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In the following paper I argue that Adoniram Judson, the first American Baptist Missionary to Burma, was strongly empathetic with his adopted country. His work as interpreter-translator during the negotiations leading to the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826 and his visits to Ava both immediately before and after the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826), although couched in the language of Christian mission, exhibited characteristics markedly different from the perspective of Ann Judson’s memoir, and from those of certain missionary narratives subsequent to his own. I propose to examine aspects of three texts: Ann Judson’s An Account of the American Baptist Mission to the Burman Empire; Henry Gouger’s Personal Narrative of Two Years Imprisonment in Burmah; and Adoniram Judson’s deposition to John Crawford. I shall also refer to J. Snodgrass’s Narrative of the Burmese War (1824-1826) and Henry Trant’s Two Years in Ava for other perspectives on some events.

In the following discussion, I use “Burma” to identify the monarchical state in its pre-colonial destiny before 1886. Since the main outline of the Judsons’ story is well-known, I will not spend a great deal of time in telling it, nor in highlighting Adoniram Judson’s

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considerable labors in translating the Bible and other Christian texts into Burmese and his production of the Dictionary and Grammar. I wish to focus on what I perceive is a supra-text in the Judson story.

The Spirit of the Missionary Context
When Adoniram and Ann Judson finally landed in Burma on July 13, 1813 after a sojourn in British India where they had made contact with the British Baptist missionaries at Serempore, it could be said that their mission to the Burman Empire had as much to do with the American myth of wilderness and the religious history of Protestant America as it did with the history of Christian missions in Burma. The Judsons were neither the first Christian missionaries, nor the first Protestant missionaries in Burma, that honor having gone to Messrs. Chater, Marsden, Carey, and Pritchett, some years previously, while the Catholic Dominican, Francisca, and Barnabite Fathers credited by Vivian Ba with introducing the first elements of western education and science to Burma, had been quietly working in the country since the mid-sixteenth century.¹ The Judsons were, however, the first American Protestant missionaries to work in Burma, in preparation for which Adoniram had read Captain Michael Symes’ account of his 1795 mission to the country and also the work of Father Sangermano, both of which would have given him a solid factual background for his work.² Yet it is well to remember that in 1813 the Judsons were novices with respect to non-Western, non-Christian cultures.

The Judsons were neither the first nor last to have experienced both the joy and suffering of Christian mission, to have been caught up in local wars in the land where they had chosen to proselytize and carry out their “mission for life.” What is significantly different in the Judsons’ experience from that of both their Catholic colleagues and their Presbyterian compatriots working in nineteenth-century Thailand, is that they constructed a myth of mission, an “imagined

community” in Benedict Anderson’s terms, which justified their continuing presence in the country from the perspective of their sponsors, encouraged subsequent young American spiritual idealists to choose the foreign missionary field as the object of their well-intentioned efforts, but most importantly, enabled Adoniram Judson to live his “Pilgrim’s Progress.” From this perspective, his spiritual journey from his arrival in 1813 to his death at sea in 1850 required that, like Bunyan’s characters Christian and Faithful, he be imprisoned, experience suffering and spiritual desolation, revile himself with the burden of perceived sin arising from hubris — the unrestrained pampering of the ego — and arrive at his spiritual destination as a character of mythic proportions, having overcome all obstacles strewn in his path by the supposed demonic forces opposing him. The imagined community in which Judson lived on this mythic journey was first constructed in Ann Judson’s text, An Account of the American Baptist Mission to the Burman Empire. Key elements from this work, embellished by those without first-hand experience, were later re-cycled throughout various writings, including those of the third Mrs. Judson, a renowned writer of fiction before her marriage, and contributed much to the negative international image of Burma and the Burmese people in the later nineteenth century. As Helen Trager has succinctly expressed of the results of these writings, “The case, so to speak, against the Burmese, was made by the Judsons’ experience” which “created a stereotyped, antagonistic view of the people” and “indicted a whole people and a whole nation.” Nineteenth-century Burma was the new Frontier for Protestant American missionary endeavors, the new wilderness, against which Spiritual Man was to test himself and work out his destiny. In the four decades after the American victory in the war of 1812, when classic American writers, James Fenimore Cooper (d. 1850) and Edgar Allan Poe (d. 1849) were exploring in their fictions of the forest and the ocean the concepts of wilderness

in the mind of man, the ethical ambiguities that bedeviled their characters were played out in the real-life drama of Adoniram Judson.

