

# RUDYARD KIPLING'S 'THE BALLAD OF EAST AND WEST'

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## Foreword

Writing in 1942, George Orwell maintained that 'Kipling is the only English writer of our time who has added phrases to the language'.<sup>1</sup> Of the six examples Orwell gives in support of his assertion, the first is 'East is East, and West is West'.

Not only is this undoubtedly one of Kipling's most famous and memorable phrases, it is also one of the most misquoted and misunderstood. Kipling's biographer Charles Carrington wrote that 'no lines of Kipling's have been more freely quoted, and more often misquoted in exactly the opposite sense which Kipling gave them'.<sup>2</sup>

The phenomenon of literary misquotation is by no means new. What is different in Kipling's case is the virulence of the personal attacks this misquotation has produced. Such attacks have focussed mainly on three or four notorious phrases from verses such as 'Recessional' and 'The White Man's Burden'; but, to borrow the words of Kingsley Amis:

Most of the ignorant castigation of Kipling as a racialist in the full aggressive sense comes from a single famous line of verse quoted out of context:

*Oh, East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet.*<sup>3</sup>

The present study of 'The Ballad of East and West', of which poem the above quotation forms the first line, is intended to serve as a brief introduction to the ballad itself, and to some of the criticisms directed against it. Some of these criticisms are concerned solely with the first line of the poem, others with the ballad as a whole. Of the former, some deal with the first line in context, most do not. The complexity of the permutations thus produced makes direct comparison of such criticism extremely difficult, and the present study has, of necessity, restricted itself to a brief examination of some of the more interesting facets of the controversy surrounding 'The Ballad of East and West'.

## Genesis and Reaction

Born in India in 1865, Kipling was sent to England at the age of six, there to undergo eleven years of formal Victorian education. He returned to India in 1882, and for the next seven years honed his emerging literary talents as a reporter for both the *Civil and Military Gazette* of Lahore, and its parent paper, the *Pioneer*

of Allahabad.

In March 1885, Kipling was sent to cover the ceremonial reception of the Amir Abdurrahman, who had consented to pay a state visit to the new Viceroy of India, Lord Dufferin. The reception was held in Rawalpindi, in a magnificent city of fluttering marquees specially erected for the occasion. Kipling accompanied the welcoming party that travelled out to Peshawar, and then to the frontier outpost of Fort Jumrood (Jamrud). There the party waited to greet the Amir's entourage as it came through the Khyber Pass. On one of his few days at Fort Jumrood, Kipling wandered off by himself into the Pass, where, he later claimed, 'I was shot at, but without malice, by a rapparee who disapproved of his ruler's foreign policy...'<sup>1</sup>

Angus Wilson, in a puzzling comment on this well-known episode, implies that Kipling 'believed' he was shot at by Pathans, and then follows this with the bewildering statement that this was more than likely, 'for even today the tribes of the neighbouring Kohat pass have found their only appropriate peaceful occupation in turning out replica guns of all times and places for tourists'.<sup>2</sup> It is not clear whether Wilson is suggesting that deliberately mis-aimed pot-shots at tourists were a part of traditional Afghan hospitality, or whether he is implying that Kipling fabricated, or perhaps fantasized, the whole episode to add colour to his visit to the Khyber. What *is* clear, however, is that this brief visit was Kipling's first and last experience of the North-West Frontier. It was an experience that provided much of the background material for 'The Ballad of East and West', and for many other of his verses and stories.

Whether a few days in Fort Jumrood, and a few hours strolling in the Khyber Pass, qualified Kipling to use those settings in his later works is a fine point upon which, not unexpectedly, many writers have chosen to focus their attention. His ambivalent attitude to the 'pot-shot' incident notwithstanding, Wilson notes perceptively that in Kipling's case, the sights, sounds, and experiences of even those few hours were to remain with him forever, stirring his imagination many times, and materializing into vivid scenes of compelling authenticity.<sup>3</sup>

During his years with the *Civil and Military Gazette*, Kipling was asked by its new editor, E. Kay Robinson, to write pieces that would be 'topical, arresting, and short, restricted to 2000 words'.<sup>4</sup> These pieces proved immensely popular, and were later collected into a series of cheap paperback books used to launch Wheeler's Indian Railway Library. Some of these volumes found their way to England, were reviewed favorably, and served to establish Kipling's name, if not widely, then at least where it most mattered: in the literary world of editors and publishers.

On the strength of this promising critical reception, Kipling decided to leave India and return to England, arriving in London in 1889 after a long sea and overland voyage that took him through the Far East and America.

Finding accommodation in Villiers Street, in the shadow of Charing Cross Station, and directly opposite Gatti's music hall, Kipling began his audacious assault upon



the citadel of the British literary establishment. Whether he could have stormed that citadel as quickly and as dramatically as he did, had he only the advantage of his precocious talent, is an interesting question. As it was, his conquest was greatly facilitated by the presence of two staunch allies within the world of letters.

The first of these was Stephen Wheeler, the editor of the *Civil and Military Gazette* when Kipling joined that paper, and the man responsible for Kipling's training as a journalist. Wheeler was later replaced by E. Kay Robinson, whose attempts to revitalize the *Gazette* were to result in Kipling's first original pieces. Wheeler left India, and in 1889 was working on the staff of the *St James Gazette*, a famous literary evening paper of the period. Wheeler gave his editor, Sidney Low, some copies of the Railway Library paperbacks, and also a copy of the *Departmental Ditties*, a collection of early verse which had appeared in India in 1886. Impressed, Low asked Wheeler to put him in touch with Kipling upon the latter's arrival in London. The meeting was arranged, and Kipling agreed to write some sketches and short stories for the *St James Gazette*.<sup>5</sup> The resulting pieces, published anonymously in November 1889, marked Kipling's literary debut in England.

Kipling's second important introduction to the literary world came through Mowbray Morris, the editor of *Macmillan's Magazine*, and former art editor of the *Allahabad Pioneer*. In the same month that Kipling's first pieces appeared in the *St James Gazette*, Morris agreed to accept two long ballads for *Macmillan's*. The first of these, 'The Ballad of the King's Mercy', appeared in the November issue, and the second, 'The Ballad of East and West', appeared in December. Both were written under the pseudonym of 'Yussuf', a not altogether inappropriate choice if we remember that alternate generations of male members of the Kipling family were named 'John' and 'Joseph', and that Kipling's full name was, in fact, Joseph Rudyard Kipling. Whether anyone was fooled by the transparent pseudonym is open to doubt, but the same December issue of *Macmillan's* that carried the 'Ballad of East and West' also featured the first of Kipling's stories to appear under his own name, 'The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney'.

Kipling's auspicious debut in the pages of both the *St James Gazette* and *Macmillan's Magazine* was further reinforced by the extraordinary impression his pieces made upon W. E. Henley. According to Lord Birkenhead:

Some time in February 1890 Henley had received a package addressed in an unknown hand, containing a manuscript headed *Barrack Room Ballads. I Danny Deever*. Before finishing it, Henley was said to have flung himself about the room, stamping on his wooden leg and shouting in an ecstasy of delight. Later Henley's patron, Fitzroy Bell, and Herbert Stephen arranged to call on the author to discuss *Barrack Room Ballads*, and were surprised to find a *farouche* boy of twenty-four, who stood on the hearth rug with easy assurance and recited another of his ballads, 'Fuzzy Wuzzy'.<sup>6</sup>

Henley, the editor of the *Scots Observer* (later to become the *National Observer*), was an influential literary figure of the time, chiefly remembered for the group of notable young writers he collected around him. This group, at one time or another, included such major figures as Stevenson, Yeats, Barrie, Wells, and Conrad. Henley welcomed Kipling into his group, and the association eventually led to the publication of the *Barrack Room Ballads* series, beginning in February 1890.

The 'Ballad of East and West' was promptly recognized as one of the most outstanding of Kipling's early pieces. The eulogies flowed thick and fast: 'A thing to stir the blood like a trumpet,' wrote Lionel Johnson in 1892;<sup>7</sup> 'The first plain manifestation of genius,' enthused J. H. Millar eight years later.<sup>8</sup> Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, writing of the *Barrack Room Ballads* collection in 1893, said that it contained verse 'for which "splendid" is the only term—so radiantly it glitters with incrustations of barbaric words',<sup>9</sup> and George Saintsbury selected it as 'one of two examples of contemporary verse worth mentioning by name in his *History of English Prosody*'.<sup>10</sup> Simultaneously with this flood of praise came the first negative reactions, focussed mainly upon Kipling's choice of theme and language.

It would be well to pause here and examine the nature of the form Kipling chose for his verse (he never referred to his work as 'poetry'), and analyse the strong reactions it produced.

