

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

Burmese Days poses difficult editorial problems. The book was published first in the United States by Harper & Brothers on 25 October 1934; 2,000 copies were printed and, probably on 11 December, a second impression was issued. The number of copies printed in the second impression is not known, but 976 copies were remaindered. Victor Gollancz was keen to publish *Burmese Days* in England but, having had his fingers burnt following the publication of Rosalind Wade's *Children Be Happy* in 1931, he was apprehensive that publication might lead to actions for libel or defamation. A meeting between Orwell, Gollancz and his solicitor was arranged for 22 February 1935 to discuss publication in England. Orwell had recently received a letter of praise for his novel from John R. Hall, Book Editor of the Democrat-News Publishing Co. of Marshall, Missouri, Ohio, dated 5 February 1935. It seems certain that Orwell took that letter with him to the meeting to demonstrate the kind of interest his novel had aroused in America. Two of the proposals put forward at the meeting were that Orwell should delocalise the story and that he should change some of the names in order to make identification more difficult and so reduce the chances of legal action. On the back of Hall's letter Orwell drew a sketch-map of Kyauktada, the scene of the events of *Burmese Days*, to facilitate revisions, and in one corner he listed pages where topographical changes were to be made (keyed to the American edition) and he noted pages where certain name changes were required. Among the name changes, Dr Veraswami was changed to Dr Murkhaswami, Lackersteen to Latimer, and,

marks.) The first American edition made very little use of italic, but increasingly thereafter Gollancz, Penguin and Secker & Warburg italicised, sometimes unsystematically. Orwell read the proofs of each edition. The problem of what to italicise is made more difficult because standard authorities disagree as to what has been assimilated into English (and should be printed in roman type), and what is alien, and should be italicised. Thus the *Oxford English Dictionary* regards *sahib* as alien but *syce*, a groom, as naturalised, which is sociologically interesting if nothing else. Some words might reasonably be regarded as 'understood' and so printed in roman—bazaar, chit, havildar, sahib (but not *sahiblog*), salam, sepoy, topi. Its very frequent use in *Burmese Days* might lead to *shiko* being similarly assimilated in this context. However, almost fifty words have been italicised at every appearance. One effect is that Orwell's story is presented as he would wish: it is the British who are aliens in this society and the language in which the story must be told—English—is itself alien to the host people. The effect is neatly encapsulated on page 229, line 30, having in mind that Flory (like Orwell) spoke Burmese and Hindi.

As Orwell rejected the Gollancz edition, it would seem reasonable to ignore it, but a single-word clue points to the fact that in addition to emending the American text to suit Gollancz's requirements, Orwell also made some changes on literary grounds. In notes he wrote for his Literary Executor in the last six months of his life, Orwell said that 'sat', which had 'persisted through all editions', should be changed to 'knelt' (page 282, line 22). In fact, it had not so persisted: Orwell had made the change from 'sat' to 'knelt' in the Gollancz edition, but he had so taken against that edition that he had forgotten he had made the alteration. A careful check of the different readings throws up a number of other changes made on literary grounds in that 'garbled'

incongruously, the newspaper, *Burmese Patriot*, to *Burmese Sinn Feiner*. An additional authorial note was added stating that the characters were all fictitious and pointing out that the magistrate (properly, U Po Kyin), called U Po Sing in the Gollancz edition, did not even have a genuine Burmese name. The key to Orwell's sketch-map appears as a frontispiece. Full identifications will be found in the Complete Works edition, II, pages 305–8 (Secker & Warburg, 1986).

After the meeting Orwell wrote to his agent, Leonard Moore, telling him that *Burmese Days* was to be published 'subject to a few trifling alterations which will not take more than a week'. On 28 February Orwell sent Gollancz a copy of the American edition with a list of the alterations to be made in order to meet the requirements of Gollancz and his solicitor. This list has survived. The English version was brought out on 24 June 1935; 2,500 copies were printed and a second impression of 500 copies was called for.

Orwell rejected the Gollancz edition, referring to it in later years as 'garbled', a description that for him was condemnatory. For the first Penguin edition, which was published in May 1944 (60,000 copies), and the Secker & Warburg Uniform Edition, printed in July 1949 (3,000 copies), Orwell gave instructions that the American edition must be followed. However, these later editions introduced errors (a considerable number in 1949) and each modified the way certain words—home, canal, war—were capitalised and which words should be italicised. These may seem matters of little moment, but 'Home', the [Suez] 'Canal', and 'War' assumed greater and specific significance when capitalised, especially in those days for expatriates. Variable use of italic is more than annoying. (The Uniform Edition prints *weiksa*—Burmese for conjuror—in three different ways: in italic, in roman, and in roman within quotation

edition: for example, 'footling' (very much an Orwell word) for 'fooling' (page 96, line 26).

There is one other class of change that is important, for it affects all Orwell's work. He was ahead of his time in condemning the use of what he called insulting nicknames for those of other races, even in the left-wing press (*Tribune*, 10 December 1943). This article was written at the time Orwell was checking proofs for the first Penguin edition of *Burmese Days*. He argued that by ensuring the word 'native' was not used in a derogatory sense, that 'Negro' was always given an initial capital letter, and by substituting 'Chinese' for 'Chinaman' and 'Moslem' for 'Mohamedan' it was possible to do 'a little to mitigate the horrors of the colour war'. He made such changes to the Penguin edition of *Burmese Days* and his injunction has been followed throughout this new edition of his writings.

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GEORGE ORWELL

Burmese Days

'I...recommend it to anyone who enjoys a spate of efficient indignation, graphic description, excellent narrative, excitement, and irony tempered with vitriol'-Cyril Connolly

Set in the days of Empire, with the British ruling in Burma, *Burmese Days* describes both indigenous corruption and Imperial bigotry, when 'after all, natives were natives-interesting, no doubt, but finally only a "Subject" people, an inferior people with black faces'.

Against the prevailing orthodoxy, Flory, a white timber merchant, befriends Dr Veraswami, a black enthusiast for Empire. The doctor needs help. U Po Kyin, Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Kyauktada, is plotting his downfall. The only thing that can save him is European patronage: membership of the hitherto all-white Club. While Flory prevaricates, beautiful Elizabeth Lackersteen arrives in Upper Burma from Paris. At last, after years of 'solitary hell', romance and marriage appear to offer Flory an escape from the 'lie' of the 'pukka sahib pose'.

'Mr Orwell's indignant and unsparing realism is a sound tonic for us! It is convincing realism; and it is as illuminating as it is distressing'

-John Cowper Powys

THE AUTHORITATIVE TEXT

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