

Representing Buddhism in British Media and Popular Culture, 1875-1895

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1 Introduction

"The sudden popularity of Buddhism among some classes in Christian lands is one of the remarkable signs of the times."

The Free Church Monthly and Missionary Record, June 2, 1884.¹

The period between 1875 and the end of the century witnessed an unprecedented surge in popular interest in Buddhism in England. Lectures, sermons, colonial exhibitions, works for a non-specialized readership, and above all the periodical and newspaper press disseminated new information and generated increasing excitement about Buddhism among the general public. The streets, clubs, and drawing rooms of London bore witness to this interest: almost weekly lectures on Buddhism were advertised at the most popular lecture halls and clubs for both men and women, while hugely popular exhibitions and native villages drew large crowds to meander through Buddhist temples and observe Burmese and Singhalese monks praying and carrying out rituals. Plays, poems, literature, and even musical pieces featured the life of the Buddha or Buddhist themes. Whether it was in the guise of a cocktail named the *Light of Asia*² or a racehorse named Buddha,³ "Buddhism" had penetrated popular discourse and arguably achieved something of trend status among fashionable urbanites of London. Among the working class, too, Buddhism had gained a foothold in the form of popular lectures. Far from being shunned or denigrated by the established church, enthusiasm for the Buddha as a religious figure reached as far as the pulpit of Westminster Church in the Christmas sermon of 1879, an incident that caused the satirical *Punch* to gibe:

Clergymen in the Church of England work for their bread and butter. After his sermon in Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day, Dean Stanley may be said to be working in the Establishment for his bread and *Buddha*.⁴

This interest did not go unnoticed by contemporaries. Indeed, by the 1880s seemingly every newspaper and magazine was commenting on the current enthusiasm for Buddhism. (Whether this was bemused, amused, or accompanied by the wringing of hands depended on the publication.) Buddhism "seems daily to be exciting more interest among us," observed the *Birmingham Daily Post* in 1881 (incredulously citing

¹ *The Free Church Monthly and Missionary Record*, June 2, 1884; Issue 30: 181.

² Untitled. *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Wednesday, December 18, 1889; Issue 10661: 8.

³ "The Turf." *Glasgow Herald*, Monday, November 23, 1891; Issue 280.

⁴ "From To-day's Punch" *Northern Echo* (Darlington, England), Wednesday, January 7, 1880; Issue 3112. See also: "Dean Stanley on Christmas Day," *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (Manchester, England), Saturday, December 27, 1879; pg. 5; Issue 7213.

"the vague desire which some people seem to feel to substitute it for Christianity"),⁵ but the same paper would refer with less reactionism, almost a decade later, to those fashionable crowds who "gush about Buddhism."⁶ In 1884 the *Daily News* noted that "the public rises eagerly... at any literary fly dressed with some scraps of an old religion revived, like Buddhism,"⁷ while *Funny Folks* comic magazine spoke of a "Buddha Boom" in "Buddha-bitten London."⁸ "The sudden popularity of Buddhism among some classes in Christian lands is one of the remarkable signs of the times,"⁹ noted a missionary magazine in 1884; meanwhile the London correspondent for the *Liverpool Mercury* asked his readers rhetorically in 1885, "Who ever expected to be hailed in a London club, as I was the other day, with the exclamation, 'I am a Buddhist'? Who expected to hear a cultivated English gentleman in a railway carriage discourse to a lady, as I heard one last week, on the superior certainties of the Buddhist teaching?"¹⁰ The *Graphic* called Buddhism "a fashionable fad" in 1889.¹¹ *The Pall Mall* noted in 1891 the inescapability of "chatter about the Nirvana"¹² and (in a different article) referred to the current period as "days of Buddhist revival."¹³ The fashion travelled under different names: in 1883 the *Graphic* referred to the "newly fashionable eclectic Buddhism"¹⁴ but in 1887 the same paper was calling the trend "Neo-Buddhism,"¹⁵ while "esoteric Buddhism" had of course long since entered common parlance. In 1890 the *Dublin Review* even coined a new verb to describe those (like Olcott) who were "working with real zeal to *Buddhize*" the West.¹⁶

One aspect is clear from this flurry of social commentary: Buddhism had captured the popular imagination. What's more, interest in Buddhism was clearly no longer limited to the elites who could afford membership in posh clubs and the routine purchase of gilt leather volumes; nor was it limited to the male intelligentsia, as is (often tacitly) assumed.¹⁷ By the mid-1880s, "Buddhism"—or we had better say the

⁵ "Periodicals for December." *Birmingham Daily Post*, Thursday, December 16, 1880; Issue 7004.

⁶ "New Books." *Birmingham Daily Post*, Friday, January 1, 1892.

⁷ *Daily News* (London), Wednesday, January 2, 1884; Issue 11769.

⁸ "The 'Buddha' Boom." *Funny Folks* (London), Saturday, February 02, 1884; p. 38; Issue 479.

⁹ Untitled. *The Free Church Monthly and Missionary Record* (Edinburgh), June 2, 1884; pg. 181; Issue 30.

¹⁰ "Our London Correspondence." *Liverpool Mercury*, Thursday, February 26, 1885; Issue 11585.

¹¹ "Topics of the Week." *The Graphic* (London), Saturday, June 29, 1889; Issue 1022.

¹² "Sir Edwin Arnold's New Poem." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London), Saturday, February 14, 1891; Issue 8083.

¹³ Untitled. *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Thursday, December 24, 1891; Issue 8350.

¹⁴ "New Novels." *The Graphic*, Saturday, September 15, 1883; Issue 720.

¹⁵ "Recent Poetry and Verse." *The Graphic*, Saturday, March 5, 1887; Issue 901.

¹⁶ Harlez, C De, "The Buddhist Propaganda in Christian Countries," *The Dublin Review*, July 1890; emphasis mine.

¹⁷ J. J. Clarke, for example, writes of "considerable growth in the study of Eastern religious and philosophical ideas... among the *educated public*" and "interest among *intellectuals*" (emphasis mine). Clarke does not need

Victorian idea of it—had obtained a mass-market appeal that extended well into the rapidly expanding middle class and increasingly even to the working class. Women, too, found reason to appeal to Buddhism for their own interests and purposes; for example, there is evidence that Buddhism was an increasingly popular topic for lectures at women's clubs.¹⁸ For those of any class or gender fascinated by life in the colonies of India, Ceylon, or Burma, a burgeoning number of reports, books, and travelogues about the furthest-flung territories of the empire transmitted new images and impressions about Buddhism and its colonial adherents. In sum: for the late Victorians, Buddhism was no longer an abstract field of speculation and inquiry for the philosophically minded, philologically inclined, or religiously uncertain. It had become a household term with a multiplicity of meanings, associations, and uses.

It is my contention that existing academic studies have not adequately appreciated or explained this popularization; indeed, most scholars, preoccupied with the Spence Hardys and Rhys Davids of history, have satisfied themselves with a hasty gesture towards Buddhism's surprising wider popular appeal. Its ubiquity in late nineteenth century popular discourse and the frequency with which it appears in popular media have to date been inadequately explained. This dissertation addresses two very fundamental questions: *how* and *why* a dramatic popularization of Buddhism took place in the decades from 1875 to 1895. I first ask how such a rapid dissemination of information and ideas about Buddhism could occur in a relatively short period of time. While there was indeed an explosion of information and learned books about Buddhism in this period,¹⁹ there is no evidence to suggest that, say, the pricey and unwieldy tomes of Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East* were flying off the shelves.²⁰ Even a work as popular as Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* cannot alone account for the extent to which Buddhism saturated popular discourse; frankly, even generously estimated sales figures for Arnold's works pale in comparison with other

to state outright that he is thinking mainly of a male audience; the thinkers and scholars selected for his study demonstrate this clearly enough. J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁸ See chapter 6.

¹⁹ In 1875 the *Examiner* boasted, "there are now in the four leading languages of Europe upwards of one thousand works on Buddhism, and a great proportion of these are by men of sagacity and culture." "Literature." *The Examiner* (London, England), Saturday, June 5, 1875; Issue 3514.

²⁰ Müller - presumably only half-facetiously - recalled doubting the market viability of his works when he first announced the *SBOE* series: "And if you should succeed in assembling such a noble army of martyrs [i.e., translator-scholars], where in these days will you find the publisher to publish twenty-four or forty-eight portly volumes, volumes which are meant to be studied, not to be skimmed, which will never be ordered by Mudie or Smith [i.e., the popular lending libraries], and which conscientious reviewers will prefer to cut up rather than to cut open?" F Max Müller, "Forgotten Bibles." *The Nineteenth Century*, June 1884; 15, 88; 1004-1022.

bestsellers of the 1880s.²¹ As I will demonstrate, a full understanding of the transmission of ideas about Buddhism takes us far beyond the pages of academic journals and learned translations, even book-length popularizations, and into the realm of the period's ubiquitous and opinion-setting periodicals and newspapers, even into the world of comic papers and illustrated magazines. That the mass media might have played an instrumental role in this phenomenon is not surprising: after all, scholars consistently assert that newspapers and periodicals were the primary means and mode of discourse in the nineteenth century.²² What is surprising, however, is that the role of the popular press in shaping the conversation around Buddhism has not yet been appreciated or analyzed in academic discussions.

The first question begs the second: *why* did Buddhism achieve such a boom in popularity? Londoners were not, after all, "chatting" about Islam or even Hinduism; there was no "Mohammed-bitten London." This suggests that certain factors and qualities of this newly "discovered" old religion made it irresistibly interesting for late Victorians. I am not the first to address this question; there is in fact a standard set of explanations, namely, that the appeal of Buddhism for intellectual elites can be attributed to factors including secularization, the Victorian "crisis of faith," and the foreword march of progress, rationality, evolution, and science (arguments explored in my literature review). Yet the mass media disclose surprisingly little evidence that secularism and science were really so pressing or influential in driving popular interest in Buddhism. One peruses the popular media sources in vain looking for the explicit signs and symptoms of religious crisis and shaken philosophical foundations (popular discourse has, frankly, other concerns and purposes). Furthermore, in contrast to previous studies, this study is not restricted to Buddhism's adherents and sympathizers (or their sparring partners in conservative pulpits); it includes discourse about Buddhism in all its diverse manifestations, not just overt polemics. My dissertation therefore considers the myriad factors, both domestic and colonial, that influenced the popularization of Buddhism, especially in the booming imperial metropolis of London,

²¹ For example, the publishing sensation of the 1880s, *Robert Elsmere*, sold 40,000 copies in the UK in its first year alone. See Erin A. Smith, "Religion and Popular Print Culture," in *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture*, ed. Christine Bold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 277-292.

²² Scott Bennett has called the nineteenth century a "journalizing society" and noted that during this era, the press was the "chief means of carrying forward the discourse by which a society comes to know itself." Scott Bennett, "The Bibliographic Control of Victorian Periodicals," in *Victorian Periodicals: A Guide to Research*, ed. Jerry Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel (New York: Modern Language Assoc. of America, 1978), 21-51.

from 1875 to 1895. Specifically, I foreground forces such as the ubiquity and pervasiveness of mass media as well as popular imperialism, urbanization, commercialization, and the rise of a dominant popular culture.

This dissertation situates itself within the wealth of existing academic studies on the nineteenth century European encounter with Buddhist ideas; yet it carves out a small niche for new insights by considering hitherto neglected materials from popular mass media. The next section discusses the main themes and arguments of the existing academic discussion with the goal of locating my own work within it. I conclude that a reassessment of the period using a wealth of newly digitized mass media materials is not only justified, but necessary, and can provide additional insights and nuance even in this well-traversed field of inquiry.

1.1 Literature Review

Philip Almond's 1988 monograph on the British nineteenth century "discovery" of Buddhism argued that the mid-Victorian generation's views on the religion were defined by the highly reified and text-focused approach of missionaries, orientalist, and academics.²³ Almond's study, based on an analysis of the research, translations, and scholarship that took place in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, has become the prevailing interpretation of the period and the standard work on the subject.²⁴ There is now general agreement that the nineteenth century awareness and understanding of Buddhism was heavily indebted to the pioneering researches and linguistic foundation laid by Western missionaries such as Samuel Beal and Spence Hardy.²⁵ In a second phase, missionary publications were extended by the translations and interpretations of scholars of Buddhism and Pāli, especially Rhys Davids, who founded the Pāli Text Society in 1881.²⁶ Max Müller, whose interests were of course much broader than Buddhism alone, played a decisive role in influencing his contemporaries' views on

²³ Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

²⁴ According to Google Scholar, 364 scholarly publications reference Almond's monograph. Scholars such as Tomoko Masuzawa, J. J. Clarke, Richard King, and J. Jeffrey Franklin all rely on Almond's interpretations in order to construct larger, more synthesized arguments about Orientalism and imperialism in the study of religion, especially Buddhism.

²⁵ Almond, *The British Discovery*, 42, 65, 100-114; see also Christopher Clausen, "Victorian Buddhism and the Origins of Comparative Religion," *Religion* 5.1 (1975), 2-4.

²⁶ Ananda Wickremeratne, *The Genesis of an Orientalist: Thomas William Rhys Davids and Buddhism in Sri Lanka* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1984); Charles Hallisey, "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravada Buddhism," in *Curators of the Buddha*, ed. Donald Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 31-61; and Judith Snodgrass, "Defining Modern Buddhism: Mr. and Mrs. Rhys Davids and the Pāli Text Society," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 1 (2007).

language, myth, and religion;²⁷ he likewise played a crucial role in winning public recognition for scholarship on Eastern religions and cultures.²⁸ (More recently, other scholars have also emphasized Müller's role in the imperial agenda.²⁹) Both Rhys Davids and Müller are attributed with an essential role in the creation of the new "science" of religion - a science that traced the evolutionary progress of religions in a Darwinian manner, relied almost exclusively on the comparative and philological study of religions, and enabled scholars to (in their minds) "peel away the layers of accretion and priestly corruption that hid the original form of the religion from view."³⁰

Almond's key thesis is that a "discovery" or even "imaginative creation" of Buddhism took place in the nineteenth century that enabled Western scholars to study, delineate, and classify Buddhism on the basis of translated texts; this in turn created a position of superiority from which living Buddhist adherents could be judged and criticized by Western scholars. As Almond, Tomoko Masuzawa, and others have argued, in the mid-nineteenth century Buddhism was shaped into an object of study, specifically a "taxonomic object" which allowed for "systematic definition, description, and classification" and that could then be identified and studied in the cultures that manifest it.³¹ This was accomplished through a textual reification that focused almost exclusively on the Pāli sources and was heavily influenced by the mid-century focus on the search for the origins of the tradition, reflecting the commonly held belief that later manifestations of Buddhism were degenerate.³² As Richard Horsley more explicitly argues, this focus on texts and translations was a reflection of the dominant Protestant understanding of religion, with its heavy emphasis on scripture and the written word.³³ Thus, by the middle of the century, Buddhism was essentially defined by its textual sources; Donald Lopez, Jr. sums this trend succinctly when he

²⁷ Marjorie Wheeler-Barclay, *The Science of Religion in Britain, 1860–1915* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 37-70.

²⁸ Wheeler-Barclay, *The Science of Religion in Britain*, 65. On Müller's fame and a fascinating analysis of the way he was caricatured in the media see Norman J. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 183-191.

²⁹ John R. Davis, "Friedrich Max Müller and the British Empire: A German Philologist and Imperial Culture in the Nineteenth Century," in *Transnational Networks: German Migrants in the British Empire, 1670-1914*, ed. John R. Davis, Stefan Manz, and Margrit Schulte Beerbühl (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 79-100.

³⁰ Wheeler-Barclay, *The Science of Religion in Britain*, 4.

³¹ Almond, *The British Discovery*, 12.

³² Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 126-127 and 131-132; Almond, *The British Discovery*, 25.

³³ Richard A Horsley, "Religion and Other Products of Empire," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 1 (2003): 13-44, 16.

writes that during this phase, "Buddhism was born as an object of Western knowledge."³⁴

Some nineteenth-century thinkers preferred to categorize Buddhism as a philosophy, rather than a religion, a strategy that made it less threatening and more amenable to Western modes of thought; hence there arose a "vision of a Buddhism that was essentially philosophical and atheistic."³⁵ This tendency was in fact the consequence of a long tradition of philosophy's attraction to and fascination with Buddhist ideas, especially concepts such as nirvana and emptiness, dating from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. As Urs App argues, this produced a single "Oriental philosophy" that subsumed all varieties of Buddhist and "Eastern" thought into one amalgamate whole that centered on the ideas of nothingness and emptiness.³⁶ Richard King has made similar arguments in his study of the Western attraction to a rather generic "mystical East."³⁷ In the mid-nineteenth century, scholars and religious thinkers continued to focus on the philosophical aspects of Buddhism. For example, the idea that nirvana consisted of final annihilation became a dominant interpretation and a major factor in the frequently held view that Buddhism was pessimistic.³⁸ On the whole, though, philosophical and rational interpretations may have dominated more in Germany, where a "line of rationalist interpretation" of Buddhism dominated until the First World War and where Buddhism was celebrated as a "religion of reason."³⁹

In explaining the attraction of Buddhism to the Victorians, many have resorted to an argument based on the (by no means uncontentious) thesis of nineteenth century

³⁴ Donald S. Lopez, Jr. "Introduction." *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 2, 7-8.

³⁵ Almond, *The British Discovery*, 93-96 (quote on 96).

³⁶ Clausen, "Victorian Buddhism," 9-10; Urs App, *The Cult of Emptiness: The Western Discovery of Buddhist Thought and the Invention of Oriental Philosophy* (Kyoto: UniversityMedia, 2012), which covers the 16th/17th centuries, and *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), which covers the 18th century Enlightenment. See also Roger-Pol Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness: The Philosophers and the Buddha*, trans. David Streight and Pamela Vohnson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), which focuses mainly on Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Hegel, Cousin, and Renan.

³⁷ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"* (London: Routledge, 2013).

³⁸ Almond, *The British Discovery*, 106; Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 136-146. The persistent Western association of Buddhism with pessimism is often traced to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche; see Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, 76-80.

³⁹ Martin Baumann, "Culture Contact and Valuation: Early German Buddhists and the Creation of a 'Buddhism in Protestant Shape,'" *Numen* 44, no. 3 (1997): 270-295. 279-284; see also Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, 76-77.

secularization and the oft-cited Victorian "crisis of faith."⁴⁰ Judith Snodgrass, for example, finds "the religious crisis at home" to be the most important reason for the growing popularity of Buddhism in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁴¹ Almond, too, cites growing secularism and pluralism, where Christianity was understood as only one religious tradition among many, as a primary explanation for interest in Buddhism.⁴² In this view, Buddhism appealed to Victorians because it presented an alternative to Christianity at a time when traditional beliefs were increasingly being challenged. Buddhism's humanist moral founder, its morality and code of ethics, and its alleged freedom from strict doctrine helped it to appeal to spiritually floundering Westerners. Snodgrass notes: "Buddhism's value was its alterity. It was not the radically 'not us' of Hinduism, but a religion that was recognizably similar, differing on precisely those points at issue in the current debates: the nature and necessity of God, the existence of the immortal soul, the divinity of Jesus."⁴³

In light of the frequency with which this argument is appealed to, it is necessary to take a moment here to emphasize the diversity, fervency, and energy of the late nineteenth century discourse on faith and religion. While it was certainly a period of great religious change and upheaval, a simple trajectory of secularization is no longer accepted as the dominant paradigm. Frank Turner especially highlights the irony inherent in the contrast between the robust and adamant Christianity of the era and the oft-cited crisis of faith. Turner writes:

A remarkable and virtually unnoticed irony lies at the very heart of the problem of nineteenth-century religious doubt, unbelief, and scepticism. Victorian faith entered crisis not in the midst of any attack on religion but rather during the period of the most fervent religious crusade that the British nation had known since the seventeenth century, indeed during the last great effort on the part of all denominations to Christianise Britain.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ See David L. McMahan, "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72, no. 4 (2004), 918; Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, 80-84; J. Jeffrey Franklin, "The Life of the Buddha in Victorian England," *ELH* 72, no. 4 (2005), 942.

⁴¹ Judith Snodgrass, "Discourse, Authority, Demand: The Politics of Early English Publications on Buddhism," in *TransBuddhism: Transmission, Translation, Transformation*, ed. Nalini Bhushan, Jay L. Garfield, and Abraham Zablocki (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 34.

⁴² Almond, *The British Discovery*, 139.

⁴³ Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 85-114.

⁴⁴ Frank Turner, "The Victorian Crisis of Faith and the Faith that was Lost," in *Victorian Faith in Crisis: Essays on Continuity and Change in Nineteenth-Century Religious Belief*, ed. Richard Helmstadter and Bernard Lightman (Stanford University Press, 1990), 9-38, 11.

Other scholars have likewise adamantly reasserted the centrality of Christianity for the late Victorians and effectively challenged the secularization thesis.⁴⁵ Even Callum Brown, in his influential study on the death of Christian Britain, reminds us that Britain remained "a highly religious nation" in this period, the "last puritan age," when evangelical piety, religious fervor, and missionary impulses were culturally dominant.⁴⁶ It was also an era of unprecedented missionary work, as increasing numbers of Anglican missions joined the existing evangelical missionary societies and as women, in particular, played an ever more powerful role overseas.⁴⁷ At home, religious culture was characterized by a dynamic mixture of forces: more daring freedom of exploration and expression on religious matters, on the one hand; and the meteoric rise of aggressively evangelical Christian movements such as the Salvation Army on the other.⁴⁸ This coincided with an explosion of Sunday lectures and entertainments of every conceivable variety, all vying for the time and attention (not to mention income) of the middle and upper middle classes, especially in London. It was in this context that some more daring religious leaders, including popular preacher F. D. Maurice and Archdeacon Frederic William Farrar, began to argue that even heathen religions revealed some aspects of divine truth.⁴⁹ This more nuanced understanding of the changing religious landscape of late-Victorian Britain suggests that we must reject any overly simplistic explanations that Buddhism appealed to a rapidly de-Christianizing society. Instead, we must ask how Buddhism fit into a religious milieu that was at once modernizing and diversifying, yet still adamantly, fervently, and even aggressively Christian.

⁴⁵ e.g. Timothy Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). See also Harris, *Private Lives*, 150-179.

⁴⁶ Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800 - 2000* (London: Routledge, 2009), 1, 9.

⁴⁷ The literature in this field is enormous. See e.g. Andrew F. Walls, "British Missions," in *Missionary Ideologies in the Imperialist Era, 1880-1920*, ed. Torben Christensen and William R. Hutchison (Aros, 1982), 159-166; Andrew N. Porter, ed. *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1880-1914*. (Grad Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); Andrew N. Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 225-315; and Steven Spencer Maughan, *Mighty England Do Good: Culture, Faith, Empire, and World in the Foreign Missions of the Church of England, 1850 - 1915* (Grad Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

⁴⁸ Gerald Parsons, "Introduction," in *Religion in Victorian Britain: Controversies*, ed. Gerald Parsons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 5-13.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Harris, *Theravada Buddhism*, 92-93. As Farrar wrote in 1887: "We are prepared, then, to see the light of God shining even in the heathen. In the sacred books of the East there are many lovely and holy thoughts, many flashes of subtle insight, many trains of profound speculation." F. W. Farrar, "Ethnic Inspiration," in *Non Biblical Systems of Religion: A Symposium* (London: Nisbet and Co.), 1-16, quoted in Harris 93.

In addition to religion, many scholars have argued that a decisive factor in Buddhism's increasing attraction was its perceived compatibility with modern science and Enlightenment rationality. Donald Lopez Jr., J. J. Clarke, and David L. McMahan (among others) have focused on this aspect in their scholarship. During the Victorian period, in the wake of Darwin's theses and other advances, claims that Buddhism and science were particularly compatible became dominant in Europe and America.⁵⁰ Buddhism's supposed compatibility with modern science gave it "cultural currency" in the West and was a major feature in its popularity and eventual adoption by Westerners.⁵¹ By the end of the century, the attitude that Buddhism and science were especially compatible "became almost commonplace amongst intellectuals," Clarke notes.⁵² In his book, McMahan argues that the Western focus on Buddhism's teaching of "enlightenment" reveals "a complex of meanings tied to the ideas, values, and sensibilities of the European Enlightenment: reason, empirical observation, suspicion of authority, freedom of thought, and so on."⁵³ A key part of McMahan's thesis on Buddhism and modernity is therefore the supposed congruities between Buddhism and science, which allegedly account for its appeal to the Western mind:

...various forms of Buddhism have encountered, incorporated, or been incorporated by narratives of modernity - that is, narratives emphasizing the autonomy of individual reason, the scientific method, the inevitable progress of humanity, the suspicion of tradition and traditional authority, and the reformist impulses of the Enlightenment and Protestantism.⁵⁴

The compatibility of science and Buddhism achieved particular emphasis in America, mostly thanks to the efforts of Paul Carus.⁵⁵ In his study of American Buddhism, Thomas Tweed claims: "Probably the most crucial source of Buddhism's appeal in nineteenth-century America was the perception that the tradition was more 'scientific' than other religious options."⁵⁶ Paul Carus, founder of the Open Court Press and the *Monist* magazine, advocated what he called the Religion of Science (he described the Buddha as "the first positivist, the first humanitarian, the first radical freethinker, the

⁵⁰ Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *The Scientific Buddha: His Short and Happy Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 10.

⁵¹ McMahan, "Modernity," 898. See McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 89-116.

⁵² Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, 82-83.

⁵³ McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 18.

⁵⁴ McMahan, "Modernity," 898-899.

⁵⁵ Tweed, *The American Encounter*, 60-68, 103-110. See also Martin J. Verhoeven, "Americanizing the Buddha: Paul Carus and the transformation of Asian thought," in *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 207-227.

⁵⁶ Tweed, *The American Encounter*, 103.

first iconoclast, and the first prophet of the Religion of Science.”⁵⁷) As Lopez Jr. notes, the focus on science ultimately impacted Asian Buddhism, as well, as Buddhist elites developed claims for the scientific nature of Buddhism to defend themselves against the claims of Christian missionaries.⁵⁸ John S. Harding has also analyzed the 1893 Japanese delegates to the Chicago World's Parliament of Religions, who adopted a "strategy of presenting a carefully repackaged modern Mahayana Buddhism to ideally position Japan in favorable contrast to the religions and cultures of both East and West," including a "polemical role" for science and a heavy emphasis on scientific enlightenment rationality as a particular ally in religious debate.⁵⁹

The nineteenth-century American context has been most thoroughly analyzed by Thomas Tweed, who situates the American Victorian interest within the (quite different) contemporary ethos of individualism, optimism, and growing religious pluralism.⁶⁰ Factors such as the nation's upheaval and reorganization after the Civil War, rapid industrialization, and cultural belief in progress, as well as an assault on American Protestantism's "gloomy" Calvinist origins, make the American narrative quite distinct from the British one.⁶¹ Dorothea Lüddeckens' work on the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893 is another important source on the American context.⁶² The parliament brought representatives of Buddhism from Japan and Ceylon to America long before they visited Britain.⁶³ (Surprisingly, there was an almost total dearth of coverage of the World's Parliament of Religions in the British press; consequently, it does not feature in this dissertation.)

The situation in Germany and France was more similar to that in England, as both of these countries also boasted of a long tradition of Sanskrit and Pali philology and related academic scholarship. In Germany, thinkers and philosophers including Schlegel and Schopenhauer turned to Indian wisdom and spirituality during the so-

⁵⁷ Lopez, *The Scientific Buddha*, 2.

⁵⁸ Lopez, *The Scientific Buddha*, 10.

⁵⁹ John S. Harding, *Mahayana Phoenix: Japan's Buddhists at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions* (Peter Lang, 2008), 117-136.

⁶⁰ Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (3rd revised edition, Boston: Shambhala, 1992).

⁶¹ Tweed, *The American Encounter*, 80, 134-135.

⁶² Dorothea Lüddeckens, *Das Weltparlament Der Religionen. Strukturen Interreligiöser Begegnung Im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 116-162.

⁶³ Richard Hughes Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009). See also e.g. Lüddeckens, Dorothea. *Das Weltparlament Der Religionen. Strukturen Interreligiöser Begegnung Im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002).

called Oriental Renaissance.⁶⁴ Among Orientalist scholars, Hermann Oldenberg contributed significantly to the translation and publication of Pali source texts; Oldenberg's widely-read 1881 monograph "*Buddha. Sein Leben. Seine Lehre. Seine Gemeinde.*" concerns itself with the same search for origins as the works of Rhys Davids and others of the period.⁶⁵ These scholars and philosophers in turn inspired later Buddhist enthusiasts including translator Karl Eugen Neumann, Paul Dahlke (founder of a demythologized "Neo-Buddhism"), and Georg Grimm (whose 1915 work on Buddhism as a religion of reason became one of the most popular German-language works on the subject).⁶⁶ As was true of England, Martin Baumann notes that this first phase of German interest in Buddhism was "dominated by ethical and intellectual interests."⁶⁷

Histories of Buddhism in France have been compiled by Henri de Lubac and Frédéric Lenoir.⁶⁸ In France, Eugène Burnouf's 1844 *L'introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien* was one of the first to present Buddhism as a coherent system for a Western audience. Arguably, *L'introduction* defined the tone and direction of studies of Buddhism for the next century; its readers included Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Thoreau.⁶⁹ Jules Barthélemy-Saint-Hilaire's *La Buddha et sa Religion*, 1860, written by a clergyman for the express purpose of discrediting Buddhism in comparison to Christianity, also found a wide readership. The British popular media that I examined for this dissertation presents some tantalizing hints that Buddhism also underwent a similar popularization process in France, especially in Paris; it would be worthwhile for another scholar to investigate whether this was the case. Paris, too, was the site of

⁶⁴ Michael von Brück and Whalen Lai, *Buddhismus und Christentum* (München: Beck, 1997), 200. See also: Martin Baumann, "Buddhism in Europe: past, present, prospects," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, ed. Prebish and Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002): 85-105, esp. 85-86; Baumann, "Creating a European path to nirvana: historical and contemporary developments of Buddhism in Europe," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 10.1 (1995): 55-70; and Baumann, "Culture Contact and Valuation," 274-275.

⁶⁵ Heinz Bechert, *Der Buddhismus in Süd- Und Südostasien Geschichte Und Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2013), 237. Baumann, *Deutsche Buddhisten*, 50-64.

⁶⁶ Bechert, *Der Buddhismus*, 251.

⁶⁷ Martin Baumann, "The Transplantation of Buddhism to Germany: Processive Modes and Strategies of Adaptation." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 6, no. 1 (1994): 35-61; 36. See also von Brück and Lai, *Buddhismus und Christentum*, 201-202.

⁶⁸ Henri de Lubac, *La Rencontre Du Bouddhisme et de l'Occident* (Paris: Aubier, 1952). Frédéric Lenoir, *La rencontre du bouddhisme et de l'occident* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 2011). In Lenoir's work, see especially chapters 2 ("Découverte intellectuelle du bouddhisme (1780-1875)") and 3 "soterisme et modernisme bouddhique (1875-1960)."

⁶⁹ See the introduction by Donald S. Lopez, Jr. in his translation of Burnouf's *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism* (trans. Donald Lopez, Jr. and Katia Boufetrille, University of Chicago Press, 2010), 1-39. Lopez calls the work "the most influential work on Buddhism to be written during the nineteenth century," claiming it "set the course for the academic study of Buddhism... for the next hundred years" (1).

several world expositions, including the Exposition Universelle of 1878 and 1889⁷⁰; likewise, several of the entertainments discussed in chapter four (including Hagenbeck's native exhibitions as well as Sarah Bernhardt's Buddhist play) were performed/presented in Paris, as well.

Since the 1990s, the study of Buddhism's modern development and transmission has shifted gears as a growing percentage of works, influenced by Edward Said's critiques of Orientalism, have addressed the implications of colonialism on the study of religion. These studies have addressed the study of Buddhism and other non-Christian religions in a wide variety of colonial contexts, from Sri Lanka to Africa.⁷¹ Richard King and others have even challenged the idea that there is a coherent 'Buddhism' at all, arguing that the concept was invented by early Orientalists and tainted by a cultural nostalgia for origins and the allure of the mystic East.⁷² In these interpretations, the study of Buddhism was not a study with any reference to real Buddhists, but a pure construction or even a "fantasy," as Richard Horsley writes:

In recent hindsight on Orientalism, however, this "original" or "pure" Buddhism can be recognized as the product of the Oriental Renaissance in Europe, with its fantasies of lost wisdom, its search for the languages of Eden, and its construction of classical ages long past, coupled with the denigration of contemporary "Orientals."⁷³

Importantly, increasing attention is now being paid to the Buddhists in Asian and South East Asian countries who played pivotal roles in the global exchanges of ideas. More recent studies have attributed more agency and intentionality to Asian Buddhists in altering the ideas and expressions of Buddhism in the nineteenth century (notable examples include Anne M. Blackburn on Sri Lanka, Peter van der Veer on India, and Richard Jaffe on Japan).⁷⁴ These scholars reject the notion that the East was passively "written" or "invented" or "discovered" by Western writers. It has become almost

⁷⁰ The 1878 Paris exhibition, for example, included a hall celebrating the "Religions of the Far East" and featuring artwork from Indochina; this in turn inspired the creation of the Musée Guimet in Paris in 1889.

⁷¹ Works on Buddhism under colonialism include e.g. Elizabeth Harris's *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter: Religious, Missionary and Colonial Experience in Nineteenth Century Sri Lanka* (London: Routledge, 2006); Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed., *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993). On Africa, but with revealing insights for any context: David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

⁷² Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"* (London: Routledge, 2013), 143-161.

⁷³ Horsley, "Religion and Other Products of Empire," 15.

⁷⁴ Anne M. Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism: Colonialism and Modernity in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2001); Richard M. Jaffe, "Seeking Śākyamuni: Travel and the Reconstruction of Japanese Buddhism," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 30, no. 1 (2004): 65-96.

commonplace to issue a stern warning that to focus only on Western thinkers "results not only in the myth of the passive Oriental but also perpetuates precisely the East-West dichotomy" that normally characterizes Orientalist discourses; instead scholars are urged to attend to the "convoluted and multiple trajectories and processes involved in the construction and appropriation of Orientalist discourses by different groups."⁷⁵ As Richard Jaffe demonstrated, greater attention to exchanges between East and West reveals that there was already a "tightly linked global Buddhist culture" in place by the late nineteenth century through which ideas were transmitted and transformed (I would note that such networks appeared later in England than in America).⁷⁶ More theoretically, Sven Bretfeld notes the increase in conceptual metaphors such as intercultural mimesis, hybridity, intercultural flows, and network approaches that attempt to capture the complex dynamics between East and West in the sharing and shaping of religious tradition.⁷⁷ Bretfeld himself develops a sonic metaphor that references the "polyphone 'concert' of different agencies, interests, ideas and power relations" involved in intercultural study of religion. It is one acknowledged limitation of this dissertation that it was not possible, for reasons of scope and practicality, to include mass media sources from Burma, Ceylon, or India.

1.2 A New Direction: Mass Media and Popular Representation

As even this cursory literature review reveals, several aspects of the dominant narrative of Buddhism's discovery in Britain invite additional exploration. Despite a near-saturation of the field of study of "Buddhism in the West," I see an opening to explore more deeply the role of the mass media in the popularization and representation of Buddhism in this period, as well as to analyze more closely the imperial and colonial context of popular representations. The aims of this dissertation are therefore as follows.

First, existing studies of the British context have dealt primarily with a fairly consistent lineup of characters: Beal, Hardy, Rhys Davids, Monier-Williams, Müller. The assumption that Buddhism appealed to a certain intellectual elite is a common one. Clarke, for example, cites the "interest among intellectuals" that was brought about by the century's outpouring of translations and studies and claims that the nineteenth

⁷⁵ King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 158.

⁷⁶ Jaffe, "Seeking Śākyamuni," 67.

⁷⁷ Sven Bretfeld, "Resonant Paradigms in the Study of Religions and the Emergence of Theravāda Buddhism," *Religion* 42, no. 2 (April 1, 2012): 273–97.

century "saw considerable growth in the study of Eastern religious and philosophical ideas... among the educated public as a whole."⁷⁸ McMahan writes more explicitly that Buddhism "appealed mostly to educated cultural elites in the West,"⁷⁹ and Martin Baumann that Buddhism "aroused a strong interest among bourgeois, educated members of the middle and upper classes" and "persuaded a few learned men to take up Buddhism."⁸⁰ A focus on intellectuals and the conflicts between competing currents of thought has been the default approach for almost every study in the genre. By his own claim, Philip Almond limits himself to the "serious but popular" literature about Buddhism,⁸¹ yet his book relies almost exclusively on the work of scholars as well as on a very small handful of the most "serious" journals and reviews; he contends erroneously that it was only the "educated middle and upper classes" who were interested in the subject.⁸² Thomas Tweed's study of the American context draws more heavily on magazines and the occasional newspaper; Tweed, however, limits his study to Buddhism's Western adherents and apologists, and his work thus ignores the surprising quantity of discourse being produced by the public at large. J. Jeffrey Franklin's work on Buddhism in British literature has made inroads in considering popular literary works such as those by Edwin Arnold, Rudyard Kipling, Marie Corelli, and H. Rider Haggard.⁸³ His literary focus does not, however, deliver many insights that would be of much use for religious scholars interested in popularization processes or the role of mass media in religion.

A first aim of this dissertation is thus to demonstrate the importance of popular works on Buddhism by focusing on Edwin Arnold's best-selling poetic epic life of the Buddha, *The Light of Asia* (1879). The existing scholarship on Edwin Arnold is either outdated or focused on Arnold in his literary context.⁸⁴ To fill this gap, I hope to gauge the impact of Arnold's poem on popular conceptions of Buddhism by performing a detailed reception analysis. I trace the complicated publication and reception history of

⁷⁸ Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, 71.

⁷⁹ McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 15.

⁸⁰ Baumann, "Buddhism in Europe: past, present, prospects," 87.

⁸¹ Arnold, *The British Discovery*, 4-5.

⁸² Arnold, *The British Discovery*, 3.

⁸³ J. Jeffrey Franklin, *The Lotus and the Lion: Buddhism and the British Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), and "The Counter-Invasion of Britain by Buddhism in Marie Corelli's *A Romance of Two Worlds* and H. Rider Haggard's *Ayesha: the Return of She*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 31, no. 01 (2003): 19-42.

⁸⁴ The only detailed study of Arnold's life is a semi-hagiographical biography of often doubtful veracity written in collaboration with family members in the 1950s (Brooks Wright, *Sir Edwin Arnold: A Literary Biography of the Author of The Light of Asia*. Harvard University, 1951).

Arnold's work, including an analysis of several hundred newspaper and periodical articles and a study of his popularity and legacy among his contemporaries. Specifically, I hope to demonstrate how Arnold translated Buddhism for a popular audience, distilling available academic works on Buddhism through the lens of exotic colonialism and Tennysonian epic poetry.

A second promising avenue for further exploration is the role of mass media – by which I mean not the well-researched standbys of Britain's intelligentsia, but rather the comparatively unexplored realm of daily newspapers, comic papers, illustrated magazines, and papers for the middle and working classes. Judith Snodgrass hints towards this avenue of exploration when she writes that "another of the key features of modern Buddhism" is "the importance of publications—books, magazines, and now electronic media—in its formation."⁸⁵ Unfortunately she doesn't fulfill the promising line of inquiry that this observation suggests. In this dissertation I show that a critical factor in the popularization of Buddhism was the explosion of attention it received in the British press. Increasingly from the mid-1870s to the 1890s, Buddhism made an appearance in newspapers and magazines of every stripe and quality. I explore how information and opinions about Buddhism were interpreted and formulated in various types of publications, each addressed to a different readership and audience. This focus is more than justified: newspapers and periodicals were arguably the most important discursive field in the nineteenth century.⁸⁶ These sources are not merely a clouded mirror imperfectly recasting a certain mindset or interpretive framework inherited from standard-setting intellectual elites; rather, they are creative, constructive discursive sites where ideas about non-Christian religions took new forms.

Finally, as mentioned in the literature review, the decades following Said's 1978 publication of *Orientalism* have dramatically increased our attentiveness to the often self-serving distortions inherent in Western representation of Eastern subjects, a turn which has been deeply felt in Buddhist studies. While there is now a large literature on popular imperialism in the 1870s-1890s, this literature has not explicitly focused on Victorian representations of Eastern religions. A third and final aim of this dissertation

⁸⁵ Snodgrass, "Discourse, Authority, Demand," 22.

⁸⁶ This is in consideration of B. E. Maidment's plea to take seriously "periodicals as discourse rather than evidence" and to more astutely analyze "the specific place occupied by the discourses of periodicals within that hierarchy of discourses by which social meaning is constructed." B.E. Maidment, "Victorian Periodicals and Academic Discourse," in *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, ed. Laurel Brake (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1990), 143-154.

is therefore to explore in greater detail how the increasing level of contact with the cultures and peoples of the British colonies was essential in framing the public's understanding of Buddhism. This demands an explicit attentiveness to colonial discourse, defined (by Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer) as "the study of the language of the historical representation of colonized peoples"⁸⁷ and as "a way of conceptualizing the landscape of the colonial world that makes it susceptible to certain kinds of management."⁸⁸ Indeed, the colonial implications of popular representations of Buddhism are literally impossible to ignore: imperial themes saturated all forms of media and directed the public's shifting attentions from one form of Buddhism to another. It was no coincidence that it was the Buddhism of India, Ceylon, and Burma that most captured the late Victorian British imagination: these were precisely the countries that, as an immediate consequence of the rule and expansion of the Empire, were splashed across the daily headlines. (Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, by contrast, only came to enjoy more attention near the close of the century, as contact and trade with those nations increased, while the Theravada Buddhism of Siam (Thailand) was hardly studied at all.⁸⁹) Chapters two and four of this dissertation, on Ceylon and Burma respectively, aim to reveal how the British colonial engagements played a definitive role in shaping the way that British citizens encountered and discussed Buddhism in the era of High Imperialism.

1.3 Scope & Context: England on the Cusp of Modernity, 1875-1895

This study focuses on a crucial period of transmission, dissemination, and popularization that ranges from 1875 to 1895; it is bookended on the one end by the Prince of Wales's visit to Ceylon in 1875, and on the other end by Sarah Bernhardt's performance in the Buddhist drama *Izeyl* in 1895. I argue that the Prince's 1875/1876 tour through India and Ceylon, featuring a highly publicized visit to see the Buddha's tooth relic in Ceylon, was a critical turning point that aroused public interest in Buddhism as more than an academic subject, and in Buddhists as more than

⁸⁷ Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 5.

⁸⁸ Breckenridge and van der Veer, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, 6.

⁸⁹ Siam makes an interesting counterpoint to Ceylon and Burma; what little attention Siam received was due to the influence of Anna Leonowens. On China, see N. J. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). On Japan, see Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism*; Toshio Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian Mind: A Study of Stereotyped Images of a Nation, 1850-80* (London: Macmillan, 1987); and John S. Harding, *Mahayana Phoenix: Japan's Buddhists at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

prospective converts. From there, the publication of the *Light of Asia* in 1879, the explosion of colonial entertainments and native villages in the London metropole in the 1880s, the British takeover of Burma in 1886, the operatic dramatization of *La Luce dell'Asia* in 1891, and an increasing flow of jokes, satires, pop fiction, and other 'trivial' discourses about Buddhism provide a steady trajectory of material that reaches into the early 1890s. Readers will find that the material is concentrated in the 1880s, when the public's fascination with Buddhism was at its peak. This dissertation intentionally ends when the period of Buddhist self-representation begins, that is, when Buddhists increasingly begin touring Britain and establishing personal contacts in the metropole. (The period of contact and dialogue began somewhat earlier in America, thanks to the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, but there was virtually no such comparable contact in Britain until the twentieth century.⁹⁰)

The two decades in focus in my dissertation find British society experiencing a period of transition: poised on the cusp of modernism, it also still bore the marks of a lingering Victorian focus on social improvement, middle class morality, and Victorian values.⁹¹ Donald Read thus terms this period "the Victorian Turning-Point."⁹² These late-stage Victorians were themselves keenly aware of a feeling of constant change; starting even in the 1870s, the idea of the modern became essential to cultural debates and discussion, and Britons increasingly used the language of modernity when reflecting on contemporary changes in society.⁹³ Historian José Harris, for example, emphasizes the generation's sense of the newness of the age, their strong sense of modernity and progress, and their fluid use of the word 'modern' as a self-descriptor.⁹⁴ Then as now, the designation 'modern' was flexible and multifaceted, encapsulating a host of developments ranging from mass production, capitalist relationships, and

⁹⁰ The first well-known association for the study of Buddhism was the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland, founded in London in 1908, which published a popular series of pamphlets for the public. James C. Livingston, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age* (London: Continuum, 2007), 256.

⁹¹ As famed cultural historian Raymond Williams has written, "The temper which the adjective Victorian is useful to describe is basically finished in the 1880s; the new men [sic] who appear in that decade, and who have left their mark, are recognizably different in tone." Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780 - 1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 161. Throughout this dissertation I will use the common designator "late Victorian" in reference to this generation - yet it is important to appreciate that our study subjects were standing with one foot in the Victorian era and one foot in the approaching fin-de-siècle.

⁹² Donald Read, *The Age of Urban Democracy: England 1868-1914* (London: Routledge, 2014), 1.

⁹³ Bernhard Rieger and Martin Daunton, "Introduction," in *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2001), 2, 15.

⁹⁴ Harris writes: "the consciousness of living in a new age, a new material context, and a form of society totally different from anything that had ever occurred before was by the turn of the century so widespread as to constitute a genuine and distinctive element in the mental culture of the period." José Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 32.

increasing commercialism, to a shrinking global network, better transportation, and a massive expansion of both visual and print media.⁹⁵ All of these left their mark on the men and women whose writings appear in this study - liminal figures who inhabited both the Victorian and, increasingly, modern frames of mind.

As we will see, an overwhelming amount of media discourse was produced in London, the center of the Empire's discursive and print production; this discourse often reflects the increasingly cosmopolitan, global, and imperialistic outlook of the metropole. These developments could only happen in the context of the new urban center. Starting in the 1870s, a shift from industry to trade and finance made the City of London the "undisputed capital market of the world."⁹⁶ Eric Lampard even suggests that London was the world's "first urban transformation" and the century's "distinctive achievement."⁹⁷ By the end of the century, an astounding 45% of the entire population of England and Wales was living in London.⁹⁸ The result was a series of profound cultural shifts. Nowhere was the leaning toward modernity more palpable, or more contested, than in the world metropolis of London.⁹⁹ It was of course also the seat of global commerce and imperial power; increasingly, London played host to visitors, delegations, and immigrants from around the world, becoming a global hub where the metropole and the periphery of the colonial empire slowly began to blur at the edges.¹⁰⁰ The processes of urbanization and the dynamics of life in sprawling, modernizing, congested London are essential to this study, as London provided a unique locus where crowds could be counted on to gather for circuses and exhibitions; where people congregated to discuss the latest ideas in lecture halls and clubs; and where the mass media had its dynamic center.

The increased literacy in this period and the explosion of printed mass media resulted in a uniquely and profoundly media-driven culture. The establishment of

⁹⁵ John McKenzie, "Some Reflections on Aspects of Modernity," in *Art, Politics and Society in Britain (1880-1914): Aspects of Modernity and Modernism*, ed. Trevor Harris (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 2. See also Timothy J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 7-8.

⁹⁶ Jose Harris, *Private Lives*, 19.

⁹⁷ Eric E. Lampard, "The Urbanizing World," in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, ed. Harold James Dyos and Michael Wolff (London: Routledge, 1999), 10.

⁹⁸ J. F. C. Harrison, *Late Victorian Britain 1875-1901* (London: Routledge, 2000), 14-15.

⁹⁹ Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 3.

¹⁰⁰ Francis Henry Wollaston Sheppard, *London: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 309-320. See also Laura Tabili, "A Homogeneous Society? Britain's Internal 'Others,' 1800-Present," in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. Catherin Hall and Sonya Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 53-76.

school boards and introduction of compulsory schooling in 1870 paved the way for a larger, more active, and more demanding reading public, to the point that it was common to find a newspaper or magazine even in every working-class home (the middle and upper classes, it goes without saying, were nearly inundated with books, newspapers, and periodicals).¹⁰¹ Statistics reveal that the number of newspaper readers quadrupled between 1880 and 1914.¹⁰² Free public libraries, although officially established by a bill in 1850, began to proliferate in major cities only in the last quarter century and marked a turning point in the availability of reading materials for broad swathes of the public.¹⁰³ (The popular family magazine *All the Year Round* asserted, "the library, public and free, is becoming one of the features of the period, and is made use of by all classes of the community."¹⁰⁴) Subscription libraries played a major role as well, especially the famed Mudie's Lending Library, with its Great Hall teeming with shelves and patrons and with more than a half of a million volumes as well as a huge range of periodicals on offer.¹⁰⁵ With increasing literacy came a thirst for information and hard facts that dominated the latter half of the century; we will see this reflected in the enthusiasm with which information about Eastern religions was collected, disseminated, and devoured among the general populace. Indeed, nowhere was the thirst for more information more visible than in the interest in the more exotic inhabitants of the empire – especially in counting and cataloguing them (as a *Leeds Mercury* article once opined: "rows of numerals are as seductive as a romance."¹⁰⁶) The up-and-coming middle classes demanded information about new fields and developing subjects, especially the natural sciences, but also biblical criticism and comparative religion. The result was a proliferation of reading rooms, clubs, and lecture halls for all classes and, by the end of the century, for both men and women.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd: Popular Culture in England, 1750–1900* (London: Sutton Publishing, 1984), 179.

¹⁰² Matthew Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

¹⁰³ For a detailed chronicle of the development of public libraries see Thomas Kelly, *History of Public Libraries in Great Britain 1854-1975* (2nd rev. ed. London: Library Association Publishing, 1977).

¹⁰⁴ The number of libraries in London had doubled in the last five years and that they were visited by "a constant stream of people" of almost every class and disposition. "A Day at the London Free Libraries." *All the Year Round*, 35 (1892), 305-309.

¹⁰⁵ Advertisement in *The Athenaeum*, 7 Feb. 1880: 172. Quoted in Lewis Roberts, "Trafficking in Literary Authority: Mudie's Select Library and the Commodification of the Victorian Novel," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 34, no. 01 (March 2006), 17.

¹⁰⁶ "A Statistical Survey." *The Leeds Mercury* (Leeds, England), Saturday, September 6, 1884; Issue 14482.

¹⁰⁷ Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 144. Barbara Black, *A Room of His Own: A Literary-Cultural Study of Victorian Clubland* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2012). Amy Milne-Smith, *London Clubland: A Cultural History of Gender and Class in Late Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Alan Rauch notes, "The spirit of self-improvement.... as well as the promise of scientific innovation held sway as the dominant ethos of the time. In this climate, knowledge, as a cornerstone of progress, improvement, and civilization, answered well as a vehicle for moral growth."¹⁰⁸ Sunday societies and lecture institutions became an augment to church attendance or a replacement for it; they were a crucial means of disseminating information about Buddhism to interested crowds.¹⁰⁹

Another cultural development essential to this dissertation was the growth and redefinition of popular culture.¹¹⁰ Especially in London, the expanding middle classes enjoyed increasing time for recreation, including the new Saturday half-holiday.¹¹¹ The result was the development of an entertainment industry and an increasingly dominant and vocal popular culture featuring new forms of commercialized entertainment.¹¹² This "habit of enjoyment," as Peter Bailey calls it, was most visible in the crowded metropolis; improvements in communications and media encouraged the people's new appetite for amusement.¹¹³ There was a strong link between pop culture and commercialism, resulting in a thriving entertainment industry by the end of the century.¹¹⁴ Far from merely providing recreation and entertainment, scholars conclude that popular culture was a powerful social and cultural force that exerted itself in many directions. Dennis Denisoff, for example, notes that late-century popular culture long retained some of its Victorian emphasis on improvement and morality of the masses, that is, on educational entertainments designed with self-improvement in mind.¹¹⁵ (We will see this enthusiasm for pedantic moralizing when we turn to our analysis of the

¹⁰⁸ Alan Rauch, *Useful Knowledge: The Victorians, Morality, and the March of Intellect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 24.

¹⁰⁹ Ruth Barton, "Sunday Lecture Societies: Naturalistic Scientists, Unitarians, and Secularists Unite against Sabbatarian Legislation," in *Victorian Scientific Naturalism: Community, Identity, Continuity*, ed. Bernard Lightman and Gowan Dawson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 189-219.

¹¹⁰ The Victorian period is described as "witnessing new and distinctive contests about the relationship between 'high' and 'popular' culture, and at the same time experiencing a blurring of the boundaries defining ownership of these categories." Juliet John and Alice Jenkins, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 2.

¹¹¹ Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 26-29, 48-50.

¹¹² "We would suggest both that the economic and technological revolutions which transformed English society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to a more varied and satisfying popular culture, based upon higher living standards and greater individual choice." This popular culture "owed much to the tastes and aspirations of the mass of the population.... A nexus of popular demand and commercial supply did, however, produce novel cultural forms which it is deeply condescending to dismiss as placebos and opiates." Golby and Purdue, *Civilisation of the Crowd*, 12.

¹¹³ Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance*, 16.

¹¹⁴ Barry J. Faulk, *Music Hall and Modernity: The Late-Victorian Discovery of Popular Culture* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004), 5-6.

¹¹⁵ Dennis Denisoff, "Popular Culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Culture*, ed. Francis O'Gorman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 137.

upper classes' critical praise for *The Light of Asia*.) The mass media, especially the periodicals, were home to lively debates on the value and purpose of popular culture; the Victorians, Denisoff notes, were well ware that mass media and popular culture were "a site of ideological contestation" where ideas and worldviews collided.¹¹⁶

Late Victorian popular culture and media played a significant role in supporting British imperialism – an aspect that we will see manifested in the chapters to come. In the 1980s, scholars began examining the extent to which imperialist and jingoistic fervor penetrated the daily cultural lives of late-century Victorians: in music halls, literature, advertisements, popular entertainment, and more. John MacKenzie, the father of what is now an entire field of popular imperialist studies, broke new ground with his insistence on foregrounding the popular excitements that fed the nation's imperialist spirit.¹¹⁷ Imperialism, MacKenzie argues, was far more than merely an intellectual agenda of the elite and powerful; on the contrary: towards the end of the century, popular culture was dominated by a "potent mixture of patriotism, excitements in adventure and colonial warfare, reverence for the monarchy, a self-referencing approach to other peoples, admiration for military virtues (represented also by renewed interest in medieval chivalry), and a quasi-religious approach to the obligations of world-wide power."¹¹⁸ Other scholars have pointed out that popular culture was often a means of reinforcing nationalist and imperialist sentiment. Barry Faulk, for example, in his study of the late-Victorian music hall, writes that "the late-Victorian discourse on the popular... fostered a notion of culture that bolstered another powerful fabrication, the nation, which in turn created a climate of opinion congenial to the growth of the centralized state."¹¹⁹ An entire field has since developed to study the way that popular British culture fostered and fed a culture of imperialist spirit at home. Scholars such as Catherine Hall, Sonya Rose, and Susan Thorne have emphasized the way that colonial and imperial propaganda saturated almost every

¹¹⁶ Denisoff, "Popular Culture," 136.

¹¹⁷ John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986). See also John Saville, "Imperialism and the Victorians," in *In Search of Victorian Values: Aspects of Nineteenth-century Thought and Society*, ed. Eric M. Sigsworth (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 162–78.

¹¹⁸ John M. MacKenzie, "Empire and Metropolitan Cultures," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire Vol. III*, ed. Andrew Porter and William Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 291.

¹¹⁹ Faulk, *Music Hall and Modernity*, 5.

aspect of British home life.¹²⁰ John Springhall, for example, has written of the push to "sell" the empire to the public as an unceasing series of skirmishes and negotiations; stories of heroes, missionaries, and discoveries shored up public opinion during this era, turning imperial aggression into "romantic adventure and heroism."¹²¹ Popular literature and even children's literature also played a role in transforming the idea of the empire into an irresistibly grand and romantic myth.¹²² These scholars' insights form an important backdrop to this dissertation by helping us to appreciate the powerful role of entertainment and media in shaping public opinion about the colonies and the imperial project in general.

1.4 Victorian Mass Media: Understanding the Sources

This dissertation takes as its object of study over 5,000 newspaper and periodical articles mentioning Buddha or Buddhism in the period between 1875 and 1895. These materials represent a hitherto under-explored archival resource for the study of Buddhism's reception in late Victorian culture. This timing of this dissertation is fortunate: only in the last five to ten years have digitalization efforts advanced so far as to offer a substantial repository of keyword-searchable materials, making it possible to quickly locate and investigate large numbers of print materials on a particular subject. In this section I discuss some of the most salient features of the late Victorian press that demonstrate why this is an exciting and rewarding basis for inquiry.

This study's explicit emphasis on popular sources is intentional. In 1971 Michael Wolff changed Victorian-era scholarship by challenging historians to move beyond histories based solely on the opinions of the "people who matter" and to begin to write history based on what might, in today's parlance, be called the ninety-nine percent. "There are large numbers of people to be taken into account," Wolff wrote then,

¹²⁰ Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford University Press, 1999); Thorne, "Religion and Empire at Home," in *At Home with the Empire*, ed. Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 143–65; Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose, "Introduction," in *At Home with the Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 22-23.

¹²¹ John O. Springhall, "'Up Guards and At Them!': British imperialism and popular art, 1880–1914," in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. John M. Mackenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 49. Springhall's article examines graphic representations of conflicts in Egypt and the Sudan in *The Graphic* and *The Illustrated London News*, as well as fine art depictions in the Royal Academy and elsewhere. Of course, British intellectual journalism was no less saturated with imperial ideologies; Neil Berry notes that the high-minded reviews were likewise a "creature of empire" that "projected the moral authority of a nation steeped in the exercise of imperial power" (Berry, *Articles of Faith*, 17).

¹²² Tania Zulli, *Colonial Transitions: Literature and Culture in the Late Victorian Age* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011). Robert H. MacDonald, *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism, 1880-1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 233.

"larger than the conventional sources permit us to reach."¹²³ Wolff's critical description of the state of research into popular sources could be used to describe how periodicals have been referenced (when at all) to explore the nineteenth-century understanding of Buddhism:

What one must generally conclude about the current use of the periodicals is that scholars' needs have been met and that familiar evidence has been extracted only from familiar sources. The great pioneering reviews have been mined, their files are in most scholarly libraries, they have been thought of as providing matchless evidence even at a time when their actual influence had levelled off and when other journals and other types of journalism had become more prominent.¹²⁴

The turn towards popular sources and mass media has since been widely embraced, especially in the study of popular imperialism; slowly, it is being embraced in religious studies as well.¹²⁵ My dissertation joins this turn by intentionally shifting its focus from the "people who matter" towards the masses who, many now want to argue, mattered just as much.

It is important to appreciate at the outset the extraordinary dominance of the media in late Victorian culture, which has been called the first mass-media society.¹²⁶ The press was the primary means and locus of cultural ideas and discourse, a key site where opinions, meanings, and cultural values were forged. The periodical press of the nineteenth century was thus much more than a mirror reflecting opinions that had been formed elsewhere. "One might almost claim that an attitude, an opinion, an idea, did not exist until it had registered itself in the press," Michael Wolff noted, calling periodicals "the national history at its most self-conscious."¹²⁷ The Victorian mass media boasted an entire range of formats, prices, and audiences, and a diversifying and consumer-oriented market for media meant that there was soon a publication for every taste and proclivity. As we will see, different periodicals captured and reflected different audiences, each providing a platform for a certain stratum or segment of

¹²³ Michael Wolff, "Charting the Golden Stream: Thoughts on a Directory of Victorian Periodicals," *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter* No. 13, Vol. 4, No. 3 (September 1971), 25. Contrast this to the focus of scholars such as Neil Berry, for example, whose study on British intellectual journalism focuses on those publications "seen by few... [yet] read by many who mattered: politicians, clergymen, dons, lawyers" (Berry, *Articles of Faith*, 80).

¹²⁴ Wolff, "Charting the Golden Stream," 28.

¹²⁵ More and more researchers have sought to "return to the archive to enhance the understanding of imperialism by literally accessing new materialities through the study of a wider range of documents and social texts" and to "embrace ... a 'cultural turn' that has led scholars away from an emphasis on the purely political and economic in favor of the social and effective." See Ross G. Forman, *China and the Victorian Imagination: Empires Entwined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 18-19.

¹²⁶ Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers*. 6.

¹²⁷ Wolff, "Charting the Golden Stream," 26.

society; each type of reader found herself or himself again in one form of media or another. Julie Codell writes, "These broader socio-cultural meanings placed most periodicals on a cultural spectrum, and most Victorian readers would recognize these codes as 'naturalized' parts of their cultural experiences."¹²⁸

Cultural discourse, especially politics, was dominated by the daily papers (the *Times*, *Morning Post*, *Standard*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Chronicle*, and *Daily News*), plus four evening papers that featured more society items and cultural reporting (the *Globe*, *Evening Standard*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, and *St. James's Gazette*). Readers were above all attracted to the newspapers' immediacy of information; the papers quenched an "insatiable thirst for news and entertainment," not to mention for novelty items and society gossip.¹²⁹ This correlated strongly with a change in newspaper format and focus from an organ of political and international affairs to a mixed media genre designed to appeal to the widest audience and with gradually increasing entertainment value.¹³⁰ The *Daily Telegraph*, edited by none other than Edwin Arnold of *Light of Asia* fame, led the charge in this respect.¹³¹ A steady decrease in newspaper prices over the century meant a significant increase in readership; even at the beginning of our period, the *Daily Telegraph* was boasting sales of a quarter million copies daily, reaching readers who previously could not afford a daily paper; it joined by the *Standard*, which reached the quarter-million mark in 1880.¹³² The readership of the *Daily Telegraph* increased to a half-million in 1893; through the even more popular weeklies, the news would reach a million readers (per issue!) at the end of the period.¹³³ Compared to one scholar's estimate that the novel-reading public consisted of only about 120,000 persons as late as 1890, these figures reveal the extraordinary reach of periodicals and newspapers among the general public.¹³⁴ In the period we are looking at in this dissertation, it would not be an exaggeration to say that one of these papers reached almost every home in Britain, at least once every few weeks; this

¹²⁸ Julie F. Codell, "Imperial Differences and Culture Clashes in Victorian Periodicals' Visuals: The Case of Punch," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 39, no. 4 (2006): 410–28, 410.

¹²⁹ Jerold Savory and Patricia Marks, *The Smiling Muse: Victoriana in the Comic Press* (London: Associated University Presses, 1985), 17.

¹³⁰ Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers*, 5.

¹³¹ On the *Daily Telegraph*, see Edward Frederick Lawson Burnham, *Peterborough Court: The Story of The Daily Telegraph* (London: Cassell, 1955).

¹³² Williams, *Read All About It*, 102, 112.

¹³³ The *Daily Telegraph* boasted over 500,000 readers every day by 1893. "The Daily Telegraph." *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* (London, England), Saturday, January 28, 1893; pg. 53; Issue 1652.

¹³⁴ Karl T. Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846 - 1886* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 382-383.

makes the news our most valuable asset when gauging the public's level of interest in or knowledge about a subject.

A second stratum of the media consisted of the Sunday newspapers such as *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, *Reynolds's Newspaper*, and the *Weekly Dispatch*.¹³⁵ These "Sundays" or "weeklies" were cheaper than their daily counterparts and leaned towards greater sensationalism.¹³⁶ They found success by "translating the dissemination of news into a completely new category of popular leisure," specifically by making the news lively, readable, and sensational.¹³⁷ While the dailies had a very broad but generally well-educated readership, the weeklies were addressed specifically to the working class (*Reynolds's*) or the lower middle class (*Lloyd's Weekly*). It would be hard to overstate the popularity or significance of these papers; G. M. W. Reynold has been convincingly credited with being the father of mass media,¹³⁸ and sales of *Lloyd's Weekly* eventually outstripped the dailies to become, in 1896, the first paper of any kind to reach sales of one million.¹³⁹ These types of papers adopted a "self-consciously personal tone" and a "direct, vigorous, demotic style" that mimicked speech and oral culture.¹⁴⁰ This approach earned them a loyal readership among their often politically radical working-class readers, as the papers better reflected their interests and opinions than the dailies and gave the lower and middle classes a forum for their ideas and opinions.¹⁴¹ Both *Reynolds's* and *Lloyd's* feature heavily in this dissertation and provide a valuable counterweight to publications for the upper middle and upper classes.

The weeklies were a strong step in the direction of the new style of reporting of the 1880s that came to be called New Journalism, epitomized by the evening paper the *Pall Mall Gazette*, edited by W. T. Stead.¹⁴² The New Journalism embodied a market-

¹³⁵ David Scott Kamper, "Popular Sunday Newspapers in Late-Victorian Britain." Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2003. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304764048>.

¹³⁶ Williams, *Read All About It*, 118-119; Vincent, David. *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 251-258.

¹³⁷ Vincent *Literacy and Popular Culture* 252.

¹³⁸ Anne Humphreys, "Popular Narrative and Political Discourse in Reynold's Weekly Newspaper," in *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, ed. Laurel Brake et al (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 33-47.

¹³⁹ Virginia Berridge, "Popular Sunday papers and mid-Victorian society," in *Newspaper History: From the 17th century to the present day*, ed. George Boyce et al. (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1978), 249.

¹⁴⁰ Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, 242, 253.

¹⁴¹ Berridge, "Popular Sunday papers," 250; see also "Reynold's Newspaper," in *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (Gent: Academia Press, 2009), 541.

¹⁴² The term was coined (as a pejorative) by Matthew Arnold. See J. O. Baylen, "The 'New Journalism' in Late Victorian Britain," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 18, no. 3 (December 1, 1972): 367-85. On W. T.

driven media strategy that was much more explicitly commercial and which focused on providing readers with a mixture of entertainment, sensation, and society content, but which also delivered hard-hitting exposés on subjects such as prostitution and poverty in London.¹⁴³ A lively, chatty tone was one of the new style's most marked characteristics; according to the boasts of the *Graphic* in 1893, the New Journalism explicitly set itself up against those heavy-handed papers which would "strain the weary reader" with "the dulness of goodness," noting that only "some hardy few" would still "care to meet at this eleventh hour another critique of John Locke, a new essay on Personality, or a further comparison of 'Socrates, Buddha, and Christ.'" ¹⁴⁴ The enormous popularity of collections of "tit-bits" and gatherings from other printed sources that collected and refracted discourses like a prism was another feature of this style. One column in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, for example, summarized the daily papers of the week, including lists of letters to the editors and the position of all the major papers on various issues of the day. This trend was epitomized at the end of the period by the "Review of Reviews," a development targeted especially at the busy reader with no time to read the lengthy and ponderous reviews.¹⁴⁵ Finally, it is important to note that the New Journalism contributed significantly to the imperial agenda by dramatizing imperial adventures and crafting a national narrative that supported Britain's exploits abroad.¹⁴⁶ In this genre, the evening paper the *Pall Mall Gazette* plays the most significant role in this dissertation. As a society paper, the *Pall Mall Gazette* was known for being "by gentlemen, for gentlemen" – the type of paper the busy modern man might peruse at his club.¹⁴⁷ While its circulation peaked at only

Stead, see Berry, *Articles of Faith*, 89-102 and Raymond L. Schults, *Crusader in Babylon: W. T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972).

¹⁴³ Williams, *Read All About It*, 120. See also the essays in Joel H Wiener, ed. *Papers for the Millions: The New Journalism in Britain, 1850s to 1914* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988).

¹⁴⁴ "Notes by a Lazy Reader." *The Graphic* (London, England), September 24, 1892; Issue 1191. A more critical voice would describe the new style thus: "By the New Journalism, I take it, we mean that easy personal style, that trick of bright colloquial language, that wealth of intimate and picturesque detail, and that determination to arrest, amuse, or startle, which had transformed our Press during the last fifteen years." Evelyn March Phillipps, 'The New Journalism,' *New Review*, August 1895, 182-189, 182. Quoted in John Stokes, *In the Nineties* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 15.

¹⁴⁵ Brake, Laurel. *Print in Transition 1850 - 1910; Studies in Media and Book History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 11.

¹⁴⁶ Andrew Griffiths, *The New Journalism, the New Imperialism and the Fiction of Empire, 1870-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 6, 9.

¹⁴⁷ "Pall Mall Gazette," in *The Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*. ed. Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (Gent: Academia Press, 2009), 477.

around 12,000 in 1885,¹⁴⁸ it nonetheless had a powerful cultural impact and enjoyed a reputation as "fashionable, informed, and influential."¹⁴⁹

These major strata were complemented by an explosion of publications targeted to every taste and interest; an astounding 276 new publications were introduced to the British media market in 1884 alone.¹⁵⁰ Many of these new magazines and papers mixed together news and entertainment, advice, jokes, illustrations and tidbits with letters to the editor, advice columns, and plenty of product advertisements.¹⁵¹ Then there were, of course, enormous numbers of religious magazines, which Callum Brown calls an integral part of the "salvation industry" and which embodied the "perfection (and indeed innovation) of multi-media propagandisation" that injected Christian ideas and values into every sphere of life.¹⁵² These were designed explicitly for family edification and fireside digestion; they aimed to uplift and edify their audience – and to steer them away from less worthy printed temptations. Their import should not be underestimated: *Sunday at Home* and its sister publication, *Leisure Hour*, boasted that they together reached an astounding one million readers monthly in 1879; if this is true, they rivaled the major dailies in their ability to reach into a vast number of homes in Britain.¹⁵³ This is another type of magazine that we will find throughout our study of Buddhist popularizations; to cite just one example, *Sunday Talk*, advertising itself as "The Sunday Magazine for the Houses of the People," came out in 1884 selling for only two pence; one of its first issues contained an instructive and morally-focused article on Buddhism and Christianity.¹⁵⁴

England's two major illustrated papers, the *Illustrated London News* and the *Graphic*, were also crucial in shaping cultural ideas and, especially, the public's shared visual imagination. While in the early years of its publication it was novelty enough that the *ILN* was lavishly illustrated, the *Graphic* (launched in 1869) would further

¹⁴⁸ "Pall Mall Gazette (1865-1923)." *C19: The Nineteenth Century Index*, 2009.

¹⁴⁹ Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 193.

¹⁵⁰ John S. North, "The Rationale - Why Read Victorian Periodicals?" in *Victorian Periodicals: A Guide to Research*, ed. Jerry Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel (New York: Modern Language Assoc. of America, 1978), 5.

¹⁵¹ While the composition can seem a bit random Margaret Beetham has noted that most are "governed by formulae" designed to, what else, boost sales and circulation. Margaret Beetham, "Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre," in *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, ed. Laurel Brake et al. New York: St. Martin's Pr., 1990, 19-32.

¹⁵² Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 53.

¹⁵³ Rosemary Scott, "The Sunday Periodical: 'Sunday at Home,'" *Victorian Periodicals Review* 25, no. 4 (1992), 160.

¹⁵⁴ Recommended in the *Spectator*: "Its price is only twopence, and yet it is well-printed, well-illustrated, and admirably edited." "Current Literature." *The Spectator* (London, England), 3 May 1884, 24.

change the market for illustrated papers by insisting on the primacy of the image: it featured full pages of illustrations and only smaller explanatory texts, rather than the other way around.¹⁵⁵ Julie Codell has called Victorian news illustrations "para-texts" because "they do not simply 'illustrate' a text in a literal way (presuming this could even be done), but rather provide visual comment on the topic that may not simply repeat something from the text."¹⁵⁶ Indeed, scholars argue that the illustrated papers actually began to alter readers' expectations of realism, immediacy, and objectivity in the news – a not-too-distant forerunner of photojournalism.¹⁵⁷ John Stokes likewise notes that illustrated papers both reflected and augmented 'reality': "First sketches and, later, photographs were presented as a means of enlivening the actual, making it present and undeniable, as if multiple reproduction was itself a form of verification."¹⁵⁸ The illustrated papers fostered the belief that the reader could be vicariously present at an event; they encouraged the belief "that an image allows us to see an even for ourselves, as though we had been present" and were often "presented as an objective transcription of reality, unmediated by the artist's subjectivity," writes Andrea Korda.¹⁵⁹ We will witness the use of illustrations as a means of constructing immediacy and pseudo-accuracy, especially in the Prince of Wales's tour of the East and the conflicts in Burma. Following the observations of these scholars, this dissertation treats illustrations of Buddhists, temples, teeth, and relics – scattered throughout this study – as a potent tool for transporting readers to imperial lands and augmenting reality by allowing the reading public to vicariously 'experience' the Buddhism of Ceylon and Burma.

This brief survey of the late Victorian mass media landscape suggests that we can expect significant homogeneity among our sources. The diversity, variety, and even the sheer vast enormity of the mass media ensure that our sources will be pointing us in many directions, rather than one.¹⁶⁰ Each publication was itself multivocal, with numerous authors contributing to each issue and each issue covering a wide range of

¹⁵⁵ Andrea Korda, *Printing and Painting the News in Victorian London: The Graphic and Social Realism, 1869-1891* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2015), 55.

¹⁵⁶ Codell, "Imperial Differences," 410.

¹⁵⁷ Korda, *Printing and Painting the News*, 3-4.

¹⁵⁸ Stokes, *In the Nineties*, 20. Peter Bailey also notes: "the popular ideography of the later nineteenth century should not be neglected, for images no less than print proliferated in the period and clearly shaped as well as reflected the mores and behaviour of the crowd." Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance*, 50.

¹⁵⁹ Korda, *Printing and Painting the News*, 19-21.

¹⁶⁰ James Mussell reminds us that newspapers and periodicals were characterized above all by their "seriality, abundance, ephemerality, diversity, [and] heterogeneity." Mussell, *The Nineteenth-Century Press*, 2.

genres, themes, opinions, and ideas. Articles were not read in isolation, but as a part of an ongoing discussion in and between publications.¹⁶¹ A periodical is also by nature heterogeneous, Margaret Beetham notes, with its blend of forms and materials, authors, and opinions; she calls the periodical "characteristically a mixed form."¹⁶² Victorian newspapers and periodicals were likewise highly intertextual; important and interesting news items were subject to endless, often unattributed reprints and direct quotations.¹⁶³ This leads to an almost dizzying interpenetration of discourses, which makes it sometimes next to impossible to guess the origins of a particular idea or point of view. Interestingly, Richard Menke has examined the prevalence of extended quotations from other sources and argued that this had the effect of bringing the gap between high- and low-culture periodicals.¹⁶⁴

When analyzing our mass media sources, we must attempt to anticipate the effects that the particular characteristics of journalism had on the reader, and how this in turn may have altered their processing of information. First, the news is defined above all by its topicality, relevance, and ceaseless quest for currency and immediacy. The telescope lens of the news swings wildly to take new vistas into focus, depending on the events and interests of the day. As James Mussell notes, periodical readers were "forced to abandon the neat narratives offered by a totalizing history and instead engage with the complexity of passing events, with all their diverse causes and unresolved consequences."¹⁶⁵ In a competitive media market, editors sought the latest and most relevant topics for features and relentlessly fought each other to get the latest scoop. Thus Laurel Brake has called journalism "the commercial and ideological exploitation of the transient and the topical, a ceaseless generating of production of 'news' and 'novelty.'" Second, these sources appealed not merely to the intellect, but to the eye, to the emotions, and often to the reader's sense of identity as (some combination of) Christian, British, modern, male, female, white and racially superior.

¹⁶¹ "Articles from the periodical press also have the advantage of being public documents that were often intended to be interventions in specific debates... Such articles have a topicality and social embeddedness that link the public and private in intricate and often arcane ways." Andrew King and John Plunkett, "Introduction," in *Victorian Print Media: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 4.

¹⁶² Margaret Beetham, "Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre," in *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, ed. Laurel, Brake, Aled Jones, and Lionel Madden (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1990): 19-32, 24.

¹⁶³ See Alberto Gabriele, *Reading Popular Culture in Victorian Print: Belgravia and Sensationalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 16-17.

¹⁶⁴ Richard Menke, "Touchstones and Tit-Bits: Extracting Culture in the 1880s," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 47, no. 4 (2014): 559-76.

¹⁶⁵ Mussell, *The Nineteenth-Century Press*, 32.

As Alberto Gabriele states, periodical reading created a "fragmented present that juxtaposes the input of visual, intellectual, and emotional stimuli in a montage effect."¹⁶⁶ Finally and most importantly, in contrast to a book, information in mass media sources is presented unsystematically and in often highly disparate forms; thus readers were left to synthesize on their own information they may have gleaned about Ceylonese and Burmese Buddhism, visual impressions from illustrations, and snippets from esoteric Buddhism, with jokes and editorials that slipped from fact to opinion with no clear delineation. This produced a very particular mode of reading and absorbing information – one that was piecemeal instead of holistic, fragmented instead of systematic. The periodicals themselves were sensitive to, and critical of, such fragmentation; long before scholars coined the trick of referring to Buddhisms (plural), this diversity was duly noted by its late Victorian critics: in 1885, the *Saturday Review* captured the variety of the Buddhisms of the day in an article that satirizes all of its proponents, from E. Arnold's "extravagant claims" for Buddhism, to Schopenhauer's fascination with its "pessimism and its atheistic fatalism," to the Theosophists' "amusing but nearly exploded craze of 'Esoteric Buddhism.'"¹⁶⁷ This, then, was how Buddhism was made comprehensible to the modern reader in the metropole in 1880: in fragmented snippets, with a driven quest for immediacy, and with increasing sensationalism and emotionalism. We would do well to bear these characteristics in mind throughout this study as a caution against drawing overly simplistic conclusions, or over hastily imposing one coherent narrative or interpretation onto the material.

1.5 Structure and Contents of the Dissertation

Chapter two investigates the Prince of Wales's trip to India and Ceylon in the winter of 1875-1876, focusing on the Prince's encounter with Buddhist temples, relics, and priests in Kandy - an episode that was highly publicized, documented, and dissected in the popular press. An imperialistic media spectacle *par excellence*, this episode transformed the way that Buddhism was discussed and represented in the press. The illustrated press played a particularly important role in this episode; the *Graphic* and the *London Illustrated News* provided readers with a visual gateway into vicarious colonial-religious tourism. The Prince of Wales's political position and above all his unparalleled cultural influence in England meant that his open display of

¹⁶⁶ Gabriele, *Reading Popular Culture*, 21.

¹⁶⁷ "Buddhist Theosophy." *The Saturday Review*. October 10, 1885, 478.

interest in Buddhism generated national curiosity about the subject. This episode of imperial history has been largely neglected in historical studies and has, as far as I am aware, never been mentioned in connection with the popularization of Buddhism in Britain. Another result of the tour was an ongoing public fascination, even obsession, with the Buddha's tooth relic housed in Kandy, which was the focus of hundreds of popular articles and reports in the decade following the trip.

Chapter three takes a new look at Edwin Arnold's 1879 bestselling epic poem on the life of the Buddha, *The Light of Asia*. This chapter focuses on Arnold's contemporary reception, his impact on his readership, his role as a celebrated public figure, and the public's engagement with the poem and its ideas. The picture that emerges is one of Edwin Arnold as an intentional popularizer with a keen and explicit sense of public taste who used his publicity savvy to awaken national interest in Indian literature and Buddhist myth. The goal of this chapter is to analyze the waves of interest generated by its publication and to situate this effect within the larger context of the late Victorian encounter with Buddhism, especially colonial Buddhism. In keeping with the focus of my work on role of popular culture and popular trends, I emphasize Arnold's reception in mass publications as well as his audience and his (the word is not a stretch) fan club. I demonstrate how Arnold played a key role in translating Buddhism for a mass audience and simultaneously suggest that his poem capitalized on the public's voracious appetite for colonially inspired, exotic-infused Buddhism. Finally, I discuss theater performances including the 1891 operatic interpretation of *The Light of Asia* at the Royal Opera House, which forms an apex of the orientalist/romantic fictional imaginings of Buddhism.

Chapter four turns its gaze back to the booming metropolis of London, where we discover that Buddhism had stepped off the page and had become the focus of a number of popular entertainments. First I discuss the unusual episode of P. T. Barnum's exhibition of a 'Buddhist' white elephant at the London Zoo in 1884. This section reveals how the popular media negotiated contested ideas about Buddhism, where the learned opinions of the orientalists competed with the snide commentary of the comic and social papers. Second, I investigate a series of native village exhibitions: the 1885 Ceylonese Exhibition, the 1885-86 Japanese Village, and the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition. The exhibitions presented Buddhism on British soil, with living anthropological panoramas that featured Buddhism temples and idols as well as ritual-

performing natives. Lacking any other basis by which to judge the authenticity of such exhibitions, the media assessed them above all by aesthetic and visual criteria.

In the fifth chapter I examine the popular media's portrayal of Burmese Buddhism in 1885/1886 to show how the country's political involvements thrust a nearly unknown country to the forefront of the public's attention. Britain's allegedly unpremeditated acquisition of Upper Burma in 1886 produced a public clamor for even the most basic information about the country, its culture, and its notoriously "savage" Buddhist king. A surge in media reports about Burma forced the public to grapple with the conflict between their understanding of Buddhism's philosophical orientation and the reality of religious expression and Buddhist violence in Burma. Writers and illustrators such as George Scott and W.H. Titcomb presented a picturesque, charming, but often stereotypical and one-dimensional picture of Burmese Buddhism to an eager reading public. The tone and tenor of these mass media articles suggest that - like Ceylon and Burma themselves - Buddhism had, in the eyes of the British public, become a possession of the crown.

Chapter six, the final substantive chapter of my dissertation, focuses on Buddhism's permeation of British mass culture primarily in the 1880s. In this chapter, we see how Buddhism was discussed, digested, and negotiated in references in a host of discourse styles and formats: short and serialized fiction, social commentaries, jokes and satire, puzzles, children's tales, Christmas books, birthday books, and more. This chapter addresses the phenomenon of popular Buddhism at its most integrated and infiltrating, showing how Buddhism permeated British discourse down to its most minute level. Assessments of class and gender also demonstrate how interest in Buddhism was adapted for different subgroups of the British public. Finally, I show how Buddhism was taken to new levels of commercialization with the sale of heavily commercialized volumes, gift books, and even trinkets.

