

## ***THE BALLAD OF EAST AND WEST*** **RUDYARD KIPLING**

### **About the Poet**

**Joseph Rudyard Kipling** (30 December 1865 – 18 January 1936) was an English journalist, short-story writer, poet, and novelist. He was born in India, which inspired much of his work.

Kipling's works of fiction include *The Jungle Book* (1894), *Kim* (1901), and many short stories, including "The Man Who Would Be King" (1888). He is seen as an innovator in the art of the short story. His children's books are classics; one critic noted "a versatile and luminous narrative gift".

Although Kipling is most famous for his short stories like "The Jungle Book," he was just as famed for his verse as his prose. His work, which is staggering in number, consists of such major poems as "If", "The White Man's Burden", "The Ballad of East and West", "Gunga Din", "Mandalay", and "Danny Deever". He wrote poetry throughout his life and published in newspapers, magazines, and collections and anthologies.

Kipling in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was among the United Kingdom's most popular writers. In 1907, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, as the first English-language writer to receive the prize, and at 41, its youngest recipient to date. He was also sounded for the British Poet Laureateship and several times for a knighthood, but declined both.

The poems in narrative form include "*The Ballad of East and West*", "Tomlinson", and "Mary Gloster". They are some of his greatest work and are easy to read and comprehend and express large and universal themes.

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

**The Ballad of East and West** is a poem by Rudyard Kipling. It was first published in 1889, and has been much collected and anthologised since. Its first line is often quoted, sometimes as an example of Kipling's attitudes to race and to the Empire; but those who quote it thus often completely miss the third and fourth lines. It is worth quoting the refrain which opens, and closes, the poem in full:

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

This may be read as saying that 'it is indisputable that geographic points of the compass will never meet in this life, but that when two strong men [*or equals*] meet, the accidents of birth, whether of nationality, race, or family, do not matter at all - the Asian is equal to the European'.

The poem, which demonstrates Kipling's mastery of verse, is written in the style of a border ballad. It is printed as rhyming heptameters, two of which are equivalent to a ballad stanza; some texts print these in quatrains (groups of four lines). The vocabulary, stock phrases and rhythms are reminiscent of the old ballads, and the culture described is not unlike that of the Border Reivers: the first line of the actual story, for example, is "Kamal is **out** with twenty men to raise the Border-side" to mean that a raid is in progress to cause trouble in the Border (here the North West Frontier, and originally the English/Scottish Border); the second line contains 'lifted', a Scots term for 'stolen', and the fourth 'calkin' (a technical term of horseshoes, here used to describe a trick of horse-mounted brigands, reversing the horseshoes to leave misleading tracks); and the second quatrain (line 9) has the stock phrase, also found in *Sir Patrick Spens*, "Then up and spoke the

[Colonel's son] that led a [troop of the Guides]", with a most traditional driving rhythm. Such echoes are to be heard throughout the poem: there is a couplet that is repeated with slight variations several times:

There is rock to the left, and rock to the right, and low lean thorn between  
And ye may hear a breech-bolt snick where never a man is seen.

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

#### **Kamal**

The Afghan warrior in "Ballad of East and West," Kamal is powerful and wise. He steals the Colonel's mare and is followed by the Colonel's son into the desert. He shows the Colonel's son mercy and the two acknowledge respect for each other's courage and nobility. Kamal returns the mare and gives his own son as a companion to the Colonel's son.

#### **The Colonel's son**

Defending his father's honor, the Colonel's son pursues Kamal into the desert but is nearly killed by the effort. He and Kamal realize their commonalities in spite of their differences of race and background, and the Colonel's son tells Kamal he can keep the prized mare.

### **Plot Summary**

The story of the ballad is simple, to do with theft, honour and strength - like many of the border ballads. It tells the story of Kamal, an Afghan warrior and raider, and a raid he made on a horse that belonged to an English colonel.

The introduction to the poem says that East is East and West is West and the two shall never meet until Judgment Day, but that when two strong men stand face to face, it does not matter where they come from because geography and breed and birth no longer matter.

Kamal and his twenty men are trying to raise the border-side. Kamal has taken the Colonel's horse right out of the stable and rode her away. The Colonel's son asked if any of his men knew where Kamal hides, and Mohammed Khan replied that if one knew where the morning mist was, they would find Kamal. He might be near Fort Bukloh because he has to pass it on the way to his residence, so it is possible to cut him off before he gets to the Tongue of Jagai. If he is past the Tongue, then avoid that grisly plain full of Kamal's men.

After Mohammad finished speaking, the Colonel's son mounted his horse; the son's horse is fearsome with "the heart of Hell and the head of a / gallows-tree". He made it to the Fort and stayed there briefly to dine. He left quickly and rode until he saw his father's missing mare at the Tongue of Jagai. Kamal was on her back, and the Colonel's son fired twice but missed.

Kamal replied that the man shot like a soldier and summoned him to show how he could ride. The Colonel's son's horse let up like "a stag of ten" but Kamal's stolen mare was like a "barren doe". There was a rock on both the right and the left and a thorn in between.