The four young men ordained amidst an air of fervor and excitement with Adoniram Judson in February 1812 as “Missionaries to the heathen in Asia,” shared with him the millennial context of the New England religious revival that hearkened back for its inspiration to the Great Awakening of mid-eighteenth century New England, the Reverend Jonathan Edwards, and the missionaries to the Indians, John Eliot and David Brainerd. It is not insignificant that the little son born September 11, 1815 to Ann and Adoniram Judson in Rangoon, was named Roger Williams Judson, after the notable New England non-conformist Baptist dissenter who had broken away to found a new settlement at Rhode Island. Having observed the traumas of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, the guardians of piety in the Theological Seminary at Andover and the New England churches looked toward a thousand years of peace, if only the “sensual, idolatrous and selfish community” of mankind could be transformed into a “nation of intelligent, moral, Christian freemen” by American Protestant missionary endeavors. As Clifton Jackson Phillips comments, a “vocabulary of millennial expectancy” dominated the announcements of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) as the directors saw their missions working in partnership with Providence to bring Protestantism — and therefore, Civilization — to non-Protestant lands.

Foreign missions provided a convenient outlet for, as well as gained an important dynamic from, the tremendous release of evangelical energies accompanying this radical readjustment of American

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religious life which has been called the Protestant Counter-Reformation.⁹

From pulpit to missionary periodical, the millennial spirit heralded a regenerate world in a state of unprecedented grace, part of the myth of history that a young America had created for its own nation-building processes.¹⁰ With the founding of the ABCFM in 1810, the mission to spread the gospel in distant lands made the nineteenth century the “missionary century” for American Protestants.¹¹ Judson and his friends, Nott, Newell, Mills, Rice, and Richards, formed a secret society called “The Brethren”, committed to carrying out the work of foreign missions. Originally based at Andover, it networked among likeminded student clubs at Princeton, Auburn and Williams Colleges, and elsewhere to disseminate the spirit of foreign mission. Their success may be measured by the fact that there was never any dearth of enthusiastic New England youth ready to follow them in spreading the gospel overseas with the aim of converting the entire world within their own generation. It is in this context that Ann Judson wrote in her letters home, shortly after her arrival in Burma — a country to which the Judsons came of their own accord, uninvited,

I wish I could write you something about the conversion of the Burmans, or their eagerness to hear the word of God. No missionary has ever attempted to preach among the natives, so that we are hardly able to judge how the gospel would be received, if publicly preached. Yet their firm belief of the divine origin of their religion renders it improbable, to human appearance, that they would willingly receive the gospel... Much wisdom and precaution are necessary in our present situation. A little departure from prudence might at once destroy the mission. We still feel happy and thankful that God has made it our duty to live among the heathen. Though we

⁹ Phillips, Protestant America, 5.
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have met, and continue to meet, with many trials and discouragements, yet we have never, for a moment, regretted that we undertook this mission.\textsuperscript{12}

Some three years after their arrival, she wrote home optimistic about the success of the mission, announcing the gift of a printing press and Burmese type settings from the Serempore Baptists, while pressing the case for further financing of the mission in the following terms.

We see the mission established in this land. We unite in opinion that a wide door is set open for the introduction of the religion of Jesus into this great empire. We have at present no governmental interdict to encounter and no greater obstacles than such as oppose the progress of missionaries in every heathen land. It appears to us (and it may so appear to our fathers and brethren) that God, in removing the English mission from this place, and substituting in their stead an American mission, is emphatically calling on the American churches to compassionate the poor Burmans, and to send their silver, and their gold, and their young men, to this eastern part of the world, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

After the arrival of the printing press and preparations to print a gospel tract Ann Judson wrote,

We cannot move one step in the way of printing without money. We therefore beg an immediate appropriation, not only to liquidate the expenses already incurred, but to enable us to proceed in this all-important part of our work.

Holding out the possibility of expansion of the mission to the capital, Ava, she writes,

\textsuperscript{12} Ann H. Judson, \textit{An Account of the American Baptist Mission to the Burman Empire} (London: Butterworth and Son, 1823), 39.

6 \textit{The Journal of Burma Studies, Volume 7}
Such a measure would, doubtless, tend to the furtherance of the cause, and the introduction of religion into the very heart of the empire, where Satan’s seat is. But, in this case, more men, and more money, would be imperiously demanded, and, we trust, that the patronage of the Board [that is, the ABCFM] will not fail in these necessary points.  

How different her style and language is in depicting the official image for home consumption may be gauged by contrast with her frank accounts of the mission’s physical comforts, friendships made, and, significantly, acknowledgment of Burmese religious tolerance of other religions. Thus, across the same period of the first three years of the mission she has written that

Our home is in the mission house, built by the English Baptist Society, on the first arrival of Messrs. Chater and Carey in this country. It is large and convenient, situated in a rural place, about half a mile from the walls of the town. We have gardens enclosed, containing about two acres of ground, full of fruit trees of various kinds. In the dry season our situation is very agreeable. We often enjoy a pleasant walk, within our own enclosure, or in some of the adjoining villages. ... This climate is one of the healthiest in the world ... we feel that we have all the comforts, and, in comparison, even the luxuries of life. We feel that our temporal cup of blessings is full.

