# PARADOXICAL ORIENTALISM:

# GENDER AND POWER IN GEORGE ORWELL'S

# *BURMESE DAYS*

A Dissertation submitted to the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies

Drew University in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree,

Doctor of Letters

Carol Biederstadt

Drew University

Madison, New Jersey

May 2017

ABSTRACT

Paradoxical Orientalism:
Gender and Power in George Orwell's
*Burmese Days*

Doctor of Letters Dissertation by

Carol Biederstadt

The Caspersen School of Graduate Studies
Drew University May 2017

In this dissertation I argue that despite George Orwell's purported hatred of imperialism, the result of the ideological metamorphosis he underwent while serving as an Imperial Police officer in colonial Burma, many of the imperialist and Orientalist attitudes that he so vehemently condemned are abundantly evident in his novel *Burmese Days,* particularly in respect to his treatment of women. Specifically, I argue that the female character Ma Hla May, described as Flory's Burmese "mistress," whom scholars have been consistent in labeling with a range of pejoratives, was depicted solely through the Western male gaze and is in fact widely misunderstood. Drawing on historical, legal, cultural, and linguistic evidence to support my claims, I attempt to give voice to the subaltern by building a framework with which the perspective of Ma Hla May can be considered, arguing that subjected to multiple layers of Orientalism as both a colonial subject and a white man's "mistress," she was in fact much more a victim than she was a villain. In the final chapter of this study I present an overview of the history of concubinage in the British Raj in an attempt to shed light on Orwell's likely motives for depicting her in this manner before presenting evidence to dispute the notion that Flory's treatment of Ma Hla May was the result of a cross-cultural misunderstanding. I argue that

Flory, informed by the experiences and beliefs of the author himself, knew well how Ma Hla May would have viewed their relationship. The implications of this are significant, for Orwell's tacit approbation of Flory's behavior suggests that his legendary affinity for the oppressed did not apply to women.

Dedication

In memory of my mother,

Elizabeth “Betty” Jane Biederstadt,

loved and missed.

1937-2015

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

I would not have been able to complete this project without the kind and generous support of many people. I would first like to thank Dr. Frank Occhiogrosso and Dr. Karen Pechilis, my advisors, for their patience, support, and encouragement throughout this process. I feel truly blessed to have had the privilege to work with such remarkable scholars. Thank you both for opening up a new world of possibilities to me. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to John Okell, Sayama Thazin, and Saya Khin for their kind and generous assistance in analyzing terminology used in the Burmese translation of *Burmese Days*. Furthermore, I owe a debt of gratitude to the many wonderful librarians whose expertise has helped me in various ways throughout the research process, and I would first like to thank Bruce Lancaster from the Drew University Library, who has been a constant source not only of information, but of inspiration and friendship. Heartfelt thanks also go out to Jennifer Heise from the Drew University Library, whose moral support and expertise have saved the day more than once. Sincere appreciation also goes out to San San May and John O'Brien from the British Library and Dan Mitchell from the Orwell Archive at University College London Library, who provided their generous assistance during my visits to London, and Elsa Brugier and Dena Leiter from the Union County College Library, who have also provided invaluable assistance. I am grateful to members of the Orwell Society, in particular, Dione Venables and Richard Blair for generously sharing their first-hand recollections and reminiscences, and Leslie Hurst for his generosity and willingness to help in so many different ways. I would also like to thank Dr. Laura Winters, Dr. Liana Piehler, and Verna G. Holcomb at Drew University, Dr. Michael Adas at Rutgers University, and Dr.

Myint Zan at Multimedia Law University, Malaysia. Thank you also to friends and family in Burma for all of their various contributions to this project, from searching for and sending me books to helping with travel arrangements in Burma: U Moe Zaw Oo, Daw Htate Tin Than, U Thet Naing Oo, U Kyaw Thu, Daw Kay Thi Nwe, Daw Wut Yee Aung, and Daw Ei Thazin Aung. Finally, special thanks go out to my husband, Bill Aungtoe, for his patience in reading Burmese texts and providing a wealth of information about the nuance of Burmese words and, most especially, for being my partner and companion on this long journey. You are loved and appreciated.

List of Figures

## Introduction

In 1984, in response to the publication and production of what he perceived to be a spate of popular books and films glorifying the British Raj, Salman Rushdie wrote a lengthy essay entitled "Outside the Whale," in which he set forth scathing yet largely justifiable criticism of what were then recent Raj-revival films and novels,[1] claiming that such works were "only the latest in a very long line of fake portraits inflicted by the West on the East" and asserting that the popularity of such works in the 1980s was symptomatic of "the rise of conservative ideologies in modern Britain" ("Outside the Whale"). The title of Rushdie's protracted yet eloquently argued critique reflects the tail end of a string of inter-textual allusions: Rushdie refers to George Orwell's 1940 essay "Inside the Whale,"[2] which in turn refers to Henry Miller's comparison of Anais Nin to "Jonah in the whale's belly" ("Inside the Whale"). Shortly into the essay, however, Rushdie's commentary appears to digress from its objective of denouncing Raj literature, shifting gears in order to repudiate some of the ideas set forth in the Orwell essay instead before ultimately tying the seemingly loose ends together near the end of the piece.[3]

---

[1] Rushdie objected to the films *Octopussy, Gandhi, A Passage to India,* and the documentary *War of the Springing Tiger*; he also criticized the novels *The Far Pavilions* and *The Jewel in the Crown* and the television serials thereof.

[2] Christopher Hitchens points out that E. P. Thompson had already responded to Orwell's essay in an essay entitled "Outside the Whale" in 1960, although he notes that Rushdie "maintains that [his use of the title of Thompson's earlier essay] was coincidental" (30).

[3] Similarly, while ostensibly a review of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer,* Orwell's essay wanders into a lengthy treatise on his sometimes conflicting assertions about the propriety of infusing politics into fiction until he, too, eventually connects the dots to clinch his own argument.

Rushdie's primary point of contention with the Orwell essay is the politically passive stance that Orwell claims to admire in Miller and appears to recommend writers of fiction to assume; indeed, Orwell states clearly: 'On the whole, the literary history of the 'thirties seems to justify the opinion that a writer does well to keep out of politics" ("Inside" 240). Rushdie, on the other hand, vehemently opposes this position, holding that the individual has a moral and social imperative to speak out against injustice. Thus, instead of a futile attempt to return to the safety and comfort of the metaphoric womb represented by the belly of the whale, as Orwell's essay seems to endorse, Rushdie advocates "the ancient tradition of making as big a fuss, as noisy a complaint about the world as is humanly possible." Rushdie urges, "[w]here Orwell wished quietism, let there be rowdyism; in place of the whale, the protesting wail," and to be sure, his essay condemning the 1980s wave of Raj literature and films was prompted by exactly such sentiment.

Oddly, though, while Rushdie uses Orwell's argument as the springboard from which to launch his own, he fails to comment on the position Orwell actually takes in his own major contributions to the body of Raj literature: his novel *Burmese Days,* two semi-autobiographical essays set in Burma, "Shooting an Elephant" and "A Hanging," and a political essay originally published in French, the English translation of which is entitled "How a Nation is Exploited: The British Empire in Burma." Published in 1934, 1936, 1931, and 1929, respectively – the very period whose literary history Orwell was later to say seemed "to justify the opinion that a writer does well to keep out of politics" ("Inside" 240) – these works would seem to be a logical starting point for an examination not only of Orwell's stance toward politics in fiction, but also of his position about the British Raj that Rushdie so vehemently insists should not be glorified; Orwell's novel and

the essays, after all, are all set in or about Burma, which was then annexed to India, and are thus clearly examples of Raj literature. This study began, then, as an endeavor to fill that void in Rushdie's essay by examining Orwell's contributions to the canon of British Imperial literature in an attempt to clarify his position regarding the British Raj and to place both the author and the main characters of his works, considered by many to represent the alter-ego of Orwell himself, "inside" or "outside" the belly of the metaphorical political whale.

It soon became apparent, however, that characterizing Orwell's position on the Raj and on Burma was no simple task. While it is clear that Orwell's relative broadmindedness in his stance vis-à-vis the Raj was in many ways ahead of its time, it cannot be denied that his Burma narratives reveal numerous contradictions and inconsistencies, suggesting that he was, in fact, deeply conflicted about certain aspects of British dominion in the East. Indeed, the almost sadistic manner in which he portrays many of the female characters in *Burmese Days,* most particularly Flory's Burmese "mistress" Ma Hla May, belies the reputation he has since gained for fair-mindedness, egalitarianism, and empathy. In fact, so offensive is his treatment of Ma Hla May – a prime example of one whom Gayatri Spivak refers to as "the subaltern" – that as my research progressed, my goal shifted from simply clarifying Orwell's seemingly paradoxical position regarding the British colonial rule of Burma; instead, I found myself compelled to try to defend Ma Hla May by attempting to piece together her side of the story. Thus, through both a close reading of the novel and examination of other cultural, legal, and historical resources available, I have attempted to advocate for Ma Hla May by building for her a case, admittedly conjectural at times, but still, I believe, utterly

convincing, due to the abundance of evidence that exists to suggest she had good reason to reject the notion that she was no more than Flory's "mistress." I further explore the reasons why Orwell chose to depict her in this manner and the implications of this portrayal, concluding that Orwell's identification with the oppressed apparently did not extend to women.

Chapter One, "The Makings of a Sahib," explores Eric Blair's background and formative period with the intention of establishing that in upbringing and education, he was eminently suited to serving the British Empire. Both the maternal and paternal sides of his family and their long association with colonialism are discussed, and Blair's connection to Burma through his mother's family is established. Possible motives for applying to serve in the Indian Imperial Police are reviewed, and his attitude about the Burmese upon arriving in the country – much of which appears to have been in keeping with the mindset of the *pukka sahib* – are explored.

Chapter II, "From *Pukka Sahib* to Anti-Imperialist," explores both the disillusionment with colonialism and the social and political metamorphosis that the young Eric Blair experienced while in Burma. The chapter begins with an overview of the prevailing political climate of the early 1920s and explains the causes of the tensions between the British and Burmese that marked the period. I then demonstrate how these tensions are woven into the plot of *Burmese Days* and describe how, despite the political agitation of the era, Blair's experience in Burma triggered the emergence of the anti-imperialist writer later known the world over as George Orwell.

Chapter III, "Toward a Reassessment of Orwell: Anti-Imperialist or Paradoxical Orientalist?" revisits the received characterization of Orwell as anti-imperialist with an

aim to encouraging reconsideration of the widely accepted model. The chapter begins with an examination of the genre of Orwell's writings on Burma in an effort to establish that such works were informed by Orwell's own experiences in the country. I assert that Flory, the protagonist of *Burmese Days,* is a semi-autobiographical character, imbued with the ideas and experiences of the author himself, and suggest that Orwell and his protagonist are best viewed as a hybridized "Florwell." In the second half of the chapter I argue that the authorial tone of the narrative and Orwell's depiction of some of the novel's characters, females especially, bear the mark of what Edward Said has labeled "Orientalism." I suggest that most revealing about Orwell's position on both women and Britain's imperial subjects, however, is his depiction of Flory's Burmese "mistress" Ma Hla May, which closely correlates to Orientalist descriptions of Burmese women commonly found in travelogues and ethnography of the era depicting Burmese women as "Other." I argue that far more egregious than Orwell's exotic characterization of Ma Hla May, however, is the exploitative and abusive way in which Flory treats her, behavior that Orwell appears to tacitly condone.

Chapter IV, "An Attempt to Listen to the Subaltern: Constructing a Framework in Support of Ma Hla May's Perspective," examines Flory's relationship with Ma Hla May through the lens of both Burmese culture and customary law. The chapter begins with the assertion that so convincingly has Orwell depicted this character as villain that scholars and critics have overwhelmingly accepted his scathing depiction of Ma Hla May at face value, describing her in almost exclusively negative and sometimes even hateful terms. I suggest, however, that this depiction actually speaks volumes about Orwell and assert that before Orwell's inconsistent position about Burma and the Burmese can be

fully appreciated, a reassessment of Ma Hla May is necessary. In the second half of the chapter I attempt to construct a framework with which to view the relationship from Ma Hla May's perspective. In doing so, I consider the impact of Burmese Buddhist Law as well as the manner in which colonialism had disrupted traditional Burmese society and how this affected a Burmese woman's perception of marriage. I examine the important implications of Ma Hla May's insistence that she was a "*bo-kadaw"* (a white man's wife) and argue that since Flory had "purchased" her from her parents, Ma Hla May likely considered her relationship with Flory a legitimate marriage in accordance with Burmese custom. The chapter concludes with additional evidence in support of Ma Hla May's perspective, including details found in the novel itself as well as the telling way in which the Burmese translator renders the English term "mistress" into Burmese.

Chapter V, "Debunking the 'Inadvertent Cultural Misunderstanding Theory,'" disproves Daphne Patai's suggestion that "Orwell's novel may inadvertently represent a case of cross-cultural misunderstanding, with Flory and Ma Hla May operating from different paradigms" (39). Correction of this erroneous assumption then necessitates a reevaluation of that which motivated Orwell to portray Ma Hla May in this manner and effectively transforms her character from villain to victim. The grave implications of this paradigm shift are first pointed out, and the chapter then proceeds with a brief history of concubinage in the British Raj, focusing on its prevalence in Burma even after it had begun to die out in India. The changes in the way in which the practice was perceived in both the colonies and the metropole are discussed, and the fact that concubinage had already fallen out of favor by the time Orwell and Flory served in Burma is established. Oddly, despite widespread disapproval of the practice, however, it remained relatively

common, and the reasons for this are examined. In the second half of the chapter I present evidence to prove that Orwell (and, by extension, Flory) was well aware of both the Burmese concept of marriage and the controversy surrounding the continuing practice of concubinage in Burma. I contend that it was precisely this awareness that caused Orwell to manipulate certain elements of the novel in order to protect his protagonist. The chapter concludes with an analysis of several scenes from the novel that demonstrate how Orwell's keen attention to authenticity of detail ultimately betrays him by exposing intentions that were not only unprincipled, but sexist and Orientalist.

# Chapter I

## The Makings of a Sahib

"Fair Danae had retired, we're told,
Darwaza band, within a tower,
When Jove came calling in a gold-
en shower,

You know the myth as well as I,
I only quote it to confirm a
Belief that many types apply
To Burma."
(From "On Certain Types. *Inclusam Danaen.*" by J. M. Symns, *Horace in Burma*)

### Introduction

Few modern writers have had a stronger impact on the collective Western psyche than George Orwell. His very name calls to mind virtues such as fairness, honesty, decency, and integrity. Conversely, and rather oddly, the adjectival derivative of his name, "Orwellian," immediately evokes images of the political evils he was to challenge in almost all of his writing. Indeed, the term "Orwellian" has become synonymous with oppression, tyranny, manipulation, and deception, iniquities utterly antithetical to the principles associated with the author himself. It would perhaps surprise some, then, to know that before achieving his eventual stature as a world-renowned anti-imperialist writer, the young Orwell, of his own volition, served the British colonial regime as an Indian Imperial police officer, a position for which, by upbringing and indoctrination, he seemed eminently suited. Even more startling is the fact that despite the ideological metamorphosis he underwent in Burma and his purported hatred of imperialism, the imperialist and Orientalist attitudes that Orwell was later so vehemently to condemn are abundantly evident in his first novel, *Burmese Days*, particularly in respect to his treatment of the female character Ma Hla May. An understanding of his formative period

is crucial to understanding how his firmly rooted imperial attitudes were later to impose limitations to his ideological transformation. Chapter I of this study thus provides an overview of factors in Orwell's early life that made him appear particularly well-suited to serving the Empire.

**A. The Early Orwell: Eric Blair**

George Orwell has come to be regarded as the quintessential anti-imperialist; indeed, Christopher Hitchens goes so far as to state: "Orwell can be read as one of the founders of the discipline of post-colonialism, as well as one of the literary registers of the historic transition of Britain from an imperial and monochrome (and paradoxically insular) society to a multicultural and multi-ethnic one" (25). The stature Orwell was eventually to assume, however, must have surprised many who had known him in his younger days, for in upbringing and indoctrination, he had much in common with Rudyard Kipling, whom history was later to label the archetypal apologist of the Empire and whom Orwell himself once dubbed "a jingo imperialist" ("Rudyard Kipling" 117). Like Kipling, Orwell was born in India to parents in the colonial service and seemed almost predestined to carry on the family tradition. Indeed, born Eric Arthur Blair on June 25, 1903 in Motihari, Bengal, "[e]verything in Orwell's background . . . indicated that he was, almost literally, bred for the Empire" (Larkin 53), and both the maternal and paternal sides of Orwell's family had long and wide-ranging colonial associations.

Biographers Peter Stansky and William Abrahams claim that Orwell's paternal great-great-grandfather, Charles Blair, "was a man of considerable wealth" (8) whose will indicated that he possessed "'Estates, Plantations, Messuages, Lands, Tenements and Hereditaments . . . in the Island of Jamaica,' as well as 'Negro, Mulatto and other

Slaves'" (5-6; see also Crick 46). Blair's wealth, they note, was increased by his marriage to Lady Mary Fane, "the second daughter of Thomas, eighth Earl of Westmorland," who added an air of the aristocratic to Orwell's background (Stansky and Abrahams 5-6) and whose family included "Masters of Hounds and army cavalry officers as well as a Commander of the British Army in Burma" (Bowker 4). Significantly, they also point out that "in the style perhaps of Sir Thomas Bertram of [Jane Austin's] *Mansfield Park,*"[4] Charles Blair was an absentee landlord of his properties in Jamaica (7), some of which, Emma Larkin claims, were in fact sugar plantations (53). Stansky and Abrahams' comparison of Charles Blair to Sir Thomas Bertram is especially germane when considered in light of the impact Edward Said's later postcolonial criticism of *Mansfield Park* has had. Of the novel, Said states: "What sustains [the lifestyle of the protagonist] materially is the Bertram estate in Antigua" (*Culture and Imperialism* 85), ostensibly a sugar plantation dependent on slave labor (89).[5] While seemingly setting forth little more than a logical deduction, Said's essay proved to have a weighty impact on the average reader who theretofore had not considered the implications of Bertram's holdings. Peter Barry, for example, says:

> There is, I think, no doubt about the effect of reading Said's essay. Any 'innocence' we might have had about this aspect of the novel goes: it is

---

[4] The Orwell Archive at University College London includes a copy of *Mansfield Park* once owned by Orwell and later by Richard Rees. One can only speculate as to whether Orwell recognized the similarity between Charles Blair and Sir Thomas Bertram.

[5] Said notes that "Sir Thomas's property in the Caribbean would have had to be a sugar plantation maintained by slave labor . . . these are not dead historical facts but, as Austen certainly knew, evident historical realities" (*Culture and Imperialism* 89).

> impossible henceforth to read it without a constant awareness of that absentee settler-planter who is at the center of everything, in one sense, and yet constantly withdrawn and marginal in another. (193-94)

In a similar manner, the lifestyle enjoyed by Orwell's great-great grandparents, who spent most of their time in Dorset (Stansky and Abrahams 7), was also sustained by the labor of slaves on a Caribbean sugar plantation. As far as four generations back, therefore, the relatively comfortable lifestyle enjoyed by the Blair family was one tainted by its linkage to colonialism. Orwell makes a vague reference to his family's culpability in the workings of empire in his essay "Writers and Leviathan," noting that writers in 1948 had developed "a sort of compunction which our grandparents did not have, an awareness of the enormous injustice and misery of the world, and a guilt-stricken feeling that we ought to be doing something about it" [6] (qtd. in Rees 19; see also Orwell, *All Art is Propaganda* 338). There can be little doubt that his family's long association with the Empire fed into the feelings of guilt Orwell was later to express in his writing; indeed, as Richard Rees says, "Both his life and his books were deeply influenced . . . by his sense of guilt for belonging to the upper class – indeed, for not belonging to the lowest" (19).

Charles Blair, Jr., Orwell's great-grandfather, was heir to his father's estate, but by the time his son, Orwell's grandfather, Thomas Richard Arthur Blair, was born in 1802, the family's wealth had already greatly declined. Since income produced by the Jamaican property holdings was no longer sufficient for sustaining a family, "he was

---

[6] Richard Rees cites this passage on page 19 of *George Orwell: Fugitive from the Camp of Victory* but erroneously attributes it to Orwell's essay "Why I Write." Rees, editor of *The Adelphi,* a literary journal to which Orwell was a contributor, was a personal friend of Orwell's who later served as his literary executor.

expected to fend for himself, choosing a career from among the handful of possibilities open to the younger son of a good family: Church, Army, the Colonies," and Orwell's paternal grandfather chose "to serve God and country in the Empire" (Stansky and Abrahams 8). In 1839 he was ordained a deacon in Calcutta, followed by ordination as a priest in Tasmania in 1843 (Stansky and Abrahams 8; Larkin 53). Accompanied by his wife, Francis, he returned to England in 1854 and served as vicar of a church in Dorset. It was there that Orwell's father, Richard Walmesley Blair, was born in 1857 (Stansky and Abrahams 9-10).

The family's economic stature continued to decline, and in 1875, at age eighteen, Orwell's father entered the civil service as "Assistant Sub-Deputy Opium Agent, fifth grade" in the Opium Department in India (Stansky and Abrahams 11), something which Jeffrey Meyers believes Orwell came to feel "intensely guilty about" since "the production, collection and transportation of opium to China was the most vicious and indefensible kind of imperialistic exploitation" (3). Despite the family's somewhat reduced circumstances, life in India still had its perks; just as Kipling later recalled in his autobiography the devoted servants who looked after him as a young boy in India (*Something of Myself* 1-3), the Blairs, too, had "a houseful of servants, to free Mrs. Blair from time-consuming, worrying domestic responsibilities, and to cosset and beguile a small boy" (Stansky and Abrahams 16). Although Mrs. Blair and the children returned to England when Eric was an infant,[7] Richard Blair was to spend his entire career in the

[7] Stansky and Abrahams claim that Orwell's father brought his family back to England in 1907, when Orwell was four, before returning to India alone. Bernard Crick, however, disputes this date, providing convincing evidence to support the claim that "Ida Blair took their two young children back to

colonial service in India, overseeing the production of opium crops that were then traded with China, a trade that had precipitated the Opium Wars of 1839 – 1842 and 1856 – 1860. Crick notes that Blair changed posts annually for the next two decades (46), overseeing the opium crop in a variety of locations including "Muzaffarpur; Gorakhpur; Sarsa; Allahaba; Salem; Rai Beareilly; Fuzabad; Hahjahanpur; Etah; Patna; Tehta; Motihari; and Monghyr" (Stansky and Abrahams 11).

Orwell's maternal side of the family, too, had long colonial connections. Although his mother, Ida Mabel Limouzin, had been born in England, she grew up in the port town of Moulmein, Burma, where her family had established roots "almost from the time that port city had been ceded to the British in 1826" (Stansky and Abrahams 11). The family held a position of wealth and influence there; Larkin, for example, notes that Orwell's great-grandfather, G. E. Limouzin, "founded Limouzin & Co., a company that specialized in building wooden ships" and grew to become "one of the most prosperous companies in town" (181). In addition to shipbuilding, the family engaged in teak-trading for three generations (53), and one family member even owned a local distillery (Stansky and Abrahams 11). John Newsinger points out that like his forebears on the paternal side of the family, Orwell's maternal grandfather was a wealthy businessman who had "at one time employ[ed] thirty domestic servants"[8] (33). So influential was

---

England, as was then quite common, some time in 1904" (48). If Crick is indeed correct, Orwell would have been only a year old. (See also Davison, *A Literary Life* 2).

[8] Orwell sheds light on his boyhood feelings regarding wealth, which undoubtedly applied to his mother's family as well: "Before [World War I] the worship of money was entirely unreflecting and untroubled by any pang of conscience. The goodness of money was as unmistakable as the goodness of

Orwell's mother's family in Moulmein, in fact, that a street there, "*Lain Maw Zin* Street," the Burmese equivalent for "Limouzin," was named after them, and Emma Larkin writes about locating the street sign still in tact in the mid-1990s (183).[9] A woman of strong character and influence in Moulmein, his maternal grandmother, Ida Limouzin, is said to have been "well known in the town for her popular dinner parties and tennis gatherings" (182). Toward the end of her life, however, she was thought by the British community "to have gone 'somewhat native' [because] she chose to wear native dress . . . which gave rise to the rumor among acquaintances of Eric Blair's in the Imperial Police that he was himself part Burmese" (Stansky and Abrahams 12). It is probably not coincidental that Flory, the protagonist of *Burmese Days,* would later be accused of the same thing.[10]

---

health or beauty, and a glittering car, a title or a horde of servants was mixed up in people's minds with the idea of actual moral virtue" ("Such, Such Were the Joys" 33).

[9] The origins of the street name, however, are no longer widely known among residents of Moulmein. Larkin notes that when asked about its meaning, a Moulmein local confidently explained to her: *"'Leimmaw'* means 'orange' and *'zin'* is a kind of shelf. In Burmese, we call this Orange-Shelf Street'" (183). A photograph of the street sign taken in January 2016 shows a variant transliteration. See Figure 1.

[10] Ellis says of Flory: "'I can't bear a fellow who pals up with the natives. I shouldn't wonder if he's got a lick of the tarbrush himself. It might explain that black mark on his face. Piebald. And he looks like a yellow-belly, with that black hair, and skin the colour of a lemon'" (*Burmese Days* 32).


Figure 1: *Lain Maw Zin* Street sign in January 2016; photo by the author

Although as Richard Rees, a personal friend of Orwell's, claims, Orwell's family "was more upper-class than middle-class" (17), the family's wealth had dwindled with each successive generation, and Orwell's parents were by no means wealthy. Still, as Rees says, owing to Orwell's "ability to win scholarships, [he] obtained the most exclusive type of upper-class education" (17-18). In September 1911, at age eight, Eric Blair entered St. Cyprian's, a preparatory boarding school at Eastborne, which had been recommended to his parents by Anglo-Indian acquaintances (Stansky and Abrahams 26). Friend and schoolmate Cyril Connolly, who later wrote about his years at St. Cyprian's using the fictitious name "St. Wulfric's," described the preparatory school as a place

where boys would build character before graduating on to England's best public schools and eventually finding "their vocation in India, Burma, Nigeria and the Sudan, administering with Roman justice those natives for whom the final profligate overflow of Wulfrician character was all the time predestined" (qtd. in Stansky and Abrahams 32). Orwell himself later documented, apparently at Connolly's behest, his time at St. Cyprian's in the essay "Such, Such Were the Joys," although due to its length and libelous content, the essay was not published until after Orwell's death in 1950 (Stansky and Abrahams 35). The narrative describes the years spent at the school as far from happy and describes incidents of bed-wetting and ritualized beatings at the hands of upperclassmen. Many have thus compared Orwell's unhappy boarding school childhood to that of Rudyard Kipling, again drawing a connection between the two. [11]

---

[11] Childhood friend Jacintha Buddicom, who knew Blair in his "last seven or eight terms" at St. Cyprian's, however, disputes the notion that Blair was as miserable there as "Such, Such Were the Joys" would suggest (*Eric & Us* 45). Buddicom concludes that in "Such, Such Were the Joys," "we hear the voice of the sick and disappointed man of forty-three: not the voice of the good-humoured cynic schoolboy of fourteen" and surmises: "It may sometimes be desirable for a scapegoat to be selected: perhaps poor old St Cyprian's was Eric's" (53). She also points out that in an article in the *New York Times,* Cyril Connolly later expressed remorse about the negative comments he himself had made about both the school and the headmaster and mistress in his book *Enemies of Promise.* Says Connolly:

> In the case of St Cyprian's and the Wilkes whom I had so blithely mocked there is an emotional disturbance. I received a letter of bitter reproach from Mrs Wilkes after *Enemies of Promise* which I have never dared to reread, and when, after the death of my own parents, their papers descended to me, I found evidence of the immense trouble she had taken to help me win my scholarship to Eton despite the misgivings of my father which had to be overcome. The Wilkeses were true

Good or bad, Orwell's years at St. Cyprian's were undoubtedly formative and contributed to his indoctrination into the imperial mentality. For sure, as John Newsinger says, he "was very much the product of the imperial administrative class, brought up and educated to take his place in its ranks" (33). Cyril Connolly echoes this sentiment, saying: "with his shabby-genteel background and Establishment education [Eric Blair was] just right for the higher branches of the civil service . . . " ("Such Were the Joys" 61). Similarly, childhood friend Jacintha Buddicom claims that the young Eric Blair was "an example of a *Britannian,"* which she defines as "an un-dictionary word [Blair] invented himself in the First World War" (162). She supports this claim by pointing out that two poems he wrote during this period, which were published in local newspapers, exemplify Blair's budding imperialist mindset. The first, written when he was eleven, appeared in a local newspaper, the *Henley and South Oxfordshire Standard*:

---

friends, and I had caricatured their mannerisms, developed from dealing with generations of boys, and I had read mercenary motives into much that was just enthusiasm.

He then refers to Orwell's essay, concluding: "What they would have made of Orwell's more severe strictures, published in England only after his death in 1950, I have no idea. I hope they never saw them" (qtd. in Buddicom 45). Stansky and Abrahams, too, question the reliability of "Such, Such Were the Joys" as a biographical interpretation of Orwell's days at St. Cyprian's, pointing out that "Orwell has written a highly selective and purposive work of art, an 'indictment' of the cruelty inflicted on children in the name of boarding-school education, and whatever will lessen the force of the argument has been omitted" (45). Regardless of whether his experiences were in reality quite as traumatic as he describes them in the essay, St. Cyprian's offered the Blair family a reduced tuition on account of Orwell's academic ability, and he became one of a small number of boys who received rigorous academic training to prepare for the examination for scholars at the prestigious public schools.

*Awake! Young Men of England*

*Oh! Give me the strength of the Lion,*
*The wisdom of Reynard the Fox*
*And then I'll hurl troops at the Germans*
*And give them the hardest knocks.*

*Oh! Think of the War Lord's mailed fist,*
*That is striking at England today:*
*And think of the lives that our soldiers*
*Are fearlessly throwing away.*

*Awake! Oh you young men of England,*
*For if, when your Country's in need,*
*You do not enlist by the thousand,*
*You truly are cowards indeed.*
(qtd. in Buddicom 36-37, see also Davison *The Complete Works* 20)

Curiously, though, for Orwell, even this early poem appears to have been connected in some oblique way to Burma, for as Peter Duby has recently suggested, although "biographers have usually attributed young Eric Blair's reason for writing the verses to the 'welter of blazing jingoistic headlines' that accompanied the news of the British Army's first arrival in France in August 1914," the real inspiration for the poem was the death of one particular soldier: Blair's first cousin, Neville Lascelles Ward, the son of his mother's sister, "who had grown up in Moulmein in Burma but had married and migrated to London." Ward, who had been educated at Sandhurst, was killed in France in the Battle of Mons in August 1914 (30). The second poem, written to fulfill an assignment at St. Cyprian's in honor of the death of Lord Kitchener, appeared in the *Henley and South Oxfordshire Standard* two years later, when he was about thirteen. It reads:

*Kitchener*[12]

*No stone is set to mark his nation's loss,*
*No stately tomb enshrines his noble breast;*
*Not e'en the tribute of a wooden cross*
*Can mark this hero's rest.*

*He needs them not, his name untarnished stands,*
*Remindful of the mighty deeds he worked,*
*Footprints of one, upon time's changeful sands,*
*Who ne'er his duty shirked.*

*Who follows in his steps no danger shuns,*
*Nor stoops to conquer by a shameful deed,*
*An honest and unselfish race he runs,*
*From fear and malice freed.*
(qtd. in Buddicom 37; see also Davison *The Complete Works* 20)

Stansky and Abrahams note that the last five lines of the poem reflect the values instilled in the boys at St. Cyprian's: "never to shirk one's duty, to be brave and honorable, honest and unselfish, and free from cowardice and malice . . ." (76). Although childhood friend Jacintha Buddicom is said to have likened "Kitchener" to the words of A. E. Housman, a favorite poet of the young Orwell (Venables *Eric & Us* 171-72), there is certainly a quality redolent of the verse of Kipling in the tone of Orwell's early poems, and it is likely that the young Blair, who much later in life claimed that he "worshipped Kipling at 13, loathed him at 17, enjoyed him at 20, despised him at 25, and now again rather

[12] Kitchener of Khartoum was a military hero of the late Victorian era. As Secretary of War, he was killed when the vessel he was aboard, the cruiser *Hampshire,* struck a German mine en route to Russia on June 5, 1916.

admire him"[13] ("'Rudyard Kipling'" 409), was influenced by the Empire's bard when writing them.[14] Certainly, Buddicom must have been aware of one striking similarity the poems bore to those of Kipling: "Both are typical *Britannian* poems: a Britannian was more than just a Briton, who might still be covered with woad. He was a *Rule Britannian*: England For Ever, and God Bless Our Glorious Empire, On Which May The Sun Never Set" (*Eric & Us* 37).

In the spring of 1916, at the age of thirteen, Eric Blair took the examination to become a King's Scholar at Eton. His rigorous training at St. Cyprian's had served him well, and when the list of successful candidates was published in the *Times* in June, Blair's name was among them. Although at number fourteen on the list, Blair would not be admitted with the first election to enter the College in the fall, the likelihood was great that with a bit of patience he would eventually be able to enter the coveted Eton College (Stansky and Abrahams 72-73). Due to the number of students leaving Eton to take part in the war effort, the turnover of students happened sooner than expected, and after a nine-week stint at Wellington College, Blair was able to transfer to Eton in May, 1917, just before his fourteenth birthday (84-85). Eton, like St. Cyprian's, continued to instill in its students the values associated with Empire, and as Christopher Hollis explains, "Patriotism and the readiness to sacrifice one's life for one's country had been the quality

---

[13] Again, in his essay "Such, Such Were the Joys," written about his years as a student at St. Cyprian's, Orwell notes that Kipling was among his favorite authors (17). Furthermore, Orwell's personal library, now housed at the Orwell Archive at University College London, contains several volumes written by Kipling.

[14] In his essay "Why I Write," Orwell says simply that "Awake! Young Men of England" and "Kitchener," were patriotic poems written at the outset of the war (309-10).

to which Eton had paid especial – and what to its critics might appear exaggerated – honour." The difference was that there was a far greater sense of immediacy of one's patriotic duties at Eton than there had been at St. Cyprian's, for a large number of Etonians were leaving the school to fight on the front lines; indeed, Hollis claims that "5,687 Etonians served in the war. Of these, 1,160 were killed and 1,467 were wounded" (qtd. in Stansky and Abrahams 86-87). Seeing one's peers going off to fight – many of them never again to return – affected those left behind with what Stansky and Abrahams call an "irrational guilt" (87). As Orwell much later explained it to Richard Rees, "his generation must be marked forever by the humiliation of not having taken part" in World War I (qtd. in Stansky and Abrahams 87-88). This guilt, however irrational it may be, was later to factor into the development of Orwell's political ideology.

**B. Orwell Goes to Burma**

Upon leaving Eton in December 1921, Orwell applied to join the Indian Imperial Police in 1922 (Davison *A Literary Life* 15; *A Life in Letters* 3). Why exactly he chose this route is a topic of much debate. Buddicom claims that Orwell had desired to enter Oxford University but that his father vehemently opposed the idea, insisting that his son follow in his own footsteps: "Indian Civil he had been himself, and Indian Civil was the only career he would tolerate for his son" (*Eric and Us* 116). Bernard Crick, however, rejects the notion that Orwell wished to continue his education, surmising that at some point, "the idea of simply following in his father's footsteps must have occurred," which, he notes, "was then, after all, a most ordinary thing to happen" (135). Crick further notes that in a discussion with Richard Blair regarding his son's future, Andrew Gow, Orwell's tutor at Eton, definitively ruled out the possibility of Eric Blair's being awarded a

scholarship to Oxford on account of his poor academic showing at Eton[15]; a career in the far East, then, seemed the logical remaining option, and with entry into the Imperial Civil Service requiring a university degree, the Indian Police seemed to be the best of the "lesser services," which included "Forestry, Public Health, Roads or the wretched Opium Department"[16] (136). Gordon Bowker, however, believes that it was a spirit of adventure rather than limited options that drove Orwell eastward (70), and fellow Etonian Steven Runciman, whom Crick claims was probably Orwell's closest friend during his first two years at Eton, remembers Blair always saying that he wanted to go east one day (qtd. in Crick 104). In a similar manner, a recent study by John Sutherland even makes the

---

[15] Jeffrey Meyers, however, refutes the idea that Orwell could not have won a university scholarship and says that Steven Runciman, who had studied with Orwell at Eton, later told him that Gow simply "resented someone like Orwell, who was capable of doing well in classics but was bored by the subject" (224).

[16] It is interesting to note that Orwell himself came to view these professions as nobler callings than his own. He refers to "men who are doing something which is demonstrably useful and would have to be done whether the British were in India or not: forest officers, for instance, and doctors and engineers. But I was in the police, which is to say that I was part of the actual machinery of despotism" (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 145). Similar sentiments were earlier attributed to Flory: "There is a prevalent idea that the men at the 'outposts of Empire' are at least able and hardworking. It is a delusion. Outside the scientific service – the Forest Department, the Public Works Department and the like – there is no particular need for a British official in India to do his job competently" (*BD* 69). Likewise, Kipling appears to have had a low opinion of the police; as David Gilmour points out, in the short story "The Tomb of His Ancestors," Kipling writes, "'Certain families . . . serve India generation after generation as dolphins follow in line across the open sea.'" He invents one such family that he calls the Chinns, "who knew it was their duty to send their sons out to India, whatever talents they might or might not possess. A 'clever Chinn' went into the Civil Service; a 'dull Chinn' entered the Police Department or 'the Woods and Forests'" (29).

intriguing suggestion that one reason he opted for Burma "was surely the call of the nostalgic curries, and the fading but still pungently mingled scents of sandalwood, rattan and teak . . . in the Anglo-Indian house he was brought up in" (14). In "Such, Such Were the Joys," however, Blair himself says only: "For people like me, the ambitious middle class, the examination passers, only a bleak, laborious kind of success was possible. You clambered upwards on a ladder of scholarships into the Home Civil Service or the Indian Civil Service, or possibly you became a barrister" (32).

Another recent theory regarding the motives that drove Eric Blair east is especially thought-provoking. Gordon Bowker points out that Orwell had proposed marriage to Jacintha Buddicom in 1922, and conjectures that he had also suggested that she accompany him to Burma, although she refused (71). William A. Hunt rejects Bowker's suggestion that Orwell's proposal had implied a request for her to accompany him to Burma, however, and while crediting Bowker with "detecting Eric's proposal," notes that "Jacintha Buddicom was not the sort of girl one takes to Rangoon, let alone to the Burmese hill country" (6). Hunt bases his theory on a Postscript that Dione Venables, cousin of Jacintha Buddicom and heir to the copyright of *Eric & Us* upon Buddicom's death (D. Venables, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2014), wrote to the 2006 edition of Buddicom's memoir. In an article entitled "Why Orwell Went to Burma: Re-visiting the Buddicom Thesis," he speculates that the real reason Orwell decided to enter the service was that Buddicom had severed all relations with him after he had tried to

"FORCE [Venables' emphasis] her to let him make love to her"[17] (182). Indeed, in a 1972 letter Buddicom penned to a relative, she corroborates the allegations later publicly set forth by Venables, stating clearly that "[h]e had ruined what had been such a close and fulfilling relationship since childhood by trying to take us the whole way before I was anywhere near ready for that." Lending credence to the notion that Blair proposed marriage to her and supporting Hunt's conclusions regarding the notion of taking Buddicom to Burma, she writes: "How I wish I had been ready for betrothal when Eric asked me to marry him on his return from Burma" ("A Letter from Jacintha Buddicom" 9). Orwell's own words in 1949, in the second letter exchanged between Orwell and Buddicom after a thirty-year period without communication, again support this theory; after asking her if she is "fond of children," he says: "I think you must be. You were such a tender-hearted girl, always full of pity for the creatures we others shot & killed. But you were not so tender-hearted to me when you abandoned me to Burma with all hope denied" ("To Jacintha" 445). As Hunt notes, while "[t]he tone is light, . . . the reference to Dante is telling. It suggests that Eric Blair left England feeling like a damned soul"[18] (7). While it is perhaps doubtful that mere unrequited love prompted his decision

---

[17] In a newspaper article entitled "Orwell 'Assaulted His Girlfriend,'" Jack Grimston quotes Gordon Bowker, Orwell's biographer: "'Orwell had a record of it . . . He tried the same thing later on a woman in Southwold, but she was a strapping PE teacher and fought him off."

[18] It is possible that Orwell's experience with Jacintha Buddicom inspired the following passage in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*: "He could not remember how fond he was of her and she of him, how happy they always were together on the rare occasions when they could meet, how patiently she put up with his almost intolerable ways. He remembered nothing save that she would not sleep with him and that it was now a week since she had even written" (636).

to join the Imperial Police in Burma, it is significant that the alleged brutish behavior he displayed with Buddicom, his love interest, is consistent with the ambivalent manner in which he later depicted the relationships of British men with both British and Burmese women in *Burmese Days.*

The decision to serve the Empire was not simply a matter of making the move, however; there were procedures to follow and examinations to prepare for. Peter Davison notes that Orwell "was coached for the competitive entrance examinations . . . [and] . . . had come seventh of twenty-nine successful applicants obtaining 8,464 marks out of a possible 12,400, the pass mark being 6,000." He adds that Orwell's "strongest subjects were Latin, Greek and English" but that he "just passed the horse-riding test[19] and scored 174 out of 400 for Freehand Drawing" (*A Life in Letters* 3). Despite his high

[19] Prior to 1853, patronage had been the means by which men joined the Indian Civil Service and the Indian Army. In 1853, however, the system was changed in order to allow anyone to sit the competitive examinations. Successful inductees into the Civil Service then came to be known as "competition wallahs." Says E. M. Collingham: "As the first waves of competition-wallahs began arriving in India they became the focus of fierce attack. A dispute about their physical fitness for the service raged throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." One common complaint about the competition-wallahs was that they were "unable to ride, a skill which it was argued was essential to the execution of their duties" (118). A lack of horsemanship skills was also considered to be "a sure sign of a lowly social background …" (126), and indeed, Orwell sheds light on the problem in *The Road to Wigan Pier.* He delineates a set of problems peculiar to members of the "lower-upper-middle class," among them: "Theoretically you knew how to shoot and ride, although in practice you had no horses to ride and not an inch of ground to shoot over" (123). It is probably more than sheer happenstance that the topic of horsemanship also finds its way into *Burmese Days*: in an attempt to impress Elizabeth, Flory asks to ride one of Verrall's horses. Embarrassingly, however, he is thrown from the horse's back (193-94).

score on the entrance examination, Larkin notes that when asked for his choice of assignments, Orwell requested to be sent to Burma, even though it was considered a hardship post and was not a common request for new recruits. Balachandra Rajan, for example, describing the last Mughal monarch's banishment to Rangoon following the Indian Rebellion of 1857, describes "the last of a legendary line" as being "erased in the oblivion that was Burma" (7). Similarly, in his autobiography, *A Civil Servant in Burma,* Herbert Thirkell White recalls what he had heard about Burma before being posted there in the late 1800s:

> Burma was not considered of sufficient importance to have men assigned to it after the open competitions. Men were sent thither for their sins, either permanently or for a term of years. A Chief Commissioner's wife is said to have told one of these young men that other Provinces sent their worst men to Burma. However this may be, no doubt Burma was regarded as a place of banishment, a dismal rice-swamp (or, as was once said, a howling paddy-plain), where the sun never shone. I remember, while still in London, the commiseration expressed with one of our seniors whose deportation to this dreary land was announced. (7-8)[20]

Bill Tydd demonstrates that impressions of Burma had not changed considerably in November 1929 when he went to Burma, like Orwell, to serve in the Indian Police. Tydd

---

[20] White goes on to say, however:

> "All this was fiction, falser than the Roman's conception of Britain. I found Burma a bright and pleasant land, green and forest-clad, with a climate healthier on the whole than the average climate of Indian plains; its people singularly human, cheerful, and sympathetic; its officers of all ranks companionable and friendly" (8).

recalls the surprised reaction of his superiors upon learning of his desire to be posted in Burma: "Did I know that Burma was regarded as a backwater of India and not usually put first in the list of selections?" He also recalls receiving a "'Burma Allowance' as a sort of consolation prize for having to serve in a backwater" (1). Likewise, in her reminiscences, Buddicom's choice of words reveals that she, too, had a similar impression of Burma: "It was in October 1922 that he was exiled to the Burmese Police" (*Eric & Us* 143). Despite the alarm his posting may have inspired in those who knew him, however, it is clear that Orwell had not been "exiled" but had in fact requested to be sent to Burma in spite of its reputation as a backwater. It seems likely that Orwell, who had told Buddicom that he had aunts and uncles who "had a family business in Burma" (*Eric & Us* 14), was curious to learn more about his family lineage. Indeed, when candidates were asked to explain the reason for their requests, Orwell responded simply: "'Have had relatives there'" (Larkin 116). In fact, Larkin notes that "his mother's family was still living in Moulmein at that time" (116), although sadly, "[a] year before Orwell arrived in Moulmein to head the police headquarters there in 1926, his grandmother . . . died " (181).[21]

In addition to the fact that Burma was not considered a choice destination, John Newsinger makes clear the implications of Orwell's decision to join the Indian Police, noting that he did so "at a time of considerable turmoil" (34). Certainly, the 1920s were a period of political turbulence in the Indian provinces. Demand for Indian home rule had

[21] Orwell's grandmother died before he was posted in Moulmein but not before his arrival in Burma. Crick notes that "[o]ne officer, seven years older than Blair, remembers meeting him with two ladies at a sports meeting, and the elder (almost certainly Mrs Limouzin) asking his advice about Eric, as if it was common knowledge that he was unhappy in the Service" (168).

become a political thorn in Britain's side; indeed, only three years before Orwell enlisted in the Indian Police, General Dyer had ordered the Indian troops under his command to open fire on a peaceful gathering at Amritsar, massacring almost 400 men, women, and children and injuring 1,200 more.[22] The timing of Orwell's induction into the Indian Imperial Police is of great importance, therefore, for as Newsinger points out, "it was most unlikely that anyone with anti-imperialist sympathies would ever have joined the Indian Police" to begin with, and "it is altogether inconceivable that they would have joined in 1922. Clearly young Blair set out for Burma as, at the very best, a naïve supporter of British imperialism" (34). Matters would only intensify for Orwell once in Burma, where, according to Peter Davison, "he was imbued with the Spirit of Empire, of imperialism" (*A Literary Life* 16). Clearly, then, the young Orwell possessed the makings of a proper imperialist in terms of family history, upbringing, education, and indoctrination.

