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# Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Jean Rhys and the Poetics of Colonial Time

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# **Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Jean Rhys and the Poetics of Colonial Time**

Thèse soutenue le 2 décembre 2022 devant le jury composé de :

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Thèse présentée par **Réka BALOG**

pour obtenir le titre de Docteur de l'Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis.

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## Summary

### **Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Jean Rhys and the Poetics of Colonial Time**

Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys — three women writers from the first half of the twentieth century that have usually been read and analyzed as Modernists, are treated here under a new angle: that of coloniality. Modernism and colonialism are thus the two pillars on which the current analysis stands. Modernism, as a literary movement, has always been preoccupied by time, hence the topic around which this dissertation revolves, which is *colonial time*. On the one hand, colonial time is embodied in the past colonial context and heritage of the writers. On the other hand, the influence that London, the city from which the authors write, has on their writings, as steeped in a colonial environment. The coloniality of the three writers also consists in the feminist issues that they treat: the women's condition inside a patriarchal society is what emerges out of the poetics of these writers. The poetics of their fictional writings are analyzed in conjunction with their private writings to see how Modernism transforms the colonial. Thus, a variety of literary genres written during an extended period of time constitutes the corpus of this study.

The main issue of the dissertation is the way Modernism as an art form is transformed by this new reading, the colonial angle that I propose.

**Keywords:** Modernism, colonialism, colonial time, poetics, imperial London, colonialism and patriarchy, genre

## **Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Jean Rhys et la poétique du temps colonial**

Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield et Jean Rhys — trois écrivaines de la première moitié du vingtième siècle qui ont généralement été lues et analysées comme des modernistes, sont traitées ici sous un nouvel angle : celui de la colonialité. Modernisme et colonialisme sont donc les deux piliers sur lesquels repose la présente analyse. Le modernisme, en tant que mouvement littéraire, a toujours été préoccupé par le temps, d'où le thème autour duquel tourne cette thèse, qui est le temps colonial. D'une part, le temps colonial s'incarne dans le contexte colonial passé et l'héritage des écrivains. D'autre part, l'influence que Londres, la ville d'où les auteurs écrivent, a sur leurs écrits, comme imprégnée d'un environnement colonial. La colonialité des trois écrivains réside également dans les questions féministes qu'ils traitent : la condition des femmes dans une société patriarcale est ce qui ressort de la poétique de ces écrivains. La poétique de leurs écrits fictionnels est analysée en conjonction avec leurs écrits privés pour voir comment le modernisme transforme le colonial. Ainsi, une variété de genres littéraires écrits sur une longue période de temps constitue le corpus de cette étude.

La question principale de la thèse est la manière dont le modernisme en tant que forme d'art est transformé par cette nouvelle lecture, l'angle colonial que je propose.

Mots-clés : Modernisme, colonialisme, temps colonial, poétique, Londres impérial, colonialisme et patriarcat, genre.

To my beloved parents

Their love and wisdom shape my life and work.

*What is the meaning of life? That was all — a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years, the great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead, there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* [1927], St Ives, Oxford University Press, 2006.



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I would like, first, to express my profound gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor Professor Claire Joubert. Her deep knowledge, competence and leadership have guided me through these years and made me become the person and scientist that I am today. Every time I saw her, I got mental stimulation, insight and vision for my next steps and for my project as a whole. This dissertation could not have seen the light of day without the numerous discussions that we had together and, above all, the fact that she unconditionally believed in me even when the road got difficult and I felt lost. I am forever grateful to her for accepting my research proposal at the beginning of this journey. At the edge of hope and despair, I came across Professor Françoise Palleau who introduced me to Professor Joubert and my whole path changed. The rest is history, as they say. I would like to extend a special word of thanks to Professor Palleau who came in my life in the right place at the right time.

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My accomplishments are not mine alone — Nothing could be further from the truth. On a more personal note, I would like to take this opportunity to extend a special word of thanks to people who are the closest to me. I am forever grateful for my parents and family for their unconditional love and support during all these years. They believed in me and guided me even in difficult times. This volume would not exist but for the vision and encouragement of my mother who infused me with the thirst for knowledge and curiosity of a researcher.

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## List of abbreviations

### Virginia Woolf

*Jacob's Room* — JR

*Mrs Dalloway* — MD

*Three Guineas* — TG

*The Years* — Y

*Congenial Spirits: The Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf* — CS

*The Flight of the Mind: The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1888-1912* — FM

### Katherine Mansfield

*The Urewera Notebook* — UN

### Jean Rhys

*Tigers are Better-Looking; With a selection from The Left Bank* — TBL

*After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* — ALM

*Voyage in the Dark* — VD

*Good Morning, Midnight* — GMM

*Wide Sargasso Sea* — WSS

*Smile Please* — SP



# Introduction

Time was considered as the universal pillar that directed the evolution and development of science and arts. “Time was ubiquitous in the second half of the nineteenth century, time became an object of display and inquiry in a staggeringly wide array of fields.”<sup>2</sup> Time was a popular object of study, which led to significant discoveries in the following century. The beginning of the twentieth century was marked by important theories related to time, in several areas of study, such as science and physics (with Einstein’s theory of relativity), psychology (with Jung’s and Freud’s theories on time and timelessness) or philosophy with Bergson’s breakthrough (introducing a theory on the extension of time, or “la durée”), which had a great influence on the early Modernist writers such as Katherine Mansfield or Virginia Woolf.

In literature, the Modernist period was the framework for those same features, literature was actually co-creating the tendencies of the century or perhaps pioneering them.<sup>3</sup> Ideas around consciousness, Modernity, and the relationship between time and space were widely circulating. Modernism was nonetheless a shift in perception, a change from the so far known way of thinking, believing and writing about time. As Morag Shiach has framed, constructed through contradictions, Modernism is rooted in tradition and classicism but fascinated by the impulse towards the “new”; it aspires to aesthetic integrity but finds ingenious ways to capture fragmentation; it presses towards the intensity of the moment but also reaches towards the infinite<sup>4</sup>.

Modernism in literature is considered to have begun towards the end of the nineteenth century (1890) or shortly after the beginning of the twentieth century (1910), and ended around 1930-1940<sup>5</sup>. Modernism is a literary movement defined by the concept of innovation, of “‘making new’; a sense of historical liminality; the fragmentation of absolutes; interests in subjective and multiple perspectives, and in the fluidity of consciousness.”<sup>6</sup> Instead of focusing on nature and the

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<sup>2</sup> Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time: 1870-1950*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2015, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> This is also reflected in Gertrude Stein’s idea of a composition. According to her, nothing changes from one generation to the other except what is actually seen, and that is what she calls “composition”. Moreover, it is the relation between the elements that changes, not the individual elements themselves. See Patricia Meyerowitz (ed.), *Gertrude Stein: Writings and Lectures 1909-1945*, Baltimore, Penguin, 1967, p. 21-30.

<sup>4</sup> Morag Shiach, “Periodizing Modernism” in Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Lonfsworth, and Andrew Thacker (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modernism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Lonfsworth, and Andrew Thacker (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modernism*.

<sup>6</sup> “Elleke Boehmer and Steven Matthews, “Modernism and Colonialism” in Michael Levenson (ed.), *A Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (1999), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 286-287.



individual as, for instance, the Romantics previously did, Modernist writers chose to innovate by presenting fiction that spoke of the inner self and consciousness.

Colonialism on the other hand, as an ideology, is according to Edward Said — the author of *Orientalism*, often considered as the founding text of postcolonial studies — based on a distinction between East and West.<sup>7</sup> Another way to put this would be to emphasize “the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority.”<sup>8</sup> Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffiths’s glossary containing what they view as the key concepts of postcolonial studies defines colonialism as “the specific form of cultural exploitation that developed with the expansion of Europe over the last 400 years”.<sup>9</sup>

At first glance, a literary movement — especially one focused on form and aesthetics, and the complexities of subjectivity — associated with a political ideology may appear incongruous and they barely seem to work together. Yet, analyzing the literary texts of the twentieth century in context will provide evidence of the interconnection between the two. The association of the two forges the core argument of this study.

When talking about colonialism, one firstly thinks of the idea of space. Location is an important marker in this area of study. The immediate concept related to space is time, the two are interconnected and indissociable in the tradition of European imagination. One cannot talk about one without referring to the other, hence there is a particular link of time and space that is specific to the colonial context of the twentieth century and the Modernist literature written during this time. It is a link that will be considered later on in the study.

The concept that I propose to explore and test in this dissertation, and around which the study revolves, is that of *colonial time*. How does this angle change the terms of the debates on Modernism and colonialism?

Most of the sources mention the so-called colonial period, which only refers to the colonial experience from a chronological point of view, whereas the aim of the current research is to shed some light on the way the period affected by the experience of colonialism was described in the literary works.

Literature shaped and acted upon the colonial experience or culture. As Jane Stafford and Mark Williams observe: “The forms and values of colonial literature are, of course, Victorian, and in the past Victorian literature was viewed through the lens of a disdainful modernism. [...]”

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<sup>7</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Reading, Vintage, 1994, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (2000), New York, Routledge, 2007, p. 40.

Colonial writing characteristically responds to the new world in terms imported from the old one.”<sup>10</sup> The concept of colonial temporality has been discussed in major theoretical debates in the last decades, by critical theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Edouard Glissant or Robert Young. Bhabha, for instance, talks of the concept of “time-lag”, a difference of time that the writers themselves experience when going to London after having spent time and actually lived in the colonies. The analysis of colonial time will be considered within the framework of postcolonial studies, which implies the study of a time during which the influence of colonialism has been felt and acknowledged. I am choosing this frame work to put in perspective *colonial* time, show that the writers’ works that I am studying have other features as well, other than the Modernist ones for which they are well known and acknowledged.

The first half of the twentieth century is in particular a century in which Modernism and colonialism interact; the present study will help us see the way one influences the other and, furthermore, the way one helps the other to surface and manifest itself. Sometimes it is Modernism that helps colonialism to manifest itself and at other times it is colonialism that will showcase Modernism.

Robert Young has remarked the contemporary effects of the cultural history of colonialism, making connections between the past and the politics of the present<sup>11</sup>. The past and the present are inseparable in postcolonial studies, and also when referring to Modernism. The Modernist movement comes with a non-linear timeline, in which the past and the present are on the same plane, in order to fully experience the present.

As recalled earlier, the present dissertation explores the colonial context, and more precisely the colonial time of the literature that was written at the heart of the empire’s metropolitan centre. In order to generate a complex multi-dimensional view in a colonial context, three writers were carefully chosen. Writers originally coming from outside the colonies arrive and write in London. Therefore, two writers coming from New Zealand, and respectively from the Caribbean Islands will be analyzed in conjunction with a writer coming from London itself. These writers are: Katherine Mansfield (originally from Wellington, New Zealand), Jean Rhys (born in Roseau, Dominica) and Virginia Woolf, who was born and lived her whole life in London, the metropolitan centre of imperial power. The particularity of this dissertation is to bring these writers’ contexts together,

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<sup>10</sup> Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature (1872-1914)*, Wellington, Victoria University Press, 2006, p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001), Singapore, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 6.

while they are most of the time studied separately. It is their Modernism that unites these three authors, but also their colonial and historical background. The colonial context is found in their poetics; their literature holds specific markers inspired by and recalled from history itself. My aim is also to illuminate how their “works” rework that context.

In their article about Modernism and colonialism, Elleke Boehmer and Steven Matthews suggest that the “creative involvement of other cultural and national players [such as Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys] inevitably intensified those experiences characteristically associated with Modernism”<sup>12</sup> There were times when even Mansfield and Rhys were not known or recognized as being colonial authors; today we know that their writings contain numerous and important colonial traits, which in turn help the reader understand their Modernist specificity as well. By associating these three authors along with an emphasis on their works’ colonial signifiers, the current study will help the readers to perceive even more the value and richness of these writers. The writers’ works abound in colonial signifiers, which will be analyzed by revealing the form and aesthetics of Modernist poetics.

A first detail that unites these three authors is the location of their writing process; all three mostly wrote in London. We have three women authors who write in the twentieth century — 1905-1937 in the case of Woolf, 1903-1922 for Mansfield, and 1927-1976 to Rhys. 1905 is the year when Woolf began her career as a professional writer by publishing in the literary magazine *Times*, followed by her first novel *The Voyage Out*, published in 1915; in 1937 the last novel published during her lifetime, *The Years*, sees the light of day. As for Mansfield, she started publishing around 1903 when she came to London to pursue her studies at King’s College. In July 1922 she published *The Garden Party* and wrote her last short story *The Canary* in July 1922. Jean Rhys’s trajectory as a writer begins with *The Left Bank and Other Stories*, her first collection of short stories published in 1927. In 1966, after a period of silence, the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published. Her last publication was the collection of stories *Sleep it Off, Lady* in 1976.

The present dissertation will explore the way Modernism, colonialism and feminism interact in order to give a meaning to the concept of *colonial time*, or the topic of the proposed study. The three authors under study are often analyzed through a Modernist view. My idea is to propose a new reading of these writers, by shifting the gaze, and concentrating on a colonial perspective. That does not mean explaining or wanting to demonstrate that they are colonial authors, my goal being to

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<sup>12</sup> Elleke Boehmer and Steven Matthews, “Modernism and Colonialism” in Michael Levenson (ed.), *A Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, p. 286-7.

enrich the present research and not to deny the studies that have already been done. In this light, my main goal will be to highlight the colonial features of their writings, brought or injected by the colonial context in which they wrote. By doing that, the reader will manage to perceive these authors differently, in a richer but also closer way to today's society, whose research is more and more interested in these writers' colonial angle, while reframing the Modernist features of their works that the critics have talked about in the first place.

I am also trying to identify the specific and singular colonial context that each author draws and relates in her works. The styles of the writers, read in their poetics, and the way they treat the subject of colonialism will all reflect a particular context of colonization and the way time was felt, lived and understood. By reading them together, what will rise is the singularity of each context and the power of their texts.

The richness of the study resides in the different views that the writers project on the same topic: Woolf's heritage from the centre will be concomitantly analyzed with Mansfield's and Rhys's experience and perception from the periphery. But not only that, because Mansfield does become somewhat of an insider, whereas Rhys hardly does. I am thus interested in seeing how the colonial is (re)written by their works. There will be similar features and ways of grasping colonial time, and there will be opposed perspectives on colonial society and its perception. On the other hand, the differences will help us understand the different shades of colonial time, depending, for example, upon the colonial environment that the authors come from, their different backgrounds and upbringing. Woolf and Mansfield continuously influenced one another, either from the point of view of their writing or their everyday life; their friendship is one to remember among the most important literary relationships of the twentieth century. Jean Rhys on the other hand, comes, chronologically speaking, after them. Different phases of modernism and colonialism are to be perceived throughout the analysis of the three authors.

The works that express and are mostly linked to the problematics of colonial time have been selected. My corpus of study includes a variety of texts, and different literary genres will highlight the specificities of the topic. Attached to this Introduction you will find a corpus chronology that will help situate the period in which the authors write and forge connections among their publications. In Woolf's case, I have chosen the novels *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *The Waves* (1931), the essay *Three Guineas* (1938) and *A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf* (1954). In Mansfield's case I have opted for *The Collected Stories* (1945), from which I intend to analyze in more detail the short stories "Prelude", "Germans at Meat", "The Luft Bad",

“Millie”, “Ole Underwood”, “How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped”, “The Woman at the Store”, “An Indiscreet Journey” and “The Life of Ma Parker”. I will also study her *Collected Poems* (2016), with a selection of a few poems, and her *Journal* (1954). In Rhys’s case, I have decided to take the novels *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), and her autobiography *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography*, along with her collection of *Letters 1931-66* (1984).

All these texts have been carefully chosen in order to draw a concise and accurate panorama of colonial time. Keeping in mind the two major points or dimensions of this dissertation: Modernism, on the one hand, and colonialism, on the other. Each element of the corpus bears the two characteristics: apart from being written in a Modernist fashion, they contain important colonial signifiers.

For instance, the life in the colonies is drawn by Mansfield through short stories such as “Prelude”, “How Pearl Button was Kidnapped”, “The Woman at the Store”, “Millie” and through *Wide Sargasso Sea* in Rhys’s case. It is notable to see here that the action takes place in the actual colonies, New Zealand (Wellington mostly), and Dominica (in which case Roseau is the chosen place for the description). To include a selection of Mansfield’s poems, apart from her stories, is also necessary, since they treat the writer’s childhood and her brother, whose death constitutes some of the crucial reasons of her writing about her home country.

Then, there is Woolf’s *The Years* that characterizes the colonial experience from the colonies, emphasizing a trip from the imperial centre to the colony (namely Africa), and the return to London. Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark* also describes a “voyage” having colonial Dominica as a departure point and its point of arrival in the imperial centre. The action takes place in London but contains several time-lags. Woolf’s *The Years* describes the impact of the war and of the colonial experience once North, the character who opens the novel, upon his return to London from his trip to Africa. Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark* illustrates a time that is full of darkness and doubt, as the title itself suggests. Anna Morgan, the main character, is unable to find her place in London society.

*Three Guineas* deals with the subject of the Second World War, as Woolf is asked to come up with measures to prevent it. Among other arguments, she develops the necessity of educating the women and thus preventing war. Feminism is central to her reasoning, which gives rise to colonial signifiers in her writing.

In *Mrs. Dalloway* Woolf describes a post-First World War England. Reminiscences from the colonies constantly arise in the characters’ memory. The time length of the novel is worth mentioning: the whole novel offers details of a day in the life of the main character. This Modernist

way of rendering time new and completely unimaginable up to that point, mixed up with important references to the colonies, makes it an unquestionable choice for my corpus.

Two works belonging to the writers' private writings, *The Journal of Katherine Mansfield, A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf* and *Jean Rhys: Letters 1931-66*, draw attention to the writing of the inner self and that of the correspondence. The correspondence is of interest here because it contains details about the context itself, which will help reveal the colonial time that this study is looking for. A similar work is Rhys's incomplete autobiography, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography*. The first person narration is present here, but also the direct expression of feelings, in a way similar to the diaries and letters mentioned above. The research involving the diaries and letters, or of what I call private writings, will try to bring innovation to the field, since these are less researched, especially in the studies combining Modernism and colonialism.

The contribution this study hopes to make lies in its analyses of colonial time from the perspective of the genres in which the authors were involved and which they practised. The temporality of London — the pace and rhythm of the metropolitan centre — differ from one writer to the other. The multitude of genres employed — novels, short stories, novellas, poems, journals/diaries — will each set a different tone to the one and single place of literary meetings, London. Furthermore, we will gain a better insight into the temporal experience developed under colonialism once we go through an analysis of the literary genres that the authors use. Each literary genre is a mirror of the colonial time set by early twentieth-century London.

We know for sure about the importance of colonial contexts in the three writers' works. Subsequently, we may want to ask ourselves: How and in what way does colonial time influence these works, their poetics, and their consequences on generations of readers, critics and English-speaking cultures? In the case of Rhys and Mansfield, it is about the newly created life far from the colonies, whereas in the case of Woolf, it is the details of her London life as colonial setting, along with the social and political context, that will constitute the case study analysis.

A five-chapter argument will be proposed in this sense. The first chapter explains the necessity of such a study and offers an essay in contextualizing. I will begin by illustrating the link between the two key pillars of the study: Modernism and colonialism. The latter is at the core of my perspective, but the whole idea comes from the presence and influence of time in Modernism.

In the second chapter, I study the colonial context and heritage that the writers come with. I introduce the poetics of home and heritage, and the influences due to a specific colonial and temporal background. The location of heritage takes an important role here. Childhood connections are identified, as well as the intensity of the temporal uprooting. Virginia Woolf's figure of the outsider is acknowledged. The longing of the characters to live in London will be discussed and the poetics of disillusion that follows once they come to London.

In the third chapter, the location of time will be discussed. This essentially refers to bringing together time and place, and explaining what happens from a colonial, but also Modernist perspective. The dynamics of time, stagnation versus antagonism in conjunction with the concept of the "flânerie" is first introduced. The feeling of "no-escape" is haunting the characters. Colonial places will be analyzed along with London, the figure of time.

Time and place will constitute a core argument for the next chapter as well, as the subject of war as a temporal and geographical refuge is treated. The colonial experience and time are not restricted to London, but continue elsewhere, in places like Paris in the case of Rhys, the countryside for Woolf, and the South of France when considering Mansfield. The war makes these writers discover other places as well, apart from London, and it is precisely the war that triggered their trips. What is interesting is that it is not only the colonial context that characterizes them, it is also the Modernist environment. Paris, for instance, as a Modern metropole, is a case in point.

The fifth and last chapter will be closely related to the second and fourth parts. Heritage and female identity constitute a bridge for the final argument, which opens up the topic of colonial time from a different perspective, that of personal writing. The innovation here is that the colonial context can also be found in these personal writings. The question of private writings is present via the writers' letters and diaries, which are relatively less researched documents in the case of these authors. A significant theme that appears in these documents is the war, a topic that even if fairly well researched in recent decades, will now be included in the category of colonial time. Letters and diaries draw the reader closer to the colonial context in a perhaps more tangible and factual way, via precise dates and colonially charged experiences, such as meetings, friendships and the writers' opinions and attitudes on colonially related facts.

The purpose of this dissertation is to look deeply into what colonial time means, down to its deepest layers. I intend to do that by "diving" into the written evidence of the three authors, which are the literary works, and also by examining theoretical, but also postcolonial critical resources. In a similar way, Robert Young adds that if we want to learn what postcolonialism is, we have to make

sure that we are looking at the world not from above, but from below<sup>13</sup>. I think that by digging deeper into these writers' works, biographies and the rich postcolonial criticism dedicated to them up to now we will reach interesting arguments and conclusions that will serve the future generations in their research.

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<sup>13</sup> Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, Bungay, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 20.



## Chronology of the Authors' Works

1882	.....	V. Woolf was born
1888	.....	K. Mansfield was born
1890	.....	J. Rhys was born
1911	.....	<i>In a German Pension</i> <sup>14</sup> (K. Mansfield)
1913	.....	<i>Something Childish and Other Stories</i> <sup>15</sup> (K. Mansfield)
1920	.....	<i>Bliss and Other Stories</i> <sup>16</sup> (K. Mansfield)
1922	.....	<i>The Garden Party and Other Stories</i> <sup>17</sup> (K. Mansfield)
1922	.....	<i>Jacob's Room</i> (V. Woolf)
1923	.....	<i>The Doves' Nest and Other Stories</i> <sup>18</sup>
1923	.....	Poems (K. Mansfield)
1925	.....	<i>Mrs Dalloway</i> (V. Woolf)
1927	.....	<i>The Left Bank and Other Stories</i> (J. Rhys)
1931	.....	<i>After Leaving Mr Mackenzie</i> (J. Rhys)
1934	.....	<i>Voyage in the Dark</i> (J. Rhys)
1937	.....	<i>The Years</i> (V. Woolf)
1938	.....	<i>Three Guineas</i> (V. Woolf)
1939	.....	<i>Good Morning, Midnight</i> (J. Rhys)
1966	.....	<i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i> (J. Rhys)
1968	.....	<i>Tigers Are Better Looking</i> (J. Rhys)
1978	.....	<i>The Urewera Notebook</i> <sup>19</sup> (K. Mansfield)
1979	.....	<i>Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography</i> <sup>20</sup> (J. Rhys)
1984	.....	<i>Jean Rhys Letters: 1931-1966</i> <sup>21</sup> (J. Rhys)
1985	.....	<i>Tales of the Wide Caribbean</i> <sup>22</sup> (J. Rhys)

<sup>14</sup> Collection including "Germans at Meat", "The Luft Bad". My actual study is limited to a couple of this volume's short stories.

<sup>15</sup> "Millie", "Ole Underwood", "How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped", "The Woman at the Store", "An Indiscreet Journey".

<sup>16</sup> "Prelude".

<sup>17</sup> "At the Bay", "The Garden Party", "The Life of Ma Parker".

<sup>18</sup> "The Dolls' House", "The Fly". My actual study is limited to a couple of this volume's short stories.

<sup>19</sup> Edited by Anna Plumridge.

<sup>20</sup> Edited by Diana Atthil.

<sup>21</sup> Edited by Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly.

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Ramchand (ed.).

## **I. Towards an Understanding of the Early Twentieth-century English literature**

*Never had he seen London so enchanting — the softness of the distance; the richness; the greenness; the civilisation; [...] Every woman, even the most respectable, had roses blooming under glass; lips cut with a knife; curls of Indian ink; there was design, art, everywhere. (Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway [1925], London, Penguin Books, 1992, p. 78)*

This first part is a crucial step in showing the contribution and capturing the innovative part of this research. To this end, I will go through the research that has been done up to now and formulate the new perspectives that I will try to generate throughout this study.

The first chapter of this part wishes to investigate the already existing link between Modernism and colonialism and the way this connection can be used to study and showcase colonial time in Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys. In the second chapter, I will explain the necessity of studying the concept of *colonial time*. I will highlight the studies that have already been carried out in the field, which will help in extending and developing the research. In the final chapter, the three writers' works will be analyzed from a colonial perspective. I will stress the common ground of these authors and the reasons why they fit together very well. I will highlight the necessity of studying them together and the contribution that such a study makes. The selection of the works under study will also be justified in the conducive environment that this part establishes.

## 1. When Modernism meets colonialism

The critical discussions of Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys requires looking closely into what the new literary movement created, namely Modernism, means, what its particularities are and the concepts that attempt to frame it. Because of these first gestures and qualifications, the writers that I analyze are mainly and traditionally known as belonging to the Modernist literary movement. Given the historical and political context of the period, among the necessities required by the works was to look into colonialism, an obvious but at the same time a challenging choice. This choice becomes even clearer when placing the works of the three writers under comparison.

The link between Modernism and colonialism is thus required, more precisely the importance of a simultaneous study of these two concepts. First and foremost, a definition of the two terms is necessary.

Modernism is an artistic movement that derived from the changes and transformations of the Western society during the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century; “its peak period in the Anglo-American context lay between 1910 and 1925<sup>23</sup>”. Those transformations were of a varied nature: social, cultural, historical, etc.: “The catastrophe of World War I, and, before that, the labour struggles, the emergence of feminism, the race for empire, these inescapable forces of social modernization were not simply looming on the outside as the destabilizing context of cultural Modernism”, writes Michael Levenson, “they penetrated the interior of artistic invention.”<sup>24</sup> The writings of the authors of the period were very much influenced and shaped by these changes. The conventions and beliefs of the “human character changed”, wrote Woolf, about the year 1910, along with people’s actions and ways of acting and constructing their art. Writers used diverse approaches to express themselves through writing and thus drawing a picture of the society in question, but as Woolf suggested: “men and women who began writing novels in 1910 or thereabouts had this great difficulty to face — that there was no English novelist living from whom they could learn their business<sup>25</sup>”. Woolf explains this newness and its literary and artistic viewpoint on this transition. Woolf defines how “character reading” functions in the case of novelists:

Novelists differ from the rest of the world because they do not cease to be interested in character when they have learnt enough about it for practical purposes. They go a step further; they feel that there is

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Levenson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* [1999], Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4-5.

<sup>25</sup> Leonard Woolf and Virginia Woolf (eds.), *Virginia Woolf: Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, London, The Hogarth Press, 1924, p. 11.

something permanently interesting in character in itself. When all the practical business of life has been discharged, there is something about people which continues to seem to them of overwhelming importance, in spite of the fact that it has no bearing whatever upon their happiness, comfort, or income. The study of character becomes to them an absorbing pursuit; to impart character an obsession. And this I find it very difficult to explain: what novelists mean when they talk about character, what the impulse is that urges them so powerfully every now and then to embody their view in writing.<sup>26</sup>

It is this perpetual and keen interest of the writer that made a change in literature possible, a new movement that was born. It is this “absorbing pursuit” that almost haunts the writers, which ultimately “embod[ies] their view in writing”.

Keeping the same literary angle, in “Modern Fiction” Woolf wrote about the deconstruction of the old by embracing new ways of approaching literature:

We seek to define the quality which distinguishes the work of several young writers [...] from that of their predecessors. They attempt to come closer to life, and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them, even if to do so they must discard most of the conventions which are commonly observed by the novelist<sup>27</sup>.

It is precisely what was “commonly observed” by the novelist, or the writer in general, that had to change, and these were precisely the conventions that they *had to* discard.

The term *Modernism* is sometimes mistaken with *modernity*. A clarification of these terms will help the reader in situating the Modernist literary movement on the time axis. Modernity is a post-medieval historical period defined by a sudden break from traditions. Patrick Williams in his article on “‘Simultaneous Uncontemporaneities’: Theorizing Modernism and Empire” argues that one of the few points of consensus in definitions of Modernism is that it is “the art of modernity”, or that it constitutes a cultural response to modernity.<sup>28</sup> His perspective of putting the two, modernity and colonization, on the same time axis, as emerging around the same time is interesting: “Rather than thinking of empire as actively involved in the exporting or disseminating of modernism, we could see it as exporting modernity.” He also adds:

Modernism and modernity exist in complex relations with a third and arguably even more important term: modernisation. Social theorist Johan Fornas attempts to encapsulate this relationship: “While modernity is the result of modernisation that provokes modernisms, modernity is also the condition in which

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<sup>26</sup> Virginia Woolf, “Character in Fiction” in *Selected Essays* [1924], New York, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew McNeille (ed.), “Modern Fiction” in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf. Volume 4: 1925 to 1928* [1924], London, The Hogarth Press, 1984, p. 161.

<sup>28</sup> Patrick Williams, “‘Simultaneous Uncontemporaneities’: Theorizing Modernism and Empire” in Howard J. Booth, Nigel Rigby (ed.), *Modernism and Empire*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 27.

modernisation appears, and of which modernisms are necessary constituents.<sup>29</sup> In this modernisation, is an ensemble of economic, technological and political processes premised on change (though not necessarily rapid change); modernity is a state or condition characterised by fundamental ambivalence, and modernism, is a “heterogeneous group of collective ways of relating or reacting<sup>30</sup>” to the other two. These ways of reacting are also fundamentally ambivalent: modernism famously, or notoriously both celebrates modernity and vigorously opposes it. In addition, in what Marshall Berman has called the first modernist text, *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx long ago poetically described the ambivalent nature of capitalist modernity; and also saw the same combination of lamentable destruction and necessary progress being brought to India by colonialism.<sup>31</sup>

According to Williams, the late nineteenth century, which is the period of rapid colonial growth, is one of intensified capitalist development and competition, as well as the start of modernity (and the modernist response).<sup>32</sup> To that extent *The Oxford Handbook of Modernism* distinguishes three phases of the Modernist period. The beginning of modernism: 1890 - 1910, followed by the end of modernism: 1930 - 1940, and lastly the period of the “afterlife of modernism” : 1930 - 1960<sup>33</sup>.

One of the main reasons why this dissertation stands alone revolves around the colonial situations of the three writers. Virginia Woolf was born and raised at the heart of the empire centre, having thus access to a panorama of everything that went from the imperial centre towards the colonies. She was where the power was. At the beginning of the twentieth century, around the 1910s, a significant European population migrated to the colonies. Cultural, social, economic changes and exchanges happened during this period. Katherine Mansfield who, from a young age, lived and wrote from London, had nonetheless important earlier connections with colonial New Zealand, and specifically Wellington, as she was born and raised there. Jean Rhys’s situation also bears a colonial origin, but a different one, whose roots come from Dominica, namely Roseau. Katherine Mansfield emigrated to the imperial centre in 1908, whereas Jean Rhys did it in 1907. The different places offer different experiences and contexts of the same culture: colonialism.

In order to grasp the full meaning of colonialism, as a concept, a couple of clarifications need to be brought in. First, postcolonial studies distinguish between imperialism and colonialism. At the beginning of his study, *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said makes the distinction between *imperialism* and *colonialism*, two different practices according to the critic: “imperialism” means

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<sup>29</sup> Johan Fornas, *Cultural Theory and Late Modernity*, London, Sage, 1995, p. 40.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Morag Shiach, “Periodizing Modernism” in Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Lonfsworth, Andrew Thacker (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modernism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010.

the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; “colonialism”, which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory’<sup>34</sup>. Imperialism being a concept, colonialism is analyzed primarily as a practice: “Colonialism functioned as an activity on the periphery, economically driven; from the government’s perspective, it was at times hard to control. Imperialism, on the other hand, operated from the centre as a policy of state, driven by the grandiose projects of power.<sup>35</sup>” We should also note that an empire was controlled by a government from the centre, developed for ideological and financial reasons, a structure that can be called imperialism. Furthermore, an empire developed for settlement by individual communities or for commercial purposes by a trading company is a structure that can be called colonial.<sup>36</sup>

The numerous literary references drawn out of the writers’ works will demonstrate the interconnection between the two. The power of the literary studies is writing on the text itself. The texts of these writers will change the way we understand colonialism, imperialism and its connection with Modernism.

This dissertation proposes to change the way we study Modernism and the Modernist writers. The aim is to propose a new reading, focused on colonialism. It is about rethinking traditional Modernism through the angle of colonialism, or by enriching it with the colonial dimension. In doing so, it is a matter not only to enrich literary studies per se but also to uncover new value to these authors and their works. My aim is not exclusively to make these authors “colonial”, but to highlight the colonial characteristics of their works. That simply means that apart from the Modernist angle, through which they are generally perceived and known, there is more to discover in their works. It is time to see and appreciate another dimension of their works as well.

A relevant question that one can address at the beginning of such a study is: How can Modernism, a concept belonging to literary history, intertwine with colonialism, a political ideology? Modernism, as a literary movement, has itself sprung from a desire to break the traditional ways of writing, a desire to write in a new and different way, using a different approach, one that would revolutionize the styles of writing known up to then. Fragmentations, repetitions, pauses in writing or even ellipses ... are just some representative examples of Modernist poetics. Modernism is constructed through contradictions, rooted in tradition and classicism but fascinated by the impulse towards the “new”, as Ezra Pound put it in his 1934 famous command, “Make it

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<sup>34</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, *op. cit.*, 1994, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Young, *Postcolonialism*, *op. cit.*, 2001, p. 16-17.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

new!”. The proposed approach was to recreate the vestiges of the past through a whole different angle. Modernism aspires to aesthetic integrity but finds ingenious ways to capture fragmentation; it presses towards the intensity of the moment but also reaches towards the infinite<sup>37</sup>. Where did these shifting and unconventional writing forms proceed from? Rachel Potter in her book on *Modernist Literature* explains the way Modernism has shaped its way throughout the context of the century:

Modernist texts engage with the geographical instabilities of the early twentieth century. New nation states were emerging, cities were expanding, natural landscapes were disappearing and the geographical boundaries of nation states were redrawn. These shifts had a profound impact on how Modernist writers engaged with the ‘real’, thematically and formally.<sup>38</sup>

All these “instabilities”, as Potter calls them, and transformations made a significant contribution in the remodelling of twentieth century literature, and the way it shaped and adjusted itself across the nations. Another way to define this concept would be to see it under the profile of an innovation. In that case, we can assert that Modernism is “a self-reflexive concern with formal innovation in the face of perceived historical and moral crises besetting the West.<sup>39</sup>”

Colonialism, on the other hand, is an ideology that “involve(s) an extraordinary range of different forms and practices carried out with respect to radically different cultures, over many centuries<sup>40</sup>”, as Robert Young maintains. In its common feature, though, colonialism is a form of domination of generally one population over the others. Generally speaking, it is the colonized man who wants to move forward, and the colonizer who holds things back<sup>41</sup>. The power belongs to the colonizer. Moreover, because of his condition, the colonized man is deeply rooted in his uneasy past, and is thus stuck to it. The connection between past and present situations is at the heart of the colonial temporality. Nonetheless, in the literary text a major factor that holds these elements together is space. McClintock’s argument of space being a synonym for time is relevant in this case since it marks a strong historical commitment generated by the colonial era:

In colonial discourse [...] space is time, and history is shaped around two, necessary movements: the ‘progress’ forward of humanity from slouching deprivation to erect, enlightened reason. The other

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<sup>37</sup> Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Lonfsworth, Andrew Thacker (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modernism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 17-18.

<sup>38</sup> Rachel Potter, *Modernist Literature*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2012, p. 80.

<sup>39</sup> Boehmer and Matthews, *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 285.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001), Singapore, Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

<sup>41</sup> Aimé Césaire, From ‘Discourse on Colonialism’ in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Hertfordshire, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, p. 179.



movement presents the reverse: regression backwards from (white, male) adulthood to a primordial, black 'degeneracy' usually incarnated in women.<sup>42</sup>

There were a large number of exchanges realized during the period of colonization. Colonization brought important changes concerning the entire world population. It was a process of immigration and migration, from the imperial centre to the colonies and from the colonies back to the metropolitan centre. The understanding of these migrations will help us establish a better positioning and grasp of colonial time. Moreover, two of the writers under study come from New Zealand and the Caribbean, two large and significant colonies at the time. We are mainly interested in the European migration, which began in the early nineteenth century, in the 1810th. If I think of Jean Rhys and her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, it seems relevant to add that the Second World War also brought major changes in this sense. *The Penguin Historical Atlas of the British Empire* cites important references:

Significant numbers of migrants from South Asia and the Caribbean began arriving in Britain itself at the end of the Second World War, and by 1991 these communities formed 5.5 per cent of the British population (some three million people). Despite some racial tensions, the general effect has been to broaden cultural life and understanding in British society.<sup>43</sup>

With colonization came a series of relevant and also critical historical events that have changed the course of the history, but also of twentieth century literature. Throughout this century, we can speak of major colonial events, such as World War I, a moment considered as a turning point in British colonial history. As for literary writings, it had an influence and impact, which in turn triggered the study of colonial time in literature. I intend to problematize this issue keeping in mind these major events that shaped the works of these writers.

The twentieth century Modernist revolution in literature was an acknowledgement of the chaotic experience created by the war. "You will be astonished to find how art is to war, I mean 'modernist' art [...] and a war just-finished effects art. [...] An artist (is one who) is always holding the mirror up to politics without knowing it<sup>44</sup>."

The war shaped the way the whole world was perceived, and literature was a source that embraced those changes. It is a period of great changes, rich in transformations and shifts from the

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<sup>42</sup> Anne McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term *Post-colonialism*' in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Hertfordshire, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, 292.

<sup>43</sup> Nigel Dalziel, *The Penguin Historical Atlas of the British Empire*, London, Penguin Group, 2006, 135.

<sup>44</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering: An Autobiography (1914-1926)*, John Calder (ed.), London, Riverrun Press, 1982, p. 4.

traditional way of writing to creating a fracture, perceived as a shock. The Great War, also known as World War I (1914-1918), had a great influence on the literature written at that time.

Colonialism has a similar approach to time, but from a different angle. Here, it is usually the case of traumas, or the individual being haunted by past experiences and the presence of alienation and rootlessness that are the major causes of the urge to take a journey in the past, far back in time. In the case of the works created by the authors under study, especially Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys, the “voyage” in the past becomes a necessity. The past is represented by the homeland of the writers, in this case New Zealand for Mansfield and Dominica for Rhys, whereas the present is embodied by London, or the metropolitan centre where they have emigrated. The characters are revitalized when the past and present meet, or, in other words, when the past comes alive. This dissertation proposes to analyze the specificities of this question. It is also important to mention the specificities of these writers’ situations, because they are not part of the colonized people, and we know that because of their status in the colonies. They are colonials whose situation changes when coming to London, because they lose the comfort and status they had back in the colonies. The characters of their fictional works do not only go back in time; past and present are actually simultaneously present in their beings, living with both temporal dimensions. I am interested in seeing what triggers the eagerness to go back to the past and when this happens. It is an eagerness that becomes a necessity. Colonial time is after all past and present united, because the past comes alive in the present and that is exactly what happens at the level of the narration because of the colonial that “haunts” the characters in question and transforms the narration. For instance, home, which is itself charged with temporal and spatial characteristics, is a major theme when it comes to colonial time.

The two terms, Modernism and colonialism, seem to have been associated and used together for the first time in 1988, by Fredric Jameson who coined the expression by writing the paper called *Modernism and Imperialism*<sup>45</sup>; interestingly, it was initially published as a pamphlet. However, it took some time for the literary world to officially proclaim and recognize its value. For instance, in the 1999 first edition of the *Cambridge Companion for Modernism*, there is no reference to the association of these terms. However, in the 2011 edition there are four additional chapters referring to that, among which one is entitled *Modernism and Colonialism*.

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<sup>45</sup> The paper was initially published by Field Day and is now included in Fredric Jameson, *The Modernist Papers*, Cornwall, Verso, 2016.

At first, “Fredric Jameson’s argument, [using the example of Woolf’s *The Voyage Out*] — that colonialism’s dispersed and unknowable forms of economic activity filter into modernist works at the level of style — has seemed highly speculative to some critics. But *The Voyage Out* invites us to consider its departure from generic conventions precisely in terms of the unknowable geography of production in the imperial metropolis.<sup>46</sup>”

*Modernism and Empire* is “the first book-length study that seeks to explore the persuasive but complex interrelations between British colonialism and the modern movement<sup>47</sup>”, as claimed by the editors Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby, who also argue that:

Modernism can be seen as just part of modernity, which began [...] with the Renaissance and has only been critiqued, analysed, and perhaps surpassed by postmodernity in the late twentieth century. A major issue in the philosophy to modernity is the relation of self to other, and the power relations involved. The critique of modernity has involved examining how the modern subject was also an inherently “colonizing” subject. Couze Venn has argued that the subject in modernity has a constitutional instability that requires the “other” to be at once present and subjugated. [...]: “The colonized becomes the object through Western ‘man’ absolves and resolves himself. [...] Western imperialism is the expression of this subjugative and subjectifying enterprise. It functions as a proof of the power, righteousness and authority of the Western modern subject.<sup>48</sup>” In this account, the modern — with *modernism* at its end before the inauguration of postmodern critique — is saturated to its core with colonialist attitudes.<sup>49</sup>

The aim of examining Katherine Mansfield, Jean Rhys and Virginia Woolf together in this dissertation is to highlight the colonial features of the three writers. That does not mean that their Modernist features are forgotten; on the contrary, one can use Modernism to bring colonialism to the surface. Let us consider Modernism as a background for this dissertation study on which one builds up the pillars, which are in this case represented by colonialism. In writing one always influences the other. For example, Elleke Boehmer and Steven Matthews, in *Modernism and Colonialism*, emphasize the way colonialism made Modernism possible, which shows that the two concepts belong together on many levels:

We suggest that empire (alongside war, urbanization, modernity itself) made Modernism possible — powered it, even if partly in reverse or negatively. The experience of colonial rule produced a cultural and aesthetic process that ultimately helped to trigger the delegitimation of that rule: the dissociation of

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<sup>46</sup> Jed Esty, “Virginia Woolf’s Colony” in Richard Began & Michael Valdez Moses (eds.), *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2007, p. 82.

<sup>47</sup> Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby (eds.), *Modernism and Empire*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Couze Venn, “History lessons: formation of subjects, (post)colonialism, and an Other project” in Bill Schwartz (ed.), *The Expansion of England: Race, Ethnicity and Cultural History*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 42-3.

<sup>49</sup> Booth and Nigel (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 3-4.

subjectivity, the dislocation of western sensibility, the valorization of the fragment, the reification of the alien, and the fascinated glance at the stranger.<sup>50</sup>

The creation of these values inside British imperial culture was possible only because of the phenomena initiated and shaped by the colonial rule. The colonial context made possible the kind of Modernism that developed around it.

Boehmer and Matthews emphasize this intersection between the two concepts by referring to Dipesh Chakrabarty<sup>51</sup> and his vision on this duality. The historian does not see Modernism in the colonial context as “a continuous line of progress but a layering of disjointed temporalities, Modernism in the context of a world-embracing anglophone empire emerged out of that empire’s concatenation of discontinuous cultural perceptions of time and space.<sup>52</sup>” The reference to time and space, and more importantly to the existence of different temporalities is emphasized here; the different “time-frames”, as Edward Said puts it, led to the emergence of Modernism in the colonial context. According to Said, Modernism was in a sense the release of energy produced by that intersection of different time-frames<sup>53</sup>.

In the well-known book of postcolonial criticism, *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin hold that: “modernity and modernism are rooted in empire”<sup>54</sup>. Modernism and colonialism are very much linked and that is exactly behind the question I chose for my dissertation, and also the choice of my corpus. My selection of writings of the three writers echoes this particular link between Modernism and colonialism, first because of the period in which they were written and also because of the reason that lies behind their writings: why and when they were written.

Historically speaking, the Modernist movement and the twentieth century period of colonial expansion coincide. Colonialism had its peak moments during the age of Modernism:

the British empire reached the height of its geographic expansion not in 1877; when Victoria was proclaimed empress of India, nor in the 1880s and 1890s when England made substantial territorial gains in Africa, but during the boom years of modernism: the early twentieth century, especially the period between the World Wars. In fact Britain’s influence expanded after the First World War on virtually all fronts.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Boehmer and Matthews, *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 287.

<sup>51</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000.

<sup>52</sup> Boehmer and Matthews in Levenson (ed.), *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 285.

<sup>53</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London, Cape, 1993, p. 276.

<sup>54</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Basingstoke, Routledge, 2002, 293.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Began & Michael Valdez Moses (eds.), *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2007, 2.

Thus, Modernism had a crucial role in the construction and influence of the empire itself. This temporal dimension is due to historical facts. Nonetheless, that temporal synchronicity created similarities in the way Modernism and colonialism treat the question of time. The past is undeniably linked to the present moment in both cases. Michael F. O'Riley refers to this connection using a critical approach inspired from the concept of haunting:

Postcolonial theory has relied, to a great extent, upon the idea of haunting in order to bring awareness of colonial history to the present while revising the conception of the contemporary nation and of cultural relations. The haunting of the colonial frequently turns on what is undoubtedly a well-intended desire to relate to the Other, the silenced, and the hidden<sup>56</sup>.

In postcolonial literature, past and present are inseparable. The characters being haunted by the past raise the following question: Does their condition allow them to fully experience the present? On the one hand, that connection of the past with the present creates a new one, that with their homeland. On the other hand, they manage to identify with the new culture found in the empire.

Modernist writing also treats the inter-dependence between past and present but from a different angle. For instance, Woolf mentions and develops several times in *Moments of Being* that there is no present without the past. She states that we need the past in order to be fully aware of the present moment:

The past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deeper river. Then one sees to the surface to the depths. In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, not that I am thinking of the past but that it is then that I am living most fully in the present. For the present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the present when its presses so close that you can feel nothing else, when the film on the camera reaches only the eye.<sup>57</sup>

Woolf's conception of being in the present moment requires the indispensable presence of the past.

Past and present cannot be separated. The two are one; that is a common theoretical concept to those disciplines, to the Modernist studies but also to the postcolonial ones. For instance, Mansfield's poems that I intend to analyze were written during a period of transition, in which the writer decided to turn to New Zealand and write about it due to her brother's death. On the other

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<sup>56</sup> Michael F. O'Riley, "Postcolonial Haunting: Anxiety, Affect, and the Situated Encounter" in *Postcolonial Text*, Ohio State University, Vol. 3, no 4, 2007, 1.

<sup>57</sup> Jeanne Schulkind (ed.), *Virginia Woolf: Moments of Being* (1976), London, Pimlico, 2002, 108.

hand, Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* was particularly chosen because of its setting in Paris, another important colonial metropole of the twentieth century.

In order better to understand the connection and interdependence between the two, Modernism, on the one hand, and colonialism on the other, the analysis of an excerpt is necessary. We will see the way the traces of a literary movement, such as Modernism and its juxtaposition with a political phenomenon, such as colonialism intertwine. The latter is most of the time felt due to the poetics that are to be created in the text, but also at the level of the writing itself.

Woolf, Mansfield, and Rhys's sentences, throughout their works, are rich in such instances. Colonial time, and colonialism in general, is expressed through Modernism, the process that it engages and the writing style associated to it. An example in this sense is to be found towards the end of Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, her novel published in 1966, well known because of its association of (post)modern and (post)colonial elements. *Wide Sargasso Sea* represents a key element of my corpus. It was written after a long period in which Rhys stopped writing; when she decided to go back to writing, she did something extremely unexpected and new for that period, since her new novel was set in the Caribbean dealing with a colonial context, but also since she passed in a way the limits of Modernism, and recreated it, through what we call today Postmodernism.

The following analysis will highlight this link and explain the way they work together in a Rhysian context. In the first part of the novel, the reader automatically perceives and engages with the first-person narration expressed by Antoinette, which means that we have to deal with an autodiegetic narrator. It is a passage that reveals Antoinette's inner thoughts and feelings, a characteristic of the Modernist style:

This was the second time I had my dream. Again I have left the house at Coulibri. It is still night and I am walking towards the forest. I am wearing a long dress and thin slippers, so I walk with difficulty, following the man who is with me and holding up the skirt of my dress. It is white and beautiful and I don't wish to get it soiled. I follow him, sick with fear but I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse. This must happen. Now we have reached the forest. We are under the tall dark trees and there is no wind. 'Here?' He turns and looks at me, his face black with hatred, and when I see this I begin to cry. He smiles slyly. 'Not here, not yet', he says, and I follow him, weeping. Now I do not try to hold up my dress, it trails in the dirt, my beautiful dress. We are no longer in the forest but in an enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall and the trees are different trees. I do not know them. There are steps leading upwards. It is too dark to see the wall or the steps, but I know they are there and I think, 'It will be when I go up these steps. At the top.' I stumble over my dress and cannot get up. I touch a tree and my arms hold on to it. 'Here, here.' But I think I will not go any further. The tree sways and jerks as if it is trying to throw me off. Still I cling and the seconds pass and each one is a thousand years.

'Here, in here,' a strange voice said, and the tree stopped swaying and jerking. (Jean Rhys, *WSS* [1966], London, Penguin Books, 2000, p. 34)

The way Modernism shapes itself is to be felt even from the first sentence of the excerpt. On the one hand, we have a temporal marker, "the second time", which marks a recurrence and then we have the motif of the dream. The uneasiness expressed by the phrase "with difficulty" is specific to a dreamlike atmosphere, but in this case it is also associated with hopelessness: the character is not willing to save herself. The fact that she "is not willing to save herself" can make us think of her acceptance of alienated and colonial condition. We can perceive the accumulated suffering that lies behind that hopelessness. The narration relies on Modernist traits, but also colonial ones. We can see how the barrier or the line that divides the two is very thin, almost imperceptible.

The character's refusal to help herself asserts the fact that she becomes withdrawn. The dim atmosphere experiences a new level; the reader gets to know the ambiance that the narrator intends to describe, one primarily involving the feelings and interior life of Antoinette: "I follow him, sick with fear", "I follow him, weeping", "I begin to cry". The feeling of fear and desperation is emphasized by the repetition of the phrase "I follow". Her entire being is "sick with fear", a construction stressing the limits of her feelings. The adjective "sick" is reinforced by "fear", rendering the intensity of Antoinette's emotions. The depression, as a pathology of coloniality, in which the characters have fallen along with their strong discomfort, almost protest, is underlined by the act of crying: "I begin to cry". The atmosphere described here in which "the trees are different trees. I do not know them" recalls the title of Rhys's earlier novel, *Voyage in the Dark*, also part of the corpus of this study. Through the unknown and the dark Rhys captures the colonial experience to which she tries to cling, but everything goes away in an infinite abyss: "Still I cling and the seconds pass and each one is a thousand years." The absence of definite time markers involves a time that stops, a marker of the Modernist fiction, and the desperate condition "still I cling" generated by the colonial context.

The first time when the character, Antoinette, loses her sense of being and hope is when we read the sentence: "I make no effort to save myself". The second phase is when she refuses any help from the others. Fear attracts passivity. Nevertheless, we can sense her trying to catch a glimmer of hope. The conditional clause "if anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse" transports the reader into an imaginary world where she would be saved, but only for a brief moment ... Rhys instantly urges the rhythm of the narration with the sentence that follows "This must happen". The verb "must" is the strongest modal verb in the English language. A total acceptance of her

condemned being is emphasized here. In this brief excerpt, the reader experiences a feeling similar to that of a roller coaster; energies filled with hope come and disappear just as easily. That gives an intense rhythm to the narration and also to Antoinette's situation. All these sentences emphasize the alienated and weighty condition of the character, which in turn expresses its colonial situation.

The passage that follows: "I do not try to hold up my dress, it trails in the dirt, my beautiful dress" maintains the tension started earlier. The narrator wants to highlight the loss of her own (possible) beautiful life. She does not try to hold up her dress, in the same way in which she is not making any effort to save herself. A passive life is a characteristic of the colonial context in which the narration transports the reader.

She lets the unknown drive her - "trees are different trees, I do not know them" but up to a certain point she thinks: "I think I will not go any further". Nature does not let her advance any more: "The tree sways and jerks as if it is trying to throw me off." She is trying to hold on to the tree but suddenly she realizes that it is too difficult. The expansion of time shows the difficulty of the task and the inability of the character to escape: "Still I cling and the seconds pass and each one is a thousand years". The "enclosed garden", with "the stone wall" also underline the inability to escape and the loss of any hope.

An existence between dream and reality is emphasized in the analyzed excerpt. It is a recurrent dream, in a dark atmosphere, one that recalls suffering and hopelessness. The place and time are uncertain, just like in a dream. The narrator is willing to locate the episode by using the adverb "here", which appears six times in this excerpt, but a general ambiance of uncertainty still reigns in the excerpt. The perception of the present moment, specific to Modernist fiction, is emphasized by the obscure and unknown landscape created by the colonial description of the forest, with "tall dark trees", in which "my dress [...] trails in the dirt, my beautiful dress". The repetition of the adverb "here" in "not here, not yet" underlines the absence of space. There is nonetheless a certain measure of time, but unrealistic and almost hyperbolic: "The seconds pass and each one is a thousand years".

The path that leads upwards is blocked. Advancement in the character's life is difficult, if not impossible. The inability to go further and continue the path emphasizes the colonial condition: "There are steps leading upwards. It is too dark to see the wall or the steps". The characters are stuck there; nature itself is an indicator in this sense. It is dark, and the narrator recalls a forest. Even if Antoinette's mind is clouded by fear, she is not ready to save herself or get saved, a scene that metaphorizes colonialism. The latter is seen here as a destiny that no one can escape, something



inevitable that “must happen”. The adverb “must” and its intensity, from a linguistic point of view, is an indicator in this sense.

Then, the forest turns into an “enclosed garden surrounded by a stone wall”. The stone wall could be a reference to the walls that were built to delimit space during the period in which colonialism held sway.

The main character of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is facing a crisis, one with herself and another one with her environment. Her feeling of alienation is present here: the juxtaposition of modern and colonial time makes this deeply embedded feeling to come to the surface.

The excerpt chosen made us picture Modernism and colonialism on the surface of a text, inside the poetics itself. This is where we can perceive their interconnection. We are now a step further into the argumentation of this first part, we are at a stage when the concept of *colonial time* itself gains space and meaning.

## 2. The meaning of colonial time

Time is a key concept in Modernist art. There were literary Modernists who were extensively preoccupied by the notion of time and the way they could reinvent the temporality of fiction such as novels, short fictions, essays, etc. Among the important figures who dealt with this issue we can cite: James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, etc. They dramatized, explored and questioned the cultural meaning of time. Therefore, Modernists reinvented time as an extended period or duration. A proper and well-known example in this sense would be Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, a novel that covers the action and development of a single day. Nonetheless, the reader experiences a real journey in time, as the plot shifts from one place to the other, from one time to the other. The reader is transported in various times and places, all exterior to the actual development of the day. It is through the characters' thoughts that this time travel is possible — as a consequence, colonial times and spaces are thus evoked and rendered alive.

The twentieth century creates an environment where Modernism and colonialism are linked and establish a unique context. The first question that one might ask is whether Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys are colonial writers or not. If so, do they belong to or come from a colonial background? In the case of Mansfield and Rhys, their colonial upbringing would undoubtedly justify their place in (the context of) colonial literature. The New Zealand origin of Mansfield lies behind the choice of her writing. Rhys writes about her lost Roseau, located in Dominica. The image of the Caribbean Islands along with that of the centre of the empire, where she writes from, is described from the angle of the colonizer. The same case applies to our writer from New Zealand. The most challenging author of this dissertation, Virginia Woolf, comes from a completely different background, yet in some ways close to that of the two other authors. Her reference in writing is the colonizer's framework. She has a rich colonial heritage behind her, due to her father and her husband, Leonard Woolf, as we shall see in the second part. All three authors come from a colonial background; the difference lies in the perspective in which they are placed regarding colonialism. Woolf was herself raised in a colonial environment and belongs to one. So far, there has been some research done that examines the colonial dimension of Woolf's works. Yet, things are not that clear and pertinent in Woolf's case. There are still things that could be said; research that could be extended and developed. So the question that arises is: Is Woolf a colonial figure? Can we talk about colonial influences concerning or found in Woolf's works? Is twentieth century colonial time visible in Woolf's texts? If yes, in what way? For instance, in 2015, Alan Chih-Chien Hsieh claims

that the term “postcolonial Woolf” elicits an “estranged intimacy” that “foregrounds a tension in this unusual combination”<sup>58</sup>. Once I have studied the fundamental traits of colonial history along with Woolf’s writings, it was this “unusual combination” that pushed me further throughout my studies. The first Woolfian novel mentioned as engaging colonial implications was *The Waves* with the publication of Jane Marcus’s *Britannia Rules “The Waves”* in 1992. She classifies Woolf’s novel as a critique of imperialism by asserting that it is a story of “the submerged mind of empire.”<sup>59</sup> Marcus develops her argument by stating the following:

Virginia Woolf’s novel *The Waves* has consistently been read as a work of high modernism, a novel of the thirties that is not a thirties novel. Its canonical status has been based on a series of misreadings of Woolf’s lyrical text as synonymous with and celebratory of upper-class genteel British culture.<sup>60</sup>

Marcus explains that by borrowing Coetzee’s “jagged time” of “rise and fall,” a phrase repeated throughout the novel, Woolf uses as a sign of the “fall” of British imperialism. It is true that imperialist history is divided into chapters called “the rise of...” or “the fall of ....” [...] But her interest is also in the relation of class (race and gender) to culture. The novel explores the way in which the cultural narrative “England” is created by an Eton/Cambridge elite<sup>61</sup>.

An equally old but still significant reference in Woolf’s colonialism is Kathy J. Phillips’s *Virginia Woolf against Empire*<sup>62</sup>. In a clearly written and solidly researched monograph, Phillips reads Woolf against a fascinating backdrop packed with the political, military, cultural, and intellectual tenor of her times, a backdrop which embodies both England’s hegemonic imperialist enterprise and the spirit of informed, conscientious resistance that Woolf advocated. Phillips pushes further what was once considered as a sensible implementation of a postcolonial critical sensibility — her awareness of how pervasively the ramifications of imperialism pervade Woolf’s England, and her certainty that Woolf is intensely attuned to these details — redeems Woolf’s novels from reductionist misreadings.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Alan Chih-Chien Hsieh, *An Estranged Intimacy with the World: The Postcolonial Woolf’s Planetary Love in The Voyage Out* in *Virginia Woolf: Writing the World*, Liverpool University Press, 2015.

<sup>59</sup> Jane Marcus, “Britannia Rules The Waves,” in Karen R. Lawrence (ed.), *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century “British” Literary Canons*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1992, p. 136.

<sup>60</sup> Jane, Marcus, “Britannia Rules The Waves” in *Hearts of Darkness: White Women Write Race*, Ithaca, New York, Rutgers University Press, 2004, p. 59-85.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Kathy J. Phillips, *Virginia Woolf Against Empire*, Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1994.

<sup>63</sup> Kathy J. Phillips, *Virginia Woolf against Empire*, book reviewed by Randy Malamud: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3201150>

Anna Snaith's 2015 article "Leonard and Virginia Woolf: Writing against empire" manifests interest in the colonial side of Woolf and the place that the "routes by which Woolf would have gained knowledge about colonial issues<sup>64</sup>". She observes the following:

Scholarship on Virginia Woolf has turned its attention increasingly to the representation of empire in her writing. This has manifested itself in a reordering of the Woolf canon, with texts such as *The Voyage Out* (1915) or "Thunder at Wembley" (1924) coming to the forefront. It has also meant engagement with the way London monumentalizes empire in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), for instance, or *The Years* (1937) as a novel peopled by the colonial returned.<sup>65</sup>

I also think that perceiving Woolf as colonial has come with a kind of "reordering" of the classical image that we have of this writer. Mrs Dalloway's London is a perfect example in this sense since in this novel the imperial centre gains a crucial meaning, both from a Modernist and colonialist perspective as well. Something similar happens with *The Years*, in which the time gap between the colonies and London constitutes a pertinent argument in a colonial sense, one that is at the forefront of the book.

Woolf's view of London is extremely rich, abundant and necessary to the current study. London represents a place where "economic systems<sup>66</sup>" and trade take place: "London is figured as a giant factory<sup>67</sup>", as Anna Snaith argues. Woolf is involved in the subtle "layers" of London society. The same applies to Rhys and Mansfield, to their perception of the colonies and the empire.

After having answered the question of the colonial belonging, a second question that we must discuss is the one related to the writers' literary choices, mainly what their writings were about. Do they write about the empire, the experience of the colonized or the entire colonial context of the twentieth century? Mansfield often recalls memories from her homeland, under the form of daily experiences in New Zealand, and the plot of her short stories often takes place in Wellington. Woolf is preoccupied by long descriptions of London, but also of the countryside, the latter being usually used as a critique of London. The most affected by the colonial circumstances seems to be Rhys. Her characters' alienation, pain and everyday struggle is substantial.

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<sup>64</sup> Anna Snaith, "Leonard and Virginia Woolf: Writing against empire", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 2015, Vol. 50(1), pp. 19–32, p. 20.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

London is the common place of writing for all three. Approximately at the same period of time, we have an image of London from three different but complementary perspectives. Woolf and Mansfield offer the reader a picture of the beginning of the century, whereas Rhys comes with a different side and introduces a possible illustration and interpretation of the mid-twentieth-century London and Paris as well.

Once we know the writers' colonial belonging and their literary choices, we can reflect upon their temporal perceptions. By dissecting colonial time in the past, present and future, one notices that each one is differently interpreted and received. In postcolonial studies, time integrates the present that is in a continuous interaction with the past, and an uncertain future, due to the questionable and unsettled present. The constant interaction of the past with the present is due to the fact that the clutches of the past need to be revealed. The past is linked to the present, but there is at the same time a certain split, a disconnection.

The instability of the present moment is emphasized by Homi K. Bhabha, a theoretician and literary critic. His idea is to use a metaphor that is expressed throughout a visual image. He suggests:

Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present', for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post': *postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism* ...<sup>68</sup>.

The present time is perceived as a time that is on the borderlines of existence; people have a shadowy or obscure way of survival. They do not perceive the present in its full expression and development. The way they see the world now was influenced by the previous era of colonialism. The question that automatically arises is: How did people perceive the present and the existence in general? What were the features of that specific time that they created? According to Bhabha, postcolonial studies have a strong affinity with what time means. The purpose of this dissertation is to try to understand the value that time has in a colonial context.

When speaking about the meaning of past and present times, I am interested in seeing the way in which the past is released or liberated, but also the manner in which the present creates itself anew by contact with the past. Homi Bhabha articulates the paradigm of past-present times when debating on the subject of the transmission of culture. He does this in a talk given at Harvard

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<sup>68</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Bury St Edmunds, Routledge, 1994, p. 1.