Readers will immediately note some omissions and limitations to this study. As already mentioned, this dissertation intentionally shies away from an attempt to re-read the orientalists, as their works have been mined and exhausted by numerous previous studies. Another striking omission is the Theosophists, despite their being undoubtedly instrumental in popularizing (their breed of) Esoteric Buddhism in precisely this period. The Theosophical movement has, however, already been the focus of innumerable studies; reassessment of its appeal in the last quarter of the century does not seem warranted at this point, when there are other avenues of inquiry that have

been neglected.¹⁶⁸ In addition, the 1893 Chicago World's Parliament of Religions, while obviously also falling within the decades of my study, is not further considered; because the parliament received almost no notice whatsoever in British media, its impact on the reading public across the Atlantic appears to have been negligible. Finally, owing to considerations of scope and practicality, it was not possible to include sources produced in the colonies of Ceylon, India, or Burma in the study at hand.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Just a selection would include: Stephen Prothero, *The White Buddhist: The Asian Odyssey of Henry Steel Olcott* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 277-332; Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001); L. Barrow *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and the English Plebeians, 1850-1910* (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul Books, 1986).

¹⁶⁹ For an introduction to these sources see Jerry Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel, *Periodicals of Queen Victoria's Empire: An Exploration* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), especially Brahma Chaudhuri's chapter on India (175-202) and Don Vann and VanArsdel's notes on Ceylon (310-315); and Ronald Warwick, *Commonwealth Literature Periodicals: A Bibliography* (London: Mansell, 1979). Don Vann and VanArsdel do not include Burma in their study. Many relevant publications are archived in the historical collections of the Royal Commonwealth Society (located in Cambridge), an association that was established in 1868 "with the objective of promoting knowledge and appreciation of the British colonies." Unfortunately the process of digitization is not as far advanced with this group of materials, and a lengthy research trip to Cambridge and London was not financially or practically feasible for this dissertation.

2 Colonial Buddhism I: The Prince of Wales in Ceylon (1875)

"Buddhists might in perilous times derive some confidence from the fact that Britain is, in one sense, the greatest of Buddhist powers."

The Pall Mall Gazette, September 1878¹⁷⁰

"We have introduced the blessings of British rule—the good and well-paid missionary, the Remington rifle, the red cotton pocket handkerchief, and the use of the liquor called rum—into so many of the corners of the tropical world that it is high time we should begin in return to learn somewhat about fetishes and fustic, Jamaica and jaggery, bananas and Buddhism."

Cornhill Magazine, February 1885¹⁷¹

The peak of Victorian popular interest in Buddhism coincides with the period historians call High or New Imperialism.¹⁷² From 1857 to the end of the century – when "the empire spread like the measles rash," in Bernard Porter's memorable phrase – England's relationship with her possessions changed to one of greater aggression and explicit confrontation.¹⁷³ This expansionist program coincided with advances in media technology, image reproduction, and the increased realism of New Journalism. As a consequence, the press played an increasingly critical role in analyzing and dramatizing Britain's relationships and actions overseas – to that point that some authors see special correspondents and the popular press as especially complicit in ensuring popular support for the imperialist agenda.¹⁷⁴ An abundant surplus of travelogues, special reports, and other media aimed at a wide audience brought the Queen's subjects at home at the center of empire into contact with the cultures, peoples, and religions of the Queen's *other* subjects. As Andrew Griffiths has noted, "The rapid expansion of Britain's empire through the 1880s and 1890s was a source of spectacular images and dramatic narratives for the press, whilst the press helped to produce a consensus (or acquiescence) in public opinion which permitted imperial

¹⁷⁰ "Occasional Notes." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Monday, September 23, 1878; Issue 4240.

¹⁷¹ "De Bananas." *Cornhill Magazine*, February 1885. Part of this article is quoted again in *Glasgow Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland), Thursday, February 5, 1885; Issue 31.

¹⁷² On High Imperialism, see Scott B. Cook, *Colonial Encounters in the Age of High Imperialism* (New York: Pearson, 1997). Jonathan Hart, *Empires and Colonies* (Polity, 2008), 171-223. Michael Adas, "High Imperialism and the New History" in *Islamic & European Expansion: The Forging of a Global Order* (Temple University Press, 1993), 311-344.

¹⁷³ Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A History of British Imperialism 1850-2011* (London: Routledge, 2014), 74.

¹⁷⁴ H. J. Field, *Toward a Programme of Imperial Life: The British Empire at the Turn of the Century* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982), especially chapter 3, "Co-Opting the Masses" (83ff.). See also Mackenzie, "Empire and Metropolitan Cultures."

expansion. For the new mass reading public, the experience of empire was an experience mediated through the press.¹⁷⁵ One scholar even estimates that during this period, 50 to 70 percent of the articles in the illustrated popular press were dedicated to colonial conflicts.¹⁷⁶ Newspapers raced to keep up with conquests and skirmishes and to provide readers with adequate information about Britain's newest acquisitions – and to do so in a way that fed Britons' imperialistic spirit and heightened their belief in the glory of the empire. In colonial reporting, factual accuracy was often secondary to sensationalism; as Alan Lee has noted, "[i]mperial expansion after the 1870s was ideally suited to exploitation by the 'new journalism' ... it provided opportunity for sometimes vastly imaginative tales of foreign lands, disguised as news."¹⁷⁷ This hybrid genre of entertainment-cum-news bulletin was also instrumental in ensuring that the reading public maintained at least a minimum level of information about its government's activities in lesser-known parts of the world. In the era of High Imperialism, then, Britain's activities and interests abroad often dictated the focus of the press.

The media's dominant imperial emphasis had a concrete effect on the nation's interest in Buddhism. Before the end of the century, clear shifts in interest took place as first Indian Buddhism, then Ceylonese, and Burmese, and eventually Japanese and Chinese Buddhism came into sharper focus - a pattern that closely follows the movements and expansions of British interests around the globe.¹⁷⁸ Popular imperial interest had a transformative impact on Britons' understanding of Buddhism as information about Buddhist priests and practitioners from across the colonies increasingly began to feature in the news. The Buddhist countries of Ceylon and Burma offer unique case studies in this regard, as both were focal points of popular media reporting. In this chapter, I analyze changes in the popular media representation of Ceylonese Buddhism, starting the Prince of Wales's 1875 victory lap around the colonies, with its celebrated and minutely documented trip to see a perahera festival and the Buddha's tooth in Kandy. I argue that this imperialistic media spectacle had a

¹⁷⁵ Griffiths, *The New Journalism*, 9.

¹⁷⁶ H. Hazel Hahn, "Indian Princes, Dancing Girls and Tigers: The Prince of Wales's Tour of India and Ceylon, 1875–1876." *Postcolonial Studies* 12, no. 2 (June 1, 2009): 173–92, 174.

¹⁷⁷ Alan J. Lee, *The origins of the popular press in England, 1855-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 161.

¹⁷⁸ On China's emergence in the Victorian consciousness, see Forman, *China and the Victorian Imagination* and Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China*. On Japan, see Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism* and Hugh Cortazzi, *Japan in Late Victorian London* (Sainsbury Institute, 2009).

transformative effect on media representations of Buddhism and in turn on the reading public's perceptions of the religion.

In November 1875, on the eve of his thirty-fourth birthday, the Prince of Wales (Albert Edward, crowned Edward VII in 1901) left England for a five-month tour of the British subcontinent, including India and Ceylon. The journey - the Prince's own idea - initially raised the vocal objections the socialist and populist press in England, who were outraged at the prospect of having to fund what they perceived to be a pleasure tour (which *Reynolds's Newspaper* derisively referred to as the Prince's "Frolics in the East.")¹⁷⁹ Before the tour, the Indian newspaper press had already begun criticizing the undertaking, and some major British papers expressed their doubts about whether the playboy prince was really suited for the role of imperial ambassador.¹⁸⁰ Most papers, however, expressed confidence that the trip would "deepen the native appreciation of British rule," as *The Spectator* put it.¹⁸¹ Once underway, the Prince's travels immediately captured the attention of the whole nation. The British reading public quickly warmed up to the exoticism and romance of the tour, following the Prince's every move in telegraphic installments relayed to the *Times* and reprinted in almost every newspaper around the country. Papers such as the *Graphic* printed detailed schedules of each stop on the tour, allowing readers to follow the Prince's journey in minute detail.¹⁸² Even the four-week delay in transmission of more detailed reports from the special correspondents on location seemed to heighten, not dampen, the public's hungry clamor for updates.¹⁸³ Much of this popular success was thanks to the Prince's strong inner sense of showmanship and spectacle: "Instinctively he grasped the essence of the Raj," notes Edward VII's most recent biographer, Jane Ridley, and so "elevated a royal visit into a historic event."¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ "Our Rule in the East." *Reynolds's Newspaper* (London, England), Sunday, April 23, 1876; Issue 1341. On public criticism of the tour see Christopher Hibbert, *Edward VII: The Last Victorian King* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 131.

¹⁸⁰ "India." *Times*, June 28, 1875: 8. For a discussion see Chandrika Kaul, "News of the Imperial World: Popular Print Culture, the *News of the World* and India in the late Nineteenth Century," in *The News of the World and the British Press, 1843-2011*, ed. Laurel Brake, Chandrika Kaul, and Mark W. Turner (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 100-115.

¹⁸¹ "Topics of the Day: The Prince of Wales's Visit to India." *The Spectator*, 10 July 1875, 4.

¹⁸² "Calendar of the Prince's Journey Through India." *The Graphic* (London, England), Wednesday, May 10, 1876.

¹⁸³ Chandrika Kaul, *Reporting the Raj: The British Press and India, 1880-1922* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 31.

¹⁸⁴ Jane Ridley, *Bertie: A Life of Edward VII* (London: Chatto & Windus), 176.

Measured by the furor of media attention, the tour was an unparalleled sensation - in part because so much care had been taken to ensure that every footstep was not only documented, but richly illustrated and even photographed (though the technology to reprint photographs in the news was introduced only in 1891).¹⁸⁵ William Howard Russell, the Prince's private secretary, was appointed the trip's official chronicler, while sketches were prepared by the court-appointed artist Sydney Hall.¹⁸⁶ The trip was deemed so important that most of the larger papers, including the *Times*, *Standard*, and *Daily Telegraph*, sent their own special correspondents; the *Illustrated London News* and *Graphic* sent artists as well. In addition, the famous Sri Lankan artist J. L. K. Van Dort was engaged to produce illustrations for the *Graphic* (these would include the Buddha's tooth, Buddhist priests, and related sketches). The result was a near-total saturation of the press with news of the Prince's progress for almost an entire year, both in the form of rapidly dispatched telegraphs as well as detailed reports and illustrations that followed by mail. Furthermore, the constant (often unattributed) recycling of news items in every type of paper – from the *Times* and the *Spectator* to working-class papers like *Lloyd's* – ensured a universal audience for the tour (clearly, then, interest in the Prince's every move and maneuver was not limited to a certain social strata).¹⁸⁷ While the elitist *Athenaeum* would complain with some exasperation in July of 1876 that "[t]he public are sick and tired of hearing of the Prince of Wales's visit to India," the continued enthusiasm for articles discussing the Prince's journey, even eight months on, proves that the public was anything *but* weary of the romantic adventures of the future Emperor of India.¹⁸⁸

The tour was, of course, ultimately conceived as a display of power and imperial splendor; a prelude, in some ways, to Queen Victoria's official assumption of the title of Empress of India later that same year. Each choreographed, photographed, and documented encounter during the journey was calculated to assert and underscore the

¹⁸⁵ Brake and Demoor, *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*, xix.

¹⁸⁶ William Howard Russell, *The Prince of Wales' tour: a diary in India; with some account of the visits of His Royal Highness to the courts of Greece, Egypt, Spain, and Portugal* (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1877). <https://archive.org/details/princeofwalestou00russuoft>; Accessed Feb 20, 2015. Russell's account is lively and detailed yet he too often epitomizes, unfortunately, what one imagines from a racist English colonist. Other contemporary accounts in book form include: George Wheeler, *India in 1875-76: The visit of the Prince of Wales: Chronicle of His Royal Highness's Journeying in India, Ceylon, Spain and Portugal* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1876). J. Drew Gay, *The Prince of Wales in India, or From Pall Mall to the Punjab* (New York: R. Worthington, 1877). Gay was the private correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*.

¹⁸⁷ e.g. "The Prince of Wales." *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, Sunday, December 12, 1875; Issue 1725.

¹⁸⁸ "From Pall Mall to the Punjab; or, With the Prince in India." *The Athenaeum* 2543, July 22, 1876: 105-106.

crown's dominion and ownership in India and Ceylon. The Prince's role could not be even momentarily forgotten by contemporaries at home or in the colonies; as the *Athenaeum* noted in October 1875, "it would be easier to persuade Bengalese that the Prince of Wales came out here to write a book of travel than to make them imagine that he comes out as anything else than the future Emperor."¹⁸⁹ The *Times*, too, noted (without censure) that whatever might be the details of the trip, it was clear to all that the Prince's journey was primarily intended to assert Britain's power over her colonies:

In theory he will be in one sense (as India views such matters) the guest of the Sovereign, represented by the Viceroy; really the guest of the Viceroy himself and India; but no theory will alter the fact, in the eyes of Native or European, that reception is being given to the heir of the magnificent thrones of England and India. ... The Prince will initiate no new policy; but he will be the centre and representative of English power...¹⁹⁰

The *Spectator* likewise celebrated the Prince's tour as an opportunity to reinforce British rule; as the paper noted, the Prince must have been keenly aware that his every move was a symbol act of kingship and sovereignty, and that every maneuver carried the symbolic weight of this essential relationship:

It is right that the vast population entrusted to our care should know something of the man who must one day demand their allegiance...and who must exercise, no matter whether through "influence" or through "power," great control over the policy to be pursued by the ruling nation towards them. ... Kings forget everything, except their Kingship, and it is impossible for the Prince of Wales, whatever his real character— still an unknown quantity, for no King has ever yet been what he was as Prince—to traverse India and know that he must be its Emperor, and not recognise somehow the responsibility which that amazing destiny lays upon his conscience.¹⁹¹

Unmistakably, then, aspects of power and domination were obvious, self-understood, and indeed explicitly celebrated by contemporary readers. As historian Chandrika Kaul has noted, "[t]he journalists of the popular press clearly appreciated the political potential and role of royalty in both creating and consolidating imperial sentiment."¹⁹² It is thus not too much of a stretch to suggest that every scene of the Prince's journey must be interpreted as playing a specific and calculated role in fostering the conviction, in the colonies and abroad, of the power and magnificence of the empire as well as of the natural sovereignty that entitled the British monarch to rule it. It is with these

¹⁸⁹ "The Prince of Wales's Visit to India." *The Athenaeum*, October 9, 1875; 2502.

¹⁹⁰ "The Prince's Visit To India." *Times* (London, England) August 20, 1875: 8.

¹⁹¹ "Topics of the Day: The Prince of Wales's Visit to India." *The Spectator*, July 10, 1875, 4.

¹⁹² Kaul, "News of the Imperial World," 113.

aspects in mind that we must approach our analysis, as well, since even the Prince's encounter with the Buddhist world would prove no exception to this rule.

We turn now to the question of religion. The Prince's tour took him to lands that were not only under British control, but that had also been enduring focal points for Christian missions and central locations for British encounters with non-Christian religions. Initially, some anticipated that the Prince's tour would be a great opportunity for Christian missions, with the possibility that his visit might ignite *increased* interest in Buddhism being nearly unimaginable. In a sermon preached to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) a month before the Prince's departure, the Bishop of Oxford predicted that the Prince's travels to India would awaken new interest about the lands and people of the empire and in turn be a boon for the cause of Christ abroad. As reported in the *Times*, the Bishop observed that they "were probably on the eve of a time of much more general acquaintance with India than even the great advances of late years had afforded," and the Bishop would be "very much mistaken if the visit of the Prince of Wales to India, whatever else resulted from it, did not open up a large amount of information respecting that great Empire to many English men and women who had not from various causes been much interested in the subject hitherto." The Prince's visit was, for the Bishop, primarily a prime opportunity to learn more about India for the sake of the "great capacities for conversions" the country presented. "It we were only true to ourselves," the Bishop continued, "if in our dealings with the people we were honest, earnest, and gentle - not arrogant and imperious - we might, by God's urgency, succeed in doing as great a work there as had ever been done since the Gospel was first preached."¹⁹³ As it turned out, the Bishop and other Christian conservatives would have cause for alarm, rather than celebration, at the Prince's attitude toward non-Christian religions in the empire. Not only did the Prince display not the slightest hint of interest in carrying out missionary work abroad, but he set a globally publicized example of religious tourism and (arguably superficial) interest in non-Christian religions.

2.1 A Banquet in the Caves of Elephants

This discussion begins with a brief mention of the royal banquet that the Prince of Wales hosted in the Hindu and Buddhist Caves of Elephanta (near Bombay), an

¹⁹³ "The Prince Of Wales's Visit To India." *The Times* (London, England) 13 Sept. 1875: 8.

episode that is revealing of the kind of theatrical spectacle-making that characterized much of the trip. The press reactions to this episode also serve as a litmus test that reveals the public's divided mindset towards non-Christian religions and the Prince's public engagement with them. On November 12, in a scene that modern scholars are likely to interpret as a almost obscene display of colonial insensitivity, the Prince of Wales hosted an elaborate dinner party in the ancient Hindu caves on Elephanta Island (which a number of British journalists incidentally believed were primarily Buddhist, not Hindu).¹⁹⁴ The detailed descriptions printed in the papers evoke a sense of the magnitude and splendor of the extravagant fête and seem to relish in the 'weird beauty' and 'incongruity'— obvious even to contemporaries – of celebrating an imperial dinner party at the site of the native subjects' ancient worship. The *Daily News*, for example, described the scene as follows:

Elephanta Island was reached about sundown, and the party strolled slowly up the steep ascent, the pathway being lined with rows and festoons of lighted lamps... Under the palm trees here carpets had been laid down and chairs and torches arranged. The result was an al fresco dining room, where people sat chatting for an hour and a half, looking down on the myriad lights on the water and shore and jetty. [...] An incongruity was perhaps discernible in the popping of champagne corks where priests has worshipped; in nineteenth century flirtations where devotees had knelt; in flounces, and tulle, and dainty bonnets amid the hoary mystical relics of a faith older than our own. [...] But, incongruity apart, the entertainment was very pleasant and successful; and when, after the usual loyal toasts, the caverns to their remotest accesses were illuminated with red, green, and blue fire, the weird beauty of spectacle was extremely impressive.¹⁹⁵

The arrangement of the dinner seating was carefully designed so that the Prince's royal table symbolically supplanted and usurped the religious figures that should have formed the focal point of the cave. While the *Daily News* correspondent displayed some uncertainty about the identity of the gods being worshipped in the caves, the symbolism of the maneuver was not lost on him: in the central cave the table of honor was "raised across and in front of the Buddhist Holy of Holies" and "the Royal seat [of the Prince of Wales] was immediately before the famous allegorical Trinity of the Buddhist [sic] Deity Shiva."¹⁹⁶ This interpretation is reinforced by the reflections of the correspondent for the *Standard*, who similarly hints at the displacement of the Hindu deities as the Prince becomes the focal point of the evening's rituals:

Innumerable lamps had been suspended from the solid rock overhead, which

¹⁹⁴ There are in fact five Hindu caves devoted to Shiva and two Buddhist caves on the island.

<http://elephanta.co.in/history-of-elephanta>, accessed May 2016.

¹⁹⁵ "Latest Telegrams." *Daily News* (London, England), Monday, November 15, 1875; Issue 9223.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

formed the roof of the temple, and they were now filling the cave with more than a dim and anything but a religious light. Around the walls stood or sat strange massive figures of Hindoo gods, sculptured by unknown hands, nobody knows when, and, *mirabile dictu*, up and down the temple ran wooden tables, daintily laid out with all the signs of a forthcoming European banquet. At the far end was a cross table somewhat raised above the others, and it was easy to divine what guest was to occupy the seat of honour there.¹⁹⁷

Noteworthy here is the *Standard* correspondent's use of quasi-religious language in the description (religious light – *mirabile dictu* – divine). For the journalist, however, it is not the caves or the sculptures that are marvelous to relate, but the Prince himself and the wonder-inducing transformation of the ancient temple into an imperial banquet hall. The ancient Hindu deities, described elsewhere in the same article as "grotesque and sadly mutilated," form the negative foil for the Prince's and his company's lively celebrations: the decayed ancient traditions supplanted by the living power of the British rule.

Lavish, two-page illustrations created for both the *Graphic* and the *London Illustrated News* (reproduced on the following pages) indicate that this spectacle was seen by the correspondents and illustrators alike as a prime scene for conveying the splendor, romance, and drama of the Prince's Indian tour to readers back home. The seated Victorian diners were waited on by an army of Indian servants, and the festivities celebrated in the midst of one of India's archeological and religious treasures broadcast an aura of ownership, mastery, and control. The Prince's seating at the banquet table of honor, directly beneath the Hindu trinity at the front of the caves, sent a clear signal of dominion and ownership. Yet the newspapers and journals, including even the normally more sensitive *Athenaeum*, went so far as to insist, "They (the Hindoos), as well as the Jains, look upon the visit to the Elephanta Caves with gratification."¹⁹⁸ Far from any perceived insult towards the natives, therefore, the Indians were presumed to be flattered and gratified that the Prince had elected to throw a banquet in their sacred caves. Prior to the feast, the guests had been given two hours to wander about the caves, although readers were hastily assured that "the presence of the party there implied no desecration of the once sacred place"¹⁹⁹ (the use of the qualifier "*once* sacred" naturally reinforcing the European view of the natives' religion

¹⁹⁷ "The Prince's Visit to the Caves of Elephanta." *The Standard*; reprinted in *The Belfast News-Letter* (Belfast, Ireland), Thursday, November 18, 1875; Issue 18819.

¹⁹⁸ "The Prince of Wales's Visit to India." *The Athenaeum*; December 11, 1875; 2511; 789.

¹⁹⁹ "The Prince's Visit to the Caves of Elephanta." *The Belfast News-Letter* (Belfast, Ireland), Thursday, November 18, 1875; Issue 18819.

as decaying or even dying out). Readers were assured that – rather than feeling insult or slight at the evening's events – Brahma looked down upon the party with "sublime countenance surveying in its stillness a hearty English dinner party, unperturbed by the bang of the champagne bottle, the rattle of knives and forks, the happy English laughter, or the cheers that crowned the toasts."²⁰⁰ The language of the article strongly suggests that, for the correspondent, the ancient sacrality of the caves had been wholly obliterated by the divine hero-worship of the Prince, who had usurped the role of the Hindu trinity as the object of adoration.

As the Standard described the scene,

Not all contemporaries were so insensitive to the dynamics of the banquet: the *Examiner* took offense at what it saw as an affront to Buddhists everywhere. (The *Examiner*, like the *Daily News*, apparently believed the caves to be in Ceylon, and thus mistakenly concluded that they were Buddhist in origin; in any case, the caves in fact contain statues and structures from both traditions.²⁰¹) The *Examiner*, irate at the report of the festivities in the Caves of Elephanta, analogously compared the Prince's banquet to a group of Mahomedans throwing a sumptuous and raucous feast beneath the crucifix in Westminster Abbey. "We are not aware that there are any concealed Singhalese Buddhists in London, but if there was their feelings must have been gravely shocked" by the Prince's behavior, wrote the paper. "Not even the plea that the Oriental mind is indifferent on the subject would justify Europeans in showing disrespect to any religion while they claim from all denominations a respectful attitude towards

Figure 4 "The Prince of Wales Lunching in the Caves of Elephanta. from a sketch by one of our special artists."

Figure 3 "The Prince of Wales Dining in the Caves of Elephanta, Bombay, from a sketch by one of our special artists."

The Graphic, Saturday, December 11, 1875.

²⁰⁰ "The Prince of Wales in India. The Caves of Elephanta." *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* (London, England), Saturday, November 20, 1875; pg. 326; Issue 742. Reprinted from *The Standard*.

²⁰¹ The source of the mistake is not clear; at this time, many treated Buddhism as a sect or offshoot of Hinduism (Thomas, "The Impact of Other Religions," 292).

Christianity."²⁰² Yet while censured for his lack of religious respect on the one hand, on the other hand the Prince of Wales was also criticized for his tourist-like interest in religious sites: "the future head of the Established Church has been taking part in 'heathen' rites," the same journal complained in reference to the Prince's visit to the caves.²⁰³

At least according to the *Athenaeum*, the fact that several other papers so easily confused Hinduism and Buddhism was an understandable one: "It is hardly to be wondered at that, speaking of the visit of the Prince of Wales to Elephanta, the able 'Special Correspondent' of a London daily newspaper described Siva as a Buddhistic deity," the journal wrote.²⁰⁴ This confusion was not the fault of the journalist, but of the natives, who "frequently hold vague views about the Supreme Object of Worship." So indiscriminate were the natives in their objects of worship that the *Athenaeum* speculated that the Prince himself might be up for deification after his trip: "It is a queer thing to say, - and we only wish that it were as preposterous in reality as it may appear in print, - but do our readers know (we have not seen a line in reference to the matter yet in any newspaper) that it is not at all unlikely that the Prince's visit to India will be made the occasion for his solemn deification by some misty-minded Jain, some sleepy Buddhist of Ceylon, or some red-hot Telugu Brahmin?"²⁰⁵

This episode is interesting for our study not because some papers were unsure whether the caves, and the statues in them, were Hindu or Buddhist; this confusion was merely incidental. Rather, the affair is relevant because it serves as an effective introduction to the Prince of Wales's remarkable skill at arranging spectacular, visually impressive tableaux that were eagerly consumed by imperially minded readers back home in Britain. Furthermore, it provides some first hints regarding the way that the ancient religions of South East Asia could be appropriated by the press as a convenient, artful backdrop to play out theatrical scenes of ownership, dominion, and control. The caves' Hindu statues became picturesque background scenery, a theatrical set that allowed the Prince to play the leading role of (future) Emperor of India, surveying and appropriating ancient traditions for his own use – a tactic that we will

²⁰² "Political and Social." *The Examiner*, Saturday, November 20, 1875; Issue 3538. The article was printed before the Prince was even in Ceylon, ruling out the possibility that the journal's reference to "Singhalese Buddhists" could have been a reference to the Prince's later visits to Colombo and Kandy.

²⁰³ "Political and Social." *The Examiner*, Saturday, November 20, 1875; Issue 3538.

²⁰⁴ "The Prince of Wales's Visit to India." *The Athenaeum*; Dec 11, 1875; 2511; 789.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

next see repeated with Buddhist ceremonies and relics in Ceylon. Whatever innate interest and appreciation the Prince may have had for the religions of the South East Asia, they in no way hindered him from his true goal of pleasure-seeking and royal tourism, or from creating a display of pomp and circumstance worthy of his position.

2.2 The Buddha's Tooth and the Perahera

The Prince of Wales's attendance at a special perahera festival and his heavily-publicized viewing of the tooth relic in the Temple of the Tooth (the Sri Dalada Maligawa) in Kandy created a spectacle that freely mixed elements of religious tourism, imperial triumphalism, and theatrical spectacle. On December 1, 1875 the Prince of Wales arrived in Ceylon for a seven-day stop, where he "made his first acquaintance with Buddhism and the Buddhists," as the *London Evening Standard* reported.²⁰⁶ The visit seemed to visibly deepen Britons' sense of pride at their ownership of the tropical island nation, which had been under British control since 1815. At the time of the trip Ceylon was already becoming a favorite travel destination for adventurous and well-heeled Britons; it was deemed to be "a combination of all that makes eastern life and eastern scenery so attractive to Europeans,"²⁰⁷ with Kandy in particular presenting "a most picturesque appearance" to the traveller.²⁰⁸ The Prince's reception in Ceylon was enthusiastic and positive; as he disembarked from the *HMSS Serapis*, the landing was decorated with flowers and arches, and the road to the city illuminated with bonfires, as the *Times* reported.²⁰⁹ When the Prince arrived in Kandy, "The cheering was continuous. The decorations and the scenery delighted and surprised the Prince... The spectacle here was extraordinary. There was a prodigious crowd, and in no part of the British dominions has the fervent demonstration here been surpassed. The Kandyans seemed wild with joy at the sight of the Queen's son, and the English, of course, were delighted."²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Untitled. *London Evening Standard*, Monday, December 6, 1875.

²⁰⁷ "Ceylon." *The London Journal*, Dec 25, 1875; 62, 1611; 408.

²⁰⁸ "The Prince of Wales." *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, Sunday, December 12, 1875, 3.

²⁰⁹ "The Prince Of Wales." *Times* (London, England) 27 Oct. 1875: 10. The Prince's arrival in India was even more sumptuously celebrated; see Kaul 108-109.

²¹⁰ "Court Circular." *Times* (London, England) December 3, 1875: 7.

Modern analyses of the Prince's tour have taken comparatively little notice of his week in Ceylon - remarking, at most, on the spectacle created by his dramatic elephant and tiger hunts in the jungles of Ceylon. To date, scholars have not mentioned the Prince's attendance at a special, exclusive performance of the traditional Sinhalese Perahera festival or discussed his highly publicized visit to see the sacred tooth of the Buddha in the Sri Dalada Maligawa temple in Kandy.²¹¹ Yet the evidence clearly suggests that the Prince's visit effected a fundamental shift in the perceptions of the reading public and inaugurated a remarkable interest in the Buddhist relic as an object of interest and, later, as a tourist destination. There had been little interest in Britain in the Buddha's tooth before the Prince's trip in 1875, yet afterwards there would be a remarkable boom in fascinated reports about the relic. In 1874, for example, Trübner & Co. had published an English translation (completed by the English-educated Sri Lankan Muthu Coomaraswamy) of the history of the relic, the *Dāṭhāvamsa*, but the publication was largely ignored.²¹² At the time of the translation's publication, the *Athenaeum* wrote in its review that the subject was unlikely to elicit any wider interest: "To a European reader... the subject is an unfortunate one: the fortunes of Buddha's tooth are too remote from our sympathies to excite much interest; and the portentous miracles, which everywhere accompany its progress, are wearisome from their monotony."²¹³ (The *Examiner* was less condemning, noting: "This interesting romance bears to Buddhism the relation that the history of the Holy Grail bears to Christianity; its adventures and miracles are of a similar kind."²¹⁴) These expressions of general disinterest in the subject, pronounced only a year before the Prince's tour, suggest the magnitude of the shift in interests that the Prince was able to effect. The indifferent descriptions of Anthony Trollope are also unlikely to have been a source of much inspiration, although the famous novelist mentioned a visit to the tooth in letters he sent back for newspaper publication in the papers during a tour in the summer of 1875, a few short months before the Prince of Wales would embark for India. (In Trollope's

²¹¹ The limited secondary literature on the Prince's 1875/1876 focuses almost exclusively on India and is not interested in religious themes. I am likewise not aware of any studies of (Sinhalese or British) Buddhism during the colonial era that mention the Prince's visit.

²¹² Mutu Coomara Swamy, *The Dathavansa; or, the History of the Tooth Relic of Gotama Buddha, in Pāli Verse. Edited, with an English Translation* (London: Trübner & Co., 1874). Rhys Davids and the Pāli text Society would produce another edition in 1884; that edition was received more favorably, due probably both to Rhys Davids's fame and to the increased general public interest in the tooth relic.

²¹³ "The Dathavansa; Or, the History of the Tooth-Relic of Gotama Buddha." *The Athenaeum* no. 2469 (Feb 20, 1875): 258.

²¹⁴ "Literary." *The Examiner* (London, England), Saturday, June 13, 1874; Issue 3463.

description, the temple was a "low, shabby place" and the jeweled casings surrounding the tooth "too barbaric to be beautiful." Of tooth itself, Trollope wrote: "I was very glad to be save the trouble of having the long operation of unpacking done before my eyes in a place as hot as an ordinary oven. [...] The tooth, which is very far within, is not real - and if real, if the undoubted tooth of Buddha, would not have given out its essence of reverence to eyes so irreverential as mine."²¹⁵)

2.3 Buddhism Through the Eyes of the Prince of Wales

Before 1875, then, meager sources and lackluster impressions had made the English public an unlikely audience to display avid interest in a sacred Buddhist relic housed halfway across the world. Yet the special correspondents who accompanied the Prince of Wales saw his viewing of the tooth as the most newsworthy item of the entire trip to Ceylon; likewise, the papers' special artists relished the opportunity to create numerous illustrations of the visit. The *Graphic* led the way in this regard, printing a multi-page spread, replete with pictures, detailing the Prince's visit to Kandy. A dramatic full-page illustration of the Prince of Wales bent over the shrine of the tooth was featured on the paper's cover on Saturday, January 8, 1876, ensuring that this image caught the eyes and imaginations of readers across Britain. The image captures an expression of serious interest and concentration on the Prince's face as he examines the shrine presented on the table before him. Especially notable is that the way that the illustration foregrounds the Prince, rather than the tooth itself, at its center. (The Buddhist priests seem to fade naturally into the background, partly because of the illustrator's heavy shading of the native figures, so that form of the Prince is effectively highlighted and becomes the natural focal point of the illustration.) As a consequence, the reading audience is confronted not with an image of the tooth per se, but of the Prince of Wales examining the tooth. The Prince is depicted as a model embodiment of

²¹⁵ The letter detailing his visit to Kandy is found in: "Letters by Anthony Trollope." *Liverpool Mercury* (Liverpool, England), Saturday, July 31, 1875; Issue 8591. Trollope wrote a total of four letters from Ceylon, which are collected in Anthony Trollope, *The Tireless Traveler: Twenty Letters to the Liverpool Mercury* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). Trollope's opinion of the Buddhists was in general rather grim; in another paper, he wrote: "We are told that even the guardian of the temple cannot open the shrine except in company with certain other minor servitors in the temple. It seemed that those around him were simply his servants, obeying his orders. There was one Buddhist priest looking on, a man draped from head to foot in yellow, and whose physiognomy was more against him than that of any other Singhalese that I saw - a horrid cut-throat looking fellow. But the character of the Buddhists priests generally is very low." Trollope, Anthony, "Scenery, Relics, and Sports in Ceylon." *Northern Echo* (Darlington, England), Monday, August 2, 1875; Issue 1736.

respectful, curious interest in the relics of the religion that he would someday inherit and govern.

Figure 5 (previous page) – "The Prince of Wales in Ceylon–Kandy; The Buddhist Priests Exhibiting Buddha's Tooth to the Prince. From a Sketch by One of our Special Artists." *The Graphic*, Saturday, January 8, 1876; Issue 319.

Figure 6 – "The Prince of Wales in Ceylon - The Devils' Dance at the Private Perehara before the Prince, Kandy." *The Graphic*, Saturday, January 8, 1876; Issue 319.

In the accompanying report inside the *Graphic's* January 8 issue, the exhibition of the sacred tooth, "one of the most holy relics of the Buddhists," is detailed in an almost play-by-play fashion. The paper's correspondent, who deemed the tooth's presentation "one of the most interesting ceremonies of his stay at Kandy," seems confident that the event will capture readers' fascination, and spares no effort to share the excitement of the tooth's unveiling. It is worth allowing the correspondent's report to speak for itself:

The shrine chamber where the relic is kept is exceedingly small, and on the occasion of the Prince's visit was crowded to suffocation - yellow-robed Buddhist priests, with their shaven heads and right arms bare to the shoulder, elbowing a miscellaneous crowd of unbelieving generals, civil officials, and special correspondents. The chief Buddhist, of course, acted as showman, and after exhibiting some curious jewellery ... he slowly and solemnly opened a silver-gilt bell-shaped shrine, and took out a golden and jewelled casket. From thence he took out another, and then another - like a conjurer performing the interminable box trick - until at last a beautiful little casket, covered with sapphires and emeralds, was reached, which, on being opened, displayed the tooth reposing on the sacred emblem, a gold lotus-leaf. The tooth is about 1 1/2 or 2 in. long, and is believed by the incredulous to be either a piece of discoloured ivory or the tooth of a boar or a crocodile. After inspecting the relic and presenting the priests with handsomely-bound dictionaries, the party adjourned to another part of the building, where a portion of the sacred books were read or chanted, and two copies presented to the Prince and mementoes of his visit.²¹⁶

This passage is revealing of the correspondent's attitude toward the relic and the natives who venerate it. Like the cover illustration, the text heavily underscores the difference between the natives and the colonial spectators. The journalist contrasts the observant priests ("yellow-robed... with their shaven heads and right arms bare to the

²¹⁶ "The Prince of Wales in Ceylon." *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, January 8, 1876; Issue 319

shoulder") with the skeptical crowd of "unbelieving" Europeans. Rhetorical cues are used to subtly cast on the authenticity of the tooth, with a comparison of the head priest to a "conjurer" performing an everyday circus "trick." This effect is exacerbated by the journalist's winking aside to the reader that "the incredulous" suspect the tooth to be of ivory or animal origin (of course, "the incredulous" do not need to be explicitly identified, as both correspondent and reader are presumed to be among their ranks).

The same issue also features three smaller illustrations, set into the text, of the ornate relic shrine, a close-up of the tooth, and a close-up character sketch of a Buddhist priest:

Figure 7 – "...a silver-gilt bell-shaped shrine, and took out a golden and jewelled casket. From thence he took out another, and then another - like a conjurer performing the interminable box trick - until at last a beautiful little casket, covered with sapphires and emeralds, was reached, which, on being opened, displayed the tooth reposing on the sacred emblem, a gold lotus-leaf." *The Graphic*, January 8, 1876; Issue 319.

Figure 8 – "The tooth is about 1 1/2 or 2 in. long, and is believed by the incredulous to be either a piece of discoloured ivory or the tooth of a boar or a crocodile." *The Graphic*, Saturday, January 8, 1876; Issue 319.

Figure 9 – "The shaven crown of one of these priests, with the screen which in certain ceremonies he places before his face, is shown in our illustration."
The Graphic, Jan. 8, 1876; Issue 319.

In contrast to the elaborate cover illustration, these small sketches are empty of spectators, colonial administrators, or the Prince of Wales; as such, they serve to usher the viewer directly into the shrine of the tooth, to create a much stronger sense of immediacy, and to strip away the layer of distance created by the "viewing the Prince viewing the relic" strategy of the cover illustration. At this point familiarity with Buddhist relics would have been basically non-existent among the majority of English readers, and the jeweled reliquary may have been literally unimaginable, without illustrations, for most of the paper's audience. The images thus act in the manner of cinematic close-ups to provide the reader with pictorial representations of the otherwise inconceivable. The same can be said for the unadorned, pseudo-scientifically styled drawing of the tooth (Fig. 5), which strips away all of the jeweled trappings of

the preceding drawing of the shine (Fig. 4) and paints the tooth in what might be described as a harsh, intentionally de-romanticizing, or even demythologizing light. In the harsh black lines of newspaper print, the larger-than-life close-up of the tooth appears grotesque and decidedly unholy, adding to the paper's deft and subtle undermining of the tooth's authenticity or ritual power. The image of the priest, with his robes and shaved head (Fig. 6), would also have been a novelty for most readers. Prior to 1875, while images of Buddhist temples and excavation sites had been populating the papers for some time, images of living priests were exceptionally rare.²¹⁷ Flipping between the cover and the inner images, then, the viewer is presented with a range of viewing possibilities that both vicariously frame his encounter with Buddhism through the mediating presence of the Prince (cover), while allowing the reader to vicariously assume the role of the Prince in inspecting, analyzing, and judging the 'veracity' of the relic for himself (close-ups). This provides a certain allowance for complexity and ambivalence in the reader's reaction to the images.

A number of other popular media sources provide descriptions of the visit. Among the daily papers, the special correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* gives a lively description of the viewing of the tooth; here, too, the drama of the unveiling is balanced by the coolness of the skeptical witness. The journalist's language is at once teasingly evocative of the excitement of the scene, while simultaneously suggestive of the joke (shared with the reader) of the obvious inauthenticity of the tooth:

How necks were craned forward and eyes strained to catch the first glimpse of this relic of Gautama Buddha! At last it burst into view, and we were in possession of all the good which those gain who are fortunate to see the mortal remains of a god. I am bound to admit that it was large enough to satisfy anybody and, more than that, to say that if Gotama Buddha ever did have such a tooth as that in his head, he might fairly claim to be excused from all responsibility for anything he said or did.²¹⁸

The viewing of the tooth was followed by various other ceremonies; as reported in the *Times* telegraph, the Prince presented a medal to the chief priest of the temple and Tamil-English dictionaries to the chief priests. After the tooth was exhibited, two priests chanted devotional passages before presenting two manuscript volumes to the

²¹⁷ As far as I can ascertain this seems to be the first image of a Buddhist priest in a British newspaper, although there are some (very, very few) periodicals with illustrations of priests as early as 1867 (e.g. Simpson, William. "The Praying Machine." *Good Words*; Dec 1867; 8, 845-848, which depicts a group of Tibetan Buddhist priests). This is the first close-up of a Buddhist priest that I found, possibly suggesting a change towards an increasingly intimate encounter.

²¹⁸ "The Inspection of the Buddha's Tooth." Excerpt from the *Daily Telegraph* reprinted in the *Bury and Norwich Post*, Tuesday February 8, 1876, 2.

Prince.²¹⁹ The chanting and devotional reading impressed the visiting British as heartfelt and not without aesthetic appeal; as William Howard Russell described it:

...one of the younger priests proceeded to chant in minors, ending in a prolonged high note, from one of the books, in a manner not unmusical, reminding us somewhat of the intonation of the Russian ritual. The reverential air and deep attention of the Buddhists who sat round the reader were very striking; one especially, who, with moistened eyes, raised his hand gently, from time to time, to emphasize a passage, looked at the Prince as if he expected a miraculous conversion.²²⁰

Russell displays respect and admiration for the emotional and religious sincerity of the priests, mixed with a sense of incredulity that such an object could be held in veneration by millions of native Buddhists, despite there being "not much to see in it" and "nothing to admire":

There was an expression of awe on the faces of the priests, which could not have been feigned; the eldest, a venerable man in spectacles, who quivered with emotion, taking up the gold lotus lead in one hand.... he took up the tooth and held it for the Prince's gaze. There was, of course, not much to see in the tooth, and, without faith, nothing to admire; and so the Prince, having duly looked at it, departed.... But it was very curious to think that so many millions of people, some of them, no doubt, wise and good, spread all over the East, constituting the population of great empires, not destitute of culture, should hold such an object in veneration.²²¹

As the Prince's private secretary and the trip's official chronographer, Russell's reflections (printed after the tour as a book, rather than immediately in the periodical press) may reflect more accurately than the media how the Prince's accompanying entourage felt about the encounter. Russell's conflicting reactions of curiosity and skepticism, polite interest mixed with secret disbelief, may reflect the general mood and reactions of those present.

While the *Graphic* and the *Times* indulged readers' curiosity with detailed and generally positive descriptions, a number of newspapers and periodicals were less generous in their assessment of the visit. Some directly attacked the Prince's visit to the temple, more overtly asserted the tooth's inauthenticity, or took pains to paint the Buddhist priests in a starkly negative light. One Exeter newspaper, for example, felt sure that the Prince must have been inwardly laughing at the priests in their enthusiastic relic-worship:

The Prince of Wales, when he looked on this invaluable relic (generally believed,

²¹⁹ "This Evening's News." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Saturday, December 4, 1875; Issue 3369.

²²⁰ Russell, *The Prince of Wales' Tour*, 271.

²²¹ *ibid.*, 270.

by the undeluded, to have been the tip of an elephant's tusk) without doubt laughed inwardly when he saw the reverence expressed by the priesthood, and the rich accompaniments for the impartation of honour to a piece of ivory.²²²

The *London Daily News* correspondent expressed what was perhaps the most negative view of the visit, dismissing the revelation of that "famous and ugly tusk" as a worthless fake.²²³ The *London Evening Standard* was likewise unimpressed, asserting: "The temple itself is of little beauty, consisting of little more than a small hall, with a sort of closet in which the sacred tooth is kept."²²⁴ Other papers relied on a common trope of ill-humored priests "jealously" guarding the tooth, casting a negative light on the experience. The special correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, for example, noted:

Passing under a curtain which was now lifted, I entered the room and found myself in the company of about twenty priests, all guarding very jealously the inner apartment of all. ... It was possible that I might have to turn back after all, for the priests gave me looks that could not be called affectionate, and muttered in their unpleasant language remarks the reverse of complementary.²²⁵

The motif of "jealous" priests appears in several other articles and, like many of the media's visual and rhetorical strategies, serves to underscore the demarcation line dividing Western journalists from native Buddhist priests – in this case even creating a suggestion of tension and concealed conflict. Other papers went further in denigrating the native priests and worshippers, often falling back on common stereotypes such as the laziness of Buddhist adherents. The *London Journal*, for example, wrote of the Sinhalese: "Their religion is Buddhism of the severest type; but their faith does not prevent their being thieves, even for Orientals. Otherwise they are harmless, timid, and willing in their lazy way."²²⁶ The Prince's visit also gave some papers the opportunity to repeat some of the less flattering stereotypes of the Buddhist religion that were common at the time. The *Graphic* would close its January 8 article with an assertion that the Buddhism of Ceylon was a "corrupted" form: "We may here mention that the Buddhism professed by the Cingalese is corrupted from the purer religion on the mainland. Amongst other things, caste distinctions are allowed, and priests are allowed to pursue secular avocations, and to leave the fraternity at will."²²⁷ For still other papers, the Prince's visit was an opportunity to recycle oft-repeated tidbits that had long fascinated Europeans interested in Buddhism, such as the supposed shared

²²² J.F. "Old Customs and Odd Notions." *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, Friday 17 March 1876.

²²³ "The Prince of Wales in Ceylon." *London Daily News*, Tuesday January 4, 1876.

²²⁴ "The Prince's Visit to Ceylon." *London Evening Standard*, Monday 03 January 1876.

²²⁵ "Sanctum of Buddha's Tooth." *Bury Free Press*, Saturday, January 8, 1876.

²²⁶ "Ceylon." *The London Journal*, December 25, 1875; 62, 1611; 408.

²²⁷ "Prince of Wales in Ceylon." *The Graphic*, Saturday, January 8, 1876; Issue 319.

identity of St. Josaphat and Buddha (argued by Max Müller in his *Migration of Fables*.)²²⁸ Such articles suggest that the Prince's tour was an opportunity for papers to roll out what little information (or clichés) about Buddhism as were at their disposal.

Finally, the popular media shows a repeated rhetorical emphasis on the exoticism and otherness of the scene. Several sources suggest that the public struggled to digest and understand the fact of their future monarch engaging in an appreciative viewing of a heathen relic. This discomfort could be expressed in the form of serious critique or scathing satire, depending on the media outlet. The *Era*, for example, expressed in memorable language what may have been a common sentiment: a mixture of fascination, skepticism, and even repugnance at the spectacle of the tooth viewing:

It has become quite proverbial that there are many things which are very often talked about, but very seldom seen. The majority of English men - aye, and women, too - have recently heard and read much respecting the splendour which has attended H.R.H. the Prince of Wales during his stay in India. Our imaginations have had to conjure up all sorts of strange sights, and our mental vision has been almost dazzled by pictures of the pomp and magnificence of Eastern magnates. Why, only a day or two since we were all reading of a jealously guarded temple whose very doors were covered with beaten gold, with posts of carved ebony, ivory, and embossed silver; of a pagoda of pure gold, with hanging chains of splendid jewels... And all for what? To shelter and protect a tooth - the sacred tooth of Buddha. With so much splendour surrounding a tooth, what cause is there for wonder at the glories which have surrounded a Prince?²²⁹

Here the language of dazzling, conjuring, strangeness, and splendor is contrasted with the bald reality of a tooth that to the English reader appeared anything but holy. The *Era* emphasizes the extraordinary feats of imagination required of the average English reader to picture the carefully guarded, elaborately housed relic. Despite the elaborate descriptions of the relic appearing in all of the major papers, the fantastic scene still stretched the readers' imaginations to their limits.

Taking a more satirical route to underscore the otherness of the event, one long poem published in an Irish paper teased the Europeans who had been caught "straining their necks" to see the tooth. A few lines will suffice to give an idea of the flavor of the piece:

How strained each Western neck to catch a sight
Of relic dear! The Queen of Sheba said,
"Half was not told her" - sure, this tooth so bright
Grew not in mortal's, but in elephant's head.

²²⁸ "Buddha Alias St. Josaphat." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Thursday, December 16, 1875; Issue 3379.

²²⁹ "The London Music Hals." *The Era* (London, England), Sunday, January 9, 1876; Issue 1946.

Indeed, 'twas large enough to please them all -
 "H.R.H," too. Strange piece of ivory -
 Two inches long, and one inch broad withal.
 Speak! precious relic; speak! we cry to thee.
 And not a speck upon thee! Happy Buddha
 Did'st thou ne'er have the tooth-ache, never lose
 A grinder - that could briskly chew some cud-ha?
 Tell me, is this thine own? or, tell me whose?²³⁰

This satirical piece ridicules not the native Buddhist priests with their (genuine) attitude of veneration, but the Westerners, including the Prince of Wales himself, with their inexplicable interest in the relic. The tooth relic itself is likewise satirized as nothing more than a strange piece of elephant's tusk, a "grinder" (molar) that must have given the Buddha a toothache.

The popular press's discussion of the tooth reveals a number of noteworthy aspects. First, we see a consistent concern with asserting the tooth relic's (historical) inauthenticity and labeling it as an unambiguous "fake." For the British readership, the tooth relic's value was synonymous with its historical authenticity; hence, denying the tooth's legitimacy as the actual tooth of the historical Buddha was tantamount to dismissing its value altogether. The pseudo-scientific, ostensibly true-to-life drawing of the tooth in the *Graphic*, for example – or the *London Daily News*'s dismissive reference to that "famous and ugly tusk"²³¹ – are visual and discursive examples of how correspondents deromanticized the relic and encouraged British readers to dismiss the relic as not only inauthentic, but grotesque or laughable. This popular media stance reflects the larger Western concern with the verifiability of the historical Buddha and its longstanding devaluation of ritual.²³² This is consistent with the trend of demythologizing that other scholars have identified as characteristic with the West's encounter with Buddhism in the nineteenth century.²³³ Value, for the British, meant

²³⁰ H.B. "Buddha's Tooth." *The Belfast News-Letter* (Belfast, Ireland), Wednesday, February 23, 1876; Issue 18899.

²³¹ "The Prince of Wales in Ceylon." *London Daily News*, Tuesday, January 4, 1876.

²³² "Buddhism itself was often characterized in nineteenth-century western literature as pessimistic, nihilistic, devoid of any power for promoting goodness, and in a state of degradation and decline. Especially decried were Buddhism's supposed idolatry, benighted superstition, and mechanical ritualism. Not just the uninformed made such assertions but the early orientalist scholars who were largely responsible for introducing Buddhism to western audiences." McMahan, *Making of Buddhism Modernism*, 94.

²³³ "What I am calling demythologization is the process of attempting to extract—or more accurately, to reconstruct—meanings that will be viable within the context of modern worldviews from teachings embedded in ancient worldviews. In order to transpose such themes into a modern key, elements that are incompatible with modernity are relegated to "myth" and shorn of literal truth-value." McMahan, *Making of Buddhism Modernism*, 46.

historical truth-value; divested of historical legitimacy, the tooth could be more easily dismissed as an object whose only value was as an exotic curio.

Second, assertions of the tooth's illegitimacy were accompanied by an apparent need on the part of the Western journalists to constantly reaffirm their stance of unequivocal suspicion and skepticism – a tactic, perhaps, to underscore that the journalists' curious interest was not to be mistaken with the veneration of the natives. The otherness of the priests was asserted by associating them with naive superstitious belief; this was contrasted to the Westerners, who were described as undeluded and incredulous. Further characterization of the priests as emotional, jealous, and irrational also served to create a rhetorical boundary between reporters and natives and to reinforce the 'otherness' of the Buddhists. The papers also contain repeated assertions of the immoral character of the Buddhist priests, with an emphasis on their jealous guarding of the tooth and their generally dishonest nature.

Finally, it is worth noting that some within the clerical community raised more serious objections to the Prince's engagement with Buddhism. The most vocal of these was the Rev. Dr. Duff, professor of evangelistic theology at the Free Church College in Edinburgh, whose invective against the Prince's actions in India and Ceylon was widely reprinted in almost all the major British papers, ensuring that his vocal criticism obtained a national audience. In his sermon at a meeting of the Anglo-Indian Christian Union, Dr. Duff suggested that it was inappropriate and outrageous for the future monarch of a Christian nation to investigate with open curiosity, even respect, the relics and rituals of an "idolatrous" and "tyrannical" religious system. In the words of the *Times* summary, which was reprinted often nearly verbatim in local papers throughout the country: "Undoubtedly, there were some things which had already excited numerous apprehensions. Idolatrous temples were visited; the Tooth of Buddha, the founder of the Buddhist system, which prevailed so widely and tyrannically over the people, was inspected, and so on."²³⁴ Furthermore, "Spectacles had been witnessed which had produced a feeling of painfulness on the part not only of Christian people in this land, but of respectable secular-minded people," including cruel animal fights and nautch girl dances.²³⁵ The popularity of Dr. Duff's sermon

²³⁴ "The Prince of Wales. On Tuesday a meeting." *The Times* (London, England) 13 Jan. 1876: 8. Reprinted in many sources, e.g. "A Hit at H.R.H." *Reynolds's Newspaper*, Sunday 16 January 1876, 1.

²³⁵ *ibid.*

suggests that its vitriolic against the Prince resonated with readers around the country. Other conservative religious voices also expressed their disappointment at the Prince's failure to further the Christian missionary cause on his journey; his tour had resulted not in conversions, but in the open interest in, and apparent appreciation of, foreign religions. Joining in Dr. Duff's refrain, for example, was an irked female correspondent for the *Evening Telegraph* who reported on the great disappointment felt by the religious communities of London after learning that the Prince's visit was comprised of "sporting, dancing, receiving rich gifts of jewels, and bestowing photographs in return," but had delivered not a single Christian conversion. The hoped-for model of "Christian morality and earnestness in the work of religion" expected from the Prince of Wales had not materialized; nor had the 200,000 pounds granted for the trip borne the expected religious fruit that the Bishop of London, among others, had so ardently hoped for.²³⁶ Such critical Christian voices surely represent a fair proportion of the British population.

It is a sign of the times, however, that most of the papers dismissed such conservative reactions out of hand and defended the Prince's interest in the tooth as presenting no danger to Christendom. "There is no more idolatry in going to see BUDDHA's tooth any more than there is Romanism in visiting the POPE," one local newspaper reassured its readers.²³⁷ The *Glasgow Herald* likewise reminded its readers that the Prince could hardly be expected to engage in Christian missionizing in lieu of his more important functions: "Dr. Duff has evidently forgot that the Prince of Wales went out to India not as a reformer with the 'bosom of destruction' in his hand, but as a tourist, certainly of a more exalted kind than usual, but all the same a British tourist with the intention of seeing as much in a given time as possible."²³⁸ Another paper spoke scathingly of those who had

...apparently deluded themselves into the hope that the Prince would go out to India as a sort of amateur missionary, full of zeal for the spread of the narrowest views on Sabbath observance among the heathen of that benighted land, determined to bring discredit upon Siva, Brahma, and Vishnu, the Hindu Trinity, and to undermine the temples of the Buddha. Instead of that the Prince has exhibited a great deal of that British capacity of doing at Rome as Rome does.²³⁹

²³⁶ "London Gosspip." Reprinted from the *Evening Telegraph. Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin, Ireland), Monday, October 2, 1876; Issue N/A.

²³⁷ *Northern Echo* (Darlington, England), Thursday, January 13, 1876; Issue 1876.

²³⁸ Untitled. *Glasgow Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland), Wednesday, January 12, 1876; Issue 12047.

²³⁹ Untitled. *Dundee Courier*, Tuesday January 18, 1876.

With the exception of a few conservative voices, then, the majority of Britons were not only *not* appalled by the Prince's interest in Hinduism and Buddhism, but they accepted with equanimity his interest in the religion of the British possessions and even applauded his "when in Rome" approach to dealing with local religious populations.

2.4 Repercussions: The Crown as Colonial Caretaker of Buddhism?

We have just examined at some length the press reactions to the future Emperor of India's ceremonial visit to a Buddhist relic – a relic that had long been seen as the symbolic keys to the kingdom of Kandy. What were the religious and political repercussions of this highly visible event? Was the Prince of Wales's viewing of the tooth relic merely a tourist stop and a publicity stunt – or did the event have an actual impact on public perceptions of Buddhism? Before we can delve deeper into the contemporary implications of the spectacle and aftermath of this event, it will be helpful to (briefly) review the historical significance of the tooth and its relationship to British rule. The tooth relic played a long and significant role in the history of Sinhalese Buddhism, and historical accounts dating from as early as the fourteenth century suggest that the relic and associated festivals held enormous religious significance for the people of the island.²⁴⁰ In addition to its religious significance, the tooth was a palladium of the kings of Ceylon and a symbol of the right to rule the island. This combination of religious significance and political power was celebrated and reinforced in associated festivals and processions, most notably the Kandy perahera. As Sujit Sivasundaram notes, "In Kandy, history was linked to acts of performance whereby the king associated his greatness in relation to a past line thorough processions, translations, and artistic and religious patronage."²⁴¹ Buddhist relics and places of worship thus provided political as well as social cohesion, with the tooth relic and the perahera that celebrated it taking precedence. This association has been maintained even into the modern era; Anne Blackburn, for example, notes the

²⁴⁰ Richard F. Gombrich, *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 103-115; Kitsiri Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750-1900: A Study of Religious Revival and Change* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1976), 13-14. On the relationship between the king, the sangha, and political authority within the Sinhalese Buddhist cosmology, see Bardwell L. Smith, "Kingship, the Sangha, and the Process of Legitimation in Anuradhapura Ceylon: An Interpretive Essay," in Heinz Bechert (ed.), *Buddhism in Ceylon and Studies on Religious Syncretism in Buddhist Countries*. Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978, 100-126.

²⁴¹ Sujit Sivasundaram, *Islanded: Britain, Sri Lanka, and the Bounds of an Indian Ocean Colony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 172.

"consistency and resilience" of South East Asian Buddhists in venerating the island as a place of pilgrimage, reliquary veneration, and offerings.²⁴²

The Portuguese and later British colonization of the island produced a fundamental change in this historical relationship between religious and political rule. In 1815, when the British took control of Ceylon, Buddhism was officially declared "inviolable" and was to be "maintained and protected" by the British - a role that included guarding the tooth relic.²⁴³ Under the British, the duty of guarding the tooth was tasked to a Sinhalese native government official, although ownership remained (officially) in the hands of the colonizers. Initially, the British conquest of Ceylon had accelerated the encounter between England and Buddhism - providing the context and impetus, for example, for Sir Alexander Johnston to take two Buddhist priests and an assortment of Buddhist manuscripts to London just a few years after Britain took control of the island.²⁴⁴ (Still, this often amounted to the natives' loss of control of their own tradition; Sivasundaram has also poignantly described Sri Lanka as "an island space that saw texts and other forms of religious culture arrive, depart, and sustain themselves across the sea."²⁴⁵)

Because they assumed ownership and oversight of the tooth relic, the traditional symbol of the right to rule the island, the British were seen by the Sinhalese to have entered into the lineage of the Buddhist kings of the island.²⁴⁶ British control of the tooth was one of the more symbolic, but also potentially more contentious aspects of British colonial policy in Ceylon - an aspect that was not lost on the Colonial Office. As one early administrator noted, "The possession and exhibition of the Tooth relic of Bhood is regarded by the natives of the Kandyan provinces as the most important of the prerogatives of the Kings of Kandy to which the British Government has succeeded."²⁴⁷ One of the early British administrators, John D'Oyly, was said to have

²⁴² Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism*, 133.

²⁴³ Sivasundaram, *Islanded*, 125-126; Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft* 230-231. As Bechert notes, the government appointed certain Buddhist authorities, oversaw the relics in Kandy, supported a number of monks from the two main monasteries with monthly payments, and covered the costs of several religious ceremonies (231).

²⁴⁴ Sivasundaram, *Islanded*, 107-110.

²⁴⁵ *ibid.* 95, provides a history of interactions between the Buddhist clergy and the first generation of British orientalist, such as Alexander Johnston and John D'Oyly, reversing the arguments made by Gombrich and others regarding "Protestant" Buddhism. He argues that the 18th century Buddhist reformers influenced the orientalist and colonial administrators, not only the other way around. For these early orientalist, "their intellectual work fitted into the narrative of the consolidation of the British hold of the island" (118) - yet this was a "restless union of interests" that could easily be disturbed.

²⁴⁶ *ibid.* 6.

²⁴⁷ *The Colebrook-Cameron Papers* 37, quoted in Malalagoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, 117.

arranged sacrifices to the tooth relic, and was lauded in poetry and praised by Sinhalese as fulfilling important criteria to become a Buddha.²⁴⁸ Not surprisingly, however, the early administrators' open protection, support, and even patronage of Buddhism generated resentment among the Christian missionaries in Ceylon and among more religiously conservative members of the Colonial Office.²⁴⁹ After around 1830, the government began to distance itself from the religion, under pressure from missionaries, especially Spence Hardy; official government support and defense of Buddhism was permanently abolished in the 1840s.²⁵⁰ As a result, the understanding that the British had inherited the role of the former Buddhist kings dissipated near the middle of the nineteenth century, as political support for Buddhism was withdrawn.²⁵¹ In 1844, the Colonial Office expressly prohibited British officials from taking part in the tooth relic exhibitions, and control of the relic and the temple was handed back to a committee of Buddhist Sinhalese in 1847.²⁵² Many Kandyans actually opposed this move, as they felt that the Tooth should remain in the custody of the political rulers of the island, in keeping with ancient tradition.²⁵³ An 1848 peasant revolt led to yet another reassessment of the official policies of the government and a gradual relaxing of the rigid Christian stance towards the Buddhists.²⁵⁴ The end result of these several decades of conflict and pressure between administrators, missionaries, and Buddhists was a serious loss of authority and protection for the sangha.²⁵⁵

²⁴⁸ Sivasundaram, *Islanded*, 7; see also Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, 109-116 for the (often reluctant) participation of colonial officers at Buddhist rituals from 1815 until D'Oyly's death in 1826, until resentment against Buddhism's special favor increased.

²⁴⁹ Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, 118-119.

²⁵⁰ Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft* 233; K. M. De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Rev. ed., New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005), 267-268. See Hardy, *The British Government and the Idolatry of Ceylon*, 1839; quoted in Sivasundaram 126. See also Snodgrass, "Discourse, Authority, Demand," 21-41, on the role of Hardy as well as Sir James Emerson Tennet in negotiating the British administration's support of Buddhism (Tennet felt that the British should uphold their end of the agreement).

²⁵¹ "This idea of the British as new kinds of the island, and as doers of righteous acts like the Buddhist kings of the past, only went into abeyance as the state disassociated itself from the official patronage of Buddhism in the mid-nineteenth century." Sivasundaram, *Islanded*, 7.

²⁵² Lennox Algernon Mills, *Ceylon under British Rule, 1795-1932*, (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1964), 128.

²⁵³ Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, 119-120.

²⁵⁴ Mills, *Ceylon under British Rule*, 126-127. For a full account of the rebellion see 168-202.

²⁵⁵ Bechert notes: "Die Regierung hatte durch ihr Schwanken zwischen einer Politik der Aufsicht über den Sangha und einer Politik der völligen Trennung der buddhistischen Angelegenheiten vom Staat Auflösungserscheinungen in der Struktur und der Verwaltung des Sangha beschleunigt, deren Wurzeln allerdings bereit in die vorkoloniale Epoche zurückreichen." *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft* (233). Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, 18: "The political change of 1815 and all the other changes that followed in its wake were clearly detrimental to the interests of the religious establishment in Kandy. With the disestablishment of Buddhism, they lost a good deal of their ecclesiastical *power*. Their *esteem* did not survive much longer."

More than a quarter-century thus passed between the return of the tooth to the Singhalese in 1848 and the Prince of Wales's visit in December 1875. Yet the conflicted history of British interactions with the Singhalese Buddhist community, and the role of the tooth relic as a focal point for these conflicts, had not been forgotten by the British public in 1875. The evidence suggests that readers were well aware of this complex history. It was for this reason that the *Times*, in reporting on the tour, felt a need to reassure readers that the Prince's participation and enjoyment of the festivities and presentations of the tooth in no way constituted an official condoning of the Buddhist rites, nor a return to the days when Buddhism enjoyed a privileged and protected status under British rule: "The procession of elephants in private rehearsal and devil dancing on the night of arrival in Kandy might have been misunderstood by people if it were not known to all that the British Government has no longer any connexion with Buddhism, and that it will punish a priest as well as a peasant for a breach of the law," the paper asserted.²⁵⁶ Presumably, this statement was crafted to reassure anxious readers and supporters of Christian missions that the Prince's interest in the tooth need not be understood as a change of position towards Buddhism in Ceylon. Clearly, then, the crown's association with Buddhism could still be a source of anxiety and consternation for some Christian readers in England.

With this complex history in mind, it is easier to appreciate how the Prince of Wales's apparently respectful, non-confrontational interest in the tooth and the procession was in fact rich in implied meanings. Although British control of the tooth relic had officially ended in 1848, the Prince's viewing surely reminded the media and the wider public of the reality that the tooth was colonial property, and thus in end effect still a possession of the crown. To pretend otherwise would be to ignore the principal goal of the entire trip, which was to reinforce on a global scale the supposed magnificence of the British Empire's dominance over large swathes of South East Asia. Looking more carefully at the popular press's depiction of the Prince of Wales's tour of Ceylon, we see the subtle ways that the press reinforced the Prince's centrality as owner and monarch of all that he saw on his tour - including Buddhism itself. In both the Caves of Elephanta and the Temple of the Tooth, the Prince made clear that the religious relics and symbols of the countries of the empire were his rightful

²⁵⁶ "The Prince Of Wales." *Times*, December 7, 1875.

playground, an opportunity for him to inspect and survey the religions of his realm.²⁵⁷ The fact that he enjoyed a special, private showing of the tooth is itself significant. The tooth had been put on display only intermittently in the decades before his arrival, yet the Prince's visit was an occasion to pull out all of the stops, with a private perahera and viewing, something that not even visiting Buddhist monarchs could expect.²⁵⁸ The Prince's attitude towards the tooth can be interpreted critically as an example of the "monarch of all I see" trope as described by Mary Louise Pratt in her classic of postcolonial analysis, *Imperial Eyes*.²⁵⁹ While Pratt identifies this stance at work in a range of travellers' and explorers' texts from this period, nowhere is the "monarch of all I see" trope more accurately diagnosed than in the case of the one man in England who could claim to legitimately *be* the (future) monarch of all that he saw. This is in keeping with what other scholars of tourism and travel in the colonial context have noted – for example, that "the privilege of inspecting, or examining, or looking at" always belonged to the visiting European (whether monarch or not); natives, on the other hand, "are obligated to show themselves to view for the white men, but they themselves lack the privilege of the gaze; though looked at, they are forbidden from looking back."²⁶⁰ In this case, the Prince of Wales's gaze stood in for the gaze of the entire nation, allowing the British reading public to vicariously inspect the relic and cast judgment on its authenticity.

With this in mind, it becomes clear that one of the consequences of the Prince's visit to the tooth was an assertion, through the medium of the popular press, of the ultimate ownership and control over the essential relics of Buddhism and by extension over the religion itself. This sentiment was felt among the popular press – as when the *Pall Mall Gazette* wrote in 1878 that "Buddhists might in perilous times derive some confidence from the fact that Britain is, in one sense, the greatest of Buddhist powers."²⁶¹ In the same spirit, an article in the *Times* boasting of Britain's pride in the

²⁵⁷ The Prince's interest in Eastern religions was not entirely superficial; he had corresponded with Max Müller, for example, and there was some suggestion that Müller might be invited on the Prince's tour of India – an idea that did not come to fruition. Nevertheless both Victoria and Albert Edward were aware of, and interested in, philological and religious scholarship. Davis, "Friedrich Max Müller," 90-91.

²⁵⁸ The symbolism of the tooth relic remained so crucial for Buddhists in this period that the King of Siam, denied access to see the tooth in 1897, was so piqued that he left Ceylon in a huff (Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism*, 143.)

²⁵⁹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2007), 201-205.

²⁶⁰ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 13.

²⁶¹ "Occasional Notes." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Monday, September 23, 1878; Issue 4240.

primacy of India as a colonial possession ("China may claim priority in one way and Russia in another, but India has a priority all its own") extended the sense of pride of ownership to the *religions* of India, even claiming (by extension) some right to be proud of the "wonderful" missionaries who spread Buddhism through the East:

In it, while Europe was barbarous, Bramah and Buddha contended for ages—the legend of Ram against the dreams of Saki Muni; and from it went forth those wonderful Buddhist missionaries who were destined to revolutionize the still further East.²⁶²

Likewise, popular author Arthur Lillie, in his work on *Buddha and Buddhism*, would assert the Queen's possession of the tooth in the context of her greater dominion of the world's religions. His quote that suggests a belief that the Queen's political dominance made her – and by extension her countrymen – rightful governors of the world's religious traditions:

The Queen has in her possession a piece of ivory or bone little valued by her white-faced subjects, but immensely esteemed by the Buddhists of all lands. 'The possessor of the Tooth of Buddha will have the dominion of the World.' ... She holds in her dominions the most vital sections of all the great religions of the past.²⁶³

The message of the popular press was thus unmistakable: Buddhism, too, had now been colonized by the British. The consequences of this ownership included protective caretaking, but also the right to judge the authenticity and value of the various forms of the tradition.²⁶⁴ Above all, it included the right to create discourse about the Buddhism of Britain's colonies in a way that allowed Britons of any qualification to pronounce judgment on the native tradition.²⁶⁵

Another crucial aspect of the Prince's tour was its performativity, which turned Buddhism into a theatrical spectacle for consumption by English audiences. As the *Times* noted, the presence of the Prince and the documentation of every moment of the packed agenda meant that history was constantly in the making: "The incidents of the visit to Colombo, to Kandy, to the elephant jungle, the day's shooting, the festivities, addresses, presents, receptions, and the exhibition of the Buddha's tooth are now

²⁶² "The Prince's Visit To India." *Times*, August 20, 1875: 8.

²⁶³ Arthur Lillie, *Buddha and Buddhism*. 1900. Reprint. (London: Forgotten Books, 2013), 5-6.

²⁶⁴ For a more theoretical take on this aspect, see Horsley, "Religion and Other Products of Empire," who writes, "It would appear that as often as not religion and other forms of cultural practice are embedded in political-economic power relations and far from being reducible to them—reflect, express, resist, and even constitute those relations of power.... [Religion can be] inseparable from, and even the product of, particular imperial relations (38).

²⁶⁵ As Pramod Nayar writes of colonial discourse more generally, "It determines what can be said and studied and the processes of doing so... Discourse is produce about an object by an authority possessing the power to make pronouncements on this object." Nayar, *Colonial Voices*, 3.

matters of the history of last year."²⁶⁶ The spectacle of the tooth was just one more performance that joined the ranks of tiger hunting and gala dinners in the official court annals. The *Spectator* wrote approvingly of the tour in the language of "pageantry" and "grand ceremonial," a colonial show that would "delight the people" and "indulge for once that taste for magnificent display which the European affects not to feel, but which is instinctive with all mankind."²⁶⁷ As Hazel H. Hahn has noted in her article on the tour that it "occasioned a unique convergence of royal spectacle, the theatre of colonies and the theatre of exotic tourism."²⁶⁸ The role of descriptive, theatrical news reports and especially the vivid illustrations of the *Graphic* and the *Illustrated London News* were pivotal in this respect; as Hahn also notes, "the most popular events were spectacular ones most suited for visual consumption."²⁶⁹

The tour also had the function of cultivating and curating a taste for Buddhism among the public, particularly in terms of helping to determine what the public deemed noteworthy and newsworthy. What the Prince of Wales deemed interesting became the defining standard of what the British reading public should find interesting. The Prince's tour became a kind of showcase that selected, curated, and presented the most interesting aspects of Indian and Singhalese culture to the public, and the fact that the Temple of the Tooth was deemed the primary object of interest in the entire country would have lasting repercussions on trends in tourism and Eastern travel. One might even go so far as to argue that the Prince's tour was an early precursor to the kinds of Singhalese native villages that would be enthusiastically embraced by the British and American public in the 1880s and 1890s, in which the most 'interesting' and 'exciting' aspects of the culture of Ceylon - including the perahera festival and Buddhist relics - were displayed for the amusement and benefit of a paying public (discussed in detail in chapter four).

A final consequence was that the trip established the temple and the tooth relic at the center of the visual and imaginary canon that Britons mentally referenced when discussing the Buddhism of Ceylon. This was true of the trip at large: in Hazel Hahn's analysis, the entire trip entailed a "re-forging of the cultural imaginary of India and

²⁶⁶ "From Goa To Madras." *Times*, January 20, 1876: 9ff.

²⁶⁷ "Topics of the Day: The Prince of Wales's Visit to India." *The Spectator*, July 10, 1875, 4.

²⁶⁸ Hahn, "Indian Princes," 174.

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 183.

Ceylon"²⁷⁰ that provided the public with a new set of defining images and impressions of these colonial possessions. Ruth Brimacombe goes so far as to argue that the Prince's tour, especially embodied in its visual reproductions, created a "visual canon" of sights and locations that would become not only iconic, but virtually synonymous with the public's conception of India and Ceylon.²⁷¹ Given the paucity of images of Buddhists of any kind in the popular media before this date, we can surmise that the images of the Prince's encounter with Buddhism created, or at the least strongly influenced, the public's otherwise extremely limited visual canon of Buddhism. Surely the *Graphic's* striking cover image of the Prince surrounded by robed Buddhists, bent over the tooth relic in mild-mannered fascination, hands respectfully clasped behind his back, entered into the public's long-term visual memory of Buddhism. Indeed, we have proof that this visual spectacle entered the public's common visual repository: in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1887, more than a decade after the Prince's tour, one young traveller explicitly compared her own visit to the perahera with the visual model provided by the illustrations in the *Graphic*:

Then came a large number of Buddhist priests, with yellow silk garments and shaved heads; each had a sunshade and a fan. They were followed by the devil-dancers, who were terribly affected, and *looked exactly like they do in pictures in the Graphic which illustrate the Prince of Wales's tour to India*. More elephants, priests, and dancers followed; and last of all came a very large elephant with a tiny golden temple on his back, and in the temple a small dish with Buddha's tooth. (emphasis mine)²⁷²

Brimacombe and Hahn were thus correct in asserting that the Prince's tour established the visual and mental canon that defined how Britons would see Ceylonese Buddhism for the remainder of the era.

2.5 Epilogue: A Trendy Tooth

In August 1875 the *Times* predicted: "The proposed visit of the Prince of Wales to India will probably have a first result in an increased interest at home in places,

²⁷⁰ Hahn, "Indian Princes," 174. Pramod K. Nayar explains the concept of the cultural imaginary more fully: "By cultural imaginary I mean the textual (visual as well as written) archive that became a collective unconscious for the Europeans. The cultural imaginary is the shared ideas, prejudices, and beliefs about the non-European world produced as an effect of the discourses. The cultural imaginary is not just a collection of myths – it has a very powerful material, emotional, and social *energizing* effect upon the people." Nayar, *Colonial Voices*, 5.

²⁷¹ Ruth Brimacombe, "The Imperial Avatar in the Imagined Landscape: the Virtual Dynamics of the Prince of Wales's Tour of India in 1875–76," in *Virtual Victorians*, ed. Veronica Alfano, and Andrew Stauffer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015), 189–214.

²⁷² "From Colombo to Kandy." *Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Wednesday September 14, 1887.

characteristics of life, and public affairs in all the lands governed or influenced by the Viceroy."²⁷³ Bertie was a trend-setter whose every move and interest could inspire a fashion frenzy back in London; Buddhism could have no better ambassador if it only wanted to ensure a surge in popularity and interest. In this final section we turn to how the Prince's tour ignited an interest in the tooth relic that lasted almost to the end of the century. The popular media bears ample witness to this ongoing interest: one newspaper database contains 400 articles about the tooth from 1875 to the end of the century, and another database 350 articles in the same period, with article frequency peaking in the years after the tour of Ceylon.²⁷⁴ A wealth of periodical articles adds to this richness. From missionary magazines to travel reports, the tooth came to symbolize the exotic religion of the Buddhist colonies and the Victorians' ambivalent fascination with it. While it is not possible to analyze the entire wealth of articles in any great detail here, it is worth briefly discussing the ways that the Buddha's tooth continued to be featured in the popular press through the end of the century. In many ways, the tooth can be seen as symptomatic of the Victorians' modes of engagement with the exoticized Buddhism that they had 'discovered' in the colonies and put on display, in myriad ways, in the metropole.

An examination of the popular press materials reveals the increasing frequency with which the tooth relic was featured as a topic of discussion in the media - and not always very seriously. After the media storm of the Prince's tour, the tooth relic became a frequent novelty item in columns of miscellaneous tidbits and facts (a common space-filler for Victorian newspapers). To take just one of countless typical tidbits, the *Manchester Times* featured the tooth relic as one of a dozen or so unrelated factoids in its "Miscellaneous Extracts" column in 1882, noting: "The tooth itself is described by European visitors as a piece of yellowish ivory, two inches long, and curved; but fervent Buddhists meet every objection with the assertion that in Buddha's time men were much larger than they are now."²⁷⁵ There are numerous examples of similar "fascinating tidbits" on the tooth relic that could be counted on to both fill space in the newspaper column and attract readers' attentions.²⁷⁶ These recycled bits of

²⁷³ "The Prince's Visit To India." *Times* (London, England) August 20, 1875: 8.

²⁷⁴ The British Newspaper Archive, <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>, owned by the British Library. Gale Cengage, Nineteenth Century British Newspapers Database. The results are for the combined search terms Buddha AND tooth between 1875 and 1900.

²⁷⁵ "Miscellaneous Extracts." *Manchester Times* (Manchester, England), Saturday 1 January 1876.

²⁷⁶ Examples: G.A. Sala, "Literary Miscellany," *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* (Bath, England), Thursday 22 February 1877. "Lord Buddha's Tooth." *The Newcastle Weekly Courant* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England),

information, culled from other papers and sources and printed without any indication of source, ensured that the tooth relic never dropped from sight for long. Such filler texts appear well into the 1890s and suggest that newspaper editors were confident in the public's ongoing interest and curiosity in the relic.

Of course, filler items and tidbits were not the only way that the tooth relic entered popular discourse. On the negative side, public interest in the tooth prompted more conservative Christian publications to counter-attack with cautionary stories regarding the worship of heathen relics. To again just take one example: the *Indian Female Evangelist* magazine (printed in London by the Church Missionary Society) instructed its young readers about the tooth relic while simultaneously underscoring the hopelessness of heathen relic-worship, with a strategy towards provoking sympathy among English readers for the Singhalese children involved in such practices:

Many of these little ones are taken to a temple, which they regard as being very sacred, to offer flowers, etc., at a shrine on which is placed a very beautiful casket, made of gold. Inside this are several smaller caskets; and what do you think the innermost one contains? A piece of bone, which looks very like a boar's tusk, but which their priests tell them was one of Buddha's teeth! They are taught that by worshipping this tooth they will gain very great merit. Do you not wish that these little children could learn of the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ?²⁷⁷

This Sunday School-lecture article is typical of the way that some Christian publications attempted to deal with the generally positive surge in attention to the relic and the religion associated with it. Ironically, of course, such articles only served to increase, rather than stem, the general level of discourse and interest in the relic. As the decades wore on, the pedantic missionary admonitions gave way to a more open approach, with curiosity gaining the upper hand. The *Sunday at Home* family magazine, 1891 provided a positive, fanciful description that was very visual: "the scene is very striking as seen in the bright morning sun beneath a clear blue sky, with so many thousand picturesque people dressed either in white or gay clothes, many

Saturday, June 18, 1892; Issue 11344. "The Value of Relics." *Liverpool Mercury* (Liverpool, England), Wednesday, December 29, 1880; Issue 10286. "Buddha's Tooth." *The Leeds Mercury* (Leeds, England), Saturday, April 4, 1885; Issue 14661.
²⁷⁷ Cavalier, Mrs. "The Story of a Mission Box." *The Indian Female Evangelist* (London, England), Monday, January 01, 1883; pg. 47; Issue XLV. Information about the paper is available from the Yale Missionary Periodicals Database: <http://divdl.library.yale.edu/missionperiodicals/viewdetail.aspx?id=103>, accessed January 15, 2016.

carrying umbrellas of all hues, forming a brilliant foreground to the richly-wooded hills which embosom the city."²⁷⁸

A large portion of the articles relating to the tooth relic are travel memoirs and diary entries. Increasing travel possibilities meant a much higher proportion of Britons could travel East. Still, even at the end of the nineteenth century, such reports were still rare and exotic enough to warrant publication as feature items in the press; even towards the turn of the century, a detailed travelogue of a tour of India and Ceylon could be counted on to fascinate readers at home. The temple of the tooth, together with Adam's Peak, became must-see stops on any tour of Ceylon for those upper- and upper-middle class travellers who were fortunate enough to be able to afford such a journey.²⁷⁹ The Prince of Wales's own tour surely played a pivotal role in producing this interest; the destination's ongoing popularity was likely also reinforced by the young princes' (Prince George of Wales and Prince Albert Victor) visit to the temple of the tooth and Perahera procession on their own tour of the East in 1882.²⁸⁰ Though nowhere near as publicized as the Prince of Wales's tour, the journey was still a matter of considerable interest for the reading public.

Figure 10 Inner door of the Maligawa Buddhist Temple, Kandy, Ceylon. "Our Illustrations. The Young Princes on Their Cruise." *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, March 18, 1882; Issue 642. The issue also features an image of the Perahera festival and the procession of elephants.

Throughout the 1880s, a surprisingly large number of travellers published narratives of visits to the temple of the tooth in popular and family-oriented periodicals. A large number of these were women, in keeping with the growing trend of intrepid female travellers.²⁸¹ In 1885 several papers heaped praise on the well-known female adventurer and traveller Mrs. Gordon Cumming for obtaining "by clever

²⁷⁸ "The Adoration of Buddha's Tooth." *The Sunday at Home: A Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading*, no. 1951, September 19, 1891: 747–49.

²⁷⁹ For a more general analysis of late Victorian travel narratives of Ceylon, see Kanchanakesi Channa Prajapati Warnapala, "A Contested Sight/site": *British Constructions of Ceylon in Visual and Literary Texts, 1850-1910*. PhD Dissertation, Michigan State University, 2008.

²⁸⁰ "The Young Princes In Ceylon." *The Times*, Wednesday, March 8, 1882; pg. 4; Issue 30449. See also "The Young Princes on their Cruise." *The Graphic*, Saturday March 18, 1882, 6.