Accounts of his early years in Burma certainly support the notion that upon arrival in the country, he fit the stereotypical model of the *pukka sahib.* Maung Htin Aung, former Rector and Vice Chancellor and the first Burmese chair of the English Department at Rangoon University, for example, claims that in a personal encounter he had with the pre-Orwell Eric Blair in November of 1924, Blair displayed the unmistakable attitude of a proper *sahib*, if not exactly behavior befitting one. According

[22] The staunchly imperialistic character Ellis in *Burmese Days* refers to the massacre at Amritsar, providing insight into how the incident was viewed by some members of the civil service at the time: "'We could put things right in a month if we chose. It only needs a pennyworth of pluck. Look at Amritsar. Look how they caved in after that. Dyer knew the stuff to give them. Poor old Dyer! That was a dirty job. Those cowards in England have got something to answer for'" (30).

to Maung Htin Aung, who was a student at University College in Rangoon at the time, he and a group of fellow students coincidentally encountered Blair at the Pagoda Road Station one day. He says that Blair was about "to take the train to the Mission Road station, where the exclusive Gymkhana Club [a British social club] was situated"[23] ("George Orwell and Burma" 23). While clowning around, one of the boys accidentally bumped into Blair, causing him to tumble down the stairs. As he tells it, "Blair was furious and raised the heavy cane which he was carrying, to hit the boy on the head, but checked himself, and struck him on the back instead"[24] (23). Jeffrey Meyers rejects the validity of this oft-cited anecdote, however, arguing that "this apparently eyewitness account seem[s] more like nationalist propaganda than an actual event." He goes on to say that he "was pleased to have this belief confirmed by [his] learned Burmese friend, who said that Aung, an old colleague and rector of the university, was an unreliable historian who refused to give sources for his assertions"[25] (11). Whether or not the incident did in fact occur is impossible to know. If the story is indeed true, however, a civil servant battering a schoolboy on the way to an evening at the Club surely reflects

---

[23] Of the three important British social clubs in Rangoon at the time, the Pegu, the Boat, and the Gymkhana, Michael Gravers says: "The Pegu Club was dominated by senior officials from the Civil Service and the other two by the mercantile establishment" (4).

[24] *Burmese Days* includes a similar scene, in which the rabidly "anti-native" character Ellis unwittingly begins a riot when he blinds a schoolboy by hitting him in the face with a stick. Maung Htin Aung notes that it is possible that the idea for the scene had its origins in this real-life incident ("George Orwell and Burma" 23). To be sure, Orwell later confesses to striking "servants and coolies" in Burma in "moments of rage" (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 147-48).

[25] Oddly, Meyers commits the same offense by failing to cite his own source of information.

the attitude – if not the behavior – of the stereotypical *pukka sahib,* and certainly fits the mold in which the young Blair seems to have been cast.

Other evidence exists to support the notion that as a young officer with the Indian Imperial Police, Blair exhibited such tendencies. According to Christopher Hollis, a friend of Blair's who visited him in Burma in 1925,

> He was at pains to be the imperial policeman, explaining that these theories of punishment and no beating were all very well at public schools but that they did not work with the Burmese – in fact that
>
> Libbaty's a kind o' thing
>
> Thet don't agree with niggers. (27)

Despite accounts of such attitudes and behavior and notwithstanding his upbringing and myriad other factors that seemed conducive to the formation of the quintessential *sahib,* Burma paradoxically proved to furnish Blair with the soil into which the roots of the keen social conscience more commonly associated with the mature Orwell were to grow. As Davison says, "Orwell's indoctrination in imperialism at St Cyprian's was of such a strength that it was not shaken off until Orwell experienced, and practiced, imperialism in action in Burma" (*A Literary Life* 16). These experiences in Burma eventually proved to be formative and life altering, and it would be no exaggeration to say that the Eric Blair who arrived in Burma in 1922 and the soon to emerge socialist writer who left the country in 1927 were in many ways no longer the same person.

## Chapter II

## From *Pukka Sahib* to Anti-Imperialist

"The truth is that no modern man, in his heart of hearts, believes that it is right to invade a foreign country and hold the population down by force."
(George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* 144)

### Introduction

Despite his decision to serve the Empire, Orwell quickly found himself disillusioned with the British administration of Burma. A budding political consciousness coupled with a social conscience racked by guilt over his role in what he considered to be a despotism propelled Orwell on a political and philosophical trajectory that would have a profound effect on all of his writing, eventually transforming him from willing cog in the imperial machinery to uncompromising opponent of Britain's authority in Burma. This chapter thus begins with a brief synopsis of British-Burmese relations in the 1920s, the period during which Orwell served with the Indian Imperial Police. In addition to illustrating how the tensions of the period sorely tested his patience with a people for whom he possessed genuine empathy, I demonstrate that while an awareness of these tensions and their causes is interwoven into the novel and Orwell's other writings on Burma, Orwell paradoxically trivializes any real sense of agency on the part of the Burmese. Despite this limitation, it cannot be denied that his experience in Burma transformed him markedly, in many ways molding the writer who would later be recognized the world over as the fair-minded socialist George Orwell, and the second half of the chapter will detail his political transfiguration.

### A. British-Burmese Relations in 1920s Burma

Before commencing a discussion of the metamorphosis that Blair was to undergo in Burma, it is important to reiterate that the 1920s were a period of political agitation in

India and Burma; the sun had finally begun to set on the British Empire, and tensions between the British and the Burmese ran high. The root of this agitation was Britain's decision to exclude Burma from the reforms stipulated under the 1919 Government of India Act, which, as Bernard Crick explains, was "a system of dual government or 'Dyarchy' by which Indians were given representation in elected assemblies as well as having higher posts in the civil service open to them" (145-46). Not surprisingly, being officially slighted in this manner resulted in widespread discontent throughout Burma, and in 1923, the British conceded and extended the reforms, "which included desegregation of European Clubs," to Burma as well (Goonetilleke, *Images of the Raj* 118). For the Burmese, however, it was a case of too little, too late, and as Crick points out, "the damage had been done" (145-56). Maung Htin Aung perhaps best summarizes the political climate: "In the long history of Anglo-Burmese relations, . . . the darkest period was from 1919, when the Government of India Act was passed, to 1930, when a peasants' rebellion broke out against the whole might of British rule." He contends: "Before 1919, the English and the Burmese were friends, and after 1930 they were merely political opponents; but during that dark period between 1919 and 1930 they were bitter enemies, each despising the other." He points out, importantly, that George Orwell "lived and worked in Burma during that critical period . . ." ("George Orwell and Burma" 19). An awareness of the atmosphere of political upheaval and British-Burmese hostilities that characterized 1920s Burma is crucial to fully appreciating Orwell's first novel, *Burmese Days,* and his other discourses on Burma; not only does it provide necessary context for understanding some of the apparent incongruities in the young writer's depiction of and feelings toward the country and its people, but it is also necessary for

fully appreciating Orwell's first-hand knowledge of the complexities of early twentieth century Burma. Maung Htin Aung, for example, views Orwell's *Burmese Days* as "a valuable historical document, although in the guise of a novel, for it recorded vividly the tensions that prevailed in Burma, and the mutual suspicion, despair and disgust that crept into Anglo-Burmese relations" ("George Orwell and Burma" 19).

Without doubt, Orwell understood these tensions and their causes and incorporated elements of both into *Burmese Days*. Early in the novel, for example, Mrs. Lackersteen, the wife of the manager of a local timber firm, expresses the stereotypical attitude of a *memsahib* in referencing the reforms: "We seem to have no *authority* over the natives nowadays, with all these dreadful Reforms, and the insolence they learn from the newspapers" (*Burmese Days* 26).[26] In another passage, the narrator sounds like an apologist for the frustrated British, caught in the web of tensions brought on by the 1923 Dyarchy reforms:

> . . . you could forgive the Europeans a great deal of their bitterness. Living and working among Orientals would try the temper of a saint. And all of them, the officials particularly, knew what it was to be baited and insulted. Almost every day, when Westfield or Mr Macgregor or even Maxwell went down the street, the High School boys, with their young, yellow faces – faces smooth as gold coins, full of that maddening contempt that sits so naturally on the Mongolian face – sneered at them as they went past, sometimes hooted after them

[26] References to *Burmese Days* will hereafter be indicated as *BD* in parenthetical citations. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from *Burmese Days* are from the Penguin edition.

with hyena-like laughter. The life of the Anglo-Indian officials is not all jam. (32)

In the same way, specific policies resulting from the reforms find their way into the novel, even though they are not identified as such, and one in particular actually becomes central to the novel's plot. As Maung Htin Aung notes, under the reforms, European social clubs were required to extend membership to "one or two senior Burmese officials"[27] ("George Orwell and Burma" 24). The unpopularity of this stipulation with some Europeans is reflected in the novel almost to the point of caricature.[28] Upon reading

[27] In *Letters of an Indian Judge to an English Gentlewoman,* the narrator, an Indian judge serving in Myosein, Burma, alludes to this change: "By the recent amendment of a bye-law I am now admitted to the Government Club, but I have only been there once" (22). In another reference to the Club, the narrator mentions that despite the changes to the regulations, when he arrived at the Club without his boss one night, he was not welcomed: "I went to the Club to pass away the time, but Mr. Chelston not being with me, I remained unhailed, beside the door. Then I tried the Engineer's Club and saw only a young man with reddish hair who called to me:

'What do you want here, Black Face?'" (35).

When the narrator is later transferred to Shillong, he again mentions the Club: "I believe that I am eligible for the European Club, but I do not think I shall go to it, since to go there only rubs in that of which I am already well aware, and now in my old age I become rather shy!" (88).

[28] Maung Htin Aung opines that the requirement to allow native officials membership in the European Clubs "was considered to be a great concession by the English officials" and that "[y]oung Blair obviously agreed, for in *Burmese Days* election to the district European club was depicted as the highest ambition of all Burmese officials" ("George Orwell and Burma" 24-25). While his conclusion is open to question, Maurice Collis illustrates how difficult it was even in the 1930s for a Burmese to become a member of an English Club when he notes that Sir Joseph Maung Gyi, Acting Governor, "was not a

a notice Deputy Commissioner Macgregor had posted regarding the Kyauktada Club's need to admit "Oriental" members, the odious Ellis goes wild:

> He's asking us to break all our rules and take a dear little nigger-boy into this Club. *Dear* Dr Versawami, for instance. Dr Very-slimy, I call him. That *would* be a treat, wouldn't it? Little pot-bellied niggers breathing garlic in your face over the bridge table. Christ, to think of it! We've got to hang together and put our foot down on this at once. (*BD* 20)

Despite his friendship with Dr. Veraswami, protagonist Flory, modeled after the young Orwell himself, is ultimately cowed by peer pressure and signs a notice penned by Ellis stating that: "'the undersigned wish to give it as our opinion that this is the worst possible moment to consider the election of niggers to this Club . . . '" (63).

In addition to both direct and indirect references to the Dyarchy reforms, the novel also includes a scene about a peasant uprising undoubtedly based on what Maung Htin Aung calls the "sporadic rebellions [that occurred] from 1886 onwards," which came to a head with the Saya San Rebellion of 1930-1932[29] ("George Orwell and Burma" 26). The uprising in the novel is triggered by an incident in which Ellis, itching for retribution in the wake of the murder of an Englishman, attacks one of the Burmese schoolboys he encounters while walking to the office one day. The narration again sheds light on the strained relations that marked the period:

---

member of any of the three English clubs, nor could he, even as Acting Governor, have sought election with any confidence" (*Trials in Burma* 236; see also Campbell).

[29] Michael Adas says of Saya San: "Out of economic depression and sociocultural disintegration, he forged a rebellion that at one point in 1931 threatened to engulf most of Burma and to put a sudden and unexpected end to British colonial rule" (38).

> Ellis saw them coming, a row of yellow, malicious faces – epicene faces, horribly smooth and young, grinning at him with deliberate insolence. It was in their minds to bait him, as a white man. Probably they had heard of the murder, and – being Nationalists, like all schoolboys – regarded it as a victory. They grinned full in Ellis's face as they passed him. (*BD* 252)

Ellis then provokes an encounter that results in an attack conspicuously similar to the one Maung Htin Aung claims to recall Blair being involved in at the Mission Road Station.[30] In the novel, Ellis strikes one of the boys in the face with a cane, ultimately blinding him. This then prompts an uprising in which a group of armed villagers surrounds the Club, demanding that Ellis be handed over (*BD* 252). It is noteworthy that while Orwell touches on the idea of Burmese nationalism and uprisings, his depiction of the revolt serves only as a backdrop to a storyline revolving around the novel's main characters and minimizes the actual political determination of the Burmese people. Crick also points out, significantly, that "[t]here is no record of Blair making friends among any of the young nationalists" (146). It can thus be concluded that Orwell, having little or no direct contact with those involved in the burgeoning movement, underestimated the strength of the nascent nationalist sentiment. He reveals his opinion of the matter, in fact, in an article he wrote in 1929: "The most dangerous enemies of the government are the young men of the educated classes. If these classes were more numerous and were *really* educated, they could perhaps raise the revolutionary banner. But they are not" ("How a Nation Is Exploited" 145). These beliefs are clearly reflected in the manner in which he depicts nationalism in the novel. The aforementioned article ends with a prediction that while the

[30] See page 28-29 of this study.

Burmese had passively accepted their lot up until that time, the time would come when "they [would] be able to appreciate how capitalism shows its gratitude to those to whom it owes its existence" (147). Apparently, however, Orwell did not expect this to happen for quite some time[31]; in reality, the nationalist movement had already been gaining momentum and would continue to increase in intensity until Britain was ultimately ousted from the country, with the help of the Japanese,[32] less than fifteen years later. Despite the understated importance Orwell gives the uprising, the scene serves to illustrate that nationalists and nationalism were already buzzwords of the day, evincing the hostilities that marked British-Burmese relations at that period.

The tensions that marked the era and the mixed feelings they evoked in Orwell are also evident in some of his other works set in Burma. The essay "Shooting an Elephant," for instance, published two years after *Burmese Days*, begins:

> In Moulmein, in Lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people – the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me. I was sub-divisional police officer of the town, and in an aimless, petty kind of way anti-European feeling was very bitter. . . if a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel juice over her

---

[31] Daphne Patai posits an interesting theory about Orwell viewing Burmese men as "social females." In this discussion, she points out another passage in the novel indicative of Orwell's position on Burmese agency: "When Flory receives an 'anonymous' letter from U Po Kyin containing a covert threat, he does not consider it important: 'no Englishman ever feels himself in real danger from an Oriental'" (qtd. in Patai 25-26).

[32] See my study "The Allure of Japan: A Study of Factors Which Encouraged Burmese Complicity with the Japanese Before and After World War II."

> dress. As a police officer I was an obvious target and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so. When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football field and the referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter. This happened more than once. In the end the sneering yellow faces of young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance, got badly on my nerves. The young Buddhist priests were the worst of all. There were several thousands of them in the town and none of them seemed to have anything to do except stand on street corners and jeer at Europeans. (148)

In the same essay, Orwell describes the mixed emotions and exasperation that behavior such as this evoked in him: "With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny, as something clamped down, in *saecula saeculorum,* upon the will of prostrate peoples; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts" (149).

Clearly, the empathy Orwell had for the plight of the Burmese was sorely tested by the strained relations of the period, and this is often detected in conflicting emotions that color Orwell's Burma writings, particularly the novel. Despite the vexation he experienced and his sometimes equally mean-spirited reactions to it, however, Orwell's own "Burmese days" forever changed his feelings about imperialism and made him reject the notion apparently held by so many of his and previous generations that might makes right.

**B. A Change Occurs**

The transformation that Eric Blair underwent in Burma is nothing short of remarkable. Had he not served in the Imperial Police in Burma, it is possible that the world might never have known George Orwell, the political writer who would later be known for his decency and identification with the oppressed. While there can be little doubt that in upbringing and indoctrination, Eric Blair was perfectly cast for the role of servant of the Empire, even at the outset of his tenure with the Imperial Police, certain peculiarities set him apart from the typical official of the British Raj. His interest in learning local languages, for example, went beyond the Burmese language instruction required of all police officers and was driven not only by the need to perform official duties, but also by a genuine desire to communicate with the local people. (Orwell's study of Burmese will be described in greater detail in Chapter V). Unlike his own grandmother, who had lived in Burma for four decades without ever bothering to learn the language ("Letter to F. Tennyson Jesse [32]" 142), Orwell, in Maung Htin Aung's assessment, became "quite proficient in the language" ("George Orwell and Burma" 27). This was significant, for along with the shifting sensibilities about the propriety of social relations with the people over whom Britain ruled, British attitudes toward learning "native" languages had undergone a significant change around the middle of the 19th century. Maung Htin Aung points out that the former breed of scholarly civil servants such as Sir Arthur Phayre and G. E. Harvey had "spent long hours studying the language so that they could read the Burmese sources and write their histories of Burma." In contrast,

> [b]y 1922, in addition to the granite wall of racial prejudice, there stood the iron barrier of language. The English officials no longer cared to learn the Burmese language well; they merely studied to pass the examination, compulsory for all officials, in elementary Burmese, a Burmese so elementary that it was barely adequate to order servants to bring food and drink. ("George Orwell and Burma" 27) [33]

Along with his desire to learn the Burmese language, Blair is also said to have learned the "more obscure Shaw-Karen tongue of the Burmese hill people" (Hitchens 23) and even to have attended Baptist Church services conducted in the Karen language, behavior branded quirky by his peers (Crick 153). Not only his interest in acquiring local languages set Blair apart from his contemporaries, however. Roger Beadon, a fellow probationary police officer in Blair's cohort at the Mandalay Training School, recalls, "I was fond of going down to the club and playing snooker and dancing and what have you, but this didn't seem to appeal to him at all; he was not what I would call a socialite in any way" ("With Orwell in Burma"). Crick adds, "Others confirm that he was not disliked,

[33] While the language requirements may have been relaxed by the time Orwell entered the Indian Imperial Police, those that took effect in May 1866 stipulated that in order to be considered for promotion from Assistant Superintendent of Police to Superintendent, one had to pass a Burmese language examination that required the candidate to "read fairly and translate with tolerable accuracy, a manuscript written in the Burmese language" which was to be "selected from the petitions filed (on the criminal side) in Court." Furthermore, the candidate was required "to converse with a native of Burma with sufficient correctness to be intelligible." Successful candidates would then be "entitled to a reward of 125 rupees" (Fryer 536). Similar requirements existed for Hindustani and Karen (527-28 and 531). Still, although somewhat exaggerated, Maung Htin Aung's assertion that high-level governmental officials no longer immersed themselves in the local languages as they had once done is essentially correct.

did nothing provocative at the Training School, but was an unclubbable man,[34] a solitary and therefore 'an eccentric' (144). Furthermore, Gordon Bowker notes that while posted in Mandalay, Orwell "began to mingle with those cast out from Anglo-Indian society – British men married to Burmese women, the Eurasian offspring of mixed liaisons, and the strangest Englishman in Town, Captain H. R. Robinson, who had left the police service, taken up with a Burmese woman, become a Buddhist priest, and addicted himself to opium" (81). Recalling Orwell's friendship with Robinson, Etonian friend Christopher Hollis says: "he insisted on befriending an Englishman who was greatly cold-shouldered by Rangoon society for having married an Indian lady, even though the marriage seemed to Orwell a folly" (28).

"Eccentricities" such as these, many of which were later embodied in the character of Flory, made it evident that Blair was not a typical governmental servant, and after serving in Burma for only a short while, it soon became apparent that his feelings about the Empire were also far from typical. In fact, as Richard Rees says, "five years in Burma were good enough to give him a violent detestation for imperialism" (24), although this transition, Crick opines, was likely gradual (147). In any case, Blair ultimately resigned from his post, returning to Europe in 1927 with the intention of dedicating himself to writing, and most of what is now widely known regarding his disdain for imperialism was revealed in the writing he produced in the decade after leaving Burma. In fact, his experiences in the country affected him so profoundly that as

[34] Ralph Crane suggests that the Club was viewed as "a place of refuge for those wishing to escape the diseased world of India [and Burma]" (19). Orwell, however, clearly did not view it this way. Crick adds that there may have been other reasons for Blair's avoidance of the Club, noting that it was "terribly expensive" (144).

Christopher Rollason points out, although he "never returned to Asia after his time in Burma, . . . Indian and/or Burmese references appear right across his essays and [also] in several of his apparently unconnected longer works . . . "

After resigning from his position with the Imperial Police, Orwell settled briefly in Paris, where, writing as E. A. Blair, he contributed an essay entitled "*Comment on exploite un people: L'Empire britannique en Birmanie"* (Hitchens 13) to the French publication *Le Progrès Civique* in 1929; oddly, the article was only later translated into English by Janet Percival and Ian Willison and published under the title "How a Nation is Exploited: The British Empire in Burma" (Rollason). The first of Orwell's Burma-related writings, Christopher Hitchens succinctly summarizes the essay as "a meticulous examination of the way the colonial power fleeces the Burmese of their natural resources and the fruits of their labour. It is, in all essentials, a study in deliberate underdevelopment and the means by which raw materials are used to finance another country's industrial progress"[35] (13). Calling the relationship the Burmese have with the British Empire "that of slave and master," Orwell asserts: "The government of all the Indian provinces under the control of the British Empire is of necessity despotic, because only the threat of force can subdue a population of several million subjects" (144). The notion of a British despotism would recur throughout almost all of Orwell's Burma writings, next resurfacing in his 1934 novel *Burmese Days*, the most scathing indictment

[35] Hitchens further comments: "But one may also notice the emergence of another trope: the author's keen and sad interest in the passivity and docility of the victims, who know little or nothing of the wider mercantile world from which their nation is being excluded" (13). I would suggest that in addition to ignorance of the "wider mercantile world," the influence of Buddhism might also have played a role in what Orwell perceived as passivity. (See, for example, Min Zin's "The Power of Hpoun.")

of imperialism he was to write. Throughout the novel, central character Flory, steeped in the convictions of Orwell himself, rails against the evils of imperialism, and his feelings are conveyed both in dialogue and narration. One of several passages in which he refers to an exploitative British despotism, for example, reads: "he had grasped the truth about the English and their Empire. The Indian Empire is a despotism – benevolent, no doubt, but still a despotism with theft as its final object" (68). Again in 1936, the notion of a despotism appears when he describes in "Shooting an Elephant" an incident that gave him "a better glimpse than [he] had had before of the real nature of imperialism – the real motives for which despotic governments act" (149). Likewise, in the discussion of his service with the Imperial Police in his 1937 work of nonfiction, *The Road to Wigan Pier,* he again labels the British rule of Burma a despotism, saying: ". . . I was in the police, which is to say that I was part of the actual machinery of despotism" (145). So too, in discussing his reasons for abandoning the position, he states: "I was not going back to be a part of that evil despotism" (147).

The impact of his experiences in Burma again inspired the 1931 narrative essay "A Hanging," which, characterized by an emotive discourse that appears to be forged in personal guilt, was a major stylistic departure from the pragmatic commentary of his first essay. Published under the pen name "George Orwell," the essay, set in 1920s Burma and based on his experience as an officer with the Imperial Police, describes the narrator's life-altering experience in witnessing a prison hanging, although the narrator's role in the event and the prisoner's crime are details never revealed. Viewed in isolation from Orwell's other works, the dichotomy between the humanism of the essay on the one hand and its blatant racial overtones on the other may for some obscure or lessen the impact of

the narrative's underlying anti-colonial sentiment; in fact, some would surely argue that its depiction of Francis, the toadying Dravidian head jailer whose obsequiousness is expressed in dialogue replete with hissing s's, is informed by an Orientalist belief system: "'Well sir, all hass passed off with the utmost satisfactoriness. It was all finished – flick! like that. It iss not always so – oah, no! I have known cases where the doctor was obliged to go beneath the gallows and pull the prisoner's legs to ensure decease. Most disagreeable!'" (170)[36] Still, the narrator's social conscience and an unmistakable sense of moral outrage reverberate throughout the narrative. Employing particularly powerful prose, the narrator tells of an epiphany he has while watching a condemned man step aside to avoid a puddle while being led to the gallows. He writes:

> It is curious, but till that moment I had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man. When I saw the prisoner step aside to avoid the puddle, I saw the mystery, the unspeakable wrongness, of cutting a life short when it is in full tide. This man was not dying, he was alive just as we were alive. All the organs of his body were working – bowels digesting food, skin renewing itself, nails growing, tissues forming – all toiling away in solemn foolery. His nails would be growing when he stood on the drop, when he was falling through the air with a tenth of a second to live. His eyes saw the yellow gravel and the gray walls, and his brain still remembered, foresaw, reasoned – reasoned even about

---

[36] Alok Rai says that "[t]he educated 'native', in general, was a fictional pariah, and his speech and manner were held up to ridicule both for being untrue to himself and also for being imperfect imitations of his masters'" (PE-48). Mimicry of "native" speech is also found in Orwell's depiction of Dr. Veraswami, the quintessential "babu," in *Burmese Days.* (See, for example, Neelam Srivastava's "'Pidgin English or Pigeon Indian?' Babus and Babuisms in Colonial and Postcolonial Fiction.")

> puddles. He and we were a party of men walking together, seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding the same world; and in two minutes, with a sudden snap, one of us would be gone – one mind less, one world less. (368)

It is consequential, as Maung Htin Aung points out, that "[w]hen Blair witnessed the hanging, his mood of despair had become somewhat brightened by his growing compassion for the natives, drowning helplessly in the cruel sea of alien laws" ("George Orwell and Burma" 27). This compassion, however, then inevitably led to guilt and other conflicting emotions that would be evident in all of his later writings on Burma. As Hitchens points out, for example, in describing "the dismal futility of [the] execution," the essay also conveys "the terrible false jocularity of the gallows humour" that had marked the event, noting that Orwell's honesty had "forc[ed] him to confess that he had joined in the empty laughter" (12). In addition, an awareness of the gulf that existed between the Burmese and the British – a gulf that Orwell eventually came to feel was unjustifiable – is underscored when, in the penultimate line of the essay, he writes: "We all had a drink together, native and European alike, quite amicably" (371), indicating that this was clearly an anomaly. Although the exact timeframe of the hanging Orwell describes cannot be determined, it is plain to see that he had already perceived the inherent wrongness of colonialism while still employed by the Imperial Police – long before the essay was written – and the guilt he felt over his own role in the workings of imperialism had already begun to wear on him.

Indeed, guilt was to become one of most recurrent themes in all of his writing about Burma, and, as he was to describe in "Shooting an Elephant," much of it centered around experiences directly related to his role with the Police. He says, for example:

> . . . I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better. Theoretically – and secretly, of course – I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British. As for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear. In a job like that you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters.[37] The wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos – all these oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt. (148)

Yet again he explores this subject, at times using identical language, in *The Road to Wigan Pier:*

> Our criminal law . . . is a horrible thing. It needs very insensitive people to administer it. The wretched prisoners squatting in the reeking cages of the lock-ups, the grey cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos, the women and children howling when their menfolk were led away under arrest – things like these are beyond bearing when you are in any way directly responsible for them. (146)

Indeed, so heavy was his burden of guilt that after leaving Paris, Blair returned to England, where, as Rees says, he "lived in and around London as a tramp" (24). In *The Road to Wigan Pier,* Orwell elucidates:

---

[37] Orwell uses similar language in *The Road to Wigan Pier*: " . . . in the police you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters, and there is an appreciable difference between doing dirty work and merely profiting by it. Most people approve of capital punishment, but most people wouldn't do the hangman's job" (145).

> For five years I had been part of an oppressive system, and it had left me with a bad conscience. Innumerable remembered faces – faces of prisoners in the dock, of men waiting in the condemned cells, of subordinates I had bullied and aged peasants I had snubbed, of servants and coolies I had hit with my fist in moments of rage (nearly everyone does these things in the East) . . . haunted me intolerably. I was conscious of an immense weight of guilt that I had got to expiate. . . . I felt that I had got to escape not merely from imperialism but from every form of man's dominion over man. I wanted to submerge myself, to get right down among the oppressed, to be one of them and on their side against their tyrants. (147-48)

Compounding the agony of guilt, as he makes clear in several different works, was the need for disgruntled servants of the Empire to maintain the status quo, which translated into maintaining the official facade by suffering in secrecy and silence and betraying one's native friends in order to show solidarity with British compatriots. The narrator of *Burmese Days* expresses this idea after Flory adds his name to the notice Ellis writes objecting to the admittance of natives to the Club:

> It is a stifling, stultifying world in which to live. It is a world in which every word and every thought is censored. . . . Free speech is unthinkable. All other kinds of freedom are permitted. You are free to be a drunkard, an idler, a coward, a backbiter, a fornicator; but you are not free to think for yourself. Your opinion on every subject of any conceivable importance is dictated for you by the pukka sahibs' code. . . . Year after year you sit in Kipling-haunted little Clubs, whisky to right of you, *Pink'un* to left of you, listening and eagerly agreeing while Colonel Bodger develops his theory that these bloody

> Nationalists should be boiled in oil. You hear your Oriental friends called 'greasy little *babus'*, and you admit, dutifully, that they *are* greasy little *babus.* You see louts fresh from school kicking grey-haired servants. The time comes when you burn with hatred of your own countrymen, when you long for a native rising to drown the Empire in blood. And in this there is nothing honourable, hardly even any sincerity. For, *au fond,* what do you care if the Indian Empire is a despotism, if Indians are bullied and exploited? You only care because the right of free speech is denied you. You are a creature of the despotism, a pukka sahib, tied tighter than a monk or a savage by an unbreakable system of taboos. (68-70)

In *The Road to Wigan Pier,* Orwell expresses similar sentiment about both guilt and the need to suppress one's true feelings for fear of retribution, and looked at in hindsight, reading the prose gives one a premonition of what was later to come, so clearly do these emotions resonate with the political paranoia of his groundbreaking novel *1984*:

> . . . every Anglo-Indian is haunted by a sense of guilt which he usually conceals as best he can, because there is no freedom of speech, and merely to be overheard making a seditious remark may damage his career. All over India there are Englishmen who secretly loathe the system of which they are part; and just occasionally, when they are quite certain of being in the right company, their hidden bitterness overflows. I remember a night I spent on the train with a man in the Educational Service, a stranger to myself whose name I never discovered . . . Half an hour's cautious questioning decided each of us that the other was 'safe'; and then for hours, while the train jolted slowly through the pitch-black

> night, sitting up in our bunks with bottles of beer handy we damned the British Empire – damned it from the inside, intelligently and intimately. It did us both good. But we had been speaking forbidden things, and in the haggard morning light when the train crawled into Mandalay, we party as guiltily as any adulterous couple. (144-45)

Closely associated with the feelings of guilt he describes, Orwell also recalls experiencing intense embarrassment and shame about his position with the Imperial Police. In *The Road to Wigan Pier,* he explains that "[e]ven the other Europeans in Burma slightly looked down on the police because of the brutal work they had to do" and describes an incident involving a conversation with an acquaintance:

> I remember once when I was inspecting a police station, an American missionary whom I knew fairly well came in for some purpose or other. Like most Nonconformist missionaries he was a complete ass but quite a good fellow. One of my native sub-inspectors was bullying a suspect (I described this scene in *Burmese Days).* The American watched it, and then turning to me said thoughtfully, 'I wouldn't care to have your job.' It made me horribly ashamed. So *that* was the kind of job I had! Even an ass of an American missionary, a teetotal cock-virgin from the Middle West, had the right to look down on me and pity me! (145-46)

It is striking that despite the genre – novel, essay, or work of nonfiction – Orwell's anti-imperialistic diatribes overlap in both the sentiment expressed and the phraseology applied. Words, themes, and expressions such as despotism, thievery, yellow faces, "hooted" insults, insolent monks, silence and secrecy, the bullying and abuse of

servants, prisoners, and elderly peasants, "the dirty work of Empire," "the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts," and "the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos" are bandied about with such a degree of consistency and repetition that a reader familiar with these various sources can be forgiven for confusing passages from one with those of another. The result is a remarkably consistent denunciation of British imperialism that cuts through all of Orwell's works on Burma and informs fictional Flory. Indeed, so disillusioned by imperialism was Orwell that when talk arose of adapting *Burmese Days* for a theatrical production in 1936, Orwell told his publisher, Leonard Moore, "If this project comes to anything I would suggest the title 'Black Man's Burden'" (479).[38] For sure, when in both "Shooting an Elephant" and "The Road to Wigan Pier," Orwell stresses: "I hated [my job with the Imperial Police] more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear"[39] ("Shooting and Elephant" 148), he underestimates himself, for in fact, he *does* make his antipathy to serving the Raj abundantly clear. Indeed, his hatred of imperialism was the catalyst for what was yet to come, as any reader familiar with his more well-known political works, *Animal Farm* and *1984*, can clearly see the connection between these later works and his first novel.

---

[38] Orwell also mentions this idea in another letter to Moore, saying: "I forget just what his title was but it was a very weak one. Something like 'Black Man's Burden' would be better, I should say" ("To Leonard Moore" 476-77).

[39] In *The Road to Wigan Pier,* Orwell writes: "I was in the Indian Police five years, and by the end of that time I hated the imperialism I was serving with a bitterness which I probably cannot make clear" (143).

Without doubt, Orwell's hatred of oppression of all types had its roots in Burma. As Crick says, " . . . at the end of his Burmese days a specific hatred of imperialism is clear which he soon turned into a general critique of autocracy of any kind" (174). Clearly, serving in Burma and witnessing – even participating in – the injustices which that entailed was transformational for the young Eric Blair, thrusting him forward ideologically and giving rise to the political writer who would forever be immortalized as the fair-minded socialist George Orwell.

## Chapter III

## Toward a Reassessment of Orwell: Anti-Imperialist or Paradoxical Orientalist?

"If your conscience be sound and untainted,
If you own a medicinal chest,
Some day you may rank with the Sainted,
Who are throned on the heights of the blessed,
But your conscience and liver unaided,
I fear, will not carry you far,
Till you learn to re-echo as they did
The praise of the Powers that are."
(From "On the Powers That Are. *Integer Vitae.*" by J. M Symns, *Horace in Burma)*

### Introduction

There can be no doubt that Orwell underwent profound changes in Burma, and the anti-imperialist sentiment pervading *Burmese Days* has been the subject of much critical and scholarly discussion. Despite Orwell's remarkably progressive views regarding Britain's economic and political exploitation of Burma, however, the novel clearly shows that his enlightened convictions failed to encompass any revision of patently patriarchal and gender-biased attitudes, particularly as they pertained to colonized women – who, being neither white nor male, were doubly subjugated – as his depiction of Ma Hla May clearly illustrates. In this chapter I thus argue that while Orwell represented himself and remains widely viewed as an anti-imperialist author, his perspective still clearly bore the mark of what Edward Said has labeled Orientalism, through which the West was able to justify imperialism and the imbalance of power it wielded vis-à-vis that of the countries and peoples it colonized. Drawing on an examination of factors both textual and contextual to make my case, the first section of this chapter establishes that Orwell's writings on Burma, despite their varied and sometimes classification-defying genres, display an overarching consistency in that they are steeped in the author's own ideas, life

experiences, and disenchantment with imperialism. That being so, I propose the tenability of viewing *Burmese Days* protagonist John Flory as a semi-autobiographical representation of Orwell himself. In the second half of the chapter I make the case that Orwell's novel sheds light on his gender bias, which, while not limited to "native" women, is reflective of an Orientalist mindset and especially remorseless and misogynistic when used in his depiction of Ma Hla May.

**A. The Genre: Autobiography, Memoir, or Fiction?**

Orwell's keen social and political conscience was first awakened in Burma, and the time he spent with the Indian Imperial Police was to have a profound impact on the writer he would later become. This influence is bitingly evident in the novel *Burmese Days,* the essays "A Hanging" and "Shooting an Elephant," and sections of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, all of which were colored by his first-hand experience and resultant disillusion with British imperialism. Despite the consistency of detail running through both his fictional and nonfictional works on Burma, however, much debate has revolved around the degree of authenticity and true genre of his texts. Christopher Rollason has commented that "the *oeuvre*" of Orwell "calls in question the dividing-lines between fiction and non-fiction, narrative and essay, encompassing fictional, documentary and mixed-status texts[,]" and perhaps it is this sort of ambiguity in Orwell's Burma narratives that makes them so intriguing. Orwell is indeed, as Jeffrey Meyers suggests, "a literary nonconformist whose works defy genres, a writer who is hard to place" (22), and this has led to much debate about the reality that lies beneath the surface of these texts.

There can be little doubt that much of the sentiment attributed to John Flory, protagonist of Orwell's first novel, *Burmese Days,* was rooted in Orwell's own psyche, as

even in works of fiction, Orwell had a propensity to infuse the narrative with what appear to be his own ideas. Referring to the novel *Burmese Days,* for example, Maung Htin Aung asserts that "Orwell himself considered the book to be a documentary" ("George Orwell and Burma" 19), and indeed, a letter Orwell sent to F. Tennyson Jesse in defense of a review he had written of her book, *The Story of Burma,* suggests that to a certain degree, this was true. After criticizing her rendering of the British as a benign presence in Burma, calling her account "decidedly over-charitable towards the British" ("Review: *The Story of Burma*" 140), he asks if she has read *Burmese Days,* characterizing it thus: "I dare say it's unfair in some ways and inaccurate in some details, but much of it is simply reporting of what I have seen" ("Letter to F. Tennyson Jesse [31]" 142). Shamsul Islam appears to agree, saying: "There is . . . not much of a division between his fiction and non-fiction," stating that "his fiction also borders on the factual" (68). Many other critics and scholars have similarly commented on the degree to which the novel was a semi-autobiographical account of the author's own experiences: Richard Rees, for example, puts *Burmese Days* among the works of Orwell that are at least "to some extent autobiographical" (28), and Edward M. Thomas believes that "Flory, the hero, like Orwell's later heroes, is Orwell without his quality of moral courage" (9). Christopher Hollis takes the argument a bit farther, contending that while "[i]t would be false – and indeed villainously uncharitable – to suggest that Flory is in any way a self-portrait of Orwell," it is also important to note that whereas Flory was thirty-five in the novel, Orwell was only twenty-four when he left Burma; he then connects the dots between Orwell and Flory, pointing out that "[i]t was after twenty-four – just the age at which Orwell came home – that Flory began to deteriorate." He finally surmises that "Flory

was clearly to some extent Orwell as he imagined that he might have been if he had stayed in Burma" (35-37), a conclusion with which John Newsinger was later to agree (37). Likewise, Alok Rai feels certain that John Flory is Orwell's "authorial mouthpiece," noting that "[t]he authorial concurrence is clear in the accents of Flory's speculations on imperialism" (PE-50), while Daphne Patai points out Orwell's "tendency to break through his narrative frame and impose generalizations that seem to express the author's rather than the character's views," noting in particular that "[t]hroughout *Burmese Days* this occurs, frequently marked by a shift to the present tense and an editorializing tone" (41). Perhaps it is this predisposition that causes Malcolm Muggeridge to go so far as to say that Flory is "Orwell himself" ("On George Orwell"), while D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, exhibiting more restraint, says that although "Flory embodies Orwell's own radical values," it is an oversimplification to surmise that one equals the other, reasonably concluding that "Orwell and Flory are not one and the same person, though their attitudes overlap" ("George Orwell's" 186). Others still have argued that too much emphasis has been placed on the autobiographical qualities of the novel; John Victor Knapp, for instance, contends that "the automatic assumptions that Orwell's fiction is best understood within the context of realistic and biographical theory have been misleading" (16), advocating instead the more "rewarding alternative" of reading the novel as "an allegory of the power relationships among people who live in a totalitarian environment" (9). While the allegorical interpretation that Knapp sets forth is unquestionably compelling, it cannot be denied that the novel is grounded in real people, places, and events; it seems impossible, then, not to view Flory – to some degree, at least – as a reflection of Orwell.

One clear indication that the novel was to some extent semi-autobiographical was that Orwell's English publisher, Victor Gollancz, and his attorneys feared that the novel was so accurately based on Orwell's own experience in Burma that legal repercussions were likely to arise unless the story was "delocalized" and some of the names changed "in order to make identification more difficult" (Davison, "A Note" v). As Orwell explained to R. N. Raimbault, his French translator, the novel was about "the lives of the English in Burma (in India) and it [was] being published in New York because [his] publisher (Gollancz) would not dare publish it in England owing to the observations [he] made regarding English imperialism" ("To R. N. Raimbault" 39). Further complicating matters was the fact that the issue of Indian home rule had by then become a political hot potato, and as Orwell expressed in a 1936 letter to Henry Miller, his "publisher was afraid the India Office might take steps to have it suppressed"[40] ("To Henry Miller" 63). Although Harper & Brothers published the American edition in October 1934, therefore, it was not published in England until late June 1935, and only under the condition that Orwell make the changes recommended by Gollancz's solicitor.[41] Orwell agreed and included a list of the alterations made in a letter to Gollancz dated 28 February 1935;

---

[40] Jeffrey Meyers notes that the novel was indeed later "banned in India" (102).

[41] In a 1934 letter to Leonard Moore, Orwell mentions that he had spoken to another publisher in England, Mr. Jonathan Cape, about the possibility of publishing *Burmese Days*. He notes, however, "I shouldn't think there is much likelihood of his taking it, as apart from anything else he tells me he goes to the same lawyer as Gollancz and therefore would probably have the same ideas about what constituted libel" ("To Leonard Moore" 351). Even after Gollancz eventually decided to publish the novel, Orwell says that he first wanted "to have it thoroughly vetted by his lawyer, after which the latter was to cross-examine [Orwell] on all the doubtful points" ("To Brenda Salkeld" 374).

some of the modifications included obscuring the timeframe by eliminating a reference to an event that occurred in 1910 and changing the date in which the story is set from 1926 to "19–." Explained Orwell: "The events of the story are supposed to be taking place in 1926, though I have now cut out this date and it can only be inferred in a roundabout way if at all" ("To Victor Gollancz [Ltd]" 379-80). Names, too, were changed: U Po Kyin was changed to U Po Sing, Dr. Veraswami was transformed into Dr. Murkhaswami, Lackersteen[42] was renamed Latimer, the name Macdougall was eliminated entirely, and Molly Pereira, the "Eurasian tart" whom Ellis says Maxwell would have married had he not been transferred away from Mandalay (*BD* 22-23), became Molly Walters.[43] Other identifying details were also changed so that "'whisky, Blackwood's and the Bonzo pictures,'" which might, perhaps, have identified the European Club in Katha, became "'whiskey, Lancashire cotton shirts and public-school humbug'" (379), "'the Irrawaddy,'" which might have pointed to an unambiguous location, was simplified to "the river," "[t]he name of the native paper [was] changed from the Burmese Patriot to

---

[42] Crick opines: "'Mrs Lackersteen' of the novel . . . and Mrs Limouzin [Orwell's grandmother] of life are too close to be coincidence" (168).

[43] As Orwell explains it, U Po Sing and Dr. Murkhaswami were not authentic names and thus could not have been identified with any real Burmese or Indian individuals. Furthermore, he claims to have searched through the Burma Civil List for 1929 to ensure that he had not inadvertently used the name of anyone in Burma at that time when naming the characters representing British officials (Davison *The Complete Works* 380). Exactly why Pereira was changed to Walters is uncertain, although Davison points out that in an unpublished manuscript "written on Government of Burma paper," Orwell makes reference to a "Pereira's Surefire Lung Balm" (*The Complete Works* 104). Furthermore, one of the common references to Burmese Buddhist Law at the time had been translated and compiled by a man named Jules Friend-Pereira.

the Burmese Sinn Feiner,"[44] and a reference to Mandalay General Hospital was eliminated entirely. Indeed, Orwell even went so far as to change references to flora and fauna that were geographically identifiable with Upper Burma to those of Lower Burma and described Kyauktada as a "railway terminus" instead of a "junction," lest it be discovered that the town had been modeled on Katha. While Orwell thus "delocalized" the story in a bid to have the book published in England, as has already been established, much of the sentiment and many of the views represented in the novel overlap – sometimes almost word for word – sentiment expressed in his essays and other non-fictional works, particularly *The Road to Wigan Pier,* "Shooting an Elephant," and "A Hanging."

Figure 2: The former British Club in Katha, much of which has been rebuilt, in January 2016; photo by the author

[44] Orwell explains: "I don't think this is a possible name, and at the same time it gives the right implication to an English reader" ("To Victor Gollancz [Ltd]" 380).

Moreover, while not one of the characters flagged by Gollancz's attorney for revision as a Burmese woman clearly would not have been in a position to litigate, the Burmese character Ma Hla May was likely derived from an actual individual or composite of individuals. Gordon Bowker, for example, asserts that "[s]mall hints and clues from what he wrote suggest that later, up-country, [Orwell] followed the practice of many other men sent to lonely outposts and took a Burmese mistress, passing her off as a servant, just as John Flory does with Ma Hla May." He points to a preliminary sketch Orwell wrote to *Burmese Days,* in which the author's "alter ego," Flory, is upbraided by a superior for consorting with a "native" woman: "'Now this girl you've made friends with, – perfectly respectable girl, I don't doubt, perfectly respectable, – but you've got to realize, my boy, that it won't do. Get entangled with a woman like that, – & where are you? Ruined. Ruined!'" Bowker also recognizes the possibility that Ma Hla May could have been based on the story of Orwell's Uncle Frank Limouzin, who married a local woman named Mah Hlim, with whom he had a daughter. Presumably, Orwell would have been well acquainted with the details surrounding Frank and Ma Hlim's relationship as their daughter, Kathleen, was only four years older than Orwell himself. Bowker thus concludes: "Whether the Flory-Ma Hla May relationship is built on his own association with a Burmese girl or on Frank Limouzin's story is impossible to tell, though the understanding and conviction with which that story unfolds suggest a basis of first-hand experience" (83).

Adding another layer of intrigue to the Flory-Ma Hla May relationship is that Ma Hla May bears the same name as a jewel-broker prosecuted for "criminal breach of trust" in Moulmein, the home of Orwell's grandmother and relatives, some time around 1924. I

discovered this while reading the memoir of E. C. V. Foucar, the barrister who defended Ma Hla May in the lawsuit and later detailed the case in his book *I Lived in Burma* (30-31). Foucar went to work in Moulmein in 1922 and practiced there for two years (23-33) before transferring to Rangoon, where he remained until the outset of World War II. As a contemporary of Orwell, then, it is possible that the two were acquainted with each other. Even if they were not, however, Orwell may have heard news about the case through his relations in Moulmein. Although this argument is admittedly conjectural, the contemporaneous circumstances are worthy of consideration.

Furthermore, Ma Hla May's name is very similar to the name of a woman who sued for conjugal rights in 1930 in the case of *Ma Hla Me vs. Maung Hla Baw.* The case, according to Myint Zan, "hinged on the issue of whether there was a valid marriage in the absence of cohabitation or consummation between the married couple after the marriage ceremony" (162). Ironically, the case was settled with a ruling that held that under Burmese Buddhist Law, cohabitation and consummation, not a wedding ceremony, validated a Burmese marriage. The case was significant from 1930 until 1972, Myint Zan says, as "the ruling in *Ma Hla Me* remained 'case law' and could be cited, referred to[,] and even followed by the Burmese courts" (163). The lawsuit was brought to court three years after Orwell had left Burma and a few years before the publication of *Burmese Days*, and whether or not Orwell was aware of the case is uncertain. Still, as it is estimated that Orwell began writing the preliminary sketches for the novel between 1926 and 1930 (see, for example, Davison, *The Complete Works* 93-110), the case is of interest.