University, entitled “On Global Memory: Thoughts on the Barbaric Transmission of Culture”. He draws on Walter Benjamin to suggest that “memory (and cultural memory), does not just change the appearance of things, it displaces the angle of vision.<sup>69</sup>” Walter Benjamin’s theory is based on the *now of recognition*, rather than *resemblance*, the reconstruction in the moment or discourse of the present. On a different note, history is always anew, never resemblance, but recognition, reconstruction. There are two moments in time: before and after history. What has been the trauma and the now. That means that, by accessing the past in the now, the past can (be) change(d).

The phrase “colonial time” refers to the time lived and experienced in the centre of the empire itself, but also in the colonies. The study of the latter form of colonial time will involve a continual reference to the empire as well.

The following excerpt is taken from Katherine Mansfield’s “How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped”, a short story from 1910, but published in 1924 in *Something Childish and Other Stories*. It illustrates the life of a little girl who was “kidnapped” from home during a period in which New Zealand was a settler colony. The everyday life situations and struggles that occur inside a colony, as mentioned earlier, evoke a time that reveals a strong colonial background in New Zealand. That is also underlined in *Katherine Mansfield and the (Post)colonial* — a book that “explores Mansfield’s identity as a (post)colonial writer in relation to her foremost reputation as a European modernist”<sup>70</sup> — when the author points out that Mansfield’s short story “exposes the fissures and fractures of settler-colonial ideology.<sup>71</sup>” While familiarizing themselves with this text, readers can easily get familiar with the enthusiasm, happiness and excitement of the little girl. The so-called kidnapers, or the ones who will take the little girl for a walk, are two Maori women, a fact that is acknowledged from their looks: they wear multicoloured and vibrant clothes, they don’t wear any shoes and they are plump. The word “kidnapped” used in the title of the short story is used here cunningly to express the colonial background of the little girl. The irony used, or the whole narrative strategy of the story, is to be felt here: she is not actually kidnapped, because she feels happy when spending time with the two women. The title also draws the reader’s attention to the fact that the short story’s focus is on the way Pearl Button is kidnapped, by using the adverb “how”,

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<sup>69</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *On Global Memory: Thoughts on the Barbaric Transmission of Culture*, talk given on April 18, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Fp6j9Ozpn4&frags=pl%2Cwn>, last accessed August 17, 2018.

<sup>70</sup> <https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/book-katherine-mansfield-and-the-post-colonial.html>, last accessed: December 7, 2021.

<sup>71</sup> Lorenzo Mari, “‘How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped’: A (Post)colonial Family Romance” in Gerri Kimber, Delia da Sousa Correa and Janet Wilson (eds.), *Katherine Mansfield and the (Post)colonial*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2013, p. 69.

which reinforces the previously implied ironical hint. Moreover, this behaviour feels like a form of escape to her, given the uneasy situation that she faces and the settler-colonial environment. If we were to answer the title (by imaging a question mark), we would probably say that she was “kidnapped” mildly, harmlessly, or even gently. By simply answering the title, we could sense the colonial implications of the story of the little girl. A close reading reveals the even more subtle colonial nuances and the message that Mansfield intended to share with her readers:

She walked about in her petticoat and then she walked outside the grass pushing between her toes. The two women came out [...]. They took her hands. Over a little paddock through a fence, and then on warm sand with brown grass in it they went down to the sea. Pearl held back when the sand grew wet, but the women coaxed, “Nothing to hurt, very beautiful. You come.” They dug in the sand and found shells which they threw into the baskets. The sand was wet as mud pies. Pearl forgot her fright and began digging into. She got hot and wet, and suddenly over her feet broke a little line of foam. “Oo, oo!” she shrieked, dabbling with her feet. “Lovely, lovely!” She paddled in the shallow water. It was warm. She made a cup of her hands and caught some of it. But it stopped being blue in her hands. She was so excited that she rushed over to her woman and flung her little thin arms round the woman’s neck, hugging her, kissing ...

Suddenly the girl gave a frightful scream. The woman raised herself and Pearl slipped down on the sand and looked towards the land. Little men in blue coats — little blue men running, running towards her with shouts and whistlings — a crowd of little blue men to carry her back to the House of Boxes. (“How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped” in Ali Smith (ed.), Katherine Mansfield: *The Collected Stories*, London, Penguin Group, 2007, p. 519)

The little girl experiences a feeling, the text suggests, unknown to her, that of freedom. The feeling that she acknowledges is to be noticed from the very beginning: the noun “petticoat” is an indicator of the excitement, freedom and abandonment felt by the girl. The girl is not wearing any clothes, the petticoat is a metaphor for the pure, almost naked or little female body in a Victorian British colony. It is her true self that resurfaces. The sentence goes on to highlight even more the effect created: “she walked outside the grass pushing between her toes”. While reading this sentence, we have the impression that she is being liberated from a certain entrapment. She almost does not know how to perceive that all at once. The whole landscape represents freedom, which stands in opposition with Pearl Button’s seemingly (harsh and) rigid life. When facing the sea, for instance, she seems to be frightened, hence the reaction of the women who assure her that there is nothing to hurt there. After a while, she overcomes her fear and begins digging into the sand. She even enjoys the sea after all. The sea is warm — the little girl is now in an acknowledged territory. Her excitement reveals enjoyment, just like after being released from some sort of imprisonment, or perhaps getting a break from the settlement. The confirmation of the existence of this double world occurs when the girl

looks towards the land and “(gives) a frightful scream”. At this moment she remembers who she is and also confronts herself with her actual life. The “frightful scream” reveals a sign of her being afraid of going back to her former colonial life. A couple of “little men in blue coats” come to take her back, an even stronger expression is used here: “to carry” or to move her back to where she belongs, to the House of Boxes. The little girl’s freedom is compromised again. The men in blue coats probably represent the Pakeha, usually associated with dullness, at the other end being the Maori, who are characterized by freedom. The Pakeha or the European New Zealanders were actually early European settlers, and the Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand. Majumdar emphasizes the reading of that “boredom”, characterized by the Pakeha or settler society, as a colonial condition<sup>72</sup>. Colonial time overwhelms the little girl’s being and turns her behaviour out of control. This last paragraph is almost cut off from the rest of the text, as if there were two separate things. Fear and the urge to go back to her place control her body. It is mainly that urge that leads her to face the reality of colonialism.

It is interesting to notice Pearl Button’s two diametrically opposed attitudes: she enjoys herself while spending time with the Maori women, but is afraid when the blue men show up. Suddenly some “little men in blue coats” start to run and come towards her. These are white men who want to get her back to the “House of Boxes”. The name of the house itself reveals entrapment, where freedom is limited and also sacrificed. Furthermore, Mansfield uses the plural form here. She chooses the noun “house” instead of “home”. The girl’s experience of home is far from being that of a real home, and that is due to the colonial background of the country itself. The colonial background creates an alienated colonial time that transforms the experience of home into one of estrangement and dislike, even fear, as the text builds up. Mansfield’s interest in the poetics of home is to be found in other short stories, such as “The Garden Party”, “Prelude” or “At the Bay” and in numerous poems as well.

Home here is no more a place of joy and unity, but rather of dislocation and entrapment. The short story revolves around two diametrically opposed feelings or attitudes: there is, on the one hand, the fear and alienation expressed by the little girl towards her home, and, on the other hand, the joy and model of home when speaking about the life that the women in the story had to offer. Roslyn Jolly from the University of New South Wales (Australia) points out the difference between the two cultures present in New Zealand, the Pakeha and the Maori: “The story expresses

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<sup>72</sup> Saikat Majumdar, “Katherine Mansfield and the Fragility of Pakeha Boredom” in *Modernism and the Banality of Empire*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013, p. 78.



Mansfield's alienation from the Pakeha culture in which she was raised, and presents the Maori way of life as an antidote to the sterility, mechanism and commodification of modern European civilization.<sup>73</sup> Mansfield compares the two cultures, the Pakeha and the Maori. By doing that, she communicates her dislike of the colonial society and what that has to offer. According to Anna Snaith, the story reveals even more than that: in her well-known book on Modernist and colonial women writers, she states that "How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped" is an "anti-colonial celebration of Maori over settler society<sup>74</sup>". Anna Snaith's reflection emphasizes an obvious colonial touch: by attacking the European settlers, the indigenous people are accordingly made superior, and described in a positive light.

There is another feature of the story that once again presents British imperialism but from a different perspective. Mansfield chooses the little girl as the protagonist of the story. Snaith adds that the little girl's condition and identity are used to characterize the Maori as "a primitive, childlike community<sup>75</sup>". The short story allocates several moments to emphasize the girl's uneasiness, we could even call it clumsiness, towards the Maori context and its customs, ways. Let's take, for instance, the passage right before the one that has just been analyzed. The extract, and the short story itself, casts a glance at the true colonial image of the colony:

There were some men on the floor, smoking, with rugs and feather mats round their shoulders. One of them made a funny face and he pulled a great big peach out of his pocket and set it on the floor, and flicked it with his finger as though it were a marble. It rolled right over to her. Pearl picked it up. "Please can I eat it?" she asked. At that they all laughed and clapped their hands, and the man with the funny face made another at her and pulled a pear out of his pocket and sent it bobbling over the floor. Pearl laughed. The women sat on the floor and Pearl sat down too. The floor was very dusty. She carefully pulled up her pinafore and dress and sat on the petticoat as she had been taught to sit in dusty places, and she ate the fruit, the juice running all down her front. (*How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped*, 2007, p. 521)

From the first sentence, the colonial environment invades the reader's mind: "There were some men on the floor, smoking, with rugs and feather mats round their shoulders." The first part of the passage illustrates a stereotypical colonial image, or a colonial *cliché*, as one may call it: men sitting on the floor while eating and picking up food from earth level. The dusty places make us certainly think of the colonial environments as well. The way the author highlights the characteristics of the environment is worth noting: "The floor was very dusty." The adverb "very" could be taken as a

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<sup>73</sup> Roslyn Jolly, "Children of Empire: Rereading Katherine Mansfield's 'How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped'", *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 16 (2), 2017, p. 86 - 107.

<sup>74</sup> Anna Snaith, *Modernist Voyages: Colonial Women Writers in London, 1890-1945*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 127.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

criticism against the colonial middle-class values. The second part of the passage reveals an antithesis between the European settlers and the Maoris, a feature also analyzed above. The passage as a whole reveals this distinction of identity. The girl not being used to that kind of gesture, and her effort in adjusting, create a humorous touch in the readers' minds, all the more so since the laughter appears on the men's face and on Pearl's as well. Two types of ironical techniques meet here: the irony manifested from the men and the innocent, probably unknown, self-irony shown by the girl. The name of the girl is suggestive in this passage; its significance has a major role in the whole story since it is revealed even from the title. The noun "Pearl" reminds me of something valuable, bringing to mind the expensive jewel itself or the expression "jewel in the worm" meaning colonial India. The Oxford Dictionary lists as a second meaning the following: "a person or thing of great worth<sup>76</sup>". The noun "button" makes us think of something small, which in association with the previous noun "pearl", confirms its uniqueness and preciousness. In that case, the noun "pearl" shall replace the noun "button". It is similar to being confronted with a pleonasm.

In this, a clear antithesis is drawn: there is the superior Western society represented by the white men (in this case the girl) and, on the other hand, we have the colonial people represented by the "men (who sit) on the floor". The petticoat saves her from becoming "dusty", she uses it to protect herself, whereas in the following passage the petticoat changes meaning and comes to represent freedom and rebirth. This means that the colonial time is being attributed to a double meaning: that of protection, of being careful — "She carefully pulled up her pinafore and dress and sat on the petticoat" — of being aware of danger ... and that of freedom, rebirth and experience of joy. The girl sits "on the petticoat as she had been taught to sit in dusty places", which all the more highlights the distinction between the two nations, and the superiority of white people.

Now that the meaning of colonial time is clear and explicit, it will become necessary to establish the connection between the writers chosen for this study. This will help in repositioning and contextualizing colonial time, the main topic of this dissertation.

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<sup>76</sup> English Oxford Living Dictionaries, source: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/pearl>, last visited: October 23, 2018.

### 3. Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys: a joint study

The writers' diversity and relevance in this study comes from the differentiated positions in the (same) colonial system. Katherine Mansfield comes from Wellington, the capital of New Zealand. Jean Rhys is originally from Roseau, the capital of Dominica, located in the Caribbean Islands. Virginia Woolf comes from London.

Virginia Woolf is most likely seen as one of the most famous female authors of the twentieth century. A famous, notorious but also memorable relationship of the Modernist literary movement is the relationship between Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield, one with sharp edges perhaps, since in their case friendship went hand in hand with rivalry. Katherine Mansfield was Virginia Woolf's literary rival and friend, as Woolf herself acknowledged. Only one week after Mansfield's death, Woolf confessed in her diaries: "I was jealous of her writing — the only writing I have ever been jealous of. Probably we had something in common which I shall never find in anybody else."<sup>77</sup> With rivalry, there was also appreciation. Woolf, with a clear vision about her writing, exclaims in one of the letters that she addressed to her friend: "You seem to me to go so straightly and directly — all clear as glass — refined, spiritual."<sup>78</sup> To Janet Case, a British classical scholar, Woolf confessed about "Bliss": "I've not read K. Mansfield, and don't mean to. I read 'Bliss', and it was so brilliant — so hard, and so shallow, and so sentimental that I had to rush to the bookcase for something to drink. Shakespeare, Conrad, even Virginia Woolf."<sup>79</sup> By "something to drink" she seemingly meant something that could in a way bring her back on earth: her writing shocked her in a positive way but not only. After reading Mansfield, she needed to escape into "genuine writing", such as Shakespeare or Conrad, or even herself, as a way of reassuring herself and her superiority regarding Mansfield.

The correspondence between Woolf and Mansfield is significant; the two even used to see each other occasionally. Woolf's diary testifies the literary connection between them. In her 1920 journal entry, she states: "To no one else can I talk in the same disembodied way about writing, without altering my thought more than I alter it in writing here. (I except L. from this.)"<sup>80</sup> In the same year, there are recollections found in Mansfield's letters as well: "I wonder if you know what

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<sup>77</sup> Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew Mc Neillie (eds.), *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 2, London, The Hogarth Press, 1977-84, p. 227.

<sup>78</sup> Joanne Trautmann Banks, *Congenial Spirits, The Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf* [1989], Chatham, Pimlico, 2003.

<sup>79</sup> Virginia Woolf's letter to Janet Case, 20th of March 1922, in Nigel Nicolson, Joanne Trautmann (eds.), *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: The Question of Things Happening (vol. II 1912-1922)*, London, The Hogarth Press, p. 514.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

"L." stands for Leonard here, Woolf's husband.

your visits were to me — or how much I miss them. You are the only woman with whom I long to talk work. There will never be another.<sup>81</sup>” They knew and had easy access to each other’s works; besides, Woolf and her husband, Leonard, even published some of her works with The Hogarth Press, the publishing house created by the couple. Mansfield died when she was only 34 years old, whereas Woolf published her first novel when she was 33.

According to John Middleton Murry’s edition of Mansfield’s *Journal*, published posthumously in 1927, Virginia Woolf declared: “She is a writer, a born writer. Everything she feels, and hears and sees is not fragmentary and separate, it belongs together as writing.”<sup>82</sup> Such a declaration from someone so prolific as Woolf, who had the opportunity to read a large quantity of works of various writers is indeed crucial, all the more so as it is a comment on the meaningful skills of a writer. Deep inside her own being, Woolf felt admiration towards Mansfield’s works, and liked her for the writer and literary friend that she found in her. As a consequence, Mansfield’s death came as a shock to Woolf; she felt distress. It was a moment of revelation for Woolf, since she realized her friends’ contribution and the loss that she was about to experience. As Woolf’s biographer, Hermione Lee notes: “The echo had gone: “Katherine won’t read it. Katherine’s my rival no longer. There’s no competitor. I’m a cock — a lonely cock whose crowing nothing breaks — of my walk.”<sup>83</sup> In Lee’s view, the image of the echo that has gone illustrates the actual closeness and unison of the two writers, which in turn highlights Woolf’s metaphor of the “lonely cock” whose existence is no more threatened nor disturbed by noise.

Previous research has underlined the connection and common ground between Woolf and Mansfield, but also between Mansfield and Rhys. Woolf is a worldwide literary reference; however, Mansfield’s contribution was significant as well: she revolutionized the twentieth century English short story. Chronologically speaking, both Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield belong to the early Modern twentieth-century tradition, but Jean Rhys’s writing is traditionally included in the mid-twentieth century literary Modernism, even if her literary career began later on. In the 1920s and 1930s Rhys published several short stories and novels, or novellas, such as *The Left Bank and Other Stories* (1927), *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1931), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), or *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). After a period of break, she made a successful comeback by publishing *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which instantly became a best-seller. Of all three she is the least well

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<sup>81</sup> Vincent O’Sullivan and Margaret Scott (eds.), *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, vol. 4, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 154.

<sup>82</sup> John M. Murry, *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, p. 256.

<sup>83</sup> Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 398.

known; nevertheless, her contribution to Modernist and postcolonial literature is significant. It is notable how she is the only one who is both a Modern/colonial figure and a key author of postcolonial literature.

Jean Rhys could also easily have access to the writers' works at that period and was certainly interested if not influenced by them, especially if we think of Mansfield. An influence in this sense is the comparison that she makes between her own self and Mansfield's characters:

Things aren't so good. Max has got into an awful jam at the office, has left and set up with a new partner. The less said about *him* the better. Maybe I'm wrong for I am so often — Here's hoping — Altogether I feel like Katherine Mansfield's fly after it was drowned the sixth time or was it the seventh? (*L*, p. 68)

Rhys and Mansfield were both born in the British colonies only two years apart: Mansfield in 1888, Rhys in 1890. We can recall similarities linked to the topics that they were interested in and that they included in their writings: they both wrote about issues related to their homeland: what it meant to lack the feeling of home, and the sense of security that the presence of home could possibly give. Another significant topic of their writings included love affairs, mainly perceived as failures. They were both women who came from the colonies and needed a man in order to make themselves more visible, especially from a literary perspective, and that shows how their love affairs are connected with colonialism. They are also connected with Modernism, yet in a very different way. Both Mansfield and Rhys travelled across Europe and tried to maintain their relationships with their partners, which was never an easy affair. Modernism brought them in cities like Paris, Vienna, or countries like Poland or Germany, but they also made their relationships more difficult.

Once we get to know them from a biographical point of view, another distinction is automatically and instantly made, a historical one. Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys have not gone through or experienced colonialism from the point of view of the *colonized*, they have been in more privileged positions. On the other hand, we situate Virginia Woolf who perceives the entire idea of colonialism from a different perspective, that of the *colonizer*; but not exclusively; there is also the issue of the link between imperialism and patriarchy, which she explicitly experienced and deconstructed. Throughout the study, we will see how important, if not crucial, it is to have three different perspectives. If we were to have a look only at Mansfield and Rhys, we would undoubtedly have a unilateral view of the topic treated. Woolf's presence in this study may be unexpected — since not many of the Woolfian experts have investigated Woolf's colonial features

— but the more we analyze and pore over the Woolfian corpus, the more we will sense the depth and necessity of such a study.

A joint study of the three women writers therefore raises the question of incongruity. There are no questions of race here. We are dealing with white authors; even if Rhys is Creole, she is still “white”. In post-colonial studies, race and gender are two major issues. Nonetheless, the question that we will examine here is not mainly related to their racial positioning, even if race is not absent in their writings. The question of gender is a common aspect of the three that we will take into consideration and develop whenever the issue of womanhood comes up.

Furthermore, a close look at the relationship between Mansfield and Rhys will explain the choice of authors for this study. The political and historical aspects intertwine in this study as it does more generally in post-colonial studies. Even if Mansfield and Rhys are both colonial authors, it is notable to see the different ways in which they have been affected and shaped by colonialism, this major historical and political context. The way they perceive colonialism and the manner in which this context is transmitted to their works has been greatly influenced by the actual invasion of colonialism in these two territories, respectively New Zealand and the Caribbean, and the way it has been carried out. Therefore, they both have been shaped by colonialism, but in different forms.

Mansfield’s direct contact with England began when she was a teenager. At the age of 15 she came to London to complete her studies. Along with her sisters, she attended Queen’s College. After finishing her studies and travelling in continental Europe, she moved back to New Zealand but only briefly; two years later, in 1908 she decided to return to London, a place that was to become her home for the rest of her life. Back home she started to write and publish in journals and magazines. She also started to use her pen name, *Katherine Mansfield*, which replaced her actual name, Kathleen Mansfield Murry, née Beauchamp. Besides the short story genre that made her well known, she also wrote poems. The brevity in writing and the capacity of analyzing facts of life in a profound way are features of Mansfield’s writing, which also bear her signature. She was in love with short stories. She lived in a period when major changes took place in the construction of the English short story forms. Marvin Magalaner emphasizes the historical and literary effects of World War I on Mansfield and the short story fiction: “she wrote at a time (at the time of the First World War) when a breakthrough in the representation of reality was not only desirable but also possible in

the English short story.<sup>84</sup> The war brought out new ways of writing, new traditions, that's why Modernism was never the same after the war.

Mansfield has a preference for descriptions, which she expresses in her short stories, but also poems. A glimpse of an afternoon, or a brief part of a day are common for Mansfield. Her struggle with longer literary genres and reluctance to approach the novel form is expressed by the writer herself: "I thought a few minutes ago, that I could have written a whole novel about a liar. A man who was devoted to his wife, but who lied. But I couldn't. I couldn't write a whole novel about anything. I suppose I shall write stories about it."<sup>85</sup>

At the heart of her choosing the short story form lie multiple reasons, among which one related to a meaningful temporal question that we shall discuss in detail throughout the dissertation. For instance, "The Aloe" provided the original title of earlier draughts of her well-known short story, "Prelude", but at this point Mansfield intended to write a novel<sup>86</sup>. She was more concerned in analyzing the interior lives of the characters and what they felt, rather than narrating a multitude of actions linked to the surroundings and the outer lives of the characters. Nevertheless, she immersed herself in the experience of novel writing right before her death, the latter disabling her to finish the work.

Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams known under the pen name of *Jean Rhys*, was born and raised in Dominica. At the age of 16, she was sent to England accompanied by her aunt. She attended a girls' school, in Cambridge, part of the Stephen Perse Foundation. Rhys's status as a foreigner, of someone coming from another land, was obvious from her very first experience with England. At school she was mocked for being an outsider and also for her accent. Her family's descendants explain her Creole origin. Rhys's descendants were from Europe, mainly Welsh and Scots. Her father was a Welsh doctor and her mother, even if, of third-generation Creole, was of Scottish ancestry. Mansfield's and Rhys's contact with England and settling down there comes at an early age. They both came to England at nearly the same age and decided to make a living there given the historical context, the richness and number of possibilities offered by a city such as London. That precise cultural, historical and political context is reflected in their writings. We are

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<sup>84</sup> Marvin Magalaner, *The Fiction of Katherine Mansfield*, Illinois, Southern Illinois University Press, 1971, p. 131.

<sup>85</sup> Julia van Gunsteren, *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Impressionism*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1990, p. 92.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

interested in the effects of power that can be perceived and understood throughout the literature of that period. It is the pragmatic relationship and the socio-cultural effects of literature that post-colonial studies, and this dissertation in particular, is looking for. The pointing out of such aspects of the period followed by their analyses will enlighten the colonial implications that hide in the shadows.

Adeline Virginia Woolf, née Stephen, was born in London. Her parents were Leslie and Julia Stephen, her mother being descended from an Anglo-Indian family. When one thinks of Virginia Woolf, one most often thinks of either *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) or *A Room of One's Own* (1929), two masterpieces of the respective genres. The former writing is one of her best-known novels, which entails one day of Clarissa Dalloway's life, a character present in a post-First World War England context. As regards the other, *A Room of One's Own*, it constitutes a foundational text of feminism for a period having a literary tradition dominated by men. Woolf's colonial references in her writings are rich and accurate, especially given that her life came down to her homeland, she never stepped outside Europe. Nigel Nicolson notes:

Virginia never travelled outside western and southern Europe, apart from her two short visits to northern Turkey before her marriage. Her only interest in the Far East was prompted by Arthur Waley's translations from the Chinese. She never visited any part of Africa, never flew in an aeroplane, and never crossed the Atlantic. Although she had two or three invitations to visit America, she never did.<sup>87</sup>

She never had the possibility to really see those colonial places that she talks about in her writings, a fact that is implied in her diary. We also know that besides writing, she spent a lot of her time reading; she enjoyed and was interested in historical and political issues. Her knowledge of history was impressive. In this sense, it is interesting to see the look and also the perspective that these writers had on the issue of colonialism.

If we were to picture them on a map, geographically speaking, we would see that they form a triangle that includes the vastness of the British empire: the imperial centre and the colonies that surround it. It is a question of involving three different points of the colonial world. If we imagine the triangle, Woolf is at the top; Mansfield and Rhys are on the same line. From a colonial perspective, the Northern hemisphere is looking down on the Southern hemisphere. This theory was richly researched by the postcolonial critics, namely Edward Said who states: "At some very basic level, imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is

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<sup>87</sup> Nigel Nicolson, *Virginia Woolf*, New York, Penguin, 2000.



distant, that is lived on and owned by others.<sup>88</sup> Colonialism is stated by Said as being almost always the consequence of imperialism.<sup>89</sup>

Colonial London comes alive through the writers' works. Moreover, most of the stories of their writings (novels, short stories but also journals and letters) take place in London. London is a city of reference, *a figure of time*, which will help us identify, describe and understand colonial time at multiple levels: social, political, historical, cultural, etc.

Throughout the analysis that we are going to undertake, we will see that everything revolves around the centre of the British Empire. It is the place where everything starts, where every movement begins. London is the place of desire, so much idolized by Rhys and Mansfield; when back in the colonies, their most cherished dream was to live in that city. Mansfield and Rhys's writings decipher what it is like to experience such a longing and how the actual contact with the English people is established. The characters' colonial experience is double: on the one hand, they come from a colonial background and, on the other, they live in a London colonial context. That especially applies to Rhys: most of her relevant writings take place in London, except *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which has a Caribbean setting and *Good Morning, Midnight*, in which case the chosen location is Paris. Mansfield's attachment to her homeland is expressed in the choice of her setting. The scenes of her short stories take place in Wellington and sometimes London.

On the other hand, Virginia Woolf had access to London, not only because it was the place where she came from and the environment that surrounded her, but also the education that she received. First of all, she is connected to London through her father, the great intellectual and editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Her other great influencer was undeniably her husband, Leonard Woolf. He had a marked colonial background; he was a colonial administrator in Sri Lanka before marrying Woolf, between 1904 and 1911. There were some other factors that contributed to her having access to the London life. Along with her husband, she created the Hogarth Press. She had the opportunity to meet plenty of people via the Hogarth Press but also the Bloomsbury group that she (and Mansfield) went to. Woolf chooses the city of London as the setting of most of her writings.

Each writer has a diversity of writings, and the aim was to choose those that underline and express the best the dimension of colonial time. Besides, the literary genres used by them are

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<sup>88</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

numerous, starting with the prose form (such as novels, short stories, and novellas in the case of Rhys) and continuing with poems. Special attention will be dedicated to the study of the private writings, which include diaries and letters. A particular place will be given to the study of this last category, in order to complete the previous chapters of the dissertation, which deal with the writers' fictional works. The aim is to show that colonial time can also be found in their private writings, as well as in their fictional ones. The poems will also shed some new light on Mansfieldian and Rhysian studies. A new collection of poems written by Mansfield was published in 2016, containing 217 poems. The most significant poems relevant for this study will be analyzed.

When referring to Katherine Mansfield, the particularity of her writing style is the short story. We will thus use her short stories, published under the name of *The Collected Stories* (1945). Several stories included in this collection will be given particular attention in order to reveal the meaning of colonial time in Mansfield's work along with the temporal dimension that the said genre holds. Among these: "The Woman at the Store" (1911), "Millie" (1913), "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" (1920), "At the Bay" (1921), "The Doll's House" (1922), and "The Garden Party" (1922). We will focus on these particular stories because they are rich in colonial signifiers, which will lead us to read the poetics concerning colonial time.

Another collection of writings that will help the reader enter the Mansfieldian universe consists of her journal, which was published by her husband, John Middleton Murry, in 1954. These private writings allow us to seize the dimension of time from a different perspective than by analyzing a work of fiction. A journal is a record of various and significant experiences, which gives important details of a writer's life. When discovering a writer's journal, the reader has access to his/her thoughts, feelings and perception of the world, and above all to the practice of writing. The reader can also access important and various information regarding the background and context that surrounded the writer and the linear unfolding of events. It can be a very useful tool when looking for ways to understand a topic such as the colonial time since it bears reminiscences and reports on the most important events of the century in question, with its specific poetics. In Mansfield as in Woolf's case, we can, for instance, read the way they interpreted and lived the First World War and the way they responded to the entire colonial situation over the successive decades. The First World War changed the perception of the people, including that of the writers. Besides, by deciphering the temporality of the private writings, the regularity with which they wrote in it, the ellipses and fragmentations that are present in the text due to the circumstances, the people that they used to

communicate with, etc. ... we access a unique temporality that has the ability to enrich and eventually change our perception and understanding of colonial time.

Mansfield's love for the short form is to be found in her poems as well. We will use several poems from the complex edition of *Collected Poems* (2016) that recently became available. We can see, for instance, how she faces the tragedy of losing her brother. It is a defining moment in her life that shapes the course of her existence and affects her work. The already-existing feelings of homesickness along with love, nostalgia and admiration towards her childhood and her homeland, New Zealand, come to the surface. Poems such as "To L.H.B. (1894-1915)" (1916), "'Last night for the first time since you were dead'" (1916), or "The Gulf" (1916) express the author's sorrow for her brother's death. During her stay in Bandol<sup>90</sup> she wrote some of her poems, such as "The New Husband" (1919), "Arrivée" (1918), thinking about her existence and the fact that she cannot find her place. "Arrivée" begins with a sentence that reminds us of Jean Rhys's writing: "I seem to spend half of my life arriving at strange hotels<sup>91</sup>". Jean Rhys's lack of home and constant moving from one place to another, especially from one hotel to the other, is at the heart of Mansfield's writing as well.

Jean Rhys's selection of works includes novels and letters. The specificity of Jean Rhys's style are the novels that have a short length (over a hundred pages), or novellas. The novels under study are *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and her unfinished autobiography *Smile Please* (1979), which was published posthumously. In *Voyage in the Dark*, the poetics of colonialism are very much present. Once settled in London, the protagonist Anna feels alienated and cannot find her place. No matter how much she tries, she still has the feelings of being an outsider. Past and present are simultaneously present in this work since Anna cannot stop recalling her life before moving to London. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the location is the West Indies. It is considered to be a response or a "prequel" to Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*, with implications that are mainly feminist and anti-colonial. Nancy R. Harrison seizes the link between *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929): "The whole of *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be seen to complete the 'woman's sentence' that, more than fifty years ago, Virginia Woolf despaired of

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<sup>90</sup> Two years ago, in June 2016, I had the opportunity to go to Bandol and attend a conference on Mansfield. I presented a paper on the poetics of colonial time in two of Mansfield's short stories, "Prelude" and "At the Bay". We can see the aloe that Mansfield fervently talks about in her works, both short stories and poems. That vegetation is to be found in New Zealand as well, hence her interest in the plants. It was a wonderful experience that helped me in understanding Mansfield's world and literary creations.

<sup>91</sup> Gerri Kimber and Claire Davison (eds.), *The Collected Poems of Katherine Mansfield*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 125.

finding.<sup>92</sup> The postcolonial perspective is self-explanatory as Rhys develops some major themes such as racism, assimilation issues, migration and uprooting, etc. After having analyzed the fictional works of Rhys, we will proceed to the analysis of her autobiography and correspondence. Rhys's *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography* (1979) is a biography that appeared while she was still alive (along with *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) ; she was very careful about the information that she shared with the public and her request was not to publish any biography during her lifetime, except the ones she wrote herself. We will use her autobiography to see the way she perceived colonial time and also her collection of *Letters*, edited by Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly, including the period between 1931 and 1966. The letters were gathered and published only in 1984. They are a significant and useful tool in the understanding of her fictional writings. The way Rhys talks about London and the West Indies can be considered a sequel not necessarily of the writings themselves but of the perception that we have after having read her writings. They serve and help the reader to understand the context and period that colonial London went through better, which are undeniably part of her poetics. Moreover, they are enriched with details about the London context and the literary genres that she was engaged in.

Virginia Woolf's writings are not only numerous, but they are also charged with historical, cultural and political significance. Her particularity consists of sharing so much information in so little writing; sometimes, a page is enough for Woolf to contextualize the historical and political effects that colonialism had in the twentieth century. She has the capacity to draw hidden meanings in each of her texts. When focusing on the colonial features of Woolf's writings, the reader can be surprised to discover a variety of colonial references in her texts. For instance, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), one of the works included in the corpus, contains lots of subtle references to the empire and the colonies. In spite of being a Modernist work *par excellence*, it abounds in colonial references. That is only a confirmation of the existing link between modernism and colonialism. Another Woolfian novel dedicated to this study is *The Years* (1937), which contains plenty of colonial references. It is the last novel published in her lifetime. Here the attention is mainly on Britain, precisely on the life of London and the countryside. Each chapter begins with a report on Britain's changing weather, which constitutes a mirror of the changing period of the empire. After having set up the general context, a description of the characters follows. Important colonial events are mentioned and described, such as the First World War. This dissertation will include and argue why

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<sup>92</sup> Nancy R. Harrison, *Jean Rhys and the Novel as Women's text*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1988, 130.

war can be considered as a colonial time reference. The war is also linked to the city of London; we will see, for example, in Woolf's journals how she longs to go to the countryside and quit London because of the sudden war. The question of war has a prominent place in Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938). It is an essay written in 1938, a year before the Second World War began. Woolf's historical and political approach demonstrates her mastery of the essay genre. Including this work in the corpus of the current study will help in understanding the connection between war and colonialism. Moreover, it will reconnect us to the question of feminism, one that also has its place and importance in this study. Woolf portrays the link between war and feminism. The latter helps in the understanding of colonial time since feminism is an important issue of the twentieth century. I think that when studying colonial time, it is essential, if not crucial, to choose the fundamental movements of the century, such as feminism. The last work that I intend to analyze is *A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf* (1954). It is a selective edition published by Leonard Woolf and which gathers the "most important" journal entries that she has written during a period of twenty-seven years: details on her own writing, records of people and events that she attended and that she later used in her literary works, etc. I include this in the corpus of this study as a work, because of the impossibility to treat here the whole collection of Woolf's letters. This would probably be the subject of another dissertation.

Overall, the corpus of the study has an extraordinary significance. One work will complete the other in order to arrive at an accurate representation of our problematics. The writers will be analyzed individually but also together, by comparing one to the other.

This first chapter served to sketch out the general context of this dissertation. After having established the link between Modernism and colonialism, the importance of studying colonial time, and the way these three writers perfectly work together for this study, it is now time to examine the writers' colonial upbringing and the heritage that each one brings in.

## II. Colonial Situations: Context and Heritage

*The mind I love must have wild places, a tangled orchard where damsons drop in the heavy grass, an overgrown little wood, the chance of a snake or two, a pool that nobody's fathomed the depth of, and path threaded with flowers planted by the mind.* (Katherine Mansfield, *Notebooks*, vol. II, p. 163)

In this part I wish to investigate the colonial situation of the three authors, and emphasize the way their colonial lives and experiences influence their development and status as pioneer women of Modernist literature. Biographical elements along with direct textual references will help us see the colonial roots and background of the three writers, in conjunction with their colonially related behaviours. Why are they actually in London? Why did Rhys and Mansfield come to the centre of the empire? What is the colonial situation or heritage that these writers have? What about their early years and the colonial connections that they had from that period on? In Woolf's case, what is it that relates her to colonialism? All these questions have led to the creation of this second chapter.

Each point of this chapter reflects and dives deeper into the study of the colonial situation of the three authors. If in the first chapter we attentively presented the authors, here we have the occasion to get a clearer image of their colonial implications and the way they relate to the British Empire.

This chapter is divided into five sections, as follows. The first section opens up the question of *Colonial Situations: Context and Heritage* and concentrates on the initial, lifelong and general colonial situation of Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys. When I say *situations*, I mean the writer's provenance and early life. It focuses on biographical elements accompanied by an analysis of their origins, colonial family implications and early years spent in London, Wellington or Roseau, which constitute the setting for the three authors' colonial heritage. In the second section, the authors' colonially inspired behaviours are reviewed, all being part of their early years: childhood and young adulthood. A particular interest is given to the study of their heritage and colonial provenance. The third section looks into the lives of the authors once they arrive in London (in the case of Mansfield and Rhys) and also the way they face colonialism. Mansfield and Rhys longed to come to London, but once they arrived there, they had to face disillusion, because things were not as they dreamed when they were (still) in the colonies. In the fourth section presentness, or the ability to be present in the moment despite their outsider status, is questioned, the figure of the outsider being more and more a relevant figure for them. By presentness I mean the ability to perceive the present London in which the writers are immersed, after their arrival from the colonies. And finally, the fifth section treats the image of the pioneer woman author whose contribution is undeniable, but also women as outsiders and alienated figures.

All in all, we will see how the past colonial space and experiences generate the colonial time that the writers experience, which is in turn also reflected in the poetics of their works.

## 1. From a colonial past to a present in London

In this chapter our purpose is to look at the colonial heritage that the authors come with, particularly Mansfield and Rhys. We look at the way they manifest the colonial upbringing in their later adult life, while living and writing in London. In Woolf's case, we study the colonial culture that she was born and inside which she was educated. Moreover, we examine all the things that influenced Woolf's colonial perception and that ultimately contributed to her writings: novels and short stories, but also diaries and letters. At this point, we must treat the three writers separately, since their early colonial years are separated, geographically speaking.

This chapter's study looks simultaneously at the authors' colonial provenance from a double perspective: inside the empire, which is the case of Virginia Woolf — who was born and raised in the centre of the empire, metropolitan London, and outside of it — which includes Mansfield and Rhys, who were born and raised in the colonies. Another difference is established between the perception that Rhys and Mansfield have, the two coming from two different colonial spaces. We must seize the difference of their colonial upbringing in order better to understand their writings.

In the case of Mansfield and Rhys, their arrival was in a way foreseeable. London had always been a dream for them and not just for them; it was actually the place that the colonials were dreaming about in the twentieth century, given the historical context of the period and its colonial implications: mainly resulting from England's conquest of the world through colonialism and positioning itself as authority. Most intellectuals from the colonies had gone there to study from an early age. Ann Blake argues that in the 20th century among the earliest to arrive was Katherine Mansfield, descendant of colonial English settlers.<sup>93</sup> Mansfield, before being a pioneer of the short story genre, was a pioneer in the geographical sense by being among the first ones to move to England from the colonies. She transcended the classical colonial situations of the period.

But why did these authors actually come to London? The question of what stood behind their act of going there is essential, since it is what helped them become the Modernist writers that they are known for nowadays.

I would like to introduce this topic by treating the writers' colonial background, because that is ultimately where their origin lies, which is finally a fundamental issue in this writing. Rhys and

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<sup>93</sup> Ann Blake, "'A Literature of Belonging' : Re-Writing the Domestic Novel" in Ann Blake, Leela Gandhi and Sue Thomas, *England Through Colonial Eyes in Twentieth-Century Fiction*, Chippenham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, p. 37.



Mansfield can be identified as colonial writers mostly because of their origins, even if Mansfield is mostly ignored as a colonial. Their colonial origin is thus undeniable; it is something that they acquired through birth and education, one would think at first glance — their actual living in a colonial environment. Yet, there is more than that: their later life, their London experience, also contribute in classifying and considering these writers as colonials. The writers' experience of colonial time is divided between, on the one hand, their life lived in the colonies and, on the other, their contact with the metropolitan centre. There is nonetheless a strong link between them, the first influencing the other.

## **Woolf's London colonial heritage**

I choose to follow a chronological order and start with Virginia Woolf, who was born on January 25th, 1882. Her situation is different from Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys — having a different historical and political context — but her poetics is nonetheless extremely rich in colonial signifiers.

Woolf's involvement with the British Empire is to be seen on both sides of her family, on the side of her mother, but also on her father's side. Woolf's great-grandfather, James Stephen, was an anti-slavery campaigner in the "Clapham Sect", an influential group in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>94</sup> Being horrified by the treatment of blacks, he started an abolitionist campaign and began to correspond with the leading English abolitionist, William Wilberforce<sup>95</sup>. His son, Woolf's grandfather, Sir James Stephen, author of *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography*, became one of the most influential colonial administrators of the nineteenth century. He was appointed as Counsel to the Colonial Office and Board of Trade and the dominant administrator to the colonies<sup>96</sup>.

On Woolf's maternal side, James Pattle, Woolf's great-grandfather, was a member of the Bengal Civil Service<sup>97</sup>. Woolf's mother, Julia Jackson (1846-1895), was born in an Anglo-Indian family, in Bengal, part of British-ruled India at the time. Hermione Lee, biographer and literary critic, well known for her major biography on Woolf, goes back to Julia Jackson's mother and the

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<sup>94</sup> Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, Chatham, Chatto & Windus, 1996, p. 59.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

way she integrated the Anglo-Indian administrative family, just like Woolf did by marrying Leonard:

The [...] Pattle girls – Adeline, who died young, Louisa, Maria (Julia’s mother), Julia and Sarah – all married into Anglo-Indian administrative families. The two most interesting and closest sisters, Sarah and Julia, moved to England. One was married to a Director of the East India Company and Persian scholar, Thoby Prinsep, the other to the first lawyer on India’s Supreme Council, Charles Cameron [...]. They collected around them a huge circle of Anglo-Indian, literary, artistic, and political friends: Gladstone, Sir Henry Taylor, Jowett, Herschel, Watts, Ellen Terry, Burne-Jones, Joachim, Tennyson, Browning. Thackerays and Stephens crossed paths here: Leslie met and admired Julia at Little Holland House in the mid-1860s, when they were both still single; and felt a pang of jealousy on hearing of her marriage.<sup>98</sup>

Julia Jackson moves to England when her daughter, Virginia, is two years old. The rich Anglo-Indian circle that the Jackson sisters gathered around is fascinating. It is indisputable how rich in colonial relations and links Woolf’s ancestral line is. Woolf’s biographer Hermione Lee also observes how her entire family was engaged in colonial culture: “Colonial society, attitudes and traditions were embedded in the fabric of Julia Jackson’s maternal ancestry, just as the legal history of colonial government ran as the main thread through the Stephen family tree.”<sup>99</sup>

In the early twentieth century, Woolf finds herself at the core of the British colonial legacy. Born in the heart of the empire, she inherits a particular status, as the daughter of Leslie Stephen, the influential man of letters, and author and first editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1882-1891). Stephen, born himself in an eminent intellectual family, was the author of other important works, such as *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876), or *The English Utilitarians* (1900), a philosophical investigation. One of Woolf’s great influencers was undeniably her father, who contributed to her becoming a person of encyclopaedic knowledge and learning, just as he himself was. Woolf had a vast knowledge in the historical and literary areas, among other fields, and her writings are nothing if not a proof of that. Woolf, as a woman, could not follow classical studies at school or university, but received home education, contrary to her male siblings. Therefore, her colonial situation is special in the sense in which she holds a peripheral status. The colonial feature here lies in her place as a woman. She finds herself at a cultural periphery. Two important and intriguing contradictions arise in this sense: being born and raised in the centre, she still had in certain ways a peripheral view on the English culture.

Woolf’s lack of formal school was never a drawback, at least her father took care of that:

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

Although he (Woolf's father) never considered sending his clever daughter to a university alongside her brothers, she had the use of his library. Almost through her skin she imbibed the habit of study and took to hard work early; after her mother's death, when Virginia was thirteen, her father taught her himself and arranged for her to have Greek lessons. [...] Her ambitions were, from the start, purely literary, and she was born into the literary establishment: Henry James and Thomas Hardy were among Leslie Stephen's friends, and his first wife was the daughter of Thackeray.<sup>100</sup>

Born in an intellectual and literary environment, Woolf's literary ambitions revealed themselves from an early age. Mansfield also had an early desire towards reading and writing. Rhys, on the other hand, did not even think of investing herself in a literary path.

Woolf's relation with her siblings is also worth mentioning. As Hermione Lee notes:

Thoby was the leader, admired and followed, first by Vanessa, then by both girls. Vanessa "mothered" and organised the others. The three older children ganged up on Adrian. The two boys, though they went to the same preparatory school and would both go to the same Cambridge college, Trinity, seem not to have been especial friends [...] A special literary relationship developed between Virginia and Thoby after he went to school. And, from the first, Vanessa and Virginia were exceptionally close, and remained so all their lives.

The least satisfactory of these sibling "relations", [was that of] Virginia with Adrian.<sup>101</sup>

Among her siblings, her closest relationship was with Vanessa. Born in 1879, Vanessa was three years older than Woolf. They shared an interest for beauty, art, and self-expression through art, since Vanessa's passion was painting. Even if they were extremely close and understood each other very well, there was also a part that did not match completely, as Lee states:

There was something grim in their feeling for each other. Passages of estrangement and hostility strained their relationship. Though Vanessa remembered their establishing from very early on that Virginia "would be a writer and I a painter", there was competition between them, and it would surface at periods of conflict and intensity in their lives. Vanessa was closely involved with Virginia's breakdowns until, and to an extent after, Virginia married Leonard, but she did not necessarily understand them very well. She was racially prejudiced against, and critical of Leonard (and, later, of Vita) and not much in touch with Virginia's feminism and her political thinking.<sup>102</sup>

It is interesting how the two sisters completed each other very well on the artistic side, but could not find common ground on the political side. It seems that Vanessa had an aversion to issues related to

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<sup>100</sup> Claire Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life*, Frome and London, Penguin Books (Viking), 1987, p. 48-49.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

colonialism since she understood neither Woolf's choice of marrying Leonard, nor her feminism and political thinking.

Woolf's father's intellectual and literary influence was somehow carried on by her husband's later impact and significance in her life. As we can see, men had a determining role in Woolf's life, and not only in hers, but in Mansfield's and Rhys's lives as well. There are two dimensions that we can identify when taking into account the three writers and the determining role that certain key men had in their lives: there is, on the one hand, Woolf and the colonial dimension inspired by her husband, Leonard — since he was for Woolf an important colonial source — and there is also the incommensurable knowledge and influence received from her father, Leslie Stephen. On the other hand, there are Mansfield and Rhys whose partners facilitated access to publication and the literary world. For Rhys Ford Madox Ford and John Middleton Murry, Mansfield's husband, in the case of Mansfield.

Leonard Woolf's colonial background had an impact on Woolf's perception of colonialism and her later works, beginning with Woolf's letters and diary, as my analysis shows. On graduating from Cambridge in 1904, Leonard Woolf joined the Colonial Civil Service and was sent to Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka), where he spent seven years as a colonial administrator. He did not very much enjoy the white colonial society that he encountered, so he threw himself into the administrative work, and was later promoted to Assistant Government Agent, being put in charge of running his own district in South-East Ceylon, Hanbantota Province, in 1908, which contained a population of 100.000. He travelled all over his district, dealing with agriculture, justice, public health, road building, taxation and all kinds of issues. He got to know the people of the area and the hard lives they led, and wrote detailed notes in his diary. Daily activities were noted down, and the diary was eventually published in 1963<sup>103</sup>, under the title *Diaries in Ceylon, 1908–1911, and Stories from the East: Records of a Colonial Administrator*, published in London at Hogarth Press.

Leonard Woolf's vision and later career was very much influenced by the Colonial Civil Service experience he had had in Sri Lanka. Right after his return from the colony, in 1913, he published *The Village in the Jungle*. The novel became famous quickly on account of its deeply innovative touch: it was the first English novel written from an indigenous perspective, not a colonizer's. It was followed by three *Stories from the East* (1924) and other works on imperialism

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<sup>103</sup> Inspired from a BBC magazine report on “Leonard Woolf's forgotten Sri Lankan novel”, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-27518833>, published on the 23rd of May 2014; last accessed: the 6th of August 2019.

and economics. He also wrote his impressive five-volume autobiography, publishing its last volume before he died in 1969<sup>104</sup>.

Once back from his colonial mission, Leonard Woolf started seeing Virginia Woolf, whom he knew through her brother Adrian Stephen, his university friend. The colonial influences of her husband are to be found throughout her writing career after that. The way she embraces colonial facts, her attitude and implication, are accounted for in her letters and diaries. But it is also worth noting that Woolf's colonial opinions and exploration did not start taking shape when meeting her husband, but were part of Woolf's mind and perception before that. Also, Woolf began her literary career by writing *The Voyage Out*, a novel where, according to Patrick Parrinder and Andrzej Gasiorek, "Woolf's critique of war and empire begins"<sup>105</sup>. She published her first novel in 1915, but began writing it in 1910. When the two met, the novel was already written.

Surprisingly, Woolf became known and appreciated as a Modernist writer, even though her early piece *The Voyage Out* had important colonial arguments in it. The colonial signifiers of her novel were always present. However, it is a couple of years ago that we began being conscious of these facts and changing our way of reading Woolf, precisely starting to see the value and significance of the colonial signifiers that Woolf's works carry. These first readings emerged in the 1990s on aspects carrying Woolf's anti-imperialist view. It is for instance the case of Kathy J. Phillips's in her study on *Virginia Woolf Against Empire*<sup>106</sup>. At the time her contribution to the Woolfian studies was impressive and noteworthy. Woolf's interest was revealed, and she was counted among the political thinkers of her time. Phillips presents the numerous satires that Woolf creates, regarding gender relations, militarism and also social institutions. She was also interested in showing Leonard Woolf's influence on Woolf and mainly that of his anti-imperialist writings.

What is noteworthy here is that after she met Leonard, the way of regarding colonial issues changed. She began seeing things from a different perspective, a more attentive one, having daily contact with her husband's work, the talks they had together and the people they received in their home.

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<sup>104</sup> Leonard Woolf, *The Journey Not the Arrival Matters: An Autobiography of the Years 1939–1969*, London, Hogarth Press, 1969.

<sup>105</sup> Patrick Parrinder, Andrzej Gasiorek (eds.), *The Reinvention of the British and Irish Novel 1880-1940*, Bodmin and King's Lynn, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 334.

<sup>106</sup> Kathy Philips, *Virginia Woolf against Empire*, Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1994.

## Mansfield's New Zealand heritage and arrival in London

Another important writer of this study and of the first half of the twentieth century is Katherine Mansfield. She was born in a family with Australian connections. Her father was a banker in New Zealand, but was born in Australia. He was successful in his career and later made his fortune in Wellington, New Zealand. Her mother was also born in Australia, and they were both children who thought for one reason or another that they were not wanted in England, or could not make their way there. In the nineteenth century, New Zealand was for many a colony of Australia as much as Australia was a colony of England; it was the very last place, the furthest you could go<sup>107</sup>.

Katherine Mansfield came to London for the first time when she was fourteen and stayed until she was seventeen, a time during which she went to Queen's College, a girls' school in London along with her sisters. This first experience left a crucial mark on her later development: "The three homeless years at Queen's effectively detached Katherine from her parents"<sup>108</sup>, Claire Tomalin writes in her biography. She also highlights Mansfield having immediate access to the life of the streets and parks as well as shops, galleries and concert halls. She had stayed in London and provincial hotels with her family, as Claire Tomalin notes.<sup>109</sup> More specifically, she emphasizes her "habit of impermanence", her constant need to go from one place to the other, and the fact that "safety was never her concern".

She then went back to Wellington, but not for a long time. Three years later, in 1910, she came back to London — where she would later make a home — with the intention of becoming a professional writer. Prior to her arrival, she had actually begun writing and publishing in New Zealand. Her first meeting with the publishing world was back in high school, when she had her first stories printed in the school's magazine. She later began to publish formally in New Zealand's magazines, such as *New Zealand Graphic* and *Ladies Journal*, and also an Australian one, the *Native Companion*. Nevertheless, she knew that in order to become a well-known and successful writer, she needed the power, cultural context and resources that probably only London could give her. Once she arrived in London for the second time, she started publishing in the periodical *The New Age*. A first collection of short stories, inspired by her trips in Germany, called *In a German Pension*, was published in 1911, not long after her arrival. 1911 is also the year when she met her future husband, the famous literary critic John Middleton Murry. He was the one who helped her in

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<sup>107</sup> Claire Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life*, p. 7.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>109</sup> Claire Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life*, p. 30.

building her writing career, supported and accompanied her literary path. Mansfield was also offered the privilege of publishing in a notable critical review magazine of the moment, edited by Murry, called *Rhythm* (later known as *The Blue Review*); Mansfield's first stories were thus published in 1912.

Murry helped her out a lot, with her writing, but also in times when she was sick or needed help. Nonetheless, she never relied completely on him and preserved her own independence as a woman, as did Woolf in her relation to her husband: "Katherine sometimes spoke of herself as being more man than woman in her relations with Murry, in the sense that she took her own decisions and ran her own financial, professional and emotional affairs and did not depend on him."<sup>110</sup>

When Mansfield died, it was Murry whom she trusted and left in charge of her documents. Another of Mansfield's biographers, Anthony Alpers, notes: "She left all her papers to her husband, with a letter asking him to 'Go through them one day, dear love, and destroy all you do not use. Please destroy all letters you do not wish to keep and all papers. You know my love of tidiness. Have a clean sweep, Bogey, and leave all fair — will you?'"<sup>111</sup> We know from her other biographer, Angela Smith, that Murry inherited 53 notebooks and hundreds of loose pages of Mansfield's handwriting.<sup>112</sup> Mansfield was afraid of the idea of her dying one day and leaving everything behind unfinished, as she mentioned in her *Notebooks*: "Oh, yes, of course I am frightened. But for two reasons only ... I shan't have my work written. That's what matters. How unbearable would it be to die, to leave 'scraps', 'bits', nothing really finished."<sup>113</sup> Smith also makes an interesting comparison underlining Murry's influence on Mansfield, which she finds similar to the one Leonard Woolf had on his wife: "Murry's control over the production of the Mansfield myth can be compared to the editorial function exercised by Leonard Woolf and by Ted Hughes in relation to their dead wives' personal writings."<sup>114</sup> Both Woolf and Mansfield had protectors who made sure that the writer's heritage would continue.

Nowadays the short stories of her first publication are gathered in a new collection, illustrating Mansfield's early writings. Her first writings describe and are inspired by her home country, New Zealand. We can find this collection under the name of *The Collected Fiction of Katherine Mansfield (1898-1915)*, published in 2012 by Edinburgh University Press. The editors assure us that the collection covers "a truly complete collection of the author's fiction writing [...]"

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225."

<sup>111</sup> Anthony Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*, New York, Viking Press, 1980, p. 365.

<sup>112</sup> Angela Smith, *Katherine Mansfield: A Literary Life*, Chippenham, Palgrave, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>113</sup> Scott Margaret (ed.), *The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks*, vol. II, Auckland, Lincoln University Press, 1997, p. 125.

<sup>114</sup> Angela Smith, *Katherine Mansfield: A Literary Life*, p. 5.

[including] hitherto uncollected or rarely seen stories and prose fragments as well as the instantly recognisable stories”<sup>115</sup>.

Mansfield was also friends with the English poet and novelist, D. H. Lawrence. Several letter exchanges map out the existing friendship between the two couples: Mansfield - Murry and Lawrence - von Richthofen (Lawrence’s wife, Frieda). When Lawrence gave the couple a copy of *Sons and Lovers*, they instantly knew it was a great and powerful novel. The impression on Katherine was so strong that, within days, she wrote out a complete 35-chapter plan for a novel of her own — *Maata*, containing literary memoirs that she never had the chance to finish — and began working on it<sup>116</sup>.

The noteworthy masculine presence in Mansfield’s life was not limited to her father, Murry, or Lawrence: there was also her brother, who played a major role in her life and literary career by being an inspiration to her: Mansfield acted as her protector. Leslie Heron Beauchamp, or “my little brother”, as she used to call him, was younger than her, born in 1894, whereas Mansfield was born in 1888.

Throughout her life, Mansfield dealt with isolation, a constant feeling that she experienced at home and later in London. Claire Tomalin states the following in *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life*: “She travelled too far outside the boundaries of accepted behaviour for her family to feel she was one of them, but she did not find herself at home in any other group, nor did she make a family of her own. The particular stamp of her fiction is also the isolation in which each character dwells.”<sup>117</sup> For Mansfield isolation was like a second nature that she brought wherever she went. It is a feature that Mansfield frequently deals with and explores in her works.

## **Rhys’s Dominican origin and her London arrival**

Let us now have a look at Jean Rhys’s colonial origins and the way she made her way in the English metropolitan centre. We know that Rhys’s family had Scottish (her mother’s side) and Welsh (her father’s side) ancestors. James Potter Lockhart, Rhys’s maternal great-grandfather, came

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<sup>115</sup> <https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/book-the-collected-fiction-of-katherine-mansfield-1898-1915.html>, last accessed on the 2nd of June 2022.

<sup>116</sup> Claire Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield, op. cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.



to Dominica to get going a sugar plantation in the 1790s. He was a Scot, the grandson of William Lockhart, laird of Birkshill, Lanarkshire, and a prosperous sugar merchant. His ledgers declared that he owned 1,200 acres and 258 slaves.<sup>118</sup> Rhys's mother was a third-generation white Dominican Creole, a descendant of a Welshman. Rhys's father, "William, was the youngest son of an Anglican clergyman, William Rees Williams of Cardiganshire, South Wales."<sup>119</sup>

On her mother's side, Rhys was therefore the descendant of a wealthy slave owner for whom blacks were possessions. Even if she claimed that she loved black people and would have loved being black, she knew she would never be accepted as one of them<sup>120</sup>. The well-known episode with the black baby from her childhood reinforced her beliefs, her mother's remarks being compelling in this sense:

She loved babies, any babies. Once I heard her say that black babies were prettier than white ones. Was this the reason why I prayed so ardently to be black, and would run to the looking-glass in the morning to see if the miracle had happened? And though it never had, I tried again. Dear God, let me be black. (*SP*, 26)

Nevertheless, she was not accepted by white people either: "All the while Jean was growing up, she grew increasingly aware of ancient resentments and old grudges against his [Old Lockhart, Rhys's great-grandfather] profligacy and the seeming injustice of it all. If some of the blacks, to whom she might be related, eyed her and her family suspiciously, so did the white planters, who feared loucheness more than anything<sup>121</sup>. White planters rejected the Lockharts because they were the ones who owned so many slaves in the past. Rhys might be related to black people of mixed marriages and relations that were going on between white and black people during the colonization.

Rhys's Caribbean childhood left important marks on her, which would have an influence on her later life in London. Rhys was familiarized early with issues such as the lack of belonging and identity, which turned her into an isolated person, eager to write.

Jean Rhys's path towards becoming a well-known writer and her first encounters with London and the literary world are worth considering. We know from Lilian Pizzichini, her biographer, that Jean Rhys came to England when she was 16. Her intention was far from that of becoming a writer; she actually never dreamed or imagined she would turn out to be a writer; however, she started writing poetry during her childhood: "I used to write poetry when I was a little

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<sup>118</sup> Lilian Pizzichini, *The Blue Hour: A Life of Jean Rhys*, New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 2009, p. 9.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

girl, perhaps thirteen or fourteen, but I didn't show it to anyone"<sup>122</sup>, she declares in an interview with Peter Burton, published in *The Transatlantic Review*.

She found pleasure and delight in writing from an early age, even if she was not aware of the gift that she had. A couple of years later, she went to England. She was first enrolled in the Perse School for Girls in Cambridge. It was a typical move for young colonial women to go to London, at "home", and finish their education, and that is what Rhys also actually did. She had a hard time as soon as she got there. At the school, she was mocked for her West Indian accent. Two years later, in 1909, she went to R.A.D.A. (The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art) to train as an actress. R.A.D.A. was considered a global school of the empire, in the sense in which it offered a world leading training in the dramatic arts. She stayed there only two years, and then she decided to be a chorus girl. In a 1970 interview to Peter Burton, she confesses: "I came to England when I was sixteen and went to R.A.D.A. When my father died I got a job in a chorus line ... it was tough, we moved once a week, sometimes every three days, mostly up North. Tough but fun, you know."<sup>123</sup>

When we think of Rhys in general, we associate her to the artist, or more specifically the actress that she wanted to become, because that was her intention when coming to London. When we think of her women characters, the connotation that springs to mind is that of the actress prostitute, a recurrent theme of her writings. A parallel is to be drawn here between Rhys and Woolf's sister, Vanessa, both leading a comparable artistic life. Woolf's sister, Vanessa, also experienced life as an artist and followed similar studies. She followed her calling and went to the Royal Academy of Arts to study painting, married the art critic Clive Bell, and later on became a distinguished painter and interior designer. What distinguishes Vanessa from Rhys though was the latter's interest in feminism and colonial issues; in this sense, she resembles Woolf more.

But what was the act that triggered Rhys's writing and later publications as a writer? Furthermore, how was she able to make the transition from performing as an actress to publishing fictional works as a writer? During her life, she developed relationships with several men, all representing an emotional and financial support for Rhys. We will see that her writing career is very much linked to the men she had in her life, just as in the case of Mansfield. Her first love affair was with a distinguished Englishman named Lancelot Hugh Smith whom she met in 1910. He eventually ended the relationship with her; yet, he continued to give her an allowance every month, a gesture that made Rhys feel overwhelmed and distressed. The emotional charge was more than

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<sup>122</sup> Joseph F. McCrindle Foundation, "Jean Rhys: Interviewed by Peter Burton", *The Transatlantic Review*, No. 36, Summer 1970, 105-109, p. 105.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

Rhys was able to bear, so she started writing diaries and notebooks. At first, writing was for Rhys a means through which she expressed her emotions and state of mind. It was a need, an emotional and personal one, that she first felt when she began writing, an act that would later turn into a career. Maybe this first attempt to write notebooks and diaries was necessary and actually prepared her for the person that she later turned into, the fiction writer. It was certainly the door through which she attempted writing and the gradual advancement that followed: short stories and then novels. When we think of notebooks and diaries, we are dealing with private writings, a genre that has been little studied to date in Rhys's case, and which will be elaborated in more detail in the last part of this dissertation. The issue of private writings becomes a focal point in my treatment of Modernism-colonialism, because the treatment of these texts allows me to show how Modernism is transformed when coming in contact with colonialism.

In 1917 Rhys met Jean Lenglet, who eventually became her husband. "In 1920 his fabulous command of languages secured him a post as interpreter [...] in Austria and Hungary."<sup>124</sup> Rhys followed him: they moved to Paris and travelled across Europe. Paris is a city that marks her writings, a place that includes and shapes her experience and perception of colonial time. Besides London, Paris is a place where there is room for exploiting the meaning and value of colonial time given the period and cultural context of the time. Modernism was a movement that expanded across Europe, especially in big cities, such as London, Paris, Zurich, Vienna. Pericles Lewis in his *Cambridge Companion to European Modernism* explains the place that these cities had at the time:

In the context of political modernization, it is notable that for virtually every modernist, including even those in the global financial capital London, the "centre" seemed to be elsewhere. Paris was perhaps the only modernist city to consider itself culturally central, the capital not only of the nineteenth century [...] but also of the early twentieth.<sup>125</sup>

Then, he goes on by completing his argument: "[...] 'Peripheral' regions, such as Spain or Eastern Europe, offered particularly salient contributions to the development of modernism because of their special relationship to the question of modernization."<sup>126</sup> In 1923, Lenglet was eventually arrested and imprisoned for selling objets d'art of suspicious origin and illegally entering France. At the time, Rhys was desperately looking for support. It is then that she met the Modernist pioneer Ford

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<sup>124</sup> Martien Kappers-Den Hollander, "Jean Rhys and the Dutch Connection", *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Mar., 1984), Indiana University Press, pp. 159-173, p. 160.