### Kipling's Ballads

By the nineteenth century, the term 'ballad' had become little more than a literary conceit, so far had it come from its original meaning. The old ballads of England and Scotland were, in essence, narrative folk songs. They were verses composed in dialect to be sung to music, and they told stories drawn from the common experience of the people. With only a few exceptions, the literary 'ballads' of the nineteenth century had only one feature in common with the ballads of old: their narrative content.

One of Kipling's greatest contributions to the literary heritage of England is that he took the ballad back to its roots, and produced a hybrid form whose appeal transcended barriers of class, education, and cultivated taste.

Bearing in mind that his ballads and verses were a return to the older folk tradition, it is not difficult to understand why most attempts to define his lyrical work in terms of classical analysis have significantly failed to add anything of relevance to an appreciation of Kipling's verse, and have usually resulted in tautology and contradiction.

A study of such critical writings shows that Kipling's contemporaries were unanimous in their recognition of his technical skill. Writing in *Blackwood's Magazine* in October 1898, John Hepburn Millar, lecturer in Scottish Literature, professor of Constitutional Law and History, and author of *A Literary History of Scotland*



(1903), noted:

The technical difficulties of poetry have no terrors for Mr. Kipling. His command of rhythm and metre is absolute. No measure is too intricate for him to master, and some of the pleasure with which his verse is read is due to the apparent facility with which he handles a complicated scheme of versification.<sup>1</sup>

Sixty years later, whatever reversals there might have been in Kipling's literary reputation, recognition of his artistry remained unchanged. In his *English Poetry: A Short History* (1962), Kenneth Hopkins writes:

He is a varied poet, using a wide variety of metres, some of them not easy to handle, but all handled easily here: he is a poet poets of an age that does not regard him might well learn from, in the department of technique, even if nobody ever again can say 'amen' to the sentiments of "Recessional", with its ideals and beliefs now almost painfully outmoded.<sup>2</sup>

Even Hopkins, it seems, felt obliged to stand counted with the rank-and-file of progressive criticism of Kipling's 'ideals'.

If critics seem united in their recognition of Kipling's technical skill, where they begin to part company is in their evaluation of his application of those talents. Writing of 'The Ballad of East and West', Charles Carrington states:

The strength of the Ballad lies in its galloping rhythm which suggested to Saintsbury that Kipling had a 'soul for the anapaest'. Its rapid and varying pace, exactly suited to the development of the theme, showed an extraordinary ease and mastery of words. Even Swinburne could not show such vigour and flexibility.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, Richard Le Gallienne, after dismissing eleven of the 'Other Verses' from the *Barrack-Room Ballads* collection as 'commonplace, dull, or bad, in their several ways', criticizes 'The English Flag' for not living up to the promise of the first eight lines, and then turns to his next target:

"The Ballad of East and West" is generally better, though not so good in any single passage. It tells a stirring story stirringly, but the Macaulayish method of its telling is outworn. We can suffer ballads that go like this no more — the metre is worn out...<sup>4</sup>

To confuse the matter further, James Harrison writes of Kipling's metres as being 'both strong and unsubtle'.<sup>5</sup> He maintains that Kipling's conscious avoidance of familiar metres greatly restricted his freedom to 'tamper' with basic linear structure. This intriguing observation of Harrison's deserves a closer examination.

According to Harrison, 'the iambic pentameter...as the most widely used meter in English poetry, is also the most flexible — the one with which poets have felt free to take those liberties which only familiarity sanctions.'<sup>6</sup> In choosing

other metres, Kipling severely limited himself, and Harrison suggests that not even Kipling's technical skill could overcome the resulting 'dogmatic quality to his rhythm':

In a poem like "The Ballad of East and West", for instance, he claims the right that Browning and Swinburne did before him to vary the number of syllables by substituting anapests for iambs at will. Reversed feet are much rarer, however, and never do we lose the sense, as we do in Swinburne, of whether the meter is basically a rising or a falling one. Similarly, Kipling is almost addicted to the long line, probably to give the appearance of having escaped the rigidity of the balladlike meters of Scott and Macaulay. Yet almost invariably such lines break in two at consistently located caesura, often marked by a repetitive irregularity in the meter (usually a missing syllable), sometimes even by internal rhyme. In the same way, Kipling is very sparing in his use of enjambment, and quite insistent in his use of rhyme.<sup>7</sup>

All such discussion of Kipling and his metres is, however, otiose; for if anything is certain, it is that metrical scansion does not provide the key to an understanding of his verse. We are not speaking here of either the limitations inherent in all attempts to define language in terms of precise mathematical formulae, nor of the oft-debated problem of whether metrical scansion techniques derived from classical languages can be meaningfully applied to modern English. As the testimony of countless friends and acquaintances clearly shows, Kipling wrote his verse, not within the framework of a selected metrical pattern, but to the infinitely more subtle rhythms, harmonies, and, above all, timing of internalized melodies. According to Carrington:

Kipling's method was to study the flow and timing of an air and to arrange his words accordingly. Instead of scanning his verses by setting them out in metrical feet with regularly recurrent accents, or stresses, it would be more significant to give them a musical notation...<sup>8</sup>

With Kipling, the tune came first, and anecdotes abound concerning his method of composition.

Kipling left India in 1889, in the company of Professor and Mrs Hill, a couple that had befriended him in India. Their imminent journey to America prompted him to change his mind about returning directly to England, and made him decide to accompany them across the Pacific. Mrs Edmonia Hill has left us the following reminiscence:

*16 March.* I was present at the inception of Ruddy's *Barrack-Room Ballads*. We were on the British India steamer *Africa* sailing toward Singapore, standing by the rail, when he suddenly began to hum, 'Rum-ti-tum-tra-la' — shaking the ashes from his pipe overboard. I was used to this knowing something was



stirring in his brain. Humming in a musical tone, he exclaimed, 'I have it. I'll write some Tommy Atkins Ballads', and this idea kept simmering for months, with an occasional outbreak in soldierlike language.<sup>9</sup>

His erstwhile editor on the *Civil and Military Gazette* also recorded that 'when he had got a tune into his head, the words and rhyme came as readily as when a singer vamps his own banjo accompaniment'.<sup>10</sup> When at a loss for a melody, Kipling would turn to his family and friends for inspiration:

He would say 'Give me a hymn-tune' and, when someone suggested one, would go about for days humming it over, drumming it out with his fingers until words framed themselves to the tune, intent upon that and oblivious of the world, until he had finished his verse. It did not matter, for that purpose, that the song whose tune he borrowed was quite incongruous with the poem he intended; it was the rhythm he wanted and made his own.<sup>11</sup>

Kipling scholars have succeeded in matching many of his verses to specific tunes, and the range thus revealed is extraordinary. American folk songs of the Civil War period, Irish jigs, popular English ballads, even nursery rhymes. Such attributions have, moreover, clearly identified the two major influences: Victorian hymns and music-hall songs.

The first of the two is perhaps not surprising. Very few writers have escaped being unconsciously influenced by the majestic prose of the King James Bible or the *Book of Common Prayer*. Kipling's first years in England were spent in what he later called 'The House of Desolation', a strict Calvinist household in Swansea, where we can be sure Bible-reading and hymn-singing formed an essential part of the daily ritual. In an age of empty churches, it is now difficult to imagine that in Kipling's time *Hymns Ancient and Modern* was one of the most popular volumes of verse in England, and one of a small number of books almost certain to appear on any Victorian family bookshelf, in the illustrious company of the Bible, Shakespeare, and Fitzgerald's translation of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.

Kipling's association with the music hall is far less obvious. Kipling himself acknowledged this association in his biography *Something of Myself*. Writing of his life in Villiers Street, he tells us that fourpence would buy admission to Gatti's music hall, included in the price being a pewter of beer or porter. In his own words:

It was here, in the company of an elderly but upright barmaid from a pub near by, that I listened to the observed and compelling songs of the Lion and Mammoth Comiques, and the shriller strains — but equally 'observed' — of the Bessies and Bellas, whom I could hear arguing beneath my window with their cab-drivers, as they sped from Hall to Hall. One lady sometimes delighted us with *viva-voce* versions of — 'what 'as just 'appened to me outside 'ere, if you'll believe it.' Then she would plunge into brilliant improvisations. Oh, we

believed! Many of us had, perhaps, taken part in the tail of that argument at the doors, ere she stormed in.

These monologues I could never hope to rival, but the smoke, the roar, and the good-fellowship of relaxed humanity at Gatti's 'set' the scheme for a certain sort of song. The Private Soldier in India I thought I knew fairly well. His English brother (in the Guards mostly) sat and sang at my elbow any night I chose; and, for Greek chorus, I had the comments of my barmaid — deeply and dispassionately versed in all knowledge of evil as she had watched it across the zinc she was always swabbing off... The outcome was the first of some verses called *Barrack-Room Ballads*...<sup>12</sup>

Leaving aside the contradiction between Kipling's own version of the origins of the *Barrack-Room Ballads*, and that of Mrs Edmonia Hill mentioned earlier, we are still left with the question of where and when Kipling developed his interest in the music hall.

