

# Comic and Serious Patterns of Speech in Kipling's Verse

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Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) was one of Britain's most talented and celebrated writers and in 1907 became the first Englishman to win the Nobel prize for literature, but he remains a controversial figure for political reasons which blind many to the skill and depth of his work as a versifier. Much of Kipling's work both in his verse and in the dialogues in his short stories is written in what purport to be regional or national dialects notably cockney (the speech of working class and lower class Londoners) but also the speech of Ireland and Yorkshire and the Glaswegian of his poem *M'Andrew's Hymn* [Kipling 1994 (1893):120]. Kipling has been criticised for this by commentators who claim that his renderings of these dialects are inaccurate and condescending. George Orwell [1968 (1942)] has even claimed in a political judgement masquerading as an aesthetic one that Kipling's use of cockney damages the aesthetic appeal of his poetry. Here Orwell has transgressed the Kantian aesthetic doctrine that [1952 (1790):42-3] aesthetic judgements are independent of 'interest' and in particular of moral judgements about the society that produced the item whose beauty we are considering. Yet even if we set Kant's dictum aside for the moment, Orwell's judgements are wrong even on his own terms. Orwell wrote that:

If one examines his best and more representative work, his soldier's poems, especially *Barrack-Room Ballads*, one notices that what more than anything else spoils them is an underlying air of patronage... the private soldier though loveable and romantic has to be a comic. He is always made to speak in a sort of style of cockney, not very broad but with all the aitches and final 'g's' carefully omitted. Very often the result is as embarrassing as the humorous recitation at a church social. And this accounts for the curious fact that one

can often improve Kipling's poems, make them less facetious and less blatant by simply going through them and transplanting them from cockney into standard speech. This is especially true of his refrains which often have a truly lyrical quality. Two examples will do...:

So its knock out your pipes and follow me!  
And it's finish up your swipes and follow me!  
Oh! Hark to the big drum calling  
– Follow me – follow me home!

Cheer for the Sergeant's wedding –  
Give them one cheer more  
Grey gun-horses in the lando  
And a rogue is married to a whore

Here I have reinstated the aitches etc. Kipling ought to have known better. He ought to have seen that the two closing lines of the first of these stanzas are very beautiful lines, and that ought to have over-ridden his impulse to make fun of a working-man's accent... even where it makes no difference musically the facetiousness of his stage cockney dialect is irritating. However, he is more often quoted aloud than read on the printed page, and most people instinctively make the necessary alterations when they quote him. [Orwell 1968 (1942):189]

Orwell is wrong on all counts. It is difficult to see why anyone could possibly see 'Follow me home' as an intrinsically better line than 'Follow me 'ome'. Let us revert to Kipling's [1994 (1894 and 1896): 446-9] original verses with their lost 'g's and 'd's, and deleted aitches and see how we might compare the two versions.

#### FOLLOW ME 'OME

There was no one like 'im. 'Orse or Foot,  
Nor any o' the Guns I knew;  
An' because it was so, why o' course 'e went and died  
Which is just what the best men do.

So its knock out your pipes an' follow me!  
An' it's finish up your swipes an' follow me!  
Oh! 'ark to the big drum callin'  
Follow me-follow me 'ome!

[ 'Orse or Foot nor Guns refers to soldiers in the cavalry or the dragoons, the infantry and the artillery respectively. The speaker's closest friend, another soldier, has just died and is being taken to burial with the military band playing.]

THE SERGEANT'S WEDDIN'

Chorus

Cheer for the Sergeant's weddin'-  
Give them one cheer more!  
Grey gun-'orses in the lando  
An' a rogue is married to a whore

[After the wedding the newly married couple, the husband a corrupt sergeant, the wife a woman of easy virtue are leaving in a landau, a four wheeled carriage with a retractable top carriage, drawn by two grey horses usually used to pull guns for the artillery.]

Orwell claims that his amended version sounds better than Kipling's original verses because the latter makes fun of the working man's accent. Yet this is not an aesthetic but a social and political point, an outgrowth of Orwell's intensely held egalitarian ideology and dislike of class differences. Orwell was the son of a minor British official in imperial India but had been educated at Eton (Newsinger 1999:1), an exclusive boarding school, most of whose pupils were rich and well connected, a school with an elite ethos, whose pupils and former pupils felt themselves to be apart from and superior to the great mass of ordinary people. Orwell came to repudiate this outlook and deliberately immersed himself (Newsinger 1999: 20,27) in the life of those doing casual work as hop-pickers or in catering or down and out altogether such as tramps, experiences leading to his writing *Hop-Picking* [1968 (1931)] and *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933). Later he tried to enter the social world of those who worked in mines and factories or were unemployed which was the basis of his book *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). The extreme difference between his early social experience and what he saw during his excursions into not only working class life but that of the lower depths made him excessively sensitive to, and indignant at, the way in which speech patterns in England were graded in their social acceptability through their association with social class and education. Hence his annoyance at those of Kipling's poems in which a kind of cockney is put into the mouths of the soldiers. Now it is perfectly possible to sympathise with Orwell's feelings in this matter and yet to see that they are irrelevant to an assessment of the aesthetic merits of Kipling's verses.