<sup>125</sup> Pericles Lewis, *The Cambridge Companion to European Modernism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 5.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

Madox Ford. He was a great guidance and mentor for Rhys: he valued and encouraged her in her writing career. Even if their relationship came with a lot of pain and eventually ended, Ford was of great help, because he is the one who actually launched Rhys and set the wheels in motion for her professional path. Lesley McDowell, the author of *Between the Sheets: Nine 20th Century Women Writers and Their Famous Literary Partnerships* argues in an article for *The Independent* that “it was Ford who taught her how to channel her experiences into publishable prose.<sup>127</sup>” Ford was also the one who “changed her name, deciding that ‘Jean Rhys’ was more modern than Ella Lenglet.<sup>128</sup>”

It is in 1927 that Rhys’s first short stories were published, a collection entitled *The Left Bank and Other Stories*, whose preface was written by Ford Madox Ford. In writing she manifested her need to express herself: it all began as an escape from the life that she had in England, which eventually turned out into a successful career. In her novel *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1931), we find Julia, the protagonist who confesses: “I was frightened and yet I knew that if I could get to the end of what I was feeling it would be the truth about myself and about the world and about everything that one puzzles and pains about all the time.”<sup>129</sup>

Rhys’s first publications picture a journey back to her native country along with stories inspired by her life in Paris. Mansfield followed the same pattern, her first inspiration being drawn from New Zealand. Rhys wrote short stories about the West Indies and she certainly found a lot of comfort in them. Far from her home country, she recalled her lost moments, memories and places that once were so profoundly part of her. The two colonial times thus overlap: one that she experienced back in the colonies, and another one that she experienced in the actual metropolitan London. The overlapping represents a journey of rediscovery: rediscovering her present in London, and at the same time seeing and perceiving her past experienced now through different eyes.

It is notable that both Mansfield and Rhys began writing by going back in time to their birth places, and felt the need to do that again later on in their writing process. The moment when they go back leaves a mark, because that is when they experience the culmination or the highest success of their literary career. In Mansfield’s case, that is self-evident, as she produces her best short stories when she deplors her brother’s death. The experience of recapturing New Zealand and her lost childhood floods her with emotion. We can for instance recall the poems written in his memory, such as “To L. H. B. (1894-1915)”, ““Last night for the first time since you were dead””, or the

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<sup>127</sup> Lesley McDowell, “Jean Rhys: Prostitution, alcoholism and the mad woman in the attic”, article published on the 3rd of May 2009: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/jean-rhys-prostitution-alcoholism-and-the-mad-woman-in-the-attic-1676252.html>, last accessed: the 7th of August 2019.

<sup>128</sup> Pizzichini, *The Blue Hour: A Life of Jean Rhys*, p. 176.

<sup>129</sup> Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* [1930], Chippenham, Penguin Group, 2000, p. 41.

collections of New Zealand short stories that Mansfield draws upon following her discussions with Leslie, including *Bliss and Other Stories* (1920) or *The Garden Party and Other Stories* (1922). In Rhys's case, it is certainly *Wide Sargasso Sea* that shows in part the way the author values and is linked to Dominica. In 1939 after the publication of *Good Morning, Midnight* Rhys decides to take a break from the literary world. After 27 years of absence, she makes her comeback in 1966 and publishes *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a great success. The novel abounds in fascinating images of the Caribbean, and predominantly Dominica. It is an important landmark in postcolonial literature, drawing sketches of colonial history and feminism. Being a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's famous novel *Jane Eyre*, Rhys captures the relationships of power that take place between men and women, particularly focusing on the question of marriage, while discussing themes of race and Dominican history.

What about Virginia Woolf? I am not sure that in the case of such a prolific writer as Woolf we can speak of or categorize a certain work as being "the best work" of his/her career. It is like trying to decide which work we like the most, since each work has its unique style, input and message. Nevertheless, let us suppose that we want to make a selection of Woolf's most groundbreaking works. Based on one's (Modernist) literary knowledge, and given a colonial perspective, that would create two big moments. The first moment would include *Mrs. Dalloway* (with numerous instances in which colonialism has the chance to surface and manifest itself), and *To the Lighthouse* (less "colonial" but still a reference in the Woolfian and Modernist studies). The second moment would include *Three Guineas* — a call for feminism and pacifism, two fields that are truly united in this essay. This unity confers the colonial dimension of the work, its richness, and truly remarkable contribution. *Three Guineas* embodies Woolf's voice as a woman who wants to put an end to the war.

Modernism brings colonialism to the surface. The colonial dimension of the three authors' works was present from the very beginning, but more and more evidence has been uncovered as time passes and as research advances on this topic. By colonial dimension I mean the writers' works whose poetics have a reference to the colonial in different forms: context of writing, biographical conditions, form of poetics, etc. If it were always present, why would it reveal itself a relatively long time after its creation? Here comes the necessity of such a study, highlighting the colonial perspective of these writers' works, and adding to the research that has already been done on the topic. In literary studies, when dealing with the reception of a work, we tend to say that a work is what the reader can see in it. The reader is the one who actually creates and recreates the literary

work. The fact that we perceive, discover and interpret more and more colonial traits of a writer, means that our horizon and way of perception expands (according to the times that we live in and the influences that we undergo). We needed time to grasp and understand certain changes and that is why post-colonial studies present a certain maturity.

After a presentation of their colonial context, mainly constituted out of biographical references, we now have a general idea of the three authors' colonial situations, which represent a leap towards the writers that they were about to become. The next chapter continues the investigation on the writers' biography and colonial context in which they developed, but for this time accurate examples from the writers' lives and writings will be analysed and put into a colonial perspective.

## 2. Home and colonial representation

This chapter wishes to investigate in more detail and with precise examples the colonial context that the authors under study come from. In this sense, an examination of the writers' lives, reinforced by their writings is necessary. If the first chapter was mostly based on biographical references, this chapter investigates colonial representations or narratives. In this sense, historical scenes are identified and analyzed in the case of each writer.

Jean Rhys's *Smile Please*, also known as her unfinished autobiography, contains important elements regarding the writer's belonging and colonial past. The presence of the *obeah* figure in Rhys's education and culture has left a colonial mark that is worth considering. In regard to Katherine Mansfield, without going any further, it is important to present the writer's Pakeha origin and the experiences that left a great mark on her and on her writing, in particular her brother's death. The experience is an important one in the writer's life since it triggers the whole process of writing about New Zealand. As regards Virginia Woolf and the colonial context in which she grew up, I find it absolutely necessary to present a clearly colonial episode called "The Dreadnought Hoax", in which she was involved and which presents important colonial connotations.

### Rhys's childhood memories

There are several events in Rhys's childhood that are worth mentioning when analyzing their colonial character. Among these childhood anecdotes, one can mention the argument around the black and white dolls, a gift that Rhys and her sister received from their Irish grandmother. Her latest work, the unfinished autobiography published posthumously under the name of *Smile Please*, rewrites this childhood episode.

## The doll episode from Rhys's *Smile Please*

The incident with the dolls that Rhys and her sister received is essential from the perspective of her identity and for the poetics of the narrative universe. Rhys explains how she always wanted to be black, she had this urge and desire inside her. Her craving was certainly shaped by her mother's remarks concerning black babies, as her biographer underlines: "Gwennie desperately wanted to please her mother. So each night she prayed to God that the colour of her skin might change. But each morning when she looked in the mirror, she was disappointed.<sup>130</sup>" What is interesting here is the distance between the biographical and the poetics: Rhys chose the pseudonym "Gwennie", just as Mansfield did by using the third-person mode as "Kathie". Rhys desperately tried to meet her mother's tastes; and that is not all: "When she was told that Gwendoline, as well as being so close to her dead sister's name, meant 'white' in her father's native tongue, she felt doomed to an invisible existence.<sup>131</sup>" Right before Rhys was born, her mother lost a child, which influenced her later existence like a ghost. It was just another layer on the top of her identity crisis. Once outside her native land, Rhys tried to (re)gain her lost identity in Europe's capital cities such as London, Paris, Vienna or Budapest ... : "one city led to another in a voyage in form and style. She experienced them from the distance of the foreigner — never belonging, always observing.<sup>132</sup>" The phrase "never belonging, always observing" contains some key words when speaking about Rhys's existence. We also have the word "home", implied here. It is also a massive focal point for all the production of colonial culture, and as such also of post-colonial cities. Rhys lived her whole life as an observer of herself and the society that surrounded her. The question of belonging was unfamiliar to her; she lived her whole life without having a real home. Without any feeling of belonging, Pizzichini suggests, Rhys was haunted by a sense of loss. Dominica, she would say many years later, was "the only home I ever had<sup>133</sup>".

The ceaseless quest for her real self and recovering her Caribbean identity began in her childhood. Later on, London undoubtedly opened new doors, and problems surely, and added new experiences to the process of finding herself. The doll episode is an important moment of self-discovery from her childhood, which left a mark on her, all the more so as she chose to include it in her autobiography, *Smile Please*, the only biography written during her life, as was Rhys's desire.

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.



She was afraid that another author would publish untrue things about her and that's why she preferred to have no biographies written by someone else apart from herself. The chapter called *The Doll* opens up with the feeling of satisfaction that she remembers having after smashing the white doll's face: "How old was I when I smashed the fair doll's face? I remember vividly the satisfaction of being wicked. The guilt that was half triumph." (*SP*, p. 23) Rhys chooses to open the episode with a rhetorical question, presumably addressed to herself. I think that the question itself is not meant to be answered. The early age when those thoughts began to rise in her being is highlighted by the first words contained in the question: "How old was I when I [...]?" She uses them in order to communicate the importance of the information that she is about to share with the reader. While trying to remember those past days, a vivid image comes to her mind. She remembers the satisfaction, which is still alive, as she uses the adjective "vividly", followed by a series of words defining a negative but glorious feeling, such as "wicked", "guilt", "triumph", and of course "smashed", the one that she chooses to introduce at the very beginning of the chapter. The narrative continues with the description of the event that caused the tension between the two sisters and with Rhys herself: "Two dolls had arrived from England, a present from Irish Granny I suppose. One was fair, one was dark. Both beautiful. But as soon as I saw the dark doll, I wanted her as I had never wanted anything in my life before."<sup>134</sup> The fact that the dolls had arrived from England and are a gift from Irish Granny picture the colonial space and more precisely the empire's centre, England, and the Rhys Irish descendants. This passage stresses Rhys's European roots and the colonial power that England had at the time. Rhys's desire to be black turns into craving when she sees the dark doll. The desire emphasized by the verb "want" is reinforced by the use of the adverbial construction "never [...] in my life" and the indefinite pronoun "anything". After her mother's promising urging, the little girl's verdict is self-evident: "I don't like her" (23). Her anger is followed by an even more drastic behaviour. She goes to the garden where, Rhys writes: "I laid the fair doll down. Her [the doll's] eyes were shut. Then I searched for a big stone, brought it down with all my force on her face and heard the smashing sound with delight."<sup>135</sup> The force and hardness of the stone are an indicator of the grief and dislike that she feels towards the doll and its significance in her life. Contradictory feelings, such as grief (expressed in "brought it down with all my force") and pleasure (as in "heard the smashing sound with delight"), meet while destroying the fair doll's face. The image of the doll is strongly related to her own image and self, and by destroying the doll she denies and rejects her own Caribbean self. Lilian Pizzichini emphasizes the

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23-24.

strong colonial implication of this event: “Jean never forgot that sense of guilty triumph at having performed a wilful, wicked act. If she destroyed the fair doll, was she not destroying herself and taking satisfaction in her own destruction? If she was not fair, she would be free to be black and truly at home on her island.”<sup>136</sup> The dissatisfaction provoked by her skin colour that would never change to black, as she hoped and begged for every day during her childhood, turns into alienation and hatred. She hates her white skin and always hated it, because that is what her alienation and source of discontent are rooted in. As Pizzichini suggests, if one physical trait were different, if she were to be black, she could experience that feeling of home, which is now missing.

The first-person narrative specific to the autobiography genre allows the reader to follow the protagonist’s thoughts. After having destroyed the doll, a moment of self-reflection follows that describes the consequences of the object itself: “There was a great fuss about this. Why? Why had I done such a naughty, a really wicked thing? / I didn’t know. I was puzzled myself. Only I was sure that I must do it and for me it was right.” (*SP*, p. 24) This passage expresses the little girl’s internal world and certainty about the way she feels, but not for too long. After a quarrel with her parents, she imagines confessing herself to Great-Aunt Jane: “‘They are always expecting me to do things I don’t want to do and I won’t. I won’t. I won’t. I think about it all the time. I’ll never do it again.’ (Never, ever.)”<sup>137</sup>. Then, she finds herself weeping for the damaged doll.

The doll episode from Rhys’s childhood rests upon a strong colonial issue, that of being white vs black. Here it appears as a choice, because the little girl receives the doll and she has to choose the one she likes and wants. Without any hesitation, her choice leans towards the black doll. The apex of this scene comes when she destroys the white doll, and in that reaction lies Rhys’s attitude towards the colonial question.

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<sup>136</sup> Pizzichini, *The Blue Hour: A Life of Jean Rhys*, p. 31.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

## The *obeah* figure

Another important feature with a powerful colonial significance that accompanied Rhys's childhood consists in the presence of *obeah*, a way of practicing magic, similar to Voodoo. As Janelle Rodriques observes in her book *Narratives of Obeah in West Indian literature: Moving through the Margins*:

In the Anglophone Caribbean and its diasporas, Obeah is a term used for a range of associated syncretic, African-derived religious and cultural beliefs and ritual practices that manipulate spiritual energy in order to effect material change. It often manifests in the casting of spells and/or administering of baths and potions, and sometimes spirit possession, for the purposes of protection, revenge, health, and wellbeing. [...] Obeah holds a particular place in a culture that would define itself in opposition to colonial rule, and as such Obeah has played a significant role in the articulation of West Indian aesthetics.<sup>138</sup>

Rodriques also explains that it was usually associated with rebellion and thus the black population, which fought for freedom and endured slavery. She further explains, by quoting Lawrence Levine, that Obeah or “slave magic” was based on the fact that there were many things that the whites did not know, and because of that their power was limited: “Obeah allowed the enslaved to ‘act with more knowledge and authority than their masters’ and was thus a way in which ‘the powers of the whites could be muted if not thwarted entirely.’”<sup>139</sup>

In literature, *obeah* women usually happen to be poor, single mothers and witches who are feared and respected in their communities. *Obeah* is a magic that liberates these women from a system of patriarchal and colonial oppression.<sup>140</sup> *Obeah* traces are to be found in Rhys's best-selling novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as well as in her early short stories, and her letters. Lilian Pizzichini's biography on Rhys also includes references to the *obeah*, the presence of this cult from a young age and the effect that it produced upon her: “Some of the women from her childhood had a benign influence on her. She spent many hours talking to Cook who was an *obeah* woman — her name was Anne Tewitt — and she never forgot her<sup>141</sup>” and also a friend, a black girl, called Francine who told

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<sup>138</sup> Janelle Rodriques, *Narratives of Obeah in West Indian literature: Moving through the Margins*, London and New York, Routledge, 2019, p. 1.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2, Rodriques quotes Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 73-74.

<sup>140</sup> Matthew Cutter, “Finding Your Own Magic: How Obeah and Voodoo Provide Women Agency in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Tiphonie Yanique's *Land of Love and Drowning*” in *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3, *Women and Gender: Looking Toward “Caribbeanness”*, June 2016, p. 130.

<sup>141</sup> Pizzichini, *The Blue Hour: A Life of Jean Rhys*, p. 25.

her tales.<sup>142</sup> Francine was a childhood friend who had a compelling influence on her: a black girl, who, while telling her tales, started with *obeah* ceremonies. She even named one of the characters from *The Left Bank* after her, the Witch of Prague. The following paragraph from the short story “Let Them Call it Jazz” pictures the atmosphere that surrounds the witches: they lead their existence in an “odd place” and the vague image that we have of them is described in the following: “It was an odd place, that hotel, full of stone passages and things. I lay vaguely wondering why Prague reminded me of witches ... I read a book when I was a kid — the Witch of Prague. No. It reminded of witches anyhow. Something dark, secret and grim.”<sup>143</sup> *The Left Bank* published in 1927 also contains the figure of the Witch of Prague, which after thirty-nine years reappears in *I Spy a Stranger* in 1966. As Elaine Campbell, who taught Caribbean literature at Regis College and several American universities, and was specialized in West Indian women’s writing from the Caribbean, observed, the *obeah* woman motif is unsuitable to an English protagonist in a completely British setting. It has been replaced by the more appropriate allusion to a European conjurer woman: the Witch of Prague.<sup>144</sup> The idea of writing about witches comes from her colonial upbringing and habits that she used to have during her childhood, such as the *obeah*, whereas the Prague setting is clearly a Modern influence, Rhys frequently relying on the use of the Modern capital cities of Europe.

Rhys’s ancestry, Welsh and Creole, along with her perception as both white and black leads William Harris to characterize her as a combination of Christianity and *obeah*. Harris is himself considered an innovative voice in anglophone literature and also led numerous studies on Rhys’s coloniality, such as “Carnival of Psyche: Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea” or “Jean Rhys’s ‘Tree of Life’”, which also comments on Rhys’s latest novel. Harris asserts that “Obeah is a pejorative term”, which “reflects significantly a state of mind or embarrassment in both black and white West Indians, a conviction of necessary magic, necessary hell-fire or purgatory through which to reenter *lost* origins, *lost* heavens, *lost* divinity.<sup>145</sup>” The *obeah* figure is definitely a practice that has marked her entire childhood and later on her writings as well.

From an early age, Rhys felt rejected by her friends and the people she came in contact with and could not fit into the society in which she was born. In *The Blue Hour: A Life of Jean Rhys*, Pizzichini states: “If some of the blacks, to whom she might be related, eyed her and her family

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>143</sup> Jean Rhys, *Tigers Are Better Looking: With a Selection from ‘The Left Bank’* (1968), St Ives, Penguin Group, 1972, p. 218.

<sup>144</sup> Elaine Campbell, “Reflections of *obeah* in Jean Rhys’ fiction”, in *Kunapipi* Vol. 4, No. 2, 1982, p. 46.

<sup>145</sup> Wilson Harris, “Carnival of Psyche: Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea”, *Kunapipi*, II, No 2, 1980, p. 146.

suspiciously, so did the white planters, who feared loucheness more than anything.”<sup>146</sup> Her “louche” or dubious side constituted a real issue when she was trying to find her place among the Caribbeans, and later on among English people. The difficulty of fitting in transformed her life into a real challenge once settled on the English soil. The feeling of uneasiness and insecurity, but also that of being different from the others grew into something even stronger and with long-lasting impacts. Alienation and loneliness took control of her poetics.

Her early stories, the collection of her short stories, frequently remind the reader of *obeah*; later on, she dedicates a great part of *Wide Sargasso Sea* to further illuminating this form of magic:

I was suddenly very much afraid [...] I was certain that hidden in the room (behind the old black press?) there was a dead man's dried hand, white chicken feathers, a cock with its throat cut, dying slowly, slowly. Drop by drop the blood was falling into a red basin and I imagined I could hear it. No one had ever spoken to me about obeah – but I knew what I would find if I dared to look. Then Christophine came in smiling and pleased to see me. Nothing alarming ever happened and I forgot, or told myself I had forgotten. (*WSS*, p. 14-15)

Antoinette, the main character of the novel, seems to feel the presence of *obeah* in the room. Through that “knowing without knowing” state that the character experiences, Rhys tries to explain the essence of *obeah* itself. It is a practice that embraces an unusual and complex situation, the meeting of two opposing things: on the one hand, there is the rumour or gossip, and on the other hand, there is the denial that actually forms the spirit of *obeah*. Antoinette thought she had felt something, but then all that quickly disappears, and she even forgot about that.

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is indeed rooted in *obeah* culture. The process of writing the novel and its source of inspiration show it. The departure point of *Wide Sargasso Sea* was a poem called *Obeah Night*, which we can find in one of Rhys's letters that she wrote on the 14th of April 1964 to Francis Wyndham, her editor. After having a hard time writing *Wide Sargasso Sea*, she got inspired when she wrote that poem.

The *obeah* figure leaves important colonial marks on the writer that Rhys later on became. By delving into this Caribbean tradition, we can see how close it is to the black culture, an affinity that Rhys always possessed. It cannot be compared with the two other writers' cultures, which also proves its uniqueness.

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<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

## Mansfield: childhood in context

Born in New Zealand, in a colony subject to several transformations mainly from a cultural, political and historical perspective. The Maori and the Pakeha, the two populations present in New Zealand had a hard time living with each other. The Pakeha — New Zealanders of European descent — were European settlers who arrived in New Zealand starting from the early nineteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century. First, they came only as missionaries and did not intend to settle down permanently. Later on, around 1840, once the British sovereignty had been confirmed and the Treaty of Waitangi signed, the Pakeha population began to arrive from Britain and settle permanently. The Maori population was made up of indigenous people whose origins are in Polynesia. Their arrival in New Zealand is estimated the thirteenth century, between 1250 and 1300. The Maori stick to their culture and traditions, which was a real challenge given the settlement of the Pakeha within the New Zealand territory. Jane Stafford and Mark Williams in *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature (1872-1914)* explain the historical context of that period: “the ancient timelessness of Maori life is obliged to cohabit with the time-conscious world of the Pakeha. Over the next half-century [second half of the 19th century] that Pakeha world would extend its dominion over the present, imprisoning Maori within an imagined past.”<sup>147</sup> In consequence: “In New Zealand, by the beginning of the twentieth century, it was more likely to represent a dying culture than a dying people.”<sup>148</sup> It was certainly a period of transition, which marked their attachment to a dear past and their place in the current and modern world, as Loughnan notes in *Royalty in New Zealand*: “There was a curious mingling of the old and new. Deeply tattooed warriors some of whom had witnessed a cannibal feast, rubbed noses with young men who rode bicycles and pounded the big drum in the brass band.... It was one huge fancy ball, full of fantastic anachronisms characteristic of a time of transition.”<sup>149</sup> Mansfield was a Pakeha who never completely felt at ease in her birth country, an estrangement which later on transformed into alienation, once arrived in London and having spent a couple of years there. The real alienation began later on; certain events linked to her childhood triggered for her a return to her colonial past.

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<sup>147</sup> Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature (1872-1914)*, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>149</sup> R.A. Loughnan, *Royalty in New Zealand: The Visit of Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York to New Zealand, 10th-27th June 1901: A Descriptive Narrative*, Wellington: John Mackay, Government Printing Office, 1902, p. 74.

One can find descriptions of New Zealand in Mansfield's early writings, such as *The German Pension*, her first collection of short stories. During her lifetime, Mansfield published three volumes of short stories: *In a German Pension* (1911), *Bliss and Other Stories* (1920) and *The Garden Party and Other Stories* (1922). This early period of writing containing traces of New Zealand is followed by a break when she practically abandons writing about her New Zealand past. What is interesting to look into is the period when she decides it's time to access New Zealand and her childhood memories again. It is actually more of a need than a spontaneous decision. After having analyzed the timeline of Mansfield's life, I draw the following conclusions: the event that shook her whole existence and career up was the death of her brother, Leslie. His death took place on the 6th of October 1915 at a training drill, while demonstrating how to use a hand grenade. This takes place in the context of the war. We know that they had a special relationship; as such, her works and also the biographies in this sense give great importance to this event. On the 19th of November 1915 in a letter to Koteliansky, a Russian born British translator, she writes the following in relation to her brother: "All this is like a long uneasy ripple — nothing else — and below — in the still pool there is my little brother ..."150 Mansfield is heartbroken at her brother's death. The status of the older sister raises her level of awareness and affection noticeably through the use of the possessive pronoun "my" and the adjective "little".

In the same year, in November, while being in Bandol she writes in her journal:

I think I have known for a long time that life was over for me, but I never realized it or acknowledged it until my brother died. [...] I am just as much dead as he is. The present and the future mean nothing to me. I am no longer 'curious' about people; I do not wish to go anywhere; and the only possible value that anything can have for me is that it should put me in mind of something that happened or was when we were alive. Have people, apart from these far-away people, ever existed for me? Or have they always failed me and faded because I denied them reality? Supposing I were to die as I sit at this table, [...] what would be the difference? No difference at all. Then why don't I commit suicide? Because I feel I have a duty to perform to the lovely time when we were both alive. I want to write about it, and he wanted me to. We talked it over in my little top room in London. I said: I will just put on the front page: To my brother, Leslie Heron Beauchamp. Very well: it shall be done.<sup>151</sup>

Only the past has a meaning to her at this moment, as she herself emphasizes: "The present and future mean nothing to me." The death of her brother is synonymous with the revival of the past. The past becomes alive at the moment that she finds out about the death of her brother. It is her

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<sup>150</sup> Katherine Mansfield, edited by C. K. Stead, *The Letters and Journals of Katherine Mansfield - A Selection*, St Ives, Penguin Group, 1977, p. 62.

<sup>151</sup> Katherine Mansfield, edited by J. Middleton Murry, *Journal of Katherine Mansfield* (1927), London, Persephone Books, 2006, p. 36-37.

childhood past spent with him that makes her feel she has a duty to write about him, and only about him. The past becomes the only tie that she has with the present. She completely transposes herself into the past and begins to write. In her journal there is also an important reference to her decision of writing about New Zealand. In 1916 she writes:

Now — now I want to write recollections of my own country. Yes, I want to write about my own country till I simply exhaust my store. Not only because it is “a sacred debt” that I pay to my brother because my brother and I were born there, but also because in my thoughts I range with him over all the remembered places. I am never far away from them. I long to renew them in writing.<sup>152</sup>

Leslie’s story started with his arrival in England for military training in February 1915. In the period from March - May 1915 Mansfield had already begun writing “The Aloe”, evoking her New Zealand childhood. In June, the same year, she moved to St. John’s Wood with Murry; she received frequent visits from Leslie while he was stationed in England. In the garden of this house grew Mansfield’s pear tree. In her writings, Mansfield uses the aloe and the pear tree, along with the New Zealand vegetation, to describe New Zealand. When Leslie dies, Mansfield plunges into depression; as an act of escape, the next month she moves to Bandol in the south of France with Murry. An even greater escape is plunging into writing and remembering their childhood. The short story “Prelude” is of great importance, because it is the one that she picked up again right after the loss of her brother. It describes people that she knew in her own life, all set in a typical New Zealand nature.

As Levenson in *A Cambridge Companion to Modernism* observes: “Even Mansfield, though relatively removed from the war experience, sought after the loss of her soldier brother Leslie Beauchamp in 1916, to commit herself to transporting the imagined worlds of her Pacific childhood “into the eyes of the old world, presumably as a mode of aesthetic escape and transformation.”<sup>153</sup> Murry returns to London and in January-February of the following year — 1916 for this time — Mansfield rewrites “The Aloe” (later “Prelude”) and completes the first draft of it in Bandol<sup>154</sup>.

She also wrote poems in relation to Leslie and her childhood. “To L.H.B.” (1916), ““Last night for the first time since you were dead”” (1916), are an expression of her mourning. In both poems, she and him are “at home again” next to a stream, as they recapture moments that they spent together. Both poems evoke a dream that she had since he was dead:

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>153</sup> Michael Levenson (ed.), *A Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (1999), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 293.

<sup>154</sup> cf. <http://www.katherinemansfieldsociety.org/timeline/>



Last night for the first time since you were dead  
I walked with you, my brother, in a dream.  
We were at home again beside the stream<sup>155</sup>

There is no evidence of any short story being published in 1916. “Prelude” was written in 1916 during a period full of greyness and sorrow, but published only in 1917. The same year another poem referring to roots and belonging is published. It is called “Now I am a plant, a weed”.

Bruce Harding in “‘The Women in the Stor(y)’: Disjunctive Vision in Katherine Mansfield’s ‘The Aloe’” talks about Mansfield having an Edenic vision of her childhood after her brother’s death.<sup>156</sup> “Actually, the New Zealand stories conjure up a solid colonial world very unlike that of Pacific paradises. Murry’s concern, however, is with what he sees as Mansfield’s spiritual awakening, in which New Zealand represents recaptured innocence, a state of grace.<sup>157</sup>”

The loss of her brother has in essence a double colonial influence. It is, on the one hand, the actual loss of her brother, who represented the link to her New Zealand homeland and childhood, and on the other hand, it is the fact that she lost her brother during the war, another colonial event per se. Therefore, there are two events that meet, both having a colonial root and perspective.

After having looked at Mansfield’s childhood and the things that triggered her writing about that period, I would like to keep the colonial understanding and context in mind as I develop my argument on an important historical event, the “Dreadnought Hoax”.

## **Woolf : the colonial context of “the Dreadnought Hoax”**

In her young adulthood, Virginia Woolf was involved in a practical joke, a diplomatic, colonial masquerade of men of conquest. The event took place on the 10th of February 1910 and has since been known as “The Dreadnought Hoax”. It is interesting that this event takes place in 1910, the year to which Woolf attaches a particular place and meaning, synonymous with the times

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<sup>155</sup> Katherine Mansfield, edited by Gerri Kimber and Claire Davison, “To L.H.B.” in *The Collected Poms of Katherine Mansfield*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 109-110.

<sup>156</sup> Bruce Harding, “‘The Women in the Stor(y)’: Disjunctive Vision in Katherine Mansfield’s ‘The Aloe’” in Janet Wilson, Gerri Kimber and Susan Reid (eds.). *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Modernism: Historicizing Modernism*, London, Continuum, 2011, p. 115.

<sup>157</sup> Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature (1872-1914)*, Wellington, Victoria University Press, 2006, p. 151.

when “the human character changed”<sup>158</sup>. One of Woolf’s biographers, Quentin Bell, notes in *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*: “The object of their excursion was to hoodwink the British Navy, to penetrate its security and to enjoy a conducted tour of the flagship of the Home Fleet, the most formidable, the most modern and the most secret o’ war then afloat, H. M. S. Dreadnought.<sup>159</sup>” Her other notable biographer, Hermione Lee, interprets the hoax as both a prank and a political undertaking, expressing the “ridicule of empire, infiltrations of the nation’s defenses, mockery of bureaucratic procedures, crossdressing and sexual ambiguity<sup>160</sup>”.

Plenty of newspapers of the time informed the public about the surprising visit and mockery of the Abyssinian Prince. For instance, on the 16th of February 1910 *The Daily Mirror* carried the following headline: “How the officers of H.M.S. Dreadnought were hoaxed: Photograph of the ‘Abyssinian Princes’ who have made all England laugh”. The participants in the hoax were members of the Bloomsbury group, led by Horace Cole, who enjoyed and practised many practical jokes, and who had become a friend of Adrian’s, Woolf’s brother, at Cambridge. The most spectacular part of this prank was a visit by the uncle of the Sultan of Zanzibar, who was impersonated by Cole, together with other members of his suite, Adrian also.<sup>161</sup> Not surprisingly, he wanted fame, so he decided to go to the newspapers. They wanted to discover Woolf’s identity, who seemingly was named Ras Mendax. They knew that it was a young lady, “very good looking, with classical features”. They finally managed to get her story.<sup>162</sup>

Among the participants at the Dreadnought Hoax was Adrian Stephen, Woolf’s brother. Woolf and her brother were enrolled on a last-minute call, when two of the participants initially involved changed their minds. Two days ahead, in a spontaneous manner, Woolf accepted to participate, adding that she entered the exploit for fun.<sup>163</sup> Her unplanned agreement was accompanied by a convinced attitude expressed by the following: “I’m quite ready to come [...] I should like nothing better.<sup>164</sup>”

She accepted to dress herself as a man and paint her face black, a colonial trope. What’s more, she was dressed in typical oriental clothes and wore accessories accordingly, while

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<sup>158</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown*, p. 5.

<sup>159</sup> Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, vol. 1: Virginia Stephen 1882-1912, London, The Hogarth Press, 1972, p. 157.

<sup>160</sup> Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 279.

<sup>161</sup> Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, p. 157.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159-160.

<sup>163</sup> Stansky Peter, *On or About December 1910: Early Bloomsbury and Its Intimate World*, Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1996, p. 32-33.

<sup>164</sup> Georgia Johnson, “Virginia Woolf’s talk on the Dreadnought Hoax”, *Woolf Studies Annual*, Vol. 15 (2009), pp. 1-7, 9-45, p. 1.

accompanied by five men. We have two important points here: the issue of the blackface and the issue of cross-dressing. Kathy Phillips in *Virginia Woolf against Empire* also sees this act as a questioning of the empire and its authority, seeing a Woolf “identified with the colonists”<sup>165</sup>. She was the only woman taking part: according to Jean E. Kennard: “Woolf [...] was the only woman at the party. She wore an embroidered caftan, a turban, a gold chain hanging to her waist, a beard and moustache, and she blackened her face.”<sup>166</sup>

It was an audacious gesture given the early twentieth century situation of women and their lack of rights and limitation in all fields. We can say that this event has a double colonial meaning: first, from a feminist perspective, and second, from a racist point of view. The act of painting one’s face black constituted, among other things, a racist behaviour at the time. Woolf’s transformation is truly remarkable: from being a woman and a white person into a man and a black person. Jean Kennard, in her book on power and sexuality, sees the hoax as a “power game in which the traditional emblems of superiority, masculinity and whiteness were the counters”<sup>167</sup>.

Painted in black, Woolf was unrecognizable; she liked the idea of performing a hoax in the shoes of a man — even if she knew that she had a short time of preparation, she could not miss the opportunity of ridiculing men. Panthea Reid in the “Inquiry into Certain Colonial Representations” notes that: “Unlike Adrian and Horace, she liked the idea of ridiculing the masculine establishment. I suspect that also, unlike them, she saw the exploit in historical-political terms.”<sup>168</sup> So far, to history and politics, Woolf is a solid reference, in terms of the knowledge that she possessed. Evidence in this sense is the literary writings that she was working on during that period. In 1915, the year when she was involved in the hoax, she was also involved in writing her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, published the same year. It is commonly known that Woolf’s *The Voyage Out* is rich in satire and anti-colonial politics. Feminist and colonial issues are highly debated, accompanied by the writer’s ironical touch. It was a period rich in literary changes and transformations.

Furthermore, in *Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown* (1924), Woolf writes that:

in or about December, 1910, human character changed.

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<sup>165</sup> Kathy Phillips, *Virginia Woolf against Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

<sup>166</sup> Jean E. Kennard, “Power and Sexual Ambiguity: The *Dreadnought* Hoax, *The Voyage Out*, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Orlando*”, *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Winter, 1996), pp. 149-164, p. 150.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>168</sup> Panthea Reid, “Virginia Woolf, Leslie Stephen, Julia Margaret Cameron, and the Prince of Abyssinia, An Inquiry into Certain Colonial Representations”, *Biography*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (summer 1999), pp. iv, 323-355, p. 323.

I am not saying that one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen had laid an egg. The change was not sudden and definite like that. But a change there was, nevertheless; since, one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910.<sup>169</sup>

She continues: “All human relations have shifted — those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature. Let us agree to place one of these changes about the year 1910.”<sup>170</sup> Woolf probably took into consideration and pointed to the emergence and surfacing of Modernism, a movement estimated by her to have possibly begun around 1910. Given the events of that year, she may also point to the surfacing of political changes, as she actually mentions a certain change in politics and also in the relations between masters and servants, husbands and wives, etc.

In her writings, there are two traces of the Dreadnought Hoax. The first one is in her short story “Society”, published in 1921. There, Woolf describes a humorous episode of a young woman called Rose: “Never have I laughed so much as I did when Rose read her notes upon ‘Honour’ and described how she had dressed herself as an Aethiopian Prince and gone aboard of His Majesty’s ships.”<sup>171</sup> Discovering the hoax, the captain visits her and demands that honour should be satisfied. Bell observes the following on Woolf:

The theme of masculine honour, of masculine violence and stupidity, of gold-laced masculine pomposity, remained with her for the rest of her life. She had entered the Abyssinian adventure for the fun of the thing, but she came out of it with a new sense of the brutality and silliness of men. And this perception came, in its turn, to reinforce political sentiments which had for some time been taking shape in her mind.<sup>172</sup>

The second occurrence of the hoax is in her diary, which mentions the hoax in an indirect way, through a talk that she gave at the Rodmell’s Women Institute in 1940: “a simple, on the whole natural, friendly occasion.”<sup>173</sup> In 1940, after a long period of silence, Woolf decides to speak out in front of women and share detailed information about the 1910 practical joke. Woolf’s decision to participate in the hoax shows in a large part of her feminist intentions. Her talk at the Women’s

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<sup>169</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown* [1924], London, Hogarth Press, 1928, p. 5.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>171</sup> Virginia Woolf, edited by Susan Dick, *Virginia Woolf: A Haunted House – The Complete Shorter Fiction* [1985], Reading, Vintage, 2003, p. 120.

<sup>172</sup> Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, p. 160-1.

<sup>173</sup> Leonard, Woolf (ed.). *A Writer’s Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, London, Hogarth Press, 1954, p. 325.

Institute about a significant feminist gesture is therefore not surprising. Woolf was trying to make her audience laugh, while presenting it as an inherently political act.<sup>174</sup> The talk has survived in the form of a manuscript. The preparation for the hoax itself was intense, as Woolf herself notes: “There followed two of the most hectic days I’ve ever spent.”<sup>175</sup> She even learned Swahili, a very difficult language.<sup>176</sup> Woolf’s declaration in this sense is noteworthy, based on real facts and details and containing a humorous hint (London as imperial space appearing even in this episode, “driving through London”):

What on earth was I doing driving through London at eight o’clock on a spring morning dressed in royal red satin with a turban on my head/*People were going to work with their bags & baskets. The milk carts/I did feel very queer — perhaps if it had been late at night one/were rattling along the road/wouldn’t have felt so much like an owl — Every body stared. [...] I saw people staring very respectfully at us. It was clear everybody believed we were Abyssinians, and one began to believe it too.*<sup>177</sup>

Woolf also speaks about her fear of meeting a policeman who would put them all in jail. One of the reasons was the fake telegram they wrote:

This burst of activity had been initiated by a telegram received by May less than an hour earlier. It reported that Prince Makalen of Abyssinia – with his suite and an interpreter – was arriving at Weymouth by the 16.20 train and requested that they be shown around Dreadnought. It was signed “Harding Foreign Office”. In the confusion it was discovered that “the Bandmaster didn’t know the anthem of Abyssinia so we played ‘The Dover Castle March’ which had a fairly regal sound”.<sup>178</sup>

Her remarks on estrangement and pretence are eloquent: “It’s very difficult I found to look perfectly blank when you hear English spoken; and then to show great interest and intelligence when you hear pure gibberish. But this of course was what we had to do.”<sup>179</sup> Woolf’s willingness to participate in such a scene and her mockery are revealed here. The modal verb “had to do” shows the theatrical side of the act in which they were involved and the actual value of the hoax.

To formulate a conclusion from a colonial perspective, it is undeniably an event that deserves to be analyzed. Its complexity essentially lies in its double perspective: feminist, on the

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<sup>174</sup> Georgia Johnson, “Virginia Woolf’s talk on the Dreadnought Hoax”, p. 1.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15-6.

<sup>178</sup> Dr. Richard Dunley in “Bunga bunga! The great Edwardian Dreadnought hoax”, published in The National Archives, last accessed on the 16th of October 2017.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

one hand, and colonial, on the other hand. It bears a strong message on colonialism: firstly, it has undeniably an ironical, perhaps even satirical intention, when as Johnson underlines: “Not yet a novelist, Virginia Stephen became an activist for one day, who thumbed her nose at the British Navy”<sup>180</sup>; secondly, it was not just a simple hoax, but one with a double colonial intention. The first colonial intention lies in the fact that everybody’s face who participated in the hoax was painted in black, and the second one was assured by Woolf herself, she added an extra layer to this act by choosing to be the only woman in this affair. This is a powerful undertaking from a woman’s part, especially at the beginning of the twentieth century.

After having analyzed the colonial context of Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys, we could see how their background could, later on, have repercussions on their writings. It is now time to go further and have a look at the period when they are already in the metropolitan centre, already living their dream. In regard to Woolf, the Dreadnaught Hoax shows us how preoccupied Woolf was in colonial matters from an early age. At the age of 28, she proved her interest in the issues of the British Empire by involving herself in a courageous and risky act such as the Dreadnaught Hoax. In this chapter the events presented take place still at a relatively young age, in the actual countries of our writers, most of the presented scenes being influenced by the colonial context itself.

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<sup>180</sup> Georgia Johnson, “Virginia Woolf’s talk on the Dreadnought Hoax”, p. 1.

### 3. Colonial temporality: disillusionment

Starting with the writers' journeys and the way they came to London and arriving at the time when they actually settled in the metropolitan centre: that is the journey of this chapter. We will examine Mansfield and Rhys's past in conjunction with the conditions of their arrival and the way they faced the reality of London.

Before having the actual experience of London, Mansfield and Rhys had always longed to go to the metropolitan centre. But once they were there, the craving vanished ... What's more, they even regretted their decision at first. Lauren Elkin, the author of a book on *flânerie*, Paris, and modernity called *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* states concerning Rhys: "When she first arrived, she was devastated by the grey drabness of it all. All 'brown' and dingy', it did not match the England of her fantasies, which she had imagined full of colour and light. It should have been a homecoming, but instead was the most disheartening kind of reverse exile.<sup>181</sup>"

So there are two states of being, which mainly characterize the writers' journey: before and after their arrival. These two experiences are charged with distinct temporalities, which in turn correspond to specific emotions. We have, on the one hand, their past experience, characterized by the time Mansfield and Rhys were in the colonies, still at home, and the present narrative time, the time that they describe in their works. The time spent back in the colonies will be evoked, a time full of hope, enthusiasm, rich in emotions of longing. The curiosity manifested towards London by the people living in the colonies was specific for that time and even more so for students and intellectuals, who were eager to go and learn in the metropolitan centre. Then, there is the "waking up to reality" and realizing that they were living a dream, which they built up themselves. Important declarations that the authors have made themselves will complexify our analysis, as they bear an echo and have a strong significance in the way we perceive them nowadays. They make a reference to and are in a direct link with the writers' colonial (identity and) belonging.

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<sup>181</sup> Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*, London, Penguin, 2016, p. 45.

## **“I wasn’t like it any longer” or growing up in the colonies**

An important aspect to begin with I believe is one linked to London and the image it projected at the time. It is essential to stress the fact that London was, among other things, a metaphor and a literary figure of time, as perceived from colonial territories. There was a certain delay between the colonies and the modernity that London embodied. London was undeniably a place that promulgated the Modernist artistic movement. The writers had the opportunity to invent and create their Modernist poetics. In the British empire they had access to culture, literature and development. The image of the colonies that they shared with the world was in a way decisive.

It is precisely in this delay, or time-lag as Bhabha puts it, that the past inevitably comes back. Homi K. Bhabha is an Indian English scholar, critical theorist and one of the most influential figures in contemporary postcolonial studies. The delay between the colonies and the capital of the British Empire is the one that projects the past and makes it alive, as Bhabha, in his well-known treatise on the *Location of Culture*, exposes his view and calls this immediate phenomenon the “furious emergence of the projective past<sup>182</sup>”. The said projection of the past attracts with it a series of states of mind, similar from one author to the other. This delay or time-lag is “a way of rethinking notions of cultural heritage”<sup>183</sup> as Michael O. O’Riley puts it in his article on “Postcolonial Haunting: Anxiety, Affect, and the Situated Encounter”. Then, he adds that “Although Bhabha’s view of the return of colonial past is designed as a disruptive intervention, it ‘flashes up’ because it already inhabits modernity, is very much a part of its heritage” (*Location*, 257).<sup>184</sup> We will now try to see how these states of awareness work in the case of our authors with specific examples drawn from their works.

It is at the age of nine that Rhys first confronts herself with the awareness of “time, change and the longing for the past.” (*SP*, p. 3-4) In a passage from *Smile Please* she remembers an early childhood experience when a photograph was taken of her; a couple of years later that act still contributes to the realization of her own transitory being:

It was about three years afterwards that one early morning, dressed for school, I came downstairs before anyone else and for some reason looked at the photograph attentively realising with dismay that I wasn’t

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<sup>182</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Bury St Edmunds, Routledge, 1994, p. 254.

<sup>183</sup> Michael F. O’Riley, “Postcolonial Haunting: Anxiety, Affect, and the Situated Encounter”, *Ohio State University, Postcolonial Text*, Vol. 3, no 4, 2007, p. 5.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.



like it any longer. I remember the dress she was wearing so much prettier than anything I had now, but the curls, the dimples surely belonged to somebody else. The eyes were a stranger's eyes. The forefinger of the right hand was raised as if in warning. She has moved after all. Why I didn't know, she wasn't me any longer. It was the first time I was aware of time, change and the longing for the past. I was nine years of age.

Catching sight of myself in the long-looking glass I felt despair.<sup>185</sup>

Let us note how Rhys chooses to begin her memoir: with an idea that actually affected all her existence, in real life and writing as well. From an early age, she saw herself a stranger, and the years only confirmed and amplified that feeling of estrangement and alienation. For Rhys, a stranger is not just somebody else, but it can also be herself, her own being. The feeling of not belonging, of being disconnected in her own self quickly transforms into a deeper sense of loss, one that manifests itself even from her first novels. Nagihan Haliloglu in her Ph.D. thesis *Narrating from the Margins: Self-Representation of Female and Colonial Subjectivities in Jean Rhys's Novels* published in 2011, finds in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* a lack of private space; the character is seen as experiencing alienation from her surroundings and her own body, referring to herself as "she", also present in *Quartet*.<sup>186</sup> The use of the third person singular is a mark of the distance from her true self and also a feature of alienation, just as in the excerpt from *Smile Please* that we just had a look at. One of the main reasons why I chose an extract from the beginning of her memoir, *Smile Please*, is to underline the passiveness by which the colonials were characterized (in face of the colonizers), and how colonization is genuinely an act of distance, of one's alienation from the other and from the society that surrounds them. That lies at the heart of my argumentation and therefore of this thesis. The colonial time described in the writers' works reflects the cultural, ideological and societal context of the 20th century. In this passage, Rhys here positioned in the role of the colonial, moves whereas she was asked to stand still by the photographer, in the role of the colonizer. She does not obey. Rhys also speaks about "the longing for the past", in this case for what she was three years ago, and the despair that characterized her from an adolescent age. The despair comes on the one hand, from the estrangement that she feels towards her own being, and on the other hand, from the gap between her present self and her younger self. As an adult, Rhys's alienation comes from this separation and mismatch between the two selves: her living in the colonies and her settling down in London, or we can even go back to the times when she still lived in Dominica, and in that case, there is a separation between herself as a Creole (not genuinely

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> Nagihan Haliloglu, *Narrating from the Margins: Self-Representation of Female and Colonial Subjectivities in Jean Rhys's Novels*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2011, p. 190.

belonging to that land) and someone who would actually belong there. The present passage abounds in temporal images, throughout the adverbial constructions that the writer uses: “It was about three years afterwards, “one early morning”, “now”, “any longer”, “the first time”, “longing for the past”, “I was nine years of age”, but also the perpetual use of past tenses. The temporal reality is expressed by the sentence: “It was the first time I was aware of time, change and the longing for the past”. The colonial dimension comes in throughout the gap that exists between her younger self, a girl born and raised in the colonies, and the person that she becomes afterwards. The passage ends with a powerful self-awareness of the girl when she “[catches] sight of [herself] in the long-looking glass”, as if she would suddenly be somebody else, somebody that she does not recognise anymore.

The haunted self appears in other Rhysian novels as well, due to the inability to fit two colonial worlds together. For this time we are dealing with a temporal gap between the colony, Dominica and London. In *Voyage in the Dark*, a striking disjunction happens at a structural level. The isolated self leads to a ruptured self, temporally speaking; the first person narration showcases the protagonist’s inner thoughts, split between an unhomely self, situated between two colonial “geotemporal montages”, London-present/Caribbean-past. Carol Dell’ Amico in *Colonialism and the Modernist Movement in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys*, debating a chapter on “*Voyage in the Dark: Unhomely*”, notes that:

The novel [is] told from Anna’s point of view [...] she records or recites portions of songs overhead or remembered, she recollects fragments of a Caribbean past, memories which are either summoned or else assail her (and Caribbean memory also occurs in extended sections of recall); and she jumbles together presently occurring events, passing perceptions, feelings, thoughts, observations, and so forth. The novel’s mass of fragments is then organized into another layer of montage, as the individual fragments are grouped around either an extended Caribbean memory sequence or else a block of events occurring in the present in London. The novel is thus a dual montage, a coalition of fragments and a blocked, overlaid, geotemporal montage (London-present/Caribbean-past).<sup>187</sup>

Carol Dell’ Amico evokes that the novel’s text affects an almost collapsing past and present — a fusion of London and the Caribbean: “But Anna [...] is a figure who is both haunted and haunting; she is both a ghost and ghosted. Indeed, as a “soucriant”, or figure of vampire inspired by the Caribbean folklore, she unhomes herself much as she unhomes her friends.”<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Carol Dell’ Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Movement*, *op. cit.*, p. 39-40.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

The estrangement present in from an early age develops into alienation and finally insanity as for the lives of the characters that Rhys creates. And that is precisely what happens in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where the desire to belong somewhere turns out to actually lead to not belong anywhere. Based on Judith Raiskin's argument, John Marx, in his work combining modernism and the influence of colonialism, underlines: "Alienation leads to insanity, according to Judith Raiskin, who reasons that 'Antoinette's madness can be read as the psychological conflict between [...] desire to belong to opposing communities and [...] recognition that (she) belongs to neither.'"<sup>189</sup> Judith Raiskin is interested in post-colonial literature and Pacific Island cultural studies, editor of the *Norton Critical Edition of Jean Rhys's novel Wide Sargasso Sea*<sup>190</sup> and author of *Snow on the Cane Fields: Women Writers and Creole Subjectivity*.

Can we actually talk of opposing communities when having in mind the English and the Caribbean, or the New Zealanders? We need to have in mind the fact that they are of British descendants. The past and present times of the colonies put together give us the New Zealand and Caribbean situations that we find in the writers' works.

A characteristic of colonial time, and colonial writing in general, is this back-and-forth in time that the characters experience; they travel and recreate colonial time each time they think about it. In his book, Saikat Majumdar, *Modernism and the Banality of Empire* — a work that, to my mind, has enriched and added some great insights to the way we perceive Modernist writers and the analysis of their works from a colonial perspective — claims the following: "Mansfield's stories [...] have a tonal ambivalence that draws from a play of desire, distaste, longing, and disillusionment that shaped her back-and-forth movement between New Zealand and Europe."<sup>191</sup> Ambivalence is representative of colonial time and it is precisely that longing and disillusionment, the pillars of this chapter, that create the back-and-forth between the colony and the imperial centre. Colonial time is always split, between past and present, longing and disillusionment, creation and recreation. As Bhabha underlines in his famous discussion on the origins and authenticity of the colonial mind and presence: "The colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference."<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> John Marx, *The Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 164.

<sup>190</sup> New York, WW Norton & Co., 1999, second edition forthcoming 2019.

<sup>191</sup> Saikat Majumdar, *Modernism and the Banality of Empire*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013, p. 78.

<sup>192</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 107.

## Longing for yet unbelonging to the imperial centre

The so-called “London dream” drowns soon after the writers arrive (Katherine Mansfield in 1903 and Jean Rhys in 1906), and the feelings associated with that state do not fail to show up. The longing for London experienced at home transforms into a longing for the home country once the dream of going to the metropolitan centre comes true. There is a constant longing for their home country described in Mansfield’s and Rhys’s stories, which they wrote towards the end of their career but also at the beginning, in the early years. It is a back-and forth game, a cycle that characterized their whole existence and which they couldn’t escape. As Janet Wilson puts it, there is this juxtaposition of the poetics of “longing and (un)belonging” in Mansfield’s works, for instance. In her article “‘Where is Katherine?’ Longing and (Un)belonging in the Works of Katherine Mansfield”<sup>193</sup>, Wilson stresses the connection between longing and belonging versus longing and unbelonging, both present in Mansfield’s works, and which is included to some extent in the colonial dimension of the writers experiencing colonialism. Biographically speaking, I think that the longing - belonging connection manifests while Mansfield was still in New Zealand, when she had New Zealand, a place where she could belong, but was longing for something more. Regarding the other longing - unbelonging connection, I think that it appears once based in London, when the unbelonging phenomenon was caused by this gap that exists in her mind between New Zealand and London. Basically, belonging and unbelonging are almost synonyms in the writer’s case, as she cannot really tell the difference between the two states (of mind). It is this gap between the colonial home and the imperial centre that manifests itself and leaves a mark on the experience and evolution of the ones involved. We can talk about a gap in its various aspects: temporal, spatial, ideological, etc.

I think that Mansfield, and Rhys as well, oscillate between the two states; the moments of unbelonging are probably mostly present, and the works are an indication in this sense. The experience of being a foreigner first in their home country — Mansfield being a Pakeha (a foreigner or white European settler for the Maori) and in the case of Rhys the image of a “cockroach”/“white nigger” being constantly present — is reinforced by their later involvement in London life, where they are seen as foreigners and wild because they come from the “uncivilized” colony. Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, claims that:

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<sup>193</sup> ‘Where is Katherine?’: *Longing and (Un)belonging in the Works of Katherine Mansfield*, by Janet Wilson published in Gerri Kimber, Janet Wilson (eds.), *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays*, Chippenham and Eastbourne, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

It was a song about a white cockroach. That's me. That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. Between you and I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all. (*WSS*, p. 85)

By stating “It was a song about a white cockroach. That’s me.”, Antoinette takes responsibility for her colonial identity and her non-belonging on her own homeland. The lack of identity that she is experiencing makes her question herself and her own existence.

It is worthwhile to mention the approach that Rhys’s biographer, Pizzichini, uses: “Jean Rhys was the voice before her time; the voice that did not belong to any group; a voice that was rendered speechless much of the time because it suffered alienation from language itself.”<sup>194</sup>

After having studied for three years at the London school, Mansfield meets English tourists back home: “It is splendid to see once again real English people. I am so tired and sick & sick of the third rate article. Give me the Maori and the tourist but nothing between.<sup>195</sup>” Once home, she misses and is tired of anything except the people she met when she was in England.

If we think about Virginia Woolf and her sense of belonging to her homeland, an article by Jane Marcus comes to mind, “Thinking Back Through our Mothers”, in which she remarks: “Writing, for Virginia Woolf, was a revolutionary act. Her alienation from British patriarchal culture and capitalist and imperialist form and values, were so intense that she was filled with terror and determination as she wrote. A guerrilla fighter in a Victorian skirt, she trembled with fear as she prepared her attacks, her raids on the enemy.<sup>196</sup>” Virginia Woolf was a complex literary and historical personality; even though she was raised in the heart of the empire, she often had colonial views and insights and was not afraid of writing about them. Nevertheless, they are most of the time difficult to analyze due to their complexity. Her ideas evolved and changed over time, which is an indicator of her evolution as a writer, just as in the case of Rhys and Mansfield.

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<sup>194</sup> Pizzichini, *The Blue Hour: A Life of Jean Rhys*, p. 289.

<sup>195</sup> Scott Margaret (ed.), *The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks*, p. 140.

<sup>196</sup> Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* [1985], Bungay, Routledge, 1990.

## The filter of the colonial

The experience of not belonging, of being nothing but a stranger settled in London who decides to write, leads the writers to make powerful declarations about themselves. These declarations are crucial from a colonial perspective, as they entail the writers' colonial self and (un)belonging. As children, Mansfield and Rhys were exposed to an enormous quantity of colonial information in the form of historical scenes. This makes me think of Sigmund Freud's theory on the primal scenes, in which the child's first observations of his/her parents' sexual relations will contribute to the development of the child as an adult. In a similar way, the rich and profuse nature of the writers' past colonial environment, which remains with them, constitutes the filter or the camera through which they perceive the world.

A remarkable and self-revealing moment is when Mansfield makes a powerful declaration about her own identity as a colonial. Interestingly, it happens in 1908, the year of her second arrival in London; from then on she would never go back to New Zealand. It is all the more intimate information as she confesses it in her diary, a manuscript that is not written with the aim of being published, possibly the most intimate form of revelation of someone's inner thoughts and feelings. It is a passage that has a powerful meaning with respect to Mansfield as a New Zealand author and the question of colonialism and colonial time:

But why should they make me feel a stranger? Why should they ask me every time I go near: "And what are you doing in a London garden?" They burn with arrogance & pride. And I am the little colonial walking in a London garden patch—allowed to look perhaps, but not to linger. If I lie on the grass, they positively shout at me: "Look at her, lying on our grass, pretending she lives here, pretending this is her garden, and that tall back of a house, with windows open and the coloured curtains lifting, in her house. She is a stranger—an alien. She is nothing but a little girl sitting on the Tinakori hills and dreaming: 'I went to London and married an Englishman and lived in a tall grave house, with red geraniums and white daisies in the garden at the back.' *Im-pudence!*<sup>197</sup>"

Mansfield's declaration starts with a powerful statement: "I am" followed by the noun "colonial" through which she declares her outsider status, preceded by the adjective "little", which I think is a form of pity towards her own being, expressing at the same time her place as meaningless, as if nobody took her into account. She imagines a dialogue between herself and "they", the English people, in which, interestingly, it is only the English people who have been given the right to speak,

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<sup>197</sup> J. Middleton Murry (ed.), *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, p. 106.

which is precisely the meaningless image of herself that she wants to give us from the beginning: “I am the little colonial ...”. The first antithesis that strikes the readers’ attention is, I believe, the contrast made between the pronouns “I”, “she”, and “her” versus “they” and “our”. It is as if there were two worlds coexisting in London, on the one hand, the pride and arrogant locals, and on the other hand, the strangers or aliens who come to London and pretend that the place was their own. They inevitably established a distance, a cold relationship, if there was any. “Pretending”, “stranger”, “alien” — are words that describe in an increasing way the identity of someone who has just entered the country. The antithesis between the image of the house (intentionally not “home”, which would not fit the colonial estrangement described here): with a garden, surrounded by grass, with the windows open and the coloured curtains ... and that of the alien, who has no house like the one described, on the contrary, she has nothing but her own dreams. The stereotypical and ironical image of the “little girl sitting on the Tinakori hills and dreaming” is all the more powerful. Someone who does not belong there only sits and dreams, contrary to those who belong there and who move, take action and live. The tension increases when the the image of “the little colonial” is completed by the pronoun “her” and the presence of the woman who “went to London and married an Englishmen”.

An image all the more related to the “little colonial” is the one featuring “the little savage from New Zealand”. A long section of her journal, written in February 1916 when she was happily living in Bandol, shows the remarkable detail of her memory:

I was thinking yesterday of my *wasted, wasted* early girlhood. [...] I never came into contact with him, (“the old Principal”) when he asked any young lady in the room to hold up her hand if she had been chased by a wild bull, and as nobody else did I held up mine (though of course I hadn’t). “Ah”, he said, “I am afraid you do not count. You are a little savage from New Zealand.”<sup>198</sup>

It is an episode that took place in London. The sentence “You do not count” is a radical, almost shocking piece of information that one could affront. It emphasizes the place of estrangement that Mansfield experienced when coming to London, at the time when she was studying at Queen’s College. At the time, she must have felt as a “little savage from New Zealand” since the idiom “little colonial” belongs to her, a sentence that she wrote years later. If we have a look at the two expressions, we can see that they are actually synonyms and clearly seize Mansfield’s identity, or in this case lack of identity. The one that she heard in college appears later in a different form, being

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<sup>198</sup> J. Middleton Murry (ed.), *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, p. 55. Entry dated February 1916.

integrated in her journal, the same applies to the first statement. The first one was written on the 17th of February 1916, whereas the second one on the 19th of May 1919, at the age of 31.

It may sound stereotypical to think about the little girl from Tinakori road who spent her days dreaming ... but that is what actually happened; Mansfield's marriage to an Englishman ensured and also helped her fit into the English society more easily. Contrary to Mansfield, Rhys never had a stable relationship with an Englishman; she married and had several relationships throughout her lifetime, none of which were stable enough to create a happy and balanced life for her. She met man after man and reinforced her condition as a foreigner even in her sentimental life.

Mansfield seems to be trapped between two states of being: one of unbelonging, that reminds me of her outsider condition, and another one of belonging, of actually accepting and creating a union with her new country and environment. In a letter to her second cousin, Sydney Waterlow, dated on the 9th of February 1921, written in Menton, France, during her stay at the Villa Isola Bella, she talks about the impossible task of fitting in the English environment, despite its qualities. She still sees England with the eyes of a stranger:

I shall never live in England again. I recognise England's admirable qualities, but we simply don't get on. We have nothing to say to each other; we are always meeting as strangers. Murry, on the other hand, is *made* for England and I am certain he will not remain abroad for long. I understand that very well in him. No, I'll go finally to some place like Yalta & build a little house at Oreanda — if I do succeed in keeping the coffin from the door for so long.<sup>199</sup>

She considered that one has to be made for a country, hence the use of the italics. The fact of seeing herself elsewhere (and, furthermore, of going from place to place) is clearly a sign of being an outsider, of not belonging to England and it is even more powerful since she is the one who acknowledges this fact. The same year, a similar criticism concerning the English appears in her notebooks, a positive one for this time. Mansfield marks the phrase “we English”. Ann Blake talks about a shifting in the understanding of her colonial identity.<sup>200</sup> Her behaviour could be seen as a shifting of perception, or a blurred perception that Mansfield experiences since the two declarations were made in the same year. We could see Mansfield's confession as a sign of uncertainty and the desire to be part of “her new home”. The previous declaration that stresses the distance between England and herself turns into one where she sees herself as part of society. There are no indications

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<sup>199</sup> Vincent O'Sullivan & Margaret Scott (eds.), *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield* (volume 4 - 1920-1921) (1966), New York, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 178.

<sup>200</sup> Ann Blake, *England through Colonial Eyes in Twentieth-Century Fiction*, p. 79.



in her notebook concerning the month when this declaration was made, but having analyzed the other notebooks, it was probably towards the end of the year in question. A cheerful acceptance of Mansfield regarding England was probably the impression that she left with.

Besides Mansfield's short stories, it is her poems, less researched, though, that have lately become of great interest. Let us have a look at the poem *To Stanislaw Wyspianski* in which she highlights the double existence that she led, that of a foreigner, a colonial writer coming from New Zealand to write, and also that of a pioneer woman:

From the other side of the world,  
From a little island cradled in the giant sea bosom,  
From a little land with no history,  
(Making its own history, slowly and clumsily  
Piecing together this and that, finding the pattern, solving the problem,  
Like a child with a box of bricks),  
I, a woman, with the taint of the pioneer in my blood,  
Full of a youthful strength that wars with itself and is lawless,  
I sing your praises, magnificent warrior; I proclaim your triumphant battle<sup>201</sup>.

This passage reveals two important aspects of Mansfield's spirit: the first is the fact that she is a colonial, coming from New Zealand, and the second one is that she has "the taint of the pioneer in [her] blood", but most of all, she is a woman doing all those changes and innovations. The pioneer reveals her Modernist side. Here we have the three most important characteristics of her work: she is a colonial woman inventing the course of Modernism. It is also stated that she is an outsider and a woman at the same time, two dimensions of colonialism. She is using her coloniality and the fact that she may come from a country "with no history", but she is nevertheless a woman ready to leave her mark and "[make her own] history".