According to Angus Wilson, the key lies in a relatively unchronicled period of Kipling's life, when he was a boarder at the United Services College, Westward Ho!<sup>13</sup> Wilson suggests that Kipling acquired his taste for the music hall under the direct influence of 'Uncle Ned' (Sir Edward Burne-Jones), at whose house Kipling spent his Christmas holidays during the blighted years of his stay at Southsea, and to which he continued to be an occasional visitor thereafter.

Be that as it may, there remain two other influences that might possibly have stimulated and shaped Kipling's ballads. One of these is his Scottish mother, and the other is the work of Sir Walter Scott. Although specific attribution is impossible, Kipling's formative years were devoted, like so many other writers in their youth, to an assiduous imitation of established authors, and it seems improbable that he should have escaped the influence of probably the most famous and popular ballad writer of his time. The intangible influence of his Scottish mother, a Macdonald, is even more difficult to assess, but certainly many of his verses show evidence of spontaneous and sometimes unwarranted Scotticisms.<sup>14</sup>

In all this discussion of Kipling's verse forms and their origins, we have still not addressed ourselves to the question, not of 'how', but of 'why'; why it was that Kipling adopted the ballad form for his verse.

Perhaps the most cogent and persuasive explanation is that offered by Vasant A. Shahane:

A modern poet is inclined to say, "If you do not understand me, so much the worse for you," whereas Kipling would assert, "If you do not understand me, so much the worse for *me*." Complete rapport between the poet and the reader thus becomes, an important element in Kipling's poetry, particularly in his choice of poetic forms. A poet who aims at direct communication is likely to find only certain verse forms — such as the ballad — suitable for his poetic needs.<sup>15</sup>



There is, however, one other important factor that determines the nature of the literary medium chosen, be it poetry or prose: the content or substance of the communication.

In choosing to write of common beer-swilling soldiers, of half-naked Indian water-carriers, of brigands and rogues, and in allowing them to speak for themselves in their own language, Kipling took the ballad form back to its roots, and succeeded in sending an immense shock-wave through the thin crust of literary gentility.

Almost a hundred years have passed since Kipling's verses fell upon the public 'like a series of hammer blows',<sup>16</sup> and that century has witnessed the systematic exploration and exhaustion of the possibilities of almost every art form. Poetry has been no exception. Traditional forms have been rejected; new ones have been created, assayed, and discarded; debilitating sterility has been combatted with desperate injections of exotic oriental elixirs. Unread and unappreciated, modern poets, like their counterparts in other artistic disciplines, have sought solace in the comforting fiction that they are not creating for society, but for history. In an age of almost total disinterest in contemporary poetry, it is indeed difficult to imagine the extreme reactions produced by Kipling's verse, the delight and the disgust.

Hilton Brown has summed up the matter so succinctly that we could do no better than to quote him at length:

In 1892 the life, habits and manners of the common soldier were not a theme realistically explored by poets: the "drunken private of the Buffs" was as near to it as they cared to go. Now suddenly this uncouth army of drinking, swearing and thoroughly human strangers burst into the domain hitherto reserved for their betters; not only this but they celebrated the invasion in their own language — their own H-less, colloquial street-pub-and-barracks talk. In 1892 this was a comparative novelty; if any had recognized the unconscious poetry of our language as spoken by the lower orders, few had ventured to record it in writing, much less in verse; and as a result these raucous battering explosive disconcerting outcries worked on their readers like the war-chorus of some new and fascinating tribe of savages. Kipling, at the moment, was at the height of his passion for soldiers and soldiering; at the height too of his mission to portray the Thing as it Was — and devil take all weak stomachs. The two passions fused together in *Barrack-Room-Ballads*; how could these not have been a success?<sup>17</sup>

So great a success were they, in fact, that verses of Kipling not written in dialect seemed to pale in comparison. This is particularly true of the 'Ballad of East and West', included in the *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses* collection as the first of the 'Other Verses', and thus coming directly after the stirring full-blooded last chorus of 'Shillin' a Day':

Give 'im a letter —

'Can't do no better,  
Late Troop-Sergeant-Major an' —  
    runs with a letter!  
Think what 'e's been,  
Think what 'e's seen,  
Think of his pension an' —  
  
GAWD SAVE THE QUEEN!<sup>18</sup>

Even W. E. Henley was overwhelmed, and in an anonymous review of Kipling's early stories and verses in the *Scots Observer* of 3 May 1890 he wrote:

The material is of the vilest — is the very dregs of language, in fact; but the artist has come that way, and has produced an effect — by the orchestration as it were of such low-lived and degraded vocables as (say) the equivalents of 'bloomin'' and 'beggar' — that in its way and degree is comparable to that of those great Miltonic polysyllables which seem to have been dictated by Apollo himself. Once, and only once, has Mr. Kipling done anything of the sort in plain English; and even then — it was in that noble 'Ballad of East and West' which remains thus far his masterpiece, alike in inspiration and execution — the quality of the result was by no means extraordinary.<sup>19</sup>

It is not our intention, however, to enter into a comparison of the 'Ballad of East and West' with other of Kipling's verses. Our purpose is to investigate the controversy and misunderstanding this ballad has generated, and this purpose will have been well served if the discussion so far has placed both Kipling and his verse in a literary and historical perspective.

### The Ballad of East and West

Many are the writers and critics that have taken the first line of 'The Ballad of East and West' out of context, and used it to defame both Kipling and his purported ideals. Out of context of not only the line that follows it, but also out of context of the qualifying couplet that comes after. Most such writers either ignore, or are unaware of, the fact that these four lines are a preface to a long ballad that serves to illustrate the truth of this qualifying couplet. Yet other writers, fully aware of the ballad as a whole, and apparently cognizant of its content, have still managed to misread it completely, and turned its meaning and significance around in support of theories, the lowest common denominator of which would seem to be their sheer negativity towards Kipling as a person.

In the immortal words of Schiller, 'Mit der Dummheit kämpfen Götter selbst vergebens.'<sup>1</sup> If even trained scholars seem not to be immune to prejudice, stupidity, and plain old-fashioned ignorance, there is perhaps little we can do to redress the balance. We should, at the very least, acquaint ourselves with the content of this



ballad before embarking upon a discussion of the misunderstanding surrounding it, lest we ourselves fall into the same error as have so many others.

'The Ballad of East and West' begins and ends with the quatrain:

*Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall  
meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment  
Seat;  
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor  
Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come  
from the ends of the earth!*<sup>2</sup>

The ballad itself deals with the theft and recovery of a prized horse, and the scene is set in the first two couplets:

Kamal is out with twenty men to raise the Border-side,  
And he has lifted the Colonel's mare that is the Colonel's pride.  
He has lifted her out of the stable-door between the dawn and  
the day;  
And turned the calkins on her feet, and ridden her far away.

The geographical location is the North-West Frontier of the Indian Empire, on the border with Afghanistan. The time is the mid-nineteenth century.

Kamal rides off with the Colonel's horse, and the Colonel's son, himself a leader of 'a troop of the Guides', asks his men if they know where Kamal has his hideaway. One of them, Mohammed Khan, replies:

'If ye know the track of the morning mist, ye know where his  
pickets are.  
At dusk he harries the Abazai — at dawn he is into Bonair.'

However, if Kamal is to make good his getaway, he must cross the border near Fort Bukloh, and Mohammed Khan advises the Colonel's son to ride as fast as possible, and try to head him off near there. He also warns him that if he fails to cut him off, and if Kamal succeeds in riding through the Tongue of Jagai,<sup>3</sup> then the Colonel's son should abandon his pursuit, for once through the Tongue, Kamal will be on his home ground, surrounded by his followers:

'For the length and the breadth of that grisly plain is sown with  
Kamal's men.  
There is rock to the left, and rock to the right, and low lean  
thorn between,  
And ye may hear a breech-block snick where never a man is seen.'

Undaunted, the Colonel's son saddles a dun horse and rides hell-for-leather in

pursuit. Arriving at Fort Bukloh, he finds that Kamal has indeed got there ahead of him, and refusing offers of food, he continues his ride. As he approaches the Tongue of Jagai, he catches his first glimpse of Kamal far ahead of him, riding the stolen mare.