The basic point being made at this stage is one expressed by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgement* [1952 (1790):42-3] in which he states that the delight which determines the judgement of taste is independent of all interest:

Now where the question is whether something is beautiful, we do not want to know, whether we, or any one else, are, or even could be, concerned in the real existence of the thing, but rather what estimate we form of it on mere contemplation (intuition or reflection). If any one asks me whether I consider that the palace I see before me is beautiful, I may, perhaps, reply that I do not care for things of that sort that are merely made to be gaped at. Or I may reply in the same strain as that Iroquois *sachem* who said that nothing in Paris pleased him better than the eating-houses, I may even go a step further and inveigh with the vigour of a *Rousseau* against the vanity of the great who spend the sweat of the people on such superfluous things. Or, in fine, I may quite easily persuade myself that if I found myself on an uninhabited island, without hope of ever again coming among men, and could conjure such a palace into existence by a mere wish, I should still not trouble to do so, so long as I had a hut there that was comfortable for me. All this may be admitted and approved; only it is not the point now at issue. All one wants to know is whether the mere representation of the object is to my liking, no matter how indifferent I may be to the real existence of the object of this representation. It is quite plain that in order to say that the object *is beautiful*, and to show that I have taste, everything turns on the meaning which I can give to this representation, and not on any factor which makes me dependent on the real existence of the object. Every one must allow that a judgement on the beautiful which is tinged with the slightest interest, is very partial and not a pure judgement of taste. One must not be in the least prepossessed in favour of the real existence of the thing, but must preserve complete indifference in this respect, in order to play the part of judge in matters of taste [Kant 1790, Book I part 2 Lines 32-61].

It is not as easy to apply Kant's view to poems as it is to palaces (indeed it is problematic) but his meaning is clear. We ought not to decide on the relative merits of Kipling's and Orwell's versions on the basis of Orwell's ideological dislike of the manifestation of class differences in language. Indeed Orwell [1968 (1942): 189] gives the game away when he admits that in many of Kipling's poems there may well be no difference musically between his kind of amended version and Kipling's original verses. Orwell is right in saying that many of Kipling's refrains have a truly lyrical quality but it then follows that changing them in the interests of political correctness far from improving them may well damage them. Consider the lines below that Orwell wanted to alter:

Oh! 'ark to the big drum callin'  
Follow me-Follow me 'ome!

It is as easy to argue that the lines above sound better, and feel better, than Orwell's conversion of them to standard written English as to argue the opposite. The lines may look better written in standard English because both native speakers of

English and those who have learned it as a second language learn to read and write the standard written version of the language. A Greek with an excellent knowledge of English might still have problems with Kipling's original lines because they will not correspond to the English he has learned in Greece. The absence of the aitches, 'd's and 'g's *looks wrong*. However, this is a criticism that can be made of anyone who, for whatever reason and however authentically, writes poetry in dialect with its own idiosyncratic syntax and vocabulary and who in a rough and ready way spells the words to try to indicate the eccentric way in which they are pronounced - a crude amateur attempt at phonetic spelling. Since there is no agreed way of spelling for example cockney this often merely confuses the reader. But verse like Kipling's is best judged by the way it sounds, and it sounds better if the 'd's and the 'g's and the aitches are left out. Curiously enough 'ark sounds better than *hark* when it is the second sound in the line not the first as in 'Oh! 'ark'; by contrast if *hark* were the first word in the line it would sound better with the aitch pronounced because it would be an emphasised consonant. 'Why of course 'e went and died' slides through more easily than 'why of course he went and died' because the aitch is a difficult strong, interrupting sound that gets in the way. It is for this reason that aitches are so often illicitly dropped in the speech of many native speakers of English and it is a very difficult sound for learners of English such as the French whose own language does not contain it. Even in English the aitch is not pronounced in words of French origin such as *honesty* or *honour* from *honnête* and *honneur* and indeed it is just about permissible to say 'an hotel' in English because it sounds like the French *un Hôtel*. If aitches are not pronounced it is easier to run the sounds of one word into the next as is the French custom (in contrast to say German where each aitch is clearly sounded and is a point of separation). Whether in general aitches sounded are more satisfying than aitches not sounded is not the question we are trying to resolve and we do not propose to express any preference for the sounds of French over German or *vice versa*. We are merely saying that it is this capacity of aitch sounds to break up the flow of speech that determines whether or not the particular lines quoted by Orwell sound better with them or without them. It does not really make that much difference one way or the other but on balance 'follow me 'ome' is a better sounding and musically more satisfying line than 'follow me home' because there is an easier elision between sounds and there is not the intrusive pulse and bump of sound that occurs when the reader pronounces the aitch in home.

Ironically when Orwell says that 'follow me 'ome' is the uglier line of the two he is unconsciously expressing the very prejudice of his class of origin that lays such

stress on not dropping aitches. They wish to retain the aitches in their own speech and see the retention of aitches in general as a mark of superiority precisely because it is a difficult (Kuipers 2001) sound and the mark of those whose speech like their character is disciplined rather than sloppy. When they say that the dropping of aitches is ugly they are not making an aesthetic point but rather perpetrating the philistine confusion between that which is beautiful and that which is difficult to do. It is the kind of prejudice held by old fashioned English people who take pride in being able to translate English into elegant Latin prose because it is effortful but dislike modern art because they think there is no craftsmanship to it.

What is odd is the sheer confidence of Orwell's assertion that the loss of an aitch wrecks one of Kipling's best lines and turns the beautiful into the ugly. If this argument were taken to its logical conclusion it would mean that no verse written in cockney or modified cockney could ever be worthy of our appreciation. In that case how could a real cockney ever write verse in a form that reflected their everyday way of speaking?

Orwell's defence would no doubt be that Kipling's use of cockney is not genuine but facetious and mocking and that this spoils his verse, yet it is difficult to see that Kipling either aims to be facetious or produces a comic effect in the particular poem quoted above in which he writes about the soldier's grief at his friend's funeral. The other verses of this poem also reveal the sincerity of Kipling's feelings and the serious indeed solemn impact of them on the reader or listener. These verses may well be judged by hostile critics to be clumsy or sentimental but they are not in any way facetious or mocking. Here is the rest of *Follow me 'Ome*:

We fought 'bout a dog-last week it were-  
 No more than a round or two;  
 But I strook 'im cruel 'ard, an' I wish I 'adn't now,  
 Which is just what a man can't do.

'E was all that I 'ad in the way of a friend,  
 An' I've 'ad to find one new;  
 But I'd give my pay an' stripe for to get the beggar back,  
 Which is too late to do!

So it's knock out your pipes an' follow me!  
 An' it's finish up your swipes an' follow me!  
 Oh 'ark to the fifes a-crawlin'!  
 Follow me – follow me 'ome!