Ann Judson’s descriptions of her developing friendship with the wife of the Viceroy, “richly dressed in Burman fashion”, the polite reception accorded herself, discussion of female interests, enthusiastic enjoyment of an outing on elephant back, and inclusion in an official dinner party hosted by the new Viceroy, all led her to comment that she and Adoniram were “delighted with the country

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13 Judson, An Account, 77.
14 Judson, An Account, 29, 39, 43.
and the hospitality of the Burmans” — but of course, she adds in official speak for the sake of her correspondent, “dejected and depressed with their superstition and idolatry — their darkness and ignorance of the true God.”15 Ann had already been the recipient of Burmese advice on their tolerant view of other religions. As she states she was advised by the Judsons’ Burmese teachers: “Our religion is good for us, yours for you.” Ironically, British India had been less tolerant of Christian missionaries than were the Burmese. Nevertheless, in the spirit of mission, she records “we are far from being discouraged. We are sensible that the hearts of the heathen, as well as those of Christians, are in the hands of God, and in his own time he will turn them unto himself.”16 In official missionary linguistic constructions, the only good Burman was a converted Burman. All others had to be depicted as living in the depths of depravity. Such images are at odds with the frank and enthusiastic records of friendship with the Vicereine and other Burmese whose kindness and courage was notable, often in situations that could have placed themselves in jeopardy as the onset of the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826) changed the context of their missionary undertaking.

The epistolary activity that forms the basis of Ann Judson’s *Account of the American Baptist Mission to the Burman Empire*, like others in the genre made popular by the eighteenth-century novelists Richardson and Fielding, projects a spirit of mission that set the Judsons’ activities in the framework of a divinely appointed American Protestant errand in the human wilderness, pushing “westward” in accordance with the concept of “Manifest Destiny.” The Protestant, Calvinist mythology of The Elect, the Chosen People whose civil leaders from the pulpits of New England overtly compared them with Ancient Israel, projected a framework in which religious and political mission were intertwined, what James Moorhead has called “the Imperial version of the Elect.” Thus for example, Reverend Wallace Radcliff asserted, “I believe in imperialism because I believe in foreign missions . . . The

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imperialism of the gospel is the emancipation of humanity.”17 The guise of universality, Moorhead suggests, cloaked a parochial Anglo-Saxon Protestant Tribalism that sought to emancipate people from their own cultures without the opportunity to register dissent. Development was projected in messianic tones; the nineteenth-century evangelical movement was seen to embody a new, ideal, regenerate international order shaped by and in the spirit of Protestant mission.18 The legacy is still with us today in the western hegemonic development paradigm and international policies which impact on all our lives, globally.

The Field of Merit
In Buddhist studies it is recognized that monk and layman are interdependent, each needs the other in order to carry out his social and religious role. The monk needs the layman to present alms, participate in ceremonies and rituals, and legitimize the monk’s role in the social, political, and religious structure. Equally, the layman needs the monk to accept the proffered alms, to carry out the rituals and ceremonies in order for the layman to acquire merit. This systemic interdependence distinguishes Buddhist monasticism from, for example, Benedictine monasticism, which was more internally focused than socially engaged. Many renowned scholars have commented on and analyzed this mutually dependent relationship characteristic of Buddhist societies: the monkhood for the layman is his “field of merit” without which the layman is unable to earn merit. I want to suggest that a similar archetypal relationship was present in the Judson’s imagined community of “Burma.” What the country and her people symbolized for Adoniram Judson and his fellow missionaries had an impact on those who followed him in the nineteenth century. “Burma” and her people had to be presented in a negative light so that the missionary could carry out his predetermined role in “uplifting” them to, what in missionary terms, was a more “civilized” state, regardless of the people’s own wishes and cultural identity.

“Burma” as a “field of merit” for the missionaries, had to be an imagined community with certain characteristics in order for the missionary to carry out his role, a role that was both national and international, personal and public. Acknowledging that there were few giants of theological thought amidst the evangelical ferment of the Second Great Awakening in America in the first half of the nineteenth century, Martin Marty comments on the strong sense of Providence and divine purpose in the first wave of missionaries to leave America’s shores for foreign lands. Their persistence in seeking to win converts despite years of frustrations was a function of their mission to “save souls,” a mission that was quite incomprehensible to the majority of their potential parishioners whose Buddhist metaphysics did not include a concept of the soul. As the nineteenth century unfolded and many more missionaries adopted Burma as their “field of merit,” the secondary, social effects of their endeavors were everywhere apparent in the educational, health, and social welfare activities they sponsored, paralleling, but not supplanting, the indigenous Buddhist institutions. But these secondary effects were not as significant as the sense that the primary purpose of mission was a “transaction with God over the fate of men in the face of heaven and hell.”