In examining Orwell's early works on Burma, I also discovered that some of the details contained in the nineteen pages of unpublished manuscript that Peter Davison, editor of the *The Complete Works of George Orwell,* refers to as "Preliminaries to *Burmese Days*" support the notion that Orwell drew on his own life in constructing the life of the character that would eventually become John Flory of the novel. I compared the timeframe and other details of the unfinished fictional piece "The Autobiography of John Flory" with Orwell's real family history and found them to differ only slightly. Flory, for example, was born in England in 1890, whereas Orwell was born in India in 1903. Flory's father is described as a civil servant who married Flory's mother in India in 1882; similarly, Orwell's father, also a civil servant, married in India in 1896. Whereas Flory's father was sent from India to work in Burma in 1883, Orwell's father joined the Opium Department in India in 1875 and remained in India his entire career. Flory has two sisters, although his mother is said to have also given birth to a boy who died at seven months; Orwell, similarly, had two sisters. Flory's mother returned to England with her children in 1888; similarly, Orwell's mother brought her children back to England in 1904[45]; both fathers continued to work in the colonial service, Flory's father until 1903 and Orwell's father until 1912.[46] Flory saw his father only three times before he eventually retired and returned to England, whereas Orwell saw his father only once in

[45] Stansky and Abrahams claim that Orwell's father took his family back to England in July 1907; Crick, however, argues that the date is erroneous, providing evidence indicating they actually returned to England in 1904, when Orwell was just a year old (48).

[46] Anglo-Indians also appear in Orwell's *Coming up for Air*. In this novel, Vincent, the father of George Bowling's wife, Hilda, is said to have retired from India and "some even more outlandish place, Borneo or Sarawak," in 1910 (509).

the interim. Flory's father is described as having a library to which he often retired, while Orwell's father, in similar fashion, spent most of his time in a room known to the family as "Father's Room"[47] (*The Complete Works* 96-97 and Crick 23). Such similarities are surely not coincidental, and there can be little doubt that the preliminary sketches of John Flory that foreshadowed the character as he later appeared in *Burmese Days* were created with details mined largely from Orwell's own life and family history.

Finally, much of the descriptive detail provided about protagonist John Flory suggests that the character was modeled after Orwell himself. While a comprehensive list of similarities between Orwell and Flory is beyond the scope of this study, in addition to those already mentioned, a representative sampling of parallels includes the fact that Flory, like Orwell, is a disgruntled servant of the Empire who harbors secret sympathy for the colonized and a concealed contempt for sahibdom. Flory's ideas about the British presence in Burma are clearly articulated in his argument with Dr. Veraswami, the ironic apologist for the Empire. Says Flory:

' . . . We teach the young men to drink whisky and play football, I admit, but

---

[47] In *Coming up for Air*, Hilda's family home is described as being typical Anglo-Indian in décor and atmosphere, and one wonders how much detail was borrowed from Orwell's own family home:

> As soon as you set foot inside the front door you're in India in the eighties. You know the kind of atmosphere. The carved teak furniture, the brass trays, the dusty tiger-skulls on the wall, the Trichinopoly cigars, the red-hot pickles, the yellow photographs of chaps in sun-helmets, the Hindustani words that you're expected to know the meaning of, the everlasting anecdotes about tiger-shoots and what Smith said to Jones in Poona in '87. (509)

Similarly, Gordon Bowker notes that upon leaving Burma, Orwell himself took with him "a collection of Burmese swords with which he would decorate his rooms, as he might have decorated it with tiger heads had he had better luck in the hunt" (95).

> precious little else. Look at our schools – factories for cheap clerks. We've never taught a single useful manual trade to the Indians. We daren't; frightened of the competition in industry. We've even crushed various industries. Where are the Indian muslins now? Back in the 'forties or thereabouts they were building sea-going ships in India, and manning them as well. Now you couldn't build a seaworthy fishing boat there. In the eighteenth century the Indians cast guns that were at any rate up to the European standard. Now, after we've been in India a hundred and fifty years, you can't make so much as a brass cartridge case in the whole continent. . . .' (39)

Flory's argument, however, reads almost like a point-by-point reiteration of ideas Orwell set forth in his 1929 essay "How a Nation Is Exploited." Likewise, Orwell's contempt for the old-school attitude toward the Empire is also clearly reflected in Flory; as Orwell complains in *The Road to Wigan* Pier: "And is there any cultured person who has not at least once in his life made a joke about that old Indian havildar who said that if the British left India there would not be a rupee or a virgin left between Peshawar and Delhi (or wherever it was)?" (159), so Flory gripes:

> But when they got on to that story about the old havildar – you know, the dear old havildar who said that if the British left India there wouldn't be a rupee or a virgin between – you know; well, I couldn't stand it any longer. It's time that old havildar was put on the retired list. He's been saying the same thing ever since the Jubilee in 'eighty-seven.' (36)

Yet again, Flory complains about living with ". . . the lie that we're here to uplift our poor black brothers instead of to rob them . . . It's at the bottom of half our beastliness to the

natives. We Anglo-Indians could be almost bearable if we'd only admit that we're thieves and go on thieving without any humbug," sentiment that can be traced back to Orwell in "How a Nation is Exploited": "If we are honest, it is true that the British are robbing and pilfering Burma quite shamelessly" (145). On a more idiosyncratic level, too, much about Flory appears to be based on Orwell. Like Orwell, for example, Flory is depicted as an avid reader who frequented the popular Smart and Mookerdum bookshop in Rangoon. Bernard Crick, for example, says that one of the saving graces of Orwell's third posting in Burma – to Syriam . . . was its proximity to Rangoon and Smart and Mookerdum's, "to which each P. & O. liner brought the latest books and even literary periodicals from England." He notes, for example, that Orwell "later told his friend, Richard Rees, the proprietor of the Adelphi, that he knew the journal [when he was in Burma], but thought it a 'damned rag' and used it for revolver practice in his bungalow garden" (157). Orwell's enthusiasm for his forays into Rangoon are later attributed to Flory: "Oh! The joy of those Rangoon trips! The rush to Smart and Mookerdum's bookshop for the new novels out from England . . . " (*BD* 66). Another conspicuous similarity between the two is that Flory, like Orwell, speaks French and is much taken with the French literary scene of the early 1900s. As previously mentioned, Orwell's first essay on Burma, "How a Nation Is Exploited," was written in French and first appeared in the French publication *Le Progrès Civique* (see Davison, *The Complete Works* 172-78). Similarly, Flory's knowledge of French is revealed when Lackersteen, ogling a racy photo in a copy of *La Vie Parisienne,* says: "'You know French, Flory; what's that mean underneath?'" (24). Even Orwell's lack of horsemanship skills is reflected in Flory: Orwell, it will be

recalled, just barely passed the horse-riding test when entering the Imperial Police.[48] Likewise, Flory, attempting to impress Elizabeth and knowing, "like nearly everyone, he looked his best on horseback," instead takes a disastrous and humiliating fall in front of both Elizabeth and Verrall (193). One is left wondering if Orwell himself took a similar tumble from the back of a horse at some point.

Figure 3: Photo of Orwell (from www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4761169)

Physically, too, there are similarities between Orwell and Flory. The narrator, for example, describes Flory as:

> …a man of about thirty-five, of middle height, not ill made. He had very black, stiff hair growing low on his head, and a cropped black moustache, and his skin, naturally sallow, was discoloured by the sun. Not having grown fat or

[48] The inability to ride a horse was one of the common complaints about the competition wallah. David Gilmour, for example, says that

> Sir James Fergusson, the Governor of Bombay from 1880 to 1885, complained repeatedly that the 'pallid victims of the crammer' fell sick, went off their heads and were generally lacking in stamina. Besides, their inability to ride was 'ludicrous': one of his officials, who clearly had not earned a genuine 'certificate of equitation', would not go out riding without servants walking either side of his horse to catch him if he fell off. (64)

> bald he did not look older than his age, but his face was very haggard . . . with lank cheeks and a sunken, withered look round the eyes. (*BD* 13)

While Orwell himself was "well over six feet" (Bowker 73), most of the other descriptive details in the passage above could most likely have also been applied to Orwell; Maung Htin Aung, for example, who claims to have had a personal encounter with the young Orwell, remembers him looking ". . . gaunt and tall, and a little older than his 22 years . . ." ("Orwell of the Burma Police"). Gordon Bowker would seem to agree, as he points out that how Orwell saw himself in his Katha days "can be glimpsed in the sorrowful words of John Flory: 'When he left home he had been a boy . . . now, only ten years later, he was yellow, thin, drunken, almost middle-aged in habits and appearance'" (94). Elaborating on this, Mitzi M. Brunsdale says that "Flory's haggard face reflects his – and Orwell's – soul-sickness at belonging to the British ruling class and supporting the Imperial system he knows is corrupt" (55). Perhaps not arbitrarily, Flory's character flaws were embodied in his most distinctive physical blemish:

> The first thing that one noticed in Flory was a hideous birthmark stretching in a ragged crescent down his left cheek, from the eye to the corner of the mouth. Seen from the left side his face had a battered, woe-begone look, as though the birthmark had been a bruise – for it was a dark blue in colour. He was quite aware of its hideousness. And at all times, when he was not alone, there was a sidelongness about his movements, as he manoeuvred constantly to keep the birthmark out of sight. (14)

Referring to Flory's birthmark, Edward M. Thomas has remarked: "As far as is known, Orwell himself had no [such] physical defect" (9), yet a sizable dark mark on

Orwell's cheek is clearly visible in the photograph of Orwell that appears on the cover of Thomas' book *Orwell,* and it is not implausible that this mark may have served as the inspiration for the exaggerated birthmark with which Orwell was to depict Flory physically.[49] Perceptible in numerous images, including the photos that appear on the covers of Gordon Bowker's *George Orwell* and Christopher Hitchens' *Orwell's Victory* – and even, more tellingly, in the Abigail Rorer illustration of Orwell that can be seen on the cover of Daphne Patai's *The Orwell Mystique: A Study in Male Ideology* – the nevus, conspicuous even in grainy old photographs, could conceivably have been a physical characteristic that Orwell disliked about himself. Indeed, he is reported to have harbored an insecurity regarding his appearance, and Thomas recognizes that "at school he imagined himself ugly, and considered that other people must be revolted by him" (9; see also Orwell, "Such, Such Were the Joys . . . " 37). Pointing out that those who knew him in his school days deny ever having been repulsed by him, Thomas thus surmises: "his sense of failure was projected in physical terms" (9), and the same could be said about Flory. Jeffrey Meyers, for example, asserts that "[t]he hideous birthmark of Flory in *Burmese Days* is the symbolic equivalent of Orwell's feeling that he was an ugly failure . . ." (6). In the same manner that Orwell may have projected his own feelings of worthlessness onto John Flory, then, the birthmark on Flory's cheek, too, could have been a distorted representation of the apparent birthmark on Orwell's own cheek. While this argument is admittedly conjectural, the rationale behind it, corroborated by Orwell's own admissions of physical insecurities, renders it worthy of consideration.

---

[49] Surprisingly, I have been unable to find any scholarship that makes this connection between Flory and Orwell.

The characters of the novel also appear to have been drawn from people Orwell actually knew in Burma. Maung Htin Aung, for example, suggests that while "[f]rom the description, Kyauktada . . . could not be any other district headquarters than Katha, . . . the Europeans of the novel," including the Deputy Superintendent of Police and the District Magistrate, ". . . belonged to his Moulmein period." Even Ma Hla May, he notes, spoke with a turn of phrase distinctive of people from Moulmein[50] ("Orwell of the Burma Police" 184). He also points out that one of the probationers at the Police Training School Orwell attended was a Burmese named U Po Kyin (184-85), and even Flory's Indian friend Dr. Veraswami appears to have been drawn after ". . . the District Medical Officer and ex-officio superintendent of the jail," a "South Indian ('Dravidian')" named Krishnaswamy (185).

In addition to *Burmese Days,* Orwell's essays on Burma have also been the focus of much debate, and the authenticity of detail in the essays has been widely disputed. Maung Htin Aung ("George Orwell and Burma" 27) and Stephen Ingle (*A Political Life* 11), for example, clearly accept the essays as autobiographical, and Richard Rees, too, seems to accept them as such (28). Goonetilleke, however, again points out that although the essays "A Hanging" and "Shooting an Elephant" are "universally lauded as autobiographical," it has been "suggested that Orwell may never have witnessed a hanging or shot an elephant" ("George Orwell's" 183). Regarding "A Hanging," Crick, too, points out that Orwell had on at least two occasions claimed that the essay "'was

[50] Although Maung Htin Aung does not identify the turn of phrase in question, he is probably referring to Ma Hla May's demand "'*Pike-san pay-like! Pike-san pay-like!* '" (Give me money! Give me money!) in Chapter XXIV of the novel (*BD* 284).

only a story,'" but reasons that "[h]is denials could have been simply to stop unwelcome and morbid conversations, for he disliked talking about his work, even his past work" (151-52). Despite this conjecture, it seems certain that Orwell did indeed witness a hanging, for he says clearly in *The Road to Wigan Pier*: "I watched a man hanged once; it seemed to me worse than a thousand murders" (146). Furthermore, as Peter Davison points out, at the time Orwell wrote the essay, "hanging was a common practice in England and its Empire." Davison cites as evidence a "Hausa Phrase Book published in 1924 – the time Orwell was serving in Burma – intended for British District Officers in Nigeria," and draws attention to a section entitled "'Duties of Constables and Warders' (all native personnel)," which contains the "grim instruction in the Hausa language: 'Next Monday a hanging will take place: begin now to get everything ready, and arrange the details exactly as I showed you last time.'" He points out that hangings were "a routine with which Orwell, and all police and prison officers in the Empire, would have been familiar" ("'Orwell Goes East'"), and indeed, Orwell later confirms this familiarity when, reflecting on the Nuremberg hangings, he wonders whether "the old method of strangulation, or the modern, comparatively humane method which is supposed to break the victim's neck at one snap" was being employed. He then clearly and with informed authority states his opinion of the practice: "It is not a good symptom that hanging should still be the accepted form of capital punishment in this country" as it is a "barbarous" and "inefficient way of killing anybody" ("As I Please" 278-79). Indeed, even in his much later novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell's familiarity with hangings is reflected when the character Syme says: "'It was a good hanging . . . I think it spoils it when they tie their feet together. I like to see them kicking. And above all, at the end, the tongue

sticking right out, and blue – a quite bright blue. That's the detail that appeals to me'" (772). Gordon Bowker, accepting that the hanging described in Orwell's essay did indeed take place, speculates that "[m]ost likely it was at Insein [Prison] that he attended the execution," adding that "[i]t has been suggested that young policemen were routinely sent to witness a hanging as a kind of initiation" (88). Crick, however, has stated that "[t]he old hands feel fairly certain it would not have been part of a young ASP's duties; but he could have watched a hanging if he had asked" (151), while Maung Htin Aung says that "It is not certain whether 'A Hanging' took place in Insein or Moulmein . . . Insein jail was too large and complex to fit the description given by Orwell, and it would have been more logical for Blair to be present at a hanging in Moulmein jail" ("Orwell of the Burma Police" 183). Thus, while there is debate about the details, most scholars seem to agree that Orwell witnessed the hanging.

In the same way, Peter Davison feels certain that Orwell did indeed shoot an elephant, citing as evidence "[t]he tape-recorded reminiscences of one of Orwell's colleagues in Burma, George Stuart." Davison points out that Stuart disputes only minor details, saying that Orwell killed the elephant in a single shot, not after multiple shots and a long, drawn-out period of suffering as indicated in the essay (*A Literary Life* 46). In an explanatory footnote to the essay, Davison also points out Stuart's claim that Orwell was transferred to Katha, the town after which the fictitious town of Kyauktada in *Burmese Days* is modeled, as a consequence of having shot an elephant (*The Complete Works* 506). Furthermore, a recent study by Gerry Abbott, drawing on poems written by Orwell and the autobiography of the aforementioned Captain H. R. Robinson, also provides a convincing argument to suggest that Orwell did indeed shoot an elephant (116-22).

Finally, lending yet even more weight to this argument, the narrator of *Burmese Days* describes a conversation between Flory and Elizabeth, saying: "She was quite thrilled when he described the murder of an elephant which he had perpetrated some years earlier" (87). The repeated theme as well as the author's peculiar choice of the word "murder" in describing the incident, the nuance of which echoes the sentiment expressed in the essay, is especially convincing.

Thus, while Orwell may have taken artistic liberties in reporting the incidents described in the two essays, as he did in *Down and Out in Paris and London*, attempting to pigeonhole the true genre of the writing is pointless since the sincerity of the emotion, undoubtedly based on genuine experience, is so convincingly conveyed. As John Rodden states, Orwell "may have used creative imagination" in the essays, but they still "appear to be firmly rooted in fact." He thus suggests that this type of writing might best be described as an early example of the "now-familiar hybrid genre known as 'creative nonfiction'" (31). It should cause little dissention, therefore, to conclude that the authorial voice of the two essays – if not indeed belonging to Orwell himself – would at the very least seem to represent an alter ego of Orwell, and that even the fictional John Flory, while not an exact likeness of the author, is imbued with Orwell's ideology and value system. Orwell once said, in reviewing Alex Comfort's *No Such Liberty* in 1941: "'I think I am justified in assuming that it is autobiographical, not in the sense that the events described in it have actually happened, but in the sense that the author identifies himself with the hero, thinks him worthy of sympathy and agrees with the sentiments he expresses'" (qtd. in Davison, *A Literary Life* 38). I contend, then, that by Orwell's definition, both *Burmese Days* and his essays on Burma are indeed semi-autobiographical.

In my analysis of the novel and in arguing my case for Ma Hla May in Chapters IV and V, therefore, I will view the attitudes and beliefs of John Flory and George Orwell to be essentially one and the same; the two are so clearly enmeshed that in analyzing their convictions and motives, I will take Rodden's assumption about the hybridized nature of the texts themselves one step further and maintain that for purposes of ideological analysis, fictional Flory, imbued with the values of the author who created him, is best viewed as a hybridized "Florwell."[51]

Figure 4 - Moulmein jail in January 2016; photo by the author

**B. Orwell: The Unwitting Orientalist?**

[51] It is of interest to note that Rudyard Kipling used the term "hybridism" in 1901 to describe the Babu Hurree Chunder Mookerjee in his novel *Kim:* "He represents *in petto* India in transition – the monstrous hybridism of East and West" (303; See also Srivastava 55).

Just as the storylines, characters, and descriptive details of Orwell's narratives on Burma were based on personal experience, much about his social beliefs and political ideology – some significant points of which may be less obvious than others – can be discerned by a careful reading of the texts. Salman Rushdie posits that ". . . works of art . . . do not come into being in a social and political vacuum; and . . . the way they operate in a society cannot be separated from politics, from history" ("Outside the Whale" 2). Yet as Patai also correctly points out:

> it is not only overtly expressed opinions or political and religious 'beliefs,' as Orwell says, that define a writer's ideology . . . It is the totality of a writer's ideology – which must not be narrowed to his 'politics' in the usual restricted sense of that term – that leaves its mark, and frequently this is even more effectively revealed through the indirections of fiction than in intentionally polemical writing. (1)

Although referring to a slightly earlier period, Edward Said similarly observes that almost all writers of the 19th century, including "liberal cultural heroes like John Stuart Mill, Arnold, Carlyle, Newman, Macaulay, Ruskin, George Eliot, and even Dickens had their definite views on race and imperialism, which are quite easily found at work in their writing" (*Orientalism* 14). The same can surely be said about Orwell in the early to mid 20th century; in fact, his strong views about imperialism likely came to play a far more central role in *Burmese Days* than did the views of any of the aforementioned authors in their own works. Certainly, Orwell uses the novel as a platform from which to denounce imperialism, the first form of power politics that he was to rail against, long before his ideological struggle with fascism and communism began. Still, despite the clear disdain

he felt for the economic exploitation at the heart of imperialism and, to a certain degree, the social oppression of colonized peoples that characterized British colonial rule, not all of Orwell's ideas were politically and/or socially progressive, and both the semi-autobiographical characters and the authorial voice of his writings set in Burma exhibit many inconsistencies in their attitude toward Burma and the Burmese. Some of these, as we have already seen, can easily be explained if the Burmese-British relations of the early 20th century are taken into consideration; others, however, cannot as easily be dismissed.

In particular, the authorial tone of the narrative and both the attitudes and resultant behavior Orwell attributes to some of the characters of the novel, most blatantly, John Flory, but also, paradoxically, Dr. Veraswami, bear the mark of what Edward Said was later to characterize and label "Orientalism." As Said explains, by

> [t]aking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point[,] Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism [can be defined] as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (*Orientalism* 3)

Inherent in Said's concept of Orientalism is the dichotomy between a Western "Self" and an Oriental "Other," which, as he explains,

> when reduced to its simplest form, was clear, it was precise, it was easy to grasp. There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated, which usually means having their land occupied, their

> internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power. (*Orientalism* 36)

The overt form of Orientalism – British political and economic domination over the Burmese – was the catalyst that brought about the change in Orwell's political outlook and is, of course, reflected throughout the narrative. The vitriol that characterizes his anti-imperialist narratives, spurred by a disdain for the blatant exploitation of colonized peoples, stood in stark contrast to most colonial accounts of his predecessors or contemporaries, and even among narratives sympathetic to colonized peoples, *Burmese Days* stands apart. For example, while a comparison is frequently drawn between *Burmese Days* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* as both novels "share the central themes of . . . rape, native uprisings, and interracial friendship"[52] (Seshagiri 106), Orwell's more caustic political agenda distinguishes it from the account of Forster, which, while clearly denouncing the workings of imperialism, employed less acrimony. Indeed, so acerbic were the views expressed in Orwell's novel that he was hailed a hero by some and a traitor by others. In response to the publication of *Burmese Days,* for instance, Bowker says: "Fan letters came from Geoffrey Gorer, the social anthropologist, and two old Burma hands – G. E. Harvey, an ex-Assistant Commissioner in the Indian Civil Service and Burma, and Beaven Rake, who had been one of Orwell's superiors in the Burma Police" (172). Roger Beadon, a former colleague in the Imperial Police, however, claims that the head of the Mandalay Police Training School, Cline Stewart, "had said that if ever he saw Blair again he would horsewhip him" ("With Orwell in Burma"). Indeed, Peter Davison speculates that even Orwell's own parents most likely

[52] For a comparison of the two novels, see, for example, Paxton 258-66.

disapproved of the novel, saying: "It is not difficult to imagine that . . . his father would find *Burmese Days* a prime example of *trahison des clercs.* His mother, whose family had close commercial links with Burma, might also have been less than pleased by the novel's anti-imperialist tone" (Davison *A Literary Life* 3). Despite the strong reactions the novel inspired, however, a close reading of the text reveals numerous contradictions in Orwell's position on the Raj and the people it ruled over. Indeed, while Orwell came to despise – conceptually, at least – the imperial system he served in Burma, it cannot be denied that the novel is marked by Orientalist attitudes and beliefs. While beyond the scope of this study, these inconsistencies are conspicuous in his depiction of both Burmese and Indians. They are also revealed by his cynicism regarding the political self-actualization of the Burmese, which has already been briefly discussed in the previous chapter of this study. Perhaps the most glaring inconsistency between Orwell's seemingly progressive political ideology and the authorial tone of the narrative, however, is the manner in which he illustrates British domination of the Burmese and the narrative attitude toward women.

As Daphne Patai rightly points out, despite much having been made about the great ideological changes Orwell underwent in Burma, he did not seem to realize when writing *Burmese Days* that "man's dominion over man, in general, is also quite specifically the male's dominion over the female" (22). Patai, of course, does not limit this charge to Orwell's treatment of Burmese women, but extends it to include English women as well, and indeed, there appears to be a streak of misogyny running through Orwell's depictions of women in general. Few European females figure into Orwell's tale, although this in itself can be excused, for few European women would have been

stationed at a remote posting such as Kyauktada/Katha. However, almost all of the European females mentioned in the novel – most in a peripheral way – are subject to narrative scorn. Flory's sisters, for example, are described as "disagreeable horse-faced women whom he had never liked" (72), and Elizabeth's aunt, Mrs. Lackersteen, is "Some damned memsahib, yellow and thin, scandalmongering over cocktails, making *kit-kit* with the servants, living twenty years in the country without learning a word of the language" (73), indeed, a character reminiscent of Orwell's own grandmother. Flory's loneliness allows him to lose his heart to Elizabeth, but his infatuation with her blinds him to her true character: in reality, she is small-minded and bitter with a streak of bloodlust running through her, which becomes apparent in the hunting scenes. For Orwell, however, Elizabeth's most unforgivable trait is her parasitism; incapable of truly loving a man, she is merely one of the "fishing fleet," as Ellis points out to Flory, in Burma solely to find a husband from whom she can attain social and financial stability.[53] After rejecting Flory at the end of the novel, she eventually achieves her life's purpose by marrying Mr. Macgregor, therein becoming, as the narrative describes her, a "*burra* memsahib" (300). Orwell saves his most cutting vitriol, however, for Elizabeth's late mother – an example of the dreaded "modern" woman. The narrator describes her as

> an incapable, half-baked, vapouring self-pitying woman who shirked all the normal duties of life on the strength of sensibilities which she did not possess. After messing about for years with such things as Women's Suffrage and Higher

[53] Likewise, Ma Hla may is depicted as greedy and materialistic, and this recurrent characterization of women likely reflects Orwell's own perception of and/or fears about women.

> Thought, and making many abortive attempts at literature, she had finally taken up with painting. Painting is the only art that can be practised without either talent or hard work. Mrs Lackersteen's pose was that of an artist exiled among 'the Philistines' – these, needless to say, included her husband – and it was a pose that gave her almost unlimited scope for making a nuisance of herself. (91)

Orwell's description of Elizabeth's mother is clearly a reaction to the feminist movement that was gaining momentum in Britain in the early twentieth century, which included the granting of women's suffrage in 1918. As Mitzi M. Brunsdale points out, however, "not only in *Burmese Days,* but also in *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*[54], Orwell seems to exhibit a profound ambivalence about the change in attitudes toward gender roles that was taking place in the 1920s and 1930s, a change he, like many men of his generation, did not wholeheartedly welcome" (69).

Without doubt, Orwell's depiction of the English women in *Burmese Days* is far from flattering, and his portrayal of Burmese and Eurasian women is equally if not more caustic. It is of interest to note, however, that the scornful depictions of "natives" are reserved only for those women who interact on a social and sexual level with Europeans. Ellis, for example, accuses Maxwell of running after "Eurasian tart" Molly Pereira, whom he describes as a "smelly little bitch" (22-23), while Ma Hla May is the recipient

---

[54] Consider, for example, this passage from *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*: "A lean, straight-nosed, brisk woman, with sensible clothes and gold-rimmed pince-nez – schoolmarm possibly, feminist certainly – came in and demanded Mrs Wharton-Beverley's history of the suffrage movement. With secret joy Gordon told her that they hadn't got it" (587). For a thorough analysis of Orwell's misogynistic treatment of the female characters in his other novels, see Daphne Patai's *The Orwell Mystique: A Study in Male Ideology.*

not only of Flory's unconscionable treatment, but of profuse narrative scorn as well. Indeed, from the beginning of the novel to its conclusion, the denigration of Ma Hla May, an exploitative combination of misogyny and Orientalism, startles the modern reader with its intensity. In fact, one of the few characters in the entire novel – male or female – to almost totally escape derision is Ma Kin, the nefarious U Po Kyin's wife, and it is apparently Ma Kin's simplicity and unworldliness that spare her. The narrator first introduces her in a scene that draws attention to her subordination to her husband; as U Po Kyin arrives at the breakfast table, "Ma Kin, his wife, stood behind him and served him. She was a thin woman of five and forty, with a kindly, pale brown, simian face. U Po Kyin took no notice of her while he was eating. . . . When he had finished he sat back, belched several times and told Ma Kin to fetch him a green Burmese cigar" (10). The narrative later describes her thus:

> Ma Kin bent her head over her sewing. She was a simple, old-fashioned woman, who had learned even less of European habits than U Po Kyin. She could not sit on a chair without discomfort. Every morning she went to the bazaar with a basket on her head, like a village woman, and in the evenings she could be seen kneeling in the garden, praying to the white spire of the pagoda that crowned the town. (11)

Ma Kin appears to escape narrative contempt because she embodies the virtues that Orwell believes a decent woman should have: she is obedient to her husband, even though she is aware of his villainous ways; she has a maternal air about her, tending to the conventionally female tasks of cooking and sewing; and she is kind, simple, and pious – in short, she is a composite of what Orwell might have labeled "traditional" female

virtues. Ma Kin attempts to dissuade her husband from engaging in wrongdoing but ultimately recognizes and accepts her own powerlessness to control him in any way. Significantly, however, the narrator later reveals that not even Ma Kin is beyond reproach; upon hearing of her husband's scheme to get himself elected to the Club, Ma Kin begins to envision "the European Club and the splendours that it might contain" and has a change of heart. While not directly attributing the sentiment to Ma Kin, the narrator says:

> Ma Kin, the village woman, who had first seen the light through the chinks of a bamboo hut thatched with palm leaves, would sit on a high chair with her feet imprisoned in silk stockings and high-heeled shoes (yes, she would actually wear shoes in that place!)[55] talking to English ladies in Hindustani about baby-linen! It was a prospect that would have dazzled anybody. (148)

Thus, it would appear that from Orwell's perspective, even the best of women can be tempted by a seemingly innate hunger for power and position.[56] It seems clear that Orwell mistrusted the motives of women, and some might conclude that he disliked them entirely; indeed, in a letter to Brenda Salkeld in 1932, Orwell as much as admitted to this: "It was ever so nice seeing you again & finding that you were pleased to see me, in spite of my hideous prejudice against your sex . . . " ("To Brenda Salkeld" 18).[57]

---

[55] See the discussion of the significance of shoes on pages 194-97.

[56] Many have argued that Orwell was attempting to show that imperialism destroyed everyone it touched. I, however, argue that this is an oversimplification, especially when his depiction of Ma Hla May is taken into consideration.

[57] Rape, sexual misconduct, and violence against women also pervade *Burmese Days.* Early in the novel, a village girl accuses U Po Kyin of impregnating her (5), and Dr. Veraswami later says about him:

Without doubt, however, it is Orwell's depiction of Flory's "mistress" Ma Hla May that reveals the most about his position on both women and Britain's imperial subjects. In *Burmese Days*, Orwell paints a picture of protagonist John Flory as a liberal voice of reason whose time in Burma is made unbearable by the loneliness and isolation brought on by the narrow-minded bigotry of his small circle of British compatriots. Despite the writer's obvious attempt to portray Flory as a flawed hero of sorts – the main flaw explicitly alluded to in the narrative being his lack of courage, symbolized by a disfiguring birthmark – it would be difficult to characterize Flory's relationship with his Burmese "mistress" as in any way enlightened or heroic. Dialogue between the couple reveals that for more than two years, Flory's loneliness in Burma has been alleviated by his romantic involvement with "mistress" Ma Hla May, a village woman in her early twenties, although Flory still pines for connection on a deeper level than the uneducated village woman Ma Hla May is able to provide. While Flory is depicted as politically

---

"The girls he has ruined, raping them before the very eyes of their mothers!" (44). When U Po Kyin sets out to ruin Dr. Veraswami, he accuses him of rape, making homosexual advances to an MP drummer-boy (140), and "inciting natives to abduct and rape the European women" (141). Mr. Lackersteen is said to have been caught by his wife "drunk, supported on either side by a naked Burmese girl, while a third up-ended a whisky bottle into his mouth" (19), and he is described as constantly trying to fondle his own niece, Elizabeth (275-76). Flory, too, is said to have come to Burma at 19 and in his early days, "squandered rupees by the hundred on aged Jewish whores with the faces of crocodiles" (65). In his later days, he recalls "an endless procession of Burmese women . . . A thousand – no, but a full hundred at the least" (203). He is further said to have dodged World War I because he was unwilling to relinquish "his whisky, his servants and his Burmese girls" (68) and to have "seduced" and abandoned a Eurasian girl named Rosa McFee (127). It is also of interest to note that Burmese translator Maung Myint Kywe translates "seduced" as "ruined" (192).

liberal and socially open-minded in comparison to his peers, who label him a "Bolshie,"[58] his ambivalence about Ma Hla May and the narrative focus on her "otherness" is immediately apparent. Initially, the text suggests, it is the allure of this indigenous "otherness" that draws Flory to Ma Hla May, and descriptive details about her accentuate her exoticism, a hallmark of Orientalist narratives: She has a "queer, youthful face, with … high cheekbones, stretched eyelids and short, shapely lips" and her teeth, says the narrator, are "rather nice[59] … like the teeth of a kitten"[60] (52). Even her smell evokes the Orient, "a mingled scent of sandalwood, garlic, coco-nut oil and the jasmine in her hair . . . a scent that always made [Flory's] teeth tingle" (52).[61]

Edward W. Said lists "exotic sensuousness" among "the figures of speech associated with the Orient" (*Orientalism* 72), and indeed, consistent with Orientalist

---

[58] In reference to the term 'Bolshie' in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell sheds light on his feelings about some popular movements of the twentieth century: "For several years it was all the fashion to be a 'Bolshie,' as people called it. England was full of half-baked antinomian opinions. Pacifism, internationalism, humanitarianism of all kinds, feminism, free love, divorce-reform, atheism, birth-control – things like these were getting a better hearing than they would get in normal times" (138-39).

[59] It is of interest to note that early Western descriptions of Burmese women also referred to their teeth. An article originally published in the *Chicago Times*, for example, noted that although Burmese women smoke and chew betel, they "have nice, white, even teeth" ("Habits of the Burmese Women").

[60] Orwell repeats the kitten analogy in describing three Burmese girls attending the *pwe*: " . . . three Burmese girls lay fast asleep with their heads on the same pillow, their small oval faces side by side like the faces of kittens" (107).

[61] Orwell can again be seen to infuse the narrative with his own ideas when in *The Road to Wigan Pier* he says, "the Burmese have a distinctive smell – I cannot describe it: it is a smell that makes one's teeth tingle – but this smell never disgusted me" (142).

descriptions of young Burmese women found in travelogues and ethnography of the colonial era, Ma Hla May's exoticism ever lurks beneath the narrative surface. This can clearly be seen by comparing the description of Ma Hla May provided in the first passage in which she appears in the novel to a passage from a *New York Times* article of 1886. The narrator describes Ma Hla May thus:

> She was dressed in a *longyi*[62] of pale blue embroidered Chinese satin, and a starched white muslin *ingyi*[63] on which several gold lockets hung. Her hair was coiled in a tight black cylinder like ebony, and decorated with jasmine flowers. Her tiny, straight, slender body was as contourless as a bas-relief carved upon a tree. She was like a doll, with her oval, still face the colour of new copper, and her narrow eyes . . . (51)

The article "The Pretty Burmese Women." [sic] describes the typical Burmese woman in a strikingly similar manner:

> A round face, with olive skin and dark bright eyes, is surmounted by coils of smooth black hair, in which is jauntily stuck a flower or two. The upper part of the body is modestly covered with a white cotton jacket. Bound closely round her slender hips, and falling to the ground, is worn the tamein, or skirt, which is generally of silk, woven into a brilliant and harmonious combination of colors.

The following table provides a side-by-side comparison of similar details from the two passages:

---

[62] *Longyi* and *tamein* are essentially the same thing, a sarong. The term *longyi* is a generic word that can refer to the garment when worn by either a man or a woman. *Tamein*, in contrast, is used to refer to the garment when worn by a woman, with *paso* being the word for a man's sarong.

[63] An *ingyi* is a type of shirt or jacket.

| **Description of Ma Hla May** | **Description of "The Pretty Burmese Women."[64]** |
|---|---|
| "She was dressed in a *longyi* of pale blue embroidered Chinese satin . . . " | " . . . the tamein, or skirt, which is generally of silk, woven into a brilliant and harmonious combination of colors." |
| " . . . and a starched white muslin *ingyi.*" | "The upper part of the body is modestly covered with a white cotton jacket." |
| "Her hair was coiled in a tight black cylinder like ebony, . . . | " . . . by coils of smooth black hair" |
| " . . . in which is jauntily stuck a flower or two." | " . . . and decorated with jasmine flowers." |
| "Her tiny, straight, slender body . . . " | " . . . her slender hips . . ." |
| ". . . her oval, still face . . . " | " . . . a round face . . . " |
| " . . . the colour of new copper, . . . " | " . . . with olive skin . . . " |
| " . . . and her narrow eyes . . . " | " . . . and dark bright eyes . . . " |

Figure 5: Comparison of Ma Hla May and "The Pretty Burmese Women"

While the phrasing differs, the descriptive details in the two passages, which highlight the unfamiliar appearance of the Burmese woman, are virtually identical: both describe the colorful Burmese *longyi* or *tamein* and the white *ingyi* or jacket worn by the woman, both comment on the Burmese woman's coiled black hair adorned with flowers, both make reference to the slenderness of her body, and both describe her exotic features, including the shape of her face, her skin color, and the particularities of her eyes. Likewise, in typical Orientalist fashion, both accounts go on to make a point of qualifying the loveliness of the Burmese woman; the *New York Times* article, for example, says: "No Mongolian can be beautiful, according to the European standard," adding, conciliatorily, "but apart from this standard there is much to admire in the Burmese girl" ("The Pretty Burmese Women."). In a similar manner, the totality of Ma Hla May's beauty is

[64] Please note that a period follows the title in the original article.

ultimately diminished by contradictory terms which shift the focus from her charm and appeal to her "otherness," and she is almost freakishly described as "an outlandish doll and yet a grotesquely beautiful one" (51).

Such contradictory descriptions of the "exotic" Burmese women were not uncommon in colonial Burma. In 1878, for example, Albert Fytche, who had served as Chief Commissioner of British Burma from 1867 until 1871, said of Burmese women: "They are not handsome, perhaps, according to European ideas of beauty; but they are, nevertheless, often very comely, as much from expression, as feature, or more so" (63). Similarly, Burmese administrator J. George Scott, whose well-known book *The Burman: His Life and Notions* was written under the pseudonym Shway Yoe and whom Andrew Marshall says "was an unrivalled authority on everything Burmese" (7), described Burmese women as "very charming at a distance" while adding that "[t]hey do not bear close inspection" (458). Writer Geraldine Mitton, who later married Scott, made a similar point in 1907; apparently not one to mince words, Mitton said:

> My visit to Burma dissipated finally the idea of the Burman girls being 'pretty' according to our ideas. They are sometimes dear coquettish little things, with a great deal of charm and some personality, but to apply the word 'pretty' to their broad noses, flat little faces, thanaka-stained,[65] and to the straight, strained, greased hair, is a misuse of adjectives. (52)

[65] *Thanaka* is a traditional Burmese cosmetic made from the bark of the tropical tree commonly known as the *thanaka* tree. It has a fragrance similar to sandalwood and is ground and mixed with water to form a yellow paste.

Perhaps the essence of "othering" is best encapsulated by an 1886 newspaper article reporting on a Baptist missionary event that describes a 14-year-old female Burmese attendee as simply "a dusky barbarian" ("Welcome to New Haven"). The sense of superiority that these writers clearly felt in relation to Burmese women was yet another hallmark of the Orientalist mindset.

Complicating matters, however, was the fact that Victorian commentators were also quick to point out the relatively high status that women enjoyed in Burmese society, being free not only to enter into and terminate marriages at will, but also to own and inherit property. Scott, for example, "asserted categorically that 'a married Burmese woman is much more independent than any European even in the most advanced states'" (qtd. in Delap 391). However, the perceived freedom of Burmese women may ironically have fed into popular Orientalist sentiment, for as Lucy Delap explains: "The challenge posed by the 'anomalous' position of Burmese women was contained by emotional strategies of humour and disgust." By way of explanation she notes Sara Ahmed's argument that "disgust is an emotion which stabilizes hierarchies and power relations, through its invocation of 'aboveness' and 'belowness'" (395). Thus, the sense of outrage caused by the knowledge that Burmese women held more power in Burmese society than British women held in their own was mitigated by Western condescension toward Burmese women, an attitude that is also apparent in Orwell's depiction of Ma Hla May.

While an emphasis on exoticism is a common mark of Orientalist narratives as described by Said, Orwell displays a far more egregious characteristic of Orientalism in that the narrative minimizes the true nature of Flory's relationship with Ma Hla May, which would be difficult to characterize as anything but exploitative and abusive. As Ann

L. Stoler points out, "In colonial scholarship . . . sexual domination has figured as a social metaphor of European supremacy" ("Making Empire Respectable" 635), and Flory's dominance of Ma Hla May certainly exemplifies this. Even more alarming than Flory's racial and sexual dominance in their relationship, however, is Orwell's tacit approval of the manner in which Ma Hla May is treated. Indeed, from the first scene in which she appears, Ma Hla May is at once rendered an unsympathetic character, both by the omniscient narrator and by Flory. As Daphne Patai points out, the reader is given an extremely biased impression of Ma Hla May since her character and their relationship are depicted only from Flory's perspective (40). In the scene in which Ma Hla May is introduced, the narrator informs the reader that Flory "bought her from her parents two years ago, for three hundred rupees"[66] (*BD* 52), which Nancy L. Paxton says renders her "literally a slave" (261).[67] Similarly, Daphne Patai says that Ma Hla May "is in fact a sexual servant" (38), and indeed, from a Western perspective, she was. In Chapter IV of this study, however, I argue that Ma Hla May most likely viewed herself otherwise. Early

---

[66] This seems to have been a "reasonable" sum as in the 1856 book *The Golden Dagon; or, Up and Down the Irrawaddi*, John Williamson Palmer describes paying 150 rupees to "buy" a Burmese woman (234).

[67] John Williamson Palmer recounts reading in "the laws of Meenyoo, which are the Law of Burmah," that "the good wives are of three sorts – the wife that is like unto a sister, the wife that is like unto a friend, and the wife that is like unto a slave; but the best of these is the wife that is like unto a slave" (231). He says that he then:

> yielding to the flattering temptation of these women-laws, became possessed of a devil of longing to know how it would seem to own a woman – some fair and tender slave who should fan me when I slept, knuckle and knead me in the diurnal shampoo, lull me into high-noon naps with the tinkling of her patola and the comfort of household songs, and sew on my moral buttons. (232)

in the novel, Ma Hla May, perceiving a change in Flory's attitude toward her, seduces him; he rather unwillingly obliges, yet immediately afterwards "turn[s] away, jaded and ashamed" (*BD* 53). His shame, however, is displaced and projected back at Ma Hla May, becoming a trigger for his cruelty. When she then strokes his shoulder, it becomes too much for him to bear, "for at these times she was nauseating and dreadful to him" and "[h]is sole wish was to get her out of his sight" (53). When he tells her to take some money and leave, she objects to his brusqueness, saying: "That is a nice way to speak to me! You treat me as though I were a prostitute." Nonetheless, as not only a male but a *white* male, Flory, of course, has the last word, pushing her out the door and saying, "So you are. Out you go" (54). Underscoring her abjection, the narrator adds that "[t]heir encounters often ended in this way" (54), yet the tone of the narrative reveals no judgment of Flory over his brutish behavior; instead, only his weakness – a far more forgivable offence – is brought to the narrative forefront. Judgment, instead, is directed only toward Ma Hla May, who, from the outset, is depicted as a manipulative, lying seductress who attempts to use her womanly wiles to control Flory[68] when in reality she is interested in him solely for economic gain while all the while secretly involved with a Burmese man (52-53). Indeed, as Patai points out, "Since Flory's viewpoint predominates, the reader is invited to consider Ma Hla May as, in fact, a money-grubbing

[68] The narrator says that Ma Hla May "believed that lechery was a form of witchcraft, giving a woman magical powers over a man, until in the end she could weaken him to a half-idiotic slave. Each successive embrace sapped Flory's will and made the spell stronger – this was her belief" (*BD* 54). She is also said to have put "love philtres" into Flory's food (53).

prostitute from beginning to end"[69] (40). She further notes that even after Flory's death at the end of the novel, Orwell "redeems Flory" by condemning Ma Hla May to a life of degradation:

> 'Ma Hla May is in a brothel in Mandalay. Her good looks are all but gone, and her clients pay her only four annas and sometimes kick her and beat her. Perhaps more bitterly than any of the others, she regrets the good time when Flory was alive, and when she had not the wisdom to put aside any of the money she extracted from him.' (40)

The implication of the one-sided depiction, it follows, is that when Flory abuses her, Ma Hla May is simply reaping her just deserts. No empathy is shown for Ma Hla May; even Ko S'la, Flory's loyal Burmese servant, disapproves of her, refusing to say her name and referring to her simply as "*the woman*" (50).

[69] Likewise, Praseeda Gopinath rightly points out that "the narrative, along with Flory, despises the apparently manipulative Ma Hla May, whom (we are casually informed) Flory bought from her parents for his sexual pleasure. The narrative does not dwell on this pertinent fact when it describes her desperate attempts to establish economic and social stability as scheming and pathetic" (218).

## Chapter IV

## An Attempt to Listen to the Subaltern: Constructing a Framework in Support of Ma Hla May's Perspective

> "It was the idle concubine's life that she loved, and the visits to her village dressed in all her finery, when she could boast of her position as a *bo-kadaw* – a white man's wife; for she had persuaded everyone, herself included, that she was Flory's legal wife" (*BD* 53).

### Introduction

Most modern readers would find it difficult to view Flory's treatment of Ma Hla May as anything short of deplorable, irrespective of any character flaws or mercenary motives on Ma Hla May's part. Nevertheless, so successful has Orwell been in maligning this character that critics and scholars have overwhelmingly bought into the notion of Ma Hla May as villain. I assert, however, that not only did Orwell knowingly and willfully depict Ma Hla May in a grossly unfair and patriarchal manner, but that the depths of the narrative disparagement of Ma Hla May reach far beyond that of which most readers are aware. This chapter begins with a brief survey of the surprising manner in which Ma Hla May has been, and continues to be, viewed by scholars and critics. I then suggest an alternative, and, I contend, more plausible framework with which to consider Ma Hla May, one that takes into account both legal and cultural factors that would have informed Ma Hla May's perception of her relationship with John Flory. In building this framework, I draw on a variety of legal, cultural, historical, and linguistic sources and evidence with an aim to establishing that Ma Hla May would likely have considered herself Flory's legal wife.