He fires off two shots at Kamal, but both go wide, and the two riders plunge headlong through the Tongue of Jagai and into Kamal's territory. They ride and ride, and suddenly the dun falls at a water course. Kamal turns back, pulls the rider free, and knocks the pistol out of his hand:

'Twas only by favour of mine,' quoth he, 'ye rode so long alive:  
There was not a rock for twenty mile, there was not a clump  
of tree,  
But covered a man of my own men with his rifle cocked on his  
knee.  
If I had raised my bridle-hand, as I have held it low,  
The little jackals that flee so fast were feasting all in a row.  
If I had bowed my head on my breast, as I have held it high,  
The kite that whistles above us now were gorged till she could  
not fly.'

Unintimidated, the Colonel's son defies Kamal to shoot him now, but also warns him of the consequences, for surely his death will be avenged, and the whole region laid waste. He asks Kamal to consider whether one horse is worth the destruction that will inevitably follow, and confronts him with the choice:

'But if thou thinkest the price be fair, — thy brethren wait to  
sup,  
The hound is kin to the jackal-spawn, — howl, dog, and call  
them up!  
And if thou thinkest the price be high, in steer and gear and  
stack,  
Give me my father's mare again, and I'll fight my own way back!'

In answer, Kamal takes him by the hand and pulls him to his feet. Impressed by his horsemanship and courage, Kamal spares the Colonel's son and praises his defiance. The Colonel's son responds to this gesture with equal magnanimity:

'Take up the mare for my father's gift — by God, she has carried  
a man!'

As if aware of what is being said, the mare comes over to the Colonel's son and muzzles against his breast, and Kamal decides on impulse to return the horse:

'We be two strong men,' said Kamal then, 'but she loveth the  
younger best.'



So she shall go with a lifter's dower, my turquoise-studded rein,  
My 'broidered saddle and saddle-cloth, and silver stirrups twain.'

Not to be outdone, the Colonel's son offers his own gift, a pistol he had kept hidden, and which presumably he could have used upon Kamal at any time:

The Colonel's son a pistol drew and held it muzzle-end,  
'Ye have taken the one from a foe,' said he. 'Will ye take the mate  
from a friend?'

Kamal acknowledges this gift, and its significance, with yet another, and the ballad reaches its unexpected climax:

'A gift for a gift,' said Kamal straight; 'a limb for the risk of a  
limb.  
Thy father has sent his son to me, I'll send my son to him!'

He whistles a signal, and his only son, hiding nearby, steps forward. Kamal tells him that he must now ride back with the Colonel's son, and join the Guides. He must 'eat the White Queen's meat', and he must fight her foes, even if that should include Kamal himself. His last words to his son are:

'And thou must make a trooper tough and hack thy way to  
power —  
Belike they will raise thee to Rissaldar when I am hanged in  
Peshawur!'

The two young men swear an oath of brotherhood, and together ride back to Fort Bukloh, the Colonel's son on his father's mare, and Kamal's son on the dun. As they approach the Fort, twenty look-outs from the Quarter-Guard leap out and draw their swords when they see the young Afghan brigand:

'Ha' done! ha' done!' said the Colonel's son. 'Put up the steel at  
your sides!  
Last night ye had struck at a Border thief — to-night 'tis a man  
of the Guides!'

The ballad ends with a return to the quatrain with which it began, and the words are now filled with increased significance:

*Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall  
meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment  
Seat;  
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor  
Birth,*

*When two strong men stand face to face, though they come  
from the ends of the earth!*

### Criticism and Controversy I

Reading 'The Ballad of East and West' through from beginning to end, it is indeed difficult to imagine what so many commentators could have found so objectionable, in what would appear at first glance to be a simple and straightforward adventure story. Before turning to an investigation of specific examples of such negative reactions, it needs to be said in passing that the politicalization of literary criticism after the First World War produced an atmosphere of intolerance so absolute, that writers such as Kipling could be dismissed as 'imperialist' without any need to justify this contention by reference to actual works. Quite simply, any writer that dealt with the Empire without criticizing it outright was, by default, recognizing that Empire and acknowledging its ideals.

Our purpose, however, is to investigate the controversy surrounding 'The Ballad of East and West', and to examine the reactions it has produced. We should begin, therefore, by returning to the observations made in the Introduction, and remind ourselves that by far the greatest cause of misunderstanding has been the quotation, out of context, of the first line of the ballad:

*Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall  
meet*

Those writers that have taken objection to this statement are, presumably, of the opinion that East is not East, West is not West, or, at least, that the twain *shall* meet.

Peter Milward has done the cause of Kipling studies a great service by committing to print a typical example of such a chain of reasoning. In a collection of short essays written for Japanese readers, and published in the form of a Japanese translation, Milward explains and comments upon fifty-two famous quotations and proverbs chosen as representing the 'Words and Wisdom of the English'.<sup>1</sup> The eleventh of these happens to be the first line of 'The Ballad of East and West'.

Milward begins by telling us that East is, of course, East, and that West is, of course, West; a fact so obvious that it hardly needs stating, as obvious as saying that Right is Right, and Left is Left. However, if we look a little more deeply, we shall see that East is not necessarily always East, nor West always West. It is all a matter of perspective, and all such concepts are relative. Speaking geographically, East usually refers to Asia, and West to Europe, but from the standpoint of someone living in America, Asia lies, in fact, to the west, and Europe to the east. That so many Americans should automatically identify Asia with 'East', and Europe with 'West', is the result, Milward maintains, of subtle cultural brainwashing. Furthermore, according to Milward, Kipling is not necessarily speaking of geographical



relationships. Rather, he is speaking of attitudes of mind:

つまり彼の言わんとしたことは、今かりに二つの国だけにあてはめて言うならば、日本人は日本人、イギリス人はイギリス人、両者が本当に出会い、お互いを理解することはけっしてない、ということだったのではあるまいか。<sup>2</sup>

To this, Milward takes strong objection. Of course Japanese are Japanese; but, Milward reminds his Japanese readers, they are also human beings. Of course Englishmen are Englishmen; but they are, at the same time, members of the same human race. Whenever Japanese and Englishmen meet, wherever it may be, they meet, not as Japanese and Englishmen, but as fellow human beings.

Acknowledging the difficulties caused by racial and cultural differences, Milward urges us to overcome these barriers to understanding, and to prove Kipling wrong:

けれどもしばらくつきあっているうちに、相手も結局、やはり同じ人間なのだと気が付いてくる。その時はじめて、われわれは本当に互いに出会い、理解することができるのだ。そしてその時、われわれはキプリングがまちがっていたことを証明できる。<sup>3</sup>

Instead of ending his essay on this inspiring note, Milward chooses to finish by admitting that this line of Kipling's is, in fact, followed 'immediately' by another, less famous line, and that this line comes much nearer to the truth. That line is, according to Milward: 'There is neither East nor West.'<sup>4</sup>

What the Japanese reader unfamiliar with Kipling's verse is to make of this flat contradiction, is indeed an intriguing question.

One is tempted to ask what prompted the inclusion of this quotation from Kipling in a volume subtitled (in English) 'Golden Words From England'. What species of 'Golden Words' is it, one wonders, that requires the exegete to call upon his reader for their refutation?

Our gratitude to Milward for his clarification of the first line of 'The Ballad of East and West' should not, however, keep us from asking two further questions.

The first of these is whether Milward is aware of the fact that in the ballad, Kipling describes how two men from entirely different religious and cultural backgrounds recognize in each other the universal virtue of courage, and how this mutual acknowledgment of bravery results in the swearing of a solemn oath of brotherhood:

They have looked each other between the eyes, and there they  
found no fault.  
They have taken the Oath of Brother-in-Blood on leavened bread  
and salt.  
They have taken the Oath of Brother-in-Blood on fire and fresh-  
cut sod,  
On the hilt and the haft of the Khyber knife, and the Wondrous  
Names of God.<sup>5</sup>

The second question is whether, in reminding us of the important fact that all

men are brothers, and all are members of the same human race, Milward is aware of the fact that he is suggesting, albeit indirectly, that Kipling had somehow forgotten this essential truth.

We can now begin to see the specious logic behind the virulent reactions to this line of Kipling's. Anyone that affirms racial or cultural differences is, de facto, denying the common humanity we share. Such a person would, presumably, not deny his own humanity; he is, therefore, denying the humanity of all those of other races or cultures. He is, consequently, a racial and cultural supremacist.

Milward's exhortation to his Japanese readers to join him in overcoming cultural barriers, and thus prove Kipling wrong, could, perhaps, have been directed at a potentially more receptive audience. It may be that his remarks are of little relevance to a nation that has long stressed its racial, cultural, and even biological uniqueness. We must also bear in mind that, by a peculiar quirk of fate, we now find ourselves in an age when the affirmation of the racial and cultural purity of minority groups is, in fact, a sign of progressive radicalism.