It is small wonder that in the eleven years between the Judsons’ arrival and the commencement of war with the British in 1824, the reaction of those they sought to convert, with a few exceptions, varied from the amused to the confused, to the outright hostile. In the first few decades of mission, the field of merit was very one sided, as Judson needed to be needed, but the positive response of the “layman” was slow to eventuate. It took six years to win the first convert, a fisherman with no family called Maung Nau. Indeed it was the initial small number of converts that was perceived as a major cause of official Burmese tolerance of missionaries.

Judson’s persistence in seeking to establish the mutual relationship is laudable, a characteristic of the dedicated missionary, inspired perhaps by the solidarity of the relationship he saw existing in the Buddhist society in which he had chosen to live. It was the very solidarity of this

19 Marty, Righteous Empire, 53.
relationship amongst Buddhists that, of course, meant that few Burmese converted to Christianity; most conversions after 1826 were amongst the animistic Karens, at that time a marginalized people. The alienation of the Tenasserim provinces after 1826 to the British administration meant that the mission to the Karen proceeded apace, particularly after further missionaries arrived to join the field — the Boardmans, Vintons, Kincaids, Wades. These missionaries followed in Adoniram Judson’s footsteps, to make the “field of merit” an interdependent relationship.

Friendship with The Golden Foot
Before the war, Judson made two visits to the King in Ava, in 1820 and 1822, and another immediately afterwards accompanying the mission of John Crawfurd as translator-interpreter, a role he had performed during the negotiations leading to the cessation of hostilities in 1826. His initial visits were only saved from being embarrassing failures by the fact that his companion on the second visit in 1822, Dr. Price, was a medical man whose skills were of interest to the Burmese king and court, a role played out many times previously by Christian missionaries in Burma during the eighteenth century. Judson’s gift of an embossed Bible was neither valued nor understood. His request for special favor for the American Baptist mission caused confusion. The Burmese monarch, King Bagyidaw, believed that all religions were already free to be practiced in his dominions, as they had been at the time of the arrival of the first Catholic fathers in the sixteenth century, and could not comprehend the exact import of Judson’s request for royal approval and favor. From the missionary’s perspective, it seemed natural to seek royal favor as a means of gaining protection for his endeavors, and greater influence amongst his potential converts. It may be that the King intuitively realized that to favor one over all others would cause dissension and discontent among the people. There were after all numerous detractors only too ready to advise him that the preacher was a spy, a charge frequently levied at missionaries by their competitors. The King therefore did not accede to the request, and the missionary was disappointed.

Nevertheless, Judson continued to orientate his mission closer to the court at Ava, closer to the seat of power, and deliberately moved the center of his activities there January 24, 1824, just on the
eve of the First Anglo-Burmese War. It is impossible to believe that the Judsons were impervious to the risk they would run in the event of hostilities breaking out between the Burmese and the British, or to accept that they truly believed they would be exempt from being treated as enemy aliens because of their American citizenship. I think Judson was a high flier who liked to be close to the source of action and power. Certainly, Ann Judson had a good sense of politics as demonstrated by her resourcefulness during Adoniram’s imprisonment. In the short Indian summer of 1823-1824 before the war commenced, a personal friendship developed between the King and Judson to whom the monarch granted a plot of land on which to build a kyoung, not in perpetuity, for the King was prophetically afraid that it would become permanently alienated to a foreign power, but for the missionary’s use whilst in Ava, and in recognition of his status as a teacher of religion which the King, and the Burmese respected. Ann Judson made friends at Ava also, and it was her status as a person worthy of respect in Burmese eyes that contributed to Adoniram’s gradual acceptance by key figures in court circles, despite certain detractors. In Ava, the Judsons met Henry Gouger, the independent British merchant who was on good terms with the King, and they were present to witness King Bagyidaw’s triumphal entry into his new capital at Ava. They made friends with the King’s partially disabled half-brother, Prince Memtiaboo, who evinced an interest in the Christian scriptures and assured Adoniram that his brother, the King, “wished all to believe and worship as they please”; and thanks to the efficacy of Dr. Price’s medical skills, Adoniram was granted the opportunity to preach in Burmese to the Burmese court. In an interview with the King on October 23, 1823, Judson records that the monarch “authorized me

