

²¹ A.A. Lawson, *Life in the Burmese Jungle* (Lewes: The Book Guild Ltd., 1983), p.1 and p.47.

²² See, for example, Hamilton, 'Musicology as Propaganda in Victorian Theory and Practice'.

²³ William Wordsworth, 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*', in R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones (eds), *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads: The text of the 1798 edition with additional 1800 poems and prefaces* (London: Methuen and Co., 1963), pp.235ff. See also Austin Asche, 'The Long Trail, and Those Who Followed It', *The Kipling Journal*, No.295, September 2000, pp.16-30.

²⁴ Simon Dentith, *Epic and Empire in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.163-8.

for the 1907 Nobel Prize for Literature (which Kipling was awarded) described as his 'somewhat coarse' language.²⁵ Other criticisms of 'Mandalay' were aimed at the poems' factual errors and what was seen by some of Kipling's detractors as his faulty sense of geography.²⁶

With regard to the latter, a particular problem arose over the first line of the poem, which described the 'Burma girl' as 'lookin' eastward to the sea'.²⁷ Yet, as some readers were quick to point out, Moulmein is not only some 61 kilometres inland, on the Salween River, but the sea lies to the west of the town, not the east. Also, it would make more sense for the girl to be looking westwards towards India, where her 'British soldier' was probably once stationed. According to the Kipling Society's extensive website, Rudyard Kipling answered this pedantry by changing the first line of the poem to match a similar line in the last stanza, which referred to the girl 'lookin' lazy at the sea'. Even so, the original wording continued to appear in published collections for some years.²⁸ Suggestions that the amendment was made by American composer Oliver (Oley) Speaks, to suit his 1907 musical rendition of the poem, are incorrect.²⁹ In fact, early printings of his setting faithfully reproduced Kipling's first line.

Questions were also raised over the last line of the chorus, which read: 'An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China 'crost the Bay!'. As Kipling later acknowledged, in response to critics who discovered that Moulmein 'did not command any view of any sun rising across the Bay of Bengal', the town 'is not on the road to anywhere'. Indeed, Mandalay is about 800 kilometres to the north of Moulmein. Yet, as Kipling wrote:

Had I opened the chorus of the song with 'Oh' instead of 'On the road' etc., it might have shown that the song was a sort of general mix-up of the singer's Far-Eastern memories against a background of the Bay of Bengal seen at dawn from a troop-ship taking him there. But 'On' in this case was more singable than 'Oh'. That simple explanation may stand as a warning.³⁰

As Kipling explained, when the soldier speaks of the road to Mandalay in the chorus, he is referring figuratively to his 'golden path to romance'.³¹

²⁵ 'Award Ceremony Speech', 10 December 1907, *Nobelpriz.org*, at http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1907/press.html

²⁶ See, for example, H., 'Mr Kipling's Accuracy', *Literature*, Vol.6, 6 January 1900, p.26.

²⁷ Kipling, 'Mandalay', *Barrack Room Ballads and Other Verses*, pp.50-3.

²⁸ John McGivering and John Radcliffe, 'Mandalay', *The New Reader's Guide to the Works of Rudyard Kipling*, at http://www.kipling.org.uk/rg_mandalay1.htm#kipling. *Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Inclusive Edition, 1885-1932* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1933) and *Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Definitive Edition* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940) both use 'lookin' lazy', rather than 'lookin' eastward'. Thomas Pinney opted for the original wording when editing the authoritative *Cambridge Edition of the Poems of Rudyard Kipling*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁹ 'Kipling's "Mandalay" – geographical puzzle', *Glind's Diversions*, at <http://glind.customer.netpace.net.au/bengal.html>

³⁰ Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, pp.203-4.

³¹ Kipling, *From Sea to Sea*, p.204.

Despite Kipling's explicit warning not to read the poem too literally, some aficionados have come up with ingenious explanations for the poem's geographical anomalies. For example, one has suggested that, if the British soldier was in India he may not be able to see China across the Bay of Bengal, but he could look at the greater (Indo) China Peninsula, which included Burma.³² Another has claimed that Kipling was referring to a village named 'China', reportedly situated to the west of Moulmein, near Rangoon.³³ In 1981, an Australian contributor to the *Kipling Journal* who was familiar with the country put forward the novel theory that the 'old Moulmein Pagoda' to which the poem referred was in fact the Botataung Pagoda in Rangoon, which had a slight connection with the southern town. Being situated beside the Rangoon (or Hlaing) River, which is a tributary of the Irrawaddy River, he felt this pagoda had a stronger claim to be 'on the road to Mandalay'.³⁴ Also, Rangoon was the home port of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company (the 'old Flotilla' mentioned in the poem).

The ballad contained a number of other factual errors, which over the years critics have been happy to point out. For example, Burmese devotees do not kiss the feet of Buddha statues, as described by Kipling. Nor do they customarily call him 'Buddha', let alone 'the great Gawd Budd'. Their usual practice is to speak in broad honorifics, or to refer to 'the Gautama'. Around the end of the 19th century, the banjo was an instrument unknown to traditional Burmese culture. Also, Burmese women did not wear petticoats, or caps. David Gilmour has even suggested that they avoided yellow clothes, as it was considered to be too close to the colour of the robes worn by Buddhist monks.³⁵ This is stretching the point, as Burmese *pongyis* (monks) customarily wear maroon or ochre robes (unlike Theravada Buddhist monks in Thailand, Laos and Sri Lanka, who wear saffron robes). In any case, Burmese women have always been quite comfortable wearing yellow clothes. That said, if poetic licence is discounted in favour of strict adherence to the facts, then Gilmour is justified in calling Kipling's 'Mandalay' 'a poem of great charm and striking inaccuracy'.³⁶

The Musical Settings

Although Kipling claimed to be unmusical, he was 'acutely sensitive to metrical form' and was often found to be 'singing a new poem'.³⁷ Kay Robinson, the editor of the *Civil and Military Gazette* from 1886, felt that he always wrote his poems 'not only to music but as music'. 'Kipling always conceived his verses that way – as a tune, often a

³² See, for example, George Engle, 'The Geography of "Mandalay"', *The Kipling Journal*, No.272, September 1994, pp.51-3.

³³ 'News and Notes', *The Kipling Journal*, No.49, April 1939, p.6.

³⁴ L.A. Crozier, 'The Pagoda', *The Kipling Journal*, No.219, September 1981, pp.18-30. Crozier was an engineer who managed a mine in northern Burma before and after the Second World War.

³⁵ ³⁵ David Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005), p.285.

³⁶ Gilmour, *The Ruling Caste*, p.285.