Be that as it may, all this should not blind us to the fact that, over fifty years ago, the Japanese translator of Kipling's verse was able to say of 'The Ballad of East and West':

少なくともその最初の一行

Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the  
twain shall meet,

あゝ、東は東、西は西、両者の出會ふ  
ことあらず、

の如きは Kipling を語る者の誰しも引用する文句であって、その餘りにも有名なるためか、ただこの一行のみより判断し、斯くの如きは毒詩である、東西兩洋の融合を妨げるものである、宜しく絶滅すべき悪文學であると憶面もなく議論する人さへ出て来るのである。

けれどもこの詩はけっして毒詩ではない。この詩は極めて勇ましい詩である。東西兩洋の融合を妨げるものではない。東西兩洋の融合こそこの詩の主題である。どうしてこの勇ましい詩を悪文學などといへやうか。さういふ人は先ず最初に始めから終わりまでこの詩を讀んで見るべきである。<sup>6</sup>

Only four years after this was written, the first President of the Kipling Society addressed a gathering of over a hundred members, and stated quite flatly that Kipling was right, and that East and West *shall* never meet.

The speaker was Major-General Lionel Charles Dunsterville, the original of 'Stalky', and a life-long friend of Kipling. The paper he presented on that day is of interest in that, clearly familiar with the content of 'The Ballad of East and West' as a whole, Dunsterville chooses to reply to Kipling's critics upon their own terms of reference, and restricts himself to the first line of the ballad.<sup>7</sup>

He begins by noting that modern critics of Kipling contend that increasing social contact between Indians and Englishmen has proved that Kipling was wrong, and



that East and West have met. Dunsterville points out, however, that the numbers of 'Indian undergraduates at our universities walking arm-in-arm with their English friends' is only a few hundred, whilst the population of India is 'about 350 millions'.<sup>8</sup> Despite the fact that we are talking of a fraction of one out of 3.5 millions, the critics would have us believe that the races have, indeed, met, and that Kipling has been refuted. According to Dunsterville, however, there are meetings and there are meetings, and that between East and West is a form of head-on collision between two diametrically-opposed cultural traditions. For this reason, it is a mistake to try, as many politicians have done, to impose Western values upon the East:

The fundamental differences of East and West are never to be altered, and none can say that our Western culture is superior to that of the East — no comparison is possible between two opposites. In forcing our ideas on them we do both them and ourselves great harm. Because a certain system has been found to suit us, that is no reason why we should run about the world pressing our great gift on people who think that they are already in possession of something much better.<sup>9</sup>

After reassuring his audience that he is not making a political speech, Dunsterville asserts that the real India has not changed in the forty years since Kipling wrote 'The Ballad of East and West', and that the sentiment of the first line remains the literal truth:

He [Kipling] had not served for the best years of his life on the North-West frontier, of India, as many in this room have done. He was only twenty-four years old when he wrote this, and after schooldays most of his time had been spent in the office of a daily paper; yet he pens in these few lines the exact feeling that lies between frontier officers and the marauding tribes from whom they enlist their best soldiers. I could have expressed the same idea inadequately myself in prose, and it would have taken me much paper.<sup>10</sup>

In complete contrast to those that have denied the validity of the statement that 'East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet', and have used it to attack Kipling as an imperialist and a racialist, and in contrast to those apologists that have pleaded the mitigation of the qualifying couplet, Dunsterville maintains that the exception serves to prove the rule, and that Kipling was stating a basic and literal truth.

Whatever we may think of Dunsterville's ideas about Anglo-Indian contact, ideas which have been rendered irrelevant by the tide of history, by the birth of an independent democratic India in 1947, and by the immigration of large numbers of Indians and Pakistanis into the United Kingdom, he has raised two invaluable points. The first of these, his remark about officers recruiting some of their best soldiers from the marauding tribes of the frontier, is an important point that we shall return to later; the second, that Kipling's famous line captures the exact feeling that existed

between the soldiers and brigands of the North-West Frontier, is even more crucial. Could it be, perhaps, that the key to the first line of 'The Ballad of East and West' lies here? Perhaps the sentiment expressed was meant neither to be taken as an absolute truth, nor even as Kipling's own opinion, but simply as being indicative of the feelings shared by the two protagonists of the story.

Whatever their motivations, and whatever the conclusions reached, both Dunsterville and Milward, and countless other writers like them, have felt it necessary to comment upon the same single line of verse taken out of context. Some of them may have been ignorant of that context, others may have chosen to ignore it. Whatever be the case, they have all felt obliged to respond in some way or other. With so many possibilities available, so many other lines from Kipling that could be quoted out of context, and could provide material for an infinite number of different theories, why is it that, with only a few exceptions, almost all critical attention has been focussed upon this, the first line of 'The Ballad of East and West'?

The answer is, of course, that it is almost impossible to ignore it, so famous and so universal has it become. It is its sheer popularity that has provoked the critical reactions, and not vice-versa. But why, one may ask, is this line of Kipling's so famous, so eminently quotable?

In his essay on Kipling, George Orwell maintains that the secret of Kipling's popularity, and the reason why so many of his lines and phrases have passed into common usage, is that he was a 'good bad poet', which means that he wrote 'good bad poems':

But what is the peculiarity of a good bad poem? A good bad poem is a graceful monument to the obvious. It records in memorable form — for verse is a mnemonic device, among other things — some emotion which very nearly every human being can share. The merit of a poem like *When all the World is Young, Lad* is that, however sentimental it may be, its sentiment is "true" sentiment in the sense that you are bound to find yourself thinking the thought expressed sooner or later; and then, if you happen to know the poem, it will come back into your mind and seem better than it did before.<sup>11</sup>

We can assume that when he wrote these words, Orwell had in mind not only the poem from Charles Kingsley's *Water Babies* that he mentions, but also the first line of 'The Ballad of East and West', for it was from that line, and a list of five others like it, that Orwell's discussion of Kipling's popularity first began.

Orwell goes on to point out that the sentiments expressed in Kipling's verses, and in those of other 'good bad poets', may not necessarily be true, but that they are sentiments that all of us, at some time or other, find ourselves embracing. If we apply this observation to the first line of 'The Ballad of East and West', we can begin to see the futility of much of the discussion and controversy it has produced.



Whether Kipling himself thought that 'East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet' is irrelevant. In these words there is a perfect and unforgettable expression of a thought that, at some time or other, must have passed, albeit fleetingly, though the mind of everyone that has stopped to consider the enormous racial, cultural, and religious differences that separate East and West. Perhaps it may be that, upon mature reflection, the eventual conclusion reached is that such differences are not, after all, irreconcilable; but, for that brief moment of doubt, the words had a temporary validity. Had they not, they would never have been recalled nor repeated and would have been forgotten long ago.

A useful parallel can be drawn with the theories of myth and story archetypes often propounded by psychiatrists and cultural anthropologists. Such archetypes do not, of themselves, generate either myths or stories. They are passive, buried deep in the collective unconscious of the human race. Each culture and each generation produces, afresh, its own stories and tales, but it is only those that correspond to the basic patterns of the universal archetypes that are perceived as having a significance far beyond the mundane facts of the narrative, that survive where others are forgotten, and that are passed on down from generation to generation.

'East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet' has become, as Orwell said, a kind of 'rhyming proverb',<sup>12</sup> and has become a tiny part of the cultural inheritance of the English-speaking world. Like all proverbs, it expresses a single facet of perceived truth, and it can be readily juxtaposed with other proverbs or sayings that may seem contradictory, but that are simply expressing different facets of the same subjective reality.

Kipling should not be blamed for his popularity, nor should he be indicted for putting into words a sentiment that has found such universal appeal. If the intention is to prove that he was a racialist and a jingoistic imperialist, this purpose were far better served by a reference to his works as a whole.

## Criticism and Controversy II

The initial favourable response notwithstanding, Kipling's works have often been criticized for a lack of credibility and authenticity. As early as 1900 Richard Le Gallienne was questioning the sincerity of Kipling's 'Recessional',<sup>1</sup> and other writers have taken issue with the authenticity of Kipling's descriptions of everything from the vernacular of private soldiers to the technology of steamships. Such charges have also been levelled at 'The Ballad of East and West', and they relate specifically to the credibility of the story-line, and to the authenticity of the characters portrayed.

Cyril Falls maintains that 'it is not unfair to demand how it came that, when after a chase lasting all night the horse of the pursued [sic] fell, the only son should happen to be at hand upon a mountain crest within reach of a whistle'.<sup>2</sup> James Harrison suggests that the ending of the story is 'too pat'.<sup>3</sup> Why should the Pathan chieftain, out of admiration for the spirit of the Colonel's son, suddenly decide to

send his own son back with him to be trained as a soldier?