²⁸¹ There is a wealth of literature on this subject, including Maria H Frawley, *A Wider Range: Travel Writing by Women in Victorian England* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994); Monica Anderson, *Women and the Politics of Travel, 1870-1914* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006); Precious McKenzie, *The Right Sort of Woman: Victorian Travel Writers and the Fitness of an Empire* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).

stratagem"²⁸² a drawing of the sacred tooth, which she "even succeeded in sketching, by returning in the stream of pilgrims day after day, and making a pencil sketch the next moment on a scrap of paper in the palm of her hand, which was corrected again and again till it was perfectly accurate. For to be caught attempting to make a picture of it would be the direst offence in the eyes of the priests."²⁸³ Far from being a scandalous heathen object, the sketch was exhibited in the center of domesticity and propriety, at a Grand Bazaar and Fete at Birdsall House for the aid of the restoration of the old church at Wollston.²⁸⁴ The tooth was apparently an audience favorite for avid fans of Mrs. Cumming; she also authored an account of "The Adoration of Buddha's Tooth" in *The Sunday at Home* magazine, printed by the Religious Tract Society, in September 1891.²⁸⁵ Other family magazines printed articles on travel narratives to the tooth, as well; one example is a feature article that appeared in *Cassell's Family Magazine* in April 1885.²⁸⁶ Numerous other examples of travel narratives to the temple of the tooth, both short and long, could be listed here.²⁸⁷ The inclusion of such narratives in popular periodicals suggests that such a journey was still a novelty, yet one that could be domesticized and easily reproduced for a home audience: on the boundary of the exotic, yet entirely proper enough for women's magazines and family papers. The tooth maintained its popularity, interestingly enough, mainly among female travellers. In 1889 the young society figure the Marchioness of Stafford, aged 20, noted in her "diary" recorded during her world tour and reprinted in the *Pall Mall Gazette* that while the tooth held some abstract fascination for her and her party, she was too lazy to actually go look at it: "The great Buddhist temple at Kandy is a very fine and ancient edifice, and the Singhalese swear that the only authentic 'Buddha's tooth' is kept within its precincts. We were too lazy to venture out in the evening to gaze upon this relic, though the ceremony of opening the sacred casket is performed with great pomp by the priests, to the accompaniment of

²⁸² *The Leeds Mercury* (Leeds, England), Saturday, September 12, 1885; Issue 14799.

²⁸³ "Some More Books of Travel." *The Graphic*, Saturday, January 23, 1892; Issue 1156.

²⁸⁴ *The Leeds Mercury*, Saturday, September 12, 1885; Issue 14799.

²⁸⁵ "September Magazines." *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* (Portsmouth, England), Saturday, September 5, 1891; Issue 5739.

²⁸⁶ "A Pilgrimage to Buddha's Tooth." *Cassell's Family Magazine*, April 1885.

²⁸⁷ A small sample: "A Night on Adam's Peak, Ceylon." *The Graphic*, Saturday, August 30, 1879; Issue 509. "On and Off Duty: Being Pages from the Journal of a Military Officer." *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* etc (Portsmouth, England), Wednesday, October 20, 1880. "The Buddhist Feast of Perraheera." *Manchester Times* (Manchester, England), Saturday, November 18, 1882. "Notes of a Pleasure Tour in India." *Glasgow Herald*, 9 July 1885; Issue 163. "Five Days in Ceylon." *Manchester Times*, Friday, January 1, 1892.

tom-toms, at a certain hour every day."²⁸⁸ A common trope in such accounts is a supercilious, know-all attitude that allowed the European traveller to pass judgment - so wrote one Beatrice Fuller in the *Manchester Times*, "Almost all of the ignorant Buddhists consider [the Perahera festival] to be a religious ceremony, but, properly speaking, it cannot be termed so, as it now contains, mixed up with it, not only ceremonies of the Hindoos, but parodies of our own ways and customs."²⁸⁹ A claim to insider knowledge that the real tooth was never moved from its place of safekeeping in the temple allowed her to judge the whole thing as a "farce" that was "annually played off on the people," so that "my interest in the whole thing was greatly marred," Fuller complains.²⁹⁰

By the 1880s narratives of visits to the tooth so common that the *Pall Mall* complained that such accounts "naturally lose somewhat in interest" as they repeatedly follow "the track beaten over and over again by ordinary European travellers."²⁹¹ This may have been why, in the mid-1880s, travellers' narratives were replaced by shows that brought the religion of the colonies back to Britain for inspection, whether it was the Colonial and Indian Exhibition's Ceylon Gallery, which had a courtyard with entryway "similar to that surrounding the Temple of the Tooth" where the "god Buddha, placid and squat, is the presiding deity,"²⁹² or the shows of Carl Hagenbeck on display in London, including a perahera in which "in a magnificent howdah, borne by a richly caparisoned elephant, the sacred tooth of Buddha is carried in triumph. The actual sacred fang it is possible he may not be able to procure, but in all other details we believe the exhibition will be scrupulously correct."²⁹³ In sum: as a direct result of the Prince's tour, the Buddha's tooth relic achieved the status of a well-known and frequently discussed novelty item in the two decades following his trip. It attained an unlikely position as a symbol of colonial Buddhism for the Victorians - an object of curiosity, interest, and exotic fascination that in many ways represented the public's fascination with Buddhism.

²⁸⁸ "A Good Girl's Diary." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Friday, May 31, 1889; Issue 7551. Gower, Millicent Fanny Sutherland-Leveson was the duchess of Sutherland, a society hostess and social reformer. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/40794>.

²⁸⁹ Fuller, Beatrice. "The Buddhist Feast of Peraheerra." *Manchester Times* (Manchester, England), Saturday, November 18, 1882; reprinted from *Tinsely's Magazine*.

²⁹⁰ *ibid.*

²⁹¹ "This Evening's News." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Saturday, March 6, 1880; Issue 4692.

²⁹² "Ceylon's Isle." *Daily News* (London, England), Thursday, June 24, 1886; Issue 12544.

²⁹³ "Carl Hagenbeck Interviewed." *The Era* (London, England), Saturday, April 24, 1886; Issue 2483.

3 Popular Apologetics: *The Light of Asia* (1879)

"In the present day there is a large class of persons who, like the Gulf weed, shift to and fro on the sea of thought unanchored to any religious faith. ... Hence the large number of books published within the last decade dealing with religious emotions and ideals other than Christian, and the considerable success with which these books meet. Such, for example, is 'The Light of Asia,' a book by which so many Westerns have been reinforcing their moral and religious emotions."

Dublin Daily Express, July 16, 1884.²⁹⁴

In 1879 Edwin Arnold, Oxford graduate, leader-writer and editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, sometime poet, the former principal of Poona College, India - a man who had previously published only a handful of translations from Sanskrit, and to no great acclaim - composed an epic poem on the life of the Buddha. It was published in July that year by the academic publishing house and Oriental specialists, Trübner and Co., and became a surprise best seller, going through 60 editions in England and 130 in America.²⁹⁵ For about a decade, Arnold's poem defined Buddhism for the American and British public; the phrase "The Light of Asia" entered common parlance and was often utilized in media sources, sermons, and popular lectures as a universally-recognized shorthand moniker for the Buddha.²⁹⁶ The poem's saturation of popular culture sometimes bordered on the excessive: in America, it was reported, bars in New York City were selling a cocktail called "The Light of Asia Eye-Opener,"²⁹⁷ and in 1890 a posh new hotel in Brighton had a perfumer create a special scent for the hotel called the "Light of Asia."²⁹⁸ Arnold's role in the history of Buddhist popularization seemed secure; contemporaries referred to him as "the English poet of Buddhism,"²⁹⁹ the "Poet Laureate of Buddhism,"³⁰⁰ our "foremost Oriental scholar and the poet of Buddhism,"³⁰¹ "the sweet singer who has brought the 'Light of Asia' into British homes,"³⁰² and "the tuneful songster of Buddha's fame,"³⁰³ among other flattering

²⁹⁴ "Letters and Science." *Dublin Daily Express*, Wednesday July 16, 1884.

²⁹⁵ I refrain from giving an estimated sales figure, as most estimates quoted in contemporary accounts seem wildly inflated; J. J. Clarke, drawing on Brooks Wright, gives the untenable figure of one million copies (Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, 88). What we do know is that in 1882 a Manchester paper reported that *TLOA* had already sold more than 100,000 copies in America; in 1890, when Arnold was being considered for the Laureateship, 60 editions in England and 130 in America had been printed. The publishing history in America was considerably more complex, owing to lax copyright laws and a booming black market.

²⁹⁶ As Elizabeth Harris notes, "All those who wrote [about Buddhism] after Arnold were forced either to contest or echo him." Harris, *Theravada Buddhism*, 96.

²⁹⁷ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* (Sheffield, England), Wednesday, December 18, 1889; pg. 8; Issue 10661.

²⁹⁸ (Deemed "an exquisite scent!") The New Hotel Metropole, Brighton." *Pall Mall Gazette*, Monday July 21, 1890; Issue 7905.

²⁹⁹ "Our London Correspondence." *Glasgow Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland), Friday, January 31, 1890; Issue 27.

³⁰⁰ "Chit-Chat." *Evening Telegraph and Star and Sheffield Daily Times* (Sheffield, England), Saturday, March 8, 1890; pg. 2; Issue 855.

³⁰¹ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Monday, August 11, 1890; Issue 10860.

³⁰² "Literature." *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* (London, England), Sunday, June 16, 1889; Issue 2430.

³⁰³ "Echoes of the Week." *The Leeds Mercury*, Saturday, September 27, 1890; Issue 16373.

epithets. As one newspaper noted, "the fashionable enthusiasm for Buddhism ... has found its culminating point in the popularity that has attended Mr. Edwin Arnold's poem."³⁰⁴ Today, however, when Arnold is remembered for his role in bringing Buddhist ideas to the West, it is generally as a quaint, old-fashioned figure whose poem is dismissed as an expression of nineteenth-century Buddhist ideas overlaid with hackneyed Victorian sentimentality and tarnished with imperialist spirit.³⁰⁵

In the pages that follow I re-explore the factors that ensured the popularity and success of Arnold's poem by looking more closely at how the work formed a bridge between orientalist scholarship and popular taste. To do so, I do two things: first, I trace the publication and reception history of Arnold's work, based on an analysis of several hundred newspaper and periodical articles; and second, I examine the nature of his popularity and legacy among his contemporaries. In keeping with my focus on the role of popular culture and popular religious trends, I focus on Arnold's reception in various types of periodical and newspaper publications as well as on Arnold's audience and ardent admirers. These analyses are then situated within the larger context of the late Victorian encounter with Buddhism, especially imperial-colonial Buddhism and the public's fascination with all things exotic, Eastern, and oriental. These insights are intended to help us to sharpen our understanding of what the 'popularization' of a religious tradition entails and how particularly influential texts and charismatic characters can play a defining role in that process. What emerges is a picture of Edwin Arnold as a man with a keen sensitivity for public taste and feeling, whose popularity and success were made possible by late Victorian consumer culture, popular imperialism, and a lingering romantic orientalism.

3.1 *The Light of Asia*: A Sleeper Hit

Most scholarly evaluations of *The Light of Asia* (hereafter: *TLOA*) create the impression that the poem was an overnight sensation and an immediate public favorite.

³⁰⁴ "Reviews." *John Bull* (London, England), Saturday, February 27, 1886; pg. 142; Issue 3,406.

³⁰⁵ Mary Ellis Gibson calls him a man of "global - if Imperialist - sensibility." *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India, 1780-1913: A Critical Anthology* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011), 260. Arnold is generally given a page or two in any relevant study; see Tweed *The American Encounter with Buddhism* 29; Clarke *Oriental Enlightenment* 88-89; Almond *The British Discovery of Buddhism* 1-3; Franklin *The Lotus and the Lion* 47-49; Harris *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter* 96-100; Gibson *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India* 259-260. The most detailed biographical information about Arnold is available in Brooks Wright's 1952 biography, written together with Arnold's son. (Wright, Brooks. *Sir Edwin Arnold: A Literary Biography of the Author of The Light of Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1951). Available as a reprint: Wright, Brooks. *Interpreter of Buddhism to the West: Edwin Arnold*. Literary Licensing, LLC, 2011; originally published 1956) Wright's biography tends towards the hagiographical.

This could not have been further from the truth: it was in fact published for a niche intellectual audience, as indeed there *was* no other audience for Buddhist literature in 1879. The publisher of *TLOA* in England was Trübner and Co., founded by German-born Nicholas Trübner – a scholarly, not a popular, press. Trübner and the publishing house he established in the 1850s played an instrumental role in introducing Indian and Asian literatures to England and, more specifically, in supporting serious academic scholarship in these fields. Most of the important works of scholarly literature on Indian religions and Sanskrit and Pāli literature in the 1870s and 1880s came out, if they were lucky, under the successful imprint of the house, and with his efforts and publications Trübner succeeded in creating a kind of scholarly network between researchers in the field.³⁰⁶ Trübner had already published Arnold's translation of the *Gitagovinda* in 1875 and so went on to publish *TLOA*, as well, despite its being a loose interpretation, rather than a translation.³⁰⁷

Initially, Trübner bothered with only limited and highly specialized marketing efforts for *TLOA*. Initial advertisements for the poem appeared in July and August 1879 only in the period's most elite reviews and journals: the *The Academy*,³⁰⁸ *The Athenaeum*,³⁰⁹ *The Saturday Review*,³¹⁰ and *The Examiner*³¹¹ – all four being established, "serious" periodicals aimed at well-educated (male) readers who might be assumed to have cultivated some interest in Eastern philology and literature, either based on theological interest or Oriental curiosity.³¹² This marketing strategy, if it can be called that, suggests (a) that the publisher anticipated that the book would be read by an elite audience of intelligentsia, not by the wider public, and (b) that the publisher

³⁰⁶ Terence Thomas, "The Impact of Other Religions," in *Religion in Victorian Britain: Vol. II Controversies*, ed. Gerald Parsons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 282. Trübner is described as having an ardent personal enthusiasm as well as professional interest in advancing oriental and Asiatic scholarship; he had himself found time to study Sanskrit in London, between his professional duties. His contemporaries noted his support of young struggling orientalist in Britain, and for his discerning judgment in selecting new works of scholarship for publication, in particular his penchant for taking risks on books of obscure scholarly interest. Leslie Stephen and Sydney Lee, eds. *Dictionary of National Biography*. (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1885). https://archive.org/stream/dictionaryofnati57stepuoft/dictionaryofnati57stepuoft_djvu.txt. Accessed 10. November 2014.

³⁰⁷ Detailed information about the publishing house's interactions with Arnold do not appear to be extant, unfortunately, mainly due to the number of times that the original publishing house merged or changed hands after Nicholas Trübner's death in 1884: "A Short History of the Publishing House." <http://www.degruyter.com/page/79> Accessed 15. November 2014.

³⁰⁸ "Advertisement." *The Academy*, July 12, 1879, 3.

³⁰⁹ "Advertisement." *The Athenaeum*, July 5, 1879; no. 2697: 28.

³¹⁰ "Advertisement." *Saturday Review*, July 12, 1879: 48, no. 1237, 68.

³¹¹ "Advertisement." *The Examiner*, August 2, 1879, no. 3731, 1004. The more widely read *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Graphic* for July 1879 mention the poem briefly in their lists of new publications, but there is no advertisement from the publisher, and the poem does not earn a review from either paper.

³¹² The best study of elite intellectual journalism in this period is Neil Berry, *Articles of Faith: The Story of British Intellectual Journalism* (London: Between the Lines, 2003).

may not have expected the book to be very widely read at all. In the *Athenaeum*, for example, *TLOA* appears in Trübner and Co.'s regular advertisement of newest books, but only at the bottom of the list of publications, suggesting a lack of optimism regarding potential sales. Unusually, the advertisement inventories Arnold's credentials as a member of the social and intellectual Anglo-Indian elite; this suggests that Trübner and Co. assumed that the poem would largely appeal to a scholarly audience who expected works on Indian religions to come from scholars and members of society's upper echelon.³¹³ The advertisement also gives the subtitle *Mahabhinishkramana*, the great departure, in what one assumes is an attempt to lend the weight of philological authenticity to the poem, even suggesting that it will be a translation rather than a fiction.³¹⁴ This first version of *TLOA* was printed in a small crown 8 vo. size, "handsomely bound in cloth," and cost 7s. 6d.³¹⁵ In August 1879 it received its first review: by England's leading scholar of Buddhism, T. W. Rhys Davids, in the highbrow *The Academy*.³¹⁶ This, too, indicates that the book's intended and actual audience consisted of scholars and the intelligentsia.

A second edition was published in November 1879 – an indication that the poem had at least outperformed initial estimates – and was again advertised in *The Academy* and *The Examiner*.³¹⁷ This time the title was deemed worthy of a separate advertisement outside of the usual list of Trübner's new publications and is explicitly mentioned as being available at libraries as well as booksellers, suggesting an appeal to a wider audience. The second edition was advertised with blurbs from glowing reviews by Oliver Wendell Holmes and others in the *International Review*.³¹⁸ The

³¹³ "Edwin Arnold, M.A. F.R.G.S., Companion of the Star of India: Third Class of the Imperial Order of the Medjidie; Honorary Member of the Société de Géographie, Marseilles; formerly Principal of the Deccan College, Poona; and Fellow of the University of Bombay."

³¹⁴ Arnold's sources for the poem were Beal's translation of the *Abhinishkrama Sutra*, Müller's 1870 translation of the *Dhammapada*, and Hardy's *Manual of Buddhism*. (Wright, *Interpreter*, 86.) Hardy's *Manual of Buddhism* may have been particularly influential for its sequential presentation of the major events of Siddhartha's life; see Hallisey, "Roads Taken," 39-40.

³¹⁵ Trübner's price for the volume was about the same as Spence Hardy's *Christianity and Buddhism Compared* (Trübner 1875, 6s.), a work largely intended for a clergy and missionary readership, but at a price significantly cheaper than scholarly works and translations such as Samuel Beal's 1875 *The Romantic Legend of Sakya Buddha* (12s.) or Beal's 1879 scholarly edition of the *Dhammapada* (18s.) These prices (6s. and 18s.) represent the lowest and highest ends of the spectrum of books on Buddhism. (To put these prices into perspective: most lower-class incomes, according to Charles Booth's *Survey into life and labour of the people in London*, were between only 15 and 35 shillings/week.)

³¹⁶ Rhys Davids, T.W. "The Light of Asia" *The Academy*, August 9, 1879.

³¹⁷ "Advertisement." *Academy* (London, England) (Nov 15, 1879): no. 393: 2. This quote was reprinted in the *Pall Mall* in 1889 in connection with the publication of Arnold's latest, a book of verse dedicated to his late wife.

³¹⁸ "It is a work of great beauty... its tone is so lofty that there is nothing with which to compare it but the New Testament." "Advertisement." *Examiner* (London, England). Saturday December 6, 1879; Issue 3749.

increasing use of quotes from orientalists and public figures suggests the importance of gathering 'authoritative' recommendations for the poem to lend support for the poem's accuracy and authority.

In the summer of 1880 the publishers responded to the ever-increasing popularity of the poem with a fourth, cheaper version for 2s. 6d.; it is clear that the poem had by this time captured the attention of a wider readership. The press greeted this version with enthusiasm; the major book trade publication commented that the publishers had "done well in issuing this edition to meet the demand which such a remarkable poem has made" and noting with approval that even the inexpensive edition was "bound in fancy board covers and the type leaves nothing to be desired, considering the moderate price at which it is sold."³¹⁹

By 1881, the book had clearly gained a wider audience, and the publisher could claim that 100,000 copies had already been sold in England. This is reflected in the publication and marketing history, as well: thereafter follow a large number of indistinguishable new editions as well as a larger-sized "Library Edition" for 7s 6d. in December 1883. The new editions of 1883 were advertised with an unusually large ad in the *Athenaeum* that included a list of distinguished recommendations.³²⁰ The large-scale advertisements as well as the new editions suggest that the publisher was busy finding new ways to capitalize on the poem's wave of popularity.

³¹⁹ Publishers' Circular and General Record of British and Foreign Literature December 15, 1880, Volume 43, No. 1038, p. 1311.

³²⁰ From America, the review by Oliver Wendell Holmes; from the *University Quarterly* of Salem, Mass.; as well as the *English Morning Post*, *Athenaeum*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Pioneer*, *Academy*, and *Observer*; and from the colonies, the *Calcutta Englishman* and other papers. As Arnold's son Julian would reminisce, "The result was a striking instance of the influence exercised in that day by a popular critic, for the unstinted praise which [Holmes] lavished on the poem in the *International Review* opened the flood-gates of the publishing industry in America to the book." Julian Arnold, *Giants in Dressing Gowns* (London: Purnell and Sons, Ltd, 1945), 175.

658 THE ATHENÆUM N° 2926, Nov. 24, '83

THE POETICAL WORKS OF EDWIN ARNOLD,
ESQ. M.A. C.S.I., &c.

NOW READY,
THIRTEENTH EDITION, crown 8vo. pp. xvi and 238, limp parchment wrapper, price 2s. 6d.

THE LIGHT OF ASIA; or, the Great Renunciation.
BEING THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF GAUTAMA, PRINCE OF INDIA AND FOUNDER OF BUDDHISM.
TOLD IN VERSE BY AN INDIAN BUDDHIST.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

"It is a work of great beauty. It tells a story of intense interest, which never flags for a moment; its descriptions are drawn by the hand of a master with the eye of a poet and the familiarity of an expert with the objects described; its tone is so lofty that there is nothing with which to compare it but the New Testament; it is full of variety, now picturesque, now pathetic, now rising into the noblest realms of thought and aspiration; it finds language penetrating, fluent, elevated, impassioned, musical always, to clothe its varied thoughts and sentiments."—OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES, *International Review*.

"Mr. Arnold, one of the most musical and thoughtful of modern writers of verse, has given to the world in 'The Light of Asia' a poem which is for many reasons remarkable. Entirely apart from the vivid beauty of the scenes as set forth in these noble lines, it is worthy of note with what admirable success the figure of anamorphosis is employed; it is impossible to conceive of anything more perfect in this way than such a line as that descriptive of the successive rises of the (Himalayan) precipice. Not the least of his merits is that he writes such pure and delicious English."—*The Light of Asia* is a noble and worthy poem."—*Morning Post*.

"This is an extraordinary book. When we sat down to the task of reading it critically, we expected to find in it many merits, and in that expectation we have not been disappointed. As an historical poem it ranks, of right, among the best of modern times; and it is safe to say that it has commanded more general attention in this country than any other modern poem."—Extracted from *Christ or Buddha, a Review of 'The Light of Asia'*. By G. T. FRANKS, D.D. Reprinted from the *Ecumenical Quarterly*, Salem, Mass.

"But it is not merely on account of its subject that this poem deserves attention; it is full of poetic merit, and its descriptions are often exceedingly beautiful."—*Athenæum*.

"The 'Light of Asia' is charming to read, suggestive of thought, and deserving of study. For elevation of thought, uniformly picturesque and appropriate expression, and faultless music of rhythm—these qualities sustained throughout a long and symmetrical composition—"The Light of Asia" is altogether without a rival in contemporary literature. No such poem has appeared since 'Childe Harold.'"—*Printer, Allahabad*.

"With much skill Mr. Arnold has illustrated his narrative with a series of Indian pictures, the fascination of which will be felt by those who know India."—*Fort Pitt Gazette*.

"Mr. Arnold's skill has not failed him. With a sure hand he has limned for us a portrait which is admirable in its fidelity to the accepted traditions of the original, which his knowledge of India and her people has enabled him to surround with the proper accessories, without once descending to the commonplace. On those, as on other points, however, the author's wide knowledge of India and genuine interest in his subject enhance the value of his researches, and entitle his opinions to respect, whilst his powers of description carry the reader with them. In fact, in reading this remarkable poem, many will be transported again to the East, or revive with pleasure, in wonderful freshness, long dormant memories of that far-off land."—*Gleaner*.

"In Mr. Edwin Arnold's Indian poetry and Indian thought have at length found a worthy English exponent. He brings to his work the facility of a ready pen, a thorough knowledge of his subject, a great sympathy for the people of this country, and a command of public attention at home."—*Calcutta Express*.

"Mr. Arnold may be congratulated on the successful accomplishment of the difficult task he has set himself; and those who feel at all in sympathy with the subject will be able to appreciate the beauty of the picture he has drawn."—*Academy*.

* * * Two other Editions are in the press, one of which, a handsome Library Edition, large post 8vo. price 7s. 6d., will be ready on December 5th; the other, an elaborately Illustrated Edition, in quarto, will appear in 1884.

Figure 11 - Advertisement. *The Athenæum*, November 24, 1883: 658.

In 1884, just in time for Christmas, Trübner & Co. produced the first illustrated edition with photographs of ancient Buddhist ruins from various parts of India, including Gandhara and the caves at Ajanta.³²¹ At 21 shillings (ten times the price of the cheap edition released five years earlier), the book's appearance suggests a renewed appeal to those with more disposable income. A review of the edition in the period's major trade publication for booksellers provides us with some indication of the intended appeal of the volume for consumers:

Messrs. Trübner & Co. have produced for this Christmas a book which is one of the choicest illustrated volumes ever published, Mr. Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*, with engravings, head and tail pieces, and even the design of the binding, derived from Buddhist sources without any modern addition or variation. [It illustrates] this venerable religion, which has in it the eternity of a universal hope, the immortality of a boundless love, an indestructible element of faith in final good, and the proudest assertion ever made of human freedom. The sources of the illustrations are sculptures, bas-reliefs, frescoes from caves, a Buddhist monastery, &c. The head of Gautama Buddha on the title-page of the book is taken from a sculpture now in the Calcutta Museum. The design on the cover illustrates the four principal events in the life of the Buddha.... These are taken from a bas-relief found near Benares, and which is now in the Calcutta Museum. This design, in order to ensure perfect accuracy, was photographed on the metal which was used to impress the gold leaf on the material of the binding, which again has been dyed the true Buddhist colour. The 'Light of Asia' has an especial appropriateness as a Christmas gift, seeing that the approach of a new year is, with the Buddhists, as with us, a sacred season.³²²

³²¹ "Literary and Art Gossip" *The Leeds Mercury* (Leeds, England), Monday, August 11, 1884; Issue 14459.

³²² *Publishers' Circular and General Record of British and Foreign Literature*. Vol. 47 No. 1133, December 6, 1884.

Several things are worth noting here. The emphasis is clearly on authenticity and adherence to so-called origins of Buddhism: the illustrations, presumably like the poem, "derived from Buddhist sources without any modern addition or variation," the binding dyed in the "true Buddhist colour" (yellow?), and the whole of the work combining to create the impression of "true Buddhism." The choice to illustrate the work with photographs of actual Buddhist relics and ancient art (rather than illustrations) conveys authenticity and realism. The poem is explicitly aligned with historical fact, rather than poetic fiction, by associating it with ancient "sculptures, bas-reliefs, frescoes from caves, a Buddhist monastery" – suggesting by extension that Arnold had recovered, rather than invented, his poetic materials. It is also an overt attempt to align the poem with ancient Indian Buddhism, rather than any living form of the tradition in Ceylon, Burma, or elsewhere. (As we will discuss later, contemporaries believed that Arnold had been able to reverse-trace the progress of Buddhism through the ages to produce an artifact of the earliest, purest, truest Buddhism.) The overall design of the volume is designed to convince the reader that he is holding an ancient artifact, rather than a modern invention, in his hand.

Figure 12 Advertisement. *Publishers' Circular and General Record of British and Foreign Literature*, December 7, 1885.

Of this same 1884 Christmas edition, the London *Daily News* pronounced:

An edition de luxe of Mr. Edwin Arnold's now widely famous poem "The Light of Asia" ... is not to be confounded with the ordinary book of the season. Its luxury of type and print are features secondary to the archaeological interest of its numerous engravings... derived from Buddhist sculptures and frescoes found in ancient ruins in India. That these engravings have a philosophical significance, to be penetrated only by the studious and the initiated, will be readily understood.³²³

This review suggests that there were two audiences for the book: those that would only appreciate its luxurious format and appearance, and those "studious and initiated" few who would be able to penetrate the secret meanings of its illustrations and, presumably, texts. We will look more closely at this fixation on the difficulty and impenetrability of Buddhism, and the public's conviction that it required a learned

³²³ "Books of the Season." *Daily News* (London, England), November 18, 1884; Issue 12044.

translator to assist the ordinary layperson in grasping its "philosophical significance," in a later section.

Even as late as 1889, 10 years after the initial publication, Messrs. Trübner & Co. were still discovering ways to continue to earn revenue from their surprise hit, including a gift-book edition of *TLOA* with a gold-embossed floral binding in their Eastern-inspired "Lotos" series. The *Pall Mall Gazette* recommended the book as an ideal Christmas gift: "It is a very pretty little book, well printed, tolerably illustrated, and most daintily bound."³²⁴ The poem had clearly left the elite ranks of the scholarly and entered the world of commercial sale. A few days before Christmas that year, even the lower middle class weekly paper, *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, with a circulation of well over half a million readers, commended the holiday gift volume to its readership:

Messrs. Trübner and Co. are to be thanked for a tasteful copy of Sir Edwin Arnold's beautiful work 'The Light of Asia,' in their admirable "Lotos" series. It would be impossible to accurately determine the number of editions this poem has passed through. Not only has it appeared in many forms in its original tongue, at widely divergent prices, but it has been translated into nearly every European and into numerous Oriental languages. 'The Light of Asia' has popularised the Buddhist faith, and has revealed its beauties to many an intolerant mind. The fable of the Buddhist votary is a latter-day classic, and its issue at a price within reach of all is distinctly a public gain.³²⁵

Especially after 1885, then, the reviews of new editions focus on the work's aesthetic appeal and its suitability as a gift for friends interested in all things Indian, colonial, and exotic. Such volumes are clearly social objects, meant not for private scholarly perusal but for display and exchange. Words like "pretty," "dainty," and "tasteful" (even "one of the choicest illustrated volumes ever published") emphasize not the volume's contents, but to its attractiveness and commercial value; the new editions explicitly appeal to a wide range of readers with growing disposable incomes and purchasing power - and with growing imperial and cosmopolitan sensibilities.

I have risked boring my readers with this detailed publishing and advertising history because I believe it produces several insights. First, it is evident that Trübner and Co. initially saw *TLOA* fitting into the existing niche market for Orientalist literature for the highly educated specialist, which was precisely the forte and focus of the publishing house; this is revealed by the placement and content of the initial advertisements. When the book enjoyed unexpected popularity, however, the savvy

³²⁴ "Some Books for Christmas Presents." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, December 4, 1889; Issue 7711.

³²⁵ *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, Sunday, December 22, 1889; Issue 2457.

publishing house responded by reissuing cheaper editions at a fraction of the cost that could be stocked in lending libraries and recommended even to a lower middle class readership by Sunday weeklies like *Lloyd's*. There were multiple target audiences for *TLOA*, and different editions with different marketing strategies were devised for each; as time progressed and the vogue for the poem only continued to increase, the publisher responded by issuing first cheap versions, then expensive illustrated editions for the armchair scholar, then dainty gift volumes with gilt edges for the Christmas shopper. Thus, the publishing history suggests that the poem *created* a demand in the market for works on Buddhism, rather than fulfilling an existing demand. It took several years before public demand reached a fevered pitch high enough to warrant lower-cost volumes for a wider public. It is also worth noting the increasing size and prominence of advertising. In one paper, *TLOA* was recommended on the same page as ads for Lea & Perrins' Worcestershire sauce and Borwick's baking powder, suggesting that a commodification process was well under way.³²⁶ These shifts in advertising strategy also reflect *TLOA*'s boundary-crossing position. In the decade following its publication, "Orientalist" literature left the realm of academic specialization and was able to compete in the market for popular books for a mass audience - and as it did so, Buddhism both found its place in the wider marketplace of ideas and became a consumer good.

In sum, a savvy publishing house, glowing media reviews, and a dynamic response to the consumer market are essential keys to understanding the poem's commercial success. Its warm reception extended not only to the collection of words and ideas, after all, but to the successful commercial product on the booming, competitive, and rapidly changing book market. These materials reveal the way that *The Light of Asia* functioned as a social object, a product, and a cultural good.³²⁷

3.2 From the Ivory Tower to Mudie's Lending Library

As we just ascertained, *TLOA* was a boundary-crossing text that debuted in the publishing world as an orientalist-academic exercise and ended as a popular Christmas book and illustrated volume. This section addresses the possible reasons for this

³²⁶ "Advertisements." *Bucks Herald*, Saturday 26 July 1884.

³²⁷ On this point see Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2012), 1-18. Price distinguishes between "reading (doing something with the words), handling (doing something with the object), and circulating (doing something to, or with, other persons by means of the book—whether cementing or severing relationships, whether by giving and receiving books or by withholding and rejecting them)" 5-6.

transition in more detail. First, *TLOA* was particularly welcomed for its treatment of what was deemed an otherwise inscrutable subject. More than one reviewer noted that Arnold had performed a form of public service in translating what was considered by many to be an incomprehensibly philosophical religion for a lay audience. Indeed, one of the more frequent and striking arguments made about Buddhism in the reviews of the poem is its inherent difficulty and impenetrability for the uninitiated.³²⁸ The *Times*, for example, commented in 1888 that "Mr. Edwin Arnold has done good service by winning his countrymen, who would be little likely to plod through the wearisome theology of Buddhism," to an interest in the subject.³²⁹ Another newspaper noted with gratitude, "Even the abstruse problems of Buddhist philosophy are simplified and made interesting" in the poem.³³⁰ The reviews reveal the public's awareness of its need for more information about Indian and other non-Christian religions, but hint that this interest was not sufficient inducement to wade through multi-volume scholarly translations or treatises for missionaries. To some, the works of the orientalist were frankly off-putting; as the *Liverpool Mercury* asserted in 1879, *TLOA* "presents [Buddhism] to those who would be repelled even from Mr. Max Müller's clear expositions of the religions of the East."³³¹ Other media sources express gratitude to Arnold for sparing them the effort of reading original sources, which must have seemed – with their complexity, their lack of a discrete recognized canon, and challenging original languages – hopelessly unintelligible to the lay person. (Referring to Sanskrit, an article in *Household Words* family magazine lamented: "Who cares to master a literature, the very alphabet of which is a juggler's mystery, more like, to uninitiated eyes, the scrawling traces of multitudinous spiders, than the rational strokes of human penmanship?"³³²) Even *The Examiner*, writing to a self-consciously intellectual audience, called Buddhism "complicated and difficult to grasp" and went so far as to wonder aloud how its "comparatively ignorant" Asian followers managed to understand their own tradition at all, when "even the cultured European intellect"

³²⁸ Pramod K. Nayar notes that a similar argument was often made about Hinduism, specifically as a consequence of "the obscurity of Hinduism and the difficulty of ascertaining the correct sequence of Indian history" as well as "the non-availability of sources and the impossibility of confirming the authenticity and reliability of what sources are available to the British" (Nayar, *Colonial Voices*, 207).

³²⁹ "The Light of Asia." *Times* (London, England), April 10, 1888.

³³⁰ "Literature." *Western Mail*, Friday August 1, 1879.

³³¹ "Our London Correspondence." *Liverpool Mercury*, Friday July 18, 1879; Issue 9832.

³³² "Pearls from the East." *Household Words*, Volume IV, Magazine No. 93, 3 January 1852, 337-341.

struggled in vain to pierce the clouds of its philosophy.³³³ These quotations suggest that, before Arnold, Buddhist philosophy was seen not only as onerous or dull, but so difficult as to be literally inscrutable to the average reader; compounding the problem, the works of the Orientalists were considered to hold little appeal or hope of elucidation even for the educated.

Enter Edwin Arnold, whom most reviewers saw as a liminal figure, a hobby Orientalist-cum-poet who was lauded by the public for combining the philological skills of an orientalist academic with an almost mystically inspired poet's touch. Metaphors of "sifting," "gleaning," and "winnowing" appear frequently to describe Arnold's valuable service in separating the Buddhist wheat from the chaff of dense philosophy, superstition, and interpolation. One newspaper wrote of the insights "which Mr. Arnold has gleaned in Eastern fields, and presented for the first time in popular form."³³⁴ The *Pall Mall Gazette* similarly noted: "The most difficult part of Mr. Arnold's task was of course to present the distinctive doctrines of Buddha. Out of the tangled and forbidding technicalities of Buddhistic theology he had to sift a system which would not seem unintelligible to Western minds."³³⁵

Arnold provided his readers with a simplistic and positive interpretation of concepts such as *karma* and *nirvana* – in fact, they are defined so nebulously in the poem as to make it nearly impossible to offer a precise definition of either concept. Crucially, however, both are displayed in the most positive of terms; in Arnold's mind, karma becomes almost synonymous with the deeds of the soul or self:

all the sum of ended life –
The Karma – all that total of a soul
Which is the things it did, the thoughts it had,
The 'Self' it wove – with woof of viewless time . . .³³⁶

While nirvana is depicted as a state of blessedness and universal oneness:

...nameless, quiet, nameless joy,

³³³ "It is difficult to realise that a faith, of which the keynote is entire and absolute dissolution should have so great a sway [as over 300 million adherents]; nor is it any easier to comprehend how its tenets, which are as complicated and difficult to grasp as its practices are ascetic, should have secured such a hold on vast masses of comparatively ignorant people. Even the cultured European intellect fails at the first reading to grapple with the notions of endless years, endless worlds, and endless transmigrations which appear in all the Buddhistic compositions..." "The Life of Gaudama." *The Examiner* (London, England), Saturday, January 17, 1880; Issue 3755.

³³⁴ "Mr. Edwin Arnold's Poetry." *Liverpool Mercury*, Saturday 28 February 1885.

³³⁵ "The Light of Asia." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Tuesday, August 19, 1879. The reviewer claims to be familiar with the Lalita Vistara, the Jatakas, and the parables of Buddhaghosha, as well as "other sources of Buddhistic history."

³³⁶ *TLOA* Book 6.

Blessed NIRVANA – sinless, stirless rest –
The change that never changes!³³⁷

These simplistic definitions as well as the highly distilled presentation of the Buddhist path in the poem gave readers and reviewers the highlights of Buddhist ideas; still, philosophy and even ethics play a secondary role, as both are eclipsed by the poem's emphasis on the narrative human element.

Many contemporaries ascribed to Arnold an instinctive, almost magical ability to pierce through centuries of degeneration to recapture the true essence or feeling of Indian Buddhism. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, for example, wrote in praise of Arnold's instinct in discerning "true Buddhism" from false and calling it a condensation, rather than a translation.³³⁸

More than one critic of Mr. Arnold's book has called it a translation, imagining, perhaps, that some such connected legend as is here furnished exists in the Sanskrit or Pāli.... [But Oriental scholars will] be the first to recognize that here is a perfectly original condensation of the ancient legendary Scriptures, from which the mass of interpolated tradition has been winnowed away, with that artistic instinct which is often wiser than erudition.³³⁹

The paper goes on to praise Arnold for his "well-informed judgment and fidelity" and the way he "has rejected as well as adopted material." A belief in Buddhism's latter-day South East Asian corruption, and the conviction that it lay in the hands of Western scholars and interpreters to restore Buddhism to its purified original form, was not a new idea; this view heavily characterized the historical approach of T. S. Rhys Davids and his contemporaries.³⁴⁰ It was furthermore a view that Arnold himself openly voiced in the short preface to the poem, where he refers to the "Buddhistical books" as "discordant in frequent particulars, and sorely overlaid by corruptions, inventions, and

³³⁷ *TLOA* Book 6. At the end of the poem, Arnold depicts nirvana as a state when " He is one with life / Yet lives not. / He is blest, ceasing to be. / OM, MANI PADME, OM! / the Dewdrop slips / Into the shining sea! / This is the doctrine of the KARMA. Learn! / Only when all the dross of sin is quit, / Only when life dies like a white flame spent / Death dies along with it." *TLOA*, Book 8.

³³⁸ The distinction between a "true Buddhism" and a "false Buddhism" was a common one in the Victorian and late Victorian periods, including among scholars; see Masuzawa 127-129, where she cites Monier-Williams' definition of true Buddhism as "the Buddhism of the Pitakas or Pāli texts." This was echoed in reviews of *TLOA* that referred to the poem as a "true poem" (e.g. Hunter, W. W. "Indian Poetry: containing a New Edition of the Indian Song of Songs, ..." *The Academy*, July 30, 1881; no. 482; pg. 81.)

³³⁹ *ibid.*

³⁴⁰ Hallisey, "Roads Taken and Not Taken," 34-36. Hallisey notes: "This historicism aimed to rescue texts from conditions of misunderstanding and reveal their objective meaning for the first time... Thus, knowing the biography of the Buddha was an essential part of any attempt to understand Buddhist texts which were attributed to him. The historian using this historicist approach could safely ignore the later biographies written in Sinhala, Burmese, or Khmer because they could—self-evidently—contribute little to any effort to uncover the origins of Buddhism." 36. On the search for original Buddhism see also Almond, *British Discovery*, 65, 95, and elsewhere; Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, 81-82; Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 126-127.

misconceptions."³⁴¹ This view is commonly reflected in the poem's reviews; the *Western Mail*, for example, insisted on the gradual corruption of Buddhism when it noted, "Mr. Arnold's object in (this) magnificent poem has been, not only to depict the life and character, but to indicate the philosophy of his hero, stripped of those corruptions and misconceptions which, like the mould of time, inevitably overlay all ancient institutions."³⁴² Yet unlike his academic colleagues, who were praised for recovering original Buddhism with their textual researches, Arnold was ascribed an instinctive poetic ability to discern true from false Buddhism and an almost mystical power to capture the "heart" and "feelings" of true Buddhism. Arnold's feat was not made possible by close philological analysis, but by what was perceived as an inspired perception of Buddhism's truths. As the *Daily News* commented, "Mr. Edwin Arnold is decidedly the poet of the Eastern world, in quite another sense than that of Byron and Moore. His 'Light of Asia' has been accepted in America, and even in India itself, as almost an inspired revelation of the mystery of Buddhism."³⁴³ Even Rhys Davids had written in the *Academy* that the poem "will make it easy for the modern reader to enter into the feelings which the noble and tender character of their great reformer inspired in the earnest hearts of his Indian followers."³⁴⁴

What were this "true" elements of Buddhism that Arnold had captured so effectively? To mid and late Victorians, the aspect of Buddhism that most required recovery or "winnowing" was the biographical details of the figure of Siddhartha Gautama. By the 1850s in England and Europe, the historical existence of the Buddha was taken to be undisputed fact, and the focus of Buddhist research shifted to the person of the historical Buddha and his appreciation as a moral teacher and even as a kind of humanist hero³⁴⁵ – a quest in which both Spence Hardy and Rhys Davids had played major roles.³⁴⁶ As Charles Hallisey has effectively argued, Rhys Davids was

³⁴¹ Arnold, Edwin. "Preface." *The Light of Asia*. London: Trübners and Co., 1879.

³⁴² "Literature." *Western Mail*, Friday August 1, 1879.

³⁴³ "Current Literature." *Daily News* (London, England), Tuesday, January 16, 1883; Issue 11468.

³⁴⁴ T. W. Rhys Davids, "The Light of Asia." *The Academy*, August 9, 1879, 89.

³⁴⁵ "The Buddha had been transformed from an idol into a man, indeed, into a philosopher, a philosopher who rejected the rituals and myths of the Brahmin priests, a philosopher who set forth an ethical system, open to all, regardless of class and caste, a system based on reason." Lopez *The Scientific Buddha* 38-39. See also Almond, *British Discovery of Buddhism*, 60-77.

³⁴⁶ Snodgrass, "Defining Modern Buddhism," especially 188-190. Early scholars, Snodgrass notes, were frustrated by the lack of a coherent biography of Sakyamuni - a gap which was filled initially by the works of Spence Hardy, which she calls "a landmark in documenting and publishing on the historical humanity of the Buddha" and a direct consequence of the early 19th century focus on the historical Jesus. Snodgrass, "Discourse, Authority, Demand," 24. See also: Jaffe, "Seeking Śākyamuni", 67; Hallisey "Roads Takem," 36; J. Jeffrey Franklin, "The Life of the Buddha in Victorian England." *ELH* 72, no. 4 (2005): 941-74.

keen to promulgate an image of the Buddha that was rational and highly ethical. These developments occurred in parallel to, or in the wake of, the *Leben Jesu* scholarship in Germany and England and the corresponding rise in imaginative historical "biblical" fiction of the 1850s and 1860s.³⁴⁷ Thus, for many in this period, Buddha was both a historical founder and a great ethical reformer as well as an attractive and charismatic figure.³⁴⁸ The Buddha had become a moral reformer whose ethical system, in particular, was admired and lauded as rivaling that of Christianity.³⁴⁹ The similarities between the Buddhist and Christian ethical systems, with their respective emphases on compassion and charity, was another favorite point of speculation.³⁵⁰

The Victorians' preoccupation with morality extended, naturally enough, to their encounters with Eastern religions, which were examined and evaluated by Christian readers not on the basis of their philosophy or soteriology, but on the basis of their moral code and ability to inspire ethical conduct. Arnold devotes a full ten pages of the eighth and final book of *TLOA* to an exposition of the ethical tenets of Buddhism as elucidated in the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-Fold Path, culminating in the following summary of Buddhism's ethical teachings, as Arnold interpreted them for his readers:

Kill not - for Pity's sake - and lest ye slay
The meanest thing upon its upward way.
Give freely and receive, but take from none
By greed, or force, or fraud, what is his own.
Bear not false witness, slander not, nor lie;
Truth is the speech of inward purity.
Shun drugs and drinks which work the wit abuse;
Clear minds, clean bodies, need no soma juice.
Touch not thy neighbour's wife, neither commit
Sins of the flesh unlawful and unfit.
These words the Master spake of duties due
To father, mother, children, fellows, friends;
...
Pass blameless in discharge of charities
And first true footfalls in the Eightfold Path;
Living pure, reverent, patient, pitiful,

³⁴⁷ "Considerable work was done in separating the historical facts of Gautama's life from the mythical accretions, a task that mirrored a similar concern of the times regarding the life of Jesus. And much scholarly energy was taken up with a pervasive occupation of the 19th century: the quest for origins." Batchelor, *Awakening of the West*, 245. See also Lopez, *The Scientific Buddha*, 16-17; Almond, *British Discovery of Buddhism*, 67.

³⁴⁸ Clausen, "Victorian Buddhism," 6.

³⁴⁹ Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism*, 90; Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*, 82.

³⁵⁰ Batchelor, *Awakening of the West*, 261.

Loving all things which live even as themselves.

Sobriety, temperance, sexual restraint, compassion: by underscoring those aspects of Buddhist ethics that were most heavily prioritized by the Victorians, Arnold earned many new followers for his Buddha. Indeed, most scholars who have written on *TLOA* note how Arnold capitalized on the ethical vision of Buddhism and view of the Buddha as a primarily moral teacher. Elizabeth Harris writes, "Arnold offered the reader a Buddha who embodied the most loved, devotion-inspiring human qualities such as compassion, modesty and sensitivity, and also a romantically appealing interpretation of the Four Noble Truths, just as they were entering Western consciousness."³⁵¹ Stephen Batchelor even comments that *TLOA* presented the Buddha in a way that "satisfied the Victorians' romantic longing for spiritual fulfillment (but kept actual spiritual practice at a safe distance) while affirming the moral qualities of the ideal Victorian gentleman: personal detachment united with universal benevolence, uprightness, truthfulness, and perseverance."³⁵²

A closer look at concrete evidence from the popular press reveals how this focus on the character and morality of the historical Buddha played out in the public's reviews and reactions to the poem. Almost all reviewers – regardless of publication type or the intended audience – placed an emphasis on the instructive, moralizing, enlightening nature of the poem. This is true of elite, middlebrow, and working-class publications. Thus, Sir W. W. Hunter, the well-known historian of India, could call *TLOA* a "true poem" that "revealed to the European and American heart the pathos of the Buddha's life and the noble piety of his teaching."³⁵³ The *Examiner* noted in its review of the poem that "higher ethical doctrines are scarcely to be found anywhere; certainly not in any religious system... as regards ethics, it has evolved maxims equaling those of the most refined thinkers of the ages."³⁵⁴ The moral aspect was emphasized in less highbrow publications, as well, like the paper that lauded Arnold's "passionate but disciplined adoration of the ethical majesty of Buddha's teaching."³⁵⁵ A reviewer for another local paper noted that "the book - pleasing as it is in style, pleasant as it is in method - is chiefly valuable because it is instructive."³⁵⁶ Of course,

³⁵¹ Harris, *Theravada Buddhism*, 96.

³⁵² Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West*, 261.

³⁵³ W. W. Hunter, "Indian Poetry: containing a New Edition of the Indian Song of Songs," *The Academy*, July 30, 1881; no. 482; 81.

³⁵⁴ "The Light of Asia." *The Examiner*, August 30, 1879, 1127.

³⁵⁵ "To-Day." *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, Friday March 25, 1904.

³⁵⁶ "Our London Correspondence." *Liverpool Mercury*, Friday July 18, 1879; Issue 9832.

by instructive the reviewer means not rich in information, but morally instructive; this is clear from the fact that the author goes so far as to recommend incorporating the ideals of the Buddhist code of ethics into an English code of conduct: "I am quite incapable of saying how far this book really represents Buddhism, but, as I read, my only regret was that Mr. Arnold was not enough of a Buddhist to carry the teachings of Guatama into national policy."³⁵⁷

It is especially in middle-class publications that we see the discussion of Buddhist ethics come to the fore in reviews and reflections on the poem; a lengthy review in the middle-class Christian magazine *Good Words* provides one fairly typical example.³⁵⁸ The author, a popular London curate by the name of Reverend Haweis, offers his readers a guided commentary on the poem's moral code that is both laudatory and cautionary. "The characteristic of Buddha's religion is a sublime and severe morality wedded to a tender piety and world-wide charity," he explains to his family readers. He especially attributes the popularity of Buddhism to its unwavering advocacy of "those moral precepts which alone bind human society together, and in its inspired recognition in the spiritual as in the physical world." Despite Haweis' enthusiasm for the moral code of Buddhism and its sympathetic founder, however, Buddhism's lack of a living Savior ultimately leaves it "powerless" in the sight of Christians.³⁵⁹

For female readers, too, the morality of the Buddha could be recommended as exemplary. One female columnist recalled Princess Christian (Victoria's third daughter) quoting, at a recent social event, some lines from *The Light of Asia*; she advises her star-struck royalist readers that they should likewise take Arnold's poem and "peruse with care" its instructive contents, and especially

...this beautiful imaginative passage from the life of Buddha, whose doctrines and influence rightly understood are of the highest, gentlest and noblest character. In book VII we have, I think, the poetical code of a moral and exalted life, developed and inculcated in the ancient faith of Eastern nations.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁷ *ibid.*

³⁵⁸ Haweis, "The Religions of the World. II. Buddhism" 253.

³⁵⁹ *ibid.* ("...but apart from all sense of a personal God revealed in a living Saviour, and operant upon the heart through a Holy Spirit, even such priceless qualities left Buddhism powerless to lift the masses above the evils of Oriental despotism, or in any degree to rival in the East the slowly but surely advancing triumph of Christianity in the direction of civil liberty and moral progress - justice, mercy, and love - in the West.")

³⁶⁰ "Our Ladies Column. By One of Themselves." *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* (Bristol, England), Saturday, March 10, 1888; Issue 12426.

As in many things, Victoria and the royal family were trendsetters in terms of establishing moral example and family values; what is surprising is that a Buddhist poem could have found its way into this morality.³⁶¹ Or, as Tennyson's religiously liberal sister reflected in a magazine in 1887, "Who can read of such great men as Socrates, as Confucius, as the gentle Gautama Buddha, who taught forgiveness of injuries as a necessary virtue, and not feel that the Spirit of God was working in them for good?"³⁶²

Finally, aspects of *TLOA* emphasizing Buddhist morality made it into publications for children, as well. The "Young Folks' Column" in the *Newcastle Weekly Courant* published a series of articles on the moral acts of the Buddha that are lifted directly from the poem.³⁶³ The first prints the story of Prince Siddhartha's tender rescue of the swan his cousin shoots down with an arrow; the second, the young prince's encounter with the suffering old man. The author concludes that the Buddha was "after Jesus Christ... the best and noblest man that has ever been seen on the earth." The stories of his boyhood and natural ethical instincts "will show you how early he began to be good, and how soon people found out how kind and gentle he was," the young reader is instructed.

The media's interest in Buddhism's exemplary morality correlated with a national preoccupation with the proper Christian or moral response to poverty – not in India or elsewhere abroad, but in neighboring London boroughs. Andrew Mearns' 1883 exposé-style pamphlet *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* had forced the issue of urban poverty into national consciousness.³⁶⁴ In the 1880s, in particular, the middle classes mobilized themselves on behalf of the poor; charities and settlement houses, socialist organizations and movements, and other "good works" took center stage on the nation's conscience.³⁶⁵ As one journal reported

³⁶¹ In England morality was also tightly integrated with the ideal of the monarchy. Himmelfarb argues that as the power and influence of the clergy waned, the moral example of the royal family became more central and more convincing. Far from holding any suspicious of the degeneracy or profligacy of the royal household, Victoria was held up as an example of decency, thrift, industriousness, honesty, and stability. Himmelfarb, *The De-Moralization Of Society* 55.

³⁶² Lushington, Cecilia. "The Influence of Religion on the World." *Good Words*, Dec 1877; 18, 300-311. (Cecilia Lushington, nee Tennyson, was the younger sister of the poet.)

³⁶³ "Young Folks' Column" *The Newcastle Weekly Courant* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England), Saturday, January 16, 1892; Issue 11322 and Saturday, February 13, 1892; Issue 11326.

³⁶⁴ Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Conditions of the Abject Poor* (London: James Clarke & Company, 1883). For an analysis, see Anthony S. Wohl, "The bitter cry of outcast London." *International Review of Social History* 13.02 (1968): 189-245.

³⁶⁵ Gertrude Himmelfarb. *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 220.

in 1884, "Books on the poor, poverty, social questions, slums and the like subjects, rush fast and furious from the press... The titles of some of them sound like sentimental novels."³⁶⁶ The period's zealous focus on improving the lot of England's poor finds a direct reflection in the discussions of Buddhist morality. Siddhartha Gautama's compassion on the poor and downtrodden, particularly as emphasized in the poem, was taken as an exemplary response to what was considered the most pressing domestic issue of the decade. Thus, some contemporaries chastised their fellow Londoners for their insensitivity to urban poverty by pointing towards the moral example of the Buddha as one who could not bear to see suffering without seeking its immediate alleviation: "We have to do with a man of the most exquisite moral sensibility - a man who could no more bear to see sorrow of any kind, without devoting himself to its extirpation or alleviation, than a hungry man can forbear to crave for food," one contemporary wrote.³⁶⁷ This was sharply contrasted with those so-called Christians who turned their backs on their slum-dwelling neighbors: "Hundreds of thousands of people in the West End of London see such spectacles readily, but are not so moved; a passing '*poor wretch!*' or a superfluous sixpence flung on the ground, to be picked up by a half-naked suppliant, settles the score of their pity."³⁶⁸

Concern with the welfare of the poor could reveal itself in other guises: if the Buddha could inspire the wealthy to greater compassion, it was also suggested that he could rouse the poor with his moral example. In a display of patronizing condescension, a reviewer in the highbrow *Examiner* makes clear his enthusiasm at the prospect of *TLOA* being made available to London's poor:

Our opinion of this true poem was given to our readers nearly twelve months ago, and needs not to be repeated. We greet the appearance of a cheap, popular edition with a welcoming thought that the work will now be accessible to a wider circle of readers and thinkers, who otherwise might greet it from afar, as the villages did Buddha, 'grieved to be poor.' 'The Light of Asia' now comes to the 'hut doors, a yellow cloth o'er his shoulder cast,' and 'taking the granted dole with gentle thanks.'³⁶⁹

(Despite the *Examiner's* romantic vision of the light of Asia illuminating the huts of London's slum dwellers, even a book costing 2s. 6d. was not affordable for those "grieved to be poor" in the "huts" of London.) *The Examiner's* prescription of a strong

³⁶⁶ Charity Organisation Society's journal for 1884, quoted in Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, 5.

³⁶⁷ J. S. Blackie, *The Natural History of Atheism* (London: Daldy, Isbiter, 1877),. 119. Archived online at <https://archive.org/stream/nathisatheism00blacuoft#page/118/mode/2up>; accessed 21. Feb 2015.

³⁶⁸ *ibid.*

³⁶⁹ "Book Review." *Examiner* no. 3783, July 31, 1880: 925.

dose of Buddhist morality for England's less fortunate may be a reflection of the poem's emphasis on karmic action and right action as a form of self-improvement. As J. Jeffrey Franklin notes in his study of the poem, *TLOA* emphasizes the doctrine of karma as a natural system of just rewards; Arnold, "whether unintentionally or shrewdly, appeals in his portrait to the Victorian discourses of 'improvement' and 'self-help.'"³⁷⁰

These references – culled from the spectrum of elite reviews, religious family magazines, women's columns, and children's publications – indicate that the poem's coupling of middle-class morality and dramatic inspirational narrative (rather than, say, its philosophical tenets, compatibility with science, or presentation of a viable alternative to Christianity) was the primary reason that the public treasured the poem. Readers marveled that Asian culture could have produced a person of such ethical character as all classes of Victorians aspired to. Yet most reviews (subtly or explicitly) concluded that Buddhism's power to inspire virtuous behavior was close to, but not on par with, that of Christianity: "...even in its system of morals, which is the best part of Buddhism, it falls far short of the saving power of Christian morality," noted one Catholic paper.³⁷¹ And it is critical to note that comments emphasizing the degenerate morality of contemporary Buddhist communities remained commonplace, and not in the least challenged by the public's growing fondness for the tradition's founder. As one journal noted, "They who may have gathered their notions of Buddhism from Sir Edwin Arnold or from the Esoteric ecstasies of a Theosophist novel would hardly recognize their romantic faith, we fear, when observed in that vulgar field of operation – daily life and practice."³⁷² Or as another paper noted, "Sir Edwin Arnold in his 'Light of Asia' wrote a poem intended to idealise Buddhism, which some thought was real Buddhism, but it was found to be only a theory which somehow had never been able to command practice."³⁷³

³⁷⁰ Franklin, "Buddha in Victorian England," 960. Franklin also notes Arnold's skill in "marshalling the middleclass discourses of domesticity, progressivism, and self-help" to make the poem more palatable to contemporary readers, for example in the emphasis on Siddhartha and Yashodara's tender parting (968).

³⁷¹ "Reviews." *John Bull* (London, England), Saturday, February 27, 1886; pg. 142; Issue 3: 406.

³⁷² Graham Sandberg, "Philosophical Buddhism in Tibet." *The Contemporary Review* 57, February 1890: 256-271.

³⁷³ "Faith and Morals." *Portsmouth Evening News*, Monday 17 October 1910.

3.3 Creating a Classic: The Role of the Mass Media

The existing scholarly assessments of *TLOA*'s remarkable popularity focus exclusively on key intrinsic qualities of the poem and its appealing presentation of Buddhism – the aspects we discussed above, including its morality, simplified and accessible rendition of Buddhist ideas, and narrative appeal. Any best seller, however, requires marketing, positive media resonance, and a receptive audience. This next section more explicitly examines the powerful role of the mass media in making the Buddha a household name. As we will see, it is likely that far more readers encountered *TLOA* in the pages of the press than would have actually purchased the book for their own private home reading. This media attention is essential to understanding the poem's success; after all, this was an era when the newly invented best seller list reigned, when epic poetry was talked about in the highest terms, when literary success was still a path to national fame (think Tennyson and Matthew Arnold). In the case of *TLOA*, it was the media that insisted on the poem's "appeal... to the masses of readers,"³⁷⁴ that listed it in its best 100 books of all time,³⁷⁵ and that otherwise ensured that *TLOA* remained in the public spotlight for over a decade.

For one thing, the mass media played an essential role in the popularization process by printing plot summaries of the life of the Buddha, often together with lengthy quotations from the poem, augmented by their own opinions and insights into the subject matter. Most of the early reviews assumed that their readers were not sufficiently knowledgeable about Buddhism to understand the review without a lengthy plot summary of the Buddha's life. Lengthy quotes were also popular, with half the length of some reviews consisting of extended excerpts of the poem. The essential episodes of the life of the Buddha (as filtered through Arnold's interpretive lens) were hence told and retold in the press between 1879 and about 1885. As a result, the actual audience of some parts of the poem was incalculably large. This drastically increased the circulation of the life story of the Buddha and should be considered one of the most significant phenomena resulting from the poem's publication.

The glowing recommendation of the poem in *Lloyd's Weekly*, which had a circulation of over a half a million, was quoted above; add to this the readership of

³⁷⁴ "Mr. Edwin Arnold's Poetry." *Liverpool Mercury*, Saturday 28 February 1885.

³⁷⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, Friday 29 January 1886.

daily papers such as the *Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, at a quarter-million each,³⁷⁶ and we can conclude that summaries and excerpts of *TLOA* reached upwards of a million readers through the medium of the daily and weekly press. Just a small selection of the papers that included such summaries include the dailies (e.g. the *Times*³⁷⁷), the elite journals (the *Athenaeum*³⁷⁸ and the *Academy*³⁷⁹), evening papers (e.g. the *Pall Mall Gazette*³⁸⁰), popular family magazines (e.g. *Macmillan's Magazine*³⁸¹ or *Good Words*³⁸²), papers for children and young people (e.g. *Young Folks Paper*³⁸³ or *Young England*³⁸⁴), and women's magazines. As one example of the latter, the June 1893 edition of the domestic *Hearth and Home* magazine included an essay on the light of Asia versus the "light of the world" and included liberal quotes from the Buddhist poem.³⁸⁵

Taking a closer look at one of these popular media reflections on *TLOA* will reveal how its themes were taken up in various discursive circles. The poem provoked a renewed nation-wide discussion about the value of Buddhism; for this I return to the Reverend Haweis' article in *Good Words* that was briefly cited above. In 1885 – six years after *TLOA* was published, but long before its popularity diminished – a five-page article on *TLOA* and Buddhism appeared in the enormously popular family magazine *Good Words*, a mainstream, firmly middle-class religious magazine with a broad cross-denominational readership.³⁸⁶ *Good Words* was developed to rival existing secular publications for fireside reading, and did so with around 70 pages of lively prose stories, articles, poetry, and generous illustrations. When it came out in the

³⁷⁶ The *Times* readership was the third-largest in England at the time, following the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Standard*. Brown, *Victorian News*, 52-53.

³⁷⁷ "The Light of Asia." *Times* (London, England), April 10, 1888. This review includes multiple columns summarizing the entire plot of the poem from start to finish, with lengthy excerpts. The author adds only a small blurb at the end cautioning the reader to carefully compare the teachings of the Buddhists to the New Testament ("the one will be felt to be moonlight, the other sunlight").

³⁷⁸ "The Light of Asia." *The Athenaeum* August 9, 1879, no. 2702, p. 171.

³⁷⁹ W. W. Hunter, "Indian Poetry: containing a New Edition of the Indian Song of Songs, ..." *The Academy*, Jul 30, 1881; no. 482; p. 81.

³⁸⁰ "The Light of Asia." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Tuesday, August 19, 1879; Issue 4521.

³⁸¹ Stanley Lane-Poole, "The Light of Asia." *Macmillan's Magazine* 41.246 (1880): 496-504.

³⁸² Rev. H. R. Haweis, "The Religions of the World. II. Buddhism." *Good Words* December 1885, 249-253.

³⁸³ The author confesses that in his gloomier moments he turns to Arnold's "grand and sublime" Eastern poem which confers an "immeasurable calm" with its "ennobling and beautiful thoughts." "A Chat About Books." *Young Folks Paper*, Saturday, January 22, 1887; Issue 843, 61.

³⁸⁴ "An Eastern Garden." *Young England: An Illustrated Magazine for Recreation and Instruction* (London, England), June 1, 1892; pg. 263; Issue 129.

³⁸⁵ R. Vernon, "Sir Edwin Arnold's Poems." *Hearth and Home* (London, England), Thursday, June 15, 1893; pg. 154; Issue 109. This 'Illustrated Weekly Journal for Gentlewomen' cost 3d and was targeted at middle-class women; it contained mostly household management advice and fashion.

³⁸⁶ Mark Knight and Emma Mason, *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 133.

1860s it cost only 6d and so was affordable for a wide range of families. By 1865 *Good Words* was selling 150,000 copies a month, making it the most successful fiction-carrying monthly of the era – a position it held until the 1890s.³⁸⁷ A majority of the *Good Words* contributors came from the ranks of the clergy; as a consequence, the magazine is the practical equivalent of a series of amusing, informative, but always morally uplifting sermons delivered directly to the family fireside. It was not unusual for the magazine to use its platform to instruct readers about non-Christian religions.³⁸⁸

The majority of Haweis's article consists of a summary of the basic outline of the life of the Buddha, rendered in the spirited prose of someone who regularly entertains an audience of London Victorians from his pulpit and surely knows their tastes and limits. The episodes that receive prominent attention include the young prince's encounter with the old man outside the gates of his palace, his religious quest as a wandering ascetic, and of course his enlightenment – narrative elements designed to emphasize Siddhartha Gautama's innate natural compassion and goodness, the rigorous self-denial of his spiritual quest, and its culmination. The insertion of Christian allusions is liberal and heavy-handed (far more so than in the original poem), to the point that, out of context, one thinks Haweis must be speaking of the Christian Savior: Siddhartha is "the Stainless one... about to reveal himself afresh to a sin-stained world," the "essence of wisdom and truth," and the "healer of pain and disease," who was "the form of all things, yet formless, the way and the life - now again took form and become incarnate, at once human and divine, to be adored by-and-by by countless millions of the human race as the last and best-beloved manifestation of Deity, the Light unapproachable."³⁸⁹ The comparisons with Christ are both implicit and explicit, and in several places Haweis comments on the story with a Bible verse (Psalm 51:6). The corollary "scripture" that is heavily quoted is the text of *TLOA*: to describe Siddhartha's enlightenment, for example, Haweis quotes Arnold directly. This has the effect of elevating Arnold's text to the level of a Buddhist bible, allowing Arnold's Buddhist creation to stand in in the absence of a more readily available and quotable

³⁸⁷ John Sutherland, *The Stanford Companion to Victorian Fiction* (Stanford University Press, 1990), 252. To quote *Good Words* itself: "GOOD WORDS is now by far the most popular Magazine issued in England, having attained the largest circulation ever reached by any similar periodical - a conclusive evidence of its intrinsic merits.... GOOD WORDS is in every respect a periodical of the highest class - its contributions being from the pens of the most able writers in England." Norman and Donald Macleod, *Good Words* (Alexander Strahan and Company, 1870).

³⁸⁸e.g. H. Alabaster, "Buddhist Preaching." *Good Words* 1872, 830-833, on the Buddhist priests of Siam.

³⁸⁹ Haweis, "Buddhism," 251.

original source. Haweis's article is representative of many others like it and allows us to gauge how the media, in this case an explicitly Christian middle-class publication, both popularized and reframed the poem's narrative and insights for its readerships. Lengthy reviews such as Haweis's provided a platform from which essential plot elements could be summarized but simultaneously commented on and controlled, with frequent references to Christian teachings and Scripture used to contextualize the poem's teachings and perhaps mitigate its effects on readers.

3.4 Colonial Contexts

It is important to contextualize *TLOA*'s publication and popularity within the framework of Britain's colonial involvement as well as in light of Edwin Arnold's own strong pro-imperial stance. This context is heavily reflected both in the poem's Indian orientalism and in the way that media reviewers repeatedly connected the poem's significance to the nation's responsibilities in colonial administration. One such connection was reviewers' fascination with the number of living Buddhists. In his preface to the poem, Edwin Arnold had noted that 470 million people around the globe adhered to Buddhism.³⁹⁰ It was common for Victorian authors to cite the number of Buddhists as a primary reason for the need to understand the religion's teachings, and writers were urging statistical information on readers long before Arnold; estimates ranged from 300 million to 500 million Buddhists worldwide throughout the period, and many believed that Buddhists were the largest of any religious group.³⁹¹ Justifying an interest in Buddhism on the grounds of its size alone became commonplace; as one journalist noted in 1885, "No apology certainly can be needed for calling attention once more to what a writer in the *Church Quarterly* quite rightly describes as "the great religion of the world," in point of numbers, seeing that it counts among its adherents some 500,000,000 souls, or forty per cent of the whole human race."³⁹² The statistical importance of Buddhism was often cited in reviews of the *TLOA*, as if the

³⁹⁰ "Four hundred and seventy millions of our race live and die in the tenets of Gautama... More than a third of mankind, therefore, owe their moral and religious ideas to this illustrious prince, whose personality, though imperfectly revealed in the existing sources of information, cannot but appear the highest, gentlest, holiest, and most beneficent, with one exception, in the history of Thought." Arnold, "Preface," *The Light of Asia*.

³⁹¹ For example, *The Examiner* wrote in 1870: "Especially it is valuable to learn the inner and modern life of that vast and mysterious Church of Buddha, of which there are still at this hour a larger number of members (variously estimated at 350,000,000 or 450,000,000) than of any other religion of the world, and in which an enormous majority of the departed have lived and died." *The Examiner* (London, England), Saturday, January 21, 1871; Issue 3286.

³⁹² "Buddhist Theosophy." *Saturday Review* 60, no. 1563 (October 10, 1885): 478–79.

sheer number of Buddhism's adherents more than justified the poem's existence. "The fact that nearly half the human race are followers of the Buddhist religion ceases to excite surprise when it is seen how admirably adapted is its ethical system to the needs of humanity. Mr. Arnold's poem places this aspect of the gentlest of creeds in a very striking light," noted one Calcutta paper.³⁹³ Or as *The Daily News* noted, the fact that Buddhism held sway over so much of the world's population lent it "intrinsic interest and importance."³⁹⁴ Likewise, "A religion which had lived on for four-and-twenty centuries; a religion which, at the present moment, counted more votaries than any other on the face of the globe" was worthy of public attention, one local paper noted.³⁹⁵ *The Examiner* asserted in its review: "a creed rooted in more than a third of mankind certainly merits attention in the History of Thought."³⁹⁶

A preoccupation with the statistical prevalence of Buddhists around the world was characteristic of the entire Victorian period, and the figures were hotly debated by academic scholars as well as in the popular media.³⁹⁷ This statistical fascination was one of the ways that Britons came to terms with both the extent of their empire as well as with the unsettling possibility that Christianity was not the dominant world religion.³⁹⁸ The surprising abundance of religious census data printed and reprinted in the popular press, especially in reviews of *TLOA*, reflects a need to attach concrete facts to the nebulous mental idea of other religious groups and populations. The Victorians – who loved to measure and count any thing, but especially people – turned the impressive number of 500 million Buddhists into a rallying cry for the reading public to better understand the appeals of Buddhism. In addition, the ongoing concern with the number of adherents of Buddhism in various imperial lands reveals reviewers'

³⁹³ "The Light of Asia or the great Renunciation (Mahâbhinishkramana)" *The Calcutta Review* (Calcutta, India); pg. iv; Issue CXXXVIII.

³⁹⁴ Canon Liddon, speaking to a crowd of young men in St. Paul's in early 1873. "The St. Paul's Lectures to Young Men." *Daily News* (London, England), Wednesday, January 22, 1873; Issue 8343.

³⁹⁵ "The Rev. S. F. Williams on English Interests in India." *Liverpool Mercury*, Tues., October 21, 1879; Issue 9913.

³⁹⁶ "The Light of Asia." *The Examiner*, August 30, 1879, 1127.

³⁹⁷ Tomoko Masuzawa notes: "Lest it bring about a crisis of confidence among the Christians, prominent experts on Buddhism such as Monier-Williams and Rhys Davids.... chose to address this demographic question when they wrote their treatises, and they did so either by correcting the numbers or by offering an alternative interpretation of the existing numbers" – for example, by claiming that only a quarter of that number were "real Buddhists". Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 138-139.

³⁹⁸ Benedict Anderson has discussed the way that the census, along with the map and the museum, was a primary way that the colonial state "imagined its dominion" including "the nature of the human beings it rules." Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 164-170. Bernard Cohn makes a similar argument that the 1881 census clearly represented "a model of the Victorian encyclopedic quest for total knowledge." Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 8.

awareness, on in some cases concern, that some portion of these Buddhists had become, by virtue of imperial expansion, fellow subjects of the crown. As one newspaper noted, "When it is recollected that nearly 500,000,000 of our race profess the tenets of Buddha, *a large proportion of whom live and die under the sovereignty of this country*, the practical interest of the subject will be readily recognized."³⁹⁹ This rather extravagant claim is based on the belief – propagated by Arnold himself in the preface to the poem – that India remained in some elusive manner a "Buddhist" country.⁴⁰⁰ (India aside, there is, of course, no accuracy to the claim that a "large proportion" of Buddhists were British subjects; in 1879, only Ceylon contributed any large number of Buddhists to the empire, to be joined by Burma in 1885.) As another local newspaper observed, it was the British entanglement in India that should motivate readers to want to engage with the ancient Indian religions:

The literature and philosophy Mr. Arnold delights in are those of the country where he spent so many years—it seems delightful years. He has fairly made out his claim to be poet, or poetical interpreter, of the religion and life of India, and is striving, along with Max Müller and others, to make us understand a little better the vast race with which we have otherwise so much to do.⁴⁰¹

Indeed, as one contemporary clergyman noted, "It was only through those studies that they could form an adequate conception of the vast responsibilities which their Indian Empire had entailed upon them."⁴⁰² Contemporaries clearly believed that a better understanding of ancient Indian Buddhism, despite its having long since ceased to play an active role in Indian religious life, could still provide valuable insights into the Indian heart and mind. Thus even those who were not intrinsically motivated by any interest in Buddhism were urged by reviewers to read the poem to understand how the largest segment of the world worshipped and believed, or because they felt that the "vast responsibilities" of colonial administration should entail understanding of the beliefs of those governed.

³⁹⁹ "Literature." *Western Mail*, Friday, August 1, 1879 (italics mine).

⁴⁰⁰ Arnold wrote in the preface to *TLOA*: "Four hundred and seventy millions of our race live and die in the tenets of Gautama; and the spiritual dominions of this ancient teacher extend, at the present time, from Nepaul and Ceylon over the whole Eastern Peninsula to China, Japan, Thibet, Central Asia, Siberia, and even Swedish Lapland. India itself might fairly be included in this magnificent empire of belief, for though the profession of Buddhism has for the most part passed away from the land of its birth, the mark of Gautama's sublime teaching is stamped ineffaceably upon modern Brahmanism, and the most characteristic habits and convictions of the Hindus are clearly due to the benign influence of Buddha's precepts." Arnold, "Preface," *The Light of Asia*.

⁴⁰¹ "Literature." *Dundee Advertiser*, Wednesday 20 May 1885.

⁴⁰² "The Rev. S. F. Williams on English Interests in India." *Liverpool Mercury* etc (Liverpool, England), Tuesday, October 21, 1879; Issue 9913.

Fitting hand in hand with this statistical concern, another facet of Arnold's poem reflects its colonial context: the richness of its oriental imagery and its presentation of a reified, purified ancient India. With its lengthy and sensuous descriptions of the Southeast Asian landscape – the towering Himalayas, the flora and fauna (elephants, gazelles, lemongrass, mango trees) – Arnold's poem is an exhibitionist, voyeuristic presentation of an idealized Indian panorama. In a period when periodicals and newspapers were filling with exotic eyewitness travel reports from voyagers to the farthest corners of the empire, Arnold's poem provided his readers with a romantic, whitewashed, slightly titillating glimpse into a scenic, "ancient" Indian landscape.⁴⁰³ The press was in particular raptures over Arnold's effective use of "local colour" – a hackneyed phrase that appears with surprisingly consistent regularity in reviews. The poem was praised in the papers for its "vivid beauty"⁴⁰⁴ and "vividness of colouring"⁴⁰⁵ – as a result, its "gorgeous sensuousness and local colouring" had made *TLOA* "a revelation in these colder climes."⁴⁰⁶ One review swooned that "nothing could exceed the ease, the ingenuity, and the power with which the local colour is worked in; so that as we read we seem to feel the sultry rays of the Indian sun, and to behold the wild pageantry of that Eastern nature."⁴⁰⁷ The poem "abounds with chaste and beautiful Oriental imagery," another paper noted.⁴⁰⁸ One imperial paper was in raptures about the "rich luxuriousness of imagination, which is verdant, glowing, many-coloured; and has a strong scent about it, like an Indian landscape after heavy rain."⁴⁰⁹ "He has well caught the glow of orientalism,"⁴¹⁰ said one paper; Arnold's poetry had "all the warmth and gorgeousness that the imagination has been wont to associate with the products of the Oriental Muse," including "the mystery and music, the strange and lovely imagery."⁴¹¹ The glowing depictions of the sultry landscape of India, lushly painted in Arnold's rich, heady Miltonic verse, surely

⁴⁰³ J. Jeffrey Franklin has noted of the poem: "The settings, the foreign cultural references, and the use of vocabulary from ancient languages provide an exotic *mis-en-scène*" with descriptions of exotic languages "that could have come from, or rather will appear in, Kipling's *Jungle Book*." Franklin calls this (unfoundedly, I think) "patriarchal, imperialist wish fulfillment" on the part of readers. Franklin, "Buddha in Victorian England," 950.

⁴⁰⁴ *Morning Post*, Wednesday 17 September 1879

⁴⁰⁵ "Literature." *The Bristol Mercury*, Saturday 06 January 1883.

⁴⁰⁶ "Sir Edwin Arnold." *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin, Ireland), Tuesday, March 15, 1892.

⁴⁰⁷ "Some Recent Books." *The Contemporary Review*, February 1881, p. 328.

⁴⁰⁸ "Literature." *Western Mail* (Cardiff, Wales), Friday August 1, 1879; issue 3192.

⁴⁰⁹ "Indian Idylls." *The Friend of India & Statesman*, December 18, 1883; pg. 1778; Issue 2545.

⁴¹⁰ "Our Library Table." *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* (Bristol, England), Saturday, August 15, 1885; Issue 11624.

⁴¹¹ "The Song of Songs." *The Friend of India*, Saturday, December 25, 1875; Issue 2128.

felt like a breath of warm Indian breeze to Englishers in cold, grey London. The poem offered a pleasant exotic voyeurism, transporting its readers from a drafty parlor to the fragranced mango grove. A *Western Mail* reviewer put it succinctly:

London life forms certainly the greatest possible contrast to what a dreamy and meditative follower of the Teacher of Nirvana would regard as the proper surroundings for his thoughts and feelings.⁴¹²

Here, too, Arnold is following in the footsteps of Renan, Farrar and other authors of 'Lives' of Jesus in capitalizing on his previous personal trips to India and using his familiarity with the landscape to add the right note of pastoral color to the work. Just as ever more Anglo-Indian poetry and novels were capturing the sounds, smells, and sights of India, Arnold's imaginative presentation of this landscape, peopled with heroic characters and romantic scenes, enthralled his curious readership.⁴¹³ This is typical of the type of "picturesque" descriptions of India that dominated English literary and travel narratives of India throughout the nineteenth century.⁴¹⁴

Reviews that appealed to Arnold's intimate colonial familiarity of India suggest that this was a highly coveted and prized form of insider's knowledge. The *Pall Mall Gazette* subtly addresses its review to fellow colonial insiders and those who "know" India: "With much skill Mr. Arnold has illustrated his narrative with a series of Indian pictures, the fascination of which will be felt by those who know India," it reported.⁴¹⁵ The first-person narrative style that Arnold adopts in the poem, speaking through the voice of an ancient Indian votary, is an instrumental part of this strategy. As Arnold writes in the preface, "I have put my poem into a Buddhist's mouth, because, to appreciate the spirit of Asiatic thoughts, they should be regarded from the Oriental point of view."⁴¹⁶ As a result of this convincing impersonation, Arnold was freely attributed the right to speak for Indians, and was deemed to have captured the essential religious nature of Buddhism better than they were able to do themselves: "The Light of Asia seems at first sight the indigenous product of India," noted one imperial paper

⁴¹² "The Light of Asia." *The Examiner*, August 30, 1879, p. 1127.

⁴¹³ As Elizabeth Harris notes, "Comparisons between the greyness of Britain and the vibrant colour and warmth of the 'tropics' began to fuel an embryonic tourist industry. And, as in the middle years, one tendency that flowed from this was that Buddhism became an object to be romanticized rather than a religion to be understood." Harris, *Theravada Buddhism*, 92.

⁴¹⁴ "The colonial picturesque... served up India as a still life or a postcard 'scene,' filled with ruins, seductive feminine forms, poverty, and effeminate males" as well as an Indian landscape marked with excesses of human, plant, and animal life which are characteristic of the "imperial picturesque." Pramod K. Nayar, *Colonial Voices: The Discourses of Empire* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

⁴¹⁵ "The Light of Asia." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Tuesday, August 19, 1879; Issue 4521.

⁴¹⁶ Arnold, "Preface," *The Light of Asia*.

from Calcutta: "If we may say so, there is an Indian soul speaking in the Saxon tongue."⁴¹⁷ This claim is ironic considering that Arnold's "Indian soul" speaks in the rhyming poetic meter of Victorian epic poetry; despite this discordance, Arnold had clearly created a poem that was held to speak for Indian Buddhists in the way that his contemporaries believed was wholly convincing and true the original spirit of the Buddhist tradition as well as to "Indian feeling."⁴¹⁸

One of the reasons that Arnold could achieve such authenticity in his works, according to his contemporaries, was the belief that India hadn't changed in millennia. The *Pall Mall Gazette* reassures its readers that since India's arts and culture have been frozen in time for 2,000 years, there is no reason to assume Arnold's depictions are anything but of the highest accuracy:

It may be objected that his word painting cannot be true, seeing that Prince Sidhartha lived 2,5000 years ago. *But the life and arts of the East are still the life and arts of antiquity – little has changed*; and the public and domestic scenes of the Court and Country of the Sakya Kings which are here reproduced are almost identical, we may be sure, with what illustrated the India of the first ages of Buddhism [emphasis mine].⁴¹⁹

The belief in an unchanging, essential Indian soul enabled contemporaries to attribute a kind of accuracy to Arnold's poem that was, in a sense, even more than historical: the poem was not necessarily (merely) factually accurate, but it had captured the very essence of life and religious belief in ancient India. This is in keeping with what scholar Sara Suleri Goodyear has noted of colonial literature: that "its proper colonial function" is "making memorabilia out of a culture still alive but one that it must nevertheless take pains to embalm."⁴²⁰ Elsewhere, she writes that this approach is "synonymous with a desire to transfix a dynamic cultural confrontation into a still life."⁴²¹ Arnold's use of "local color" and his readers' suspension of disbelief in accepting his descriptions of village life, religious asceticism, and Indian spirituality as eternally true reflect the colonial function of creating a narrative that conveniently substitutes one coherent, attractive Buddhist myth for the vagaries of history.