Another declaration that comes to mind is the one that Mansfield wrote in March 1922, a couple of months before her death: "I thank God I was born in New Zealand. A young country is a real heritage, though it takes one time to recognize it. But New Zealand is in my very bones. What wouldn't I give to have a look at it!"<sup>202</sup>

Jeffrey Meyers is right, I think, when he underlines Mansfield's belonging to England, as much as to her home country. He makes his point by commenting Victor Pritchett's view on Mansfield's colonial identity: "Victor Pritchett, misled by the qualities that Katherine often chose to

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<sup>201</sup> Katherine Mansfield's poem *To Stanislaw Wyspianski* in Gerri Kimber and Claire Davison (eds.), *The Collected Poems of Katherine Mansfield*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 71.

<sup>202</sup> John Middleton Middleton (ed.), *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, London, Constable, 1928, II, p. 199.

emphasize rather than conceal, quite mistakenly calls her ‘the exquisite colonial, the prim exile, who belong neither to England, nor New Zealand.’ Though illness gave Katherine a frail and delicate appearance, her character was more tough than exquisite [...]. She was rebellious and daring, nor prim, and belonged very much to New Zealand as well as to England.”

Contrary to Mansfield, who was very close to finding her place and becoming a part of London society, and more broadly that of Europe, Rhys never had the chance to feel at home. *Smile Please* is a testimony about the way she felt towards the end of her life, a declaration which stands in opposition to Mansfield’s. Her rootlessness was too strong, as if she were suspended in the air waiting for a sense of belonging. It is the case of a scene that happens at Christmas, when she is alone in her room in London and has a moment of reflection: “I sat in the armchair looking out of the window on to the empty street, for London is always empty at Christmas, wondering how I would get through the day.” (*SP*, p. 108) Then, she received a gift of a tree, carried by her landlord. There was no letter, only a card with the inscription “HAPPY CHRISTMAS”:

I stared at the tree and tried to imagine myself at a party with a lot of people, laughing and talking and happy. But it was no use. I would never be part of anything. I would never really belong anywhere, and I knew it, and all my life would be the same, trying to belong, and failing. Always something would go wrong. I am a stranger and I always will be, and after all I didn’t really care. (*SP*, p. 109)

The future seems certain in her eyes, projected by the use of the conditional tense, which acts here as a future tense, and the future tense itself. The certainty of her feeling and projection is emphasized and reinforced by the use of the utterance “I knew it”. By declaring “I am a stranger” she excludes herself from English society and from all societies: “I would never belong anywhere”. Anna, in *Voyage in the Dark*, exclaims: “I’m a real West Indian ... I’m the fifth generation on my mother’s side.” (*SP*, 47) Just like her protagonist Anna, Rhys is a true West Indian woman, which means that she belongs neither to the West Indies, her homeland nor to England. Being a true West Indian woman means being a colonial, which carries with itself the pattern of not belonging. Being colonial means that she has no actual home. She may belong more to the Caribbean, but has never experienced a true belonging to some place. Her lack of belonging to one place, or *placelessness*, creates her temporal issues, thus experiencing *timelessness* as well.

Most of the time she was envious and sad not to be black and thought that black people “were more a part of the place than [they] were.” (*SP*, p. 34) She felt as if she was belonging more to the black society than to the white creoles. Her deep sense of unbelonging is manifested in her

later life in England. While in England, she certainly did not consider herself an English woman, at the most she was a “pseudo-English” (*SP*, p. 119) as she herself claims in her autobiography, given her Irish and Welsh origins. Her father was Welsh, whose mother was Irish. Rhys’s double identity is a recurrent pattern in her writings. Judith Raiskin, a specialist in postcolonial and women’s studies, mentions this characteristic aspect of Rhys’s fiction: “The doubleness of their [Rhys’s Creole characters’] identities — as both Caribbean and English, while also neither Caribbean nor English — forces them to shift between the two national ‘realities’.”<sup>203</sup> It is precisely this identity trouble experienced in the metropolitan centre that creates the lack of presentness of the characters, or the inability to experience the present moment. Their ambiguous “realities” is what precisely creates the feeling of alienation.

As a brief conclusion to this third chapter, we can say that the announced title “Colonial temporality: disillusionment” was, as expected, treated in reference to the writers’ experience and their desire to live in London, which in the end is self-revelatory, as the writers’ statements reveal. It is a journey of self-knowledge and self-discovery that the writers undertake. Their perspective of colonial time changes and evolves considerably throughout their experience in the metropolitan centre. Imagine how their writings would have evolved without the understanding and perspective that they gained by moving to London. The illusion that the writers came up with to London only left with a greater realization, of not belonging either to New Zealand in Mansfield’s case or the Caribbean in Rhys’s situation, nor to the “second home” that they chose for themselves.

Our journey of introducing the writers’ colonial context unwraps itself as the chapters pass. The next chapter revolves around even more detailed information on Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys.

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<sup>203</sup> Judith L. Raiskin, *Snow on the Cane Fields: Women’s Writing and Creole Subjectivity*, London, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 147.

#### 4. History (re)located: past and present situations

With respect to the works written by the authors and the characters that give life to these works, this chapter's aim is to investigate, on the one hand, the situation of the authors once settled in London, their relationship to time and the way they carry on and reinvent the colonial time that they experience at that time. The present moment or 'presentness' is questioned: the inability to clearly perceive and live in the present moment comes from a past that is constantly coming back, which in turn gives no space to the future. This mainly applies Mansfield and Rhys's works. Rhys and Mansfield's situations are similar, especially at the beginning, but they evolve differently; the manner they make their way and adapt to the colonial London is not the same. The past-present antagonism nonetheless appears in Woolf's works as well. Her situation and the way she perceives the London context are also intriguing. Therefore, after having treated that, the argument examines what is happening on Woolf's side. This part does not aim to establish Woolf's place in the colonial context, whether she is a colonial or anti-colonial figure, but rather to point out some of Woolf's opinions expressed in her writings.

#### Rhys and Mansfield: The early years

Ann Blake, in her chapter, "Katherine Mansfield and the Rejection of England", explores the different phases that Mansfield had to go through when confronted with the new: England. One of Blake's previous publications, *Christina Stead's Politics of Place*, is dedicated to Christina Stead's writings, an Australian twentieth-century writer. The chapter on Mansfield included in this book is drawn from a collection of articles, which offers a panorama of the twentieth century London, using a colonial perspective and focusing on writers who have emigrated, been exiled or simply travelled to England, as suggested by the book's title, in which the chapter is integrated: *England through Colonial Eyes in Twentieth-Century Fiction*. It is these different phases that I would like to dwell on a little. Mansfield's collection of early writings<sup>204</sup> is a testimony of the dual

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<sup>204</sup> We will use the 2013 (new material) edition of Katherine Mansfield's early writings: Gerri Kimber and Vincent O'Sullivan (eds.), *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield (vol.1): The Collected Fiction of Katherine Mansfield, 1898-1915*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

existence that she led: they describe London and the places she had visited at the time, along with her home land. Her European discovery includes the German experience, but other places as well, such as Bruges, Geneva, etc. This edition clearly expresses Mansfield's chronology and her journey abroad. She takes inspiration from the life that she lived in those places, but an important and not negligible part of her early works is represented by her life back in New Zealand. In the introduction to her early writings it is stated that her first and final short story are set in the same street in Wellington.<sup>205</sup> The first one emphasizes her living in New Zealand and dreaming of England, and the last one the reverse: after experiencing England for a lifetime, she goes back to her first memories and her initial home, Wellington. The final story was written in the Swiss Alps, but nonetheless gathers the experience of a lifetime. The symmetry of the place is also a symmetry of time, of her inner colonial time. The two acts of writing seem to be opposed to one another, but they have actually the same root. It is colonial time that creates the two. Mansfield experiences colonial time in different shapes; hence, her richness as a colonial author.

Mansfield's first short story, "Enna Blake", written in 1898, describes Enna and Mrs. Blake spending a few days in Torquay, England, after receiving an invitation from Lucy Brown. England was a dream for her, but most of all London, of which she thought all the time: "Today is much nicer here than in London."<sup>206</sup> Enna's enthusiasm manifested when "that night Enna said she thought it was the nicest day she had ever had in the country."<sup>207</sup> Little Enna's delight could be read on her face every day and "when the holidays did come to an end, Enna thought it was the happiest she had ever had"<sup>208</sup>.

In the following stories, Mansfield continues to be inspired by her daily experiences, and thus narrating stories based on her family and personal life. Her first longer story is dated from 1906, the year she goes back to New Zealand for a while.

While reading her early short stories, the reader can easily identify Katherine Mansfield's need and pleasure to write about New Zealand, shortly after having emigrated to Europe. In 1908, in the story "In Summer", the first-person narrator remembers her mother and childhood: "So I remembered. I was never unhappy. I learned a great many songs, and drank milk out of a little white cup, and my Mother curled and uncurled my hair, and we looked at each other in the looking

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<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xix.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

glass.”<sup>209</sup> The word “Mother” being capitalized makes us think of a sacred person and also a sacred time that the character once had. A feeling of nostalgia along with gracefulness is perceived in this short passage: the confession “I was never unhappy” and the description of the time that the two characters have spent together are all the more present. The story pictures Mansfield’s childhood, in other words, her happy days, which is also an indication of her already missing home.

A characteristic of Mansfield’s works is that the characters’ colonial experience brings colonial time to the surface. Colonial time is rendered here by means of the question of identity. For example, in the story “The Luftbad”, the first-person narrator, who is also a character, is asked about her identity:

‘Are you an American?’ Said the Vegetable Lady, turning to me. ‘No.’

‘Then you are an Englishwoman?’

‘Well, hardly —’

‘You must be one of the two; you cannot help it. I have seen you walking alone several times. You wear your —’<sup>210</sup>

This passage deals directly with the theme of identity, but there is one particular word that makes allusion to the character’s colonial status, and that is the adverb “hardly” in the syntagm “Well, hardly —”. The reaction of the character takes her through a whole process of awareness vis-à-vis her own self: her colonial past and the present in which she is unable to fit. The answer “Well, hardly” here is, I think, a mark of the impossibility, the inability of the character to picture herself as an Englishwoman. What strikes me here is that the passage ends abruptly: the sentence is not finished and what follows is a paragraph describing the weather, something completely unrelated to the conversation of the two ladies. The writer makes use of the Modernist technique of ellipsis in order to call attention on a colonial issue. According to the edition that we have been using, the short story was published in March 1910, not long after Mansfield’s second arrival in England. The short stories about New Zealand continue in the cited volume; they are located in a New Zealand, usually Wellington context, just as the one written in 1911, “A Birthday”. This presumably describes Mansfield’s birthday and it takes place in the house located on Tinakori Road, where the author was born. Later that year, another story brings up the question of identity and belonging. In the well-known short story, “The Modern Soul”, we can read:

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<sup>209</sup> Gerri Kimber and Vincent O’Sullivan (eds.), *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield* (vol.1): *The Collected Fiction of Katherine Mansfield, 1898-1915*, p. 114.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

'I have never been to England', interrupted Fräulein Sonia, 'but I have my English acquaintances. They are so cold!' She shivered.

'Fish-blooded,' snapped Frau Godowska. 'Without soul, without heart, without grace. [...] My lamented husband, your father, Sonia, knew a great deal about England. But the more he knew about it, the oftener he remarked to me, "England is merely an island of beef flesh swimming in a warm gulf sea of gravy." Such a brilliant way of putting things.'<sup>211</sup>

In this passage, the criticisms made by the characters are direct and linked to the way people, and more specifically Mansfield saw the English at that time, but they also show some historical and colonial issues. It is precisely the husband's opinion that is to be analyzed here. The remark made in this paragraph is complex and could possibly have several interpretations. A plausible one would be the one offered by Anne Fernihough written in her book on *Freewomen and Superwomen: Edwardian Radicals and Literary Modernism*. In relation to this excerpt, Fernihough thinks that: "It is an image of decadence and excess suggesting that Britain is past its imperial peak; it also obliquely but unmistakably alludes to the rapidly expanding German navy which by this time was threatening Britain's naval supremacy. The traditional English breakfast, rich in animal fats, is similarly targeted by the pension guests as a symptom of national 'unfitness' (...)." <sup>212</sup> I believe that it projects Mansfield's opinion about England, but also about the tensions between the two countries, England and Germany, as mentioned by Anne Fernihough. Mansfield was witness to Europe's historical facts, precisely from the country in which she was established, in this case in Germany.

Contrary to Mansfield, Rhys did not keep a journal, diary or notebook. The only work available for that period is her first collection of short stories; the letters are referenced later, 1931-1966. As for Rhys's early works, there is also a tendency to write about her homeland. She brings to light the marvellous qualities of the West Indies. Rhys begins her career by writing short stories; it is then that she focuses on the novel writing, relatively short novels, as we know. The first stories that Rhys ever wrote are short and the fact that she is missing her home land is self-evident. For example, in the short story "Mixing Cocktails", an English woman speaks about the West Indies in a wonderful way, expressing the island's qualities: "The English aunt gazes and exclaims at intervals: 'The colors ... How exquisite! ... Extraordinary that so few people should visit the West Indies ... That sea ... Could anything be more lovely?' / It is a purple sea with a sky to match it.

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<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>212</sup> Anne Fernihough, *Freewomen and Supermen: Edwardian Radicals and Literary Modernism*, Croydon, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 229.

The Caribbean. The deepest, the loveliest in the world ...”<sup>213</sup> Rhys’s ironical gesture follows her throughout the entire collection of these first stories. She chooses an English woman to express her stunning reaction and admiration towards the West Indies. The choice of an English woman is a powerful gesture on Rhys’s part and that is where her irony lies. By that she does not only elevate the colonial Caribbean but lowers in a way the English woman’s status, who is now able to see more than she used to before. The sentences “Could anything be more lovely?” And “The deepest, the loveliest in the world” imply that England does not and will never have anything similar, this way distancing herself and her readers from England. The act of distancing herself from England continues in the short story “Again the Antilles”, a title that suggests that she cannot have enough of this land. In this story she refers to her own identity and mostly to the way she feels inside. The expression “we West Indians” precisely refers to a feeling of attachment, and implicitly of not belonging to the English society that Rhys herself integrated twenty-one years earlier. This volume is like a description of the West Indies, emphasizing the Caribbean woman’s place, who is actually part of the land.

But towards the end of the first part of her career, when she writes *Good Morning, Midnight*, things change. The syntactic unit “we English” is used by Sasha Jansen, the protagonist of the novel. Her confession occurs while she is on a trip to Paris. Sasha is an Englishwoman who returns for the second time to Paris. She finds herself in a desperate situation, controlled and driven by alcohol and she has no other wish than to be left alone. Maybe it is the fact that she is abroad, outside England, or the alcohol talking, but she considers herself English, and what’s more, she even brings complements: “We English are so animal-conscious. We know so instinctively what the creatures feel and why they feel it ...”<sup>214</sup> What is interesting is that the same syntactic unit “we English” used by Mansfield in her letters towards the end of her life, is used by Rhys in her short stories. It seems that both authors use an expression that brings up a collective consciousness: “we” followed by the nation identifier “English”, which in turn gives them a sense of security and belonging, the possible equivalent of “I am one of them”. What follows the pronoun “we” is actually the way they feel inside the English society. It is an opportunity that allows colonial time to surface. The colonial time experienced in the colonies, during the writers’ childhood, merges with the colonial time experienced later in London. The notion of colonial time translates here by an act or feeling of belonging, of being part of something. The collective aspect of this idiom makes the writers part of the centre, an important shift from the periphery, or the colonies that they used to

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<sup>213</sup> Jean Rhys, *TBL*, p. 163.

<sup>214</sup> Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* [1939], St Ives, Penguin Group, 2000, p. 37.



belong to. It is an enormous leap given the colonial history and destiny of never belonging anywhere.

Since we tackled the question of belonging, I would like to bring one more example from the same collection *The Left Bank and Other Stories*. The concept of belonging is also present in the short story “Hunger”:

If I were Russian I should long ago have accepted Fate: had I been French I should long ago have discovered and taken the back door out. I mean no disrespect to the French. They are logical. Had I been ... SENSIBLE I should have hung on to being a mannequin with what it implies. As it is, I have struggled on, not cleverly. Almost against my own will. Don't I belong to the land of Lost Causes ... England ...

If I had a glass of wine I would drink to that: the best of toast

To a Lost Cause: to All Lost Causes ...

Oh! The relief of letting go: tumbling comfortably into the abyss ...

Not such a terrible place after all ... One way, no doubt, one will grow used to it. Lots of jolly people, here ...

No more effort.<sup>215</sup>

This passage is powerful in meaning. The comparison with other nations, such as the Russian or French, who appear superior here, or better positioned, puts the English in a darker place. England, along with the character's situation, belonging to the land of Lost Causes (emphasized here by the use of capital letters), implies an irony, which uses the second conditional “If I had a glass of wine I would drink to that” and the imperative in the form of a toast: “To a Lost Cause: to All Lost Causes ...”. The phrase “the best of toast” implies a highly ironical hint. The passage ends on a cheerful note with the slight hope that “One way, no doubt, one will grow used to it.” The use of the English word “jolly” in the construction “lots of jolly people, here” implies an effort of belonging, contrary to what the narrator states at the end: “No more effort.” The character is unknown here, which refers to the fact that it could be any foreigner, anyone who feels like a lost cause. The first person narration makes the act of narrating and the fact narrated even more drawn from reality.

After introducing Mansfield and Rhys's approach and projection towards their home country and the colonial features that it entails, an inquiry on Woolf is now required. The next part is an extension on the way the colonial left a mark on Woolf's poetics.

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<sup>215</sup> Jean Rhys, *TBL*, p. 170.

## The figure of the outsider in Woolf's *The Years*

As seen it in the previous chapter, the colonial condition implies the issue of not belonging. The colonial experience implies a limited access to spatial and temporal landmarks, which positions the colonial subject outside the societal rules and norms. The condition of the outsider defines each experience of a colonial. Thus, colonial temporality makes the outsider emerge as a point of interest in post-colonial studies, and in this chapter in particular. In some of Virginia Woolf's works too, I have identified the figure of the outsider. *The Years* abounds in particular in such poetics. It is too soon to determine whether Woolf is a colonial or an anti-colonial figure; hence, the aim of this part is to highlight the perspective of the outsider that we can find by analyzing her works. We are dealing with a 1937 novel, the last one published during her lifetime.

In Woolf's works, war is not only seen as a traumatic experience, but also a practice that turns the individual into an *outsider*. The choice of the term *outsider* within the scope of this study, or of Woolf's work, is due to its temporal connotation. From a time perspective, an outsider means one who steps out of a certain time, which one can call "collective time", having the feeling of not fitting into that place and time (any more). In postcolonial studies, this term is usually applied to characterize the condition of the colonial man, or someone involved in the process of colonialism. It could refer to a colonizer-colonized political framework including colonized people originally from the colonies. Woolf chooses to use this term with a slightly different connotation.

Here, the characters, more precisely Englishmen have left England to perform a military service in the colonies. The term thus concerns this precise context.

After a careful description of the weather, a way to start most of the chapters of this novel, Woolf stages Colonel Pargiter among other soldiers, briefly remembering their lives in the colonies: "Since his [Colonel Pargiter's] companions [...] had been soldiers, civil servants, [...] they were reviving with old jokes and stories now their past in India, Africa, Egypt, and then, by a natural transition, they turned to the present."<sup>216</sup> Since they were discussing and even making jokes about their past in the colonies and then turned to the present, for a brief moment one could assume the existence of an interpolated narration or *narration intercalée* as Genette puts it<sup>217</sup>, combining both past and present events, which gives way to a simultaneous narration<sup>218</sup>. The very first title for the

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<sup>216</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Years* [1976], Snaith, Anna (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 4.

<sup>217</sup> Gerard Genette, *Figures III*, Paris, Seuil, 1972, p. 229.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

novel “The Pargiters”, was temporarily transformed into “Here and Now”, followed by “Music”, “Dawn”, “Sons and Daughters”, “Daughters and Sons”, “Ordinary People”, “The Caravan”, “Other People’s Houses”, and finally “The Years”, as explained by Judith Allen in *Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Language*.<sup>219</sup> The choices of the titles reflect either the family bond created inside the Pargiter family or information related to the importance of time and its transitory nature. *The Years*, the final title’s very plurality implies the passage of time.<sup>220</sup> *Here and Now*, is “a working title which sounds the keynote of the emergent work as a representation of human existence in space and time: *here* in the present, fleeting moment.”<sup>221</sup> A colonial interpretation of this title is also worth considering. The “here and now” of the narration represents the arrival of the soldiers from the colonies, which conveys the importance of England and ultimately the focus of the narration, as opposed to the space of the colonies that the characters are discussing. The temporal focus being on the present, Woolf decides to begin her novel by shedding some light on the life of colonel Pargiter. The reader follows the state of things and even the state of mind of colonel Pargiter who returns from Africa. While talking with his friends, soldier companions, he suddenly has a revelation concerning his present life, the way he feels about it and his place there. Woolf shapes Modernist techniques: the focus is on the way the characters feel at the present moment, the present which is due to their past, characterized by the colonial experience. The present is intertwined with past memories: “He sat staring ahead of him with bright blue eyes that seemed a little screwed up, as if the glare of the East were still in them; and puckered at the corners as if the dust were still in them.” (*Y*, p. 4-5) The present contains in itself past particles. The description follows the current state of mind of the character due to and influenced by past events:

[...] some thought had struck him that made what the others were saying of no interest to him; [...] he looked down on the tops of omnibuses, hansom cabs, victorias, vans and landaus. He was out of it all, his attitude seemed to say; he had no longer any finger in that pie. Gloom settled on his red handsome face as he stood gazing. Suddenly a thought struck him. He had a question to ask; he turned to ask it but his friends were gone. The little group had broken up. [...] People were coming back to London; they were settling in for the season. But for him, there would be no season; for him there was nothing to do. (*Y*, p. 5)

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<sup>219</sup> Judith Allen, *Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Language*, Chippenham and Eastbourne, Edinburgh University Press, 2010, p. 49.

<sup>220</sup> Mary M. Pawlowski, ““Where am I’: Feminine Space and Time in Virginia Woolf’s *The Years*” in A. de Lange, G. Fincham, J. Hawthorn, J. Lothe (eds.), *Literary Landscapes: From Modernism to Postcolonialism*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 75.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

What the others say does not hold any interest for him; thus, he decides to meditate alone upon his life and its purpose. There is nobody to ask; once immersed in his own thoughts, he finds himself alone. The outside world makes no sense for him any more. He takes refuge in his past, a time that still exists in his deepest being. He has the feeling of no more belonging to that place, of no “longer (having) any finger in that pie.” A pie is something you can form easily, and which has no consistency; so was his life. The past participle “broken” that follows in the description makes perfect sense. Grammatically speaking, the use of the past perfect “had broken” could be a possible reference to his past life, the period spent in the colonies, and which had some consequences upon his present life and loneliness. The broken group is maybe due to the absence of the character, the period he spent away from his country. The coordinating conjunction “but” is reinforced by the double negation “no season” and “nothing to do”. It is interesting to note here the use of past tenses such as simple past, or past perfect to talk about current events, a mark of a simultaneous narration; several layers of his sorrow divide this short episode. The character lacks here the ability to feel at home as he once did. He is overwhelmed by the feeling of not being able to adapt to that environment any more. One could call that a *time gap*. In this first episode, the distance is between the time lived by the inhabitants of London and the difference due to the time that he spent in the colony. Something was missing ... Is there a certain time that he missed because of his journey in the colony? Will he be able to recover that time? The way the colonel finds London once having arrived is significant, especially as this episode constitutes the very beginning of the novel. The feeling of instability felt by the character is due to what Homi Bhabha calls a “time-lag”<sup>222</sup>.

This uneasiness is also present in a situation where the place is being emphasized. The episode that follows is what happens next after one finds out that “for him there was nothing to do” (5): “[...] there was a sparkle, an animation everywhere; the air smelt clean and brisk. But Colonel Pargiter saw neither the grass nor the trees. He marched through the Park [...] looking straight ahead of him.” (Y, p. 6) The narrative focal point is clearly set in a continuous present mode, but intercut by inserting a perspective on him: he was different from the rest of the people, because he “saw neither the grass nor the trees” and “marched through the Park [...] looking straight ahead of him”. Modernism is intercut by the colonial, and the function of Modernism is here to make the colonial resurge. The time linearity is broken, as past and present do not recover their customary compliance. Time is not only unusual but also slower because the present-past linearity is broken. The temporal discrepancy that Bhabha refers to is also highlighted in the

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<sup>222</sup> Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*, p. 254.

previously analyzed excerpt: “People were coming back to London; they were settling in for the season. But for him, there would be no season” (5) The lack of the season in the colonel’s life marks that erasure of the compliant past-present progress that Bhabha talks about.

The temporal suspension or even eradication in the colonel’s life generates alienation. On the page that follows:

The grass was very green; the leaves were beginning to shoot; little green claws, like birds’ claws, were pushing out from the branches; there was a sparkle, an animation everywhere; the air smelt clean and brisk. But Colonel Pargiter saw neither the grass nor the trees. He marched through the Park, in his closely buttoned coat, looking straight ahead of him.<sup>223</sup>

The typical Woolfian Modernist description shows a vivid landscape, rich in vivid nature images. Nature seems to renew itself and the season seems to begin, as the earlier analysis showed. Modernist images of liveliness contrast here the colonial figure of alienation. Woolf shapes Modernism to highlight the colonial feature of her text. The context provides the text a colonial dimension. The fact that he is alone and isolated makes him an outsider, makes him ‘an Other’. The lively picture of the nature is created through the following lexical field: “grass”, “green”, “leaves”, “shoot”, “birds”, “branches”, “sparkle”, “animation”, “air”, “brisk”, etc. The conjunction “but” that opens up the second half of the description marks the antitheses between the vivid nature and the abandoned being who marched by himself in the Park. His inability to perceive either of these things situates him outside the time and space of the actual description. He is external to the time and space of the London image being described and lived. He is clearly a figure of time. Thus, the meaning of the outsider takes shape.

### **The notion of the outsider and the issue of belatedness**

The temporal gap that opens *The Years* gradually increases. The feeling of not belonging to the Londoners’ life any more gains in meaning as the novel goes along. This feeling concretizes and the narrator calls the colonel an *outsider*. This noun appears several times throughout the novel and

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<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

thus has an intentional anaphoric value. These occurrences are to be found towards the end of the novel, which is also an indicator of the complexity of perception and awareness that this term carries. The first occurrence is in the chapter called “Present Day”, which is also significant in this case. Woolf’s choice to use this term in this specific chapter shows another relevant implication. The features of this trait are relevant in the “present day”, once Colonel Pargiter has returned from the colonies, which highlights even more the importance and urge of the isolated being and of the situation itself. Before introducing the term *outsider* itself, the narrator prepares the reader for what will follow by expressing the reason why the character is so called. North who joined the Front Line and who has just returned from Africa, feels isolated and can’t cope with the rhythm and noise of London:

The girl was in the room, and she distracted him; also the noise of London still bothered him. Against the dull background of traffic noises, of wheels turning and brakes squeaking, there rose near at hand the cry of a woman suddenly alarmed for her child; the monotonous cry of a man selling vegetables; and far away a barrel-organ was playing. It stopped; it began again. [...] (Y, p. 301)

The modern time is showcased here by the speed and variety of events, but also by the noise and rhythm specific to a London landscape. The presence of these elements indirectly brings out the ambiance of the colonies and the way time is lived there, because North, who has just returned from the colonies, cannot bear with it. The difference between the two is thus implied. In other words, modernism helps colonialism to the surface. Modern and colonial time coexist in Woolf’s *The Years* and this passage accurately shows it. The passage continues with a paragraph that introduces the first occurrence of the term *outsider*:

The door stood open. Nothing seems to be happening. He waited. He felt an outsider. After all these years, he thought, everyone was paired off; settled down; busy with their own affairs. You found them telephoning, remembering other conversations; they went out of the room: they left one alone.

Even if the door is open, he nonetheless feels an outsider. One can sense a slight contrast here. The silence produced by the sentences: “Nothing seems to be happening. He waited” seems to prepare what follows, that is to say the announcement of the way the character feels and perceives his own condition. The features of colonial time are to be found in the vocabulary used by Woolf. The character’s feeling of alienation is emphasized by the narrator through the use of the verb “to settle down”: “After all these years, he thought, everyone was paired off; settled down” (301). This period

of time is perceived as a burden for the character. One can have the impression of being faced to some events caused by long and heavy years. The verb “to settle down” marks the impossibility of continuing the natural course of life. Everybody is able to settle down but him. Features from the past make his settling down impossible. One can almost have the impression of experiencing a time that came too late, a certain belatedness due to colonial markers. One can seize another instance of the use of the verb “to settle in”, which appears in the same kind of context. The first time the reader encounters this verb is in chapter one, the excerpt has been analyzed at the beginning of this presentation. The narrator talks about the people who “were settling in for the season” (Y, p. 5). This specific vocabulary denotes the presence of colonial time, of a London that goes through and faces a colonial period.

Being an outsider is certainly a frame of mind, but also a physically felt state, manifested via the abandonment performed by the characters who surround him and by London itself. Here the temporal gap is more profound. There is a direct interior monologue expressed here through the presence of the past tense “he thought” in “After all these years, he thought, everyone was paired off; settled down; busy with their own affairs.” (Y, p. 301) If at the beginning of the novel the gap was between society in general and the character’s personal time spent abroad, towards the end, the situation has evolved. Here, the character feels a certain divergence in relation to his family, which is more significant because of the family bonds that tie them together. North’s absence is related to coloniality and that is something that we can see throughout the way it inscribes coloniality in the novel. The difference between centre and periphery, between the noisy metropolitan centre and the calm colony, but also the development that has since been produced, are all points of references in this sense. The character’s status and function in the novel are to be a kind of bridge between the old and the new, the centre and the periphery, the colonizers’ world vs the colonized ones. Woolf uses the colonial time to ensure this bridge.

The second appearance of the term *outsider* is five pages later. The family is talking about apparently insignificant family issues, mainly about a man, “one of those voluble foreigners with a theory about everything” (Y, p. 306). North tries to be a part of the conversation and asks what the man does. A member of the family answers about what he does: “‘Talks’, she replied, ‘about the soul’. She smiled. Again he felt an outsider; so many talks there must have been between them; such intimacy.” (*Ibid.*) The narrator gives the reader information about the way North lives these distances between him and his family. North feels uneasy and isolated. He can neither understand nor participate in the discussion as that would require a certain knowledge about past things. It is once again the omniscient narrator that introduces the reader to the thoughts of the characters about

the way they feel, in this case about North. The adverb “again”, appearing at the beginning of the narrator’s intervention, reminds the reader of the first occurrence and highlights its significance. The sentence “So many talks there must have been between them” refers to talks that have occurred in the past, the time when he was absent. “Absence” is in this context a word that goes with “outsider” and is the opposite of “intimacy”. “Such intimacy” is like a sigh that best expresses the character’s inner state provoked by his current environment and his past facts that come together in his mind. The term outsider comes with a certain awareness of the things and events that the characters experience. To my mind, it shows a certain maturity of the facts, that is probably the reason why Woolf decides to unravel it towards the end of the novel. The term “outsider” clearly places Woolf among the writers who use a colonial dimension in their writings.

A third occurrence of the term *outsider* is within the same last chapter entitled *Present Day*. The narrator once again makes a short introduction before launching the actual term:

[...] he was not interested in what other people were saying. His mind could no longer stretch beyond its beat. His body was still beautifully proportioned; it was his mind that was old. He would say the same thing all over again, and when he had said it he would pick his teeth and sit gazing in front of him. There he sat now, holding a flower between his finger and thumb, loosely, without looking at it, as if his mind were gliding on ... But Delia interrupted. /‘North must go and talk to his friends’, she said. Like so many wives, she saw when her husband was becoming a bore, North thought [...].<sup>224</sup>

The reader learns that North has no interests in what other people say. Moreover, his experience in the colony has wasted his years and now he feels old and bored. The adverb “over again” shows a repetitive action, which is probably due to the “time-lag” or belated colonial time that he experiences. His absence prevents him from having an actual family time. In *The Years* the narration and time-lag focus on the soldiers who come from the colonies back to England and not on the colonized people living in the colonies, which is usually the recurrent figure of the Other, well known in postcolonial studies. Nonetheless, the lack of progression is present in this scenario as well. The characters in this novel, and in this case North, are not up to date with the news and events that have been going on in their families. In addition, the character is aware of the boredom and belatedness that he experiences: “Like so many wives, she saw when her husband was becoming a bore, North thought.” (383) “North thought” is an indicator in this sense. The statement found on page 306 “Again he felt an outsider” is similar to the one on page 383 “He was an outsider, he felt again”. The last statement seems more serious and complex. The verb “to feel” is

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<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 382-383.



transformed into “to be”, which clearly refers to the character’s identity that is being forged. The sentence “He was an outsider” makes one think of a sentence with a confirmation value, thus confirming the character’s status as an outsider.

The answer to his wife’s offer embraces North’s complex feelings. They are complex and carefully thought out. Some of the elements used here were previously employed and stated:

North was glad to go; but where was he to go? He was an outsider, he felt again, as he glanced round the room. All these people knew each other. They called each other [...] by their nicknames. Each was already part of a little group, he felt as he listened [...] They were arguing [...] But he could not understand the argument, which was already heated. Never have I felt so lonely, he thought. The old platitude in a crowd was true; for hills and trees accept one; human beings reject one. (*Y*, p. 383)

The feeling of not belonging anywhere makes him an outsider. The colonial condition of the character is emphasized in the rhetorical question: “but where was he to go?”. The adverb “again” reminds the reader of the uneasy and insecure situation in which the character perpetually finds himself. The position of his relatives and the intimacy created between them is once again emphasized. The “little group” that was created turned North into an outsider. The “already heated” argument that he couldn’t understand put him completely on the other side of the fence. The adverb “never” is in first position here as it opens the sentence, hence its importance in the time articulation of the notion of the outsider and the terms associated, such as loneliness and even thinking, translated here probably as overthinking. The notion of the time gap is unmistakable once again, such is the difference and loss of connection between North and his family members. That time gap is reinforced by the sentence: “for hills and trees accept one; human beings reject one.” (383). Colonial belatedness becomes clearer throughout the novel. This moment is perhaps the culmination of the concept of belatedness, which renders the notion of the outsider even more critical. North is unquestionably an alienated character, who becomes an outsider due to his “time-lag” and due to the society itself. As a consequence, the two concepts “belatedness” and “outsider” are very much linked; the latter being a consequence of the former.

## The outsider confronting society

Not only are the family issues beyond the character, but also the societal ones; they actually overlap him, hence the power of the idea stated. Aspects linked to money and politics are several times mentioned throughout the novel. On page 383, for example, North is listening to his family's discussion, without being involved in the argument: "He listened. They were arguing. Politics and money; he said to himself; money and politics. That phrase came in handy. But he could not understand the argument, which was already heated." The only phrase that he could catch was "politics and money"/"money and politics" and it was not accessible to him. The repetition of the phrase with a slight turn emphasizes a playful and perhaps ironic caricature of reality. Some pages later, the same idiom appears, but for this time the message is more direct:

"Then, North ..." said Eleanor, looking down on the parting of North's hair as he sat on the floor beside her.

"Yes, North", said Peggy, looking at him across her aunt's knee. "North says we talk of nothing but money and politics," she added. "Tell us what we ought to do." He started. He had been dozing off, dazed by the music and voices. What we ought to do? he said to himself, walking up. What ought we to do?<sup>225</sup>

The family's discussion is being interrupted when Peggy realizes North's lonely and abandoned mental state. Helpless, North is sitting on the floor, next to Eleanor. The isolation of the character is once again crucial here. His sitting on the floor denotes the division or gap between him and the others and his inferiority. North's opinion about his family is clearly stated here: "(they) talk of nothing but money and politics." This is a gap between himself and his family, but also between himself and society, considering the nature of the question. The statement "Tell us what we ought to do" is repeated twice in the form of interrogatives as it follows: "What we ought to do?" and "What ought we to do?". The message sheds some light on the actual meaning of rhetorical questions: a question asked to make a point rather than get an immediate answer. There is no actual answer to this question and the whole novel constitutes an interrogation in this sense; hence, the necessity of studying colonial time. In a half-awakened state, surrounded by London noises and family voices, he questions the meaning of his life, helplessly thinking about rebuilding his future. The entire novel revolves around the question of time, and the title *The Years* is extremely suggestive in this sense. It is about questioning the different temporalities that leave their mark on the individual, usually shaped through the Modernist art, whereas important colonial symptoms lie inside it.

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<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 401.

North's reaction and behaviour are certainly a huge part of his reintegration process into his family circle, but there is also his family's reaction that is crucial. The time gap that the character experiences is not felt to the same extent by the members of his family. It is actually absent and not worth of any attention. As Karen Levenback, a researcher interested in Modernist and Colonial aspects of Woolf's works, suggests in *Virginia Woolf and the Great War*, "There is little evidence to suggest that North's relatives remember either his experience of the war or their own."<sup>226</sup> The isolation in which the character is immersed is intentional (in this case). Although much of the novel involves memory, Woolf chose to delete some significant parts that would have changed the course of the novel. For example, the episode involving Sara's renewed attack on North's enlistment during his visit in "Present Day" is omitted and thus included in her holograph.<sup>227</sup> The characters seem not to be aware of the long-time (10 years) he had been away or not to care so much about his war experience. At the beginning of "Present Day", one can seize his family's attitude, in this case Eleanor's, whose reaction is meaningful: "It's so nice to see you", she said. 'And you haven't changed ...'. [...] 'We shan't let you go back?'" (*Y*, p. 291) The sentence "You haven't changed", clearly expresses Eleanor's careless attitude towards North. The ellipsis at the end of the sentence stresses hesitation and uncertainty, or perhaps even ambivalence. But it is different now: the lack of his ability to fit into his family is certainly due to the imprint that the war and the fact of being away have "provided" him with. Eleanor's following sentence, 'We shan't let you go back', is decidedly aimed to denote a certain affection, but it also shows an absence of knowledge of the character's situation and his inner world. One can also seize a certain ironic touch on Woolf's part. If the character did not change, why would someone not want to let him go back? These two statements seem to be diametrically opposed and inharmonious from a semantic perspective. The narrative technique is worth noting here. From a temporal perspective, the three temporal dimensions, past, present and future, coexist here. That aspect renders the lack of knowledge of the character even more prominent. Eleanor speaks of all these three in a single utterance, but she obviously lacks information related to North's situation and the context in which he finds himself. North pays her in kind: "He smiled. 'And you haven't changed either,' he said." (*Y*, p. 291); the text further explains that Eleanor had been in India probably for leisure, whereas North has been in Africa as a soldier: "She looked very vigorous. She had been in India. Her face was tanned with the sun." (*Ibid.*) Both characters are wearing a mask. North does nothing but to go on with Eleanor's hidden and abstract behaviour.

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<sup>226</sup> Karen Levenback, *Virginia Woolf and the Great War*, New York, Syracuse University Press, 1999, p. 148.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

The alienation that North suffers once back in London is mostly visible in the conversations that he has with his family. The irony comes when Eleanor is not able to perceive the changes that he has gone through. Woolf ridicules the typical English family that is only able to talk about “money and politics” but unable to perceive the colonially induced changes that a journey into the colonies comes with.

### **The figure of the outsider as a perpetual image**

As the novel progresses, the characters sink more and more into alienation. Something was missing, as if their whole life had been cut into pieces. North visits his family; the overall feeling is one of strangeness and remoteness. Some pages later, despite their lack of connection, North and Sarah are trying to reassemble the patchwork. North feels lost in London, both physically and mentally. The physical loss in this excerpt highlights the emotional and mental one:

“Where the dickens am I now?” he asked, peering at the name on the street corner. [...] He looked down the long vista. Door after door, window after window, repeated the same pattern. [...] A bunch of flowers, he thought, held in the hand would soften the awkwardness of meeting and the usual things that had to be said. “How nice to see you — you’ve filled out”, and so on. He had only heard her voice on the telephone and people changed after all these years. Whether this was the right street or not, he could not be sure [...] He was always finding himself now outside the doors of strange houses. He had a feeling that he was no one and nowhere in particular. <sup>228</sup>

The temporal adverb “now” calls for the hopelessness of the character. Metaphorically speaking, the question that he raises “Where the dickens am I now?” is perhaps a rhetorical one: he does not feel that he belongs to that place ... and in truth to no other place either.

The same pattern repeats itself in North’s life from the moment of his arrival in London on. The emphasis of something happening again and again is marked by the repetition of certain nouns in the idioms: “door after door” and “window after window” but also by the simultaneous use of the verb “repeat” and the adjective “same”. The noun “awkwardness” best describes the situation being announced. The metaphor of discomfort is well completed by the modal expression “have to” in the

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<sup>228</sup> *Ibid*, p. 294-295.

construction “the usual things that had to be said”. He feels obliged to meet his family and behave around its members. The premeditated talk going on in North’s mind makes reference to the former “How nice to see you” previously uttered by Eleanor when meeting North. Repeated utterances or anaphors are a sign that the character is annoyed by automatic responses generated by phoney behaviours. The expression “and so on” underlines North’s same discontent (regarding his life situation). Two temporal connections are emphasized here: one implying a physical presence and another one involving only the voice of the interlocutor. The last one makes a quick reference to the character’s life spent in the colony, away from home. He feels lost in London but also in his own thoughts: “Whether this was the right street or not, he could not be sure” ... as if because of his absence he would question himself: Is he in the right place? Is that home? It is the temporal distance due to the time-lag that in turn generates the spatial distance, that is to say his inability to locate himself and to feel lost.

North finds himself “outside the doors of (...) houses”, which qualifies him as an outsider. These houses were not just simple houses but strange houses, which is also the way North feels in his country and next to his family. Could that qualify the character as a stranger (in his own home country)? The metaphor of the absence is decidedly brought to light here. The double negative of “no one” and nowhere” hint to the negation of the character’s own existence.

Things from the past come back into North’s memory, but some of them remain unrevealed:

He remembered the attitude; she came back in sections; first the voice; then the attitude; but something remained unknown./ “You’ve not changed,” he said — the face he meant. [...] / “And you —” she said, looking at him. It was as if she were trying to put two different versions of him together; the one on the telephone perhaps and the one on the chair. Or was there some other? This half knowing people, this half being known, this feeling of the eye on the flesh, like a fly crawling — how uncomfortable it was, he thought; but inevitable, after all these years (rep). The tables were littered; he hesitated, holding his hat in his hand. She smiled at him, as he sat there, holding his hat uncertainly.<sup>229</sup>

North’s exchange with Sara makes him confront himself with his present throughout his past. There was still a part of him that she knew and recognized: “You haven’t changed” merged with a part unfamiliar to her. Therefore, the present is not entirely accessible to him because of the time gap that exists between his remote past and his present. The inability to confront his present and the difficulty to maybe build his future are also due to a past, a more recent one. The colonial past disables the present to fully rise and manifest itself. The present is ruined because of past

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<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

experiences. After their experience in the colonies, the characters are seen as having a split personality. Sarah has difficulty in putting “the two versions of him together”, the one absent but fed by her imagination and the other one that was standing right next to her. Does reality not fit the imaginary world? The present is blurred and questions the existence of another version of North’s. Alienation goes hand in hand with the feeling of uncertainty. Uncertainty and doubt create the feeling of “half-knowing people” and of discomfort. The inevitable is when the past manifests itself in the present and creates the feeling of estrangement: “after all these years”. This expression appears as the anaphora of the previous excerpt analyzed; it marks a time gap, but also the effort of meeting the past in a present context. The adverb “all” marks the complexity of the events that must have happened during those years and also the completeness of feelings and richness of experiences.

Memories seem to haunt the character’s mind: “‘This isn’t the room where I came last time?’ he asked. [...] He remembered. He had come to her the evening before he left for the war and he had hung his cap on the bust of their grandfather — that had vanished.”<sup>230</sup> The last night he visited the places seem to have remained impregnated in his memory. A precise flashback evokes the evening before the war and the loss that occurred during the time he had been away. Some lines later, the narrator clarifies the memories of the soldier by adding in some detail: “He had been to Kensington to dine with his family; he had said good-bye to his mother; he had never seen her again.”<sup>231</sup> Another loss that has occurred during the time he was absent stresses the character’s restlessness. The passage of time is here emphasized by bringing up the time he was enrolled in the war. The omniscient narrator reveals North’s thoughts and deepest concerns.

In conclusion, the image of the outsider crosses the entire development of *The Years*. This notion transforms and ripens throughout the novel. The image from the beginning of the novel emphasizes the colonel's status as Other. The situation changes and even evolves, one might say, throughout the course of the novel. Towards the end, the image of the outsider is more assimilated. The ‘an Other’ becomes ‘the Other’. That transformation is due to the complexity of the image of the Outsider, an image that the narrator deals with all along the novel, which makes it become more complex.

To underline the dynamic representation of the outsider in *The Years* is to shed some light on a colonial perspective of Woolf’s writing, an angle that has recently started to bloom. In this chapter

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<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

the poetics of time corresponds to the meaning and significance of the outsider's figure, which is situated and defines the limit between the centre and the periphery.

In conclusion to this chapter, we can point out that the outsider's figure is one carried by all three writers, but their dynamic evolves, changes and matures along their lives, which in terms affects their writings. There is also another aspect that is crucial when treating the image of the outsider: the perspective that we choose. A pertinent example is an extract from Mansfield's letters, where English people are the outsiders, or those who are not in any way related to New Zealand, unlike herself or her cousin Sydney, to whom she writes the letter:

[...] just before Christmas I wrote a very long story & YOU were my reader. I hope that doesn't sound impertinent. I confess the impression was that you enjoyed the story, *saw* it, *felt* it, as I did — in a quite special way that outsiders wouldn't appreciate. I even had a mental picture of you sitting in an armchair, reading it. It is called, in case you should ever see it "The Daughters of the Late Colonel".<sup>232</sup>

She narrates an imaginary story that she made up herself, in which her cousin enjoys one of her works, *The Daughters of the Late Colonel*, a short story that has important New Zealand features, such as the location, but also other features related to her home country. The emphasis that she makes on certain perceptions, such as seeing and feeling (by the use of the Italics), which are unique and special as she says. The way a New Zealander would appreciate her story is singular, and that is expressed by the use of the adjective "special". The quality attributed to the New Zealanders through the use of this adjective is doubled when the comparison to other people is mentioned, who "wouldn't appreciate" it. The place of the outsider is in reality a question of perspective and agency. Our analysis will go further now and exploit the representation of women in modern literature and their perception as outsiders.

In conclusion, for Rhys and Mansfield, life in the colonies means integrating this double temporal paradigm, the present that they live, which includes the past as well. Their writings are a testimony in this sense, which also proves that all the colonial background that we have studied so far has a clear utility. Woolf's writing also encompasses this past-present conundrum, mainly through what Bhabha calls "time-lag", or that distance in time and progress between colony and centre. There is undeniably a distance between colony and centre, but this distance is adjusted and rendered in writing according to the intention and goal of the writers. This distance varies from writer to the writer, and the study of their colonial background helps in understanding that.

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<sup>232</sup> O'Sullivan & Scott (eds.), *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield (volume 4)*, the 9th of February 1921, p. 178.

## 5. Women's identity

The function of this section is to show the double representation that the writers set forth: on the one side, that of pioneers, who changed the course of English literature, and on the other side, that of outsiders, who could not fit into society, and the way this particular aspect is treated in their writings. Since we are dealing with three women who write at the beginning up to the middle of the twentieth century, when women's issues were relevant and problematic issues mainly because of the existence of a patriarchal society, I think this section is crucial in getting the overall picture of what it means to be a woman writer in the twentieth century, especially when to this feature we add that of being a colonial, as in the case of Mansfield and Rhys. Thus, women are outsiders and doubly colonized. The Modernist issue, on the other hand, reveals itself in their role as pioneer women, the way they use art and shape Modernism.

The women's issue may seem not to fit at the end of this chapter, right before going into the heart of the writers' poetics. We have so far based our argument on the colonial question, but in order to go further it is absolutely necessary for us to tackle the woman's issue as well. The colonial is always in a cross-reference with gender differences. It is a crucial question as regards the three writers' texts. Let us take for instance Rhys's case. Rhys's characters' relation to femininity, and being helpless women always at the mercy of men is something that comes from a colonial situation. In turn, the colonial system is based on patriarchal values (those of the empire), geographically displaced in the colonies, where they take a new form: the colonial form (transferred from the old model). Elisabeth Béranger, in her PhD dissertation on *Une époque de transe : l'exemple de Djuna Barnes, Jean Rhys et Virginia Woolf*, emphasizes the interconnection that lies between feminism, colonialism and the empire's heritage that weighs on the writer's shoulders:

Pour Jean Rhys, le passé à la Dominique, l'esclavage et le racisme, constituent le modèle des relations humaines et des relations sexuelles. Femmes et esclavages sont dans la même impasse. Des structures pesantes, la tradition, les préjugés ancrés depuis des générations, forment des clichés qui imposent des modèles et des illusions.

L'analyse étant faite, on s'attendrait à voir l'auteur relever le défi, s'employer à dissiper ce passé contraignant. Il n'en est rien, au contraire. Jean Rhys revit une attitude de coupable qui tourne ses entreprises en échec. De plus en plus "paumée", elle se dégrade comme à plaisir. / L'écriture est marquée par ce désir de se rabaisser, de se dégrader.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Elisabeth Beranger, *Une époque de transe : l'exemple de Djuna Barnes, Jean Rhys et Virginia Woolf*, op. cit., p. 212.



That is why we cannot separate colonialism from feminism. The woman's issue is at the heart of the three writers' poetics. Women bear the consequences of the imperial power and domination that they are submitted to, which is ultimately characterized by women's inability to move or assert themselves, an important feature for Rhys. Ann Laura Stoler, an anthropologist and specialist of colonial history, in her work on *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* talks about these consequences and the sexual component or nature of this colonial domination: "[...] sexual control was more than a convenient metaphor for colonial domination. It was a fundamental class and racial marker implicated in a wider set of relations of power."<sup>234</sup> We will see how these relations of power gain ground in the writers' poetics.

## Pioneer women

Famous for *A Room of One's Own*, an essay on how "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction"<sup>235</sup>, Woolf was eager to change the way women saw themselves, the way they approached their identity through their writings. Throughout *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* Woolf fought for women's future and place in society and also education. Woolf saw in writing a tool for solving women's problems.

Mansfield was interested in reinventing the short story. V. S. Pritchett, a twentieth century notable British writer and literary critic, particularly known for his short stories, notices Mansfield's contribution to the literary field and reinvention of the genre, despite his thorough criticism against her. Pritchett's following statement is significant since he goes into the literary methods that Mansfield uses:

Katherine Mansfield liquefied the short story. She destroyed many of its formal conventions. She cut out the introductions, the ways and means which are simply barriers. She cut across country, following a line which must have seemed erratic to her early readers, but which is really the direct line.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* [2002], London, University of California Press, 2010, p. 45.

<sup>235</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* [1992], Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 3.

<sup>236</sup> V. S. Pritchett, "Books in General" in *New Statesman and Nation*, XXXI (1946), p. 87.

That is precisely what happens in the case of “Prelude”, Mansfield’s probably most appreciated short story nowadays, but it was not always the case. “Prelude”, a short story with a significant length, having New Zealand as setting, was dedicated to the loss of her brother, Leslie. It was published in 1918 by the Woolf couple at the Hogarth Press. Mansfield reinvented the traditional writing styles and thus contributed to the shaping of a new art form, the Modernist one. Mansfield was, as her biographer states, “the true Modernist who changed the rules for the English language short story”<sup>237</sup>. Mansfield’s contribution to the short story genre is compelling.

Speaking up as a woman in the early twentieth century was something remarkable ... and this is exactly what these writers did! Their voice affected and influenced people’s consciousness. The Bloomsbury Group was an important literary association, especially active in the early twentieth century. Woolf was a leading member of the group. Mansfield also gained her entry.

Being a colonial (woman) directly involved feminist issues. As women writers they could not withdraw from reality and essential questions that women were facing, being, first of all, themselves involved. Being a woman at that period meant having well-established boundaries; but being a pioneer woman meant being ready to destroy them, which is precisely the case of our writers. Jean Rhys was interested in the same issue, but in a slightly different way. She imagined characters who were alienated and powerless, thus expressing the pain and lack of authority that they suffered from. Some critics state that Rhys’s gesture was rather an anti-feminist one, denigrating women’s cause rather than contributing to its salvation. But I think that there is more than that; Rhys denigrates women’s condition and brings it to its lowest degree, in order to make room and bring out the essential:

He looks at me with distaste. Plat du jour - boiled eyes, served cold. ...

Well, let’s argue this out, Mr Blank. You, who represent Society, have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month. That’s my market value, for I am an inefficient member of Society, slowing the uptake, uncertain, slightly damaged in the fray, there’s no denying it. So you have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month, to lodge me in a small dark room, to clothe me shabbily, to harass me with worry and monotony and unsatisfied longings till you get me to the point when I blush at a look, cry at a word. [...] But the right to ridicule me afterwards because I am a cripple — no, that I think you haven’t got. And that’s the right you hold most dearly, isn’t it? You must be able to despise the people you exploit. [...] your damn shop’s going bust. Alleluia! Did I say all this? Of course I didn’t. I didn’t even think it.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Claire Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life*, p. 5.

<sup>238</sup> Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* [1939], London, Penguin Group, 2000, p. 25-26.

Women are perceived as a commodity: “That’s my market value”. It is like a mechanical process going on, with no feelings involved, it’s all about factual things, such as the law in the sentence “You have the right to pay me”. The metaphor of the shop in which you buy and choose things, in this case the women you want, makes the whole image very lifelike, real and raw at the same time. Rhys’s protagonists sink very low, men having “the right to ridicule” and even exploit them. It is precisely in this image of denigration and utmost degradation that Rhys’s power and essence of writing lies. The image of the street walker is sharpened by the woman’s poor social condition. She finds herself in front of Mr. Blank and speaking to him; the “blank” image that his name expresses stands in opposition to the “dark room” and her being clothed “shabbily”.

Jean Rhys’s contribution is significant and noteworthy in the way she sees and approaches women’s role in society. Even if she began by writing collections of short stories mainly inspired by her Caribbean childhood, she then continued writing by experimenting with the short novel genre. What she liked in writing was shape, as Jean Rhys herself stresses: “I like shape very much. A novel has to have shape, and life doesn’t have any.” (*SP*, p. xi) In Rhys’s time, women’s lives hardly had a shape, or sometimes not at all; it is through the novel form that she tried to give them shape and meaning. Her writings are full of ellipses and fragmentation that “come after a full stop, creating a break in the sentence structure before going on to Sasha’s next train of thought”<sup>239</sup>. An example in this sense is when the narrator describes the streets of Paris, followed by a moment of awareness on her condition as a woman, and then switching to reading the menu, which she was actually doing during all this time. Rhys places several temporal dimensions on top of each other, which are actually her train of thoughts:

I’ve had enough of these streets that sweat a cold, yellow slime, of hostile people, of crying myself to sleep every night. I’ve had enough of thinking, enough of remembering. [...]

I have no pride — no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don’t belong anywhere. Too sad, too sad ...  
[...]

All this time I am reading the menu over and over again.

Rhys developed literature on women through Modernism. It is through elliptical and fragmentary writing that the characters are described, thus emphasizing what they are lacking; they need the Modernist technique to be what they are intended to be, those fragmentary beings who lack

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<sup>239</sup> Joanne Norris, “Time and Repetition in Jean Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight*”, <https://www.booksthatmatter.co.uk/post/it-seems-to-me-that-things-repeat-themselves-over-and-over-again/>, last accessed on the 8th of June 2022.

substance and structure in their lives. Modernism allows these characters to surface and come alive. The colonial woman that Rhys creates is modern by nature; it is the ultimate Modernist.

## Women as alienated figures

A characteristic of colonial women is their state of alienation, lack of home and the fact of being haunted by a constant state of wandering. Alienation is a representative theme in Mansfield's and Rhys's works. These writers' lack of belonging is mostly characterized by a loss of a sense of space, security and ultimately home, features also true of their characters' existence. Their fictions play on issues of women's insecurity, hence the lack of a stable place to live, Rhys emphasizing a constant change of hotel rooms is famous in this sense, but also Mansfield's moving and fleeing from one place to another — her characters are often in motion.

Modernism and feminism intercut on several occasions in the writers' works via the question of hotels, and the whole environment that comes with it. Anna Snaith observes the representation of Rhys's landscapes, the aspect of her Modernism, and portraits of cafés, bedsits, hotels, streets as a geography of modernity, with feminist articulation<sup>240</sup>.

Mansfield acquired “the habit of impermanence”<sup>241</sup> in the first years in which she was in England: “The hotel room, the temporary lodging, the sense of being about to move on, of living where you do not quite belong, observing with a stranger's eye — all these became second nature to her between 1903 and 1906.”<sup>242</sup> Mansfield registers a total of twenty-nine postal addresses between 1908, her arrival date, and 1916, information contained in her collection of letters.<sup>243</sup> In a letter addressed to her friend Sylvia Payne dated April 1906 (London), Mansfield expresses how much she enjoys “this Hotel life” that she leads: ““There is a kind of feeling of irresponsibility about it and that ‘it is fascinating’”<sup>244</sup> Roger Robinson notes a couple of words on Mansfield's traveller spirit in his work *Katherine Mansfield: In from the Margin*: “Mansfield's characters are ceaselessly

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<sup>240</sup> Anna Snaith, “‘A Savage from the Cannibal islands’: Jean Rhys and London” in Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (eds.), *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2005, p. 76.

<sup>241</sup> Claire Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life*, p. 30.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> John Middleton Murry (ed.), *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, London, Constable, 1928, p. 201.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

on the move, travelling, wandering, often in foreign or threatening situations”, the stories being full of “outcasts, exiles, minorities, and fringe dwellers”<sup>245</sup>.

In her thorough study *Lire le féminin : Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield, Jean Rhys* Claire Joubert highlights the marginal place that Mansfield occupied throughout her whole life, first as an exile coming to England, then the loneliness that she is subjected to during her stay in the South of France due to medical reasons, and ultimately her brother’s loss. The rejection felt at the moment of quitting her home land comes to life during her lonely stay in the South of France: “La racine de ce sentiment de rejet et d’exclusion se trouve sans doute dans l’expérience primordiale de l’expatriation volontaire mais douloureuse. Lorsque Mansfield quitte la Nouvelle Zélande pour Londres, elle doit faire face à un ostracisme qui la blesse.”<sup>246</sup> The primordial colonial time experienced by Mansfield goes back to a young age, when moving from the periphery to the centre, and it is the one that governs her later life. The colonial time manifests itself in the form of a repetition through different circumstances, but which are essentially the same. Claire Joubert emphasizes the serious and at the same time clear image that we can get out of that:

Tout au long du séjour en Europe, et en particulier après la perte de son frère lors de la guerre, Mansfield revient sur cette souffrance de l’exil, qui devient équivalent au bannissement du jardin d’Eden. [...] La superposition de tous ces signes de non-appartenance — être artiste, être étrangère, être femme — élabore pour Mansfield une sensibilité qui la prédispose à accepter la vision moderniste du statut de l’artiste comme essentiellement exilé.<sup>247</sup>

The overlapping of the modernist life and the colonial background that she carries along make her exile experience even more significant.

Mansfield’s wandering way of life was similar to Rhys’s. Hotel rooms, the lack of security of a home, the fact of being divided between two identities, the Caribbean one and the new English one ... give Rhys a borderline experience, a life that is created in different rooms, all similar to each other, but full of incongruity. Her fleeting existence is very much connected to her experience with the men, which recalls her childhood. She also had a hard time and an uneasy relationship with her mother back home, before moving to London. Her relationship with men was not easy either, but rather problematic. She had several men in her life, but she never experienced a sense of accomplishment with either of them. In her works, Rhys pictures women who are heavily dependent

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<sup>245</sup> Roger Robinson (ed.), *Katherine Mansfield: In from the Margin*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University, 1994, p. 47.

<sup>246</sup> Claire Joubert, *Lire le féminin : Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield, Jean Rhys*, Paris, Messene, 1997, p. 83.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83-84.

on men, women who go from lovers to lovers. They are paid by men and that's how they can survive. They get paid by their partners each morning before they leave. And that is not all of it: all that usually happens in hotel rooms. The places change, the lovers change, but their situation remains the same. They have what I call a near-prostitute status. The image of the prostitute follows Rhys herself from an early age; her biographer Lilian Pizzichini mentions that when she was young reading books about prostitutes was a new secret pleasure for her and Roseau's library was stocked with them<sup>248</sup>. Pizzichini mentions *The Sands of Pleasure* by Filson Young, "Jean's first encounter with the more louche side of Edwardian society." One page later she adds that "England became her vision of glamour and excitement, of beautiful ladies, Sherlock Holmes, romantic, swirling fog and sophisticated theatre."<sup>249</sup> England also meant culture and art for her; let us only think of the period when she came to England and went to R.A.D.A. (The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art) in order to study acting.

A couple of years later, she became familiar with the London society, with all the men in it. Rhys's characters perfectly show the condition of the twentieth century women; for example in the short story "Till September, Petronella" written in the 1930s, but submitted to publication during the 1940s. The short story talks about the 28th of July 1914, a date that Petronella sees in a calendar; the date also indicates that we are at the very beginning of World War I, the date representing the first day of the war. Sue Thomas talks about women's condition during the war by referring to the story: "In this story Rhys pointedly engages with First and Second World War moral panics over the 'good-time girl'. A pejorative term for a woman sexually active outside marriage and not demanding cash payment like a prostitute, the good-time girl was a figure of promiscuity, moral degeneracy, venereal disease, threat to the national health, and death. [...] During moral panics over the figure during the First World War and the 1920s she was called the 'amateur prostitute', or, more simply, 'amateur'<sup>250</sup>". The near-prostitute status that Rhys's characters undergo, mentioned earlier, is seen by Sue Thomas as the equivalent of the 'good-time girl', specific for the pre-war and interwar period. In accordance with the Oxford English Dictionary, the first appearance of the expression "good-time girl" was in 1928, a term popularized during the Second World War, although the term "amateur" was still in use.<sup>251</sup> Thomas goes further and observes that Rhys

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<sup>248</sup> Pizzichini, *The Blue Hour: A Life of Jean Rhys*, p. 39.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>250</sup> Sue Thomas, "Thinking through: '(t)he grey disease of sex hatred': Jean Rhy's *Till September Petronella*" in *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, Vol. 3, no. 3, Jean Rhys (Summer 2003), 77-90, p. 77.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

represents in her writings the “grey disease of sex hatred”, that women undergo, grey, for her, being the expression of the negative aspects of England and Englishness.<sup>252</sup>

They keep being at the mercy of men all over again, as if there were no escape to the game that men play them, as if it were a bad dream. People thought and hoped that the First World War would change things. It did not. Rhys writes between the two World Wars, a deeply moving time for the whole of Europe. When she comes back to the literary scene with *Wide Sargasso Sea* she creates a married female character who wants to escape her reality. In the passage that follows, it is Antoinette who wonders upon her own existence: “‘Is it true,’ she said, ‘that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up.’” (*WSS*, p. 49) Dependence on men increases the characters’ isolation and anxiety. It is for example the case of Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark*, a novel inspired by notebooks written not long before the First World War. Anna’s situation with the opposite sex is directly linked to her depression. Anna has a relationship with Walter, but she shortly finds herself dependent on him. She begins to drink; when he leaves her, she feels lost and hopeless. Without realizing it, her whole life turns into prostitution. She imagines what men would think of her and tell their friends: “‘I picked up a girl in London and she ... Last night I slept with a girl who ....’ That was me. / Not ‘girl’ perhaps. Some other word, perhaps. Never mind.” (*VD*, p. 134-135) Depressed and dependent, Anna eventually becomes pregnant. She doesn’t know who the father is, but she decides to contact Walter and ask for help. He sends her gold in exchange of his love letters. She proceeds to abortion and is ready to start all over again as the doctor suggests, which is unfortunate and not quite easy, because nothing has changed in her life. The narrator uses the metaphor of the house and the way they are situated to express the character’s direction and meaning in life: “Everything was always so exactly alike — that was what I could never get used to. And the cold; and the houses all exactly alike, and the streets going north, south, east, west, all exactly alike.” (*VD*, p. 151) The use of the expression “exactly alike”, which appears three times, is symbolic here and suggests dullness and the bland life that the characters undergo. Rhys stresses the impossibility of getting used to a life marked by routine and solitude, but most importantly when being an outsider, hence the cold that Anna cannot bear.