³⁷ Thomas Pinney, 'Kipling, (Joseph) Rudyard', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/printable/34334>. See also Norman Page, *A Kipling Companion* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p.180.

remarkably musical and, to me, novel tune'.³⁸ Kipling was also familiar with most popular music styles and, as the poet T.S. Eliot wrote, he 'had at least the inspiration and refreshment of the living music hall'.³⁹ Indeed, in late 1889 Kipling wrote a short story entitled 'My Great and Only' which was based on his frequent visits to — and obvious affection for — London's music halls, two of which were situated near his Charing Cross boarding house.⁴⁰ In this story, Kipling defends the music hall song as a popular art form, despite the fact that in London 'the gentleman ... by virtue of his position preached or ordained that music-halls were vulgar, if not improper'.⁴¹

'Mandalay' was consciously written in a way that drew on Britain's tradition of popular ballads and encouraged a musical setting. As Kipling recounted in his autobiography, *Something of Myself*, 'I wrote a song called 'Mandalay' which, tacked to a tune with a swing, made one of the waltzes of that distant age'.⁴² This was presumably a reference to Gerard Cobb's 1892 musical setting of the poem, which was adapted by Bewicke Beverley the following year to create a 'Mandalay Waltz'.⁴³ It quickly became something of a hit in Victorian society. Kipling continued:

The inhabitants of the United States ... 'Panamaed' that song (this was before copyright), set it to their own tunes, and sang it in their own national voices.⁴⁴

By the turn of the century, there were six different musical versions of the poem, not counting Beverley's waltz. These were by Gerard Cobb (1892), Arthur Thayer (1892), Henry Trevannion (1898), Walter Damrosch (1898), Walter Hedgcock (1899), and Arthur Whiting (1900).⁴⁵ All but Cobb and Hedgcock were Americans. In addition, the

³⁸ Cited in Brian Mattinson, 'Kipling and Music', at http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/rg_music1.htm

³⁹ T.S. Eliot, *A Choice of Kipling's Verse, with an essay on Rudyard Kipling* (London: Faber and Faber, 1941), p.10. See also Colin MacInnes, 'Kipling and the Music Halls', in John Gross (ed), *The Age of Kipling* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), pp.58-61; and Michael Halliwell, 'Rudyard Kipling's Barrack-Room Ballads', *When the Empire Calls*, Audio CD (Sydney: ABC Classics, 2005), p.5.

⁴⁰ 'My Great and Only' was first published in the *Civil and Military Gazette* on 11 and 13 January 1890. See Rutherford, *Early Verse by Rudyard Kipling*, pp.473-5.

⁴¹ Rudyard Kipling, 'My Great and Only', in *Abaft the Funnel* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1909), p.262.

⁴² Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself and Other Autobiographical Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp.165-6.

⁴³ Bewicke Beverley, 'Mandalay Waltz' (London: Charles Sheard and Co., 1893). According to the original sheet music, this piece was 'constructed on themes mainly taken from the Song "Mandalay" by Gerard F. Cobb, No.2 of a Set of "Barrack Room Ballads" (Rudyard Kipling) published by Sheard & Co.'. See also B.E. Smythies, 'Musical Settings of "Mandalay"', *The Kipling Journal*, No.258, June 1991, pp. 34-5.

⁴⁴ Kipling, *Something of Myself*, pp.165-6. 'Panamaed' is presumably a reference to the United States' heavy-handed appropriation of sovereign rights to the Panama Canal, in 1904. The US International Copyright Act was passed in 1891.

⁴⁵ These were 'Mandalay, No.2 of a set of Barrack-Room Ballads', words by Rudyard Kipling, music by Gerard F. Cobb (London: Herman Darewski Music Publishing Co., 1892); 'On The Road to Mandalay: A Barrack Room Ballad', words by Rudyard Kipling and music by Henry Trevannion (Milwaukee: Joseph Flanner, 1898); 'Mandalay', in *Three Songs by Arthur W. Thayer* (Boston: H.B. Stevens and Co., 1892); 'Mandalay', in *Songs by Walter Damrosch* (Cincinnati: The John Church Company, 1897); 'On The Road to Mandalay: Rudyard Kipling's Celebrated "Barrack-Room Ballad"', music by Walter Hedgcock (London: Charles Sheard and Co., incorporating Herman Darewski Music Publishing Co., 1899); and

Australian composer Percy Grainger wrote a score based on 'Mandalay' in 1898, but it was never published.⁴⁶ This list does not include an arrangement of Cobb's 'Mandalay', described as a 'musical kindergarten sketch', by the prolific composer Charles Rawlings (under the pseudonym Theo Bonheur) in 1892.⁴⁷

By Brian Mattinson's latest count, there are now at least 24 different musical settings of 'Mandalay', all but six of them produced before 1948.⁴⁸ One notable version was that published in 1907 by the American Oley Speaks.⁴⁹ Others were by Dyneley Prince in 1903, Henry Handel Richardson in 1908, Charles Willeby in 1911 and Charles Maskell in 1932.⁵⁰ In 1975, the English folk singer Peter Bellamy gave the ballad a completely new treatment by adapting it to the old shanty and convict broadside tune 'Ten Thousand Miles Away' (1840s). Of those settings with lyrics, most included only the first, second and last two verses of Kipling's poem, plus the chorus. Sometimes, only three verses were sung. Settings have also embraced a wide range of styles. As time passed, the song was reshaped and rearranged as new musical genres appeared. Jazz, ragtime, big band and swing versions were produced. More modern treatments have included classic pop, folk and even country styles. There have also been French, Danish, German and Russian versions.⁵¹

At first, the musical settings were not particularly exotic. Cobb's was essentially a waltz, as demonstrated by Beverley's popular adaptation. Speaks, however, joined an insistent rhythm to ominous harmonies for the verse sections and exotically coloured the references to palm trees and temple bells.⁵² This created a different sound and mood entirely. Others followed, giving their own interpretations. As Brian Mattinson has observed:

'Mandalay', in *Rudyard Kipling's Barrack-Room Ballads set to music*, music by Arthur Whiting (New York: G. Schirmer Inc., 1900).

⁴⁶ The manuscript is held by the Grainger Museum at the University of Melbourne. Personal correspondence with Brian Mattinson, 30 December 2013. See also Kay Dreyfus, *Percy Grainger's Kipling Settings: A Study of the Manuscript Sources* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia, 1980), p.24.

⁴⁷ 'Mandalay: Musical kindergarten sketch', by Theo Bonheur (London: Charles Sheard and Co., 1892).

⁴⁸ Brian Mattinson, 'The Musical Settings of Kipling's Verse', *The New Reader's Guide to the Works of Rudyard Kipling*, at <http://www.kipling.org.uk/settings1.htm>.

⁴⁹ 'On the Road to Mandalay', words by Rudyard Kipling and music by Oley Speaks (Cincinnati: The John Church Company, 1907).