⁴¹⁷ "Indian Idylls." *The Friend of India & Statesman*, December 18, 1883; pg. 1778; Issue 2545.

⁴¹⁸ "The Light of Asia." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Tuesday, August 19, 1879; Issue 4521. "[The poem's] real merit is that it is true to Indian feeling and bears the marks of long and profitable study of the philosophy and legends of Buddha."

⁴¹⁹ *ibid.* (It is worth noting that this review, too, asserts that the poem is "true" – meaning here not strict historical accuracy, but true in spirit.)

⁴²⁰ Sara Suleri Goodyear, *The Rhetoric of English India* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 103.

⁴²¹ *ibid.*, 76.

In summary: Arnold had distilled several years' service in India and his private study of Buddhist literature into a display of intimate knowledge that contemporaries were willing to regard as authentic and "true." Indeed, to many, *TLOA* was *more* than authentic, because *TLOA* was deemed infinitely more readable and accessible than any of the actual, original Buddhist texts. Reviewers maintained that Arnold's fanciful, romantic imaginings contained the essential truths of eternal India, captured the true heart and feelings of Indian Buddhism, and pierced through the mists of interpolations and interventions to restore Buddhism's essential founding myth to its rightful place alongside (almost) the Christian gospels. As Goodyear has also noted, the "colonial will to cultural description... demonstrates an anxious impulse to insist that colonized peoples can indeed be rendered interpretable within the language of the colonizer."⁴²² One can certainly argue that Arnold's posture of familiarity and intimate knowledge of the Indian tradition made Buddhism more susceptible to management and epistemological control by divorcing the historical myth of Siddhartha Gautama from the need for knowledge exchange or engagement with living adherents of Buddhism. The poem presents one eternal, reified myth that captures an Indian Buddhist spirit that had (allegedly) not changed in millennia.

On the other hand, the Buddhism created by Arnold's romantic epic existed side by side with an increasing awareness of contemporary forms of Buddhism in colonial lands. As we see in chapters two and four, late Victorian readers were not disinterested in or unaware of the Buddhism of Ceylon and Burma; on the contrary, the crown's Buddhist subjects held a great fascination for the public (which did not, of course, always take the form of positive approval). The late Victorians' encounter with Buddhism thus embodied a contradictory tension: between the idealized, reified, mythical Buddhism of *TLOA*, on the one hand, and the increasing number of reports about actual Buddhists that were starting to enter the media channels by means of increasing contact in Ceylon and Burma on the other hand. This tension could result in palpable dissonance: reviewing George Scott's work on Burmese Buddhism, for example, the *Spectator* wrote that his portrayal of native Burmans "will be a shock to those among his readers who have been reveling in 'The Light of Asia.'"⁴²³ These and

⁴²² Goodyear, *The Rhetoric of English India*, 7.

⁴²³ "Amongst the Shans." *Spectator*, 25 April 1885, 19.

other comments reflect the mounting tension between Arnold's idealizations and the often negative or ambivalent depictions of Buddhism from Ceylon and Burma.

Finally, it is worth noting that, despite the press's gushing appreciation of local color and vivid descriptions of unchanging, scenic India, there were clear limits to the average reader's tolerance for immersion in the world of classical Indian Buddhism. One universal source of frustration was Arnold's inclusion of Sanskrit or Pāli terms and quotations in the poem – a technique that proved severely trying for reviewers of all types.⁴²⁴ One reviewer for the *Manchester Times* put it delicately: "May it be hinted, however, in reference to this really noble poem, that a glossary would greatly enhance the attractiveness of future editions?"⁴²⁵ Others, however, were more blunt. The *Graphic* called Arnold's works "not made more inviting by a plentiful sprinkling of unpronounceable Sanskrit names and words, which may have attractions for Indian students, but hardly for the general public."⁴²⁶ The *Glasgow Herald* noted grumpily:

In his preface he observes that his book has need to ask indulgence from the learned. He has more need to apologise to the general public, unless, indeed, his wishes his last volume to be studied by non save Oriental scholars. ... There is more of this kind of thing than is pleasant for people who fail to see the magic of italics, and there seems no reason why Mr. Arnold should not keep his feelings 'within reach of the dictionary,' even in a book which is not probably intended for use at penny readings.⁴²⁷

This criticism would appear in review of Arnold's later works, as well, which were also peppered with original terms. Another reviewer, writing about Arnold's volume of *Indian Poetry*, noted that the poems needed footnotes, as "much of the imagery in the text must be absolutely unintelligible to the uninitiated."⁴²⁸ A *Pall Mall* critic, irritated with the inclusion of so much Sanskrit in Arnold's translation of the *Katha Upanishads*, commented that coming generations "may accept such poetries as one of

⁴²⁴ The source for Arnold's quotations was Spence Hardy's *Manual of Buddhism*. As Brooks Wright notes, Arnold knew almost no Pali; he copied these passages from Hardy (Wright 86-88). The quotations include the Buddha's pronouncements after his enlightenment and in his sermon at Benares, for example in book seven: "And, in that Garden -- said they -- there was held / A high Assembly, where the Teacher spake / Wisdom and power, winning all souls which heard, So that nine hundred took the yellow robe -- / Such as the Master wears, -- and spread his Law / And this the gáthá was wherewith he closed: / *Sabba pápassa akaranan;* / *Kusalassa upasampadá;* / *Sa chitta pariyodapanan* / *Etan Budhánusásanan.* / "Evil swells the debts to pay, / Good delivers and acquits; / Shun evil, follow good; hold sway / Over thyself. This is the Way." For the sake of comparison, Hardy had translated the lines as follows: " This is the advice of the Budhas; avoid all demerit; obtain all merit; cleanse the mind from all evil desire." (Spence Hardy, *Manual of Buddhism* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1853).

⁴²⁵ "Recent Poetry and Verse." *Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, October 4, 1879; Issue 514.

⁴²⁶ "Recent Poetry and Verse." *Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, May 2, 1885; Issue 805.

⁴²⁷ "Literature." *Glasgow Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland), Saturday, March 24, 1883; Issue 72.

⁴²⁸ "Critical Notices." *The Calcutta Review* (Calcutta, India), [1881]; pg. 413; Issue CXLVI.

the penalties of empire, but their 'late praise' is not likely to be very enthusiastic."⁴²⁹ The general complaint was that the work was superfluous for Sanskritists and but that - as the smaller county paper the *Northern Echo* put it - "we, not having a enjoyed the advantage of a Broad School education, find a decided drawback to our enjoyment of the same."⁴³⁰ The *Graphic* complained of "the affectation of introducing Sanskrit words and phrases, which so constantly provokes one in Sir Edwin's work."⁴³¹ And as a snide criticism in the *Pall Mall Gazette* vividly illustrates, there was a clearly demarked line between Arnold's highly appreciated touches of authentic, atmospheric detail, and the interpolation of unwelcome Sanskrit terms: "This is not local colour, it is a sort of local discoloration."⁴³² The reviewer adds:

It does not add anything to the scene. It does not bring the Orient more clearly before us. ... We are sorry that a scholar and a man of culture like Sir Edwin Arnold should have been guilty of what is really a treason against our literature.⁴³³

Thus, while contemporary readers appreciated Arnold's touches of local colour in the form of vivid word pictures, lush descriptions, and descriptive detail, they drew a clear line at being forced to encounter Sanskrit terms or expressions in their poetry. Arnold closed *TLOA* with the mantra *OM MANI PADME HUM*, for example (as far as I can ascertain, the first introduction of this mantra to a wide Western audience); but rather than being impressed, his readers simply found the presence of such terminology irritating. The surprising frequency and vehemence of these critiques suggests the limits of Victorian readers' willingness to engage with Indian Buddhist concepts and terms. Audiences were capable of absorbing a few selected terms, such as nirvana; but on the whole they preferred their rendering of Buddhist myth in neatly packaged rhyming English verse, reminiscent of Milton and Tennyson, and free of any foreign words or technical terminology. This perspective is in keeping with contemporaries' sense of what was "true" and thus laudable about the poem: its (presumed) ability to capture the heart and soul of Buddhism, rather than its textual or philological accuracy. The interpolation of Sanskrit or Pāli terms was superfluous and therefore distracting

⁴²⁹ "New Books." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Wednesday, May 27, 1885; Issue 6302.

⁴³⁰ *Northern Echo* (Darlington, England), Saturday, June 27, 1885; Issue 4787.

⁴³¹ *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, January 21, 1888; Issue 947.

⁴³² "Sir Edwin Arnold's Last Volume." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Tuesday December 11, 1888; Issue 7406.

⁴³³ "Sir Edwin Arnold's Last Volume." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Tuesday December 11, 1888; Issue 7406.

because the poem's accuracy was based on its semi-mystical channeling of the Indian Buddhist soul, rather than on any degree of faithfulness to its sources.

A lengthy satirical story printed in the London *Sporting Times* uses just this aspect of *TLOA* to lampoon the Arnold-inspired enthusiasm for Buddhism among the self-identified intelligentsia of London society. The satire ridicules the lamentable middle-class Blobbs and those amongst the (aspiring) intelligentsia who had taken to gushing in raptures about the nobility of Buddhism:

Blobbs found himself the other evening in highly intellectual society, where he was rather less happy than he is in Judges' Chambers. The conversation turned to Buddhism, which (Peter being assured was no new form of cigarette) interested him but slightly. Not so with the others. "A divine religion," said one. "Glorious - so pure, so simple!" said another. "Vastly superior to Christianity," exclaimed a third. "The creed of the future," thought a fourth.

And the host produced Edwin Arnold's "Light of Asia," remarking that it contained the best exposition of Buddhism extant. "I defy you take up this book," said the host, enthusiastically, "without finding some perfect truth beautifully expressed. It expresses all my hopes, fears, longings, and doubts. Open it where you will, and you find a gem. Take the book, Blobbs, open it at random, and read us whatever exquisite expression of man's soul you come across."

Blobbs, as luck would have it, opened the book at page 190, and gravely read:

Sabba pápassa akaranan;
Kusalassa upasampadá;
Sa chitta pariyodapanan
Etan Budhánusásanan.

There was a sort of uneasy silence.⁴³⁴

The story continues with Blobbs asking for a cab and hurrying from the party; as Blobbs summarizes the moral of the evening: "Better is a supper of oysters at Rule's, even if you have to put it on the slate, with the girl you love, than a dinner of all the delicacies of the season with Buddhism thrown in." This short satirical piece embodies in another form the public's discomfort and disapproval with the original texts interpolated into the poem.

Thanks to *TLOA* and to the proliferation of information and commentary about Buddhism in the decade following the publication of the poem, the reading public's knowledge about Buddhism developed rapidly. By 1890 or so, general knowledge about Buddhism had increased to the point that reviewers looking back at its publication had a more nuanced understanding of Arnold's tactics and purposes in writing the poem. Even a decade of critical distance - a decade that had seen a rapid

⁴³⁴ Blobbs was the lower-to middle class joke character of the *Sporting Times*. *Sporting Times* (London, England), Saturday, December 8, 1883; pg. 5; Issue 1055.

expansion in materials and sources of information available to the layperson - allowed for a demonstrably different understanding of the poem's approach to its subject. Reviewers a decade later recognized more clearly two points that, while they seem obvious enough now, were not discerned in the immediate wake of publication: Arnold's harmonizing of Christianity and Buddhism, and his very generous conception of historical accuracy. Thus, a decade after its publication, the *Western Mail* looked fondly if somewhat dismissively back at "that charming book" in which Arnold had "elevated and refined the religion of Buddhism by irradiating its creed and the life of its founder with the reflected light of Christianity."⁴³⁵ And by the time *The Light of the World*, Arnold's poetic life of Jesus, was released in 1890, critics such as the *Pall Mall Gazette* were wized enough to note that *TLOA* had presented Buddhist ideas "under the cross-light of Christianity" and "digested into a poem harmonious, complete, beautiful.... *The Light of Asia* was a feast of Buddhism for Christians."⁴³⁶ Historical sensitivity, too, was changing, as a result of the wealth of scholarly and popular information proliferating in books, periodicals, and newspapers; *Jackson's Oxford Journal* reports on a lecture given by a clergyman in Oxford in 1889 where the Reverend had ostensibly called *TLOA* "very good as poetry, but altogether contrary to history."⁴³⁷ These later reflections on the poem suggest that while *TLOA* captured and defined the Western vision of Buddhism for a brief generation, its usefulness as an exposition of the religion was relatively short-lived, and other interpretations would come to dominate the landscape in its place.

3.5 Edwin Arnold and the Victorian Cult of Popularity

The second unacknowledged factor in Arnold's successful popularization of Buddhism was the role that Arnold himself played as a public figure, man of letters, journalist, and imperial supporter. In 1879, Buddhism still lacked any such public advocate in England: there were as yet no practicing Buddhists (Asian or European) in the country; the appeal of Max Müller and Rhys Davids did not extend to the general public; and the Theosophists only gained popularity in the 1880s. The tall, elegant figure of Edwin Arnold, already well known for his position at the *Daily Telegraph*,

⁴³⁵ "Notes of the Week." *Western Mail* (Cardiff, Wales), Monday, January 9, 1888; Issue 5819.

⁴³⁶ "Sir Edwin Arnold as Reciter." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Monday, August 18, 1890; Issue 7929.

⁴³⁷ "Untitled." *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, Saturday, November 23, 1889; Issue 7130.

filled the open post of Buddhist proponent admirably, with his efforts earning him the title of interpreter and ambassador of Buddhism to the West. He also achieved notoriety as a newspaper editor, linguist, general expert on "Eastern cultures," and recognizable public figure; in his day he came to be seen as "one of the leaders of public opinion."⁴³⁸ But it was above all for his role as a mediator between the worlds of East and West that readers and reviewers most enthusiastically celebrated Arnold. It was a role he monopolized until the end of the century: Mr. Edwin Arnold "has very fairly and legitimately established himself as verse interpreter *en titre* to the British public of the treasures of Indian literature," commented the *Pall Mall* in 1883.⁴³⁹ The *Daily News* would write, "Mr. Edwin Arnold has taken possession of a field to which few will be found able to contest his title. He has made himself the interpreter of the great religious and legendary poetry of the East... As an Orientalist and a poet he is doubly qualified for the mission of bringing the thought of the Western world in communication" with Eastern faiths.⁴⁴⁰ Given that – as Charles Hallisey has noted – the Victorian context was one "in which research in Oriental Studies, like other academic fields, had already been rigorously organized in a manner which left little room for 'amateurs,'"⁴⁴¹ it is all the more remarkable that Arnold managed to create and occupy a transitional space between the academic and popular spheres (the *Pall Mall Gazette*, for example, called him "an Orientalist and a poet."⁴⁴²) This section explores this popularity in more detail and investigates how Arnold's personal fame and role as a public figure enabled him to more successfully popularize his pet creed of Buddhism.

It is not only in hindsight that Arnold can be recognized for his role in popularizing Buddhism; Arnold's contemporaries recognized and lauded him for this role, as well. It was clear to contemporary readers that Arnold had taken a difficult subject and intentionally made it more attractive and accessible to a wider audience. The *Daily News* wrote in 1883: "When Mr. Edwin Arnold set before himself the novel design of popularizing in this country the classics of India he brought to his task, as no man could have done, both learning, sympathy, and a high degree of poetic capability."⁴⁴³ Just a few years of the publication of *TLOA*, it was clear to Arnold's

⁴³⁸ "Untitled." *Walsall Advertiser*, Tuesday 15 July 1879.

⁴³⁹ "Indian Idylls." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Saturday, November 24, 1883; Issue 5842.

⁴⁴⁰ "Current Literature" *Daily News*, Saturday December 1, 1883; issue 11742.

⁴⁴¹ Hallisey, "Roads Taken," 41.

⁴⁴² "Current Literature" *Daily News*, Saturday December 1, 1883; issue 11742.

⁴⁴³ *Manchester Courier* Friday, August 14, 1885; pg.2; Issue 8972.

contemporaries that his poem had been instrumental in introducing the Buddha and his creeds to the English reading public. "Mr. Edwin Arnold's poem 'The Light of Asia' has had a great success," one paper noted. "It has given all who have read it a new light on Buddhism."⁴⁴⁴ Many lauded Arnold for his role as self-appointed ambassador of Buddhism to Western readers; the *Publishers' Circular* called him "the interpreter of one intellectual hemisphere to another" and was confident that the ideas expressed in *TLOA* would pass beyond the narrower limits of the purely literary realm "to enter into the common thought of the age, to teach it a new respect for that which is alien and diverse from its own modes, and to impress anew that sense of kinship which makes the whole world one."⁴⁴⁵ The *Birmingham Daily Post* lauded Arnold for his efforts as a "revealer" who made Buddhism "accessible" to a population extending far beyond the "learned":

In an especial sense Mr. Arnold has been a revealer to his generation. To what extent the treasures of thought which are embedded in Oriental literature have been accessible to the learned among us we do not know; but to the mass of the English reading public they have been as though they were not. ... The "Light of Asia" to many among us made the noble Buddha a reality, and enabled us to realise that his peers are only to be found among the noblest teachers of the world.⁴⁴⁶

The assertion that Arnold "made the noble Buddha a reality" is particularly suggestive of the way that Arnold had successfully transformed technical scholarship and materials developed to convert Buddhists and from them conjured a heroic Buddha who appeared, in the popular conception, as if from nowhere. These reflections suggest that Arnold's Buddha rose before the inner eye of his reviewers and reading public as a sudden apparition, rather than as the inevitable reworking of existing materials in a popular direction.

To some extent, Arnold's role as an emissary of Eastern faiths to the Western world relied on his position as a public figure in social and political circles. Aspects such as Arnold's privileged social position and the open approval of Queen Victoria (including a knighthood in the Order of the Star of India) were essential to his recognition as public figure.⁴⁴⁷ His various travels and doings were reported in detail in the papers; even his illnesses and convalescences were reported in the gossip

⁴⁴⁴ "Our London Correspondence." *Liverpool Mercury*, Wednesday June 30, 1880; Issue 10130.

⁴⁴⁵ *Publishers' Circular and General Record of British and Foreign Literature*, December 15, 1880, Volume 43, No. 1038, p. 1311.

⁴⁴⁶ "New Books." *Birmingham Daily Post* (Birmingham, England), Friday, November 13, 1885; Issue 8541.

⁴⁴⁷ "...Sir Edwin Arnold, whose works - especially the 'Light of Asia' - are great favorites with the queen." "Politics and Society." *The Leeds Mercury*, Monday, January 13, 1890; Issue 16152.

columns.⁴⁴⁸ Socially, he was a "conspicuous figure" in the London season, according to *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*: "he will doubtless this year be quite a "lion" in literary circles."⁴⁴⁹ He was rumored to be an "unbounded conversationalist" and "a most talkative man, full of life and energy."⁴⁵⁰ Arnold was adept at leveraging his good name and his international reputation to promote his version of Buddhism; his fame was quite as fevered in the US as in England. His lengthy American tour in 1890/1891 was detailed in British papers and watched with interest.⁴⁵¹ Arnold was furthermore not afraid of overt commercialism: for example, an Edwin Arnold birthday book (the epitome of book commodification) featuring selections from his various works was published in 1884.⁴⁵² He was well known enough to merit being the butt of a number of jokes in popular papers, such as these two:

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"I understand," said the private secretary to a stockholder in a gas company, "that Sir Edwin Arnold got £4,000 for his 'Light of Asia.'"

"You don't tell me," was the reply; "what was it - gas or electricity?"⁴⁵³

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Peck (the grocer, to his assistant): You've rolled that oil barrel so close to the sugar that the sugar smells of petroleum."

Assistant: "Well, sir, don't you know that Sir Edwin Arnold maintains that sweetness and light should go together?"⁴⁵⁴

While seemingly silly, such jokes clearly indicate that both Arnold and "The Light of Asia" had become universally recognizable household names.

That Arnold was by profession a newspaper editor, and not merely a gentleman poet, has often been forgotten; yet Arnold's ability to keep his pulse on the tastes and fascinations of his readers surely owed itself in no small measure to his awareness of current interests among the newspaper reading public. Arnold's role as editor of the *Daily Telegraph* arguably primed him for the task of charting and matching public taste. The *DT* was a paper that was generally politically liberal but which took a very

⁴⁴⁸ e.g. "The Man About Town." *The County Gentleman: Sporting Gazette and Agricultural Journal* (London, England), Saturday, April 30, 1881; pg. 461; Issue 990.

⁴⁴⁹ "Notes of News." *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* (London, England), Sunday, February 22, 1891; Issue 2518

⁴⁵⁰ "People, Places, and Things." *Hearth and Home* (London, England), Thursday, November 05, 1891; pg. 787

⁴⁵¹ "People, Places, and Things." *Hearth and Home* (London, England), Thursday, November 05, 1891; pg. 787; Issue 25.

⁴⁵² *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 21 August 1884; "Our Library Table." *Bristol Mercury*, Saturday 28 February 1885 - "daintily printed and illustrated," with selections from Arnold's poetry "as appropriate to their purpose as any of the kind we have seen."

⁴⁵³ "Cuttings from the Comics." *The Ipswich Journal* (Ipswich, England), Saturday, March 7, 1891; Issue 9278.

⁴⁵⁴ "Odd Thoughts." *Manchester Times* (Manchester, England), Friday, June 10, 1892; Issue N/A. 1950.

pro-imperial stance, and it led the other papers in adapting form and content to appeal to the widest audience and include gradually increasing volumes of entertainment value designed to boost circulation figures.⁴⁵⁵ With *DT* daily sales of a quarter million copies daily, Arnold was accustomed to writing for a large audience.⁴⁵⁶ This feat and his editorial prowess brought him no small amount of acclaim: one paper noted, "The people of England have no truer, warmer friend than Mr. Edwin Arnold has proved himself as Editor of the Daily Telegraph," citing above all "the possession of this poetic fervour by Mr. Arnold which has raised the once obscure Daily Telegraph to its present position, as the most read and most successful of all the London journals of our day."⁴⁵⁷

Arnold's fame was not merely the novelty of an Eastern interpreter; his poetic fame was genuine (even if not of lasting historical duration). His contemporaries convey the impression that Arnold had created a new subgenre of English poetry, and indeed he was a key figure in the genre of India-inspired poetry.⁴⁵⁸ The Miltonic and Tennysonian echoes of the poem ensured readers ranked the poem among the greatest literary classics of the day. Arnold was featured in a flattering light in *Journalistic London* 1882 then the magazine claimed that even Tennyson would struggle to rival Arnold on poetic talent: "It would puzzle Mr. Tennyson, or indeed any other poet of our time, to rival the merits of that remarkable poem 'The Light of Asia.'"⁴⁵⁹ Arnold's reputation as a poet extended far beyond the realm of the specialist and earned him a place in almost every paper's rankings of literary geniuses of the day. At the close of 1885 Arnold was listed in the review of "A Year's Minor Poetry" ranking admittedly somewhere below Tennyson, Arnold, Swinburne, and Lewis Morris, but nevertheless among the top poets of England.⁴⁶⁰ And in an 1887 magazine listing the poetic achievements of Victoria's reign, Arnold is listed alongside Swinburne and William Morris among the "poets who have refined the thoughts, improved the language, and

⁴⁵⁵ The *DT* "was one of the first newspapers to take advantage of the new environment." It "reduced its price, changed its content, incorporated techniques associated with the American press and employed the most celebrated journalist of the day, George Augustus Sala, whose prose resonated with the Victorian imagination, to become the leading newspaper of the period." Williams, Kevin. *Read All About It!: A History of the British Newspaper*. Routledge, 2009, 100. See also: Burnham, Edward Frederick Lawson. *Peterborough Court: The Story of The Daily Telegraph*. Cassell, 1955.

⁴⁵⁶ Williams, Kevin. *Read All About It!: A History of the British Newspaper*. Routledge, 2009, 102, 112.

⁴⁵⁷ *The Friend of India* (Calcutta, India), Thursday, October 30, 1873; pg. 1217; Issue 2016.

⁴⁵⁸ For example, one paper called a later volume of poems "representative of the spirit of much of the poetry which Mr. Arnold has introduced to English literature." "Mr. Edwin Arnold's Poetry." *Liverpool Mercury*, Saturday, February 28, 1885; Issue 11587.

⁴⁵⁹ "Journalistic London." *The Era* (London, England) Saturday December 2, 1882; Issue 2306.

⁴⁶⁰ "A Year's Minor Poetry." *Liverpool Mercury*, Wednesday, January 21, 1885; Issue 11554.

given a sparkling lustre to Her Majesty's reign."⁴⁶¹ That same year, 1887, Arnold made it onto a list in a competition run by the *Pall Mall Gazette* that invited subscribers to write in and nominate poets to a purely fictional "English Academy of Letters."⁴⁶² And when, in 1889, there was flurry of press activity pertaining to who would succeed Tennyson as the next Poet Laureate, Arnold was cited as a leading contender, particularly in light of his being a personal favorite of the queen: "Her Majesty may make her own choice... if she selects the next Laureate herself, she will confer the position on Sir Edwin Arnold, whose works - especially the 'Light of Asia' - are great favorites with the queen."⁴⁶³

Also not to be overlooked is Arnold's role as a vigorous advocate of British imperialism in India and Ceylon (described as an attitude of "far-sighted and high-minded Imperialism," in the appreciative words of one paper.)⁴⁶⁴ His career in India began as a college president in his pre-*TLOA* days, and he was named a Companion of the Star of India for his early services.⁴⁶⁵ Throughout his life Arnold maintained personal ties with India as well as a benevolent and appreciative, but very decidedly pro-imperial stance with respect to its governance. Arnold made several trips to India and Ceylon, and his reports of these trips indicate that he was celebrated in both countries as an ambassador and proponent of Buddhism.⁴⁶⁶ In 1886 Arnold and George Sala, one of the era's most famous journalists, travelled to India and Ceylon together; Arnold had "come to the Morning Land to look up his old friends the Buddhists," according to Sala.⁴⁶⁷ There the two men were, exceptionally, also permitted to see the tooth relic in Kandy, presumably due to Arnold's fame; Sala's description of the event makes clear that Arnold's fame as a celebrated interpreter of Buddhism had reached the Buddhist island:

Is not Buddha's tooth—which is not a tooth at all, but a huge malformed piece of ivory—preserved at the temple of Kandy? The Cinghalese rose at Mr Arnold, even as the Drury Lane pit rose at Edmund Kean. I was present at a grand religious function of welcome offered to the author of "The Light of Asia," at a Buddhist

⁴⁶¹ *The Ladies' Treasury: A Household Magazine* (London, England), Saturday, October 1, 1887, 575.

⁴⁶² "An English Academy of Letters." *Pall Mall Gazette*, Thursday, February 24, 1887; Issue 6846. Arnold came in only at number 41.

⁴⁶³ "Politics and Society." *The Leeds Mercury*, Monday, January 13, 1890; Issue 16152.

⁴⁶⁴ "Notes of the Week." *Western Mail* (Cardiff, Wales), Monday, January 9, 1888; Issue 5819.

⁴⁶⁵ "The Imperial Assemblage." *Times* (London, England) 2 Jan. 1877: 5.

⁴⁶⁶ Arnold, Edwin. "Literary Extracts." *Evening Telegraph*, Wednesday 29 March 1882.

⁴⁶⁷ "Mr. G. Sala in India." *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* (Aberdeen, Scotland), Monday, March 29, 1886; Issue 9712. Sala was not overly impressed with the tooth, writing elsewhere that the Buddha's tooth "is no more a human tooth than I am an iguanodon" George A Sala, "Echoes of the Week," *The Leeds Mercury* (Leeds, England), Saturday, September 27, 1890; Issue 16373.

college near Colombo, at which between two and three thousand persons must have been present. Mr. Arnold stood in the centre of a raised platform, under a baldaquin, a kind of sanctuary, surrounded by Buddhist clerics in yellow satin dalmatics. They were "bossed" by a very fat hierarch—the High Priest of Adam's Peak, indeed. Litanies were intoned, chorales chanted, and anthems halloaed in Pāli and in Cinghali.⁴⁶⁸

Edwin Arnold's own series of articles on his travels in India and Ceylon in 1886, telegraphed home for publication in the *DT*, embody the same picturesque aesthetic and romantic-exotic "local color" that had made *TLOA* such a success. They display a perhaps not unusual blend of fascination, respect, and patronizing condescension. As Arnold himself notes his work has perhaps "borne too uniformly the tone of my pleasure and admiration" and "left out of sight the evils of which other observers speak of India."⁴⁶⁹ The *Pall Mall Gazette* found them "eminently picturesque and gossiping;" they had quality of a "magic lantern show" over which Arnold "presides in the character of an agreeable and cultivated showman."⁴⁷⁰ As the *Glasgow Herald* observed, Arnold "nobly vindicates the Eastern races from the stigma so long attached to them."⁴⁷¹ Yet Arnold cannot forgo the opportunity to remind his readers of the moral responsibility of the English in India: "the basis and purpose of our sovereignty there are [India's] advancement and benefit" and "the best thing for the two populations is that they should dwell sisterly, the stronger protecting the weaker."⁴⁷²

Arnold's support of the imperial agenda continued in other guises, both subtle and overt – mainly in his role as newspaper editor of the very pro-imperial *Daily Telegraph*. In 1888 Arnold was named a Knight Commander of the Indian Empire, "for his contributions to literature... for his zeal in the cause of India, which has won him many warm hearts among our Indian fellow-subjects, and for his general bearing as a public man," in the words of one paper.⁴⁷³ But it was above all his "services" to the crown as the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* that in all likelihood earned him the

⁴⁶⁸ "Mr. G. Sala in India." *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, Monday, March 29, 1886; Issue 9712.

⁴⁶⁹ Edwin Arnold, *India Revisited* (London: Trübner & Co., 1886), 321. Arnold notes: "I myself have found nothing but friendliness and courtesy among the countless millions of this land, from strangers, towns- folk, peasants, servants, men, women, and children ; I have witnessed a thousand instances of simple virtues — of charity, of domestic affection, of natural courtesy, of inherent modesty, of honest dignity, of devotion, of piety, of glad human life — have encountered grace and goodness in passing, as one encounters bright birds and fair flowers; have, more than in my old years of service, become endeared to this kindred and civilised population, whose intellectual and religious history is so noble, and the guardianship of whose peace and progress is Great Britain's proudest charge."

⁴⁷⁰ "India by Magic Lantern." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Thursday, June 17, 1886; Issue 6631.

⁴⁷¹ "Literature." *Glasgow Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland), Wednesday, July 28, 1886; Issue 179. Another gushing review is to be found in the *Birmingham Daily Post* (Birmingham, England), Wednesday, August 18, 1886; Issue 8779.

⁴⁷² "India by Magic Lantern." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Thursday, June 17, 1886; Issue 6631.

⁴⁷³ *Liverpool Mercury* (Liverpool, England), Thursday, January 5, 1888; Issue 12476.

honor, including "his thorough knowledge of Eastern affairs, his earnest and impassioned advocacy of a policy of far-sighted and high-minded Imperialism" and his pursuit of "enlightened Conservatism" in the paper's politics.⁴⁷⁴ Public opinion was strongly divided over the controversial appointment. Some papers adamantly asserted that Arnold had done a national service, both in his leaders in the *DT* as well as with his prolific and bestselling poetic output, in bringing Eastern and Western minds and hearts closer together. As the *Western Mail* asserted, Arnold "has evidently done more to make cordial the relations between the Englishmen and their fellow-subjects in the East than could be accomplished by scores of well-meaning, but unimaginative, statesmen."⁴⁷⁵ Others, however, saw the award of a knighthood as a cheap reward for the paper's unflinching imperial support: "To confer the order upon Mr. Arnold is an open prostitution of it. ... It is true that Mr. Arnold is an accomplished man, and was once in the Education Department, Bombay, but we repeat, that it is a prostitution of the Order for the Ministry to confer it in this way, as a reward for newspaper support."⁴⁷⁶ Clearly, Arnold's reputation as a heavy proponent of imperial control was well known throughout the country.

Finally, Arnold was also instrumental in the movement to return the temple and enclosure at Bodh Gaya to the Buddhist as a recognized holy site.⁴⁷⁷ As one modern scholar has noted, Arnold's work "served as a rallying message for the global Buddhist effort to "liberate" Bodh Gaya (dubbed the "Buddddhist Jerusalem" by Arnold in 1896) from the hands of its Hindu owners."⁴⁷⁸ Arnold wrote a series of letters in the *Daily Telegraph* describing the importance of the site and urging its return to the Buddhists.⁴⁷⁹ His efforts were lauded by some contemporaries who believed the act would engender global support for the British among Buddhist populations: "Not only would all your island revere the governor who had given back to Buddhism its geographical centre, but that the Buddhists of Siam, of our new province of Burmah,

⁴⁷⁴ "Notes of the Week." *Western Mail* (Cardiff, Wales), Monday, January 9, 1888; Issue 5819.

⁴⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁶ "Notes of the Week." *The Friend of India & Statesman* (Calcutta, India), Friday, January 12, 1877; pg. 46; Issue [2183].

⁴⁷⁷ Jacob N. Kinnard, "When the Buddha Sued Visnu," John Clifford Holt, Jacon N. Kinnard, Jonathan S. Walters edited, *Constituting Communities: Theravada Buddhism and the Religious Cultures of South and Southeast Asia*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2003: 85-106.

⁴⁷⁸ Alan Michael Trevithick, "A Jerusalem of the Buddhists in British India: 1874-1949" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1988), pp. 72-73. Richard Jaffe mentions this thesis in "Seeking Śākyamuni: Travel and the Reconstruction of Japanese Buddhism." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 30, no. 1 (2004): 65–96.

⁴⁷⁹ Reprinted from the *Daily Telegraph* in "The Month's Science." *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, April 8, 1893; Issue 1219.

of Tibet, of Japan, and of China, would be come more attached to British civilisation by this single act than by any other which could be devised."⁴⁸⁰ A majority of Britons, however, probably had little interest in the question.⁴⁸¹

Figure 13 "BACK NUMBERS (126) —SIR EDWIN ARNOLD."
Moonshine (London, England), Saturday, December 31, 1892; 321.

3.6 Siddhartha Takes to the British Stage (1891, 1894)

The final section of this chapter makes a rather dramatic shift to the stage. The leap may not be so large as it first appears, however. If the native villages and expos of the 1880s straddled the line between fact and fiction, anthropology and circus show, the theater performances of the 1890s discussed below demonstrate an unabashed and unself-conscious embrace of a purely fictive, romantic, and fantastic interpretation of Buddhist mythology. Abandoning all pretense of historical or anthropological accuracy, and abandoning altogether the premise of contact and encounter, two theater pieces created a completely fictional Buddhist history for the British theater-going public.

The Light of Asia was undoubtedly the catalyst for inspiring the late Victorians to bring Buddhism to the public stage. While one might have half-expected Edwin Arnold to capitalize on his popularity with a book tour and readings, the busy newspaperman seems not to have found the time; there is evidence, however, that *The Light of Asia* was selected popular orators for public dramatic readings. After its 1879 publication, it seems that the poem became a popular choice for a number amateur and professional recitals.⁴⁸² The most notable of these was when Mr. Clifford Harrison, one of the era's most well-known and beloved readers, performed a recital in 1893 that consisted of selections from *The Light of Asia* paired with readings from Browning,

⁴⁸⁰ "The Great Buddhist Shrine at Buddha-Gya." *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, Saturday November 20, 1886.

⁴⁸¹ One gentleman's paper noted: "Of Sir Edwin's latest—his very latest—it is fortunately possible to say that it amuses him and don't hurt anybody else... he is going to give back to the Buddhists their temple in Bangkok, which has I know not for how many years been profaned by Brahmin rites. Unfortunately, of the highness and mightiness of this achievement most people will understand nothing at all. To them Brahmanism and Buddhism are as Tweedledm and Tweedledee." "The Man About Town." *The County Gentleman: A Sporting Gazette and Agricultural Journal* (London, England), Saturday, January 09, 1892; pg. 38; Issue 1548.

⁴⁸² A few examples: a reading of *TLOA* at Westminster Town Hall in May 1891; "Things Theatrical." *The Sporting Times* (London, England), Saturday, May 30, 1891; pg. 2; Issue 1,445. At another recital of *TLOA* at Steinway Hall, June 1891, by a Miss Bass, "the audience carried away with them thoughts worth having," as the *Woman's Herald* magazine gushed in its enthusiastic write-up. "Miss Bass at Steinway Hall." *Woman's Herald* (London, England), Saturday, June 27, 1891; pg. 569.

then-poet laureate Alfred Austin, Rudyard Kipling, and others.⁴⁸³ Despite the essentially theatrical spirit of the poem, which lends itself well to recitation, the many Sanskrit and Pāli terms surely posed a significant challenge to even the most enthusiastic reciter. (*Penny Illustrated* magazine criticized one orator for mangling the Indian names and terms in the poem and complained it produced "a sense of strangeness one did not feel in reading the poem."⁴⁸⁴) These readings mark the beginnings of Buddhism's transition from the page to the stage.

This transition continued as various attempts were made, starting in 1885, to put the poem to music.⁴⁸⁵ By far the most noteworthy and critically successful of these was an Italian opera written by Isidore de Lara (described by the composer himself as "a sacred cantata."⁴⁸⁶) The opera was produced by Sir Augustus Harris and performed at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden in 1891,⁴⁸⁷ featuring popular librettist Mr. W. Beatty Kingston and well-known French baritone Jean Lasalle as the Buddha. *The Light of Asia* was an expensive production and clearly targeted (as Italian operas are wont to be) at an upper-class audience - a sneak preview was performed at the Duchess of Manchester's house, with the Princess of Wales as the audience member of honor, in early May 1891.⁴⁸⁸ The opera's production was heavily hyped in the papers as one of the theatrical events of the season: interviews with de Lara in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Pall Mall Budget*, for example, shed light on the genesis and inspiration of the opera.⁴⁸⁹ Apparently, no expense was spared for the production: the *Penny Illustrated* reported that the opera was costing its producers the outrageous sum of 990 pounds per

⁴⁸³ "The Call Boy." *Judy* (London, England), Wednesday, October 11, 1893; pg. 172.

⁴⁸⁴ *The Penny Illustrated* (London, England), Saturday, June 13, 1891; pg. 370; Issue 1567.

⁴⁸⁵ In 1885 the words of *TLoA* were put to music by Miss Antoinette Kingston, sung by the American tenor Mr. Baxter. *The County Gentleman* (London, England), Saturday, May 16, 1885; pg. 617; Issue [1201]. Another musical composition by the American Dudley Buck was performed in 1889, and *Punch's* gossip columnist went so far as to express the teasing hope that Arnold would himself join the performance. "Harmonious Proceedings." *Punch* (London, England), Saturday, February 02, 1889; 59. Buck's composition was performed for the first time in England in 1889 at St. James's Hall in Piccadilly; admission was 10s 6d or for the balcony 2s 6d. *The Times* (London, England), Monday, Mar 11, 1889; Issue 32643; 1.

⁴⁸⁶ "The Genesis of 'The Light of Asia.' Interview with Mr. Isidore de Lara." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Saturday, June 11, 1892; Issue 8494

⁴⁸⁷ The Opera House was renamed in the Royal Opera House in 1892, when it had become a bastion of theatrical traditionalism in the midst of a booming London theater scene otherwise dominated by burlesque, rowdy shows and musicals, and other low- and middle-brow entertainments (a world where Gilbert and Sullivan reigned supreme).

⁴⁸⁸ "Music and Musicians." *Daily News* (London, England), Friday, July 24, 1891; Issue 14135. There was some managerial drama that resulted in the opera's debut being later than originally announced, appearing in 1892 instead of 1891. de Lara, Isidore. "Correspondence." *Musical standard*; Aug 8, 1891; 41, 1410; "The Opera Season." *The Era* (London, England), Saturday, August 1, 1891; Issue 2758.

⁴⁸⁹ "The Genesis of 'The Light of Asia.' Interview with Mr. Isidore de Lara." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Saturday, June 11, 1892; Issue 8494. See also "Mr. Isidore de Lara's Light of Asia. An Interview with the Composer." *The Pall Mall Budget*, Thursday, June 16, 1892.

night to produce.⁴⁹⁰ The opera was perhaps even more of a social sensation than a musical one; the opening night was very well attended, especially by aristocracy and (according to the papers) predominantly by members of the "gentler sex." The opera "undoubtedly pleased" the evening's "friendly audience," said the *Graphic*.⁴⁹¹ *Reynolds's Newspaper* noted that "The house was crowded in every part, and every taking melody was received with loud applause."⁴⁹² "*La Luce dell'Asia* flashed upon a crowded and distinguished audience at Covent Garden last night," reported the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*.⁴⁹³

Twenty-first century critics, likely to be seeped in Said's *Orientalism*, might be tempted to dismiss *La Luce dell'Asia* out of hand. The opera featured an elaborate and luxurious staging with "Eastern scenes" including "nautch girl" numbers and a (presumably only mildly titillating) scene in the Indian "pleasure-house," with music that was appropriately "tinged with an Eastern colour."⁴⁹⁴ Between dramatic scenes from Buddhist mythology de Lara had found time to write musical interludes for various nautch dances, Indian dances, marches, and processions.⁴⁹⁵ The plot of the opera followed Arnold's poem "pretty closely,"⁴⁹⁶ according to one paper, but in truth the drama of the work heavily emphasized the romantic scenes between Siddhartha and his wife at the expense of any serious exploration of religious or philosophical ideas. Still, the serious portions of the play impressed at least one reviewer as having been dealt with "in a semi-sacred, and at the same time somewhat mystical fashion."⁴⁹⁷

The opera was in four acts; the following short summary is based on the lengthy description in the *Musical Standard*.⁴⁹⁸ In a prologue, Atman proclaims to gods and men the wondrous birth of Siddhartha. Act one centers on the touching scene of Siddhartha encountering an old man tottering with suffering and age; the act closes with the Devas singing a melancholy holy hymn while Siddhartha muses alone on the

⁴⁹⁰ Untitled. *The Penny Illustrated*, Saturday, June 18, 1892; pg. 394; Issue 1620.

⁴⁹¹ "Mr. Isidore De Lara's "Light of Asia."" *The Graphic*, Saturday, June 18, 1892; 1177.

⁴⁹² "Last Night's Theatricals." *Reynolds's Newspaper* (London, England), Sunday, June 12, 1892; 2183.

⁴⁹³ "The New Opera." London Letter. *The Sheffield Daily Telegraph* (Sheffield, England), Monday, June 13, 1892; pg. 5; Issue 11521.

⁴⁹⁴ "Our London Correspondence." *Glasgow Herald*, Saturday, June 11, 1892; 140. On the significance of the sexuality of nautch girls in the colonial context see Goodyear, Sara Suleri. *The Rhetoric of English India*. University of Chicago Press, 2013, 91-93.

⁴⁹⁵ *The Penny Illustrated*, Saturday, July 25, 1891; 1573; p. 50.

⁴⁹⁶ "Music." *The Graphic*, Saturday, June 4, 1892; 1175.

⁴⁹⁷ *The Penny Illustrated*, Saturday, July 25, 1891; 1573, p. 50.

⁴⁹⁸ "Isidore de Lara's Light of Asia." *Musical Standard*; Jul 18, 1891; 41, 1407. The opera's summary is taken from this article, from "The Light of Asia." *The Theatre* (London, England), July 1892, 20, 42, and from "The Light of Asia." *The Speaker: The Liberal Review* 5, (Jun 18, 1892): 736-737.

subject of human suffering. The second act features King Suddodhana hosting a contest for beautiful maidens to win Siddhartha's hand. In act three, Siddhartha has a vision of the god Indra, who appears to him on moonbeams; Siddhartha's mind is set and his fate sealed as he decides to turn from his life of pleasure to one of ascetic spiritual wandering. Act three contains what contemporaries considered the most emotionally convincing part of the opera: the farewell between Siddhartha and Yasodhara. In act four Siddhartha appears as a yellow-robed mendicant; dramatic development comes in the form of Siddhartha's battle with Mara. Siddhartha's enlightenment to Buddhahood comes only in the epilogue; at least in the *Musical Standard's* description, it almost sounds as if de Lara intended the scene as a dénouement - or possibly just as an afterthought. In the *Musical Standard's* words:

In the epilogue the sun of mind's freedom is seen rising in the East. Buddha is seed [sic] in a flood of light standing on the earth preaching the discovered truth to the Universe, and teaching mankind how to find the path that leads to Nirvana: -
Blessed Nirvana - sinless, stirless rest,
That change that never changes.⁴⁹⁹

One almost suspects from this description that de Lara considered the Buddha's enlightenment a bit of an anticlimax, and not terribly promising dramatic material.

Despite audience enthusiasm for the production, the critical reviews were mixed. *Reynolds' Newspaper* raved about the production, awarding it the "highest praise" and noting that "It is scholarly, the orchestration is masterly, and it abounds in graceful and flowing melody." *Reynolds'* went on to deem the production "extremely lavish" and the band and chorus "in excellent form."⁵⁰⁰ Another paper called the scenery "gorgeous" and the stage arrangements "perfect."⁵⁰¹ The general consensus, however, was that de Lara had failed to live up to the Victorians' grandiose ideas of Arnold's holy Buddhist epic. "To set to music Sir Edwin Arnold's legend with its rare charms, its lofty sentiment, and poetic grace was an ambitious undertaking," noted the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* - a challenge de Lara did not prove worthy of.⁵⁰² *The Theatre* noted skeptically that "the spiritual life history of the Buddhist Redeemer" was "one of the

⁴⁹⁹ "Isidore de Lara's Light of Asia." *Musical Standard*; Jul 18, 1891; 41, 1407. The lines at the end of this citation are of course Arnold's, from *The Light of Asia*.

My summary of the opera's plot is taken from the *Musical Standard* article as well as from the following: "The Light of Asia." *The Theatre* (London, England), July 1892, 20, 42; "The Light of Asia." *The Speaker: The Liberal Review* 5, (Jun 18, 1892): 736-737.

⁵⁰⁰ "Last Night's Theatricals." *Reynolds's Newspaper* (London, England), Sunday, June 12, 1892; Issue 2183.

⁵⁰¹ "The New Opera." London Letter. *The Sheffield Daily Telegraph* (Sheffield, England), Monday, June 13, 1892; pg. 5; Issue 11521.

⁵⁰² *ibid.*

vastest that could engage poet or musician" - "even Wagner despaired of doing it justice to it without becoming wearisome."⁵⁰³ Most critics seemed to agree that Arnold and his work "should be held more sacred."⁵⁰⁴ *The Era*, too, argued that the life of the Buddha was not a "suitable subject for grand opera" because of its lack of human element, despite the fact that the "beautiful, noble subject" had been "treated by Sir Edwin Arnold in the noblest manner."⁵⁰⁵ The problem with the production, then, was not that Buddhist myth was not sufficiently grand and inspiring for Western operatic tradition. Rather, the problem was the opposite one: *The Light of Asia* had so impressed Victorian contemporaries with the scope of its vision and power that it was doubted that its equal could be found in the dramatic realm. This was felt to be particularly true in light of de Lara's background as a composer of popular love songs; in the words of *Moonshine* magazine's ditty:

The "Light of Asia" bursts upon the sight-
Edwin-cum-Isidore-cum-Buddha - precious fright!
The man who sang to sentimental maids
Now wakes the world with opera's artful aids;
Yet spite of all the "boom" and the "ta-ra-ra,"
Cynics will mutter: - "Ici dort De Lara."⁵⁰⁶

Just three years later, in 1894, a second attempt was made to bring the Buddha to the late Victorian stage - with Sarah Bernhardt as one of Siddhartha's courtesans, a devoted temptress who follows the wandering ascetic Siddhartha into the forest to seduce him and bring him back to his life of indulgence and pleasure. *Izeyl* - the play is named after Bernhardt's character - was created especially for Bernhardt by Armand Sylvestre and Eugene Morand. Performed at newly-opened Daly's Theatre in Westminster, the play "revived the interest in Buddhism which Sir Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia* first awakened in fashionable London," according to one journalist.⁵⁰⁷ When the play debuted in Paris, a sensationalist headline splashed across the *New York Times*: "BUDDHA ON PARIS BOARDS: BERNHARDT IN HER NEW PLAY TEMPTS THE HINDU CHRIST."⁵⁰⁸ When the play later came to America, the paper

⁵⁰³ "The Light of Asia." *The Theatre* (London, England), July 1892, 20, 42.

⁵⁰⁴ "Music and the Theatres." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Friday July 4, 1890; Issue 7891. (The paper noted: "As a social singer of Maudlin ballads, [Mr. De Lara] was at least amusing, but as a serious composer he is only a failure.")

⁵⁰⁵ "MR. DE LARA'S NEW OPERA." *The Era* (London, England), Saturday, June 18, 1892; Issue 2804.

⁵⁰⁶ "DE-LARA-BOOM-DE-A-SIA." *Moonshine* (London, England), Saturday, June 25, 1892; pg. 304.

⁵⁰⁷ I. Zangwill, "Without Prejudice." *The Pall Mall Magazine*, May 1894; 3, 13; 167-168.

⁵⁰⁸ "BERNHARDT IN HER NEW PLAY TEMPTS THE HINDU CHRIST. Authors of "Griselidis" Produce an Indian Religious Drama — Music by Pjerne — Scenery from Sketches by Edwin L. Weeks — Anger,

reflected that the musical drama's subject matter was in no way an unfamiliar one to its enthusiastic audiences, since *The Light of Asia* had served as such an effective primer for theater-goers:

[Buddhism is] tolerably familiar to the multitude, through frequent iteration in magazine literature of the 'advanced' sort, while Sir Edwin Arnold's 'Light of Asia' is as highly esteemed throughout the English-speaking world as Gen. Lew Wallace's 'Ben - Hur.' Wherefore the mystic and legendary sides of this fluently written drama are not beyond the comprehension of the general public.⁵⁰⁹

Theater-goers must have had to look long and hard to find the "mystic and legendary sides" of *Izeyl*, however; while the play bears the clear stamp of *The Light of Asia* in its inspiration, the plot itself is pure invention. Addison Bright, theatre critic and editor London's *The Theatre* magazine, described the apex of the dramatic plot line as follows:

... [Izeyl] follows [Siddhartha] into the desert to captivate and enslave [him] when he renounces his empire to found a new religion and devote himself to the service of humanity. Her fascinations avail nothing, however; her airs for once are of none effect, and it is not he, but she who is overcome. It is she who, vanquished by his spiritual exaltation and fervour, in turn renounces her fleshly desire, and anticipating an example which, six hundred years later, affected the history of the world, gives all her good to the poor."⁵¹⁰

This is not, however, the quiet end of the tale: after a conflagration with an ex-lover and many convoluted plot twists, Izeyl ends up blinded and dying in the arms of Siddhartha; their lips touch briefly (chastely) before Izeyl "drops like a flower, like the pale lotus she wears on her breast" (Addison Bright).⁵¹¹

Figure 14 "Sarah Bernhardt in *Izeyl*."⁵¹²

The critical reception was almost unanimously enthusiastic - but then, it was Sarah Bernhardt. The critics particularly raved that Bernhardt shone in the role of this "ante-Christian Magdalen," in the words of *The Theatre*. "Picture her arts and charms

Jealousy, Lye, and Murder Give the Great French Actress a Great Opportunity — The New Drama "Izeyl." *The New York Times*, Sunday, February 18, 1894; 20.

⁵⁰⁹ "RETURN OF BERNHARDT; The Greatest of Actresses and Her New Buddhist Play. IZEYL AND PRINCE SIDDARTHA An Agreeable but Scarcely Moving Performance of a Play That Suggests New Testament Narratives." *The New York Times*, January 21, 1896. The play ran in the U.S. from 1894-1896.

⁵¹⁰ Bright, Addison. "Izeyl' at Daly's Theatre." *The Theatre: a monthly review of the drama, music and the fine arts*, August 1894; 83-85. Addison Bright was also a theater agent who embezzled large sums of money from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and J. M. Barrie.

⁵¹¹ *ibid*. It is not clear from the descriptions of the play whether Siddhartha's enlightenment was featured in the play; as I understand the plot line, however, she dies in the arms of the mendicant Indian hermit, rather than the enlightened Buddha.

⁵¹² "Sarah Bernhardt in *Izeyl*." Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3b26178>; accessed July 15, 2015.

lavished upon the hermit in the forest," the journal instructed its readers:

"Sensuous loveliness is here incarnate." The *Pall Mall* called it a "poetic drama with an unimpeachable moral tone," "elegantly preaching the ethics of abnegation and asceticism à la Buddha."⁵¹³ Even the heavyweight journals were enthusiastic; the *Saturday Review's* theater critic noted: "as a melodrama with a rich Oriental and religious colouring it is an extremely effective piece of work from a theatrical point of view, and yields abundant excuse for attractive scenery and picturesque costume."⁵¹⁴ That said, the critics were not entirely insensitive to the liberties the producers and artists had taken with historical detail. A M. Guitry, who played Prince Siddhartha, was criticized by the *Saturday Review* for his "essentially modern trim of beard and moustache," although "in the case of so exalted a person as Buddha the objection to the fair make-up need not be insisted on" (other characters, however, "might have been swarthier"). The music, too, was only "pleasant [and] appropriate," although the *SR* took objection to the pianoforte, "that not very Oriental or ancient musical instrument."⁵¹⁵ (In America, the *New York Times* also criticized Guitry for not living up to audiences' expectations for a Buddha: "M. Darmont, tall, long-limbed, handsome, black-bearded, with a clear-cut profile, is not a bit like the curious extant images of that Oriental saint. Some scenes in the drama, therefore, have a certain shivery effect upon the few theatre-goers who cherish old-fashioned religious prejudices."⁵¹⁶)

What are we to make of these extravagant theatrical spectacles, and how may they have contributed to the dissemination of new representations of Buddhism? Admittedly, both de Lara's *Light of Asia* and Bernhardt's *Izeyl* practically beg to be interpreted through the lens of Saidian orientalism. The stage is, of course, one of Said's favorite metaphors for Western interpretations of the Orient - and in these 1891 and 1894 performances, the "staging" of the East is quite literal.⁵¹⁷ And, in recent decades, scholars including Edward Ziter and Marty Gould have applied Said's

⁵¹³ Zangwill, I. "Without Prejudice." *The Pall Mall Magazine*, May 1894; 3, 13; 167-168.

⁵¹⁴ "The Theaters." *Saturday Review* 77, no. 2017 (June 23, 1894): 665-666.

⁵¹⁵ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁶ "RETURN OF BERNHARDT; The Greatest of Actresses and Her New Buddhist Play. IZEYL AND PRINCE SIDDARTHA An Agreeable but Scarcely Moving Performance of a Play That Suggests New Testament Narratives." *The New York Times*, January 21, 1896.

⁵¹⁷ "The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe." Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 63.

critiques to the Victorian theater scene and come to quite damning conclusions.⁵¹⁸ Yet it is worth pointing out that late Victorian theater critics were not uncritical of their peers' seemingly insatiable thirst for exotic Oriental themes. In his review of *Izeyl* for the liberal *Speaker*, for example, famed drama critic A. B. Walkley negatively caricatured Bernhardt's *Izeyl* as the "embodiment of Oriental exoticism" and complained of her succumbing to the fashionable "*drang nach Östen* [sic]".⁵¹⁹ The poem's take on Buddhism was subject to more serious criticism from his pen: *Izeyl* was in Walkley's opinion "a play about the Buddha and Buddhism which is a passion-drama, an assassination-drama, a drama of torture and gouged-out-eyes and death - anything you please save a Buddhist drama." *The Speaker's* 1894 condemnation of the play's Oriental fantasy is almost as critical as anything Said, Ziter, or Gould might want to argue; Walkley writes: "Why, you may ask, a drama about Buddhism? Well, in the first place, because Buddhism is something Eastern, and there is Madame Bernhardt's Eastward trend, already spoken of, to be allowed for." And in the second place, he notes, because Buddhism-obsessed audiences called for it - and lapped it up. The play's Buddhism was no Buddhism at all, according to this 1894 critic, but a representation and reenactment of Western fantasy and longing.

The question of direct relevance to this study, however, is how such performances may have contributed to the popularization of Buddhism and to the public's familiarization with its founding myth (however imaginatively reinterpreted, however fantastically transformed, exoticized, or even mildly eroticized). Most obviously, in the case of the operatic transformation of *The Light of Asia*, Arnold's poetic life of the Buddha took one further step towards cultural prominence and fashionableness; it was one more stamp of cultural acceptance. As mentioned already, de Lara's opera was above all a society event, not a musical triumph. The opera, then as now, was the purview of the upper classes and the intelligentsia; the show's private preview for the Princess of Wales didn't hurt its reputation, either. More difficult to discern are the ways in which *La Luce dell'Asia* or *Izeyl* may have contributed to the

⁵¹⁸ Ziter, *Orient on the Victorian Stage*. Marty Gould, *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and the Imperial Encounter* (London: Routledge, 2012). To quote Gould the theatre was the "primary site for the imperial encounter," whereby the late Victorians "domesticated the empire for the home audience, mediating Britons' encounter with the rest of the world and encouraging public commitment to their nation's costly and ambitious project of global expansion" ... "it was in the theatre and related venues of popular spectacle that Britons came to see themselves as masters of an imperial domain.... the empire itself came to life in London's popular theatrical venues" (1-2).

⁵¹⁹ A. B. Walkley, "The Drama." *Speaker : The Liberal Review* 9, (June 23, 1894): 695-696.

spread of general awareness about the life story of the Buddha. Especially in the case of *Izeyl*, the drama's plot line so obscures the original myth that it (arguably) creates a myth of its own, perhaps disseminating a new construction of Siddhartha's story to audiences unfamiliar even with Arnold's version of Buddhism.

It is also interesting to speculate regarding the transmission of information between the orientalists, Edwin Arnold, and these extreme forms of popularization. *Izeyl* represents an extreme transformation and reinterpretation of available colonial knowledge into a fantastical, pleasurable spectacle - a feast for the eyes and ears of audiences in Paris, London, and New York. Such popular uses of orientalist knowledge has not gone unremarked; Edward Ziter has insightfully teased out, for example, how even popular entertainments were inextricably linked to more elite orientalist projects and thus, by extension, to structures of knowledge. Ziter notes that in the nineteenth century, the Orientalist theater depended on scholarly interpretations, and a host of interdependencies could be described as "uniting popular entertainment with new orientalist disciplines."⁵²⁰

3.7 Conclusions

This chapter consisted of a reassessment of Edwin Arnold's best-selling 1879 epic life of the Buddha, *The Light of Asia*. Instead of focusing heavily on the text of the poem itself, as other scholars have done, we relied on an analysis of contemporary media reactions to the poem to assess with greater accuracy why and how the poem resonated with its readers. First, an analysis of the poem's publication and reception history revealed that the poem was initially aimed at a limited audience of readers interested in oriental themes. It was the reading public, not the publisher or the author, who created and sustained a demand and enthusiasm for the poem. Only in response to this demand did the publisher start to target a wider readership with illustrated and special-edition volumes for readers with more spending power and cheap, two-shilling versions for those with less. Illustrated, Christmas, and gift versions of the poem demonstrate the earliest stages of a commodification of the poem and its use as a gift object and conversation topic, and not merely as a medium for information.

⁵²⁰ Ziter, *Orient on the Victorian Stage*, 8-9. Ziter notes: "playbills noted specific Eastern authorities; scene painters copied images from scholarly folios; and story lines sometimes made reference to theories emerging from the human sciences."

Second, we re-examined the aspects of the poem that help to account for its liminal position between the academy and mass-market popular literature. Among reviewers, the poem's simplification of Buddhist ideas, its positive and non-threatening approach to non-Christian religion, and especially its strong emphasis on the Buddha as an exemplary moral teacher were its most appreciated and lauded aspects. The poem's picturesque, idyllic Indian landscapes and its effective use of "local color" proved likewise irresistibly appealing. At the same time, the poem was celebrated as capturing the "truth" and "soul" of Indian Buddhism; given contemporaries' fixation on the number of Buddhists worldwide, the poem was taken as a valuable source of information on one of the most important world religions.

Finally, we examined the role that Arnold played as an advocate and representative of Buddhism, a voice of imperialism, and as a public figure and man of letters. In a decade when Buddhism lacked a Western guru and had hardly any devotees or proponents in Britain, Arnold filled the hybrid role of orientalist, poet, and authority on Eastern cultures.

4 Performing Buddhism in the Metropole (1884-1886)

[Barnum] is not content with Jumbo, and wants the King of Siam to sell or lease him one of those consecrated animals which are the chief glory of his court. ... The King of Siam is consulting with the priests, and if Mr. Barnum only offers enough money, the soul of Saky Muni may compete as an attraction with the new American champion boxer, the spotted boy, and other profane curiosities.⁵²¹

Daily News, March 23, 1883

During the 1880s, a number of native exhibitions, theater performances, and a circus show presented entertaining and educating displays of "Buddhism" to live audiences in the London metropole. In several prominent episodes, Buddhism was performed, exhibited, or enacted before a fascinated public. These shows brought Buddhism from the colonies to the center of the empire and "spoke to the eye"⁵²² just as *The Light of Asia* had spoken to the poetic imagination. First, P. T. Barnum's exhibit of a Burmese sacred white elephant and two Burmese Buddhists priests at the London Zoo in 1884 provoked a controversial media storm and spawned popular debates about Buddhist folklore and mythology. Second, a number of colonial exhibitions – the 1885 Japanese Village, Carl Hagenbeck's 1885 Ceylonese Exhibition, and the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition – brought the once foreign, exotic religion of Buddhism home to England with living anthropological panoramas, temples and idols, and ritual-performing natives. In attempting to capture and display the essence of Buddhism for the first time on British soil, these shows helped to establish the collection of images, symbols, and objects that defined Buddhism. They also provoked great excitement and curiosity as well as anxiety about the presence of heathen religions in Christian England.

What ties these episodes together is not only their entertaining, blatantly commercial, and performative dimensions, but also their manifest imperial spirit and pro-colonial agenda (as Edward Ziter has noted, the late nineteenth century witnessed a "tremendous outpouring of orientalist entertainments.")⁵²³ As a result, there are some obvious continuities between these shows and the media representations of Ceylonese and Burmese Buddhism in chapters two and five – for example, stereotypical

⁵²¹ Untitled. *Daily News* (London, England), Friday, March 23, 1883; Issue 11525.

⁵²² Brenda Assael, *The Circus and Victorian Society* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 1.

⁵²³ Ziter, *Orient on the Victorian Stage*, 10. Ziter's work focuses on representations of the Orient and biblical East.

representations of the colonized and a self-assured display of ownership over the cultural and religious products of the colonies. Here, too, we see that the public's religious knowledge depended heavily on colonial structures and, especially, communication networks. Yet these episodes also represent a crucial change from purely media representations of events taking place halfway around the globe. Written travel reports and illustrations were augmented or even usurped by 'live' representation in the imperial metropole. During the decades of High Imperialism, when not even lavish illustrations and special media reports could fully satisfy the public's interest in colonial cultures, specimens of the empire (and its heathen religions) were increasingly brought to them.⁵²⁴

The locus for all of the events in this chapter was the booming metropolis of London and the stage it created for exhibiting world religions, with a natural emphasis on the religions of the British colonies. The city of London – both the seat of imperial power as well as the center of entertainment and theater, circus and spectacle – was the ideal location for these entertainments. London's ever-growing population likewise created the perfect captive audience (as noted already, by the end of the century, 45% of the entire population of England and Wales was living in London.)⁵²⁵ London drew theater managers as well as entertainment masterminds such as P. T. Barnum and Carl Hagenbeck with its promise of lively, enthusiastic audiences with a seemingly insatiable hunger for the latest empire-themed entertainments, and a longing for experiences of the Far East that were billed as authentic and true. London thus offered an ideal environment for the introduction of Eastern religious themes in the form of theatrical, carnivalistic, and anthropological performances.

4.1 Buddhist Trickery: Barnum's Sacred White Elephant (1884)

In 1884, entertainment mogul P. T. Barnum imported an allegedly sacred white elephant named Toung Taloung from Burma to the London Zoo; the elephant was accompanied by two Burmese priests who performed some unspecified rituals before a gawking retinue of journalists. In this almost entirely forgotten historical episode, the media's vague notions about Buddhism, the public's exotic-colonial fetishism and fascination, and Barnum's crafty mix of trickery and showmanship collided to produce

⁵²⁴ Ziter notes: "when images alone lost their power to transport an audience, live performance and native peoples were incorporated into shows. An equally extensive range of exhibitions presented a wealth of Eastern objects, architectural recreations, and oriental peoples." Ziter, *Orient on the Victorian Stage*, 10.

⁵²⁵ Harrison, *Late Victorian Britain*, 14-15.

a controversial media storm and a formidable public furor. The episode awakened a public interest in Burmese Buddhism, a foretaste of the interest that would peak during the 1885/1886 acquisition of Upper Burma. It also triggered a storm of heated discussions that culminated in a scholarly debate in the London *Times* about the authenticity of the elephant and rituals; even T. W. Rhys Davids felt compelled to weigh in on the matter. An episode that appears at first glance to have been a tawdry lowbrow sensation thus actually provoked a nation-wide discussion about Buddhist myth and ritual. This section will focus on Barnum's strategies for representing Buddhism, the public's reaction to the performance, and the heated debates regarding whether the elephant and the priest were "real."

Fascination with the white elephants of Burma and Siam in the British media dates back well into the early nineteenth century; during the first Anglo-Burman War (1824-1826) the Burmese King Bagyidaw was known in England as the "Monarch of the White Elephant," so that the association entered British news journalism, and thus popular parlance and colonial memory, at an early date.⁵²⁶ In the media, both Siam and Burma were popularly known as the "lands of the white elephant,"⁵²⁷ and white elephants formed part of the myth and mystique of both countries. Sarah Amato has looked at nineteenth century European travel memoirs and noted that they display a "fetishistic fascination" with white elephants in which the animals feature as "objects of myth, desire and repulsion."⁵²⁸ In the late nineteenth century, increased contact with Siam and Burma brought further exaggerated stories about white elephants to the popular press. As just a few examples, one 1870 article describes the albino elephant at Mandalay as "the third highest personage in the kingdom" with "a lot of officers attached to him, and it is his privilege to eat and drink out of silver vessels."⁵²⁹ An illustrated article on Siam in *The Graphic* in 1874 likewise included a large prominent drawing of one of the king's holy elephants. The accompanying text describes it as "one of the State Elephants, belonging to the King. This elephant possesses the same

⁵²⁶ e.g. *Jackson's Oxford Journal* (Oxford, England), Saturday, April 29, 1826; Issue 3809; *The Examiner*, Sunday, January 2, 1825; Issue 883.; etc. A white elephant had already been imported from Southeast Asia to the Paris *Jardin des Plantes* in the mid-century but at that point had failed to arouse any particular attention (*Daily News*, Saturday, June 6, 1846). A connection with Buddhism was at that time apparently unknown; only that there is considerable "superstition" surrounding the white elephant (*Hampshire Telegraph*, Saturday, January 7, 1854).

⁵²⁷ "The Land of the White Elephant." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Tuesday, January 6, 1874; Issue 2774.

⁵²⁸ Sarah Amato, "The White Elephant in London: An Episode of Trickery, Racism, and Advertising," *Journal of Social History* 43:1 (2009), 35.

⁵²⁹ *The Illustrated Police News* (London, England), Saturday, December 31, 1870; Issue 359.

title and privileges as a nobleman of the fifth rank. He has furnished apartments, and slaves in accordance with his title.... The white elephant is a subject of great adoration, but has no existence except in mythology."⁵³⁰

Figure 15 "A Titled Elephant"
 "Siamese Sketches." *The Graphic*, Saturday 24 January, 1874, 75.

Such articles presumably provoked a mixture of fascination and repulsion amongst a Christian Victorian readership, for whom reports of heathen animal worship were both grotesque and titillating. Although some articles do refer to the religious meaning of the white elephant as early as the 1860s,⁵³¹ it is safe to say that the political symbolism of the white elephant and its role in Buddhist mythology were not generally known or well understood in England. (In both Burma and Siam, the white elephant traditionally served both as a religious symbol as well as a symbol of the monarchy itself and its sovereignty.⁵³²) This uncertainty about the symbolism and import of the white elephant would reveal itself in the media's struggles to describe the importance of Toung Taloung for Buddhists or for the Burmese.

In 1883 the papers began circulating reports (undoubtedly fed to them by Barnum or his agents) that the entertainment mogul was making plans to bring a white elephant from either Siam or Burma to London and from there to America. What ensued was evidently a well-calculated media circus; details of the procurement, journey, and preparations were submitted to the press and used to heighten anticipation of the elephant's arrival. The media collaborated unreservedly in the hype: Barnum's efforts to purchase a holy elephant first from King Chulalongkorn of Siam, and then from King Thibaw of Burma, were detailed in dramatic play-by-plays in the newspapers. As an example of the way that the popular press, in particular, typically discussed these events, here is a *Daily News* description of Barnum's unsuccessful attempts to obtain an elephant from Siam:

[Barnum] is not content with Jumbo, and wants the King of Siam to sell or lease

⁵³⁰ "Siamese Sketches." *The Graphic*, Saturday 24 January, 1874, 75.

⁵³¹ e.g., the *London Reader*: "Elephants, especially white elephants, are all important personages in Siam. In the multitudinous incarnations of Buddha, it is believed that the white elephant is one of his necessary domiciles, and the possession of a white elephant is the possession of the presence and patronage of the Deity." "The White Elephant at Siam." *The London Reader*, December 9, 1865 (6.135), 172.

⁵³² See Manuel Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1965), 52.

him one of those consecrated animals which are the chief glory of his court. The King does not see why the young democrats of New York should ride about on this worshipful beast, or give him buns of a profane description instead of the hallowed cakes. The monarch asked Mr. Barnum's agent if he knew that the soul of Buddha was supposed to live in a white elephant. Now Buddha is commonly represented as sitting outside the wheel of existence, 'not in the movement,' and absorbed in Nirvana. But if he really is a white elephant, that only makes Mr. Barnum more anxious to show the only genuine Buddha, for so many cents a head.... The King of Siam is consulting with the priests, and if Mr. Barnum only offers enough money, the soul of Saky Muni may compete as an attraction with the new American champion boxer, the spotted boy, and other profane curiosities.⁵³³

The article uses a hyperbolic excess of adjectives such as "consecrated," "glory," "worshipful," and "hallowed" both to build excitement about the animal and to suggest the off-putting excesses of the Siamese Buddhists' reverence for it; again, the reaction is an ambivalent mixture of fascination and repulsion. The multiple references to "profane" buns and "profane" curiosities, on the other hand, highlight the incongruous contrast and absurdity of a holy object being purchased for display in a circus alongside other aberrances and oddities. The *Daily News* is typical of how the press would continue to frame the event: with a mixture of skepticism and anticipation at the prospect of the spectacle, with descriptions often littered with confused half-truths about Buddhist beliefs and worship, about which the media was little prepared to make accurate assessments. Clearly, Barnum's media ploys only served to heighten public attention and anticipation. Amato even argues, I think rightly, that Barnum intentionally created (and capitalized on) controversy and even rumors of trickery to boost interest and sales.⁵³⁴

Having failed to obtain a white elephant from Siam, Barnum's agent appealed to Burma – where, it should be remembered, tensions with Britain were mounting and relations with King Thibaw rapidly deteriorating. The papers detailed the lengthy process and outrageous expense of obtaining the elephant from Burma (again, factors themselves clearly a calculated part of the show), including Barnum's agent's negotiations with the Burmese monarch. The *Pall Mall* reported that Barnum had sent his agent J. B. Gaylord 20,000 pounds for the purchase, "assuring him that money is no

⁵³³ Untitled. *Daily News* (London, England), Friday, March 23, 1883; Issue 11525.

⁵³⁴ Barnum was "particularly adept at drumming up publicity for his shows. During the course of an exhibition, Barnum would let it slip to newspaper editors and reporters that he was showing a fake. In their zeal to sell papers, outdo competitors and even expose hoaxes, editors and reporters complied with and fell prey to Barnum's schemes. The effect on audiences was palpable. People felt compelled to examine his exhibits. The possibility that the spectacle might be real fueled their curiosity; conversely the scent of imposture was irresistible." Amato, "White Elephant," 33-34,

object, if the elephant can be procured,"⁵³⁵ while other sources reported a purchase price of 40,000 pounds,⁵³⁶ and Barnum himself later claimed that the outlay for the entire endeavor had amounted to a quarter of a million U.S. dollars.⁵³⁷ Barnum's agent was more successful in Mandalay than in Siam; shortly thereafter the papers described how the elephant was brought to the court with great pomp and ceremony and blessed and baptized in front of the King and the nobility in an elaborate ceremony (a spectacle that was staged – or more likely merely fabricated – for Western reader-audiences at home).⁵³⁸ The game of proving authenticity continued: Barnum claimed, through the media, to have arranged for "documents, under the royal seal, attesting the sacred character of the beast, and with the royal bill of sale executed by King Theebaw's Master of Elephants, and also bearing the King's seal."⁵³⁹ The *Pall Mall Gazette* even printed a mock "bill of sale" and a "certificate" of the elephant certifying that it was a "species of White Sacred Elephant, and possesses the qualities and attributes of such," signed by the "King and Lord of all White Elephants, Moug Thee."⁵⁴⁰ These attempts to prove the authenticity of the elephant through documentation were accompanied by reports slipped to the media by Barnum's agent, Carl Bock, regarding the sanctity of the white elephant in Buddhist history ("When Gaudama entered the womb of the queen to be born upon earth for the last time, it was in the form of an elephant, and, as albinos are supposed to have sovereignty over their race, a 'white' elephant, however few the pale spots he may have, is revered throughout the breadth and length of the land.").⁵⁴¹ The elephant arrived in Liverpool via steamship in early 1884 and travelled to London in a special rail car built for the occasion before being brought to the elephant house in the London Zoological Gardens. ("The sacred animal is quite well, and behaved capitally during his journey from Rangoon," the *London Reader* reassured its readers.⁵⁴²) The attraction was clearly

⁵³⁵ *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Thursday, March 15, 1883; Issue 5628.

⁵³⁶ "The Sacred White Elephant." *The Era*, Saturday, January 26, 1884; Issue 2366.

⁵³⁷ Barnum, P. T., and George S Bryan. *Struggles and Triumphs: Or, The Life of P.T. Barnum* (London: A.A. Knopf, 1927), 773. See also Barnum, *Struggles and triumphs; or, Fifty years' recollections of P.T. Barnum, written by himself* (Buffalo: The Courier Company, 1884), 339.

⁵³⁸ "Miscellaneous." *The London Reader* 42, no. 1084 (Feb 09, 1884): 359.

⁵³⁹ Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 770.

⁵⁴⁰ "Mr. Barnum's White Elephant." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Wednesday, January 16, 1884; Issue 5885.

⁵⁴¹ *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Monday, January 14, 1884; Issue 5883.

⁵⁴² "Miscellaneous." *The London Reader* 42, no. 1084 (Feb 09, 1884): 359.

a success, bringing 6,000 visitors to the zoo to see the elephant on the first day,⁵⁴³ while the *London Journal* reported that "great numbers have flocked to see him."⁵⁴⁴

Figure 16 "A White Elephant at Last!" "Carl Bock and Barnum's White Elephant."
The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times, January 19, 1884; pg. 44; Issue 1178.

Figure 17 "Arrival of the 'White Elephant' from Burma."
Cover of *The Illustrated London News*, Saturday January 26, 1884.

The elephant travelled with a small religious entourage that formed an integral part of Barnum's strategy for staging Buddhism: two Burmese natives, whom Barnum claimed were *pongyis* named Bah Chone and Hpo Choe. Clearly, Barnum understood that a "holy" elephant necessitates worshippers to pay respectful homage to the animal and enact ritual performances to sanctify it. Yet it was never clear to the public what functions or rituals, exactly, the priests would enact. The media descriptions are vague and unrevealing: the priests "will perform the sacred rites of their faith over the animal,"⁵⁴⁵ according to one newspaper, or "will go through the various ceremonials,"⁵⁴⁶ according to another. To augment the aura of authenticity, the priests were staged with appropriate accessories: Barnum claimed that Toung Taloung was "surrounded by the same attendants and the like paraphernalia as during the performance of religious ceremonies in his native country."⁵⁴⁷ "Two images of Gautama and a gold umbrella are among the trappings to be exhibited," reported one newspaper source.⁵⁴⁸ The costume of the priests was described as featuring "a yellow silk handkerchief" as headgear, with a "white jean tunic, the lower extremities... draped in a yellow *potso* or man's petticoat, with a scarf of an orange shade worn over the left shoulder somewhat like a Highlander's plaid," while "white stockings and embroidered slippers completed the dress."⁵⁴⁹ In his later memoirs Barnum would refer to this as

⁵⁴³ "The White Elephant." *Reynolds's Newspaper*, Sunday, January 27, 1884; Issue 1746.

⁵⁴⁴ "The 'White' Elephant." *The London Journal*, February 23, 1884, 12.

⁵⁴⁵ "Arrival of the White Elephant." *The Belfast News-Letter* (Belfast, Ireland), Wednesday, January 16, 1884; Issue 21370.

⁵⁴⁶ "Carl Bock and Barnum's White Elephant." *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times*, Saturday, January 19, 1884; pg. 44; Issue 1178.

⁵⁴⁷ Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 770.

⁵⁴⁸ "Mr. Barnum's White Elephant." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Wednesday, January 16, 1884; Issue 5885.

⁵⁴⁹ "Mr. Barnum's Priests." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, January 28, 1884, 12.

"full ecclesiastical costume."⁵⁵⁰ In the *Graphic's* cover illustration for February 2, 1884, the priests appear to be wearing what might be a more decorative version of a Buddhist's robe, perhaps adapted with more elaborate undergarments for the climate and a scarf as headwear:

Figure 18 "The Burmese 'Priests' and Mr. Barnum's Elephant at the Zoological Gardens."
Cover illustration, *The Graphic*, Saturday February 2, 1884.

Figure 19 "'Priests' of the Burmese 'White Elephant' at the Zoological Gardens"
Illustrated London News, February 2, 1884, 100.

In the days before the public opening, Barnum's agent invited journalists and other special guests to a reception with the priests in the lecture room of the Zoological Gardens, where they witnessed a special performance of what was described in vague language as a kind of Buddhist ritual. The media in turn obliged Barnum by describing the performance for their readers. The *Graphic* described in pictorial detail how the priests, "two images of Gautama in black and gold, and in robes ornamented with imitation precious stones," were brought in to the lecture room: "the two 'priests' at once kicked off their slippers, and, dropping into a crouching position, 'meditated' in orthodox fashion."⁵⁵¹ In the words of the *Pall Mall Gazette*: "They squatted on their hams. One of the party remarked, 'They're at it now,' and when they had done their mumming some one else in authority said, 'Would any gentleman like to shake hands with our friends?'"⁵⁵² *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* described how, in a room decorated with "black idols," "two dusky gentlemen, in fantastic dresses, went down on their knees before two exceedingly unprepossessing idols, and afterwards salaamed to the elephant, then feeding him with biscuits." *Lloyd's* dubbed the rituals they enacted the "Barnum ceremonies."⁵⁵³ (The convoluted terminology of "meditation," "mumming,"

⁵⁵⁰ Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs*, 770.

⁵⁵¹ "The Buddhist 'Priests' and the White Elephant." *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, February 2, 1884; Issue 740. (Also noted: "Those interested in gastronomic details may like to know that they are extremely fond of sausages, but are strict teetotallers.")

⁵⁵² "Mr. Barnum's Priests." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, January 28, 1884, 12.

⁵⁵³ "Public Amusements." *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* (London, England), Sunday, February 3, 1884; Issue 2150.

and "salaaming" suggests the journalists were at a loss to know how to describe the performance.)

It is less clear whether the priests continued to perform these meditations or rituals once they were in the public eye; the media reports are contradictory. The *Pall Mall Gazette* asserted somewhat cryptically that they were forbidden from exercising their rites in public: "They will be 'on view' to-day, but will not be allowed to perform any 'religious' ceremony, at least in public."⁵⁵⁴ Another source, however, described the priests as bowing before the elephant in worship during exhibition hours:

The exhibition of the notable animal now takes place with all the paraphernalia of its accustomed pomp.... These men, the "Phoongyees" of Buddhism, have arrived, and the curious ceremony has been witnessed of the priests of Buddhism rubbing their foreheads in the dust before the worshipful beast in the elephant-house of the Zoological Gardens. They have been placed in attendance upon Buddha, and in charge of the idols and the other sacred symbols with which he is surrounded, and so long as the animal is here the Worship of the White Elephant will be represented as faithfully as circumstances permit.⁵⁵⁵

Another paper noted merely that the priests "will be shown with the elephant."⁵⁵⁶ In this case, the phrasing "will be shown," in reference to the priests, suggests the priests served as totally passive objects in the diorama, playing a role that was no more dynamic than that of Toung Taloung himself. The reports regarding the priests and the nature of their rituals are in any case contradictory and perplexing, making it now impossible to separate fact from hyperbole from simple fiction.

Media and public reactions were characterized initially by hype and anticipation, followed by skepticism which swiftly turned to outrage. The elephant and priests had hardly stepped foot on British soil when the media began attacking the authenticity of the entire entourage. The elephant was not deemed white enough, the priests were quickly pronounced to be frauds, and the whole arrangement was suspected to be nothing more than a showman's trick. "The much-vaunted Burmese elephant ...has been weighed in the scales of metropolitan criticism, and has been declared as much wanting," wrote the *Birmingham Daily Post*, going on to note that "The Sacred White Elephant, it seems, is neither 'sacred' nor 'white,' and his name is no more 'Buddha' than it is 'Barnum,' seeing that the Buddhists would as soon think of naming an

⁵⁵⁴ "Mr. Barnum's Priests." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, January 28, 1884, 12.

⁵⁵⁵ "The 'White' Elephant." *The London Journal*, February 23, 1884, 12.