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21 See Judson’s deposition to John Crawfurd, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor General of India to the Court of Ava*, 2nd ed. 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1834), 87. Judson states: “Before the war commenced, it was fully explained to the Burmese Government, that the American Missionaries were not subjects of Great Britain; and under this impression, I thought it safe to visit the Court in 1824, although then of opinion that war was impending.”

to invite American ships to his dominions, assuring them of protection, and offering every facility for the purpose of trade."\textsuperscript{23}

It was perhaps this personal friendship that was Adoniram’s real motivation in accepting the invitation from Crawfurd to return to Ava as interpreter for the British commercial mission so soon after the conclusion of hostilities, leaving behind in Amherst a wife whose poor health, to another person, might have been the cause for declining the invitation. The supposed justification for the return, the opportunity to have a clause guaranteeing religious freedom included in the commercial treaty, to gain greater status for the Baptist mission, is of course consistent with Judson’s missionary intent and his living the wilderness myth. But surely, one might ask, after having been several years in Ava already, almost two of them as a prisoner-of-war in considerable physical discomfort, Judson would have known that there was no possibility of the King agreeing to such a clause, or of the monarch resiling from Buddhism and the traditional royal sacral role as protector of the Buddhist faith. I think he wanted to see the King again, to see how he was getting on in the post-peace period. Certainly, the fees earned, 2,500RS paid by the East India Company and some further 2,000RS in gifts, were not the attraction, these being immediately sent by Judson to the ABCFM in Boston\textsuperscript{24} in accordance with his determination not to profit from secular endeavors, as agreed with his fellow missionary, Hough, early in the history of the mission.\textsuperscript{25}

King Bagyidaw evidently had similar strong feelings of friendship for Judson. He trusted him sufficiently to insist, on more than one occasion, that he go along to the peace negotiations with the British as an interpreter-translator. He was most reluctant to allow the Judsons to leave Ava with the British at the conclusion of the Treaty of Yandabo, for, in the King’s words, “They are my people.”\textsuperscript{26} Of course, King Bagyidaw was in a long line of mainland Southeast Asian monarchs who regarded human resources as the


\textsuperscript{24} Anderson, \textit{To the Golden Shore}, 367.

\textsuperscript{25} Anderson, \textit{To the Golden Shore}, 195.

\textsuperscript{26} Quoted in Conant, \textit{The Earnest Man}, 211.
most valuable spoils of war, but I think it was more than this. I think the King so trusted Judson, amidst all the bewildering changes around him in 1826, that he would have liked to have the missionary close by, to give him the frank and fearless advice which was rarely forthcoming from his courtiers. In such a role, Thomas Spears, served King Mindon after the Second Anglo-Burmese War and the monarch sought also to use Dr. Eugenio Kincaid and the Reverend Marks. But in the mind of King Bagiyaw, the precise relationship with Judson had not been quite articulated. The King simply knew that he did not want the Judsons to quit Ava. It is notable that his fellow missionary and prisoner, Dr. Price, stayed in Ava to serve the King after the war. And Adoniram Judson knew that he must see the King once more.

It was to be his last visit to King Bagiyaw. After the provisions of the Treaty of Yandabo were enacted and Burma lost Tenasserim and Arakan provinces to the British, in May 1830 while Major Henry Burney was seeking to establish the Residency in Ava, Adoniram once more made a foray into Burmese territory, traveling to Prome. But he was no longer welcome. The bitter experiences of the war and loss of the provinces, and the missionary’s relocation to Amherst in what was, since 1826, British territory, had roused distrust of Judson in certain quarters. There was a view that he served British interests against those of the Burmese, and as Gouger succinctly expressed it, “disloyalty” was a capital crime in monarchical Burma, as the Barnabite Father Nerini had found out to his cost.27 Burney, the first British Resident appointed to the Court of Ava, in his journal, noted that the Burmese at Prome were accusing Judson of “abusing Buddhism”, a very serious offense, so serious that Burney felt bound to defend the missionary to the local officials saying, “Dr. Judson is now exclusively devoted to missionary pursuits; . . . I know him to be a very pious and good man, and one not likely to injure the Burmese king or government in any manner.” To add weight to his support of Judson, Burney wrote to one of the King’s Ministers stating, “I hope that the Minister would not think of molesting or injuring Dr. Judson, as such a proceeding would offend

and displease good men of all nations.” That such a defense was necessary speaks volumes about the change of feelings towards Adoniram arising from the perception that he had forsaken the country to which he had chosen to minister.