⁵⁰ 'On The Road to Mandalay', words by Rudyard Kipling and music by Dyneley Prince (New York: G. Schirmer Inc., 1903); 'Mandalay', words by Rudyard Kipling and music by Henry Handel Richardson (pseud. Ethel Richardson) (1908), in Bruce Steele and Richard Divall (eds), *Songs by Henry Handel Richardson for Voice and Piano* (Sydney, Currency Press, 2000), pp.28-9; 'Mandalay', lyrics by Rudyard Kipling and music by Charles Willeby (Cincinnati: The John Church Company, 1911); and 'On the Road to Mandalay: Song', words by Rudyard Kipling, music by Charles H. Maskell (Philadelphia: Morris Music Co., 1932).

⁵¹ The Danish version was translated by Kai Frus Moller and set to the music of Erling Winkel in 1942. A choral version was written by the German composer Harald Genzmer in 1963, with the lyrics translated by Otto Sachs. The Russian version was translated by E. Polonskaya and sung by Vera Matveeva.

⁵² D.B. Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp.177-8.

Comparisons are interesting and in the case of “Mandalay” there will be personal preference for emphasis on the rugged British “Tommy” (Oley Speaks 1907), the tinkly temple bells (Charles Willeby 1911), the seductive little banjo (Walter Hedgcock 1899) or for contemporary folk style (Peter Bellamy).⁵³

The latter gave greater emphasis to the pathos and underlying bitterness of the original poem than most other versions.⁵⁴ In his 1937 novel *Serenade*, James Cain declared his preference for Walter Damrosch’s setting. To him, it was:

a little tone poem all by itself, a piece of real music, with all the verses in it except the bad one, about the housemaids, and each verse a little different from the others.⁵⁵

This version was felt to be ‘in a different class from the Speaks Mandalay, or the Prince Mandalay, or any of the other bar-room Mandalays’.⁵⁶

Despite Cain’s rather dismissive comments, Oley Speaks’ setting of ‘On the Road to Mandalay’ is perhaps the best known, sales of the sheet music passing the million copies mark. Recorded by Victor in 1922, it became the signature song of the American baritone Reinald Werrenrath. It was further popularised by the Australian singer Peter Dawson, who first recorded it in 1935. He was a passionate admirer of Kipling’s works and also made recordings of the Willeby, Hedgcock and Cobb settings, in 1910, 1929 and 1937 respectively.⁵⁷ During the 1940s, Dawson devised what he called a ‘potpourri’ or ‘scena’, in which he sang parts of all four musical versions. While dismissed by one critic as ‘merely a hotch-potch’, others saw it as a seamless rendition of the entire poem.⁵⁸ After the Second World War, it became a popular feature of Dawson’s concerts in Europe and Australia. Dawson was still singing it in 1951, when he was 69 years old.⁵⁹

As a result of all this attention, ‘Mandalay’ became irrevocably associated in the public mind — in Western countries at least — with Burma. As the historian Godfrey Harvey once wrote, ‘Kipling makes Burma the daughter, hailed England the mother’.⁶⁰ In 1928, Cobb’s setting of the poem was broadcast over British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)

⁵³ Mattinson, ‘Kipling and Music’.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Peter Bellamy, ‘Mandalay’, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKOXJ9VwWtU>; and *Peter Bellamy Sings the Barrack Room Ballads of Rudyard Kipling*, Audio CD (Fellside, 2012).

⁵⁵ J.M. Cain, *Serenade* (London: Penguin, 1953), p.148.

⁵⁶ Cain, *Serenade*, p.148.

⁵⁷ Russell Smith and Peter Burgis, *Peter Dawson: The World’s Most Popular Baritone, with complete song title discography* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2001), p.322. See also ‘On the Road to Mandalay – Peter Dawson’, *YouTube*, at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5_M9kTBmug

⁵⁸ Smith and Burgis, *Peter Dawson*, p.264. See also Fidelio, ‘A Veteran’s Success: Audience Acclaims Peter Dawson’, *The West Australian* (Perth, Australia), 17 March 1949. The medley was called ‘Mandalay Potpourri’ when recorded by His Master’s Voice (HMV) in Sydney in 1945, but its name had changed to ‘Mandalay Scena’ when broadcast over Australian radio in 1954, and re-recorded by HMV in 1955.

⁵⁹ See ‘Peter Dawson – Mandalay Scena (On the Road to Mandalay)’, *YouTube*, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2N6dvVyfLbc>

⁶⁰ Alyssa Phillips, ‘Romance and Tragedy in Burmese History: A Reading of G.E. Harvey’s *A History of Burma*’, *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research*, Vol.3, No.1, Spring 2005, p.6.

radio as part of a special feature celebrating different parts of the British Empire.⁶¹ The tune was chosen to represent the Indian province of British Burma, which was accorded equal status with dominions and full-fledged colonies. Also, in addition to those already mentioned, recitations of the poem and its musical settings were performed and, in many cases recorded, by dozens of other artists, among them such well-known entertainers as Nelson Eddy, Bing Crosby, Robert Howe, Lawrence Tibbett, Robert Easton, Leonard Warren, Owen Brannigan, Ian Wallace, Christopher Underwood, Frank Sinatra and Frankie Laine.⁶²

It is perhaps also worth mentioning that, after the development of ‘talking’ pictures, several versions of ‘On the Road to Mandalay’ were captured on film. This was a mixed blessing. The sound quality was often poor and some of the artists involved paid scant attention to questions of historical or cultural accuracy. In 1932, for example, a Pathe Pictorial short featured ‘the celebrated bass singer’ Robert Easton performing ‘On the Road to Mandalay’. Cut into footage of Easton (dressed formally in white tie and tails, and standing in a parlour by a grand piano) were scenes of rural life in Burma. However, the film also included staged shots of an ‘Eastern beauty’ smoking a curious looking ‘cheroot’ and kissing a cheap Chinese-style ceramic Buddha statuette.⁶³ Other artists were guilty of similar gaffes. Film clips of Leonard Warren’s 1952 operatic rendition of the song show him in evening dress, standing in front of what appears to be a Thai temple scene.⁶⁴ Frank Sinatra’s controversial swing version, which was replaced by another song on some of his records after objections were lodged by the Kipling family, is still available on *YouTube*.⁶⁵

In other ways too, the major movie studios were quick to capitalize on the popularity and exotic Oriental associations of the ballad. For example, George Dewey Washington sang Oley Speaks’ popular setting of ‘On The Road to Mandalay’ in the second *Metro Movietone Review*, produced by MGM in 1929. The same year, the song featured in Vitaphone’s *Paul Tremaine and His Aristocrats*, played by Tremaine and his 15-piece orchestra. Also in 1929, the work was performed by Doug Stanbury and his Lyric Quartet in a musical short by Warner Brothers entitled *Pack Up Your Troubles*. The song featured again in 1932, this time in the movie *You Said a Mouthful*, starring Ginger Rogers. Speaks’ musical setting was also used, without words, as part of the soundtrack for *China Seas* (1935), a romantic adventure starring Clark Gable and Jean Harlow. The same year, the song was performed by opera star Lawrence Tibbett in the musical romance *Metropolitan*. The ballad was also used in the comedy *Wife, Husband and Friend* (1939)

⁶¹ Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876-1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p.171.