The men rode past the moon into the dawn. The dun – the Colonel's son's horse – rode like a wounded bull but the mare was like fawn. The dun finally fell, and Kamal turned his horse back and pulled the Colonel's son free. He kicked the pistol out of his enemy's hand and told him that he was only allowed to run so far because he let him. He explained that his own men lined the whole course and if he had raised his hand they would have killed the Colonel's son instantly.

The Colonel's son answers Kamal scornfully, but Kamal disregards this and helps him to his feet. He tells the young man not to talk of dogs when "wolf and grey wolf / meet". The Colonel's son, impressed by Kamal, spontaneously offers him his father's mare. The mare runs to the Colonel's son and Kamal notes that she loves the younger man best, and decides to let the mare return to him, as well as giving him his saddle, his saddle-

cloth, and his silver stirrups. Kamal also calls his own son and gives him to the Colonel's son. He introduces his son, who looks like a "lance / in rest", and tells the boy that the Colonel's son is his master and that he must ride at his left side until Death or Kamal cuts the ties. The boy must defend his new master and it is his fate to protect him. He should be a tough trooper and ascend to Ressaldar, even though he himself will probably be hanged as a traitor.

Kamal and the Colonel's son look at each other and find no fault. They have taken the Oath of the Brother-in-Blood. The Colonel's son rides the mare and Kamal's son takes the dun. They return to Fort Bukloh, and as they draw closer twenty swords flash in warning. The Colonel's son calls for them to lower their steel because while last night they had struck at a "Border thief – to-night 'tis a man / of the Guides!"

The refrain from the beginning of the poem regarding East and West and strong men meeting is repeated.

### Critical Analysis of the Poem

One of Kipling's most famous and complex poems, "*The Ballad of East and West*", was published in three magazines in December 1889 and is usually collected in *Barrack-Room Ballads, and Other Verses*. It was first called "Kamal" after the Afghan warrior, but Kipling changed it to the more epic title it now possesses. The poem has attained fame for the opening line of "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall / meet" as well as, critic William Flesch writes, "its attitude (a complexity that has room for a great deal of sentimentality), the extremely high technical sheen, the light touch of its versification, and the absorbing interest of the story it tells."

The poem is in the style of a border ballad, an Anglo-Scottish poetic form that featured recurring motifs but usually lacked a chorus, and oftentimes took up the subject of raids or battles. "Ballad" is organized in rhyming heptameters.

That story concerns two equally-matched warriors, one an Afghan raider and the other a British officer, a Colonel's son, and their rivalry that turns into great mutual respect and admiration. **The plot** of the poem is relatively simple, with Kamal stealing the Colonel's horse and riding it into enemy territory; the Colonel's son courageously follows him, firing on Kamal when he glimpses him ahead. He misses, and Kamal taunts him. The Colonel's son rides until his own horse collapses, and Kamal approaches him and tells him that he is only alive because Kamal has allowed him to live. Exhausted and apparently bested, the Colonel's son demands the stolen mare back. Kamal is impressed and helps the British officer to his feet. The Colonel's son decides to bequeath the mare to Kamal in honor of his fighting prowess, but Kamal sees that the mare prefers the other man and gently returns the horse. Kamal then gives the Colonel's son his own son as an assistant, and the men pledge their honor and fealty to one another, recognizing their similarities within their differences.

**The theme** of the poem is that even though the two ends of the earth cannot meet, men of each territory can put aside their differences of nationality, race, background, and religion and appreciate each other's universal qualities of bravery, nobility, and rectitude. The line regarding East and West is derived from Psalm 103:12: "Look how wide also is the east from the west: so far hath he set our sins from us".

There seems to be an Oedipal element to the poem in that the Colonel's son is trying to prove himself to his father by getting the mare back. The mare being female is significant, as is the praising on Kamal's part of the son's mother as a "dam of lances" (fierce warriors). Another important element in the poem is the ritual of gifting, which comes after the two men begin to realize how much they have in common and how much they value the other's courage and might. This practice of gift-giving was tremendously revealing of the true measure and capacity of a man. Kamal's final gift of his own son is very important, for, as Flesch writes, "he sets himself up as a truer father, a more equal, more capable father than the Colonel is."

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***The Ballad of East and West* by Rudyard Kipling (Original Text)**

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

Kamal is out with twenty men to raise the Border-side,  
 And he has lifted the Colonel's mare that is the Colonel's pride:  
 He has lifted her out of the stable-door between the dawn and the day,  
 And turned the calkins upon her feet, and ridden her far away.  
 Then up and spoke the Colonel's son that led a troop of the Guides:  
 "Is there never a man of all my men can say where Kamal hides?"  
 Then up and spoke Mahommed Khan, the son of the Ressaldar:  
 "If ye know the track of the morning-mist, ye know where his pickets are.  
 At dusk he harries the Abazai -- at dawn he is into Bonair,  
 But he must go by Fort Bukloh to his own place to fare,  
 So if ye gallop to Fort Bukloh as fast as a bird can fly,  
 By the favour of God ye may cut him off ere he win to the Tongue of Jagai.  
 But if he be past the Tongue of Jagai, right swiftly turn ye then,  
 For the length and the breadth of that grisly plain is sown with Kamal's men.  
 There is rock to the left, and rock to the right, and low lean thorn between,  
 And ye may hear a breech-bolt snick where never a man is seen."  
 The Colonel's son has taken a horse, and a raw rough dun was he,  
 With the mouth of a bell and the heart of Hell

and the head of the gallows-tree.