⁵⁵⁶ "Carl Bock and Barnum's White Elephant." *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times*, Saturday, January 19, 1884; pg. 44; Issue 1178.

elephant after their deity as we should."⁵⁵⁷ As another paper described, "No sooner did the animal make its appearance in London than a storm of hostile criticism was evoked. Every atom of poetry and romance was knocked clean out of it, and it stood confessed a very ordinary animal of a dirty mottled brown kind of color."⁵⁵⁸ ("Dusky," "black," "mottled brown," "unprepossessing," "dirty" - the media's language in describing both the elephants and the priests suggests racial judgments, lending support to Sarah Amato's thesis that the debates over the elephant's degree of "whiteness" reveal English anxieties about racial purity.⁵⁵⁹)

The media was equally eager to decry the priests as fake. The *Graphic* claimed: "Just as numerous naturalists have denied that Toung Tallung is white, so certain Indian authorities are expressing their incredulity that the two Burmese gentlemen now in attendance are 'priests.'"⁵⁶⁰ The magazine went so far as to cast doubt on the paraphernalia used in the show: the mysterious Indian authorities allegedly even doubted "that the idols to which they pay their respects are images of Gautama Buddha" at all, and the paper skeptically referred to the "so-called sacred umbrellas" used in the ritual as if even the umbrellas were fabricated imitations.⁵⁶¹ The *Graphic's* use of scare quotes around 'priests' and 'meditation' and its use of phrases such as 'so-called' clearly signal suspected fraudulence to the reader. *Lloyd's Newspaper* dismissively characterized the two Burmese as "boyish-looking" and "very clumsy" (a rude shock, perhaps, to those expecting real-life incarnations of the resplendent god-hero Siddhartha immortalized in *The Light of Asia*). The *Western Mail* was particularly critical, actually attributing intentionally deceptive intent to Barnum's priests:

...two priests of Buddha, who were to consecrate - or something else - the spurious sacred beast. This he thought would be certain to 'fetch' the religious feeling of the Britisher. But, alas! for Barnum; alas! also for his priests. They have speedily been shown to be 'pious' frauds in the pay of the showman.⁵⁶²

The ceremonies came under attack, as well. Reader letters joined the effort to discredit the rituals. One reader's letter to the *Times* claimed that no Buddhist would consent to

⁵⁵⁷ "News of the Day." *Birmingham Daily Post* (Birmingham, England), Wednesday, January 23, 1884; Issue 7975.

⁵⁵⁸ "London and Local Notes." *Western Mail* (Cardiff, Wales), Friday, February 1, 1884; Issue 4594.

⁵⁵⁹ Amato, "The White Elephant in London," 32-33. Amato argues: "Barnum's trick provoked anxiety about the maintenance of racial purity and white privilege. The ensuing controversy became an opportunity to discuss the precarious status of whiteness." Ultimately the episode became "a forum to express anxieties about the maintenance of racial purity" in light of increasing colonial contact.

⁵⁶⁰ "The Buddhist 'Priests' and the White Elephant." *The Graphic*, February 2, 1884, 102.

⁵⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁵⁶² "London and Local Notes." *Western Mail* (Cardiff, Wales), Friday, February 1, 1884; Issue 4594.

worship in a temple on land held by the British; otherwise "we should long ago have seen the establishment of a Buddhist temple" in England.⁵⁶³ Another letter to the editor asserted that no white elephant was ever worshiped by Buddhists.⁵⁶⁴ T. W. Rhys Davids, in one of two letters he would write to the *Times*, dismissively called it a "mock ceremony" that was "disgraceful," and a "travesty of so great a religion"; he furthermore asserted that the show was likely to cause "deep personal pain" to any professing Buddhists who might see it.⁵⁶⁵ (It is not clear what Buddhists in London Rhys Davids may have been thinking of!)

The comic papers performed a similar act of discrediting, but in humorous form. An article in *Punch* – titled "Not So White As He's Painted! (Fly-lead from an Elephant's Diary)" – impersonated the inner monologue of the elephant to effectively discredit the exhibit's religious associations from within.⁵⁶⁶ Here are a few excerpts:

[This London Zoo pen] doesn't quite come up to my idea of the 'Sacred Moveable Temple' in which Barnum's Agent, ratifying his oath with the lighting of the mystic fire, and a payment of five hundred dollars down on account, assured His Majesty I should accomplish my holy pilgrimage.... Perhaps this old dressing-gown I've got on is part of a religious ceremony. Shouldn't wonder. Anyhow, it's great fun being a 'sacred beast.'

...

Installed. Ha! here come the British public in shoals. I suppose these are the devout daily 'worshippers' guaranteed by Barnum's agreement with the Governor at home! Judging from their remarks, I don't call them reverent: but, bless you, what's that, as long as they'll only keep up those buns. Talk of Burmah after this? Gammon! Toung, my boy, you're having a time of it. So's the high priest, Three cheers for both of us!

By emphasizing the ordinary elephant's surprise and confusion at being taken for a holy animal, *Punch* humorously discredits the authenticity of the whole affair, highlights its more absurd aspects, and reveals it to the reading public to be nothing more than a cheap circus trick. The elaborate gag (the article fills almost an entire page) goes on to depict the "High Priest" as a bumbling, conniving figure who is clearly in cahoots with Barnum to squeeze as many shillings as possible from the British visitors. The comic is a less vitriolic, but perhaps ultimately even more effective means of ensuring that the public dismissed Bah Chone and Hpo Choe out of hand. *Punch* was not the only magazine that took the opportunity to satirize the

⁵⁶³ F. E. W. "Mr. Barnum's White Elephant." *The Times*, January 22, 1884: 10.

⁵⁶⁴ Nai Pleng, "The White Elephant." *The Times*, Tuesday, Jan 29, 1884; 3.

⁵⁶⁵ Rhys Davids, "White Elephants." *The Times*, February 7, 1884: 7.

⁵⁶⁶ "Not So White As He's Painted! (Fly-lead from an Elephant's Diary)." *Punch* (London, England), Saturday, January 26 1884, 38.

elephant's popularity and the attention it was getting; one Spanish paper (reprinted in the *Pall Mall Gazette*) mocked the English for their interest in the elephant: "One might think that the English imbibed the superstition of the Buddhists by the importance given to the beast and the homage rendered to it... Its movement, its disposition, its very dreams are immediately telegraphed to New York, together with notes of Prince Bismarck's well-being and the state of health of the Queen of England."⁵⁶⁷

There is a startling vehemence to the entire overblown media storm: to the public's outrage over the episode and its priggish sense of being swindled; the press's adamant and unrelenting denial of the authenticity of the priests; and the *Times* readers' assertions of authority and knowledge about Buddhism. The dismissive and even vitriolic media comments surely reflect the Burmese priests' youthful appearance, all too human ritual performances, and their willingness to perform in what was clearly a purely for-profit venture. The overtly commercial aspect of the show and its circus atmosphere may have furthermore created associations with the cheap and tawdry. (Barnum was not exactly a paragon of middle-class respectability, and the circus, despite its late-century transition away from freak show acts towards true skill and acrobatics, never quite shook off its associations with the "transgressive."⁵⁶⁸) This alone fails to explain, however, why the media indulged in such an open and virulent symbolic defrocking of the two young Buddhists – or why so much ink was spilled in the task. Their persons, their rituals, and their elephant were repeatedly and categorically dismissed as simply *not real*.

Arguably, the media's and the public's obvious lack of familiarity with the habits, dress, and behavior of the Buddhist monks and laypeople of Burma (or Siam, Ceylon, or elsewhere) left them unable to accurately assess the authenticity of Barnum's display, and thus more vulnerable to swindle – and hence more likely to respond with outrage when they began to that they had been "had." As a result, the response of the media and the public was to denounce the Buddhism on display as unreal. The sudden appearance of Burmese Buddhist practitioners, imported from a land currently in a thicket of political and military conflicts with England, apparently quite young and "clumsy," not to mention "dark" and "dusky," performing some kind of ritual of

⁵⁶⁷ "Occasional Notes." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Friday, February 8, 1884; Issue 5905.

⁵⁶⁸ Assael, *The Circus and Victorian Society*, 7.

unknown authenticity or origin (which may have been meditation, humming, salaaming, or rubbing their foreheads in the dust), with imported idols, umbrellas, and "paraphernalia" - it is not surprising that this clashed head-on with the public's vague, reified, sanitized notions of Buddhism. Barnum's show was obviously a constructed fantasy of Buddhism, but the public only slowly recognized it as such. When they did, it provoked a delayed sense of outrage.

Surprisingly, however, the episode also provoked a serious discussion about Buddhism myth and ritual. This clash played itself out in *The Times*, whose pages bear witness to a debate of a more intellectual tenor. A number of articles and letters to the editor were submitted on the subject, revealing contemporaries' struggle to determine whether the white elephant had anything to do with "real" Buddhism and whether the accompanying priests were "authentic" or merely actors, betraying in the process considerable uncertainty about what Buddhism actually entailed. Self-proclaimed experts on everything from archaeology to zoology to ancient art began applying to *The Times* to share their knowledge with England's readership. The ensuing debates reflect a great deal of intellectual one-upmanship and brandying about of intellectual authority. "Sir - I have no pretension to Pāli scholarship, like Rhys Davids," began (on a faux humble note) one James Fergusson, author of several books on art and archeology, when he wrote in to the *Times* to assure readers that white elephants did, indeed, play a prominent role in ancient Buddhist iconography and worship. He deftly refers the *Times* readers to the illustrative plates of numerous bas-reliefs in his own published works on the subject.⁵⁶⁹ Other letter-writers were more carried away by their passions; an irate Colonel Fred Brine wrote that "white horses no more exist than green horses do, and, in reply to Mr. Fergusson, I must repeat that the Buddhists no more worship elephants than the Londoners do the cream-coloured horses when the Queen is opening Parliament... and with reference to the Siamese Order of the White Elephant, only started in 1861, it has no more to do with worshipping an elephant than the Order of the Garter, instituted in 1348 has to do with worshipping a garter."⁵⁷⁰ A letter to the editor from a Thai Buddhist named Nai Pleng references the assertions circulated by Barnum's agent and appeals to his familiarity with both Pali and the Tripitaka to rebut Barnum's claims:

⁵⁶⁹ James Fergusson, "White Elephants." *Times* (London, England) 2 Feb. 1884: 7.

⁵⁷⁰ Colonel R.E Brine, "White Elephants." *Times* (London, England) 7 Feb. 1884: 7.

Having read numerous accounts newly made in the contemporary newspapers, regarding... the Buddhist religion, I may freely protest against what the showman says about the 'sacred' of the white elephant, which is foolishly supposed to be worshipped by the Buddhists of those countries in the far East. There is really not a word respecting the 'sacred' white elephant which can be found in the Tripitaka, or the Holy Buddhist Bible. Therefore, I naturally cannot help laughing at such a writer who, not knowing a word of Pali, in which all the Buddhist sacred books are originally written, makes the false story known to the public about the 'sacred' white elephant among the Buddhists... No religious rite is performed in any kind to the white elephant.⁵⁷¹

The matter was settled by T. W. Rhys Davids, who wrote in to the *Times* a second time to lend the full weight of his authority as an acknowledged expert in Buddhism in order to dispel altogether the inaccuracies he perceived to be circulating in the media. He rejected with finality the possibility of Buddhists worshipping elephants, reduced the white elephant to a mere "poetical figure" akin the symbolical lamb in Christianity, and made the sweeping assertion that "No modern ordinary elephant has in any country throughout the wide domains of Buddhism, nor at any time through the many centuries of its history, been held by any Buddhist to be more sacred than modern ordinary lambs are held to be by Christians."⁵⁷²

What is noteworthy about the *Times* readers' display of knowledge is that none of the self-proclaimed experts had any particular interest in, or knowledge of, the beliefs, habits, religious practices or even dress and appearance of modern Buddhists in Burma or elsewhere. With their convoluted references to bas-reliefs, ancient mythologies, and religious symbolism, the letters take seriously only the ancient forms of Buddhism; there is no mention of modern practices and rituals. The letters thus display a complete and total commitment to ancient sources and archeological evidence and a corollary dismissal of two living practitioners and their worship. A single letter to the editor (signed "Ayaybain") formed a surprising exception to this rule; the only author who appears to have been to Burma, he describes the scene in Mandalay some years previous when the last white elephant baby had been found, detailing the festivities accompanying the presentation of the "semi-regal, semi-sacred beast" and, in contrast to his contemporaries, concedes the ability to determine the holiness of elephants to the

⁵⁷¹ Nai Pleng, "The White Elephant." *The Times*, Tuesday, January 29, 1884; 3.

⁵⁷² Rhys Davids, "White Elephants." *Times* (London, England) February 7, 1884: 7. He wrote: "The mother of Gotama is represented, on the night of his conception, to have had a dream in which the future Buddha appeared to enter her side under the figure of a white elephant with six tusks. This poetical figure has been a constant favourite with Buddhists authors and artists and they make a frequent use of it as Christian authors and artists do of the figure of the Lamb. The Chad-dants - the six-tusked one - is just as much and just as little sacred to the former as the Agnus Dei is to the latter...."

Burmese themselves: "I cannot, therefore, conjecture how the astute Mr. Barnum will find it profitable to palm off on Europeans and Americans as white, an animal which can only be pronounced so by Buddhist Burmans well up in the subject of white elephants."⁵⁷³ Overall, however, the attacks on the veracity and authenticity of the 'Buddhism' of the show - attacks launched by the popular media, self-styled experts, and recognized authorities such as T. W. Rhys Davids - reveal the extent to which the British felt that Buddhism was theirs to define. What was Buddhism? Did white elephants form a valid aspect of "real" Buddhist belief and ritual? The show made one thing clear: it was for the British to decide, not the Burmese.

Finally, it is crucial to point out that the white elephant obviously symbolized Britain's imperial designs on Upper Burma, which were already becoming clear by 1884.⁵⁷⁴ Few sources acknowledged this symbolism openly at the time. A comic poem in the magazine *Judy* in December 1885, however, makes the allegory explicit:

Figure 20 – "To the Zoo! To the Zoo!" *Judy*, December 16, 1885; 296.

The sketch and poem play on Thibaw's reputation in Britain as an uncivilized brute and a beast; in this comic, it is suggested that both "brutes," the elephant and Thibaw, should be housed in the same shed at the zoo. The line "Let us take it without more ado" refers not only to the suggested course of action, but to Upper Burma itself, the kingdom of Ava, which should be "taken" without delay and its ruling "beast" swiftly encaged in a "triumphant display." Amato also emphasizes this interpretation of the events: "As an object of British interest that was also symbolically linked to the Burmese monarchy, Barnum's elephant, Toung Taloung, became a living referent to this ongoing conflict and a trophy of Britain's imperial ambitions."⁵⁷⁵

Taken as a whole, the outlandish episode of Toung Taloung reveals a showman's creation in late Victorian England of a fantasy projection of Buddhism that managed, at least for a time, to thrill, swindle, and finally outrage an eager, gullible public. The episode suggests both the extent of the public's colonial fascination as well as the lack

⁵⁷³ W. H. Flower and Ayaybain, "The White Elephant." *Times* (London, England), January 21, 1884: 7.

⁵⁷⁴ Myint-U notes that the British had been discussing the annexation of the remainder of Burma since the 1870s, with many feeling it was a foregone conclusion. Myint-U, *Making of Modern Burma*, 186-190.

⁵⁷⁵ Amato, "White Elephant in London," 33.

of reliable information on contemporary Buddhism available in the period. The laboriously obtained white elephant, symbolic priests, golden umbrellas, ritual 'paraphanelia,' the elaborate 'ecclesiastical costumes' – the items on display (including people) reveal what Barnum considered essential for a convincing presentation of Buddhism. The elaborate staging of "Buddhism" thus both echoed and reinforced existing stereotypes of contemporary Buddhists as ritually-oriented idol worshipers. The media, especially the popular press, played a powerful role both in perpetuating these stereotypes and in fostering vitriolic, possibly racist attitudes. The flurry of educated reader letters to the *Times*, on the other hand, reveals the extent to which ancient sources remained authoritative and definitive for judging any contemporary expression of Buddhism. Here and elsewhere in this study, we see the contentious battle to determine who held the authority to define and delineate authentic Buddhism from its poor imitations and degenerate modern forms. Finally, the episode portends the British annexation of Burma less than two years later and foreshadows the way that the media would parade Burmese Buddhism before readers at home in a triumphant display of conquest and ownership.

4.2 Exhibitions and Native Villages (1885-1886)

"This is pre-eminently an age of exhibition, and the present year is essentially one in which the colonies and dependencies of the British Crown have been brought to the front," boasted the parochial *Ipswich Journal* in 1886.⁵⁷⁶ Between the Great Exhibition in 1851 and the start of the Great War, a steady stream of colonial exhibitions—one or two a year—presented the colonies to a curious public in England.⁵⁷⁷ The years 1885-1886, in particular, witnessed a remarkable concentration of exhibitions - so much so that the *Saturday Review* complained in 1886 of being "overrun with Exhibitions of Natives of all nations" – the "Japanese Villages at Knightsbridge, Indian Villages at Battersea, 'India in London' at Langham Place, have very nearly exhausted any curiosity we may have possessed of with regard to the manners and customs of the inhabitants of far-off climes."⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁶ "The Ceylon Exhibition at the Agricultural Hall." *The Ipswich Journal*, Thursday 01 July 1886.

⁵⁷⁷ Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2001), 1-2.

⁵⁷⁸ "Amongst the Cingalese." *Saturday Review*; Jul 10, 1886; 62, 1602; 54.

Exhibitions had been serving as a means of introducing English visitors to Buddhism at least since 1871, when one of the highlights of the London International Exhibition that year was a giant cast of the gateway of the great stupa at Sanchi, or "the picture Bible of Buddhism," as one source called it.⁵⁷⁹ By the 1880s, however, the exhibitions had taken a different turn: no longer satisfied with plaster reconstructions of archeological gems from its colonies, exhibition organizers turned to the display of live human beings. A number of recent studies have established the formative impact of the nineteenth-century's numerous colonial and international exhibitions on both scholarly and popular understandings of religion; the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago has received by far the most attention.⁵⁸⁰ This next section examines three successful and extremely popular colonial exhibitions, clustered in a span of two years, which instrumentally shaped popular perceptions of Buddhism in England: the 1885 Japanese Village, 1886 Ceylonese Exhibition, and the 1886 Colonial and India Exhibition. The three exhibitions in question featured constructed Buddhist temples, living Buddhists from colonial lands, and quasi-theatrical displays of Buddhist ritual or meditation for curious onlookers - and as such, they played a unique role with respect to the enactment and exhibition of Buddhism on London soil.

4.3 1885 - The Japanese Village in Hyde Park

In January 1885, the "wonder-seeking crowds of the Metropolis" were treated to a new spectacle when a "*bona fide* Japanese village" opened in Humphrey's Hall in Hyde Park.⁵⁸¹ Hyde Park, the center of fashionable London and "the favourite rendezvous in summer of fashionable society for riding, driving, and the promenade," according to one 1885 guide book, provided a prime location for the fashionable and

⁵⁷⁹ M. Conway, *Travels in South Kensington* (London: Trübner, 1882); quoted in Tim Barringer, "The South Kensington Museum and the Colonial Project," in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, ed. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998), 19. Tim Barringer notes the political symbolism of the cast: "situated in British India, rediscovered, excavated, photographed and published by officers of the British army," the recreated gate was "proudly displayed at the imperial centre as a symbol of responsible British custodianship of, and authority over, Indian history and culture" (19).

⁵⁸⁰ Eric J. Ziolkowski, ed. *A Museum of Faiths: Histories and Legacies of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions* (Atlanta: Oxford University Press, 1993); John P. Burris, *Exhibiting Religion: Colonialism and Spectacle at International Expositions, 1851-1893* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), 2001; Lüddeckens, Dorothea. *Das Weltparlament Der Religionen. Strukturen Interreligiöser Begegnung Im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002); Richard Hughes Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

⁵⁸¹ "From a London Correspondent." *The Newcastle Weekly Courant*, Friday, January 2, 1885; Issue 10955.

royally-sponsored Japanese Village.⁵⁸² During the 1880s the mansion and expansive grounds were the location of a number of high-class entertainments and bazaars.⁵⁸³ It was also located in close proximity to the "museumland" that had been constructed on the site of the 1851 Great Exhibition.⁵⁸⁴

The exhibition, organized by Japanese businessman Tanniker Buhicrosan, featured around 100 native Japanese (including about 25 women and children) who exhibited their arts, crafts, and culture in an exhibition space that included a carefully constructed Japanese garden, restaurant, and teahouse as well as a theater and temple.⁵⁸⁵ The exhibition was an enormous success; *The Times* reported it was attracting around 3,000 visitors a day, paying half a crown each for admission,⁵⁸⁶ and the show inspired numerous imitations in provincial towns.⁵⁸⁷ Advertisements for the village boasted of "skilled Japanese artificers and workers," a "magnificently decorated and illuminated Buddhist Temple," "five o'clock tea in the Japanese Tea House," Japanese musical and other entertainments," and realistic representations of "Everyday life as in Japan."⁵⁸⁸

Figure 21 Advertisements for the Japanese Village
Reynolds's Newspaper, Sunday, January 4, 1885.

Figure 22 - Advertisement for the Japanese Village
The Pall Mall Gazette, Thursday, January 14, 1886.

Press coverage was extensive and enthusiastic; most papers wrote of the exhibition in lively and glowing prose. The *Penny Illustrated* called it a "unique show" that "brings the Every-day life of the Japanese home to us in the pleasantest way" –

⁵⁸² Charles Eyre Pascoe, *London of today. An illustrated handbook for the season* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1885). <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008687430>. In attendance at the opening were Princess Louise and Princess Christian.

⁵⁸³ *Survey of London*, v. 45, Knightsbridge, 79-88. Ed. John Greenacombe (London: London County Council, 2000). Available online at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol45/pp79-88>.

⁵⁸⁴ Joseph McLaughlin, "'The Japanese Village' and the Metropolitan Construction of Modernity." *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*: 48 (2007), 10.

⁵⁸⁵ "Oriental Club -The Annual General." *Times* (London, England) 1 May 1885: 9. See also Hugh Cortazzi, *Japan in Late Victorian London: The Japanese Native Village in Knightsbridge and 'The Mikado', 1885* (London: Sainsbury Institute, 2009).

⁵⁸⁶ "Indian Native Village Exhibition." *Times* (London, England) 2 July 1885: 6.

⁵⁸⁷ Greenacombe <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol45/pp79-88>.

⁵⁸⁸ "Advertisement." *Reynolds's Newspaper*, Sunday, January 4, 1885.

they deemed it the most popular and successful entertainment of the season.⁵⁸⁹ The media's assurances to the public that the exhibit matched Japanese reality with almost one-to-one authenticity was crucial to its success. "You may fancy yourself in Japan as soon as you have passed the door," wrote the *St. James's Gazette*, noting that visitors are quickly able to "forget they are in England and ... resign themselves to the local colour and influence."⁵⁹⁰ As the *Saturday Review* described it, Japan had been virtually transplanted to England; the Japanese had come "bag and baggage, with their wives and children, their houses and their shops, their temples and their theatres, and practically they have, as it were, transplanted a village from the sunny slopes of Fusiyama, with all its life and industries, to Humphrey's Hall, Knightsbridge."⁵⁹¹ The village was in "perfect conformity"⁵⁹² to the original and conveyed "an air of absolute reality."⁵⁹³ For all sources, the village's avowed authenticity was crucial, as this quote from the *Pall Mall Gazette* proves: "Here is a Japanese village in our midst - none of your aesthetic shams, but the real genuine article. By paying your shilling, or half-crown, as the case may be, you may see real Japanese, in real native costume, at work on real Japanese works of art, from a piece of pottery to an umbrella, or what passes for such."⁵⁹⁴ The excessive underscoring of "real genuine" and the compulsive repetition of *real* in this and other descriptions of the village reveal the visitors' eagerness to partake in authentic experiences of far-away Eastern lands.

Figure 23 "Afternoon Tea at the Japanese Village, Knightsbridge."
The Graphic, March 13, 1885; 285.

Japanese Buddhism was a prominent aspect of the exhibit, represented by the large temple that was erected at the center of the village and which contained, according to the papers, various idols and gods as well as priests. The temple was "fitted up with some of the most magnificent carvings, principally gods" and was reportedly large enough to be "capable of holding the whole of the Japanese

⁵⁸⁹ "Chat of the Gossips." *Penny Illustrated* (London, England), Saturday, March 14, 1885; pg. 170; Issue 1239.

⁵⁹⁰ "Japan in Miniature." *St. James's Gazette*, Saturday January 10, 1885.

⁵⁹¹ "The Japanese Village" *Saturday Review*, January 17, 1885; 59, 1525; 79.

⁵⁹² "A Japanese Native Village." *Reynolds' Newspaper*, Sunday January 11, 1885.

⁵⁹³ "Our London Letter." *Shields Daily Gazette*, Monday January 12, 1885.

⁵⁹⁴ "Occasional Notes." *Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Saturday, January 10, 1885; Issue 6188. The "reified figure of the native artisan" was an important aspect of exhibitions and villages by that point. Eric Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck's Empire of Entertainments* (University of Washington Press, 2008), 83.

colony."⁵⁹⁵ The *Penny Illustrated* noted that the temple was "open to inspection" from all visitors.⁵⁹⁶ Inside, visitors could appreciate the beauty of a collection of "bronze altar vessels, gift-boxes for pious remembrances of the deceased, carved lanterns, [and] images of Buddha and sacred personages."⁵⁹⁷ There were "many idols scattered around the show," noted another paper.⁵⁹⁸ Here, too, assurances that the temple and idols were real and genuine were paramount. A collection of quotes from a number of papers reveals the value accorded to authenticity: the temple was "complete with real bronze gods,"⁵⁹⁹ according to one paper, and "with (it is said) real Buddhist priests" according to the *Graphic*.⁶⁰⁰ *The Era* noted that the Buddhist Temple contained "real gods of bronze" and was "sure to be an attraction."⁶⁰¹ Another magazine noted, "In the temple are (strange to say) a couple of genuine Japanese priests."⁶⁰²

The repetitive assertions that the temple, idols, and priests were "real" and "genuine" proved both an irresistible attraction and a source of anxiety for those who imagined the worst from the practice of heathen worship and rites in the middle of fashionable London. Around the time of the village's opening, rumors began to circulate that the Japanese would use the temple for worship: the Buddhist temple "is intended not only as an ornament, but for use, for there the natives assemble and worship their gods," reported the *Leeds Mercury*.⁶⁰³ As in the case of Barnum's pongyis, there was little concrete sense of what Japanese Buddhist might actually do in their temple: there was only vague talk of the priests exhibiting their "religious devotions."⁶⁰⁴ These reports provoked considerable anxiety among readers and played on fears of heathen missionary efforts on British soil. To allay anxieties, a writer for *The Times* informed readers that he had sought reassurance from the organizer that no Buddhist rituals were to be performed in public. It was "satisfying that there is no

⁵⁹⁵ "The Japanese Native Village." *Leeds Mercury*, January 12, 1885, 5.

⁵⁹⁶ "Occasional Notes." *Pall Mall Gazette*, Saturday, January 10, 1885; Issue 6188. "The Buddhist temple is open to all comers - in fact, as Mr. Buhicrosan (the organizer) remarks, 'during a short sojourn in the village visitors can readily imagine themselves transplanted to the 'Land of the Rising Sun' (less the heat)."

⁵⁹⁷ "A Japanese Village In London." *Times*, 10 Jan. 1885: 6.

⁵⁹⁸ "London Notes." *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, Friday January 16, 1885, 2.

⁵⁹⁹ "The Japanese Village in London." *Birmingham Daily Post* (Birmingham, England), Tuesday, December 30, 1884; Issue 8268.

⁶⁰⁰ Untitled. *The Graphic*, Saturday, January 17, 1885; Issue 790.

⁶⁰¹ "The Japanese Village." *The Era*, Saturday, January 17, 1885; Issue 2417.

⁶⁰² "Japan in Miniature." *St. James's Gazette*, Saturday January 10, 1885.

⁶⁰³ "The Japanese Native Village." *Leeds Mercury*, January 12, 1885, 5.

⁶⁰⁴ "A Japanese Native Village." *Reynold's Newspaper*, Sunday January 11, 1885.

intention of making a show of their religious ceremonies," he noted.⁶⁰⁵ Making similar efforts to reassure readers of the harmlessness of the temple, another paper reported that, according to the organizer, the natives were not only already faithful Christians, but they were in fact *more Christian* than the English themselves, if church attendance was any measure:

It is true, says Mr. Buhicrosan, that a Buddhist Temple has been erected in the village, for the simple and sufficient reason that no representation of the village in Japan would be complete without one. But it is totally untrue that any of the rites and ceremonies are observed within it by the inhabitants.... Moreover, Mr. Buhicrosan is a Christian, and so are most of the 'Japs' in the Knightsbridge village, and they go to church twice every Sunday, which is more than can be said for 'all those who profess to call themselves Christians' in England.⁶⁰⁶

Another paper, however, reported that Buhicrosan's goal in bringing the natives to England was to *convert* them to Christianity, by extension obviously suggesting that the 100 Japanese were still Buddhists.⁶⁰⁷ Another paper dismissed this as improbable: "These industrious pagans look as if nothing would convert them," the writer attested.⁶⁰⁸ The various rumors were also claimed to be a "sore point" with the organizer himself, who (at least according to one newspaper) had actually "brought over his countrymen with a view to interest Christian people in their customs" - that is, with the ultimate goal of increasing England's Christian missionary efforts to Japan.⁶⁰⁹

Public reactions to the prospective spectacle of heathen idols and gods on display and open to inspection in Hyde Park were, not surprisingly, very mixed. One Christian woman's abhorrence at the sight is neatly captured in an anecdote related in the *Daily News*:

Those sleek white-robed priests praying in the temple happily do not understand English, else they might have heard, not many days ago, a strong-minded mother direct a little girl's attention to the image of Buddha at the back, and call upon her to recite the verse ending with the quite accurate statement that 'the heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone.'⁶¹⁰

This snapshot of one middle-class female visitor's reaction to the Buddhist temple, with its mixture of fascination, judgment, and Christian certainty, may be typical of many visitors' reactions. Quite probably some even responded to the exhibition with a

⁶⁰⁵ "A Japanese Village In London." *Times*, 10 January 1885: 6.

⁶⁰⁶ "Knightsbridge." *The West London Standard and Chelsea Herald* 14 March 1885: 8.

⁶⁰⁷ "I have been informed that the intention of the gentleman who has hit upon the happy idea of the Japanese village is to convert the inhabitants to Christianity. We shall see!" "Our London Letter." *Belfast News-Letter*, Monday January 12, 1885, 5.

⁶⁰⁸ "London Notes." *Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough*, Friday January 16, 1885, 2.

⁶⁰⁹ "From our London Correspondent." *Manchester Times*, Saturday, January 17, 1885; Issue 1410.

⁶¹⁰ "The Japanese Villagers." *Daily News* (London, England), Monday, January 26, 1885; Issue 12103.

renewed commitment to Christian missions, just as its organizer Mr.

Buhicrosan had intended. In this case, however, it is the parochial and pedantic middle-class woman who is ultimately the object of *Daily News'* joke. As the anecdote continues, the calm and unruffled priest, secure in his own religion, is contrasted with the anxiety of the English woman:

The priest, conscious of the inviolable strength of his ancient religion, now nearly 1400 years old in Japan, might have received the parable without offence, since the cultivation of a serene spirit and unruffled philosophy is one of the habits of his order.⁶¹¹

Thus the media was quite capable of self-critical reflection on the interactions between the natives and the gawking public. One acerbic editorial by a ladies' columnist proved so popular that it was reprinted in innumerable newspapers throughout the country; in its she, too, lampoons the gawking visitors for what she sees as their insular and parochial reactions to the village, especially their hasty judgments of the villagers' religion:

It is not a little entertaining to watch the well-dressed crowd on their tour of inspection, to hear their plain-spoken and insular remarks upon the quiet operatives squatting within, and to observe how the very children soon learn to regard them as poor benighted barbarians enveloped in gross mental and spiritual darkness.⁶¹²

These mixed reactions suggest the complexity and variance among responses to the representation of Buddhism in the village. While some experienced anxiety about the practice of heathen religions in the heart of the London metropolis (including the mainstream and intellectual *London Times*), other, more self-consciously progressive or cosmopolitan voices ridiculed that very same 'insular' public for its missionary-minded attitude to the exhibition and for its hasty categorization of the natives as gross heathen barbarians.

Not surprisingly, the village was a popular subject for the illustrated papers. An image in the *Illustrated London News* suggests that the temple contained at least one statue of a sacred guardian, rather than a Buddha; the Victorian journalist was unable to identify the statue, however, and the accompanying text explains it in vague terms merely as "a hideous idol, before which two lanterns burn continually."⁶¹³ The image of a young Victorian woman posing before the "hideous idol" in a heathen temple, in the middle of London, could be seen as domesticating and neutralizing the presence of

⁶¹¹ "The Japanese Villagers." *Daily News* (London, England), Monday, January 26, 1885; Issue 12103.

⁶¹² "The Japanese Villagers." *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, Saturday January 31, 1885.

⁶¹³ "The Japanese Village." *The Illustrated London News*, February 21, 1885, 203.

the heathen gods; for other readers, however, the image may have provoked anxieties of reverse missionizing. Another page of illustrations in *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* is less sensational, with a drawing of the outside of the temple as well as an image of a Japanese man lighting candles inside; whatever idols or Buddhas may have been inside the temple, they are carefully excluded from this illustration.

Figure 24 "A Place of Worship."
"The Japanese Village." *The Illustrated London News*, February 21, 1885, 203.

Figure 25 – "The New Japanese Village at Knightsbridge."
The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, January 1886, 404.

Some preliminary conclusions about the Japanese Village can be drawn before turning to the other two exhibitions. First, the exhibit organizer intended the religion of the visiting Japanese to be represented primarily by a display of aesthetic objects, rather than any observable worship or ritual. The exhibit encouraged aesthetic appreciation of Japanese religious objects, including artifacts, relics, and the temple itself. There is no evidence – beyond the sensational, but apparently unfounded media rumors – that any actual Buddhist monks were present in the village or that anyone was meditating, praying, or performing rituals in the illuminated temple. As Buhicrosan had attested, the Buddhist temple had only been erected in the village "for the simple and sufficient reason" that such a temple was a typical building in every Japanese village.⁶¹⁴ It seems accurate to conclude that the overarching goal of the production was an aesthetic, "museumized" display of the *objects* only of Buddhism. This is in keeping with the aim of the exhibition as a whole; as Joseph McLaughlin notes, one of its prominent features was a representation of Japan as "an aesthetic and Aestheticist paradise."⁶¹⁵ The aesthetic judgments were deeply ambivalent - one very short *Pall Mall Gazette* note on the exhibition combines "pretty" and "prettily" with

⁶¹⁴ "Knightsbridge." *The West London Standard and Chelsea Herald* 14 March 1885: 8.

⁶¹⁵ McLaughlin, "The Japanese Village," 10.

"grotesque" and "fantastic" in the span of two sentences.⁶¹⁶ And while the temple was often deemed beautiful and noteworthy, the descriptions of the idols were universally described as "hideous." The village's presentation Buddhism was thus valorized largely on the basis of its aesthetic appeal.

Second, the press's almost compulsive repetition of adjectives such as real, genuine, and bone fide indicates that the question of the authenticity was of paramount importance. The desire for ethnological and cultural authenticity echoes the outrage expressed towards Barnum's "fake" priests and will be seen again in the other exhibitions. There were limits, however, to how much reality the English wanted to experience on their home turf. Contemporary media reactions to the Japanese Village display an observable ambivalence and inconsistency: while the public wanted to see an authentic Buddhist temple and statues, they simultaneously worried about the consequences of heathen worship taking place under their noses, in the town's most fashionable public park. These echoed fears and rumors of possible Buddhist missionary attempts in England.⁶¹⁷ These media reports betray a deep-seated ambivalence about the display of foreign idols and worshippers. The curious British public wanted to gaze at living Buddhists imported from the East, yet some visitors simultaneously found even the thought of their worship an anxiety-provoking threat to Christian England.

4.4 1886 - Hagenbeck's Ceylonese Village

In the summer of 1886, the legendary Carl Hagenbeck brought his travelling Ceylonese village (*Völkerschau*) from the continent to London after a wildly successful tour in Germany, Austria, and Hungary.⁶¹⁸ Even by amusement-weary Londoners' standards, the show made a powerful impact: "It might well be imagined that, after having had so many gigantic shows, nothing now remained which could in any sense of the word be called a novelty," wrote one paper; yet Hagenbeck had

⁶¹⁶ "Occasional Notes." *Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Saturday, January 10, 1885; Issue 6188. Note the use of the word grotesque; as Cortazzi also observes, "There was often a condescending tone to their comments, reflecting Victorian feelings of superiority to non-European peoples, and some gave way to the temptation to make fun of the Japanese and their 'grotesque' ways." Cortazzi 14.

⁶¹⁷ This threat was not always taken so seriously; as one comic paper reported: "Goose Sauce - Prepared in Japan. - It has been announced, with a flourish of paper trumpets, that certain enthusiastic Japanese propose to send Buddhist Missionaries to Europe and America. The originator of this project may be considered a proper gander in himself." "Cuttings from the Comic Papers." *The Ipswich Journal* (Ipswich, England), Friday, February 15, 1889; Issue 9170.

⁶¹⁸ Carl Hagenbeck, *Beasts and Men, Being Carl Hagenbeck's Experiences for Half a Century among Wild Animals* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1912), 26-29.

demonstrated "that there is still a field for shrewdness and enterprise even in the well-worn track of public displays."⁶¹⁹ The Ceylon exhibition stopped first briefly at the fair grounds in Birmingham before coming to London, where it was housed in the Royal Agricultural Hall.⁶²⁰ The show had been a wild success in Berlin, drawing 90,000 visitors in a single day; in Paris, over a million people came to see the troupe.⁶²¹ The show included sixty-five Singhalese and Tamil natives as well as "a vast menagerie," according to *The Era*, with 70 animals including 14 elephants and 16 zebras.⁶²² The show's design featured a series of groupings of performing artisans and family units, all arranged around an idealized primitive village of bamboo huts in the center of the hall. Enormous sheets of canvas painted with Sri Lankan scenery hung in the background and created a startling effect as one entered the exhibition space, which one paper described as a "picturesque" and "curiously true" *trompe l'oeil*:

The further end of the arena is shrouded with canvas, painted to represent mountain scenery, and in the midst a broad road slopes up to the highest gallery. ... This bit of road seemed curiously true, with the bright sun on it, when at a bamboo hut beside half a dozen natives in yellow and red sarong, with lustrous hair and brown shoulders, lounged in the doorway.⁶²³

The show was heavily advertised in advance of its opening. Advertisements from *The Times*, *Reynolds's Newspaper*, and the *Birmingham Daily Post* (just three examples of many) reveal the strategies that Hagenbeck employed to draw visitors to the exhibit, emphasizing the novelty and variety of the show and its success on the continent. All of the advertisements explicitly boast of the reproduction of a perahera, "with native priests and processionists," proudly advertised as being "exactly the same as that shown to H.R.H. the Prince of Wales on his last visit to Ceylon."

Figure 26 – Advertisement in *The Times*, 2 July 1886: 1.

⁶¹⁹ "The Ceylon Exhibition at the Agricultural Hall." *The Ipswich Journal*, July 1, 1886.

⁶²⁰ "The Ceylon Exhibition." *Times*, July 22, 1886: 13. Admission was 6d.

⁶²¹ Eric Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck's Empire of Entertainments* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 84. The Ceylonese exhibition was one of the most popular elements of the *Jardin d'Acclimation* in Paris in 1886, where it attracted nearly one million visitors in six weeks, generating more than two-thirds of the total entrance tickets (67). Hagenbeck claimed in an interview that the show "was so interesting to the public that I had in the seven different towns in Germany and Austria, where I showed, the great number of 1,900,000 visitors, among whom were his Majesty the Emperor of Austria and family, King and Queen of Saxony, King and Queen of Denmark, King and Queen of Greece, with their suites, the Duke of Nassau, the various ambassadors, and the principal aristocracy and nobility of each town." "A Visit to Carl Hagenbeck's." *The Era*, Saturday 22 November 1884.

⁶²² "Carl Hagenbeck Interviewed." *The Era* (London, England), Saturday, April 24, 1886; Issue 2483.

⁶²³ "The Ceylon Exhibition." *London Evening Standard*, (London, England), Tuesday June 29, 1886.

Figure 27 – Advertisement in *Reynolds's Newspaper*, Sunday, July 4, 1886; Issue 1873.

Figure 28 – Advertisement in the *Birmingham Daily Post*, Friday, May 7, 1886.

Once in London, the show was at the center of the media's attention, where it was praised for the "variety, intelligibility, and liveliness of the performances."⁶²⁴ Here, too, impressions of authenticity were paramount; descriptors such as "preserved," "reproduces," and "scrupulously correct" stress the *realness* of the displays and aggressively assert the anthropological authenticity of the show. It "makes the spectator forget that he is in London, and think himself in Ceylon," assured the *Graphic*.⁶²⁵

In Hagenbeck's exhibit, as in the Japanese village, a temple was one of the central structures and was used to foreground the presence and significance of the exotic foreign religion of the natives. Here, too, the temple was an essential factor in establishing the authenticity of the exhibition and creating an effectively and convincingly "picturesque" and exotic immersion experience. I was unable to locate an illustration of the temple, but reports suggest it was decorated with motifs from Buddhist history and mythology (one paper described "a temple of larger dimensions, built of similar materials, but having its walls covered with brightly painted illustrations of Buddhist mythology, gives considerable picturesqueness to the scene.")⁶²⁶ The temple appears to have been an important visual focal point for the show. The *Times* called the temple "a sanctuary of rather elaborate construction."⁶²⁷ The *London Evening Standard* gave a detailed account of the impression that the

⁶²⁴ "Ceylonese Exhibition at Aston Lower Grounds." *Birmingham Daily Post*, Tuesday, May 11, 1886; Issue 8694.

⁶²⁵ The Ceylon Exhibition at the Agricultural Hall." *The Graphic*, Saturday July 17, 1886.

⁶²⁶ "Ceylonese Exhibition at Aston Lower Grounds." *Birmingham Daily Post*, May 11, 1886; Issue 8694.

⁶²⁷ "Hagenbeck's Ceylon Exhibition." *The Times*, 5 July 1886: 4.

temple made upon the visitor upon entering the exhibition hall, describing the structure as "round, with grotesque figures in cotton, with a lamp and reliquary and censer in front, and a sleeping Buddha behind the curtain."⁶²⁸ In addition to this aesthetic spectacle, two Buddhist priests travelled with the show to "see that religious ordinances are preserved," as one paper noted.⁶²⁹ This is confirmed by Hagenbeck's biographer, whose description of the show likewise reveals that the temple and priests were essential elements in the creation of authenticity: "durch Errichtung eines Buddhistentempels mit echten Buddhapriestern, durch die Vorführung verschiedener Tänze, sowie des Festzuges bei dem Perra-Harra-Fest, wie dieser jährlich mit vielen Elephanten in Ceylon stattfindet... wurde hier ein Stück Indisches Leben vorgeführt, wie es auf dem Festlande Europa's noch nie zu schauen gewesen war."⁶³⁰

Unlike in the Japanese Village, Hagenbeck's Ceylonese temple did not just serve to generate an authentic atmosphere; it formed the backdrop for a performance of the *perahara*, the Buddhist procession that had fascinated the British public since the Prince of Wales' journey to Kandy in 1875. Even before the show arrived in London, a reporter for the *Era* expressed palpable excitement at the prospect of seeing the famous procession performed 'live,' and - remarkably - even expressed cautious optimism that the great and legendary Hagenbeck might be able to borrow the sacred tooth itself from Ceylon:

The elephants ... will figure prominently in a series of Indian religious processions, amongst others that of the Parra Harra, in which, in a magnificent howdah, borne by a richly caparisoned elephant, the sacred tooth of Buddha is carried in triumph. The actual sacred fang it is possible he may not be able to procure, but in all the other details we believe the exhibition will be scrupulously correct. He showed us a series of photographs procured by his representatives in India, from which the details of the show will be arranged.⁶³¹

Almost every paper emphasized the *perahera* spectacle as one of the highlights of the show; the *Saturday Review*, for example, provides a lengthy commentary on the procession:

After them comes, as a contrast, the holy 'can-can' of the Devil Dancers who act as exorcisers of the Devil in the case of sickness. It is said that this practice of driving

⁶²⁸ "The Ceylon Exhibition." *London Evening Standard*, Tuesday June 29, 1886. See also "The Ceylon Exhibition." *The Morning Post*, Friday, 09 July 1886.

⁶²⁹ "The Ceylonese Exhibition in Manchester." *Manchester Times*, Saturday, April 24, 1886; Issue 1502.

⁶³⁰ Wilhelm Fischer, *Aus dem Leben und Wirken eines interessanten Mannes* (Hamburg: Baumann, 1896), 35. Quoted in Anne Dreesbach, *Gezähmte Wilde: die Zurschaustellung "exotischer" Menschen in Deutschland 1870-1940* (Campus Verlag, 2005), 180.

⁶³¹ "Carl Hagenbeck Interviewed." *The Era* (London, England), Saturday, April 24, 1886; Issue 2483. See also "The Ceylon Exhibition." *The Morning Post* (London, England), Friday, July 9, 1886.

out the enemy of mankind by songs, dances, and contortions dates from the earliest days of Buddhism. [...The dancers] look more like visions seen a dream than anything else.... Yet they are in Cingalese eyes old men, who have prepared for their high calling by a thorough course of religious training and education; and in Ceylon they are never seen in public except when some rich Cingalee is grievously tormented with the devil, or else at religious festivities. It is for his latter reason that they appear and take part in the yearly Perra-Harra procession held at Kandy in honour of the most precious relic, the tooth of the Holy Buddha, a procession which Mr. Hagenbeck reproduces with great picturesqueness as the closing feature of his exhibition. In this procession the elephants which are so important an item of the exhibition also take part.⁶³²

The descriptions of the devil dancers and the perahera combine the language of fantastic, dream-like visions with adjectives we have encountered repeatedly: picturesque and grotesque. (*The Times*, too, called the Perra Herra "very striking" and "instructive and amusing," but noted that the dancers' elaborate contortions "would be grotesque if it were not for the ardour with which they are performed."⁶³³) It is perhaps interesting to note that there was little reflection on the purpose of the devil dancers or their relationship to Buddhism. It is also unclear whether the four guardian gods of Ceylon were a part of the procession as performed in Britain, and whether this caused any confusion or uncertainty regarding the procession's mixture of elements from Buddhism and popular religion.⁶³⁴

⁶³² "Amongst the Cingalese." *Saturday Review*; Jul 10, 1886; 62, 1602; 54.

⁶³³ "The Ceylon Exhibition." *Times* (London, England) 22 July 1886: 13.

⁶³⁴ As Heinz Bechert notes, the yearly Asala Perahara provides an "impressive exemplification of this integration of Buddhism and cults of gods" and thus clearly embodies the syncretism of Buddhism and popular or folk's religion that is characteristic of the island. "Here, the cult of the most important Buddhist relic of the island and of the guardian gods of the island form part of the state cult of the Sinhalese." "The island's four main guardian gods may have also influenced the cult of relics, he notes, including the Tooth Relic and associated rituals. Bechert, "On the Popular Religion of the Sinhalese," in Heinz Bechert (ed.), *Buddhism in Ceylon and Studies on Religious Syncretism in Buddhist Countries* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978) 217-233, 223.

Figure 29 – "The Ceylon Exhibition at the Agricultural Hall."
The Graphic, Saturday July 17, 1886

Hagenbeck's exhibition differentiates itself from the Japanese Village in that its ostensible pedagogical purpose is even more deeply subsumed within entertainment aspects. The Ceylon exhibition took the pretense of authenticity and ethnological sincerity of the native village and gilded it with "very gorgeous and glittering costumes,"⁶³⁵ exotic elephants, and performers trained in a range of the standard sideshow feats. Wrestling, swordplay, snake charming, juggling, and dancing were just some of the attractions. Hagenbeck's natives were thus skilled in far more than native handicrafts; they were trained performers in a range of circus-ring skills.⁶³⁶ The ubiquitous *nautch* dance, the ultimate emblem of Indian exoticism, found its place as well, although the performance was desexualized by the use of young girls as performers: "Few things at the Agricultural Hall are prettier than the nautch of two tiny little girls of the Tamil Comedy troupe," noted the *Saturday Review*. "These baby nautch-girls dance with a conviction that is most quaint to witness."⁶³⁷ Hagenbeck's exhibitions were a celebration of skill and entertainment, as much in the model of the circus as the ethnological habitat display.⁶³⁸

The Buddhist temple and the performance of the *perahera* take on a completely different import and connotation when viewed in the context of this visual spectacle and unabashed focus on novelty and amusement. An analysis of the media reports reveals that the "religious" aspects of the show were subsumed within, possibly even wholly swallowed by, the overall entertainment spectacle. The *London Evening Standard's* list of the troupe's performers, for example - "priests, religious dancers, stick dancers, jugglers, snake charmers, &c."⁶³⁹ - draws no distinction between Theravada priests and other types of entertainers. A lengthy article in *The Times* reveals how Hagenbeck deftly combined circus performance and choreographed religious spectacle, blurring or even obliterating the boundary between them:

With these buildings, surrounded and tenanted by natives in conspicuous costumes of bright and varied colours, the hall assumes an appearance more picturesque than

⁶³⁵ "The Ceylonese Exhibition in Manchester." *Manchester Times* (Manchester, England), Saturday, April 24, 1886; Issue 1502.

⁶³⁶ "What this [Sri Lankan] series, like no other, demonstrates is the way in which Hagenbeck's work displays co-opted the circus at the height of its phenomenal popularity." Training of the performers became essential as Hagenbeck demanded an ever larger repertoire of entertainment abilities from the natives he imported. Ames, *Carl Hagenbeck's Empire*, 84-85.

⁶³⁷ "Amongst the Cingalese." *Saturday Review*; Jul 10, 1886; 62, 1602; 54.

⁶³⁸ Sadiya Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 4.

⁶³⁹ "The Ceylon Exhibition." *London Evening Standard*, Tuesday 29 June 1886.

that which it is accustomed to present. Among the items of the entertainment are juggling, fencing with swords and sticks, dancing by devil dancers, snake charming, racing with zebus in light carts called hackarries, wrestling, the beating of native drums, elephant keepers at work with elephants, and a religious procession in imitation of that known as the Perra-Herra, which takes place once a year in the town of Kandy, Ceylon, in honour of Buddha... As a representation of some phases of the life and customs of the natives of Ceylon, the exhibition should not be without its interest for anthropologists as well as for the general public.⁶⁴⁰

The description in *The Times* suggests that while the Buddhist ritual crowned the rest of the show in terms of extravagance, it was no different than the rest of the entertainments in kind. And while *Reynolds's Newspaper* called the perahera "most imposing," its writer seemed almost to prefer the "most exciting" zebra race.⁶⁴¹ Any religious meaning had been so subsumed within the spectacle atmosphere that some journalists missed its religious import altogether: "The show is brought to a close with a procession of elephants, dancers, and natives in various picturesque costumes," noted the *Ipswich Journal*, for example – either not aware of, or not caring to discuss, the religious significance of the procession.⁶⁴² These and other media descriptions suggest that Hagenbeck's show dissolved the lines between ethnology and anthropology, on the one hand, and pure fantasy and spectacle on the other. The Ceylon exhibit removed the perahera from its original context and imported the procession and ritual dances to England as a choreographed, well-rehearsed spectacle for Britons, emphasizing ownership and control. In doing so, it transformed the once-annual religious ceremony into a daily spectacle for paying spectators: a perahera that could be viewed on demand.⁶⁴³

4.5 1886 - The Colonial and Indian Exhibition

Significantly dwarfing both the Japanese and Ceylonese exhibitions in size, scope, and pomp was the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition, a spectacle that many contemporaries compared to the 1851 Great Exhibition in its ambition and royal

⁶⁴⁰ "Hagenbeck's Ceylon Exhibition." *Times* (London, England) 5 July 1886: 4.

⁶⁴¹ "Public Amusements." *Reynolds's Newspaper* (London, England), Sunday, August 8, 1886; Issue 1878.

⁶⁴² "The Ceylon Exhibition at the Agricultural Hall." *The Ipswich Journal*, Thursday, 1 July 1886.

⁶⁴³ Anne Dreesbach makes a similar point: "Wenngleich das Gezeigte dem Original entsprechen haben mag, so ließen die stündlichen Aufführungen nach vorgeschriebenem Ablauf die verschiedenen Ritualtänze oder Zeremonien profan erschienen und nahmen ihnen ihren exklusiven und bedeutsamen Charakter." Dreesbach, *Gezähmte Wilde*, 188.

patronage.⁶⁴⁴ The Colonial and Indian, sponsored by the Prince of Wales and organized by Royal Commission, smacked heavily of imperial propaganda and made proud display of the cultural as well as commercial goods of the colonies.⁶⁴⁵ *Time* magazine noted that the "pageant" of opening day began with "becoming pomp and striking circumstance"⁶⁴⁶ – namely, with a processional and elaborate ceremonies performed before 14,000 gathered audience members and Queen Victoria seated on a golden Indian throne.⁶⁴⁷ After its opening in May 1886 the Colonial and Indian welcomed an astounding 5 million visitors over the course of 6 months.⁶⁴⁸ In contrast to the Japanese and Ceylonese exhibitions, the Colonial and Indian was an explicitly and extravagantly imperial event. Numerous scholars have already explored the role that the exhibition played in fostering public approval of Britain's colonial agenda. Tim Barringer called it "the key event" in the development of the late-century's rampant and sweeping popular imperialism and notes that the exhibition immediately became a crucial means of communicating and reinforcing "the invented traditions of empire."⁶⁴⁹ Barringer concludes that the 1886 exhibition "was a massive exercise in publicity for the imperial ideal and a bonanza of national self-aggrandizement."⁶⁵⁰ Paul Greenhalgh also notes that the Colonial and Indian broke with its predecessors in embracing more obvious power relations and an overtly imperialistic spirit; it thus signaled "a move from complacent pride in empire to a propagandistic defense of it."⁶⁵¹ Greenhalgh notes that during and after 1886, public events and exhibitions focusing on the empire gradually moved away from "quasi-educational displays" with a pedagogical motive and embraced more "abrasive forms of entertainment" with more overt jingoistic, racial, and pejorative connotations.⁶⁵² Peter Hoffenberg has also noted the exhibition's role in promoting a cultural and social acceptance of the colonial project: "Exhibitions

⁶⁴⁴ e.g. "The Colonial and Indian Exhibition." *Westminster Review*, July 1886; 126, 251, 29-59; "The Colonial And Indian Exhibition." *The Times*, Wednesday, May 05, 1886; 11.

⁶⁴⁵ One scholar even calls it an "unimaginative and dry propagandistic exercise" Jacqueline S. Bratton, *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 153.

⁶⁴⁶ Banfield, Frank. "The Colonial and Indian Exhibition." *Time*, June 1886; 14, 18.

⁶⁴⁷ Frank Cundall, *Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, illustrated by Thomas Riley* (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1886), 7-9. The opening of the exhibition was accompanied by singing of the national anthem in Sanskrit ("a language which nobody but Max Müller and Edwin Arnold understands.") *The Sporting Times* (London, England), Saturday, May 08, 1886; 2.

⁶⁴⁸ J. R. Royle, *Report on the Indian Section of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition 1886* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1887), 11.

⁶⁴⁹ Barringer, "The South Kensington Museum," 23.

⁶⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁵¹ Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, 58.

⁶⁵² *ibid.*, 58.

offered the objects and activities of mass education and entertainment, providing the public culture necessary for the participatory remarking of history, memory, and identities."⁶⁵³

As was to be expected, press coverage was enormous and unabashedly enthusiastic, detailing every aspect of the preparations and exhibitions for the public.⁶⁵⁴ The press was also unreserved in its enthusiasm for the blatant imperialism of the event. The *Saturday Review* boasted that the "chief object" of the exhibition was "realized with overwhelming force" - namely, "It teaches with admirable distinctness a simple elementary lesson. It brings home to every observer the solidarity of a world-wide Empire, its unity of interest, and its manifold resources."⁶⁵⁵ In an article aptly titled "A Walk Round the Colonies," the *Pall Mall* asserted that the great show "will this year bring home the magnitude, the diversity, and the unity of the Empire in a fashion never before attempted." It called the show "a great stroke of Imperial policy" and "a great political object-lesson, that will do more to unify the Empire... [than] any Act of Parliament."⁶⁵⁶ *Time* magazine wrote: "With the air full of imperial sentiment we have the scheme for bringing together, under one roof, a presentment of all that the British empire, in every zone, can show of manufactures, of arts, and of natural products."⁶⁵⁷ The *Pall Mall Gazette's* description of the displays and revelries of the 'Colonies,' as the show was sometimes called, is revealing of contemporaries' sense of pride and ownership in surveying their extensive holdings. The exhibition was "a microcosm of the Empire - a show which no other country in the world could produce, and one which brings home to the minds of the world as nothing else could do a sense of the magnificence of the dominion which owns our sway. *The Exhibition is much more than a show. It is a revelation of Empire.*"⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵³ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, 273.

⁶⁵⁴ Some of the more substantive articles: a lengthy report from London correspondent via special telegraph: "Opening of the India and Colonial Exhibition by the Queen." *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin, Ireland), Wednesday, May 5, 1886; Issue N/A; "A Walk Round the Colonies." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Tuesday, May 4, 1886; Issue 6593; "The Colonial and Indian Exhibition." *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, May 8, 1886; Issue 858. all *Mall Gazette*, 4 May 1886; Illustrated London News, 17 July 1886 and 24 July 1886; *Primrose Record* 2, 1886; Various reports in the daily press including illustrations in the *Graphic* and the *Penny Illustrated Paper*.

⁶⁵⁵ "The Colonial and Indian Exhibition." *Saturday Review* 61, no. 1595 (May 22, 1886): 707

⁶⁵⁶ "A Walk Round the Colonies." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Tuesday, May 4, 1886; Issue 6593.

⁶⁵⁷ Frank Banfield, "The Colonial and Indian Exhibition." *Time*, June 1886; 14, 18.

⁶⁵⁸ "A Walk Round the Colonies." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Tuesday, May 4, 1886; Issue 6593, emphasis mine.

The exhibition had a strongly pedagogical function; it was explicitly constructed to educate the public about the colonies and their peoples, cultures, and religions and, in turn, to enhance a belief in a unified "Greater Britain." One magazine noted that the exhibition "... cannot fail to have the most instructive and elevating effects, calculated to foster loyalty and patriotism."⁶⁵⁹ Even the "casual visitor who merely scans the more tangible and imposing evidences of the extent and wealth of Greater Britain must be sensible of an enlargement of his mental horizon,"⁶⁶⁰ noted the *Saturday Review*. In another article it called the exhibition "an object lesson on an enormous scale" and concluded that "if any man can look at this and not come away with a new and lively sense of the greatness of the country he belongs to, he must be a fellow of a very dull imagination and a very stupid temperament."⁶⁶¹ At the same time that the exhibition fostered pride in the strength and glory of the British Empire, it was ostensibly supposed to reinforce a sense of universal brotherhood. The *Liverpool Mercury* noted that the exhibition forced Britons to engage, in a way they had previously managed to avoid, with their "kinsfolk," the colonial inhabitants:

So insular are we in our views that we rarely think of a black man as a fellow subject. We forget that our Queen rules and reigns over nearly three hundred millions of coloured people. We forget that amongst our fellow subjects are millions of Mahomedans, millions of Hindus and Buddhists, and nearly every other creed under the sun. Our Exhibition has brought many of these facts to our very doors. The children of far distant lands, who live under the sway of our lady queen, are living and working with us; and if could only be arranged to have their relationship with us explained, we would all be better and wiser for it, and perhaps broader in our views.⁶⁶²

As another paper noted pedantically, "The important point is not to lose the lesson which all this should teach: we are God's stewards for a large part of this habitable globe."⁶⁶³ This emphasis on custodianship and authority was instrumental in reminding visitors of their responsibility towards the colonized peoples and countries of the exhibition.

The area devoted to Ceylon was located behind India in the South Galleries in South Kensington. As we saw in chapter two, Ceylon was often considered one of the most beautiful and resplendent of the crown's possessions.⁶⁶⁴ The Ceylon display

⁶⁵⁹ "Colonial and Indian Exhibition." *The Ragged School Union Quarterly Record* 11, no. 44 (10, 1886): 201.

⁶⁶⁰ "The Colonial and Indian Exhibition." *Saturday Review* 61, no. 1595, May 22, 1886: 707.

⁶⁶¹ "The Imperial Object Lesson." *Saturday Review*, May 8, 1886; 61, 1593.

⁶⁶² "Our Kinsfolk." *Liverpool Mercury* (Liverpool, England), Monday, July 5, 1886; Issue 12008.

⁶⁶³ "Her Majesty's Colonies." *London Quarterly Review*, Oct 1886; 7, 133; 187-190.

⁶⁶⁴ One paper wrote: "Ceylon, from whatever direction it is approached, unfolds a scene of loveliness and grandeur unsurpassed, if it be rivalled, by any land in the universe. The traveller from Bengal, leaving behind

proudly displayed the country's primary commercial products: cocoanut, cinnamon, tobacco, coffee, cinchona bark (for producing quinine), and of course tea. Yet the main emphasis of the display was creating appearance and atmosphere, not showcasing industry or agriculture: Ceylon in particular was "devoted ... to the ornamental, the curious, and interesting, even more than to the merely useful," wrote the *St. James's Gazette*.⁶⁶⁵ The display thus celebrated pride of cultural ownership as much as it celebrated Britain's control of Ceylon's commercial possibilities. The showcase of Ceylon's beauty and cultural heritage was elaborately constructed for maximum effect on the visitor. A number of large photographs as well as paintings by the famous female travel writer Miss Gordon Cumming revealed the "varied and charmingly picturesque" scenery of the island and were, as one paper noted, "sufficiently striking to excite a desire to proceed forthwith to Ceylon."⁶⁶⁶ The Ceylon area was also populated by "well-made and graceful natives clad in pure white."⁶⁶⁷

Showcasing Buddhism was an essential factor in creating a convincing atmosphere of the exotic, mysterious, and of course picturesque island country. The Ceylon area of the exhibition was thus dominated by a replica of the temple of the sacred tooth that had been carved in Ceylon, before which was seated a large statue of the Buddha, "demonstrating to all, the religion professed by the Sinhalese."⁶⁶⁸ After all, as one paper claimed, "Ceylon is one of the head-quarters of Buddhism, and a land of mystery and myth par excellence."⁶⁶⁹ One ladies' columnist described the powerful impression created by walking into the island exhibit through the wooden porch that divided it from India: one "entered the Ceylon Court through a porch of wood, most elaborately carved by Singhalese workmen in Ceylon, and said to be an exact representation of the Buddhist Temple of the "Sacred Tooth" in Kandy."⁶⁷⁰ Either side of the porch was flanked with big game trophies: a stuffed elephant, as well as leopards and elk, together with colorful tropical birds; there was also a collection of

the melancholy delta of the Ganges and the torrid coast of Coromandel, or the adventurer from Europe recently inured to the sands of Egypt and the scorched headlands of Arabia, is alike entranced by the vision of beauty which expands before him as the island rises from the sea, its lofty mountains covered by luxuriant forests, and its shores, till they meet the ripple of the waves, bright with the foliage of perpetual spring." "Colonial and Indian Exhibition," *The Morning Post*, Monday August 16, 1886, 3.

⁶⁶⁵ "The Colonial and Indian Exhibition." *St. James's Gazette*, April 22, 1886, 5.

⁶⁶⁶ "Colonial and Indian Exhibition," *The Morning Post*, Monday August 16, 1886, 3.

⁶⁶⁷ "The Prince Of Wales At The Exhibition." *The Times* (London, England), Monday, May 03, 1886; pg. 4; Issue 31749.

⁶⁶⁸ "The Colonial and Indian Exhibition." *Westminster Review*, July 1886; 126, 251.

⁶⁶⁹ "Colonial and Indian Exhibition," *The Morning Post*, Monday August 16, 1886, 3.

⁶⁷⁰ "Our Ladies' Column." *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, Saturday, June 19, 1886; Issue 11887.

elephant tusks mounted on stands of ebony and calamander. Near the Buddha was a reproduction of the gateway of Yapahu [Yapahuwa], the ancient royal residence of the Kandyan kings, "the most picturesque" of all the ruins of the exhibition, "though not so majestic of those of some others of the buried cities of the interior."⁶⁷¹ There was also a frieze painted with Singhalese representations of the 550 birth stories of Buddha.

Details described in the illustrated visitors' gift book, *Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition*, suggest the specific elements whose presence in the Ceylon display area embodied the essential characteristics of that country: the temple of the sacred tooth (including a replica of that famous relic), a mendicant priest, an enormous seated Buddha statue, and an assortment of relics and artworks depicting Buddhist themes:

The entrance to the court... is through a Kandyan porch in carved woods, flanked on either side by a dwarf wall, pierced and ornamented in the fashion of the ancient decoration of Kandy. The porch and wall are faithful representations of portions of the *Dalada Maligawa*, the Buddhist Temple of the Sacred Tooth. Underneath is placed a representation of a Buddhistic mendicant priest, clad in a torn yellow robe and holding his begging bowl. The decorations of the court have been faithfully copied, both in colour and design, from the Buddhistic art of Ceylon. Facing the entrance is a colossal figure of Buddha.... sitting in the attitude of contemplation, the representation being especially appropriate as coming from a country where the doctrines and the learning of Buddhism have been maintained in the highest purity.⁶⁷²

As the *Daily News* noted, these items were "symbolic" of Ceylon's religion: "The god Buddha, placid and squat, is the presiding deity; his sacred yellow, and the general design of the decorations of the Court are all symbolic of the ancient religion (it is said to have existed for 2,500 years) which prevails against more than a third of the human race."⁶⁷³ Details from contemporary newspaper reports add additional detail. A 10 foot tall statue of a meditating Buddha stood in front of the temple and commanded the viewer's attention: he was "seated in his well-known uncomfortable attitude, his legs tucked up under his august person, in an attitude of contemplation," noted the *Morning Post*.⁶⁷⁴ There were also "a variety of images of Buddha his gracious self, large and small, seated always and always smiling benevolently, contemplating ever, like the

⁶⁷¹ Frank Cundall, *Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, illustrated by Thomas Riley* (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1886), 36-37.

⁶⁷² Cundall, *Reminiscences*, 36-37.

⁶⁷³ "Ceylon's Isle." *Daily News* (London, England), Thursday, June 24, 1886; Issue 12544.

⁶⁷⁴ "Colonial and Indian Exhibition," *The Morning Post*, Monday August 16, 1886, 3.

wise and good natured being that he was."⁶⁷⁵ "The High Priests of Buddha of Ceylon have been equally generous in lending extraordinary relics and curios to the Ceylonese section," including a dagoba reliquary (which may have reminded visitors of the one so prominently depicted in the illustrated papers' engravings of the Prince of Wales in Kandy in 1885) as well as a facsimile of "that tremendous Buddhist relic, the tooth of Buddha, mounted on a golden lotus leaf."⁶⁷⁶ Also lent to the exhibition was a collection of Buddhist Scriptures "written on slips of the talipot leaf sumptuously bound in silver and hold." At the entrance to the temple there was a Buddhist mendicant ("the figure of a mendicant priest at the entrance is no means unlike that of a holy Franciscan friar.")⁶⁷⁷

The display of the Temple of the Tooth and the tooth relic (in reproductions) reiterated and reinforced what Britons had come to learn about Singhalese Buddhism during the extensive reporting of the Prince of Wales's visit to Ceylon in 1875. Now, 10 years later, millions of ordinary citizens could pay a modest entrance fee (there was even a reduced fee for poor families) to inspect the temple, reliquary, and tooth – just as the Prince had done. Reminiscences of the Prince of Wales's trip to Ceylon in 1875 may have also been prompted by the fact that the Prince of Wales was reported to have been particularly pleased and fascinated by the Ceylon area at the Colonial and Indian.⁶⁷⁸ Altogether, this was another decisive moment in the popularization and increasing accessibility of colonial Buddhism.

Figure 30 – "Buddhist Mendicant Priest." Cundall, *Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition*, 36.

Burma, too, was represented by various Buddhist statutes and reliquaries on display at the exhibition, sent to the exhibition by the Viceroy and the Secretary of

Figure 31 – "Ceylon Court." Cundall, *Reminiscences of the Colonial and Indian Exhibition*, 37.

⁶⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁷⁸ "The Prince Of Wales At The Exhibition. " *The Times* (London, England), Monday, May 03, 1886; pg. 4; Issue 31749.

five months after the British announced their annexation of Upper Burma.)⁶⁷⁹

Two sanctuaries were erected in the Upper Gardens with structures stripped from Ava and Mandalay and displaying a wide variety of booty - reliquaries, statues, and objects from Theebaw's court and personal collections, all of it jewel-encrusted.⁶⁸⁰ The objects also included "reliquaries to hold the teeth of Buddha or other objects of veneration."⁶⁸¹

The exhibition took pains to characterize the Buddhism of Ceylon and Burma as pristine and precious, yet ancient, unchanging, and untouched by time. Ceylon was represented by what had come to be signature symbols of its religion, especially the temple of the tooth and the tooth relic, while Burma was largely represented by reliquaries and other recently acquired spoils from Mandalay. These presentations reinforced viewers' belief that the religions of the Far East exhibited a symptomatic failure to progress. An article on the Colonial And Indian in the *Westminster Review* made explicit that Eastern religions could be dismissed on the basis of their hopeless resistance to the forces of progress and enterprise:

The complex Hindoo mythology is illustrated by images of the various gods of the Pantheon, and the gods of the Nicobarese, and the masks of the devil dancers of Ceylon, form conspicuous objects; *but these do not illustrate progress, we therefore leave them to be studied by the anthropologist and archaeologist*, and pass on to the great colonies which are so well represented, and which, from their comparative youth, show more clearly the effects of modern enterprise (emphasis mine).⁶⁸²

The popular press, too, echoed this perspective. For example, the family magazine *All the Year Round* impressed upon readers that Ceylon - and by extension its religion - was already in a state of decadence and decline:

Ceylon, too has its own particular character, with its Buddhist temples, its pearls, its cats' eyes and barbaric gems. But, in all these Eastern lands, we are in the presence of a civilisation that has reached its acme long ago, and in which decadence is more or less strongly marked.⁶⁸³

⁶⁷⁹ *Daily News* (London, England), Wednesday, September 22, 1886; Issue 12621. Madame Tussaud's premiered an exhibit on Burma in 1887 that included a replica of King Theebaw's state carriage and a collection of Buddhist statues and religious relics. "Public Amusements." *Reynolds's Newspaper* (London, England), Sunday, December 4, 1887; Issue 1947.

⁶⁸⁰ Cundall, *Reminiscences*, 33.

⁶⁸¹ "From King Theebaw's palace at Mandalay a magnificent collection of jewellery and plate has been sent to England by the Viceroy, and it has been lent to the Exhibition by the Secretary of State for India. There are gold vases of different sizes, dishes of quaint shape, some in the form of a duck, betel boxes, reliquaries to hold the teeth of Buddha or other objects of veneration, jade ornaments, daggers and swords, dresses, hats, slippers, and a State umbrella... Most of these articles are heavily set with diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, pearls, and other precious stones." "Colonial and Indian Exhibition." *The Derby Daily Telegraph*, September 21, 1886.

⁶⁸² "The Colonial And Indian Exhibition." *Westminster Review*, July 1886; 126, 251.

⁶⁸³ "The Colonial Exhibition." *All The Year Round*; Dec 31, 1887; 41, 996; British Periodicals pg. 55-56

The Colonial and Indian presented a constructed tableau that thus emphasized the pristine nature of the ancient Buddhist cultures of Ceylon and Burma, while at the same time subtly suggesting that these same cultures - and by extension their religions - were unable to keep pace with modern developments.

Almost needless to say, the Colonial and Indian obviously differs from the other shows and exhibitions in this chapter with its explicit and heavy-handed celebration of the ownership of the nations on display. As contemporaries noted, the Ceylon area was not heavily focused on trade or products, but emphasized above all the appearance, art, and religion of the island, and Buddhism was spatially and metaphorically the center of the display. Visitors were explicitly urged and expected to experience the exhibition as a display of the pomp and grandeur of all that Britain controlled. The Colonial and Indian was thus not only a celebration of the fascination and spectacle that a foreign religion could provide, but a celebration of Britain's ownership and possession of them.

4.6 Conclusions

Between 1885 and 1887 the Japanese, Ceylonese, and Colonial and Indian exhibitions provided Londoners and visitors with a series of carefully constructed exhibits of colonial and far Eastern buildings, artifacts, and bodies. Numerous scholars have detailed the way that such exhibitions used a potent mixture of entertainment, visual spectacle, and immersive experience to encourage popular support of the colonial agenda and to foster the national culture of imperialism; few, however, have explored how such exhibitions impacted popular understandings of foreign religions.

Clearly, these exhibitions heightened ordinary Britons' fascination with the religions of the colonies, particularly Buddhism, by inviting visitors to immerse themselves in a (carefully constructed, heavily fictionalized) experiential arena. In an era when leisure travel to the East was the prerogative of the ultra-wealthy, the exhibitions boasted that they could bring the religions of the colonies and the Far East to England's doorstep. In this regard, the exhibitions took distinct liberties: the exhibition organizers were free to offer visitors a constructed and carefully designed submersion into colonial worlds. As a result, however, they did undoubtedly extend interest in foreign religions to a middle- and working-class audience. (In contrast, the upper (middle) classes sometimes claimed a kind of cultural superiority when it came to such shows; the often elitist *Saturday Review* referred to "the more sensible part of

mankind which dislikes exhibitions, and the noise they make, and the mobs they collect, and the intolerable quantity of cant and gush they set going.")⁶⁸⁴

Regardless of how little the exhibitions' staging of Buddhism reflected reality, there is no doubt that they had a massive impact on the public's fascination with the subject. Hagenbeck's Ceylonese village, for example, invited thousands of curious spectators to witness the "same" perahera that, in 1879, had been exclusively staged for the Prince of Wales in Kandy and experienced only vicariously, through media reports; the Colonial and Indian welcomed millions of spectators to experience the Temple of the Tooth and a replica of the Buddha's tooth relic. At the same time, advertisements for the exhibitions reveal the ways that Buddhist and colonial entertainments were marketed and sold to the public, as well as how such shows competed with the almost endless amusements of the London metropole. Religious/ethnological entertainments were subject to the same market competition as any other form of public amusement; the result was the introduction of an unmistakably sensationalist and commercial bent. By commercial necessity, the shows emphasized the most spectacular, dramatic, aesthetic, and appealing (or repulsive) aspects of their subjects.

The exhibitions had not only an educational, but also a pedagogical imperative.⁶⁸⁵ They invited the British public not only to gawk at the exhibited bodies and objects, but also to judge them according to their own intellectual frameworks - specifically, to measure the organizers' interpretations of Buddhism against their own constructed renditions of it. More than merely observing the spectacle, visitors engaged in acts of classification, valuation, and judgment, ordering and assessing Buddhism within the framework of their own expectations. As Brenda Assael has noted, audiences "trad[ed] their shillings for the privilege of 'epistemological authority,'" engaging in "an exercise in cultural power."⁶⁸⁶ In the case of the exhibitions, audiences' exercise of epistemological authority was most evident in their heated evaluations of the authenticity or realness of idols, relics, rituals, and even human beings. The priests, mendicants, and artists imported to populate native shows became the tableau on

⁶⁸⁴ "The Imperial Object Lesson." *Saturday Review*, May 8, 1886; 61, 1593.

⁶⁸⁵ As Qureshi notes in his study of exhibits, "Such political relevance proved vital in both attracting the crowds and shaping the shows' receptions, especially since pleasure and instruction were neither mutually exclusive or necessarily confined to distinctly separate spaces. Rather, explorations of nineteenth-century entertainment, from menageries to department stores, were all sites in which social and political orders, often amenable to imperialism, were created or endorsed." Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade*, 7-8.

⁶⁸⁶ Assael, *Circus and Victorian Society*, 10.

which Englanders worked out their visions of constructed Buddhism and attempted to delineate what was, in their view, *real*. The imported priests and practitioners, rather than becoming partners in dialogue and exchange, acted merely as silent figures onto which the English could project their own conceptions of what did or did not constitute a valid interpretation or expression of Buddhism.

In addition to valuations of authenticity, the shows were analyzed on an aesthetic level. These aspects are closely intertwined; as Henriette Lidchi has noted, "Ethnographic displays are profoundly visual products, and their literalness quickens their claim to be both evidence and truth.... to be seen is to be known."⁶⁸⁷ Buddhism was reduced to a visual display, and the temples, idols, performances, and even the natives themselves who populated this visual sphere were subjected to the gaze of the audience as well as its aesthetic scrutiny. An important test of the authenticity of any display became the extent to which is satisfied the *aesthetic* criteria the British had developed for Buddhism, based on a growing visual repertoire of associated images. The heavy preponderance of certain aesthetic adjectives – specifically, the persistent repetition of "picturesque" and "grotesque" – reveals that Englanders approached Buddhism as a profoundly visual and aesthetic phenomenon, one that was simultaneously attractive and repelling.

Another important aspect of the exhibitions was their careful construction of an East that was ancient and unchanging – an effective counterpoint to the myth of British progress. Peter H. Hoffenberg has noted that imperial exhibitions bypassed countries' current states of development or modernization in order to display a partly idealized, partly denigrated past that was heavily laden with what he terms "imperialist nostalgia."⁶⁸⁸ Ethnographic displays and elaborate sets encouraged viewers to envision an India of "fantasy and tradition," Hoffenberg claims; this strategy in turn allowed the audience members to contrast the native culture with their own and to thus reaffirm their own faith in Britain's modernity and progress. In his study of the Japanese village, McLaughlin likewise observed the creation of a "striking contrast between the fragility of traditional society (the "village") and the security and solidity of an emerging

⁶⁸⁷ Henriette Lidchi, "Culture and Constraints: Further Thoughts on Ethnography and Exhibiting," *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12:1 2006, 93-114.

⁶⁸⁸ Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display*, 130; see also 155ff ("Manufacturing the Indian Past").

technological modernity (the metropolitan exhibition venue)."⁶⁸⁹ Extending these observations to the field of religion, the Victorians' stagings of Buddhism likewise reenacted an ambivalent fantasy of backwardness and grotesque idolatry, on the one hand, and the ancient spiritual purity of the East on the other. In its reflection on the Colonial and Indian Exhibition, for example, *The Times* wrote in raptures of the way that the exhibits preserved the "pristine purity" of the "unchanging" East and thus offered the visitor a panacea against the whirlwind of modern life in industrialized Britain:

The exhibition must be seen for its unique fascination to be understood. At a single step the visitor is carried from the wild, mad whirl of the individual competitive struggle for existence to which civilization has been reduced in the ever-changing West into the stately splendour of that unchanging antique life of the East, the tradition which has been preserved in pristine purity...⁶⁹⁰

The inclusion of the colonies' religious traditions in the exhibits and exhibitions was crucial because it enabled visitors to see first-hand how Buddhism (backwards, idolatrous, stultifying) was symptomatic of the stagnant East, while Christianity (progressive, muscular, industrious) was the natural religion of the ever-changing West. For this reason, the shows exhibited those aspects of Buddhism that were most likely to convey the impression that Buddhism was primal idol worship: elaborate temples, "hideous" idols and bronze gods, and riotous reliquary processions with devil dancers and drums (instead of, say, a display of a monk in a simple yellow robe shown studying, copying sutras, and meditating quietly). This reinforced existing stereotypes about Buddhism and in turn reinforced the visitors' belief in the authenticity of the shows.⁶⁹¹

Finally, the exhibitions flaunted the power relationships between Britain and Ceylon and Burma and asserted proprietary ownership over the colonies and, by extension, over Buddhism. Such exhibitions were "the spectacular visual stage upon which imperial power was enacted," as one scholar notes.⁶⁹² David Ciarlo, for example, has written of what he diagnoses as an "exhibitionary complex," a form of

⁶⁸⁹ McLaughlin notes: the exhibitions "functioned to stage a contrast between past and present that helped Londoners to see themselves as modern." McLaughlin, "'The Japanese Village' and the Metropolitan Construction of Modernity," 4, 19.

⁶⁹⁰ "Indian Art At The Colonial And Indian Exhibition." *The Times*, Saturday, May 22, 1886; 5.

⁶⁹¹ As Anne Dreesbach has insightfully noted: "Hand in Hand mit der Bestätigung der Stereotypen ging die Betonung der Authentizität der gezeigten Gruppen. Denn das Publikum wollte glauben, dass das, was es in den Schaustellungen zu sehen bekam, 'echt' war. Und echt war das Dargebotene, weil es dem eigenen Vorurteil entsprach und weil die Veranstalter betonten, dass alles 'authentisch' sei." Dreesbach, *Gezähmte Wilde*, 149.

⁶⁹² Saloni Mathur, *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 11.

veritable neurosis that "drove Europeans to arrange the bewildering multiplicity of the world into discrete and comprehensible parts, and then display these parts as a way to showcase their own cultural power."⁶⁹³ The native villages and exhibitions explored in this chapter reveal Britons' ongoing attempts to come to terms with the "bewildering multiplicity" of religions in their possessions, their struggle to understand these foreign religions that they now owned, but simultaneously to assert their hegemonic power over them as well as their right to classify, organize, and delineate them.

⁶⁹³ David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 27.

5 Colonial Buddhism II: Burmese Buddhism (1885/1886)

Be it remembered that Buddhism has held undisputed sway in Burma for centuries: Buddhism, whose morality is said to rival that of Christianity, the religion of humanity and charity and sympathy!... the worst government in the worst days of modern Christendom is immeasurably above such a government as that of Burma. Whatever the abstract excellence of Buddhist precepts, we look in vain for their practical fruits.

All The Year Round, November 21, 1885.⁶⁹⁴

"Another empire gone,"⁶⁹⁵ noted one family magazine almost wistfully in 1886, the year that finally settled the Burmese Question and completed the piecemeal dismantling of Burma that Britain had started in the 1820s.⁶⁹⁶ For decades, longstanding tensions in Burma had been compounded by rapidly deteriorating relations with King Thibaw and his government; the situation culminated ultimately in a two-week war and the fall of Mandalay into British hands on November 29, 1885.⁶⁹⁷ The 28-year old king was quickly deposed by the advancing British and exiled to India; he was never permitted to return to his country.⁶⁹⁸ ("Theebaw's government fell at a touch," boasted *The Saturday Review*, "and for a short time it seemed as if Upper Burmah was to be annexed with as little opposition as an uninhabited island in the South Pacific."⁶⁹⁹) The impact on the British popular media was immediate and significant: the acquisition of Upper Burma in the winter of 1885/1886 thrust the little-known country into the media spotlight and produced a surge of reports about the country, its culture, and its notoriously "savage" King Thibaw. Few facets of the country were as conspicuous, or proved as fascinating to readers, as the country's prevalent expressions of Buddhism. During the early period of reporting, many media sources presented a picturesque, charming, but often stereotypical and one-dimensional picture of Burmese Buddhist life to an eager and curious reading public.