Take 'im away! 'E's gone where the best men go.  
Take 'im away! An' the gun-wheels turnin' slow.  
Take 'im away! There's more from the place 'e come.  
Take 'im away, with the limber an' the drum.

For it's "Three rounds blank" an' follow me,  
An' it's "Thirteen rank" an' follow me;  
Oh, passin' the love o' women  
Follow me- follow me 'ome

[By chance the soldier had had a fight with his friend over a dog the day before the friend died and struck him too hard. Now that his comrade has died (from quite other causes), he regrets that he did so. He says he would give his pay and his stripe, the mark of his status in the army as a lance-corporal, (a minor Non-Commissioned Officer) to have him back alive again. The body of his dead friend is now being taken away on a gun carriage for burial with the regiment's fife and drum band playing and soon they will fire a military salute over his grave].

Now it may be that Orwell sees Kipling's stylised, not very broad cockney as inauthentic, yet what does authentic mean? If Kipling had written in truly broad cockney with all its peculiarities of grammar, vocabulary, usage and pronunciation including glottal stops the verses would have been incomprehensible. There is no agreed method of writing cockney down and no agreed standard of what cockney should be. Even the mild cockney in which Kipling writes can sometimes create problems for a reader or listener, for whom English is not their first language and the use of very broad cockney would have defeated them and indeed native speakers of standard English as well. If correctly read aloud verses written in very broad cockney would not be understood by anyone other than Cockneys or those used to speaking with them on a regular basis. Not only speakers of standard British or American English but people who speak other dialects, such as those of Fife, Yorkshire, County Antrim, Wiltshire or South Wales would be unable to follow what was being said. When the distinguished American literary scholar, Professor Don Nilsen of Arizona visited Sheffield University in South Yorkshire he found he needed an interpreter to translate the local speech of the janitors into standard British English for him. The local people of South Yorkshire could understand general American because they regularly hear it on the radio, films and television and the Americans have no problem in understanding standard British English but the peculiarities of highly local British speech defeat them. It would have made no sense for Kipling to attempt to write broad cockney; it would merely have diminished his readership without any gain in profundity or authenticity. Kipling's collections of

verse were in his own day best sellers and continue to sell but if he had written in broad cockney his audience would have been restricted to that limited number of people who can understand the meaning of cockney when it is written down more or less phonetically and who would be able to read it aloud without difficulty to listeners who could understand what they were saying. Cockney can not be written down with any precision except by using the symbols of the specialist which very few people know. What is more, there is not just one form of broad cockney but many, for it varies from district to district within London and there is no agreed standard form. Which one should Kipling have used? How easily would Cockneys from other parts of London have been able to read him if he had done so? That Kipling could not have done it, not being a native speaker of any form of cockney, indeed not being a Londoner, is neither here nor there. Those who are the "nationalists" of local speech regularly run into this problem when they try to write poetry and the exercise runs into a squabble over the question of which local patois limited to one or another group of little villages is to be used as the canonical form, or whether some new synthetic *mélange* should be introduced. The followers of Mistral who tried to write born-again Provençal rather than standard French or of Christopher Murray Grieve (who changed his name to Hugh McDiarmid) who tried to write in Lallans, the very varied dialect of the Lowland Scots, all ran into the same problem.

Kipling could not speak cockney and when he uses it in the dialogue of his short stories it comes out in a mutilated way (Birkenhead 1980:95) but he could understand what Cockneys said to him from the time he was at school at Westward Ho!, in England. According to Carrington (1955:108):

... veterans (were) employed successively at Westward Ho! as 'school sergeants', that is as janitors, drill instructors, and general assistants with the school discipline. When Kipling went to school as a little boy it was the time of Sergeant Kearney, a huge drunken old Irishman who delighted in talking about the Sikh wars of the eighteen forties. Kearney retired in 1879, giving place to Schofield, a smart brisk little cockney whose character is indicated by his school nickname of 'Weasel'.

Later when he returned to India he often met and spoke with private soldiers and non-commissioned officers living in barracks though on a rather casual basis and tried to reproduce their speech in his short stories notably the speech of the Irishman, the Cockney and the dalesman from the West Riding of Yorkshire (Carrington 1955 :107. Birkenhead 1980: 69,123). These contacts and observations gave him a sympathetic insight into the life of the ordinary soldier in the British army in India in the nineteenth century which was a volunteer army since Britain had no



conscription. The officers were 'gentlemen' but those they commanded were drawn from the lowest sections of society. Most workers with a trade, steady employment or a claim to respectability would not have joined the army and would have despised those who did. Many of the volunteers in India would have spoken broad cockney (the sheer size of London and the peculiar insecurities of its labour market would have ensured that many of the soldiers were Cockneys) though it would have been modified over time through mixing with soldiers having different forms of local speech. Later back in London, Kipling was a frequenter of the music halls the most popular form of entertainment of the common people of London and of the bars attached to them (Birkenhead 1980: 110). Thus Kipling could and frequently did talk to Cockneys and the stylised cockney of his verse is at least not that of a person imagining cockney from a great distance.

Indeed Rutherford (1990: xv) writes of Kipling's war poems as "poems based on songs he had heard sung in canteens around camp-fires on manoeuvres and in London music halls, in which the proletarian idiom and outlook of soldiers themselves are used to give a remarkably frank and inclusive account of their real experiences in peace and war".

Thus Kipling knew not only the soldiers' conversation but their songs and indeed he describes some of his own early volumes of verse as 'ballads' and 'ditties'. Curiously Orwell's other accusation against Kipling is that he is vulgar and that some of his verse is only fit for the music hall [Orwell 1968(1942):194], the popular entertainment of the working classes, where indeed some of Kipling's verses, because of their accessibility and their expression of popular sentiment would have been recited or sung often by Cockneys for a Cockney audience. Far from feeling demeaned by Kipling they were willing to adopt his work (see Birkenhead 1980:86,366) and would not have liked Orwell's snobbish use of the term vulgar to describe the verses they enjoyed.