The locked-up and immobilized existence is synonymous with the outsider’s condition and the issues that she faces. In the following, we will shed some light on the matter of women as outsiders, and more importantly when being doubly colonized.

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<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77-78.

Women as alienated figures is a theme that haunts these writers and their writings, first of all, because they are women, and second of all because they are colonial. The alienation is in part linked to men and their attitudes towards women. All these experiences happen in a cyclical way, which women seem to have no power on.

## **Women as doubly colonized**

For Woolf, being a woman, carries with it a non-belonging status, similar to that of an outsider, constantly fighting for women's status and recognition. For Rhys and Mansfield, the question goes further: they are women, but they are also foreigners — which means they are doubly involved in the colonial issue.

Being a woman means to be directly involved with the colonial question. Women are already outsiders by nature. This is an idea that Woolf was interested in and that she developed in *Three Guineas*: “The outsider will say, ‘in fact, as a woman, I have no country.’”<sup>253</sup> The link between being an outsider and being a woman is clearly expressed here. Mansfield's interest in the feminist issues is different from that of Woolf's or Rhys's. Whereas Woolf is deeply involved in crucial feminist issues — such as the equality between men and women, which appears on several levels: equal opportunities and equal access to education, etc. — Mansfield's approach is one that does not dive into such thorough problems, but still manages to draw the twentieth-century women's role and place, using a more subtle tone, in which the characters' daily lives portray their struggles. As for Rhys, her vision usually renders a woman, victim of the circumstances and of society, just as in the abortion scene at the end of *Voyage in the Dark*: “I thought I'm going to fall nothing can save me now but I clung desperately with my knees feeling very sick”. (*VD*, p. 158)

In a letter addressed to her husband, John Middleton Murry, Mansfield encapsulates the universe of a woman writer, that of a being a woman and also that of a writer. She chooses to defend the second one over the first one. In other words, she puts first her role and duty as a writer in the involvement of daily matters. It is a letter that shows Murry's sympathy and possible romantic liaison with another woman, who happens to be also a writer. Murry sends Mansfield the

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<sup>253</sup> Virginia Woolf, “Three Guineas” in *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, [1992], Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 185.



woman's stories to ask her opinion on the matter. Mansfield's answer hides a probable self-awareness, an image of the way she sees herself and the priorities that she has. The way Mansfield perceives herself is also an indicator of the way she sees her role in the literary landscape: "I am a writer first and a woman after."<sup>254</sup> Mansfield's quite neutral tone, and rather cold reply could possibly be an avoidance on her part to go into the feminist thought. In the same letter we can also find the following: "More even than talking or laughing or being happy I want to write." Her serious tone continues in this paragraph as well: no laughing or no talking, as regards writing. She is ready to sacrifice her happiness and role as a woman in her relationship with Murry in the name of writing. Mansfield's gesture is one of self-discovery, of looking for a shelter and plunging into oneself, something that an outsider would do.

This is a question that Rhys is also interested in. Her way of dealing with this problem is by associating womanhood to the idea of loss. Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo and Gina Wisker see Sasha's loss as a female loss<sup>255</sup>: "I have no pride — no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere."<sup>256</sup> According to Dodgson-Katiyo and Gina Wisker: "If women have never possessed these, as Woolf points out in *Three Guineas*, their mourning must be for the lack they now recognize."<sup>257</sup> Woolf indeed points out the link between womanhood and their inborn colonial nature:

"'Our country', she will say, 'throughout the greater part of its history has treated me as a slave; it has denied me education or any share in its possessions. 'Our' country still ceases to be mine if I marry a foreigner.' [...] For the outsider will say, 'in fact as a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world.'<sup>258</sup>

Woolf plays here with the double meaning of the colonial condition: that of the woman and that of the foreigner. By saying: "'Our' country still ceases to be mine" she is putting the woman and the foreigner on the same level, they are both colonials, who lack the ability to belong somewhere. She insists on the double foreigner as a woman and the foreigner itself, the person coming from another country.

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<sup>254</sup> Letter to her husband, John Middleton Murry, the 12th of December, 1920.

<sup>255</sup> Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo and Gina Wisker (eds.), *Rites of Passage in Postcolonial Women's Writing*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2010, p. 236.

<sup>256</sup> Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, p. 44.

<sup>257</sup> Dodgson-Katiyo and Wisker (eds.), *Rites of Passage in Postcolonial Women's Writing*, p. 236.

<sup>258</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* [1992], Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 185.

And because women do not belong anywhere, or at least that is the way they feel, and also the characters that they create, their existence does not correspond only to that of alienation, but goes further. Alienation transforms them into something even more meaningful, as they become outsiders, women as outsiders, which means they are doubly colonized.

Sasha Jansen in Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* decides to leave her existence covered by alcoholism and loneliness and go to Paris. She wanders from city to city, lacking the feeling and stability of a home. An illustrative moment is when she reflects upon her own condition:

Drink, drink, drink ... As soon as I sober up, I start again. [...]

I must be sober as an oak. Except when I cry. [...] Besides, it isn't my face, this tortured and tormented mask. I can take it off whenever I like and hang it up in a nail. <sup>259</sup>

Erica L. Johnson in her work treating the poetics of home, notes the following: "In spite of the narrative framework from one clear location (London) to another (Paris), Sasha lacks all of the markers that render a voyage meaningful; namely, she lacks a "home", in contrast to which she can understand her "awayness<sup>260</sup>".

In Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys's writings, women characters are often emphasized as outsiders; each one having a singular way of dealing with the issue. However, there is one feature that unites them as writers: the Modernist style that they use. Modernism helps them fight against the outsider condition that they bear. In this case, Modernist art creates itself throughout the writing in order for these writers to make themselves heard.

This chapter represents an extremely important part of the thesis, without which I couldn't have seen this dissertation take place. It is a necessary start before actually diving into the poetics of the texts themselves. Knowing the colonial background of the writers unravels unexpected aspects, such as Woolf's Anglo-Indian origin. Digging even deeper into their colonial background, from an early age we notice their rich colonial influence, as is the case for Mansfield and Rhys, and interest in the colonial, as for Woolf. The longing that Mansfield and Rhys experienced while still in the colonies, transforms into a time in which the colonial past intercuts the present, and the two cannot

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<sup>259</sup> Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, p. 38.

<sup>260</sup> Erica L. Johnson, *Home, Maison, Casa: The Politics of Location in Works by Jean Rhys, Marguerite Duras and Erminia Dell'Oro*, London, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003, p. 39.

be dissociated. All these have to do with their identity, so the chapter on women's issue comes naturally. I hope to have reached the goal of this chapter, which was to familiarize and situate the reader in this vast colonial context, which the three writers had access to before becoming the writers that we know today.

### III. The Location of Time and the Poetics of Dislocation

*And there he was, this fortunate man, himself, reflected in the plate-glass window of a motor-car manufacturer in Victoria Street. All India lay behind him; plains, mountains; epidemics of cholera; a district twice as big as Ireland; decisions he had come to alone — he, Peter Walsh. (Virginia Woolf, MD, op. cit., p. 53)*

Time and space are linked in the works of Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys. This connection reveals the intersection between Modernism and colonialism, while problematizing the latter. This is the part in which the study of the text or the poetics will get a fuller and more complex meaning. After having studied the writers' biographies and the colonial context that they have inherited, we are now ready to study the texts themselves. If in the first two chapters I have shown how the poetics surface, in the following chapters the focus will be on the study of the corpus. What's more, the issue of time and space requires an analysis of the literary genres involved in the writing, hence the necessity of the study of poetics at this stage.

Time and space are two fields that come together in my thesis, but also in Modernist and colonial studies. Modernism puts forward the idea of time, and as such the notion of time occupies a rich and distinctive place in Modernist literature. There are several problematics of time in Modernism, such as the notion of a present that is extremely alive, the change of the usual temporality by introducing a non-chronological, fragmentary and shifting time, in which the past and present blend into each other, creating a continuous present. Therefore it is not even a temporal rupture that we are talking about but a continuous present, a time in which past, present and future are all alive. Claire Joubert writes in this sense:

Les textes modernistes ne fonctionnent pas à partir du schéma de la rupture. Ils sont au contraire la revendication réitérée du *continu*, partout : entre la tradition et l'originalité, entre le passé et le présent, entre l'oeuvre individuelle et l'espace collectif de l'énonciation, entre la théorie et la textualité [...].<sup>261</sup>

T. E. Hulme saw this change as a new technique or convention as observed in his essay "Romanticism and Criticism": "We shall not get any new efflorescence of verse until we get a new technique, a new convention, to turn ourselves loose in."<sup>262</sup>

In Wyndham Lewis's view, the artist — or "the individual", "the timeless fundamental artist", as he calls him — should differentiate himself from the masses: "The essence of the living-in-the-moment and for-the-moment — of submission to a giant hyperbolic close-up of a moment — is [...] to banish all individual continuity."<sup>263</sup> Claire Joubert adds: "le moderne qu'il cherche n'est pourtant spécifiquement pas le présent du devenir : il est l'irruption fulgurante de la Présence."<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Claire Joubert, "Le nouveau et le moderne : Poétique du modernisme" - conference presented at the DEA seminar at University Paris 8, from November to February 2000.

<sup>262</sup> T. E. Hulme, "Romanticism and Criticism" in Karen Csengeri (ed.), *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme*, Bath, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 64.

<sup>263</sup> Wyndham Lewis, edited by Paul Edwards, *Time and the Western Man* [1927], Santa Rosa, Black Sparrow Press, 1993, p. 17.

<sup>264</sup> Claire Joubert, "Le nouveau et le moderne : Poétique du modernisme", *op. cit.*

Stein's view is also interesting to look at. She sees text as a space open for experimentation and language as the one holding the truth. "Prolonged present" or "continuous present" are idioms specifically used by Stein, thus avoiding the traditional past, present, future tenses. Her temporal palette is also described by expressions such as "using everything" and "beginning again".<sup>265</sup>

The colonial environment, on the other hand, encompasses the very idea of space, whether it is about appropriation, domination or simply geographically situated territory. Space is considerably well known as a central problematic to the colonial world, but as regards time, it is a notion less often associated to colonialism than space. The issue of space has been problematized by a number of critics and specialists in the field of post-colonial studies. For instance, Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*: "imperialism was essentially pure dominance and land-grabbing"<sup>266</sup> and also the fact that "Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control."<sup>267</sup> This chapter's aim is to show that not only do time and space meet in the writers' works, but also Modernism and colonialism. It is in fact the intersection of Modernism and colonialism that in turn generates the connection between time and space.

The encounter of a literary movement and a geopolitical ideology informing a multiseular span of history has a strong influence on the overall concept and poetics of colonial time. It is a contribution to the very core of colonial time, since time and space are interconnected in Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys's works. The conjunction of time and space reinforces the fact that Modernism and colonialism intersect in Anglophone literature, and more particularly in the case of Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys.

First of all, I aim to show a special interest devoted to *time dynamics* and the way the temporal aspect plays an important role in the writers' works when shedding some light on the literary genres of the works. Textual dynamics such as development (temporally speaking), and its opposite, stagnation, create an antagonism that affects the writings; the novel - short story duality works almost as a tension. It is noteworthy to look at the two genres in this chapter, keeping in mind the contribution that they have made to the Modernist field. The dynamics developed here, such as stagnation, or slowing down echoes a well-known concept, that of the *flânerie*, which implies the urban life and its dynamics. I propose here a shift of perspective, by focusing on the *flânerie* — a

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<sup>265</sup> Gertrude Stein, "Composition as Explanation" [1926] in Joan Rettalack (ed.), *Gertrude Stein: Selections*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2008.

<sup>266</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Reading, Vintage, 1994, p. 34.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

Modernist concept *par excellence* — but having in mind a colonial vision for this time, which in turn allows a new contribution to our perception of the *flânerie*.

Secondly, I propose a reading that focuses on the allegory of “no-escape”, one that captures and ultimately affects Rhys’s world in particular. There is an impression of “search for salvation” that the reader gets while and after reading her writings. The complexity of factors such as the narrative techniques or methods used, irony playing for example an important role, the harsh life that the characters live, while trying to escape the routine that they are trapped into ... all of these portray the colonial aspects of the twentieth century.

And finally, I show the intervention of time in place, in which case we disarticulate or possibly rearticulate space. Dislocation happens at a narrative level and I am interested in the way the narration is affected and the consequences that it has on the chronology of the narration and also the way the issue of “belonging” restructures itself. For Rhys, belonging is meaningless, and that is (part of) the norm. It is for example Anna’s case in *Voyage in the Dark*, whose detached and rootless existence spent in hotel rooms, without a stable relationship and a clear direction in life is all she knows. For Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* the chronological aspect is constantly shifting and gaining a different value. As for narration, time is fragile, and constantly shifting from past to present.

I focus on all three writers and sometimes pay special attention to Rhys’s works, since out of the three writers, her works are the ones that trouble the reader most and thus introduce him/her into a marginalized, depressed and aimless atmosphere, speaking from a colonial perspective .

The dynamics of time will at each step be regarded through the interaction of Modernism and colonialism.

## 1. Time dynamics

Here we focus on the limitations and concerns that the writers' works face from a perspective of development or, on the contrary, stagnation. It is by analyzing the colonial signifiers of the texts that we can sense the aspect of evolution, or at times regression. All this will be closely studied from a temporal perspective. On the other hand, it is through the concept of the *flânerie* that the hidden colonial and feminist features will be revealed. Through the interaction of Modernism and colonialism we are able to see these temporal dynamics and the way they articulate in the poetics of the three writers.

### Development and stagnation: a tension

“L’invention des nations coïncide avec une intense création de genres littéraires ou artistiques et de formes d’expression. Le retour à l’origine est en fait oeuvre d’avant-garde<sup>268</sup>”, observes Anne-Marie Thiesse in her work dedicated to the creations of national identities. There is undoubtedly a strong link between the invention of the nations and the creation of literary genres. The way early twentieth century England shaped itself and also its colonies influenced the way Modernism shaped itself and made its trajectory. Modernism intercuts the colonial features in the works of our writers and that is precisely what we are looking into in this chapter.

The short story genre — in which Mansfield excelled — along with the novel genre — mostly embraced by Woolf and Rhys — are the angles through which I analyze the time dynamics and the antagonism between the development and stagnation that they create. I am also looking into some of Woolf’s works that are related to and have their setting in London, particularly the novel *Mrs Dalloway* and the short story “Street Haunting: A London Adventure”. I choose the angle of the genre, because I am interested in seeing the position of the writing proper, and the way it presents itself: how does the Modernist novel or short story (with its fragmentary, and disconnected structure) intercut colonialism and how do the two interact in the writing process?

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<sup>268</sup> Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Les Créations des identités nationales: Europe XVIIIe - XIXe siècle*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, p. 21.



By examining the development and stagnation process present in the works, I am looking at the way in which colonial time shapes itself. The urgency to write characterizes Mansfield's writing: "The truth is one can get only *so much* into a story; there is always a sacrifice. One has to leave out what one knows and longs to use. Why? I haven't any idea, but there it is. It's always a kind of race to get in as much as one can before it *disappears*.<sup>269</sup>" The "kind of race to get in as much as one can" is precisely applied to the short story genre. However, an immediate counter-example would be Woolf's *moments of being*, which has the power to expand time. Mansfield makes a remark on the genre and its attached temporal specificity. It is through Modernism that the short story genre developed considerably, the time element being a crucial one when considering this development. Less known as a colonialist, and more as a Modernist, Mansfield's writings abound in colonial signifiers more precisely her short stories, and we can possibly relate them with the urgency that characterizes Mansfield's writing.

Mansfield's experiments with Modernism are realized through the short fiction genre, "a fragmented and restless form<sup>270</sup>", in Nadine Gordimer's words. Even if Mansfield usually captures the beauty of the day, as in "Prelude" for instance "A breeze blew over the garden, dropping dew and dropping petals, shivered over the drenched paddocks, and was lost in the sombre bush. In the sky some tiny stars floated for a moment and then they were gone — they were dissolved like bubbles." ("Prelude", p. 24), the setting also includes moments of boredom. Boredom is usually coupled with the repetitiveness of the everyday life:

And then she sat quiet, thinking of nothing at all, her red swollen hands rolled in her apron, her feet stuck out in front of her, her little head with the thick screw of dark hair drooped on her chest. Tick-tick went the kitchen clock, the ashes clinked in the grate, and the venetian blind knocked against the kitchen window. Quite suddenly Millie felt frightened. A queer trembling started inside her—in her stomach—and then spread all over to her knees and hands. "There's somebody about." ("Millie", p. 573)

Boredom is seen as a colonial feature, women experiencing a patriarchal condition. "[...] boredom emerges variously as the overarching experience of everyday life and as an affective marker of the lack of progress that becomes measurable in contact with dominant colonial or neocolonial powers.<sup>271</sup>" Boredom as a colonial feature consists in the image of the woman staying with her "hands rolled in her apron", thus expressing the cliché of women stying in kitchen, an image that

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<sup>269</sup> Katherine Mansfield, *Journal*, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>270</sup> Nadine Gordimer, 'The Flash of Fireflies' in *The New Short Story Theories*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1994, 262-7, p. 265.

<sup>271</sup> Saikat Majumdar, *Modernism and the Banality of Empire*, op. cit., p. 198.

makes them almost useless and meaningless: “her feet stuck out in front of her, her little head with the thick screw of dark hair drooped on her chest”.

“It was too much<sup>272</sup>” — the image of the accumulated burden of everyday life is embodied in Mansfield’s “Life of Ma Parker”, a story about a British working-class woman, who recently became a widow and who has to work hard in order to take care of her children, in a world in which work performed by men is more valued than that done by women. This eventually leads to the protagonist’s impossibility of facing her own existence: “she’d had too much in her life to bear<sup>273</sup>”. Ma Parker, like other Mansfieldian characters such as Millie (an isolated character whose maternal gestures are revealed in the arms of a man), is surrounded by alienation, which ultimately transforms into isolation. Change is not even an option for Ma Parker, she is only looking for a place to cry her heart out: “Wasn’t there anywhere in the world where she could have her cry out — at last?<sup>274</sup>” The adverb “at last” suggests the accumulated burden and boredom of life. Joanna Kokot in her article focused on the Mansfieldian short story’s limits and capabilities from a narrative and mostly temporal perspective, observes that: “The character’s point of view blends with that of the narrator, and as a result the narrative distance from the protagonist’s fantasies is blurred; they are presented as facts, even if they become so only in the observer’s mind.”<sup>275</sup> There is an absence of temporal gap, usually present between the narrator and the character, and it is only the reading that reveals its consequences, that is to say the protagonists’ fantasies that are presented as facts. Mansfield uses a similar technique when choosing her temporal attributes. In this story she is playing with the juxtaposition of the past and the present to accurately picture the hard life of her protagonist. By using the Modernist technique of flashbacks, “The narrative concerning the past events recalled by the protagonist blends into that relating the here and now — thus not only disturbing the border between the real and the imagined, but also between the actual and the remembered, the present and the past.”<sup>276</sup> The past events are mostly recalled drawing Ma Parker’s most important life situations and the difficulties that she faces. The woman’s present life observation is nothing but a consequence of her past life. The title itself “The Life of Ma Parker” evokes a temporal background, with the noun “life” playing an important role here. The very title

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<sup>272</sup> Katherine Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, “Life of Ma Parker”, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>275</sup> Joanna Kokot, “The Elusiveness of Reality: The Limits of Cognition in Katherine Mansfield’s Short Stories” in Janet Wilson, Gerri Kimber and Susan Reid (eds.). *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Modernism: Historicizing Modernism*, London, Continuum, 2011, p. 68.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

encapsulates the past events of her life with the present situation of her actually realizing the state of things:

“She’s had a hard life, has Ma Parker.” Yes, a hard life, indeed! Her chin began to tremble; there was no time to lose. But where? Where?

She couldn’t go home; Ethel was there. It would frighten Ethel out of her life. She couldn’t sit on a bench anywhere; people would come asking her questions. She couldn’t possibly go back to the gentleman’s flat; she had no right to cry in strangers’ houses. If she set on some steps a policeman would speak to her. Oh, wasn’t there anywhere where she could hide and keep herself and stay as long as she liked, not disturbing anybody, and nobody worrying her? Wasn’t there anywhere in the world where she could have her cry out — at last?<sup>277</sup>

The protagonist keeps repeating that she had a hard life “‘She’s had a hard life, has Ma Parker.’ Yes, a hard life, indeed!”. The temporal issues are challenged: “Her chin began to tremble; there was no time to lose”, because she has a difficult and unsure life, and the spatial issues seem to find no place either: “ But where? Where?” She realizes that she does not have a home, a place where she could go and seek comfort. This lack of a space bears a relation to the colonial space, more precisely to the theme of spatiality. Ma Parker is an English woman, part of the low-class. Social hierarchy, an important theme here, is in itself a spatial indicator in society. The lack of a real home and place and the urgency of finding a home, where Ma Parker could at last cry herself out are two states connected here. The condition of the colonial who does not have a home of her own, who is neither able to benefit from her real home nor can she make another one somewhere else, is very well expressed here: “She couldn’t go home. [...] She couldn’t sit on a bench anywhere; [...] She couldn’t possibly go back to the gentleman’s flat; she had no right to cry in strangers’ houses.” Her limitations (both physically and metaphorically speaking) are expressed by the choice of verbs. The present perfect form “she’s had”, immediately followed by the present “has”, which could also be interpreted as an auxiliary here, expresses oscillation and uncertainty. The two rhetorical questions from the third paragraph state the character’s stagnation and her inability and also lack of desire to change. This third part is more likely a decision expressed by the narrator, a voice that overlaps that of the character’s in this case. Nonetheless, there is no real pursuit here, since the short story ends with Ma Parker “looking up and down” and picturing the uncertainty of the life that she has in front of her: “There was nowhere.” The Mansfieldian “nowhere”, which the short story does not allow the writer to extend, given its urgency, is in relation to the specificity of Mansfield’s colonial writing. Mansfield needs the short story to fully express the coloniality that lies within herself.

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<sup>277</sup> Katherine Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p. 308.

In Mansfield's short stories, the borders of linear time are crossed. Time is suspended, past and present being mixed, blended and so is the reader's vision and perception; the future is also uncertain and blurry. The following passage shows how the past creates an uncertain future and a present that is also inaccessible: "She's had a hard life, has Ma Parker." Yes, a hard life, indeed! Her chin began to tremble; there was no time to lose. But where? Where? / She couldn't go home; Ethel was there." Characters are a product of the writing that created them. Because the writing has no clear distinctions of time, the characters automatically follow the narration and writing itself. As for Mansfield's characters, their world is mostly stagnant, even if at first we have the impression that they evolve. Mansfield's characters move from one place to another, they are constantly looking for something, which paradoxically gives an impression of development, even through the boredom expressed by Ma Parker's example. Joanna Kokot writes:

Thus there is practically no evolution, no development in Mansfield's world; everything is suspended in time — yet usually in a way different from other Modernist writing, where past and present are blended in the character's consciousness. Here, time is divided into short segments, into independent moments. There is no maturing, gaining experience, understanding — only reacting.<sup>278</sup>

Mansfieldian characters only react as Kokot underlines as when "Her chin began to tremble" or "But where? Where?", without being able to do anything about it, as if the character was only a spectator, with no participation whatsoever. The fragments that we find in the writing recreate the gaps in the characters' lives: they are everywhere, and at the same time, nowhere; they are suspended in time. Time is no longer linear, as is usually the case, but circular. J. Kokot :

Indeed, there is no development of the characters in Mansfield's worlds, not just because of the eternal and absolute nature of the here-and-now of a given person, but also because the 'real self' never has a chance to come to the surface, never a chance to dominate completely.<sup>279</sup>

The lack of development is a consequence of the low-class society in which the character is trapped and from which she cannot escape. The fact that Mansfield's characters' "real selves" never have a chance to dominate completely is, I think, a sign of the conditions of patriarchal lives that the characters experience. It is the case in "The Life of Ma Parker", where the protagonist leads a harsh and difficult life, one that she has real difficulties to carry on: "It was too much — she'd had too

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<sup>278</sup> Joanna Kokot, "The Elusiveness of Reality: The Limits of Cognition in Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories" in Janet Wilson, Gerri Kimber and Susan Reid (eds.), *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Modernism: Historicizing Modernism*, p. 74.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

much in her life to bear. [...] Why must it all have happened to me? She wondered. ‘What have I done?’ said old Ma Parker. ‘What have I done?’”<sup>280</sup> The same rhetorical question used at the end is mentioned here to emphasize the inability to face one’s own self and destiny. A confirmation reinforces the idea that the narrator explores first via the rhetorical question: “‘She’s had a hard life, has Ma Parker.’ Yes, a hard life, indeed!”<sup>281</sup> It is as if the “hard life” would cover the real self, preventing the character itself from having access to it. The “hard life seems to be the only sure thing, it is for sure the one that dominates. The whole colonial question (the woman’s struggle) is wrapped up in a Modern way of writing through the endless rhetorical questions addressed by the narrator and the repetition, which highlights the difficulty that the character faces and the inner dialogue that the reader has access to. It is as if the narrator did not have time to enter into all these problems, which would actually be the case in a novel, contrary to the short story form, characterised by economy, first of all, due to its format and length.

Most of Mansfield’s stories have an indoor setting, such as a tea room, a drawing room, a hotel room, an ambiance proper for observation, contemplation, description of details ... stories that usually lack a precise or determined goal. Jean Rhys’s setting is similar to Mansfield’s, hotel rooms being the ones she alludes to the most. Don W. Kleine, in “Mansfield and the Orphans of Time”, a title particularly suggestive given Mansfield’s relation to temporality and its nuances, notes that “It might be said that the allegoric or symbolic use of rooms is peculiarly suited to the short story as a form spatially restricted.”<sup>282</sup>

It can be argued that Mansfield reinvented the spatiality of the short story. Mansfield’s writings are short, compact, quick to read but complex in interpretation. The textual economy, specific to the genre that she uses, is the origin of mystery in Mansfield’s works since nothing is completely revealed in her stories. Claire Joubert’s *Lire le féminin* devotes a chapter to the fragmentary and disunited nature of Mansfield’s short stories whose title is extremely revealing: “L’économie spasmodique de la révélation”. Here she calls Mansfield’s short story form the “nouvelle mystérique”: “La nouvelle de Mansfield est la mystérique. C’est la boîte qu’une nouvelle Pandore n’ouvre jamais entièrement : rien n’est finalement révélé. La nouvelle ne finit pas ; elle est toujours seulement un “prélude”.”<sup>283</sup> Thus Mansfield’s writing and her choice of the short story emphasize reality as necessarily containing something unrevealed, as a kind of announcement — following the definition of the word “prelude”, which means something that precedes, that

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<sup>280</sup> Katherine Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p. 307.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>282</sup> Don W. Kleine, “Mansfield and the Orphans of Time”, *Modern Fiction Studies*; Fall 1978; 423-438, p. 433.

<sup>283</sup> Claire Joubert., *Lire le féminin, op. cit.*, p. 108.

announces. Mansfield's "nouvelle mystérique", combining the unrevealed and prelude form, sheds light on the colonial subject who is fragmented, without a real sense of home, always wanting to belong but never actually belonging. The link between the specificity of the short story and colonial writing arouses the question of colonial time and makes us understand it better. Colonial time appears as episodic, without a definite form or structure (the story lacking either its beginning or its end)

The specificities of the short story genre used by Mansfield can be compared to the way Woolf shapes her narrative in *Mrs Dalloway*, for instance. Woolf also turns to the "technique" of using the prelude. Such a prelude takes up almost all of *Mrs Dalloway*, if we can say so, since the novel has no real plot. Apparently, nothing is happening, which leaves the scene open for the analysis of the multiple narrative devices that Woolf relies on to do that.

From the first pages, Clarissa Dalloway is preparing her upcoming party, preparations that will last for almost the entire novel, the party itself only taking place a couple of pages before the end of the novel.

Mansfield is either taking too much time to begin, in the form of a long prelude, and never actually continues the story, or she has no prelude at all. Mansfield's beginnings are often missing, as Claire Joubert explains in her analysis of the Mansfieldian short story, taking the example of "The Garden Party" whose beginning phrase is "And after all", or that of "The Daughters of the Late Colonel", a short story which begins *in media res* once the narration is supposedly already set in motion: "The week after was one of the busiest weeks of their lives"<sup>284</sup>. A similar phenomenon happens in *Mrs Dalloway* whose beginning lines are fresh and brisk, they "plunge" ("What a lark! What a plunge!"<sup>285</sup>) the reader into a new fresh morning: "How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning."<sup>286</sup> The early morning descriptions are also specific to Mansfield's short stories. For instance, in "Such a Sweet Old Lady" the beginning sentence is: "Why did old Mrs. Travers wake so early nowadays?"<sup>287</sup>, or "At the Bay" that begins with a "very early morning" (a sentence where not even a verb is necessary; the atmosphere is taking up the narrator's interest). Mansfield has a preference for the early morning setting, but she also has short stories that are set either in the afternoon, which is the case of "How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped"

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<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>285</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* [1925], London, Penguin Books, 1992, p. 3.

<sup>286</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 3.

<sup>287</sup> Katherine Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p. 484.

where “It was the early afternoon of a sunshiny day”<sup>288</sup>, or in the evening, usually around dinner time, for instance, when “A Married Man Short Story” opens with: “It is evening. Supper is over.”<sup>289</sup> In this case, the present tense of the verb “to be” recreates in a way the effect of the adjective “early”, used in the previous example. We can see how the story concentrates on a certain aspect, a certain moment, a part of the day, etc. by actually leaving out other aspects. That’s how it creates present moments. The presence of temporal gaps is the one that renders the specificity of the genre, which is to focus on a particular time frame.

The description of a day is common in Modernist short stories. Through her short stories, Mansfield usually describes an afternoon, a day, an event. *Mrs. Dalloway* illustrates a woman’s day and her inner thoughts after the First World War. Woolf is attempting to describe the events of a day in a novel, not in a short story as we would expect. Woolf applies the rules of the short story in a form novel for this time. Woolf’s experimentation with the genre is unexpected and challenging, both in form and the techniques used. It was an attempt that the Modernist writers were experimenting with. Another novel of the time, also considered a masterpiece today, *Ulysses*, written in 1929 by James Joyce, describes the events of an ordinary day in Dublin.

The opening sentence of the novel is the following: “Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself” (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 3) From the beginning, Woolf plunges into the urban, London environment, by introducing the eponymous character, Mrs Dalloway, who is going for a stroll to buy the flowers herself. The pronoun “herself” is here an indicator of her social status; the narrator communicates to the reader that the protagonist buys herself the flowers, implying that usually there would be someone to do that for her. The morning’s freshness and newness give the reader a positive and optimistic mood. The first page of the novel is strong, significant and telling for the whole novel. The time of the narration oscillates between several layers, mainly between the present and the past, a back-and-forth overlapping of narrative plans. At a first reading, the reader feels confused. It is precisely the idea of spatial form that we are dealing with, a theory developed by Joseph Frank in 1991.<sup>290</sup> He develops the idea that Modernists invent formal techniques to give a sense of simultaneity to the reader, by describing several events that take place at the same time. The idea of “spatial form” thus taking place causes a disorder in the time length of the narration and dissolves the natural progression of time. When using this technique, Modernists suspended time and therefore froze its flow. It is, on the one hand, the descriptions that make us truly live next to

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<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 519.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 422.

<sup>290</sup> Joseph Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form*, New Brunswick and London, Rutgers University Press, 1991.

the character. On the other hand, it is the temporal uncertainty that the reader faces, when the narrator oscillates between the present and past times of the narration. The reader feels confused, without knowing anymore which narrative or temporal plane to follow. It is a second reading that usually allows the reader to perceive the totality, what is described as a whole, past and present together. We can find a concrete example at the beginning of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*:

For having lived in Westminster — how many years now ? over twenty — one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh; but the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same; can't be dealt with, she felt positive, by Acts of Parliament for that very reason: they love life. (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 4)

Woolf jumps from describing general atmospheres — in an extremely detailed and lively way — to acknowledging the character “Clarissa was positive” and later on “she felt positive”. The way she does it is almost the same, using even similar words.

The stagnation, or speed reduction specific to Modernist writing — let's take as an example the calm morning description from the beginning of *Mrs Dalloway*: “How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning” (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 3) — stands in essence in opposition to colonialism, an ideology that promulgates progress. The war transformed people's perception and prompted them to change. The relation that people had to time after the war was one of change. But first, they needed to slow down, to reexamine things, to put things in perspective, and that is merely the function of *Mrs Dalloway*'s beginning. Slowing things down is the opposite of what colonialism puts forward. Slowing down in this writing would therefore suggest that the colonial is mixed with the Modern. Nevertheless, both Modernism and colonialism promulgate the idea of change. So how do these two regimes of time relate? Modernism (as a literary movement) means a change in the way we approach time, the cutting of the linear and progressive fluency of time; on the other hand, colonialism as an ideology of domination means change, evolution and getting things at the next level economically, politically and socially speaking.

The time-shift technique, as Joseph Conrad called it, the “chronological looping method” — in which past and present are confused or rather fused, and are not delimited anymore; the past is



not separated from the present and complete but an even-developing part of a changing present<sup>291</sup> —makes complete sense here. The post-war London narration that Woolf does actually needs this time shift technique; by involving the past, which becomes almost a character here, the narration suggests that the 1920s London context is subject(ed) to change. The war means change, and the narration expresses this “changing present” that society experiences. In this sense, we can say that Conrad and Woolf use similar time techniques.

The past and present times transposition and the narrator’s shift of perspective, which wanders from a character’s thoughts and inner self to the other abound throughout the entire novel. The focus on the inner world of the character and not on the plot is a feature common to the Modernist short story as well.

The present moment narration from the beginning of *Mrs Dalloway* unexpectedly shifts to the past, remembering one of Peter Walsh’s thoughts on men and cauliflowers. The character of Peter Walsh is introduced, followed by the narrator’s voice: “He would be back from India one of these days, June or July, she forgot which” (*Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 3), the temporal markers being uncertain. The urban setting along with other Modernist features, such as the vivid and lively description of the day are there to help the reader to plunge into the colonial atmosphere that comes next. The first mention is London, followed by the second one, India. From the very first page of *Mrs Dalloway*, there is a reference to India. The colonial context opens up little by little. In order to be plunged even more into the context of the 1920s, on the second page, the reader finds a direct reference to the exact period that is evoked. The war has just ended and we can see some of the immediate consequences that it has brought:

In people’s eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some airplane overhead was what she loved; life; London this moment of June.

For it was the middle of June. The War was over, except for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough [...] with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed; it was over; thank Heaven — over. It was June. [...] everywhere, though it was still so early, there was a beating, a stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats; [...] wrapped in the soft mesh of grey-blue morning air [...] (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 5)

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<sup>291</sup> A. A. Mendilow, *Time and the Novel*, p. 104.

This passage emphasizes the specific London atmosphere with its characteristic alert rhythm. There is a temporal shift in narration. This Modernist urban description is intercut by an important colonial signifier in the text, which is the war. The shift in narration is made through a temporal marker: “For it was the middle of June”, which is the door through which Woolf makes the switch from a typical urban Modernist setting to a colonial one. The narration follows a “colonial direction”: “The War was over”, followed by the immediate consequences brought by the war, mainly “that nice boy [who] was killed”. The transition created through the earlier “For it was the middle of June”, which is a very important sentence, appears one more time in the narration a couple of sentences later: “But it was over; thank Heaven — over.” This frontier that is still fresh and uncertain, of a period before and after the war, is transferred into the narration throughout the way Modernism and colonialism intersect. At the same time, the quick, modern image of London interferes in the narration, right after having mentioned the damages of the war. The frontier between the Modern and the colonial is very thin. Then, the fresh early morning atmosphere from the beginning of the novel radically changes one and a half pages later, into a “grey-blue morning”. The positive mood described a couple of lines earlier is now transformed into a harsh reality picturing men killed in the war. The quick shift present in the narration is also a feature of the reality, which can turn into war sometimes and therefore change unexpectedly. The lively morning is abruptly and also bluntly changed, the narrator insisting on the fact that not only is the war over, but also “that nice boy was killed” and Lady Bexborough’s John was killed too. The silent, “beating” atmosphere, featuring the sound of a “stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats” pictures from the after-war phase, and renders the whole scenario featuring the killed men even more lively. Woolf uses here the technique of the contrast. The silent image contrasts very well with the active and dynamic image that we have of the war.

A characteristic of short stories is the presence of fragments, but here we are dealing with a novel. The quoted paragraph comes almost as an explanation for the sudden change of ambiance and environment, since the narrator starts talking about the war using the preposition “for”, as an argument for the “grey-blue” picture that it brings. The sudden change of concept and humour is in essence a sign of Woolf’s fragmentary writing, as if the novel were made of several short stories gathered together. Also, the Modern writing’s fragmentary nature introduces the harsh colonial events of the period, in this case the war. We need the Modern (writing) when introducing and developing colonial signifiers. Once the war is introduced, Woolf continues to describe the city throughout lively Modern writing techniques: “ [...] how strange, on entering the Park, the silence; the mist; the hum; the slow-swimming happy ducks; the pouched birds waddling; and who should

be coming along with his back against the Government buildings, most appropriately, carrying a despatch box stamped with the Royal Arms” (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 5). We can see how the modern and the colonial go hand in hand in Woolf’s narration. Modernism, as a literary movement, creating all of its methods and techniques, welcomes in its writing the colonial culture, present at that period through the First World War. The fresh atmosphere of a world that has just escaped the war is created through the numerous temporal instances present in the narration.

The place where the Modern writing aspects intersect colonialism is the one where colonial time arises. Colonial time, as seen in *Mrs Dalloway* (or *The Years*) is the time lived and experienced in the centre of the empire during colonialism. That’s why London is so important for this study. London is an urban figure of Modernism that experiences the time of the colonization. And not only London, but also Paris in Rhys’s case. I could also say that when Modernism intercuts colonialism is the moment of creation of colonial time itself.

Referring to the title and initial idea of this chapter, I can say that the stagnation and development tension is present in *Mrs Dalloway*’s narration through the form of a direct comparison between India and London, that is to say between the colony, generally speaking, and the centre of the empire. In *Mrs Dalloway* it is through India, and Peter Walsh, that Woolf evokes the colonial situation of the moment. The term “civilisation” is at stake here since it appears in three different places throughout the novel, each adding a different perspective to the idea expressed. Freshly coming back from India, Peter holds an idea of “civilization” that is interesting to consider since he has access to the two worlds:

Admirable butlers, tawny chow dogs, halls laid in black and white lozenges with the white blinds blowing, Peter saw through the opened door and approved of. A splendid achievement in its own way, after all, London; the season; civilisation. Coming as he did from a respectable Anglo-Indian family which for at least three generations had administered the affairs of a continent (it’s strange, he thought, what a sentiment I have about that, disliking India, and empire, and army as he did), there were moments when civilisation, even of this sort, seemed dear to him as a personal possession, moments of pride in England; in butlers; chow dogs; he thought. (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 60)

The character’s approach is based on the way he sees things after having had access to both worlds, the colony and the centre of the empire. The image of the “Anglo-Indian family” that “had administered the affairs of a continent” alludes to Woolf herself and her roots. Woolf’s grandfather, Sir James Stephen, was one of the most influential colonial administrators of the nineteenth century.

He was appointed as Counsel to the Colonial Office and Board of Trade and the dominant administrator to the colonies, as Hermione Lee writes in her biography on Woolf.<sup>292</sup> The biographical elements are followed by colonial opinions on: “disliking India, and empire, and army as he did”, but nonetheless having “moments when civilisation, even of this sort, seemed dear to him [...], moments of pride in England”.

The amusing thing about coming back to England, after five years, was the way it made, anyhow the first days, things stand out as if one had never seen them before. [...] Never had he seen London look so enchanting — the softness of the distances; the richness; the greenness; the civilization, after India, he thought, strolling across the grass.

[...] After India of course one fell in love with every woman one met. There was a freshness about them; even the poorest dressed better than five years ago surely; and to his eye the fashions had never been so becoming; the long black cloaks; the slimness; the elegance; and then the delicious and apparently universal habit of paint. Every woman, even the most respectable, had roses blooming under glass; lips cut with a knife; curls of Indian ink; there was design, art, everywhere; a change of some sort had undoubtedly taken place. What did the young people think about? Peter Walsh asked himself.

Those five years — 1918 to 1923 — had been, he suspected, somehow very important. People looked different. Newspapers seemed different. (*Ibid.*, p. 78)

“Civilisation”, in this case England, is presented in opposition to India, as if the former would stand out after having seen the latter: “the civilisation after India”, “after India of course”. Women’s fashion changed, bearing the marks of the Indian civilisation, which are prominently present: “lips cut with a knife; curls of Indian ink”, blended with art, all being influences of colonial civilisations. The civilisation admired by the character, whose inner life we therefore follow, is indeed based de facto on colonialism, and thus on the system of domination, a reality but also a fantasy that this system (and the empire) is fed with, one that it is dependent on and that it feeds, implicit here. This kind of carelessness, art life and elegance that the character admires and that he calls “civilisation” masks or rather reveals a kind of underlying indecency and disorder: if Indian civilisation is not a civilization and is therefore, by contrast, “savage”, “primitive”, why do “civilized” women use Indian ink? — that does not shock the character who has known both worlds and who could have hoped that London, by contrast, would not have any sign of Indian “non-civilization”, but it is the opposite and, in a way, he ends up admiring “India” but only in London (centre of the Empire), perfected, reappropriated, even possessed by the imperialist civilization. The Indian ink represents a marker of the implicit domination, which the empire and its colonial system needs in order to survive and continue to believe in itself, in its illusion of civilization.

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<sup>292</sup> Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf, op. cit.*, p. 60.

In this passage colonial time is represented by the fusion between England, the civilized world, and the colonial image of the colonies, taking the example of India here. Colonial time is presented throughout the time gap between the metropolitan centre and the colony, in a post-war period: “Those five years — 1918 to 1923 — had been, he suspected, somehow very important”.

And there is also another place where the term “civilisation” appears:

One of the triumphs of civilisation, Peter Walsh thought. It is one of the triumphs of civilisation, as the light high bell of the ambulance sounded. Swiftly, cleanly, the ambulance sped to the hospital, having picked up instantly, humanely, some poor devil; some one hit on the head, struck down by disease, knocked over perhaps a minute or so ago at one of these crossings, as might happen to oneself. That was civilization. It struck him coming back from the East — the efficiency, the organisation, the communal spirit of London. Every cart of carriage of its own accord drew aside to let the ambulance pass. Perhaps it was morbid; or was it not touching rather, the respect which they showed this ambulance with its victim inside” (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 165-166)

The advancement and technology, but also organization of society serve here to define once again the meaning of civilization in a metropolitan context. There is a spirit of contentment and assurance expressed through the expressions: “the triumphs of civilisation” and “That was civilisation”, the latter being in addition found at the end of the sentence in the quoted passage. The colonial perception is what Woolf is interested in showing in this novel, a perception that is created because of colonial time: the gap that exists between the two experiences. This is possible by examining the colonial reality of the early twentieth century.

Each occurrence reinforces even more the civilisational gap and the ambivalence between the centre of the empire and its colony, which represents colonial time itself. The progress and civilisation specific to London makes an echo to the notion of time gap (or “time-lag” as Bhabha puts it). This discrepancy is a question of perspective, mainly because it is through the eyes of Peter Walsh that the reader has access to it and can actually see it: “That was civilization. It struck him coming back from the East”. The time gap is expressed through feelings of wonder and awe, in a negative sense, of course. This negative interpretation rises from all the positive comments on London’s efficiency and organization. The Modern world clearly opposes the colonial one. Freshly back from India, Peter’s view bears the two worlds combined: the heart of London, which he admires, and the colony, which he “dislikes”. This time gap is made through the idea of progress and development that stands in opposition to the idea of stagnation or the fact that they are behind if we relate to the metropolitan centre itself. This time-lag contributes to the Modernist poetics expressed in the text. The Modern world characterized by “efficiency”, “organisation”, “communal

spirit of London” intercuts the colonial world, a world not described here, but implied, standing in opposition to the triumphant civilization represented by the metropolitan centre, and that is precisely what colonial time is. The novel genre allows us to deepen into such questions of analysis and reflection.

After performing a new reading of *Mrs Dalloway*, for this time having in mind Woolf’s Modernist style but focusing on the colonial signifiers of the narration, we find a post-war atmosphere, but also a London that cannot be separated from its colonies. Several instances throughout the narration confirm that. We have, for example, the trades that London practices with the colonies, and in particular India. The reader has access to the background work, the preparation for exportation:

[...] Mrs Dalloway lost her way, and was hemmed in by trunks specially prepared for taking to India, next got among the accouchement sets and baby linen; through all the commodities of the world, perishable and permanent, hams, drugs, flowers, stationery, variously smelling, now sweet, now sour, she lurched; she saw herself thus lurching [...] and at last came out into the street. The tower of Westminster Cathedral rose in front of her, the habitation of God. (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 146)

The background is represented by the colonial activities, whereas once we step “into the street”, the centre of the empire rises, “[t]he tower of the Westminster Cathedral”. Mrs Dalloway seemed to be disturbed by this colonial ambiance since she lurched<sup>293</sup> (a verb used twice in the same sentence), which expresses her opinion about the colonial environment. Woolf undoubtedly speaks the language of the colonial world by using nouns such as “commodities”, otherwise known as trades, which lie at the heart of colonialism, but instead of shipping them from the colony to the metropolitan centre, as was usually the case (Indian tea is an example in this sense), it is shipped in reverse, from centre to colony, in order to emphasize the belatedness of the colonies.

The frame that outlines *Mrs Dalloway* is colonial, it represents the colonial surroundings itself, whereas the descriptions, emotions and events of the day are at the heart of the novel, all covered up in a past-present-future temporal gathering. The setting that Woolf chooses to emphasise the Modern dynamics as opposed to the colonial ones is an open one, the writer textually “jumping” with ease between London and the colonies, which can be seen as a particularity of the novel genre.

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<sup>293</sup> According to the Cambridge Dictionary “to lurch” means “to move in a way that is not regular or normal, especially making sudden movements backwards or forwards or from side to side”; <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/lurch>, last accessed on the 22nd of June 2022.

On the opposite side, we have Mansfield's short stories that usually use an indoor setting to cover the Modern-colonial dynamics that takes place at a textual level.

### **“Digg[ing] deeper than the eye can see” and the shadow of the *flâneuse* in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and “Street Haunting: A London Adventure”**

“I love walking in London’, said Mrs Dalloway. ‘Really, it’s better than walking in the country!’” (*MD*, p. 6) — “I love walking in London”, a sentence that I think delivers the quintessence of this chapter on *flânerie* and the figure of the twentieth century *flâneuse*. Virginia Woolf couples here London, the centre of the empire, with the concept of *flânerie*. The goal of this chapter is to help the reader perceive in *flânerie* not only a Modernist concept, as we already know it is (Janet Wolff's “The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity”<sup>294</sup>, Grisselda Pollock's “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity”<sup>295</sup> or Deborah L. Parsons's *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*<sup>296</sup> being a couple of reference points), but to look at it from another perspective, a colonial one for this time. Because the *flânerie* is also a colonial issue since its practice allows distinguishing, like a marker, the colonizing people from the colonized ones — and my argument here is mainly based upon Woolf's and Rhys's works. It is precisely by pairing cities like London, in Woolf's case, or Paris, in Rhys's case, that the colonial aspect of the *flânerie* stands out and eventually makes us see it in a different light. Also, in this chapter, it is important to analyze the *flânerie* through the figure of the *flâneuse*, which is the feminine equivalent form of *flâneur*. We are dealing with female characters. In Woolf's case, it is the character of *Mrs Dalloway* in her eponymous novel that describes women in general. In Rhys's works, we have women characters such as Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight* and Julia in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. The actions of the *flâneuse*, that is to say the walks that she takes and the colonial implications that we can infer about London and Paris make it fit in the chapter on “Time Dynamics”. An example in this sense would be a scene from *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*:

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<sup>294</sup> Janet Wolff, “The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity” in *Theory, Culture and Society* 2/3 (1985), pp. 37-46.

<sup>295</sup> Grisselda Pollock, “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity” in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, London, Routledge, 1988.

<sup>296</sup> Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* [2000], New York, Oxford University Press, 2003.

When he took her arm to pilot her across Regent Street he touched her as lightly as possible. They turned to the right and walked along aimlessly.

Julia thought: “This place tells you all the time, ‘Get money, get money, get money. get money, or be for ever damned.’ Just as Paris tells you to forget, forget, let yourself go.”

Mr Horsefield said, in an aimless voice: “Now, let me see, where shall we go?”

“This will do as well as anywhere, won’t it?”

They were passing the Café Monico. She walked in, and he followed her. When they had sat down she said: “I hate drifting about streets. Do you mind? It makes me awfully miserable.”<sup>297</sup>

In this passage we can see, thanks to the *flânerie*, how time and space interact and the difference that it makes for Rhys to walk through the two cities, Paris and London. This “walk[ing] along aimlessly” is what brings out the colonial representation of London: “This place tells you all the time, ‘Get money, get money, get money. get money, or be for ever damned.’” The spatial element, represented by the *flânerie*, generates a temporal one, for time is here represented by and as the haste to “get money”. This argument comes from Julia who had troubles with money and who relied on men’s money to make a living. So the colonial issue comes from the feminine one, which is of greater importance here. In contrast, Paris brings out Modernism and the Modernist time, because this is why Rhys actually goes to Paris so often: to be in the capital city of Modernism. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* the argument around Paris goes like this: “Just as Paris tells you to forget, forget, let yourself go.” Not only is the walk aimless, but also Mr Horsefield’s voice, which shows that Julia’s affairs with men do not have a clear direction either. Julia does not seem to like walking side by side with him either, especially because “drifting streets [...] makes [her] awfully miserable.”

The *flânerie* is initially a concept that holds a spatial meaning. I assign it as temporal and spatial, because it elucidates the patriarchal and imperial times that metropolis such as London or Paris went through in the early twentieth century, more precisely the period between the wars. The above passage shows this link between space and time very well as regards the *flânerie*: “This place tells you all the time”.

Aimlessly walking in the city in quest of adventure and the discovery of new things and places is what actually represents the concept of the *flânerie*. Among the earliest critical traditions on *flânerie* we can find Charles Baudelaire’s view on the concept also found in *Le Peintre de la vie*

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<sup>297</sup> Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.



*moderne*<sup>298</sup>, Walter Benjamin's *Paris, Capitale du XIXeme siècle : Le Livre des Passages*<sup>299</sup>, or Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank, Paris: 1900-1940*<sup>300</sup>. When defining the concept of *flânerie*, based on Baudelaire's view, Walter Benjamin links *flânerie* to the idea of space: "Le flâneur cherche un refuge dans la foule. La foule est le voile à travers lequel la ville familière se meut pour le flâneur en fantasmagorie. Cette fantasmagorie, où elle apparaît tantôt comme un paysage, semble avoir inspiré par la suite le décor des grands magasins".<sup>301</sup>

To take a more recent research on the question, I would like to take the definition given by Lauren Elkin. Based on her own experience of the city and her literary studies, Lauren Elkin, a writer specialized in British literature, feminism, and urban studies, in her work *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* assigns a new perspective to the *flâneuse* comparing several cities, as the title suggests, and authors, among which Jean Rhys and Virginia Woolf. She observes that

The *flâneur* understands the city as few of its inhabitants do, for he has memorised it with his feet. Every corner, alleyway and stairway has the ability to plunge him into rêverie. What happened here? Who passed by there? What does this place mean? The *flâneur*, attuned to the chords that vibrate throughout his city, knows without knowing.<sup>302</sup>

It is notable how Elkin uses the pronouns "he" and "his", which therefore imply that there is a feminist issue at work. The *flâneur*, or the *flâneuse* in Rhys's texts, for example, would therefore be someone idle, who takes the time (temporality) to question the places (spatiality). With this in mind, knowing that the *flâneur* is aware of the history of the places and the times in which it took place, we can already sense the inseparable connection between the *flânerie* and the history behind, and ultimately between place and time.

The sentence that I chose to begin my chapter with was used by Woolf twice: once in her short story *Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street* (1923), which prepared the publication of her famous novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), the latter constituting the second occurrence. Woolf loved walking in London, a fact that she mentions in her *Diary* as well: "To walk alone in London is the greatest

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<sup>298</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, Paris, Fayard, 2010.

<sup>299</sup> Walter Benjamin's *Paris, Capitale du XIXeme siècle : Le Livre des Passages*, online version: [https://www.urbain-trop-urbain.fr/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Benjamin\\_Paris-capitale-du-XIXe-siècle.pdf](https://www.urbain-trop-urbain.fr/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Benjamin_Paris-capitale-du-XIXe-siècle.pdf), last accessed on the 22nd of June 2022.

<sup>300</sup> Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank, Paris: 1900-1940*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1986.

<sup>301</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Paris, Capitale du XIXeme siècle : Le Livre des Passages*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>302</sup> Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*, London, Penguin Random House (Vintage), 2016, p. 3.

rest.<sup>303</sup> The city belongs to and is part of the Woolfian universe and the question of *flânerie* is an urban question for sure: “‘I love walking in London’, said Mrs Dalloway. ‘Really, it’s better than walking in the country!’” (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 6) and a Modernist one at the same time. John Sutherland in “Clarissa’s Invisible Taxi” (in *Can Jane Eyre Ever Be Happy?*) points out that *Mrs Dalloway* is perhaps the greatest flâneuse of twentieth-century literature.<sup>304</sup>

Being a *flâneur/flâneuse* also means being an observer, a beholder of society: “I like observing people. I like looking at things”<sup>305</sup>, declares Woolf in *The Voyage Out*, which implies a sense of pleasure too. Strolling in the streets of London allows Mrs Dalloway to review the state of things — how London is at the time of the narration, and how it was before, and during the war. Let us remember that *Mrs Dalloway* is a post-war novel; in this sense, the act of *flânerie* has a crucial role here: to reveal the post-war, colonial London of the time. Walking around Bond Street, a place that fascinated her, she notices some changes due to the war: “‘That is all,’ she said, looking at the fishmonger’s. ‘That is all,’ she repeated, pausing for a moment at the window of a glove shop where, before the War, you could buy almost perfect gloves.”<sup>306</sup> The repetition of the sentence ‘That is all’ brings awareness to the current state of things: things have changed after the war, the city itself is not what it used to be. Its economy has been affected, which underlines the colonial implications due to the war. And that has some values for the novel: the Modernist novel begins to integrate colonial aspects. The stroll that Mrs Dalloway takes in London allows her to perceive the changes. The sentences “That is all” — repeated via a direct discourse — and “before the war you could buy almost perfect gloves” — using indirect discourse for this time — emphasize the present, on the one hand, and the past, on the other hand, placing them next to each other. That is a mark of the Modernist writing that she uses, in which the present encapsulates the past. The changes, among others of economic nature, due to the war reveal the colonial dimension of the writing. And all these changes represent the colonial time that Woolf describes in this novel.

A couple of pages later, we can see how the episode of the gloves opens up a series of the colonial events. Clarissa continues to observe the city and the society of London: “The British middle classes sitting sideways on the tops of omnibuses”<sup>307</sup>. In this case, the observation is not made through a direct intervention, a dialogue, as was the case before, but via the narrator that

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<sup>303</sup> Anne Oliver Bell and Andrew McNeillie (eds.) *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, volume 3, 1925-30*, St Ives, Penguin Books - letter written on the 28th of March 1930, p. 298.

<sup>304</sup> John Sutherland, “Clarissa’s Invisible Taxi”, *Can Jane Eyre Ever Be Happy?*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997.

<sup>305</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* [1915], St Ives, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 120.

<sup>306</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 11.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

describes the protagonist's stroll. The way the *flânerie* is narrated is different, but what remains the same is the state of things concerning society, which the *flâneuse* has access to. It is also an inner *flânerie* that Woolf proposes to us, while being engaged in the physical one. While describing the streets of London, Woolf submits the reader to the cartography of London society through class and gender: the middle class, the rich and the poor, men and women.

The episode goes on with a car crash. Once a car that produced the car crash is gone:

a slight ripple [...] flowed through glove shops and hat shops and tailor shops. Choosing a pair of gloves — should they be to the elbow or above it, lemon or pale grey? — ladies stopped; when the sentence was finished something had happened. Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibrations; yet in its fullness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional; for in all the hat shops and tailors' shops strangers looked at each and thought of the dead; of the flag; of Empire. In a public house in a back street a Colonial insulted the House of Windsor which led to words, broken beer glasses [...] For the surface agitation of the passing car as it sunk grazed something very profound.<sup>308</sup>

Walking along the streets of London, the current situation of the city and of the colonial tension that exists show themselves. The *flânerie* is not only an enjoyable moment, but one that allows to “register the vibrations”, the world “in its fullness”, and even its emotional appeal, in both time and space. The colonial vocabulary stands out in this passage. We have on the one hand, “China”, a territory that has experienced the English colonial dominance and “a Colonial”, with its indefinite article “a”, which underlines the tension between the colonies and the metropolitan centre represented by “the House of Windsor”. Other colonial signifiers are represented by words and expressions such as “Empire”, the “House of Windsor”, the “flag”, and “the dead”, the latter represented in opposition to the colonial. We can see how the novel, as opposed to the short story, covers important “voyages” from “[c]hoosing a pair of gloves” in London to “transmitting shocks in China” and then going back to London and thinking “of the flag; of Empire”. Colonial time is rendered here through spatial markers that make this “colonial journey” possible. Important London authorities are present in *Mrs Dalloway*, such as the House of Windsor, Buckingham Palace or Westminster Abbey and the pervasive sound of Big Ben, the latter also being echoed in *Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street*. Two forces are opposed here: the colonial versus the colonizer, which stands actually at the foundation of the ideology of colonialism. It is the symbol of “the dead” that is appealing here; it makes me think of fear, of being haunted, and the Colonial as a ghost. The last sentence here is of great importance: “For the surface agitation of the passing car as it sunk grazed

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<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

something very profound.” The colonial History that lies behind the surface things is impressive and extensive so that “no mathematical instrument [...] could register (its) vibrations”, precisely because here time and place seem melted into each other, reconfigured, in order to give the place and voice to the “Colonial” (with an all-powerful capital “C”), a ghostly figure, voice, or allegory of imperialist ideology, which intervenes or can only intervene in this kind of spatiotemporal rupture.

Mrs Dalloway incarnates the *flâneuse*, her surname suggesting a woman who enjoys “to dally along the way, the *flâneuse* herself<sup>309</sup>”. Speaking from a Modernist perspective, the act of *flânerie* leaves us to discover the city of London, in Woolf’s case. “Woolf thought deeply on the relationship between women and the city.<sup>310</sup>” As an example, we have *Street Haunting: A London Adventure* (1930), an essay in which Woolf invites the reader for a little adventure; it is actually more than a walk, it is a street haunting. The pretext, as the author admits herself, is to go and buy a pen, which eventually turns out to be a search of ourselves: “Let us put off buying the pencil; let us go in search of this person — and soon it becomes apparent that this person is ourselves.<sup>311</sup>” And that’s because the London stroll leads to research and discovery. She accepts to leave her room and “become part of that vast republican army of anonymous trampers.” Nevertheless, we are in for an adventure, or even a discovery:

But here we must stop peremptorily. We are in danger of digging deeper than the eye approves; we are impeding our passage down the smooth stream by catching at some branch or root. At any moment, the sleeping army may stir itself and wake in us a thousand violins and trumpets in response; the army of human beings may rouse itself and assert all its oddities and sufferings and sordidities. Let us dally a little longer, be content still with surfaces only — the glossy brilliance of the motor omnibuses; the carnal splendour of the butchers’ shops with their yellow flanks and purple steaks; the blue and red bunches of flowers burning so bravely through the plate glass of the florists’ windows.<sup>312</sup>

In this passage we can clearly see the political represented by “the *army* of human beings”<sup>313</sup> or when one leaves its room to “become part of that vast *republican army* of anonymous trampers”<sup>314</sup>, as seen earlier, comes in contact with the Modern represented by the *flânerie* as in “Let us dally”. According to Woolf, if one continues the *flânerie*, one may find himself/herslef “in danger of

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<sup>309</sup> Rachel Bowlby, “Walking, Women and Writing” in Isobel Armstrong (ed.), *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 206.

<sup>310</sup> Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*, p. 86.

<sup>311</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Street Haunting: A London Adventure* (1930), <http://s.spachman.tripod.com/Woolf/streethaunting.htm>, last accessed: the 19th of March 2020.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>313</sup> my Italics.

<sup>314</sup> my Italics.

digging deeper than the eye approves". There's an action and a movement of digging down if I may use this tautological expression. I think that among other things Woolf makes a reference to the 1930s historical context that London crosses, a period in between the two World Wars. The essay itself was published in 1930. The *flânerie* opens up the possibility of "catching at some branch or root". Nouns such as "branch" and "root" make me think of the earth — to stroll is in a way to excavate, to dig in the earth; the latter, insofar as it allows you to catch a branch or a root, which reminds me of the original, ancient temporality. The city can at any moment come alive and tell its history; the idea of ghosts haunting the place occurs again: "the sleeping army may stir itself and wake [...]". The threat here is the colonial army that could wake up. For the moment, she prefers "to be content still with surfaces only"; what follows is a vivid description in Modernist style.