The Colonel's son to the Fort has won, they bid him stay to eat --

Who rides at the tail of a Border thief, he sits not long at his meat.

He's up and away from Fort Bukloh as fast as he can fly,

Till he was aware of his father's mare in the gut of the Tongue of Jagai,

Till he was aware of his father's mare with Kamal upon her back,

And when he could spy the white of her eye, he made the pistol crack.

He has fired once, he has fired twice, but the whistling ball went wide.

"Ye shoot like a soldier," Kamal said. "Show now if ye can ride."

It's up and over the Tongue of Jagai, as blown dustdevils go,

The dun he fled like a stag of ten, but the mare like a barren doe.

The dun he leaned against the bit and slugged his head above,

But the red mare played with the snaffle-bars, as a maiden plays with a glove.

There was rock to the left and rock to the right, and low lean thorn between,

And thrice he heard a breech-bolt snick tho' never a man was seen.

They have ridden the low moon out of the sky, their hoofs drum up the dawn,

The dun he went like a wounded bull, but the mare like a new-roused fawn.

The dun he fell at a water-course -- in a woful heap fell he,

And Kamal has turned the red mare back, and pulled the rider free.

He has knocked the pistol out of his hand -- small room was there to strive,

"'Twas only by favour of mine," quoth he, "ye rode so long alive:

There was not a rock for twenty mile, there was not a clump of tree,

But covered a man of my own men with his rifle cocked on his knee.

If I had raised my bridle-hand, as I have held it low,

The little jackals that flee so fast were feasting all in a row:

If I had bowed my head on my breast, as I have held it high,

The kite that whistles above us now were gorged till she could not fly."

Lightly answered the Colonel's son: "Do good to bird and beast,  
 But count who come for the broken meats before thou makest a feast.  
 If there should follow a thousand swords to carry my bones away,  
 Belike the price of a jackal's meal were more than a thief could pay.  
 They will feed their horse on the standing crop,  
 their men on the garnered grain,  
 The thatch of the byres will serve their fires when all the cattle are slain.  
 But if thou thinkest the price be fair, -- thy brethren wait to sup,  
 The hound is kin to the jackal-spawn, -- howl, dog, and call them up!  
 And if thou thinkest the price be high, in steer and gear and stack,  
 Give me my father's mare again, and I'll fight my own way back!"  
 Kamal has gripped him by the hand and set him upon his feet.  
 "No talk shall be of dogs," said he, "when wolf and gray wolf meet.  
 May I eat dirt if thou hast hurt of me in deed or breath;  
 What dam of lances brought thee forth to jest at the dawn with Death?"  
 Lightly answered the Colonel's son: "I hold by the blood of my clan:  
 Take up the mare for my father's gift -- by God, she has carried a man!"  
 The red mare ran to the Colonel's son, and nuzzled against his breast;  
 "We be two strong men," said Kamal then, "but she loveth the younger best.  
 So she shall go with a lifter's dower, my turquoise-studded rein,  
 My brodered saddle and saddle-cloth, and silver stirrups twain."  
 The Colonel's son a pistol drew and held it muzzle-end,  
 "Ye have taken the one from a foe," said he;  
 "will ye take the mate from a friend?"  
 "A gift for a gift," said Kamal straight; "a limb for the risk of a limb.  
 Thy father has sent his son to me, I'll send my son to him!"  
 With that he whistled his only son, that dropped from a mountain-crest --

He trod the ling like a buck in spring, and he looked like a lance in rest.

"Now here is thy master," Kamal said, "who leads a troop of the Guides,

And thou must ride at his left side as shield on shoulder rides.

Till Death or I cut loose the tie, at camp and board and bed,

Thy life is his -- thy fate it is to guard him with thy head.

So, thou must eat the White Queen's meat, and all her foes are thine,

And thou must harry thy father's hold for the peace of the Border-line,

And thou must make a trooper tough and hack thy way to power --

Belike they will raise thee to Ressaldar when I am hanged in Peshawur."

They have looked each other between the eyes, and there they found no fault,

They have taken the Oath of the Brother-in-Blood on leavened bread and salt:

They have taken the Oath of the Brother-in-Blood on fire and fresh-cut sod,

On the hilt and the haft of the Khyber knife, and the Wondrous Names of God.

The Colonel's son he rides the mare and Kamal's boy the dun,

And two have come back to Fort Bukloh where there went forth but one.

And when they drew to the Quarter-Guard, full twenty swords flew clear --

There was not a man but carried his feud with the blood of the mountaineer.

"Ha' done! ha' done!" said the Colonel's son.

"Put up the steel at your sides!

Last night ye had struck at a Border thief --

to-night 'tis a man of the Guides!"

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

Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;

But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,

When two strong men stand face to face,

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