**Henry Gouger’s Perspective, Imprisonment and the Treaty of Yandabo**

There is no doubt that the story of Adoniram Judson’s suffering in the prison of Let-ma-yoon for eleven months and Oung-pen-la for six months given by Ann Judson in her *Account of the American Baptist Mission to the Burman Empire*, contributed significantly to raising him to mythic stature — and deservedly so. Ann and Adoniram were true pioneers of the missionary spirit in every way. The story of Judson’s prison ordeal made him internationally renowned. The main outlines of her account are corroborated by another text, that of the British entrepreneur, Henry Gouger, whose *Personal Narrative of Two Years’ Imprisonment in Burmah*, provides valuable eyewitness testimony to events in the prisons from 1825 to 1826. As happens during all wars, foreigners were rounded up and interned for the duration of hostilities, Ann Judson being the only one not incarcerated. Trager has pointed out that the conditions of the prison and the threat of imminent and arbitrary death were no better, nor worse, than most similar situations and prisons until recent times, and even then one could cite numerous instances from the international arena during the past decade where prisoners were treated with even greater inhumanity. There are several interesting features of Gouger’s text that reflect on our theme. Independently minded, a speaker of Burmese who removed his shoes in accordance with Burmese custom, Gouger, like Judson, was on good terms with the court and King before the war, and was not inclined to favor the business practices of the English East India Company. He held the Judsons in high regard, had visited their home in Ava, and was impressed with the spirit of their work, and the quality of their converts. As Trager has noted, he writes neither in anger nor in bitterness about his experience as a prisoner-of-war and seems to take full cognizance of the cultural environment occasioning their rough treatment. It would, after all, have been impossible for

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foreigners in the country to have been regarded as anything other than probable or actual spies, given the circumstances of the invasion. Thus his account is punctuated with humor and balance giving due credit to kindnesses received. His testimony of life as a Burmese prisoner-of-war is a "counterbalance" to that of the missionary narratives and allows us to see events from another perspective.  

Firstly, Adoniram is not portrayed by Gouger as a Christian hero of mythic proportions. Rather he is "Poor Judson" who grew mighty irritable when one of his fellow prisoners kneed him in the back, thus preventing him sleeping in the cramped, foul quarters. He is a Judson who made "thorns peculiarly his own." Gouger intimates that Judson's sufferings were more psychological than physical, and that his mental state exacerbated his sufferings, which would have been even greater had it not been for Ann Judson's resourceful management of Burmese officialdom, constant efforts to alleviate his discomfort, and an uncanny eye for the changing politics of the situation as the Burmese faced defeat. It has been suggested that some of Judson's mental anguish arose from concern at Ann's pregnancy and her precarious state as a lone foreign woman in a capital at war. No doubt this is true. But Gouger hints at other sources for his suffering, sources which may well have their origins in his spiritual calling. I think that, like many another New England divine, Adoniram saw his imprisonment in Biblical terms and that his mental anguish arose from his religious views, his constant searching his soul for signs of sin or grace. Would not his imprisonment have represented itself to him as punishment for hubris, pride in thinking perhaps that he could succeed where others had failed, arrogance in thinking that he and Ann would not be judged as other foreigners and that their American citizenship would protect them from being categorized with other foreigners, as the enemy approached? Whatever the spectrum of reasons for Judson's mental anguish, Gouger's text clearly presents the missionary's sufferings more in psychological terms than physical ones. I am almost tempted to think that Judson, in fact, may have welcomed the

29 Trager, *Burma Through Alien Eyes*, 201.
physical torment, the ropes that cut into his wrists, the manacles on his ankles, as part of his rite of passage as a Christian pilgrim, the archetypal mortification of the flesh to purify the soul.

Judson’s skill in the Burmese language was formidable. His years spent meticulously acquiring such linguistic skills and translating the Biblical texts made him eminently suitable as an intermediary to facilitate the peace negotiations between the Burmese and the British. Yet he did not readily volunteer his services. He had to be encouraged to go to Melloon, the first abortive attempt at having a peace treaty ratified; then as the second opportunity presented itself, he initially refused to participate. Dr. Price went in his place and did much of the initial work towards negotiating peace. It was only at what one might call the final barrier, that Judson went to assist in the preparations of the treaty and then only at the King’s command. Indeed, the various military accounts of the War and the peace negotiations rendered by Snodgrass, Trant, and Robertson portray Dr. Price taking the leading role accompanied by the British prisoner-of-war, Dr. Sandford, while Judson appears to play a relatively minor role until mid-February 1824, quite late in the process. Anderson notes that it was Gouger who helped Judson “frame the final details.”31 Gouger himself comments that

The General’s [Sir Archibald Campbell’s] interpreter was a native youth of Chinese Extraction, who, of course, spoke the Burmese fluently enough, and English indifferently. With this his knowledge ceased; he could neither write nor read the Burmese, and, had not Dr. Judson and myself been at the General’s disposal, the impediment would have been a serious one, as the Burmese could not be expected to put their hands to a document written in a language they did not understand; nor, on the other hand, could the British Commissioners trust to a native copy alone. The English Treaty was therefore placed in our hands for translation, and when

31 Anderson, To the Golden Shore, 362.
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we produced a Burmese copy, both were to be acknowledged as original documents of equal validity.  