### A. The Misconstrued Woman: The Received View of Ma Hla May

The omniscient narrator depicts Ma Hla May as a thoroughly unsympathetic character, and numerous scholars, critics, and acquaintances of Orwell's have accepted

this portrayal at face value. Indeed, so convincing has Orwell been in vilifying Ma Hla May that few scholars have considered her perspective or pondered, instead, what the narrative portrayal of Ma Hla May might reveal about Flory or Orwell. Richard J. Voorhees, for example, refers to her simply as "the Burmese girl who was formerly Flory's mistress" (76), Ana Moya calls her "Flory's native lover," (101) Emma Larkin describes her as "sluttish and desperate" (20), Christopher Hollis describes her as a mistress "who has no affection at all for Flory nor had ever been faithful to him" (31), Mitzi M. Brunsdale describes her as Flory's "mercenary native mistress" (55), pointing out that Orwell "reserved biting satire for the *grasping* [italics added] Ma Hla May" (57), and Urmila Seshagiri simply labels her a "prostitute" (112). In a similar manner, David L. Kubal says, "Childlike, she is greedy and self-seeking but also nearly diabolical in her ability to manipulate her lover," adding that "Orwell does not offer the saccharine image of the prostitute debased by the capitalists . . . but a woman who knows her power and enjoys it" (74), while Richard Rees, commenting on the female characters in Orwell's novels, fails to mention her at all (99-100). It is interesting to note, however, that Ma Hla May's critics do not hail from the Western world alone; in fact, some of her harshest denigrators have come from those with firsthand experience of British imperialism. Labeling her Flory's "servant-mistress" ("George Orwell and Burma" 22), for example, Burmese Maung Htin Aung describes her as "villainous" ("Orwell of the Burma Police" 184), while Sri Lankan D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke lauds Orwell for his "perceptions into the complex being of the woman from a race and culture alien to him, into her aesthetic sense, her divided allegiances, her dissimulation and primitive thinking," criticizing him only for attributing "her degeneracy wholly to the imperial system," saying that

"prostitution is proverbially the oldest profession and was practiced by Easterners before Westerners had anything to do with them; it is a human failing" (*Images of the Raj* 122-23). Indeed, so consistently has Ma Hla May been depicted in this manner that the 1952 Popular Library paperback edition of the novel goes so far as to include a highly sexualized artist's rendering of Ma Hla May in the cover illustration. The image shows an olive-skinned Ma Hla May, arms bare and breasts covered only by what appears to be a length of cloth draped over them, glaring at Flory from around a corner while he kisses the bare shoulders of a white woman. Above the title is emblazoned the provocative caption: "A Saga of Jungle Hate and Lust." The back cover blurb, ridden with inaccuracies, further adds to the graphic misrepresentation of Ma Hla May, leaving one to question whether the publicist responsible for the teaser had read the book at all. Under the bold heading "She knew all about love!" the blurb reads:

> She was seventeen, she was beautiful and she was for sale to the highest bidder. *Ma Hla May* was her Burmese name. But in any language she was perfect, and well worth the 200 rupees Flory paid for her. All the way back to his jungle camp the Englishman felt the hot desire mount in him. But there was also a shyness in him, an apprehension about the girl's tender age and knowledge of men. Then they were in his room. The girl made herself ready. Flory stared at her in surprise. Moments later he got an even greater surprise from innocent-eyed *Ma Hla May*. Flory had bought himself a wildcat!

Depictions such as these and the common assumptions of scholars and critics, however, are troubling not only for their single-sidedness, but also because Ma Hla May, silenced by the combination of patriarchal and colonial forces acting upon her, is given little

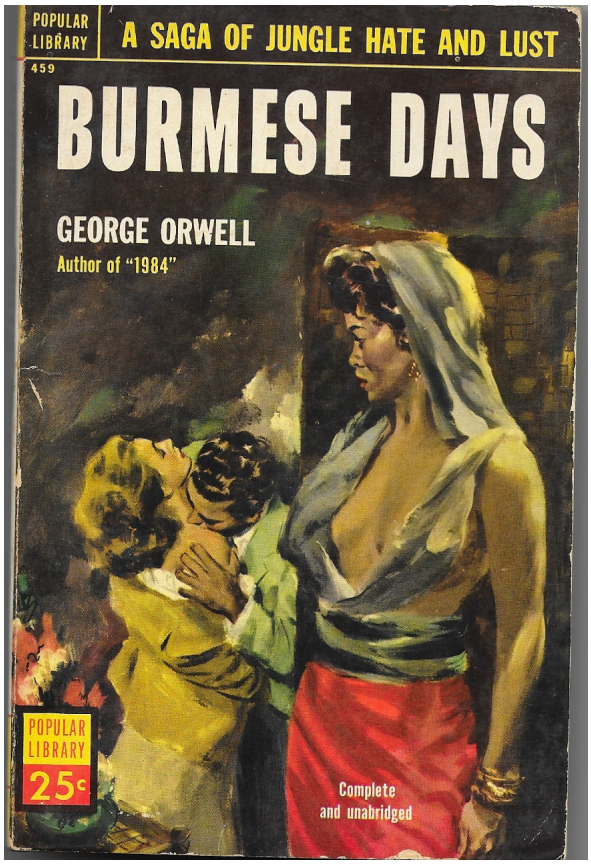



Figure 6: Cover of the 1952 Popular Library paperback edition of *Burmese Days*

or no agency. In this sense, the example of Ma Hla May seems to support Gayatri Spivak's claim that "the subaltern cannot speak," and Spivak's observations about colonized women seem especially relevant to her: "[b]etween patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 102). Furthermore, unquestioning acceptance of the narrative depiction of Ma Hla May is problematic in that it precludes further examination of what such representation reveals about Flory or, more importantly, the author himself. Thus, I hold that a reassessment of Ma Hla May is clearly warranted, for in order to understand

Orwell's inconsistent position on Burma and the Burmese, one must first attempt to better understand Ma Hla May.

**B. An Alternative View of Ma Hla May**

Key to an understanding of Ma Hla May and indicative of the true depths of both Flory's depravity in his relationship with Ma Hla May and Orwell's apparent approbation of Flory's behavior is the enigmatic passage in which the reader is told that Ma Hla May views herself as Flory's legal wife. The narrator, though, rejects the validity of her claim and sardonically dismisses her sincerity, asserting instead – with obvious judgment of Ma Hla May – that it was simply "the idle concubine's life that she loved, and the visits to her village dressed in all her finery, when she could boast of her position as a *bo-kadaw* – a white man's wife; for she had persuaded everyone, herself included, that she was Flory's legal wife" (53). A reader unfamiliar with Burmese custom may well miss the significance of this passage, for as Daphne Patai rightly points out, "[w]hat the narrative does not tell us . . . is that open cohabitation counted as de facto marriage in Burmese customary law." Problems sometimes arose, Patai notes, in cases of a union between a Burmese woman and a foreign man since "the foreign man's law considered these women as mistresses and their offspring as bastards" (39).[70] Indeed, as explained in the 2013 report "Myanmar Laws and CEDAW," "Since colonial times, Christians [in Burma] have been governed primarily by British common law, along with the *Christian Marriage Act*, 1872, requiring registration of marriages, and the *Burma Divorce Act,* 1869, which

[70] Nancy L. Paxton correctly observes that when Flory eventually decides to dispose of Ma Hla May in order to pursue a new relationship with Elizabeth Lackersteen, "what facilitates the break is that [Ma Hla May] has not given birth to any children" (261).

authorizes the court to pronounce on divorce, nullification of marriage, and judicial separation" (Gender Equality Network 16), and as a British subject, such laws would have applied to Flory. Taking into account their different perspectives, Patai then logically concludes: "Orwell's novel may inadvertently represent a case of cross-cultural misunderstanding, with Flory and Ma Hla May operating from different paradigms" (39). While Patai's theory of an "inadvertent cross-cultural misunderstanding" at first appears to be valid, closer scrutiny suggests that her conclusion is exceedingly charitable in its assessment of Orwell, for upon examination of the facts, there can be little doubt that Orwell (and if one accepts the premise that Flory's attitudes and values are imbued with those of Orwell, then Flory, too, by extension) was well aware of the Burmese laws and customs regarding cohabitation and marriage and therefore would also have been cognizant of Ma Hla May's perception of her relationship with Flory. Notwithstanding this knowledge, Orwell consciously chose to adopt the presumably more convenient Western male perspective in his portrayal of the relationship, in a sense feigning ignorance of matters about which he was almost certainly aware and exhibiting Orientalist arrogance through both his utter disregard for Ma Hla May and his condescension toward local custom, especially as it pertained to women.

While the narrative largely obscures Ma Hla May's perspective, a plausible framework for determining her viewpoint can be constructed deductively by parsing details provided by the narrative with information gleaned from legal, cultural, and historical sources. Such analysis makes it possible to establish with reasonable certainty that her claim to be Flory's legal spouse was, in her estimation, legitimate. The implications of this proposition are of grave significance, for taking Ma Hla May's

viewpoint into account completely upends the role in which she has heretofore been cast, effectively transforming her from villain to victim. This paradigm shift then prompts a re-evaluation of the underlying factors that drove Orwell to depict her in such a contemptible manner and shows that Orwell's renowned identification with and sympathy for the colonized and the subjugated apparently did not extend to women.

**C. An Overview of Burmese Buddhist Law**

To ascertain how Ma Hla May would have viewed her relationship with Flory, the basic tenets of Burmese Buddhist Law as it relates to marriage must first be considered. At the outset, it should be stated that as Mi Mi Khaing explains, Burmese Buddhist Law "is not in any sense a system of law laid down in Buddhism, but is the law which Buddhist Burmese have developed through the centuries, and have applied to themselves[,] interpreting it in the light of changing social conditions, as customary law" (*The World of Burmese Women* 26). As Aye Kyaw explains, the term "Buddhist Law" was in fact a misnomer, for there is no intrinsically "Buddhist" law that applies to all Buddhists. He explains:

> That body of Buddhist law known as the Vinaya Pitaka mainly deals with rules and regulations which the Buddha promulgated, as occasion arose, for the future discipline of the Order of monks (Bhikkhus) and nuns (Bhikkhunis). Even though it also reveals indirectly some interesting information about ancient Indian history, customs, arts and sciences, it is not concerned with matrimonial law. (60)

For this reason, May Oung contends that labeling Burmese customary law "Buddhist" and using it "in connection with matrimonial law is not only misleading, but even incongruous" (qtd. in Aye Kyaw 60), and indeed, as Aye Kyaw points out, Buddhist

monks are far removed from worldly matters such as marriage (60). Starting with the descriptors used to label it then, Burmese Buddhist Law was fraught with ambiguity, which became only more pronounced when it was later interpreted and applied by British administrators. Following a long tradition of noninterference with the religion and customs of colonial subjects,[71] the centuries-old customary laws by which Burmese Buddhists had theretofore abided were left largely in tact under British colonial rule. Originally known simply as "Buddhist Law," the law first appeared in the British-enacted Burma Courts Act of 1872 and again in the Burma Courts Act of 1875. According to Aye Kyaw, section 4 of the latter "made Buddhist Law the *lex fori* of the British courts regarding succession, inheritance, marriage or caste or any religious usage or institution in cases where the parties were Buddhists" (60).[72] Still, as S. J. Tambiah rightly notes, "The customary law . . . does not necessarily apply to the Shan provinces, though the Shans[73] may come within the Buddhist label" (148). The imprecision of the term, thus, confounded British magistrates, who found it difficult to determine exactly to whom the law should apply, and in 1927, a year after *Burmese Days* takes place, "a Full Bench of

[71] For a detailed discussion of Britain's non-interference policy regarding indigenous customs and law, see Aye Kyaw, 59-60.

[72] Aye Kyaw notes that "no provisions were made with respect to other religions . . . presumably because . . . the Christian Marriage Act and the Miscellaneous Marriage Act, also Known [sic] as the Special Marriage Act, had already been brought into operation in 1872" (60).

[73] The Shans are one of the many ethnic groups residing in Burma.

the High Court at Rangoon ruled that the term 'Buddhist Law' was to be interpreted as 'Burmese Buddhist Law'"[74] (Aye Kyaw 60).

Like the nomenclature itself, the British administrators of Burma also found the disquisitions on which Burmese Buddhist Law was based to be bewildering and difficult to interpret. Myint Zan, an expert in Burmese law, explains that "[a] major source of Burmese customary law is the *Dhammathats,*[75] which can be very roughly described as 'legal treatises' that were written by various persons or groups of persons from about nine hundred to about two hundred years ago" (157). As Maung Maung explains, the *Dhammathats* "are not codes of law in the strict sense, and there is a wide variance among them in content and quality. They reflect the social customs of the day, and expound rules of wisdom as guides for kings, ministers, and judges to rule by and for the people to live by" (7). Not surprisingly, relying on documents of such antiquity and variability to administer the law created a number of problems. In compiling *A Manual of Buddhist Law* in 1887*,* for example, advocate Henry M. Lütter noted the great difficulties judges encountered in judiciously interpreting and applying the law, saying:

> [t]he only Burmese Code of Law which the courts have had for their guidance is the Damathat or Burmese version of the Laws of Menoo.[76] This book is in a

---

[74] In this study, "Buddhist Law," "Burmese Common Law," and "Burmese Buddhist Law" will be used interchangeably.

[75] Maung Htin Aung explains that "the term *Dhammathat* was derived from the Hindu *Dharmashastra*" (*Burmese Law Tales* 8).

[76] *Dhammasat*, *Damathat, and Dhammathat* are all variant spellings of the same word. Likewise, the *Menu Kye Dhammathat* is rendered in various sources as *Menugyi, Manu Kyay,* "Laws of Manu," and "Laws of Menoo." Maung Maung explains that because in the estimation of John Jardine, Judicial

> great measure obsolete, and is no more applicable to the decisions of suits of the present day in the Courts of Pegu than are the laws of Alfred in the modern courts of England. It contains moreover a vast number of contradictory enactments on matters of grave importance, mingled in almost inextricable confusion with the most puerile absurdities. [Furthermore,] the utter want of sequence in its component parts will be seen by the references made in the body of the Code . . . (1)

Still, because Burmese Common Law was rooted in the *Dhammathats* and because, as Lütter recognized, "some points of [the] Code [had] retained their vitality, and [were] as familiar in the mouths of the people as household words" (2), there was a necessity to make them more accessible, and a concerted effort appears to have been made by the British to compile and edit the *Dhammathats* so that they might more effectively and consistently be applied in rulings of cases involving Burmese Buddhists. S. J. Tambiah, for example, states that "[i]n the nineteenth century the British rulers tried to establish what the Burmese customary laws were," noting that the well-known "works of Richardson,[77] Jardine,[78] Sparks,[79] Forchhammer,[80] [and] Sanford[81] attest to this effort" (148).[82] Furthermore, as Myint Zan explains,

---

Commissioner of British Burma, "[the] Manugye was 'fuller than most' . . . [and] enjoyed the advantage of being written in Burmese prose, . . . the Privy Council decided to give Manugye . . . pre-eminence among all Dhammathats. . . . " It was thus decided that "in disputed questions where Manugye provided clear answers[,] other Dhammathats did not need to be consulted" (9). The superiority of this particular *Dhammathat*, however, was questioned by some at the time and has remained an issue subject to debate.

[77] Maung Maung notes that the first translation of the *Manugye Dhammathat* in English was Richardson's 1847 *The Damathat, or The Laws of Menoo* (9).

[78] John Jardine served as Judicial Commissioner of British Burma. Collaborating with Forchhammer "on a research project into the pre-colonial legal literature of Burma[, the pair] wrote four books and pamphlets, reprinted two more and had a third translated from the Burmese" (Huxley "Is Burmese Law Burmese?" 184-5).

[79] Maung Maung credits Major Sparks with collecting "extracts from the Dhammathats and existing customs" and publishing them in 1860 (27).

[80] Maung Maung calls Pali professor Em Forchhammer "a great oriental scholar . . . [who] marked three periods in the development of Dhammathat literature: the first ending with the break-up of Bayinnaung's empire in 1600 A.D., the second ending with the Talaing invasion of Ava in 1750 A.D., and the third covering the Alaungpaya dynasty, the last before Burma came under British rule" (8). He served as Government Archaeologist of British Burma and collaborated with John Jardine in researching "the pre-colonial legal literature of Burma" (Huxley 184).

[81] Douglas Sandford assumed the post of Burma's first Judicial Commissioner in 1872 (Huxley 188). According to Maung Maung, "important Dhammathats in their Burmese and Pali texts were published under the auspices of Mr. Justice Sandford in 1877" (27).

[82] While beyond the scope of this study, it is of interest to note that Andrew Huxley, moving forward on the notion originally set forth by Hilary McGeachey that Jardine and Forchhammer may have been "legal Orientalists" ("Is Burmese Law Burmese?" 198), concludes that Jardine and Forchhammer were instrumental in disenfranchising the traditional practitioners of Burmese law by implementing requirements that "aspirant Burmese lawyers of all grades . . . take their [law] exam in English" (190). This, he concludes, was done for political reasons between February 1883 and December 1885, just prior to the fall of upper Burma to the British. He thus questions the accuracy of "scholarship written in furtherance of imperial ends" (186).

> After the whole of Burma was annexed into the British Empire on January 1, 1886,[83] a compilation of thirty-six *Dhammathats* was made under the auspices of a Chief Minister who served at the court of King Thibaw. *A Digest of Burmese Law,* better known as *Thirty-six Dhammathats,* was compiled by Kinwun Mingyi[84] U Gaung from June 1893 to February 1897, and was published soon thereafter. (157)

These volumes were then translated into two English volumes (Maung Maung 9), and as Myint Zan notes, "During the colonial era, judges referred to these *Dhammathats* – mainly the translated versions – when deciding cases dealing with family law issues among Burmese Buddhists" (157-58). Intended to serve simply as what Maung Maung calls "Mirrors of Society" (9), however, making rulings based on the values of the *Dhammathats* necessitated that judges make judgments in more than one sense of the word: As stated in the ruling of *Ma Hnin Zan vs. Ma Myaing,* "'The Court is not only at liberty but is bound to decide the case in accordance with Burmese customary law as it obtains today, rather than to perpetuate the outworn shiboleths of bygone ages . . . '" (qtd. in Maung Maung 10). Naturally, this became a matter of some complication when

---

[83] Britain took possession of Burma in piecemeal fashion through a series of three wars, commonly referred to as the "Anglo-Burmese Wars," the first of which took place from 1824 – 1825, the second from 1852 – 1853, and the third in 1885.

[84] According to John Cady, the Kinwun Mingyi was "an ex-monk friend of [King] Mindon," the father of King Thibaw (105).

ancient and already ill-defined laws were translated into an alien language to be administered by alien overlords.[85]

Among other things, the *Dhammathats* on which Burmese Buddhist Law is based set down a series of guidelines for marriage of Burmese Buddhists, and it is of interest to note, as Chie Ikeya points out, that "[t]he various *dhammasat* evince preference for class endogamy, but nowhere in them is found a proscription against interethnic, interracial, or interfaith marriage" (*Refiguring Women* 25). Indeed, as Ikeya notes, "Burma scholars . . . attribute the existence and acceptance of intermarriage to local Buddhist ideas and customs of marriage that present no barriers to unions across caste, racial, ethnic, or religious lines." She further notes that the *Dhammathats* even make explicit provisions for marriage between a local woman and a nonlocal man:

> 'A man coming from a distant place gives bridal presents to the parents of the girl and lives with her; if he wishes to return to his place of residence, he shall intimate the date of his return to her and also provide means for her maintenance; if otherwise, her mother is entitled to take her back.' (qtd. in Ikeya 128)

---

[85] The problem of British judges interpreting Burmese Customary Law was addressed by U Ba U in 1959: " . . . where customary law has to be interpreted by non-Burmese judges, the help of the Burmese members of the bar is absolutely essential; otherwise the exposition can never be satisfactory, as it will not be in accord with the ideas and traditions of the Burmese people" (112; also qtd. in Maung Maung 10). Furthermore, as Andrew Huxley points out, "In order to facilitate their colonial enterprise, [the British] played down the legalistic aspects of Burmese culture: since the British colonists saw themselves as bringing the rule of law to Burma, evidence that Burma had it already was a potential embarrassment to their project" ("The Importance of the Dhammathats in Burmese Law and Culture" 2).

This flexibility regarding intermarriage was later to prove a mixed blessing for Burmese women when along with the British conquest of Burma came a huge influx of immigrants, most of them from India and China. So large was the number of immigrants flooding into the country, Ikeya points out, that by 1918, the only port of immigration in the entire world that was busier than Rangoon was New York, and "[f]or a period in the 1920s, Rangoon was the busiest port in the world, with as many as 360,000 immigrants and 280,000 emigrants in one year to and from Indian ports alone." The vast majority of newcomers were men; in 1931, for example, 72 percent of all Indian immigrants were male, most of them settling permanently in Burma. However, as Ikeya notes, "Far from being a homogeneous community, the group of [Indian] immigrants included a diverse array of people from Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Muslim, Sikh, and other religious backgrounds" (21), and as Aye Kyaw notes, "The resulting plurality of diverse creeds and beliefs necessitated accommodation in laws . . ." An attempt to accommodate the needs of the many immigrants was made in 1898 with promulgation of the Burma Laws Act, Section 13 of which held that:

> Where in any suit or proceeding, it is necessary for any Court to decide any question regarding succession, inheritance, marriage or caste or any religious usage or institution, (a) The Buddhist Law in cases where the parties are Buddhists; (b) the Mohammedan Law in cases where the parties are Mohammedans; (c) the Hindu Law in cases where the parties are Hindus, shall form the rule of decision, except in so far as such law has by enactment been altered or abolished or is opposed to any custom having the force of law. (qtd. in Aye Kyaw 60)

In addition to the wave of immigrants from Asia, British civil servants and company men, subject to the Christian Marriages Act, added to the number of foreign men entering the country during the colonial period, and many of these men – both Asian and Western – eventually took Burmese wives.[86] Indeed, so common were intermarriages that in 1901, J. Nisbet predicted that the "fusion of races [would] be rendered all the more rapid and complete by the comparative ease and alacrity with which the Burmese woman mates with men of other than her own nationality" (249).

Despite the multiplicity of laws applying to different ethnic and religious groups, tradition appears to have reigned supreme in the minds of the average Burmese people. In describing the marital customs based on Burmese Buddhist Law as they were viewed in early 20th century Burma, for example, Charles Haswell Campagnac, an Anglo-Burmese[87] who served as both a barrister and former Mayor of Rangoon in the early 1900s – the period during which Orwell served in the Imperial Police – omits mention of special laws pertaining to foreigners:

> There is no caste system in Burma and a Burmese woman is free to marry whom she chooses and when she does marry a European, she does not become cut off

---

[86] While Burmese law did not forbid unions between Burmese and non-Burmese, Mi Mi Khaing points out that they were eventually amended with the "Burmese Women's Special Marriage Acts of 1939, 1940, and [19]54," in order to "safeguard the position of Burmese women who marry foreigners" (*The World of Burmese Women* 26).

[87] The terms "Anglo-Burmese" and "Anglo-Burmans" were used during the colonial administration to refer to both British nationals residing in Burma and those of mixed lineage. Charles Haswell Campagnac uses the term "Anglo-Burman" in the latter sense: "Most of the Anglo-Burmans in Burma were of the first generation, that is, by English fathers and Burmese mothers" (170).

> from her own people . . . A Burmese woman who lives with a man regards herself as being his wife, as she undoubtedly is under Buddhist Law. For a woman to be validly married in Burma, it is not necessary that there should be a wedding ceremony. According to Buddhist Law, if a man and woman live together, as man and wife and 'eat out of the same pot'[88] and are regarded by their neighbours as man and wife, they are lawfully married. (170)

Even under the British administration of Burma, then, the role tradition played in Burmese marriages often overrode any formalized laws, for as Mi Mi Khaing says, "In family law, perhaps more than in any other aspect of life, tradition is of more importance than actual legislation" (*The World of Burmese Women* 25). Throughout the years there have, of course, been numerous court rulings requiring interpretation of the *Dhammathats* and the criteria that constitute a legal marriage, especially in cases involving a demand for spousal or child support.[89] Still, the Burmese Buddhist concept of marriage had not changed significantly even decades after *Burmese Days* was written, as can be seen in anthropologist Melford E. Spiro's 1967 explanation of Burmese Buddhist wedding customs. Says Spiro: "if a couple, with or without the approval of their parents, openly live and eat together under the same roof, jointly participate in Sabbath observance,

---

[88] The significance of commensality in determining the validity of a Burmese marriage will be discussed in greater detail on pages 191-93. It is important to note, however, that years before Orwell had arrived in Burma, Scott had already stated that "[t]he old custom that the bride and bridegroom should join their right hands together, palm to palm, in the presence of all the assembled guests, and then should eat rice out of the same dish and feed each other with one or two morsels in turtle-dove fashion, has in many cases died out . . ." (*The Burman* 57).

[89] See, for example, *Burmese Buddhist Law* by Dr. E. Maung.

pagoda worship, and so on, their status as husband and wife is legally valid and publicly assured" (186). In fact, as pointed out in "Myanmar Laws and CEDAW," a ruling in the 1972 *Daw Khin Mya Mar* (a) *Mar Mar vs. U Nyunt Hlaing* case held that "Burmese customary law recognizes the marriage of a couple publicly cohabitating without the requirement of other formalities, and [even] without proof of physical consummation of the marriage" (17). This ruling overturned the previously mentioned 1930 ruling in the *Ma Hla Me v. Maung Hla Baw* case that held that both cohabitation and consummation were the defining characteristics of a Burmese Buddhist marriage,[90] making the parameters for defining a legal marriage even more pliable. Furthermore, Spiro rejects the notion of ambiguity of status in common-law marriages, pointing out that such marriages are

> hardly ambiguous in the village, where everyone knows everyone else, and where the rather simple question of whether a couple are living together as husband and wife is easily answered by the various criteria . . . the economic protection of wife and children is as much assured by a common-law marriage as by one solemnized by a wedding.[91] (188-89)

---

[90] See, for example, E. Maung, 41-46, and Myint Zan, 163-69.

[91] In 1906, however, Fielding Hall also rightly pointed out that the frequency with which government officials were transferred contributed to an increasingly mobile society, which served to erode traditional ways. This newfound mobility sometimes profoundly affected the discernibility of a person's marital status. Whereas the entire village was once aware of any given villager's marital status, ascertaining a newcomer's marital status became murkier business. As Hall explained:

> . . . matrimonial cases grow and come into the courts where formerly they went to the village elders. Now there is often no village council which could know. The husband is from the north,

Burmese Buddhist Law and local custom were thus very closely intertwined in the minds of Buddhist Burmese, who made up the majority of the population. The lack of legal formalities in Burmese marriages did not lessen the institution of marriage in the minds of the Burmese, for as Mi Mi Khaing says, "despite the ease with which a union becomes valid[,] particularly in the absence of registration or ceremony, responsibilities and commitments nonetheless come with it" (*The World of Burmese Women* 35).

To understand how Ma Hla May likely perceived her relationship with Flory, therefore, it is first necessary to consider it in the context of the Burmese laws and traditions prevalent at that time. According to the *Dhammathats*, there are three ways in which a couple can marry: "1. When the parents give a couple to each other[;] 2. When by the instrumentality of a go-between, they by intercommunication, become man and wife[; and] 3. When they come together by mutual consent" (Friend-Pereira 182).[92] In

---

> his wife is from the west, they live in a central district. How can their marriage be proved? Who can prove a continuing status where the people change so much? There is no ceremony which could be registered, or at least remembered and noted. The absence of all ceremony has become a defect, when formerly it was an advantage. . . . A status that has no determining point is often very difficult to prove. A man runs away with a girl. Are they married or are they not? In the simple village life of other days such a matter would be decided at once. The elders would determine it. They would not tolerate any connection that was not a marriage, but now who is to settle it among strangers? (*A People at School* 229-30)

[92] While this excerpt is from the *Menu Wonana Dhammathat,* the *Menu Kyi Dhammathat* concurs with this information (Maung Maung 55). Many writers have referred to this traditional classification of marriage, albeit in wording that varies slightly, in their writings about Burma. Under the pseudonym Shway Yoe, for example, James George Scott provides a translation of the *Dhammathat* that reads: "1. When the parents of the couple give them to one another. 2. When they come together through the good offices of a

1963, Maung Maung noted that "[t]his classification has no real validity today" (55), although he also said: "the most important element of the Burmese Buddhist marriage . . . is consent. The consent of the parents or the guardian is needed . . . if a girl is below the age of 20 and not yet emancipated" (57). While the novel provides little specific detail of how Ma Hla May and Flory first met, it can be inferred that their relationship commenced by mutual consent with the approval of Ma Hla May's parents, whom, the reader is informed, received from Flory three hundred rupees for their daughter (*BD* 52). Thus, their relationship appears to adhere to one of the customary ways in which a couple can marry. Furthermore, the *Dhammathats* detail "8 motives for giving daughters in marriage," which read as follows:

(1) the assertion that the man is of high family;

(2) a promise to make presents in return;

(3) a promise to do some business or other;

(4) a promise to discharge some important service;

(5) the fact that threats have been spoken;

(6) a promise to do service inside the house;

(7) a promise to cure a disease; and

(8) mutual wish.[93] (186)

---

go-between, called an aungthwe. 3. When they arrange the matter between themselves" (54). Chan-Toon expresses the same ideas but adds that in all three scenarios, the couple must "live and eat together" (14). Similar translations of the *Dhammathat* can be found in Mi Mi Khaing, *The World of Burmese Women,* 32 and Lütter, 9.

[93] Likewise, an English translation of the *Menu yin Damathat* delineates the eight reasons for parents to give their daughters in marriage: "(1) because of good family, (2) because of presents given, (3)

Again, while these criteria would have been interpreted in a manner befitting the time, (items 5 and 7, for example, appear particularly outdated), of the eight traditional motives for giving daughters in marriage, at least three of these ideas had likely persisted and may have been particularly relevant to the relationship between Flory and Ma Hla May: the first, the second, and the eighth.[94]

***i. The First Motive***

An elaboration of the first motive for marriage specifies: "The daughter is given in marriage because of the statement in the presence of the elders that the man is of a high race"[95] (186). While it is unlikely that such a statement was made in the presence of elders (or indeed, that this was still a common practice in the early twentieth century), an

---

because of threats to bring a law-suit, (4) because of a promise to conduct a difficult case, (5) for fear, (6) because of a promise to do service in the house, (7) because there is no disease, and (8) because of the mutual consent of the daughter and the man" (Friend-Pereira 204). The language varies slightly in an English translation of the *Wini Saya Paka Thani Damathat*, which lists the reasons as: "(1) the belief that the man is of high family; (2) a promise to make presents in return; (3) a promise to do some business or other; (4) a promise to relieve from poverty; (5) the fact that threats have been spoken; (6) a promise to do continuous service; (7) a promise to cure a disease; and (8) mutual wish" (200-01).

[94] Regarding the sixth motivation, *BD* gives no indication that Flory benefited from services other than those sexual in nature from Ma Hla May; instead, Ko S'la is credited with running his household affairs. According to the accounts of many Western men in colonial Burma, however, household management skills seem to have been a common motivation for marriages between colonizing men and colonized women.

[95] Likewise, as previously mentioned on page 109, the *Wini Saya Paka Thani Damathat* lists "a promise to relieve from poverty" as the fourth motivation for giving a daughter in marriage (Friend-Pereira 201).

argument can be made that Ma Hla May and her parents most likely agreed to the union because under the colonial administration of Burma, a man like Flory, a member of the ruling class, would likely have been deemed to be of high "race" or "family." According to Burma historians Michael Aung-Thwin and Maitri Aung-Thwin, "Burmese experiences with colonialism were either intrusive, disruptive and deadly . . . or beneficial, uplifting and opportune . . .These encounters were affected by one's social status, occupation, class, geographical location and personal connection to various institutions and individuals in society" (196). As a common villager of humble means, Ma Hla May is a prime example of a person whose association with colonialism might have been personally "beneficial,"[96] for a European timber merchant[97] such as John Flory would likely have been deemed a highly desirable partner based on his race (a representative of the ruling elite), position, and economic status.[98] Indeed, as Chie Ikeya asserts, "the Burmese public in the 1920s and the early 1930s regarded Anglo-Burmese

[96] As Laura Ann Stoler makes clear, however, while "[c]olonized women could sometimes parlay their positions into personal profit and small rewards, . . . these were *individual* negotiations with no social, legal, or cumulative claims" (*Carnal Knowledge* 57).

[97] Maung Htin Aung points out that European "foresters" came from both "the Government Department of Forests and from the large English timber companies" ("Orwell of the Burma Police" 183). Flory appears to have a desirable position with a private timber company, as the narrator says that "[h]is parents, good people and devoted to him, had found him a place in a timber firm. They had had great difficulty in getting him the job, [and] had paid a premium they could not afford . . ." (65).

[98] David L. Kubal places Ma Hla May among the characters in the novel that "[welcome] imperialism for [their] own purposes," claiming that Ma Hla May views it "as a way to get her own little flower shop" (72), suggesting that Ma Hla May entered the relationship for financial security.

marriage as a means to socioeconomic advancement, or marrying up" (136).[99] She notes that this was because

> Officialdom, wealth, and . . . modern accouterments of power and prestige . . . had become the prerogative of foreign men who immigrated to Burma under the auspices of the British colonial administration. Intimate relations with foreign men thus offered socioeconomic benefits that Burmese men could not provide. (*Refiguring Women* 134)

Mi Mi Khaing goes so far as to say that "during the colonial period . . . bachelors in British Government service were considered heaven born eligibles"[100] (*The World of Burmese Women* 31), and it is likely that Ma Hla May would have viewed Flory in a similar manner. Furthermore, writing about the limited educational opportunities for Burmese women during the colonial period, Khin Myo Chit makes clear that "[m]arriage was the only career for women. That was the normal pattern" (192). Certainly, Ma Hla

---

[99] Maung Htin Aung, however, expresses a different viewpoint on this matter, which is discussed in detail in footnote 109 on page 115.

[100] Maung Htin Aung includes Orwell and his contemporaries in the Imperial Police in the category of "heaven borns" ("Orwell of the Burma Police" 182). Furthermore, Maurice Collis, a former District Magistrate of Rangoon with many years experience in the Indian Civil Service, shows that even Burmese members of the Indian Civil Service were considered highly desirable marriage partners. In his novel *Sanda Mala*, the Zalun Min, "a prince of the old royal house of Mandalay" (9), describes to an Englishman the young man his daughter is to wed:

> 'A young Burman in your service. …He passed the I.C.S. examination three years ago and is now in charge of a sub-division in Upper Burma. In six years' time he will be a Deputy Commissioner. Or he may become a judge and eventually rise to the High Court. My daughter, with her education, my money and his position can become a great lady – as she is by birth.' (12)

May and her family must have viewed Flory as a "good catch," and Ma Hla May's perception of her own status is clearly intertwined with and dependent on her perception of Flory's status.

Moreover, the pride Ma Hla May takes in her association with Flory is clearly evidenced by the fact that she "boasts of her position as a *bo-kadaw* – a white man's wife" (*BD* 53). In describing herself, Ma Hla May's choice of the Burmese term "*bo-kadaw*"[101] rather than a number of other words that also denote the status of a wife[102] lends support to the notion that at that time, Flory would have been deemed by the Burmese to be "of a high family." Chie Ikeya explains the meaning of the term thus:

> The word *bo* signified the military ranking of a general in precolonial times. The word *gadaw* literally means 'wife' but is associated only with a wife of an official or a dignitary; the term for the wife of a high-ranking government official, for example, is *min gadaw.*[103] *Bo gadaw* thus alludes to the envied status of a military general's wife . . . [and] *bo* came to mean 'European' during the colonial period . . . (*Refiguring Women* 121)

When Flory suggests that Ma Hla May return to her village after ending their relationship, she protests:

---

[101] Similarly, Ma Hla May refers to Flory as *thakin* or "master," a respectful term used by the Burmese to address the British.

[102] Other Burmese words for wife include *maya, zani, meinma, amyothami, einthu, and kinbun* (See, for example, Bennett 34, Hough 127, Lane 462, Sun Associates' *Practical Myanmar* 345, and Taw Sein Ko 12).

[103] J. Nisbet also uses the term *min gadaw* to refer to the wives of Europeans (253).

> 'How can I go back, to be jeered at and pointed at by those low, stupid peasants whom I despise? I who have been a *bo-kadaw*, a white man's wife, to go home to my father's house, and shake the paddy basket with old hags and women who are too ugly to find husbands! Ah what shame what shame! . . . [To] go back to my village, with no money, with all my jewels and silk *longyis* gone, and the people will point and say, "There is Ma Hla May who thought herself cleverer than the rest of us. And behold! her white man has treated her as they always do.' (158-59)

Clearly, in her own eyes and in the eyes of the villagers, Ma Hla May's status has been elevated by her relationship with Flory, and indeed, the elevated status of the *bogadaw* was affirmed by Nisbet in 1901: "In becoming the *Gadáw* or 'lady' of any European . . . [the Burmese woman] raises herself to a position where she receives many marks of outward attention and homage, and she not infrequently utilizes this position to her own advantage in respect of the supposed influence she has with him whom she addresses as *Shin,* 'lord and master'" (230-51).[104] By the same token, Ma Hla May feels that the termination of her relationship with Flory will bring her great shame and degradation.[105] Viewed outside the context of Burmese custom and law, however, Ma Hla May's remonstrations are likely only to strengthen the Western reader's impression of her as an

---

[104] The notion that Burmese women used their relationships with Western men to their advantage was one that fueled the campaigns against mixed marriages and concubinage (See page 149).

[105] As Alan Blackstock notes, "Ma Hla May faces punishment by her culture for having violated its standards through her dalliance with an Englishman, although in her case what is scandalous is not the dalliance itself but her subsequent rejection[,]" or, as he later puts it, "having been thrown out of a white man's home" (196).

unsympathetic character, as the resentment she feels, devoid of the cultural context, is easily obscured by words that appear to denote little more than a mean-spiritedness comprised of haughtiness, greed, and egocentricity. For this reason, even scholars of Orwell can be forgiven for referring to her almost exclusively in a derogatory manner. The significance of Ma Hla May's insistence that she is a *bo-kadaw*, then, cannot be emphasized enough, as it is clearly an attempt to validate what she perceives to be her own higher station in relation to the villagers around her, a status, sadly, based solely on her tenuous relationship with Flory. At this point, however, it must be conceded that the rise of both the nationalist and feminist movements that began in the 1920s and strengthened in the 1930s eventually brought about "shifting attitudes towards intermarriage in colonial Burma," and as Ikeya notes, the term *bo gadaw* eventually "took on a pejorative connotation: 'a white man's mistress'"[106] (*Refiguring Women* 121). While it is true that the term eventually took on a secondary nuance, it is important to note that Ikeya's translation of *bo gadaw* as "a white man's mistress" is a bit equivocal and most likely reflects an attempt to approximate the derogatory connotations later attributed to the term for an English-speaking readership.[107] She translates, for example, the title of the 1934 Burmese short story entitled "*Bo gadaw"* into English as "A European's Mistress" (Ikeya 137), not as "A European's Wife," thereby forgoing a literal

[106] This shift in nuance may be compared to the use of the Burmese word *thakin* (master), a term previously reserved for the British. Burmese nationalists later appropriated the term and prefaced their own names with the title in defiance of the subordinate roles they had been forced to assume in relation to the British (See, for example, Vore 216).

[107] Several requests for clarification on the use of these equivocal terms were sent to Dr. Ikeya; however, no response was received.

translation for one imbued with nuance instead.[108] Explains Ikeya: "The double entendre of the term *bo gadaw* embodied the nuances of a Burmese woman's relationship with a European man, which was at once prestigious and undignified: her source of prestige was simultaneously the source of her ill repute"[109] (121). Still, the term *gadaw* itself means "wife," not "mistress," as the story "*Bo gadaw*," in which a Burmese mother discusses with her daughter the benefits of the daughter's impending marriage to a Westerner, clearly demonstrates (Ikeya 136). More recently, in an attempt to vilify democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, the government-sponsored *New Light of Myanmar,* an English-language daily newspaper, referred to Suu Kyi as a "*bogadaw*," a reference to her marriage to British scholar Michael Aris (See, for example, Wain). While the term was undoubtedly meant as a slur against Aung San Suu Kyi, the fact remains that Suu Kyi was undeniably the wife of the late Michael Aris, not his "mistress" in either the Burmese or English sense of the word. Ikeya's translation of *bogadaw* as "mistress," therefore, would undoubtedly perplex a Western reader attempting to understand Ma Hla May's intentions in demanding recognition as a *bogadaw.*

---

[108] Ironically, some early scholars of Burma, including Fielding Hall, used the term "mistress" synonymously with "wife." Describing the Western wife, he says: "She has even lost her own name, and becomes known but as the mistress of her husband . . . " (*Soul of a People* 190). Burmese scholars Sayama Thazin and Saya Khin Aye, however, agree that the Burmese term *apyaw maya* comes closest in meaning to the English word "mistress" (Okell).

[109] Maung Htin Aung refers to the changing sentiment when he says that "[b]y Blair's time . . . no decent Burmese woman would become friendly with any English official, and the English officials on their part no longer cared to become friendly with any Burmese, man or woman" ("George Orwell and Burma" 21-22). Evidence suggests, however, that his claim was grossly exaggerated, especially in the early to mid 1920s.

Semantic hairsplitting aside, however, it is not clear whether an upper Burma villager such as Ma Hla May would have been greatly influenced by the shifting sensibilities. As upper Burma was the last part of the country colonized by the British, most resistance efforts that erupted there, accordingly, were not organized nationalist efforts but movements seeking to bring about the return of tradition. As John Cady notes, "When the average Burman considered displacing British rule he thought automatically in terms of a revival of kingship" and notes that prior to the Saya San Rebellion of 1930, "[p]retenders had appeared repeatedly in Upper Burma since 1910, but had usually been suppressed without difficulty" (310). Organized resistance to colonial authority, on the other hand, was strongest in the urban capital and spread to outlying areas only later. As Michael Adas states, "Although Burmese nationalism had begun to move beyond the 'study club' stage by the 1920s, its base remained primarily urban and limited to a small percentage of the colonial population" (88). Thus, it is uncertain whether there had been sufficient time by 1926 for modern movements to have spread to the remote areas of upper Burma, including Kyauktada/Katha. By the same token, it is not clear whether a woman like Ma Hla May would have been aware of any shifting ideas about intermarriage. Still, it is possible to argue that Ma Hla May's fears that the people of her village would mock her after her breakup with Flory – especially her assertion that they would conclude that "her white man [had] treated her as they always do" – suggest that she was indeed aware of the secondary nuance of the term or at least the European male propensity to abandon the Burmese women with whom they entered into relationships.[110]

[110] Maung Htin Aung has suggested that while the setting of *Burmese Days* is Kyauktada/Katha, the characters of the novel were drawn on people Orwell knew in his Moulmein days ("Orwell of the

Without doubt, a parallel can be drawn between Ma Hla May's experience with Flory and a story depicted by a 1925 cartoon. Ikeya describes the cartoon thus:

> Titled 'On Being a Foreigner,' the cartoon begins with a picture of a Burmese woman flatly rejecting what appears to be a marriage proposal from a European-looking man. She says, 'You think you're worthy of me?' Her mother, however, entreats her daughter to accept the foreigner's proposal, which prompts the daughter to ask why. The mother, envisioning the foreigner with his servants, replies that marrying him will mean that the couple will get to be chauffeured in cars. The daughter evidently accepts the foreigner's proposal because, explains the caption next to the couple, 'she is opportunistic.' Later, just as she gives birth to the foreigner's child, a servant instructs her: 'Go! Go! The wife from the home country is coming!' Presumably, the foreigner's wife in Britain is on her way to Burma to join her husband. The cartoon concludes with the Burmese 'wife' in tears, accompanied by the caption: 'Oh, the impermanent nature of life.' (132)

---

Burma Police" 184). Of Moulmein, he says: "There were not too many Europeans but enough for him not to feel lonely. The Europeans included not only officials and merchants but also 'foresters', both from the Government Department of Forests and from large English timber companies" (183). In contrast, he says that Katha "was unique in that all the four Senior District Officers were natives" (185), and in the novel, the narrator says that Kyauktada had a population of " . . . about four thousand, including a couple of hundred Indians, a few score Chinese, and seven Europeans. There were also two Eurasians . . . the sons of an American Baptist missionary and a Roman Catholic missionary . . ." (*BD* 15). Had the novel been set in Moulmein, therefore, this argument would have been more convincing. Ma Hla May, however, was said to have been from a village, presumably on the outskirts of Katha, where contact with British would have been quite limited.

Admittedly, Ma Hla May's relationship with Flory comes to a similar end. Nonetheless, it is clear that any shame that Ma Hla May feels results not from being in a relationship with Flory, but from his decision to end the relationship, as Ma Hla May obviously believes that being a *bo gadaw* has elevated her status among her countrymen. Furthermore, despite "the condemnations of intermarriage in the 1930s [that] were in all likelihood informed by the rhetoric of 'us versus them' – that is, Burmese nationalists versus colonialists" (Ikeya 131), much of the population still viewed marriage to a European as a means toward upward mobility, in contrast, for example, to the way in which Indo-Burmese marriages were viewed (136). As Ikeya explains in her 2006 doctoral dissertation,

> . . . the *bo-gadaw* was conflictual because the Burmese public in the 1920s and the early 1930s regarded relations with Europeans to be a way to access power and status, and an expression of white prestige. And while representations of the *bo-gadaw* often imply that young Burmese women functioned merely as pawns for their opportunistic families . . . they suggest that mothers and daughters alike reckoned knowingly with the practice of *bo-gadaw* as a means of socio-economic advancement. This, furthermore, was a culturally accepted practice wherein the parents often played a central role in arranging their daughter's marriage. (*Gender, History and Modernity* 152-53)

To illustrate this point, Ikeya cites the aforementioned short story entitled *"Bo gadaw,"* published in the 22 June 1934 edition of *Youk Shin Lan Hnyun.* Ikeya summarizes the story thus:

> The title refers to the main character of the story, Ma May Thoun, whose mother,

Daw Aw Hma, has arranged for her daughter to marry a *bo* named Bo Galay (Young European Lad). The story opens with the mother and the daughter in the kitchen, deep in conversation:

Daughter: Mother, the neighbors are going to sneer at me. Everyone's going to make a mockery out of me.

Mother: So what if they sneer at you? It's because they are envious of you. Once the marriage is finalized, they'll be the first to befriend you.

Daughter: They say all sorts of insulting things about *bo gadaw* . . . that they're very sly . . .

Mother: That's because they themselves haven't found a *bo* who is interested in them. Don't listen to such things.

Daw Aw Hma . . . tells her daughter: 'You just worry about being a good wife, May Thoun. A *bo* cherishes and takes great care of his wife and children . . . [O]ne day, you will make your grand return to the village as a *bo gadaw* and show off in front of those who now scoff at you.' (*Gender, History and Modernity* 148; see also *Refiguring Women* 136)

A twist ending awaits the unsuspecting reader, however, when Daw Aw Hma's "dream of [her daughter] living a *bo* life [is] shattered upon her marriage to Bo Galay, who, it turns out, is not really a *bo* but a European-looking Muslim *kala*[111] by the name of

[111] The term *kala* is used to refer to people from India or of Indian descent. As Ikeya notes, "That the equivalent of the term *bo gadaw – kala gadaw* – never developed is significant" (*Refiguring Women* 121).