There is, unfortunately, no end to this line of questioning. Why did the Pathan chieftain steal the horse in the first place? Why did the Colonel's son ride out alone in pursuit? Why did he ignore the warnings of his own men, and plunge deep into Kamal's territory? If the tale is complete fiction, then the responsibility for the narrative lies with Kipling. Only Kipling could tell us, were he alive today, why he chose a reckless youth and an Afghan horse-thief to personify the meeting of East and West. Viewed dispassionately, the 'bravery' of the Colonel's son lies in his throwing all caution to the wind, and riding into enemy territory armed with only two pistols. The 'bravery' of Kamal is even more suspect, and we must remind ourselves that many equestrian cultures have seen fit to reward the crime of horse-stealing with capital punishment.

Such a critical approach, however, is self-defeating, for if a story is not credible, and its artistic impact is thus vitiated, then we hardly need a critic to point out to us the inconsistencies and improbabilities. If these were not self-evident upon first reading, and the reader read the story or poem with innocent pleasure, then the critic is doing the reader no service by pointing out to him the reasons why he should have *not* enjoyed it. All fiction, after all, demands some suspension of belief, otherwise we shall end up like the American preacher who refused to write an academic essay on Hamlet, on the grounds that it was impossible to analyse the character of someone that had never existed.<sup>4</sup> If there are incredible aspects to 'The Ballad of East and West', this does not seem to have detracted from the enormous enjoyment so many of Kipling's readers have derived from the verse.

We are assuming, however, that the story of 'The Ballad of East and West' is completely fictional, and that any stretching of the reader's credulity is the result of a lapse of skill on the part of the author. Such, however, is not the case. What many writers seem to have been unaware of, is that this ballad is, in fact, based upon actual events. These events were familiar to Kipling, and to almost every Anglo-Indian of his time, and if Kipling's readers in England and America were, perhaps, unaware of this background to the 'Ballad of East and West', then this is certainly no excuse for the learned critics that have condemned it as incredible and improbable.

One writer that is obviously fully aware of this background is Vasant A. Shahane:

The English Colonel in the poem, as pointed out by Karl W. Deutsch and Norbert Wiener, is Sir Robert Warburton, who is known as the founder of the Khyber Rifles. As historians of the Border Wars have noted, Colonel Warburton was taken prisoner in Kabul in 1842 and he escaped through the regal intervention of an Afghan princess whom he later married. The hero of Kipling's poem is, in reality, Sir Warburton's son, Warburton, Jr., who was obviously half Afghan, half English.



Quite ironically East and West had already met in the person of Warburton, Jr., and as such one of the two principal characters in the ballad nullifies the argument of the incompatibility of East and West. The major question is why Kipling chose to suppress the facts which were so out-of-step and exotic and why he remained content with showing the Colonel's son in the ballad as a pure Anglo-Saxon in Indian setting.<sup>5</sup>

The answer to this 'major question' is, of course, given in the article by Deutsch and Wiener to which Shahane refers, and which appeared in the *Yale Review* of July 1963.<sup>6</sup> Reference to that article, however, reveals that the historical basis for Deutsch and Wiener's thesis — the 'historians of the Border Wars' that Shahane mentions — is, in reality, the entry on Sir Robert Warburton in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th Edition. The facts as stated by Deutsch and Wiener are more or less as Shahane relates them, but there is one glaring discrepancy. In quoting from Deutsch and Wiener, Shahane has obviously, in a fit of absent-mindedness, misplaced one entire generation of the Warburton family, and assumed the Colonel of Kipling's story to be the officer that married an Afghan princess. According to Shahane's computations, this officer's son is the 'Colonel's son' of the ballad, and is, in consequence, 'obviously half Afghan, half English'.

Deutsch and Wiener make no such mistake, and, on the basis of the *Britannica* article, unerringly identify Sir Robert Warburton of the Khyber Rifles as the son of the artillery officer and the Afghan princess. If Sir Robert Warburton is the 'Colonel' of the ballad, then his son must have been 'at least one-quarter Afghan in blood'.<sup>7</sup>

Deutsch and Wiener now ask why Kipling chose to 'distort the facts he found'.<sup>8</sup> If Kipling's intention really was to depict a meeting of cultures, why did he suppress 'the real fact of individual love crossing the racial and cultural barrier, and the real fact of the child of such a marriage growing up into an honored and distinguished officer, respected by Afghan and English alike'.<sup>9</sup> Why did he chose to depict the meeting of East and West as a confrontation between a 'pure-bred Englishman' and a 'pure-bred Afghan'?<sup>10</sup>

After pointing out that Kipling was a sub-editor in Lahore at the same time as Warburton was active at the Khyber Pass, and that therefore Kipling could not plead ignorance of the facts, Deutsch and Wiener come to the crux of their indictment:

If Kipling had chosen to ignore trivial facts in favor of the impressive and unusual, he would merely have followed the frequent practice of poets. But he chose on the contrary to ignore a series of extremely unusual and arresting facts, and reduced a situation of strange, profound, and complicated human contacts to an ordinary gesture of mutual respect between two otherwise irrevocably alienated warriors. Why should a poet thus reject the very stuff of poetry? And why should a reporter ignore or misrepresent the crucial facts of

a situation which he pretended to describe?<sup>11</sup>

The answer, according to Deutsch and Wiener, lies in Kipling's psychological need to belong to a clearly-defined group, a need which sprang from his deep-rooted emotional insecurity. Evidence for this can be found in the frequent occurrence in Kipling's works of the image of a 'small group fighting to the death for its superior values'.<sup>12</sup> Deutsch and Wiener tell us that Kipling desperately wanted to belong to such a group, and that he was haunted by the fear of being an outcast. Writing of 'The Gentlemen Rankers' and 'The Broken Men', they maintain:

These poems, like almost all of Kipling's works, reveal a horror of ambiguity, and a frantic belief in the all-or-nothing character of group allegiance. One can only be entirely inside a group or inside the pale, Kipling feels, or entirely outside it. Thus East is East, and West is West; and in another poem, the hero Tomlinson begs to be received either into heaven or into hell, because he cannot stand the loneliness of inter-stellar space.<sup>13</sup>

Deutsch and Wiener are not the first to have remarked upon this aspect of Kipling's character. In a 1948 lecture, C. S. Lewis commented: 'What he loves better than anything in the world is the intimacy within a closed circle...To belong, to be inside, to be in the know, to be snugly together against the outsiders — this is what really matters.'<sup>14</sup>

To explain why Kipling should have felt this overpowering need to belong to a close-knit group, Deutsch and Wiener introduce the concept of 'marginality'. Brought up largely by native servants, he 'learned Hindustani as soon as or sooner than English'.<sup>15</sup> Presumably this experience blurred his cultural self-identity. In England, his ill-treatment in the 'House of Desolation' in Southsea made him an outcast within the Holloway household. At school, Kipling 'must have felt marginal indeed',<sup>16</sup> partly as a result of his less than heroic family background, and partly because of his inability to join the other boys in sports. His bad eyesight also precluded any possibility of a military career, and whereas most of his schoolfriends went on to join the army or navy, Kipling had to content himself with a return to India, and a junior post on the *Civil and Military Gazette*. Any self-confidence that his early literary success in India might have inspired in him was negated by 'persistent and entirely unfounded rumors about Kipling's partly colored ancestry'.<sup>17</sup> Having traced the history of Kipling's 'marginality', Deutsch and Wiener are now in a position to present their conclusion:

He found a source of emotional security in the very close unity of the Kipling family in India, the social prominence of his parents, and his emotional identification with the elite of the English administrative system. But all the English were marginal in India, where they were ruling as an extremely small minority over the vast population of a subcontinent. Kipling's intolerance of ambiguity, his frantic



need to belong, his ignoring or underplaying of all facts that might break down the barriers on which his security depended — such as his ignoring of the true Warburton story mentioned above, or his virtual ignoring of the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885 — all these may well have their roots in his emotional reaction to the repeated experiences of marginality to which he had been exposed.<sup>18</sup>

Deutsch and Wiener then go on to level a number of other charges at Kipling, from his pusillanimity in not overcoming the limitations of his bad eyesight and thus becoming a ‘man of action’, to his indirect culpability for the Second World War:

The relief found in belonging to a group may become the rigor of fear-rooted conformity. Kipling’s rigid image of a fundamentally separated and divided world may once again perpetuate itself in a series of dreadful stereotypes illegitimately but recognizably derived from it, like the fatal stereotypes of the mental world of *Mein Kampf*.<sup>19</sup>

Whatever one might think of Deutsch and Wiener’s conclusions, it must be remembered that they have their origin in the identification of the Colonel of ‘The Ballad of East and West’ with Sir Robert Warburton of the Khyber Rifles. The only evidence Deutsch and Wiener offer for this identification is the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article mentioned earlier. A comparison of that article with the ballad itself, and of the figure of Sir Robert Warburton with the ‘Colonel’ of the story, produces only two points of congruity: both men were army officers, and both served on the North-West Frontier. This description could also fit several hundred other persons. Why, then, did Deutsch and Wiener choose Sir Robert Warburton? The authors themselves adduce no supporting evidence, neither do they offer any explanation for several inconsistencies in their account.