Many music hall artistes of Kipling's time would of necessity have played the part of the 'stage cockney' in their acts. This mode of speech was for them, as for Kipling, a necessity. Many of them were of cockney origin and a large proportion of their audiences would have been cockneys. Cockney was the natural speech for them to use on the stage. Yet many of those in a theatre audience, even in London would not have found broad cockney very easy to follow; also the performers would have wished to take their acts on tour to other parts of the country. The performers wished to remain Cockneys and yet also to communicate with the entire British population; the employment of stage cockney, a mild cockney with certain emphasised recognisable markers of cockney speech achieved this end. However

inauthentic Kipling's cockney may have been, his 'cockney' poems and songs would have suited these entertainers purposes very well, for example *Mandalay* (Kipling 1994:418-10).

Kipling is doing something similar with his stylized cockney – he is providing readers and would-be reciters with enough well-known identifying markers to recognize that the speaker is meant to be a cockney but not burdening them with items incomprehensible to the vast majority of speakers of English. It is the best possible compromise as we can see from his poem *Wilful Missing* [Kipling 1994 (1903): 482-3] about deserters from the British army during the Boer War between Britain and the Boers of the Afrikaner republics in South Africa 1899-1902.

“WILFUL-MISSING”

(Deserters of the Boer War)

There is a world outside the one you know,  
To which for curiousness 'E'll can't compare-  
It is the place where “wilful-missings” go,  
As we can testify, for we are there.

You may 'ave read a bullet laid us low,  
That we was gathered in “with reverent care”  
And buried proper. But it was not so,  
As we can testify, – for we are there!

They can't be certain – faces alter so  
After the old aasvogel's 'ad 'is share.  
The uniform's the mark by which they go –  
And-ain't it odd? the one we best can spare.

We might 'ave seen our chance to cut the show-  
Name, number, record, an' begin elsewhere-  
Leavin' some not too late-tormented foe  
One funeral-private-British-for 'is share.

We may 'ave took it yonder in the low  
Bush-veldt that sends men stragglin' unaware  
Among the Kaffirs, till their columns go,  
An' they are left past call or count or care.

We might 'ave been your lovers long ago,  
'Usbands or children – comfort or despair.

Our death (*an* 'burial) settles all we owe,  
An' why we done it is our own affair.

Marry again, and we will not say no,  
Nor come to bastardise the kids you bear.  
Wait on in 'ope-you've all your life below  
Before you'll ever 'ear us on the stair.

There is no need to give our reasons, though  
Gawd knows we 'ad reasons which were fair;  
But other people might not judge 'em so-  
And now it doesn't matter what they were.

What man can weigh or size another's woe?  
There are some things too bitter 'ard to bear.  
Suffice it we 'ave finished-Domino  
As we can testify, for we are there,  
In the side-world where "wilful-missings" go.

[Brief Summary of *Wilful Missing*: The entire poem is placed in the mouth of an army deserter who has disappeared into the rough and often empty countryside of South Africa. An official report has mistakenly claimed that he had been killed in action and his body given a suitable burial. The authorities had found and bestowed a funeral upon a body (probably that of a dead Boer soldier) with its face eaten away by a vulture, around which the deserter had wrapped his abandoned uniform – thus giving his name, his army number and his past identity to the corpse. In fact, having wilfully and deliberately gone missing from his army unit, he had not died but gone into hiding. He is now telling his 'widow' back in Britain that she is free to re-marry because he is never going to return to England and embarrass her by turning up alive after she has acquired a new husband and children. He finally asks the reader for a sympathetic understanding both of his desperate decision to quit the army and of his present hapless position as a non-person trapped in an alien land and cut off for ever from his own people.]

Most of the poem is written in standard English. There are traces of the stilted speech of official documents deliberately placed in quotation marks as "with reverent care" or the title itself *Wilful Missing* and also some words in South African English taken from Afrikaner usage such as *aasvogel* for 'vulture', *Kaffirs* for 'the local black Africans' or *bush-veldt* for 'scrubland'. These too are markers of context and place. The loss of the speaker's aitches and 'd's throughout or the use of 'why we done it' rather than the standard form 'why we did it' are simply ways of

indicating what kind of person the speaker, the 'wilful-missing' deserter from the ranks, is. It is relevant here to know his social background. The use of these markers does not spoil the verse and in one place at least it improves it. The line above 'And buried proper. But it was not so' is a great improvement on the correct standard proper form using the adverb 'properly' properly. 'Buried proper' provides a better contrast to the stilted official sounds of 'with reverend care' in the previous line than 'buried properly' ever could. We can see this from the Orwellized version of the line below which has been amended into standard English; it has too many syllables and lacks force:

And buried properly. But it was not so

No one can possibly say that *Wilful Missing* is facetious or mocks the way in which the deserter is made to speak. Kipling is often criticized for being a militarist and an imperialist yet here is a poem of very real sympathy for the plight of the hapless man at the very bottom of the military hierarchy who has had as much as he can take and has quietly deserted his unit in South Africa during the Boer War and sought a dangerous refuge in the wilderness. One cannot imagine a Soviet poet ever having written such a poem about a Russian soldier fading away like this into the hills or the steppes in one of the Soviet Union's many colonial wars in Central Asia or the Caucasus. Kipling can understand, sympathise with and express the feelings of those who give in to weakness and in part he does so through the use of markers in the speaker's patterns of speech that indicate his original as well as his present powerlessness. It is an indication (no more than that. It is not an attempt to reproduce it or to achieve realism) of the feel of the speech of a man who has never in his life had any economic power or social standing and is now driven even lower by events. It would have made no sense to make him speak absolutely standard English or to use the generally approved forms of 'received pronunciation'. The deserter is not being mocked as verbally inadequate for he is strikingly articulate and well acquainted with the ways in which other groups in his society write and speak English. Orwell was wrong to accuse Kipling of a general condescending facetiousness in his treatment of those who spoke non-standard English or had accents that revealed their low social class origins. There is no assertion of superiority in *Wilful-Missing*.