Here, perhaps, in the top rooms of these narrow old houses between Holborn and Soho, where people have such queer names, and pursue so many curious trades, are gold beaters, accordion pleaters, cover buttons, or support life, with even greater fantasticality, upon a traffic in cups without saucers, china umbrella handles, and highly-coloured pictures of martyred saints. There they lodge, and it seems as if the lady in the sealskin jacket must find life tolerable, passing the time of day with the accordion pleater, or the man who covers buttons; life which is so fantastic cannot be altogether tragic. They do not grudge us, we are musing, our prosperity; when, suddenly, turning the corner, we come upon a bearded Jew, wild, hunger-bitten, glaring out of his misery; or pass the humped body of an old woman flung abandoned on the step of a public building with a cloak over her like the hasty covering thrown over a dead horse or donkey. At such sights the nerves of the spine seem to stand erect; a sudden flare is brandished in our eyes; a question is asked which is never answered.<sup>315</sup>

In this passage throughout the *flânerie* we discover a world of opposites. On the one hand, there are the colonials with "such queer names" who "pursue so many curious trades", who "support life with even greater fantasticality", bearing "china umbrella handles", "sealskin jacket[s]", and "passing the time of day with the accordion pleater". On the other hand, there are "us", those who come from the metropolitan centre, who bear "prosperity", and who almost feel pity for the colonials and think that "life which is so fantastic cannot be altogether tragic". The class issue is strongly at stake here, mainly emphasising the poor condition of the colonials versus the prosperity that those from London benefit from. To make this opposition even more powerful and striking, Woolf returns to the image of the outsiders evoking the "bearded Jew, wild, hunger-bitten, glaring out of his misery", right after talking about "us". The sentence "They do not grudge us" situates the colonial at the border of their existence. In other words, we have the two ends of the social ladder: *up* and *down*. The *flânerie* is not only an act that gives us pleasure, because the person who strolls in the streets of

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<sup>315</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Street Haunting: A London Adventure* (1930), *op. cit.*

London finds suffering, discovers that there is not only the prosperous one that muses and that we wouldn't grudge, but there is also the "wild, hunger-beaten," those that are "glaring out of misery", abandoned, whose existence is close to that of the dead horses or donkeys. The term "haunting" that Woolf chooses to insert in her title is significant since the London pedestrians are indeed haunted by the memory of the streets: walking in London is having access to life, and death or those who died, in its fullness. The Jew abandoned in the street makes reference to the exclusion of Jews from Europe; it's a Jew that cannot have a home (any more). Taking a walk in London while facing the reality of the situation, the basics of society, is what Woolf's work brings awareness to — as a socially concerned realist. The *flâneuse* is dazzled with the situation: "life which is so fantastic cannot be altogether tragic" along with the erected spine and the sudden flare in the eyes. The implied question would probably try to give an answer or understand the situation — but there is no answer to that. Woolf resorts to opposing concepts: tolerable/fantastic vs tragic and misery to project life bearing its inequalities and differences. The quotation "They do not grudge us, we are musing, our prosperity" is significant in this passage. This image seems to be a direct reference to the colonial illusion or phantasmagoria, analyzed earlier: the "roses blooming under glass; lips cut with a knife; curls of Indian ink; there was design, art, everywhere". The attitude to the colonial reality of London in the novel is clearly not one of indifference; the novel is interested in these important questions of class and colonial reality. I think that in Woolf's view these are also things that should be considered. Here we have meditation or daydreaming about one's own prosperity; as a result, seeing the miserable, already dead ghosts appearing on street corners, breaks this dream, this simulacrum of self-satisfaction, self-indulgence and carelessness of the rich. The Modern world represented by London gathers in itself the colonial part as well, that we sometimes forget or neglect since "life which is so fantastic cannot be altogether tragic". Therefore, the place of *flânerie* in the Modernist-colonialist configuration of Woolf's work is to situate the two together, the Modern world being inseparable from the colonial one. It is precisely the act of *flânerie* that wakes us up to reality and makes us perceive this double side of London, Modern and colonial at the same time.

Whereas Woolf's *flâneries* take place in London, Rhys's are mostly in the Parisian streets. The woman's condition troubles Rhys's works; the question of the *flânerie* encapsulates that of the woman's place and the near-prostitute status that she bears, the two being closely related. *Flânerie* is used in Rhys's works to make the feminine condition come to light. That means that the streets of London, in which the female characters in the texts wander, allow us to highlight their condition,

their difference vis-à-vis men, excluding them at the same time from the urban space. In Rhys's case, just like in Woolf's, the *flânerie* is twofold: we perceive it strictly speaking, but also metaphorically speaking. If we go back in time, we remember that women, unlike men, were not allowed to walk in the street and stroll. Deborah L. Parsons in *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity* observes that:

The urban observer, as both a social phenomenon and a metaphor for the Modernist artist, has been regarded as an exclusively male figure. The opportunities and activities of *flânerie* were predominantly the privileges of the man of means, and it was hence implicit that the artist of "modern life" was necessarily the bourgeois male. Raymond Williams, for example, notes that the perspective on the city has always been that of "a man walking, as if alone, in the streets"<sup>316</sup>. *Flânerie* has thus also become a metaphor for the gendered scopic hierarchy in observations of urban space.<sup>317</sup>

The *flâneuse* was seen as a prostitute or street walker at the beginning and prostitutes did not have free range over the city, their movements were strictly controlled, as Lauren Elkin outlines in *Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*<sup>318</sup>. "Prior to the 1890s, women's appearances in public were necessarily codified and regulated according to a well-defined set of conventions. If loitering and alone, she risked being regarded as a prostitute [...]"<sup>319</sup>, Dudley Andrew writes in *The Image in Dispute: Art and Cinema in the Age of Photography*. In this case the near prostitute status that Rhys's writing embodies makes complete sense, and we can see how the *flânerie* is closely related to the question of gender. The activity of strolling was commonly associated with men, so we mostly talked of *flâneurs* and not *flâneuses*. We can still find this connection in Rhys's works. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys reveals an interwar Paris where Sasha, the protagonist, appears to be the figure of the colonial woman, who comes to London and finds herself without any resources, helpless and at the mercy of men.

We can't all be happy, we can't all be rich, we can't all be lucky—and it would be so much less fun if we were. Isn't it so, Mr. Blank? There must be the dark background to show up the bright colours. Some must cry so that the others may be able to laugh the more heartily. Sacrifices are necessary. [...] Let's say that you have this mystical right to cut my legs off. But the right to ridicule me afterwards because I am a cripple—no, that I think you haven't got. And that's the right you hold most dearly, isn't it? You must be able to despise the people you exploit.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1973, p. 231.

<sup>317</sup> Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>318</sup> Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse*, p. 8-9.

<sup>319</sup> Dudley Andrew, *The Image in Dispute: Art and Cinema in the Age of Photography*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1997, p. 92.

<sup>320</sup> Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* [1939], London, Penguin, 2000, p. 26-7.

By using the pronoun “we” in “we can’t all be happy, we can’t all be rich” or “some” in “some must cry” and the quantifiers such as “some” or “others” as in “Some must cry so that the others may be able to laugh”, Rhys distinguishes the social classes, the rich from the poor, men from women, highlighting the devastating condition that women are subject to. “The pronoun “we” used here by Rhys is different from the one used earlier by Woolf. They are even opposed. Sasha’s name is merely absent from the narration, thus emphasizing the universal woman. Thomas Staley, in his critical study on Rhys, clarifies that “Sasha’s own name is rarely referred to; there is a nameless quality to both characters [Mr. Blank included] which reinforces the dissolution of self, central to the theme of the novel.<sup>321</sup>” Darkness opposes brightness, just like her life as a prostitute opposes that of Mr. Blank, his name being suggestive here, he has “the right” over women. In relation to her, the name “Mr. Blank” has a strong symbolism: he is the manager of a dress shop where Sasha used to work. The way the shop functions and is designed is key in his attitude towards women. The shop has mannequins and women dressed up like puppets and having robotic movements. It is merely composed of showrooms, fitting rooms, various small rooms that have no clear destination, which makes the women run around in circles. Nonetheless, Mr. Blank represents emptiness for Sasha; she is like an employee or prostitute who is doing her job, hence the fact that she is paid every month. She is a woman who leads a fight: “slightly damaged in the fray, there’s no denying it”. The idea of walking is present here, but metaphorically speaking, in the sense of walking away towards regaining freedom : “Let’s say that you have this mystical right to cut my legs off”. The Rhysian woman undeniably strives for freedom. That’s why Sasha sees herself as a cripple who cannot lead her life anymore. Has she lost her integrity after all? The scene continues with the protagonist in the streets of Paris:

And there I am, out in the Avenue Marigny, with my month’s pay — four hundred francs. And the air so sweet, as it can only be in Paris. It is autumn and the dry leaves are blowing along. Swing high, swing low, swing to and fro ...<sup>322</sup>

The lively image of the weather pictures the colonial substance of Rhys’s poetics: this low and high balance that the writer uses to make her point: “Swing high, swing low, swing to and fro”. Rhys needs to make her protagonist sink very low so that the essence of her writing could rise and get to the reader. The sentence “And there I am”, suggests abandonment and helplessness, similar to a declaration made to herself at the end of a road, waiting for the next step, which is full of

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<sup>321</sup> Thomas F. Staley, *Jean Rhys: A Critical Study*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1979, p. 88.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.



uncertainty and not conceivable for the moment. The conjunction “and” at the beginning of the sentence brings to mind the idea of a conclusion, as if Rhys wrapped her human condition and presented it to us. The “I am” is mostly a statement referring to her physical condition, because mentally and spiritually speaking she is clearly not there, and that’s why she tries to look for comfort and liveliness in the streets of Paris. The narrator, who is in this case Sasha herself, feels the urge to insist on the fact that she finds herself alone with her month’s pay, thus emphasizing the decay of women’s condition. Out in the street, with her month’s pay ... that’s all she has. Rhys is like a voice that speaks out loud the condition of the Modern and colonial woman: Modern because she finds herself in the street (space of *flânerie*) and colonial because of her degrading status both financial and physical (she has no home, the issue of a hotel in the Rhysian world thus making sense). That is how throughout the woman in the street with no means and at the mercy of men Rhys manages to picture a perfect image of colonial time combining all three issues: Modernism, colonialism and feminism.

Rhy’s *flâneuse* is almost abandoned in the streets of Paris, and the sweet air that she breathes is like a lullaby that “swing(s) high, swing(s) low, swing(s) to and fro ...”. The Modern woman who finds herself in the streets of Paris is subject to colonial acts, attitudes and beliefs. The novel form helps Rhys explore the woman condition throughout the figure of the near prostitute who wants to walk away from her social condition but is nonetheless stuck there, who wants to “cut [her] legs off” but it is her colonial condition that does not allow her to do that.

Johanna Wagner emphasizes in this sense the “reluctant flâneuse”, contrary to Woolf, underlining that Rhys’s protagonists

engage in a type of *flânerie* that is perhaps indicative of the difference between the *flâneuse* and the *flâneur*. While the *flâneur*’s act of social observation is entirely voluntary and deliberate, the *flâneuse* in these texts can evoke a sense of involuntary and reluctant participation. This suggests that the *flâneuse*’s keen sense of communal examination may be more an act of survival than one of leisure.<sup>323</sup>

Rhys’s protagonists are undeniably the type of *flâneuses* for whom the *flânerie* is a way of survival since they are “exploit[ed]” by men “who represent Society”, being just some puppets after all. Once she gets her pay, she is out on the street, as if the street were closer to her than the hotel rooms. In hotel rooms she mostly gets humiliated, the street is thus like a comfort to her existence. There she finds “the air so sweet, as it can only be in Paris”. The sweetness of the air is associated

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<sup>323</sup> Johanna M. Wagner, “Public Places, Intimate Spaces. The Modern *Flâneuse* in Rhys, Barnes, and Loos” in E-rea (Revue électronique d’études sur le monde anglophone), <https://journals.openedition.org/erea/7377>, last accessed 20 March 2020.

with the urban space specific to Paris, which is also the place of the *flâneuse*. Interestingly, the way Rhys's image of *flâneuse* goes back to the origins of this concept; there is an undeniable connection with the colonial and marginalized woman and the sacrifices that she makes. "Sacrifices are necessary." Cafés and hotel rooms, symbolizing abandonment and the lack of an actual home, are most of Rhys's novels settings. The places that comes next are the "city streets their heroines walk after humiliating encounters in these cafes and hotels.<sup>324</sup>" That is mainly why the street is perceived by the Rhysian heroine as liberation. The marginalized and downgraded woman (who has a "market value", "blush[es] at a look, cr[ies] at a word") close to the figure of the colonized ("slightly damaged in the fray"), insofar as the street (as a male and colonial space) outside the hotels where she is humiliated, makes her a marginalized being, dominated by men (figures of power), and whose difference (as a mark distinguishing the dominated), of gender nature here, is clearly visible. Following this point of view, wandering is therefore more reticent and survivalist for the female character, unlike the wandering of the man, which is "entirely voluntary and deliberate", because he embodies a figure of power, of the dominant (on and in the urban space, shaped by and for him), and of the colonizer.

*After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), another of Rhys's interwar novels, reveals a portrait of London and Paris, the latter representing the focus, at the end of the 1920s. Its French title, *Quai des Grands-Augustins*, is suggestive in the sense of the *flânerie* that the character undertakes, thus putting it at the forefront. It also places Paris as a capital of Modernism where *flânerie* has thus a particular place. In Paris the Quai des Grands-Augustin is actually situated all along the river Seine, so the title is deliberately chosen given the central place that the river Thames has in London and the centre of trade that it embodies. The title is therefore extremely Modern and colonial at the same time. It is the novel form, mainly its length, that allows Rhys to deeply go into these questions.

Julia Martin, the protagonist of the novel, depends on the generosity of men that she encounters, who eventually become her lovers. The city and its streets make Rhys's heroines uneasy and ashamed of who they are, so that each walk is like a reminder of their poor condition and pathetic life circumstances. While still in Paris, Julia's walks turn her into a street ghost:

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<sup>324</sup> Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse*, p. 63.

When she had finished her meal, Julia went for a walk. She did this every day whatever the weather. She was so anxious not to meet anybody she knew that she always kept to the back streets as much as possible.

When she passed the café terraces, her face would assume a hard forbidding expression, but she loitered by the shop-windows.<sup>325</sup>

The ghost theme appears here through the fact that the protagonist “always kept to the back streets as much as possible” and “loitered by the shop windows”, having a desire to be invisible like a ghost. The cafés were familiar to her, being the second place where she would go after the hotels, which means she could be easily recognized there. As Lauren Elkin notes in her study on the *Flâneuse*: “Jean Rhys, whose female characters walk past café terraces and cringe as the clientele follow her with their eyes, knowing she’s an outsider.<sup>326</sup>” Her characters are outsiders because of the ashamed attitude that they have once on the street and because they are, like Julia, “so anxious not to meet anybody”. The shame that she experiences due to her poor relationship with men makes her an outsider, and this is where colonialism enters into play. Julia not only walks in the back streets but also lives her life in the back streets, leading a marginalized life due to her condition. What is interesting is that she goes for a walk every day even if she feels the need to hide. This is interestingly configured by Rhys in the way in which she attributes certain values to this marginality. The Rhysian woman practices the *flânerie* despite her colonial condition that could easily stand in the way. The Rhysian woman is a Modernist *per se* in this sense. At the same time, it is as if the Rhysian woman needed this humiliation: “She did this every day whatever the weather.” This is the peak and artistry of Rhys’s writing (irony in this case), where she shows the woman’s utmost state of degradation as if to shout for an SOS signal, to tell the world that there is something in the woman’s condition that needs to be taken care of. The repetition of the pronoun “she” followed by a verb in the past tense makes her a sort of automaton — an image that recalls Mr. Blank’s shop and “his” women — following a blind repetition, but nonetheless necessary for her survival. She is perhaps escaping from one pain — which is even more difficult to endure, the life that she has in her hotel rooms accompanied by her lovers — only to reach another one. The *flânerie* is also like an escape for her; she enjoys that because it gives her the opportunity to escape for a while from her daily life. It is like a consolation, a breath of fresh air, and therefore essential for her survival: “When she had finished her meal, Julia went for a walk. She did this every day whatever the weather.”

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<sup>325</sup> Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* [1930], Chippenham, Penguin, 2000, p. 13.

<sup>326</sup> Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse*, p. 2.

In London, the situation is no different. Her shame and poor self-image in conjunction with the avoidance and fear of being recognized are still part of the character:

Out in the street Julia thought suddenly, 'I must look ghastly.'

She stood under a lamp-post and powdered her face, and pulled her hat over her eyes. 'It seems a year since last night,' she thought.

[...]

All the way home she was thinking: 'If I have any luck, I oughtn't to meet anybody on the stairs. They all ought to be eating just now.'

She opened the door of her boarding-house very gently and cautiously. On the fifth landing the door opposite her bedroom opened, and her neighbor [...] put her head out.

'Good evening,' she said.

'Good evening,' said Julia.

'Aren't you going down to dinner?'

Julia shook her head. She was suddenly unable to speak.

'Well, won't you have some tea?' said the woman, staring at her with curiosity. 'I'm just making myself a cup.'

'No,' answered Julia. 'No, thank you.' She went quickly into her bedroom, and locked the door.

As soon as she was alone the desire to cry left her again, and she was filled with only one wish — a longing for sleep.<sup>327</sup>

Rhys's *flâneuse* is willing to do anything not to get recognized. Her sudden gestures and the continuous desire to hide describe the protagonist's stroll. Temporal markers such as "suddenly", which appears twice, "quickly", "just now", "as soon as" suggest sudden, brief deeds, but also haste, and Julia's desire to step out from her current life. The "longing for sleep" shows a desire, perhaps need for an empty time, a time to forget, consigned to oblivion, just like her life. This is one value of being on the street, in public, in the colonial conformist age, which stands in opposition to Woolf's way of treating this question. Here we can see the mark of two Modernist writers and the perspectives that they have. In contrast to Woolf, Rhys is a colonial, and that is something that is to be felt in her writings.

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<sup>327</sup> Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, p. 90.

Aimlessly walking is certainly a characteristic of the *flâneuse* who is eager for adventure, but in Rhys's works the situation is different. Instead, here the aimless and repetitive walks come from reflecting upon life, but also the lack of life direction and hesitation. A flashback crosses her mind about her young years, during the war when "an exultant and youthful feeling took possession of her."<sup>328</sup>

She crossed Oxford Street into Charing Cross Road. But in Soho she missed her way and her exultation suddenly vanished. She began to think that she must look idiotic, walking about aimlessly. She found her way back into Oxford Street and went into Lyons'.<sup>329</sup>

The protagonist misses her way and thinks that she "must look idiotic", which underlines the importance and value that she sees in the way the others look at her. The sentence "She began to think that she must look idiotic, walking about aimlessly" is similar to the one found in the earlier text: "Out in the street Julia thought suddenly, 'I must look ghastly.'", a repetition which acts as a confirmation on Rhys's part. The woman character seems to be enclosed in an image, inextricably linked to the way others look at her, of a dominant figure of power, but invisible and implicit; she must necessarily look dreadful in the eyes of someone else.

After her uncle advised her to go back to Paris, the narrator continues with the same concept of aimless walk, "without any clear idea":

Julia felt bewildered when she got into the street. She turned and walked without any clear idea of the direction she was taking. Each house she passed was exactly like the last. Each house bulged forward a little.<sup>330</sup>

Repetition (and even boredom here) is a recurring issue in Rhys's works. Each house being "exactly like the last" is a clear sign of isolation, physical and mental, in the midst of a monotonous, even dehumanized, landscape scenery. This is actually the opposite of the real *flânerie*, which involves discovery and newness.

These streets near her boarding-house on Notting Hill seemed strangely empty, like the streets of a grey dream – a labyrinth of streets, all exactly alike.

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<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

She would think: 'Surely I passed down here several minutes ago.' Then she would see the name Chepstow Crescent or Pembridge Villas, and reassure herself. 'That's all right; I'm not walking in a circle.'<sup>331</sup>

"A labyrinth of streets" I think accurately describes the woman's condition and life in Rhys's works. Her protagonists have no direction, they lead a repetitive life, like "walking in a circle" only drifting through life and in the streets. She leads a life in which the street and everything it contains, such as cafés, shops, etc., are closer to her than anything else. Rhys closely describes the woman's tragedy with all its daily habits and deeds. The value of *flânerie* in Woolf where she sees "life which is so fantastic" stands in complete opposition to Rhys's way of perceiving it. And it is precisely the presence of the colonial woman character that makes us perceive this tragedy. We can see how Woolf's upbringing and status as a true London woman sees life completely differently from someone like Rhys who comes from the colonies and thus experienced the limitations of the women's condition.

In both Woolf's and Rhys's case the *flânerie* turns out to be the element that leads to discovery, to what exists beyond what the eyes can see ("digging deeper than the eye approves", as Woolf says), to perceive society and the human, respectively, the woman's condition, as it really is. As Virginia Woolf noted in her diary: "I have a deeply hidden and inarticulate desire for something beyond the daily life."<sup>332</sup> Gender and class issues can be noticed from a simple *flânerie*, and if the stroll is longer, as in Woolf's *Street Haunting*, there is even more to discover. Woolf's and Rhys's *flâneuses* "(dig) deeper than the eye approves"<sup>333</sup> and show the poor who are in the street, the Jew who feels exiled, the woman who sacrifices herself and her dignity in a patriarchal society that she is unable to control, and in which she is trying to find her own self ... but Woolf's protagonists clearly never belong to these characters. These writers go beyond the surface and confront the reader with the truth: what exactly happens in the street regarding the woman's condition and the colonial markers of society. The Modernist concept of the *flânerie* is at the heart of this chapter, and questions in turn another perspective: a colonial one for this time, illustrating the condition of the woman and what happens with her on the street. While Rhys's protagonists are ashamed of themselves and their condition, they need and see value in the way the others look at them. They walk every day even if they have to hide. That's how the Modern comes to the surface despite the

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<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>332</sup> Anne Oliver Bell (ed.), *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, volume 1 1915-19* [1977], St Ives, Penguin, 1979, p. 141. - entry dated on the 18th of April 1918.

<sup>333</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Street Haunting, op. cit.*

difficult colonial characteristics emphasized in the novel. The colonial *flânerie* that we discussed in this chapter makes the reader perceive the city walk from a different perspective, thus contributing to the enlargement and expansion of the *flânerie* concept itself. The *flânerie* is being enriched by the colonial and sexual difference parameter. Meanwhile, it also helps the reader in picturing even more the colonial layer of the reading of these writers, which contributes to the global picture of this dissertation.

The *flâneuse* is an outsider of society and all her gestures are being interpreted and followed by the non-outsiders, or local people, just like in Julia's case from *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* who feels ashamed on the street. If the Modernist *flânerie* is an attempt to discover the city, its beauties and unexpected features, the colonial *flânerie* is about the socio-political context of the period in question; in other words, it goes deeper, as if we were to add another layer to the description of society, a metaphorical one, and undeniably a critical one for this time. The *flâneuse* is saying something about the society around, even when she is just walking. There is always an attempt to communicate her isolation, outsider condition and precarious life. The *flâneuse* seen through colonial eyes gives a new and different sense to the city. The *flânerie* is an attempt to recreate the city, with a deeper and more realistic look. Thus, the urban life and the way we look at it changes.

The analysis of spatial concepts, such as development, stagnation, and the figure of the *flâneuse*, allowed us to introduce the time dynamics that shape the writers' narrations. These are the first steps into acknowledging "The Location of Time", the global chapter where these notions belong. Our consideration of two pertinent literary genres, namely the short story and the novel, and the time dynamics that revolve around them, helps in our understanding of the link between time and space, the primary goal of this chapter. I chose to analyse the poetics of *flânerie* in Woolf and Rhys's works since in Mansfield the place of the *flânerie* is not essential.

Our research goes on with the study of the allegory of "no-escape", mostly affecting Rhys's fiction.

## 2. Seeking salvation: the allegory of “no-escape” in Rhys

The aim of this chapter is to reveal the dichotomous entity in the Rhysian novel: the way Modernism and colonialism play out in the issue of patriarchy, to try to find a way when it looks like there is no-escape, “to get on or get out” (*VD*, p. 67) ... and to fail each time. There is always an enclosure, a barrier that is somehow impossible to cross in Rhys’s world. Rhys’s works emphasize the limitations that the patriarchal society imposes on women’s lives ... It is actually a call to awareness of the complexity of imperial issues that society, and in particular women, are confronted to. It is through *Voyage in the Dark* in particular that I propose to carry out this analysis. Aside from this novel, I am using other works as well to help me draw the hopeless, but extremely meaningful world that Jean Rhys proposes to us. The object of the analysis is to highlight through the Modernist writing the limitations and also the struggle that is going inside patriarchal society. That is how Modernism and colonialism are related in the Rhysian novel and they play out in the issue of patriarchy.

This chapter opens up a new meaning to the way we see the spatial limitations of “no-escape” inside a patriarchal society, which in turn compromises its temporal attributes as well. This chapter’s goal, that of “locating time” finds its place inside the “no-escape” allegory analyzed here, by showing the attributes, characteristics and functionalities of colonial time across an analysis of the limitations of space. I talk here of an allegory as a symbolic representation of society, debating the concept of “no-escape” from this politically infused society in particular. I propose to do that through two different aspects. Firstly, I refer to the circumstances that Anna faces in *Voyage in the Dark* when arriving in London and the inability of getting used to the new climate, people, and society overall. Secondly, my attention goes to the patriarchal society that women have to endure and the issues that they encounter with men. I am interested here in the way Rhys uses the figure of the prostitute in order to offer the reader a picture of the limitations women had to face due to colonial issues. It all happens throughout the question of marriage, present in Rhys’s work and the place of abortion in women’s lives, both *Voyage in the Dark* and *Smile Please* containing revealing passages in this respect.

The human tragedy of the feminine condition is the undertone/quintessence of Rhys’s works. In Rhys’s world, one colonial notion follows the other. The narration’s temporality is easy to anticipate. The characters step from one tragedy into the other. For example, in *Voyage in the Dark*, Anna Morgan’s coming to London is a real challenge for the character (among others because of the



cold weather, the English accent that is different from what she is used to) but this colonial issue shortly meets another one: the patriarchal society in which women never have the ability to surface to the fullest. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sophia takes a trip to Paris but is still troubled by her past memories, particularly her family's disapproval of her going back to London once her marriage has disintegrated. She also cannot stop thinking of the disaster of losing her five-week-old son.

Rhys's narrators try to give the characters a chance to escape from their lives and limited condition. For example, in *Good Morning, Midnight*, the protagonist believes that by changing her name from Sophia to Sasha, she changes her destiny as well: "[...] I started calling myself Sasha. I thought it might change my luck. Did it bring me any luck, I wonder — calling myself Sasha?<sup>334</sup>" Isn't that just a way to get less recognized and pretend to be someone she is not? Identity issues lie at the heart of this passage.

What follows is a life of meeting men, and eventually getting pregnant, which ends in an abortion — the climax of her alienation and life struggle.

Rhys's characters are marginalized and they cannot go beyond their condition. Rhys was occasionally reproached for developing the same stories and having dealt with the same type of heroines. As Lauren Elkin observes: "The women Rhys describes are similar enough that they used to be referred to in the singular, as the Rhys heroine.<sup>335</sup>" There is undeniably a narrative loop that comes back in each novel but in slightly different forms. I think that this monotonous and temporal boredom, if we can call it so, has a definite meaning too: to emphasize the ennui and repetitive life that women were not able to escape, or the patriarchal condition, in the early twentieth century, which stands in relation to the state of boredom that women experience and that we emphasized earlier in the case of Mansfield.

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<sup>334</sup> Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, p. 11.

<sup>335</sup> Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

## **“I had read about England ever since I could read” and the inability to meet reality in Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark***

*Voyage in the Dark* opens up with an episode portraying Anna’s arrival in England, and more precisely London:

A curtain fell and then I was here.

... This is England Hester said and I watched it through the train-window divided into squares like pocket-handkerchiefs; a small tidy look it had everywhere fenced off from everywhere else — what are those things — those are haystacks — oh are those haystacks — I had read about England ever since I could read — smaller meaner everything is never mind — this is London — hundreds thousands of white people rushing along and the dark houses all alike frowning one after the other all alike all stuck together — the streets like smooth shut-in ravines and the dark houses frowning down — oh I’m not going to like this place I’m not going to like this place I’m not going to like this place — you’ll get used to it Hester kept saying I expect you feel like a fish out of water but you’ll soon get used to it — now don’t look like Dying Dick and Solemn Davy as your poor father used to say you’ll get used to it ... (*VD*, p. 15-16)

The fall of a curtain reminds us of a theatrical performance, as if the character’s life was set in a staged scene. The text is situated in between dashes and ellipsis that show suspense. It begins with a hesitation, and it ends likewise. The abundance of dashes reinforces the idea emphasized by the dots. Dashes are usually used to mark bigger pauses in narration, they cover up the gap and emptiness that the character feels when faced with this new reality: London. It’s as if there were still things to say. We can notice the absence of punctuation marks, which, in my opinion, expresses confusion and an emotion of tension with speed effect. The writing voice is established using Modernist issues of time. The past and present (separated by the dashes) cannot go together since what the character was reading since “she could read” does not match the reality. The confrontation of the past with the present creates disillusionment: “smaller meaner everything is never mind — this is London”. Strangeness and disappointment dominate this passage from the beginning until its end. The way Rhys juggles the temporal markers is an imprint of her Modernist style. Colonial time is what rises from this confrontation of the Caribbean past with the present London throughout the Modernist technique of slipping the past into the present. The colonial signifiers are also extremely powerful here: “I had read about England”, “white people”, and “like a fish out of water”. The expression “white people” could only be used by someone in contact with colonial issues, as is the case of Rhys. The other syntagm “like a fish out of water” really shows the essence of this chapter, the no-

escape context in which the characters are trapped once in London. Here it is the collision of cultures that makes it appear.

At a first glimpse, there is a desire to show the progression as in “hundreds thousands” or “frowning one after the other” ... but not for long, because the vocabulary itself shows dullness and the inability to proceed: the houses were “all alike” (an expression occurring twice) and “all stuck”. The sentence: “hundreds thousands of white people rushing along and the dark houses all alike frowning one after the other all alike all stuck together” is key here. The fact that “hundreds of thousands of white people (rush) along” emphasizes the metropolitan life of London, whereas “the dark houses all alike frowning one after the other all alike all stuck together” pictures the white people living a dark, colonial life. Rhys’s performance is spectacular: she manages to sum up the context of colonial London times in just a sentence. The “white people” living a colonial life is something that we can perceive once we step in London, once the curtain has “fallen”. It is like an illusion that has finally come to light, an illusion of the perfect image that colonials build when they are still in the colonies. It also shows how colonials are led by the imperial centre. Meanwhile, London is the place of reality. Rhys stresses here that the coloniality of London, which in the first half of the twentieth century is to be seen already from the streets; it is an obvious trait that cannot be hidden or denied. In a similar fashion, Woolf’s *Street Haunting* pictures the same essence of the metropolitan centre, which also begins in the street. But there the coloniality concentrates more on class issues, poverty, Jews, etc., what actually characterizes London itself, and not on a condition of liminality that Rhys evokes here. When I say liminality I mean this double temporality, the Caribbean past and the present London that Rhys exposes.

Contradictions create Rhys’s plots, abound in her vocabulary and give life to powerful metaphorical meanings. There is a clear and important opposition that is at play in this passage: the one between “white” and “dark”. Darkness in Rhys’s case has a strong meaning, one that is perceived even from the title of *Voyage in the Dark*. If we refer to this first passage, the “dark houses all alike” describe a dull London and the inability to like or even make one’s peace with this city. It is also a reference to the existence led by colonials once they arrive in London.

Darkness seems to be in the foreground of the Rhysian narrative. *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Voyage in the Dark* are Rhys’s most evocative titles — they both suggest that the characters’ lives are led mostly during night-time, but it is also a hint to the lack of life that they are subject to. Darkness seems to be the foreground of the Rhysian narrative. In both titles, there is also an almost oxymoronic antithesis, which finally makes darkness very illuminating, and necessary or unavoidable.

There is an ironical hint right from the title in Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*. The opposition of night and day and the suppression of the day describes the life conditions of the heroine and the near-prostitute figure that is ironically emphasized right from the title, the reader's first contact with the work, which makes its presence even more important. Contradictions seem to shape Sasha's existence. Judith Kegan Gardiner in her article called "Good Morning, Midnight; Good Night, Modernism", whose title is also very suggestive in expressing the colonial time of Rhys's novel (the fact that she "welcomes" midnight actually awakens the novel's colonial side, this intersection between past and present), states that:

The title of *Good Morning, Midnight* indicates its main theme and the structural expression of that theme: apparent oppositions collapse when brought into close juxtaposition. The novel constantly spins new oppositions and recuperates them, including those between dark and light, past and present, despair and hope, inside and outside, nature and art, life and death, male and female. The rhetorical effect of Rhys's fiction is to clap our ears with these imploding polarities.<sup>336</sup>

The oppositions are also present in the title of *Voyage in the Dark*. Physically speaking, there is no voyage that can be made in the dark. Moreover, there is also a no-escape issue found here. The inability to see anything due to the darkness makes the voyage almost blind, without an exit and without a direction to follow. In *Voyage in the Dark* there are two worlds that Rhys, and ultimately the protagonist, Anna tries to fit together. The Caribbean, where she comes from, and her new experience, London, hence the original title of the novel, *Two Tunes*. Her biographer, Carole Angier stresses in her Introduction to *Voyage in The Dark* the following: "Jean's first title for *Voyage in the Dark* reflected the importance of this new, or old, world in Anna's story: *Two Tunes*, two musics which neither she nor Anna could ever fit together.<sup>337</sup>" The spatial colonial signifiers from the original title are even more obvious in the second and definitive title. The space has changed from the Caribbean to London, but what's more important, and ultimately spurs the opposition installed, is the temporal gap between the two, and the title "Two tunes" shows it, as if there were two different "tunes" or frequencies that couldn't meet.

There is darkness, as we can read in the text, but there are also repetition and dullness. The emphasis on "dark houses" is well established since the expression appears twice: first, we have the "dark houses frowning", and then, "the dark houses frowning down". The repetition in the text, a mark of Modernism, shows the context of London and characterizes the colonial conjuncture. Once

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<sup>336</sup> Judith Kegan Gardiner, "Good Morning, Midnight; Good Night, Modernism" in *boundary 2*, Vol. 11, No. 1/2, Engagements: Postmodernism, Marxism, Politics (Autumn, 1982 - Winter, 1983), pp. 233-251, p. 234.

<sup>337</sup> Carole Angier's *Introduction of Voyage in the Dark*, *op. cit.* p. vii.

the colonial is inserted in the text, here comes an immediate response: “oh I’m not going to like this place I’m not going to like this place I’m not going to like this place”. There is a complete rejection of London, the same expression appearing three times consecutively, without any mark of punctuation. The personification of the houses makes them imposing, severe, and frightening. Another expression that is quite striking is “You’ll get used to it”, appearing twice. Repetition as a Modernist approach is extremely useful in lending weight to the colonial condition of the exiled. Two opposing voices — “I” and “you” — occur at the same time, one after the other: “I’m not going to like this place” and “you’ll get used to it”, symbolizing the fight that is being fought in Anna’s consciousness. Tension rules the whole atmosphere. Whitlock argues that “the memory, vision or myth making about colonial spaces represents them as sites of longing and ambivalence, held in utopic/dystopic tension.<sup>338</sup>”

The interjection “Oh” points to something pre-established, pre-known. Therefore, the construction of the sentence emphasized earlier acts as a refusal, as if the enunciator knew something and rejected it henceforth. The first “oh” present in the passage is created on a similar note: “those are haystacks — oh are those haystacks — I had read about England ever since I could read”. The fact that she has already read about London creates a sense of unfamiliarity “oh are those haystacks”, of something not known contrary to what we could expect.

Sameness and circularity characterizes the narrative in this passage but also the colonial condition overall. Even the towns in England look the same, and Anna’s first rejection of England gradually transforms into a sort of acceptance:

After a while I got used to England; and I liked it all right; I got used to everything except the cold and that the towns we went to always looked so exactly alike. You were perpetually moving to another place which was perpetually the same. (*VD*, p. 8)

The “cold” represents here a colonial experience since it necessarily evokes a comparison with the times lived in the colonies, when it was hot and warm. The past and present being encapsulated in this perception of new reality, it can definitely be seen as colonial time. The things and life situations that are presented in the novel repeat themselves over and over again and the beginning of the work offers nothing but a warning. From the first pages of the novel, the reader is accustomed to the Modern writing where time does not follow its usual linear course, but instead endlessly repeats itself. The sentence “You were perpetually moving to another place which was perpetually the

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<sup>338</sup> Gillian Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire: Reading Women’s Autobiography*, Cassell, London, 2000, p. 179.

same” simultaneously encompasses temporal and spatial markers such as “moving to another place” and “the same”. Changing the place does not necessarily mean changing the environment since the place that she moves to is “perpetually the same”. The adverb “perpetually” calls attention to a kind of destiny that the character is bound to follow, which she cannot escape. Towards the end of the novel, at the end of Part Three, the narrator decides to end up in a circular way resuming and highlighting the temporal and spatial markers:

Everything was always so exactly alike — that was what I could never get used to. And the cold; and the houses all exactly alike, and the streets going north, south, east, west, all exactly alike.<sup>339</sup>

The dullness resides not only in the way the houses look, “all exactly alike”, but also in the protagonist’s paths. In these two passages, it is not just the geography of England that is being argued but the fact that the heroine is either “moving to another place which was perpetually the same”, or “going north, east, west” ... The endless way seems to be without escape, like in a maze, and that is exactly what *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* suggests. In *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, the protagonist travels from London to Paris and then back again to London, one city following the other, while the protagonist is unable to find its place. The fact that she constantly relates to Dominica creates a split reality, which finally makes her unable to live the present moment in Europe. The chapters also suggest the inability to go further despite the endless trials: from “The Hotel on the Quai” through the voyage in Paris, we follow the “Return to London”, the “Change of Address” still in London, to “It Might Have Been Anywhere” (a very suggestive chapter title), and then the final “Departure” when Julia leaves Mr Horsfield. Julia used to be taken care of by men. First, it was her ex-lover Mr Mackenzie who continued to give her 300 francs per week (which was enough for her to survive) even after their break-up. One day he stops sending her money. Then, she meets Mr. Horsefield, who also gives her money, and who faithfully promises that he will visit her soon, but never does. At the end of the novel, she accidentally meets Mr Mackenzie on the street and asks him to lend her 100 francs. The careless attitude and untidy look that she has only show the deprived situation in which the Rhysian heroine finds herself, who continues to go downward in life, a direction that follows her lifestyle.

Just like the narration’s temporality, Anna herself does not follow the social norms, which is the case of Rhys’s other protagonists as well. It is merely in their relation to men that they do not submit to society’s rules and expectations.

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<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Modernism helps Rhys in describing and ultimately introducing the reader into the colonial atmosphere of London, by making constant allusion to the Caribbean past. In these allusions past and present go together and that is how colonial time is pictured.

## **Marriage and men: The figure of the prostitute**

A large part of Rhys's "no-escape" allegory turns around the relationship that women have with men: the conventional idea of marriage, the figure of the prostitute that the female characters embody, and the dependence to men that they are subject to. The context in which women live in the early twentieth-century England is captured by Rhys in her works. The fact that women are dependent and exploited by men is part of most of the Rhysian post-war works, a feature that ultimately marks the characters' whole destiny.

According to A. L. Kennedy, the provider of the *Introduction* for the Penguin Edition of *Good Morning, Midnight*: "Of all the temptations and torments which afflict Jansen and Rhys's other creations, those which are the most terrible and the most finely worked all lie in her depictions of relationships. [...] Her eloquence in the language of human sexual transactions is chilling, cynical and surprisingly moving."<sup>340</sup>

Rhys's writings are very much enriched by and abound in the irony that they hold. The kind of irony that Rhys uses is particular and it is mostly used indirectly to criticize the London society in which she lives. Through irony, she criticizes the patriarchal society that expects women to marry or "get on" ... otherwise you just "get out", which means that you are no longer part of society:

Everybody says, 'Get on.' Of course some people do not get on. Yes, but how many? What about what's-her-name? She got on, didn't she? 'Chorus-Girl marries Peer's Son.' Well, *what* about her? Get on or get out, they say. Get on or get out. (*VD*, p. 64)

The repetition "Get on or get out" induces irony. Rhys's opposed terms, present in our earlier analysis, are extremely meaningful once again. By repeating what a woman is supposed to do, Rhys is being ironical; the second occurrence of this sentence is all the more powerful, acting as a

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<sup>340</sup> Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, *Introduction* by A. L. Kennedy, p. xii.

mockery. In this passage, the verb “get on” appears three times, which only highlights the inextricable code and imposed way of living life that women are subject to. The tone is quite neutral, the narrator uses unspecified subjects and impersonal constructions such as “everybody”, “some”, “how many”, “what’s-her-name”, “her”, “they say”, which tell us that we are dealing with societal issues, and what is important is really not the name of the woman in question (hence the use of the syntagm “what’s-her-name), but the societal issue that women are subject to.

Rhys’s world is full of all kinds of women’s issues, but there is one that she escapes: marriage. Lou Emery in her book on *Jean Rhys at “World’s End”: Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile* notes that “The usual experience of time is jeopardized; in Rhys’s novels the marriage part is always missing: the characters have different partners but they never really settle down.<sup>341</sup>” Temporally speaking, there is clearly a limitation present in Rhys’s novels, they go from one relationship to another without any purpose. This limitation is emphasized by a spatial metaphor, “settle down”. Both temporal and spatial markers are limited in the Rhysian universe. The absence of marriage creates, narratively speaking, a temporal gap worth considering. The jeopardization of time, to borrow the terminology used by Mary Lou Emery, is due to the presence of patriarchal rules and functionality, which in turn implies a concession on spatial indicators too, that is to say the woman’s free movement and action. The word “settle” used by Lou Emery is not accidental in my view. It has a strong meaning if we associate it with the role of the migrant or the colonist. The British Empire was composed of colonies of settlement, which were exploited in order to create profit and to economically develop the empire. Rhys and Mansfield were also descendants of colonial English settlers.

Marriage has an important temporal value: it is an experience that involves the shaping of the early twentieth-century women’s colonial time. Rhys’s characters are not involved in this kind of union, and temporally speaking it reshapes the whole Rhysian universe.

The blunt language expressed by Rhys’s statement, “Get on or get out” expresses, on the one hand, that in the absence of marriage, there is no continuity, as if the whole societal “machine” would stand on this very one thing. On the other hand, the fact that her characters do not marry, so they do not get on, means that they do not fit in. We can think of Rhys’s short story “Outside the Machine”, whose title clearly suggests the outsider position that the heroine, Inez Best, shares, who firstly appeared in *Quartet*, in 1928. Inez does not belong to society, to the so-called machine, neither do Rhys’s other heroines.

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<sup>341</sup> Mary Lou Emery, *Jean Rhys at “World’s End”: Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1990.



If one thing is sure about the Rhysian characters, it is that they never fit into society's standards, as if they were intentionally created to stand out, or "get out". If we were to take the meanings of these words: "to get on" means to advance in life, whereas "to get out" means to escape, which makes perfect sense in the case of Rhys's narrative and the issue of escaping. Rhys treats the female destiny very seriously, in fact, she presents it as if there were only two ways to deal with it.

Besides the idea of representation of the possible but nonetheless limited options a woman had at the time, the whole concept of getting on and getting out is a form of resistance. Anne Cunningham in her article on Rhys's dichotomy of "Get(ting) on or get(ting) out" observes that:

Anna's "down-ward career" urges the reader to consider how, given the options to "either get on or get out" under the white, gendered symbolic order, a failed patriarchal femininity functions as a form of resistance. Rhys's description of the unbecoming of a woman represents a disruption of the feminine relationship to patriarchal forms of power, a disruption that is especially evident in Anna's refusal and inability to inhabit the space(s) denied for her within the colonial social structure on the island and while in England.<sup>342</sup>

The resistance form that Rhys suggests is extremely powerful since it portrays the unbecoming of women and the disruption of the feminine balance. The refusal to belong that women choose is realized through a careful awareness of spatial and temporal attributes.

Cunningham also notes that "Anna neither gets on, nor does she get out; rather she finds an alternative in the act of unbecoming."<sup>343</sup> Rhys's way of finding an alternative and thus not fitting in, shows courage but is also a way to say that women should clearly not fall into the trap of obeying society's rules and forget about their true nature and path. Cunningham adds that despite that, Anna's failure to "hope", in Anna's words, "keep(s) the world rolling"<sup>344</sup>. Her "hope" at least makes the social and political system, in which she is enrolled, work.

Unfortunately, any effort on Anna's part to save herself seems to be in vain and beyond her capacities, as if each act only reinforced her outsider condition. The same happens in Julia's case in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. At the same time, for a moment there is a part of her that is "shooting upwards like a flame":

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<sup>342</sup> Anne Cunningham, "'Get On or Get Out': Failure and Negative Femininity in Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*", *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 59, Number 2, Summer 2013, pp. 373-394, p. 390.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 389.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*

Julia had abandoned herself. She was kneeling and sobbing [...]. She was crying now because she remembered that her life had been a long succession of humiliations and mistakes and pains and ridiculous efforts. Everybody's life was like that. At the same time, in a miraculous manner, some essence of her was shooting upwards like a flame. She was great. She was a defiant flame shooting upwards not to plead but to threaten. Then the flame sank down again, useless, having reached nothing.<sup>345</sup>

Julia finds herself between hope and despair when she thinks about her life. She gives up on herself and remembers the colonial life that she had been living, which was nothing but “a long succession of humiliations and mistakes and pains and ridiculous efforts.” The multiple and consecutive use of the coordinating conjunction “and” reinforces the vast and endless efforts she has been through. Then she regains fate for a while, but the paragraph ends with the way it started ... She feels abandoned anew. She experiences an emotional roller coaster, which only proves that her emotional state moves in a circle, similar to her life, and to the things that she experiences, which keep coming back over and over again. Arnold A. Davidson in his study on *Jean Rhys* points out: “It is hardly surprising then, that essentially the same thing happens over and over again to the Rhys protagonist and that the text traces out the vicious circle in which this character is caught. Indeed, in Rhys's novels [...] chronology is typography.”<sup>346</sup> The essential idea in Davidson, “chronology is typography” links time with the place, emphasizing the inescapable quality that chronology has in Rhys's work, that of being universally present. Let us think only of her titles, which rely either on temporal or spatial elements (usually metaphors). Temporal chronology is inscribed in titles such as: *Voyage in the Dark*, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, *Good morning*, *Midnight*, and also her collections of stories *My Day: Three Pieces* (1975) and *Sleep it off Lady* (1976). Spatiality is used for her collections of stories *The Left Bank or Other Stories* (1927), *Tales of the Wide Caribbean* (1985) and her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966).

At the same time Rhys's world is also characterized by chaos and unpredictability. Radhika Mohanram and Gita Rajan in their work on *English Postcoloniality*, dedicate a chapter to “Caribbean Writing in English: Intimations of a Historical Nightmare”, where they observe that in Caribbean literature one can move from a well-fenced order to spilling chaos.<sup>347</sup>

Another episode shows Julia getting disturbed whenever she decides to change and do things better. Once she gets a cheque on behalf of Mr Mackenzie, her first thought is about the new clothes that she would buy with that money:

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<sup>345</sup> Jean Rhys, *ALM*, p. 94-95.

<sup>346</sup> Arnold A. Davidson. *Jean Rhys*, King's Lynn, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1936, p. 27.

<sup>347</sup> Radhika Mohanram and Gita Rajan (eds.), *English Postcoloniality: Literatures from Around the World*, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1996, p. 46.

When Julia got out into the street a certain caution awoke in her. She thought: 'I must go and sit somewhere and really make up my mind what I'd better do.'

She went into the cafe on the corner of the street; it was nearly empty. She sat down and ordered a drink. While she waited for it she looked at herself in the mirror opposite, still thinking of the new clothes she would buy. She thought of new clothes with passion, with voluptuousness. She imagined the feeling of a new dress on her body and the scent of it, and her hands emerging from long sleeves.<sup>348</sup>

The vivid details of her wearing the dress, "with passion, with voluptuousness" point to the fact that she chooses to escape in the world of physical appearance, dealing with superficial things. Once again the woman condition is at stake here, the woman who cannot escape from male dominance, as if the cheque that she got encouraged her to stay the same. Escaping into fleeting moments of happiness brought by material things, such as clothes are part of Rhys's narration, but not only since she does not only picture her characters as superficial and material, and that is for instance the case while they work as models. *Voyage in the Dark* offers a similar scene, while Anna receives the money from Walter, she feels excited and forgets about everything else for a moment: "All the time I was dressing I was thinking what clothes I would buy. I didn't think of anything else at all, and I forgot about feeling ill." (*VD*, p. 24)

There is dependence and inability to escape present at the core of the relationship between men and women, a relationship dilemma present in most of Rhys's works. At an advanced age, precisely in *Smile Please*, Jean Rhys declared:

It seems to me now that the whole business of money and sex is mixed up with something very primitive and deep. When you take money directly from someone you love it becomes not money but a symbol. The bond is now there. The bond has been established. I am sure the woman's deep down feeling is "I belong to this man. I want to belong to him completely." It's at once humiliating and exciting. (*SP*, p. 106)

The business of money is directly linked here to that of belonging, of "want[ing] to belong". The fact that she finds this "at once humiliating and exciting" shows how dependent she is on men. At the same time, she may not even realize the situation she is confronted with. In any case, it reveals Rhys's direct thinking on the matter since we are dealing with an autobiography.

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<sup>348</sup> Jean Rhys, *ALM*, p. 15.

Once when Anna in *Voyage in the Dark* finds herself in a shop, the feeling of happiness is so overwhelming, as much as she begins to see her future: “*This is a beginning. Out of this warm room that smells of fur I’ll go to all the lovely places I’ve ever dreamed of. This is the beginning.*” (*Voyage in the Dark*, p. 25) In her narration Rhys goes beyond material things such as the fur and exploits the theme of space (“lovely spaces”) and time (“This is the beginning”). The expression “This is a/ the beginning” shows that she can only temporarily see her future, and see only the beginning of it. She can escape only for a short amount of time from the destiny that accompanies her daily life. The adjective “warm” is significant here if we think of the cold weather and herself being cold in this country, physically and metaphorically speaking as well. It would be a chance for her to escape from her “cold”, outsider condition. Rhys’s style contains the use of italics here and there, which highlights the expressed idea. What is more important here is that this technique reveals the thoughts and inner life of the character, in this case, the escape from her actual condition. Nagihan Haliloglu in her work on Jean Rhys’s representations of female and colonial subjectivity observes the role of these reflections in italics: “A first-person narrative, *Voyage in the Dark* uses various markers to distinguish between Anna’s present and past experiences as Rhys develops a method to signal interior monologue and memories with punctuation and type-face.<sup>349</sup>” So in this case the lovely fur that opens up new places and times translates into the present of the narration, which is ultimately one of hope.

Apart from clothes, rooms are also very much indicative of women’s inextricable situation and their “near prostitute status”. Rooms are spaces exploited in detail and repeatedly by the writer. Alienation, a theme on which the whole Rhysian universe resides, mostly takes place in rooms in Paris and London. When Sophia Jansen, the protagonist of *Good Morning, Midnight*, tries to find a hotel room for the night, the receptionist offers her a multitude of choices, even though she only wants “a light room”. Despite the fact that she cannot afford a nice room, for a moment, she feels seduced by the possibility of having one, but only for the sake of a possible escape from her actual reality:

Suddenly I feel that I must have number 219, with bath — number 219, with rose-coloured curtains, carpet and bath. I shall exist on a different plane at once if I can get this room, if only for a couple of nights. It will be an omen. Who says you can’t escape from your fate? I’ll escape from mine, into room number 219. Just try me, just give me a chance. (*GMM*, p. 32)

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<sup>349</sup> Nagihan Haliloglu, *Narrating from the Margins: Self-Representation of Female and Colonial Subjectivities in Jean Rhys’s Novels*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2011, p. 187.

The space she wants to change is actually her life, her destiny: “Who says you can’t escape from your fate?”, which she wants to escape from by installing herself in a new hotel room: “I’ll escape from mine, into room number 219.” It is as if the character wanted to demonstrate herself or to life that she can actually change her destiny: “Just try me, just give me a chance.” This repetition of spaces (or interchangeable spatiality) is what brings out the colonial aspect of the narration, the fact that she has a life that she has to “escape from”.

Nothing is established, everything is floating in the universe of Rhys, and the sudden reactions described by the narrator show that “Suddenly I feel that I must have ...”. Semantically speaking, the adverb “suddenly” does not exactly match with the modal verb “must”, since the first one evokes a sudden and fleeting reaction or idea, whereas the second is usually used to express a conviction, a certainty, something that springs out of someone’s enduring values. The sentences that follow very appropriately describe the near prostitute status that Sasha has: “Who says you can’t escape from your fate? I’ll escape from mine, into room number 219. Just try me, just give me a chance.” There is a trial, a desire, almost a beginning to escape ... but one based on chance. The first person narration gives access to the protagonist’s thoughts, and it is a very valued tool in discovering her real identity.

After a while, she remembers that all rooms are the same, all rooms accomplish their mission of hiding you from the “wolves outside”, so she decides to take a regular room.

A beautiful room with bath? A room with bath? A nice room? A room? ... But never tell the truth about this business of rooms, because it would bust the roof off everything and undermine the whole social system. All rooms are the same. All rooms have four walls, a door, a window or two, a bed, a chair and perhaps a bidet. A room is a place where you hide from the wolves outside and that’s all any room is. Why should I worry about changing my room?<sup>350</sup>

Expressions such as “business of rooms”, “social system” describe the outside world, the one in which “the wolves (from) outside” live. Impersonal constructions are once again present, but for this time the narrator undermines the neutrality and businesslike affairs to which these rooms are subject to: “all rooms”, “a room”, “any room”. It is interesting to look at the effect that it has in the writing: the writing becomes repetitive and automatic and denotes anonymity. All these reflect Sasha’s poor and automatic life actions. There is also something interesting in the gradation and composition of the sentences “A beautiful room with bath? A room with bath? A nice room? A room?”, which, in my opinion, shows precisely the hierarchy of the social ladder, and the fact that

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<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

the narrator ends up settling for the lowest rung of the ladder, or that she is in a way condemned to end up at the bottom of this social ladder established by the “whole social system” that sets the rules to which she does not correspond, or does not want to correspond, or which she feels out of step. There is a kind of weariness, of cynicism, at the end of the quotation with the rhetorical question: “Why should I worry about changing my room?”; the narrator is conscious of the social machine she is being dragged into, as if she questioned her desire to conform to it by wanting to change her room. It is so important to change her room when in the end the only use of a room is to hide from the wolves, the same oppressive patriarchal system that sets the rules of the “whole social system”? Her pessimism inferred in the description “All rooms have four walls, a door, a window or two, a bed, a chair and perhaps a bidet” confirms her awareness of this social machine, even of the masquerade that she undertakes.

The room is a place that reveals the society in which women live. *Voyage in the Dark* is another novel in which rooms have a crucial and central position. The room reveals women’s conditions and also the judgments that people have against women. And when I say people, I mean women as well. Furthermore, the internal gaze, the imposing overhanging gaze, patriarchal and dominant, is omnipresent (from the outside) but also internalized (inside the room, which we no longer care whether it is pretty or not, all that matters is that it allows us to hide from the wolves). The idea suggested by the quotation “whatever the room” finally seems to me to be a kind of passive resistance of the feminine to the omnipresent, and internalized judgments of women’s condition (the already analyzed “must look”) that weigh on the character. This necessity or need for a room seems to go hand in hand with this kind of indifference or distance from it (antithesis), which could eventually be seen as a passive resistance.

At the beginning of the story, when Maudie arranges to move in the house where she lives, the landlady warns them, and more precisely Maudie, not to behave inappropriately. Maudie comes downstairs in her nightgown when the landlady angrily makes the following reflection:

‘Showing yourself at my sitting-room-window ‘alf naked like that’, the landlady said. ‘And at three o’clock in the afternoon too. Getting my house a bad name.’ [...] ‘When you come downstairs for your dinner you’ve got to be decent. Not in your nightclothes.’

She slammed the door. (*VD*, p. 8)

“Getting my house a bad name” is a way to imply the poor, unfortunate condition that women have and that she rejects completely. It is a reference to the fact that women should be ashamed of their bodies while their freedom and behaviour patterns are restrained. There is a progression in which

the words uttered amplify their meaning and value. There is also a strong image created with words such as “showing”, “alf naked”, “getting”, “be decent”, “nightclothes”, which involves the gaze and describes a hyper sexualized and intentional attitude in the critical words of the landlady. It is the sexuality of the woman that is therefore attacked here and constantly rewritten by the patriarchal moral order. The very critical and judgmental gaze of the landlady embodies here this patriarchal morality, which the female characters have internalized, and that refers precisely to the absorbed “must look” that leads them to constantly consider the gaze of others weighing on and around her (from whom they try to hide in the “room”).

The colonial time that women experience is thus amplified. Women already have a negative perception of themselves: “I must feel ghastly” (*ALM*, p. 90); in addition, here we have a confirmation from one of the characters. Thus colonial time is internalized and externalized at the same time. The episode containing the remark of the landlady is followed right on the next page by yet another one. The episode goes on while Maudie is getting dressed. The conversation between the two women strikes the reader because of its content but also due to the fact that it takes further the idea begun earlier. Anna, the first-person narrator, engages the reader in a usual conversation about the issue of a certain book:

[...] That’s a dirty book, isn’t it?’

‘Bits of it are all right,’ I said.

Maudie said, ‘I know; it’s about a tart. I think it’s disgusting. I bet you a man writing a book about a tart tells a lot of lies one way and another. Besides, all books are like that — just somebody stuffin’ you up.’ (*Ibid.*, 9)

The term “tart” progresses and gains in meaning — Rhys actually labelling and giving a name to those women or “prostitutes” that she talks about — and so does our perception about women’s condition. What is surprising is not Maudie’s use of the term “tart”, but what comes after. Rhys clearly wants to tell the reader how “disgusting” and misleading is the opinion that men have on tarts. It is about a critical look at female sexuality considered as shameful, which makes us think about the “hundreds thousands of white people rushing along and the dark houses all alike frowning one after the other all alike all stuck together”, altogether judgmental, a clear hint to the colonial issue. I think that Rhys refers here to the kind of “tart” that she deals with in her novels, and notably in *Voyage in the Dark*. The near-prostitute status that women embrace in the early twentieth century is completely misunderstood, and not just by men, but by writers in general. Rhys’s voice as a

writer intervenes here, by shedding light on the challenging and harsh life that women are subject to, a gesture that separates her from the other writers and denotes the role of her fiction.

We also have a third occurrence of the word “tart”, similar to the first one. If in the first case, the landlady does not use the word “tart”, but implies it by using the sentence “Getting my house a bad name”, in the next passage she actually uses it. Anna’s landlady asks her to leave the room shortly because she does not like her behaviour: her 3 o’clock return to home, and the expensive things she buys. She notices Anna’s affairs with men and wants to stay away from her.

‘Here is your tea, Miss Morgan,’ the landlady said. ‘And I must ask you to find another room on Saturday. This room is reserved after Sunday.’  
‘Why didn’t you tell me that when you let it to me?’ I said.  
She began to bawl. ‘I don’t hold with the way you go on, if you want to know, and my ‘usband don’t neither. Crawling up the stairs at three o’clock in the morning. And then today dressed up to the nines. I’ve got eyes in my head. [...] ‘I don’t want no tarts in my house, so now you know.’ (*Ibid.*, 26)

The narration offers a face-to-face confrontation through a dialogue between Anna and her landlady. Anna has to come clean concerning her daily activities with men, a thing that the other people notice and start judging. Things are serious in the lady’s view and acting on them is inevitable: “I must ask you to find another room.” The verb “crawling up” is quite striking when one associates it with the heroine’s life and the way she tries to make a living. The “ing” form expresses the continuous and endless activity in which the protagonist is trapped. Light has been shed on her night life: “at three o’clock in the morning”, a temporal marker that is immediately followed by another one: “And then today”. The temporal succession here emphasizes the continuous life routine that Anna has been following, habits that cannot pass unnoticed. What bothers the landlady is obviously the near-prostitute condition that Anna has. It is a way of suggesting how the past is part of the present and the whole life of the character is in a continuous and endless temporality. She calls her a “tart”, slang for “prostitute”. The double negation, “don’t want” and “no tarts”, otherwise grammatically incorrect, can also be read as a colonial and social marker. It could highlight the landlord’s view that is filtered throughout society’s rules. The lady has been meaning to say these things out loud, and so the time has finally come: “So now you know”, an expression that suggests the delay, but also the accumulation of these judgments in time. The succession and evolution of this term through the novel shows that.

Anna becomes furious, takes some medicine, lies down but feels too ill when she thinks: “*This is England, and I’m in a nice, clean English room with all the dirt swept under the*



*bed.*” (*Ibid.*, p. 27), a sentence that engages temporal and spatial signifiers at the same time. The immediate reaction to her rejection is that of going back to being an outsider, it is like the role of a refugee that she takes. The patriarchal look is therefore outside but also inside, and has already invaded the room: “I’m in a nice, clean English room”. The fact that the room is pretty underlines the hypocrisy of the patriarchal well-thinking society, setting the hierarchy and the social values. We can detect a sense of hypocrisy, dissimulation in the expression “all the dirt swept under the bed”. The issue that she has with men generates an automatic response involving her condition as a colonial. In other words, Anna turns into a life circle, stepping from one colonial condition into another. Her temporal experience is extremely difficult because of the unceasing omnipresent colonial conditions that she is haunted by. When she comes to England, she feels as an outsider, and then she begins to have issues with the opposite sex, and when light has been shed on her men issues and “tart” condition, she goes back and acts as a victim of her own destiny, by criticizing England. There is a follow-up and going back and forth from one condition to the other, because they are essentially the same, they have the same colonial root, and that root is the time gap between herself being born in Dominica and having a particular status, and her coming to London where she does not benefit from the same life and privileges. England and herself become apart in the sentence: “This is England and I”. “This is England” stands in opposition to the “I”, and it is mainly the coordinating conjunction and the comma that precedes it that make this separation. The italics used here emphasize the metaphorical meaning that is implied. The metaphor is wrapped up in an ironical hint. Her landlord’s news came as a shock to her; “all the dirt swept under the bed” refers to the current situation and the unexpected turn of events that she experiences. It can also be seen as an allusion to all the judgments that people harbour, but do not say, which is usually followed by an outburst, just like in the case of the landlady. This sentence is also an argument against England and the English in general. It is quite a strong ironical statement against the nation in question. By using the adjective “clean” and its antonym in the form of a noun, “dirt” in a single sentence, one right after the other, her statement becomes all the more powerful. The repetition of the nation, first by using “England”, and then the adjective “English” highlights the idea expressed, the fact we are clearly dealing with an attack — indirect because of the irony used — towards the English society. The irony used here makes me think of a kind of passive resistance. The typeface and the interior monologue mentioned earlier make their presence felt again. The colonial comes to the surface, mainly her outsider condition, but also what’s underneath English society, or at least the way she perceives it from the inside. The fact that she is able to see what’s “swept under the bed”, recalls

here Woolf's "digging deeper than the eye approves" analyzed above, the interior monologue allowing revealing a critical, and therefore resistant, look at the patriarchal and colonial system.

Anna does not distance herself only from the English, but also from the Caribbean culture:

Parody and quotation [Haliloglu writes] fit the articulation of Anna's transitional identity in self-narration that is politically inflected. Anna parodies not just the English but also the Caribbean discourse, distancing herself from both. This political strategy is best observed in the novel in moments of recollection that are held in utopic/dystopic tension, summoned up where the narrator needs to make sense of her present situation, questioning the extent to which the child in the colonies can be implicated in the oppression of slaves and the emancipated.<sup>351</sup>

After having analyzed the prior condition, that of the colonial, coupled with the woman's condition, both being an obstacle in the Rhysian character's becoming, I would like to pursue my analysis by mentioning a passage in which temporal and spatial markers recreate the woman condition forever condemned to her limited and painful existence. Here the colonial time that the character lives in is all the more obvious since in a single passage Rhys manages to picture several temporal plans, thanks to the Modernist techniques that she embraces. It is a passage from *Voyage in the Dark*, picturing a usual but dull, monotonous day as experienced in Anna, the protagonist's life.

I didn't get up when the alarm went next morning. Ethel came in to see what was wrong. I said, 'I want to stay in bed a bit today. I've got a headache.'

'Poor kid,' she said, blinking at me. 'You don't look well and that's a fact. I'll bring you some breakfast.'

She had two voices — the soft one and the other one.

'Thanks,' I said. 'Just some tea — nothing to eat.'

I had to put the light on to see to pour the tea out.

'It's cold and there's an awful fog,' she said.

When I put the light out again the room was dark, and warm so long as I kept my hands under the blankets. I hadn't got a headache. I was all right really — only damned tired, worse than usual.

I kept telling myself, 'You've got to think of something. You can't stay here. You've got to make a plan.'