In accusing Kipling of a distortion of the facts, Deutsch and Wiener are themselves not entirely innocent of the same transgression. Their numerous references to ‘Colonel Warburton’ may serve to convince the uninformed reader that Sir Robert Warburton and the ‘Colonel of the Guides’ are one and the same person, but these references are inaccurate. Deutsch and Wiener insist that Kipling could not claim ignorance of the facts of the story, because: ‘Kipling himself came to India as sub-editor of the Lahore *Civil and Military Gazette*, at the age of 17, in 1882 or 1883, at the time when Colonel Warburton had just become permanent at his post at the Khyber Pass.’<sup>20</sup> The truth of the matter is that in 1882 and 1883 Warburton was not a colonel, but a major, and would remain so until 1887, in which year Kipling was posted away from Lahore to Allahabad, more than 600 miles to the south-east. When Kipling wrote ‘The Ballad of East and West’, Warburton was a lieutenant-colonel, and his promotion to colonel did not come until 1893, almost four years later.<sup>21</sup>

Even more damaging to Deutsch and Wiener's case is their refusal to acknowledge the fact that the Guides and the Khyber Rifles were two completely different army units. If Kipling had intended to obfuscate the facts of a story that 'was obviously a matter of common knowledge',<sup>22</sup> he could have done no worse than to attribute them to the Queen's Corps of Guides, one of the most famous and distinguished of all Indian Army regiments.

Deutsch and Wiener are certainly correct in stating that the true story behind 'The Ballad of East and West' was 'a matter of common knowledge'. This being the case, it should come as no surprise to learn that other writers have also drawn attention to the origins of the ballad. Carrington, for example, tells us that "The Ballad of East and West' is a romantic version of a tale that was in print long before Kipling's day".<sup>23</sup> Deutsch and Wiener make no mention of any attributions other than their own, and consequently omit telling the reader that all the other published accounts tell a completely different story.

On the basis of numerous historical studies, it is possible to identify the sources of 'The Ballad of East and West' with a fair degree of accuracy, and the best reply to the serious charges made by Deutsch and Wiener rests in giving a full description of these sources, and then leaving the reader to compare these with the Deutsch and Wiener attribution.

In 'The Ballad of East and West', Kipling tells us that the hero of the tale leads 'a troop of the Guides'. One can safely assume that he is not referring to the Corps of Guides of the Madras Army of 1787. This leaves only one other regiment bearing this name: Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides.

The Corps of Guides had its headquarters at Mardan, about 50 miles from the Khyber Pass, and very near the two frontier districts of Abazai and Bonair mentioned in the ballad. Ralph Durand, in his *Handbook to the Poetry of Rudyard Kipling* (1914), gives the following account of the regiment (*italics are mine*):

It was raised in 1846 by Sir Harry Lumsden by direction of Sir Henry Lawrence, who realized the Indian North-West Frontier's need — to protect outlying portions of the frontier, and to keep the tribesmen in check — of a thoroughly mobile force of troops, both horse and foot, composed of individuals able not only to fight but to act quickly and intelligently on their own initiative in times of emergency. It had at first one troop of cavalry and two companies of infantry. It has now 1400 men. Twenty-seven of its officers are British, the rest native. The corps is recruited from among the fighting races of the frontier, and in order to provide scouts with local knowledge in frontier wars, *it alone among Indian regiments obtained permission to recruit men from beyond the frontier*. Afridis, Yusufzai, Pathans, Khuttucks, Swats, Sikhs, Punjabi Mohammedans, Parsiwans (Afghan Persians), Dogras, Kabulis, Gurkhas, Turcomans, etc., serve in its ranks. Some Indian princes *and several ex-outlaws* have served as Guides. The corps is famous for the courage, loyalty, and intelligence of its



individual members and for its efficiency as a whole. At one time no less than thirty-four of its members were entitled to wear the star 'For Valour,' until recently the highest reward that could be earned by an Indian soldier, and an exceptionally large proportion of its commanding officers have met soldiers' deaths.<sup>24</sup>

Philip Mason, historian of both the Indian Civil Service and the Indian Army,<sup>25</sup> has given a superb graphical description of the kind of warfare in which the Guides and other Frontier regiments were involved, and the extraordinary spirit it produced in the combatants:

Terrible country, harsh, fierce, and jagged; rocky peak, serrated ridge, dry icy upland, stony breathless valley that pens up the heat; a marksman behind every rock; a war of sniping and ambush and long marches at night, occasionally the rush of yelling fanatics sworn to die for the faith of Mohammed.... But the extraordinary part about these wars is the spirit in which they are fought; death is real enough, exhaustion, hunger, thirst and above all courage, but across this harsh and bitter landscape will flash suddenly a jagged lightning-streak of humour. It is a game — a contest with rules in which men kill without compunction and will die in order to win, in which kinship and friendship count less than winning — but in which there is no malice when the whistle blows and the game is over. And the transfer of an important player may be arranged at half-time while the lemons are being sucked.

This odd spirit grew over the years, as the Pathan tribesmen and the British on the Frontier came to know each other better. Each side defended its own interests but the players admired the same things — courage above all, loyalty to the side on which a man happened to be fighting at the moment, personal honour.<sup>26</sup>

Anecdotes abound concerning this unique spirit. Stories of natives and Englishmen shaking hands after a battle, or of jokes being exchanged in the heat of combat. Of particular relevance to 'The Ballad of East and West' is an anecdote recounted by Durand:

When the Malakand garrison was surprised (July 1897) two officers, Lieutenants Rattray and Minchin, were playing polo there. It was the duty of these two officers to make the desperate attempt to get back to their station, an outpost named Chakdara, seven miles from the Malakand garrison. On their way there they met, and (as they held steadily on their way) were at the mercy of, the insurgent Afghans, who, admiring their pluck, instead of attacking them wished them Godspeed.<sup>27</sup>

All of these stories only serve to underline the fact that the incidents described in 'The Ballad of East and West' are utterly plausible. In constructing the narrative

of the ballad, Kipling was drawing upon a rich tradition of such anecdotes, and upon one story in particular, a story that provided him with a model for the character of Kamal. The story in question comes, not surprisingly, from the Corps of Guides:

Lumsden was pursuing Dilawar Khan, a famous outlaw, the hero of a dozen raids, a man on whose head the Government had set two thousand rupees. It occurred to Lumsden that Dilawar Khan — a man quite without fear and unrivalled at finding his way through difficult country at night — would be very useful in the Guides. He sent him a safe-conduct, asking him to come and talk. Dilawar Khan came and, after some chat about how nearly he had been caught on such an occasion and how cleverly he had given the soldiers the slip on another, Lumsden pointed out that sooner or later he would catch him and then he would hang him. Why not surrender now and join the Guides? Dilawar laughed loud and long at so absurd an idea. But he said he would think it over and six weeks later he came in to enlist. The two thousand rupees was still on his head and he had no safe-conduct, but he trusted Lumsden. He said later that he had meant to learn what he could and then desert — back to his old life but with much more understanding of what the soldiers were likely to do. But something caught him and he stayed on. He said it was because the officers were so straight — a word which means much the same in Hindustani, Pashtu and English. He became a subadar and eventually died while on a secret and very dangerous mission — but that is another story.<sup>28</sup>

Durand also relates the story of Dilawar Khan as an example of an outlaw joining the Guides. His account is virtually identical to the one quoted above, differing only in the amount of the reward upon Dilawar's head. Durand does, however, add the following interesting information: that Dilawar had originally been trained for the Mohammedan priesthood, that he delighted in religious controversy and theological debate, and that his dissatisfaction with Islam led to his conversion to Christianity in 1858.<sup>29</sup>

We are now in a position to compare the historical accounts relating to the regiment of the Guides with the story of 'The Ballad of East and West', and thus determine how Kipling shaped and altered the material he was using. Changes there certainly are, but none of them are unfaithful to the spirit of the original sources. To heighten the dramatic effect of the ballad, Kipling has compressed events that took several weeks into a single night. The confrontation takes place, not in the Guides camp, but out in the barren terrain of Kamal's stronghold. The almost legendary figure of Sir Harry Lumsden has been, of necessity, metamorphosed into the thematically more malleable person of the Colonel's son. Although Kamal himself does not go to join the Guides, his parting words to his son echo the fate Lumsden prophesied for Dilawar Khan.



We can no more demand of Kipling absolute fidelity to the historical record than we can of Shakespeare. Had Kipling restricted himself to the actual facts, lost forever to English literature would have been the sheer exhilaration of the midnight pursuit on horseback, the stunning descriptions of the awesome landscape, the impetuous defiance of the Colonel's son, and the moving solemnity of the exchange of gifts.