⁶⁹⁴ "Burmah and the Burmese." *All The Year Round*; Nov 21, 1885; 37, 886; 276-283.

* Throughout this chapter I use the designation Burma instead of Myanmar, reflecting 19th century usage. However, I use the now-common modern spellings for Thibaw, and for terms such as *Thāthanābaing* and *pongyi*, because the original sources are so inconsistent in their spelling.

⁶⁹⁵ "Another Empire Gone." *Bow Bells: A magazine of general literature and art for family reading*; Mar 10, 1886; 44, 1128; 283.

⁶⁹⁶ Britain gradually assumed control over Burma in what are now referred to as the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824 to 1826), the Second Anglo-Burmese War (1842 to 1853), and the Third Anglo-Burmese War, covered in this chapter, which started in November 1885.

⁶⁹⁷ See Thant Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), and Ernest C.T. Chew, "The Fall of the Burmese Kingdom in 1885: Review and Reconsideration." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 10, no. 02 (September 1979): 372-80.

⁶⁹⁸ These events are detailed e.g. in Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma*, 1-3 and in Nicholas Tarling, *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia: Volume 2, The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge University Press, 1992) 38-41.

⁶⁹⁹ "Burmah." *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 62, no. 1626 (Dec 25, 1886): 833.

Pagodas and temples were ubiquitous and resplendent; native Buddhists monks were lazy and indolent but cheerful and good-hearted. As tensions in the country mounted, however, there was a pivotal shift in the press's reporting on Burma, and its assertions about Buddhism shifted in tone as well. Increasingly, Buddhism became part of a negatively drawn portrait of the Burmese that was intended to undermine confidence in Burmese native rule and foster popular and political support for annexation. After 1886, the intensity of the Burmese resistance (instigated in no small part by Buddhist monks) and the atrocities reportedly committed by King Thibaw proved especially difficult for Britons to reconcile with their understanding of Buddhism's ethical mandates. This chapter examines the popular media's portrayal of Buddhism in the years preceding and following the acquisition of Upper Burma, demonstrating how media representations of Burmese Buddhism could be employed for a range of strategic purposes ranging from the commercial to the colonial.

5.1 Burma: The Unknown Colony

Britain's relations with Burma were longstanding and complex: throughout the nineteenth century, the British had used commercial treaties to secure informal control over both Lower and Upper Burma.⁷⁰⁰ Yet Burma had never been a focal point for media attention or public interest; in comparison with India and Ceylon, the public's knowledge and interest in the country were minimal.⁷⁰¹ Even the visit of a Burmese embassy to England and Europe in 1871 did little to raise the profile of the country in Britain or elsewhere.⁷⁰² The situation remained unchanged even as tensions mounted and the Burmese Question became more critical: "British Burma is one of the least known portions of our Eastern Empire," the *London Quarterly Review* asserted in 1878;⁷⁰³ as *The Spectator* noted in 1884, the Burmese are "a people less known in England than any race in Asia."⁷⁰⁴ What little was known seems to have been of a

⁷⁰⁰ Myint-U, *Making of Modern Burma*, 137. Myint-U notes elsewhere: "The history of Anglo-Burmese relations over the thirty years or so between the second and third wars might be best seen as a failed attempt to reach some kind of mutual accommodation. On the one side were Burmese desires to preserve at least some measure of national sovereignty and pride. On the other were British desires to achieve a suitable local framework within which commercial and, to a lesser extent, strategic interests might be promoted and protected" (126).

⁷⁰¹ Deborah Deacon Boyer notes, "Burma was considered an uneventful backwater, worthy of little attention in Britain." "Picturing the Other: Images of Burmans in Imperial Britain." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 214–226, 214.

⁷⁰² Myint-U, *Making of Modern Burma*, 139.

⁷⁰³ "Burma, Past and Present, with Personal Reminiscences of the Country." *London Quarterly Review*, July 1878; 284.

⁷⁰⁴ Untitled. *The Spectator*, January 19, 1884, 3.

largely stereotypical nature: "Burma is known in England mainly as a country where rice is exported, where heat, water, and mud abound, where mosquitoes are plentiful, where the ladies wear a picturesque but not too ample costume, and where a dissolute young monarch has spent most of his time in drinking and murdering his relatives, followers, and servitors," one paper asserted.⁷⁰⁵ Burma was until recently, "by many otherwise well-instructed persons, looked upon merely as a sort of unwholesome swamp which produced certain cargoes," noted *The Examiner*.⁷⁰⁶ The public's vague knowledge of Burma, its reputation as mysterious and unknown Eastern kingdom, and the lack of available studies of the country meant that the media's reporting on Burma played an especially influential role in shaping public opinion.

For all its imperial spirit, the wider public seems to have been caught unawares by the military takeover of Upper Burma. "The bewildered inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland will read with astonishment and dismay the telegram from Calcutta ... pointing strongly to the belief that we are upon the eve of a third [Burmese] war!" exclaimed one paper.⁷⁰⁷ The speed of the takeover contributed to this avowed sense of surprise. Even Parliament members seemed to have lost track of their expanding empire, as revealed by a contemporary anecdote: "It is said that a member of Parliament hearing of British Burma, remarked: 'I had a cousin out there for some time. But he always called in *Bermuda*.'"⁷⁰⁸ Yet in the midst of their alleged surprise, most sources simultaneously expressed a strong sense of the inevitability of complete British rule in the country. There was considerable talk of "destiny" with respect to Britain's actions in Burma (e.g. "the struggle which was destined... to add a province to the Empire"),⁷⁰⁹ and the acquisition met with almost no political or popular resistance at home.

By the mid 1880s, however, as the government debated the respective merits of acquisition or a protectorate, Britons' curiosity about Burma and its inhabitants

⁷⁰⁵ "The Crisis in Burma." *The Graphic*, October 31, 1885, 489.

⁷⁰⁶ "Our Burmese Wars." *Examiner* no. 3757 (Jan 31, 1880): 146-148

⁷⁰⁷ Clifford-Lloyd, C. "Burmah and the Burmese." *Dublin University Magazine* 86, no. 515 (November 1875): 584-589.

⁷⁰⁸ "The Latest Addition to our Empire." *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*; May 1886: 362-371. (This caused the *Morning Post* to note: "Whether or not there is any member of the present House of Commons who supposes that Bermuda and Burma are synonymous terms, as a certain popular representative is related to have done on one occasion, there is no doubt that before the despatch [sic] of the recent expedition to Mandalay a very general ignorance prevailed in this country with regard to Burma and its people." "Burma." *Morning Post*, Tuesday August 17, 1886.)

⁷⁰⁹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, Tuesday April 13, 1897.

increased noticeably. *The Examiner* noted: "Lately... it would almost appear that the body of the public had become aware of the existence of British Burma, and even to take an occasional, though, of course, a very languid interest in it."⁷¹⁰ Or as *The Speaker* would note after the fact: "However adversely the annexation of Upper Burma to the British Empire may have affected Theebaw's fate, there can be no question that it has increased the interest which Englishmen feel in the country."⁷¹¹ The impending takeover generated, almost overnight, an avid audience for new information about Burma. The popular media scrambled to provide the reading public with information about the country's people and cultures – and of course, its religion.

5.2 Colonial and Missionary Representations of Burmese Buddhism

Before diving into the mass media sources, it is important to appreciate that until the mid-1880s, there had been an almost complete dearth of information about Burmese Buddhism available to the public. The available printed works on Burma were especially paltry; as one paper remarked, "Few books have ever been written about [Burma], and few of these are worth reading."⁷¹² Another asserted, "The history of Burma yet remains to be written, and the materials are so scanty and conflicting that the task would not be easily achieved."⁷¹³ For many years, the only volumes available on Burma and its people were those published by colonial administrators or missionaries. Works in the former camp included *British Burma and its People*, by Captain C.J.F.S. Forbes (1878), General Albert Fytche's two-volume set of *Burma Past and Present* (1878), and Sir Arthur Phayre's *History of Burma* (1883).⁷¹⁴ Both Phayre and Fytche had served as chief commissioners of Burma (from 1862 to 1867 and from 1867 to 1871, respectively), and their interest in the practice of Buddhism in that country was largely only a corollary of their concerns with maintaining administrative control of a country that offered rich resources, profitable trade, and a gateway to China. Information on Burmese Buddhism in these monographs relies almost wholly

⁷¹⁰ "Our Burmese Wars." *Examiner* no. 3757 (Jan 31, 1880): 146-148

⁷¹¹ "Three Books on Burma." *The Speaker: The Liberal Review* 15, (Apr 24, 1897): 461-462.

⁷¹² St Barbe, H. L. "Our Trip to Burmah." *Calcutta Review* 66, no. 132, April 1878: 367-389.

⁷¹³ "England and Ava." *Cornhill Magazine* 40, no. 236, August 1879,: 213-224

⁷¹⁴ Captain C. J. F. S. Forbes, *British Burma and its People* (London: John Murray, 1878). Reviewed in: "British Burma." *The Examiner*; Dec 7, 1878; 3697; 1558-1559 and "Some Books About Burmah." *Calcutta Review*; Apr 1878; 66, 132, 367-389. Albert Fytche, *Burma Past and Present; With Personal Reminiscences of the Country* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878) and "Burma." *Fortnightly Review*, April 1879, 627-635. For an analysis of Fytche's role in demanding commercial concessions from the Burmese and thus dramatically increasing tensions in the decade before the takeover, see Thant Myint-U, *Making of Modern Burma*, 136. Arthur Purves Phayre, *History of Burma: Including Burma Proper, Pegu, Taungu, Tenasserim, and Arakan: From the Earliest Time to the End of the First War with British India* (London: Trübner & Co., 1883).

on existing European studies of Buddhism, rather than on personal observation or exchange. Fytche's volume, for example, contains a whole chapter on Buddhism, but it consists mainly of clobbered-together quotations from Spence Hardy, Rhys-Davids, and others. Like his sources, Fytche emphasizes Buddhist cosmology and history; there is almost no discussion of contemporary customs or worship – nor any recognition of the importance of Buddhism to the position of the monarchy and hence the governance of the country. Phayre, likewise, is interested only in the role of Buddhism in the country's history, not in its contemporary expression. Forbes's *British Burma and its People*, in contrast, paints a more colorful and considerably more positive view of the Burmese religion and claims an unusual (for its time) interest in understanding "Buddhism as it presents itself to the mind of an ordinarily educated Burman."⁷¹⁵ As Forbes notes, he is the first to even attempt to fill an obvious gap in available information: "Buddhism has not been considered, in special connection with Burma, in books now generally accessible to the public, although in the opinion of the Burmese this widespread religion in its purest form is now to be found in that country."⁷¹⁶ Forbes also acknowledged the importance of studying contemporary forms of the faith, rather than historical texts, if one wanted to understand the Burmese people: "it is only by carefully considering what follows that a real conception of the religion—nay, of the very character—of the people can be arrived at."⁷¹⁷ Still, Forbes discredits the very tradition he wants to describe with repeated negative assessments, such as his insistence that Buddhism is "complicated and absurd"⁷¹⁸ and an atheist religion (a common assertion)⁷¹⁹ as well as claiming that it "his religion, if it can be called such, has apparently little influence on the Burman's mode of thought and life."⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁵ Forbes, *British Burma and its People*, 300.

⁷¹⁶ *ibid.*, Preface, vii. Later he notes: "But the Lamaism of Tibet, the mixtures of Confucianism in China, and Hinduism in Ceylon, with the ancient Buddhism which form the ordinary religious faith of those countries, have little in common with the creed of Gaudama Buddha as we may suppose it was held and practiced by his immediate followers. To find the nearest approach to this we must search in the Indo-Chinese countries, and more particularly in the Burman Peninsula, which received the Buddhist faith and scriptures about A.D. 409, and has preserved them almost uncorrupted to the present day" (301).

⁷¹⁷ *ibid.*, 300.

⁷¹⁸ *ibid.*, 300.

⁷¹⁹ "It will perhaps be best, before we advance any farther, to state broadly and clearly that the Buddhists of Burma do not worship Gaudama or his image as a deity, nor are the multitude of images seen near pagodas and monasteries gods. So far is the Burman from having a multiplicity of deities that, in our sense of the word, he believes in no God at all." Forbes, *British Burma and its People*, 300.

⁷²⁰ *ibid.*, 321.

Dedicated studies on Burmese Buddhism were almost non-existent at the time. At the end of the century the authority on the subject remained the Catholic Bishop Ambrose Bigandet (1813-1894), whose mid-century work on *The Life or Legend of Gaudama*, although originally printed in 1858, remained a standard reference throughout the century.⁷²¹ Newer information on the country's religion was so slow in coming that Bigandet's work was recommended by *The Saturday Review* as late as the 1880s to readers interested in the subject.⁷²² Bigandet's two-volume work is a study of Burmese textual sources, rather than a report on contemporary expressions of Buddhism in the country; and as Charles Hallisey has noted, he takes significant liberties in reinterpreting those Burmese sources.⁷²³ Far from considering the Buddhist monks to be an authority on their own religion, he claims that the Burmese hold incorrect and inaccurate views of Buddhism and laments their (to his mind) inability to articulate their own religious views:

Their mind is of the narrowest compass. Though bound by their profession to study, with particular care, the various tenets of their creed and all that relates to Buddhism, they are sadly deficient in this respect. They have no ardour for study. ... There is no vigor in their intellect, no comprehensiveness in their mind, no order or connection in their ideas, their reading is of a desultory nature; and the notions stored up in their memory, are at once incoherent, imperfect, and, too often, very limited. *They possess no general nor correct views of Buddhism. I never met with one who could embrace the whole system in his mind and give a tolerably accurate account of it* (emphasis mine).⁷²⁴

In addition, Bigandet's depictions of the Burmese often highlight their supposed laziness, crudeness, and moral deficiencies. Bigandet's limited discussion of contemporary forms of Buddhist worship in Burma, as well as his characterization of the Burmese as race, is typical of the extremely negative and derogatory tone of mid-century missions; as Helen Trager has demonstrated, such negative characterizations can be found in most missionary accounts of the period.⁷²⁵

⁷²¹ Paul Ambrose Bigandet, *The Life or Legend of Gaudama: The Buddha of the Burmese* (Rangoon, 1858. Second edition Rangoon, American Mission Press, 1866).

⁷²² "Legend of the Burmese Buddha." *Saturday Review* 49, no. 1269 (Feb 21, 1880): 255-256. The journal praises Bigandet, who is deemed to have "approached his work in the most enlightened and impartial spirit... [Bigandet] sets forth the virtues of Buddhism with candour, and censures its errors and deficiencies with a firm though gentle tone." The article's quotations from the work suggest general agreement with Bigandet's ambivalent assessments: "Though based on capital and revolting errors, Buddhism teaches a surprising number of the finest precepts and purest moral truths. From the abyss of its almost unfathomable darkness it sends forth rays of the brightest hue," etc.

⁷²³ On Bigandet's translations/interpretations and his use of Burmese sources see Hallisey, "Roads Taken and Not Taken," 40-41.

⁷²⁴ Bigandet, *Life or Legend of Gaudama*, 531-533.

⁷²⁵ Helen G. Trager, *Burma Through Alien Eyes: Missionary Views of the Burmese in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1966), especially 91ff.

Bigandet's work was joined in 1883 by the volume *Short Chapters on Buddhism, Past and Present* by J. H. Titcomb, the first Anglican Bishop of Rangoon.⁷²⁶ The work was published by the Religious Tract Society as the first in a series of books for a general readership on the religions of the East. Titcomb's publishers anticipated a larger audience – it was heavily advertised in newspapers and family papers – and the book was generally deemed "in every respect admirable" by its reviewers.⁷²⁷ Despite the title's promise to focus on both the *Past and Present* of Buddhism, however, Titcomb devotes almost no attention to describing his interactions with the Buddhists of Burma - he covers the history, mythology, teachings, and morality of historical Buddhism but offers almost no discussion of his own experiences among the Burmese people.⁷²⁸ Titcomb's earlier memoir of his time as Bishop, *Personal Recollections of British Burma and Its Church Mission Work* (1880), published by the SPG, likewise describes only one disappointing encounter with a Buddhist priest, as a result of whose complete disinterest in Christianity the bishop is inspired to write a tract on Christianity and to have it translated into Burmese for circulation among the monks.⁷²⁹ Both works are remarkable for the absence of any accounts of interactions with local Buddhists, or any descriptions of local religious habits and customs. This may well have been a direct reflection of the historical situation: Trevor Ling goes so far as to assert that there was an "almost total absence of communication or knowledge between the two communities, the Buddhist Sangha and the Christian missionaries."⁷³⁰ (This would make these personal elements and encounters, when they began to appear in the popular media, all the more interesting and novel to readers at home.)

In fact, British Christian missions to Burma were late in coming and limited in scope; as a result, Burma also received considerably less attention than other missionary destinations in English religious publications and missionary magazines.⁷³¹

⁷²⁶ Titcomb, Jonathan Holt. *Short Chapters on Buddhism, Past and Present* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1883).

⁷²⁷ "Advertisement." *The Leisure Hour*, Jan.1877-Oct.1903 (01, 1884): 5. See also the review in "Literature." *Glasgow Herald*, Saturday, January 5, 1884; Issue 5.

⁷²⁸ One of the few surprising aspects of the work is that Bishop Titcomb asserts, on the basis of his personal observations, that Nirvana should actually be understood as a state of "emancipation" – even of "undisturbed tranquility and happiness under unknown conditions" – rather than annihilation. Titcomb, *Short Chapters*, 68.

⁷²⁹ Titcomb, *Personal Recollections of British Burma and Its Church Mission Work* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton and Co (Published for the SPG, Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts), 1880), 17.

⁷³⁰ Trevor Ling, *Buddhism, Imperialism and War: Burma and Thailand in Modern History* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979), 66.

⁷³¹ Jörg Schendel notes, "Whereas Roman Catholic priests had been in Burma for centuries, the ministers of the Anglican Church entered Lower Burma only in the wake of British soldiers." Jörg Schendel, "Christian

When Burmese missions were discussed, Burmese Buddhists were often characterized as intractable heathens who confounded the British missionaries' attempts at conversion (a view that was frequently asserted by the missionaries and then repeated in Christian media sources back home). Titcomb had reflected in his memoirs, for example, on the Buddhist's stubborn conviction of the superiority of their creed vis-à-vis Christianity:

The greatest difficulty we meet with arises from the fact that Buddhism has been rooted in the soil for upwards of 2,000 years, and therefore lies in the hearts of the people with all the veneration which is due to its antiquity and many immemorial sanctions. It is a religion, moreover, which in spite of its atheistic hopelessness and childish superstitions, is both astute and philosophical. Add to which it has a morality that commends itself to every upright conscience. This gives an immobility of temper to the Buddhists which appears to justify them in asking, "What can we desire better?"⁷³²

The Christian media often expressed its incomprehension at the Burmese people's lack of openness to the Christian gospel. "Whatever may be the defects of the Buddhist faith, to the Burmese it is thoroughly comprehensible; whereas the mysteries of our own, the missionaries are unable to explain to his inquiring mind," noted the *Dublin University Magazine*, reflecting on the failure of missions in the country in 1875.⁷³³ This awareness was echoed in numerous sources: "The devoted labours of Anglican, Roman, and Baptist missionaries for a couple of decades have been almost resultless, even in persuading the Burman of the hopelessness of his creed," noted *Cornhill Magazine* several years later.⁷³⁴ "It is impossible to convert a true Buddhist," *All The Year Round* family magazine asserted in 1885, nothing that in Burma, "Missionaries amongst the Karens and Cossyahs [people groups] have been successful, for these people have no religion, but they have proved a failure amongst the Burmese and Hindoos."⁷³⁵ Occasionally this tendency was chalked up to the general indolence of the Burmese character: "The Burman is rarely in a hurry, and he is never so leisurely as in changing his religion," reported the Christian family magazine *The Sunday at Home*.⁷³⁶ As one contemporary source on Burma noted, "Buddhist are not by any means easily

Missionaries in Upper Burma, 1853–85." *South East Asia Research* 7, no. 1 (1999): 61–91, 75. For a more contemporaneous view see W. C. B. Purser, *Christian Missions in Burma* (Westminster: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1911).

⁷³² Titcomb, *Personal Recollections*, 18.

⁷³³ C. Clifford-Lloyd, "Burmah and the Burmese." *Dublin University Magazine*, 86, no. 515 (November 1875): 584-589.

⁷³⁴ Schway Yoe (George Scott), "Buddhists and Buddhism in Burma." *The Cornhill Magazine*; December 1880; 42, 252; 721-731.

⁷³⁵ "Burmah and the Burmese." *All The Year Round*, November 21, 1885; 37, 886; 276-283.

⁷³⁶ "Among the Burmans." *The Sunday at Home: A Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading*, January 01, 1896: 695-702

argued out of their faith into another. To judge by the way pagodas and monasteries are founded and kept up, the hold of Buddhism is not very much shaken even in Rangoon."⁷³⁷ The perceived stubbornness of the Buddhist laypeople and priests in Burma, and their apparent disinterest in the gospel of the Christian missionaries, thus confounded the reading public as well as the missionaries and led to a belief that Buddhists were simply inconvertible.

After the takeover, some sources expressed an incautious optimism that "a new chapter in Burmese Christian missions" was just around the corner, as did *The Quarterly Review* in 1887; after all, the paper asserted, "Where Buddhism is impotent - namely, in providing for the wants of man's spiritual nature, Christianity is strong; and where Buddhism is strong - namely in ethical truth and inspiration, Christianity is incomparably stronger."⁷³⁸ The SPG made a special appeal for Upper Burmah after the conquest, using language rich with intentionally militaristic metaphors: "The way is now open for the re-occupation of Mandalay in the name of Christ," the society boasted in a prominently-placed advertisement in *The Times*: "From this centre the Gospel should spread over the whole region."⁷³⁹ The 1885 political and military conquest was thus optimistically interpreted by mission societies as a positive harbinger of a religious conquest to come (this did not prove to be the case).⁷⁴⁰ There was also a notable contradiction between the increased aggressiveness of missionary efforts after the takeover and the new British administration's post-1886 reassurances to the leaders of the Buddhist *sangha* that they would not interfere with their traditional structures and observances.⁷⁴¹

In sum, the works generated by both the colonial administrators as well as the Christian missionaries to Burma created the foundation of imperial-colonial knowledge that was available to readers in England before the acquisition of Upper Burma in 1885. With respect to their views on Buddhism, both types of sources share a

⁷³⁷ Archibald R. Colquhoun, *Burma and the Burmans: or, "The Best Unopened Market in the World."* (London, Field and Tuer, 1885), 48.

⁷³⁸ "The Religion of Burmah." *London Quarterly Review*, January 1887; 7, 134.

⁷³⁹ Advertisement in *The Times*, 20 March 1886: 14.

⁷⁴⁰ Missionaries had been restrained under rule of the Burmese monarchy; the removal of King Thibaw seemed to thus herald new opportunities for missionaries to act more freely in the country. Schendel notes: "Burmese latitude towards, and often support for, missionary activity was larger than ever under King Mindon (1853-78) and King Thibaw (1878-85). Even so, particularly Protestant missionaries longed for more freedom. ... And the hope that altered circumstances would favour conversion eventually led to almost universal missionary support for British annexation" (Schendel, "Christian Missionaries in Upper Burma," 63).

⁷⁴¹ Alicia Turner, *Saving Buddhism: The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 10-15.

prioritization of Buddhism's (text-derived) philosophical and historical foundations over contemporary forms and practices. There was a general conviction that modern Burmese Buddhism was corrupt and degenerate, compounded by a belief that the Burmese themselves possessed only a limited and inaccurate understanding of the tenets of their own creed. These views were often buttressed by the authors' negative racial characterizations and reliance on orientaling stereotypes. As we will see in the next section, it would take an influx of reporting from journalists, illustrators, special correspondents and others writing for a general audience to offer the British public more detailed and colorful accounts of the monks and laypeople of Burma. These media accounts were, however, themselves in no way free from value judgments or imperial sentiments.

5.3 Popular Media and Burmese Buddhism

Throughout the winter of 1885-1886, the reading public was increasingly inundated with media reports about its newest possession. Catering to the public's curiosity and quickening interest in Burma, journalists were eager to supply a steady stream of lively popular interest pieces on the country. In the months between the two-week Anglo-Burman war in November 1885 and the official pronouncement of annexation in January 1886, newspapers churned out military news bulletins even as the popular and illustrated presses produced a wide range of human-interest stories about the country's people, landscape, and traditions. These articles, focusing on subjects ranging widely from Burmese folk tales to festivals to dramatic arts, are strongly marked by a shift away from informing and missionizing towards entertainment and popular interest.⁷⁴² Even as frictions increased and military action seemed inevitable, the popular press continued to focus on reports that highlighted exotic details, travel narratives, and anecdotes about the people and sights of the land. Illustrated magazines such as the *Graphic* and the *Illustrated London News* used a heavy saturation of vivid engravings to make Burma come alive to readers.⁷⁴³ The

⁷⁴² For a general discussion of the popular media's portrayal of Burma in this period, see Deborah Deacon Boyer, "Picturing the Other: Images of Burmans in Imperial Britain," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 214–226. Deacon describes in detail the increasingly negative racial and cultural stereotyping of the Burmese after the takeover. My own analysis concentrates on religious aspects, which Deacon does not consider.

⁷⁴³ Of course the selling point of these papers are rich illustrations, which normally took clear precedence over the text, and the articles on Burma that we examine in this section adhere to this principle of visual dominance. As Andrea Korda notes, the illustrations in the *Graphic* "often exceeded the meanings offered by their accompanying texts and demonstrated the greater communicative power of the image." Korda, *Printing and Painting the News*, 56.

Illustrated London News focused almost exclusively on celebratory scenes of colonial conquest, engravings of military actions, and full-page spreads of, for example, King Thibaw being escorted from his palace. The *Graphic*, however, tended to focus on travel guide-esque pieces, and this chapter thus focuses heavily on that magazine. Buddhism was often highlighted in these reports as one of the most conspicuous features of the country and foremost among its most captivating facets.

The remainder of this chapter analyzes popular media representations of Buddhism in Burma before and after the acquisition, and is divided into four parts. In the first, I examine articles that fulfill a (vicarious) Burmese travel guide function by describing and illustrating pagodas, monasteries, and festivals. In these articles, Burmese Buddhism was essential to conveying to readers a sense of the aesthetic landscape of the country and portraying Burma as an appealing, beguiling land that constituted a valuable addition to the empire. Second, I examine the increasingly personal portraiture (both textual and visual) of Buddhist monks and laypeople; frequently, these took the form of "humorous" or "picturesque" anecdotes, stories, and engravings and that were often simultaneously indulgent and dismissive in their stance towards their subjects. Third, I turn to the enigmatic figure of "Shway Yoe," a.k.a. colonial administrator George Scott, whose books and articles on Burma were instrumental in providing contemporaries with what they (at least initially) believed was an authentic insider's perspective on Burma through the eyes of a young Buddhist and a Burmese national. Finally, I address a number of articles that espouse a vehemently negative view of Burmese Buddhism, using attacks on Buddhism as a strategy to advance negative racial stereotypes and ultimately justify British rule in the country.

5.3.1 *The Land of the Golden Pagodas*

During the high noon of imperialism, the exotic lands of the Empire proved endlessly fascinating to metropolitan audiences.⁷⁴⁴ Burma, in particular, regaled the British eye with scenes of temples, pagodas, and golden Buddhas, and journalists and administrators were eager to capture the splendor of the country to tantalize readers back home. Almost all media representations rely heavily on exotic descriptions of

⁷⁴⁴ For a study of relevant travel writing, see Stephen L. Keck, "Picturesque Burma: British Travel Writing 1890-1914," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Oct., 2004), 387-414.

glittering golden pagodas, spectacular festivals, array of gods and idols, and armies of yellow-robed monks to create a visual and discursive portrait of Burma. "The feature of the landscape in Burma which first strikes the visitor is the vast number of Buddhist shrines which dote the whole face of the country," the *Graphic* attested.⁷⁴⁵ The "great feature" of Burma, wrote one newspaper, was "the number of pagodas and monasteries scattered over the land."⁷⁴⁶ It was the ubiquitousness of the pagodas, as well as their dramatic golden domes, that impressed the British: "the country is covered by pagodas," wrote the *Graphic*.⁷⁴⁷ (There was even a popular saying at the time: that the chief products of Burma were "pohn-gyees, pariah-dogs, and pagodas."⁷⁴⁸) The emphasis on the Buddhist-ness of Burma prompted uneasy reflection on the comparative Christian-ness of Britain; as the *Sunday at Home* family magazine admitted, the density of pagodas in Burma outstripped the frequency of churches on English soil.⁷⁴⁹ "In Burma the pagodas are everywhere," it wrote; "...in the depth of the jungle; on every hill or hillock top; perched on the seemingly inaccessible crags; fringing the banks of the Irrawaddy from the defiles of Bhamo to the rice-fields of the Delta; among the hills of Aracan, and inland to the confines of Siam, the pagoda spires, golden, white, or grey, point heavenwards."⁷⁵⁰

The country's largest and most impressive temples and religious structures naturally received the most praise and elaborate descriptions in the media. In this sense the popular media often functioned as an armchair travel guide for Britons at home, who experienced their expanding empire vicariously through the celebratory reports of the journalists. These Buddhist structures were naturally also attractive targets for illustrators; articles in both the *Graphic* and the *Illustrated London News*, for example, printed engravings of the Atumashi monastery in Mandalay, known by the British as the "incomparable pagoda."⁷⁵¹ The explanatory descriptions accompanying the engravings describe the architectural features of the buildings and emphasize their

⁷⁴⁵ "Some Burmese Buddhist Shrines." *Moring Post*, Friday November 8, 1889, 5.

⁷⁴⁶ "Personal Recollections of Burma." *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, Friday December 18, 1885.

⁷⁴⁷ "The Crisis in Burma - II." *The Graphic*, Saturday November 14, 1885, 545.

⁷⁴⁸ E. M. Clerke, "Burma and the Farther East." *The Dublin Review*, 1836-1910 15, no. 2 (04, 1886): 309-340, 310.

⁷⁴⁹ A. H. Finn, "Burmese Pagodas." *The Sunday at Home: A Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading* no. 1902 (Oct 11, 1890): 789-794.

⁷⁵⁰ A. H. Finn, "Burmese Pagodas." *The Sunday at Home: A Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading* no. 1902 (Oct 11, 1890): 789-794.

⁷⁵¹ "The Campaign in Upper Burma – Mandalay Under British Rule." *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, February 26, 1887; Issue 900. "The Incomparable Pagoda," or the Dhobies' Ghaut, Mandalay. "Sketches in Burma: By Captain C. Pulley, 3rd Ghoorka Regiment." *The Illustrated London News*, 1887.

grandeur and splendor, providing the kind of historical and architectural detail that a reader would expect from a travel guide.⁷⁵²

Figure 32 "The Incomparable Pagoda" (Atumashi monastery) "The Campaign in Upper Burma – Mandalay Under British Rule." *The Graphic*, Saturday, February 26, 1887; Issue 900.

Figure 33 "The Incomparable Pagoda," or the Dhobies' Ghaut, Mandalay. "Sketches in Burma: By Captain C. Pulley, 3rd Ghoorka Regiment." *The Illustrated London News*, 1887.

Journalists strove to outdo one another with their superlative-laden descriptions of the country's religious buildings. The magnificent Shwe Dagon pagoda was understandably praised as "lofty and beautiful" with its coating of gold, for example; the *Morning Post* description of the structure is littered with superlatives such as "magnificent" and "marvellous," and "glittering in the sun."⁷⁵³ The *Graphic's* article on the crisis in Burma in late 1885 likewise describes the pagoda as "glittering" and unforgettable:

The Shway Dagon Poyah, or Golden Dagon Pagoda, of Rangoon is the largest and most celebrated in Burma, or rather in Indo-China. Pilgrims come hither from all parts of Burma, even from Yunnan, in Southern China. It is a commanding and graceful edifice, standing on one of the last spurs of the Pegu Yoma range, and is visible for a long distance around. When seen on a clear day, glittering in the sun, it is a sight not to be forgotten.⁷⁵⁴

Figure 34 Entrance to the "Shway Dagon" Pagoda, Rangoon.
"The Crisis in Burma - II." *The Graphic*, Saturday November 14, 1885, 545.

⁷⁵² For example, the explanation accompanying the illustration in the *Graphic* reads: "The Incomparable Pagoda is one of the largest and most substantial buildings in Mandalay, situated to the east of the city. It is very different to all the other pagodas, as the whole building is capacious, and affords room for a very large number of worshippers. It was constructed in 1858 by King Midone (sic) Min, father of Theebaw... The sides are entered by numerous gilded doors, covered with elaborate and quaint carving in relief. The building within contains two lofty rooms divided up by numerous teak pillars, which support the roof, the whole interior, together with two huge figures of Gautama, being richly gilt. From the roof are suspended several handsome chandeliers of different coloured glass, apparently of European manufacture. The lower portion of the building is used on Sundays as a Protestant church for the British troops. Our engravings are from a photograph by Colonel Graham."

⁷⁵³ "Some Burmese Buddhist Shrines." *Morning Post*, Friday November 8, 1889, 5.

⁷⁵⁴ "The Crisis in Burma - II." *The Graphic*, Saturday November 14, 1885, 545.

Festivals and celebrations were also a favorite subject for the popular press, and descriptions of Buddhist festivals were extravagantly descriptive, heavily laden with superlatives, and strove to recreate the visual panoplies of colour and beauty for readers back home. On feast days "the gorgeous surroundings are made still brighter and more glittering by the many-coloured robes of the Burmese men and women who come here to recite the praises of Gautama," wrote the *Morning Post*.⁷⁵⁵ Another contemporary source described a religious parade with the following tantalizing portrait:

...a rolling river of colour, out of which shoot up an apparently interminable array of spires, enormous white umbrellas, gold umbrellas, long bamboos like gigantic fishing-rods, but gilt and covered with tinsel, all dancing, swaying, flashing in the sun... [...] We are standing on one of the terraces of the pagoda, so as to look down on the crowd of several thousands now assembled. It is like looking at an immense tulip bed, or the ever-shifting colours of the pendant prism; while the forest of graceful and fantastic spires of long decorated bamboos, and of umbrellas white and gold, all glittering in the rays of the setting sun....⁷⁵⁶

An illustration in the *Graphic* depicting a worshipful parade and festivities in Upper Burma provides another example of this type of reporting (next page). The illustration captures the dramatic pagoda, the worshipping Buddhists on the stairs, and boats full of laypeople with offerings for the priests. The accompanying explanation describes the pilgrimage of families to the pagoda with offerings of fruit and flowers, calling the resulting scene "eminently picturesque and full of colour."⁷⁵⁷ Unlike descriptions of the temples, the description of festivals and religious parades attempted to provide readers some insight into Burmese forms of lay worship:

The worshippers step out of their little boats, and reverently take off their sandals, and carry them in their hands. They pass between the two ugly dragons on either side of the first step, and on reaching an open flat bit of the rock they kneel and begin their first prayer, telling their beads and chewing betel nut. They then proceed up to the next praying platform, and so on until they reach the pagoda, where they present their gifts.⁷⁵⁸

Such descriptions and engravings dazzled the inner eye of readers with scenes of energy, color, and excitement. It is important to observe, however, the total lack of explanations regarding the meaning or symbolism behind any of the festivals or rituals. While adept at recreating eyewitness accounts of what they witnessed in Burma, the

⁷⁵⁵ "Some Burmese Buddhist Shrines." *Moring Post*, Friday November 8, 1889, 5.

⁷⁵⁶ "British Burma," 186, 190.

⁷⁵⁷ "The Pagoda and Whirlpool of Kalewa, Upper Burma." *The Graphic*, Saturday December 8, 1888.

⁷⁵⁸ *ibid.*

journalists possessed little understanding of the social or cultural function of Buddhism in the country.

Figure 35 "The Pagoda and Whirlpool of Kalewa, Upper Burma."
The Graphic, Saturday December 8, 1888.

The media thus embraced a vision of Burma as saturated by Buddhism, (correctly) seeing in it one of the country's essential distinguishing characteristics. Buddhism was, in other words, what made Burma Burmese. Hence, these illustrations and descriptions reveal that Buddhism – at least as embodied in its most obvious and impersonal manifestations of decorative pagodas and monasteries – was the primary way that the British imagined and conceptualized Burma. One can argue that Buddhism was essential to the British collective cultural imagination of Burma in a way that was not true of reporting on India or even of Ceylon, for example. One primary function of Buddhism in the popular media, especially in popular illustrated magazines such as the *Graphic*, was thus to serve as an appealing aesthetic element – one that was repeatedly paraded before the reading public as a quintessential element of exotic Burma.

Furthermore, descriptive reports of pagodas and festivals, as well as the detailed engravings that became increasingly more prevalent and elaborate, functioned as bite-sized travel guides for the armchair imperial tourist, allowing ordinary Britons to survey their newest possession and appreciate the splendor it brought to their empire. This echoes the way that other travellers' memoirs as well as artworks of the period made frequent recourse to the mode of the "picturesque" to freeze Burma in an eternal exotic Eastern panorama; Oliver Pollack, for example, argues that works of this time served to provide a form of voyeuristic education about exotic colonial lands for what he calls the "stay-at-home adventurer."⁷⁵⁹ Popular media reports in turn increased the public's unquestioning acceptance of the acquisition and their belief in the inevitable

⁷⁵⁹ See Oliver B. Pollak, "Robert Talbot Kelly and 'Picturesque' Burma." *Journal of Burma Studies* 3, no. 1 (1998): 35–45, and Keck, "Picturesque Burma." Keck notes: "British travel writers did engage this society as they explored its land and peoples and its place in the Empire; their publications were aimed at a wide metropolitan audience, the vast majority of whom would never set foot in Southeast Asia, let alone Burma. These figures have left us with a source to help comprehend not only Burma, but also the colonial mentalite which articulated and provided definition to imperial rule" (388).

destiny of British rule. The media heightened the public's sense of pride and excitement as it watched the borders of its empire expand to include this glittering, golden, exotic Buddhist land.

Most popular media sources emphasized two positive effects of Burmese Buddhism: the strength of the monastic-run Burmese school system, and the high morals and good character of the Burmese people. Even the much-bemoaned fact of the Burmese native's resistance to conversion, noted above, was begrudgingly attributed to the strength of its educational system: "The Burman does not wear his religion or his superstition lightly, for they have become part of his nature by an elaborate system of social customs and compulsory religious education," *The Sunday at Home* noted.⁷⁶⁰ Another family magazine wrote approvingly, "The Buddhist faith inculcates the instruction of youth as a meritorious action, and this had given rise to the establishment of lay and monastic schools in such numbers that the people have every opportunity of receiving the rudiments of education... consequently a Burman is rarely met with who cannot at least read, write, and cipher."⁷⁶¹ Works such as colonial administrator George Scott's monographs on Burma included whole chapters on the school system of the country.⁷⁶² The Burmese educational system thus became renowned in England, probably because it resonated positively with the Victorians' own high valuation of education.⁷⁶³ It was also well known that the Burmese enthusiasm for education had led to a greater cooperation between the Burmese monarchs and the British missionaries.⁷⁶⁴

Inquiries into the state of Burmese Buddhism were tightly coupled with evaluations of the morals and character of the Burmese, particularly the monks. On the one hand, celibacy, begging for alms, and meditation - those aspects that echoed Catholic monastic practice, in particular - were more likely to be depicted as perplexing and strange. The Christian family magazine *All The Year Round* noted with a tone of disapproval, "Their priests are doomed to celibacy. They cannot possess any

⁷⁶⁰ "Among the Burmans." *The Sunday at Home : A Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading* (Jan 01, 1896): 695-702

⁷⁶¹ *Cassell's Family Magazine*, reprinted in *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post* (Exeter, England), Wednesday, May 7, 1879; Issue 5960.

⁷⁶² Scott, George. *The Burman; His Life and Notions* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1882), chapter 2.

⁷⁶³ For modern scholarly views see Juliane Schober, "Colonial knowledge and Buddhist education in Burma." *Buddhism, Power and Political Order* (2007): 52-70, and Turner, *Saving Buddhism*, 45-74.

⁷⁶⁴ Schendel, "Christian Missionaries in Upper Burma," 69-70. Thibaw had even planned to open a university in Mandalay where instruction would be offered in both Pali and Western languages.

property, and are solely dependent on the charity of the people for their daily food."⁷⁶⁵ On the other hand, however, the Burmese monks were frequently praised as highly moral figures – in striking contrast to how they were depicted in the missionary monographs. "As a rule, these 'phoonghies' are good, honest men, acting up to the tenets of their religion, which, after Christianity, is, perhaps, the best in the world," *All The Year Round* informed its readers.⁷⁶⁶ This sentiment was echoed by a positive appraisal of the general morality of the Burmese people, whose personal ethics - "for Orientals," that is - were deemed "very good."⁷⁶⁷ Another magazine even went so far as to assert that the English had little to add to the Burmese manners and morals; rather the opposite:

Since the annexation of the province, we have undoubtedly added much to the material prosperity of the country; but whether our rule, and the example set by individual Europeans, has tended to strengthen or weaken morality amongst the people, is a question which I fear cannot be answered in the affirmative. However, taking the Burmese as they are now, there is not a more domestic, peace-loving, and moral people, I believe, upon the earth.⁷⁶⁸

This was frequently attributed to the natives' religion, which was "in essence the purest and noblest of all heathen creeds," as one Irish paper concluded in an article on Burma.⁷⁶⁹ There were therefore many media sources that saw Buddhism as one of the best influences in Burma and attributed the generally peace-loving nature of the Burmese to their religious observance.

Popular media reports about the country also tended to emphasize the lively, playful, celebratory, and easy-going religious character of the Burmese. They were described as "careless and happy-go-lucky" and in possession of a "magnificent generosity"⁷⁷⁰ as well as "merry, impetuous, and susceptible."⁷⁷¹ The popular media outlets printed articles on the Burmese theater, for example, or on the *Yama Zatdaw*, the Burmese epic based on the Ramayana.⁷⁷² "Their religious ceremonies always partake of the nature of a grand fair and feast, in which everyone joins," noted *The Examiner*.⁷⁷³ The number of exotic travel accounts in the media increased during this

⁷⁶⁵ "Burmah and the Burmese." *All The Year Round*; Nov 21, 1885; 37, 886; 276-283.

⁷⁶⁶ "Burmah and the Burmese." *All The Year Round*; Nov 21, 1885; 37, 886; 276-283.

⁷⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁶⁸ Clifford-Lloyd, C. "Burmah and the Burmese." *Dublin University Magazine*, 86, no. 515 (November 1875): 584-589.

⁷⁶⁹ Untitled. *Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin, Ireland), Tuesday, March 11, 1879; Issue N/A.

⁷⁷⁰ "Some Burmese Buddhist Shrines." *Monring Post*, Friday November 8, 1889, 5.

⁷⁷¹ "British Burma." *The Examiner*, December 7, 1878, 1558-1559.

⁷⁷² H. L. St Barbe, "Three Burmese Heroines." *The Cornhill Magazine*; Dec 1878; 38, 228; 723-732.

⁷⁷³ "British Burma." *The Examiner*, December 7, 1878, 1558-1559.

period as well; one prominent example is the *Daily News's* special correspondent's two-page spread on his travels through the country.⁷⁷⁴ These and other articles, often boldly proclaimed "By Eastern Telegraph" to give a sense of immediacy and quasi-photographic accuracy, provided illustrated eyewitness accounts of life in Burma. In emphasizing the exotic and picturesque aspects of Burmese life, reporters mined the local customs and habits of the natives for their ability to provide the British reader with a diverting afternoon of vicarious "travel" to British Burma. *The Era* even explicitly commended the Burmese for being interesting and for their ability offer amusements to readers:

Burmah just now is attracting great attention, and but for the immediate influences of the great political crisis we should hear a great deal more of perhaps the most interest country of the East. The people of Burmah are far more intelligent and have greater cultivation than the majority of Indian races, consequently their social life and their amusements are of a better class.⁷⁷⁵

While Buddhism was only one aspect of such reports, it was one way that the popular press effectively transformed Buddhism into an entertaining spectacle for readers at home. If one of the functions of the popular media reports on Burma in this period was to fill the role of vicarious travel guide, Buddhism was one of the quintessential elements that were employed to create the projected landscape and diorama of Burma.

5.3.2 Portraits of Monks and Buddhist Laypeople

The ubiquity of pagodas went hand in hand with the high number of monks and priests in Burma. This, too, was often remarked on as one of the defining characteristics of the country. "In Burma religion is a business of life. The country is covered by temples, and these swarm with priests. High and low enter a monastery once in their lives, sometimes merely as a formality, but a vast number remain permanently in the order of the Yellow Robe," noted an article in *The Times*.⁷⁷⁶ The yellow-robed monk became a kind of stock character in descriptions of Burma; no description could fail to include a monk or two to quickly evoke a sense of exotic local color. An account of a visit to a Burmese bazaar in the *Graphic*, for example, includes

⁷⁷⁴ "Journeying in Burmah." *Daily News* (London, England), Thursday, March 20, 1879; Issue 10270. Other general articles presented readers with basic information about the country, people, customs, and religion. Other articles of this type: "The Emerald Temple." *The Sunday at Home: A family magazine for Sabbath reading*; Mar 20, 1880; 1351; 189. "Some Burmese Superstitions." *Chambers's Journal*, no. 221 (Mar 24, 1888): 189-192. Rowett, Ellen. "A Visit to the Queen of Burmah." *Fraser's Magazine* no. 629 (05, 1882): 632-642 describing a hillside of Buddhist statues glinting in the sun - "a gorgeous effect."

⁷⁷⁵ "Stage Glimpses in Burmah." *The Era*, Saturday 26. Dec 1885, 7.

⁷⁷⁶ "Upper Burmah." *The Times*, 24 Jan. 1885, 6.

a colorful description a festival crowd, described as "an everyday scene in our Burmese possessions" and including a description of "a yellow-robed priest of Buddha, who lives on gratuitous rice presents."⁷⁷⁷ The Burmese term *pongyi*, with almost endless variations on spelling, also came into popular use during this time; one has the impression that it was used by journalists to lend a greater aura of authenticity and exoticism to their reporting.

Yet it is also possible to discern a clear trend, starting in the 1870s and culminating in the years after the acquisition, towards more intimate portraits. This is especially true of the illustrated papers, where engravings of large-scale landscapes dotted with pagodas and monasteries were increasingly balanced by personal portraits of Burmese individuals or families. In written articles, as well, the earlier emphasis on pagodas, monasteries, and festivals gradually gave way to more intimate anecdotes, stories, and illustrations about individual monks or laypeople. In one illustration featured in the *Graphic* shortly before the takeover, a Buddhist priest is depicted surrounded by a small group of pupils. This engraving in fact represents a significant break from earlier illustrations: depictions of contemporary living Buddhists (rather than relics and pagodas) were still largely a novelty at this point.

Figure 36 "A Burmese Priest and Pupils." *The Graphic*, October 31, 1885.

Also novel for the public media was the text's comparatively lengthy description of the life of Burmese monks:

In Burma the monks are represented by the yellow-clad pongyees, dwelling in monasteries scattered over the face of the country, living upon alms, possessing no property... Passing slowly down the street in single file, each one carries a pot, which he opens on the approach of a donor, and receives the gift without a change of expression, movement of the head, or word of thanks.⁷⁷⁸

These descriptions admittedly reveal little more than superficial details, observable to any officer or administrator stationed in Burma; yet even a cursory description of the habits and behaviors of a monk was a novelty for the British popular press.

The multi-page spread of illustrations created by W. H. Titcomb, "An English Artist in Burma," published in the *Graphic* in December 1885, is exemplary in the way that it presents readers with an increasingly intimate portrait of Burmese Buddhism.

⁷⁷⁷ "A Bazaar in Burma." *The Graphic*, Saturday, May 22, 1875; Issue 286.

⁷⁷⁸ Archibald R. Colquhoun, "The Crisis in Burma - II." *The Graphic*, Saturday November 14, 1885, 545-549.

The primary attraction of the article is the quality and size of the illustrations, while the text falls into the background. The illustrations adopt a (purported) eyewitness, almost photographic style and are clearly designed to convey both objectivity and intimacy. Here, too, we see that a crucial element of the magazines' visual strategy with regard to its reporting on Burma was creating the illusion of intimacy and personal encounter.

Figure 37 – "On the sacred platform of the Rangoon pagoda"
 Titcomb, W. H. "An English Artist in Burma."
The Graphic, Saturday, December 19, 1885; Issue 838.

Figure 38 – "A Call to Worship (Interior of Buddhist Monastery)"
 Titcomb, W. H. "An English Artist in Burma." *The Graphic*, Saturday, December 19, 1885; Issue 838.

The pictures reproduced above are just two of the many illustrations in the article; they reveal how Titcomb wanted to visually present Burmese Buddhism in his sketches. In the first, the reader is invited to watch an ordinary Burmese family visiting a pagoda in Rangoon. Compared to some of the *Graphic's* previous articles on Burma, this article confirms the strong tendency to move towards humanizing depictions of living Buddhists. Titcomb goes even further than earlier articles in this respect by depicting an 'ordinary' Buddhist family. The portrait presents the observant Burmese Buddhist family to the English reader in a familiar, intimate format; one result of this is to make Buddhism appear more accessible and less exotic. The reader is thus encouraged to see himself or herself reflected in the photo in the emphasis on family life. (Of course, the sense of intimacy and personal encounter that the image produces is a one-sided and artificial one: the illustration serves as a one-way mirror in which the peeping reader/viewer can watch the Burmese family in their religious observances.) At the same time, the enormous bell, the spires of the pagoda in the background, the lotus flowers, and the umbrellas add enough exoticism and mystery to remind the British Victorian viewer that he is vicariously witnessing a visit to a foreign (heathen) temple. The caption informs the reader that he finds himself on the "sacred

platform" of the pagoda - thus not only inviting the English reader to participate in a family religious visit, but also placing the reader on the sacred platform alongside the family.

The second scene, in contrast, provides the English reader with a coveted glimpse into the inner sanctum of a Buddhist monastery. The forced intimacy of this scene is even more striking, as the English reader/viewer finds himself placed in a scene of private religious contemplation in a setting to which he would otherwise never gain access. The viewer's eye is immediately drawn to the bored, complacent expression on the monk's face, as well as his prayer beads. Yet the text does not provide any explanatory text about the monk, the objects, or the context; the reader is thus left to wonder about the significance and purpose of the situation.

Taken in combination, Titcomb's two illustrations both attract and repel the Victorian reader. The first draws the reader into the intimate family scene, with its comprehensible family life and recognizable scene of young religious instruction; the second repels with its strangeness and foreignness, with a meditating monk who is obviously disinterested in the reader and whose facial expression seems to shutter out the reader/viewer and deny any access to his private inner religious experience. At the same time, however, both are clearly designed to provide the reader with an (artificial) personal encounter with Burmese Buddhists. This is in keeping with what periodical scholar Andrea Korda has noted, that illustrated magazines' readers were "encouraged to take up an embodied position in front of the image and to experience the scene for themselves."⁷⁷⁹ As she notes, this strategy encouraged reader/viewers to experience the news in a more personal and intimate manner. Titcomb uses illustrations and intimate, familiar details as a strategy to invite the Victorian reader to enter into the intimacy of Burmese life. Adopting a similar strategy, he uses intimate illustration to lay bare the monastery and its inhabitants to peeping Victorian viewers, making a documentary spectacle out of their religious observance. The image of the meditating monk may strike us as particularly invasive and voyeuristic.

Titcomb also provides a lengthy, memoir-like description of his travels in Burma (though the text is clearly secondary to the large and striking images, which are designed to capture the reader's attention). Titcomb's reminiscences of painting the

⁷⁷⁹ Korda, *Printing and Painting the News*, 74.

monks are crafted in such a way as to create the impression of a familiar and intimate atmosphere. The text, like the images, reflects a trend towards intimacy and an increasing prevalence of personal anecdotes.

I met with very little opposition on the part of my sitters; and none from rudeness, or religious notions, as Buddhists are most Broad Church, and fanaticism is unknown in Burma. Only in one monastery was I forced to paint without my boots, this being enforced out of reverence to the priesthood. More than half my pictures and sketches were made in these sacred monasteries of the priests.⁷⁸⁰

Titcomb's written and pictorial portrayals of the Burmese monks adopt the same tone as many other articles in the popular press: light-hearted, familiar, bemused, friendly, yet often subtly dismissive:

These Phoongyies are sacred—to touch them would be a sacrilege, to shout at them infamous; indeed, to speak to them at all in common Burmese is like talking slang to an English clergyman, as they use a separate set of words—the high Burmese, called Pāli. Imagine, then, my disgust when, unless I watched most carefully, they would put their dirty fingers on my morning's work to see if it would rub off! I could only make a few cursory remarks to myself in English, and frown. However, they are good old fellows, and I owe a great deal to them.⁷⁸¹

The unacknowledged colonial relationship between the illustrator and subject is deftly hidden beneath of veneer of chumminess. Behind these intimate anecdotes and the familiar language hides a great deal of suggestive detail about the real relationship between the painter and his subjects. While Titcomb repeatedly asserts that the priests and their temples are "sacred," for example, he has no aversion to barging into their monasteries and, like his colonial associates, lacks the cultural sensitivity to take off his boots; at the same time he uses descriptors such as "dirty" to describe the monks and owns that they produced feelings of "disgust" when they touched his artworks. Titcomb's mixed expressions of fascination, respect, curiosity, and dismissal may have echoed his readers' ambivalence and contradictory feelings regarding the customs and observances on display for the audience at home.

Taken together, these articles suggest an interesting turn towards depicting Buddhist monks and laypeople with a novel degree of personal intimacy. While pagodas, statues, and monasteries continued to appear with frequency in the illustrated papers, by 1885 the papers had also started to depict a more human face of Buddhism. Anecdotes, stories, and tales of all kinds featuring Burmese Buddhist monks and observant laypeople became increasingly popular in the media. This did not, however,

⁷⁸⁰ Titcomb, W. H. "An English Artist in Burma." *The Graphic*, Saturday 19 December 1885.

⁷⁸¹ *ibid.*

mean that the British in Burma (whether military men or journalists) were engaging with Buddhists in any meaningful way. The lengthening stay in the country meant more contact with monks and Buddhist laypeople, but it apparently did not translate into meaningful exchanges or an increasing level of respect. To illustrate this point: a 1886 article in the *Graphic*, when the British had been in Upper Burma for almost a year, reveals that by that point the *pongyi* had become a kind of one-dimensional stock character in the press.⁷⁸² The anecdote is rife with stereotypes of the *pongyis*. The captain and his pals visit a Buddhist monastery and encounter a monk (a "wizened little old man," one of many who "abound in this pious land"). The *pongyi*, "wearying of having nothing to do but think of everlasting forgetfulness," visits the British officers. The monk sinks into a kind of stupor chewing on a cheroot, so that the men "began to think he must have suddenly attained Nirvana." They offer him a drink of their whiskey, after which the monk hollers aloud and dances a kind of jig. The joke of the anecdote is comes when the officers diagnose the reason for the violent reaction: "we had not given him the brand that he was accustomed to."

The Graphic (London, England), Saturday, September 11, 1886; Issue 876.

Here we see that the "phoongie" had become a stock character, part and parcel of the background and landscape that defined Burma for the colonial administrator or British soldier. The ubiquity of monks in the "pious land" of Burma, the cheroot-chewing, the reference to Nirvana – all are used merely as props that fulfill the goal of humor and entertainment, making a stock character (literally a laughing stock) out of the monk. As an example of a typical characterization of a Buddhist layperson, an article about "Buddhist Eccentricities," tells a rambling tale of a pious Burman who starts to build a pagoda for merit but runs out of money, with all kinds of mishaps ensuing – a story which "will best illustrate the extraordinary complications of good and evil, devotion and gracelessness, piety and rascality, that may spring out of the desire to gain merit, or, at any rate, not to lose it."⁷⁸³ Clearly, the main aim of the magazine's telling of the

⁷⁸² "Some Humours of the Burmese Campaign." *The Graphic*, Saturday September 11, 1886.

⁷⁸³ "Buddhist Eccentricities." *Saturday Review*; Jan 16, 1886; 61, 1577; 78-79.

story is to depict the Burmese belief in karma or merit in the most absurd light possible and to highlight the "eccentricities" inherent in the Buddhist karmic system.

No longer observed at a distance, Burmese Buddhists could now become the subjects of intimate, yet irreverent portraits. As Stephen L. Keck has written with reference to travel writing about Burma, such texts "encouraged greater interest in the world beyond Europe and America and hence helped to spur colonisation, while it also helped to accelerate the process of alterity whereby subject peoples were further marginalised within colonial systems."⁷⁸⁴ One could come to a similar conclusion regarding the media's characterization of Buddhist *pongyis*: their portraiture in the media may have increased public interest in living expressions of Buddhism in one of England's colonies; yet they were depicted as the quintessential other, strange and inexplicable. It was an approach that served to marginalize and create distance, not one that suggested or encouraged deeper engagement and dialogue.

5.3.3 "Shway Yoe" and the Outsider's Insider Buddhism

Arguably the most influential voice that shaped the British public's understanding of Burmese culture in this period, and by extension Burmese Buddhism, was that of Scottish-born Sir James George Scott: journalist, linguist, travel enthusiast, and later colonial administrator in Burma.⁷⁸⁵ Scott lived as a journalist in Burma from 1875 to 1882 and then served as a colonial administrator starting in 1886, intentionally steeping himself in the language, culture, and habits of the Burmese people.⁷⁸⁶ Scott's intimate familiarity with Burma was surely unprecedented for his time, and he was eager to share his insider's knowledge with his contemporaries: under the adopted Burmese pseudonym "Shway Yoe," Scott published two monographs on the country as well as a series of articles on Burma, primarily in the widely read middle-class *Cornhill Magazine*.⁷⁸⁷ In his influential books and articles, "Yoe" offered his readers a

⁷⁸⁴ Keck, "Picturesque Burma," 389.

⁷⁸⁵ On Scott as colonial historian, see Keck, "Picturesque Burma," 76-83. See also Andrew Marshall, *Trouser People: A Story of Burma in the Shadow of the Empire* (Reprint edition. Bangkok: Prestel, 2012), in which Marshall retraces Scott's travels through colonial Burma. Scott's wife G. E. Milton published a memoir of her husband, *Scott of the Shan Hills*, in 1937; but I was unable to locate a copy.

⁷⁸⁶ Boyer notes: "...during his tenure as headmaster at St. John's College in Rangoon, he went to Burmese homes, spoke Burmese, and dressed in Burmese clothes; then, having mastered the language and habits of the Burmese people, he wrote a book about them." Boyer, "Picturing the Other," 215.

⁷⁸⁷ Scott's articles (under the name of Shway Yoe) included: "The Burmese." *The Cornhill Magazine*; Nov 1880; 42, 251; 582-589; "Buddhists and Buddhism in Burma." *The Cornhill Magazine* 42, no. 252 (12, 1880): 721-731; "The Kachyens." *The Cornhill Magazine* 46, no. 274 (10, 1882): 466-476. "The Hill Tribes of Burma." *The Cornhill Magazine* 47, no. 278 (02, 1883): 202-212. "About Mandalay." *The Star*, Sat. 12. Dec 1885. "The Buddhist Archbishop Explained." *The Star* Tues Dec 22, 1885. The latter two were originally

far more rich and detailed account of the lives, customs, and habits of Burma than had been available in previous sources. The package of insider knowledge of the Burmese people and country, encased in educated English and with a charismatic authorial personality that seemed almost British, proved nearly irresistible to readers. *The Graphic*, for example, wondered at finding in Yoe "a freshness which is wanting in the raciest European descriptions of Eastern manners" and naively expressed their delight at the author's "wonderful mastery of English and a thorough acquaintance with English modes of thought."⁷⁸⁸ Scott's feat of impersonation was short-lived, however; contemporaries deciphered Yoe's identity within about a year. Particularly suspicious was the gentle irony and almost teasing tone with which Scott tended to describe his subjects, especially the religious Buddhists. The *Glasgow Herald* was one of the first to suspect the ruse: "It is impossible to avoid the suspicion, or rather it is pretty evident, that Shway Yoe is either not a Burman at all or a converted one," the paper insisted already in 1882. "The quiet humour with which he treats of religious ceremonies, which to a Buddhist would be invested with the greatest reverence, seems to be quite conclusive on this point."⁷⁸⁹ After Scott's true identity had become clear, however, reviewers were even more impressed at the sensitivity, detail, and sympathy he reveals in his works. "English he clearly is, notwithstanding his assumption of the outlandish description of 'Shway Yoe, subject of the Great Queen,'" noted the *London Daily News*. "Next to industry and natural power of observation the secret of his success is no doubt his capacity for sympathising with the feelings and thoughts of alien races. ... He has lived among them and learned to look at things with their eyes."⁷⁹⁰ During his forays in England Scott also gave public lectures on Burma⁷⁹¹ and occasionally submitted articles to the national newspapers for the purpose of clarifying aspects of Burmese religion or culture.⁷⁹²

In his articles as well as in his two published books on the country, Scott/Yoe played an instrumental role in disseminating information about Burmese Buddhism and in shaping the public's impressions and opinions of the tradition. Scott's works

printed in the *St. James's Gazette*. Scott's two books on Burma are: *The Burman; His Life and Notions*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1882 and *Burma; As It Was, As It Is, and As It Will Be* London: George Redway, 1886.

⁷⁸⁸ "The Reader." *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, September 30, 1882; Issue 670.

⁷⁸⁹ "Literature." *Glasgow Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland), Saturday, December 9, 1882; Issue 294.

⁷⁹⁰ "Current Literature." *London Daily News*, Tuesday 26 December 1882, 2.

⁷⁹¹ "To-Night and To-Morrow." *Pall Mall Gazette*, Friday 22 January 1886.

⁷⁹² e.g. Yoe Schway, "The Burmese 'Archbishop' Explained." From *St. James's Gazette*, reprinted in *The Star* - Tuesday 22 December 1885.

display a deep fascination and appreciation of the country's religious heritage as well as a depth of knowledge of its traditions that far exceeded anything that his contemporaries (whether missionaries or colonial administrators) had been able to produce. *Burma; As It Was, As It Is, and As It Will Be*, for example, contains several chapters detailing monastery life, the habits and demeanor of the monks, and the role of Buddhism in Burmese society, while *The Burman* traces the life of a young Burmese man through his years in a Buddhist school and monastery. Scott's viewpoint represents a clear departure from previously available information on Burmese Buddhism, as he was arguably the first to engage deeply with the people, language, and tradition without any Christian missionary designs on them. His profound knowledge and fascination with the people are evident on every page, and his rich and detailed description of life in the monasteries and the daily existence of the phoongies were a revelation to contemporaries. The richness of detail and description is a clear departure from the missionary and academic accounts of Buddhism and displays a new fascination and regard for actual practice. He possessed an acute eye for observation as well as rich descriptive powers, and he was keen to communicate both the beauties and the eccentricities of monastic life to his readers. Still, his descriptions are anything but unreservedly glowing; he tends to take an ironic, almost sarcastic tone in his descriptions that allow author and reader alike to distance themselves from the scene. Comments like this one are typical for their mix of interest and ironic commentary: "The account of a day spent in one of the monastic communities may be interesting, as showing how far a little method will go towards making the day pass, with the least possible amount of work and the least chance of *ennui*."⁷⁹³

While Scott's two published works were probably more aimed at the Burmese enthusiast, his articles in *Cornhill Magazine* were designed to provide the general reader entertaining and interesting impressions of the country. In this sense they offer a textual counterpart to the *Graphic's* visually dense illustrations of contemporary Burmese life. Scott's magazine articles differ considerably in tone from his works and are both more playful and more denigrating in their descriptions. Despite Scott's obvious interest in and appreciation for the religious tradition he describes, he nonetheless often betrays many of the assumptions of his time, including a conviction

⁷⁹³ Yoe, Shway (George Scott). "Buddhists and Buddhism in Burma." *The Cornhill Magazine*; Dec 1880; 42, 252; 728.

that the monks were secretly 'lazy.' In an article on "Buddhists and Buddhism in Burma" printed in *Cornhill Magazine* in 1880 (signed Shway Yoe), for example, Scott - after describing in detail the monks' rigorous daily schedule of meditation, study, work, and begging for alms - nonetheless asserted their almost incomparable laziness:

The life of the Hpongyee Kyoung is about as lazy a round of existence as is to be found anywhere in the world. A few of the monks, seized by a sudden desire to do something, occasionally enter one of the Zayats, the rest houses round the pagodas, on a feast day, when there are a number of people gathered together, and read and expound passages of the law to such as care to come and hear them. Occasionally, too, devout laymen will go to the monastery to talk over points of theology, or to ask for elucidation of some passage in a commentary; but there are only a few who are troubled in this way, and unless the monk is an enthusiast, he need never be troubled with doing anything.⁷⁹⁴

Scott went on to note, "to an unprejudiced stranger the Hypongees appear the least deserving of mortals. They spend the entire day sitting cross-legged chewing betel, or lying at full length endeavoring to fall asleep."⁷⁹⁵ Yet for Scott, the unhurried nature of the Burmese monks was only an echo of the symptomatic idleness of their fellow countrymen: "But in their incomparable idleness, they are only an apotheosis of their countrymen, and perhaps not a little of the respect paid them is due to a secret admiration for their supreme objection to doing anything at all."⁷⁹⁶ Scott's ambivalent portrayal of Burmese Buddhism did not go unnoticed by the press: "The religion of the great Indian philosopher, Gotama Buddha, seems daily to be exciting more interest among us," noted a *Birmingham Daily Post* journalist in a review of the month's magazines, "but the picture of its practical workings on Burmah, as drawn by Shway Yoe in his 'Buddhists and Buddhism in Burma,' in this number, will probably not deepen the vague desire which some people seem to feel to substitute it for Christianity."⁷⁹⁷

Scott's views of the religious learning of the monks - despite his general appreciation of the Burmese school system - were likewise rather dim, calling their actual understanding of the Pāli scriptures "parrot-like" rather than genuine, almost echoing earlier missionary authors in an apparent expectation to find scholarly

⁷⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 730.

⁷⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 730.

⁷⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 731.

⁷⁹⁷ "Periodicals for December." *Birmingham Daily Post*, Thursday, December 16, 1880; Issue 7004.

expositions of Buddhist teaching from the monks, and finding them instead inclined to recite rote passages from memory:

They learn long passages of Pāli ritual and dogma when they are preparing for admission to the Order, and can always rattle it over with surprising glibness when occasion requires. I have never yet, however, met with one who had more than a parrot-like knowledge of the sacred language.⁷⁹⁸

Scott also bemoaned the priests' lack of non-religious education, concluding that "As an almost invariable rule, the monk is densely ignorant and far below the most ordinary layman in knowledge of every kind."⁷⁹⁹ This negative and derogatory depiction is considerably more severe than what one finds in Scott's monographs. It is possible that he (or his editors) wanted to indulge readers' craving for voyeuristic details of Burmese religious life, while at the same time assuaging them by communicating a clear sense of cultural superiority.

Scott was of course not unaffected by the dominant views of Buddhism of the Victorian era. He was acutely aware of the contradiction between the perceived negativity of Buddhist philosophy and the joyful, celebratory nature of native Burmese he encountered, especially as evidenced in their festivals and processions. In some places Scott echoes his contemporaries' conviction of the pessimism and negativity of the tradition, while at the same time asserting that such qualities were out of character for the playful, easygoing Burmese:

Judging from externals, Buddhism is far from being the religion which one would expect to find adopted by the Burmese. They are a jovial, laughing, joking race, brimful of fun and delight, in the simple act of living. Strange it is to find such a people adopting the cold, stern, materialistic philosophy of Buddha. Such a faith one might think suitable for the sullen, truculent Malay, but we cannot understand the Burman holding such a purely ethical religion and still retaining his constant *bonhomie*.⁸⁰⁰

These views are echoed in the reflections of another traveller to Burma about this time, F. D. A. Bridges, who for example describes Buddha statues as "huge placid-looking figures" yet notes that "the merry and laughter-loving Burmese have managed to turn up the corners of the marble mouths, and give a faint sort of twinkle to the long eyes even of the holy Gautama."⁸⁰¹ Bridges's description of Buddhist laywomen in Burma

⁷⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 730.

⁷⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 731.

⁸⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 721-731.

⁸⁰¹ F. D. Bridges, *A Lady's Travels Round the Worl* (London: John Murray), 1883, 212.

further underscores what she perceives as the contradiction between the dour creed and their rosy outlook:

...religious-minded old ladies clad in white—symbol of their having left the world—were telling their beads; that is, repeating the formula, "Transitoriness, misery, uncertainty; Buddha, the law, the Church" over fourteen times, looking extremely cheerful about it, and stopping every now and then to play with the children.⁸⁰²

Rather than adjust their views of Buddhism to accommodate the possibility that it was the tradition itself that helped produced the "jovial, joking" national character, these observers continued to marvel at the apparent contradiction. Yet Burmese Buddhism was not without its redeeming aspects in Scott's eyes, and he emphasized those characteristics that resonated with his own values and those of his readers. One positive aspect that he emphasized repeatedly was Burmese Buddhism's hostility towards hierarchy and caste systems: it was a "republican religion," in Scott's words, that insisted on the equality of all persons.⁸⁰³ This characteristic is lauded at length in one of Scott's books.⁸⁰⁴ And, like many contemporaries, Scott professed the deepest admiration for the moral character of the Burmese people, whom he characterized as "as hospitable as the traditional Scotchman," open-hearted, kind and generous ("Charity is the most prominent doctrine of Buddhism, and the Burmese carry it to extraordinary lengths"), as well as vigorous and enthusiastic.⁸⁰⁵

The created fictional character of Shway Yoe was a crucial aspect of how Scott convinced his fellow British countrymen that they were obtaining a coveted insider's glimpse into Burmese Buddhism. Nowhere is this ruse more effective than in a two-part fictional story in which Scott adopts the voice of Shway Yoe to tell an involved and charming story of a young monk, newly released from the monastery, who tries to win the hand of the most eligible young woman in his village ("A Boat Race for a

⁸⁰² *ibid.*, 213

⁸⁰³ Yoe Shway, "The Burmese 'Archbishop' Explained." *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* (Aberdeen, Scotland), Saturday, December 19, 1885; Issue 77197. Reprinted in many papers.

⁸⁰⁴ George Scott, *Burma: as it was; as it is, and as it will be* (London: George Redway, 1886), 115. "One of the most remarkable traits of the people is the complete equality of all classes. They are perfectly republican in the freedom with which all ranks mingle together and talk with one another, without any marked distinction in regard to difference of rank or wealth. ... Buddhism brings all men — all Buddhists, at any rate — down to the same level. The poor man may be a king of spirits in the next life; the high-placed sinner may frizzle in the awful pains of hell. There is no difference between man and man but that which is established by superiority in virtue. In this they remain true to the most startling teaching of the Great Master, as it is told in 'The Light of Asia.'"

⁸⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 130-134. [The Burman] is an extremely good fellow, manly, good-humoured, and kindly... Above all, he is sober and abstemious in his way of life, except in a few cases where he has been spoilt by Western example in the coast-ports. It is their natural kindness and that first of all qualifications for the title of gentleman, consideration for the feelings of others, which make the Burmese such general favourites with all who come across them.

Wife," printed in the *Graphic* in 1886 with illustrations by W. H. Titcomb).⁸⁰⁶

The elaborate and engaging story highlights the effectiveness of Scott's invented persona, the charming young Buddhist monk – romantic, light-hearted, but not overly bright – who engages in escapades such as getting beaten for reading romantic literature in the monastery by moonlight. Scott's constructed character allows his readers a believable "eyewitness" account in a crafted native voice, replete with explanations of important aspects of Buddhist lay belief, such as kindness to animals and obtaining merit, as well as descriptions of celebrations and festivities. As mentioned before, Scott frequently adopts an ironic distancing strategy, even a sarcastic tone, that often produces an ambivalent impression of Buddhism. An excerpt provides a good sample of the kind of impish, half-serious voice that Scott attributed to his pseudonymous character:

I had just emerged from the monastery, just thrown off the monkish yellow robe, and come out into "the world" again. My father was a hunter, and as such foredoomed to hell, all the more so because he caught fish as well as killed deer, and trained dogs to beat the jungle for the Englishmen who sometimes come over for a day's shooting. It is, perhaps, hardly necessary for me to say that to kill, to take life, which all can take but none can give, is the most grievous sin a Buddhist can commit. Therefore my father, in the faith hope that he might vicariously a little better his change towards another existence, had made me stay three Lents - that is, three years- in a monastery; a Lent for him, a Lent for my mother, and a Lent for myself. I went in and studied my Pāli lauds and ritual, and went the morning rounds with the begging bowl, and longed to get out again, and at last here I was, turned seventeen, and once more free to look at the girls, without being reproved by the minks, and made to do penance for it by the old abbot.⁸⁰⁷

Even after finding out that Yoe was a pseudonym, contemporaries remained convinced that this invented character was giving them the real thing: longed-for insights into real Buddhist belief and practice from a native informant. This convenient fiction allowed them to accept Scott's portrayals of the people and their faith as genuine, authentic, and unconstructed, and permitted them to ignore the reality Scott was himself a colonial administrator who hailed from the Scottish, not Burmese, highlands. The *Pall Mall*, for example, compared Scott's accounts to those of "eminent authorities" such as Rhys Davids and Edwin Arnold and insisted that alone Scott's accounts represented the "real and actual Buddhist of concrete life" rather than a fictionalized abstraction.

Of late years we have heard and learned a great deal about that interesting Oriental theosophist, the ideal Buddhist. Mr. Rhys Davids has discoursed to us concerning

⁸⁰⁶ George J. Scott ("Shway Yoe"). "A Boat Race for a Wife: A Burmese Story " *The Graphic*; (Part I) Saturday, June 12, 1886; Issue 863; (Part II) Saturday, June 19, 1886; Issue 864.

⁸⁰⁷ *ibid.*

him from the philosophical point of view; Mr. Edwin Arnold has placed before us his counterfeit presentment in the poetical aspect; and M. Renan has permitted us to gain a few casual and etherialized side glimpses of his supposed religious nature. But all these eminent authorities have dealt mainly with the Buddhist in the abstract. The ingenious and amusing writer who thinly veils his personality under the appropriate pseudonym of Shway Yoe deals rather with the real and actual Buddhist of concrete life, as observed and studied in Burma at the present day. ... The Burman whose portrait Shway Yoe has taken is not so picturesque as the disciples of Gautama, but he is obviously a great deal more real and genuine.⁸⁰⁸

It is ironic that reviewers, finally convinced they was getting the local's view of Buddhism, were merely getting another English perspective. Scott managed to dupe even the *Fortnightly Review*:

[...] the 'life and notions' of the Burman from the cradle to the grave are here recorded by one of themselves with picturesque detail and literary grace. The Burman is a remarkable book, which, as the work of a native author, writing out of actual knowledge of what he has to tell us, has claims to our attention superior to those possessed by the narrative of a European observer.⁸⁰⁹

Some contemporary papers' reactions to the crafted character of Scott's Burman are shockingly vulgar, like the *Pall Mall*, who expressed that Yoe was

...really quite a relief in his comfortable condition after the starved and squalid cultivators with whom we are so familiar in other parts of our Eastern possessions. It is quite delightful to find oneself at last in the company of people who really appear to have enough to eat, and who do not perpetually solve the Malthusian problem by a continuous see-saw of decimating famines and redoubling population.⁸¹⁰

Still, the Burman author was declared "cheery, noisy, good-humoured, well-to-do... somewhat superstitious in his personal beliefs, but, on the whole, an excellent fellow in his way."⁸¹¹ Only the *Academy* had a critical word for the book: for its unacknowledged quotations from Rhys Davids' work on Buddhism.⁸¹²

Yet ironically, even the eventual revelation of Yoe's true identity as a colonial administrator rather than a native informer had the effect of strengthening, rather than undermining, his authority on the subject of all things Burmese. Even after it became general knowledge that Yoe was the adopted Burmese pseudonym of a Scottish

⁸⁰⁸ "The Burman." *Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Wednesday, August 30, 1882; Issue 5460, 4-5.

⁸⁰⁹ Florence Layard, "Burma and the Burmese," *The Fortnightly Review*, 42 (July 1887), 152. Quoted in Boyer, "Picturing the Other," 215.

⁸¹⁰ "The Burman." *Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Wednesday, August 30, 1882; Issue 5460, 4-5.

⁸¹¹ *ibid.*

⁸¹² "Magazines and Reviews." *The Academy*, Dec 18, 1880; 450; p 441. The paper notes: "Mr. Schway Yoe has a perfect right to make use of the text-books of the subject on which he writes; but it is, to say the least, very bad Buddhism (it would be held by a good *pongyee* to be a clear breach of the second of the Buddhist Ten Commandments, given by Mr. Schway Yoe on p. 724) to use them without certain recognised forms [of acknowledgement]."

colonial administrator, the *Glasgow Herald*, for example, still pronounced the work to come closer than ever before to the 'truth' of the Burmese identity: Yoe's work depicts "not the ideal Burman enveloped in a haze of theological and philosophical theories, but the concrete animal of the streets, the workshop, and domestic life in general, as he lives and moves and has his being," the paper approvingly pronounced.⁸¹³ This strongly suggests that the public trusted the voice of the colonial administrator over that of the local informant, even when it came to the local's own religious traditions. In a manner not unlike Edwin Arnold, Scott convinced his contemporaries that he had captured the native voice and views in a way that outstripped what the native was considered capable of. As the decade wore on Scott began to publish his articles under a dual byline, often signing his pieces "James George Scott (Shway Yoe)" or vice versa. This adopted hybrid identity gave Scott a dual form of authority among his readership: he combined the eyewitness authenticity of the local informant with a claim to objective neutrality of the European colonial administrator. Scott's views were long considered the most authoritative source on the country, so that it is almost impossible to overstate his importance: "A preliminary study of Shway Yoe is really all that is required to prepare the visitor to see, and what is more important to understand, what is worthy of notice among this interesting people," wrote the *Daily News*.⁸¹⁴ Scott remained an influential voice on Burma throughout the period and was often quoted and cited in later articles and books: in 1897 *The Speaker* would claim that Scott's work "still holds unchallenged its position as the standard work on Burmese life and character, to which every Englishman must go who would know what sort and condition of men are his fellow-subjects of the Great Queen in that part of her Majesty's dominions."⁸¹⁵

Finally, in hindsight, it is also difficult to reconcile Scott's pleasant, charming, anecdotal accounts of Burma, rich in detail and intimate knowledge of the country and its people and language, with what we know of his career as an aggressively pro-imperial colonial administrator and especially his role in the ongoing "pacification" of Burma throughout the 1880s and 1890s. The *Glasgow Herald* described in 1889 in glowing terms Scott's influential role in effecting the "complete pacification" of the 70 States and principalities of Burmah, undertaking a tour of the various States to

⁸¹³ "Literature." *Glasgow Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland), Saturday, December 9, 1882; Issue 294.

⁸¹⁴ "Current Literature." *Daily News* (London, England), Tuesday, December 26, 1882; Issue 11450.

⁸¹⁵ "Three Books on Burma." *The Speaker: The Liberal Review* 15, (Apr 24, 1897): 461-462.

convince recalcitrant princes to submit to British rule, a "thorough and satisfactory piece of work."⁸¹⁶ It was seen as a formidable task for which Scott's "profound knowledge of the Burmese language and culture"⁸¹⁷ and his "unrivalled knowledge of the eastern frontier of Burma"⁸¹⁸ made him especially adept.

5.3.4 *Burmese Buddhism's Critics*

Other media sources, particularly more intellectual journals and some of the major daily papers, took an overtly negative view of Burma's practice of Buddhism; unimpressed by golden pagodas and yellow-robed monks, these sources often display a concern with what they perceived as the faith's invidious effects on the country's inhabitants as well as the extent of the Buddhist *pongyis'* influence on the people. The very pagodas, festivals, and processions that some correspondents prized for their entertainment value could be, in other papers, a source of derision and evidence of religious decline. In this view, the glittering pagodas and riotous festivals of the Burmese were signs that the Burmese Buddhist tradition had strayed from the strict philosophical Buddhism of its earlier Indian days. "[In Burma], as elsewhere, there is a sad falling off from the ideal to the actual; and the Buddhism that seems so attractive and beautiful in the legends of Gautama becomes very vulgar and tawdry indeed in the gilding and carving and gold spittoons of the modern pagodas," the *Pall Mall Gazette* wrote in 1882.⁸¹⁹ For others, however, the gold and glitter of the pagodas begged to be contrasted with the hopelessness of the Buddhist creed itself: "There the most dreary of creeds, whose hope is negation, whose heaven annihilation, is celebrated with the most glowing pageantry of worship, and mighty shrines aflame with gems and gilding are raised to one who in the belief of his votaries has ceased to be," noted one review.⁸²⁰ For the truly critical, the pagodas themselves could be seen as metaphors for the hopeless hollowness of the Burmese religion: "they are so far symbolical of the religion to which they are dedicated—an elaborate structure with nothingness at its core."⁸²¹

⁸¹⁶ "Our London Correspondence." *Glasgow Herald*, Friday, May 24, 1889; Issue 124. For a discussion of the resistance of the Burmese states and the necessity of pacification see Tarling, *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Vol. II, 40-41, and Mukherjee, Aparna, *British Colonial Policy in Burma*, 538-547.

⁸¹⁷ "Our London Correspondence." *Glasgow Herald*, Friday, May 24, 1889; Issue 124.

⁸¹⁸ "Our London Correspondence." *Glasgow Herald*, Wednesday, September 13, 1893; Issue 219.

⁸¹⁹ "The Burman." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Wednesday, August 30, 1882; Issue 5460, 4-5.

⁸²⁰ E. M. Clerke, "Burma and the Farther East." *The Dublin Review*, 15, no. 2 (04, 1886): 309-340, 310.

⁸²¹ *ibid.* Another author noted that pagodas should be considered "not precisely places of worship... for worship in the strict sense of the word is foreign to the spirit of Buddhism. Shrines they may more aptly be called,

Some of the most critical reflections on Burmese Buddhism use religious expression as a means to criticize the Burmese as a race, and by extension to justify British rule in the country. An article in the *Saturday Review* is particularly notable for arguments of this type; the anonymous author asserts that the Buddhism of Burma is in a "comparatively primitive state" owing to the character of the Burmese people – specifically, their lack of philosophical and reflective inclinations. The "simplicity" of the Burmans' minds has, in the author's view, made them content with the cruder forms of Buddhist expression:

The people of Burma have never shown any of that aptitude for metaphysical inquiries for which the Hindus have been distinguished. They have clung to the moral and human side of Buddhism without caring to enter deeply into its philosophical teachings. The same simple easy tone of mind has made them contented with the religion of common life....⁸²²

Even as they were racially stereotyped as simple-minded, unimaginative pleasure seekers, the Burmans were ambiguously half-praised for their apparent adherence to a simple, ancient form of the faith.