Orwell was also wrong in assuming that the language of *Follow Me 'Ome* or *The Sergeant's Weddin'* is necessarily to be read as stylised cockney or that these verses would be recited in stylised cockney. The markers that Orwell notes, the missing aitches, 'd's and 'g's, are characteristic of cockney and indeed stylised Cockney is

probably what Kipling intended but they are also characteristics of many other forms of uneducated British speech. It would be as easy for example to recite either of these poems in the demotic speech of South Wales (while following Kipling's lines exactly) as to recite them in cockney. It would sound very different from Cockney but it is possible and plausible to read these verses in such a way as to make the internal narrator in each case appear to come from South Wales ; there is nothing Kipling's lines that contradicts such a possibility or that is incompatible with the everyday speech of South Wales. Many of Kipling's lines are better seen as a kind of stylised generic lower class British speech rather than as mock cockney. If, say, an unemployed tinsmith worker from Swansea were to be asked to read out Kipling's lines in his own way he would do so in South Wales English in an entirely natural fashion without departing from the lines and it would sound convincing. There is no need to 'put on' a false cockney accent to recite these verses from Kipling nor is there any need to adjust them in the direction of the kind of standard upper middle class English spoken by Orwell's associates. When Orwell says "most people instinctively make the necessary alterations when they quote him" i.e. that they restore the aitches and 'g's and the 'd's he is speaking only of people like himself and of the social class he belonged to. Did he honestly think that a genuine cockney speaker quoting Kipling, which given Kipling's mass popularity was quite likely, would have adjusted the lines that offended Orwell out of cockney and into standard English when it was not indicated by the text and which would not have been his normal way of speaking? Indeed it is likely that if asked to read Orwell's amended text out loud he would quite naturally redelete the aitches and 'g's and 'd's inserted by Orwell, return to something closer to Kipling's original version and thus utterly frustrate Orwell's purpose. Yet he too would be merely be instinctively making necessary alterations. The Welshman likewise would read out the words in his usual fashion whether he had Kipling or Orwell's version in front of him unless he were self-consciously to adjust to Orwell's spelling and the version of the language it conveys. Yet if he were to do so, it is Orwell's version that would sound embarrassing and lead to people making fun of the working man's speech because he would have been induced to abandon his normal way of speaking and to imitate, probably without success, the standard English with received pronunciation spoken by Orwell's own social class. Failed imitations of another social class's patterns of speech are embarrassing regardless of the direction in which they occur.

Because of his social background Orwell had a dichotomous view of how English was spoken. He saw it as consisting of the English his family spoke and the

mastery of which was emphasized in the elite schools he attended and there was the speech of the 'barbarians' which he had been taught to reject, a rejection that now made him feel guilty. In *The Road to Wigan Pier* [1998(1937): 117] he wrote:

I was forbidden to play with the plumber's children; they were common and I was told to keep away from them. This was snobbish if you like, but it was also necessary, for middle class people cannot afford to let their children grow up with vulgar accents... To me in my early boyhood, to nearly all families like mine, 'common' people seemed almost sub-human. They had coarse faces, hideous accents and gross manners...

Like many from that kind of social background Orwell could only speak one type of English, the posh version of 'received pronunciation'; the same was true of those with little education at the bottom of the social order who were trapped within a particular local way of talking with not only its own accents and vocabulary but its own departures from standard English syntax. Neither group could easily vary the way it spoke. When Orwell disguised himself as a tramp and went hop-picking in order to write about it, he tried to put on a fake cockney accent but he could not keep it up and it kept slipping:

Sure enough the gentleman presently came across with some butter he had not used, and began talking to us. His manner was so friendly that I forgot to put on my cockney accent, and he looked closely at me, and said how painful it must be for a man of my stamp etc. Then he said, "I say, you won't be offended, will you? Do you mind taking this?" "This" was a shilling. [Hop-picking 1968 (1931): 59]

After I had mixed it with these people for a few days it was too much fag to go on putting on my cockney accent and they noticed that I talked "different". As usual, this made them still more friendly, for these people seem to think that it is especially dreadful to "come down in the world". [Hop-picking 1968(1931): 64]

Orwell's dichotomous account of how British people speak English according to their social class background is simplistic. Society and language are in fact stratified in much more complex and uncertain ways; most people are well aware of this and would not share Orwell's horror of Kipling's stylised cockney, or stylised social class speech. They live in the broad central reaches of society where most people do not speak the posh English spoken by people of Orwell's stamp, learned at public schools (exclusive private boarding schools for those in or clinging to the fringes of the elite) nor the broad cockney of tramps, hop-pickers and private soldiers in a volunteer army, but rather one form or another of provincial English, each with its own distinctive accent – Yorkshire, Ulster, Wiltshire, Welsh, Scots, West Country etc. Within these forms of provincial speech, there are gradations of the

ways in which people speak which are rooted in class differences but the differences are subtle and continuous and the socially mobile adjust their speech accordingly. Most speakers of provincial English speak English in a very flexible way and can shift easily between the broad and the mild, between the uncouth and the couth versions of their local speech (the couth being standard English with a local flavour and a mild accent) depending on where they are, who they are talking to, and the context of the conversation. Most of the time they do this from habit and unconscious imitation of others. Thus it would not be difficult for educated persons from South Wales to recite Kipling's verses in their own accent either in the original aitchless version preferred by Kipling, or in Orwell's social class-bowdlerized (which we may term *orwellized*) version with the aitches inserted. The gap in terms of language, psychology and social class is far smaller for them and far easier to bridge; it is not the chasm that separates the speech, manners and social position of old Etonians like Orwell from that of the Cockneys. Nor is the point limited to Britain for an Australian of any social class could recite Kipling in any version of Australian English without difficulty or embarrassment, with sympathy and without a hint of facetiousness.