⁶² Smythies, ‘Musical Settings of “Mandalay”’.

⁶³ ‘Robert Easton in “Mandalay”’, Pathe Pictorial, 1932, at <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/robert-easton-in-mandalay>

⁶⁴ Leonard Warren, ‘On The Road to Mandalay (1952)’, *YouTube*, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IXTsXTRMvo>

⁶⁵ Frank Sinatra, ‘On The Road to Mandalay’, *YouTube*, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5HFVo7KmaA>. Sinatra’s version of the Speaks setting was released on his 1958 album *Come Fly with Me* but was removed after the Kipling family complained about changes made to the lyrics, which referred to ‘Burma broads’, ‘crazy bells’ and ‘cats’ who can raise a thirst.

and featured once more in *They Met in Bombay*, another Clark Gable film, in 1941. By then, the tune was so well known, and so intimately associated with the 'Far East', that it was often uncredited.⁶⁶

Imitations and Inspirations

At first, the poem 'Mandalay' appeared under its own name. Indeed, so familiar did it become that one American publisher released an adaptation of Henry Trevannion's 1898 musical setting of the ballad as a two-step dance tune, simply entitled 'The Mandalay'.⁶⁷ However, it was soon much better known by the title of its most famous musical versions, namely 'On the Road to Mandalay'.

The ballad spawned more than 24 different musical settings and arrangements. It also prompted a host of imitations and variations as composers, songwriters and music publishers attempted to cash in on its extraordinary popularity throughout the English-speaking world.⁶⁸ By the time Burma regained its independence in 1948, there were at least 175 popular songs that mentioned the country, or more often Mandalay, which became a highly recognisable symbol in the West of everything remote, exotic and romantic.⁶⁹ These works were part of a wider genre of songs and tunes that had as their central themes a young woman in Asia pining for her foreign lover, or a Western man recalling his days in Asia and the local girl who had kept him company there. Most refer to temple bells, moonlit tropical nights and 'brown-eyed dusky maids'.⁷⁰ These themes ran like a riff through the popular music of the day, recurring in different ways in different compositions. They reflected the imagined experiences of foreigners in other Asian countries, and the West's fascination during this period with the wider Oriental world, but these works still owed a great deal to Kipling's 'Mandalay'.

Four examples, chosen from the period between the turn of the century and the outbreak of the Second World War, help convey the broad content and general tone of such compositions.

In 1907, Roderic Penfield and Hans Scherber wrote a song entitled 'My Maid of Mandalay', which followed the Kipling ballad closely. The singer pines for 'My little girl in green' who 'lifted up her tear-dimmed eyes to look a last goodbye'.

The palm trees trembled in the breeze,
The temple bells rang out,
Their music floated far across the water of the bay;
She said her heart was mine, all

⁶⁶ See 'Oley Speaks', *International Movie Data Base*, at <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1672696/>

⁶⁷ 'The Mandalay (Two Step)', adapted from 'The Road to Mandalay', music by Henry Trevannion (Milwaukee: Joseph Flanner, 1899).

⁶⁸ Brian Mattinson, 'Kipling and Music'.

⁶⁹ This subject is explored in detail in Andrew Selth, *The Riff From Mandalay: Burma, Kipling and Western Music* (forthcoming).

⁷⁰ 'Down on the Philippine Isles', words and music by Melbourne Brogan (Kansas City: Brogan Music Publishing Co., 1921).

My maid of Mandalay.⁷¹

About ten years later, the popular American song writing duo of Harry Flanagan and Earl Burnett produced a song called 'There's a Burmah Girl A-Calling (in Burmah by the Sea)'. Its lyrics too echoed Kipling's sentiments, with only slight variations:

Where the Bay of Bengal's rolling,
Down on India's sunny strand
There's a Burmah girl so sweet to see,
Strolling there she waits for me;
Her heart's been ever yearning since the day I went away,
Longing for my returning
To the land where the palm trees sway.⁷²

The number of such works dramatically increased during the so-called 'jazz age', which is generally taken to have run from the end of the First World War in 1918 to the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929. During this period, the lyricists and composers of America's 'Tin Pan Alley' churned out thousands of popular songs, including quite a number with Burmese themes. One such work was 'Moonlight in Mandalay' by Lou Herscher, Elmer Naylor and Marty Fay. It was released by Victor Records in 1926 and starred Edwin J. McEnelly's orchestra, with vocals by Lewis James:

Oh take me back to Mandalay,
My land of dreams;
Where palm trees sway and moon beams play
On silv'ry streams
With lips aflame, oh let me claim
The heart I stole away⁷³

Another in this vein was 'By An Old Pagoda', written by Jimmy Kennedy to music by Hugh Williams (whose real name was Wilhelm Grosz). Published in 1938, it dwelt on the now familiar theme of a European man meeting a 'goddess of brown' in the 'Land where the temples rise / Under the Burmese skies'. This time, however, the man expressed few regrets at having to leave his Burma girl behind:

We parted in Mandalay
The East and the West
Perhaps it was best
By an old pagoda.⁷⁴

⁷¹ 'My Maid of Mandalay', words by Roderic Penfield and music by Hans Scherber (New York: Maurice Shapiro, 1907).

⁷² 'There's a Burmah Girl A-Calling (In Burmah by the Sea)', words by Harry Flanagan and music by Earl Burnett (New York: A.J. Stasny Music, 1916).

⁷³ 'Moonlight in Mandalay', words by Marty Fay and music by Lou Herscher and Elmer Naylor (New York: Jack Mills Inc., 1925). See also *Encyclopaedic Discography of Victor Recordings*, at http://victor.library.ucsb.edu/index.php/matrix/detail/800008924/BVE-34686-Moonlight_in_Mandalay.