But instead I started counting all the towns I had been to, the first winter I was on tour — Wigan, Blackburn, Bury, Oldham, Leeds, Halifax, Huddersfield, Southport ... I counted up to fifteen and then slip off into thinking of all the bedrooms I had slept in and how exactly alike they were, bedrooms on tour. Always a high, drag wardrobe and something dirty red in the room; and through the window the feeling of a small street would come in. And the breakfast-tray dumped down on the bed, two plates with a bit of curled-up bacon on each. If the landlady smiled or said 'Good morning' Maudie would say, 'She's very smarmy. What's the matter with her? I bet she puts that down on the bill. For saying Good morning, half a crown.'

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<sup>351</sup> Nagihan Haliloglu, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

And then I tried to remember the road that leads to Constance Estate. It's funny how well you can remember when you lie in the dark with your arm over your forehead. Two eyes open inside your head. (VD, p. 128)

A closer analysis of this passage made me capture the narration's structure, the fact that it is formed of bits of temporal frames that characterize Anna's existence but also the struggles that she faces. The passage could be cut into three parts. The first part expresses the present time, the England in which the character lives her life full of passiveness and inertia. Then comes the second part, when she realizes that she needs "to think of something" and "make a plan", which only made her realize the habits, repeated deeds, and things that she is doing over and over again in her life. The third and final part of the narration is when she remembers her Caribbean past, or "the road that leads to Constance Estate". The actual description of her childhood memories lack in this third passage. What the narrator chooses to highlight here is that there is life in the dark; it is there that our eyes, inside our head, open.

Anna's present is characterized by coldness and an awful fog. She puts the light on only to pour some tea. She does not enjoy the light, darkness seems to comfort her. Keeping her hands under the blankets can make us think of her childhood, a way to preserve her warm Caribbean homeland.

The necessity of coming up with a plan is emphasized by the use of the modal verb and the imperative form: "I kept telling myself", "You've got to think of something. You can't stay here. You've got to make a plan." Internal focalization and the repetition of the pronoun "you" emphasize her inner monologue in the form of a dialogue with herself.

What is interesting is that she is the one who herself induces this whole temporal "journey", since Rhys uses a first-person narrator here. There is no escape even when she tries to make a plan, she bumps into the cyclical time and the circle that her life is overwhelmed with. The image of the prostitute is linked to this cyclical time that she experiences. By counting all the towns that she has been to, the narrator emphasizes the poor, unfortunate life that she experiences as a woman, which only gets worse when she "[thinks] of all the bedrooms [she] had slept in and how exactly alike they were, bedrooms on tour". The choice of the noun "bedroom" accompanied by the adjective "all", amplified by "how exactly alike they were" and the final touch given by the expression "bedrooms on tour" is the equivalent of the near-prostitute that Anna has become. It is as if the narration offered us the definition of the prostitute, the boredom that is being described: how exactly alike these bedrooms are. There is a paradox here that holds a powerful meaning. The monotony given by the sameness of the bedrooms is in contrast to the fact that these bedrooms were actually on tour.

There is a certain movement, since “on tour” means travelling from place to place, but also a sense of dullness and cyclicity if we think of the noun “tour” as moving in circle. We get an even deeper sense of what colonial time is via this passage, and I think that the key expression here is “bedrooms on tour”. Colonial time fights with an antagonism here: being static, the primary characteristic of a bedroom, and moving at the same time hence the expression “on tour”. It is similar to the Rhysian character who cannot escape her own condition.

Several oppositions are present in this passage. The text is situated in between two opposing features: on the one hand, we have a fact, “You don’t look well and that’s a fact.” (referring to the patriarchal image imposed on women: “must look”), and on the other hand, there is the remembrance or daydreaming of the Caribbean, “And then I tried to remember the road ...”. In between the two opposing features lies Anna’s life. This is the second hint regarding her childhood and homeland, the first one being the one when she feels the need to stay under the covers and enjoy the warmth of the blankets, as she once used to enjoy the warmth of her country’s primarily and metaphorically speaking as well. The only place and time that she can finally escape are when daydreaming about the Caribbean; it is only in a dream that she can find escape. Dreaming and daydreaming are Modernist markers in the narration since when experiencing them time is no longer linear and ceases to exist for a moment, a feature that we also find in the *flânerie*. Going back to her country is possible through a Modernist technique, by “breaking” time. It is through the Modernist techniques that Rhys can access the colonial.

There is also a contrast between the darkness that covers up and reigns over the whole place and the “dirty red” spot in the room. The red stands out and the image of the mark of the feminine life in the dark is metaphorical but nonetheless extremely strong. Women live a dark existence and that is a strong indicator of women’s condition in Rhys’s time. The dark symbolizes the colonial sphere, the fact that we are in the presence of the colonial that imprisons. The “light on”, the “cold” and the “awful fog” are characteristics that define London in “I had to put the light on to see to pour the tea out. / ‘It’s cold and there’s an awful fog,’ she said”, whereas adjectives such as “dark” and “warm” in the construction “When I put the light out again the room was dark, and warm so long as I kept my hands under the blankets” stand in opposition and express the colonial ambiance. Warmth is what she is looking for, hence the use of blankets. The use of “Good morning” is an anticipatory statement of Rhys’s next novel, *Good Morning, Midnight*, published five years after *Voyage in the Dark*, in 1939. The purpose of the irony used here is to draw attention to the fake or “smarmy”, but also hypocritical world in which even the basic human contacts are being paid and in which we are used to hiding the dirt under the bed.

The narration of *Voyage in the Dark* is abrupt, non-linear, with temporal voyages that make the narration elliptical by bearing certain pauses, small but still present. The narration of this novel needs these Modernist techniques to highlight the suffering and painful, but also exiled and inextricable condition that women were facing. Nicole Flynn in an essay called *Clockwork Women: Temporality and Form in Jean Rhys's Interwar Novels* notes that in *Voyage in the Dark* "Anna's thoughts drift from her European present to her Caribbean past and back again, mapping the narrative onto nonlinear strands of memory."<sup>352</sup> It is the short story genre that would also allow that. But here the writer uses the novel form, a particular kind of novel with a shorter length than usual, specific to Rhys. Her peculiar use of the novel tells us that she revolutionizes the genre using a temporal perspective.

Darkness defines the atmosphere present in this passage, a darkness that is both physical and metaphorical, thus the colonial aspect that is present here. The end of the passage reveals a double colonialism through the image and idea of darkness. The darkness implying the situation that she finds herself in allows her to evoke another type of darkness, or colonial world, her country of origin. A reference to the title *Voyage in the Dark* is being made here. It is only in the dark that she has the possibility to go far away in her imagination, by "digging" (in reference to Woolf) into it, and meet her country again. Given the general atmosphere of this passage and its ending, the voyage in the dark evoked in the title is thus twofold: one that happens in England, in which the pain, suffering and no-escape issue of the protagonist takes place, and another one in her imagination, the only place where she can actually be present in her homeland. Both spaces are charged with important colonial characteristics, but in different ways.

Hotel rooms, dark atmospheres charged with suffering and bad mood are not something that the Rhysian protagonists choose deliberately; they are actually intrigued by such a thought: "I can see Sidonie carefully looking round for an hotel just like this one. She imagines that it's my atmosphere. God, it's an insult when you come to think about it. More dark rooms, more red curtains ..."<sup>353</sup>

The red spot comes back again in this passage, but for this time it is the curtains that are red. "More dark rooms, more red curtains ..." emphasizes saturation from the part of the character, a saturation of a space that is charged with disgust due to the experiences that happened in those rooms. The colour red of the curtains refers to sex, blood and violence, which is nevertheless hidden, but also suffering that you can draw like curtains, choosing to show it or not to the world.

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<sup>352</sup> Nicole Flynn, *Clockwork Women: Temporality and Form in Jean Rhys's Interwar Novels*, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>353</sup> Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, p. 12.

Sasha Jansen has lived all her life in hotel rooms, within four walls, which in itself also symbolizes a limitative and no-escape atmosphere.

Covered in pessimism, “Rhys denies the ability of the ‘good life’<sup>354</sup>”. It is not worth considering the escape from the actual feminine condition in which her characters are rooted. Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight* expresses the ultimate Rhysian truth: “But I don’t believe things change much really; you only think they do. It seems to me that things repeat themselves over and over again.<sup>355</sup>” A parallel and link with the colonial would constitute here the houses that are “all exactly alike”, treated above.

For Simon Gikandi, “Caribbean writers cannot adopt the history and culture of European Modernism, especially as defined by the colonizing structures, but neither can they escape from it because it has overdetermined Caribbean cultures in many ways.<sup>356</sup>” As in *Good Morning, Midnight* forgetting the past becomes impossible.

## The abortion scene

Another theme that encompasses the intersection between Modernism and colonialism is that of the abortion, which is also a way to step aside from society’s rules, an illegal practice at the time, as Rhys herself mentions in *Smile Please*. If the lack of marriage was a sign of not fitting into society, an even more serious and controversial one is abortion. Rhys herself experienced it a short time after she moved to England. The unfinished autobiographical work *Smile Please* notes this important episode from her life, in a chapter called “Christmas Day” which begins as follows:

Years later, speaking to a French man in Paris, I said, ‘I can abstract myself from my body.’ He looked so shocked that I asked if I was speaking bad French. He said, ‘Oh non, mais ... c’est horrible.’ And yet for so long that was what I did.

After what was then called an illegal operation, I stayed in a flat in Langham Street. I didn’t suffer from remorse or guilt. I didn’t think at all like women are supposed to think, my predominant feeling was one

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<sup>354</sup> Nicole Flynn, *Clockwork Women: Temporality and Form in Jean Rhys’s Interwar Novels* in Mary Wilson, Kerry L. Johnson (ed.), *Rhys Matters: New Critical Perspectives*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 215.

<sup>355</sup> Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, p. 56.

<sup>356</sup> Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1992, p. 3.

of intense relief, but I was very tired. I was not at all unhappy. It was like a pause in my life, a peaceful time. I didn't see him but he sent me a big rose plant in a pot and a very beautiful Persian kitten. (*SP*, p. 103)

Abortion becomes rich in spatial but also temporal connotations. "I can abstract myself from my body" shows the detachment and distance that she takes from her body, contrary to giving birth for example, in which case the body is in a tight relation with the woman. The woman experience is at stake here, and the disengagement or dissolution is realized through a spatial metaphor, that of extracting herself from her body. Rhys's look on the woman's condition gets even more complex by expressing how it is possible to react differently from what is expected: "I didn't suffer from remorse or guilt. I didn't think at all like women are supposed to think [...]" and still be happy: "I was not at all unhappy." Rhys perceives this act via spatial markers, which in the next paragraph gets enriched with temporal connotations: "And yet for so long that was what I did" and "It was like a pause in my life, a peaceful time." If the spatial markers were filled with a detachment, the temporal ones are more likely in the spirit of the gap and perhaps emptiness.

Spatial and temporal markers are closely linked in Rhys's works. This is important because it shows how colonial time is built in this passage. The fact that she can abstract herself from her own body, just like a prostitute could, shows her prior condition of near-prostitute, which came from her having all the means in Dominica and how once in England she had to have recourse to the money of men. This spatial image is immediately followed by a temporal one, in which we find out that for so long that was what she did, the temporal marker "for so long" being highlighted here. The colonial time thus comes alive throughout the conjunction of spatial and temporal markers. Being aware of Rhys's compression of ideas changes the way we see her whole work. For example, here, it is about the understanding of the woman condition and the fact that women were not entirely responsible for their own bodies, the decision of keeping or not keeping a baby not being an option, but rather a duty, something that they had to endure. Rhys acts differently and does not have any feelings of remorse or guilt. The irony and the tone are particularly interesting to look at in the sentence: "I didn't think at all like women are supposed to think". The abortion is an issue that has a patriarchal root, as we have just seen, but Rhys uses feminism and irony in order to undermine the patriarchal society of the time.

It is important to mention the narration's temporality and point of view that she takes here. We can sense a kind of distance between the writing of the work and the time when things actually happen. We know from Diana Athill's Foreword to *Smile Please* that "Jean Rhys began to think of

writing an autobiographical book several years before her death on May 14, 1979.<sup>357</sup> This kind of distance is perceptible in sentences such as “what was then called an illegal operation” (*SP*, p. 103) or two pages later “In those days, when going to the hairdresser was not such an ordinary thing to do [...]”. (*Ibid.*, p. 105). Adverbs such as “then” or “in those days” project the narration in the past and imply the absence of those activities in the present. It is as if Rhys were doing a kind of post-colonial critique of the times that she had lived herself. But we also need to factor in the change of genre: novel (Modernist) and autobiographical.

Following the same chapter “Christmas Day” — whose title is suggestive, as if the absence of a baby would be a gift in itself, or a “relief” as the narrator notes — getting in or getting out seems to be applicable not only in the case of marriage, but also of abortion — another way to step aside from society’s demands and unwritten rules.

The other thing which spoilt my peace in the flat was the owner who had obviously heard rumours about me and was determined to get me out. She called at unexpected times, hoping to find an excuse to give me notice. One morning she came much earlier than usual and was louder and more explicit than she had ever been before. My daily woman, who was called Mrs Turner and whom I liked very much, overheard what she said. Next day, she told me, without looking at me, that she was sorry but she couldn’t work for me any longer. She said that her husband had found a job in another part of London and that she couldn’t make the long journey back and forth every day. I was pretty sure that it was the husband who objected but of course I had to pretend to believe what she said. (*Ibid.*, p. 104)

Jean Rhys echoes the actions or life decisions that make a woman *get on* or *get out*. The rumours heard about the abortion make the people around act distantly, by even renouncing her company. Disseminating rumours, finding excuses, lying, are all fake acts that people do while judging others. Here lies the hypocrisy of the patriarchal and colonial system to which the narrators do not correspond (prostitution, abortion) and that they question, or criticize through their difference, and marginality. People silently judge her, just like the landlady does when she discovers that Anna sees men late at night and buys expensive clothes the day after. The person who really objects is the husband and she “was pretty sure” of it, which renders things even more telling and frustrating. Gender inequality becomes an issue that Rhys directly speaks about. And the fake acts follow: “but of course I have to pretend to believe what she said.” The text abounds in temporal markers that introduce this event with its strong colonial overtones, the fact that she is rejected and not wanted anymore in the house. To announce that the owner “was determined to get her out”, which is a spatial marker in itself, Rhys uses temporal signifiers such as “unexpected times”, “one morning”,

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<sup>357</sup> Diana Athill’s *Foreword* to Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography*, p. vii.



“my daily woman”, a phrase that contains in itself the temporal attribute “daily”, “next day”, “back and forth every day”. The expression “in another part of London” also contains a spatial dimension. In order to introduce the colonial, Rhys turns to spatial and temporal signifiers.

The way marriage and abortion are treated are very similar. Each time Rhys highlights the dissimulation that the characters go through and the look and prebuilt opinion that people have regarding these topics, which lie at the root of a woman’s patriarchal condition. In both cases it is the spatial marker “get on or get out” that moves things and makes people live a colonial time.

The act of abortion is the climax of Rhys’s coloniality and induces a no-escape policy. It is the case of Anna in *Voyage in the Dark* where abortion has a significant place: “I’m glad it happened when nobody was here [...]” (*VD*, p. 155)

States of suffering, uneasiness and instability are present throughout the novel *Voyage in the Dark* and they increase as the plot moves on. Initially struggling with states of boredom and having difficulties to fit into the atmosphere of London, the situation gradually exacerbates into serious colonial situations. Rhys’s main character is facing the feeling of being used by men, accompanied by hysteria, sickness, abortion or infertility. The fact that no life can pass through her only mirrors and even aggravates her near-prostitute status. Just like prostitutes who, by the nature of their work, cannot keep babies, Anna is facing the same destiny.

The study of this final abortion scene is valuable inside this chapter. The dreamy atmosphere specific to this scene makes the space and time coordinates vanish. The end of *Voyage in the Dark* finds Anna pregnant, without knowing who the father is. She decides to contact Walter, her previous lover, and ask for help. Once she has the money, she chooses to go towards the abortion without fear, as if it were not a life-threatening process. Submitting her body to an illegal and dangerous act, Anna shows courage. The Rhysian protagonist shows that women are subject to critical choices, which demonstrates once again the domination and politics that they are subject to. Even for dealing with an abortion, a woman’s private act, Rhys’s protagonists need (financial) support from men.

Rhys initially conceived a different ending than the one that was at last published. In the first version, Anna dies from the abortion. Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo and Gina Wisker study the possible ending of the novel: “[...] murder as her only hope for dissolution and escape.<sup>358</sup>” The no-escape policy of the actual ending is thus justified. Editors did not want to accept the ending proposed by Rhys, which made her revise it, adding a different ending in which Anna actually

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<sup>358</sup> Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo and Gina Wisker (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 243.

survives. This way the emphasis is put on the temporal feature where there is “hope” to start all over again. Her doctor assures her friend Laurie that “She’ll be all right. [...] Ready to start all over again in no time.” (*Voyage in the Dark*, p. 159) The narrator’s last words from the end of the novel are in the spirit of “hope”, ironically speaking here, and cyclicity of time: “I lay and watched it (in reference to “the ray of light”) and thought about starting all over again. And about being new and fresh. And about mornings, and misty days, when anything might happen. And about starting all over again ...” (*Ibid.*) This atmosphere that denotes a kind of reverie, in which Rhys calls on the universal truth (right at the end of the novel), such as the cyclical time, shows how important this is for the Rhysian world and in what way abortion represents indeed the climax of Rhys’s coloniality. Here once again Modernism is at the service of the colonial; the Modern technique gives access and makes the reader understand this colonial climax. The recurrent repetition of the coordinating conjunction “and” could lead to hope, but this hope is quickly undermined by the adverb “over”, which shows a powerful colonial life that the protagonist cannot escape. She goes on with her life, probably living the same way as she was used to. Thus, the ending is clear, bearing a powerful colonial tone. Cunningham’s reflection on the end of *Voyage in the Dark* is worth mentioning. Along with the idea of failure, Cunningham also stresses that of the negative femininity in Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark*. In this sense, she comments upon the final scene of the novel: “Rhys narrativizes negative feminism in her depiction of Anna, a subject who refuses to cohere, who chooses to disintegrate, rather than to activate, the self under the models of femininity available to her.<sup>359</sup>”

The abortion episode from the end of the novel is extremely telling. It is also ironical if we perceive it from the angle of sexuality whose purpose in part is procreation. The other way round, if we think of it as a necessary and required act done by a prostitute, the end of *Voyage in the Dark* foregrounds the tragedy of the human condition. The inability to bear a child acts as something very specific in the experience of womanhood. Marriage, stable relationships, having children ... are all off the table in a society in which women are far from being able to freely live and experience their true potential. Abortion is in fact different from the simple fact of not giving birth or procreation; there is, in fact, first of all, the fact of being pregnant, and therefore impregnated by a man, on whom the prostitute depends, and of removing the child, in painful and physical danger, the fruit of this “trade” — we can sense in a certain way a certain passive resistance, and therefore a political

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<sup>359</sup> Anne Cunningham, “‘Get On or Get Out’: Failure and Negative Femininity in Jean Rhys’s *Voyage in the Dark*”, *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 59, Number 2, Summer 2013, pp. 373-394, p. 390.

one, even under the weight of domination. It is all about how society sees women and treats womanhood.

Among other practices of colonial power relations, abortion is forever engraved on the woman's body, as Jenny Sharp notes: "[...] in the invented stories of rape and mutilation, colonial power relations being written on the bodies of women. The savaged remains a fantasy of the natives savagery that screens the 'barbarism' of colonialism.<sup>360</sup>"

The present chapter was an opportunity to analyze Rhys's works from the perspective of the societal limitations that they bear, and the no-escape allegory that is present at every step, right from the beginning of the characters' London experience. Important women's issues such as marriage or abortion allowed us to highlight even more the colonial side and origin that lie at the base of the society, and the way it reshapes the whole woman condition. The Rhysian woman bears the near-prostitute status, sometimes even that of a puppet, except that she stands up for herself and does not accept to be part of the endless patriarchal and colonial circle of society. The role of this point is important in the chapter devoted to "The Location of Time" because the identity of the Rhysian woman and her patriarchal condition make her stand out in regard to the other writers. Throughout this "no-escape" pattern that all Rhysian women fall into we are able to recreate the time-space link that Modernism and colonialism bear in themselves.

The refusal to belong is present in every aspect that this subchapter reveals. At the heart of this refusal lies the loss experienced. As Deborah Kelly Kloepfer notes: "Rhys's fiction operates around an economy of loss — loss of language, loss of homeland, loss of economic and sexual power.<sup>361</sup>"

Rhys's mostly dark narrative has nonetheless the capacity to recreate the woman's condition throughout the intersection of Modernism and colonialism. The Rhysian woman has a no-escape (political) choice that suggests, on the one hand, that her characters cannot escape from the limitations imposed by society, but on the other hand, by not fitting into the patriarchal society, the Rhysian protagonist partially breaks the powerful restraints imposed to her.

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<sup>360</sup> Jenny Sharpe, "Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text" in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Hertfordshire, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, p. 233.

<sup>361</sup> Deborah Kelly Kloepfer, "Voyage in the Dark: Jean Rhys's Masquerade for the Mother", *Contemporary Literature* 26.4 (1985), p. 443.

After this chapter, the Modernism-colonialism link is even stronger since we have seen how women's repetitive and dull experience does not even have a chance to surface or to get better, and it is the narrative itself that demonstrates that through Rhys's writing style and techniques.

### **3. The poetics of dislocation**

The works of the writers, mainly Mansfield and Rhys, express the traits of the dislocation of the self. It is the writers' past experiences that create a kind of disruption or disconnectedness from the self, which will in turn be present and will affect their writings. Mansfield's past experiences as a colonial living in New Zealand have undoubtedly shaped her short stories. It is from some of her short stories, such as "Ole Underwood" (1912) and "Millie" (1913), that my argument is drawn. Rhys's similar experience of an outsider coming from the Caribbean contributes to the fractured self that she expresses mainly in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), the work chosen for the current analysis. In the case of Woolf, her experience from the centre also bears a kind of dislocation, but in a different way, with a different perspective, and here lies the originality of her writings. I intend to capture Woolf's conception of dislocation through works such as *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *The Years* (1936). Woolf's Modernist writings intercut by colonial signifiers are aspects that describe the writer's dislocation. When looking at the authors' works, I am interested in seeing the way the two aspects of dislocation, the one originating from a Modernist mode of writing, and the other from a colonial ideology, intersect and what they create at the writing level.

#### **Dislocation of the self in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea***

Rhys's textual density is impressive: it bears so many textual devices, among which the recurrent use of irony and criticism of the patriarchal system ... all that with simple, plain words and expressions that make the reader's experience enjoyable. Joy Castro makes a compelling argument on the structure of Rhys's sentences, highlighting its intersection with Woolf and

Mansfield. This is a sentence that had a great and persuasive impact at the beginning of my Ph.D. studies when choosing my topic:

The surface texture of Rhys's style is deceptively simple. Her sentences, like Hemingway's, are bare, stripped, pared down to the minimum. Like Katherine Mansfield's Rhys's canvas is small, even miniature and yet, like Mansfield's it renders up illuminating epiphanies. Much like Woolf's Rhys's narratives care more for exploring the interior lives of their characters than describing the world outside.<sup>362</sup>

It is worthwhile to see that there is a critic that brings the three writers together. It is precisely by comparing Rhys with Woolf and Mansfield, that we acknowledge Rhys's uniqueness and contribution to the literary field. Around these strong points lies the dislocation of her narration. The epiphanies themselves and the interior lives of her characters make room for a fragmented narrative, in which bits and pieces, specific to Modernist writing, recreate the coloniality experienced by the mid twentieth-century woman. A narrative like Rhys's is not constant, dealing with epiphanies here and there, and focuses on the interior lives of her characters in order to mirror the consequences of a patriarchal and colonial system that creates confusion, and ultimately disconnection. That is exactly how Rhys pictures that in an episode featuring the protagonist of *Voyage in the Dark* who dreams about a ship:

I was still trying to walk up the deck and get ashore. I took huge, climbing, flying strides among confused figures. I was powerless and very tired, but I had to go on. And the dream rose into a climax of meaningless, fatigue and powerlessness, and the deck was heaving up and down, and when I woke up everything was still heaving up and down. (*Voyage in the Dark*, p. 141)

This is a passage from the third part of the novel in which there is a constant back and forth between London and the Caribbean, temporally and spatially speaking, the character not being able to find her place in London. Jean Rhys's works revolve around the idea of dislocation, rupture and disjunction. It is a world in which even the notion of "belonging" is meaningless, which I find strong and universally present in her works. As Steven J. Belluscio states in his analysis on the aesthetics of dislocation in Jean Rhys:

A British colonial of fin de siècle Dominica, Rhys's mixed Welsh/Irish/Scottish descent, combined with her direct experience of a "decaying colonial system", contributes to an overtly modernist style of

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<sup>362</sup> Joy Castro, "Jean Rhys", *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 20 (2000): 8-45, <https://fr.scribd.com/document/360701911/JEAN-RHYS-pdf>, last accessed: March 31, 2020, p. 14.

characterization in which dislocation is the norm, “belonging” is meaningless, and racial identity is a fraud.<sup>363</sup>

*Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is a very good example in this sense, since the novel is extremely rich in colonial history. Critics suggest that Rhys would have been an insufficiently developed colonial thinker without *Wide Sargasso Sea*.<sup>364</sup> Teresa Winterhalter in her article on “Narrative Technique and the Rage for Order in *Wide Sargasso Sea*” observes the oppositions that lie at the heart of the novel: “Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* lies between Rochester’s England and Antoinette Cosway’s island, between the opposite categories of colonizers and colonized, between the world of capitalism and post-Emancipation West-Indies, and between privileged men and dependent women.”<sup>365</sup> The first part of the novel shows an early nineteenth-century West Indian context, in which the ex-slaves work on the plantations of the rich Creoles. Even if the Slavery Abolition Act passed in 1833, and took effect from August 1834, by the time of the protagonist’s childhood, freedom had not been given to the black population of the island. As Nigel Dalziel notes in *The Penguin Historical Atlas of the British Empire*: “The anti-slavery campaign in Britain culminated in the abolition of slavery throughout the Empire in 1834, although slavery was succeeded by several years of ‘apprenticeship’ that continued to restrict personal freedom.<sup>366</sup>” Rhys’s novel shows the resentment between the whites and their servants. The title of the novel, although never referred to in the course of the work itself, is referred to in the editor’s (Angela Smith) General Notes of the book:

The identification and naming of the Sargasso Sea are inextricably linked with the history of colonialism. The sea is a tract of the North Atlantic Ocean lying roughly between the West Indies and the Azores, in the Horse Latitudes. It is a relatively still sea but at the centre of a great swirl of ocean currents. [...] its name derives from the tracts of floating weed on its surface. [...] and says that the Portuguese named the sea after the weed that grew in their wells at home, sargassum. One of the myths about it was that ships could become entangled in the weed and be unable to escape. (*WSS*, p. 131)

The inability to escape from the “ocean currents”, to use the water metaphor given by the edition under study, of colonial history implied in the title of *Wide Sargasso Sea* evokes and metaphorizes

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<sup>363</sup> Steven J. Belluscio, “Ethnic Modernisms: Anzia Yezierska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Dislocation”, *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 50, Number 2, Summer 2004, pp. 517-519, p. 518.

<sup>364</sup> Carol Dell’ Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Movement in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys*, New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 40.

<sup>365</sup> Teresa Winterhalter, “Narrative Technique and the Rage for Order in *Wide Sargasso Sea*”, *Narrative*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Oct., 1994), pp. 214-229, p. 214.

<sup>366</sup> Nigel Dalziel, *The Penguin Historical Atlas of the British Empire*, Hong Kong, Penguin, 2006, p. 41.

the troubled conditions of the early nineteenth century Caribbean context. In Rhys's *Letters* there is also a mention of a poem that she wrote, "Obeah Night", which comes as an explanation of her last novel's title and its general point of departure:

Perhaps Love would have smiled then  
Shown us the way  
Across the sea. They say it's strewn with the wrecks  
And weed-infested  
Few dare it, fewer still escape (*L*, p. 264)

At the heart of this poem and of the novel itself, there is a question of the place, a quest to "[show] us the way", joined with time issues as in the construction "few dare it, fewer still escape". An analysis of a number of important aspects of the novel will help us seize the connection between spatial and temporal locations, and more importantly the dislocation that is in place.

The marking of territory is highlighted right from the first sentence of the novel, as Antoinette presents the context:

They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks. The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother, 'because she pretty pretty self' Christophine said. She was my father's second wife, far too young for him they thought, and worse still, a Martinique girl. (*WSS*, p. 5)

An important opposition is presented here, based on social rankings, between Antoinette's family and the more honorable plantation owners. There is a tension or "trouble" that the reader is confronted with right from the first line of the novel. The sentence "But we were not in their ranks" shows exclusion and the inability to fit in society or rank. The coordinator "but", whose role is to cancel the previous sentence based on what the white people do when in trouble, and the adverb "be", expressing location and belonging, along with the possessive pronoun "their" imply displaced social situations. Rhys attempts to express important patriarchal issues through the description of the woman who is "pretty pretty", judged as "far too young" and "worse still, a Martinique girl", and that is how the writer plunges the reader even more into the colonial context. The rejection or exclusion of the woman because of these attributes pictures a limited society based on appearances and values issued from a patriarchal system.

Jean Rhys's choice of situating her story after the 1833 Independence Act, or "the period [when] the Creole planters were most disorientated, and from her perspective, to be pitied" (*Ibid.*, Notes on the text, p. 139) is worth noting here. *Part One* thus goes on with a succession of contextual settings, one prompting the other, creating an overwhelming and complex situation from the first page of the novel. We can see Christophine, Antoinette's nurse, explaining the reason why the Martinique people came to live on their land, how people grew tired of waiting for "this compensation the English promised when the Emancipation Act was passed" (*Ibid.*, p. 5): Mr Luttrell's ("our neighbour and her [Christophine's] only friend) death and the presence of the *obeah* figure, a real influence in Rhys's works:

'Of course they have their own misfortunes. Still waiting for the compensation the English promised when the Emancipation Act was passed. Some will wait for a long time.'

How could she know that Mr Luttrell would be the first who grew tired of waiting? One calm evening he shot his dog, swam out to sea and was gone for always. No agent came from England to look after his property [...]

Mr Luttrell's house was left empty, shutters banging in the wind. Soon the black people said it was haunted, they wouldn't go near it. And no one came near us. (*Ibid.*, p. 5)

The colonial power is still present in this passage: the English agent who was supposed to come to look after Mr Luttrell's property.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea* dislocation is present from the first pages of the novel. It is Antoinette's child self that talks, and the narration is an indication in this sense. We have the impression that the events are narrated as if something were missing, the gap representing a certain explanation or meaning of events. Rhys's choice of capturing a fragmented self and narration in the beginning is particularly interesting. As Antoinette grows, the reader can seize her development through the way she expresses herself. The dislocation in the narration is present through the fragments of dialogue and even gossip that she repeats after overhearing them: "Godfrey said [...] The Lord make no distinction between black and white, black and white the same for Him." (*Ibid.*, p. 6) Then, the narration, the child's in this case, goes on expressing the following:

She [her mother] persuaded a Spanish Town doctor to visit my brother Pierre who staggered when he walked and couldn't speak distinctly. I don't know what the doctor told her or what she said to him but he never came again and after that she changed. Suddenly, not gradually. She grew thin and silent, and at last she refused to leave the house at all. (*Ibid.*, p. 6)



The fact that she doesn't know what happens and the way she perceives the sudden change in her mother's behaviour demonstrates the gap and lack of connection that a child's perspective bear: "I don't know what the doctor told her or what she said to him but he never came again and after that she changed." It is the child's innocence that is at stake here.

No precise temporal markers are given by Antoinette, the narrator. It is the case at the beginning of the novel when no date is indicated, the reader could only infer that the story is set after 1833 as it shows characters: "Still waiting for the compensation the English promised when the Emancipation Act was passed." (*Ibid.*, 5) Other blurry or unclear temporal markers are used by the child narrator: "I was old enough to look after myself." (*Ibid.*, 7) Another colonial temporal aspect, one in which temporal markers are uncertain, is expressed when Antoinette's mother talks about Christophine and their family heritage:

So I asked about Christophine. Was she very old? Had she always been with us?

'She was your father's wedding present to me. I don't know how old she was when they brought her to Jamaica, quite young. I don't know how old she is now. Does it matter? Why do you pester and bother me about all these things that happened long ago? Christophine stayed with me because she wanted to stay.

(*Ibid.*, p. 8)

The setting is once again set after 1833 when Christophine was already free. Before that time she had been owned as a slave.<sup>367</sup> The whole passage contains non-delimited temporal deictics: she doesn't know how old Christophine was when they brought her or how old she is now, but "Does it matter?" It is not only Antoinette, the narrator, that does not know how to situate the setting; the same scenario applies to her mother. It seems that there is a certain avoidance or reticence regarding colonial events. It is more than that, it is a denial expressed at the end of this passage, a secret dimension felt in Rhys's writing: "Does it matter? Why do you pester and bother me about all these things that happened long ago? Christophine stayed with me because she wanted to stay." The last sentence, especially throughout the use of the verb "want", alludes to the practice of slavery. The fact that it was a wedding present also shows that slaves were treated as objects. The mother does not know anything about Christophine because she does not want to know, she prefers to live in denial and not talk about it.

The impact of British imperialism and slavery are, furthermore, expressed in the novel. Denial is followed by decay in Rhys's novel:

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<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, explanation given in the section "Notes to the Text", p. 139.

Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible — the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell. [...] Twice a year the octopus orchid flowered — then not an inch of tentacle showed. [...] All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. No more slavery — why should *anybody* work? This never saddened me. I did not remember the place when it was prosperous. (*Ibid.*, p. 6)

The metaphor of the beautiful garden, an almost Edenic atmosphere that “had gone wild” (expression appearing twice in this passage), just like all Coulibri Estate, is placed in a rich colonial environment with wild flowers and animals, but which “ [have] gone wild”, are dead and absent (“not an inch of tentacle showed”). The text emphasizes the decay of slavery “No more slavery — why should *anybody* work?” and its consequences, the way everything “had gone wild”. The pronoun “anybody” in Italics shows that there were mostly the slaves who worked, and they were thus exploited by the political system. Rhys addressed this issue in the form of an ironical question. We have the impression that the excerpt crosses a whole period of time, from a time when “Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible — the tree of life grew there”, describing a time when the whole place went wild, in order to finish with a time when “I did not remember the place when it was prosperous”.

A couple of pages later another type of exclusion is described, one that stresses a disagreement with black people because of the way Creoles are perceived by them:

These were all the people in my life — my mother and Pierre, Christophine, Godfrey, and Sass who had left us. I never looked at any strange negro. They hated us. They called us white cockroaches. [...] One day a little girl followed me singing, ‘Go away white cockroach, go away, go away.’ I walked fast but she followed faster. ‘White cockroach, go away, go away. Nobody want you. Go away.’ (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, p. 9)

Strong expressions and affirmations describe the relationship between Creole and black people, such as “strange negro”, “white cockroaches” (expressed three times here), “go away” (appearing three times as well) and “They hated us.”. There is a double identity crisis, situated in between two poles. Helen Carr notes that Antoinette was “a white cockroach to the ex-slaves and a white nigger to the English<sup>368</sup>”. The literary critic Harold Bloom in a chapter on “Jean Rhys (1894-1979)” included in his work *Caribbean Women Writers* emphasizes the limitability and the fragile position

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<sup>368</sup> Helen Carr in Bill Schwarz (ed.), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 93.

of the woman protagonist of *Wide Sargasso Sea*: “The madwoman’s story (Bertha Mason’s story) depicts the ambiguous position of the Creole in the West Indies, who, being neither colonized nor colonizer, is treated as the former by Europeans and seen as the latter by the island’s black population.”<sup>369</sup> The hatred that Antoinette evokes haunts her even in her dreams. Two pages later, such an episode takes place:

I went to bed early and slept at once. I dreamed that I was walking in the forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, and out of sight. I could hear heavy footsteps coming closer and thought I struggled and screamed I could not move. I woke crying. The covering sheet was on the floor and my mother was looking down at me.

“Did you have a nightmare?”

“Yes, a bad dream.”

[...] “You were making such a noise. I must go to Pierre, you’ve frightened him.” (*Wide Sargasso Sea*, p. 11-12)

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, in Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo and Gina Wisker’s words: “The mid-winter’s midnight that symbolizes the text speaks for itself: blessed with neither light nor warmth, this is the world of the Other, the world of the feminine.<sup>370</sup>” Dislocation and irony meet from the beginning of *Good Morning, Midnight*, the title highlighting the connection between night and day and the condition of the near-prostitute status of the heroine, which lies at the heart of the dislocated feminine condition in Rhys’s novel. The impossibility of enjoying the day is, furthermore, observed in a poem by Emily Dickinson that appears in *Good Morning, Midnight* and forms the basis for the choice of title:

Good morning, Midnight! I’m coming home,

Day got tired of me — How could I of him?

Sunshine was a sweet place,

I liked to stay —

But Morn didn’t want me — now —

So good night, Day!<sup>371</sup>

As in the case of *Wide Sargassso Sea* and the poem “Obeah Night” that comes as an explanation of its title, in *Good Morning, Midnight* the editor places the poem at the beginning of the book, thus making a reference to the title of the novel.

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<sup>369</sup> Harold Bloom (ed.), *Caribbean Women Writers*, Chelsea House Publishers, Philadelphia, 1997, p. 134.

<sup>370</sup> Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo and Gina Wisker (eds.), *Rites of Passage in Postcolonial Women’s Writing*, *op.cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>371</sup> Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, *op. cit.* - the editor André Deutsch places the poem right after the *Introduction* by A. L. Kennedy and the *Publisher’s Note* written by himself.

Another aspect of the ruptured narration constitutes the shift of the narrative at the middle of the novel. The first person narration does not change, but the narrator does: from Antoinette to Antoinette's husband, Rochester. The use of the first person narration adds to the gaps and fragments present in the narration; nonetheless, having access to the characters' feelings and inner thoughts makes the reader less critical or judgmental about the things said, ultimately generating more empathy and understanding. The narrator's shifting point of view adds an extra layer to the narration.

The dislocation of the narration has its origins in Modernist writing. As Jessica Gildersleeve observes in her study on *Rites of Passage in Postcolonial Women's Writing*, the Modernist mode is characterized by fragmentation and dislocation.<sup>372</sup> Moreover, it emphasizes "cultural break-down, severance from the past traditions, the failure or at least inadequacy of communication, the isolation of the individual and the uncertain nature of self-hood<sup>373</sup>", as John Coates notes in his study on the loss of the past and Modern consciousness. This description epitomizes the experience of the Other, the outsider or the displaced, particularly clear in postcolonial writing. [...] This is underscored in *Good Morning, Midnight*; indeed, Sasha's outsider role is exacerbated by her alcoholism and melancholia. This novel can be seen to suggest women's increasing resistance to traditional concepts of femininity. Sasha "chooses" internal and external drowning — alcoholism and suicide — rather than succumb to patriarchal expectation."<sup>374</sup>

Digging into Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an attempt to show the reader the dislocation that is happening at a textual level. The writers' choice of capturing a fragmented self and narration brings to the surface important colonial meanings of the Caribbean culture, of their identity and mostly of their history. The text abounds in such references and the fact that Rhys chose a Caribbean setting to show such dislocations has a powerful contribution to her works so far, especially given the period in which it was written, the second half of the twentieth century. Dislocation does not only happen in earlier novels which feature important Modernist cities such as Paris and London as settings (the latter also representing the heart of the empire), but also at the very heart of coloniality, back in the Caribbean. I wanted to highlight the complexity of this writer

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<sup>372</sup> Jessica Gildersleeve in Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo and Gina Wisker (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 230.

<sup>373</sup> John Coates, "Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September*: The Loss of the Past and the Modern Consciousness", *Durham University Journal* 51 (1990), p. 207.

<sup>374</sup> Jessica Gildersleeve in Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo and Gina Wisker (eds.), *Rites of Passage, op. cit.*, p. 230.

and the contribution that she makes by bringing to the table the centre of Modernism and of coloniality. Here stands the reason of my choice and of my contribution.

### **When the colonial creates dislocation in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway***

In her letters written at an early age, Virginia Woolf declares her intent in the novel form: “I shall re-form the novel and capture multitudes of things at present fugitive, enclose the whole, and shape infinite strange shapes.<sup>375</sup>” She seems preoccupied by the shape of the novel and intends to recreate it.

The contradictory aspect that characterizes *Mrs Dalloway* is that even though it describes a single day taking place in June 1923, the narration is divided in small detailed fragments. Patrick Parrinder and Andrzej Gasiorek in *The Reinvention of the British and Irish Novel 1880-1940* mention the temporal aspect of *Mrs Dalloway* and the acceptance that the temporality of the novel is not a stable, but on the contrary, a fleeting one. They see the work as preserving disparate moments in time – some taken from a single day in London, others pivoting back to Clarissa's youth, when she entertained friends at her family's country home at Bourton. The end of the novel is also of great importance: “The party at the end of the novel offers the ultimate exercise in tunneling around diverse, interacting characters, at a moment in time.<sup>376</sup>” This analysis has as a goal to capture not just the precise meaning of the textual fragment, but also the advancement of the narration, from the first pages of the novel, until the end of it, when the party takes place.

At the heart of these fragments lie the spatial and temporal connections that can be seen in the novel, or the *chronotope*, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's term, developed in 1937 in *Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel*. Right from the first pages of the novel, the context is clearly set: the experience of a day in “the middle of June”, when “The War was over”. (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 4) The attention is not on the action or plot since not much happens in *Mrs Dalloway*, but on the characters' thoughts through a third-person omniscient narrator. The reflective mode that the characters embrace is typical of a post-war ambiance, in which reminiscences of the past are

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<sup>375</sup> Nigel Nicolson (ed.), *The Flight of the Mind. The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1888-1912*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1983, p. 356.

<sup>376</sup> Patrick Parrinder, Andrzej Gasiorek (eds.), *The Reinvention of the British and Irish Novel 1880-1940*, Bodmin and King's Lynn, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 325.

suitable. At the end of the second page, we already have the setting; the context helps in deciphering and understanding the unsettling chronology and temporal experiences that the reader is subjected to. Woolf uses temporal and spatial markers to situate the different points and narrated scenes, but the scenes keep coming one after the other, and that is how the reader loses track of spatiality and temporality, in the sense in which we don't know any more whether we are talking about past or present events. The absence of chapters or short pauses that would indicate a narrative change inside the novel makes the spatial and temporal deictics even more important and necessary. There are also small breaks inside the narration, such as line breaks, when going from one idea to the other. On the second page of the novel, the reader witnesses a description of London featuring the emblem of London, Big Ben that strikes, along with a series of words and idioms describing the ambiance of the city:

There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh. [...] In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the below and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June. " (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 4)

This enumeration makes the reader lose track of the present, the narrator even emphasising that such an environment helps in "creating every moment afresh". It is like an extremely lively description of London that is suddenly interrupted by the reality of events, the war. The narrator changes the paragraph and goes on with the following:

For it was the middle of June. The War was over [...] (*Ibid.*)

The Modernist techniques used by Woolf to describe the city "suffer" a kind of dislocation when plunging into the reality of the colonial event. Modernism is in a way "shaken" by the colonial, just the way it happened when Modernism as a literary movement suddenly saw the coming of the colonial, in this case the war. It is by intercutting Modernism and colonialism that Woolf is able to create this blending of past and present.

A couple of pages later we can observe the way spatiality and temporality go together. After a brief breakfast scene with Hugh, Clarissa's memories start emerging: "She could remember scene

after scene at Bourton [...]”, “For they might be parted for hundreds of years, she and Peter”, “ — some day, some sights bringing him back to her calmly”, “and then the horror of the moment when some one told her at a concert [...]”, and finally when “She reached the Park gates.” (*Ibid.*, p. 7-8) We can see that each new scene that takes place in the character’s mind, which are usually due to reminiscences from the past, is introduced using spatial or temporal deictics. From time to time, present moment thoughts occur in Clarissa’s mind, and they are usually distinguished from the others with the aid of brackets:

(June had drawn out every leaf on the trees. The mothers of Pimlico gave suck to their young. Messages were passing from the Fleet to the Admiralty. Arlington Street and Piccadilly seemed to chafe the very air in the Park and lift its leaves hotly, brilliantly, on waves of that divine vitality which Clarissa loved. To dance, to ride, she had adored all that.) (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 7)

The novel abounds in descriptions of London; it is also the case in this passage, where important London landmarks are present. It is interesting how the context of London gains even more meaning after the Great War: Clarissa’s youth at Bourton, followed by the description of the London environment, and the protagonist’s life decisions — they all come after the announcement that the war was over. All these descriptions are particularly explainable in a post-war period; it is the war that brought them out, the writing itself shows it. The brackets emphasize their importance, but they are also the markers of a pause in narration. Temporal markers are blurred in this passage. The war produces dislocations in the characters’ relation with time, and thus in the temporal sequence of the narration. War and dislocation go together in this novel. That is how Modernism, in the form of dislocation, and colonialism are intercut in Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*.

Another one of Clarissa’s post-war reminiscences is linked to an evaluation of her situation as a woman. She ponders upon her marriage and whether she married well or not. She remembers Peter and the moments they had together, and suddenly she relives

the grief, the anguish; and then the horror of the moment when some one told her at a concert that he had married a woman met on the boat going to India! Never should she forget all that! Cold, heartless, a prude, he called her. Never could she understand how he cared. But those Indian women did presumably — silly, pretty, flimsy nincompoops. And she wasted her pity. For he was quite happy, he assured her perfectly happy, though he had never done a thing that they talked of; his whole life had been a failure. It made her angry still. (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 8)

After the war, a societal question naturally comes up, that of marriage. There is a disturbance in regard to the idea of marriage: on the one hand, “the grief, the anguish; and then the horror” concerning Peter’s choice of marriage, and on the other hand, the description of “Indian” women as “silly, pretty, flimsy nincompoops”. We can sense the narrator’s irony towards Indian women expressed by the listing of adjectives “silly, pretty, flimsy nincompoops” and their intensity. In order to add weight to the expressed idea, the narrator introduces the opinion of that “some one” who told her about: “Cold, heartless, a prude, he called her.” There is an indirect characterization of Peter’s wife. The fact that Peter married a woman whom he met on the boat, and besides that, an Indian woman, makes Clarissa extremely upset. “Indian” is typically a colonial word here, ironically characterized as “silly, pretty, flimsy nincompoops”, the typical colonial *cliché* if I may say.

As a result, strength and contemplation characterize Clarissa’s being and the world that she experiences: “She felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on.” (*Ibid.*)

India is an element through which temporality and spatiality are expressed. The scenes treating the colonial time spent in India, and their influence produced upon the character expressed throughout the writing, are revealing. How are these scenes introduced and what is their colonial impact upon the characters and inside the poetics themselves? Peter Walsh ponders upon the changes that his absence and implicitly the post-war period had made upon him and society:

[...] a change of some sort had undoubtedly taken place. What did the young people think about? Peter Walsh asked himself.

Those five years — 1918 to 1923 — had been, he suspected, somehow very important. People looked different. Newspapers seemed different. Now, for instance, there was a man writing quite openly about water-closets in a respectable weekly. That you couldn’t have done ten years ago — written quite openly in a respectable weekly. And then, this taking up a stick of rouge, or a powder-puff, and making up in public. On board ship coming home there were lots of young men and girls — Betty and Bertie he remembered in particular — carrying on quite openly; the old mother sitting and watching them with her knitting, cool as a cucumber. The girl would stand still and powder her nose in front of every one. [...]

Who was it now who had done that? Peter Walsh asked himself, turning into the Broad Walk. And they weren’t engaged; just having a good time; no feelings hurt on either side. As hard as nails she was — Betty Whatsurname — but a thorough good sort. (*Ibid.*)

The narrator uses indirect speech and also free indirect speech, to reveal the characters’ inner thoughts. The free indirect style “What did the young people think about?” from the beginning of the passage and “Who was it now who had done that?” towards the end of it, enables access to the



character's private thoughts, but they also create a distance between himself and society, if we think about his departure from the colony. The adjective "different", present twice, emphasizes the same idea. The period chosen by the narrator for his departure, 1918-1923, is strategic. The narration's after-war period coincides with the character's departure in the colonies. Thus, two colonial temporalities intertwine in this novel, and the main character responsible for this temporality is Peter Walsh, similar to North's role in *The Years*, who comes back to London after having experienced a post-war period in Africa. The dislocation due to colonial events, such as the war or Peter's colonial experience can be found in the narration as well, mostly because of the changes and advances that occurred during that time. The switches operated between past and present times are also due to the character's binary thinking. Two temporal images oppose here: on the one hand, there are "Those five years — 1918 to 1923 — [that] had been, he suspected, somehow very important.", and on the other hand, there is "now", which appears twice here. The post-war period appears in between dashes, which shows its importance, thus giving the reader time to assimilate the information. The verb in the past tense, "suspected" followed by the description of the world outside, of what he perceives, makes the reader understand that he draws his own conclusions. The private and public spheres have redefined their meanings and that seems to bother him. The narrator talks about things that are considered revolutionary for the period after the war: "Now, for instance, there was a man writing quite openly about water-closets in a respectable weekly. That you couldn't have done ten years ago — written quite openly in a respectable weekly. And then, this taking up a stick of rouge, or a powder-puff, and making up in public." What does that say about Modernism and colonialism? It is the colonial era, the war in particular, that opened up and made room for such changes. In this sense, it is not only Modernism that opens up for the colonial, as we have seen it at the beginning of the chapter, but also the colonial that acts upon Modernism.

The after-war London reshapes itself through the little bits left behind by the war. The changes can be seen even from the "board ship coming home". The change is not only in the way people look, or the way newspapers are written, but there is a change in women's behaviours, for instance, their social conventions. Interestingly, it is precisely a male character who notices that, and it bothers him perhaps as much as a woman. The appellation "Whatshername" in the expression "Betty Whatshername" suggests, as is generally the case in Woolf's writings, the general observation that she makes on women. It could be anyone, any woman, no matter her name.

Apart from Peter Walsh, another important character is Septimus Smith, a shell-shocked war soldier. War is an experience that has changed him to the core. The dislocation produced is noticeable in the narrator's choice of words, but also in the incoherence felt by the reader. Here

dislocation applies to a different notion, that of a change of identity. There is a certain kind of madness perceptible in his chaotic way of thinking, perceptible in the dysfunction that operates at a writing level. First, he alludes to knowing everything, knowing the meaning of the world.

Septimus let himself think about horrible things, as she [his wife] could too, if she tried. He had grown stranger and stranger. He said people were talking behind the bedroom walls. Mrs. Filmer thought it odd. He saw things too — he had seen an old woman's head in the middle of a fern. Yet he could be happy when he chose. They went to Hampton Court on top of a bus, and they were perfectly happy. All the little red and yellow flowers were out on the grass, like floating lamps he said, and talked and chattered and laughed, making up stories. Suddenly he said, 'Now we will kill ourselves,' when they were standing by the river, and he looked at it with a look which she had seen in his eyes when a train went by, or an omnibus — a look as if something fascinated him; and felt he was going from her and she caught him by the arm. But going home he was perfectly quiet — perfectly reasonable. He would argue with her about killing themselves; and explain how wicked people were; how he could see them making up lies as they passed in the street. He knew all their thoughts, he said; he knew everything. He knew the meaning of the world, he said. (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 72)

The third person narration (omniscient in this case) brings a broader view on the events than the first-person narration, in the latter case the whole narration being perceived through a single person's eyes. I think that the third person narration is a suitable choice when recounting colonial or historically charged events since we need to distance ourselves in order to narrate objective facts. The repetitive occurrence of the construction "he said" enables the narrator to use the indirect speech, which in turn highlights that the sentences come from Septimus, the one who suffered through the war, as in: "He knew the meaning of the world, he said", thus projecting a unique view on the things that had happened. There is a certain strangeness or ambivalence of the types of discourse (disrupted boundaries). I sense a free indirect turn of speech, disrupted by "he said", but which reports the character's thoughts and turn of speech, as well as his madness. Furthermore, the adverb "suddenly" followed by the adverb "now" express abruptness, a change in the narrative tone.

A couple of pages later, Septimus questions the meaning of the world. Instability and confusion are both present here: "It might be possible, Septimus thought, looking at England from the train window, as they left Newhaven; it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning." (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 96-97)

Septimus sees things differently. He reflects upon the possibility of a world without meaning, thus rendering a post-war chaotic image for the reader. The structure of the first sentence is extremely rich in meaning. He looks at England with a certain distance, "from the train window", and somehow examines the current situation of London. Septimus's role is essential in the novel,

that is probably why Woolf called him Mrs Dalloway's double.<sup>377</sup> This structural doubling to the two main but separate characters is interesting to consider from a Modern-colonial perspective. The epitome of the Modern woman who, from the beginning "would buy the flowers *herself*<sup>378</sup>" stands in opposition, but in a complementary way, to the colonial image projected by Septimus, who had a rich experience in the colonies. Mrs Dalloway is in London, the heart of the empire, whereas Septimus comes back from the colonies, and it is in both characters being in contact with the colonial world, but in different forms, that they complete each other and can thus be considered doubles.

The sudden or abrupt narrative is also characterized by the continual shifting between past and present. There is more than just a necessity; for Woolf there is a temporal "pressure" ... and that's how the moments emerging from the characters' consciousness suddenly gain meaning. That happens when Clarissa "plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there — the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings". (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 40)

Shifting from past to present tenses makes the reader experience a certain flux, thus recalling Woolf's novel *The Waves*, and that is ultimately one of the principal effects of her writing. Maria DiBattista writes about a natural rhythm present in *Mrs Dalloway*, like pulsations, rising and falling, associated but not limited to Clarissa's heart. To expand and contract is to rise and fall, build up and come down, like waves, she adds.<sup>379</sup>

Woolf breaks temporality and introduces the spatialization of form in the novel. As Joseph Frank notes in *The Idea of Spatial Form*, since language proceeds in time it is impossible to approach the simultaneity of perception except by breaking up temporal sequence.<sup>380</sup> As readers, we cannot attempt to experience all sensations, both past and present, engaging all our perceptions at the same time. It is by mastering the art of narration that Woolf manages to create this blend of temporal and spatial effects and evoke them to the reader through multiple narrative effects. There is the overlapping of narrative plans, and the limit or border between them is extremely sensitive, sometimes imperceptible. By breaking temporality, a process of dislocation takes place, as a consequence of it.

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<sup>377</sup> Francine Prose (ed.), *The Mrs Dalloway Reader*, Orlando, Harcourt, 2004.

<sup>378</sup> My Italics.

<sup>379</sup> Maria DiBattista, *Virginia Woolf's Major Novels: The Fables of Anon*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1980, p. 26-27.

<sup>380</sup> Joseph Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

The blurring of chronology creates space for a juxtaposition of temporalities, an endless line of events coming one after the other. However, the narration of *Mrs Dalloway* has an actual frame, a certain rigidity needed in order to support the narration: the novel begins with the idea of the party and the beginning of its planning, and it ends with the party actually taking place.

The end of *Mrs Dalloway* describes the party held by the hostess, which turns out to be a success. Most of the characters presented in the novel are there, people from her present and past as well. Mrs Dalloway learns about Septimus's suicide, which she sees in a positive light:

Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death.

But this young man who had killed himself — had he plunged holding his treasure? 'If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy,' she had said to herself once, coming down, in white. (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 202)

In the end, the relationship between Clarissa and Peter improves. It is also a way to restore the troubling consequences of the war, and regain order. That shows Woolf's pacifist nature, to stop the war, or at least the bad consequences associated with it, and preserve peace instead. The dislocation experienced by the war is being relocated here.

In *Mrs Dalloway*'s original ending, the protagonist kills herself, and Septimus is not at all mentioned. This case is similar to Rhys, when for *Voyage in the Dark* she first imagines that her protagonist would die following the abortion, and then imagines an open ending, in which Anna would have the baby and would go on with her life. In both cases the second ending imagined by the writers is more charged, colonially speaking. Septimus, the figure that embodies coloniality, is absent from Woolf's first way of thinking, whereas in Rhys's case the endless circle in which the protagonist finds herself is clearly presented in the final version of the novel.

Woolf's desire to implement a new form is reflected in the way she ends her novel. Evidence of *Mrs Dalloway*'s important narrative choices can be found in Woolf's *Diary*. The following passage is for example an entry from September 17th, 1924, less than a year before the novel's original publication:

*Mrs Dalloway* seeks to reconcile formal order with the profusion of experience. Artistic probing for life's form is complemented by a sense of the freedom of the imagination, discrete details of sensory experience, spontaneous digressions, subconscious processes, and emotional reversals and effusions. This

principle of freedom and disorder generates a shifting point of view, a shifting use of time and often a dislocated syntax.<sup>381</sup>

The “digressions, subconscious processes and emotional reveals and effusions” were mentioned in Laurence Sterne, author of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759), a writer whom Woolf admired greatly and who had an influence on her. The digressions are so vastly used here, the past intertwines the present to a point that we don’t even know which is the digression and which is the actual (focus of the) narration. The shifting point of view is created by the multitude of characters’ thoughts that the reader has access to. All the characteristics mentioned in this excerpt are characteristics of Modernist writing, which in turn creates the medium for the colonial signifiers that Woolf’s texts bear.

Woolf notes in her *Diary* the intent of providing a shifting point of view, charged with confusion. As we know, the past participle is used to create the present and past perfect tenses. The form of the past participle is often similar to the past tense form.

It is a disgrace that I write nothing, or if I write, write sloppily, using nothing but present participles. I find them very helpful in my last lap of *Mrs. D*. There I am now — at last at the party, which is to begin in the kitchen, and climb slowly upstairs. It is to the most complicated, spirited, solid piece, knitting together everything and ending on three notes, at different stages of the staircase, each saying something to sum up Clarissa. Who shall say these things? Peter, Richard, and Sally Seton perhaps: but I don’t want to tie myself down to that yet. Now I do think this might be the best of my endings and come off, perhaps. (Leonard Woolf (ed.), *Virginia Woolf: A Writer’s Diary*, p. 65)

Woolf pays more attention to the choice of the temporal aspects than to the characters who would say things: “Who shall say these things? Peter, Richard, and Sally Seton perhaps: but I don’t want to tie myself down to that yet.” *Mrs Dalloway*’s dislocation has in view important temporal aspects since the blending of past and present times is what brings to surface the Modernism-colonialism duality.

*The Years* and *Mrs Dalloway*, even if written at different times — *Mrs Dalloway*, published in 1925, being her fourth novel and written right after *The Voyage Out*, *Night and Day* and *Jacob’s Room*, and *The Years* published in 1936, being the last novel published during her lifetime — both embrace dislocation, but in a different way. Whereas at the beginning of her writing, the fragmented and elliptical writing style is at stake, the situation changes towards the end. Woolf’s lack of clear

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<sup>381</sup> Oddvar Holmesland, *Form as Compensation for Life: Fictive Patterns in Virginia Woolf’s Novels*, Columbia, Camden House, 1998, p. 27.

temporal markers as demonstrated in *Mrs Dalloway* changes towards the end of her life by writing *The Years*. It is notable that after a lifetime of writing, when creating *The Years*, Woolf prefers to come back to a well-organized type of narration, where each chapter is attributed to a year in particular, but for this time her thinking is perhaps more mature, tracing colonial features differently and more deeply. In *The Years*, dislocation lies less in the narratorial organization, and more in the substance of the argument.

The word “dislocation” is itself present in “Present Day”, the last chapter of the novel, following the chapter called “1918”, the year that marks the end of the First World War. Back from the colonies, North feels like an outsider, he feels that he does not fit into the society of London:

It seemed to him that they were still cutting little private jokes about Jones minor winning the long jump; and old Foxy, or whatever the headmaster’s name was. It was like hearing small boys at a private school, hearing these young men talk politics. “I’m right ... you’re wrong.” At their age, he thought, he had been in the trenches; he had seen men killed. But was that a good education? He shifted from one foot to another. At their age, he thought, he had been alone on a farm sixty miles from a white man, in control of a herd of sheep. But was that a good education? Anyhow it seemed to him, half hearing their argument, looking at their gestures, catching their slang, that they were all the same sort. Public school and university, he sized them up as he looked over his shoulder. But where are the Sweeps and the Sewer-men, the Seamstresses and the Stevedores? he thought, making a list of trades that began with the letter S. For all Delia’s pride in her promiscuity, he thought, glancing at the people, there were only Dons and Duchesses, and what other words begin with D? he asked himself, as he scrutinised the placard again — Drabs and Drones? (*Y*, p. 384-385)

Things do not mean to him what they used to, because the temporal gap that he experienced creates “a dislocation between the word and the reality”. It is ultimately a dislocation of the self because of his colonial experience. He realizes that since he was gone it is as if things didn’t change: “It seemed to him that they were still cutting little private jokes”, the adverb “still” is quite striking regarding his experience and the way he changed, contrary to the things around him, which did not. This dislocation of the self is to be observed in the following sentences: “He *shifted* from one foot to the other”, “he had been alone on a farm sixty miles from a *white man*” and “catching *their slang*”<sup>382</sup>.

Spatial and temporal coordinates define North’s colonial experience and ultimately his development (change of perspective). We can identify a dislocation of the self through the passing of time, or the time gap of the individual, North in this case. “North” — the name itself bears a direction, whereas he is clearly lacking one. The passage is a proof that he is looking for directions.

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<sup>382</sup> my Italics.

His North African experience and the influence it has had on him are to be found in his first name. The fact that he shifts from one foot to the other is suggestive of hesitation between past and present, and lack of roots. The spatial marker “sixty miles from a white man” introduces the reader to the colonies, in the absence of white men. The repetition of “But was that a good education?” suggests doubt, but also the uncertainty of the self and of the values of the past.

It is the acknowledgment of a new space and the time spent there that reflects the dislocation of the self. It is only by coming back to London, and comparing the two, the centre and the colony that one can experience this dislocation and time gap. The differences that he sees are a subjective way of perceiving reality: “it seemed to him”. Then comes remoteness between him and the London people: “they were all the same sort”. Then, his act of taking distance from the Londoners continues:

He turned. A nice fresh-faced boy with a freckled nose in ordinary day clothes was looking at him. If he didn't take care he would be drawn in too. Nothing would be easier than to join a society, to sign what Patrick called “a manifesto.” But he did not believe in joining societies, in signing manifestoes. He turned back to the desirable residence with its three-quarters of an acre of garden and running water in all the bedrooms. People met, he thought, pretending to read, in hired halls. And one of them stood on a platform. There was the pump-handle gesture; the wringing-wet-clothes gesture; and then the voice, oddly detached from the little figure and tremendously magnified by the loudspeaker, went booming and bawling round the hall: Justice! Liberty! For a moment, of course, sitting among knees, wedged in tight, a ripple, a nice emotional quiver, went over the skin; but next morning, he said to himself as he glanced again at the house-agents' placard, there's not an idea, not a phrase that would feed a sparrow. What do they mean by Justice and Liberty? he asked, all these nice young men with two or three hundred a year. Something's wrong, he thought; there's a gap, a dislocation, between the word and the reality. If they want to reform the world, he thought, why not begin there, at the centre, with themselves? He turned on his heel and ran straight into an old man in a white waistcoat.