Nonetheless Orwell's comments do have a basis in British social reality. Even today in a society that is far less concerned with the status attached to different patterns of speech associated with social class than was true in Orwell's day, surveys of individual responses to the same recorded item spoken in different British accents show that they tend to place them in a hierarchy of acceptability. Cockney always comes at the bottom of the scale and 'received pronunciation' at the top (Giles and Powesland 1975). The latter is spoken only by those with high levels of formal education whereas cockney is only spoken by the urban proletariat of London, England's capital and largest conurbation. Most regional speech by contrast occurs in many forms and is used across many classes. Accordingly the educated forms of regional speech are seen as acceptable. There is no educated form of cockney. Most upwardly mobile Cockneys try to abandon or at least dilute it because it is a social handicap. If a person with marked cockney speech were to take part in a formal discussion about an abstract matter he or she might well not be taken seriously. He or she would sound incongruous because cockney has never yet been successfully adapted for that kind of use and the speaker would sound as if he or she were displaying a form of incompetence. The audience would be tempted to laugh, whereas an educated Scotsman speaking 'Edinburgh' English and holding forth about philosophy or physics or jurisprudence to a lay audience would not be seen as laughable in this way. A Scottish accent is compatible with an image of general eru-

dition and authority even when speaking and using straightforward English. For these kinds of reasons even mild cockney is not used in formal public communications such as the reading of a news bulletin on the radio or television. A cockney accent lacks prestige and acts as a distracter. When respondents are asked to explain why they have negative feelings about cockney they (including those who speak cockney) will say it sounds ugly or unpleasant (Giles and Powesland 1975) i.e. they will make an aesthetic statement out of a social judgement and the two are tangled together in a way that blurs the clear distinction made by Kant that was cited earlier. Cockney is *in practice* an inadequate form of English and the lack of significant levels of education, literacy and capacity for abstract thought that characterizes most of its users gives it a low status but why should that make it *sound ugly* except by association? Is it in fact possible to divest ourselves of these associations and to judge cockney impartially as a set of sounds?

However, the argument deployed here is not about the use of cockney in a formal or intellectual setting but about its use (albeit in a modified and diluted form) in a poem to express the grief of a soldier who has lost a close friend or the despair of an army deserter who has lost his identity and abandoned his society. Kipling was not in any sense a believer in social equality, and indeed he strongly upheld many forms of established social inequality but he was a believer in human equality. Kipling is clear that we are all equal in our capacity to suffer grief at human loss. Orwell's concern to do battle with a society in which social status is determined by the retention or the loss of an aitch has blinded him to Kipling's real concern and intention in *Follow me 'ome*. Far from mocking the bereaved one, Kipling is sympathetic and is trying to blend aspects of accepted tradition with the markers of Cockney or other lower class speech as we can see from his line 'Oh, passin' the love o' women' which links the affection between these two comrades in the army with that of David and Jonathan as described in the *King James Authorized Version of the Bible* [2 Samuel 1, 26]. There is an assertion here of the equality of direct human feeling, the delineation of an area of person to person communication in which all patterns of speech are equal, since no sophisticated grappling for intellectual meaning and no striving for status is involved. It is surprising that Orwell can not understand what Kipling is trying to do given that he [Orwell 1968 (1942):190] has acknowledged the genuineness of Kipling's concern (see also Birkenhead 1980:70) regarding the harsh conditions of life of the ordinary private soldier in the British nineteenth century volunteer army and his indignation at those of higher standing who despised the enlisted man and failed to recognize his common humanity with themselves. Kipling is not deriding the mourner in *Follow me 'ome* whom he



makes speak stylised cockney. Kipling knew that in proximity to death we are all equal as is made amply clear in his poem *A Recantation* (to Lyde of the Music Halls) [1994 (1917):369-70]. Kipling here admits that he had formerly regarded Lyde as his social and artistic inferior but now recants because his son and Lyde's son have both been killed in 1917 in the First World War and so they are united in a common grief. Kipling pays tribute to the stoicism of the comedian who had gone on stage with his songs and jokes on the night of the day when he had learned of his own son's death.

By contrast *The Sergeant's Weddin'* is a mere piece of deliberately humorous vulgarity. Kipling's concern here, though, is not to make fun of the way the narrator speaks but to use a form of speech that is linked to humorous comment and performance in the popular mind. The respondents to the social surveys that revealed speakers of Cockney to be widely perceived as lacking in intelligence, leadership and status relative to the speakers of more prestigious forms of English also rate them highly on their supposed sense of humour (Giles and Powesland 1975). Cockney is and long has been the language of the comedian, in Kipling's day in the music halls, later that of or used by British radio and film comedians such as Tommy Trinder, Ronald Shiner, Arthur English or Sid James and most recently of British television comedies such as *Steptoe and Son*, *Till Death Do Us Part* and *Only Fools and Horses* and of some of the characters in *Dad's Army* and *Porridge*. It is then entirely appropriate that the verse of a vulgar rollicking tale such as *The Sergeant's Wedding* should be written in stage cockney, as long established stage convention demands. In writing *Wilful Missing* Kipling was defying the convention that the poetry of sadness had to be written in standard English about the tragedies of heroes but in his comic verse he can simply take up an existing strand of popular culture. Kipling is merely using a form of language popularly seen as appropriate in such a context and not specifically deriding the internal narrator.

It was and still is a normal feature of jokes and comedy in all cultures that those who speak what can be represented as a distorted version of the standard and accepted form of a language are laughed at (Davies 1998, 2001, 2002). In Greek it has been true from the time when the Greeks of classical Athens laughed at their Boetian neighbours [Fuller 1811 (1622) Vol 2: 206] to the modern Greek jokes about Pontians (Petropoulos 1987), the Black Sea (Pontus) Greeks who when they first returned to their Greek motherland in the twentieth century spoke in what was seen as a peculiar manner. Aristotle commented on the humorous quality of distorted Greek long before the English language (let alone cockney) existed.