This seems to be a veiled reference to Kipling's poem 'The Ballad of East and West' (1889), which opens with the words 'Oh East is East and West is West / and never the twain shall meet'.⁷⁵ As is often the case, these lines have been misinterpreted to mean that the peoples of two cultures are essentially incompatible — quite the opposite of what Kipling actually intended.⁷⁶

There were also several works by classical musicians who were inspired at least in part by Kipling's description of Burma, and the increased public interest in the country that followed publication of his ballad. During the 1920s, for example, Joseph (or Josef) Holbrooke produced a number of works with a Burmese theme. They included his 'Piano Concerto No.2, L'Orient, Op.100' (1920-28), a work of three movements one of which was 'Burmese Dance' (1928). Its origins are not clear, but it appears that this part of the larger work was originally described as a Burmese fantasy, called 'Sacrifice of Water Buffaloes', and identified as Opus 81. Holbrooke also composed a piece for brass band entitled 'In Mandalay' (part of Suite, Op.85), and there was a solo piano work entitled 'Rangoon Rice Carriers', probably written around 1930. Little else is known about this last piece, but Piccadilly recorded Holbrooke playing it, on a 78 rpm 10 inch disc, soon after its composition.⁷⁷

Familiarity with Kipling's ballad, if not its reputation, was also enhanced by the fact that it lent itself easily to parody and adaption. An early example, sung by British soldiers during the 1896-98 campaign against the Mahdist state in the Sudan, was 'A Ballad of the Expeditionary Force'. Its first verse went:

By the old Soudani Railway, looking southward from the sea,
There's a camel sits a'swearin' – and, worse luck, belongs to me:
I hate the shadeless palm-tree, but the telegraphs they say,
"Get you on, you 'Gippy soldier, get you on to Dongolay."
Get you on to Dongolay,
Where the buck stern-wheelers play:
Can't you hear their insides gruntin' from Cairo to Dongolay?
On the road to Dongolay!
Where you don't get foreign pay,
And the sand bungs up your eyelids the livelong blessed day.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ 'By An Old Pagoda', words by Jimmy Kennedy and music by Hugh Williams (London: Peter Maurice Music Co., 1938).

⁷⁵ Rudyard Kipling, 'The Ballad of East and West', *Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Definitive Edition*, pp.234-8.

⁷⁶ Charles Carrington once observed that 'No lines of Kipling's have been more freely quoted, and more often misquoted in exactly the opposite sense to that which Kipling gave them'. Charles Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p.180.

⁷⁷ 'Rangoon Rice Carriers' was released by Piccadilly as part of its red label series of records (catalogue no. 5078), which were on sale between March 1930 and January 1931. The piece was re-released on CD by Symposium Records in 1994, as part of a collection of Holbrooke's early orchestral and popular music.

⁷⁸ 'Road to Dongolay', *The Press* (Canterbury, New Zealand), 31 July 1896, at <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=CHP18960731.2.16>.

As noted in the *Pall Mall Gazette* at the time, ‘the tune is, of course, that of Mr Rudyard Kipling’s “On the Road to Mandalay”’ (although it is not clear precisely which ‘tune’ the paper was referring to).⁷⁹ There were other versions, with different words. One, entitled ‘On the Road to Dongolay’, began:

On the Road to Dongolay,
Where the dying camels lay,
And the sun comes down like hellfire,
And grows hotter day by day.⁸⁰

Dongola was a city on the Upper Nile River. It was also the name of the surrounding province, where General Herbert Kitchener defeated a Mahdist force in 1896.

There were also at least half a dozen ‘soldiers’ songs’, produced during the 1898 Spanish-American War and the Philippine-American War of 1899-1902, which drew directly on Kipling’s original and were sung to the tune of ‘On the Road to Mandalay’. These included spin-offs such as ‘Down by Manila Bay’, ‘Manila Way’, ‘By Old Fort San Felipe’ and ‘On the Road to Old Luzon’. All have been nominally dated 1904, but they could have been composed a little earlier or later.⁸¹ One song entitled ‘At Naiac’ (1904) barely made any changes to the original lyrics, as seen by the first two verses:

By the moss-grown church of Naiac, lookin’ lazy at the sea,
There’s a gugu girl a-sitting and I know she longs for me,
The wind blows through the palm trees and I think I hear her say
Come you back you Yankee soldier, come you back to me today.

Her petticoat is yellow, her camisa it is green,
And her nombre is Teresa, my chocolate-coloured Queen,
I saw her first a’ smoking of an overgrown cheroot,
And a’wasting dainty kisses that should be a soldier’s loot’.⁸²

The word ‘gugu’ (or ‘goo-goo’), a derogatory term applied to local women by American soldiers in the Philippines during this period, is thought to derive from ‘gugo’, a local tree the bark of which Filipinas used to wash their hair, in lieu of shampoo.⁸³

⁷⁹ ‘Road to Dongolay’, *The Press*, 31 July 1896.

⁸⁰ Rory MacLaren, *Canadians on the Nile, 1882-1898: Being the Adventures of the Voyageurs on the Khartoum Relief Expedition and Other Exploits* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1978), pp.142ff.

⁸¹ Thomas Walsh, *Tin Pan Alley and the Philippines: American Songs of War and Love, 1898-1946* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2013), p.177.

⁸² ‘At Naiac’, in *Historical Sketch, Constitution and Register of the Military Order of the Carabao, Together with Songs That Have Been Sung at “Wallows” in Various Places* (Washington: W.F. Roberts, 1914), pp.142-3.

⁸³ It has been suggested that ‘gugu’ eventually morphed into the all-purpose word ‘gook’, which American troops used to describe Asians from the Second World War right through to Korea and Vietnam. See David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* (New York: Hyperion, 2007), p.110.

There is a second, longer version of this song which is less romantic. After some racially disparaging and uncomplimentary comments about a ‘gugu girl’, whose ‘hair is thin and scraggy and sometimes full of fleas’, the narrator sings:

But I’ve left it all behind me, Thank the Lord, I’m miles away,
And back in God’s own country, and there I intend to stay,
And I’m learning in my old home, what all the wise folk say,
“When you hear the East a’calling, you had better stay away”.

No more have I the “dhobie”, nor the awful “prickly heat”,
I walk out of an evening, with a maiden bright and sweet,
Just give me one good Yankee girl, one I can call my own,
And gugu dames are welcome to the man who wrote the poem.⁸⁴

‘Dhobie’ is a reference to ‘dhobie itch’, a fungal infection of the groin common in the tropics.⁸⁵ The ‘man who wrote the poem’ is clearly a reference to Rudyard Kipling, who the American soldier singing the song seems to feel has an overly romantic view of Asia and Asian women.

‘O’er The Sea, Manila Way’ (1904) was composed by a woman named Rose Kidd Beere, and takes a more kindly view. It began:

By the curved Luneta seawall, facing outward from the lea
There’s a dark-eyed maiden waiting and I know she thinks of me;
For a transport’s in the harbour, and she sighs as she would say,
Come, my ‘Mericano soldier; Come you back Manila way.⁸⁶

The debt owed to Kipling’s poem by all these songs is obvious. It is not clear which musical setting is meant when ‘On the Road to Mandalay’ is cited as the tune, but in his detailed study of *Tin Pan Alley and the Philippines* Thomas Walsh suggested that at least two settings were well known to the US Volunteers. One was the 1898 version by Henry Trevannion and the other was the version by Oley Speaks. Most of the sheet music of Trevannion’s version which was sold in the US after 1898 featured a cover photograph of Brigadier General Charles King, the commander of the US Eighth Army Corps in the Philippines. This may have simply been clever advertising, but it suggests that Trevannion’s was the preferred setting.⁸⁷ In any case, as it did not appear until 1907, Speaks’ version would have been released too late to be adopted by many of the US soldiers posted to the Philippines during this period.