Why was Judson so reluctant? Why did he initially refuse? Surely, to put his linguistic skills to good use to bring about peace between the combatants would have been his Christian duty? It can hardly have been from want of courage as suggested by one commentator, or fear that his endeavors would be misconstrued. Whatever his human weaknesses, Judson did not lack courage. I suspect that he had divided loyalties, which while from the perspective of his spiritual mission it was his duty to assist in bringing about the Treaty of Yandabo, yet his empathy with his adopted land meant it gave him great pain to participate in an historical process that would reduce its autonomy. There was clearly some spiritual struggle of phenomenal dimensions going on in Judson’s mind at the time of the treaty and just after it. By contrast, Ann Judson’s Account focuses on what she perceives as the social triumph of the dinner with Sir Archibald Campbell and the British officers at the conclusion of the treaty, and the barely suppressed irony of having some of her former tormentors present at table. But Adoniram’s linguistic response to his release from captivity was an evocation of Christian triumphalism worthy of Bunyan’s hero. He was not just sailing down the river with his wife and child; he was flying from fear of failure, for he had overcome the demons of his inner self. Unlike other missionaries who left Burma as soon as the British had secured their safety in Rangoon, Judson elected to stay on in his “field of merit.” So too did Gouger and Dr. Price. The Burmese Buddhist zayat was frequently adopted as his pulpit, as he had done before the war, surely an indication of empathy with his cultural environment. Indeed on his first visit to a Burmese zayat on April 6, 1818, he had been careful to remove his shoes in the Burmese fashion, an act which had attracted approving comment, ironically to the effect that Adoniram and his wife were “not wild; they are civilized!” He had then purposely built a zayat for the mission at a cost of $200; its opening on April 4, 1819 had made Adoniram feel that a “new and important era” had commenced in the life of the mission as he sought to adapt himself overtly to the ideas and customs of the people around him and to win their

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52 Gouger. Personal Narrative, 297.
attention. Perhaps in the words of J. S. Furnivall, Adoniram Judson was seeking to “make Christianity Burmese.”

Adoniram’s Judson’s Return to Ava and the Deposition to John Crawfurd

The third text I want to look at is Judson’s deposition to Crawfurd, recorded in May 1826. The longest of the depositions taken, occupying some twenty pages in the 1834 edition, it has been said that this is a masterly piece of information by someone with an eye for strategic detail. In response to questions asked, Judson comments at length on Burmese troop movements, reasons for the war, personalities at court, attitudes to the peace negotiating process, resentment that the British refused to repatriate refugees from Chittagong, relations with China, and establishment of a permanent Resident at Ava. If the charge of being a spy for the British, sometimes leveled at the missionaries during the period of hostilities, had been true, this deposition would have been brought in support of it. Yet it is no more than would have been expected from an educated intellectual who had lived in the country for thirteen years and knew its people and language intimately. It is no more than would have been expected from any one of the explorers and surveyors who began to frequent the country after 1826. It was Judson carrying out his public role, returning to confidence and self-command after the imprisonment in “Doubting Castle” as one might term Oung-pen-la. Gouger had witnessed a Judson beset with self-doubt; Crawfurd saw one restored to confidence whose advice he had sought in selecting a new site for the capital of the British administered provinces.

It was in that spirit of full confidence that Judson grasped the opportunity to return to Ava as interpreter with the Crawfurd mission, just a few months after the conclusion of hostilities. Crawfurd’s account provides further insight into the nature of Judson’s relations with the King and court for we learn: “Mr. Judson was altogether left out in the distribution of presents. We could understand that he was deemed a Burman subject,” and thus as part

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33 Conant, The Earnest Man, 117-120.
34 J. S. Furnivall, Christianity and Buddhism in Burma (Rangoon: Peoples’ Literature Committee and House, 1929), 4.
of the delegation, was perceived to be “acting in his present position contrary to his allegiance.” In this role Judson applied his linguistic skills to detecting significant Burmese alteration to clauses in the draft treaty relating to the repatriation of families of those who had married in the country, and to Burmese attempts to manipulate the time for payment of war reparations. He earned a fee for his services which was contributed to the support of the Baptist mission. The alleged reason for his accepting Crawfurd’s invitation to join the delegation was couched in terms of his religious mission, but the real reason was a personal one, the sense of participating in the making of history. His religious mission was a failure, as ever in Ava. His personal history was made for him during his absence, when, exhausted from the rigors of the war years, Ann Judson’s health gave out, and she died at Amherst, before Adoniram’s return from Ava. Their infant daughter, Maria, born in Ava, did not long survive her mother. Once again, Gouger’s neutral observation on the proceedings is instructive. He writes,