Not only is rustic or plebeian speech comic in itself but it is also often used as a vehicle for absurd sentiments. Indeed the deliberate and facetious use of such speech in a context that is clearly comic is a way of emphasizing that what one is saying is farcical and not to be taken seriously. The writer or speaker is not indulging in facetiousness for its own sake but in order to show that he or she has moved firmly out of the world of everyday commonsense discourse and into that of comic fantasy (Schutz 1962: 207-8, 232, 236), a space where it is possible to play verbally with the forbidden indeed even at times with the obscene, the blasphemous and the violent but only on condition that all hint of seriousness is excluded. We can see Kipling using a bizarre, baroque, exaggerated form of synthetic cockney for just this purpose in the outrageous comic verses of his poem *Loot* [1994 (1892): 410-11] which could not possibly be written in standard English because of the danger that someone might take it seriously. Kipling's usual humorous technique of ironic comment and apparent endorsement (Krishna: 74-5) where he casts doubt by appearing to agree is far too mild and ambiguous a method to work here. Nothing short of farce will do. Kipling's *Loot* is a precursor of Joe Orton's (1967) *Loot*.

*Loot* is an account of a British soldier's boasting to the new recruits of how he has defied common morality and army regulations alike and forcibly deprived the local people of a newly occupied colony (probably late nineteenth century Burma) of their possessions. The utterly facetious language is necessary if the soldier's advocacy of looting is to remain pure farce; were the verses written in standard English they would be too close to seriousness for comfort given the repellent nature of the events that are being described.

#### LOOT

If you've ever stole a pheasant-egg be'hind the keeper's back,  
If you've ever snigged the washin' from the line,  
If you've ever crammed a gander in your bloomin' 'aversack,  
You will understand this little song o' mine.

But the service rules are 'ard, an' from such we are debarred,  
For the same with English morals does not suit.

(*Cornet*: Toot! toot!)

Why, they call a man a robber if 'e stuffs 'is marchin' clobber  
With the-

(*Chorus*) Loo! loo! Lulu! lulu! Loo! loo! Loot! loot! Loot!

Ow, the loot!

Bloomin' loot!

That's the thing to make the boys git up an' shoot!

It's the same with dogs an' men,

If you'd make 'em come again

Clap 'em forward with a Loo! loo! Lulu! Loot!

Whoopee! Tear 'im, puppy! Loo! loo! Lulu! Loot! loot! loot!

Now remember when you're 'acking round a gilded Burma god

That 'is eyes is very often precious stones;

An' if you treat a nigger to a dose o' cleanin'-rod

'E's like to show you everything 'e owns.

When 'e won't prodooce no more, pour some water on the floor

Where you 'ear it answer 'ollow to the boot

(Cornet: Toot! toot!)

When the ground begins to sing, shove your baynick down the chink

An' you're sure to touch the-

(Chorus) Loo! loo! Lulu! lulu! Loo! loo! Loot! loot! Loot!

Ow, the loot!.....

You can mostly square a Sergint an' a Quartermaster too,

If you only take the proper way to go,

I could never keep my pickin's, but I've learned you all I knew-

But don't you never say I told you so.

An' now I'll bid good-bye, for I'm gettin' rather dry,

An' I see another tunin' up to toot

(Cornet: Toot! Toot!)-

So 'ere's good-luck to those that wears the Widow's cl'es,

An' the Devil send 'em all they want o' loot!

(Chorus)

Yes, the loot !

Bloomin' loot!

In the tunic an' the mess-tin an' the boot!

It's the same with dogs an' men,

If you'd make 'em come again

Whoop 'em forward with a Loo! loo! Lulu! Loot! loot! Loot!

Heeya! Sick 'im puppy Loo! loo! Lulu! Loot! loot! loot!

[Brief summary: A long serving private soldier in the British army is telling the new recruits how to extort loot from the native people of Burma, one of Britain's newly conquered colonial possessions. He refers first to the nature of petty thefts in rural England that the recruits already know about such as pilfering pheasant's

eggs when the gamekeeper is not watching, stealing clothes hung up to dry on a washing line in a garden, hiding a stolen gander in a haversack. Then he notes that British army regulations, rooted in a very English sense of what is proper moral conduct, forbid looting and will treat as a criminal and punish accordingly a man caught with items stolen from the local people hidden in his uniform. There then follows a raucous chorus (repeated later with variations) in which aggressive behaviour on the part of both men and dogs is praised and encouraged.

In the second verse a soldier raiding a Burmese temple is advised to prise out the eyes of the idols since they may be precious stones. Likewise if one of the natives has hidden his valuables from predatory soldiers he can be forced to reveal their hiding place by ramming the metal rod used to clean the barrel of a rifle up his arse. If the victim has buried his valuables under the earth floor of his house their hiding place can be discovered by stamping on the floor to discover the point where it is hollow underneath. If you pour water on the floor at this point the ground will sag and you can dig out the victim's possessions with your bayonet.

In the final verse the singer suggests that sergeants and quartermasters in charge of army stores can be bribed to overlook looting and other dishonesty and perhaps will also handle stolen goods. The long serving soldier admits he has squandered the proceeds of his own looting but is happy to pass on his skills to the new recruits provided they do not tell the authorities where they learned them. He concludes by hoping that the soldiers who wear the uniform of Queen Victoria (the widow)'s army will enjoy good luck in their future looting.]

It is easy to see that if taken seriously these verses would strongly offend many readers. The cynical advocacy of violence against, theft from and denigration of a local colonial population would have outraged Kipling's contemporaries, let alone the modern reader. Yet Kipling is clearly *not* being serious as can be seen from the ludicrous chorus 'Lulu, loo loo loot', with its inserted incitement to a puppy dog to attack someone or some beast and the bizarre interruptions from a man playing a cornet. Everything is a deliberate exaggeration to the point of farce from the sacrilege committed in a Burmese Buddhist temple to the soldier sticking the rod used to clean the barrel of his rifle up the arse of a native to force him to disclose where he has hidden his possessions. It is the obverse of the coldly severe disapproval of looting laid down in army regulations – "But the service rules are 'ard and from such we are debarred". The verses are wildly humorous because they play with the obviously forbidden.