The Burmese appear also to be deficient in imagination; they have but few aspirations for the beautiful and spiritual, and they have no craving for the ritualistic and sensuous forms and ceremonials which have grown to such a height in the Buddhism of Tibet. For all these reasons they have retained a large share of the original simplicity of Buddhism, and their form of religion is consequently of very high interest.⁸²³

This ambivalent description at once lauds Burmese Buddhism for its authenticity while attributing this very characteristic to the racial deficiencies of its practitioners and their lack of imagination and aspiration. Depicting the Burmans as simple-minded, unphilosophical, and unsophisticated practitioners of their faith was a convenient fiction that allowed the *Saturday Review* to dismiss the importance of Buddhism while simultaneously reinforcing racial stereotypes.

One of the most vocal critics of Burmese Buddhism was businessman and colonial administrator Archibald Colquhoun, whose 1885 best-selling book *Burma and the Burmans: or, "The Best Unopened Market in the World"* was instrumental in convincing the British of the need to depose King Thibaw and secure the rest of Burma

inasmuch as they are receptacles of sacred relics." A. H. Finn, "Burmese Pagodas." *The Sunday at Home: A Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading* no. 1902 (Oct 11, 1890): 789-794.

⁸²² "Legend of the Burmese Buddha." *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 49, no. 1269 (Feb 21, 1880): 255-256.

⁸²³ *ibid.*

for the sake of its commercial interests.⁸²⁴ Lengthy excerpts from the book were printed in a *Times* article that year as well as in the *Graphic*, dramatically increasing the resonance and audience of his views.⁸²⁵ Colquhoun repeats some of the conservative stereotypes about the religion that had been especially prominent during the mid-century, including a strong insistence on the degeneracy of contemporary forms of Buddhism, its similarities to Catholicism, and its status as an atheistic, rather than deistic, faith:

Contrary to the notion generally entertained in England, Burmese Buddhists are atheists of a very pronounced type; they do not worship Buddha, the images are not gods, and the "priests" are not priests in the Western sense of the word. The sole end and aim of Buddhism is annihilation; the images are mere representations of a being who was perfect; and the priests, or monks, as they ought more properly to be styled, are only men who, for their own benefit, have renounced the world to devote their lives to working towards the Nirvana, the annihilation they covet.⁸²⁶

Colquhoun's insistence on the Burmese's atheism and nihilistic goal of annihilation, as well as his conviction that the pongyies were self-interested charlatans, paint a starkly negative view of the country under Buddhism's religious influence. In an article in the *Graphic*, Colquhoun is particularly at pains to describe the Burmese sangha as having fallen into disorder and decay and to depict the monks in as negative a light as possible. The order "has fallen into a low degree of abjectness and degradation," he comments. In addition, "the profession of *poongyee*, or monk, is often looked on now as one fit for lazy, ignorant, and idle people" who are "anxious to live well and do nothing."⁸²⁷

Colquhoun was not alone in his views; *The Times* maintained this negative tenor about Burmese Buddhism in other articles as well. An article in the *Times* in February

⁸²⁴ Archibald R. Colquhoun, *Burma and the Burmans: or, "The Best Unopened Market in the World"* (London: Field and Tuer, 1885). For a discussion of the commercial motivations for the takeover see Anthony Webster, "Business and empire: A reassessment of the British conquest of Burma in 1885." *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 04 (2000): 1003-1025. Myint-U notes that in his book, Colquhoun "had one message: All that stood in the way of a revival of British commerce and industry... was the despotic king of Burma. Remove the king, and Burma would become Britain's best friend. And from Burma, the riches of China, and all that meant for British commerce and industry, would be there for the asking" (8) Thant Myint-U, *The river of lost footsteps: a personal history of Burma* (New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 8.

⁸²⁵ "Upper Burmah." *Times*, 24 Jan. 1885, 6.

⁸²⁶ *ibid.*, 6.

⁸²⁷ Archibald R. Colquhoun, "The Crisis in Burma - II." *The Graphic*, Saturday November 14, 1885, 545-549. Colquhoun's unusually negative portrayal of Buddhism was so vehement that it actually drew criticism from other papers for its tone; Colquhoun's views on Buddhism "will be a shock to those among his readers who have been revelling in 'The Light of Asia,'" the *Spectator* commented in a review article. "Mr. Colquhoun evidently dislikes Buddhism cordially, and insists on its atheistical tendency, either ignoring or disdaining the controversy on that point." "Amongst the Shans." *Spectator*, 25 April 1885, 19.

1885, for example, goes so far as to assert that Buddhism has had an insidious effect on the minds of the people.

Religion, such as it is in Burma, has contributed to the abject enslavement of Burmese minds. Buddhism in its Burmese shape, as our Correspondent has described it, conduces to a state of calm which disarms energy as if by a narcotic. Ministered to and educated by a legion of monks, whose invariable text is the delight of annihilation, the Burman is seldom in a mood to struggle for the recovery of the control of his own secular destiny. KING THEBAW and royal barbarities are to him, when he happens to think at all, mere temporary accidents beside the Nirvana, the sole goal he is taught to aspire after.⁸²⁸

The unusually aggressive and damning tone of this article reiterates persistent stereotypes about the lazy indolence of the Burmese while adding the insidious suggestion that the country's predominant religious tradition has acted as a narcotic and led to the mass "enslavement" and enervation of the Burmese. The purpose of such characterizations may well have been to provide further justification for military action in the country. Depictions of the Burmans as enslaved to a gross religion and a barbarous king obviously help to suggest to the public that the British would be liberating, rather than occupying, the country in the event of a takeover. Thus even Buddhism could be used as a strategic argument to create pro-imperial support among the reading public, even casting Buddhism as a form of oppression from which the British could "save" the natives. Aside from its negative tenor, the article is striking for its misreading of the role of the sangha in Burma and its erroneous assumption that the Buddhism's doping effect on the minds of the people would ensure that there would be no resistance or insurgency to expect from the natives after occupation. This was a common – and costly – error.

5.3.5 Buddhist Violence and Resistance

After the occupation, the British government's official stance towards Buddhism in Burma was one of determined neutrality ("British religious policy was a non-policy," Woodward notes.⁸²⁹) This did not mean, however, that the public media in Britain strove to emulate the administration's neutral position. On the contrary, characterizations increased in both intensity and negativity. The alleged brutalities of King Thibaw as well as the aggressive resistance against Burma's imperial occupiers made a particularly noteworthy impact on the public's perceptions of Buddhism. The

⁸²⁸ "King Thebaw has secured for his administration..." *Times*, February 3, 1885: 9.

⁸²⁹ Mark R. Woodward, "When One Wheel Stops: Theravada Buddhism and the British Raj in Upper Burma." *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (1988): 57-90, 62.

media's discussion of these events reveals the public's struggle to understand what role Buddhism played in the king's allegedly barbarous behavior and in motivating resistance plots and supporting armed resistance. In some cases, Burmese violence was understood not as a natural reaction to foreign occupation, but as evidence that Buddhism (despite its ethical tenets, so universally lauded in the West) produced men of weak character and violent inclination.

Thibaw had long suffered from an unsavory reputation in British media, where the Burmese monarch was consistently portrayed as savage, brutal, and ruthless. Particularly damning (understandably) were the reports that had flooded Britain in 1879 alleging that the young King Thibaw had massacred 86 members of his own family to secure his right to rule.⁸³⁰ As the *Examiner* suggests, the 1879 massacre in Mandalay and the ripples of outrage that resonated across Europe were what finally forced the British public to take some interest in this little-known possession: "The massacre of his relations by the present King Theebaw - though no unusual event in the history of the kingdom - seems to have awakened English people to the knowledge that we have, in two successive wars, annexed the greater part of it," the journal noted.⁸³¹ Suddenly, Burma was the center of a whirlwind of negative attention in Europe, and media news bulletins overflowed with expressions of moral outrage, indignation, and contempt. The *National Review* wrote of the "spectacle of Theebaw's savage freaks and excesses" and of "the fearful atrocities which marked Theebaw's accession to power, and caused a thrill of righteous indignation throughout Christendom."⁸³² Descriptions of Thibaw in the press strive to outdo one another in their efforts to describe his villainy. *The Era* called him "one of the vilest monarchs that ever disgraced a throne."⁸³³ Thibaw was noted for his "exceedingly cruel" punishments;⁸³⁴ in the eyes of one *Graphic* article he was a "complete ruffian" and an "evil potentate"⁸³⁵ and in another, that "drunken young lunatic whom an evil fate has

⁸³⁰ Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat, und Gesellschaft*, 2. vol., 7. Oddly, Deborah Beacon Boyer writes that "In February 1879, (Thebaw) allegedly killed 86 blood relatives in his effort to gain the throne. While no mention of this was made in the press in Britain at the time, it was well known in Rangoon" (Boyer, "Picturing the Other," 216). In fact, the episode was widely discussed in the British press.

⁸³¹ "Our Burmese Wars." *Examiner* no. 3757 (Jan 31, 1880): 146-148

⁸³² A. R. McMahon, "The Situation in Burma." *The National Review* 6, no. 32 (10, 1885): 254-265. Here: 256, 263.

⁸³³ "Stage Glimpses in Burmah." *The Era*, Saturday 26. Dec 1885, 7.

⁸³⁴ "Burmah and the Burmese." *London Reader*, Nov 29, 1879; 34, 865; 104

⁸³⁵ "Topics of the Week: The Burmese Buddhists." *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, March 6, 1886; Issue 849.

placed over the Burmese people."⁸³⁶ One family magazine described him as a "usurper—a drunken savage, a sanguinary, tyrant, an oppressor of both rich and poor."⁸³⁷ For the sensationalist *Penny Illustrated* he was a "Burmese monster" and a "royal butcher" who had "wallowed in the blood of his subjects since his accession."⁸³⁸ So damning was Thibaw's reputation that Britain itched with eagerness to retaliate against Thibaw and "save" the people of Burma through annexation: "King Theebaw, of the Golden Foot, and Lord of the White Elephant, has in the course of a short reign earned a title for sanguinary deeds of atrocious violence, which must have made many an Englishman's fingers tingle to bestow upon this Burmese monster the punishment he richly deserves," the *Penny Illustrated* contended.⁸³⁹

The media gleefully cast Thibaw in the role of evil potentate and nefarious savage; it is not difficult to deduce that these hyperbolic characterizations of Thibaw's barbarity were designed to increase public support for acquisition of Upper Burma. (On a historical note, many historians now argue that it was Thibaw's wife Supayalat who initiated the brutal executions of 1878, and that Thibaw may not even have known about the massacres until after the fact; in accounts circulating at the time, however, Thibaw was depicted as the sole instigator and mastermind of the massacre.⁸⁴⁰) A massacre of prisoners in the Mandalay jail in 1884 reinforced the belief in Thibaw's essential cruelty; the British described the event as an "indiscriminate slaughter" and described bodies lying in "ghastly and festering heaps" in the capital city.⁸⁴¹ The British media were reliant on the reports coming out of Rangoon by special bulletin, which were naturally skewed towards casting the British as heroes and the Burmese (ex-)ruler as cruel and villainous.⁸⁴² Negative propaganda was a crucial aspect of the strategy for securing public support for annexation, for – as Aparna Mukherjee points out – Britain had no valid pretext whatsoever for military action, so that allegations of

⁸³⁶ "Burmah and India." *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, September 6, 1879; Issue 510.

⁸³⁷ "The Latest Addition to our Empire." *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*; May 1886; 362-371.

⁸³⁸ "Burmah's Affront to Great Britain." *The Penny Illustrated Paper* (London, England), Saturday, April 26, 1879; Issue 926, 259.

⁸³⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁴⁰ Aparna Mukherjee, for example, is doubtful that Thibaw knew anything of Supayalat's plans. *British Colonial Policy in Burma: An Aspect of Colonialism in South-East Asia, 1840-1885* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publ., 1988), 415.

⁸⁴¹ Quoted in Mukherjee 497.

⁸⁴² Only General McMahon offered some limited insights into Thibaw's actions to kill off potential threats to the throne: "Rebellion of the Princes has always been the skeleton in the cupboard of the Royal House," noted the paper, finding it understandable, at least, that "When Theebaw took possession of the throne, he was at one brought face to face with the danger that threatened him... He accordingly adopted the traditional method of securing personal safety." McMahon, A. R. "The Situation in Burma." *The National Review* 6, no. 32 (10, 1885): 254-265. Here: 262.

cruelty and misrule were necessary to create a justification for action.⁸⁴³ This support was not slow in coming: as *The National Review* confidently expressed it: "The other half of the cherry - Upper Burmah [is] ready for us when it suits us to swallow it."⁸⁴⁴

Thibaw's alleged cruelty and violence proved difficult for the public reconcile with Buddhism's standards of morality and piety, which the British had long alleged could rival those of Christianity. Several papers printed vivid descriptions of Thibaw's particular way of killing those who displeased him - allegedly, clubbing them at the base of their skulls - and asserted that this was the "typical Buddhist fashion" for murdering one's family members.⁸⁴⁵ This strange assertion implied that the king's Buddhist religion not only condoned the massacres, but demanded them and indeed explicitly specified the means by which they were to be carried out. The reactions of the media display ambivalence and confusion about Thibaw's Buddhism. In England, it was well known that Thibaw was a trained and learned Buddhist with an advanced monastery education and an extensive collection of Buddhist manuscripts, and that he had followed his father, King Midon, in actively supporting Buddhism during his reign.⁸⁴⁶ Yet this only made the reports of his brutality seem all the more shocking and disturbing. Yet other media sources asserted that Thibaw's behavior was in fact a direct contradiction of Buddhist ethical tenets, and that a "good Buddhist" would never have been guilty of the kinds of intrigues that Thibaw was charged with. An article in the *Manchester Times*, for example, unfavorably compared Thibaw with his father, who had been "a good Buddhist, and never took the life of man or animal."⁸⁴⁷ Thibaw was of course given little chance to defend himself, although he asserted in an interview with *Times* correspondent E. K. Moylan, given immediately before his exile and published in *The Times* and reprinted throughout the country, that he had not actually killed his relatives. He noted in the interview: "I wish the English to know that I am

⁸⁴³ Mukherjee, *British Colonial Policy in Burma*, 524. Mukherjee also convincingly argues that the real motivation for swift action in the autumn of 1885 were the impending General Elections; Lord Randolph Churchill used of the prospect of a Burmese campaign, with alluring promises of lucrative increases in trade once Upper Burma was annexed, as a means of ensuring an electoral victory (514).

⁸⁴⁴ A. R. McMahon, "The Situation in Burmah." *National Review* 6, no. 32 (10, 1885): 254-265. McMahon was Deputy Commissioner in Burma from 1869-79.

⁸⁴⁵ Among others: "Burmah's Affront to Great Britain." *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* (London, England), Saturday, April 26, 1879; Issue 926, 259.

⁸⁴⁶ e.g. "Burmah." *Saturday Review* 62.1626 (Dec 25, 1886): 833-833; "King Thebaw." *Times* (London, England) 19 Dec. 1885: 15.

⁸⁴⁷ "Miscellaneous Extracts, &c." *Manchester Times* (Manchester, England), Saturday, June 18, 1881. The paper noted that drily that "Theebau is, perhaps, not quite so strict in his notions" and noted Theebau's penchant for waving around the spear of his grandfather which is now "used to split his counselors."

not a drunkard. I am a religious Buddhist."⁸⁴⁸ The entire situation was deemed to reflect poorly on Buddhism; more than one paper would suggest that Thibaw's behavior and misgovernment were indicative of what could be expected of a country run by Buddhists. One magazine, for example, felt that the situation in Burma was final proof of the superiority of the ethics and government possible in Christian countries:

Be it remembered that Buddhism has held undisputed sway in Burma for centuries: Buddhism, whose morality is said to rival that of Christianity, the religion of humanity and charity and sympathy!... the worst government in the worst days of modern Christendom is immeasurably above such a government as that of Burma. Whatever the abstract excellence of Buddhist precepts, we look in vain for their practical fruits.⁸⁴⁹

Ultimately, the media were ambivalent: for some, Thibaw's behavior was evidence of the moral poverty of Buddhism; for others it merely proved that Thibaw was a bad Buddhist.

The extreme vilification and demonization of Thibaw in the British press provided a way for the British to heighten their own case against the monarch and justify their military intervention and takeover.⁸⁵⁰ The alleged savagery and ill government of the country provided ample justification for removing him and installing a British government. Given the negativity of their view of the king some even believed that they were liberating the Burmese from Thibaw.⁸⁵¹ One family magazine, for example, argued that the Burmese "remain wholly impervious to those modern influences which educate the sense... The King, for example, can imprison, torture, and put to death at his own sweet will.... We need not shed tears over the fall of such a king, nor lament unduly over a fallen throne."⁸⁵² Contemporary sources similarly reveal that Britain eagerly cast itself in the role of the savior of an oppressed people: *Cornhill Magazine*, for example, claimed: "In this part of the world at least England has no cause for self-reproach. She came as the protector of the slave, the captive, and the oppressed against the conqueror and the tyrant."⁸⁵³

⁸⁴⁸ "This Evening's News." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England). Saturday, December 5, 1885; Issue 6467.

⁸⁴⁹ "Burmah and the Burmese." *All The Year Round*; Nov 21, 1885; 37, 886; 276-283.

⁸⁵⁰ Myint-U, for example, notes: "The vilification of Thibaw was in many ways the work of Rangoon-based commercial interests which had been, throughout the 1870s, pressing for intervention." Myint-U 164.

⁸⁵¹ Winfield, "Buddhism and Insurrection," 350.

⁸⁵² "Another Empire Gone." *Bow Bells*, Mar 10, 1886; 44, 1128; 283.

⁸⁵³ "England and Ava." *The Cornhill Magazine* 40, no. 236 (08, 1879): 213-224.

After the quick takeover, the complexity and tension of the situation in Burma was further compounded by the fact that the British administration failed to adequately account for the role that Buddhism played in the stability and governance of the country, or to anticipate the effect that Thibaw's removal would have on the sangha and people. The British removal of the king, the symbolic head of the order and center of Burmese Buddhist cosmology, resonated deeply and painfully in the sangha and for all Buddhists in the country.⁸⁵⁴ As Heinz Bechert notes, the colonial government was rejected by a majority of Burmans because it had destroyed the traditional unity of state and religion; instead of attempting to convince the public that the British administration could effectively take the place of the royal religio-political leadership, the British plundered the palace and allowed the king's throne to be removed to Calcutta.⁸⁵⁵ Thus the British displayed a distinct failure to appreciate the interdependency of the secular and religious spheres in Burma, specifically the roles of the king and the *Thāthanābaing* (patriarch) in supporting the sangha and in ensuring Burmese political and social order. In Britain, the media referred to the *thāthanābaing* as the "archbishop" or "Grand Lama" of Burma or compared him to the pope; there was little accurate conception of the role of the king or the patriarch in terms of the wider stability of the country.⁸⁵⁶ In reality, of course, Burmese nationalism and self-identity were inseparable from Buddhist identity; yet the British media had no conception of the fact that Thibaw was not merely a figurehead, but a *dhammajara*, a king who ruled in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha and who provided extensive material and practical support for the sangha.⁸⁵⁷

The failure of the colonizers to appreciate this fact and to adjust their policy exacerbated the tensions in the country. Colonel Sladen and later Lord Dufferin,

⁸⁵⁴ Heinz Bechert, "Das Lieblingsvolk Buddhas': Buddhisten in Birma," in *Der Buddhismus: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Bechert und Gombrich (H. C. Beck: München, 2000): 169-189, 173: "Im alten Königreich Birmas war das königliche Patronat über den Orden so ein wesentliches Element für die religiöse Ordnung im Lande, dass vielen Birmanen die Beseitigung des Königtums als schwerer Schlag für die Sache ihrer Religion erscheinen müsste." As Winfield notes, a Buddhist king was essential to the stability of the Konbaung Burma dynasty, and his removal threatened the stability of the entire social, political, and religious order. Thus "the abolition of the monarch was interpreted as a danger to Buddhism, and ... the Burmese hoped for a replacement that could continue to exercise the function of patron of religion, even if he were, politically speaking, merely the symbolic head of state." Winfield, "Buddhism and Insurrection," 350-351. See also Woodward, "When One Wheel Stops," 57-90, who examines some of the consequences of the removal of the king on the lives of Buddhists, focusing on Mandalay.

⁸⁵⁵ Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat, und Gesellschaft*, 2. vol., 101.

⁸⁵⁶ e.g. "Topics of the Week." *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, March 6, 1886; Issue 849; "The Buddhist Archbishop Explained." *The Star* Tues Dec 22, 1885. The Times called him "a species of archbishop or Grand Lama," noting the need for his replacement looked "strange and incongruous at first sight" (*The Shadow In Burmah.* *The Times* (London, England), Tuesday, May 11, 1886; pg. 15; Issue 31756.

⁸⁵⁷ Woodward, "When One Wheel Stops," 57. Swearer, *Buddhist World*, 82-83.

visiting from India, made a concerted effort to appease the Buddhists and considered what could be done to fill the gap in Buddhist leadership.⁸⁵⁸ To the press at home, however, any concessions to the Buddhists were interpreted as absurd and ridiculous: it was a "preposterous notion" that the removal of that "complete ruffian" King Thibaw could destabilize the country's religious population, noted *The Graphic*, deeming Thibaw's role "purely ornamental" rather than politically essential.⁸⁵⁹ The *Graphic's* summary of the situation and their proposed "solution" display an astounding insensitivity to the gravity of the situation and a dismissive, belittling attitude towards the Buddhists:

...Clearly, therefore, all they require is some great Panjandrum, with or without the little button atop. Perhaps Lord Dufferin would serve their turn. He bears the reputation of being able to make himself 'all things to all men,' and we have little doubt that, if he only set his clever mind to it, he would soon develop the attributes required in a Buddhist Caliph. Or perhaps Mr. Booth would like to essay the task. There is plenty of work for the Salvation Army both in Lower and Upper Burma.⁸⁶⁰

The *Pall Mall Gazette* is one of several papers that displayed a mistaken confidence that the monks' creeds would hinder them not only from rebellious or violent action, but in fact ensured their disinterest in the political proceedings in the country. "Of this creed or system of morals monasticism is the most prominent feature; so that the exact position which these austere recluses occupy in Burmese politics and the influence they are likely to exercise over the course of affairs in Mandalay are not altogether without interest to us at the present moment," noted the *Pall Mall*; yet the author comes to the conclusion that the monks of the country were indifferent to Thibaw's fate, "whose sympathies he is commonly supposed to have estranged through his vices and cruelties." The article concludes by asserting that "the brotherhood, as a society, views with something like indifference the changes and chances of Burmese politics."⁸⁶¹ The press's lack of information about the effects of British control in Lower Burma was almost as complete; while there was some awareness that Buddhism had suffered and splintered in British Burma (Lower Burma) in the preceding decades,

⁸⁵⁸ "The Viceroy promised that every assistance should be given to the Buddhists to meet their wishes with regard to the Achiepiscopal appointment they requested." "Foreign." *The Graphic*, March 6, 1886; Issue 849.

⁸⁵⁹ "Topics of the Week." *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, March 6, 1886; Issue 849.

⁸⁶⁰ "Topics of the Week." *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, March 6, 1886; Issue 849.

⁸⁶¹ For one example: "King Theebaw and the Buddhist Monks" *Pall Mall Gazette*. November 5, 1879; 4.

there was no awareness of the currents of discontent and change fermenting in the Buddhist community at the time.⁸⁶²

Figure 39 "Campaigning in Upper Burma—A Group of Buddhist Priests." *The Graphic*, Saturday, February 12, 1887⁸⁶³

After the annexation, the country entered a period of unexpected rebellion and turmoil; the necessary pacification and never-ending skirmishes presented a continued challenge to the British view of the Burmese.⁸⁶⁴ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, one of very few sources critical of the annexation, summarized the situation:

The truth is, that neither parliament nor the country had any knowledge of what actually happened. It flattered the vanity of both that a few hundred English soldiers had deposed a king, annexed his country—larger than the whole of the United Kingdom—and with very little expense, and without the loss of a drop of English blood. But the mask has now been rudely torn from the eyes of parliament, and the country is just awakening to the fact that it is engaged in a serious war.⁸⁶⁵

The result was an unexpectedly brutal military effort that would draw on for five years. "It is not pleasant to look back on the condition of Upper Burmah for the first ten months of 1886," admitted *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in mid-summer 1887: the smoldering ashes of Burmese army had "burst into flame, strong, lurid, and menacing."⁸⁶⁶ As Jordan Carlyle Winfield has effectively demonstrated, Buddhists pongyis played a critical role in supporting (ideologically and practically) the insurrections against the British starting in 1886.⁸⁶⁷ This was despite the fact that the Thathanabaing explicitly forbade the monks from participating in the political revolution.⁸⁶⁸ The colonial government even offered a bounty of 5000 rupees for the capture of one monk considered a leader of the insurgency; after capture, he was

⁸⁶² This is most masterfully described in Alicia Turner, *Saving Buddhism: The Impermanence of Religion in Colonial Burma* (University of Hawaii Press, 2014).

⁸⁶³ *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, February 12, 1887; Issue 898. The accompanying text notes that the engraving is from a photograph taken at Mandalay.

⁸⁶⁴ For a description of the post-annexation resistance see Dorothy Woodman, *The Making of Burma* (London: Cresset Press, 1962), 335-518 and Ni Ni Myint, *Burma's Struggle Against British Imperialism* (Rangoon: The Universities Press, 1983), 103-154.

⁸⁶⁵ "The Burmah White Elephant." *Reynolds's Newspaper* (London, England), Sunday, November 28, 1886; Issue 1894.

⁸⁶⁶ "Burma Reformed." Yate, A C *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*; May 1887; 141, 859; 711-718.

⁸⁶⁷ Winfield, "Buddhism and Insurrection in Burma, 1886-1890." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20 (3). July 2010, 345-67. See also Trevor Ling, *Buddhism, Imperialism and War: Burma and Thailand in Modern History* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979), and Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat, und Gesellschaft*, 2. vol., 100-101.

⁸⁶⁸ Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat, und Gesellschaft*, 2. vol., 100.

publically hanged.⁸⁶⁹ Insurgent leaders in Burma made explicit appeals to Buddhists, which were "likely a reflection of both their personal concern for Buddhism and the concerns of the Burmese population whom they hoped to recruit," Winfield notes.⁸⁷⁰ As one contemporary administrator observed in his reports, "Wherever there was an appearance of organized resistance, Buddhist monks were among the chiefs. No political movement of importance has been without a monk as the leading spirit."⁸⁷¹ Administrators were aware that some of the most serious resistance plots originated among the pongyis or were hatched in monasteries; there is little evidence, however, that the media was aware of this role.⁸⁷²

The role of Buddhists in the insurrections and resistance skirmishes proved perplexing to the British media because they associated Buddhism so strongly with pacifism and reluctance to violence. Repeatedly, the British expressed surprise that the Burmese, although being Buddhist people, were ready to fight to defend their independence and autonomy. As a result the Burmese Buddhist character was "almost impossible to understand," noted one paper: "A man will not injure a worm; his religion forbids the shedding of blood; he will starve rather than kill a cow or a bullock.... but they care no more for taking the life of a human being, often with the greatest tortures, than we should think of killing a flea."⁸⁷³ Most papers could only conclude that Buddhists must care more about animal life than human life: "There, where human life is so little regarded that a man may publicly drown without a hand stretched out to save him, the monk stains his drinking water lest he swallow a gnat," noted one paper.⁸⁷⁴ Nowhere was this contradiction more visible than when it came to the Burmese fighting to defend or regain their country from the British: "Individually the Burman is a plucky fellow; collectively he is of very little use as a soldier, as he is impatient of restraint and discipline," one paper wrote. "Professing Buddhism, a religion which forbids the shedding of blood, no one in the world is more blood-thirsty and cruel than he, when he has a wrong, either real or fancied, to avenge."⁸⁷⁵ The British conception of Buddhist as peace-loving, passive, and non-violent was thus

⁸⁶⁹ Bechert, "Das Lieblingsvolk Buddhas': Buddhisten in Birma," 173.

⁸⁷⁰ "Winfield, "Buddhism and Insurrection in Burma, 1886–1890," 355.

⁸⁷¹ H. Thirkell White, Secretary of Upper Burma, *A Civil Servant in Burma* (London: Edwin Arnold, 1913), 161; quoted in Ni Ni Myint, *Burma's Struggle*, 62.

⁸⁷² Ni Ni Myint, *Burma's Struggle*, 62.

⁸⁷³ "Burmah and the Burmese." *All The Year Round*; Nov 21, 1885; 37, 886; 276-283.

⁸⁷⁴ Clerke, E. M. "Burma and the Farther East." *The Dublin Review*, 1836-1910 15, no. 2 (04, 1886): 309-340, 310.

⁸⁷⁵ "Burmah and the Burmese." *All The Year Round*; Nov 21, 1885; 37, 886; 276-283.

shaken by the phenomenon of armies of (Buddhist) Burmese, and even more so by the activities of the pongyis in resisting the British.

5.4 Conclusions

This chapter analyzed a wide range of media representations of Burmese Buddhism published in the years preceding and following the British annexation of Upper Burma in 1885/1886. Buddhism proved to be one of the most conspicuous and quintessential characteristics of Burma. As was the case with the Prince of Wales's trip to Ceylon, the media's descriptions of Burmese Buddhism became essential to what scholars have called the "cultural imaginary"⁸⁷⁶ as well as the "visual canon"⁸⁷⁷ of the country. Stephen Keck has even coined the term "Burmascape" to describe "the ways in which many—if not all—British writers imagined Burma and derived meanings about it from the combination of conceptual vocabulary, images, and narratives which enabled them to make sense of what to them was an alien and essentially unknown place."⁸⁷⁸ Entertaining travel exposes and news bulletins used descriptions of pagodas, monasteries, shrines, and yellow-robed monks to evoke the exotic landscape and peoplescope of Burma. For the reader at home in the metropole, the study of the media's lavish descriptions of Burma and eager perusal of the lavishly illustrated magazines was a form of armchair imperialism and cultural consumption. This in turn increased the public's enthusiasm for the annexation and their pride in the expanding empire.

With increasing familiarity with the country came a sense of increasing personal familiarity with its inhabitants. Some media reports (best represented by Titcomb's illustrations and the revelatory insider intelligence delivered by Burmese native "Shway Yoe") deftly created the illusion of intimate familiarity and insider knowledge of Burma and its religious traditions. Both Titcomb and George Scott enjoyed positions of cultural superiority that allowed them to provide readers at home with the illusion of an intimate and authentic glimpse into the lives of the Burmese,

⁸⁷⁶ Hahn "Indian Princes" 174. Pramod K. Nayar explains the concept of the cultural imaginary more fully: "By cultural imaginary I mean the textual (visual as well as written) archive that became a collective unconscious for the Europeans. The cultural imaginary is the shared ideas, prejudices, and beliefs about the non-European world produced as an effect of the discourses. The cultural imaginary is not just a collection of myths – it has a very powerful material, emotional, and social *energizing* effect upon the people." Nayar, *Colonial Voices*, 5.

⁸⁷⁷ Ruth Brimacombe, "The Imperial Avatar in the Imagined Landscape: the Virtual Dynamics of the Prince of Wales's Tour of India in 1875–76," in *Virtual Victorians*, ed. Veronica Alfano, and Andrew Stauffer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015), 189-214.

⁸⁷⁸ Keck, *British Burma*, 13.

including both monks and Buddhist laypeople. Scott's (constructed) hybrid identity furthermore allowed him to assert an outsider's colonial view of Buddhism through the invented guise of a fantasy Burman, thus creating the most authoritative views on Burmese Buddhism in his day. These portraits went far beyond any of the previously available monographs or missionary works on Burma in revealing some of the customs, habits, rituals, and traits of the Burmese. Viewed more critically, the media's visual and textual representations of Buddhists could create an artificially static, passive, and one-dimensional portrait that invited armchair voyeurism and, at its worst, reduced its monks to stock characters in a Burmese pantomime.

Finally, we looked at the increasing negativity of portrayals of Buddhism that accompanied the increasing tension and violence in the country. Some sources used damningly negative portraits of Buddhism to argue for mindless acquiescence on the part of the natives, supposedly fostered by the Buddhist cultivation of passivity and laziness. Other sources created a barbaric monster of the Buddhist King Thibaw in order to underscore the alleged brutality and lawlessness of the country's monarchy. These strategies helped the media to depict the British annexation of Upper Burma as not only expedient, but urgently necessary for the "liberation" of the Burmese people. Reports of ongoing violence, the role of the Buddhist monks in resistance against the British, and the perceived brutality of some Buddhist soldiers proved difficult for the media to reconcile with their understanding of Buddhism as a pacifist tradition.

All of these media sources – however superficially innocuous – were, of course, ultimately part of the machinery of imperial propaganda that made the acquisition of Upper Burma possible and indeed overwhelmingly popular. This is not to say that descriptions of Burmese Buddhism were 'merely' imperial constructs; all of the sources create the impression, at least, of desiring to understand a real or authentic Burma.⁸⁷⁹ Despite this fact, the media's portrayals of Burmese Buddhism within this context were by no means consistent or uniform. Quite the contrary: the popular media's portrayal of Buddhism in Burma was highly ambivalent and contradictory. Some correspondents highlighted its amusing, exotic-picturesque facets even as other sources employed starkly negative characterizations to justify British occupation of the rest of the country. None of them, however, can be considered ideologically neutral: support of

⁸⁷⁹ On the British as a "descriptive regime" who strove, whether with statistics or eyewitness accounts, to capture a real and authentic Burma, see Keck, *British Burma*, 1-22.

the British annexation of the remainder of the country underlies every characterization. Ultimately, Buddhism was a critical part of the shared understanding of the country that allowed them to assert a specific role for Britain vis-a-vis Burma and its inhabitants.

6 Chatter About Nirvana: Pop Culture Discourse On Buddhism

HEARTLESS SCIENTIST: "Miss Adelina, permit me to ask your acceptance of my Hand—"

—Gushing maiden: "Oh, Professor - so sudden."

—Heartless scientist (proceeding): "My—er—Handbook of the Buddhist Psychology and
Ethnology of the Hindoos." (Collapse of G.M.)

- *Every Week* magazine, Feb 26, 1879⁸⁸⁰

The focus of this final substantive chapter of my dissertation focuses on Buddhism's permeation of British mass culture in the 1880s. As we saw in previous chapters, Buddhism had long since expanded beyond ivory towers and missionary summits, even beyond the lecture hall and the library; in this chapter, we see how it became a staple feature of short and serialized fiction, social commentaries, and jokes and satire, with references to Buddhism appearing in puzzles, jokes, children's tales, Christmas books, birthday books, and more. Buddhism permeated British culture down to the level of the everyday, whether it was sporting enthusiasts cheering on a racehorse named Buddha (a very winning horse, as it turned out)⁸⁸¹ or puzzling over clues about Buddhism in the games page of the newspaper ('An island, and a very rich one, too / Where Buddha, so 'tis said, left print of shoe').⁸⁸² But as we will see in this chapter, portrayals of contemporary Buddhist sympathizers were often strongly gendered and characterized by class associations; at the same time, Buddhism was (already) becoming an object of commodification and commercialization.

Even without deeper analysis, these rather offhand comments about the striking 'boom' in Buddhism reveal contemporaries' sense that Buddhism was everywhere. And in many guises and contexts, it had indeed permeated almost every genre and format of popular discourse in the 1880s. My point of departure in the following pages is as wide and various as this suggests: serialized fiction, editorial commentaries, and the kind of lampooning social satire for which the Victorians remain notorious. In many cases, the reference to Buddhism is fleeting and apparently unrelated to the primary theme of the article or story. At first glance many of these materials may appear trivial,

⁸⁸⁰ "Humorous Gatherings." *Every Week: A Journal of Entertaining Literature*; February 26, 1879; 20, 504;144.

⁸⁸¹ "The Turf." *Glasgow Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland), Monday, November 23, 1891; Issue 280.

⁸⁸² "Puzzledom." *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* (Bristol, England), Saturday, April 2, 1892; Issue 13694. There are also a number of other puzzles with clues about Buddhism, e.g. in "Christmas with the Children." *Leeds Mercury* (Leeds, England), Saturday, December 12, 1891; Issue 16750; "Our Own Sphinx." *Bow Bells: A Magazine of General Literature and Art for Family Reading* 37, no. 942 (Aug 16, 1882): 192.

insignificant, even frivolous; they beg the question of whether and how one might use contextually-bound cultural ephemera to generate a substantive analysis of popular religious understanding. Such analysis requires dissecting the social, cultural, political and discursive contexts of each reference in order to demonstrate that even the most apparently non-serious references to Buddhism should be treated as essential to the construction of popular meanings. The effort is worthwhile, however: these materials disclose a great deal more than they first portend to by providing valuable clues about how discourse about Buddhism was situated in terms of class, gender, and social conventions.

6.1 A Matter of Class

If one takes the *Liverpool Mercury's* beleaguered London correspondent at his word, one could hardly hope for an afternoon in the club or a quiet railway carriage journey without Buddhism becoming a subject of conversation: "Who ever expected to be hailed in a London club, as I was the other day, with the exclamation, 'I am a Buddhist'? Who expected to hear a cultivated English gentleman in a railway carriage discourse to a lady, as I heard one last week, on the superior certainties of the Buddhist teaching?"⁸⁸³ The journalist was in good company among those who felt that Buddhism was becoming an onerously common topic of discussion at fashionable tables. This short section addresses the motif of Buddhism at dinner parties - a trope that appeared not infrequently in various types of texts and publications in the 1880s - as a means of probing how Buddhism was situated in terms of culture and class. The texts below all rely on the Victorians' painfully acute awareness of social mores; their analysis is indicative of the social placement of Buddhism and suggests that Buddhism was (like most things in that era) at least partly a matter of class.

The "Art of Conversation" was the title of an instructive editorial published in *Chamber's Journal* in 1884. The piece is a lengthy exposition on the value of witty and amusing conversation (a favorite Victorian theme); in it, the author compares the British conversational arts unfavorably to the French, and especially chides readers for an excessive, very-British type of seriousness at dinner parties, "for com[ing] down with a thud on the toes of all whom they encounter in the various walks of conversation." Buddhism comes in in the following section (the article is rather long):

⁸⁸³ "Our London Correspondence." *Liverpool Mercury*, Thursday, February 26, 1885; Issue 11585.

"But really, say, at a dinner, or in the crowded corners of a fashionable soirée, you cannot go into the craze of evidences, nor discuss the value of esoteric Buddhism, nor yet winnow your sheaf of political economy, beginning with Adam Smith and ending with Henry George. You can only play with words and toss up airy bubbles of ideas."⁸⁸⁴

Now, as Michael Feldberg has pointed out, *Chamber's Journal* was explicitly developed to embrace and expound pedantically middle-class values to a lower- to middle-class audience.⁸⁸⁵ Given the intended audience, it rather unlikely that the magazine's readers would find themselves in a "crowded corner of a fashionable soirée" any time soon. The article's social instruction is hypothetical, not practical: the anonymous article's socially instructive and "improving" voice wants to guide and inform lower-income or lower-born readers about the rules and limits of proper conversations at elegant dinner tables they will never populate. Its function is therefore not to offer practical instruction, but to delimit the acceptable topics of discussion; clearly, esoteric Buddhism is out-of-bounds.

Two pieces of short periodical fiction create a discursive association between interest in 'new-fangled' Buddhism and a frivolous leisure class. As one example, Mary Grace Wightwick's somewhat pedantic short story about a "Good Samaritan" (published in *The Argosy*, a monthly fiction magazine for women, in 1888) depicts Buddhism as both wearisome and frivolous. In the story the sympathetic and love-sick hero, Geoff, finds himself at a dinner party with acquaintances whose trivial conversation about the latest fashionable spiritualities is sharply contrasted with his own emotional gravity.

He turned the subject hastily and plunged into talk with their vis-à-vis who were discussing Spiritualism, Buddhism, and other kindred isms of fashionable philosophy, with all the enthusiasm of Athenians of old for some new thing. Geoff was an old-fashioned fellow in many ways, and opened his honest eyes in sheer perplexity at the new lights of these nineteenth century iconoclasts who, having long ago cast down the old time-honoured idols, seemed to be exalting others with feet of clay to their vacant niches. The vagaries of modern thought are not soothing to a mind saddened and preoccupied.⁸⁸⁶

⁸⁸⁴ "The Art of Conversation." *Chamber's journal of popular literature, science and arts*. Jul 12, 1884; 1, 28; 442-444. Chamber's Journal, started in the 1830s, was one of the first cheap general interest magazines in Britain. It emphasized moral instruction and uplifting, elevating content aimed at the lower and middle classes. Its circulation in 1870 was around 60,000.

⁸⁸⁵ Michael Feldberg, "Knight's 'Penny Magazine' and 'Chamber's Edinburgh Journal': A Problem in Writing Cultural History." *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter* No. 3, [Vol. 1, No. 3] (Nov., 1968), 13-16: 13. Feldberg notes: "The workingmen's journals endlessly canted the values which the middle classes prescribed for those below them. These injunctions were not formulated with regard for working-class experiences of life-style." Rather, they are "ideology," shirking the actual interests and language of the masses for pedantic sermonizing and condescending moral lessons.

⁸⁸⁶ Mary Grace Wightwick, "Roy's Good Samaritan." *The Argosy: A Magazine of Tales, Travels, Essays, and Poems* 46, (08, 1888): 137-154; 150." *The Argosy* (published monthly) was edited by Mrs. Ellen Price Wood, under who guidance the magazine achieved a readership of about 20,000 (compared to the 16,000 of its biggest rival, *Belgravia Magazine*, ed. Mary Elizabeth Braddon). Both Braddon and Wood contributed to making

In a similar vein, a fiction piece in *Murray's Magazine* titled "A Good Old Family," George Gresham, a young man from a good but poor country family, finds himself at a fashionable London dinner party. At one point in the story he is so distracted by the beauty of the young woman seated next to him that his fashionable and style hostess chides him:

You look as if you were in a trance, Mr. Gresham. I hope you are not an esoteric Buddhist. You have refused my husband's best wine, and know you are letting my celebrated *ortolans a l'aurore* pass you by I cannot allow that. Take that dish back to Mr. Gresham," said Lady Katharine to the servant. "I insist on your eating this *chef d'oeuvre* of my cook's. He would be much hurt otherwise.⁸⁸⁷

Here, the trope is similar: a flighty society hostess peppering her dinner-table talk with references to the latest fashionable spirituality and French expressions.

What is especially notable about these three examples from the mid 1880s - two scenes from short pop fiction and one lesson in social manners - is that all three appear in popular magazines with a large, predominantly lower- to middle-class readership. The subculture they gently poke fun at, however, is not their own, but rather the glamorized world of London Society (with a capital S). In both of the two short fiction examples, in particular, the earnest, unpretentious romantic hero of the piece finds himself at a dinner party where esoteric Buddhism is quickly but suggestively characterized either as trivial foppery (in the first example) or as part of the superficial arsenal of a society hostess who wants to charm her guests with references to the latest intellectual fashions as she impresses them with her French. All three of the pieces serve the same purpose: in each, a pedantic authorial voice (negatively) depicts esoteric Buddhism as the purveyance of the flippant and frivolous upper classes, all too likely to make an appearance at a fashionable dinner soirée, and all too likely to leave the earnest, down-to-earth dinner guest (a.k.a. the reader) feeling bored, bewildered, or worse.

A final text takes the situational and social comedy of Buddhism (academic, not esoteric, this time) at the dinner party table a step further with an extended humorous

sensationalist pulp fiction a more respectable literary form for a domestic middle-class audience (*C19: The Nineteenth Century Index*, 2009).

⁸⁸⁷ "A Good Old Family." *Murray's Magazine : A Home and Colonial Periodical for the General Reader*, 4(22), 1888, 555-573. The magazine was published by the firm of John Murray, famous for publishing some of the century's most renowned academic journals and reviews, inc. the *Quarterly Review*, and for publishing Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* and Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help*. *Murray's Magazine* was the firm's attempt to lighten their tone and attract a wider, middle class audience (National Library of Scotland, <http://digital.nls.uk/jma/topics/publishing/periodicals.html>).

anecdote - one considered funny enough to warrant repeated reprinting in various papers in the late 1880s.⁸⁸⁸ In the satire, the socially insecure Mrs. Sharpe learns she will be seated next to an illustrious professor of German descent (a thinly veiled caricature of F. Max Müller) at an upcoming dinner party. She asks her hostess what the professor's academic specialty is, so that she can adequately prepare for the party (clearly she, too, has devoted serious thought to the "art of conversation"). The following comedic situation ensues:

Mrs. Sharpe rattled on about the cows for a conversational mile or two without drawing out any response from the professor. ... she proceeded to discuss the churning methods in vogue in Devonshire, with an infinite deal of talk about coolers and temperature and mechanical butter-workers, and so on. She hadn't read up on the subject all the afternoon for nothing.

But not a word could she get out of the professor beyond "Um" and "Ah!" He was plainly very much bored, and edged away after awhile. Mrs. Sharpe was in despair.

Presently Mrs. Marlborough Crowes got her into a corner, and said - "Why, what in the world to you mean by talking for ever to Professor von Dunkelheim about cows and dairies and all that sort of thing?"

"Isn't that his specialty? Didn't you tell me so?"

"Why, never in the world?"

"What is it then, for heaven's sake?"

"Buddha, of course. He's written any number of books about Buddhism."

There is a marked coolness now between Mrs. Sharpe and Mrs. Marlborough Crowes. Mrs. Sharpe says that a woman who pronounces "Buddha" like "butter" is hardly fit for cultivated society.

This social comedy relies on the universally understood discomfort of an embarrassing *faux pas* and violated cultural conventions to produce its humorous effect. Both Mrs. Sharpe's excessive eagerness to appear knowledgeable before the learned savant, as well as Mrs. Marlborough Crowes' incorrect pronunciation of "Buddha," are used as a means to gently lampoon these eager middle-class social climbers. In the satire, the ladies' attempts to appear knowledgeable about the latest intellectual currents only serve to render them ridiculous in the eyes of the reading audience (not to mention Professor von Dunkelheim).

⁸⁸⁸ "A Page for Christmas." *The Illustrated Police News* (London, England), Saturday, December 4, 1886; Issue 1190. As with many cultural memes it is difficult to pinpoint the original source. Versions of this story are also printed in: "Miscellaneous Extracts," *Manchester Times* (Manchester, England), Friday, June 19, 1891; Issue N/; "Humorous Gatherings." *Every Week : A Journal of Entertaining Literature* 39, no. 998 (Aug 29, 1888): 144; *Boys of England: A Journal of Sport, Travel, Fun and Instruction for the Youths of All Nations* (London, England), January 06, 1882; Issue 790: 238.

6.2 What's Funny about Buddhism?

Mrs. Marlborough Crowes' mispronunciation of "Buddha" provides a convenient segue to test my readers' patience with a collection of groan-inducing late Victorian gags about Buddhism:

Trees are religious once a year; then they profess Buddhism.⁸⁸⁹

The Original Buddhist – Spring.⁸⁹⁰

— Mr. B: 'My dear Mrs. Croesus, may I not put your name down for tickets to Professor Pundit's course of lectures on Buddhism?'

— Mrs. C: 'O, by all means! You know how passionately fond I am of flowers.'⁸⁹¹

"Pa," asked Walter, "What is a Buddhist?" "A Buddhist, my son," replied Pa, "is a – well – a sort of horticultural chap – you've heard of budding fruits, you know."⁸⁹²

Buddhism is greatly on the increase at present; don't be alarmed at the report. Though – it is the proper season for budism on the trees, isn't it?⁸⁹³

A conundrum for botanists and theologians – If trees had any religion, what would it naturally be? – Buddhism.⁸⁹⁴

The imaginative London Correspondents who speak of Lord Beaconsfield as a 'Fatalist' are clearly mistaken. The ex-Premier's avowed anxiety to see the buds open at Hughenden this spring point rather to his being a Buddhist!⁸⁹⁵

The Japanese invasion of England has found a new avenue of attack [in the art of flower arrangement]. [...] We may safely prophesy that the new importation is destined to become more or less the fashion, like everything else Japanese; especially as this particular floral arrangement is said to be connected with Buddhism – the pun is quite intentional – another fashionable 'fad'.⁸⁹⁶

These one-liners about tree buds and bud-dhas feature a simple, straightforward, and harmless style of humor, one that is based largely on the near-universal Victorian penchant for puns and homonyms. Also, these jokes appear in a most ubiquitous and quotidian Victorian context: on the comics page of a regional or national newspaper. The comics page was a regular feature of many Victorian papers and consisted of several columns or an entire page of one-liners and gags (with at most one graphical comic); it was surely one of the most widely-read and popular forms of Victorian discourse. The style of the humor on these pages is designed to appeal to all ages, classes, and literacy levels; family-friendly and harmless, these are jokes that could be

⁸⁸⁹ "Merry Thoughts." *Penny Illustrated Paper*, Saturday, January 27, 1872; pg. 59; Issue 540.

⁸⁹⁰ "John Bull's Jokes." *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, June 6, 1885; Issue 5425.

⁸⁹¹ Repeated in about 6 papers, e.g. *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, Saturday, June 8, 1889; Issue 5634. "Scraps." *Manchester Times*, Saturday, October 12, 1889; Issue N/A. "Facetiae." *The London Journal, and Weekly Record of Literature, Science, and Art*, 12, no. 294 (Aug 17, 1889).

⁸⁹² "Varieties." *The Newcastle Courant*, Friday, June 27, 1884; Issue 10928.

⁸⁹³ "Wit of the Week." *Liverpool Mercury*, Thursday, April 14, 1881; Issue 10377.

⁸⁹⁴ "Humorous Gatherings." *Every Week: A Journal of Entertaining Literature* 37, no. 946 (August 17, 1887):

144

⁸⁹⁵ "A Man's a Budder!" *Fun*; Jun 2, 1880; 31, 786.

⁸⁹⁶ "Buds and Buddhism." *The Graphic*, Saturday, June 29, 1889; Issue 1022.

read aloud equally in the club, to the neighbor next to you on the omnibus, or to spouse and children on a Sunday afternoon. These one-liners thus encapsulate the ubiquitousness of talk about Buddhism and its total and seamless integration into everyday speech language and everyday contexts.

Barbless and family-friendly was not the only type of Victorian humor, however. The Victorian penchant for satire has received renewed academic attention in recent years, especially as digitalization has made it possible to locate larger amounts of comic material from a wider variety of sources.⁸⁹⁷ Jennifer Wegner-Lawlor, for example, has edited a collection of essays that explore the ways that Victorian humor functioned as a "dialogic interchange between the humorous text and its culture."⁸⁹⁸ As we will see here, the goal of the comedic text is often to pry open the cultural discourse to create space for digression, contradiction, and deviations from the norm. Satire, in particular, often aims to reveal the incongruous and ridiculous in the cultural center. In the following I examine a few more sharply satirical pieces involving Buddhism that appeared in some of the most well-known and widely-read popular comic papers in the 1880s, such as *Fun*, *Punch*, and *Judy*.⁸⁹⁹ These are not one-liners and puns, but elaborate comedic setups whose decoding requires deeper analysis of their context.

The first piece, printed in *Fun* in 1882, pokes ruthless fun at the same morally improving middle-class spirit that informed projects such as *Chamber's Journal* (above). In this satire, a stage manager has devised an idea for what he calls an "improving" theater: "no mere medium of worldly amusement" but "a place for the real serious improvement of all classes." He boasts the theater piece will be "replete with promise of most beneficial consequences to the theological knowledge of the theatre-going masses." (As the stage manager muses to himself: "Just think how Brown, Jones, and Robinson will rush to the theatre to be entertained in this way after their day's

⁸⁹⁷ The British Library, in a project headed by periodical scholar Bob Nicholson, is in fact currently creating an enormous searchable "Victorian Meme Machine" using digitized newspaper collections (see <http://labs.bl.uk/The+Victorian+Meme+Machine> and <http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/digital-scholarship/2014/06/victorian-meme-machine.html>). Nicholson's academic work on Victorian newspaper humour includes e.g. "Jonathan's Jokes: American humour in the late-Victorian press." *Media History* 18, no. 1 (2012): 33-49.

⁸⁹⁸ Jennifer A. Wegner-Lawlor, "New Perspectives on the Victorian Comic Spirit," in *The Victorian Comic Spirit: New Perspectives*, ed. Wagner-Lawlor (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), xiii-xx, xvi.

⁸⁹⁹ "Satirical Magazines," *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*, 556-557; John Strachan, "Satirical Print Culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Culture*, ed. Francis O'Gorman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 156-176. On satire in nineteenth century prose and verse more generally, see Ruben Quintero, *A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern* (2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 340-367.

work!") In the following excerpt, the stage manager is speaking to his patron and relating the conversation he had with the author who is to write the commissioned theatrical piece:

[So I said to the author,] "Just knock me off a nice little play with a Bishop in it, and a Ritualistic Vicar in it, and a Methodist in it, and a Freethinker in it, and you might as well throw in a Mormon, and a Moravian, and a Buddhist, and a fire-worshipper, and a Salvationist, and -"

"But, hang it!" said my author, "What sort of play to you require? A comedy, or a tragedy, or a burletta, or what? And how on earth am I to work in all these characters, I should like to know? Where's your plot that'll contain 'em all, and where's your interest, and where's your - hang it! where's your anything?"

"Pooh" says I... "my public won't want plot, or interest, or any of that trivial nonsense. What they want is to learn. Make it a farce," I said; "a farce will do as well as anything."

So, after he'd grumbled a bit, he made it a farce, and a nice compact little thing it is - won't take more than a month to perform, if so much; might get it over in three weeks."⁹⁰⁰

Fun's lower- and middle-class readership is of course expected to howl at the depiction of the theater manager plotting an improving theatre whose moral lessons are to be directed at them, the readers.⁹⁰¹ At its heart of this humorous bit is thus a social spoof of the preachers and "improvers," the earnest and well-meaning but pedantic and out-of-touch moralists from the mobile upper-middle classes, with their arsenal of improvement societies, clubs, and lectures designed to inculcate working men and women with their own moral, political, and socio-cultural values. The exact religious orientation of the play or its characters is irrelevant, so long as the play is instructive and "improves" its audience; and Buddhism will do as well as anything else. Of course, in *Fun*, no one escapes unscathed, and there is an equally sharp jab at those who run from Freethought to Buddhism to the next intellectual trend - regardless of their social class.

Those who freewheel through the 'isms of the day without stopping for breath are lampooned more directly in "An Uncertainarian," a joke printed in the *Hampshire Telegraph's* popular "John Bull's Jokes" column:

A few days back the male parent of a lad about to be sent to a reformatory was questioned by the magistrate's clerk as to what creed he professed. "Are you a Protestant?" asked the

⁹⁰⁰ "The Improving Stage Again." *Fun* 36, no. 917 (Dec 06, 1882): 242.

⁹⁰¹ Although *Fun* always trailed behind *Punch* in circulation numbers (20,000 vs. 40,000 ca. 1870), it was considered to have a more lower- and middle-class readership than its big brother, as well as to have more politically liberal readers. Strachan also suggests that at the end of the century the papers' readership was getting younger, as hard-hitting political and moral satire gave way to silly jokes and light-hearted fun (Strachan, "Satirical Print Culture," 172). *Fun* was *Punch's* only real rival on the newsstand; in actuality, they were owned by the same firm that owned the third-largest satirical paper, *Judy*, as well (Strachan, "Satirical Print Culture," 170). See also Jerold Savory and Patricia Marks, *The Smiling Muse: Victoriana in the Comic Press* (Associated University Presses, 1985), 16.

official. "Well, I feels rather honsartin,"⁹⁰² replied the witness. "Are you a Roman Catholic?" "I shouldn't like to swear to that ere." "Are you a Mohammedan, a Buddhist, a Jew, or an Atheist?" "Devil a bit of either." "Then what, in the name of fortune, are you, man?" inquired the clerk, somewhat testily. "I ain't quite exactly sure, but I think as 'ow as I'm a bit of a vegetarian, or a Unitarian, or something of that sort; do, please, sift it hout for yourself," groaned the witness.⁹⁰³

Here, too, the joke's sharp edge comes from its reference to class differences; for contemporary readers, the witness's accent (East End Cockney?) and mode of speech, as well as his association with petty criminality, unmistakably signal lower-class status. We note, for example, that the various religions and creeds of the day easily roll off the tongue of the middle-class magistrate, the more educated and respectable figure; but the joke comes at the expense of the less educated witness, who is humorously depicted as floundering in a sea of religious 'isms, awash in the glut of contemporary religious options, unable even to keep their names straight. This is the advent of what Callum Brown called the "essentially 'modern' conception of religion as a personal choice."⁹⁰⁴ Here, Buddhism is just one more 'ism that presents itself as a lively and competitive option for an increasingly choosy (if overwhelmed) public - faced with the task of evaluating increasingly diverse options in the marketplace of religious ideas and as likely to become an "Uncertainarian" as anything else.

Returning to *Fun*, the paper sharpened its knives on the Victorian national-cultural obsession with the discovery of Buddhist relics in a satire from 1889 titled "The Latest Discovery." In this satirical poem, however, it is not the Buddha's tooth that generates excitement, but the discovery of "Buddha's little finger joint." The poem bears quoting in full:

"The Latest Discovery"

From farthest Ind this tale. (I wist
in Truth's own mintage it was coint.)
How Campbell, Archaeologist,
By strength of will and force of fist,
Found Buddha's little finger-joint!

In ancient days a king of Sutch
(His name would British jaws disjoint,
And doesn't matter overmuch)
Detained within his reverent clutch

⁹⁰² I am not sure I have transcribed this correctly - the print quality of this paper is very poor. In any case, I cannot fathom what 'honsartin' (or similar?) could mean.

⁹⁰³ "John Bull's Jokes." *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* (Portsmouth, England), Saturday, May 14, 1887; Issue 5525.

⁹⁰⁴ Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 37.

Great Buddha's little finger-joint.

He put it in a box of gold
 (With costlier essences anoint).
 A silver casket's shining fold,
 A copper urn's metallic hold,
 Guarded Great Buddha's finger-joint.

He scaled it in an earthen bowl
 (With charms from Dervishes purloint);
 He burrowed in a stone a hold
 And hid, unknown to any soul,
 Great Buddha's little finger joint.

And o'er the hole he reared a pile,
 A stately tower well conned and quoiunt,
 Then died - it may be with a smile.
 Centuries passed, ere trod the sile
 The Finder of the finger-joint.

The artless natives, fearing Djins
 In those unsweetened shades, did point
 And gibber, with uplifted chins.
 "For spooks I do not care two pins!"
 Quoth he who found the finger joint.

The tower fell down - the dust flew up.
 He bade the bricks and blocks aroint.
 The cobra and the jungle-pup
 Might not disturb his lofty gup.
 "Found! Found! he shrieked, "the finger-joint!"⁹⁰⁵

The lyric is a direct commentary on British archaeologist James Campbell's discovery in late 1888 of a finger-nail supposedly belonging to the Buddha and housed in one of Asoka's stupas, in a mound located about 25 km from Lumbini.⁹⁰⁶ The discovery was first reported in England by the *Daily Telegraph* (of course),⁹⁰⁷ and the story was

⁹⁰⁵ "The latest discovery." *Fun*. April 3, 1889; 49: 149. The creativities in spelling are of course original. Some of the more obscure references in the poem (e.g. the cobra and the jungle-pup) are to the details of the discovery: the site was being 'guarded' by a large cobra, whom even a snake-charmer could not entice to leave, and local mothers kept their young boys at home due to rumors that human sacrifices were planned to appease the cobra and obtain the stupa's treasures.

⁹⁰⁶ For a historical account of the British archaeological race to obtain and identify Buddhist relics, see Himanshu Prabha Ray, *The Return of the Buddha: Ancient Symbols for a New Nation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 101-113. The relics were handed over to Buddhists in an elaborate ceremony; they were then divided up among Mandalay, Rangoon, Kandy, Combo, and Bangkok (109).

⁹⁰⁷ "Discovery of Buddhist Relics in India." *The Daily Telegraph* (London, England), March 26, 1889. The London papers were actually three months behind the Americans, who had reported on the find in early January, with the *New York Daily Tribune* calling it the find of the century ("Literary Notes." *New York Daily Tribune*, Jan, 7, 1889, 8; quoted in Ray, *The Return of the Buddha*, 107). Possibly this suggests more general enthusiasm for the find in America than in England.

quickly picked up by the other major dailies - *The Spectator*⁹⁰⁸ and *The Times*⁹⁰⁹ - and then by evening society papers such as the *Pall Mall*.⁹¹⁰ It would thus have been fairly difficult for a literate man or woman to not have read about the discovery of the finger-nail unless the paper boy had called in sick for the entire week. The finger relic was assumed to be genuine; *The Times* quotes part of Campbell's own letter on the find including his confident assertion that it belonged to "the divine pessimist Gautama Buddha [sic] himself."⁹¹¹ The following excerpt from *The Spectator's* expansive report on the find is a bit more revealing of contemporary journalistic reports:

[Asoka] enclosed it in a bottle of gold, and that in a casket of silver, and that in a vessel of copper, and that in a bowl of baked clay—a substance as durable as the earth of the world—and that in a coffer of claystone, and that in a hollow square of sandstone, and that, again, in a pyramid of brick more than 80 ft. high, and at the base of the same thickness ... The Prince did not spend all that thought and labour and treasure only to honour his relic; he meant to preserve it as long as India or Time itself should last, and so well did he plan that he succeeded in preserving it for fifteen hundred years. His dynasty ceased, and was even forgotten; his people changed their creed, and ceased to worship Buddha; his clearances were abandoned by human beings, and the jungle spread its obliterating mantle over roads and plain and pyramid; and still the relic remained as safe in its golden bottle as it was when the Prince placed it there.⁹¹²

Fun's piece, then, appearing a scant week after the serious newspaper reports, appears close on the heels of the discovery and is obviously eager to take the wind out of its sails. It does so by lampooning the entire situation: by hyperbolically portraying Asoka as more than slightly crazed, the natives as superstitious "gibberers," and Campbell himself as the stereotypically obsessive and single-minded archaeologist. Campbell of course bears the brunt of the joke's force: his "strength of will and force of fist" in excavating the stupa, the insinuation that he let the dust fly as "the tower fell down - the dust flew up" and above all the wild and utterly un-English "shrieking" that closes the poem on a histrionic high note - all have the effect of collapsing the distinction between Asoka and the British archaeologist, so that Campbell appears to have sunk to the level of an ancient Indian Buddhist relic-worshipper in his excessive veneration of a fragment of finger-bone.

⁹⁰⁸ "English Foresight." *The Spectator* (London, England), March 30, 1889.

⁹⁰⁹ "Discovery Of Buddhist Relics In India." *Times*, Monday, April 8, 1889, 5.

⁹¹⁰ "Discovery of Buddhist Relics in India." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Monday, April 8, 1889; Issue 7506.

⁹¹¹ "Discovery Of Buddhist Relics In India." *Times* (London, England), Monday, April 8, 1889, 5.

⁹¹² "English Foresight." *The Spectator* (London, England), March 30, 1889.

The following joke about Ceylonese Buddhists is the only joke I found imported from a Buddhist context to the West. It appears in a magazine piece in the family-oriented Saturday paper *All the Year Round* for October 1887. The joke is reputedly of Ceylonese, not European, origin; it appears in an article of humorous tales the author claims to have heard while living in Ceylon. The significance of the joke for my analysis therefore rests not in its content or construction, but in its inclusion and recontextualization in a popular English family magazine.

The sacred precepts of Buddha are called "Pansil," and are communicated orally by the priests to any who may desire to hear and follow them. A certain woman, having been to the temple for this purpose, asked her husband, who was a very stupid man, why he, too, did not go and hear 'Pansil.' 'Because I do not know how to do so,' he replied. 'Why all you have to do,' said the wife, 'is to repeat whatever the priest says to you.' 'If that is all, I will go,' says the man."

(As the joke continues, the man goes to the temple. There, the Buddhist head priest attempts to engage him in conversation, but the man simply creates an absurd echo of everything the priest says. Finally the priest, utterly fed up, calls his attendants, and the man receives a good thrashing and gets thrown out of the temple.)

On returning home, he told his wife that, considering she heard Pansil once a fortnight, he was surprised at her keeping so well. For his part, the first dose was enough, and he wanted no more of it.⁹¹³

What makes this joke's appearance in *All the Year Round* so interesting is that it introduces the paper's wide lower- to middle-class readership, in a humorous and non-threatening way, to the Buddhist tradition of *pansil* - a concept which was elsewhere causing serious consternation in British circles because it was, at the time, considered the "official" means by which a European converted to Buddhism.⁹¹⁴ The biggest splash had been of course been made by the Rev. Leadbeater's conversion (discussed in a previous chapter), which had been so vigorously lampooned in the *Saturday Review* in 1885.⁹¹⁵ Similarly, in 1889 *The Times* reported on the "remarkable" conversion of an American man to Buddhism in Ceylon by receiving the *pansil* precepts,⁹¹⁶ and in 1890 the *Dublin Review* reprinted a lengthy story from an Indian

⁹¹³ "Ceylon Folk Lore." *All the Year Round*; Oct 1, 1887; 41, 983. Reprinted in "Scraps." *Manchester Times* (Manchester, England), Saturday, October 22, 1887.

⁹¹⁴ Blavatsky and Olcott were two of the earliest and most famous Europeans to receive *pansil*. It was only in 1894 that some of the novelty or shock value of *pansil* had worn off, and a European traveller could recount in detail his/her experience personally attending Bana in a Ceylonese temple: "Of Reading Bana." *Chambers's Journal*, May 5, 1894; 11, 540; 282. See Gary Lachman, "New Age fin de siècle." in *The Fin-de-Siècle World* ed. Michael Saler, (Routledge: 2014), 611-622, 613.

⁹¹⁵ "Buddhist Theosophy." *Saturday Review*, no. 1563 (October 10, 1885): 478-79.

⁹¹⁶ "A Convert to Buddhism." *Times* (London, England) 28 Sept. 1889: 3. The *Times* describes the scene: "The convert knelt before the assembled priests and intimated his desire to be admitted a member of the Buddhist Church. The high priest then catechized him and the assembled monks satisfied themselves that he was fitted to be a follower of Buddha. The gentleman, whose name was Powell, then begged the high priest 'to give him the Pansil,' which the latter did, the candidate repeating it after him with the palms of the hands brought together uplifted. Having explained to the convert the responsible duties of a Buddhist the high priest gave him his blessing." Mr. Powell attributed part of his conversion to a picture of the Buddha in one of his father's books,

paper about the conversion of another Theosophist, a Mr. E. D. Fawcett originally of London, with a similar description of a similar ceremony.⁹¹⁷ And in 1891 a large number of papers picked up on the story of a young Australian woman named Miss Picket who had travelled to Ceylon and publically converted to Buddhism in the presence of Colonel Olcott, but who only a few days later committed suicide by throwing herself down a well. The dramatic tale, with its aura of exotic tragedy and sad romance, made for popular press copy; the elaborate description of her funeral includes a description of the priest giving *pansil* to the assembled Buddhists.⁹¹⁸ These journalistic reports thus constitute the 'frameworks of knowledge' that suggest the joke's cultural relevance and educative power. The joke's explanation of *pansil* is almost incidental (and it certainly wasn't in the Ceylonese original); it is merely the setup to the joke, and in a text clearly not meant to be entertaining, not instructive. The inexpensive 2d. *All the Year Round* enjoyed a wide readership in a family setting, and its readers surely laughed at the almost slapstick humor of the antics of the dull husband. While readers were laughing, however, they were absorbing new information about a Buddhist concept with which they were almost surely unfamiliar, and in a way that was remarkably less reactionary and polarizing than the circulating reports of European conversions.

A final selection of quotes and quips are suggestive of the associations with Buddhism that formed part of the common cultural currency of the period, whereby a mere reference to the Buddha was strongly suggestive of a host of personal qualities. Such associations were particularly significant in the political realm, where both Disraeli and Gladstone were compared to Buddha when they wore passive or bored expressions in Parliament. On Disraeli in 1879, the *Manchester Times* noted commented: "The Prime Minister moves on sublimely indifferent to all that irresponsible and frivolous outsiders can speak or print. He appears, like Buddha, to be absorbed in contemplating with imperturbable self-satisfaction, his own perfections of his policy, and nothing can disturb his blissful reveries."⁹¹⁹ The allusion was not party-

which he discovered as a child, with the Buddha sitting in repose on a lotus leaf. Mr Powell claimed that he was so inspired by the Buddha's look of love and peace that he got in the habit of going into his father's study every evening to sit as long as possible in the same way. He was later also deeply moved, he reported, by *The Light of Asia*."

⁹¹⁷ "The Buddhist Propaganda in Christian Countries." *The Dublin Review*, Jul 1890; 24, 1; 54.

⁹¹⁸ Reported in the *Daily News* (London, England), Wednesday, July 29, 1891; Issue 1413 and *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Wednesday, July 29, 1891; Issue 8223; *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* (Aberdeen, Scotland), Wednesday, August 5, 1891; Issue 7491.

⁹¹⁹ "Summary of the Week." *Manchester Times* (Manchester, England), Saturday, August 9, 1879; Issue 1129.

specific: Disraeli's arch-rival Gladstone was described by the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* in 1883 as possessing that "bland passivity with which the image of the Buddha contemplates the prostrations of his adorers."⁹²⁰ (The likeness does seem more fitting for Gladstone than for Disraeli!) Other public figures could be caricatured in the same way. The *Leeds Mercury* noted in 1885: "If Lord St. Oswald is an authority, it would appear that elevation to the Peerage is even a more certain method of attaining the blessed state of 'passionless repose' than any which is known to the Buddhist. And he has only been a Peer for half a dozen weeks; yet already he has scaled the height of this divine perfection!"⁹²¹ The then-Lord Chancellor sitting in Parliament in 1891 likewise appeared, in the words of the *Pall Mall*, "like the Lord Buddha, with crossed legs, sitting waiting for Nirvana. But ever and anon the figure rose, and muttered a strange incantation over phantasmal peers."⁹²² These short quips rely a familiar interpretation of Buddhism that draws mainly on the remarkably persistent popular understanding of nirvana as a passive cessation of interest and activity, if not a complete annihilation of personality.⁹²³ In these examples, a journalist uses a reference to Buddhism as a kind of cultural shorthand in order to invoke a host of related meanings including passivity, detachment, and apathy. This reinforces the dominant cultural stereotypes: to be like the Buddha, at least as a prime minister or a peer, clearly suggested an other-worldly dissociation and state of passive disinterest... and I think it goes without saying that this was not intended as a complement.

That Buddhists had a certain cultural currency in the popular imagination is also reinforced by a humorous story told in the Irish *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* in 1880, in which a policeman was so busy observing the slabs before his feet on the O'Connell Bridge in Dublin that he failed to notice to a purse-snatcher running past him. The journalist complains: "It is too much to ask that this constable's mind shall be relieved from the responsibility of contemplating the slabs like a Buddhist devotee of the first rank, and that... he shall be permitted to descend to the lighter and more ornamental duties of the force - the prevention of crime?"⁹²⁴ Here,

⁹²⁰ *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* (Aberdeen, Scotland), Friday, October 12, 1883; Issue 8944.

⁹²¹ *The Leeds Mercury* (Leeds, England), Monday, August 10, 1885; Issue 14770.

⁹²² "Betting Circulars and British Soldiers." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Tuesday, February 24, 1891; Issue 8091. The Lord Chancellor was at the time Hardinge Giffard, 1st Earl of Halsbury.

⁹²³ See Almond, *British Discovery of Buddhism*, 103-106.

⁹²⁴ *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser* (Dublin, Ireland), Monday, August 23, 1880; Issue N/A.

too, an off-hand reference to Buddhism is expected to communicate to readers a sense of the policeman's otherworldly-absorption and hence distraction from his duties.

One of the things that this wide-ranging and heterogeneous collection of comic material reveals is that Buddhism could appear in a variety of contexts to convey a surprisingly wide range of cultural meanings. Rather than concentrating popular understandings into one core cultural 'meaning' of Buddhism, these materials form a refracting prism that creates an even wider spectrum of associations and significations. As discussed in a previous chapter, the remarkable slippage and fluidity between Buddhism and Esoteric Buddhism in the mind of the public contributed significantly to this diversity and plurality of meanings. Thus, in a fictional sketch of a dinner party, talk of esoteric Buddhism suggested excessive frivolity; at the same moment, uttered in the context of political journalism, Buddhism could be used to swiftly caricature a politician as exactly the opposite: passive, immovable, detached.

Second, these comedic materials assist us in gauging the extent to which Buddhism had penetrated popular discourse, offering valuable evidence for understanding both the depth of knowledge as well as the types of associations that circulated in popular culture. Satire and jokes, tightly bound to popular culture in a mutually (de)constructive way, offer unique insights into contemporary cultural concerns. In his study of *Punch*, for example, Patrick Leary has noted how Victorian popular satirists "ransacked classical mythology, current novels and poems, talked-about paintings, popular catch-phrases, advertising, folk customs, gossip, fashions, and the periodical's own back issues for comic parallels to people and events in the news."⁹²⁵ One result of this 'ransacking' and constant culling and sifting of popular forms for the sake of comedy was the presence of a teasing but simultaneously hard-edged satire of the 1880's fashion for Buddhism in contemporary papers. This is also in keeping with what theorist Paul Simpson has aptly noted: that humor is "inextricably bound up with context of situation, with participants in discourse and with frameworks of knowledge."⁹²⁶ And indeed, most of the jokes above work with, and play off, contemporary discourses; most are only obliquely funny (if at all) until one probes the

⁹²⁵ Patrick Leary, *The Punch Brotherhood: Table Talk and Print Culture in Mid-Victorian London* (London: British Library Board, 2010), 12.

⁹²⁶ Paul Simpson, *On the Discourse of Satire: Towards a Stylistic Model of Satirical Humor* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2003), 1.

social context of the joke and the 'frameworks of knowledge' that undergird it. But while some jokes only reinforced common stereotypes about Buddhists, others actually increased the level of popular knowledge about the subject. The increasing popularity of 'bud'-related jokes and puns made the Buddha a household name; political jokes reinforced existing associations; and a joke in a family magazine could even serve as a means of introducing Buddhist concepts, such as *pansil*, to a non-specialized mass audience.

Third, some of the materials played a more potent role in delimiting the boundaries of permissible versus excessive interest in Buddhism. Sharper satirical pieces in *Punch* and *Fun* lampooned those who, like archaeologist James Campbell, transgressed these limits and displayed an excessive enthusiasm for Buddhism. Jokes and references to excessive talk about Buddhism at dinner parties also suggest the limits of Victorian toleration of interest in other religions. This is very much in line with what Michael Billig has asserted: that humor often has "disciplinary aspects," and that "the possibility of ridicule ensures that members of society routinely comply with the customs and habits of their social milieu."⁹²⁷ Despite the near-total saturation of popular media with Buddhist themes, an excessive interest in the subject could result in censure or 'discipline' in the form of a mocking satire or a negative portrayal in a joke or in pop fiction. Finally, it is worth explicitly noting the surprising lack of jingoistic or xenophobic humor directed at foreigners or colonized peoples; in keeping with Billig's assertion that satire is "at the heart" of society, jokes about Buddhism were exclusively directed at perceived cultural excesses in the Victorians' immediate environment.⁹²⁸ Buddhist jokes were almost exclusively self-critical, and meant to discipline or delimit the boundaries of the Victorian cultural center.

6.3 Ladies and Gentlemen

The following sections examine the increasingly gendered construction of popular Buddhism in this period. In the 1880s portrayals of women interested in (esoteric) Buddhism in the popular press and short fiction were clearly on the rise.

⁹²⁷ Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 2.

⁹²⁸ There were, of course, exceptions. One joke, for example, focuses on the "almond-eyed ... Heathen Chinese" - but this was really exceptional. The Passing Observer." *Judy: Or the London Serio-Comic Journal* (May 23, 1877): 57.

Some of the associations between women and Buddhism seem admittedly rather silly: one short story describes a ladies' social gathering at which "tea, muffins, shortbread, sentiment, Buddhism, pleasantly occupied the afternoon hour"⁹²⁹ - and in another magazine women are cautioned to avoid giving themselves a Buddha-brow with excessive eyebrow pencil (This season "eyebrows are pencilled and darkened very generally.... [but] ladies are cautioned not to make themselves look like an image of the Buddha, where the eyes are always shown in a formal arch.")⁹³⁰ More seriously, as will be seen in the following, there were two basic 'types' of women Buddhists in the popular media: the intellectually fragile young maiden, and the world-weary spinster aunt.

6.3.1 Ladies

Starting in the mid-1880s, popular media and fiction featured an increasing number of comments about the particular likelihood of young women to become interested in Buddhism. The trend, it appears, seems to have started in America: in 1886, the "American Cuttings" column of the *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* reported that girls in Boston "languidly proclaim themselves Buddhists."⁹³¹ *Fun* and the *Graphic* picked up on the entertaining gossip in 1887. *Fun* noted: "It is said that a number of American ladies, who are tired of excitement and frivolity, have gone in for Buddhism, because the religion affords them sweet, calm repose. This is a polite way of recording the fact that, owing to their generally battered condition, these daughters of Eve have been obliged to become 'totes.'"⁹³² In the words of the *Graphic*: "Cultured Americans are beginning to weary of the eternal hurry and excitement which so strongly marks Transatlantic existence, and accordingly it is fashionable just now to affect an extreme admiration for Buddhism. The placid Oriental ease, the attainment of Nirvana, is especially affected by fair ladies of an indolent turn of mind, who point out that rest and repose are the true height of bliss, strangely overlooked by their restless countrymen."⁹³³ Likewise, in popular literature, a novel aimed at young female readers

⁹²⁹ From a short story entitled "The One Thing Needful." *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* (Portsmouth, England), Saturday, June 5, 1886; Issue 5476.

⁹³⁰ "Our Ladies' Column." *The Preston Guardian* etc (Preston, England), Saturday, August 5, 1893; Issue 4172. In yet another article and women decked out in furs and feathers are admonished that "the very Buddhist of heathen India blushes for you." "Second Thoughts." *The Leisure Hour*, Nov 1891; 38.

⁹³¹ "American Cuttings." *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* (Portsmouth, England), Saturday, September 11, 1886; Issue 5490.

⁹³² (Untitled) *Fun* 46, no. 1179 (Dec 14, 1887): 253. A "tote" is Victorian slang for a teetotaler (Crombie, Catriona. *Victorian Slang for Today*. Lulu Press, Inc, 2015 - no page numbers).

⁹³³ *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, November 19, 1887; Issue 938.

(*Penelope's English Experiences* by Kate Douglas Wiggin) features a young American heroine with vague Buddhist leanings; her leisure activities are memorably described as including serving as "the treasurer of the Boston Band of Benevolence, of the Saturday Morning Slöjd Circle, of the Club for the Reception of Russian Refugees, and of the Society for the Brooding of Buddhism."⁹³⁴ These gossipy transatlantic societal reports may be teasing in tone, but their underlying orientation is of course a critical one.

Back in England, popular media was more overt in its portrayal of young women as excessively susceptible to religious uncertainty, and hence more open to novel religious movements. In various papers, fashionable young society girls were repeatedly and explicitly associated with religious fickleness, and often accused of swapping creeds and religious leanings as often the season's fashions. "It is not easy to take the religion of the London drawing-room very seriously," complained the *Darlington Northern Echo* in its "London Letter," containing gossip from the big city, in 1886. The author complained that the women of London cycled through religious trends in every season; recently the ladies "had donned another creed," according to the columnist: Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott were out of fashion again, for the moment, but "when you asked a miss some seventeen years old, in a dress apparently modelled from Gilbert and Sullivan's 'Patience,' what her religion was, she informed you, with a lisp, that she was a Buddhist."⁹³⁵

The plot line of the religiously inconstant young woman, shaking off the strictures of faith and susceptible to every change in the winds of religious fashion, is taken up in a number of serialized fiction pieces from the period. Violet Fane's 1881 novel features a young, impulsive heroine named Sophy, who "like the conscientious Buddhist ... was beginning to shed her illusions, though... her heart ached anew with every fresh demolition."⁹³⁶ A similar motif - albeit addressed in a considerably more

⁹³⁴ "Literary References." *Liverpool Mercury* etc (Liverpool, England), Wednesday, July 19, 1893; Issue 14209. My readers may know this but Slöjd was a Finnish movement for handicraft-based education. :)

⁹³⁵ "Our London Letter." *Northern Echo* (Darlington, England), Saturday, April 24, 1886; Issue 5044. It is interesting to note the choice of the unusual verb "to don," which creates a particularly gendered interpretation of women's changing religious interests by imagining women putting on Buddhism as they put on a fashionable dress.)

⁹³⁶ Violet Fane, *Sophy, or The Adventures of a Savage* (London: Hurst and Blackett), 1881. The following scene depicts Sophy educating her love interest about Buddhism during a shooting party: "'And now, instead of travelling, and trying to improve your mind, you are always destroying life — shooting, or going out with the beagles; and then, upon the slightest provocation, you "have out the ferrets," as you call it. It's very easy to see that you're not a Buddhist.' 'No,' answered the young man, with a slight south-country burr, 'I am certainly not a Buddhist; and what's more, I don't see why I should be one.' *The Buddhists,' said Sophy

moralizing tone - appears in the short story "Sheba" published in the *London Society* magazine in 1889. The story features a rather clumsy caricature of a German professor (with the unsubtle name of Professor Müller) who introduces the young woman to the brave new world of ideas and philosophy, including of course Buddhism, and thereby ruins her simple faith forever. Part one of the tale ends on a sour cautionary note: "The old German himself never guessed what harm he had done; with what a devastating blast his chill philosophies had blown over that untrained, yet fruitful mind-garden of the young girl. ... [to the professor] a child's faith in what he termed the 'nursery stories of Christianity' seemed weak and foolish, and of no account."⁹³⁷ A slightly more sympathetic portrait appears in Beatrice Harradan's wistful romance "The Mathematical Master's Love Story" in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, in which the young female heroine is an overworked schoolteacher, budding Socialist, and Buddhist sympathizer.⁹³⁸

The theme is taken up at greater length, and more satirically, in a short work of semi-comic fiction published in Blackwood's in 1893. In it, a sweetly silly young wife seeks counsel from her husband because she is struggling with her faith.⁹³⁹ The piece's tone of dry bemusement in its observations of social mores and manners is brutally effective in trivializing the young wife's religious struggles. Athanasia's attraction to non-Christian religions and her discomfort with the established church are teased and made to appear silly, absurd, and feminine. Her struggles are overtly contrasted with the "honest doubt" of struggling clergymen when she tells her husband that she had tried to read *Robert Elsmere* (Mrs. Humphrey Ward's 1888 blockbuster about an Anglican clergyman's crisis of belief and flight from the church), but found it too difficult and dull to finish. Through a friend, esoteric Buddhism presents itself to her as a possible option for alternative religious engagement:

severely, 'will not destroy life, fearing, I have heard, to destroy their ancestors; believing, as they do, in the transmigration of souls.'" (168).