⁸⁴ ‘At Naiac (Another version)’, in *Historical Sketch, Constitution and Register of the Military Order of the Carabao*, pp.144-5.

⁸⁵ The name derives from *dhobi*, the Hindi term for a washerman. It was used throughout colonial India and, as seen from this song, elsewhere in the region. ‘Dhobi itch’ (or *tinea cruris*) was so named because of a common but erroneous belief that the infection was communicated by clothes from the wash.

⁸⁶ Cited in Walsh, *Tin Pan Alley and the Philippines*, p.186.

⁸⁷ Trevannion, ‘On the Road to Mandalay’ (1898). Sheet music of ‘The Mandalay’, produced by the same publisher, also featured a photograph of General King on the front cover.

An imitation of another kind was a broadside poem written by Lawrence Harris about the great San Francisco Fire of 1906. It included the memorable verse:

Put me somewhere west of East Street where there's nothing left but dust,
Where the lads are all a'hustlin' and where everything's gone bust,
Where the buildings that are standin' sort of blink and blindly stare
At the damnedest finest ruins ever gazed on anywhere.⁸⁸

Being written to the rhythm of Kipling's ballad, the poem could also be sung to one of its musical settings.

Perhaps the best known spoof of the poem, however, was by the British music hall comedian Billy Bennett, who was popular during the 1920s and 1930s. Billed as 'almost a gentleman', he specialised in parodies of well-known Victorian dramatic monologues and poems. In fact, he performed two versions of 'Mandalay', the first of which began:

By an old whitewashed pagoda
Looking Eastwards towards the West
There's a Burma girl, from Bermondsey
Sits in a sparrow's nest.

She's as pretty as a picture
Though she's lost one eye, they say
Through the Black Hole of Calcutta
Perhaps the keyhole of Bombay.⁸⁹

The second version proceeded along similar lines, and included the verses:

On the Road to Mandalay, where you'll see the fried fish play.
They bring their own chips with them when it's early closing day.
There's Ghurkas doing mazurkas with baboons inside their bunks,
There's kangaroos with carpet bags and elephants with trunks,
And fat men dump their 'ombongpong' inside their Clapham Juncs
On The Road to Mandalay...

There's a farm on the horizon, looking eastwards to Siam,
We could have some ham and eggs there, if they had some eggs and ham
They've only got one hen, they call her "Mandy" by the way,
They found out she's a cock – that's why they can't make Mandy lay.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ L.W. Harris 'The Damnedest Finest Ruins: After Kipling's "On The Road to Mandalay"' (San Francisco: A.B. Pierson, 1906).

⁸⁹ Billy Bennett, 'Mandalay (1)', *Make Em Laugh*, at <http://monologues.co.uk/003/Mandalay.htm>. A Billy Bennett monologue of 'Mandalay' was revived and included on a 1975 EMI LP record based on the popular BBC TV comedy series 'It 'Aint Half Hot Mum', which portrayed the activities of a Royal Artillery Concert Party in India and Burma during the Second World War.

⁹⁰ Billy Bennett, 'Mandalay (2)', *Make Em Laugh*, at http://monologues.co.uk/003/Mandalay_2.htm. The slang term 'ombongpong', current before the Second World War, had several meanings, none of which are

Bennett always appeared on stage in dishevelled evening dress. In the US around the same time, the African-American baritone George Dewey Washington also performed as a 'gentleman tramp', in a tattered suit. He made Oley Speaks' setting of 'Mandalay' his vaudeville signature tune, but sang it in a conventional manner.

Criticisms and Acclaim

Despite its fame, 'Mandalay' continued to attract controversy. After Rudyard Kipling's death in 1936, for example, the author and social commentator George Orwell claimed that his enormous popularity was 'essentially middle class' and that 'Mandalay' was 'something worse than a jingle'.⁹¹ This charge was summarily dismissed by T.S. Eliot, among others.⁹² The author and critic Osbert Sitwell opined in 1943 that 'only a hairbreadth divides the poem from hopeless vulgarity'.⁹³ Reflecting postcolonial evaluations of Kipling and his works, modern authors have registered different concerns. In 1970, for example, Charles Carrington observed that;

Of Burma, Kipling knew nothing at first-hand, until he called in a sea-going liner at Rangoon and Moulmein for a few days in 1889. Accordingly, we find his Burmese pieces somewhat remote and romantic.⁹⁴

Another of Kipling's biographers, Charles Allen, suggested in 2009 that 'Mandalay' had not aged well and now sounded 'almost maudlin'.⁹⁵ The scholar Thomas Pinney has called 'On the Road to Mandalay' 'the most notorious' of Kipling's musical settings.⁹⁶

Yet even Orwell, a trenchant critic of Kipling, imperialism, the British colonial presence in Burma and indeed of Mandalay city itself, confessed that he was 'seduced' by Kipling's work.⁹⁷ He is reputed to have told the British author and critic Malcolm Muggeridge that 'Mandalay' was his favourite poem.⁹⁸ Sitwell too conceded that 'some kind of spiritual Bovril, as well as the energy of the writing, enables you to derive

clear. However, most seem to have been related to obesity, or to specific parts of the body, such as the chest, stomach or posterior.

⁹¹ George Orwell, 'On Kipling's Death', in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds), *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, Vol.1, An Age Like This, 1920-1940* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p.183.

⁹² Eliot, *A Choice of Kipling's Verse*, p.6.

⁹³ Osbert Sitwell, 'Vulgarity in Literature: Modern Manifestations', *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 September 1943, p.438.

⁹⁴ Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work*, p.143.

⁹⁵ Charles Allen, *Kipling Sahib: India and the Making of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Abacus, 2009), p.307.

⁹⁶ Thomas Pinney, 'On Collecting Kipling', in D.A. Richards (ed), *Rudyard Kipling: The Books I Leave Behind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p.15.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Michael Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorised Biography* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), pp.79-112. In his novel about Burma, Orwell described Mandalay as a most disagreeable place famous for five products all beginning with 'P', namely pagodas, pariah dogs, priests, pigs and prostitutes. George Orwell, *Burmese Days* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1934), p.237.