Yusuf" (137). The story shows that even as late as in 1934, eight years after the story of *Burmese Days* takes place – and even in the urban areas where the magazine was primarily read – marriage to a *bo* was still considered by many to be marrying up. Moreover, the story suggests that the pride Ma Hla May feels about her status as a *bogadaw* was common not only among Burmese women married to Western men, but also among their family members. While economic betterment is hardly a motivation for marriage limited to Burmese Buddhists, the *Dhammathats* do appear to have deemed it a valid one. Still, the narrative spares no sympathy for Ma Hla May, presenting her instead as a manipulative, parasitic, and thoroughly abject enemy; indeed, as Seshagiri rightly maintains, "Even though English and Burmese patriarchy severely limit Ma Hla May's . . . access to material resources, Orwell represents . . . [her] . . . struggles for self-preservation only as a morally-indefensible [assault] on masculine autonomy"[112] (113). Both the Burmese and the female perspectives are completely ignored.

***ii. The Second Motive***

The second motive for marriage reads: "Because it is promised in the presence of the elders that presents will be made in return, the daughter who is loved is given to the lover" (Manu 186-87). This section of the *Dhammathat* further supports Ma Hla May's claim to be Flory's legal spouse as in offering both material goods and money to Ma Hla May and her parents in exchange for Ma Hla May – regardless of the capacity in which Flory actually viewed her – Flory, in essence, offered the family a dower. Regarding the

[112] As Seshagiri correctly points out, however, the disparaging portrayal is not limited to Ma Hla May; "[w]omen characters – white, native, mixed-race – are all abject and degraded in this novel, exempt from receiving even the partial sympathy that Orwell extends to male characters" (111).

circumstances in which a girl's parents are correct in accepting the offerings of a daughter's suitor, the *Menu Kye Dhammathat* says:

> If parents have a maiden daughter, and the parents of several young men approving of her, shall separately make presents of betel, tea, gold, silver, or cloth, and demand her in marriage, and the maiden's parents accept them with a promise that if she is willing, they will give her in marriage, should the maiden on consideration, approve of the person who first or last made the presents, or any one of them, let her be given to him . . . (Manu 158)[113]

While Maung Maung notes that "there was no rigid requirement of dowry" and "parents on both sides would give what they could" (55), Spiro affirms that the practice was still being adhered to in the twentieth century, noting that the "[d]ower *(tinthade pyitsi)* is an almost universal village practice and . . . an essential element in the marriage" (194). He also points out both that "the value of the dower . . . tends to vary with the wealth of the girls' parents" and that "[w]omen are not . . . in short supply in Burma – if anything, given a large celibate monkhood, the contrary is the case; and they are less important than men in the agricultural economy" (196-97), and such facts would surely have played a role in determining the payment agreed to by Flory for Ma Hla May's hand. The narrator says that Flory "had bought [Ma Hla May] from her parents two years ago, for three hundred rupees" (52). In addition to the cash sum, Flory appears to have offered Ma Hla

[113] Interestingly, the parents, the *Dhammathat* notes, also have the right to keep the presents offered by the men not chosen.

May material gifts similar to those described in the *Dhammathat* and other sources.[114] This is alluded to when, complaining about his change in attitude, Ma Hla May protests: "'Ah, two years ago [when Flory first "bought" her] it was so different! You loved me in those days. You gave me presents of gold bangles and silk *longyis* from Mandalay. And now look . . . not a single bangle. Last month I had thirty, and now all of them are pawned'" (52). The *Dhammathat* does not provide specific instructions regarding appropriate marriage payments or dowries, however, and S. J. Tambiah points out that "the relatively sparse literature . . . [makes it] somewhat difficult to establish what precisely were and are the marriage customs, particularly those relating to payments, residence and the like. It could of course very well be that the essence of Burmese marriage is this imprecise and flexible formulation" (149-50). As no clearly defined guidelines appear to have existed, it is difficult to definitively measure the appropriateness of Flory's payment to Ma Hla May's parents; nonetheless, it can be argued that Flory's offering of cash and gifts would have been viewed as an acceptable dower, satisfying the second motive for giving a daughter in marriage as described in the *Dhammathats*. Attributed to the thoughts of Mrs. Lackersteen, the narrator informs us that Flory's "pay was barely seven hundred rupees a month . . . " (*BD* 203). This can be compared to Orwell's own income as Assistant District Superintendent; according to Stansky and Abrahams, he received 740 rupees per month from mid-December 1924 (two years before the timeframe of *Burmese* Days) until the time he left Burma [in

[114] Writing in 1906, James George Scott explained that when a wedding was arranged, it was customary for the bridegroom to present the girl with "a silken skirt" or "a piece of jewellery, a relic of the purchase money . . . . " (*Burma* 84).

1927].[115] This amounted to approximately £65 per month, which, "[b]y most standards, certainly by Orwell's, [was] an adequate sum in the early 1920's to live a comfortable life" (183-84). The 300 rupees that Flory paid to Ma Hla May's parents, in addition to gifts of gold jewelry and silk *longyis,* which, according to Willis, were "said to be worth in some cases as much as £40 a piece" in 1913 (99), would likely have totaled at least half of Orwell's monthly wage at almost exactly the same period. Furthermore, in *Notes on Buddhist Law,* published in 1883, John Jardine, then Judicial Commissioner, quotes the *Mohavicchedant Dhammathat*:[116] "If a woman is bought and made a wife and if the man die, the woman should get her liberty" (4). This would suggest that whether the exchange of cash and property offered the parents of a girl are considered a dowry or a payment, the "purchased" woman is considered by Burmese tradition to be a wife. Writing in 1913, for example, W. N. Willis discussed Burmese girls "sold" into marriage

---

[115] Similarly, Maung Htin Aung says that Orwell's initial monthly salary in Burma was £23, excluding "his Burma allowance of £5, which only 'heaven-borns' were entitled to draw." He further notes that "[t]he salary and the overseas pay increased with each year of service, so that when he completed his probationary period in 1925 his total monthly emoluments jumped to £58," which, he adds, "compared favorably" with the salaries of Burmese policemen: "Constable £1, Cadet £5, [and] Inspector £10, all without allowances" ("Orwell of the Burma Police" 182). In addition, *The Rangoon Police Manual* of 1901 indicates that police officers of Orwell's rank also received a house allowance or free quarters, which would have compounded his gross income (2), and timber merchants (like Flory) may have received similar incentives from their companies. In comparison to Orwell's wages, Mrs. Lackersteen reveals that a butler received about forty or fifty rupees per month: "I remember when we paid our butler only twelve rupees a month, and really that man loved us like a dog. And now they are demanding forty and fifty rupees . . ." (*BD* 27).

[116] Jardine claims that this *Dhammathat* was the most recent of all the *Dhammathats.*

by their parents, claiming that "[t]he present rate now rules as high as one hundred rupees – £6 13s. 4d. of English money – but she must be exceedingly comely to reach that figure. . . . the average price which the ordinary dark, saffron-skinned girl of Upper Burma will realize for her people is between fifty and sixty rupees. The higher rates are usually realized by the straw-coloured Eurasian girl" (105-06). As these estimates were made 13 years before the timeframe of the novel, it is likely that the price for a bride had risen slightly by 1924. Moreover, similar payments mentioned in other accounts support the notion that Flory's offering would have been considered a reasonable amount. For instance, in *The Golden Dagon; or, Up and Down the Irrawaddi,* a book recounting the travels of American physician and author John Williamson Palmer's travels in Burma, published in 1856, the author describes "purchasing"[117] a woman for the sum of 150 rupees (233). In view of the bride price rates provided by Willis, Palmer appears to have made a generous offering; still, seventy years later, Flory doubled this sum in purchasing Ma Hla May. Similarly, in 1902, twenty-four years before the timeframe of *Burmese Days*, a case was investigated involving a "a certain Major Brown, who was thought to have made insufficient provision for his mistress and illegitimate child." The Major explained, however, that upon their separation, he had given his former mistress three

[117] Palmer's account, too, likely portrays what the Burmese perceived to be a legitimate marriage. Indeed, Palmer even mentions that his union with village girl Mayouk was formalized under Burmese customary law by the eating of *let-hpet*: "Then we chewed some pickled tea all round according to law, the old people laughing consumedly at the wry faces I made over that imposing ceremony" (234). As James George Scott explained in the early twentieth century, a couple getting married are "supposed to feed one another, in love-bird fashion, but the chewing of betel and salad tea, *let-hpet*, by the parents on both sides – the national way of ratifying any contract, legal or commercial – is the really effective rite" (*Burma* 85).

hundred rupees with which "to open a shop and trade on her own account"; in addition, he had offered to pay for their child to be sent to a boarding school. He refused to continue paying her regular allowance, he explained, only because "she had since placed herself under the protection of a Muslim gentleman" (Ballhatchet 152). A comparison of the financial arrangements in the two cases suggests that the three hundred rupees Flory paid to Ma Hla May's parents, in addition to gifts of gold jewelry and silk *longyis*, was a reasonable – and perhaps even generous – offering as what was most likely perceived to be a dower.

***iii. The Eighth Motive***

Finally, of the eighth motive for marriage, "mutual wish," there can be little doubt that Ma Hla May is a willing partner to Flory. As has previously been established, what Maung Maung refers to as "consensual contract" continued to be "[t]he most important element of the Burmese Buddhist marriage." Says Maung Maung: "Time has weakened the parental power and control however, and today it is settled law and custom that the vital consent on which a marriage must be founded is that of the parties themselves" (57). Regardless of whether Ma Hla May's true intention regarding her relationship with Flory was based on economic gain or genuine affection, and whether or not she was aware of the changing attitudes toward *bo*-gadaw, her words and actions throughout the narrative make it clear that she not only entered the union willingly, but is also loath to see it come to an end. Perhaps most telling of all is that when she realizes there is no hope of dissuading him in his pursuit of Elizabeth, she resorts to begging him to keep her, offering to stay on under the guise of a servant's wife. She pleads: "Oh, master, take Ma Hla May back! No one need ever know. I will stay here when that white woman comes,

she will think I am one of the servants' wives. Will you not take me back?'" (161). Taking Burmese marriage laws and customs that permitted bigamy into consideration, it is conceivable that Ma Hla May might have concluded that staying on in Flory's household despite his possible marriage to Elizabeth would have been her best option. As her true status would be unknown to Elizabeth, Flory would be able to carry through with his plans to marry the British woman; even if he did marry her, Ma Hla May may have reasoned that she would still retain her rightful status as first wife or *mayagyi.*

**D. Additional Cultural Considerations Supporting the View of Ma Hla May as Wife**

As has already been established, tradition was more important than law in validating a Burmese marriage, and perhaps the most important evidence in support of Ma Hla May's claim to be Flory's wife is that, as the narrative clearly states, "*she had persuaded everyone,* [emphasis added], herself included that she was Flory's legal wife" (*BD* 53). Since being considered a married couple by the community in which one lives is a fundamental determinant in establishing the validity of a marriage in Burma, the fact that "everyone" in their surroundings considered Ma Hla May to be Flory's wife lends credence to the notion that in accordance with Burmese law and custom, they truly believed that she was. Subtle evidence exists throughout the novel – evidence that Orwell may not have intended or indeed realized – to support the narrator's claim that "everyone" either considered Ma Hla May to be Flory's wife or at least recognized the existence of the relationship. Before this point can be established, however, it is useful to draw some lexical distinctions between the implications of the terms "wife" and "mistress."

When Ma Hla May is first introduced in the novel, the narrator says, "Ko S'la always called her *the woman,* to show his disapproval – not that he disapproved of Flory keeping a mistress, but he was jealous of Ma Hla May's influence in the house" (50). It is entirely plausible that Ko S'la would have resented Ma Hla May's influence since increasing one's social and economic stature through a romantic association with a European was a means possible only for Burmese women, a fact to which Ko S'la would certainly have taken exception. The narrator's use of the word "mistress" in conjunction with thoughts attributed to Ko S'la, however, is fraught with ambiguity, and at the outset it is necessary to consider the nuance of the word both from Western and Burmese perspectives. The *Myanmar-English Dictionary*, published in 1993, for example, provides as the Burmese equivalent of the English word "mistress" the Burmese word "*ange ahnaun*." While *ange* literally means "small" and *ahnaun* "later," the term is translated as "lesser wife; concubine; mistress" (Department of the Myanamar Language Commission 550). Published in 1921, however, *The Judson Burmese-English Dictionary* includes the entry *ahnaun ange* - the same words transposed - which it defines as "an inferior wife" (66). Similarly, in *Kinship and Marriage in Burma,* anthropologist Melford E. Spiro provides as the Burmese equivalents of "mistress" the words "*qapyou maya,*[118] 'unmarried wife'" and "*mayange,* 'lesser wife'" (249).[119] It is significant that both of

[118] This is a variant spelling of what I will later refer to as *"apyaw."*

[119] It is also important to note that according to the *Menu Kye Dhammathat*, an "inferior" or "lesser" wife is "'inferior' or 'lesser' only in the sense that her marriage is posterior to that of the 'superior' or 'head' or 'great' wife" (Maung, E. 51). Furthermore, as Sisir Chandra Lahiri makes clear, an "[i]nferior wife is not a mistress. It is a mistake to use the term mistress with reference to an inferior or in other words, lesser wife among Burman Buddhists" (32).

these terms include the Burmese word "maya," which means "wife," and as Mi Mi Khaing points out, "A 'mistress' of a married man is considered a sort of wife, but the disapproval with which this is regarded is shown in the term applied to her; *ma-ya-nga* [sic], lesser wife"[120] (*Burmese Family* 185). Of significance is Spiro's explanation that the practice of keeping a mistress is one of "the two kinds of extramarital sex," the other being "[c]asual sex, whether it be with a prostitute or a non-prostitute" (248). He further explains that "unlike the Chinese concubine who is taken into the home, the Burmese mistress is rigidly segregated from the family." For this reason, he concludes, "[o]f the two kinds of extramarital sex, the keeping of a mistress is the less frequent because, among other reasons, few men can afford the expense. Moreover, the notion of a man keeping a mistress was deemed so contemptible that until modern times, it "could not even be portrayed in fiction" (249). Hla Pe, for example, draws attention to the fact that "[a] novel in which the hero has a mistress in every village and town he visits was not allowed to be seen in most of the 'drawing rooms' of that period [the 1920s]" (qtd. in Spiro 249). Spiro further explains that "[a]lthough colloquially even a mistress may be called a 'lesser wife' *(mayange),* technically this term is reserved for a woman, other than the first, or senior wife *(mayagi)* [sic]*,* with whom a man is not only having sex, but with whom he lives and eats under a common roof."[121] He further points out, significantly, that "[t]hese three activities, it will be recalled, [also] constitute the criteria for marriage" (251). In the Burmese sense, then, a mistress usually signified a woman being kept and

[120] Interestingly, Mi Mi Khaing adds that "the liberty operates both ways, and in the rare cases of a woman who runs to a second husband without any agreement having been reached beforehand, she is said to have a *lin-ngè,* lesser husband" (*Burmese Family* 185).

[121] See discussion of commensality on pages 191-93.

provided for by a married man in a residence other than his primary residence. Thus, status as a mistress necessitated the existence of a primary wife. In contrast, a woman such as Ma Hla May, living with an otherwise unmarried man, would have been viewed by the Burmese as the man's wife as Flory's lack of a primary wife precluded Ma Hla May's status as a mistress. Furthermore, although it was legal for a man to have more than one wife in Burma,[122] cases of actual bigamy were rare among Burmese, as was indicated not only in legal references available at the time, but also in many well-known works of various genres[123]; the narrator's description of Ko S'la as an "obscure martyr of bigamy" (50) indicates, importantly, that Orwell was aware of this, and his curious decision to depict Ko S'la as a bigamist, then, is intriguing, although beyond the scope of this study.[124] In light of these definitions, then, it is appropriate that the narrator refers (on

---

[122] In 1841, an article appeared in *The Maulmain Chronicle* critiquing an entry entitled "Burman Empire" in the *Encyclopedia Americana.* Cited as an example of "the mistakes . . . so gross, the misstatements so unfounded, and the exaggerations so absurd, as to be really a disgrace to American literature" (337) is the claim that "[n]o Biruman can have more than one wife; but he may have as many mistresses as he will. The latter live in the same house with the wife, and are her servants." In refutation, the anonymous author of the article states: "It is well known that a Burmese may have as many wives as he chooses to burthen himself with" (339).

[123] George Scott, for example, noted in 1921 that while "[t]he rich sometimes have two establishments, particularly if they have business in different towns, . . . it is very rare for two wives to be under one roof." He further noted that "[t]he Census of 1891 showed returns of 1,306,722 husbands and 1,307,292 wives" (*Burma* 85). See also Mi Mi Khaing, *Burmese Family* 185.

[124] While Orwell's intention in labeling Ko S'la a bigamist is not clear, it is possible that he provided this information to lend authority to the narrative by underscoring his knowledge of Burmese culture. It could perhaps also be interpreted as tacit approval of the practice of polygamy.

several occasions) to both of Ko S'la's wives as "wives," distinguishing them later in the narrative as "Ma Pu, the first wife, … and Ma Yi, the 'little wife'" (*ange ahnaun*) (77); never is Ma Yi referred to as Ko S'la's "mistress" or "concubine," as neither term would apply to her.[125] Indeed, while the narrator does make reference to Ma Hla May enjoying "the idle concubine's life" (53), Ma Hla May is never directly labeled a concubine. In fact, the only women directly referred to as "concubines" in the entire novel are the two young girls kept by the anachronistically pigtailed and pipe-smoking Chinese shopkeeper Li Yeik, whose shop is stereotypically Chinese, replete with incense offered to ancestors, an odor of opium, and women with bound feet (*BD* 132-33), and, ironically, Elizabeth, whom U Po Kyin claims "had been Flory's concubine [but] had deserted him for Verrall because Verrall paid her more." Commenting on U Po Kyin's take on things, the narrator, tellingly, adds: "he had a way of being essentially right even when he was wrong in detail" (236), extending the narrative scorn for Ma Hla May to Elizabeth. On the other hand, Ma Hla May, who, from a Burmese perspective, would most likely have been viewed as Flory's wife, is considered by Ko S'la, the narrative informs us, to be Flory's "mistress." There appears to be an odd double-standard at play, then, causing Ko S'la to view Ma Hla May as Flory's "mistress" when a woman openly cohabiting with a man would normally have been viewed by the Burmese as some form of wife; the notion of a "mistress" in the sense in which the term was used by British colonial officials and company men, to be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, was

[125] Although no evidence exists to support the assumption, Ko S'la's arrangement with his second wife, Ma Yi, was undoubtedly based solely on their living arrangements and involved no formal ceremony or official documentation, yet she is recognized by the community, and, importantly, by Orwell, as a legitimate wife under Burmese law.

incompatible with the traditional Burmese definition of a marriage, which, as has already been determined, equated cohabitation with marriage.

Furthermore, insight on the Burmese perspective of Ma Hla May's designation as Flory's "mistress," can be gleaned by considering a recent translation of the novel into Burmese. The term "mistress," used in reference to Ma Hla May, appears to have been problematic for the Burmese translator, Maung Myint Kywe. In his translation of the novel, which won the Burmese government's highest literary award, the National Literary Award, in the category for "informative literature (translation)" in 2012 (Kyaw Phyo Tha), Maung Myint Kywe uses the word "*apyaw zani*" as the equivalent of Orwell's "mistress" (*BD* Maung Myint Kywe 84). Incongruously, however, the word *apyaw* means "not serious; frivolous" while *zani* is a far more reverential word for "wife"[126] than the aforementioned *maya;*[127] together, then, *"apyaw"* and *"zani"* appear to be conflicting terms. In an effort to make sense of the seeming paradox this Burmese term presented, I consulted several Burmese language dictionaries; failing to find *"apyaw-zani"* listed in any, however, aroused my suspicion that the term had perhaps been devised by the translator in an effort to approximate the nuance of Orwell's use of the term "mistress" while at the same time retaining the plausibility of the character for a Burmese readership. I then sought the advice of Burmese language scholar John Okell, who consulted with Burmese scholars Sayama Thazin and Saya Khin Aye, both of whom

[126] In "The *Myanmar-English Dictionary* defines *zani* as the "formal & polite" form of "wife" (Dept. of the Myanmar Language Commission 148). Tourist phrasebook *Practical Myanmar* also indicates that *zani* is a "polite" term for a wife (Sun Associates 345).

[127] In "Burmese Kinship Terminology," Robbins Burling says that *maya* is "somewhat more formal and polite" than *meima,* and that *zani* is "still more formal and literary" (108).

confirmed my suspicions that Maung Myint Kywe had created the term, as Okell says, "to make it sound less pejorative than the usual equivalents" (personal communication, Feb. 16, 2015). Indeed, the Burmese words usually used to express the Burmese notion of a "mistress," *"apyaw maya"* or *"mayange,"* which evoke a negative connotation, were apparently rejected as being improper designations of Ma Hla May's status.[128]

Therefore, Orwell's narrator, who uses the word "mistress" in conjunction with thoughts attributed to Ko S'la, appears to infuse Ko S'la's thoughts with a bias informed by Western mores. As Josef Silverstein, political scientist and longtime scholar of Burma Studies, says, Ko S'la "is allowed to act in ways that are more universal than Burmese, [and that] one should not generalize Burmese behavior, culture, or values from the things he does or says" (133). Perhaps, then, it would have been more accurate – from a Burmese perspective at least – if the narrator had simply explained that Ko S'la's resentment of Ma Hla May stemmed from jealousy over the power that she – another Burmese villager like himself – wielded in Flory's household as a *bogadaw,* as this was a power that Ko S'la, as a man, could never aspire to achieving, regardless of how many years he remained in Flory's service. Ko S'la was undoubtedly aware of the imbalance of power in Ma Hla May's relationship with Flory; still, I believe that the narrator's claim that it was "not that [Ko S'la] disapproved of Flory for keeping a mistress" is misleading in that it makes it appear as though the Burmese, like Flory and Orwell, saw Ma Hla May as nothing more than a "mistress."[129]

---

[128] On a recent visit to Myanmar, I attempted to contact Maung Myint Kywe to ask him about his use of the term *apyaw zani.* Unfortunately, I was informed that he had already died.

[129] Another incongruous passage attributed to the ideas of Ko S'la reads: "In Ko S'la's eyes Flory, because a bachelor, was a boy still; whereas Ko S'la had married, begotten five children, married again and

Furthermore, the very fact that Ko S'la resented Ma Hla May's influence in the house suggests that she did, in fact, possess a degree of status in the household, standing that only a wife would have possessed. Had she truly been a "prostitute" as Flory calls her, there would have been no reason for a servant to resent her influence. Indeed, when Flory eventually kicks Ma Hla May out of the house, Ko S'la, "who had long wished for Ma Hla May's removal, was not altogether pleased" (117) for he and "all the [other] servants knew . . . that he was getting rid of her because of Elizabeth" (116). The servants all dread the thoughts of living under a *memsahib,* and Ko S'la, commiserating with the others, says, "'She will be worse than Ma Hla May. Women!'" (118). In the eyes of the servants, a Burmese wife, bad enough, is being replaced with a *memsahib,* which is "usually the signal for the flight of every servant in [the] house, even those who have been with [the master] for years" (119).[130] Indeed, Ko S'la's exasperated exclamation

---

become one of the obscure martyrs of bigamy" (49-50). While Ko S'la might have looked upon Flory as a boy because he had not yet fathered children or taken on the responsibility of heading a family, the assumption that he would have viewed him as a bachelor is not convincing.

[130] Ko S'la and another of Flory's servants bemoan the impending arrival of Elizabeth in Flory's household:

> '. . . I know what is in store for us when that woman comes. She will shout at us because of spots of dust on the furniture, and wake us up to bring cups of tea in the afternoon when we are asleep, and come poking into the cookhouse at all hours and complain over dirty saucepans and cockroaches in the flour bin. It is my belief that these women lie awake at nights thinking of new ways to torment their servants.'
>
> 'They keep a little red book,' said Sammy, 'in which they enter the bazaar-money, two annas for this, four annas for that, so that a man cannot earn a pice. They make more *kit-kit* over the price of an onion than a sahib over five rupees.' (*BD* 118)

"Women!" also appears to lump Ma Hla May and Elizabeth into the same category in his mind. Moreover, when Ma Hla May is unceremoniously sent away after coming face to face with Elizabeth on Flory's porch, Ko S'la sends Ba Pe to look after her at the market: "'The woman has gone down to the bazaar,' [Ko S'la] announced, pleased, as he always was when Ma Hla May left the house. 'Ba Pe has gone with a lantern, to look after her when she comes back.' 'Good,' Flory said" (610). Again, the implication behind the action of sending someone to look after Ma Hla May – even though Orwell's true intention is to underscore her illicit relationship with Ba Pe, again fueling the narrative bias against her – is that Ma Hla May was a woman whose status warranted special attention and protection. Through his simple remark "'Good,'" Flory not only shows his implied approval of the arrangements made by Ko S'la, but also concedes responsibility for Ma Hla May. Despite the resentment he felt toward her, Ko S'la was clearly aware of Ma Hla May's status in Flory's household.

Early in the novel, Ma Hla May objects to Flory's treatment, saying: "'You treat me as though I were a prostitute,'" and Flory responds: "'So you are. Out you go'" (*BD* 54*).* Although these words, which Flory utters out of cruelty and frustration, have been taken literally by a number of scholars and critics, the narrative leaves no doubt about Ma Hla May's status differing from that of a common prostitute, and it is evident that Ko S'la was aware of this difference. The narrator, for example, mentions that Ko S'la had "pimped" for Flory (49), and the full extent of Flory's experience with prostitutes is revealed later in the novel when he is snubbed by Elizabeth after Mrs. Lackersteen

---

Complaints such as these were common in colonial households and are discussed at length in E. M. Collingham's *Imperial Bodies* 171-73.

informs her that Flory "is keeping a Burmese woman." The dejected Flory sinks into a mood of "self-loathing," haunted by memories of his past:

> For a moment it seemed to him that an endless procession of Burmese women, a regiment of ghosts, were marching past him in the moonlight. Heavens, what numbers of them! A thousand – no, but a full hundred at the least. 'Eyes right!' he thought despondently. Their heads turned towards him, but they had no faces, only featureless discs. He remembered a blue *longyi* here, a pair of ruby earrings there, but hardly a face or a name. (203)

While it is never directly confirmed, it can be inferred that Ko S'la, who "had been Flory's servant since his first day in Burma" (49), was responsible for securing many if not most of the prostitutes who would later haunt Flory. Indeed, when Flory sinks into a drunken depression after hearing news about Elizabeth's dalliance with Verrall, Ko S'la says, "'I think I know what he will be wanting tonight'" and takes it upon himself to procure a prostitute for his boss. When Flory later awakens, a woman sitting beside his bed "explain[s] that she [is] a prostitute, and that Ko S'la . . . engaged her on his own responsibility for a fee of ten rupees" (231). In contrast to the women clearly denoted as "prostitutes" in the novel, the narrator states that Flory "had bought [Ma Hla May] from her parents two years ago" for 300 rupees (52). The negotiations with Ma Hla May's parents and even the fact that Flory paid 30 times more for Ma Hla May than Ko S'la paid the prostitute – not to mention the jewels and silk *longyis* that he bought for her –

indicates that he viewed her as something far more than a prostitute, and a Burmese like Ko S'la would surely have recognized such distinctions.[131]

Ko S'la, however, was not the only one who recognized Ma Hla May's role; the reaction of the "stork-like Mohammedan butler" employed by the Lackersteens at hearing Elizabeth's account of seeing Ma Hla May for the first time suggests that he, too, recognizes the relationship between Ma Hla May and Flory: when Elizabeth says, "'And oh, aunt, such an interesting thing! A Burmese girl came on to the veranda … Mr Flory said she was his laundress[,]' [t]he Indian butler's long body stiffened. He squinted down at the girl with his white eyeballs large in his black face." The narrator elucidates the reaction: "[The butler] spoke English well," the implication being that he understood what had been said and recognized both the falsehood and the reasons behind it (101-02). Ironically, Elizabeth's uncle reacts similarly, spontaneously exclaiming: "'Laundress? . . . Laundress! I say, dammit, some mistake there! No such thing as a laundress in this country, y'know. Laundering work's all done by men. If you ask me –'" before biting his tongue so as not to reveal Flory's dirty secret to his niece, who had come to Burma with the "fishing fleet" and whom he and his wife were eagerly trying to marry off [132] (102).

---

[131] Indeed, even at the end of the novel, when Ma Hla May is relegated to working in a Mandalay brothel after Flory abandons her, the narrator says that she received from her clients only four annas (*BD* 297).

[132] As Gilmour notes, " . . . improved communications encouraged more young women (known as 'the fishing fleet') to come out from Britain and trawl for officers and officials for themselves'" (284). In *The Spotted Deer,* J. H. Williams also makes a reference to the "fishing fleet," describing it as "an irreverent term used to describe the young ladies who came annually to Rangoon from home as spinsters and in many cases remained there as matrons" (19-20). Indeed, later in *BD*, Ellis immediately judges

Mrs. Lackersteen, too, is aware of the relationship, and hoping to encourage a relationship between Elizabeth and Verrall, whom she believes to be a more suitable potential partner for her niece, informs her: "'Of course you know, Elizabeth dear, that Flory is keeping a Burmese woman?'" (203). Though neither of the Lackersteens considered Flory's relationship with Ma Hla May to be a bona fide marriage, the fact remains that at the very least, they recognized the existence of the relationship. This was not surprising, for as David Gilmour says of colonial stations, "In a society of twenty or thirty Anglo-Indians no one could be independent or anonymous. Everybody knew each other and was, [as] reported [by] Harcourt Butler,[133] 'intensely interested in the doings and failings of [his] neighbours'" (80). The district magistrate and his minions, also aware of Flory's relationship with Ma Hla May, ultimately use it to destroy Flory's reputation with his peers. Even Flo, Flory's beloved black cocker spaniel, recognizes Ma Hla May as a member of the household. Indeed, Flo's commonplace reaction to Ma Hla May, intended by the narrator to underscore Ma Hla May's abjection, also serves to support the notion that Ma Hla May had theretofore been an established member of the

---

Elizabeth to be such a woman and warns Flory: "'Anything in trousers but nothing this side of the alter.'" When Flory pretends not to understand, Ellis continues:

> 'My good fool! She's come out to lay her claws into a husband, of course. As if it wasn't well known! When a girl's failed everywhere else she tries India, where every man's pining for the sight of a white woman. The Indian marriage-market, they call it. Meat market it ought to be. Shiploads of 'em coming out every year like carcases [sic] of frozen mutton, to be pawed over by nasty old bachelors like you. Cold storage. Juicy joints straight from the ice.'" (*BD* 112-13)

For a detailed discussion of the "fishing fleet," see Anne De Courcy's *The Fishing Fleet: Husband Hunting in the Raj*.

[133] Among other official postings, Harcourt Butler served as Governor of Burma from 1923 – 1927.

household; as Ma Hla May slithers across the floor, begging Flory to keep her, Flo comes "ambling into the room, walk[s] to where Ma Hla May lay and sniff[s] at her *longyi.* She wag[s] her tail vaguely, recognizing the smell" (160). A member of the household, Ma Hla May arouses little reaction other than friendly recognition in Flo. Thus, David L. Kubal is correct in his observation that "[e]veryone knows, even Elizabeth, about his mistress, but when they are made to admit it publicly, the code has to be invoked" (73).[134] Clearly, Ma Hla May's relationship with Flory was recognized not only by her parents, but by the people of Kyauktada as well, and it was exactly such recognition that typically validated a Burmese marriage.

Finally, the novel contains ample evidence to prove that Ma Hla May certainly believed herself to be Flory's legitimate spouse. Early in the story, when Flory orders her out of the bedroom after intercourse, saying: "Get out of this room! I told you to go. I don't want you in here after I've done with you,'" Ma Hla May indignantly protests, "'That is a nice way to speak to me! You treat me as though I were a prostitute,'" clearly denoting that she perceives herself to be of a far higher status (54).[135] Later, when Flory

---

[134] J. H. Williams, who spent over twenty years in Burma in charge of elephants used in teak extraction, alludes to "the code" in a reference to a complaint made about a young recruit recently posted to Burma. A colleague informs Williams that en route to Burma, the man had gotten involved with an Anglo-Malayan girl and says: "I don't blame him. Nor do I blame her. . . . But I had to speak to him. There are ways of doing these things, you know. He flew off the handle, and thought it was colour prejudice on my part. Couldn't see what makes the scandal is not what you do, but how openly you do it" (20-1).

[135] So one-sided is the narrative handling of Ma Hla May, however, that even feminist critics have swallowed the bait, viewing her in the way in which she has been presented; Urmila Seshagiri, for example, in describing the character of Ma Hla May, refers to her as "the Burmese prostitute" (see, for example, 107 and 112).

escorts Elizabeth to his house for the first time, Ma Hla May sees them approach and comes out onto the veranda with the intention of staking her territory: "Ma Hla May came forward with her hand on her hip. She had come from within the house, with a calm air that asserted her right to be there" (88). After briefly assessing the situation, "Ma Hla May turned her face round to Flory, with her black brows, thin as pencil lines, drawn together. 'Who is this woman?' she demanded sullenly," again establishing her position in Flory's household. Flory threatens her and precipitates her leave-taking; still, he is relieved when Elizabeth makes a move toward the stairs to leave as "he thought Ma Hla May quite capable of coming back and making a scene," and only the fact that neither woman spoke the other's language gives him any reassurance (89). Clearly, a prostitute or a woman without any standing in the household would not have dared to question Flory in such a manner, and Flory's relief after Elizabeth's departure is an indication that Ma Hla May was justified in her indignation at seeing Elizabeth at the house.[136] Later in the novel, Ma Hla May again attempts to assert her rights as his wife when she makes a last ditch effort to work her way back into Flory's good graces, but when Flory suggests that she return to her village, she responds:

> ' . . . Ah, what shame, what shame! Two years I was your wife, you loved me and cared for me, and then without warning, without reason, you drove me from your

[136] Ma Hla May's eventual acquiescence could also have indicated that she was aware of the futility of objecting to the presence of the other woman as Burmese law allowed men to take second wives without being deemed to have committed any offense against the first wife. While polygamy was not forbidden in Burma, it was not common (Scott, *Burma: A Handbook of Practical Information* 85).

> door like a dog[137]. . . I am ruined, ruined! What man will marry me after I have lived two years in your house? You have taken my youth from me. Ah, what shame, what shame!' (158-59)

Ma Hla May's anger was in fact all the more justified if Burmese attitudes toward divorce are considered. Pointing out that the dower was viewed in part as economic protection against divorce, Spiro notes the ease with which divorces were obtained under Buddhist Law and how this ease resulted in a "high risk of divorce-induced economic insecurity." He further mentions that economic difficulties resulting from divorce were likely to become permanent for cast-off women, due to the "negative attitude towards marrying divorcees." Says Spiro: "Burmese men prefer to marry virgins – [thus,] the wife's chances of remarriage are not very good" (198-99). This leads to another issue on which the Burmese translation of the novel sheds light: Ma Hla May's statement that Flory had taken her youth from her (*BD* 162*)*; Maung Myint Kywe translates Orwell's word "youth" into Burmese as "virginity" (237), and there is a strong possibility that this is indeed what Orwell intended to imply. Had Ma Hla May sacrificed her virginity to a man she believed to be her husband, only to be discarded by him two years later, her outrage would clearly have been justified. Without doubt, Ma Hla May expresses the proverbial shame and anger of the wife wronged, to which the narrator then offers the most telling support of all for Ma Hla May's position, the narrator's own admission of Flory's blameworthiness: "He could not look at her; he stood helpless, pale, hang-dog. Every word she said was justified …" (159) and "It was true what she had said, he had robbed her of her youth" (162). Clearly, Flory recognizes his own guilt, and so does Orwell.

---

[137] The narrator, too, describes Ma Hla May following Flory around like "a disobedient dog" (205).

Without doubt, a strong and compelling argument can be made in support of Ma Hla May's assertions that she truly was Flory's legal wife. Still, Orwell chose to portray Ma Hla May as a cunning and devious whore who evokes little if any sympathy in the reader, and most scholars and critics have readily accepted this portrayal. As has already been established, however, the factors constituting a legitimate "marriage" at this time and in this place varied greatly according to one's perspective, based on education, race, religion, and sex. The gulf that existed between the way in which Flory and Ma Hla May defined marriage was further compounded by the imprecise and patriarchal nature of the laws themselves; originally borrowed from India, these antiquated and somewhat arcane laws were further obfuscated by their codification and/or implementation by the British. The fact that Flory's version of the truth has been almost unquestioningly accepted hinges on the tacit recognition – until modern times – of the "truth" or norm of white, male members of the ruling class in colonial Burma; Ma Hla May's perspective, that of the "Other" or subaltern, has been marginalized and gone unvoiced. While Daphne Patai has argued that Flory's relationship with Ma Hla May might have reflected an inadvertent cultural misunderstanding, I argue otherwise in the following chapter, providing evidence to support the notion that both Orwell and Flory were well aware of the way in which Ma Hla May would have viewed her relationship with Flory. It follows, then, that Orwell's own attitude toward colonized women (and possibly toward women in general) must be called into question, and I propose that the vicious maligning of Ma Hla May by Flory, the omniscient narrator, and Orwell – which has persisted in the works of so many critics and scholars – is simply another manifestation of the orientalist sensibilities that

continued to plague Orwell despite the almost legendary social and moral awakening that transformed him during his time in Burma.

## Chapter V:

## Debunking the "Inadvertent Cultural Misunderstanding Theory"

"Let the man to whom she is given by her nearest
relation be her husband" (The *Dhammathat* as quoted
in Shway Yoe 54)

### Introduction

As established in the previous chapter, the idea that "Orwell's novel may inadvertently represent a case of cross-cultural misunderstanding, with Flory and Ma Hla May operating from different paradigms" (Patai 39), certainly appears plausible when viewed from Ma Hla May's perspective, and much of her seemingly base behavior can be forgiven when her perspective of the relationship with Flory is taken into consideration. Indeed, attempting to better understand Ma Hla May through examination of Burmese cultural and legal norms of the period leads one to conclude that despite the manner in which she is commonly viewed, she was much more a victim than she was a villain. Absolving Flory of guilt, however, is a bit more problematic. While the general danger inherent in conflating ideas attributed to a fictional character with those of the author who created him is conceded, there can be little doubt that Orwell used many of his own experiences as a template for Flory's, and that the opinions and beliefs of fictional Flory are imbued with the attitudes and ideas of Orwell himself. Had Orwell been ignorant of Burmese customs and the manner in which Ma Hla May would have viewed her relationship with Flory, it would therefore have logically followed that Flory, too, would have been oblivious to Ma Hla May's perspective, thereby creating a genuine cross-cultural misunderstanding on both parts. The offensiveness of Flory's treatment of Ma Hla May would then, perhaps, have been lessened a notch. Orwell, however, was undoubtedly knowledgeable of Burmese mores, and acceptance of the premise that Flory

was largely an autobiographical representation of Orwell himself, based on the numerous biographical and ideological parallels that existed between the young Orwell and Flory, seems to preclude the possibility of a cultural misunderstanding on the part of Flory. More significant than the misdeeds of fictional Flory, however, is the strong message about Orwell conveyed by the almost complete lack of narrative sympathy for Ma Hla May. Indeed, as Stephen Ingle, quoting Kenneth Quinn says, "'In every sentence of a novel or poem, if we know how to read it, we feel the speaking voice of the writer,' what George Steiner referred to as the writer's real presence. In short, the writer's personality and experience will shape our understanding of a novel" ("Anti-Imperialism" 218). In discussing the process of fiction-writing, author Madeline L'Engle similarly opines: "[t]he story comes, and it is pure story. . . . But I don't believe that we can write any kind of story without including, whether we intend to or not, our response to the world around us" (97); she thus concludes that even in the absence of intentionality, "Those of us who write are responsible for the effect of our books" (99). This presupposition, compounded by the almost complete absence of narrative compassion for Ma Hla May, who is objectified and presented solely through the Western male gaze, forces me to conclude that Orwell's legendary identification with the oppressed apparently did not extend to colonized women, at least not at the time *Burmese Days* was written. It is thus difficult to absolve the author of responsibility for depicting Ma Hla May through the skewed and one-sided lens of androcentrism that has led critics and scholars to view her so critically. In this chapter I first discuss the historical factors and underlying attitudes that I believe likely contributed to what appears to be Orwell's conscious decision to portray Ma Hla May in this unforgiving manner, overlooking the inherent egregiousness of concubinage

and adopting instead the more convenient position of Western male privilege and patriarchy. I then delineate factors that belie the notion of an inadvertent cultural misunderstanding on the part of Orwell.

**A. Unraveling Causation**: **A Brief History of Concubinage in Burma**

To appreciate why Orwell chose to represent Ma Hla May as he did, the history of concubinage in Burma and the general feelings about the practice in the early 20th century when both Orwell and Flory served in Burma must first be considered. Orwell's depiction of Ma Hla May as "mistress," perceived from the Western male perspective, is rooted in the prevailing British colonial mindset and evolving official and/or demi-official policies of both the colonial government and private companies operating in Burma. Viewing local women in this manner was convenient for British officials and company men posted in Burma who sought the benefits of intimate relationships without the responsibilities normally associated with formalized unions. The practice of keeping mistresses was originally a common occurrence not only in Burma, but throughout the British colonies, and it is not surprising that the phenomenon should have found its way into Orwell's novel. What *is* unexpected and alarming, however, is that George Orwell – renowned for his sense of fair play and identification with the lowly and abject – chose to align himself so solidly on one side of the spectrum of this controversial matter, depicting Ma Hla May in a thoroughly bigoted and illiberal manner and providing a reader unacquainted with Burmese customs little information to suggest that she may have viewed herself otherwise.

The British Raj was marked by a long history of cultural intermingling in the form of mixed marriage and concubinage. William Dalrymple, for example, notes that in India,

"[a]t all times up to the nineteenth century, but perhaps especially during the period 1770 to 1830, there was wholesale interracial sexual exploration and surprisingly widespread cultural assimilation and hybridity: what Salman Rushdie – in reference to modern multiculturalism – has called 'chutnification.'"As Dalrymple explains:

> . . . in this insular world the only way that a Briton in Calcutta could come into close or intimate contact with Indians and Indian society was if he took an Indian *bibi*, or companion. In the second half of the eighteenth century the majority of Company servants still seem to have done this; of the Bengal Wills from 1780 to 1785 preserved in the India Office, one in three contains a bequest to Indian wives or companions or their natural children. It can safely be assumed that many more kept Indian mistresses without wishing to leave a formal legal record of the fact. (34)

Dalrymple further notes that "[v]irtually all Englishmen in India at this period Indianised themselves to some extent. Those who went further and converted to Islam or Hinduism, or made really dramatic journeys across cultures, were certainly always a minority; but they were probably nothing like as small a minority as we have been accustomed to expect" (10).[138] A similar practice developed in Burma, which, except for a brief period between 1942 and 1945 when Japan occupied the country, was ruled by the British from 1824 until 1948 and annexed to India in 1886. The Burmese equivalent of the Indian *bibi* was the "mistress" or "temporary wife," the "keeping" of which was sometimes referred

[138] Dalrymple cites as an early example of this transculturation Job Charnock, the founder of Calcutta. In the 1660s, Charnock is said to have "adopted the Bengali *lungi* and married a Hindu girl whom he allegedly saved from the funeral pyre of her first husband" (22).

to as an "irregular union." Due to the scarcity of European women in Burma as well as the Burmese tolerance for mixed unions, the practice of concubinage became widespread. Ann L. Stoler defines concubinage as "a contemporary term which referred to the cohabitation outside of marriage between European men and Asian women; in fact, it glossed a wide range of arrangements which included sexual access to a non-European woman as well as demands on her labor and legal rights to the children she bore" ("Making Empire Respectable" 637). As I have already argued, however, some of the relationships that fell under the umbrella term "concubinage" were in fact deemed by the Burmese to be legitimate marital unions.

The sexual intermingling of the races and the keeping of "mistresses" continued to be widespread in India up until about the mid-19th century, around the time when Orwell's father went to serve in India, when improved communications with England (Ballhatchet 147) and changing moral values began to cause it to decline. As David Gilmour says, "What had been acceptable to the Prince Regent was intolerable to the Prince Consort. What the nabobs had lapped up was no longer appetizing to the Stracheys and the Lyalls" (284). Thus, while some senior officials in India still had Indian wives, the number of British men keeping mistresses became far fewer than it had once been. As Gilmour notes, "After the Mutiny open cohabitation was largely restricted to remote areas on the fringes of the Empire in Burma and Assam" (284). Indeed, both concubinage and registered marriages persisted in Burma long after they had begun to taper off in India, although these unions, too, eventually came under fire from the government based in India, which responded by issuing a series of confidential circulars to warn officers of the dangers of consorting with local women. The primary tactic used in discouraging

these unions was the threat to a man's employment, either through promotion refusals or outright termination, and such tactics, in various ways, continued to be employed up until the early 20th century when Orwell was posted in Burma. As early as in 1867, for example, concubinage was demi-officially scorned after the Bishop of Calcutta expressed shock when faced with the ubiquity of the practice in Burma. In response, Chief Commissioner Colonel Fytche issued what was perhaps the first of a number of "confidential circulars" denouncing the practice and implying that Burmese mistresses were wont to use their influence with their European paramours "to prevent suitors and others obtaining a hearing or approaching officers of Government thus situated, except through a corrupt source." The circular was forwarded to Commissioners and department heads with instructions to "issue it to every officer under them and to take note of such things when considering promotions."[139] Despite the purported confidentiality of the document, word about the circular got back to Calcutta, and fearing that the missive "'might get into the wrong hands'[,] . . . 'Fytche was accordingly rebuked.'" Still, Fytche made sure "to tell any officer living in 'open concubinage' that the Governor-General in Council disapproved and would not sanction promotion in such a case" (Ballhatchet 146). Apparently his efforts had little effect, for in 1881, when the Deputy Commissioner of Bassein, Colonel W. Munro, appealed to the Chief Commissioner after "his superior officer refused to recommend him for promotion, on the ground that he had a Burmese

[139] The timeframe makes it possible that this was the circular to which J. Nisbet was referring when he said, "The first [circular], issued about 1872, is said to have resulted in a match, at a Rangoon race meeting, between two ponies named, *pro hâc vice,* 'C.C.C.C.' (Chief Commissioner's Confidential Circular) and 'Physiological Necessity.' The latter won, and the threats of the circular were thus smothered in ridicule" (251).

mistress," Munro's defense was that "the relationship had begun two decades [earlier] when 'things of [the] sort were looked at in a much more venial light.'" Still, the tide had turned enough by then that while the Chief Commissioner conceded "that the custom had continued 'a full generation' longer in Burma than in India," Munro still failed to be promoted (146-47).