What rendered this fruitless instance of self sacrifice and devotion to the cause [that is, Judson’s going to Ava again] peculiarly distressing was, that in his absence the amiable woman, his wife, who had so long and successfully administered to his and our relief in our troubles, passed away from this life, having been carried off by a fever, which her impaired constitution had not strength enough to resist.

Did Adoniram recognize the self-centered motivation for his actions in so soonabsenting himself from his wife? His return from Ava is marked in his personal spiritual journey by his withdrawal into the wilderness to examine his soul, to regain his spiritual pole, an archetypal withdrawal by a hero who felt he was spiritually flawed. His great work in translating the Bible into Burmese paralleled his spiritual journey, completing as he re-emerged.

37 Anderson, To the Golden Shore, 367.
38 Gouger, Personal Narrative, 318.
Adoniram’s spiritual journey is repeated in several of the great American writers of the nineteenth century: the flawed hero endlessly in search of absolution, seeking a mission to make his life meaningful, ever fearful of not being one of the Elect. His compatriot and colleague, Boardman, did not live long enough to complete the whole journey, dying in 1831 at the age of 30. His mission to the Karen showed that the “field of merit” was now a reciprocal relationship, one that Boardman’s wife, Sarah, who became the second Mrs. Judson on April 10, 1834, was able to fulfill with remarkable complimentarity. Other narratives of mission — the Vintons, the Kincaids, the Wades, and the Masons — continue the tradition, but do not rise to the heights of myth as does the narrative of the first American Baptist mission to the Burman Empire.

Conclusion
In many ways, Judson’s death and burial at sea was a fitting finale for this great character. If we continue the analogy of the spiritual journey, Judson’s path is no doubt in the trajectory of baptismal immersion into the new life played out in the characters of the classical nineteenth-century American novelists, Cooper, Poe, and Melville. It is no wonder that Judson was such a gigantic figure in American cultural history. His life enacted the American myth of wilderness and helped to forge the nation-building rhetoric of the later industrial era, an era whose materialism would have been quite repugnant to him. Yet he was uncomfortable with how his letters and life had been represented in his home country and only returned once in his thirty-eight year career as a missionary. The numerous biographies, poetry, and honorific prose inspired by his life, enshrined the religio-romantic evangelical culture in the nineteenth-century American consciousness. Ann Judson, the first American woman to participate in foreign mission, created in her epistolary writings a new career for women as “managers of a benevolent empire” of teachers, social workers, and missionaries so that her own biography in turn became sacrosanct, in that tradition of service to others which Furnivall saw as one of the bridges of understanding between Christians and Buddhists.30

40 Furnivall, Christianity and Buddhism, 10.
In many ways, it is entirely appropriate that Judson left the field of merit when he did, before increasing secularization set the framework for human development in non-spiritual terms. As a pioneer of the pre-modern era he had not yet come to grips with religious pluralism although he was acutely aware of the problem of self-centeredness as the root source of human suffering. His dualistic, monotheistic world vision precluded him from perceiving that “Many are Chosen” as they seek to find what Masao Abe has designated the “non-dualistic oneness”, leading to perceptions of greater tolerance and harmony in human relations. Yet Judson would, perhaps, have experienced a measure of wry satisfaction in the post-modern challenge to secularization which, by questioning assumptions of continued universal progress in attempting to posit an alternative paradigm of development, is both transcultural and multi-religious.

On Remembrance Day, November 11, 2001, the ABC Radio National in Canberra carried on its program, “Encounter,” a dialogue between Reverend Larry Rasmussen, a professor at Union Theological Seminary and specialist in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Protestant theologian hanged by the Nazis for his involvement in a plot to assassinate Hitler in 1943, and a Muslim cleric from South Africa. For both, “Many are Chosen”; for both, only the few, for there are many paths to the divine essence and the greatest disservice is to propagate the philosophy that only one path is valid. As the long night of empirical mission founders amidst developmental ideologies which have failed to bring fulfillment, Hans Küng’s call for an interfaith dialogue, which spiritually and intellectually advances the interests of peace, resonates as the still small voice of calm. Perhaps Adoniram Judson’s hesitation at Yandabo arose from a perception that peace is ephemeral.

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