⁹³⁷ "Sheba." *London society : a monthly magazine of light and amusing literature for the hours of relaxation*; May 1889; 55, 329; 449-466.

⁹³⁸ Beatrice Harradan, "The Mathematical Master's Love Story: A Record." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 151, no. 919 (05, 1892): 651-668.

⁹³⁹ Hugh E. Stutfield, "Athanasia in Search of a Creed: A Dialogue." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*; Feb 1893; 153, 928; 196-208. Although the famous literary magazine, publisher of George Eliot and many others, continued to attract top-notch burgeoning fiction authors (Joseph Conrad, Stephen Crane, Jack London, Hugh Clifford, Oscar Wilde), as the fin-de-siècle approached it was no longer the cutting-edge literary publication it once was. Still, it remained a "prosperous and respected literary miscellany" through the end of the period. (Birch, Dinah. "Blackwood's Magazine." In *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Oxford University Press, 2009. Online ed.: <http://www.oxfordreference.com>, accessed May 2, 2015). 1897): 104-117, which discusses feminism as a neurosis.

Ath. [...] It was only the other day that I met a friend who wanted me to become an Esoteric Buddhist. He said that he himself was a theosophist or occultist, or something, and -
"

Alg. (laughing). "Occultist," I suppose you mean.

Ath. (petulantly). I have no doubt that you are right, Algy, but that is no reason why you should laugh at me. These clever people use such awfully long words. It's enough to muddle any one. Well, this friend said that Esoteric Buddhism was just the thing for me, and that I ought to take it up seriously. I know that it is the fashion to laugh at theosophy, but I really don't see why people should ridicule it."

Athanasia's inability to pronounce "occultist" and her struggle with all the "awfully long words" of esotericism is a cheap gag that serves to undermine her intellectual credibility, as she looks helplessly to her husband to enlighten her in her moment of befuddled religious uncertainty.⁹⁴⁰

The trope of the religiously and intellectually unstable young woman was only one of two possible portrayals. At the other end of the spectrum, popular fiction and social satires were increasingly populated by Blavatsky-esque spinster aunts whose interest in Buddhism is a good fit for their liminal and precarious social position. One example is provided by a social satire that appeared in *Time* magazine in 1889. "Some Modern Instances" - by a female journalist - presents a biting but amusing collection of "portraits of current types" of society figures as "suggested by the streets and drawing-rooms of 1889," including The Artizan [sic], The Man of Humor, and The Sympathizer.⁹⁴¹ The last of these is a carefully drawn comedic study of the fictional Mrs. Under-Standall. This world-weary spinster and Society lady is described as having gone through every phase of religious investigation under the sun:

"from Doubt at eighteen, to Spirit-hunger in maturer years, when Faith, Hope, and Love, each of which has become a great pain to her, culminate in that vague desire for something too large to be defined or known... She accordingly makes it her business to found a Salon of Sufferers - the young and seething- the old and regretful - and the whiney of all ages.... They drop in to confidential tea, from which they emerge strengthened but morbid. [Among her regular visitors is a young woman who] is in an inward agony as to whether Catholicism or Neo-Buddhism would be the best creed for her".⁹⁴²

In a similar story titled "Vixen" in *All the Year Round*, the romantic hero's aunt, a Miss Skipwith, has been laboring her whole life on a universal religion:

I have striven to focus all the creeds of mankind in one brilliant centre - eliminating all that is based and superstitious in each several religions, crystallizing all that is good and true. The Buddhist, the Brahmin, the Mahomedan, the Sun-worshipper, the Romanist, the Calvinist, the Lutheran, the Wesleyan the Swedenborgian - each and all will find the best and noblest characteristics of his faith resolved and concentrated in my universal religion.

⁹⁴⁰ Stutfield, Hugh E. "Athanasia in Search of a Creed: A Dialogue." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*; Feb 1893; 153, 928; 196-208.

⁹⁴¹ Edith Sichel, "Some Modern Instances." *Time*; May 1889; 5, 509-520, 510. Sichel was one of the period's developing "women of letters" - a philanthropically-minded Christian woman and successful periodical author. She was quite involved in MABYS - perhaps she heard M. Müller's lecture on Buddhism there! See Rosemary Mitchell, 'Sichel, Edith Helen (1862-1914)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/55974, accessed 21 May 2015]

⁹⁴² Edith Sichel, "Some Modern Instances." *Time*; May 1889; 5, 509-520, 510.

Here all creeds will meet. Gentler and wiser than the theology of Buddha; more humanitarian than the laws of Brahma; more temperate than the Moslem's code of morality; with a wider grasp of power than the Romanist's authoritative Church; severely self-denying as Calvin's ascetic rule; simple and pious as Wesley's scheme of man's redemption....⁹⁴³

These sketches draw heavily on popular portraits of Madame Blavatsky to further develop the trope of the esoteric aunt with wide-ranging, but not entirely serious religious and philosophical leanings. Her social position and age makes her dalliance in other religions less scandalous than that of younger women's, but she, too, cannot be taken seriously.

Whether they took the guise of the impressionable young maiden or the esoteric spinster aunt, there were apparently few opportunities for a woman to express interest in any non-Christian religion without becoming the subject of ridicule. The popular press almost invariably suggested that a women's interest in Buddhism, especially esoteric Buddhism, was a weakness of her sex. Such interested was associated not with a serious, intellectual effort to grapple with religious uncertainties (Tennyson's famous "honest doubt"⁹⁴⁴), but as a frivolous and indulgent dalliance with new creeds and religions. And as amusing as these portraits seem, women's reputed tendency towards religious uncertainty and their openness to experimenting with esoteric and unconventional religious forms was held against them on a less abstract level in the "serious" intellectual reviews. An anonymous article titled "Women Voters" in the influential and powerful *Saturday Review* in May 1884 went so far as to make an explicit argument from women's openness to non-Christian religions and their unfitness for suffrage.

There is no doubt that women are more amenable than men to ecclesiastical influence; but clerical agency would not be all one side. Modern experience also proves that anti-religious fanaticism is as unreasoning as the strongest sectarian propensity. There are women who now persuade themselves that they believe in Positivism, Agnosticism, and even in the fantastic theories which are attributed to the Buddhists.⁹⁴⁵

⁹⁴³ "Vixen. By the Author of Lady Audley's Secret." *All The Year Round*; Apr 12, 1879; 22, 541; 385-390.

⁹⁴⁴ I remind my readers of those lines which so encapsulated the Victorian struggle with the Christian faith: "There lives more faith in honest doubt / Believe me, than in half the creeds. / He fought his doubts and gather'd strength, / He would not make his judgment blind, / He faced the spectres of the mind / And laid them: thus he came at length / To find a stronger faith his own." (*In Memoriam* A.H.H. 96.II.iii ff., first published in 1850)

⁹⁴⁵ "Women Voters." *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 57, no. 1492 (May 31, 1884): 698-699. While I was unable to conclusively identify the anonymous author of the two *SR* articles quotes here, it is worth noting that it may well have been a woman, as the *SR* and other reviews printed numerous articles by female anti-Suffragettes. The most famous of these was Eliza Lynn Lynton, who published "thousands" of periodical articles expounding an archly conservative view of women, including many in the *SR*. Barbara Leah Harman and Susan Meyer, *The New Nineteenth Century: Feminist Readings of Underread Victorian Fiction* (New York: Garland Publishing), 119-120.

Women's religious persuadability was problematic in view of political enfranchisement because, as the *Saturday Review* author goes on to explain, "ladies who have engaged in public movements have almost uniformly been subject to a bias in favour of objects to which they unconsciously attach a kind of moral reverence" - i.e., instead of disinterested political engagement, women are liable to vote for that which appeals to them on a (merely) moral level. Another anonymous article in the *Saturday Review* in June of the same year (very possibly by the same author) addresses the theme of "the preposterous demand for women's suffrage." It too, arrives at the conclusion that women's susceptibility to "heresies" was just one reason (among many) why the argument for women's suffrage was wholly untenable:

Waverers who are tempted to enfranchise women in the hope that they may be amenable to ecclesiastical influence would, if they were allowed to try the experiment, be utterly disappointed. [...] Even among the cultivated classes new-fangled doctrines have lately found their most credulous proselytes in the sex which ought to be loyally tenacious of orthodox convictions. No measure would be too preposterous for female Buddhists or female Positivists; but it is scarcely worth while to pursue a collateral discussion. It is not on account of feminine heresies, but because the regimen of women is intrinsically monstrous, or, in milder terms, unnatural, that their claim to govern and legislate is untenable.⁹⁴⁶

The fact that women were supposed to be the valiant guardians of domestic Christian religiosity made their forays into Buddhism and similar evils all the more distressing for conservative pundits.⁹⁴⁷ Thus, for one *Saturday Review* author at least, women were overly "amenable" to religious influence, and their exploration of alternative religious traditions indicated a suspicious susceptibility to "preposterous" notions and "feminine heresies" that made them (especially) unfit for political enfranchisement. This association could also be found outside of the pages of the staunchest journals, however; in 1886 *Punch* went so far as to couple women's suffrage and esoteric Buddhism in their inventory of the particular "burdens" of the age:

"A Ballad of Burdens"

[...] The burden of Strange crazes. Woman's right
To throng the polls, and join the spouting bands;
Theosophy and astral bodies, sleight
Of cunning jugglers from far foreign lands;
Buddhistic bosh which no one understands,
A thousand fads that 'gainst good sense conspire.
To gag the crotcheteers and tie their hands,
This must be every sober man's [sic] desire.⁹⁴⁸

⁹⁴⁶ "Women's Suffrage." *Saturday Review*, Jun 21, 1884; 57, 1495; 800. One does so desperately wish that these articles were written in a satirical vein; alas, they are very much in earnest.

⁹⁴⁷ See Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 115-140 for an interesting analysis of the way that periodicals strongly associated Christianity, especially in the domestic sphere, with women.

⁹⁴⁸ "A Ballad of Burdens." *Punch*, August 7, 1886, 70.

Of course, it may be mere coincidence that "Buddhistic bosh" appears directly after a woman's right to "through the polls" in the list of the most onerous burdens of a tiresome age - but given the above, there are good grounds to suspect it was no accident at all.

6.3.2 *Gentlemen*

The portrayal of men interested in Buddhism in the period forms a stark contrast to the material above. The preceding explorations of the Orientalists' role as public intellectuals as well as on Edwin Arnold's extraordinary popularity suggest that there was considerable fame and personal gain to be had by men who made a profession of Buddhism, poetically or academically. This section turns its attention to the gendering of popular portrayals of male Buddhist sympathizers. On this side of the coin the evidence is more limited, and there was considerably more diversity and freedom.

Often, the amateur Buddhist gentleman took the guise of the adventurous young male intellectual. In 1887, for example, the *Graphic* called a "leaning towards Neo-Buddhism" a "craze among clever young men,"⁹⁴⁹ and the *Pall Mall* was likewise keen to ridicule those "young men" who have been trying out new philosophies "with the zeal of new-fangled Buddhists."⁹⁵⁰ It perhaps goes without saying that Oxford and Cambridge were the place to be for a young man interested in Eastern religions. This is naturally not the place for any extended discussion of the gradual secularization of the universities, nor of the symbolic role that the Oxbridge universities played in British culture as a locus of "invented tradition" where British notions of masculinity, identity, and nationalism were articulated and lived out.⁹⁵¹ But despite the controversies that

⁹⁴⁹ Their literary review column noted of one burgeoning young poet in 1887: "Probably extreme youth may be predicted of the author of 'Nakiketas, and Other Poems,' by Julian Sinclair (Kegan Paul). Whatever he may do in the future, at present there is little evidence in his work of anything beyond the imitative faculty and that leaning towards Neo-Buddhism which we had hoped had ceased to be the craze of clever young gentleman." "Recent Poetry and Verse." *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday, March 5, 1887; Issue 901.

⁹⁵⁰ "Occasional Notes." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Monday, January 29, 1894; Issue 9002. Ironically, Julian Sinclair was the pen name of the female novelist May Sinclair; but in my view this makes the *Pall Mall's* hasty assumption that the author was part of the crowd of trendy male intellectuals all the more revealing.

⁹⁵¹ Deslandes, Paul R. "'The Foreign Element': Newcomers and the Rhetoric of Race, Nation, and Empire in 'Oxbridge' Undergraduate Culture, 1850-1920." *Journal of British Studies* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 1998): 54-90. Deslandes describes the "...assumptions that supposedly inferior groups, like women, the working classes, other nationalities, Roman Catholics, non-Christian religions, and colonized peoples, did not possess the traits assigned to undergraduates and British men more generally." (58).

had raged a decade earlier surrounding the secularization of the university,⁹⁵² it remained the heart of the English intellectual and academic study of religion, Christian and otherwise, and the most likely place for young men to come into contact with Buddhist or Hindu ideas.⁹⁵³ The evidence suggests, however, that the universities played a central function in creating a space where young men could explore interest in other faiths in a less restricted intellectual environment. Earl Russell, for example, the gossip-plagued eldest son of Lord and Lady Amberley, attracted a great deal of attention for proclaiming himself a Buddhist while at Oxford.⁹⁵⁴ The eccentric Earl created another scandal when he was sued for divorce by his wife, the Countess Russell (Mabel Edith Scott), less than five months after they were married; the newspapers seemed unable to decide which was the more interesting titbit: the Earl's fashionable Buddhism or his unfashionable divorce.⁹⁵⁵ As the *Preston Guardian's* gossip columnist noted:

Some of my contemporaries in their comments upon the Russell [divorce] case, incidentally mention that the Earl is a vegetarian and teetotaler. This reminds me that when at Oxford he professed Buddhism, and as the followers of Gautama are expressly forbidden to eat flesh or drink intoxicating liquors, it is possible that the eccentric nobleman is still true to this one of his many crazes.⁹⁵⁶

It was generally acknowledged that Oxford was a place where men could more freely indulge their intellectual curiosities; as one author noted in the *Dublin Review* in 1890: "At Oxford, Buddhist or Brahmanic sympathies are not concealed. I know a Hindu who desired to embrace Christianity. He was prevented from doing so by being told that when a man had the happiness of belonging to such a religion as his, he could not desire to become a Christian!"⁹⁵⁷ There was even a joke that circulated about the

⁹⁵² Oxford and Cambridge had long been seen as a place where young men were likely to be (negatively) influenced by contact with non-Christian religions. As Disraeli said before the Parliament in 1873: "Recently I was looking over the programme in Oriental literature which is to be submitted to the University of Cambridge next year... There is nothing in this Bill to prevent the Professor of Arabic in the new University from giving lectures in the Koran, on Buddhism, or on the religion of Zoroaster." "Imperial Parliament." *Daily News* (London, England), Wednesday, March 12, 1873; Issue 8385. Likewise in 1875 Lord Chancellor at Bournemouth, proclaimed at a missionary meeting: "here [in England] they were brought near to us, face to face; these Mahommedans, Jews, Buddhists, Hindoos, were close at our doors, even in the University of Oxford." *Jackson's Oxford Journal* (Oxford, England), Saturday, March 20, 1875; Issue 6364.

⁹⁵³ Commenting on the widening of theology and the growth of comparative religion as early as 1876, the Pall Mall had quipped: "[W]e may see the day when candidates for holy orders will be examined in Brahminism and Buddhism as well as in Judaism." "The Science of Religion." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Wednesday, December 6, 1876; Issue 3682.

⁹⁵⁴ *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Tuesday, December 1, 1891; Issue 8330.

⁹⁵⁵ London society was fixated on the affair; *Lloyd's Weekly* devoted a two-page illustrated spread to a minute detailing of the court case. "Lady Russell's Suit Against her Husband." *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* (London, England), Sunday, December 6, 1891; Issue 2559.

⁹⁵⁶ "Society Gossip." *The Preston Guardian* etc (Preston, England), Saturday, December 19, 1891; Issue 4100.

⁹⁵⁷ Harlez, C. "The Buddhist Propaganda in Christian Countries." *The Dublin Review*, Jul 1890; 24, 1; 54-73.

famous Oxford theologian Benjamin Jowett: that he so disliked change that "when a young Buddhist who had been converted to Christianity went to Oxford, Jowett immediately converted him back to Buddhism."⁹⁵⁸ (Of course, this joke says far more about Jowett than it does about Buddhism.) In general, this suggests that for young male intellectuals, an interest in Buddhism was more likely to signal modernity, cosmopolitanism, and savoir-faire than it was any sign of religious instability or excessive persuadability.

Popular fiction was most likely to portray men interested in Buddhism as one of two types: the clergyman plagued by doubts about Christianity, à la Robert Elsmere; or the professor-figure interested in Eastern religions. The character of Robert Elsmere himself had in fact Best-selling author Robert Buchanan's *The New Abelard*, for example, serialized in *The Gentleman's Magazine* starting in January 1883, features one such stereotypical vicar who loses his faith and explores Buddhism under the guidance of an American professor of spiritualism; the *Times* called it "a tale of the new-fangled 'isms'" and *The Academy* lambasted it for its superficial portrayal of "a priggish clergyman, who adopts Agnosticism and founds a new Transcendental church."⁹⁵⁹ Another novel, *Parson Jones*, by Florence Marryat, features a Welsh clergyman who loses his faith and features the requisite sprinkling of Buddhist ethics as moral inspiration and as a counterpoint to depiction of a stodgy Christian orthodoxy.⁹⁶⁰ The *Pall Mall Gazette* even parodied the growing troops of Elsmere-lookalikes in its satirical review of the 1889 theological tract *Lux Mundi* (a sort of latter-day *Essays and Reviews* that, unlike its predecessor, produced hardly a ripple of popular interest). The *Pall Mall Gazette* even offered satirical suggestions for how the authors could transform their dud of a tract into a popular bestseller:

There is no doubt the book would soon be in its *n*th thousand if only the authors would weave the essays into some sort of connected thread of a story. It should start with an Elsmere-Inglesant curate, of course; and work each essay into a chapter of conversation with the curate's heretical acquaintances. Each essayist might write an alternative ending. Or they might combine on neutral ground by finishing the curate off neither as High Church nor as Low, neither in a Protestant brotherhood nor in a Trappist monastery, but as an Esoteric Buddhist starting for the Himalayas. The book would go like wildfire, and would

⁹⁵⁸ Told as a serious anecdote in "Signs of the Times at Oxford." *The Spectator*, 30 Sep. 1882, 6 and as a joke in "Wales Day by Day." *Western Mail* (Cardiff), Wed., Nov. 8, 1893; Issue 7636.

⁹⁵⁹ Buchanan, Robert. *The New Abelard*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1884. Reviewed in "'The New Abelard.'" *Times* (London, England) 11 Apr. 1884: 5. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 24 May 2015; and "New Novels." *The Academy*, 1869-1902, 0269-333X; Apr 26, 1884; 625; 291. Extensive reviews and more information are collected here: <http://www.robertbuchanan.co.uk/html/magrfiction.html>

⁹⁶⁰ Marryat, Florence. *Parson Jones*. London: Griffith, Farran & Co, 1893, 3 vols. "The shadow of Robert Elsmere appears to have thrown itself over Miss Florence Marryat," as the *Glasgow Herald* noted. "Literature." *Glasgow Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland), Thursday, June 8, 1893; Issue 136.

reach an enormous public, which as a book of Essays at 12s., 6d. it is not likely to touch."⁹⁶¹

The *Pall Mall Gazette* review reveals a good deal about popular literary tastes of the moment, suggesting the enormous success to be achieved with a novel featuring the now rather stock plot line of the wavering Anglican cleric who finds himself attracted to Eastern religions in the midst of a crisis of faith. It is worth noting how starkly the admirable honest doubt of the intellectually tortured and angst-ridden clergyman contrasts with the flippancy and frivolity of women who expressed interest in non-Christian themes.

If a pop culture male Buddhist sympathizer wasn't a young Oxford student or a troubled Anglican clergyman, then he was a professor of German descent. The spoof on Max Müller in "Sheba" (*London Society* magazine, 1889) as well as the dinner-party joke featuring poor Mrs. Sharpe, who tortured the German professor next to her with talk of butter, not Buddha, have already been discussed. Another example is the character of Colonel Shepstone in Frederick Talbot's 1889 short story "In a Place of Security," who is too busy discussing Buddhist inscriptions to chaperone his daughter at a party, with the consequence that she ends up with very much the wrong sort of gentleman.⁹⁶²

In general, however, pop culture references suggest that male associations with Buddhism were far less likely to fit into a predefined scope or to follow a set pattern. James Payn's popular serialized novel of the late 1870s, for example, featured an eccentric Englishman travelling in China who attempted to steal a relic from a Buddhist temple and was sentenced to the death; the plot of the novel centers on another travelling Englishman who volunteers to take his place for £20,000.⁹⁶³ In a short story titled "The Easy Chain: Was it Chance?" the (male) narrator is given a tiny sandal-wood box containing an ivory carving of Buddha that he carries around with him; loses it; found by a tramp; a friend of the original possessor buys it for a shilling, and it makes it way back to the original owner.⁹⁶⁴ And in "Captain Phil: A Sketch From Life," a Wild West adventure story by Iza Duffus Hardy whose plot is almost

⁹⁶¹ "Special Edition." *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Monday, May 26, 1890; Issue 7857.

⁹⁶² Talbot, Frederick. "In a Place of Security." *All the Year Round* 2.39 (Sep 14, 21, and 28, 1889): 310-312.

⁹⁶³ Urban, Sylvanus. "Table Talk." *The Gentleman's Magazine*; Jul 1878; 243, 1771; *British Periodicals* pg. 121. See also the review in "BY PROXY." *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 46, no. 1190 (Aug 17, 1878): 219-220

⁹⁶⁴ "The Easy Chain." (short story) *The Derby Mercury* (Derby, England), Wednesday, November 9, 1892; Issue 9279.

impossible to summarize, the notoriously heartless Western outlaw Captain Phil turns out, in an unexpected plot twist, to have discovered Buddhist teachings, as a result of which the outlaw decides to forgo his planned killing spree.⁹⁶⁵ These are, of course, only a smattering of examples from popular culture that emphasize that - for men - Buddhism could even be mixed with adventure stories and Wild West outlaw adventures.

A final satire that appeared in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1890 brings this discussion of gender full circle by mocking both the ambitious young intellectual gentleman and the women who fall prey to him. "Wanted, a New Religion - Advice to Ambitious Young Men" takes the guise of a letter from a wise and sagacious father figure to a young man. Instead of the usual earnest moral advice one might expect in such a missive, it is a satirical recommendation about how to achieve renown and popularity by starting a new religious craze:

Such being the position of affairs, I am about to suggest in this article the means whereby this craving for novel and fantastical creeds by be turned to practical account by young men anxious to get on in society. To aspirants for fame in London drawing-rooms, I say without hesitation, 'Start a New Religion, and start it at once.'⁹⁶⁶

The criteria of the new religion are not depicted overly complex: "cheek" is to be preferred over sincerity, and a "strong flavour of the supernatural" should suffuse the entire endeavor. In sum: "The world will turn an attentive ear to any fresh prophet who may appear on the scene, provided only his doctrines bear the semblance of originality, and be dressed in a garb of attractive whimsicality." The wished-for result: the philosophically-inclined lady,

with a tear in her voice and a hugely expansive soul that is always yearning to get upon a higher plane, will gaze up into your eyes with those liquid orbs of hers dim with straining to penetrate the arcana of the unseen world, and seek your counsel and sympathy. If she is young and pretty, you will doubtless accord them to her - especially the sympathy.⁹⁶⁷

While not focused on Buddhism per se, this short satire neatly brings together the previous analyses, portraying the relationship between young men's dalliance in other religions and young women's religious susceptibility. Like other instances of satire we

⁹⁶⁵ "Short Stories by Popular Authors." *The Newcastle Weekly Courant* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England), Saturday, November 19, 1892; Issue 11366. In the story, a little girl named Birdie mulls over whether her fish will make it to heaven, and the mysterious visitor (Captain Phil) tells her that "we may suppose, if there's anything in the Buddhist doctrine of transmigration, that they get there at last." A loner in the area rumored to rough and perhaps even violent turns out to be a "gentleman" - "He was a gentleman, Lucy decided.... no rough miner this!"

⁹⁶⁶ "Wanted, a New Religion. Advice to Ambitious Young Men." (1890). *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 148(901), 611-615

⁹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

have looked at, this text surely produced at least a chuckle, but did so while reinforcing cultural norms and clearly designating activities and attitudes that were outside the limits of social acceptability.

6.4 Buddhas for Sale: Idols or Knickknacks? (1884)

The final sections of this chapter turn from jokes and gender to focus one more on themes of commodification and commercialization. Recent years have seen a steady rise in the number of studies examining religion in its relationship to consumer culture⁹⁶⁸ as well as, in the field of cultural studies, a growing emphasis on discretionary consumption as one form of cultural meaning production.⁹⁶⁹ Consumerism was already booming in the mid- and especially late nineteenth century, when a "new commodity culture dominated by advertising" began its path towards dominance, creating a social world in which "the commodity teemed with signification."⁹⁷⁰ By the 1880s popular culture was already increasingly shaped by marketing, advertising, and commercialization, with a rise in discretionary spending and leisure shopping and the growth of department stores such as Harrod's.⁹⁷¹ Unfortunately, there is only inconclusive evidence about the extent to which Buddhism had already been subjected to some form of commercialization in this period. While Buddhist-themed books reached their late-Victorian commercialized peak with the 1891 *Imitation of Buddha*, the evidence regarding whether Buddhist statues, idols or other memorabilia may have become an interest item is unfortunately rather limited.

If there was any taste for Buddhism as a fashion accessory for the home or for personal attire, it seems to have been imported from abroad. As early as 1872 a

⁹⁶⁸ Just a few examples: John Michael Giggie and Diane H. Winston, eds. *Faith in the Market: Religion and the Rise of Urban Commercial Culture* (Rutgers University Press, 2002); Tuomas Martikaine, Francois Gauthier, and Marion Bowman, eds. *Religion in Consumer Society: Brands, Consumers and Markets* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2013). Jean-Claude Usunier and Jörg Stolz, eds. *Religion and Society: Religions as Brands: New Perspectives on the Marketization of Religion and Spirituality* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2014). Unfortunately, almost all of the studies of religion and commodification focus on the post-WWII era.

⁹⁶⁹ E.g., John Storey, *Cultural Consumption and Everyday Life* (Arnold, 1999) and of course the classic by M. Douglas and B. Isherwood. *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. (Basic Books, 1979).

⁹⁷⁰ Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford University Press, 1991), 1-2. Richards argues that the Great Exhibition of 1851 was "a monument to the commodity" (18) that effectively created British consumer culture and thereby created "a new kind of being, the consumer" (5). See also: John Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain, 1880-1980* (Longman, 1994).

⁹⁷¹ Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

reporter in the *Glasgow Herald* cites rumors that the latest American trend was to carry Japanese fans with pictures of the Buddha on them:

They are in people's hands everywhere - in railway, steamboat, public gardens, theatres, concerts, and Sunday schools.... to sit through a sermon looking at these waving pictures of Japanese gods, and enjoying the cool breeze with which they fan the heated brow! - One writer says, 'Long before we are cool, we shall find that we are more than half pagan, and there will remain very little for the Buddhist missionaries to do.'⁹⁷²

In Paris, too, all things "Buddha" had caught on as early as the mid-1870s, where it was reported that "the learned and artistic societies have found a sort of refuge from the dulness of this dull season in the study of things oriental." Ladies' columnist, fashion expert, and French countess Eliane de Marsy, reporting on the latest parties in Parisian season, reported attending a ball for a thousand guests at the home of Henri Cernuschi, who was already famous for his collection of Asian art.⁹⁷³ The ball featured as its visual focal point "a colossal bronze statue of the god Buddha... paced in the centre of the principal reception room, mounted on a pedestal, which was completely hidden with banks of flowers."⁹⁷⁴ The gossip columnist also reported a few years later about an Englishwoman planning to build a Buddhist temple in Paris, but I was unable to find any further information about this.⁹⁷⁵ The London magazine *The Speaker* noted at the end of our period of analysis that it had become common in Paris to adorn one's mantelpiece with fat Buddhas purchased at Le Bon Marché, the world's first department store:

M. Paul Desjardins computes that there are sixty thousand Buddhists in Paris; and you can buy fat little figures of the Buddha, as cheap ornaments for your mantelshelf, at the Louvre and the Bon Marché. With a tincture of Shopenhauer, you can easily fancy yourself a Buddhist, and there is an alluring air of literary distinction about it.⁹⁷⁶

In London, Buddhist idols were frequently advertised for auction, especially at Sotheby's in their auction-house at 13 Wellington Street, the Strand.⁹⁷⁷ Otherwise, if

⁹⁷² "Table-Talk about Passing Events in America." *Glasgow Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland), Saturday, August 10, 1872; Issue 10176.

⁹⁷³ Art collector Henri Cernuschi, whose Asian art collection now forms the Musée Cernuschi in Paris (opened in 1898).

⁹⁷⁴ "The Household." *The Newcastle Courant*, Friday, June 7, 1878; Issue 10615. The journalist noted in another Paris gossip column that the number of glovemakers in Paris was large as the number of arms of Buddhist deities: "If the population of Paris were double what it is, and each individual furnished with as many arms as a Buddhist deity, the drapers would certainly supply them with gloves sufficient for any emergency. Their name is legion." "The Ladies' Column." *Manchester Times* (Manchester, England), Saturday, March 15, 1879; Issue N/A.

⁹⁷⁵ "Miscellaneous." *The London Reader* 42, no. 1095, Apr 26, 1884: 623. "A Buddhist temple is to be built in Paris by a rich Englishwoman - so says the Paris Temps. The English dame has become a violent admirer of the Buddhist creed, so intends to devote her fortune to the propagation of the faith, and has ordered a colossal bronze image of the God to adorn the temple." This was the second Buddhist temple to be built in Paris: the first was erected for the 1867 Exhibition.

⁹⁷⁶ B. W. A. "The Drama." *The Speaker : The Liberal Review* 9, (Jun 23, 1894): 695-696.

⁹⁷⁷ One of truly countless examples: "Advertisement." *The Athenaeum* no. 2890 (Mar 17, 1883): 330

one wanted to purchase a Buddhist statue in London, one could do so at Jamrach's shop in Ratcliff-Highway, the "ancient and original centre of the wild-beast trade in London," according to *The Spectator*.⁹⁷⁸ Here, German-born Charles Jamrach had created an exotic three-story emporium for wild animals and imported goods of all kinds; his business supplied the royal family and English nobility as well as Indian princes at home and in England, but his chief customers were zoogological gardens, aristocratic bird collectors and ornithological clubs.⁹⁷⁹ It was an "ill-assorted Noah's Ark socked by an impulsive but commercially-minded Noah," as *Tinsley's Magazine* described it.⁹⁸⁰ A lengthy description of a visit to Jamrach's in *Strand Magazine* (1981) gives a powerful impression of its interior:

In a street like this, every shop is, more or less, an extraordinary one; but no stranger would expect to find in one of them the largest and most varied collection of arms, curiosities, and works of savage and civilised art brought together for trade purposes in the world, and this side by side with a stock of lions, tigers, panthers, elephants, alligators, monkeys, or parrots. [...] Everybody, of course, knows Jamrach's by name [...] altogether, one of the most curious and instructive spots which the seeker after the quaint and out-of-the-way may visit.
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The *Strand Magazine's* journalist was particularly impressed by the "hundreds" of foreign idols for sale in the shop:

Among hundreds of idols we are shown three which are specially noteworthy. The first is a splendid life-sized Buddha - a work of surprising grace and art. The god is represented as sitting, his back being screened by a great shell of the purest design. The whole thing is heavily gilt, and is set, in places, with jewels. Every line is a line of grace.⁹⁸²

The fact that Londoners had started purchasing Buddha statues for personal display is revealed by a number of notices in the papers advertising Buddhist icons and relics for sale. That such statues were liable to lose appendages is revealed by the following response to an anonymous query in *Bow Bells* magazine in 1889:

293. Cement. — "Buddha." You cannot do better than use coaguline cement for mending your idol's foot. It is quite cheap, about 4d. a bottle, and the best I know of, to be had at most grocers' and colour-shops. —B.T.⁹⁸³

Admittedly, it is hard to find evidence that purchasing Buddhist statues or idols for home display was ever anything more than an eccentric party trick or a memento from

⁹⁷⁸ "Jamrach's." *The Spectator*, September 24, 1894, 13. The shop, which was enormous, was located near the docks on St. George's street (although it never shook its old name thanks to the infamous Ratcliff Highway murders).

⁹⁷⁹ "Jamrach's." *Good Words* 20, January 1879, 165-169.

⁹⁸⁰ "Jamrach's." *Tinsley's Magazine*, December 1867, 545-552.

⁹⁸¹ "Jamrach's." *Strand Magazine : An Illustrated Monthly* 1, (01, 1891): 429-436. See also "Jamrach's." *Saturday Review* 47, no. 1229 (May 17, 1879): 611-613 and "A Jaunt to Jamrach's," *The Era* (London, England), September 13, 1884.

⁹⁸² *ibid.*

⁹⁸³ "Notes and Queries." *Bow Bells* 78, June 28, 1889: 413.

a trip to London's most famous and exotic curiosity shop. There is ample evidence, however, that Buddhism was an increasingly attractive theme for those looking to capitalize on the booming book trade.

6.5 The Birthday Buddha (1890)

The literary commodification of Buddhism reached a high point with the 1890 publication of a "birthday book" titled *The Imitation of Buddha*.⁹⁸⁴ Compiled by Ernest M. Bowden with a preface by Edwin Arnold, this now long-forgotten volume contains moral and inspirational aphorisms from a wide selection of Buddhist scriptures and sources. In keeping with the standard format of the birthday book, *The Imitation of Buddha* features one aphorism for each day of the year; most days' readings are only one or two sentences. As was also standard, the quotes are removed from their original context (although the source and verse are noted) and unified only by their common authorship. A quote from the *Cullavagga* - "The Buddha has mercy even on the meanest thing" - appears on the title page and sets the tone for the volume. As Bowden notes in his proem, the translations in Müller's *Sacred Books of the East* series supply over half of the quotations, supplemented by various other works.⁹⁸⁵ But not all of the sources are ancient: the birthday book includes reflections from *The Light of Asia* beside the *Dhammapada* with no suggestion that Edwin Arnold's poem should be considered any less authoritative. Most of the citations are focused on morality, with a particular emphasis on "the compassionateness of Gautama," as Arnold terms it in his preface. The readings are oriented around basic moral tenets, inspirational snippets, and homages to the personal morality of the Buddha, as just a few examples with indicate: "It is better to die in righteousness than to live in righteousness," *Loweda Sangrahaya*, May 4; "Practise the most perfect virtue," *Udānavarga*, October 11; "The words of Buddha, even when stern, yet... as full of pity as the words of a father to his children," *Questions of King Milinda*, Christmas day.

The genre of birthday books and Christmas books was a commercially important one in the Victorian era and warrants a brief explanation here. Although such volumes had their roots in mid-century devotional books compiling short biblical texts for daily

⁹⁸⁴ Ernest M. Bowden, ed. *The Imitation of Buddha* (London: Methuen & Co., 1891).

⁹⁸⁵ The "Compiler's Proem," with its 5-page list of sources, offers a tidy list of the available Buddhist translations available at the time (17-21).

private use, by the 1870s celebrity appeal and literary fashion had usurped this primarily religious focus. Publishers could count on birthday books to be very strong sellers, and they remained a perennially popular gift item among members of the intellectually ambitious middle class. The form and content of these small, attractively printed sentimental gift books were overwhelmingly driven by commercial considerations, rather than aesthetic or literary ambitions. Maura C. Ives, for example, emphasizes that the "constraints, conventions, and manipulations" of text and image that characterize the books were the direct result of their "over commercialism."⁹⁸⁶ Writers, readers and publishers alike were acutely aware of the intense and overt commercialism of the genre, which was liable to border on the gaudy and vulgar: George Eliot, for example, expressed fears that her own birthday book (published in 1878) would be "puffing, gaudy, claptrappy," noting in a letter that "we had to consider a colonial class rather as likely to be its largest buyers."⁹⁸⁷ Late-century birthday books also differed from their devotional predecessors in that they served a social function beyond the immediate family circle; whereas devotionals were meant for private or at most family consumption, the giving and receiving of a birthday book was a highly social act, arguably even a ritualized one. Birthday books in fact normally included space for writing or collecting friends' signatures and well-wishes. This suggests that they served as discussion items at a birthday party, as friends would gather around to flip through the book and jot down their well-wishes for the birthday celebrant; my copy of *The Imitation of Buddha* features these blank pages as well. In the case of the birthday book, the attractiveness of the volume and its potential as a pleasing birthday gift were arguably just as important as the contents. In this respect the book was certainly a success; the *Birmingham Daily Post* noted, "This is in every sense of the word a beautiful little volume, choicely printed on good paper, tastefully bound, and full of the choice thoughts of a very wise and good man," and commented approvingly on Edwin Arnold's preface: "no European is so well entitled to express an opinion on the subject."⁹⁸⁸ Likewise the *Pall Mall Gazette* called it "A very pretty and

⁹⁸⁶ Maura C. Ives, "'The Summit of An Author's Fame': Victorian Women Writers and the Birthday Book," in *Women Writers and the Artefacts of Celebrity in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 119–32 (Ashgate, 2012), 97.

⁹⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 107. (As Leah Price notes: "Within Eliot's lifetime, the traditional fear of finding one's books recycled for trunk-linings or curl-papers gave way to a new anxiety about finding oneself displayed on a coffee-table." Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 123.)

⁹⁸⁸ "New Books." *Birmingham Daily Post*, Tuesday, November 24, 1891; Issue 10428.

dainty little volume, which should have some vogue in these days of Buddhist revival." ⁹⁸⁹

Beside its format as a birthday book, one of the more remarkable facets of *The Imitation of Buddha* is its direct and intentional association with the 15th-century devotional classic by Thomas à Kempis. *The Imitation of Christ* remained a favorite throughout the Victorian era, keeping its place beside the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress* in the holy trinity of private devotional reading. As the *Pall Mall Gazette* had phrased it in 1886: "The Bible, Matthew Henry's or Barnes's Commentaries on it, and the 'Imitation of Christ,' by Thomas a Kempis, are all-sufficient for a healthy and simple theology."⁹⁹⁰ *The Imitation of Christ* had (of course) also been turned in to a birthday book; published in 1887, the volume featured selections from à Kempis paired with daily Bible readings and was advertised in the *Glasgow Herald* as a recommended gift for a young person.⁹⁹¹

Despite the popularity of gift books featuring daily biblical excerpts - as in the à Kempis birthday book - the same strategy applied to Buddhist materials had a jarring effect on most reviewers. The difference, of course, was that the Victorians' extraordinarily intimate acquaintance with the Bible allowed them to immediately and effortlessly (re)contextualize excerpted biblical passages.⁹⁹² This was obviously not the case with Buddhist works, and as a result the decontextualized sayings in *The Imitation of Buddha* were a source of consternation for many contemporary reviewers. The *Daily News* deemed the "latest manifestation of the birthday book fashion" only a limited success; while the quotes made for interesting reading, they lacked necessary contextual information. "Unfortunately the reader is left without much information regarding either the ages or the relative authority of the various sources from which these samples of Buddhist wisdom are culled," the *Daily News's* journalist complained.⁹⁹³ For the *National Observer*, it was worse: "much as if, having selected passages from Montaigne, Rabelais, Novalis, and Shakespeare, he had represented the

⁹⁸⁹ "New Books and New Editions." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Thursday, December 24, 1891; Issue 8350.

⁹⁹⁰ "The Best Hundred Books" *The Pall Mall Gazette*, January 21, 1886; Issue 6506. The same magazine included *The Imitation of Christ* in an article advising readers on the best volumes for young persons in various genres: "In Theology, I have put down that most beautiful of books, the 'Imitation of Christ,'" the author noted. "What Young Persons Should Read." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, March 29, 1886; Issue 6563.

⁹⁹¹ "Gift Books for Young People." *Glasgow Herald*, Thursday, December 15, 1887; Issue 299.

⁹⁹² See Timothy Larsen, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁹⁹³ "This Morning's News." *Daily News* (London, England), Friday, November 20, 1891; Issue 14237.

final doctrine as Christian. Notoriously, Buddhist literature contains more platitude and more nonsense (often vicious nonsense) than 'lofty ideals of religious conduct.'⁹⁹⁴The *Pall Mall Gazette*, while sharing this skepticism regarding the wisdom of Bowden's methodology, was perhaps a bit fairer when it admitted that even the Bible, placed on the chopping block in the same manner, was likely to suffer:

"Undeterred by this unqualified benediction [i.e., Arnold's preface] we venture to say that very many of the quotations are extremely dry, bald, and jejune. But the Bible, too, is apt to pall when served up, as Mr. Riskin says, in pilules."⁹⁹⁵

In keeping with the spirit of the era, most reviewers honed in on the moral teachings; and while liberal reviewers were not hesitant to equate Buddhism's ethical standards with those of Christianity, more conservative reviewers advised their readers to stick to the Bible. The morality of the book was especially highly praised by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, who went so far as to state that "the lofty morality which it inculcates - supplementary, and even in some respects superior, to Christianity - will probably be a new revelation to many people."⁹⁹⁶ The *Liverpool Mercury's* reviewer likewise expressed considerable optimism that that this potent distillation of Buddhist moral maxims, especially those focused on sympathy, would inspire young readers to greater compassion and morality. It insisted, however, that the value in the book was not its uniquely Buddhist contribution to the discussion of ethics, but rather the "universality" and "perennial worth" of human moral elevation:

...we have many magazines, especially juvenile ones, which have for their special aim the enlargement of this spirit of compassionateness through a development of an intelligible sympathy; and the question will be raised by some people - Does this volume tend to deepen in a greater degree that natural tenderness of feeling we wish to see encouraged in the young? [...] All this is unquestionably good, and, no doubt, much of it is the better for standing aloof from its proper context; yet its excellence is not that it is novel, but lies in its universality as the best experience realised under natural religion.... it is the sublime human elevation which gives this little book its perennial worth.⁹⁹⁷

The *National Observer* also remarked on this aspect, complaining that the ethical standard presented in the text was no more or less than the universal "gentleman's code" of good conduct.

... he who shall wear [these jewels] upon his heart day by day, although he be rich beyond Sir Edwin Arnold's estimation, is not of necessity by way of becoming a Brahmana or child of Buddhist grace. Every really sane precept in this 'modest compilation' forms part of an

⁹⁹⁴ "The Pecksniff Birthday Book." *The National Observer*, Jan 9, 1892; 7, 164; 202-203.

⁹⁹⁵ "New Books and New Editions." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, December 24, 1891; Issue 8350.

⁹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁹⁷ "Buddhism and Englishmen." *Liverpool Mercury*, Monday, December 28, 1891; Issue 13721.

ordinary and not particularly religious gentleman's code. It is no more Buddhist than Swedenborgian to 'abhor dissimulation,' to keep one's hands from picking and stealing, and to tell the truth. The merest pagan or Presbyterian recognises that 'this world is afflicted with death and decay; therefore the wise do not grieve, knowing the terms of the world.'⁹⁹⁸

Others, however, expressed well-warranted skepticism that yet another book of moral aphorisms was likely to result in personal moral improvement, simply because it was Buddhist; the *Birmingham Daily Post* noted in their review of the work, "With regard to the suggestion that we should be better men and women if we acted on the principles here stated, probably no one ever goes far wrong through not knowing what is right. What we need is not so much instruction as to what is good and what is evil, but an impulse to right action."⁹⁹⁹

And, not surprisingly, the book was not without its more strident critics. No one came down more harshly on the book than the *National Observer*, whose anonymous reviewer lashed out against the book in a surprisingly lengthy diatribe. The paper's outrage was directed largely at the kind of moralist "prigs" who were, in the reviewer's mind, likely to use Buddhist aphorisms as fodder to bolster their own self-approval. The reviewer goes so far as to title his/her review "The Pecksniff Birthday Book" in reference to the insufferable know-it-all in Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit*:

Such aphorisms as these collected here are considered as a labour-saving machines for the manufacture of prigs. And of a truth it is impossible to imagine anything more like such stuff as Pecksniffs are made on than this selection of 'cut and uncut jewels from many sources' (quoting Arnold's preface).¹⁰⁰⁰

Buddhist literature was dismissed as "contradictory and, in some places, unfit for publication." There was nothing necessary for contemporary morality beside good Christian duty and doctrine: "And as for these 'lofty ideals' : the healthy men and women who strive to do their duty in that state of life into which it shall have pleased God to call them find sufficient difficulty already in maintaining an 'indifferent honesty.'" Unless contemporaries "hanker after the minor annihilation of Nirvana," in other words, they were advised by the *National Observer* to stick to the familiar pages of their Bibles.

The Buddha's birthday book and its uneven reception are significant to my analysis for several reasons. First, the birthday book goes considerably further than Arnold's poem in 'domesticating' Buddhism by producing a text to be exchanged in a

⁹⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹⁹ "New Books." *Birmingham Daily Post*, November 24, 1891; Issue 10428.

¹⁰⁰⁰ "The Pecksniff Birthday Book." *The National Observer*, Jan 9, 1892; 7, 164; 202-203.

social setting and to be consumed in manageable tidbits. We saw in an early chapter that the Victorian public perceived Buddhist ideas (especially pre-*Light of Asia*) as philosophically difficult, overly abstract, even impenetrable. The *Imitation of Buddha* provided one solution to this problem by distilling *The Sacred Books of the East* into heavily concentrated one-line aphorisms for an impatient reading public. Thus even lengthy and complex Buddhist scriptures are represented in the volume by a small handful of quotes, hand-selected to include lofty moral ideals similar to those of Victorian Christianity and neatly divorced from any passages on doctrine, philosophy, or (heaven forbid) ritual practices. While the *Imitation of Buddha* cites sutra, chapter and verse (presumably as a means of establishing its own authenticity and authority), its targeted selection strategy and radical decontextualization effectively sever the excerpts from their original purpose and meaning.

The *Imitation of Buddha* was explicitly designed for seamless integration into daily domestic life. As Arnold himself notes in his preface, "many another lofty tenet of the 'Light' of Asia finds illumination in some brief verse or maxim, as day after day glides by; and he who should mark the passage of the months from January to December with these simple pages must become, I think, a better man at the year's end than at its beginning."¹⁰⁰¹ The saturation of daily domestic Victorian life with Buddhist quotations and ideas was thus one effect of the book. Deidre Shauna Lynch has described how birthday books, as a genre, neatly divided literature into quotidian daily reflections. It is a strategy that emphasizes the ordinariness of literature - or in this case Buddhism - by subjecting religious or literary texts to the constraints of domestic household schedules. Lynch goes so far as to suggest that birthday books had the power to transform literature into "kitsch."¹⁰⁰² Whether the *Imitation of Buddha* is kitschy or not could be debated; but what is indisputable is that it assisted in the increasing domestication of Buddhism and its integration into the quotidian routine. The *Imitation of Buddha* enabled this transition, arguably even more than *The Light of Asia*, in both form and content.

The *Imitation of Buddha* was also, like *The Light of Asia*, a hybrid text that used strong associations with well-known forms and themes to popularize Buddhist ideas.

¹⁰⁰¹ Edwin Arnold, "Preface." *The Imitation of Buddha*. ed. Ernest M. Bowden (London: Methuen & Co., 1891).

¹⁰⁰² Deidre Shauna Lynch, *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 163.

The Light of Asia had, as we saw in a previous chapter, freely interpolated biblical references and borrowed scriptural as well as poetic language to craft a text that eased readers and gently as possible into the foreign world of Buddhism. *The Imitation of Buddha* adopts a similar strategy by taking a popular format (the birthday book) and effectively softening its exoticism by associating itself with *The Imitation of Christ*. Due to the late Victorians' lack of familiarity with Buddhist works, however, the strategy at least partially backfires, with the excerpted texts disorienting readers, rather familiarizing them with new sources. Finally, Bowden's volume also goes far beyond Arnold's in embracing a more overt commercialism. The birthday book, as a format, was practically synonymous with mass-market appeal and profit orientation; to some elitist minds, the format was associated even with vulgarity and kitsch. Bowden's (or his publisher's) selection of this format for the work suggests his prioritization of popularity and profit margins over other concerns. This clear commercialism may, however, have been one reason why Bowden's volume was met with limited enthusiasm by critics, and why it has been all but forgotten by history.

6.6 Conclusions

As cultural theorist George Lipsitz has noted, "For all of their triviality and frivolity, the messages of popular culture circulate in a network of production and reception that is quite serious."¹⁰⁰³ This chapter investigated a number of ephemeral, seemingly trivial cultural forms with the conviction that the production and reception of these materials was very much a "serious" thing. Satire, serialized fiction, gossip columns, gift books: these pleasure-texts are serious forms for the researcher because they offer valuable insights into the cultural adaptation and transformation of a religious phenomenon; and serious, too, for their powerful impact on the popular imagination, for their wide reach and readership, and for their ability to shape popular opinion. But these materials are also serious because, for all their apparent levity, they touch on powerful cultural forces that have real implications for real people - forces such as gender constructions, class distinctions, popular stereotypes, and structures of knowledge. Who would have expected, for example, that a woman's interest in Buddhism could be construed as grounds for her exclusion from the basic right to

¹⁰⁰³ George Lipsitz, "Popular Culture: This Ain't No Sideshow," in *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 3-20, 20.

suffrage? Or that a rhyming satirical poem about an archaeological discovery could conceal a biting social critique of excessive interest in Buddhist relics - while simultaneously transmitting knowledge about the real, historical relic discovery to anyone who had failed to read the week's headlines? Pleasurable and amusing cultural forms become serious indeed when they implicate themselves (however marginally) in contestations of class, gender, and knowledge; when they are deployed as a part of a disciplinary strategy that serves to delineate acceptable and unacceptable cultural behaviors; or when they become integral to an era's ways of sharing knowledge.

Second, it warrants emphasizing that the popular media, in keeping with its role as a social gatekeeper and minder of cultural norms "within the gates" in the metropole, demonstrated a primary interest in Buddhism as a Victorian cultural phenomenon, not as a foreign religion. As Barry J. Faulk has noted, "The Victorians delighted in drawing and redrawing the lines that set off cultural insiders from outsiders; half the fun, and all the stakes, rested on figuring out which side of that all-important line you found yourself on, or might persuade others that you resided on."¹⁰⁰⁴ In other words, the materials in this chapter do not constitute statements about the late Victorians' views on Buddhism as a philosophy, religion, or foreign cultural phenomenon. These texts are only revealing of the particular, local manifestations of a domesticated and appropriated tradition, and the media's mediating and constructive role in this process. The social norms and cultural behaviors subjected to censure and satire in the pages of the comic magazines were of course not Buddhist per se, but popular manifestations of interest in Buddhism in the British cultural center. (Although even this distinction raises fascinating, if problematic distinctions about where 'Buddhism' begins and ends!) Perceived excesses and 'unnatural' interests were corralled and controlled by satirical texts that reinforced and buttressed the Christian center; in doing so, these materials help us to identify the limits of late-Victorian toleration.

Finally, these materials bear powerful witness to the active role played by the mass media and popular culture in shaping perceptions of Buddhism. The texts in this chapter are creative and constructive (rather than merely derivative); they use contemporary forms and formats to comment on what was, at the beginning of our

¹⁰⁰⁴ Faulk, *Music Hall and Modernity*, 13.

period, largely still a highly specialized academic topic. To phrase it rather strongly, these popular materials assert ownership and agency over an area of cultural production that was formerly the sole purview of missionaries and academics. Comic magazines such as *Punch* and *Fun* as well as family magazines such as *All the Year Round* played a central role in translating serious, abstruse Buddhism into the language of popular culture. And given the size of their readerships and their centrality in Victorian culture, we must assume that such publications had a formative impact on cultural perceptions. *The Imitation of Buddha* perhaps most explicitly undertakes an active reworking of tradition in its radical transformation of the expensive, scholarly, by nature elitist *Sacred Books of the East* into a format that was synonymous with mass market appeal. It should also be clear by now, however, that such popular transformations were not an organized, unified reworking of elite materials according to a central populist ideology or aesthetic; rather, they constitute a loose process of manipulation, permutation and change driven by complex and contradictory forces including, but certainly not limited to, commercial objectives and popular taste.

7 Conclusions

Our little crazes have their day,
They have their day and cease to be; [...]
The Buddhist boom its course has run,
And its exponents, brought to book,
Find all their miracles are done
By Messrs. Maskelyne and Cooke.¹⁰⁰⁵

The enthusiasm for Buddhism, which has been aroused of late years among us, has probably passed its highest point. A few years ago the magazines were full of it; and every young lady, who made any pretensions to the higher culture, was prepared to admire 'such a beautiful religion and so like Christianity.' But the height of this is already past, and it is safe to predict a further decline of the popular interest in the subject, not only because fashions change, but for the juster reason, that part of the claims of Buddhism on the popular interest are found to have rested on imperfect knowledge.¹⁰⁰⁶

British mass media and popular culture in the period between 1875 and 1895 witnessed a demonstrable upsurge in interest in Buddhism, marked both by an increase in the sheer number of references to the subject as well as by a deepening level of engagement with the tradition – most notably, with Buddhism as it was expressed in Britain's colonial possessions. Moving chronologically, we saw how a sequence of important events had a definitive impact on expanding the public's awareness of Buddhism: reports on the Prince of Wales's spectacle-making visit to India and Ceylon; the publication of *The Light of Asia*; popular exhibitions and native villages; the media's coverage of the third Anglo-Burman War; and finally, popular discourse, chatter, and jokes. These episodes warranted examination in the context of one study not only because the evidence was drawn from a common media archive and time period, but also because they form part and parcel of a common trajectory of change: over the course of these two decades, new information and shifting perspectives, often arising directly or indirectly from the colonial situation, transformed what late Victorians meant when they talked about Buddhism. While this study was limited to a comparatively brief period and limited context – a localized, time-bound, and specific stratum of the conversation about Buddhism in the West – we saw significant developments in terms of cultural production and strategies of representation. These modes of representation included both the textual as well as the pictorial.

¹⁰⁰⁵ "Our Harmonic Club." *Judy: Or the London Serio-Comic Journal* (Feb 17, 1892): 75. Maskelyne and Cooke were illusionists who presented mysteries, tricks, and illusions to late-Victorian Londoners.

¹⁰⁰⁶ "ART. II.-1. Buddhism, in its Connexion with Brahmanism and Hinduism, and in its Contrast with Christianity." *The Quarterly Review* 170, no. 340 (04, 1890): 318-346.

The evidence suggests that Buddhism's prominence in British public discourse from 1875-1895 was a novelty in terms of broad participation across social classes, genders, and interest groups. Most importantly, this period witnessed Buddhism's entry into popular culture as well as its gradual loss of mystique as a difficult, abstruse tradition that demanded intensive language mastery and academic study. The increasing prevalence of Buddhism in mass-market media sources was a driving force by which information about the subject (however accurate or inaccurate) was increasingly available to the public. As Buddhism lost its aura of specialization and rarefication, it became a subject of conversation in the everyday, quotidian context. Undoubtedly, an essential part of the transformation of a tradition in a new cultural context is this ability to integrate itself into the everyday lives of new groups and audiences. In his work on Buddhist Modernism, for example, David McMahan has argued that a tradition must be "able to engage with a culture's lived world: the daily repertory of practices, implicit ideas, and dispositions that structure perception and action."¹⁰⁰⁷ As Buddhism became increasingly present in popular culture, the processes of integrating, redefining, and transforming were well underway. Using their own culture as a reference point, Britons compared and contrasted Buddhism and reflected on what was appealing, pretty, picturesque – or grotesque and repulsive. In this way the media and the public constructed new representations of Buddhism that reflected available information on the subject, filtered through the prism of their own existing constructions and expectations. And so Buddhism became – although it retained its air of exoticism – a part of the daily context and lived experience of the reading public.

In closing, I want to reflect more explicitly on what this study has, up to now, sometimes uncritically referred to as the "popularization" of Buddhism. This conclusion interrogates this claim by drawing out four aspects of this process that appear with consistency throughout each of the chapters, namely: the role of the mass media, the rise of new authorities on Buddhism, the importance of the colonial context, and the processes of commodification and commercialization.

¹⁰⁰⁷ McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 15. McMahan continues: "The way a tradition is reconfigured in a new cultural context has much to do with what seems attractive, repulsive, or anomalous about it from the perspective of the tacit understandings and social practices of the dominant tradition—that is, what resonates."

7.1 The Dominance of Mass Media

By the late nineteenth century, a dominant media culture had assumed a definitive role in the dissemination of views, opinions, and information to a wide audience of voracious news consumers. The dawn of the mass-media society meant that, in this period, the views of the press and the media took precedence over other forms and sites of cultural production.¹⁰⁰⁸ The mass media was revealed here to have been essential to Buddhism's extraordinary penetration into public discourse over the course of only two decades. Even popular books on Buddhism, such as *The Light of Asia*, could never have achieved the popularity that they did without the championing of the media. This is in keeping with what Judith Snodgrass has noted, namely that an essential feature of what she calls "modern Buddhism" is the role of media in its formation.¹⁰⁰⁹ The ubiquity of these sources, their availability and cultural prominence, ensured that the media's representations of Buddhism were instrumental in shaping the cultural imagination.

The power of the popular media depended, on the one hand, on its role as gatekeeper in deciding what was news in the first place; and on the other hand on the specific linguistic, visual, and rhetorical strategies adopted to craft a particular story or narrative.¹⁰¹⁰ The way that events were reflected on and analyzed on the pages of the papers and magazines was definitive for the public's reception and understanding of them – whether the event in question was a book publication, the opening of a new native village, or a theater performance. In cases where the actual event took place in distant colonies, this role was even more pronounced. In the shaping, framing, and illustration of the Prince of Wales's trip to Ceylon, for example, the media not only controlled access to information, but also created an atmosphere of excitement and sensation surrounding the trip, defined the visual and verbal angle of the reporting, circulated images of the events, and used pictorial and discursive strategies to create a narrative of imperial triumph and exotic spectacle. A similar function was performed in reporting on Burma. Even in instances where the public could experience the event

¹⁰⁰⁸ Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers*, 6.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Snodgrass, "Discourse, Authority, Demand," 22.

¹⁰¹⁰ Stuart Hall notes that the media uses strategies of "selection and exclusion, the editing of accounts together, the building of an account into a 'story', (and) the use of particular narrative types of exposition" to control information and perspectives. Stuart Hall, "The Rediscovery of Ideology: Return of the Repressed in Media Studies," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (Harlow, England: Pearson Prentice Hall, 1982), 111–41, 135.

first hand, such as Barnum's Buddhist elephant or the native villages, the media still played an important role in promotion and evaluation. In other cases, there *was* no event; as we saw in chapter six, the popular media, in particular, was highly adept at using entertainment and satire to create cultural boundaries and delineate social norms.

A second observation: although newspapers and other media allegedly aim to disseminate information of the highest factual accuracy, it is easy to see from our study just how often the media is engaged in the business of constructing and fabricating representations. As David Spurr has noted, "journalism and other forms of nonfiction, despite conventional expectation, depend on the use of myth, symbol, metaphor, and other rhetorical procedures."¹⁰¹¹ The repeated appearance of certain phrases and tropes in the media's portrayal of Buddhism underscores this point – the almost reflexive use of the words "picturesque" and "grotesque," for example; the trope of the incurably lazy and indolent Buddhist monk; or the way that the Buddha's tooth relic came to encapsulate, for an entire generation, the public's touristic engagement with the exotic, allegedly primitive Buddhist worship of Ceylon. Clearly, then, representations of Buddhism in mass media and popular culture were creative and constructive, rather than derivative or merely reflective; by this I mean that these media outlets by no means simply parroted the views on Buddhism that were being espoused in the academic setting or published in more traditional outlets. Quite the contrary: the mass media was revealed to be a site of productive originality that developed its own assessments of and ideas about Buddhism, for its own purposes.

What was the nature of this representation? As I stressed in the introduction, the mass media should be understood as a fractured, heterogenous discourse that was not controlled by any one dominant ideology or authority. As a direct consequence of this, Buddhism and the Buddha symbolized many, often conflicting ideals for the mass reading public. Rather than attempting to identify one dominant, consistent, or typical popular understanding of Buddhism in this period, it is far more crucial to underscore the variability and heterogeneity of opinions and perspectives. While for some the Buddha suggested withdrawal from the world, passivity, and pessimism, for others he was the ultimate moral teacher next to Christ. In the context of imperial encounters, native villages, and media propaganda, Buddhism represented for other readers an

¹⁰¹¹ Spurr, *Rhetoric of Empire*, 2-3.

exotic and exciting element of two kingdoms under British control, Ceylon and Burma; the imperative to understand its creeds and philosophies was driven in large measure by a growing awareness of global demographics and the conviction that Buddhism "belonged" in part to Britain. For still others, especially in the late 1880s, knowledge about and interest in Buddhism became a signal of cosmopolitanism, *Weltoffenheit*, and a certain intellectual savvy, and for a time it would become inextricably linked (or confused) with Blavatsky and Olcott's brand of Esoteric Buddhism. Finally, while some papers and sources continued to espouse rather outdated views of Buddhism carried over from the early and mid nineteenth century (that Buddhism shared many of the failings of Catholicism, for example), other sources had already started associating Buddhism with progress and modernism. All of these views existed simultaneously and, depending on which paper or magazine one picked up at the newsstand, one's impressions could vary significantly.

7.2 New Authorities on Buddhism

A second development that took place between 1875 and 1895 was a powerful shift in the persons who contributed to the representation of Buddhism. The study of Buddhism had been, in the early to mid nineteenth century, dominated almost entirely by academics and missionaries primarily working on textual study and translation; but after 1875 this process became increasingly fractured as various voices claimed the authority to define, analyze, and judge what Buddhism was supposed to entail. Throughout the period, the orientalists, as well as archaeologists, missionaries, museum collectors, and other traditional authorities, continued to wield significant authority in defining what constituted "real" Buddhism (we witnessed this in the episode of Barnum's white elephant and Rhys Davids' letters to the *Times*, for example). Increasingly, however, new authorities on Buddhism arose – figures whose authority was granted and sustained either by public interest and general acclaim, or by appeal to eyewitness observations and personal experience travelling in South East Asia. Thus Edwin Arnold was able to adopt a new office as an internationally recognized authority on Buddhism and its poet and interpreter into English *par excellence*; it was the public, especially the media, that awarded him this office and sustained his popularity. The Prince of Wales, while making no pretense to be any kind of expert on Buddhism, played a crucial role both as a socio-cultural trendsetter and as the figurehead of the Empire; in 1875 he served as the vicarious eyes through which the

entire peeping public became spectators of Singhalese Buddhism. And increasingly, foreign correspondents, as well as those in the service of the imperial crown, made assertions and claims about Buddhism that were not directly backed by reference to academic authorities, but by their own travels and observations in Asia. Colonial administrators such as Sir George Scott gained prominence in this type of reporting - or, as in Scott's case, fabricated fictional native personae to satisfy the public's curiosity about the customs and habits of the locals. And while the realism and authenticity of their exhibitions were sometimes called into question, there is no doubt that entertainment moguls like P. T. Barnum and Carl Hagenbeck contributed significantly to the cache of images and ideas that British audiences came to associate with Buddhism. Finally, although they were not explicitly studied in this dissertation, we should remember that Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky were massively influential in positing their brand of Eastern spirituality for the public; we saw evidence of this influence in the discussion of esoteric Buddhism in chapter six. This shift in the voices that were discussing Buddhism, how they shaped the debate, and how they asserted or assumed authority, was swift and profound. As we saw, one ensuing consequence was the occasional heated conflict regarding what constituted "real" or "authentic" Buddhism – and who was qualified to recognize and validate it. Again, our sources by no means demonstrate a homogenous consensus.

Finally, however, it is critical to note that a majority of newspaper and periodical articles in this period were anonymous.¹⁰¹² The journalists and authors who contributed to the public's understanding of Buddhism from behind the veil of anonymity, often espousing their views in the editorial "we" of their publication, were legion. Journalists assigned to cover events in London or abroad could make powerful assertions about Buddhism that were associated with a publication, and not with an individual author. In satirical and comic papers, anonymity was the rule; this was also the case in newspaper editorials, including in the *Times*. Hence, traditional forms of securing authority (a recognizable name, or certain qualifications, titles, or academic degrees) became – at least in some contexts – less important. This had the overall effect of creating a disembodied discussion about Buddhism that was not anchored by the views of specific authority figures, nor tightly controlled by any external authority. This adds

¹⁰¹² Rachel Sagner Buurma, "Anonymity, Corporate Authority, and the Archive: The Production of Authorship in Late-Victorian England," *Victorian Studies* 50, no. 1 (March 17, 2008): 15–42.

to the argument that the materials examined in this study form not a chronological sequence of almost innumerable individual statements and observations, but are parts of an entire discursive environment, a realm of production of ideas and ideologies about Buddhism – often with no single author or origin.¹⁰¹³ The pervasive practice of recycling materials and memes from other publications (without attribution) underscores this point.

7.3 Buddhism Through Colonialist Eyes

It is overwhelmingly clear that the boom in interest in Buddhism was inextricably linked to the popular spirit of the age of High Imperialism. In general, the bolstering and deepening of popular support for the Empire in the last quarter of the century was central to the development and transformation of ideas about the religions of the East. Colonial communication networks, pro-imperial propaganda, and the public's fascination with India, Ceylon, and Burma all contributed profoundly to the development and expression of interest in Buddhism. Most concretely, information about Ceylon and Burma came to England through exclusively colonial channels. Information and impressions of Buddhism were thus communicated through the lens of explicitly triumphant imperialist frameworks, such as the blatant celebration of crown control of the temple of the tooth and the tooth relic during the Prince of Wales's visit in 1875. The media's both triumphant and ambivalent representations of Burmese Buddhism are also exemplary in this respect, as the country (and its religion) had received comparatively little study or attention in England until the takeover of 1885/1886. The reports and images published by Colquhoun, Titcomb, and Scott were made possible - and were deemed interesting - only as a direct consequence of imperial rule. As we saw, reporting on Burma and Ceylon flaunted the imperial and picturesque while suppressing or glossing over the harsher realities of colonial governance.

Not only the availability, but also the content and presentation of new information about Buddhism was heavily influenced by the imperial context. We observed that the Empire's spokespeople and media outlets could emphasize specific interpretations of

¹⁰¹³ Here I am of course thinking of Foucault's observations, as when he writes, for example: "We can easily imagine a culture where discourses could circulate without any need for an author. Discourses, whatever their status, form, or value, and regardless of our manner of handling them, would unfold in a pervasive anonymity." Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" Trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. Ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 124-127.

Buddhism for different purposes. This discourse was part of the "entire system by which one culture comes to interpret, to represent, and finally to dominate another."¹⁰¹⁴ One approach was to adopt a caretaker model, best represented by Edwin Arnold, whereby the British positioned themselves as benevolent custodians of the religious traditions of their imperial possessions. This model relied on a mindset that treasured Buddhism as ancient, pristine, and pure, while simultaneously asserting that contemporary Buddhists in India, Ceylon, or Burma were not able or competent to represent, articulate, or maintain the treasures of their tradition. The British were essential (in this model) to the correct understanding and preservation of this great religious tradition. The media's portrayal of the Prince of Wales's visit to the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy likewise implicitly highlighted the Prince's role as owner and also guardian of the tooth relic.

In a second media strategy, Buddhism became an aesthetic phenomenon that helped to define all that was essentially exotic, exciting, titillating, and different about the lands of the Far East. From the perahera and the tooth that would be associated with the Prince of Wales for a generation of British public, to the relics, temples, and idols imported to decorate the exhibits and shows of the 1880s, the media created a visual and discursive canon of Buddhism. This repertoire of images, associations, and ideas, shared by the reading and viewing public, would be associated with Buddhism for several decades. As we noted, Buddhist temples and other manifestations of Buddhism were repeatedly described as "picturesque" - that ubiquitous term that at once captured all that was pleasing to the British eye, yet simultaneously devalued Buddhism by categorizing it as a primarily aesthetic, rather than substantive, phenomenon.

A third media strategy was to employ negative characterizations of Buddhism as a justification for British control. This strain appeared most prevalently in our study of Burma, where some sources employed derogatory stereotypes of Buddhists in order to suggest that the natives who followed such a tradition were apathetic, lazy, and incapable of self-government. Another variation on this argument came to the fore in response to rumors of Thibaw's alleged atrocities as well as during the Burmese resistance; here it was claimed that while Burmese Buddhists revered animal and plant life, no one was as bloodthirsty or violent.

¹⁰¹⁴ Spurr, *Rhetoric of Empire*, 4.

Regardless of which of these three strategies a particular author or publication adopted, it is clear that the imperial context defined the British public's experience and perceptions of Buddhism. Many sources reveal a struggle to come to terms with the sheer number of adherents of other religions around the globe, and in particular with the reality that Greater Britain now included populations of Buddhists and Hindus, as well as Christians. Typing and stereotyping Buddhists in their prolific publications was one way that citizens at home in Britain established and affirmed their identity as the Christian rulers of the Empire. This is in keeping with what Richard Horsley has critically termed "imperial religion," which, as he writes, "expresses and even constitutes the imperial power relations."¹⁰¹⁵ Buddhism was thus a quintessential part of what was essentially 'other' about Ceylon, Burma, and even India; and all of these strategies can be seen as embodying and reproducing the power dynamic between Britain and the colonies.

7.4 Commercialization / Commodification

Interest in Buddhism in this period was also connected, in a new way, to commercial enterprise, a direct result of the growth of the market economy and consumer culture that characterized the advent of modernity. This commercialization marked a turning point whereby Buddhism could be exploited for profitable commercial ends. It also reveals that Buddhism had obtained a kind of cultural capital as well as a market value: something worth paying to see, to read, to own, or to display. There were two important aspects to this process of commercialization: first, it turned Buddhism into a commodity; second, it turned Buddhism into a spectacle.

Buddhism became a commodity when it could be exchanged, either as an idea or an item, for money. Newspapers and magazines competed on the newsstands for readers, and the most interesting and attention-grabbing stories and illustrations, often sensationalized, directly increased sales. Twice we saw representations of Buddhism splashed across the front page of an illustrated magazine: the memorable image of the Prince of Wales inspecting the Buddha's tooth on the cover of the *Graphic* in 1876, and the cover dedicated to Barnum's elephant Toug Taloung on the cover of the

¹⁰¹⁵ Richard A. Horsley, "Religion and Other Products of Empire." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 1 (2003): 13–44. Horsley goes on to note: "...as often as not religion and other forms of cultural practice are embedded in political-economic power relations and—far from being reducible to—reflect, express, resist, and even constitute those relations of power. The way in which religious expressions form and develop depends on the particular configuration of imperial power relations" (38).

Illustrated London News in 1884. Commercial and profit-driven factors were also crucial to the marketing and publishing history of *The Light of Asia*, with its series of illustrated and gift volumes for readers with increasing disposable incomes. In the last chapter we also examined a Buddhist gift book and the sales of idols and other knickknacks, revealing the various ways and means that books, objects, and trinkets of Buddhism could be purchased and put on display. These trends amounted to a process by which Buddhism was transformed into merchandise – a process that capitalized on the public's powerful interest in its exotic colonial lands by creating tangible goods as well as entertainment events that satisfied public curiosity.

Second, we saw throughout the dissertation how Buddhism gradually became part of a performative spectacle whereby the religion, its relics, and even its representatives were artfully staged for readers and audiences in the metropole. This process began in 1875 with the Prince of Wales's heavily publicized and promoted visit to India and Ceylon, when the eyes of the entire nation were trained on the future monarch as he, in turn, inspected the temple and tooth relic. By extension, the tooth relic was unveiled from its reliquary home and paraded before the gawking, curious eyes of the countless households in Britain who read the *Graphic* and the *Illustrated London News*. The process of turning Buddhism into a spectacle found its most obvious expression in the shows, villages, and exhibits we examined in chapter four. Here, Buddhism was flaunted and paraded for the pleasure as well as instruction of domestic audiences. Ultimately, these shows amounted to a display of power and ownership that reminded readers/audiences of the extent of Britain's dominance and of their possession of Ceylonese and Burmese Buddhism. Whether theatrical or educational, these spectacles reinforced and fostered specific stereotypical images and ideas that had come to be associated with Buddhism, including temples, robe-wearing priests, white elephants, and idols and Buddha statues. This in turn helped to define and reinforce notions of the primitive otherness of the countries of Burma and Ceylon while underscoring the self-identification of the British readers/audiences as educated, enlightened, and superior.¹⁰¹⁶

¹⁰¹⁶ Niyar has referred to this process as a "cultural self-fashioning of Britain as an imperial cosmopolitan culture," made possible by the "selective appropriation of aspects of Indian aesthetics in diverse fields ... into British taste, consumption, and identity so that imperial England became cosmopolitan even as it projected its own cultural difference from the primitive colony." Nayar, *Colonial Voices*, 204.

As we noted, a primary concern of such spectacles was their alleged authenticity and organizers' claims (echoed by the media) that they closely mimicked reality. Ultimately, however, such shows placed natives, temples, and relics on display even while denying any outlet for actual self-representation. The culmination of this type of silencing was the staged presentation of Buddhist bodies in the form of imported monks and priests. The Buddhists in the colonial spectacle (whether media or exhibitions or theatre) were thus both there and not there, as Homi Bhabha has written of colonial mimicry: it is a force that "fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence," a presence that is "both 'incomplete' and 'virtual.'"¹⁰¹⁷ Natives were brought to England by entertainment moguls not for a dialogue or a parliament, but to be placed on display in a clumsy mimesis of worship. They were silenced and spoken for, their representation and significance wholly defined by the organizers. Despite their theatricality, such shows could be destabilizing and anxiety provoking for audiences who feared that natives might engage in "real" heathen worship on British soil.

7.5 Concluding Thoughts

Throughout the nineteenth century, scholars and missionaries were prone to dismissing out of hand contemporary forms of Buddhism, as practiced at that time in Asia, as corrupt and degenerate expressions of a pure and early tradition. It would be a similar mistake on our part to dismiss or denigrate the nineteenth century's mass media constructions and popular projections of Buddhism as incorrect, inaccurate, or irredeemably tainted by imperial spirit, and thereby unworthy of critical and scholarly attention. Throughout this dissertation, we have attempted to take our sources seriously as constructive, creative, and dynamic efforts to interpret and understand Buddhism as adequately as possible through the lens of the views, ideas, and information available at that time. As such we can agree with McMahan, who writes: "the many modernist scholarly and popular constructions of Buddhism, some of which have indeed been fantasies, nevertheless have not been idle fantasies."¹⁰¹⁸ Even those episodes which may seem most tainted by commercial aspirations or imperial fantasy are part of the work of the media and the wider popular culture to assimilate, reflect on, and integrate information about Buddhism into their own spheres of cultural understanding. These

¹⁰¹⁷ Homi Bhabha, "Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse." *October* 28 (1984): 125-133, 127.

¹⁰¹⁸ McMahan, *Making of Buddhist Modernism* 21.

popular constructions of Buddhism satisfied a cultural need to understand, order, and classify the religious expression of millions of inhabitants of the shrinking globe and, specifically, the expanding British Empire.

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8.3 Newspapers, Magazines, and Journals Cited

London Papers

Bristol Mercury and Daily Post
Daily News (London, England)
Daily Telegraph
London Evening Standard
Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper
London Daily News
Morning Post
Reynolds's Newspaper
Spectator
St. James's Gazette
Sporting Times
Star
Times
West London Standard

Local Papers

Derby Mercury (Derby, England),
Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser (Dublin, Ireland)
Hampshire Telegraph
Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle
Leeds Mercury
Aberdeen Weekly Journal
Dundee Evening Telegraph
Manchester Times
Glasgow Herald
Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser
Newcastle Courant and Weekly
Courant (Newcastle-upon-Tyne)
Northern Echo (Darlington)
Preston Guardian
The Ipswich Journal
Sheffield Daily Telegraph
Western Mail (Cardiff, Wales)

Reviews and Journals

Fortnightly Review
Examiner
Academy
Athenaeum
Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine
Chambers's journal of popular literature, science and arts
Jackson's Oxford Journal
Dublin University Magazine
National Observer

National Review
Westminster Review
Contemporary Review
London Journal, and Weekly Record of Literature, Science, and Art
London Reader
Quarterly Review

Saturday Review
The Speaker: The Liberal Review
London Reader

Society Papers

Pall Mall Gazette
London Society
Strand Magazine
Every Week
Gentleman's Magazine

Leisure, Faith, and Family

All The Year Round
Argosy
The Sunday at Home
Bow Bells
Cornhill Magazine
Era
Leisure Hour
Good Words
Musical Standard
Tinsley's Magazine
Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine
Boys of England
Murray's Magazine
The Theatre

Comic Papers

Fun
Punch
Judy
Moonshine

Illustrated Papers

Illustrated Police News
Illustrated London News
Graphic
Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times

8.4 A Very Short Note on Databases and Method

The media sources examined here come overwhelmingly from digital archives. My search methodology was in hindsight rather unsophisticated: in a first step, I simply searched for every article that contained the partial word "Buddh*" (to capture both

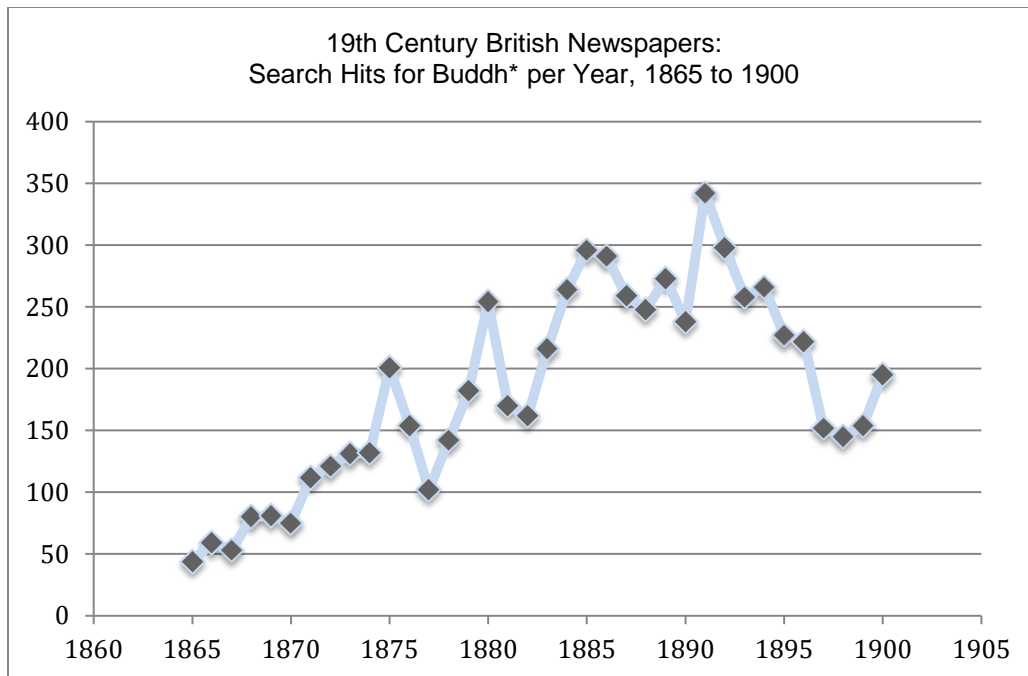
"Buddha" and "Buddhism") from 1860 to 1900. I used this initial assessment to narrow my focus to the period of greatest media interest in Buddhism (1875 to 1895), and then to identify the specific phenomena that resulted in particular peaks. Once I had identified these events, I searched with a wider variety of terms to capture as many relevant articles as possible (for example, by also searching for "Edwin Arnold" and "Light of Asia" in as many variants as I could imagine).

The four largest archives currently available for the nineteenth century are:

- ProQuest British Periodicals
- Gale Cengage 19th Century UK Periodicals, especially the "New Readerships" and "Empire" collections
- The British Newspaper Archive (British Library)
- Gale Cengage 19th Century British Newspapers collection

These were supplemented by research in a number of smaller specialist archives. Some publishers have digitized their own historical records, including the Times and the Spectator, for example. I also consulted some important publications directly (i.e., in the physical library) if digital access to them was not available; this included e.g. the Illustrated London News.

The chart below illustrates the growth and decline of interest in Buddhism in the period between 1860 and 1900, according to one newspaper database; the other digital archives reveal similar trends. The grey box represents the period closely analyzed in this study.



Several spikes in interest are immediately evident. The surge in 1875 reflects the many reports on the Prince of Wales's visit to India and Ceylon. The peak in 1879-1880 corresponds to the publication of *The Light of Asia*, while the 1885-1886 peak can be explained by the Anglo-Burman War as well as the native exhibitions in London. The peak in 1890 reflects a combination of interest in esoteric Buddhism in its many forms and, oddly enough, the success of a racehorse named Buddha.

A few limitations result from reliance on digital databases. For one, OCR (optical character recognition) technology is not perfect; I may have missed relevant articles if the machine scanner did not correctly recognize the text. Two, the databases are curated by teams of 19th century media experts, meaning that I did not directly select the publications I was searching. While this pre-selection greatly alleviates what would have otherwise been a painstakingly painful research task, there is no doubt that this impacted the sources available to me. (James Mussell has noted, "digitization is both interpretive and transformative and so the resource already shapes the way in which we encounter its contents.")

Third, digital databases are continually expanding as cooperating libraries and collections contribute new sources, and as the scanning process continues. It is not

inconceivable that another decade or two will make this dissertation seem limited in scope and out of date - or at least superseded by (the possibility of) far more thorough search and analysis. The current explosion of electronic information thus both offers unprecedented opportunities for scholarship, while simultaneously stamping our results with a "best-by" date. Still, while the analysis undertaken here cannot claim to be exhaustive, I hope it can make a reasonable claim to be representative.