Seen against the background of the historical record, the sentiments expressed in the first lines of 'The Ballad of East and West' can be seen in their proper perspective: as neither racist humbug nor imperialist arrogance, but as a perfect expression of the feelings of both sides involved in the fighting on the North-West Frontier.

### Postscript

The misguided irrelevance of much of what has been written about this poem; the squalid and irresponsible scholarship marshalled in support of apoplectic attacks upon Kipling's character: all these bring into question the motivation and purpose of such literary criticism. It was such literary criticism that stimulated Bonamy Dobrée to write: 'Kipling, it is now coming to be generally acknowledged, has been more grotesquely misunderstood, misrepresented, and in consequence denigrated, than any other known writer.'<sup>1</sup>

Why should such a simple and straightforward adventure ballad have provoked such extreme reactions? We have already offered one possible reason: the almost universal fame and currency of the first line of the poem.

It is one of the great ironies of English literature that this, perhaps one of the most famous of all Kipling's lines, and the one that has drawn the most criticism and contumely, was not written by Kipling at all, but by his mother. Kipling died in 1936, and in the following year his sister wrote in the *Kipling Journal*:

He has told the world in *Something of Myself* that our mother gave him what is perhaps the most frequently quoted line, 'What do they know of England who only England know?', but I was surprised to find that he had forgotten his debt to her for 'Oh East is East and West is West', etc....<sup>2</sup>

Eleven years later, as if to make sure that there was no possibility of misunderstanding, she confirmed this story, once again in the *Journal* of the Kipling Society:

Ruddy was writing 'The Flag of England', and he was stuck at the very first line, and he said to mother, 'What am I trying to say?' and mother said, quick as a flash, 'What do they know of England who only England know?'. . . I think it's characteristic of Ruddy that two of his best known lines were written by his mother; the other one is 'East is East and West is West and never the twain

shall meet.<sup>3</sup>

The twenty years since the centenary of Kipling's birth have witnessed an extraordinary resurgence of critical interest in Kipling's work. Whether recent scholarship will ever balance the negativity of earlier critical studies is problematic. It is to be hoped, however, that there may come a time when both readers and critics can enjoy 'The Ballad of East and West' for what it really is: a magnificently written adventure ballad that has captured for ever the atmosphere and the adventure of the North-West Frontier in the nineteenth century.

## NOTES

### Foreword

1. 'Rudyard Kipling', *Collected Essays* (London: Mercury, 1961), p. 189.
2. *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 136.
3. *Rudyard Kipling and his World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), p. 54.

### Genesis and Reaction

1. *Something of Myself*, XXXI, 89. Volume numbers refer to *The Sussex Edition of the Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Rudyard Kipling*, 35 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1937-9).
2. *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1977), p. 104.
3. Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling*, pp. 104-5.
4. As quoted in Harold Orel, ed., *Kipling: Interviews and Recollections*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1983), I, 78, n. Hereafter cited as *KIR*.
5. For Low's own account of the meeting, see Desmond Chapman-Huston, *The Lost Historian: A Memoir of Sir Sidney Low* (London: John Murray, 1936); rpt. in *KIR*, I, 118-20.
6. *Rudyard Kipling* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), pp. 119-20. Another interesting account of Henley's reaction to Kipling's verse is given in C. Lewis Hind, *Authors and I* (New York: John Lane, 1921); rpt. in *KIR*, I, 128.
7. *Academy*, XLI (28 May 1892); rpt. in Roger Lancelyn Green, ed., *Kipling: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 103. Hereafter cited as *KCH*.
8. *Blackwood's Magazine*, CLXIV (Oct. 1898); rpt. in *KCH*, p. 211.
9. *English Illustrated Magazine*, X, No. 120 (Sep. 1893); rpt. in *KCH*, p. 175.
10. Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work*, p. 136.

### Kipling's Ballads

1. Millar, *KCH*, p. 210.
2. *English Poetry: A Short History* (London: Phoenix House, 1962), p. 523.
3. Carrington, p. 136.
4. *Rudyard Kipling: A Criticism* (London: John Lane, 1900), p. 42.
5. *Rudyard Kipling* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), p. 129.
6. Harrison, *Rudyard Kipling*, p. 129.
7. Harrison, p. 129.
8. Carrington, p. 353.
9. *Atlantic Monthly*, CLVII (Apr. 1936); rpt. in *KIR*, I, 105.
10. *McClure's Magazine*, VII (July 1896); rpt. in *KIR*, I, 78.
11. Carrington, p. 356.
12. *Something of Myself*, XXXI, 119.
13. Wilson, p. 56.
14. Carrington, p. 350.



15. *Rudyard Kipling: Activist and Artist* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), p. 110.
16. Birkenhead, *Rudyard Kipling*, p. 121.
17. *Rudyard Kipling: A New Appreciation* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1945), p. 191.
18. *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses*, XXXII, 227-28.
19. Reprinted in *KCH*, p. 56.

#### **The Ballad of East and West**

1. *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, III, vi.
2. *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses*, XXXII, 231-37.
3. The Jagai Pass also provides the setting for the climactic battle in 'The Drums of the Fore and Aft', *Wee Willie Winkie*, III, 418.

#### **Criticism and Controversy I**

1. *Igirisujin no kotoba to chie*, trans. Tetsuo Anzai (Tokyo: Asahi Evening News, 1978).
2. Milward, *Igirisujin no kotoba to chie*, p. 60.
3. Milward, pp. 62-63.
4. Milward, p. 63.
5. *Barrack-Room Ballads and Other Verses*, XXXII, 236.
6. Tameji Nakamura, trans., *Kipuringu shishu* (Tokyo: Azusa Shobo, 1929), p. 184.
7. *Kipling Journal*, No. 26 (June 1933); rpt. in *KCH*, pp. 371-77.
8. Dunsterville, *KCH*, p. 372.
9. Dunsterville, *KCH*, p. 373.
10. Dunsterville, *KCH*, p. 373.
11. Orwell, 'Rudyard Kipling', p. 193.
12. Orwell, p. 193.

#### **Criticism and Controversy II**

1. Le Gallienne, *Rudyard Kipling: A Criticism*, p. 130.
2. *Rudyard Kipling* (London: Martin Secker, 1915), p. 72.
3. Harrison, p. 135.
4. Garner Ted Armstrong, *The World Tomorrow* (London: Radio London, ca. 1966).
5. Shahane, *Rudyard Kipling: Activist and Artist*, pp. 111-12.
6. 'The Lonely Nationalism of Rudyard Kipling', *Yale Review*, 52, No. 4 (June 1963), pp. 499-517.
7. Deutsch and Wiener, 'The Lonely Nationalism of Rudyard Kipling', p. 500.
8. Deutsch and Wiener, p. 500.
9. Deutsch and Wiener, p. 500.
10. Deutsch and Wiener, p. 500.
11. Deutsch and Wiener, pp. 500-1.
12. Deutsch and Wiener, p. 501.
13. Deutsch and Wiener, p. 502.
14. 'Kipling's World', given as a lecture in 1948; included in *They Asked for a Paper* (1963); quoted in Norman Page, *A Kipling Companion* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 188.
15. Deutsch and Wiener, p. 508.
16. Deutsch and Wiener, p. 508.
17. Deutsch and Wiener, p. 509.
18. Deutsch and Wiener, p. 509.
19. Deutsch and Wiener, p. 516.
20. Deutsch and Wiener, p. 500.
21. See 'Sir Robert Warburton', *Dictionary of National Biography*, 22 vols. (1901; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1917), XXII, 1377.
22. Deutsch and Wiener, p. 500.
23. Carrington, p. 104.
24. *A Handbook to the Poetry of Rudyard Kipling* (1914; rpt. New York: Kraus, 1971), pp. 49

25. Mason's definitive study of the Indian Civil Service and its antecedents has appeared in two editions. The original two-volume version was published under the pen-name of Philip Woodruff as *The Men Who Ruled India* (1953-54; rpt. London: Jonathan Cape, 1963), and an abridged single-volume version, under his own name, as *The Men Who Ruled India* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985).
26. *A Matter of Honour* (1974; rpt. London: Peregrine, 1976), p. 337.
27. Durand, *A Handbook to the Poetry of Rudyard Kipling*, pp. 50-51.
28. Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, p. 339.
29. Durand, p. 52.

#### Postscript

1. *Rudyard Kipling: Realist and Fabulist* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. vii.
2. Alice Macdonald Fleming, 'Some Reminiscences of my Brother', *Kipling Journal*, No. 44 (Dec. 1937); rpt. in *KIR*, I, 5.
3. Fleming, 'My Brother, Rudyard Kipling (2)', *Kipling Journal*, XIV (Apr. 1948); rpt. in *KIR*, I, 13.

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