The mid-late 1880s, only a few decades before Orwell's posting to Burma, marked a period of renewed effort to eradicate both so-called "illicit" relationships as well as legal marriages between Burmese women and British men. Ronald Hyam credits this crackdown to "the convergence of two reformist programmes operating at different levels of British society," the Purity Campaign, which Penny Edwards says "coincided with the high-tide of social Darwinism and rising preoccupations with racial purity"[140] (284), and the "'colonial service reform,'" marked by the belief in the necessity of maintaining a proper social distance between the ruling and the ruled (Hyam 171-72). Compounding long-held fears of the influence Burmese women might wield over Western men, Edwards credits Ann Stoler with pointing out that "much of [the] anxiety [associated with the Purity Campaign] was linked to the emergence of a sizeable mixed-

---

[140] The notion of purity is reflected in the novel when Flory recalls the scores of prostitutes he had been with over the years. The narrator says: "He had dirtied himself beyond redemption . . . " (*BD* 203). The influence of social Darwinism can also be seen in the novel in Elizabeth's comments on the physiognomy of the Burmese. When Flory praises the Burmese physique, Elizabeth responds:

> 'But they have such hideous-shaped heads! Their skulls kind of slope up behind like a tom-cat's. And their foreheads slant back – it makes them look so *wicked.* I remember reading something in a magazine about the shape of people's heads; it said that a person with a sloping forehead is a *criminal type.'* (122)

race community in European colonies" (284). This mindset was reflected in Chief Commissioner Sir Charles Crosthwaite's 1888 circular issued to Commissioners serving in Upper Burma, which suggested that "'[t]he creation of a large class of Anglo-Burmans who are insufficiently educated and left without means of supporting themselves is likely to become a source of difficulty to the Government and to prejudice our name'" (Ballhatchet 147).[141] Thus, concubinage and mixed marriages, once the norm for men posted in the British colonies, were increasingly discouraged – officially, at least.

Efforts to discourage mixed unions, however, did not always engender the results desired. In 1894, for example, the ideas driving the "colonial service reform" were conveyed in another confidential circular, this time circulated by Chief Commissioner Sir Alexander Mackenzie. Concerned with maintaining English prestige, Mackenzie held that an officer consorting with a Burmese mistress "'not only degrades himself as an English gentleman, but lowers the prestige of the English name, and largely destroys his own usefulness.'" He later more realistically confided to the Viceroy, however, that he feared his circular had not "'gone beyond the office boxes of the recipients'" due to their reluctance to act on such orders, "'being unfortunately hampered by ancient sins of their own of the same description'" (147). In an even more drastic contrast between intention and result, Nisbet notes that the 1894 circular actually had the unanticipated and unwanted effect of prompting at least several "*bonâ fide* unions registered under English law." He cites the case of

[141] Orwell, too, addresses the issue of Anglo-Burmese through the characters of Samuel and Francis.

> [o]ne young civilian, stationed in a lonely township where he was cut off from the district headquarters save by steamer communication about once a fortnight in the dry season and once a month in the south-west monsoon months, [who] even went the length, as official registrar, of marrying himself to his Burmese girl, in order to legitimize the child about to be born of the union; . . .

This was certainly not the desired result of the circular, for as critical as the government was of the practice of keeping mistresses, many still deemed concubinage preferable to formalized marriage under the British legal system. Thus, despite the man's efforts to legitimize the relationship, Nisbet reports that "the trustees of the Bengal Civil Fund refused to recognize the act as legal or as entitling the woman and her child to be thus brought on the Fund as possible annuitants" (251-52). In another case, the new Chief Commissioner of Burma, Sir Frederick Fryer, sought the transfer of two officials in 1895 on the grounds that they had legally married Burmese women. Fryer argued that "legal marriages were 'as harmful from the point of view of the administration' as illicit connections," again reiterating the common fear of women exerting negative influence on their husbands in relation to their work. Although the transfer was eventually denied, Fryer continued to argue the case (Ballhatchet 148-49). What such cases prove, however, is that not all of the relationships between British officials and Burmese women were frivolous or temporary, nor were they viewed as such by the Burmese.[142] Indeed, this was

---

[142] Many Western men attempted to minimize the harm done these women by insisting that the women knew that these unions were only temporary. Nisbet, for example, says of the Burmese woman: "From her point of view she is married to the European; and she knows quite well that in perhaps more than nineteen cases out of every twenty the time must come when there will be a separation – this is to say, a divorce – desired by the husband" (250). Evidence suggests, however, that many of these women did not

again exemplified when Mackenzie suggested, in a letter to the Viceroy's private secretary, that it would be more difficult to quell the practice in Burma than it had been in India, owing to "'the greater attractiveness and perfect freedom of Burmese women, who do not regard such connexions as shameful *liaisons,* and who in this are supported by the opinion of their families'" (147). Despite official British misgivings about the practice, then, Mackenzie's admonition not only serves to underscore the fact that unions between British men and Burmese women were deemed to be valid relationships in the eyes of both the Burmese women who entered such unions and their families, but also – importantly – *that those serving in the British administration were aware of this perception* (my emphasis).

---

knowingly enter into temporary unions. John Williamson Palmer, for example, says of Mayouk, the girl he "purchased": "When I left Rangoon forever, she cried, and begged me to take her silver spittoon for a keepsake . . ." (236). More dramatically, Michael Myers Shoemaker says: "It is reported that foreigners who have formed relations with the women of Burma have found them very faithful in all respects, but they are vengeful and unforgiving, and rumour hath it that several English brides who have come out here have been done away with through the medium of powdered glass or drugs" (86). Similarly, Willis cites an anecdote about a British man employed by an oil company in Burma who takes a Burmese wife named Meh Suey with whom he has several children. When he decides six years later to return home to marry a woman to whom he had long ago become betrothed, Meh Suey is devastated. A colleague tries to persuade him to stay with Meh Suey and says: "These Burmese women are the very devil to shake off. In fact, it is the old saying in Burma that it is far 'more easy to get melted butter out of a mad dog's mouth than to shake your Burma girl off if she loves you,' and Meh Suey seems devoted to you.'" He refused to change his mind, however, and Meh Suey, faced with no other options, poisons and kills him instead of allowing him to leave her (127-44). In a similar manner, Ma Hla May is clearly shattered when Flory ends their relationship and ends up destroying herself so that she may also destroy Flory.

Ironically, despite official efforts to dissuade men from entering into such relationships, economic considerations and long-held beliefs about the climate and remoteness of most Burmese posts being unsuitable for European women caused many British administrative and company officials to only half-heartedly enforce the official position about concubinage with some even going so far as to dissuade or prohibit their subordinates from marrying English women or bringing English wives to Burma. In the words of Mackenzie, there were "'many places where Englishmen [were] expected to live in mat hovels, to which no gentleman could take an English wife'" (qtd. in Ballhatchet 148), and the perceived "mortality risk" of the sultry climate was so feared that Charles Crosthwaite, for example, "counselled his officials not to marry" (Gilmour 285). These beliefs, coupled with the costs involved in providing accommodations deemed acceptable for Western women, ultimately made companionship with "native" women seem a favorable alternative.[143]

---

[143] Despite the incongruity of the last two lines, the notion of the undemanding Burmese woman was even exemplified in the words of a song from the 1905 British musical "Blue Moon":

> Oh Burmah Girl, you're quite divine,
> Would we had met before,
> On my half pay if you were mine
> I could do so much more;
> You do not ask for rows of pearls
> To trim your frenzied frocks,
> You only need a simple bead,
> You've got no op'ra box.
> Burmah, Burmah, Burmah girl,
> You don't spend your days at Wooland's and Jay's,
> You don't fret to play roulette,
> Making a poor man squirm, ah!
> No Carlton for you, no supper for two,
> I've made up my mind, if a wife I find
> I shall bring her to live in Burmah. (Johnson)

Inconsistent policies and arbitrary enforcement of regulations thus encouraged erratic adherence thereto, resulting in the continuance of both concubinage and lawful British marriages. Indeed, as Ikeya points out, "[i]n 1885 there was only one officer, Major Parrott, with a Burmese wife; the number had increased to thirteen by 1903" (*Refiguring Women* 123). Of the thirteen, eight were police officers like Orwell, while the others were civil servants (Ballhatchet 153). The ubiquity of the practice prompted yet another effort to quell it, and in 1903, Lieutenant-Governor Sir Frederick Fryer issued a demi-official circular known as the Burmese Minute, which "consolidated the substance of earlier confidential circulars issued in Burma" (Hyam 177). This was followed up with an even more concerted effort six years later, approximately a year before Flory is said to have come to Burma, when Lord Crewe, Secretary of State for the Colonies, drafted what came to be "variously known as 'the morals despatch', 'the immoral relations memo', 'the concubine Circular', or simply as 'the Crewe Circular'"[144] (171). Crewe recognized the difficulty involved in "'launching by surprise against the whole Colonial Service, young and old, married or unmarried, a thunderbolt forged for reasons of which they will have heard nothing, to the effect that if they engage in relations with native women they run the risk of being dismissed'" and therefore proposed the dubious tactic of circulating two different memorandums with "a covering letter instructing governors on their use." As described by Hyam,

---

[144] In 1906, between the time the Burmese Minute and the Crewe Circular were distributed, civil servant and respected historian John Furnivall married a Burmese woman with whom he had three children, although Carol Ann Boshier notes that he "retained a lifelong reserve about his personal and domestic arrangements" (322).

> A drastic circular would warn new recruits of severe treatment, but a more general circular would be issued to all officers already in the service. This would impress on them the danger and scandal to the public service, but it would not contain threats of dismissal. The principle of the drastic circular might, however, if necessary be applied at any time to any officer. (177)

Likewise, this hypocrisy was again spotlighted by a report on prostitution compiled by John Cowen, an instructor at the Rangoon Baptist College, which included a section entitled "Condonement of European Vice" that discussed "the widespread practice of 'temporary unions' entered into by European men." It stated that "the attitude of the administration towards European men who cohabited with Burmese women was one not merely of leniency but of 'positive friendliness,'" which was evidenced by "government grants for illegitimate children of British men by Burmese mothers in the form of orphan stipends, boarder stipends, and apprentice stipends." The report states that "[c]olonial authorities . . . acknowledged their preference for cohabitation over marriage but insisted that irregular and temporary unions – which 'Burmese women have always shown themselves very ready to contract' – were, 'according to the ideas prevalent among [Burmese] people, not looked upon as disreputable.'" The report also noted that the main objection to a bill introduced in 1914 that would have protected underage girls who were often lured to Rangoon "on false pretences and tricked into a life of prostitution" was that "its definition of the words 'illicit intercourse' would lead to extensive abuse due to the prevalent practice by foreign men of taking Burmese girls as mistresses. 'It is of course well known,' the report claims, 'that many foreigners residing in Burma take Burmese girls as mistresses, paying money to the guardians" (Ikeya, *Refiguring Women* 125-27).

Perhaps in an attempt to assuage guilt, the report blamed the Burmese and their "loose marriage laws." In an effort to protect the men who routinely victimized vulnerable women, in reality often children and teens,[145] then, authorities and other members of society looked the other way. Tellingly, this double standard is later reflected in Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* when the narrator discusses Winston Smith's experiences with prostitution: "Tacitly the Party was even inclined to encourage prostitution, as an outlet for instincts which could not be altogether suppressed. Mere debauchery did not matter very much, so long as it was furtive and joyless and only involved the women of a submerged and despised class"[146] (781). It is easy to trace this passage back to Orwell's experience in Burma, and it seems no coincidence that he describes the women as being of "a submerged and despised class" as Hla May is depicted in exactly the same way. It is of further interest to note that Orwell compares the relative "innocuousness" of this depravity to the more scandalous iniquity of pre- or extramarital relations with one's own kind: "The unforgivable crime was promiscuity between Party members[,] although, the narrator says, "it was difficult to imagine any such thing actually happening" (781). Likewise, when Flory wishes to pursue a relationship with Elizabeth, he immediately contemplates proposing marriage, mere cohabitation never being an option. Clearly a

---

[145] The narrator, describing Ma Hla May as "weeping quite shamelessly" after Flory ends their relationship, admits: "After all, she was hardly more than a child" (*BD* 160).

[146] Similarly, in *The Road to Wigan Pier,* Orwell says that the difference between the Burmese and the "lower classes" in England was that the Burmese "were not felt to be physically repulsive. One looked down on them as 'natives,' but one was quite ready to be physically intimate with them," adding that "it was the case even with white men who had the most vicious colour prejudice" (124).

distinction between "native" women (analogous to proles) and women of his own kind (the counterpart of Party members) existed in Orwell's mind.

The practice of concubinage and the occurrence of registered marriages between Europeans and local women, then, continued until the time Flory and Orwell served in Burma, 1910 and 1922, respectively. Relationships between Western men and Burmese women had by then become such a contentious issue, however, that Western men contemplating such relationships were forced to make a choice: they could enter into honorable relationships and accept the consequences, or they could enter into unofficially sanctioned temporary unions and abide by a de facto code of secrecy. Different men chose different paths, and despite continued cases of retribution, many men chose the upstanding alternative.[147] Others, however, opted to hide their mistresses,[148] often passing them off as servants. The true role of the women, of course, was recognized by all, but as long as the façade was maintained, a tacit agreement existed wherein superiors and associates – some presumably doing the same thing – pretended not to know. The result was a zero-sum game allowing libidinous Western men to prevail over powerless

---

[147] One such case occurred around 1920, when Rangoon University was being established, two years before Orwell joined the Imperial Police and about four years before Flory "bought" Ma Hla May from her parents; Gordon H. Luce, who had served as an English literature lecturer at Government College in Rangoon, was notified that "'because of his "Burmanization"' [Luce had married a Burmese Pali scholar's sister in 1915], he would not be considered for appointment'" as newly-established Rangoon University's first Professor of English (Ikeya *Refiguring Women* 124-25).

[148] Bill Tydd, for example, who served as a police officer in Burma in the late 1920s, recalls that his fondness for frequenting a couple of remote villages aroused suspicions that he "must have had one, if not two, pretty little Burmese mistresses discreetly tucked away in either, or even both, of these outlying places" (111).

"native" women, most of whom were probably guilty of no more than hoping to better their lives. Florwell, I argue, was of this ilk.

**B. Evidence Suggesting an Awareness of the Burmese Perspective**

***i. Reading Materials***

The notion that Orwell could have been unaware of the Burmese interpretation of marriage or that Flory could have misunderstood Ma Hla May's perception of their relationship is unconvincing in view of the abundance of evidence that exists to suggest otherwise. To begin with, references to Burmese marital customs were ubiquitous in writings about Burma, at least some of which Orwell would surely have encountered. As an avid reader[149] with family history in Burma, Orwell had almost certainly read up on the country before ever leaving England. Maung Htin Aung clearly shared this assumption as is evidenced when, commenting on the surprise Orwell must have felt upon encountering the hostility that marked the period during which Orwell served in Burma, he says that Orwell "must have felt angry with himself, with the books on Burma that he had read, and also with the Burmese people" ("George Orwell and Burma" 20). Even supposing that Orwell had not researched the country before his arrival there, however, he would surely have encountered informative sources while living in Burma during his tenure with the Imperial Police. Gordon Bowker, for example, points out that Orwell made "occasional forays to Rangoon to haunt the public library and visit Smart & Mookerdum's bookshop" (79), which, as previously mentioned, is also referenced in

[149] Modeled after Orwell himself, Flory is also depicted as an avid reader. Upon meeting Elizabeth, Flory says: "'…if you ever want books, you might find something you liked among mine. There's nothing but tripe in the Club library….What it means to meet somebody who cares for books! I mean books worth reading, not that garbage in the Club libraries'" (86-87).

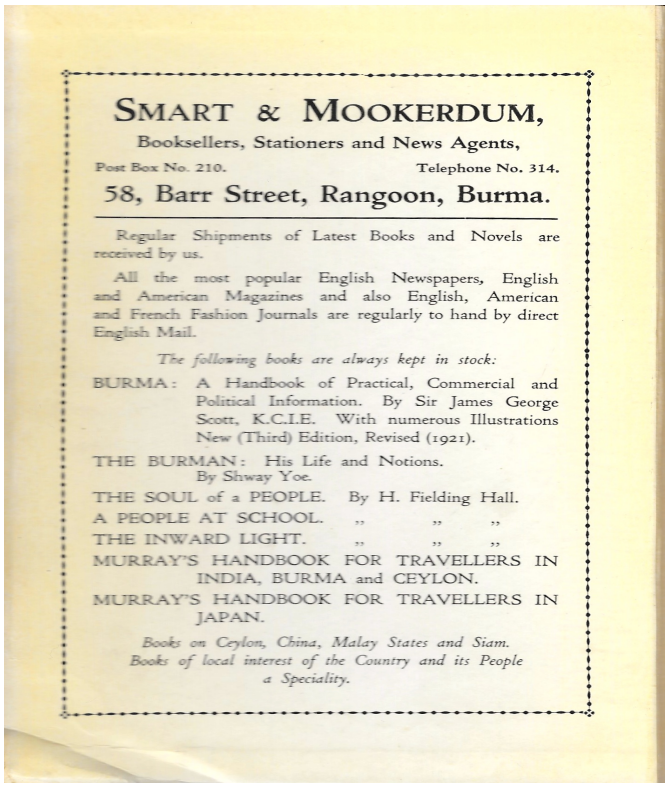
*Burmese Days*: "Oh, the joy of those Rangoon trips! The rush to Smart and Mookerdum's bookshop for the new novels out from England…" (66). Like most English bookstores abroad, their offerings included a selection of books on local history, culture, and related topics. Indeed, a full-page advertisement for Smart & Mookerdum pasted into the front cover of John Stuart's *Burma through the Centuries,* published in 1910, reads (see Figure 7):

> All the most popular English Newspapers, English and American Magazines and also English, American and French Fashion Journals are regularly to hand by direct English Mail.
>
> *The following books are always kept in stock:*
>
> BURMA: A Handbook of Practical, Commercial and Political Information. By Sir James George Scott, K.C.I.E. With numerous Illustrations New (Third) Edition, Revised (1921).
>
> THE BURMAN: His Life and Notions. By Shway Yoe.
>
> THE SOUL of a PEOPLE. By H. Fielding Hall.
>
> A PEOPLE AT SCHOOL. " " "
>
> THE INWARD LIGHT. " " "
>
> MURRAY'S HANDBOOK FOR TRAVELLERS IN INDIA, BURMA and CEYLON.
>
> MURRAY'S HANDBOOK FOR TRAVELLERS IN JAPAN.

*Books on Ceylon, China, Malay States and Siam.*

*Books of local interest of the Country and its People*

*a Specialty.*



SMART & MOOKERDUM,

Booksellers, Stationers and News Agents,

Post Box No. 210. Telephone No. 314.

58, Barr Street, Rangoon, Burma.

Regular Shipments of Latest Books and Novels are received by us.

All the most popular English Newspapers, English and American Magazines and also English, American and French Fashion Journals are regularly to hand by direct English Mail.

*The following books are always kept in stock:*

BURMA: A Handbook of Practical, Commercial and Political Information. By Sir James George Scott, K.C.I.E. With numerous Illustrations New (Third) Edition, Revised (1921).

THE BURMAN: His Life and Notions. By Shway Yoe.

THE SOUL of a PEOPLE. By H. Fielding Hall.

A PEOPLE AT SCHOOL. ,, ,, ,,

THE INWARD LIGHT. ,, ,, ,,

MURRAY'S HANDBOOK FOR TRAVELLERS IN INDIA, BURMA and CEYLON.

MURRAY'S HANDBOOK FOR TRAVELLERS IN JAPAN.

*Books on Ceylon, China, Malay States and Siam.*
*Books of local interest of the Country and its People*
*a Speciality.*

Figure 7: Full page "Smart & Mookerdum" Frontispiece Advertisement; photo by the author

Of the above-listed books, all but the last deal specifically with Burma. Moreover, a sampling of advertisements from the bookshop's first year in business[150] indicates that as early as in 1899, the store carried several of Fielding Hall's works on Burma (*Times of Burma* 18 March 1899) and James George Scott's *Burma As It Was, As It Is, and As It Will Be* (*Times of Burma* 25 Feb. 1899). Significantly, Chan Toon's *The Principles of*

[150] An advertisement for Smart and Mookerdum in the January 1st 1899 edition of *The Times of Burma* indicates that the bookshop had opened for business in that year (1).

*Buddhist Law* was also featured in a turn-of-the-century newspaper advertisement for Smart & Mookerdum, which clearly shows that even books on Buddhist Law were widely available to a general readership and kept in stock at Orwell's and Flory's favorite Burmese bookshop (*Times of Burma* 28 Jan. 1899). In fact, Smart & Mookerdum,

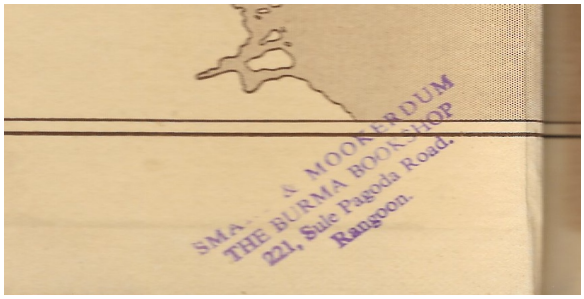



Figure 8: "Smart & Mookerdum: The Burma Bookshop" stamp in a copy of E. C. V. Foucar's *I Lived in Burma* (1956); photo by the author

which in the earlier advertisement claims to have specialized in "Books of local interest of the Country and its People," appears to have so specifically identified itself as a purveyor of books on Burma that it was later to add "The Burma Bookshop" to its name, as is indicated in Figure 8. Clearly, English books about Burma were abundant in the country. Indeed, in a 15 July 1935 letter to Leonard Moore, his literary agent, Orwell himself alludes to the wealth of English reading materials readily available in Burma and India[151] when, in an attempt to have *Burmese Days* more widely distributed, he writes:

[151] Again in his essay "Reflections on Gandhi," Orwell reports first reading Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* in serialized format in "the ill-printed pages of some Indian newspaper," most likely while he was stationed in Burma (172). Indeed, much like the author himself, the narrator of *Burmese Days* takes issue with the poor quality printing of a local newspaper: "He produced a copy of a bilingual paper called the *Burmese Patriot.* It was a miserable eight-page rag, villainously printed on paper as bad as blotting paper, and composed partly of news stolen from the *Rangoon Gazette*" (*BD* 5).

> It occurred to me that we could probably sell quite a lot of copies in Burma, and also India, and I wondered whether Mr Gollancz was making any arrangements to do this. There are quite extensive libraries and bookshops[152] out there. Also it would be well worth sending a copy for review to the Rangoon Gazette and Rangoon Times, and perhaps to one or two of the Indian papers. ("To Leonard Moore" 388)

Considering the availability of books about Burma, then, it is hard to imagine that Orwell and Flory would not have read at least some of them.

With the assumption that Orwell and Flory would indeed have sought out information on the country to which they had been posted, I examined some of the books on Burma available in the early 20th century and discovered that most of the books providing an overview of the country and its culture also included a section on Burmese marital customs. For example, Father Sangermano, an Italian priest and missionary who lived and worked in Burma from 1783 until 1808 and wrote the influential book *A Description of the Burmese Empire,* which, published in 1833, provided a foundation for later scholarship on Burma, observed that "in concluding a marriage, the customs of the Burmese are somewhat different to ours. With us it is the woman who brings the dowry . . . ; but in this country the man, on the contrary, goes to the house of the bride's parents, and must take with him a dower according to the resources of his family" (133). He notes the ease with which matrimony was entered into, stating that in most cases, a man who

---

[152] An advertisement for another bookseller that Orwell likely frequented, "The Rangoon Times Bookstall," located at 7 Merchant Street, in the heart of downtown Rangoon, appears in the 15 October 1921 edition of *The Weekly Rangoon Times* (1).

had taken a fancy to a woman would send an elder to her parents to ask for her hand. "If they and their daughter consent to the match, the contract[153] is immediately made" (133). He adds, importantly, that parental consent was not necessary and that marriages occurred "even in direct opposition to [parental] wishes. For the Burmese law allows no restraint in these matters, but leaves young people at liberty to follow their own inclinations, nay, even forbids all opposition to them, and all attempts on the part of the parents to force upon their children an odious marriage" (133). It is clear, then, that in the early nineteenth century – and perhaps even earlier – commentary by Europeans was already being written about Burmese marital customs, including the simplicity of the arrangements and the freedom of both bride and groom to choose a spouse. Albert Fytche, who held the post of Chief Commissioner of the British Crown Colony of Burma from 1867 until 1871, expressed almost the same sentiments in his 1878 book entitled *Burma Past and Present*: "Women are generally married about seventeen or nineteen years of age,[154] to the man of their choice of about the same age or older, the parents very seldom interfering, more than to advise." Like Sangermano, he emphasizes the free will of the couple to be wed, stating: "[t]he Buddhist Law forbids opposition in such cases, leaving young people, in a great measure, to follow their own inclinations, and marriages are occasionally contracted without the consent of the parents of either party; and sometimes even in direct opposition to their wishes" (69). He further notes that once the parents give their consent, "the *corbeille de noce* is furnished by the bridegroom

[153] It should be pointed out that the contract in question was a "gentleman's contract" involving no legal documentation.

[154] Ma Hla May is said to be 22 in the novel, which means that she would have begun her relationship with Flory when she was about 20, in keeping with the norm as defined by Fytche.

according to his means, and the marriage takes place almost immediately" (70). In a footnote to this passage, he draws attention to the rarity of dowries in Burma, saying "almost everything is expected to be furnished by the bridegroom" (70). Also in 1878, Charles James Forbes Smith-Forbes wrote: "The legal marriage tie is easily formed…Openly living together as man and wife, and *eating out of the same dish*[155] [Smith-Forbes' emphasis], is as perfect a form of marriage, as a whole string of ceremonies could make it" (64). Later, in 1894, Chan-Toon's *The Principles of Buddhist Law* quoted the *Manu Kyay Dhammathat* in listing the three ways in which a couple can marry: with a marriage arranged by parents, a go-between, or themselves. He notes that "no particular form or ceremony is required for the purpose," again pointing out the importance of cohabitation and commensality: "a marked feature is the eating and living together as husband and wife which no doubt would be evidence of marriage" (14-15). Similarly, James George Scott, who was regarded by his peers to be an expert in all sorts of matters pertaining to Burmese culture, history, and language,[156] published numerous books on Burma, among them, in 1906, *Burma: A Handbook of Practical Information,*

[155] See discussion of commensality on pages 191-93.

[156] F. Tennyson Jesse so highly regarded Scott that in her book *The Lacquer Lady*, she describes him thus: "the greatest living British authority on Burmese life and literature, and himself author of standard books that will always be vital to the serious student…" In the writing of her book on the last days of King Thibaw, she says that Scott served as her "court of appeal throughout," crediting him thus: "He has given me vivid descriptions of the men of that day who made this particular piece of history. He has been my authority for all the Burmese words and phrases, and with unfailing patience he has 'vetted' every line of the book" (Preface vii-viii).

and in 1886, under the pseudonym Shway Yoe, *The Burman: His Life and Notions*.[157] Both works include sections devoted to Burmese marriage customs and, like Chan-Toon's work, detail the three ways in which a marriage can occur as described in the *Dhammathats,* the latter pointing out that even when a marriage is arranged by a go-between or by the couple themselves, "at least the passive consent of the father, or, if he is dead, of the guardian, mother, brother, sister, uncle, or whoever it may be" is implied and quoting the *dhammathat* thus: "'Let the man to whom she is given by her nearest relation be her husband'" (*The Burman* 54, [page number from 1910 edition]). Scott further notes the informal nature of the ceremony itself, stating that "[t]he ritual is very simple and has nothing whatever of a religious character about it," pointing out how the feast supplied by the bridegroom and the gathering of friends and relatives serve to solemnize the wedding bond instead (see also Scott's *Burma: A Handbook* 83-85). Likewise, both H. Fielding Hall's 1898 *The Soul of a People* and his 1906 *A People at School* describe in detail the norms of Burmese marriages, the former devoting three full chapters to Burmese women[158] and the latter devoting one chapter to Civil Law, including marriage, and another to women. A few years later, in 1913, Herbert Thirkell White, a longtime civil servant in Burma, wrote: "No ceremony of marriage is necessary

---

[157] Both of these books are listed in the Smart & Mookerdum advertisement shown in Figure 7. Yet another of Scott's books on Burma, *Burma As It Was, As It Is and As It Will Be*, published in 1886, was listed in a Smart & Mookerdum advertisement that appeared in the 25th February 1899 edition of *The Times of Burma*, and thus was likely available to Orwell/Flory. This book also includes a section on Burmese marital customs (135-39).

[158] Chapter XV also begins with a quotation attributed to the "*Laws of Menu*": "'The husband is lord of the wife'" (187).

or, among the mass of the people, usual . . . Mutual consent is the sole essential of a marriage" (71). The sentiment about Burmese marriage expressed in White's book even received attention in the international press, and on December 20, 1913, *The Chicago Defender,* drawing on White's assertions, published an article entitled "No Marriage Bans in Burma," which clearly stated: "No ceremony is necessary in marriage, and, among the mass of the people, none is usual." Moreover, in 1917, J. E. Marks went so far as to give an example of the simplicity of a Burmese entering wedlock with a Westerner: "In the Burmese mind, the union between John Smith or Thomas Mc– and Ma Shwe, performed in the presence of her parents and a select gathering of friends, the contracting parties eating rice and curry out of the same dish, is as much a valid marriage as if it were performed in church by a Bishop or Archdeacon" (136-37). Certainly, there was no dearth of information regarding Burmese marital norms. In fact, while *Burmese Days* provides no specific details regarding Flory's "purchase" of Ma Hla May from her parents, it seems reasonable to assume that his negotiations with her parents would have closely resembled the details described in the passages above.

In addition to books, a large number of periodicals, both local and European, were available in Burma. Ikeya points out, for example, that the 1921 *Census of India* reported that one Burmese and English[159] and 36 English newspapers and periodicals were published in Burma that year with a combined circulation of 44,567 (*Gender, History and Modernity* 26), a sizeable readership for a part of the Raj still deemed by many to be a backwater. In fact, two such publications are even mentioned in the novel, the *Burmese*

[159] In the novel, Orwell notes that the *Burmese Patriot* was "a bilingual paper." This paper was the vehicle through which U Po Kyin contrived to destroy the reputation of Dr. Veraswami, among others (5).

*Patriot*[160] (5; 37; 62; 77; 114) and the *Rangoon Gazette* (5). Furthermore, Western periodicals were also easily obtained; indeed, in the novel, Orwell names explicitly several European publications available at the Club: the *Field* (18-19; 215; 216), *Punch* (17; 27), *Pink'un* (17; 69; 180), *La Vie Parisienne* (17; 23; 24; 181), the *London News* (20), *Blackwood's* (25; 31; 180; 217), and *News of the World* (40; 41).[161] The ready availability of Western periodicals is significant, for as Lucy Delap explains in her article "Uneven Orientalisms: Burmese Women and the Feminist Imagination,"[162] the freedoms women had traditionally enjoyed in Burmese society had begun to draw considerable attention in the Western media in the late nineteen/early twentieth century, and marriage was a common component of this discussion (390-91). As noted by DeLap, articles describing the remarkable freedoms of Burmese women appeared in British publications such as *The Englishwoman's Review* (391), *The Girl's Own Paper* (393), and *Cornhill Magazine* (397). Likewise, on the other side of the Atlantic, American newspapers

---

[160] Peter Davison points out that in the changes made to the English edition of the novel in order to delocalize the story, the *Burmese Patriot* was "incongruously" renamed the *Burmese Sinn Feiner* ("A Note on the Text" v-vi). In a statement of alterations made to the American edition of the novel, Orwell says, "The name of the native paper has been changed from the Burmese Patriot to the Burmese Sinn Feiner. I don't think this is a possible name, and at the same time it gives the right implication to an English reader" ("To Victor Gollancz [Ltd]" 380).

[161] Other magazines are mentioned in the novel including *Nash's Magazine* (95), the *Sketch* (96), the *Tatler* (96; 237), the *Graphic* (96), and the *Sporting and Dramatic*[161] (96). These, however, are mentioned in connection with Elizabeth's time in Paris.

[162]As the title of her article suggests, however, DeLap notes that while the freedoms Burmese women traditionally enjoyed were lauded in the Western press, the overall attitude toward Burmese women depicted in the Western press was inconsistent.

featured articles about Burmese women with such sensational titles as: "The Women of Burma: How the Wives Hold the Purses and Manage Their Husbands as Well" (Carpenter), "Burmese Woman Is Head of Family," "Where Women Are Free: In Burmah the Men Have Been Almost Displaced as Traders," "Where Women Are Queens," "Woman and Home: Burmese Women the Freest and Happiest in the World," "Where Women Do As They Please," "The Burmese Women: A Land Where Business Is Transacted by the Ladies," and "Women Vote in Burma." In light of the evidence, then, I argue that it is inconceivable that Orwell/Flory could have been ignorant of the local conventions regarding marriage.

***ii. The "Temporary Marriage" Depicted in Periodicals and Literature, Including Orwell's Own Unpublished Manuscript***

Not surprisingly, the topic of concubinage or the so-called "temporary marriage," much like the Burmese notion of marriage and the freedoms enjoyed by Burmese women, also found its way into newspapers and became an issue of increasing debate and criticism in both the colonies and the metropole. Viewed in the context of historical events, these articles not only further support the notion that Orwell knew well what he was writing about, but also shed light on his motives in depicting Ma Hla May as he did. While I have found no smoking gun that puts any such article into Orwell's hands, evidence in the form of his own writing exists to demonstrate that he was clearly aware of this debate. Indeed, the topic was nothing new; even in the 1800s, newspapers had featured articles that called attention to this phenomenon. One such article, published in 1895, when Orwell's father would already have been well established in his career in

India, stated that Burmese women were "the most refined in their manners of any Asiatic non-Christain [sic] race, " and further noted:

> It is these refined ladies (for such they really are) that numbers of Englishmen up and down Burmah marry according to ancient Burmese laws, and then cast off when they are transferred to another part of the Empire, or marry an English wife. These marriages take place in every class of European society in Burmah, military, civil and commercial, high and low. A writer from Rangoon states, that in one place he visited nearly every Englishman had one of these Burmese wives, and urges that an Act of Parliament should be passed making it bigamy by Imperial law for an Englishman to marry again whilst his Burmese wife is alive. ("European Bigamists in Burmah" 2)

Likewise, a story entitled "The Surprise That Surprises" appeared in a 1906 edition of *The Philadelphia Enquirer,* describing a young British woman who decides to surprise her husband, a Burma Police officer like Orwell, with an unannounced visit to the town in middle Burma to which he had been posted. A Colonel she meets on the steamer up the Irrawaddy does his best to dissuade her from showing up unexpectedly, but she is adamant about surprising her husband. Upon finally reaching her destination, she is shocked to find that her husband has been living with a Burmese woman. (See Figure 9.) While the Burmese woman is never labeled "wife" or "mistress," it is noteworthy that the plot is foreshadowed by the Englishwoman's disdain for a British civilian on the ship who had "taken himself a wife from the daughters of the land" and that both the Colonel and the British wife refer to the civilian's relationship as a "marriage." A few years later, in 1910, almost the exact time when Flory would have gone to Burma, the topic of

concubinage became the subject of hot debate when an article entitled "Western Men and Eastern Morals" appeared in the newspaper *Truth* (10 Aug. 1910), which, according to an advertisement in the *Times of Burma*, was sold at Smart & Mookerdum (25 Feb. 1899). The article details the case of a Briton who, much like Flory, had gone to Burma in the early 1900s "in the service of the Bombay Burma Trading Corporation . . . chiefly engaged in collecting and exporting teak from the Burmese forests" ("Western Men and Eastern Morals" 350; see also Willis 2-3). According to the article, the man had been in Burma a couple of years when he desired to marry an English woman. Informed of his intention, the company notified him


Figure 9: Illustration from "The Surprise That Surprises," published in *The Philadelphia Enquirer*, July 1, 1906

that they "'looked with but little favour on the marriage of so junior a man,' though they did not actually forbid it."[163] After the man went ahead and married the woman, he claims to have received discriminatory treatment from his employer, which eventually prompted his early retirement. "The unpleasant part of this gentleman's allegations," the article reads, "was that while marriage is penalised by the corporation, concubinage, which prevails widely among the staff, is tolerated, and by comparison with marriage actually encouraged" (350; see also Willis 3). The writer states that the views of the corporation were issued in yet another circular, which was distributed to employees. A preface to the stipulations reads: "'As we now have among our Up-country staff a number of married men, it seems to us that the time has arrived when it is necessary to commit to paper the attitude of the corporation towards married couples.'" The circular went on to note that it would not provide housing accommodation or housing allowance to the wives of married men, that "married men [could] not take their wives on tour without first obtaining sanction from Rangoon," and that the company would not "supply elephants, carts, coolies, etc., or in any manner assist married men in taking their wives with them on tour.'" In contrast, while the corporation did not provide special housing accommodations for concubines, they "made no objection to the women residing with their proprietors," as "it was the general custom for them to occupy official quarters." He further argues that no sanction from Rangoon was required to bring concubines on tour, and that while "they did not supply elephants carts, coolies, etc., to assist unmarried men in taking their concubines on tour," they did not object to such resources "being used for

[163] In contrast to the junior officer in the article in *Truth,* Flory had already been in Burma for fifteen years when he contemplated proposing marriage to Elizabeth Lackersteen.

this purpose, and this again was done regularly"[164] (350; Willis 3-4). This then spurred a series of letters to the editor as well as follow-up articles and eventually prompted W. N. Willis to write the similarly titled book, *Western Men with Eastern Morals,* which covered the topic in greater detail. Undoubtedly due at least in part to Willis' 1913 book, which was advertised in many newspapers,[165] the topic of concubinage in Burma continued to receive attention years afterwards and even became fodder for jokes, as a 25 September 1915 column called "The Critic" in *New Zealand Truth* clearly illustrates:

> The 'Figaro,' figuring it out financially, says: – Germany paid Spain £12,000 sterling as indemnity for seven Spaniards shot at Liege in August, 1914 [sic] This works out at about £1714 5s 8½ d per defunct Don. Mr. Willis, in his work "Western Men with Eastern Morals," says that Burmese brides from eleven years of age upwards are purchased as "concubines, or wives of convenience" for £6 13s 4d per bride by the white men working on the companies ectates [sic].
>
> This world is full of irony,
> A fact no one derides,
> When an old dead Don is 'dearer' than
> Two hundred and fifty brides. (1)

---

[164] Similarly, in 1900, the wife of a Burma police officer reported to Lord Curzon, Viceroy, "an Acting Deputy Commissioner [who] was openly living with two Burmese mistresses, one of whom went with him on tour." Despite Curzon's strong objection, the official was later promoted to Deputy Commissioner of Rangoon, although Curzon is said to have "thereafter followed [his] activities with a critical eye" (149).

[165] To give just a few examples, the book was advertised in the *Press* (Simpsons and Williams) and the *New Zealand Truth* (20 Oct. 1923, 14 June 1924, and 2 Aug. 1924).

Furthermore, the attitudes expressed in the various circulars and campaigns against "illicit relationships" were also reflected in the literature of the day. The renowned James George Scott, for example, writing under the pseudonym Shway Dinga in 1912, exposed the prevailing mindset toward local women in his satirical novel *Wholly Without Morals: A Romance of Indo-Burman Life and Racing.* In the story, General Bull-Byson's 18-year old son, who had just "completed the prescribed course as a Queen's Cadet at Sandhurst" and been "gazetted to the first battalion of the Light Blues" (2), asks his father whether he'll be able to afford a wife while serving in the military. His father explains:

> 'You remember the old saw that those who begin on brown bread live to eat the white sort. Well, the adage is equally applicable to connubial bliss. The brown article is perfectly serviceable; it'll stand no end of wear and tear and knocking about in a pestilent climate, and it's dirt-cheap at the price. But its greatest feature is that it isn't a tie. You can sack it when you like – and a change is a tonic. You aren't wedded to it. Marriage you reserve for the ladies of your own nationality.' (11)

When his son incredulously asks about "'brown babies,'" the General, "quite unabashed," responds:

> 'Those . . . we never considered. You mustn't think they were uncared for. Missionary societies with large endowments competed for them – they cost me nothing. We go to India wanting gold, but the missionary goes there for babies – don't disappoint him, Corney. Indeed, finding employment for the missionary and his funds is a most popular pastime, and just think what a terrible

> thing it would be if a great philanthropic busted for want of babies. It would be an ineffaceable slur on the Bull-Bysons!' (12)

The novel is clearly satirical, its goal, by the author's own admission, to expose underlying truths in an attempt to fuel the reform programs then gaining steam both in the colonies and the metropole. Scott notes in the Preface that it is the author's "firm belief – and there are many who share it – that England's noble work in India would bear fruit a hundredfold if the younger generation of Englishmen would abandon both the racehorse and concubine; and in directing public attention to them, he hopes that crusades officially undertaken against both may be warmly supported by the public" (viii). This again proves that many Western men took exception to concubinage and wished to abolish the practice. Indeed, Orwell himself explored the hypocrisy surrounding the issue in the unpublished manuscript "Extract, A Rebuke to the Author, John Flory," making it clear that he was well aware of the official position. In the draft, a senior officer lectures a subordinate:

> 'I've known fellows who married 'em, plenty of fellows; & where are they now? Every one of them repented it. You've got to have some sort of pride, my boy, in being a white man. Don't lower yourself. I don't say, of course, treat the native badly; nothing sillier. Treat 'em properly, kind & firm at the same time, you understand. Treat 'em properly & there's no one more charming. Always polite to them, make allowances & all that, strictly impartial, but – *you are the sahib.* Never forget that, my boy . . . Just the same with these Eurasians; politeness, of course, take off your hat to the ladies if you like, encourage the youngsters, – very good subordinates sometimes, – but *no nonsense.* Intermarry

with 'em, treat 'em as equals, & you're done. You see that, my boy?

'Yes, sir,' I said weakly. What, indeed could I have replied? 'Of course', he went on not unsympathetically, 'women, out here, are a big problem. It's hard, I know. You understand, of course, that the firm wouldn't let you marry for some years yet?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, of course, young fellows will be young fellows; & some of these women, native & half-caste, are very charming. When I was your age, – well, no nonsense, that's all. No marrying. You understand that.' (103)

Like Scott, Orwell appears to have been ridiculing the attempts of superiors to keep their charges away from local women.[166] Instead of feeling outraged by the prejudicial treatment of Burmese women, however, his mockery appears to be aimed solely at the sanctimoniousness of those who moralized on an unofficially sanctioned position. Indeed, Orwell seems to have followed exactly this officer's rationale in constructing Flory's relationship with Ma Hla May. As I demonstrate later in this chapter, Orwell appears to have gone to great lengths to prove that his relationship with Ma Hla May was not a legitimate marriage – even by the Burmese definition – so that Flory would be "technically" blameless; portraying Ma Hla May as a money-grubbing hussy only further released Flory from culpability. Moreover, while not part of the novel and not specifically related to concubinage, the unpublished manuscript "'John Flory: My

[166] This passage was perhaps part of an early draft of *Burmese Days*. It is of interest to note that the sardonic tone of the passage stands in contrast to the narrative scorn shown Ma Hla May.

Epitaph,'" which Peter Davison includes in "Preliminaries to *Burmese Days*," again sheds light on Orwell's/Flory's feelings about the women he knew in Burma:

JOHN FLORY
B o r n 1 8 9 0
Died of Drink 1927.

"Here lies [sic] the bones of poor John Flory;
His story was the old, old story.
Money, women, cards & gin
Were the four things that did him in.

He has spent sweat enough to swim in
Making love to stupid women;
He has known misery past thinking
In the dismal art of drinking.

O stranger, as you voyage here
And read this welcome, shed no tear;
But take the single gift I give,
And learn from me how not to live." (*The Complete Works* 95)

While instructing the reader to "shed no tear," the sympathy of the verse is clearly with Flory, not the "stupid" women who helped "do him in," and who, perhaps, like Ma Hla May, were also ruined in the process.[167]

[167] It is of interest to note that Orwell had originally written "married women," and later changed the adjective to the more generically pejorative "stupid." Curiously, in another forerunner to the novel, which Davison labels "Extract, Preliminary to Autobiography [of John Flory]," written on Government of Burma paper, like the poem, Flory confesses to sexual relations with Mrs. Lackersteen, the wife of his "best friend" (95), demonstrating that he had earlier contemplated exploring what he was later to reframe as the "unforgivable crime [of] promiscuity between Party members" in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (781).

***iii. Linguistic and Legal Training***

The linguistic and legal training Orwell received for his position as an Assistant Superintendent with the Indian Police and, in particular, the degree of fluency he obtained in Burmese, would also have precluded ignorance of Burmese marital norms. According to Stansky and Abrahams, "The curriculum at the Police Training School had been established before the First World War and continued without change in 1922 . . ." (168). "Probationary A.S.P.'s," they state, "were required to take courses in Burmese, colloquial Hindustani, Law, and Police Procedure" (164-65). Indeed, George Edward Fryer notes in his *Hand-book for British Burma,* published in 1867, that several examinations in the Burmese language existed for members of the civil service and police force, and even junior officers were expected to possess a degree of mastery of the local language. Fryer states, for example, "The object of the first examination is to ensure that officers passing it, shall have acquired such a knowledge of the Burmese language, as shall qualify them, so far as that language is concerned, for general civil employment in Burma" (528). The "tests for first or lower standard" consisted of four sections in which candidates were tested on their ability to read and write in Burmese, to translate passages from a Burmese source, and to converse with a native speaker of Burmese. The texts on which the exam was based, a selection of religious and legal texts, included the *Thoodamatsarie*, *Damapada*, and *Pootsa Bageena*. Significantly, the written exam involved writing "from dictation in Burmese not less than half a page of the book called the Dama-that, or Laws of Menu," again supporting the notion that Orwell had likely been introduced to the *Dhammathats* as part of his training. As a reward for achieving a passing score on the examination, Fryer says, the examinee would receive "a donation of

250 rupees" (528-29). The aforementioned Roger Beadon, who attended the Police Training School in Mandalay with Orwell, says of their experience: ". . . we sat for and passed our Lower Burmese and other exams and were confirmed in our appointment as A.S.P.'s . . ." (qtd. in Stansky and Abrahams 175). A second, more difficult exam, also based on religious and legal texts, including documents related to trials of the time, enabled successful candidates to receive a further 500 rupees, and a similar exam, testing the applicant's knowledge of the Shan language, was also available to interested applicants and rewarded successful examinees with a sum of 250 rupees (529-30).[168] Contemporary A. G. R. T. Stuart, who was employed by the Burma Railways in Katha, remembers Orwell as "an excellent linguist" who easily mastered Burmese as well as "'the most difficult languages'" (qtd. in Davison, *The Complete Works* 88). Likewise, commenting on Orwell's facility with the language, Roger Beadon says: "I'm told that before he left Burma, he was able to go into Burmese temples and converse in very high-flown Burmese with the priests. You've got to be able to speak very well to be able to do that"[169] ("With Orwell in Burma" 755). Indeed, Beadon mentions that Orwell was even known to "'inton[e] the Mantras'" with the Buddhist monks as "'the language came so very easily to him'" (qtd. in Stansky and Abrahams 183).[170] Even the Burmese respected

---

[168] This amount may have increased by the early 1920's, however, as A. G. R.T. Stuart, Orwell's colleague in Burma, said that "the bonus given for each examination passed" was 1,000 rupees.

[169] Native speakers of Burmese communicate with monks using honorific language reserved solely for use with Buddhist priests.