The nearest parallels to *Loot* are to be found in the work of Kipling's contemporary Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Svejk* [1973 (1921-3)] in which the Czech

soldiers serving in the Austrian army in World War I behave with shameless contempt, hostility and rapacity towards many of the other peoples of Central and Eastern Europe whom they encounter. However, Hašek's use of language (Davies 2000) is such as to make it clear that what would otherwise be objectionable incidents such as the humiliation of the Hungarian merchant Mr Kákonyi in Királyhida leading to a vicious brawl between Czechs and Magyars or Švejk's thefts from and depredations upon the local people [Hašek 1973(1921-3): 365-70, 544-49,] are mere farce. The Hungarians obviously understand this for in Budapest they have created a restaurant dedicated to the memory of Švejk complete with Josef Lada's drawings of Czechs beating up Hungarians. Kipling's *Loot* is to be understood in the same way and this is signalled through the use of a particularly crude form of generic lower class English. It is a comic poem whose raconteur defies authority and breaks all the rules of decent behaviour. He must be given a form of speech that is the very antithesis of that used by those who exercise legal-rational, controlled and considered authority and who design and administer the regulations of a liberal state based on the rule of law. *Loot* is written in the language of carnival and disorder, of absurd time off from the constraints of normal life and normal language.

A good deal of humour consists of playing with the forbidden (for example sexual humour, humour about disasters and the death of celebrities) and in particular humour plays with aggression. However, it is necessary for Kipling to make it clear that this tale of looting is mere playful aggression and *not* a revelling in the real thing as happened when the Soviet army raped and looted its way across Central and Eastern Europe in 1944-5 with the full approval of its officers and their political masters. The way in which Kipling excludes such a possibility is by going for farce through a deliberate use of caricatured lower class speech patterns in a totally blatant and facetious manner and one calculated to make the speaker and singers look like buffoons. In relation to this particular poem Orwell's suspicion that Kipling is indulging in mockery are justified but the facetiousness is *not* a general feature of Kipling's depiction of the working man's speech but merely a technique used in this particular case in pursuit of a specific end.

In using a stylised Cockney, or a synthetic generic form of lower class speech as the language of comedy, Kipling is not doing anything unusual but merely following a general pattern and does not deserve Orwell's censure. Cockney is an agreed language of comedy and itself a source of comedy not only in Britain but even in America and Australia as we can see from jokes told in these countries in Kipling's own time.

### Tuesday Must Have Been Worse

Out in Australia two Cockneys were sentenced to die for an atrocious murder. As the date for execution drew nearer the nerves of both of them became more and more shaken. Dawn of the fatal morning found them in a state of terrific funk.

As they sat in the condemned cell waiting the summons to march to the gallows one of the pair said:

“Me mind’s all in a whirl. I can’t seem to remember anything. I can’t even remember what dye of the week it is.”

“It’s Monday,” stated his companion in misfortune.

“Ow!” said the first one, “wot a rotten wye to start the week!” (Cobb 1923: 144)

“And when Mrs Gubbins sez you wasn’t no lidy, wot did yer say!”

“I sez, ‘Two negatives means an infirmary,’ and I knocks ’er down.

She is now in the ’orspital.” (Copeland and Copeland 1939: 699)

The American soldier stood on a London street corner.

A pretty blond from Soho passed by, and a gust of wind lifted her dress higher than was decent.

“A bit ’airy,” remarked the friendly soldier.

“’Ell yes!” retorted the Cockney girl. “What did you expect – feathers?” (Hall 1934: 58 ; Wilde 1978:69)

The above jokes are all cited with their original wording and spelling from American anthologies; one of them has an Australian setting and possibly an Australian origin. Synthetic stage cockney was and is a vehicle for humour throughout the entire English speaking world, one used by peoples outside the British system of stratification by status and speech patterns altogether and having no interest in its perpetuation. Stylised cockney has long been comic to joke tellers in all three countries because it is the best known English departure from the mutually intelligible forms of speech that educated people in all these three countries share. It was not something invented by Kipling in order to mock those lower in the social scale than himself.

What *is* unique to Kipling is his willingness to use stylised Cockney in a dignified context to describe universally felt situations of grief, loss and despair in *Follow Me ’Ome* and *Wilful Missing* and in this way to give it dignity for a broad audience, many of whom might well have seen Cockney as *intrinsically* comic. In using stylised, inauthentic cockney to express the deepest of human feelings in *Follow Me ’Ome* and *Wilful Missing* Kipling has not patronized or made of fun the speech of those at the bottom of the social order but treated it with a new respect. That he

was able both to do this and to use cockney in a conventionally comic way is an index of his breadth of skill and of human sympathy.

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### *Komiczne i poważne formy wypowiedzi w poezji R. Kiplinga*

Przedstawiona w artykule analiza wierszy Rudyarda Kiplinga pokazuje zalety użycia dialektyzmów i argotyzmów w poezji. Autorzy polemizują z opiniami krytyków, uznających, że stylizowanie utworów tymi środkami językowymi jest niestosowne i psuje estetyczny wydźwięk poezji Kiplinga. Zadaniem artykułu jest pokazanie, że używając cockneya do wyrażenia najgłębszych uczuć, Kipling nie naśmiewa się z dialektu o niskim statusie społecznym, ale traktuje go z niespotykanym u innych twórców szacunkiem. To, że Kipling był w stanie korzystać z elementów stylizacji zarówno w ten nowy, jak i w tradycyjny – komiczny sposób, świadczy o dużej skali artystycznych możliwości i wielkiej wrażliwości pisarza.