⁹⁸ John Rodden, *George Orwell: The Politics of Literary Reputation* (Somerset: Transaction, 2002), p.125.

comfort and sustenance from it'.⁹⁹ This may help account for the fact that, over the years, the poem has continued to 'stay by one', as Orwell once put it. Set to music, it has been sung 'wherever songs are sung'.¹⁰⁰ This is thanks to what T.S. Eliot called Kipling's 'consummate gift of word, phrase and rhythm', linked to what Bonamy Dobree has described as 'rousing, singable tunes'.¹⁰¹

In addition to its simple lyrics, catchy rhythm and romantic theme, there were other reasons why 'Mandalay' and its musical settings became so popular. Publication of the poem followed a resurgence of interest in folk songs and ballads in Britain, including the use of vernacular language. It also appeared at a time when the 'previously oft-despised and feared "common soldier" increasingly became an object of concern and reform'.¹⁰² Until Cobb's musical settings of Kipling's *Barrack-Room Ballads* in the early 1890s, 'there was an immense gulf between the fighting man as depicted in drawing-room ballads and the British Army soldier (for whom, in reality, there was widespread contempt both among the bourgeoisie and his own commanding officers)'.¹⁰³ Helping to bridge this gulf were the music halls. In glorifying 'Tommy Atkins', their song lists represented the soldier in all his forms, from the noble and romantic to the earthy and libidinous. 'Mandalay' benefited from all these developments.

In his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', T.S. Eliot spoke of how, when a new literary work appeared, every existing work was somehow modified by it and the whole scene subtly rearranged.¹⁰⁴ He was speaking purely of literature, and his comment can be applied to Kipling's oeuvre, but the poem 'Mandalay' did this in another sense too. Despite all the critical comments that have appeared over the past 125 years or so, both the poem and its musical settings have been enormously influential. The poem irrevocably altered public perceptions of Burma, and by extension Western notions of the 'Far East'. In different ways, and to different degrees, its musical settings coloured almost all the popular songs and tunes about Asia that followed. As a survey of Burma-related songs and tunes shows, Kipling's images became fixed firmly in people's minds and inspired dozens of composers and lyricists in the UK, the US and elsewhere.

It would be going too far to claim that 'Mandalay' alone was responsible for the outpouring of songs and tunes during the colonial period that related in some way to Burma. By 1890, there was already a long association between the Orient and Western music, part of which dwelt on relationships between Asian women and Western men. Also, *Barrack Room Ballads* not only appeared at the height of Britain's imperial

⁹⁹ Sitwell, 'Vulgarity in Literature'. Bovril is a meat extract used for hot drinks and as flavouring in food.

¹⁰⁰ Orwell, 'On Kipling's Death', p.183, and 'Road to Mandalay', *The Land* (Sydney, Australia), 28 September 1928.

¹⁰¹ Eliot, *A Choice of Kipling's Verse*, p.11, and Bonamy Dobree, *Rudyard Kipling: Realist and Fabulist* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.212.

¹⁰² J.M. MacKenzie (ed), *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850-1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p.50 and p.58.

¹⁰³ Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois*, p.172.

¹⁰⁴ T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), pp.3-11. See also Douglas Kerr, 'Orwell, Kipling, and Empire', *The Orwell Prize*, at <http://theorwellprize.co.uk/george-orwell/about-orwell/douglas-kerr-orwell-kipling-and-empire/>

expansion, but it also coincided with a number of social movements in the UK and further afield, to do with questions of race, religion and gender. In addition, soon after 'Mandalay' was published, the popular music industry underwent a radical transformation. Technical advances in the recording, marketing and broadcasting of music led to the globalisation of Western music and the appearance of a mass culture that affected most countries, including Burma. Even so, assisted by all those developments, Kipling's ballad had a remarkable impact which is still being felt today.

In literature too, the ballad has long been a favourite of publishers and authors.¹⁰⁵ If one dips into the websites of a few prominent on-line booksellers they reveal almost 30 works with their main titles drawn directly from Kipling's poem. In addition to several named *The Road to Mandalay*, they encompass such variations as *The Road from Mandalay*, *Back to Mandalay*, *Red Roads to Mandalay*, *The Road Past Mandalay*, *On the Back Road to Mandalay* and *The Road from Rangoon to Mandalay*. There are similar titles in French, German and other languages. The publication dates of these works range from the early 20th century right through to the present day. The list includes novels, travelogues, autobiographies, histories, collections of poetry, science fiction stories and books of photographs. Also, 'Mandalay' has long been used to punctuate stories about Burma in the news media and to illuminate longer works.¹⁰⁶ This is in addition to the dozen or so feature films, documentaries and travel guides, all named with the obvious intention of capitalising on the popularity of Kipling's poem, or at least the likelihood that its exotic and historical associations would be recognised and acknowledged.¹⁰⁷

Once it became well known, the name 'Mandalay' acquired commercial value in other spheres. It was applied to condiments and cocktails, ships and streets, buildings and businesses. In 1907, for example, H.J. Heinz invested heavily in his Mandalay Sauce which, despite earlier criticisms of Burmese food, sought to replicate some of the 'spicy garlic smells' described by Kipling.¹⁰⁸ A drink based on rum and fruit juice was dubbed 'A Night in Old Mandalay'. It is stretching a point, but at one stage 'Manderley', believed by many to be a variant spelling of 'Mandalay', was reputed to be the most popular house name in the UK. In fact, the ubiquity of the name was more likely due to the popularity of Daphne de Maurier's 1938 novel *Rebecca* (and Alfred Hitchcock's 1940 film adaption of the same name), in which 'Manderley' was the name of the fictional country estate owned by the main character. Even so, the opening line of the novel, 'Last

¹⁰⁵ Between 1925 and 1926, for example, the New York publishers Doubleday released a 14-volume set of Kipling's works entitled *The Mandalay Edition of the Works of Rudyard Kipling*, 14 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1925-6).

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, 'No road to Mandalay', *The Economist*, 28 September 2000, at <http://www.economist.com/node/381788>; and Patrick Forsyth, *A Land Like None You Know: Awe and wonder in Burma on the road to Mandalay* (Bangkok: Bangkok Books, 2008).

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Selth, 'Burma, Hollywood and the Politics of Entertainment', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, Vol.23, No.3, June 2009, pp.321-34.

¹⁰⁸ Q.R. Skrabec, *H.J. Heinz: A Biography* (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2009), p.177. There was also a 'Burma Sauce' made by the London firm of White, Cottell and Company, which was popular between the two world wars. It was advertised as 'The only "Sauce" I dare give father!'

night I dreamt I went to Manderley again', has been likened by some commentators to the wish expressed by the British soldier in Kipling's poem to return to Mandalay.¹⁰⁹

During the colonial period, Burma never achieved quite the same status in the mind of the British public as Sax Rohmer's 'mysterious orient', or Walter de la Mare's 'heart-beguiling Araby', but it became an easily recognisable reference point, representing exotic places far away, full of mystery and promise.¹¹⁰ This was particularly true of Mandalay. Like Timbuktu, Samarkand and other semi-mythical places that captured the popular imagination of the West during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the old royal capital became a powerful symbol. After passing through the city in the 1920s, for example, Somerset Maugham observed:

First of all Mandalay is a name. For there are places whose names from some accident of history or happy association have an independent magic and perhaps the wise man would never visit them, for the expectations they arouse can hardly be realised ... Mandalay has its name; the falling cadence of the lovely word has gathered about itself the chiaroscuro of romance.¹¹¹

Maugham felt that the very name Mandalay 'informs the sensitive fancy'. To his mind, it was not possible for anyone to write it down 'without a quickening of the pulse and at his heart the pain of unsatisfied desire'.¹¹² Such was the power of its accumulated associations. The 'magic' described by Maugham was in large part derived from Kipling's ballad, and helped shape the reception given to later musical compositions with Oriental themes.