[170] Although he fails to provide compelling evidence for his claims, Maung Htin Aung rejects the notion that Orwell spent time with Buddhist monks, opining:

Orwell's acumen for language; Maung Htin Aung, for example, claims that Orwell's "real interest" was "native languages," noting, like Stuart, that: "He passed his examination in Hindustani in no time, and he passed without real effort all the compulsory examinations in Burmese and the highest 'proficiency' test. He also passed an examination in Skaw-Karen, which was optional and a rare language qualification" ("Orwell of the Burma Police" 185). According to the *Manual of Examination Rules for Government Officers and for Admission to the Government Service in Burma* of 1898, the High Proficiency examination required, among other things, that a candidate read "with readiness and accuracy" from the following books: *Zannekka, Wethandaya, Saddansinmin Wuttu,* and the *Putawwada, Lawkathara,* and *Anuthathana Sone-Masas* (34). The first three books, commonly known as Jatakas, describe former lives of the Buddha, and the three *Sone-Masas* are meant to educate people about social rules and etiquette. Reading from such texts required a degree of mastery of the language, and indeed, as Maung Htin Aung asserts, "By the time [he] had completed his probationary period and was transferred to Moulmein, he had become quite proficient in Burmese"

---

> If he did go to Burmese monasteries (which I doubt), he was not interested in Buddhism itself, as his descriptions of Buddhism as professed by U Po Kyin merely reproduced that view of Buddhism prevailing among English officials of the period, and it was so distorted that anyone with some knowledge of the religion can only smile; and young Blair simply hated Buddhist monks, again reflecting the attitude of his contemporaries. ("Orwell of the Burma Police" 185).

Perhaps it was comments like this that led Jeffrey Meyers to suspect that some of Maung Htin Aung's claims were biased due to nationalist sentiment. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Meyers has stated: ". . . my learned Burmese friend . . . said that Aung, an old colleague and rector of the university, was an unreliable historian who refused to give sources for his assertions" (11).

("George Orwell and Burma" 27). The *Manual of Examination Rules for Government Officers* also notes that an honors exam was available to qualified candidates, and it is possible that Orwell sat these exams as well.[171]

Whether or not Orwell sat the honors exam, it seems certain that he took seriously his desire to master the language in order to learn more about the country and its customs. His comments about "the disgusting social behaviour of the British [in Burma] till very recently" bear testimony to this: "I do know something about this. . . . My grandmother lived forty years in Burma and at the end could not speak a word of Burmese – typical of the ordinary Englishwoman's attitude" ("Letter to F. Tennyson Jesse [32]" 142). Furthermore, the fact that Orwell was known to visit Burmese pagodas and associate with Buddhist monks makes it even less likely that he was unaware of Burmese customs related to women, as differentiation between the sexes is even more pronounced in the gender-driven and highly prescribed rituals and behaviors associated with Burmese Buddhism.[172] Again like the author, Flory, too, was fluent in Burmese and had a keen interest in and curiosity about the Burmese culture; while his professional training would have differed from Orwell's, evidence exists to suggest that forestry workers and other company employees, too, were well aware of the Burmese perspective (See pp. 169-73 of this study).

***iv. Personal Relations***

Further weighing in against the theory of an inadvertent cultural misunderstanding on Orwell's part is the first-hand knowledge regarding Burmese marital customs that

---

[171] Maung Htin Aung may have been referring to this exam when he said that Orwell had passed "without real effort . . . the highest 'proficiency' test" ("Orwell of the Burma Police" 185).

[172] See, for example, discussion of *hpoun* on pages 198-201.

Orwell would surely have had since, as Orwell himself has stated, his family had been in Burma for more than three generations ("Letter to F. Tennyson Jesse [32]"142). Not only did the maternal side of Orwell's family have a long historical association with Burma, but Orwell also had relations in Burma even at the time he served there. The influential position his maternal grandmother held in Moulmein has already been established, and Orwell had aunts, uncles, and cousins in Burma as well. Most importantly, Orwell had at least two Eurasian relatives in Burma: his Aunt Aimée, daughter of his maternal great uncle William and an Indian woman named Sooma, with whom he cohabited, and his cousin Kathleen, daughter of his maternal Uncle Frank and his Burmese partner, Mah Hlim. Bowker claims that Orwell met his grandmother Limouzin and, most likely, his Eurasian relatives, during his time in Moulmein in the early 1920s (6-11), and Orwell would likely have been privy to family lore and gossip surrounding these mixed unions. Orwell's father also had nearly forty years' experience in India, and although I have found no evidence to substantiate the suggestion, it would have been no surprise if Orwell had heard about the practice of mistress-keeping from him.

Finally, in addition to friends such as the unorthodox Captain H. R. Robinson, mentioned in Chapter II of this study, and relatives who had relationships with Burmese and Indian women, evidence exists to suggest that Orwell himself likely had romantic encounters with "natives." Bowker, for example, points out that

> the understanding and conviction with which [the Flory-Ma Hla May] story unfolds suggests a basis of first-hand experience. Small hints and clues from what he wrote suggest that later, up-country, he followed the practice of many other

> men posted to lonely outposts and took a Burmese mistress, passing her off as a servant, just as John Flory does with Ma Hla May. (83)

Crick, too, appears to have concluded the same thing, noting that Ma Hla May ". . . is a convincing character, if lightly drawn. It really would be surprising if he had not known women – either in the brothels or with a concubine or 'keep' in his bungalows, as was so common" (160). Likewise, fellow former Etonian Harold Acton recalls that during his meetings with Orwell in Paris years later, Orwell enjoyed reminiscing about his times in Burma. Says Acton: "his sad earnest eyes lit up with pleasure when he spoke of the sweetness of Burmese women and I joked about the cheroots they were reputed to roll on their thighs." Acton adds: "But for his nagging 'social conscience'[173] I suspected he might have found happiness there" (153). Indeed, in a personal conversation in June, 2016, Richard Blair, Orwell's son, admitted to me that although no concrete evidence exists to prove it,[174] he believes that his father likely had romantic encounters with local women while stationed in Burma, adding that he was a bit of a "clunker" with women (personal communication, 11 June 2016). Yet again, in commenting on Orwell's then unpublished poem "Romance," Dione Venables, founder of the Orwell Society and heir to the copyrights of Buddicom's *Eric & Us* (personal communication, Feb. 10, 2014) recently evinced a similar yet slightly more nuanced opinion about Orwell's experience with Burmese women:

> . . . he had just spent weeks travelling by sea to the other side of the world,

---

[173] It is curious that his "nagging social conscience" was apparently unaffected by the gross imbalance of power inherent in relationships between Western men and their Burmese mistresses.

[174] Unfortunately, none of Orwell's Burma letters appear to have survived (Crick 152).

> having been furiously rejected by his first real love [Jacintha Buddicom]. He was nineteen and rejection is at its most painful at such an age. Carrying this with him to Burma, it would not have taken long for him to be introduced by his colleagues to the local 'facilities'. Since the girls in Burma tended to be small and shapely, as Jacintha had been, his enjoyment of their company resounds throughout his verse – though he soon discovered the extent of their 'devotion', judging by the comic irony of the last two lines in the . . . poem." (*George Orwell: The Complete Poetry* 20)

Indeed, as Venables points out, some of the poems Orwell is believed to have written while stationed in Burma or shortly thereafter suggest that he did indeed have experiences with Burmese women – at least with prostitutes. What is truly striking about Venables' comment, however, is that it spotlights the iniquity of the Burmese woman while assuming an apologist's attitude toward any wrongdoing on the part of the author, once again demonstrating how successful Orwell has been in promoting the notion of the licentious Burmese woman and how readily accepted his clearly Orientalist representation continues to be, even among scholars. The poem reads:

> When I was young and had no sense,
> In far off Mandalay
> I lost my heart to a Burmese girl
> As lovely as the day.
> Her skin was gold, her hair was jet,
>
> Her teeth were ivory;
> I said "For twenty silver pieces,
> Maiden, sleep with me. "
>
> She looked at me, so pure, so sad,
> The loveliest thing alive,

> And in her lisping[175] virgin voice,
> Stood out for twenty five.[176] (Davison *The Complete Works* 89-90)

Again in the poem "'The Lesser Evil,'" also thought to have been written in Burma, Orwell depicts the Burmese prostitute, and again, her mercenary tendencies are spotlighted:

> Empty as death and slow as pain
> The days went by on leaden feet;
> And parson's week had come again
> As I walked down the little street.
>
> Without, the weary doves were calling,
> The sun burned on the banks of mud;
> Within, old maids were caterwauling
> A dismal tale of thorns and blood.
>
> I thought of all the church bells ringing
> In towns that Christian folks were in;
> I heard the godly maidens singing;
> I turned into the house of sin.
> The house of sin was dark & mean,
> With dying flowers round the door;
> They spat their betel juice between
> The rotten bamboos of the floor.
>
> Why did I come, the woman cried,
> So seldom to her beds of ease?

---

[175] Davison notes that Orwell had originally used the word "gentl" [sic] but had later crossed it out and replaced it with "lisping" (*The Complete Works* 90).

[176] It is of interest to note that Orwell's son, Richard Blair, recently recited the poem to the cast of a staged production of "1984" in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Says Blair: "The next day was the matinee performance and before the start I was invited in to the dressing room to meet the cast again, where I recited that rather raunchy poem, 'Romance' [sic] This went down with rather well. They appreciated the humour" (Blair).

When I was not, her spirit died,
And would I give her ten rupees.

The weeks went by, and many a day
That black-haired woman did implore
Me as I hurried on my way
To come more often than before.

The days went by like dead leaves falling.
And parson's week came round again.
Once more devout old maids were brawling
Their ugly rhymes of death and pain.
The woman waited for me there
As down the little street I trod;
And musing upon her oily hair,
I turned into the house of God.
The woman oiled her hair of coal,
She had no other occupation.
She swore she loved me as her soul,
She had no other conversation.

The only thing that woman knew
Was getting money out of men.
Each time she swore she loved me true
She struck me for another ten. (92-93)

The consistency with which Orwell depicts these Burmese women, both those in the poems and Ma Hla May, in an avaricious light, leads one to question whether this recurrent theme wasn't based on some first-hand experience Orwell may have had with Burmese prostitutes or even a mistress of his own.[177] While I have argued throughout this

[177] Orwell's encounters with native women were apparently not limited to Burmese women, for Harold Acton further claims that Orwell also admitted to relations with Moroccan girls:

> He was more enthusiastic about the beauties of Morocco, and . . . admitted that he had seldom tasted such bliss as with certain Moroccan girls, whose complete naturalness and grace and candid sensuality he described in language so simple and direct that one could visualize their

study that Ma Hla May clearly did not consider herself a prostitute, it should be recalled that early in the novel Flory refers to her as one. When Ma Hla May objects to his brusqueness, saying: "'That is a nice way to speak to me! You treat me as though I were a prostitute[,]'" Flory responds: "'So you are. Out you go'" (*BD* 54). Orwell depicts her in essentially the same manner as he does the women in the poems, which forces me to conclude that in his mind, there was little difference between them. As previously discussed, however, this acrimony toward women was not limited to "native" women as the cynical depiction of Elizabeth Lackersteen, described as one of the "fishing fleet," suggests, and an argument could also be made that the antipathy he shows Burmese women was characteristic of his opinion and suspicion of women in general. Indeed, it seems likely that his true feelings about the women he involved himself with are best revealed by a passage in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. Says the narrator:

> Money, money, always money! The devil of it is that outside marriage, no decent relationship with a woman is possible. His mind moved backwards, over his ten years of adult life. The faces of women flowed through his memory. Ten or a dozen of them there had been. Tarts, also. *Comme au long d'un cadaver un cadaver étendu.* And even when they were not tarts it had been squalid, always squalid. Always it had started in a sort of cold-blooded willfulness and ended in some mean, callous desertion. That, too, was money. Without money, you can't be straightforward in your dealings with women. For without money, you can't

---

slender flanks and small pointed breasts, and almost sniff the odour of spices that clung to their satiny skins. (153)

> pick and choose, you've got to take what women you can get; and then, necessarily, you've got to break free of them.[178] (642)

Without doubt, there is an overarching consistency in his attitude toward women that is detectable throughout his works. The above passage, for instance, with its reference to Baudelaire's poem "Une nuit que j'étais près d'une affreuse Juive"[179] and the vision of female faces floating across his memory – almost exactly the same imagery he uses in *Burmese Days* – could be inserted into *Burmese Days* without altering the tenor of the narrative at all. The uniformity of Orwell's depictions of native women, however, suggests that they were likely based on personal experience.

***v. Expertise and the Other Clues in the Novel Itself***

Casting further doubt on the notion that Orwell could have been ignorant of Burmese marital customs is the abundance of evidence that proves Orwell was considered an expert on Burma and the British Empire in Asia and that even after leaving the country, kept abreast of current events in Burma. Orwell was a full-time employee of the BBC from August 1941 to November 1943, where he wrote weekly news commentaries that were broadcast by radio through the Indian section of the BBC's

---

[178] A recent study by Marina Remy suggests that "[t]he threat of emasculation appears when women are no longer bought or paid for in exchange for sexual intercourse as is the case with Ma Hla May, in *Burmese Days,* or the prostitutes, in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying,* but when it is women such as Rosemary who offer to buy or pay for things" (154).

[179] The title of the poem, which is about an experience with a prostitute, has been translated into English in various ways; William Aggeler, for example, translates it as "One Night I Lay with a Frightful Jewess," Roy Campbell expresses it as "One Night When, Near a Fearful Jewess Lying," and Jacques LeClercq renders it "A Bed of Shame" (Baudelaire).

Eastern Service with the intention of countering the propaganda delivered by Axis stations.[180] As noted by W. J. West, "[a]lthough they were spoken by Indians and seemed to the listener to be an account of the war literally as seen 'through eastern eyes' – the title of the series – they were actually written by [George Orwell]" (11-12). Additional evidence of Orwell's expertise on Burma and Asia can be found in the numerous reviews he wrote of books pertaining to Burma and the East, including, among others: C. V. Warren's *Burmese Interlude* ("Anonymous Review"), Maurice Collis's *Trials in Burma* ("Review"), Captain H. R. Robinson's *A Modern de Quincey* ("Portrait of an Addict"), V. R. Pearn's *Burma Background,* O. H. K. Spate's *Burma Setting,* G. Appleton's *Buddhism in Burma,* Ma Mya Sein's *Burma,* Kenneth Hemingway's *Wings Over Burma,* Charles J. Rolo's *Wingate's Raiders* ("Burma Roads"), Beverley Nichols' *Verdict on India* ("Indian Ink"), C. J. Richards' *The Burman: An Appreciation*, Harry I. Marshall's *The Karens of Burma* ("Burmese Days" *The Observer,* 3), Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth* ("Review"), and F. Tennyson Jesse's *The Story of Burma* ("Review"). Indeed, in two responses to letters he later received from F. Tennyson Jesse, in which she objected to the tenor of his review of her book, he himself assumes the stance of an expert; in the former he writes:

> You ask me what is my knowledge of Burma. It is out of date, but it is quite good of its kind. I was in the Imperial Police in Burma from 1922 to 1927, so that I know from the inside a little about the work of governing a country of that kind. I also know how the Europeans used to behave, and from what I could learn from

[180] In a letter to former Eton tutor A. S. F. Gow, Orwell later said, "I have resolved to stop hackwork for a bit, because I have been writing three articles a week for two years and for two years previous to that had been in the B.B.C. where I wrote enough rubbish (news commentaries and so on) to fill a shelf of books" ("Letter to A. S. F. Gow" 177).

> Burmese and English acquaintances, they had not improved greatly in more recent years. ("Letter to F. Tennyson Jesse [31]" 141)

In the latter, in which he lambasts the British for their "economic milching of the country," he further asserts: "I do know something about this. Apart from my own time there I have family connexions with the country over three generations" ("Letter to F. Tennyson Jesse [32]" 142).

Perhaps it is the novel itself, however, which provides the most convincing evidence of Orwell's in-depth knowledge of Burma and the Burmese. Indeed, commenting on *Burmese Days* for a BBC transmission, V. S. Pritchett once said, "This Burmese novel is written on the raw; its realism is as distinct as anything in Kipling or E. M. Forster" (4). Throughout the novel, Orwell goes to great lengths to depict the various aspects of the country and its people – ranging from the natural to the cultural, political, and religious – in a manner he deemed essentially truthful. While the abundance of such evidence warrants a survey of its own and is beyond the scope of this study, I will draw attention to only some of what I believe to be the most compelling evidence of his attentiveness to detail. For one, as previously mentioned in Chapter 3 of this study, Orwell feared that delocalizing the story in an attempt to have it published would diminish its authenticity. For this reason, in complying with Victor Gollancz's request to change the names of characters to avoid charges of libel, Orwell fretted over the idea that those serving in Burma and India would realize that U Po Sing and Murkhaswami were not authentic Burmese or Indian names, prompting him to make the request:

> As to the note on the changes in the names, which was to explain the fact that two oriental characters bore unreal names, I should be greatly obliged if this could

> be up *opposite the front page* where it will be sure of being seem. Otherwise, if anyone from India or Burma gets hold of the book and sees an incorrect name in the very first line, he will naturally be prejudiced against the book. ("To Victor Gollancz [Ltd]" 379)

His concern with the plausibility of the names shows his adamancy about maintaining the credibility of the novel's detail. Similarly, in a second letter to F. Tennyson Jesse, he reaffirms the essential realism of his novel: "Did you ever read my novel about Burma (*Burmese Days*)? I dare say it's unfair in some ways and inaccurate in some details, but much of it is simply reporting of what I have seen" ("Letter to F. Tennyson Jesse [31]" 142). Certainly, authenticity mattered to Orwell, and the novel, true to Orwell's perception of the situation in Burma, is rife with criticism of the British. Yet surprisingly, nowhere in the novel does he mention the pluralistic legal system put in place to accommodate men of other nationalities – most importantly, what I refer to as the de facto sexual extraterritoriality granted foreign men in Burma – even though, as has been established, "concubinage" was often indistinguishable from the Burmese concept of marriage and in spite of the fact that the morality of the practice, from the British perspective, had long been challenged in both the colonies and the metropole.

Still, notwithstanding the absence of overt references to Burmese laws regarding marriage, there is one subtle passage in the novel that I believe further disproves the notion that Orwell/Flory was unaware of the Burmese customs regarding marriage; instead, I suggest that the passage indicates Orwell and his alter-ego Flory consciously chose to sidestep the Burmese custom in a manner that perhaps eludes most readers. When Ma Hla May is first introduced in the novel, the narrator – for reasons not

immediately clear – says: "Ma Hla May came in kicking off red-lacquered sandals in the doorway. She was allowed to come to tea, as a special privilege, but not to other meals, nor to wear her sandals in her master's presence" (*BD* 51). With no other conceivable reason for barring Ma Hla May from eating with Flory, I suggest that Orwell, aware of the Burmese belief that commensality was a practice equated with marriage, took pains to avoid having Flory take meals with Ma Hla May, in a sense finding a legal loophole in the Burmese custom through which he could protect Flory from possible claims of spousal maintenance by Ma Hla May.[181] As Melford E. Spiro notes in *Kinship and Marriage in Burma,* "Although there are . . . a number of indicators of a valid (common-law) marriage, the most important is commensality." Citing a 19th century work by Howard Malcolm, he points out that "[i]n the past, commensality was even more binding than it is today. If, for example, it could be proved that a couple had eaten from the same dish, they could be compelled to live together as man and wife" (qtd. in Spiro 186). For most readers unfamiliar with this aspect of Burmese culture, however, the significance of Flory's refusal to take meals with Ma Hla May is likely indiscernible. Still, the implication of shared meals would undoubtedly have been clear to any old Burma hand, as is suggested by the poem "On Scent. *'Persicos odi – apparatus,*'" a humorous verse about the pungency of a "native" woman's perfume. Originally published in the *Rangoon*

[181] It could also be argued that Flory was following a tradition more common amongst Hindus or Muslims, but combined with all of the other details mentioned in the novel, the commensality argument seems far more plausible as Burmese women regularly took meals with their husbands. Indeed, as early as 1849, American Baptist missionary Ann Judson had clearly stated that Burmese women were "'on an equality with [Americans]. Wives are allowed the privilege of eating with their husbands'" (qtd. in Delap 389).

*Gazette* as one of a series of humorous rhymes written for British expatriates in Burma and later republished in the collection *Horace in Burma,* the poem reads:

I do not like your pungent nard
Your strange opoponax afflatus,
In short, to Anglicize the bard,
'I loathe your Persian apparatus.'

I watch the energy you vent
On staid de Albert's mystic mazes,
The flash of maiden devilment
Which stultifies a poet's phrases.

And yet despite your line of life,
The line, dear girl, of least resistance,
None seems to need so fair a wife,
And suitors keep a proper distance.

Mark how yon Territorial eyes
The lissome grace your form confesses,
And all the charms of Southern skies
Which glow from out your raven tresses.

Yet even he who fain would share
(As Sprat of old) the marriage platter,
Despite his drills, can never dare
To face your fusillade of Attar.

And so for all your charm, I fear
A spinster's lot is yours, for, Himmel!
'Twould tax the bravest Volunteer
To win through such a vale of Rimmel.

Then take to heart my simple rede,
For 'twas for your sweet sake I stole it
From out an ancient Latin screed, --
'Quae olet nihil, bene olet.'
(Symns 47-48)

Stanza five of this poem clearly shows that commensality as an indication of marital status was not only recognized by the Burmese, but by the expatriate community in Burma as well. Accordingly, I contend that Orwell, aware that a man and woman who lived and ate together were traditionally deemed man and wife by the Burmese, intentionally manipulated the situation in order to absolve Flory (and perhaps himself!) of any legal responsibility to his "mistress." Indeed, it is entirely possible that viewing the matter from the legalistic British perspective, Orwell had genuinely convinced himself that the boundaries he had Flory draw with regard to Ma Hla May were sufficient in ensuring his legal status as an unencumbered bachelor, regardless of the manner in which Ma Hla May viewed their relationship; her perspective, after all, clearly mattered little to Orwell or Flory. I further assert that the passage was almost certainly crafted with intentionally ambiguous wording in order to obscure the true nature of the relationship; Ma Hla May, "allowed to come to tea," is made to sound more like a guest than an occupant of Flory's home, and several scholars have viewed her in this way (See, for example, Seshagiri 112). Ma Hla May's protestations, however, previously discussed in Chapter IV, clearly show that she had lived with Flory for two years. In fact, after he evicts her, she returns to plead with him and tells him that she is "staying in Kyauktada, at [her] cousin's house" because she is too ashamed to go back to her village (*BD* 158). If she had not been living with Flory all along, then, where had she been living? Should one still need convincing, however, near the end of the novel, the narrative once again makes their prior cohabitation clear when Flory broods: "It was not right that [Elizabeth] should condemn him because of Ma Hla May, whom he had turned out of doors for Elizabeth's own sake" (224).

Furthermore, while the passage in question is replete with nuance casting Ma Hla May in a lowly and servile light, I argue that the extent of the narrative disdain aimed at her reaches beyond that which immediately meets the eye, and at the same time, further demonstrates Orwell's knowledge of Burmese history and culture. The reader is informed that Flory does not permit Ma Hla May "to wear her sandals in her master's presence,"[182] yet the narrator fails to mention that the wearing of shoes inside the home was never a Burmese custom to begin with. Indeed, according to the *Myanmar-English Dictionary,* the Burmese word for the threshold of the house is "panat-choot" (Department of the Myanmar Language Commission 29), "panat" meaning "shoes" and "choot" meaning "to remove," and in fact, another novel set in Burma, Cecile Leslie's *The Golden Stairs,* even contains a passage in which a character is "at the entrance platform, the panat-choot, or 'shoe-removing platform'" (49). Still, it is important to note that Flory, apparently not adhering to the Burmese custom, wears his shoes inside his house, which is demonstrated in the scene in which Ma Hla May calls him into the bedroom to beg him not to send her away: "She had wound her arms around his ankles, actually was kissing his shoes" (*BD* 160). His insistence that May Hla May remove her shoes, then, would seem to demand explanation. I suggest that Flory's concern with Ma Hla May's footwear is reminiscent of an incident in Burmese history that precipitated the third Anglo-Burmese War in which Britain came to rule all of Burma, and it seems likely that Orwell, influenced by this historical incident and later developments that sprang

[182] It is most likely Ma Hla May's sandals to which Praseeda Gopinath in part alludes, saying that Flory "treats Ma Hla May as his sex slave, dictating the terms on which she enters his house, her attire, and her behavior towards him" (219). While Gopinath recognizes the detail, however, she makes no comment on its significance.

from it, created this "house rule" as another informed and plausible manner in which Flory could degrade Ma Hla May and reaffirm his own dominance while at the same time outwardly denying the true nature of the Flory-Ma Hla May relationship. According to Burmese historian Ni Ni Myint, the British Residency, established in 1862, operated on the understanding that "the British Resident would conform to Burmese Court etiquette and take off his shoes on entering the royal audience chamber." Although a number of consecutive Residents accepted these terms, Sir Douglas Forsyth vigorously opposed the custom in 1875 and eventually won the support of the Viceroy, who "then issued instructions that the Resident take off his shoes on entering the audience chamber." Eventually the dispute led the British to withdraw the Resident in October 1879 (3). Several years later, on October 22, 1885, the British sent an ultimatum to the Burmese government that demanded, among other things, that a British envoy be reestablished at Mandalay who would be permitted audiences with the Burmese king without having to remove his sword or his footwear. (2). The incident came to be known as "the shoe question," and when Burma rejected the terms of the ultimatum, General Prendergast was ordered to advance on Mandalay, ushering in the third Anglo-Burmese War and the fall of the Konbaung Dynasty (21-22). The disagreement over the conventions surrounding shoes, however – originally, who was obliged to remove them and where, and later, what type of shoes needed to be worn and where – remained an issue of contention for many years after this incident had occurred. Indeed, in a list of demands the nationalist Y.M.B.A.[183] prepared to present to the Secretary of State in 1917, was "[p]ermission to wear Myanmar footwear in the schools." As K, the anonymous author of *Myanmar in My*

[183] The Young Men's Buddhist Association was associated with nascent Burmese nationalism.

*Life-time,* recalls: "Myanmar footwear had to be left at the entrance of the class-rooms, only western footwear being allowed[,] putting the non-Myanmar a cut above the Myanmar" (115). K's conclusion seems equally apt when applied to Ma Hla May, and it is distinctly possible that Flory's demand that Ma Hla May remove her sandals in his presence was simply another way of underscoring their "unequal footing": Flory's dominance and Ma Hla May's subjection. Symbolically, then, the passage suggests that Flory was free to tread on Ma Hla May, but not, of course, the other way around. Importantly, Orwell's knowledge of this discriminatory practice is not sheer conjecture, but is made evident when the narrator describes how when Ma Kin, the virtuous wife of U Po Kyin, finds herself tempted by the thoughts of becoming the wife of a Club member, she imagines herself sitting "on a high chair with her feet imprisoned in silk stockings and high-heeled shoes (yes, she would actually wear shoes in that place!)" (*BD* 148). Furthermore, as noted in the anonymous *Letters of an Indian Judge to an English Gentlewoman,* Burmese were required to remove their shoes while in their employer's presence (65-66),[184] and I argue that a concurrent motive Orwell may have had in forcing

[184] The narrator of *Letters of an Indian Judge to an English Gentlewoman* sheds light on the custom of requiring Burmese to remove their footwear:

> For many years it has been the custom of the English people to make the Burman remove his shoes and kneel when he enters the august presence. Now the Burman is of a sudden retaliating and insists that the Englishman shall also remove his shoes if he wishes to enter their Pagodas. Over the entrance of each Pagoda a new notice hangs:
>
> "No Footwearing or Umbrellering."
>
> To umbreller, you must understand, is to carry in the hand this instrument, and use it for pointing out the various kinds of carving on the shrines, and the Burman has of a sudden

Ma Hla May to remove her sandals was to maintain the façade – both to Orwell and to others – of Ma Hla May's purpose in his household.

Finally, one of several passages in the novel that relate to Burmese Buddhism suggests to me that Orwell's understanding of Buddhism is congruent with his unflattering depiction of Ma Hla May. Throughout the novel, references are made to Burmese Buddhist traditions, usually in a sardonic manner, in the form of ideas attributed to the villainous U Po Kyin. The narrator says, for example:

> According to Buddhist belief, those who have done evil in their lives will spend the next incarnation in the shape of a rat, a frog or some other low animal. U Po Kyin was a good Buddhist and intended to provide against this danger. He would devote his closing years to good works, which would pile up enough merit to outweigh the rest of his life. Probably his good works would take the form of building pagodas. Four pagodas, five, six, seven – the priests would tell him how many – with carved stonework, gilt umbrellas and little bells that tinkled in the wind, every tinkle a prayer. And he would return to the earth in male human shape – for a woman ranks at about the same level as a rat or a frog – or at worst as some dignified beast such as an elephant.[185] (*BD*[186] 4)

---

said to himself, 'Since I must kneel in the presence of my employer and go barefoot, booted and umbrellering shall he not come here.' (65-66)

[185] In point of fact, Maung Htin Aung's strong objection to Orwell's depiction of Buddhism likely stemmed from this passage, the irony of which apparently failed to register with him.

[186] It is of interest to note that this passage, as it appears in the 1976 Secker & Warburg/Octopus volume entitled *George Orwell,* reads as: "And he would return to the earth in male human shape – for a woman ranks at about the same level as a rat or a frog – or at *best* [my emphasis] as some dignified beast

The passage clearly depicts women in a hierarchically inferior position to men, and this perspective may have appealed to someone like Orwell whose attitudes toward women, arguably, bordered on the misogynistic. Of even greater consequence, however, the perceived superiority of males was, as it continues to be, intricately entwined with the Burmese notion of *hpoun,* which, as defined by Min Zin, "originally meant the cumulative result of past meritorious deeds, but later came to be synonymous with power." Min Zin expounds on the dangerous subtext of the notion of *hpoun*, which he says is "woven into the very fiber of [Burmese] society like capillaries connecting veins and arteries":

> . . . the exercise of power within the Burmese cultural context is deeply affected by the notion that the possessors of power acquired it through past acts of merit, implying that they are deserving of their status. This underlying assumption serves as the basis of all unequal relationships – between, for instance, men and women,[187] haves and have-nots, rulers and the ruled, and dominant ethnic groups and marginalized minorities. The discourse of hpoun is so deeply embedded in Burmese culture that few even think to question it. Since hpoun is theoretically a

---

such as an elephant" (74). The 1934 Harper & Brothers edition (5) and the 1952 Popular Library edition (7), however, concur with the quotation from 2001 the Penguin edition (4) shown above. Whether Orwell intended to suggest that a man returns to earth in "male human shape . . . or at worst as a dignified beast such as elephant" or that a "woman ranks at about the same level as a rat or a frog – or at best as some dignified beast such as an elephant," however, the implication is essentially the same.

[187] Describing *hpoun,* Mi Mi Khaing says, "Although the women of Burma figure as actively and have the same rights as men in the fields of business, property and professions of the modern world, we always keep alive in us the religious feeling that we are 'below' mankind" (*Burmese Family* 71).

> ‘prize’ earned through past good deeds, it is self-legitimating: Simply by virtue of possessing power, one has demonstrated that one has acquired considerable merit in past lives. . . The concept of hpoun permeates Burmese society, and its influence may be empirically observed at all levels, from the basic unit to the state. The use of the expression ein oo nat (‘guardian spirit of the home’) to refer to the husband signifies his preeminent role in the home, as does the familiar saying, ‘The son is the master; the husband is god.’ The superior status of male family members is often justified in terms of their hpoun; no further explanation is considered necessary.

The very fact that Orwell lived in Burma for five years precludes an ignorance of the concept of *hpoun* as it is so intricately enmeshed with Burmese customs – to this day – that it even dictates, for example, the way in which laundry is hung out to dry, with men’s clothing draped over a higher pole or clothesline than women’s so as not to taint or diminish the male *hpoun.* Indeed, as Mi Mi Khaing states, a man’s *hpoun* is “cherished and guarded” as much by his wife and family members as it is “by the man himself.” She elaborates on a wife’s behavior toward her husband:

> Even in private it is the ingrained habit of the wife to respect her husband’s *hpoun.* She does not stand or sit higher than him, or with her feet thrust in his direction, and instinctively treats his clothes with the same regard as she pays his person. She sleeps on his left as the *hpoun* resides in his right, she keeps her clothes at the foot of the room, and as her *longyi* (skirt) is the symbol of her sex, it does not overlie anything connected with him. In public she defers to him, not advertising her

> decision-making in their affairs. All this, because it is so deeply ingrained, comes easily, and to do the opposite would, for many women, entail a wrench. (*The World of Burmese Women* 16)

Thus, some of Ma Hla May's subordinate behaviors – which may reinforce to non-Burmese readers the notion that she truly is a servant or prostitute – might actually be due to her inherent respect for Flory, not only as a white member of the ruling class, but simply as a man.

Furthermore, I contend that another scene in the novel proves beyond a doubt that Orwell was not only aware of the concept of *hpoun,* but even wove it into a crucial element of the storyline. To appreciate the significance of the scene, however, it is necessary to understand some of the implications of a Burmese woman's respect for a man's *hpoun.* As Mi Mi Khaing explains, "The degree of a woman's belief in the concept of *hpoun* can be gauged when, in conflict, a wife 'desecrates' her husband's *hpoun* by reversing the usual manners respecting it. To her, this is a more irrevocable act than smashing his property" (16). To be sure, in the scene near the end of the novel in which the jilted Ma Hla May confronts Flory at church, she does exactly what Mi Mi Khaing describes. Using the hybridity she has acquired as Flory's "mistress" as a tool with which to challenge the hypocrisy of both Flory and the colonial double standard,[188] Ma Hla May's "irrevocable act" begins by shattering the code of secrecy by exposing their relationship, screaming:

---

[188] See Homi K. Bhabha's "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817" for a discussion of hybridity.

> ‘Look at me, you white men, and you women too, look at me! Look how he has ruined me! Look at these rags I am wearing! And he sitting there, the liar, the coward, pretending not to see me! He would let me starve at his gate like a pariah dog. Ah, but I will shame you! Turn round and look at me! Look at this body that you have kissed a thousand times – look – look — ’

Ma Hla May then delivers the coup de grâce while the churchgoers look on in horror: “She began actually to tear her clothes open – the last insult of a base-born Burmese woman” (*BD* 285). Indeed, having lost all hope of Flory’s returning to her, Ma Hla May, egged on by U Po Kyin, tolls the death knell for them both, demonstrating, perhaps, Orwell’s belief that hell truly hath no fury like the proverbial woman scorned. With this single *hpoun*-shattering act, then, the deception on which their fragile hybrid relationship has been built is exposed, causing both to self-destruct. Ma Hla May, under the illusion that her relationship with Flory has given her some semblance of power, is enraged to find herself in fact utterly defenseless. Yet another paradox, her rage then actually confers upon her a newfound power – what Homi Bhabha might label a “subversive” power – to utterly destroy Flory, even if not the power to save herself. Flory, shamed beyond redemption, kills himself, while Orwell, like Ma Hla May, hungry for the sweet taste of revenge, sees to it that Ma Hla May reaps her just deserts by having her end up in a Mandalay brothel, worn out, abused, and pining for past days spent with Flory.

Clearly, Orwell was well-versed in Burmese culture and history. The abundance of reading materials about Burma and its customs that were readily available when he served in Burma, the requisite training he underwent in Burmese language, law, and customs in preparation for his position with the Indian Police, his relations and friends in

Burma, including Eurasian relatives and the other unconventional people with whom he chose to associate, and other sometimes obfuscated clues in the novel suggestive of a deep knowledge of Burma and its people all challenge the plausibility of the notion that an ignorance of Burmese customs colored Orwell's depiction of the relationship between Flory and Ma Hla May. The inadvertent cultural misunderstanding theory, thus, is wholly unconvincing. Orwell and Flory were also well aware of the debate surrounding the morality of concubinage, as numerous circulars, both governmental and private, had been distributed throughout Burma, and it was a topic of common knowledge that even the Western press had explored. Viewed through the Western male gaze, however, Ma Hla May, like so many other Burmese women of that time and setting, was relegated to little more than an object in a lopsided power play. Instead of recognizing Burmese marital norms as different, perhaps, but equally valid as they were, after all, living in Burma, many European men disregarded them entirely. Realizing, however, that concubinage was no longer officially sanctioned in the early 20th century, those who partook of these illicit affairs abided by a code of secrecy that sometimes involved keeping mistresses under the guise of servants. While Flory appears to have done this, he also seems to have most creatively twisted and reinterpreted the local customs in a manner that best served his own interests. Recognizing that it was the fair-minded George Orwell who consciously chose to depict the Flory-Ma Hla May relationship in this deceptive and unsympathetic manner, however – without ever overtly explaining and only barely alluding to the existence of the differing perspective of Ma Hla May – not only debunks the "inadvertent cultural misunderstanding theory" but completely upends the reading experience. With the bias and manipulation of this characterization of Ma Hla May

exposed, the reader is forced to recognize and come to terms with the flawed humanity of George Orwell, the poster child of anti-imperialism, yet at the same time a man who had been marked and molded, perhaps unalterably, by his time and upbringing.

## Conclusion

"Ship me somewhere east of Suez where the best is like to worst,
Where there aren't no Ten Commandments an' a man can raise a thirst;
For the temple-bells are callin', an' it's there that I would be –
By the old Moulmein Pagoda, looking lazy at the sea"
(From "Mandalay" by Rudyard Kipling)

A close reading of *Burmese Days* and consideration of the wider historical context prevailing at the time reveals far more than is commonly recognized about both British-Burmese relations in the early 20th century and George Orwell himself, but to fully appreciate the latter, one must first be aware of the former. Burma under the British administration was in many ways a legal and regulatory quagmire, characterized by ambiguities on almost every level, most of which worked to the detriment of the Burmese and were particularly disadvantageous to Burmese women. Burmese Buddhist Law, already antiquated and in many ways arcane, had been translated and systematized by the British and was administered through the lens of a British judicial system. Not surprisingly, this resulted in the disenfranchisement of many traditional Burmese interpreters of the law, ironically, some of those who best understood and were most qualified to administer the esoteric customary law (Huxley "Is Burmese Law Burmese?"). Of those select Burmese, often Western trained, who did continue to serve as magistrates and legal practitioners, many were forced by their positions to make

rulings that conflicted with their cultural and religious values, a fact that even the Western community in Burma recognized.[189]

The annexation of the whole of Burma to India in 1886, an unnatural union that appended a nation of ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and religiously unlike peoples to an already diverse India, had served only to further complicate matters. Still largely considered a remote and enigmatic backwater, the status of Burma – whether a separate nation colonized by the British or simply one of many provinces of India – became

---

[189] An 1899 article in *The Times of Burma,* for example, reports on a legal case that occurred in Katha, the town after which Kyauktada was based. A Burmese magistrate had fined a Burmese woman twenty rupees and required that she put her dog to death after it had bitten a child. According to the article,

> The woman on receipt of this last mandate became distracted, she being a good Buddhist and the killing of any kind of life being a mortal sin, with horror and amazement ran to the all powerful 'Ayaybaing' and humbly supplicated to him on her bended knees to save her soul from this dreadful deed as the act would according to her creed make her liable to undergo in future transmigrations endless brutal existences and be killed in the same manner. . . But what mostly disturbed her equanimity was the knowledge that a staunch Buddhist Magistrate who is known to burn four lamps at the shrine of U-Ma's pagoda nightly to have issued such a killing order was a matter quite irreconcilable and incomprehensible to her mind.

Commenting on the case, the anonymous Katha correspondent writes:

> Poor woman she does not know that Buddhist Magistrates for their own convenience have two religions one carnal and the other spiritual, one as an English public servant and the other as a private exemplary Buddhist, just like the Burmese fabulous lion Manokthiha with one head and two bodies, being two in one, could exercise their volitionary powers at one and the same time in opposite directions is the universal [word illegible] of Burmese morality and religion in this country. ("Mofussil News: Katha" 7)

unclear to many in the metropole after the consolidation.[190] Indeed, so unnatural must the union have seemed to the people of India that as Jonathan Saha points out, studies and textbooks about colonial India routinely pay only scant attention to Burma, even though it was "ruled as part of British India for over 50 years" and despite the fact that the Hsaya San Rebellion, the "largest peasant rebellion faced by the Indian Government" in the early 20th century, took place in Burma (24). Annexation brought with it additional legal complexities as "Anglo-Indian codes and statutes passed by the British governor-general in India – codes and statutes based on English law – were extended to Burma" (Ikeya *Refiguring Women* 27). Moreover, pluralistic laws introduced by the British regarding marriage further contributed to the muddle of laws in Burma as under this patriarchal system, marriages between Burmese and British were subject to the Christian Marriages Act, while other mixed unions were subject to the laws of the husband's country (See, for example, Aye Kyaw), bestowing on foreign men a virtual sexual extraterritoriality. The inclusion of statutes of which Burmese women had little knowledge or understanding created an uneven playing field in cases of mixed unions. While it is conceded, as Ikeya suggests, that the "plural legal system was hardly enforced, as many did not use the courts and many judges failed to apply Anglo-Indian legislations in Burma" (27), the fact remains that when these patriarchal laws *were* enforced, it was almost always to the detriment of Burmese women, which eventually prompted new enactments. Indeed, as Mi

[190] Jonathan Saha, for example, cites a 1900 case in which someone "wrote to the India Office asking whether Rangoon was in India or not. He explained that one of his clients insisted that the city was in 'Burmah' and not India. For his part, he contended that 'Burmah' was itself a province of India and thus, by extension, Rangoon was in India." The India Office, he notes, confirmed that "Rangoon was indeed in India" (23).

Mi Khaing maintains, "The only noteworthy legislation regarding family matters in modern times [was] passed in order to protect the rights of Burmese women marrying foreigners whose own laws would deny them the rights they could expect from a marriage with a Burmese-Buddhist"[191] (*The World of Burmese Women* 42). These safeguards, however, were not implemented until 1940, so early twentieth century women like Ma Hla May did not receive their protection. Furthermore, it is unlikely that many Burmese – especially those living in rural areas – were even aware of the existence of the pluralistic laws regarding marriage. Mi Mi Khaing, for example, says that "[t]he poorer Burmese women, especially in the course of their bazaar trade and contacts, often married the 'foreigners[,'] not knowing the different rules that such marriages subjected them to" (42), supporting the notion that a woman such as Ma Hla May may have been ignorant of such laws. The British, of course, who had codified these laws, were not only aware of their existence, but in many cases took full advantage of them. Although, as Mi Mi Khaing states, it was "not necessary, in Burma, to register marriages as registration [did] not make them any more legal" (34), an Englishman like John Flory, subject to the British enactments, would have been required to register a marriage in order to make the union binding, and it was precisely this loophole that enabled men like Flory not only to dispose of their "mistresses" with ease when they had tired of them, but also, importantly, to rationalize away the wrong they had done these women. Indeed, this legal loophole encouraged many European men to form temporary unions with women they referred to as "mistresses," women who served as wives, lovers, housekeepers, cooks, translators,

[191] Ironically, however, the law was changed primarily to protect Burmese women who had married Indians, not Europeans.

and personal assistants, usually until the men returned to Europe. By the early 20th century, however, it had become common for men whose intentions were less than honorable to abide by an unspoken code that demanded such relationships be conducted discreetly.

In addition to the complex legal system, the British disruption of traditional Burmese society had profoundly affected the dynamics of Burmese social relations, including marriage. The meteoric rise of Rangoon as a center of commerce, for example, brought with it a plethora of changes, most notably mass migration to Lower Burma, both by migrants from Upper Burma and immigrants from abroad. The influx of foreign men into the country resulted in the dislocation and marginalization of Burmese men and made foreign spouses an attractive option for Burmese women, who were legally and culturally free to select their own partners. Furthermore, the frequency with which government officials were transferred contributed to an increasingly mobile society, which again served to erode traditional ways and in some cases, even made it difficult to discern the validity of a Burmese marriage. The conflicting and ever-changing position of the British Colonial Office and private companies operating in Burma, which forbade concubinage on the one hand while encouraging it on the other, served only to add yet more equivocation to an already gray area, and the sum of this abstruseness forms the background of the Flory-Ma Hla May relationship. It is clear that under these poorly defined and pliable parameters, a man like Flory, harboring less than noble intentions, would have found it easy to manipulate circumstances to his liking. Orwell, however, fails to apprise his readers of the complicated laws and regulations in early 20th century Burma, providing little or no context for fully understanding the novel.

Adding yet another dimension of vagueness to the reading experience is the fact that Orwell intentionally disguises a detail critical for understanding Ma Hla May: that Burmese women whose parents, for whatever reason, had "sold" them to European men, considered themselves legitimate spouses of these men, and that their parents viewed them in the same way. Both Orwell and Flory were well aware of the fact that under Burmese Buddhist Law, a woman who is purchased from her parents by a man with whom she lives and eats is considered to be the man's wife; Orwell, however, withholds this information from the reader, offering instead only the vague allusion that Ma Hla May "had persuaded everyone, herself included, that she was Flory's legal wife" (*BD* 53). For many women like Ma Hla May (and even, indeed, for their parents), the desire for economic stability sometimes made Western men more desirable partners than Burmese men; this enticement, however, facilitated by nonrestrictive Burmese customs, made these women particularly vulnerable to caddish European suitors like Flory. Further facilitating those with dubious motives was the fact that the Burmese had no custom whereby a married woman would adopt her husband's surname. Lacking other outward manifestations to indicate a person's marital status – traditions such as the wedding ring or Hindu marital bindi – determining a person's marital status became even murkier business,[192] and this, of course, was an added benefit for men like Flory.

Without doubt, the well educated and trained, keenly observant, and ever curious Eric Blair, fluent in local languages and informed by both family members and

---

[192] An article entitled "Burmese Women," originally published in *The Westminster Review,* noted that " . . . there is no outward symbol like a wedding ring on a Burmese woman's body. She does not even adopts [sic] her husban's [sic] family name, but retains her own."

unconventional friends in Burma, knew well about Burmese customs and laws and understood how Ma Hla May would have viewed her relationship with Flory. To be sure, it was this very knowledge that led him, in an attempt to underscore Ma Hla May's status as "Other," to manipulate factors such as commensality, deemed by the Burmese to be indicative of a legitimate marriage, and to force Ma Hla May to remove her sandals in her "master's" presence. Certainly, Orwell appears to have gone to great lengths to convince both himself and those with a knowledge of Burmese customs that Flory's relationship with Ma Hla May did not constitute a legitimate marriage even by Burmese laws and customs. This was apparently still not enough, however, as he additionally opted to vilify her – depicting her as the ultimate cause of Flory's downfall – punishment, perhaps, fueled with the resentment caused by his belief that these women never truly "loved" the Europeans who had "purchased" them but sought them only for power and prestige. It is important to point out that Orwell was not the only author to explore the theme of concubinage in Burma, yet no other literary work seems to have employed the vitriol of Orwell's portrayal of Ma Hla May. Somerset Maugham's short story "Masterson," for example, describes a British resident of Burma who is utterly heartbroken that his "mistress" has left him, taking their children with her, because he refused to legally marry her under British law as he harbors dreams of returning to England in his old age and apparently feels that bringing a Burmese family along would not be accepted by the folks at home. Maugham makes no attempt to conceal the inherent unjustness of Masterson's treatment of this woman, though, and Masterson genuinely misses her and describes her in only glowing terms.[193] (266-75). Similarly, H. E. Bates' novel *The Jacaranda Tree* is

[193] Interestingly, however, Masterson believes that the woman possessed no genuine love for him

the tale of a Western man who insists on taking both his Burmese "mistress" and her brother with him when fleeing the Japanese during World War II. In another of Bates' novels, *The Purple Plain,* protagonist Forrester not only falls in love with a Burmese woman, but tells her that he is willing to remain in Burma permanently for her sake (104). Clearly, then, not all British writers felt the same contempt for these women that Orwell did, nor were they as cagey about providing details more illustrative of the reality of these relationships in their narratives.[194]

Some may argue that Ma Hla May was not the only character in the novel subject to narrative scorn, and indeed, while almost none of the characters except, perhaps, U Po Kyin's wife, Ma Kin, is spared narrative contempt entirely, sympathy is clearly exhibited for protagonist Flory, for Dr. Veraswami, and even for the two Eurasians, Samuel and Francis. In fact, if one looks beyond the novel at the larger body of Orwell's writings on Burma, it is clear that he expresses empathy for the Indians in Burma in much the same way that he identifies with the poor and working classes in *Down and Out in Paris and*

---

(275); the narrator in *Burmese Days* depicts Ma Hla May in the same way, suggesting that these men believed that economic gain was the sole reason these women consented to such unions and that it bothered them.

[194] In *The Jacaranda Tree,* for example, a young Eurasian woman thinks of her parents:

> Time and situation were a little different – but that, or something like it, was how her mother and father had behaved twenty years before on the sea-coast of the Arakan. Nobody in those days thought very much of a Burmese girl marrying an English trader or a planter or even an administrating officer. It was a very natural thing; sooner or later the man's fiancée turned up and the couloured girl went back to her people. Nobody thought much of that. Nobody thought much of the consequences either. (87)

*London* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*. Commenting on Orwell's legendary affinity with the oppressed, Maung Htin Aung aptly points out:

> Blair seemed to have a special regard for the Indians living in Burma, as they were looked down upon by the English and regarded by the Burmese as underlings of the English and as caste-ridden people. So Blair pitied the Indian who was hanged, the Indian who was killed by the elephant, and the Indian who did not receive any compensation for the loss of his elephant. ("Orwell of the Burma Police" 185)

This assessment seems valid and suggests, as Orwell himself once stated, that it was "man's dominion over man" that he found so difficult to stomach, while man's dominion over women appears to have been far less unpalatable. As Edward Said has said of Orwell's writings on Burma: "Yes, he exposed injustice, but . . . in only a very limited way. I don't think one feels, reading Orwell, that he's moved by a will to emancipation or liberation. It's more about exposing and attacking than about opening people to new resources of hope" (Barsamian and Said 185). In the end, then, Orwell's sympathy for the Indians demonstrates what could at best be described as a partial or an inconsistently triggered affinity for the underdog. What is more telling, however, is that instead of rallying against the injustice inherent in the sexually-exploitative notion of concubinage or the "temporary marriage,"[195] Orwell chose not only to ignore it, making no specific references in the narrative to the laws that gave virtual sexual extraterritoriality to Western men in Burma, but also to depict in the novel a protagonist – a character steeped

[195] Nascent Burmese nationalism was another topic that Orwell minimized; whether this was by design or whether he did not fully appreciate its significance, however, is not clear.

in the experiences and opinions of the author himself – who shamelessly took full advantage of both laws and social practices that condoned – indeed, often encouraged – the exploitation and objectification of indigenous women, turning them into virtual sex slaves to be discarded at will. What, then, can be extrapolated about George Orwell from all of this?

Curiously, Orwell himself seems to have presciently answered this question – at least in part – long before ever writing the novel; in an unpublished forerunner to *Burmese Days,* believed to have been written during or shortly after his own days in Burma, he wrote:

> 'What is it that I am writing?' Answer 'The tale of John Flory.' What is this tale? It is the tale of the degeneration & ruin, through his native faults, of a gifted man? [sic] How was he ruined? That is the story; my degeneration began when I came to Burma, aged eighteen. But a boy of eighteen is not a blank sheet to be written on; his character is half formed already, & so, dear reader, you are in for perhaps ten thousand words about my childhood. It is not enough to say 'John Flory was a man who got drunk at least once a week, & made love to any woman who would let him.' There are many men like that, but they are not all the same. You have to go [sic] little deeper. (95-96)

While Flory's tale clearly deviates from Orwell's own, Flory can be viewed, as has been shown, as the alter-ego of Orwell himself. Both could certainly be described as gifted men, but only Flory, as discussed in Chapter III, actually suffers the "degeneration & ruin" Orwell imagines he would have experienced had he remained in the country long enough to stagnate. This did not happen, however, for Orwell underwent a political,

moral, and ethical awakening in Burma, prompting him to leave the country in which his sense of fairness had blossomed and the seeds of his lifelong hatred of authoritarianism had been sown. The remaining details of the passage, however, would appear to describe Orwell himself: his early life and education had groomed him to serve the Empire, and as he says of Flory's, his own character, too, had already been half formed by the time he went east. Indeed, Orwell as much as admits this in his essay "Why I Write," while at the same time clearly articulating the importance of taking an author's biographical details into consideration when analyzing his or her works; in reflecting on his own motives, Orwell says:

> I give all this background information because I do not think one can assess a writer's motives without knowing something of his early development. His subject matter will be determined by the age he lives in . . . but before he ever begins to write he will have acquired an emotional attitude from which he will never completely escape. It is his job, no doubt, to discipline his temperament and avoid getting stuck at some immature stage, in some perverse mood; but if he escapes from his early influences altogether, he will have killed his impulse to write. (25)

Surely it is no coincidence, then, that Flory recalls an endless procession of prostitutes near the end of the novel, for Orwell, too, was known to frequent brothels, as were many men of his time and place. As Orwell himself points out, however, not all such men are the same; without doubt, one has to "go a little deeper" to determine that which drove both Flory and Orwell, and it is precisely this which I have intended to do in this study. As I hope I have shown, many factors influenced Orwell's work, including his deep-

seated sense of being a "Brittanian," a part of himself that was inclined to admire the Raj[196] despite his otherwise progressive political views, an innate discomfort with and bias against women, and even, perhaps, his own failed romance with Jacintha Buddicom. While there can be no doubt that his firsthand experience with imperialism in Burma changed him profoundly, I cannot help but conclude that his renowned fair-mindedness and empathy for the oppressed has been grossly exaggerated, at least insofar as his ideas about and treatment of women – particularly native women – are considered. It seems clear that Orwell knowingly withheld information that would have encouraged sympathy for Ma Hla May and even went so far as to manipulate details in an effort to protect his semi-autobiographical protagonist. Orwell's depiction of Ma Hla May, then, cannot be dismissed as a mere cultural misunderstanding, nor can the utter disdain the narrative shows her continue to be overlooked. His failure to disclose or even suggest that Ma Hla May had a valid perspective of her own and a legitimate grievance against Flory is problematic and demanding of attention.

I contend, then, that both an awareness that cohabitation and commensality are the defining hallmarks of a Burmese marriage in accordance with Burmese Buddhist Law and an understanding of Ma Hla May's likely perception of her relationship with Flory are of paramount significance in deconstructing the novel, for not only does such understanding effectively transform the character from villain to victim, it also entirely alters the reading experience, making it impossible to overlook Flory's base behavior or

[196] As Malcolm Muggeridge says, "It is perfectly true that Orwell was revolted by the brutality necessarily involved in police duties in Burma, as he was revolted by all forms of brutality, and indeed, to a certain extent, by authority as such; but it is also true that there was a Kiplingesque side to his character which made him romanticise the Raj and its mystique" ("Burmese Days" 22).

the lack of narrative sympathy shown for Ma Hla May. Early in this study, I quoted Peter Barry, who commented on the effect of reading Said's criticism of *Mansfield Park.* Barry maintained that once a reader is aware of the fact that the protagonist's lifestyle is supported by an estate in Antigua reliant on slave labor, the "'innocence' we might have had about this aspect of the novel goes . . . " (193-94). I contend, likewise, that viewing Ma Hla May through the framework I have constructed forces the reader to abandon any preconceived or perfunctory justification for Flory's deeds. In short, once fully apprised of the facts, the actions of Flory can no longer be pardoned as they have been exposed to be unpardonable.

Before concluding, I would like to make clear that my intention throughout this study has not been to disparage Orwell or to besmirch his character or tremendous accomplishments. Instead, it has been my desire to show Orwell the man in all of his humanity, subject to failings and weaknesses, particularly those involving a worldview prevalent at the time in which he lived. Orwell was a young man when *Burmese Days* was written and still very much developing as an intellectual, a writer, and a human being.[197] He was a product of his time, setting, and upbringing as are we all. Gayatri Spivak recalls telling a class,

> We will read some great texts of the past – such as *The Eumenides, The Vita Nuova,* and *Émile* – and see in them the blueprints for rather questionable sexual attitudes. Now you must remember, every day in class, and as you write your papers, that this is not to belittle Aeschylus, Dante, or Rousseau as individuals,

[197] In his essay "Why I Write," Orwell says that he was thirty when he wrote *Burmese Days* but that he had "projected" the novel "much earlier" (25).

> but to see in and through them something like their 'age,' to take into account how we are ourselves caught in a time and a place, and then to imagine acting within such an awareness. ("Reading the World" 32).

Spivak's statement, I believe, could also have applied to *Burmese Days*. Without doubt, Orwell's life was cut tragically short at the age of 46 when he succumbed to complications of tuberculosis, a consequence, he believed, of having lived in Burma, and it is entirely possible that had he lived longer, his position on women might have grown more enlightened, as had his position on so many other issues. Just as Cyril Connolly lived to regret his description of the headmaster and mistress of the preparatory school he and the young Eric Blair had attended, so, too, may Orwell have reconsidered his acerbic characterization of Ma Hla May or at least his failure to fully present her point of view had he lived longer. Surely, one's perspective changes with age and experience, and as Maung Htin Aung suggests in his essay "George Orwell and Burma," "Had he been older, had he been George Orwell already, he would doubtless have written a different version of *Burmese Days,* which would have influenced English public opinion to become more favourable towards the nationalistic aspirations of the Burmese, in the same way as E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* did with regard to those of the Indian people" ("George Orwell and Burma" 28). While Maung Htin Aung's focus is on Orwell's position regarding the budding nationalist movement, his comment, too, could as fittingly apply to Orwell's position on women. One can only wonder, for instance, how "A Smoking Room Story," a novella set in Burma that Orwell was working on when he died, would have read had he been able to complete it. The world will never know, but perhaps it would have reflected a more fully evolved George Orwell and a less

acrimonious portrayal of life in Burma. Instead, however, *Burmese Days* and his essays on Burma will forever remain the yardstick with which we measure Orwell's feelings about Burma and the Burmese. Regrettably, the novel objectifies Burmese women, buying into the oft-bandied stereotype that their "loose" moral character and desire for wealth and power made them agreeable to prostituting themselves in temporary unions with Western men. Orwell may even have convinced himself that this was the truth – in an attempt, perhaps, to expiate the guilt that from time to time manages to sneak into the narrative.[198] As I have endeavored to show in this study, however, in his heart of hearts, it seems clear that Orwell understood the depth of the wrong Flory does Ma Hla May. Old, entrenched mindsets die hard, however, and as Orwell himself admits: "I am not able, and I do not want, completely to abandon the worldview that I acquired in childhood" ("Why I Write" 315). In the end, then, Orwell's on-again off-again infatuation with Rudyard Kipling seems to have said more about him than he could ever have realized. Ironically, though, even Kipling, long criticized for his flag-waving imperialism, expresses a genuine longing for both the country and the "Burma girl" he so nostalgically describes in the patently Orientalist yet undeniably ebullient poem "Mandalay." Alas, Orwell's memories of Burma are far less glowing, and it is not the sentimentality the bard expresses in the poem but his final prurient sentiments that would appear to most accurately characterize Orwell's feelings about Burma: "Take me somewhere east of

[198] This is particularly evident in a passage from the scene in which Flory evicts Ma Hla May from his house: "Then the cart jolted away, with Ma Hla May sitting beside her two wicker baskets, straight-backed and sullen, and nursing a kitten on her knees. It was only two months since [Flory] had given her the kitten as a present" (117).

Suez where the best is like the worst / where there aren't no ten commandments and a man can raise a thirst."

Works Cited

Abbott, Gerry. "The Poet Who Wanted to Shoot an Elephant." *George Orwell Studies,* vol. 1, no. 1, 2016, pp. 116-123.

Acton, Harold. *More Memoirs of an Aesthete.* 1970. Hamish Hamilton, 1986.

Adas, Michael. *Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Protest Movements against the European Colonial Order.* Cambridge UP, 1979.

Aung-Thwin, Michael, and Maitrii Aung-Thwin. *A History of Myanmar since Ancient Times.* Reaktion, 2012.

Aye Kyaw. "Religion and Family Law in Burma." *Siamese Heritage Trust, www.siamese-heritage.org/jsspdf/1991/JSS_080_2e_ AyeKyaw_ReligionAndFamilyLawInBurma.pdf.* Accessed 2 Feb. 2015.

Ba U, U. *My Burma: The Autobiography of a President.* Taplinger, 1959.

Ballhatchet, Kenneth. *Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and Their Critics, 1793-1905.* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory.* 3rd ed., Manchester UP, 2009.

Barsamian, David, and Edward W. Said. *Culture and Resistance: Conversations with Edward W. Said.* South End Press, 2003.

Bates, H. E. *The Jacaranda Tree.* 1949. Penguin, 1955.

---. *The Purple Plain.* 1947. Penguin, 1983.

Baudelaire, Charles. "Une nuit que j'étais près d'une affreuse Juive" (On [sic] Night I Lay with a Frightful Jewess). *Poets, Poems, and Poetry, Stands4 Network, www.poetry.net/poem/5051.* Accessed 3 March 2017.

Bennett, C. *Vocabulary and Phrase Book in English and Burmese.* 3rd ed. Revised by M. H. Eveleth, American Baptist Mission Press, 1886.

Bhabha, Homi. "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817." *Critical Inquiry,* vol. 12, no. 1, Autumn, 1985, pp. 144-65. *JSTOR,* www.jstor.org/stable/1343466. Accessed 26 June 2015.

Biederstadt, Carol. "The Allure of Japan: A Study of Factors Which Encouraged Burmese Complicity with the Japanese Before and During World War II." M.A. Dissertation, Sheffield University, 2002.

Blackstock, Alan. "Beyond the Pale: Women, Cultural Contagion, and Narrative Hysteria in Kipling, Orwell, and Forster." *ARIEL: A Review of International Literature,* vol. 36, no. 2, January-April 2005, pp. 183-206, digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1324&context=english_facpub. Accessed 5 March 2015.

Blair, Richard. "Nineteen Eighty Four in Pittsburgh – 'A Trip Worth Making.'" Orwell Society*,* 9 March 2017, www.orwellsociety.com/nineteen-eighty-four-in-pittsburgh-a-trip-worth-making/. Accessed 9 March 2017.

Boshier, Carol Ann. "'Burmanization' and the Impact of J. S. Furnivall's Views on National Identity in Late-Colonial Burma." *Journal of Burma Studies,* vol. 20, no. 2, 2016, pp. 291-333.

Bowker, Gordon. *George Orwell.* Abicus, 2003.

Brunsdale, Mitzi M. *Student Companion to George Orwell.* Greenwood Press, 2000.

Buddicom, Jacintha. *Eric & Us: A Remembrance of George Orwell.* Leslie Frewin, 1974.

---. "A Letter from Jacintha Buddicom." *George Orwell: A Life in Letters,* edited by Peter Davison, W.W. Norton, 2010. pp. 8-10.

Burling, Robbins. "Burmese Kinship Terminology." *American Anthropologist,* vol. 67, no. 5, Oct. 1965, pp. 106-117.

"Burmese Woman Is Head of Family." *Macon Telegraph,* 11 December 1905, p. 7, *America's Historical Newspapers,* infoweb.newsbank.com/?db=EANX. Accessed 31 Dec. 2016.

"Burmese Women." *Charlotte Daily Observer:* vol. 4, 13 August 1910, p. 4, *America's Historical Newspapers,* infoweb.newsbank.com/?db=EANX. Accessed 31 Dec. 2016.

"The Burmese Women: A Land Where Business Is Transacted by the Ladies." *Bismarck Daily Tribune,* 4 July 1889, p. 2, *America's Historical Newspapers,* infoweb.newsbank.com/?db=EANX. Accessed 31 Dec. 2016.

Cady, John. *A History of Modern Burma.* Cornell UP, 1958.

Campagnac, Charles Haswell. *The Autobiography of a Wanderer: In England & Burma.* Sandra L. Carney, 2010.

Campbell, Charlie. "The Woman Who Saved Burmese History." *The Irrawaddy.* 4 July 2012, www.irrawaddy.com/features/the-woman-who-saved-burmese-history.html. Accessed 10 Dec. 2016.

Carpenter, Frank G. "The Women of Burma: How the Wives Hold the Purses and Manage Their Husbands as Well." *Weekly Courier-Journal,* vol. 5, 13 May 1889, p. 5, *America's Historical Newspapers,* infoweb.newsbank.com/?db=EANX. Accessed 31 Dec. 2016.

Chan-Toon. *The Principles of Buddhist Law: Also Containing a Translation of Important Portions of the Manu Thara Shwe Myin with Notes.* Myles Standish, 1894.

Collingham, E.M. *Imperial Bodies.* Blackwell, 2001.

Collis, Maurice. *Sanda Mala.* Carrick & Evans, 1940.

---. *Trials in Burma.* Faber & Faber, 1938.

Connolly, Cyril. *Enemies of Promise and Other Essays: An Autobiography of Ideas.* Doubleday Anchor, 1960.

---. "Such Were the Joys." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, 3. Nov. 12 1972, *Proquest, search.proquest.com.ezproxy.drew.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/119375970/25BD86A140E04652PQ/1?accountid=10558.* Accessed 3 Feb. 2014.

Crane, Ralph. "Reading the Club as Colonial Island in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and George Orwell's *Burmese Days*." *Island Studies Journal,* vol. 6, no. 1, 2011, pp. 17-28.

Crick, Bernard. *George Orwell: A Life.* Little, Brown, 1980.

"The Critic." *New Zealand Truth,* vol. 536, 25 September 1915, p. 1. *PapersPast. /records/4447103.* Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Accessed 12 April 2015.

Dalrymple, William. *White Mughuls.* 2002. Penguin, 2004.

Davison, Peter. *The Complete Works of George Orwell - Ten: A Kind of Compulsion.* Secker & Warburg, 1998.

---. *George Orwell: A Life in Letters.* Liveright, 2010.

---. *George Orwell: A Literary Life.* St. Martin's, 1996.

---. A Note on the Text. *Burmese Days.* By George Orwell. 1934. Penguin, 1989, pp. v-viii.

---. "'Orwell Goes East.'" Orwell Society*,* 26 Dec. 2012, www.orwellsociety.com/orwell-goes-east-by-peter-davison/. Accessed 29 Dec. 2012.

De Courcy, Anne. *The Fishing Fleet: Husband-Hunting in the Raj.* Phoenix: 2013.

Delap, Lucy. "Uneven Orientalisms: Burmese Women and the Feminist Imagination." *Gender & History,* vol. 24, no. 2, August 2012, pp. 389-410, EBSCO*host*, doi:10.1111/j.1468-0424.2012.01688.x. Accessed 12 Dec. 2013.

Department of the Myanmar Language Commission, Ministry of Education, Union of Myanmar. *Myanmar-English Dictionary.* U San Lwin, 1993.

Duby, Peter. "The Man Who Inspired George Orwell's First Published Work." *The Orwell Society Newsletter,* vol. 4, June 2014, pp. 30-31.

Edwards, Penny. "Half-Cast: Staging Race in British Burma." *Postcolonial Studies,* vol. 5, no. 3, Nov. 2002, pp. 279-295. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1080/1368879022000032793. Accessed 28 June 2013.

"European Bigamists in Burma." *Manawatu Herald,* vol. III, 5 May 1891, p. 2. *PapersPast,* paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/MH18910505.2.16?query=European National Library of New Zealand.

Foucar, E.C.V. *I Lived in Burma.* Dennis Dobson, 1956.

Friend-Pereira, Jules. *Burmese Buddhist Law: Being a Collection of Portions of Several Damathats in Regard to Divorce, Marriage and Partition (1891).* Hanthawaddy Press, 1891.

Fryer, George Edward. *Hand-book for British Burma.* T. Whittam, 1867.

Fytche, Albert. *Burma Past and Present.* C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878.

Gender Equality Network. *Myanmar Laws and CEDAW: The Case for Anti-Violence against Women Laws,* Jan. 2013, www.genmyanmar.org. Accessed 4 May 2014.

Gilmour, David. *The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.

Goonetilleke, D. C. R. A. "George Orwell's Burmese Days: The Novelist as Reformer." *Kalyanī: Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences of the University of Kelaniya,* vol. 1, no. 1-2, 1982, pp. 182-94.

---. *Images of the Raj: South Asia in the Literature of Empire.* St. Martin's, 1988.

Gopinath, Praseeda. "An Orphaned Manliness: The Pukka Sahib and the End of Empire in *A Passage to India* and *Burmese Days." Studies in the Novel.* vol. 41, no. 2, Summer 2009, pp. 201-223. *Project Muse,* http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxy.drew.edu/article/376830.

Gravers, Michael. *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma: An Essay on the Historical Practice of Power.* Curzon Press, 1999.

Grimston, Jack. "Orwell 'Assaulted His Girlfriend.'" *Sunday Times,* Feb 4 2007, p. 10, *ProQuest Central*, search.proquest.com/docview/316609732?accountid=10558. Accessed 25 Jan. 2014.

"Habits of the Burmese Women." *The Telegraph and Messenger,* vol. 3, 28 October 1883, p. 3, *America's Historical Newspapers,* infoweb.newsbank.com/?db=EANX. Accessed 31 Dec. 2016.

Hall, D. G. E. *Burma.* Hutchinson's University Library, 1950.

Hall, H. Fielding. *A People at School.* Macmillan, 1906.

---. *The Soul of a People.* Macmillan, 1898.

Hitchens, Christopher. *Orwell's Victory.* Penguin, 2002.

Hollis, Christopher. *A Study of George Orwell: The Man and His Works.* Henry Regnery, 1956.

Hough, Rev. G. H. *An Anglo-Burmese Dictionary, Part I. Consisting of Monosyllables.* American Mission Press, 1845.

Hunt, William A. "Why Orwell Went to Burma: Re-visiting the Buddicom Thesis." *Finlay Publisher*. The Orwell Society, July-September 2009, www.orwellsociety.com/why-did-orwell-go-to-burma-by-liam-hunt/. Accessed 6 June 2013.

Huxley, Andrew. "The Importance of the Dhammathats in Burmese Law and Culture." *Journal of Burma Studies,* vol. 1, 1997, pp. 1-17. *Project Muse, muse.jhu.edu/article/411075/pdf.* Accessed 12 April 2016.

---. "Is Burmese Law Burmese? John Jardine, Em Forchhammer and Legal Orientalism." *Australian Journal of Asian Law,* vol.10, no. 2, Dec. 2008, pp.184-201. EBSCO*host,* ezproxy.drew.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=44150022&site=ehost-live&scope=site. Accessed 2 Feb. 2015.

Hyam, Ronald. "Concubinage and the Colonial Service: The Crewe Circular (1909)." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History,* vol. 14, no. 3, May 1986, pp. 170-186.

Ikeya, Chie. *Gender, History and Modernity: Representing Women in Twentieth Century Colonial Burma.* Dissertation, Cornell University, 2006. eCommons: Cornell's Digital Repository, ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/2537. Accessed 26 May 2016.

---. *Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma.* U of Hawai'i, 2011.

Ingle, Stephen. "The Anti-Imperialism of George Orwell." *Literature and the Political Imagination,* edited by John Horton and Andrea T. Baumeister, Routledge, 1996, pp. 218-237.

Ingle, Stephen. *George Orwell: A Political Life.* Manchester UP, 1993.

Islam, Shamsul. *Chronicles of the Raj.* Rowman and Littlefield, 1979.

Jardine, John. *Notes on Buddhist Law.* Translated by Moung Theka Phyoo and edited by E. Forchhammer, Rangoon: 1883. Delhi: Facsimile Publisher, 2016.

Jesse, F. Tennyson. Preface. *The Lacquer Lady,* by Jesse. William Heinemann, 1929, pp. vii-ix.

Johnson, Colin M. "Blue Moon." *The Gilbert and Sullivan Archive,* 9 Oct. 2016, www.halhkmusic.com/bluemoon.html. Accessed 14 Dec. 2016.

Judicial Commissioner, British Burma. *Notes on Buddhist Law.* Supdt., Govt. Printing, 1903.

Judson, Adironam. *The Judson Burmese-English Dictionary.* Revised and Enlarged by Robert C. Stevenson. Revised and Edited by Rev. F. H. Eveleth, American Baptist Mission Press, 1921.

K. *Myanmar in My Life-Time.* Today Publishing, 2013.

Khin Myo Chit. *Colourful Myanmar.* Parami, 1995.

Kipling, Rudyard. *Kim.* Kenkyusha, 1923.

---. "Mandalay." *Kipling: Poems,* selected by James Cochrane*,* Penguin, 1977, pp. 173-174.

---. *Something of Myself: For My Friends Known and Unknown.* Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1937.

Knapp, John Victor. *George Orwell: An Evaluation of His Early Fiction.* Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1971, *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, search.proquest.com/pqdthss/docview/302605334/71FAD21FDC93452EPQ/1?accountid=10558. Accessed 14 Sep. 2014.

Kubal, David L. *Outside the Whale: George Orwell's Art & Politics.* U of Notre Dame, 1972.

Kyaw Phyo Tha. "Orwell's 'Burmese Days' Wins Govt Literary Award. *The Irrawaddy,* 19 Nov. 2013, www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/orwells-burmese-days-wins-govt-literary-award.html. Accessed 10 Jun. 2014.

Lahiri, Sisir Chandra. *Principles of Modern Burmese Buddhist Law.* 6th ed. 1925, Eastern Law House, 1957.

Lane, Charles. *A Dictionary, English and Burmese.* Ostell and Lepage, 1841.

Larkin, Emma. *Finding George Orwell in Burma.* Penguin, 2005.

L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Circle of Quiet.* HarperSanFrancisco, 1972.

Leslie, Cecile. *The Golden Stairs.* Doubleday, 1968.

*Letters of an Indian Judge to an English Gentlewoman.* 1934. Futura, 1979.

Lutter, Henry M. *A Manual of Buddhist Law: Being Sparks of Buddhist Law, with*

*Notes of All the Rulings on Buddhist Law.* Hanthawaddy, 1887.

Manu Kiuiiardhon. *The Damathat, or, The Laws of Menoo.* Translated by D. Richardson, Dalton House, 1847.

*Manual of Examination Rules for Government Officers and for Admission to the Government Service in Burma.* Rangoon, Office of the Superintendent, Govt. Print., Burma, [Corrected up to 3rd November 1898].

Marks, J. E. *Forty Years in Burma.* [Dutton], 1917.

Marshall, Andrew. *The Trouser People.* Counterpoint, 2002.

Maugham, W. Somerset. "Masterson." *Collected Short Stories Volume Four,* 1951. pp. 266-275, Pan, 1980.

*Maulmain Chronicle* vol. 4, no. 43, 20 Jan. 1841, pp. 337-39.

Maung, E. *Burmese Buddhist Law.* Daw Than Tint, 1970.

Maung Htin Aung. *Burmese Law Tales.* Oxford UP, 1962.

---. "George Orwell and Burma." *Asian Affairs,* vol. 1, no. 1, 1970, pp. 19-28.

---. "Orwell of the Burma Police." *Asian Affairs,* vol. 60, 1973, pp. 181-86.

Maung Maung. *Law and Custom in Burma and the Burmese Family.* Martinus Nijhoff, 1963.

Meyers, Jeffrey. *Orwell: Life and Art.* U of Illinois, 2010.

Mi Mi Khaing. *Burmese Family.* Indiana UP, 1962.

---. *The World of Burmese Women.* Zed, 1984.

Min Zin. "The Power of Hpoun." *The Irrawaddy,* vol. 9, no. 9, December 2001, http://www2.irrawaddy.com/article.php?art_id=2471. Accessed 9 May 2014.

Mitton, G. E. *A Bachelor Girl in Burma.* Adam and Charles Black, 1907.

"Mofussil News: Katha." *The Times of Burma,* 11 March 1899, p. 7.

Moya, Ana. "George Orwell's Exploration of Discourses of Power in Burmese Days." *The Road from George Orwell: His Achievement and Legacy.* Edited by Alberto Lázaro. Peter Lang, 2001, pp. 94-105.

Muggeridge, Malcolm. "Burmese Days." *George Orwell.* Edited by Harold Bloom. Chelsea House, 1987, pp. 21-24.

---. "On George Orwell." *OrthodoxyToday.org.* www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles5/MuggeridgeOrwell.php. Accessed 7 Sept. 2014.

Myint Zan. "Of Consummation, Matrimonial Promises, Fault, and Parallel Wives: The Role of Original Texts, Interpretation, Ideology and Policy in Pre- and Post-1962 Burmese Case Law." *Columbia Journal of Asian Law,* vol. 14, Spring 2000, pp. 153-327, *Lexis-Nexis Academic,* www.lexisnexis.com/lnacui2api/api/version1/getDocCui?lni=42TB-GSX0-00SW404D&csi=270944,270077,11059,8411&hl=t&hv=t&hnsd=f&hns=t&hgn=t&oc=00240&perma=true. Accessed 20 Sept. 2014.

*New Zealand Truth.* "Page 4 Advertisements Column 1." 14 June 1924, p. 4, *Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand.* /records/6185020. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Accessed 12 June 2015.

---. "Page 4 Advertisements Column 1." no. 975, 2 August 1924, p. 4, *Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand.* natlib.govt.nz/records/6219692. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Accessed 12 June 2015.

---. "Page 4 Advertisements Column 1." no. 934, 20 October 1923, p. 4 *Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand.* natlib.govt.nz/records/6001806. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Accessed 12 June 2015.

Newsinger, John. "'Pox Britannica': Orwell and the Empire." *Race & Class* vol. 38, no. 2, 1996, pp. 33-49. *Proquest Central;* search.proquest.com/docview/233649188?accountid=10558. Accessed 9 July 2013.

Ni Ni Myint. *Burma's Struggle against British Imperialism (1885-1895),* Universities Press, 1983.

Nisbet, J. *Burma Under British Rule – and Before,* vol. II, Archibald Constable & Co., 1901.

"No Marriage Bans in Burma." *The Red Cloud Chief,* 25 Dec 1913, http://nebnewspapers.unl.edu/lccn/sn84022835/1913-12-25/ed-1/seq-7/.

Okell, John. "Question Re: Nuance of Burmese Words." Received by Carol Biederstadt, 16 Feb. 2015.

Orwell, George. "Anonymous Review of Burmese Interlude by C. V. Warren." *The Orwell Prize, https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-prize/orwell/essays-and-other-works/anonymous-review-of-burmese-interlude-by-c-v-warren/.* Accessed 24 June 2015.

---. "As I Please [61]." *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell Volume 4: In Front of Your Nose,* 1968. Edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, Penguin, 1970, pp. 276-79.

---. "As I Please [74]." *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell Volume 4: In Front of Your Nose.* 1968. Edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus. Penguin, 1970, pp. 323-27.

---. "Burma Roads." *The Observer.* 13 Sept. 1942, p. 3.

---. *Burmese Days.* 2nd ed. Harper and Brothers, 1934.

---. "Burmese Days." *The Observer.* 24 Feb. 1946, p. 3.

---. *Burmese Days.* 1934. Popular Library, 1952.

---. "Burmese Days." 1934. *George Orwell.* Secker & Warburg/Octopus, 1976, pp. 69-249.

---. *Burmese Days.* 1934. Penguin, 1989.

---. *Burmese Days.* 1934. Translated by Maung Myint Kywe. Daw Way Way Myint, 2012.

---. *A Collection of Essays.* Harvest, 1981.

---. "Coming Up for Air." 1939. *George Orwell.* Secker & Warburg/Octopus, 1976, pp. 427-571.

---. "Extract, The Autobiography of John Flory." *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, pp. 96-97.

---. "Extract, Preliminary to Autobiography." *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, pp. 95-96.

---. "Extract, A Rebuke to the Author, John Flory." *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, pp. 102-103.

---. "A Hanging," *Models for Writers: Short Essays for Composition.* 9th ed. Edited by Alfred Rosa and Paul Eschholz, Bedford/St Martin's, 2007, pp. 285-290.

---. "How a Nation Is Exploited: The British Empire in Burma." *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, pp. 142-47.

---. "Indian Ink." *The Observer.* 29 Oct. 1944, p. 3.

---. "An Incident in Rangoon." *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, pp. 98-102.

---. "Inside the Whale." *A Collection of Essays.* Harvest, 1981, pp. 210-251.

---. "'John Flory: My Epitaph.'" *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, p. 95.

---. "Keep the Aspidistra Flying." 1936. *George Orwell.* London: Secker & Warburg/Octopus, 1976. pp. 573-737.

---. "'The Lesser Evil.'" *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, p. 92.

---. "Letter to A.S.F. Gow." *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell Volume 4: In Front of Your Nose.* 1968. Edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus. Penguin, 1970, p. 177.

---. "Letter to F. Tennyson Jesse [31]." *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell Volume 4: In Front of Your Nose.* 1968. Edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus. Penguin, 1970, pp. 141-42.

---. "Letter to F. Tennyson Jesse [32]." *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell Volume 4: In Front of Your Nose.* 1968. Edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus. Penguin, 1970, p. 142.

---. *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* 1949. *George Orwell.* Secker & Warburg/Octopus, 1976, pp. 741-925.

---. *Orwell: The War Commentaries.* Edited by W. J. West. Schocken, 1985.

---. "Portrait of an Addict." *The Observer,* 13 September 1942, p. 3.

---. "Preliminaries to *Burmese Days*." *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, pp. 93-94.

---. "Reflections on Gandhi." *A Collection of Essays.* Harvest, 1981, pp. 171-180.

---. "Review of *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck." *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, pp. 205-06.

---. "Review: *The Story of Burma* by F. Tennyson Jesse." *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell Volume 4: In Front of Your Nose.* 1968. Edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus. Penguin, 1970, pp. 138-40.

---. "Review of *Trials in Burma* by Maurice Collis." *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Volume 1: An Age Like This 1920-1940.*" 1970. Edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus. Penguin, 1982, pp. 340-41.

---. *The Road to Wigan Pier.* 1937. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1958.

---. "Romance." *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, p. 89.

---. "Rudyard Kipling." *A Collection of Essays.* Harvest, 1981, pp. 116-31.

---. "'Rudyard Kipling.'" *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, pp. 409-410.

---. "Shooting an Elephant." *A Collection of Essays.* Harvest, 1981, pp. 148-55. Print.

---. "Such, Such Were the Joys." *A Collection of Essays.* Harvest, 1981, pp. 1-46.

---. "To Brenda Salkeld." *George Orwell: A Life in Letters.* Edited by Peter Davison. W.W. Norton, 2010, pp. 18-19.

---. "To Brenda Salkeld." *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, p. 374.

---. "To Henry Miller." *George Orwell: A Life in Letters.* Edited by Peter Davison. W.W. Norton, 2010, pp. 63-65.

---. "To Jacintha Buddicom." *George Orwell: A Life in Letters.* Edited by Peter Davison. W.W. Norton, 2010, pp. 444-445.

---. "To Leonard Moore." *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, p. 351.

---. "To Leonard Moore." *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, p. 388.

---. "To Leonard Moore." *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, pp. 476-477.

---. "To Leonard Moore." *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, p. 479.

---. "To R. N. Raimbault." *George Orwell: A Life in Letters.* Edited by Peter Davison. W.W. Norton, 2010, p. 39.

---. "To Victor Gollancz [Ltd?]." *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, pp. 361-63.

---. "To Victor Gollancz [Ltd]." *A Kind of Compulsion: The Complete Works of George Orwell – Ten.* Edited by Peter Davison. Secker & Warburg, 1998, pp. 379-80.

---. "Why I Write." *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Volume 1: An Age Like This 1920-1940.*" 1970. Edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus. Penguin, 1982, pp. 23-30.

---. "Writers and Leviathan." *All Art is Propaganda: Critical Essays.* Complied by George Packer. Mariner, 2009, pp. 337-345.

Palmer, John Williamson. *The Golden Dagon; Or, Up and Down the Irrawaddi. Being Passages of Adventure in the Burman Empire by an American.* Dix, Edwards & Co., 1856.

Patai, Daphne. *The Orwell Mystique: A Study in Male Ideology.* U of MA, 1984.

Paxton, Nancy L. *Writing under the Raj: Gender, Race, and Rape in the British Colonial Imagination, 1830-1947.* Rutgers UP, 1999.

"The Pretty Burmese Women." *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 19 Jan. 1896, p. 2, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times,*

search.proquest.com/docview/1016053579?accountid=10558. Accessed Oct. 2014.

Pritchett, V.S. "Living Writers 8. George Orwell." Transmission: Sat, 23rd Nov 1946. 1:30 -11:50. BBC. (tapescript). Orwell Archive, University College London, 15 June 2016.

Rai, Alok. "Colonial Fictions: Orwell's 'Burmese Days.'" *Economic and Political Weekly,* vol. 18, no. 5, 29 Jan. 1983, PE47-PE52. *JSTOR,* www.jstor.org/stable/4371800. Accessed June 2013.

Rajan, Balachandra. *Under Western Eyes: India from Milton to Macaulay*. Duke UP, 1999.

Rangoon Literary Society's Library and Reading Room York Road. "Advertisement." *The Times of Burma,* 18 March 1899, p. 1.

*Rangoon Police Manual, Containing Orders and Rules for the Rangoon Police.* Compiled by R. G. P. P. McDonnell, Rangoon, Government Printing, 1901.

Rangoon Times Bookstall. Advertisement. *The Weekly Rangoon Times,* 15 October 1921, p. 1.

Rees, Richard. *George Orwell: Fugitive from the Camp of Victory.* Southern Illinois U, 1962.

Remy, Marina. "First Encounters and the Writing of Otherness in *Burmese Days* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying.*" *George Orwell Now!* Edited by Richard Lance Keeble. Peter Lang, 2015, pp. 147-159.

Rodden, John. "'A Hanging': George Orwell's Unheralded Literary Breakthrough." *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies,* vol. 40, no. 1, March 2014, pp. 19-33. DOI: 10.6240/concentric.lit.2014.40.1.02. Accessed 25 Jan. 2014.

Rollason, Christopher. "Empire, Sense of Place and Cultures in Contact – George Orwell's *Burmese Days* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace.*" July, 2008, yatrarollason.info. Accessed 15 May 2013.

Rushdie, Salman. "Outside the Whale." *Granta,* 1984. granta.com/outside-the-whale/. Accessed 6 June 2013.

Saha, Jonathan. "Is It in India? Colonial Burma as a 'Problem' in South Asian History." *South Asian History & Culture,* vol. 7, no. 1, Jan. 2016, pp. 23-29. Ebsco*host.*search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=111869424&site=eds-live&scope=site. Accessed 26 Oct. 2016.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism.* Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.

---. *Orientalism.* Vintage, 1979.

Sangermano, Revnd. *A Description of the Burmese Empire.* Translated by William Tandy. 1833. Government Press, 1924.

Scott, James George. *Burma: As It Was, As It Is and As It Will Be.* George Redway, 1886.

---. *Burma: A Handbook of Practical Information.* Daniel O'Connor, 1921.

---. *Wholly without Morals: A Romance of Indo-Burman Life and Racing.* Duckworth & Co., 1912.

Seshagiri, Urmila. "Misogyny and Anti-Imperialism in George Orwell's Burmese Days." *The Road from George Orwell: His Achievement and Legacy.* Ed. Alberto Lázaro. Peter Lang, 2001, pp. 106-20.

Shoemaker, Michael Myers *Quaint Corners of Ancient Empires; Southern India, Burma, and Manila.* G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899.

Shway Yoe. *The Burman: His Life and Notions.* Macmillan and Co., 1910.

Silverstein, Josef. "Burma through the Prism of Western Novels." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies,* vol. XVI, 1985, pp. 129-140.

Simpsons and Williams, Ltd. Advertisement. *Press.* "Page 1 Advertisements Column 5." vol. XLIX, no. 14653, 30 April 1913. *Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand. paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/imageserver-newspapers/CHP19130430.pdf.* Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. Accessed 12 June 2015.

Smart & Mookerdum. Advertisement. *The Times of Burma,* 1 Jan. 1899, p. 1.

---. Advertisement. *The Times of Burma,* 25 Jan. 1899, p. 1.

---. Advertisement. *The Times of Burma,* 28 Jan. 1899, p. 1.

---. Advertisement. *The Times of Burma,* 11 Feb. 1899, p. 1.

---. Advertisement. *The Times of Burma,* 25 Feb. 1899, p. 1.

---. Advertisement. *The Times of Burma,* 18 March 1899, p. 1.

Smith-Forbes, Charles James Forbes. *British Burma and Its People: Being Sketches of Native Manners, Customs, and Religion.* John Murray, 1878.

Spiro, Melford E. *Kinship and Marriage in Burma: A Cultural and Psychodynamic Analysis.* U of CA, 1977.

Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture.* Edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. U of Illinois, 1988, pp. 271-313.

---. "Reading the World: Literary Studies in the 1980s." *Reading and Writing Differently*:

*Deconstruction and the Teaching of Composition and Literature."* Edited by G. Douglas Atkins and Michael L. Johnson. U Press of Kansas, 1985, pp. 27-37.

Srivastava, Neelam. "'Pidgin English or Pigeon Indian?' Babus and Babuisms in Colonial and Postcolonial Fiction." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing,* vol. 43, no. 1, May 2007, pp. 55-64. search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lfh&AN=24827956&site=eds-live&scope=site. Accessed 29 June 2013.

Stansky, Peter, and William Abrahams. *The Unknown Orwell.* Alfred A. Knopf, 1972.

Stoler, Ann L. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power.* U of California Press, 2002.

---."Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th Century Colonial Cultures." *American Ethnologist,* vol. 16, no. 4, Nov. 1989, pp. 634-660, *JSTOR.* www.jstor.org/stable/645114. Accessed 17 June 2014.

Sun Associates. *Practical Myanmar.* U Kyi Swe, 1996.

"The Surprise That Surprises." *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* 1 July 1906, p. 3. *America's Historical Newspapers.* infoweb.newsbank.com/?db=EANX. Accessed 31 Jan. 2016.

Sutherland, John. *Orwell's Nose: A Pathological Biography.* Reaktion, 2016.

Symns, J. M. *Horace in Burma.* 1910. White Orchid, 1997.

Tambiah, S. J. "Dowry and Bridewealth, and the Property Rights of Women in South Asia." *Bridewealth and Dowry.* Jack Goody and S. J. Tambiah. Cambridge UP, London, 1973. 59-169.

Taw Sein Ko. *Elementary Handbook of the Burmese Language.* Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing, Burma, 1898. Print.

Thomas, Edward M. *Orwell.* Oliver and Boyd, 1965.

Tydd, Bill. *Peacock Dreams.* Bacsa, 1986.

Venables, Dione. *George Orwell: The Complete Poetry.* Finlay Publisher for the Orwell Society, 2015.

---. Postscript. *Eric & Us,* by Buddicom, Finlay, 1974, pp. 169-189.

2006. 169-89.

---. "Re: Orwell Society Contact." Received by Carol Biederstadt, 10 Feb. 2014.

Voorhees, Richard J. *The Paradox of George Orwell.* Purdue U, 1961.

Vore, Robert. E. Afterword. *Not Out of Hate.* Ma Ma Lay. Translated by Margaret Aung-Thwin. Ohio University Center for International Studies Monographs in International Studies, Southeast Asia Series, no 88, Ohio U, 1991.

Wain, Barry. "New Extremes: Myanmar Paper Steps up Attacks on Nobel Laureate." *Asian Wall Street Journal,* vol. 1, Apr. 12 1999, *ProQuest. http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.drew.edu/central/docview/315538156/A84C1BFC198F4B18PQ/1?accountid=10558.* Accessed 15 Jan. 2015.

"Welcome to New Haven. Workers in Heathen Lands." *New Haven Evening Register,* 2nd edition, vol. XLIV, no. 94, 21 April 1886, p. 1, *America's Historical Newspapers.* infoweb.newsbank.com/?db=EANX. Accessed 31 Dec. 2016.

"Western Men and Eastern Morals." *Truth,* 10 Aug. 1910, pp. 350-51.

"Where Women Are Free: In Burmah the Men Have Been Almost Displaced as Traders." *Dallas Morning News,* 10. 7 Feb. 1898, p. 10, *America's Historical Newspapers.* infoweb.newsbank.com/?db=EANX. Accessed 31 Dec. 2016.

"Where Women Are Queens." *Dallas Morning News,* 24 May 1896, p. 10, *America's*

*Historical Newspapers.* infoweb.newsbank.com/?db=EANX. Accessed. 31 Dec. 2016.

"Where Women Do as They Please." *Bismarck Daily Tribune,* 15 Sep. 1892, p. 4, *America's Historical Newspapers.* infoweb.newsbank.com/?db=EANX. Accessed 31 Dec. 2016.

White, Herbert Thirkell. *A Civil Servant in Burma.* 1913. Forgotten Books, 2012.

Williams, J. H. *The Spotted Deer.* Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957.

Willis, W.N. *Western Men with Eastern Morals.* Stanley Paul, 1913.

"With Orwell in Burma – Roger Beadon Talks to Pamela Howe." *The Listener,* 29 May 1969, p. 755.

"Woman and Home: Burmese Women the Freest and Happiest in the World." *Knoxville Journal,* 29 May 1895, p. 6 *America's Historical Newspapers.* infoweb.newsbank.com/?db=EANX. Accessed 31 Dec. 2016.

"Women Vote in Burma." *Dallas Morning News,* 23 Mar. 1913, p. 5 *America's Historical Newspapers.* infoweb.newsbank.com/?db=EANX. Accessed 31 Dec. 2016.

# VITA

Full name: Carol Lynn Biederstadt

Place and date of birth: South Amboy, New Jersey, April 1, 1964

Parents' names: Ronald Albert and Elizabeth Jane Biederstadt

Educational Institutions:

| School | Place | Degree | Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| North Brunswick High School | North Brunswick, NJ | diploma | 1982 |
| Rutgers University | New Brunswick, NJ | B.A. | 1988 |
| Temple University | Philadelphia, PA | M.Ed. | 1995 |
| Sheffield University | Sheffield, UK | M.A. | 2003 |
| Drew University | Madison, NJ | D.Litt. | 2017 |