To use Nicoleta Medrea's memorable phrase, during the Victorian and Edwardian eras Rudyard Kipling 'colonised the imagination' of the West.¹¹³ His ballad 'Mandalay' captured 'the psychic energy of empire'.¹¹⁴ It became firmly fixed in popular culture and endured into the 21st century. It did not matter if accuracy suffered in the process. By the 1930s, Peter Dawson was seriously claiming that 'No man knew or saw more, in and about India and Burma, than Rudyard Kipling'.¹¹⁵ During the Second World War, correspondents in Burma repeatedly invoked 'Mandalay' in stories, confident that their readership would immediately make the connection. After a visit to Burma in 1951, Norman Lewis wrote: 'Mandalay. In the name there was a euphony which beckoned to

¹⁰⁹ Most critics argue that 'Manderley' in fact derives from 'Menabilly', the name of Du Maurier's Cornish home. See, for example, Vishwas Gaitonde, 'The Art of the Sentence', *Tin House*, 25 September 2012, at <http://www.tinhouse.com/blog/17326/the-art-of-the-sentence-vishwas-r-gaitonde.html>

¹¹⁰ See, for example, David Scott, 'Rohmer's "Orient" – Pulp Orientalism?', *Oriental Archive*, Vol.80, No.3, 2012; and 'Araby', words by Walter de la Mare and music by C.A. Gibbs (London: J. Curwen and Sons, 1924). De la Mare's original poem is dated 1919.

¹¹¹ W.S. Maugham, *The Gentleman in the Parlour: A Record of a Journey from Rangoon to Haiphong* (London: William Heinemann, 1930), p.27. See also Janet Aldis, *Love and Sunshine in the East* (London: Herbert Joseph, 1930), p.3.

¹¹² Maugham, *The Gentleman in the Parlour*, p.27.

¹¹³ N.A. Medrea, 'Kipling and the Colonization of Imagination', *Studia Universitatis Petru Maior - Philologia*, No.13, July 2012, pp.320-28.

¹¹⁴ Lycett (ed), *Kipling Abroad*, p.78.

¹¹⁵ Peter Dawson, *Fifty Years of Song* (London: Hutchinson, 1951), p.106.

the imagination'.¹¹⁶ Hugh Tinker could have expanded the scope of his observation when he stated in 1957, 'to the average Englishman Burma conjured up one poem and perhaps a short story by Kipling — Kipling, who spent three days in Burma'.¹¹⁷ Writing in 2002, an American travel writer took a less generous view: 'Rare is the book about Burma', he wrote, 'that doesn't gush the obligatory line or two of Kipling!'.¹¹⁸

This complex amalgam of fact and fantasy, realism and romance, in the public imagination of the West was captured in 2004 by the author and Burma watcher Emma Larkin. In her book *Secret Histories*, in which she retraced George Orwell's footsteps in Burma, she confessed to feeling something of the 'independent magic' of Mandalay:

I always find it impossible to say the name 'Mandalay' out loud without having at least a small flutter of excitement. For many foreigners the name conjures up irresistible images of lost oriental kingdoms and tropical splendour. The unofficial Poet Laureate of British colonialism, Rudyard Kipling, is partly responsible for this, through his well-loved poem 'Mandalay'.¹¹⁹

These sentiments are clearly widely held. As demonstrated by countless modern musicians, authors, film makers, journalists, tour company operators and travel guides, Kipling's ballad is widely recognised, and still holds enormous appeal. It continues to evoke strong responses among all those who read the ballad or, more likely, hear it sung. As George Orwell once wrote:

Unless one is merely a snob and a liar it is impossible to say that no one who cares for poetry could not get any pleasure out of such lines as:
'For the wind is in the palm trees, and the temple bells they say, / 'Come you back, you British soldier, come you back to Mandalay!'.¹²⁰

There is a modern footnote to this story. When Burmese opposition leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi began to challenge the country's military government after the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, Kipling's ballad was used against her. The generals likened her to the 'unpatriotic' Burma girl who turned her back on her own countrymen (and, by implication, her own country). As David Steinberg has explained:

They cite the marriage of Aung San Suu Kyi to a British academic, Michael Aris, as disqualifying her from leading the country. This colonial issue, as exemplified in Rudyard Kipling's poem "The Road to Mandalay" (and its paean to Burmese

¹¹⁶ Norman Lewis, *Golden Earth: Travels in Mandalay* (London: Eland Books, 1983), p.81.

¹¹⁷ Hugh Tinker, *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First years of Independence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p.351.

¹¹⁸ Steven Martin, 'Orwell's Burma', at http://orwell.ru/library/novels/Burmese_Days/english/e_sm_ob.

¹¹⁹ Emma Larkin, *Secret Histories: Finding George Orwell in a Burmese Teashop* (London: John Murray, 2004), p.10.

¹²⁰ George Orwell, 'Rudyard Kipling', in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds), *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, Vol.2, My Country Right or Left, 1940-1943* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p.226.

women who had relations with British soldiers) and George Orwell's *Burmese Days* (whose hero had a Burmese mistress), thus continues today.¹²¹

Aung San Suu Kyi has always admired Kipling, to the point of naming one of her sons Kim, after the novel. An extract from 'Mandalay' was read out at her wedding. She has also said that 'the poem ['If'] that in England is often dismissed as the epitome of imperialist bombast is a great poem for dissidents'.¹²² She has even distributed a Burmese translation of the poem to inspire her supporters.¹²³ Rather than illustrate Aung San Suu Kyi's abandonment of Burma, however, all this suggests quite the opposite. Indeed, some would say that the wheel had come full circle.

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¹²¹ D.I. Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.39-40.

¹²² Cited by Bart Moore-Gilbert, 'Kipling and post-colonial literature', in H.J. Booth, *The Cambridge Companion to Rudyard Kipling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.166.

¹²³ The report that she actually translated the poem is incorrect. See Justin Wintle, *Perfect Hostage: A Life of Aung San Suu Kyi* (London: Hutchinson, 2007), p.309; and Timothy Garton Ash, 'Beauty and the Beast in Burma', in *Facts Are Subversive: Political Writing from a Decade Without a Name* (London: Atlantic Books, 2009), pp.270-1.