“Hullo!” he said, holding out his hand. (*Ibid.*)

The distance that the character takes is not only a personal one, concerning “self”, but also a political act, or non-act as is expressed in the sentence: “[...] he did not believe in joining societies, in signing manifestoes.” Joining a society or signing a manifesto makes echo to Woolf's *Three Guineas* in which throughout “the daughters of educated men [...] [who] possess the greatest power of all; that is, the influence that they can exert upon educated men. [An] influence [that] can be effective in helping you to prevent war” [in order to] sign your manifesto or join your society”. (*TG*, p. 97)

Through the character of North, the narrator embodies the African experience, and that of the colonies, more generally, which are opposed to the people from the centre. The distance here is seen through the use of the pronoun “they” and the noun “centre”, towards the end of the passage, the last one denouncing the centre of the empire, London. We can access to North’s thoughts who already thinks like someone who is not part of the centre, of them: “If they want to *reform the world*, he thought, why not *begin there, at the centre, with themselves?*”<sup>383</sup> This sentence contains several spatial markers such as “world”, “there” and “centre”. The perspective that he is taking is one of the distance from the centre, as if he would not be part of it, and that is throughout the temporal gap that the character experiences. The temporal gap is due to his colonial experience, a mark of coloniality, intercut by a Modernist gesture, that of “reform[ing] the world”. This particular vision that he has on things is a mark of the colonial time that the character experiences.

Second, he notices “Justice! Liberty! For a moment, of course, sitting among knees, wedged in tight, a ripple, a nice emotional quiver, went over the skin”, but not for long, because next morning, “there’s not an idea, not a phrase that would feed a sparrow”. He perceives superficiality and lack in the “new” world that he entered when coming back to England. He seems confused: “What do they mean by Justice and Liberty? he asked”. The crucial sentence here is: “There’s a gap, a dislocation, between the word and the reality”. Things do not mean what they used to mean or what they should mean, which emphasizes the temporal gap between his self, and his time spent in the colonies, and the outside world, or England. There is a gap that operates at a spatial level as well: between England and Africa, or between the centre and the colonies. Whereas in *Mrs Dalloway*, the emphasis was placed on the temporal structures, in *The Years*, we can perceive a significant contribution in terms of spatial effects.

A dislocation between the imperial centre and the colonies is also present in *Street Haunting: A London Adventure*. The narrator proposes a “colonial tour”, one that has a cyclical shape, beginning in Cornwall, and going through the Rhine, the pyramids, visiting the “negros”, then India, China, and finally coming back to Edmonton for this time:

A tour in Cornwall with a visit to the tin mines was thought worthy of voluminous record. People went slowly up the Rhine and did portraits of each other in Indian ink, sitting reading on deck beside a coil of rope; they measured the pyramids; were lost to civilization for years; converted negroes in pestilential swamps. This packing up and going off, exploring deserts and catching fevers, settling in India for a

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<sup>383</sup> my Italics.



lifetime, penetrating even to China and then returning to lead a parochial life at Edmonton, tumbles and tosses upon the dusty floor like an uneasy sea, so restless the English are, with the waves at their very door.<sup>384</sup>

Woolf talks here about the tourists who invade London in the summer. The tour begins in England, crosses numerous colonial spaces, and then returns to England. The influences of the colonies are certainly present, and so is the dislocation or difference between the centre and the periphery, with a closer approach upon the former: “So restless the English are, with the waves at their very door”. The metaphor of the Indian ink, previously appearing in *Mrs Dalloway*, where “curls of Indian ink” (*Mrs Dalloway*, p. 60) were worn by each respectable woman, is used here once again. People “did portraits to each other” just like in *Mrs Dalloway* where “there was design, art, everywhere” (*Ibid.*)

The intersection of Modernism and colonialism, as the main methodological tool in this study, is absolutely necessary to unravel the dislocation that operates in Woolf’s writings. Entire passages in which Modernism prevails are intercut by the introduction of the war, which brings a dislocated writing. The same applies when a dislocation of the self is installed due to the colonial experience of the characters, in which it is mainly their perception that changes and that creates the time gap.

### **Mansfield’s dislocation of the self: “Millie” and “Ole Underwood”**

Literary (Modernist) and colonial implications contribute to the foundation of Mansfield’s short stories. On the one hand, there is English Modernism, situated at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. This coincides with Mansfield’s early period of writing, first in the colony, and then in England, once she leaves New Zealand for England. The writer’s early period is characterized by looking for a sense or meaning in her new life and search for her memories about New Zealand. Anne Besnault, a specialist of Katherine Mansfield, Modernist literature and criticism, and the short story in English, provides a closer look on the period in question. In the *Afterword* to a new collection of short stories, translated into French,

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<sup>384</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Street Haunting: A London Adventure*, *op. cit.*

dedicated to Mansfield's early writing, she notes: "entre les années 1880 et 1920 [...], la nouvelle débarrassée de ces mêmes exigences formelles, offrit un espace d'exploration et de liberté esthétique permettant de transmettre la vision d'un monde en rupture, résistant aux concepts de totalité, de causalité et de finalité."<sup>385</sup> In this period the Modernist movement emerges, but there is at the same time the influence of those coming from the colonies. The so-called "monde en rupture" that Anne Besnault evokes is precisely the change that takes place in literature. Even the choice that Mansfield makes to embrace the short story is revealing of her colonial status, the short story being a minor genre. Besnault talks about Mansfield as being an "artiste marginale s'exprimant dans un genre mineur"<sup>386</sup>. As a consequence, Mansfield's journey becomes a search of the self. In April 1920, Katherine Mansfield writes in her *Journal*:

True to oneself! Which self? Which of my many — well really that's what it looks like coming to — hundreds of selves. For what with complexes and repressions and reactions and vibrations and reflections, these are moments when I feel I am nothing but the small clerk of some hotel without a proprietor, who has all his work cut out to enter the names and hand the keys to the wilful guests.<sup>387</sup>

This journal record (dated from April 1920) bearing the marks of a Modernist writing, shows important colonial features as well. The "moments" that Mansfield refers to make allusion to Woolf's *Moments of Being*. But these moments here are experienced because of the loss of the self, coming from the writer's colonial background. The emphasis on a loss of proprietorial control, as this is linked to the dissolution of the firm boundaries of selfhood, is most striking in this passage.<sup>388</sup> The hotel and the proprietor, in conjunction with the image of emptiness that it alludes to and the visual metaphor of the "work being cut out to enter the names and hand the keys to the wilful guests" bears similarities with Jean Rhys's hotel rooms and the blank or gap that they convey. The primary dislocation caused by the colonial context experienced in New Zealand, which was continued by the condition of the exiled in England, is afterwards reinforced by her brother's death, by yet another colonial event, the war. Colonial signifiers for this "cut out" multiplicity of selves can be found in the sentences: "True to oneself! Which self? Which of my many — well really that's what it looks like coming to — hundreds of selves" reinforced by the "complexes and repressions and reactions and vibrations and reflections", which are signs of complex experiences.

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<sup>385</sup> Anne Besnault, *Afterword* to Katherine Mansfield, *Le Pin, les moineaux, et toi et moi : Nouvelles inédites*, Paris, Edition du Chemin de Fer, 2020, p. 262.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>387</sup> C. K. Stead (ed.), Katherine Mansfield: *Journals and Letters*, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

<sup>388</sup> Emily Ridge, "Workmanship and Wilderness: Katherine Mansfield on Edith Warthon's the Age of Innocence" in Gerri Kimber (ed.), *Katherine Mansfield and the Post(colonial)*, p. 93.

Mansfield's short stories operate around the idea of the self, and the multitude of selves that occur in her fiction, the latter forming a basis from which dislocation is developed. The word "dislocation" here means division, disintegration, and has thus a different value and meaning than in Woolf and Rhys's texts and situations. For Woolf a dislocation of the self is installed due to the time gap that the characters experience after their experience in the colonies. It is like a movement, a shifting. Rhys's texts capture a fragmented self in which important historical and cultural details are involved. This dislocation is the one that weighs the most, mainly because of the colonial history involved, the situations of inferiority/superiority, power and status of the Caribbean people.

The various selves present in Mansfield's works are developing selves. Her biographer, Angela Smith, writes about "her developing awareness of divisions in the self<sup>389</sup>", which makes us go back to the initial division present in Mansfield's life, the one when she was still in New Zealand. This aspect is particularly important because of the colonial context that she tries to develop in her fiction. Janet Wilson, in a research questioning "'Where is Katherine?': Longing and (un)belonging", goes back to the initial background of the writer: "Crucially moulded by the disjunctures between the imperial and the colonial worlds, and the permanent dislocation caused by being between both but not fully belonging to either, Mansfield, even before she first left New Zealand in 1903, laid claim to the dual sources of the settler's authority and authenticity."<sup>390</sup> Majumdar also argues that "How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped" — a dreamy allegorical play that explores the duality of restriction and freedom, the banality of routine and the excitement of spontaneous behaviour through a romanticized opposition of Western and non-Western cultures — reflects Katherine Mansfield's understanding of the relation between the European and the Maori, which often surfaces in *The Urewera Notebook*.<sup>391</sup>

Unbelonging is synonymous with dislocations in Mansfield's case, which initiates the context for numerous selves or lives. Her other biographer, Claire Tomalin, writes that she wanted to "Try all sorts of lives — one (was) so very small<sup>392</sup>".

Contrary to the freedom released by this spectrum of lives, there are also limitations associated with it. Patrick D. Morrow examines the limitation of Mansfield's fiction: "For Katherine

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<sup>389</sup> Angela Smith, *Katherine Mansfield: A Literary Life*, p. 27.

<sup>390</sup> Janet Wilson, "Where is Katherine?": Longing and (un)belonging in the Works of Katherine Mansfield in Gerri Kimber, Janet Wilson (eds.), *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays*, p. 179.

<sup>391</sup> Saikat Majumdar, *Modernism and the Banality of Empire*, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>392</sup> Claire Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life*, p. 30.

Mansfield, to define was to confine. To limit oneself to a single, fixed identity was the ultimate crime against the individual self. She wanted a freer existence.<sup>393</sup>”

In Mansfield’s works dislocation is present in several places. “Ole Underwood”, “Millie” and “The Woman at the Store” are some of her stories in which the template of colonial writing surfaces.<sup>394</sup> “Millie” (1913) is a short story written five years after her definitive arrival in England, and two years after her launch as a writer in *Rhythm*. It is about a girl who suffers from isolation, and it is precisely the tension that is inside the character that leads to a dislocated self. Saikat Majumdar delimits the levels of understanding of Mansfield’s short fiction:

“Millie” literalizes a tension that characterizes much of Mansfield’s fiction, though usually in a more subtle, covert, or metaphorical form: a tension between a routine-encased domestic space on one hand and the powerful undercurrent of violence and trauma on the other, both of them uneasy and unavoidable legacies of colonial history.<sup>395</sup>

The beginning of the short story finds Millie in her house alone since her husband and some other men have left to find Harrison, an English man who has supposedly killed Mr. Williamson. Later that day, she finds a man lying on the floor in her garden. She feeds him without knowing who he is. Then, she realizes it is actually Harrison but she does not care and continues to give him food, promising that he will be set free. Millie’s first reaction when she sees the man in her house, lying on the floor and in pain, is to comfort him since “He was not much more than a boy, with fair hair and a growth of hair down on his lips and chin” (“Millie”, p. 574) and “Nothing but a kid.” (*Ibid.*) Millie’s immediate reaction along with the boy’s physical description offers a complete image of the feminine self that wakes up in her. Majumdar’s observation on the reflection image that Millie sees and maternal instinct that is being drawn clarifies the feminine approach of the writer, and of her poetics: “In her isolation, Millie transforms the young man into a mirror reflection of her own need to mother another. Her gender thus frames Lillie’s isolation. She is a woman alone in the backcountry with time on her hands and no company [...]”<sup>396</sup> Gender meets coloniality: “She is a woman alone in the backcountry.” There is a dislocation of the self present throughout the entire short story. The reaction that she has at the beginning towards Harrison changes radically in the end,

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<sup>393</sup> Patrick D. Morrow, *Katherine Mansfield’s Fiction*, Bowling Green, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993, p. 11.

<sup>394</sup> Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, *Maoriland: New Zealand Literature (1872-1914)*, Wellington, Victoria University Press, 2006, p. 155.

<sup>395</sup> Saikat Majumdar, *Modernism and the Banality of Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30-31.

acting unexpectedly. The sudden scene of change that actually shows the dislocation happens while eating when Harrison asks Millie:

“When are they coming back?” He stammered.

At that moment she knew. She stood, holding the plate, staring. He was Harrison. He was the English Johnny who’d killed Mr. Williamson. “I know who you are,” she said, very slowly, “yer can’t fox me. That’s who you are. I must have been blind in me two eyes not to ‘ave known from the first.” He made a movement with his hands as that was all nothing. “When are they coming back?” And she meant to say “Any minute. They’re or their way now.” Instead she said to the dreadful, frightened face, “Not till ‘arf-past ten. (“Millie”, p. 575)

In her isolation, she still accepts him, even if she now knows who he is: “the English Johnny”. Thus, the initial dislocation, her not knowing the man’s identity, is being reinforced. Even if she knows who he is, her voice is still weak: “She meant to say [...] instead she said to the dreadful, frightened face.” In the face of “the English Johnny” she has no power, as a woman and as a colonial. Isolation and dislocation go hand in hand in this story. It is Millie’s isolated self that plunges herself even more in yet another experience that contributes to her dislocated identity:

And then she sat, quiet, thinking of nothing at all, her red swollen hands rolled in her apron, her feet, her feet stuck out in front of her, her little head with the thick screw of dark hair, drooped on her chest. Tick-tick went the kitchen clock, the ashes clinked in the grate, and the venetian blind knocked against the kitchen window. (*Ibid.*, p. 573)

There is a certain vacuum in the quality of Millie’s life; time here appears to be repetitive.<sup>397</sup> Repetition here is a cause of loneliness. Doreen D’Cruz and John C. Ross, referring to loneliness and the poetics of isolation, note:

[...] the state of isolation is shown at its inception as being intractably resistant to narrative mobility, because time acquires no significant shape. Hence, the narrator’s ingress encounters at the same time the fundamental inarticularity of a temporality that is as undistinguished as the monotony of the burnt paddock stretching out into the distance; this time-without meaning lasts until a point when the self interacts with the environment to find there some prop for the extension of the self. Millie traces the self-doubling of isolation in a process that takes Millie from the gradual divestment of memory, through the narrative stasis of the present, to a self-othering that is the product of isolation.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>398</sup> Doreen D’Cruz and John C. Ross. *The Lonely and the Alone: the Poetics of Isolation in New Zealand Fiction*, Amsterdam - New York, Rodopi, 2011, p. 30.

Isolation creates a world without boundaries in which “time acquires no significant shape”. This resistance to narrative mobility that characterizes Mansfield’s “Millie” contributes to shaping the Modernist short story. But at the same time, this immobility comes out of isolation, a colonial theme. In this case, it is the colonial that helps in the shaping of the Modern, and further clarifies it.

The protagonist’s childlessness includes her isolation, although she denies this to herself as a lack<sup>399</sup>: “I wonder why we never had no kids. ...” She shrugged her shoulders — gave it up. “Well, I’ve never missed them. I wouldn’t be surprised if Sid had, though. He’s softer than me.” (“Millie”, p. 573) Isolation and the feminine condition go together in “Millie”:

Yet, the extent of her self-deception as well as self-repression is underscored in the subjectivity that she gives birth to in her isolation. It is that of the mother [...] Millie, like the woman at the store, finds in isolation a dimension of self that is supplementary, or antithetical to her dominant construction by men. To this extent, the female double is the spectre of what society or chance had repressed in the woman.<sup>400</sup>

Even though Millie feels isolated and alone, she does not lose her sense of womanhood: “I’ll teach you to play tricks with a woman”. (“Millie”, p. 574) However, towards the end of the story, maternal instincts lead her to play hard on men and defend the man in front of her:

She moved across the veranda and sat down beside him, the plate on her knees. “‘Ere — try a bit.” She broke the bread and butter into little pieces, and she thought, “They won’t ketch him. Not if I can’t ‘elp it. Men is all beasts. I don’t care wot ‘e’s done, or wot ‘e ‘asn’t done. See ‘im through, Millie Evans. ‘E’s nothing but a sick kid.<sup>401</sup>

Another short story in which the dislocation of the self gains ground is “Ole Underwood” (1912). It is the story of a man who regains his freedom from killing a man with whom his wife had been unfaithful thirty years ago. He returns to the scene of his old crime, at the time when he murdered a man after having raped or seduced his wife. In this story we can see Mansfield’s recurrent temporal pattern, of a past that keeps coming back.

Mansfield’s use of several Modernist techniques is to be observed in this short story. There is, for example, the shifting focalization that the reader can experience, a trait that is present at the narrative level. The description of the main character suddenly turns into the description of the surroundings, without any justified reason. The reader is thus being dislocated for a while. There is

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<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>400</sup> Doreen D’Cruz and John C. Ross. *The Lonely and the Alone: the Poetics of Isolation in New Zealand Fiction*, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 576.

a certain temporal gap in the narration that causes dislocation. The following passage constitutes the very beginning of the short story, portraying Ole Underwood:

Down the windy hill stalked Ole Underwood. He carried a black umbrella in one hand, in the other a red and white spotted handkerchief knotted into a lump. He wore a black peaked cap like a pilot; gold rings gleamed in his ears and his little eyes snapped into two sparks. Like two sparks they glowed in the smoulder of his bearded face. ("Ole Underwood" in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield*, p. 562)

Then, come the description of nature and the environment that surrounds him. The shift is made mainly to present the New Zealand landscape in which the story takes place, thus emphasizing its importance:

On one side of the hill grew a forest of pines from the road right down to the sea. On the other side short tufted grass and little bushes of white Manuka flower. The pine trees roared like waves in their topmost branches, their stems creaked like the timber of ships; in the windy air flew the white Manuka flower. (*Ibid.*)

The abrupt shifting from the description of the protagonist to the description of the landscape bears in itself a technique used by Mansfield since it breaks the traditional way of writing. So the initial description ends in favour of one mainly emphasizing her childhood home country. The *Manuka tree* with its Manuka flower along with the aloe tree, usually present in Mansfield's descriptions of the south of France, are two trees that render a significant image of a home in Mansfield's case. The "little bushes of white Manuka flower" along with the "forest of pines" and the "pine trees" are characteristic of New Zealand, both types of vegetation appearing twice in this passage. The Modern here makes room for the colonial, the Modern technique enhancing the presence of the colonial. The first description is written in a Modern style, showing a vivid image of the described character. The second one is also in a Modern style, but using important colonial features, mainly the New Zealand environment. In this sense, we've got the "tufted grass and little bushes of white Manuka flower", "the timber of ships", and the "windy" atmosphere, specific to a colonial environment. The fact that there is no narrative gap between the two shows the blending of the Modern with the colonial.

The descriptive part ends here, followed by a section in which the narrator gives Ole Underwood the floor, with a rhythmic monologue, composed of interjections:

“Ah-k!” shouted Ole Underwood, shaking his umbrella at the wind bearing down upon him, beating him, half strangling him with his black cape. “Ah-k!” shouted the wind a hundred times as loud, and filled his mouth and nostrils with dust. Something inside Ole Underwood’s breast beat like a hammer. One, two — one, two — never stopping, never changing. He couldn’t do anything. It wasn’t loud. No, it didn’t make a noise — only a thud. (*Ibid.*, p. 572)

The writing tone of the story is set in the first sentences. A certain disgust produced by the interjection “Ah-k!” Along with the violence expressed by the image of the umbrella “beating, half strangling” and the “black cap”. Both Ole Underwood and the wind shout, and the hammer, a recurrent auditory image in the story, “never stopping, never changing”, appear here.

The narrator in “Ole Underwood” uses a subjective narrative. An example in this sense is at the beginning of the short story, the episode evoked earlier, when the narrator tells the story in a way that the reader feels pity and empathy towards the character. It is a limited narration, from the narrator’s point of view. It then continues further in the story: “He looked up at the big red prison perched on the hill and he pulled a face as if he wanted to cry.” (*Ibid.*, p. 573)

The narrator uses a shifted perspective. Reality is distorted and lacks shape in “Ole Underwood” because the reader can never know for sure whether the main character comes from jail or not:

Something inside Ole Underwood’s breast beat like a hammer. [...] like someone beating on an iron in a prison, someone in a secret place [...] trying to get free. Do what he would, fumble at his coat, throw his arms about, spit, swear, he couldn’t stop the noise. Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop! Ole Underwood began to shuffle and run. (*Ibid.*, p. 562-563)

Ambiguity rules the story from the beginning, the reader does not know where Ole Underwood comes from and where he is running to. Expressions such as “like someone” and “as if” express his borderline existence, without clear shape, and certainly without clear spatial and temporal settings.

Susan Reid, while analyzing “Ole Underwood”, observes an interesting fact about Mansfield’s short story’s temporality and the boundaries that the writer experiences in her writing:

The importance of memory and the past in shaping the present, marked in much of Mansfield’s work by a porosity between temporal and spatial boundaries, thus complicates the ‘nowness’ associated with the manifesto. The manifestos of the period would have us believe that to be a modernist writer is by definition to break with the past; though we can see that Mansfield is attempting this in her experiments



with the short-story form, she remains committed to an awareness of how the past is intertwined with the future.<sup>402</sup>

The fact that Mansfield cannot completely end with the past is due to the significant colonial heritage that she bears, which shows that she is a Modernist and colonial writer as well. It is difficult to separate the two in her case, almost impossible. It is via the spatial elements, such as the Manuka flower/tree that she continues to preserve her past, and thus the colonial temporality. How does the situation present itself in Woolf's case, probably the most "historical" of all three writers? Woolf cannot break with the past: "I can only note that the past is beautiful because one never realizes an emotion at the time. It expands later, thus we don't have complete emotions about the present, only about the past."<sup>403</sup> Woolf's colonial heritage is impressive and that is probably why she can never let go of the past.

After his return, Ole Underwood experiences coldness from the people that he encounters while entering a bar:

Nobody looked at him, only the man looked at each other, one or two of them nudged. The girl nodded and winked at the fellow she was serving. He took some money out of his knotted handkerchief and slipped it on to the counter. His hand shook. He didn't speak. The girl took no notice; she served everybody, went on with her talk, and as if by accident, shoved a mug towards him. (Katherine Mansfield, "Ole Underwood", p. 564)

The fact that he is isolated even while being surrounded by people expresses the abyss in which he finds himself. The temporal gap that he experiences due to his stay in prison creates isolation, which in turn affects his re-anchoring in the life of the town. It is like Septimus in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, who comes back from the war with a mental illness, Ole Underwood also suffers, as a result of so many years spent locked up. He comes out with a mental instability or as the narrator suggests "cracked", which already implies his split nature: "In one corner sat a stranger. He pointed at Ole Underwood. 'Cracked!' Said one of the men. 'When he was a young fellow, thirty years ago, a man 'ere done in 'is woman, and 'e foun' out an' killed 'er. Got twenty years in quod up on the 'ill. Came out cracked. [...] 'E was a sailor till 'e married 'er. Cracked!'" (Katherine Mansfield, "Ole

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<sup>402</sup> Susan Reid, "'The Silence is Broken': Katherine Mansfield and the the Manifesto Moment" in Sarah Ailwood and Melinda Harvey (eds.), *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Influence*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2015, p. 67.

<sup>403</sup> Anne Oliver Bell and Andrew McNeillie (eds.) *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, volume 3, 1925-30* - entry for March 18th 1925.

Underwood”, p. 564) The adjective “cracked” uttered by a stranger, appearing three times, shows the narrator’s insistence. Shortly, the people sternly reject him and the narrator imagines him as a rat: “Get art! Get art! Don’t you never come ‘ere no more!” Somebody kicked him: he scuttled like a rat.” Then he goes to the Chinamen’s shop where “The Chinamen didn’t mind Ole Underwood. When they saw him they nodded.” (*Ibid.*, p. 565) He opens the door of the shop and the wind scatters the cards around and the Chinamen react furiously: ““Ya-Ya! Ya!-Ya!” screamed the Chinamen, and Ole Underwood rushed off, the hammer beating quick and hard.” (*Ibid.*) The “Chinamen” or China men represent an important colonial signifier, just like the figure of the “sailor” that Ole Underwood used to be before getting married: ““E was a sailor till ‘e married ‘er.”

Throughout the story, Ole Underwood feels more and more isolated and mistreated. His last encounter is with a cat in a wood yard, which reminds him of the cat he once purchased for his wife. He becomes truly involved when looking at the female cat: “The hammer in Ole Underwood’s heart beat madly. It pounded very, very faintly. ‘Kit! Kit! Kit!’ That was what she used to call the little cat he bought her off the ship — Kit! Kit! Kit! [...] ‘Ah! my God! my Lord!’ [...] My God! My Lord!” (*Ibid.*) The figure of the cat makes him go back to his colonial past, reminding him of the way his wife “used to call the little cat he bought her off the ship”. The rhythmic interjections from this passage remind us of the beginning of the story. The end of the short story finds the protagonist dealing with the embodiment of his old self, desiring to kill his wife’s lover: “And he stared up at the wharves and the ships with flags flying, and suddenly the old, old lust swept over Ole Underwood. ‘I will! I will! I will!’ He muttered. [...] The hammer beat loud and strong. He tossed his head, he was young again.” (*Ibid.*) The image of the past is linked with the memory of a woman, which makes it even more weighty: “and looking down upon him the wall there shone her picture — his woman’s picture”. The picture emphasizes the fact that it is something past, but the memory is still present. The end of the story sheds light on the main idea of the short story, and its title, which is eponymous with the protagonist’s name. Ole Underwood’s name marks, on the one hand, his attachment to the past, or the “old”, and on the other hand, the pressure or tension that he bears, manifested through the metaphorical image of the “underwood”. Ole Underwood haunted by the past at the end of the short story and the feminine issue associated is revealing of the double colonial presence: temporal and gendered.

Mansfield’s multitude of selves, due to her colonial background, is expressed in the dislocation that happens at a textual level. The dislocation that her writing reveals is realized via the isolated and alienated self, but also via precise techniques such as the temporal gap in narration and the shift of focalization. Modernism makes the colonial surface and come to life.

The idea of dislocation is expressed in the three authors' writings in the form of a double perspective: first, due to their experiences in the colonies (Rhys and Mansfield's case in particular), and second, through the influences that the colonial system had on them and implicitly on their writings. This chapter has shown us ways in which the poetics of dislocations in Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys contributes to the reshaping of colonial time. The dislocated self in Mansfield's case has opened up new ways and possibilities of understanding the influence of the feminine ideology in the early twentieth century and its connection with the alienated and isolated self. Just as in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Mansfield's short stories picture the childhood colonial background of the writers' past. Through *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we have come closer to Rhys's Caribbean island, which has enabled us to perceive the fractured and at times isolated self due to political and historical matters. As for Virginia Woolf, her borderline perspective, usually situated between the imperial centre and the colonies, aligns well and counterbalances the other two writers' intentions. Woolf's way of facing dislocation is either on the street of London, via the *flânerie* or in a binary articulation, between the imperial centre and the colony.

Now that we have an understanding of "The Poetics of Dislocation", the study goes on with an analysis of the war and its colonial impact.

#### IV. The Global War: Unsettled Temporalities and Geographical Displacements

*I become steadily more feminist, owing to The Times, which I read at breakfast and wonder how this preposterous masculine fiction [the war] keeps going a day longer — without some vigorous young woman pulling us together and marching through it — Do you see any sense in it? I feel as if I were reading about some curious tribe in Central Africa — And now they'll give us votes; and you say — what do you say Miss Ll. D.? I wish I could borrow your mind about 3 days a week.* (Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (eds.), Virginia Woolf, *FM* - letter to Margaret Llewelyn Davies on January 23rd, 1916, p. 76)

The previous chapter has shown us that there is an undeniable link between colonial time and space. The time-space conundrum opened up earlier will serve and be valued in the current chapter. Our analysis goes on with the poetics of war: “Then suddenly, like a chasm in a smooth road, the war came”<sup>404</sup>, says Virginia Woolf in April 1940 during her lecture to the Workers’ Association in Brighton, while showing the impact of the Great War on early twentieth-century writers. This phrase was later included in her work *The Leaning Tower*, an essay imagining a freer and democratic post-war world, in which there would be no classes or other kinds of barriers between people.

London, the major actor in twentieth century literary Modernism, is no more a fixed image, but something in motion. The war shapes and transforms the literary traditions, thus contributing to what we call Modernism today.

World War I is the clear evidence of the intersection between Modernism and colonialism in English literature. Elleke Boehmer and Steven Matthews underline the impact that the First World War had on the century’s writers:

World War I, the crucial watershed in the period, had an incalculable impact on writers and art movements worldwide and must be taken into account in any discussion of Modernism and colonialism. The war [...] stirred up distinctions between centre and periphery, and promoted and intensified colonial disenchantment and local nationalist feeling.<sup>405</sup>

It is precisely this link between centre and periphery, Modernism and colonialism that has inspired the present chapter on war. The goal of this chapter is to show that war is one major expression of colonial time in the early twentieth century at the time of Modernism’s emergence, and my hypothesis is based on and involves temporal and geographical issues. To do so, I will firstly develop my argument on the link between Modernism and the war, coupled up with the war’s global dimension, which will immediately follow this introduction. By global dimension I understand the fact that the war was present in several countries across Europe, not only in England. Modernism and the war are brought together in the three writers’s works. Their influence comes from the inevitable experience that they had with the war, given that the latter is the major early twentieth century political and colonial event. War has marked several of Woolf’s works; important recollections of war can be found in *Jacob’s Room* (1922), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *The Years* (1937),

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<sup>404</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Moment and Other Essays*, 1947, <http://www.gutenberg.net.au/ebooks15/1500221h.html>.

<sup>405</sup> Boehmer and Matthews, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 293.

*Three Guineas* (1938), and her diaries. The novel *The Years* encompasses the two wars, on the one hand, the First World War, and, on the other hand, the period that precedes the Second World War. *Mrs Dalloway* recounts the after-war period, both in England and in relation to India. *Three Guineas* is a 1938 essay in which Woolf explains the ways in which we can prevent war, published right before World World II erupts, the work bringing out the writer's pacifist side. Mostly referring to her fictional works, the way she approaches war is through the characters whose experiences are narrated, but also via the narrative techniques.

Along my research I have seen that Woolf is mainly interested in the consequences of war, just like Mansfield and Rhys. For example, in *Jacob's Room* we get to know the character Jacob who is enrolled in war as a soldier, but also the uncanny environment that he faces because of the presence of war. Let us only think of the skull that he brings in his bed, at his toes, before going to sleep. Novels such as *Jacob's Room* and *The Years*, along with the essay *Three Guineas* and the writer's diaries will be the main focus in this chapter.

Mansfield's war experience is mostly related to her brother's loss in the context of the war. We will have a look at her collection of short stories "In a German Pension", a couple of poems, namely "To L. H. B. (1894-1915)", "Last night for the first time since you were dead", "The Gulf", "Arrivée" and her *Journal*. It is her collection of poems and some of her short stories that mainly describe her mourning. Some of her short stories are also interesting to look at from the perspective of the trips that she made throughout Europe. The influence of the European travel and thus of a colonial space are felt in Rhys's short stories as well. Vienna, Budapest, Prague are some of the places that she described in her works and which have ultimately shaped her war experience and that of her colonial time. In Rhys' case, we will be studying short stories such as "Vienne", "A Solid House", "I Spy a Stranger", "The Insect World", along with her collection of *Letters (1931-1966)*.

In order to analyze the poetics of war using the works mentioned earlier, I will divide my chapter into three parts, as follows: firstly, I localize Woolf's role and contribution to the twentieth century Modernist war field and the consequences that war brought into her perception, in conjunction with the global and colonial dimensions of war; secondly, I present Mansfield's approach as a writer whose voyages contributed to her works and to her development as a Modernist writer also develops the image of world/colonial war in her writings. The end of the chapter goes in the same spirit since Rhys's travel experience, through Paris and central Europe, is valuable to her becoming a Modernist and colonial writer, for this time taking into consideration her

experiencing the Great War and the Second World War as well. The colonial aspect of war gains a significant place in the way I carry out my reflection and ultimately my reasoning.

## 1. Modernism, war, and its global dimension

Writers such as Woolf, Eliot and Pound “provide a background for the evolving response of a modernist literature that owns its shaping occasion in wartime London”<sup>406</sup>, as Vincent Sherry notices in his book on *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*. Vincent Sherry is a professor at Washington University, specialized in literary Modernism in the context of the First World War, whose most recent contribution is that of the editor of *The Cambridge History of Modernism*<sup>407</sup>. He goes on with his idea by stating the following:

By the rule of well-established associations, the Great War of 1914-18 locates the moment in which the new sensibility of English — and international — modernism comes fully into existence. Phrases like “The Lost Generation” and “The Men of 1904” have long been employed to designate the effect of the war — a centering event, if a destructive legacy — on these writers.<sup>408</sup>

Vincent Sherry’s argument on 1914 as marking the beginning of a new era is particularly appealing. It highlights the way the war shaped literature, and in particular its language, as the title of his study suggests: *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*. “The new sensibility of English — and international — modernism” is precisely what is of interest when thinking about the global dimension of the war. Sherry is clear on the “well-established associations” that exist between the Great War and Modernism, the former one generating, or in the critic’s acceptance, locating, the latter.

Bearing this perspective in mind, another interesting writer to look at is Wyndham Lewis, an active soldier enrolled in the Great War. In his autobiography he notes the recollections and awareness that he had after his direct and powerful experience with the war:

You will be astonished to find how like art is to war, I mean “modernist” art. They talk about how a war just-finished effects art. But you will learn here how a war about to start can do the same thing. I have set out to show how war, art, civil war, strikes and coup d’etats dovetail into each other.

It is somewhat depressing to consider how as an artist one is always holding the mirror up to politics without knowing it. [...] A prophet is a most unoriginal person, all he is doing is imitating something that is not there, but soon will be. With me war and art have been mixed up from the start. I wish I could get away from war.<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 11.

<sup>407</sup> *The Cambridge History of Modernism* was edited by Cambridge University Press in 2007.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>409</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering: An Autobiography (1914-1926)*, John Calder (ed.), London, Riverrun Press, 1982, p. 4.



The first sentence of this excerpt, “You will be astonished to find how like art is to war, I mean ‘modernist’ art”, clearly states the undeniable perceived interconnection between Modernism and war. I consider the following utterance: “as an artist one is always holding the mirror up to politics without knowing it” as one truly expressing colonialism and in fact the expression of colonial time via art for Lewis, “war and art have been mixed up from the start”, a statement that we will find true and valid in the case of writers’ poetics and their connection to war. Reality shoots art right into the heart: “I wish I could get away from war”, he writes, which suggests that there is no way to get away from war, it is a component of Modernist literature itself.

In his book, Lewis underlines the link between art and politics, his entire ideology standing on the very idea of the interconnection between Modernism and war, a blending that happens on an unconscious level, “without knowing it”. It is the war that contributes to a great extent to the shaping of Modernism itself, as Lewis puts it. He also talks about how twentieth century Modernist art is reflected and goes hand in hand with war. He takes examples from great writers of the period but mainly concentrates on his own experience:

My life as an artist and my life as a soldier intertwine, in this unaffected narrative. I show, too, going from the particular to the general, how War and Art in those days mingled, the features of the latter as stern as — if not sterner than — the former. This book is Art — War — Art, in three panels. War is the centre panel. [...] I preferred the real thing: namely Art.<sup>410</sup>

War is the central panel of his work, as the writer himself reveals, but at the same time he cannot get rid of what he calls “the real thing”, specifically Art. That also shows that we cannot separate one from the other. Moreover, the formula that he announces “Art — War — Art” redefines war, art being the one that shapes and structures it to the core.

Apart from the already established link between Modernism and colonialism, I am interested in elaborating on the knot created through the poetics of the works, in which we have war coupled up with its global/colonial dimension and Modernism.

War opens up an international path in the English destiny. The international dimension of this moment is highlighted by isolating the word itself, “international”, in between dashes. This dimension is one that post-colonial studies would identify today as “global”, which means that the global dimension of war is closely linked to its coloniality. The term “global” is all charged with a

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<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*

geopolitical sense. We should also mention the well-known and evident other term, *world* war. The direct link to the colonial lies in the global dimension of these wars. How did that occur and ultimately manifest itself in the world? It is not only via the actual wars that took place, but it is also through the soldiers, the colonial troops of the First World War, which moved all around the world as national British soldiers. Also, the presence of soldiers from the colonies, transformed war into a colonial one. We are talking here about soldiers who were on the European territory or the Pacific, who were Black, Indian, Egyptian, Arab, etc.: immense events in the colonial imaginary. Moreover, it is also thanks to these mixed colonized soldiers that the anti-colonial movements of the in between wars could take place in the world, which ultimately generated the phenomenon of decolonization during the Second World War.

Just like the soldiers and the colonial troops overall that were in constant movement, going from one space to another, thanks to globalization, we witness an extended process both in time and space, which eventually leads to connections all around the world. In our study too, the London landscape extends its borders, mainly through Germany and France in Mansfield's case and Central Europe, by crossing Vienne and Budapest, in Rhys's situation, places that our writers have been to and lived in. While reading Mansfield's letters, one can realize that she spent only her early years in England, then she travelled through Europe, mainly in France and Germany. A similar situation happened in Rhys's case, who was originally an immigrant in England, never settled down and also travelled around Europe, especially France and Central Europe. On the other side we find Woolf, who also had journeys in Europe, but mostly as a tourist, never settling down in the countries she visited, whether it was Italy, France or any other European country that she paid a visit to.

Let us now see how these phenomena appear in the three writers' works. The novel *Jacob's Room*, for instance, is important both for the poetics of war that we can elaborate from it and because of the period in which it was written: two years after the Great War. Woolf speaks about battleships in *Jacob's Room* that "ray out" from England "over the North Sea", towards Europe, "keeping the station accurately apart", which also shows the "worldly" dimension of war:

The battleships ray out over the North Sea, keeping their station accurately apart. At a given signal all the guns are trained on a target which [...] flames into splinters. With equal nonchalance a dozen young men in the prime of life descend with composed faces into the depths of the sea; and there impassively (though with perfect mastery of machinery) suffocate uncomplainingly together. Like blocks of tin soldiers the army covers the cornfield, moves up the hillside, stops, reels slightly this way and that, and falls flat, save

that, through field glasses, it can be seen that one or two pieces still agitate up and down like fragments of broken match-stick. (*JR*, p. 216)

Even the description of the soldiers is realized in a Modernist way: it is a rhythmic description with an army that “covers the cornfield, moves up the hillside, stops, reels slightly this way and that, and falls flat”, while some of them still agitate “up and down like fragments of broken match-sticks”. Woolf thinks in measurements such as “fragments” and “blocks of [...] soldiers”. The description of the way is undeniably realized in a Modernist way. The passage that follows shows how important wars are as they move things:

These actions, together with the incessant commerce of banks, laboratories, chancelleries, and houses of business, are the strokes which oar the world forward, they say. And they are dealt by men as smoothly sculptured as the impassive policeman at Ludgate Circus. But you will observe that far from being padded to rotundity his face is stiff from force of will, and lean from the effort of keeping it so. When his right arm rises, all the force in his veins flows straight from shoulder to finger-tips; not an ounce is diverted into sudden impulses, sentimental regrets, wire-drawn distinctions. The buses punctually stop. (*Ibid.*)

The actions of these soldiers “are the strokes which oar the world forward, they say”. Here Woolf shows that the soldiers’ actions are universally recognized since she compares with all the other important functions and also because of the presence of the phrase “they say”. The force of these men is accurately described by the narrator, followed by a sudden break in the narrative line, typically Modernist once again: “The buses punctually stop.” This is like a sudden awakening to reality, which also shows that war is part of the real world, it is out there.

In February 1915 Mansfield goes on a brief trip to France, which provides her with the inspiration for writing the short story “An Indiscreet Journey” (written in the same year). Mansfield also tackles the theme of soldiers in this story, which is about an Englishwoman who goes to France to see her lover, a French soldier. This is a story that points out the fact war happens not just in England, but in Europe as well, France for instance.

Two soldiers leaned out of the window, their heads nearly touching — one of them was whistling, the other had his coat fastened with some rusty safety-pins. And now there were soldiers everywhere working on the railway line, leaning against trucks or standing hands on hips, eyes fixed on the train as though they expected at least one camera at every window. And now we were passing big wooden sheds like rigged-up dancing halls or seaside pavilions, each flying a flag. In and out of them walked the Red Cross men [...]” (“An Indiscreet Journey” in *The Collected Stories*, p. 619)

Just like Woolf, Mansfield also uses numerous spatial and duration markers “[t]wo soldiers leaned out, “[i]n and out of them”, “railway line”, “leaning against trucks or standing hands on hips”, etc. A typically Modernist description of the war is when Mansfield announces: “And now there were

soldiers everywhere”, followed by “And now we were passing”. The now encompasses everything, all the soldiers who are everywhere. A couple of pages later the story goes on with an accurate temporal image of the clocks ticking:

“The clock ticked to a soothing lilt, C’est ça, c’est ça. In the kitchen the waiting-boy was washing up. I heard the ghostly chatter of the dishes.

And years passed. Perhaps the war is long since over — there is no village outside at all — the streets are quiet under the grass. I have an idea this is the sort of thing one will do on the very last day of all — sit in an empty café and listen to a clock ticking until — .

Madame came through the kitchen door, nodded to me and took her seat behind the table, her plump hands folded on the red book. Ping went the door. A handful of soldiers came in, took off their coats and began to play cards, chaffing and poking fun at the pretty waiting-boy, who threw up his little round head, rubbed his thick fringe out of his eyes and checked them back in his broken voice. (“An Indiscreet Journey”, p. 627)

The ticking of the clock creates a sensation of eternal moment in which temporal and spatial markers blend and are somehow suspended: “And years passed. Perhaps the war is long since over — there is no village outside at all — the streets are quiet under the grass.” The theme of the village appears here, just like in Woolf’s works, where it is a shelter from London, where the war hits. Nevertheless, this Modernist image is interrupted by “[a] handful of soldiers [that] came in”. The global dimension is to be seen two pages later when the soldiers have a discussion about England and France, in which women are also involved:

Shall we have un peu de charcuterie to begin with?” he asked tenderly.

“In England,” said the blue-eyed soldier, “you drink whiskey with your meals. N’est-ce pas, mademoiselle? A little glass of whiskey neat before eating. Whiskey and soda with your bifteks, and after, more whiskey with hot water and lemon.”

“Is it true, that?” asked his great friend who sat opposite [...]

“Well, not quite true,” said I.

“*Si, si,*” cried the blue-eyed soldier. “I ought to know. I’m in business. English travellers come to my place, and it’s always the same thing. (“An Indiscreet Journey”, p. 629-30)

War makes things circulate; that is how the English woman finds herself speaking to French soldiers. The French words/idioms such as “charcuterie”, “*Si-si*” and “mademoiselle” addressed to an English woman are a case in point. What marks even more the link between French and English soldiers is the “business” that they have among them: “I’m in business. English travellers come to my place”.

In a post World War I atmosphere Rhys writes the following scene of awareness:

The walls of the bedroom where we slept that night were covered with lurid pictures of Austrian soldiers dragging hapless Czechoslovakians into captivity. (Rhys's "Vienne")

The short story "Vienne" was in Rhys's series collection *The Left Bank*, which was published with the aid of Ford Madox Ford. The stories are mostly about Paris, but also Vienne. The story "Vienne" is inspired by her own trip to Central Europe and "describes a relationship disintegrating as a couple move through a corrupt and crumbling Europe"<sup>411</sup>. The "lurid pictures of Austrian soldiers dragging hapless Czechoslovakians into captivity" is a powerful image of the reality of the war happening in Central Europe, but it gets even more alive and haunting if we consider that they were on "[t]he walls of the bedroom where we slept that night". The hanging atmosphere of the walls decorated with war pictures emphasizes the reality of the situation and the fact that they were present everywhere, night and day. The Modernist picture of the perpetual present is coupled with war.

In the case of the three writers, the perspective of war is distinct and their works illustrate different poetics in this sense. Apart from coming from colonial locations, such as New Zealand or the Caribbean, bearing an alienated feeling and never having a chance to get a real home, Rhys and Mansfield experience the war as well, so their experience of colonial time becomes even more significant, via the changes the war causes mainly moving from one city to another, all these being deeply rooted in their works. Another element that brings us closer to the idea of war being part of a colonial time is the feminist approach: the link between war and feminism. In Woolf's case especially, but also Rhys's at times, being a woman and writing about war is intriguing given the war's effects on women's status. It is for instance the case of the female characters from "Vienne" and "The Insect World" women would marry in order to assure themselves a good condition and free themselves from poverty during the war. The war brings out the male dominance of this event, as Woolf's biographer, Hermione Lee underlines: "She (Woolf) "read" the war as 'a preposterous masculine fiction'<sup>412</sup> [...] As she says in *A Room of One's Own*, "it was the war which hardened women's views about their male rulers."<sup>413</sup> Lee's argument about the war having a great influence on the relationship and views between the two sexes is worth noting here. Woolf's pacifist side

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<sup>411</sup> Chris Power in "A brief survey of the short story: Jean Rhys", online article published in the *Guardian* on the 14th of April 2014 - <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/apr/14/jean-rhys-brief-survey-short-story>, last accessed on the 19th of August 2022.

<sup>412</sup> Virginia Woolf to Margaret Llewelyn Davis, January 23rd 1916, Letter II, 740, p. 76. (?)

<sup>413</sup> Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf, op. cit.*, p. 344.

springs out in the essay *Three Guineas*, where she tackles the poetics of war intermingled with a feminist approach. Out of the three writers, Woolf is the one who tackles in detail this extra layer of the relationship between war and feminism.

So, the war has a global (“world”) dimension because it is colonial. The travelling concerns not only European destinations, there were also other parts of the world involved. For instance, Woolf treats mainly Africa and India, with some references to Egypt, China and other colonies as well, and that is exactly what we are going to see in the following chapters.

### **When Modernism intercuts the war in Woolf’s *The Years***

Virginia Woolf, a Modernist writer *par excellence*, was shaped by the colonial surroundings and events of the twentieth century, the traces of which are found in her works. I am having a look at the ways in which Woolf treats and refers to the war by looking at the poetics in her works: the way the writing is structured, along with the narrative techniques that she uses.

The novel *The Years* is divided into chapters, over a period of time, from “1880”, the title of the first chapter to “Present Day”, the last chapter of the novel, which actually represents the year 1937, concomitant with the publication of the novel. Three of these chapters describe and are linked to the war, particularly “1914”, quite an extensive chapter, “1917”, and “1918”, and then there is also “1937”, the chapter covering the period before the Second World War.

According to the review on the back cover of the first edition of *The Years*, the topic around Woolf’s ninth novel is: “the passing of the last fifty years, seen through the everyday life of separate individuals. The theme is presented in the concrete details of their daily life and the impact upon individuals of all the forces that mould society, from fear and love to war and politics.”<sup>414</sup> Woolf does indeed tremendous work by compressing 50 years in a single novel, while at the same time analyzing the “everyday life of separate individuals”. Her temporal mastery is without doubt noticeable, especially if we think of the fact that she did the exact opposite around ten years earlier in 1925 with another novel including the war, *Mrs Dalloway*, in which everything happens in a

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<sup>414</sup> Blurb presented by Jane E. Henle on the back cover of the first edition of Virginia Woolf’s *The Years*, New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1937.

single day. The time axis that Woolf plays with is impressive and multifaceted. She is experimenting with the genre of the novel, thus reinventing it. In her letters Woolf explains her narrative choices and ultimately the aim of *The Years*, the way she imagined the inner mechanisms of the novel:

What I meant I think was to give a picture of society as a whole; give characters from every side; turn them towards society, not private life; exhibit the effect of ceremonies; Keep one toe on the ground by means of dates, facts; envelop the whole in a changing temporal atmosphere; Compose into one vast many sided group at the end; and then shift the stress from present to future; and show the old fabric insensitively changing without death or violence into the future — suggesting that there is no break, but a continuous development, possibly a recurrence of some pattern; of which of course we actors are ignorant. And the future was gradually to dawn.

Of course I completely failed ...<sup>415</sup>

Via this view provided by the writer herself, some of the temporal nuances that she uses are elucidated. By “turn[ing the characters] towards society, not private life”, Woolf seeks to show the reader the real side of the twentieth-century context, by providing at the same time, “means of dates, facts”. Woolf’s goal to picture society and to turn her characters towards the outer world, while keeping the reader updated and “envelop[ping] the whole in a changing temporal atmosphere” makes me think of the war, as if Woolf intended an indirect description of the war, which stands as the mirror of society. The “changing temporal atmosphere” is undoubtedly a Modernist writing tool, influenced by the unsettling war. Whereas the first part of the quote hints at the war, the second describes in a Modernist fashion the temporal changes that society induces: without any break, “but a continuous development, possibly a recurrence of some pattern.” By turning to the future, Woolf suggests a reading of time as a whole, along with capturing the development that it entails, of which humans are ignorant because of their role as actors. It is as if Woolf were describing the ambiance of the war and the people’s attitude towards it, who are not able to interpret reality as it is.

In *The Years* England’s political history comes out. The novel represents the human sense of the passage of time, comparing our helplessness in the face of historical determinism, here signified by the coming of the War.<sup>416</sup> *The Years*’ Introduction, in the Wiley-Blackwell 2012 edition, emphasizes the tension and anxiety that rule in the midst of the Pargiter family due to the war:

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<sup>415</sup> Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (eds.), *Leave the Letters till We’re Dead: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, 1936-41*, (letter on 7 April 1937), London, Chatto & Windus, 1980, p. 116.

<sup>416</sup> Julia Briggs, “The Search for Form: Revision and the Numbers of Time” in *Reading Virginia Woolf*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2006, p. 120.

The Pargiters talk about nothing that matters and hold back what should be said even as one World War is negotiated and an even more cataclysmic conflict hangs ominously in the wings. *The Years* commences with the uncertain spring of 1880 and concludes in an uncertain mid-1930s summer, and in between Woolf lays bare an era of anxiety.<sup>417</sup>

Woolf describes “an era of anxiety”, that is to say the weight that the war brings to bear on society. The family depicted, or the Pargiters try to “talk” (“talk about nothing that matters”) — they see the doom of their civilization but can only speak of it helplessly. The narrator emphasizes deformities and helplessness due to the war through a dialogue between Maggie and North in the chapter “Present Day”, the last chapter of the novel, which acts as a warning right before the Second World War:

He was dashed for a moment. It seemed to him that she refused to help him. And he wanted her to help him. Why should she not take the weight off his shoulders and give him what he longed for— assurance, certainty? Because she too was deformed like the rest of them? He looked down at her hands. They were strong hands; fine hands; but if it were a question, he thought, watching the fingers curl slightly, of “my” children, of “my” possessions, it would be one rip down the belly; or teeth in the soft fur of the throat. We cannot help each other, he thought, we are all deformed. Yet, disagreeable as it was to him to remove her from the eminence upon which he placed her, perhaps she was right, he thought, and we who make idols of other people, who endow this man, that woman, with power to lead us, only add to the deformity, and stoop ourselves. ( *Y*, p. 361)

Longing for assurance or certainty is impossible in a world in which all people are deformed: “She too was deformed like the rest of them”. It is North who has the capacity to see in a more realistic and objective way due to his dual experience, English and colonial. When he comes back from Africa where he has spent twenty years, his perspective changes: “We cannot help each other, he thought, we are all deformed.” The rhetorical question marks that he intuitively knows the answer, then North confirms it by his plain and clear response. The possessive pronoun “my”, highlighted by the quotation marks, in the construction “of ‘my’ children, of ‘my’ possessions” followed by the disappointment and inability expressed in the sentence: “it would be one rip down the belly; or teeth in the soft fur of the throat.” Heritage is not possible either via children or possessions. The fact they are all “deformed” beaches of the war prevents them from evolving, as a human genre in this case. Colonialism intercuts and, furthermore, stops Modernism in manifesting itself.

Grace Radin in her article “I am not a Hero: Virginia Woolf and the First Version of *The Years*” refers to the *Warped Souls*, which might have been another of Virginia Woolf’s working

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<sup>417</sup> David Bradshaw and Ian Blyth (eds.), “Introduction” to Virginia Woolf, *The Years*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.



titles for *The Years*.<sup>418</sup> The whole novel actually revolves around the idea of anxiety facing the war. This kind of anxiety is emphasized through a temporal crisis; in chapter “1917” we can read:

“And the plates,” said Eleanor, looking at the purple birds on her plate, “Don’t I remember them?” she asked.

“In the cabinet in the drawing-room at home,” said Maggie. “But it seemed silly — keeping them in a cabinet.”

“We break one every week,” said Renny.

“They’ll last the war,” said Maggie.

Eleanor observed a curious mask-like expression come down over Renny’s face as she said “the war.” Like all the French, she thought, he cares passionately for his country. But contradictorily, she felt, looking at him. He was silent. His silence oppressed her. There was something formidable about his silence. (*Y*, p. 199-200)

The metaphor of the plates that one would break each week and would still last the war emphasizes duration in a time of war; the long-lasting war is directly proportional to the people’s growing anxiety and tension. The war, highlighted here by the use of quotation marks, functions as a temporal marker or guide in Woolf’s works since she uses it to show the fear and anxiety that could be read on people’s faces in such times. The silence that the narrator reveals in this text hides the pressure due to the war.

Susan Sellers, in her article “The Novels of the 1930s and the Impact of History”, included in Susan Sellers’s *Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, notes:

Virginia Woolf’s fiction explores the nature of the human condition: what makes up our consciousness when we are alone and when we are with others, how we live in time, and to what extent our natures are determined by the accidents of gender, class and historical moment. In her novels, the Great War (as it was always referred to, until the Second World War) was the defining moment, the line that separated the past from the present, always seen as an abyss or a watershed. *Jacob’s Room* (1922) portrays a middle-class English society before the war; *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) portrays it after the war. *To the Lighthouse* (1927) contrasts the two, separating them from one another with the ‘Time Passes’ section.<sup>419</sup>

Seller sees the Woolfian Great War as a borderline, which acts as a point in time that determines forms of expression of the novel. Interestingly, Woolf did not write about the war itself in an extensive manner until towards the end of her life, in *The Years*, also *Between the Acts* later. Writing about the war requires, without doubt, a certain courage and maturity on the part of the writer, which Woolf certainly gave evidence of. Another confirmation in this sense is the narrative

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<sup>418</sup> Grace Radin, “I am not a Hero: Virginia Woolf and the First Version of *The Years*”, *Massachusetts Review*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Winter, 1975), p. 195-208.

<sup>419</sup> Susan Sellers and Sue Roe, “The novels of the 1930s and the impact of history” in Susan Sellers (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* (second edition), New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 70.

concentration of the war in *To the Lighthouse*: “Ten years that include the Great War itself are thus compressed into the passage of a single night.”<sup>420</sup> Julia Briggs in the same *Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* states:

Both in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Years*, the First World War lies across the centre of the book, as the great divide between past and present, though the transition is marked rather differently in *The Years*. Kitty gives a party in the spring of 1914, and at the end of it catches the overnight train back to her country home in the north. The journey itself is used to convey something of the experience of historical change.<sup>421</sup>

Woolf pays special attention to the historical transition between the pre-war period and the beginning of the war itself. It is as Briggs points out, as a “great divide between past and present”, before and after the war being two separate historically and socially charged times. Woolf’s two narrative techniques, the division of the book in two parts (as in *To the Lighthouse*) or the “journey” that the character takes (in *The Years*), are both temporally charged, the one in *The Years* being more pronounced since the writer felt the need to dedicate a part of her novel to emphasize the change that has taken place. Let us see now how that works in the text, by having a look at the chapter called “1914”:

“There was a perpetual faint vibration. She seemed to be passing from one world to another; this was the moment of transition [...] The years changed things; destroyed things; heaped things up — worries and bothers; here they were again. Fragments of talk kept coming back to her; sights came before her [...] And which is right? She thought, turning restlessly on her shelf. Which is wrong? She turned again.

The train rushed on. The sound had deepened; it had become a continuous roar. How could she sleep? How could she prevent herself from thinking? [...] Now where are we? She said to herself. Where is the train at this moment? Now, she murmured, shutting her eyes [...] And she resigned herself to the charge of the train, whose roar now became dulled and distant. (*Y*, p. 258-259)

The text itself underlines the fact that 1914 changed things: “this was the moment of transition”. Opposite forces seem to dominate: there is destruction, followed by an upheaval: “The years changed things; destroyed things; heaped things up — worries and bothers; here they were again.” But transition means borderline and confusion. The transition induced by the war is emphasized through Modernist techniques of spatial and temporal awareness: “Now where are we? She said to herself. Where is the train at this moment? Now, she murmured, shutting her eyes”. It is through a spatial awareness that the narrator realizes the time change: “She seemed to be passing from one

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<sup>420</sup> Julia Briggs, “The novels of the 1930s and the impact of history” in Susan Sellers and Sue Roe, “The novels of the 1930s and the impact of history” in Susan Sellers (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* (second edition), New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 74.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

world to another". The perpetual vibration felt in the air and the "continuous roar": no one can miss it, change is unavoidable and everywhere. The "perpetual faint vibration", "continuous roar" and "the train [that] rushed define the war that is impossible to stop and evolves ceaselessly.

The whole novel *The Years* contains evocations of the war signalled by nature and the weather, each chapter beginning with a description of England. Woolf's novel paints the Pargiter family during three generations. The introductions of the chapters treating the poetics of war are worth having a look at. For instance, the novel begins with:

It was an uncertain spring. The weather, perpetually changing, sent clouds of blue and of purple flying over the land. In the country farmers, looking at the fields, were apprehensive; in London umbrellas were opened and then shut by people looking up at the sky. But in April such weather was to be expected. (Y, p. 3)

The "uncertain spring" is presented as "expected", as the natural rhythm of spring. "The weather, perpetually changing" just like in the previous passages analyzed. The event that precisely marked the year 1880 was the Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1880), with the victory of the British during the Battle of Kandahar, on September 1st. The anxiety of the people in the countryside and the tension felt by the Londoners are all the more signs of an emerging power and change. The comparison in the form of an opposition between the country and the city, or London, is the one that sets the war atmosphere, through Modernist and colonial traits (London — national and indeed imperial centre). "1910" is synonymous with a year in which we can sense the power of London:

In the country it was an ordinary day enough; one of the long reel of days that turned as the years passed from green to orange; from grass to harvest. It was neither hot nor cold, an English spring day, bright enough, but a purple cloud behind the hill might mean rain. The grasses rippled with shadow, and then with sunlight.

In London, however, the stricture and pressure of the season were already felt, especially in the West End, where flags flew; canes tapped; dresses flowed; and houses freshly painted had awnings spread and swinging baskets of red geraniums. (Y, p. 153)

The years pass and times change. The modal verb "might" acts as a preparation or a first step in announcing what will come. It is about the changeable spring weather again here, mostly, at this stage. Woolf uses this distinction of city countryside to emphasize the difference between the two, and thus highlighting that most of the war happens in the city; cities, such as London, are the most affected. The description of the London landscape goes further by getting into the picture the rich

part of the city, “the West End” with a specific decor: “flags flew; canes tapped; dresses flowed; and houses freshly painted had awnings spread and swinging baskets of red geraniums.”

Continuing the analysis of the introductory paragraphs of the chapters from *The Years*, among the first lines of chapter “1911” we can read:

Here in the South of France the furrowed vineyards caught the light [...]. The sun, crossing the Channel, beat vainly on the blanket of thick sea mist. Light slowly permeated the haze over London; struck on the statues in Parliament Square, and on the Palace where the flag flew though the King, born under a white and blue Union Jack, lay in the caverns at Frogmore. It was hotter than ever. [...] In all the stations trains were ready to bore their way through England; to the North, to the South, to the West. (*Y*, p. 183)

The narrator goes from England to France, “crossing the Chanel”; this extension bears in itself the global nature of the war. Geographical markers are important in this sense: England opens its borders “to the North, to the South, to the West.” The description of the frontier opening comes right after one entailing London. The narration travels from the south of France, through England, by crossing the Channel, to England where the borders open to the world. At the same time, London bears its specific monuments, such as Parliament Square, the Palace holding its flag, signs of a place with a national identity.

Woolf’s introductions bear a rhythmic and crescendo development: each moment more daunting than the previous one. Likewise, the tone of the descriptions also carries a rising and elevated rhythm. The year 1914 comes with a definite change:

It was a brilliant spring; the day was radiant. Even the air seemed to have a burr in it as it touched the tree tops; it vibrated, it rippled. The leaves were sharp and green. In the country old church clocks rasped out the hour; the rusty sound went over fields that were red with clover, and up went the rooks as if flung by the bells. Round they wheeled; then settled on the tree tops.

In London all was gallant and strident; the season was beginning; horns hooted; the traffic roared; flags flew taut as trout in a stream. And from all the spires of all the London churches — the fashionable saints of Mayfair, the dowdy saints of Kensington, the hoary saints of the City — the hour was proclaimed. The air over London seemed a rough sea of sound through which circles travelled. But the clocks were irregular, as if the saints themselves were divided. There were pauses, silences. . . . Then the clocks struck again. (*Y*, p. 213)

The narrator describes here the spring atmosphere, the season before summer, when the First World War began, more precisely on July 28th, 1914: “The hour was proclaimed”. There is suspense, and fragmentation in order to illustrate the specificity of the period: “the clocks were irregular, as if the saints themselves were divided. There were pauses, silences. . . . Then the clocks struck again.” The

Modernist theme of time emphasized by the presence of the clocks strike is used here to announce the war. The chaotic and irregular rhythm of the clocks is a sign of the London atmosphere that is about to open a new era: that of the war. There is once again an opposition between the description of the city versus the countryside. In London, the tension is much more alive and alarming. This recurrent, systematic metaphor shows continuity in the novel's structure rather than a break or a tension, as usual with the imagery of seasons. Similar traits describe the city and the countryside, as if they were in a union. In the country, the rooks "[r]ound they wheeled", whereas "London seemed a rough sea of sound through which circles travelled". Everything was alive: in the countryside "The day was radiant", whereas in London "all was [...] strident".

There is a time ellipsis, followed by the chapter called "1917". After an elaborate chapter on 1914, or the beginning of the war, the next year treated is 1917. It is interesting how the beginning of the chapters acts like a summary of the situation of the period itself:

A very cold winter's night, so silent that the air seemed frozen and, since there was no moon, congealed to the stillness of glass spread over England. Ponds and ditches were frozen; the puddles made glazed eyes in the roads, and on the pavement the frost had raised slippery knobs. Darkness pressed on the windows; towns had merged themselves in open country. No light shone, save when a searchlight rayed round the sky, and stopped, here and there, as if to ponder some fleecy patch. (*Y*, p. 266)

Woolf persists in her technique of the descriptions of nature, which are in tune with the events that happen in society. We have "a very cold winter's night", which symbolizes that we are in the middle of the war; the situation is critical. The atmosphere is blurry; there is darkness, and an extremely cold night. The oppressiveness of the war is expressed through the time gap of the narrator, or the two years of absence, and the metaphors of the dark present in this chapter. The extension of the English land is pictured throughout the "towns (that) had merged themselves in open country." The explicit signifier of the war is the word "searchlight" as in: "No light shone, save when a searchlight rayed round the sky, and stopped, here and there."

Then comes the chapter called "1918". The reader can more poignantly perceive the consequences of the war throughout the tiresome and ponderous atmosphere described in this passage:

A veil of mist covered the November sky; a many folded veil, so fine-meshed that it made one density. It was not raining, but here and there the mist condensed on the surface into dampness and made pavements greasy. Here and there on a grass blade or on a hedge leaf a drop hung motionless. It was windless and calm. Sounds coming through the veil — the bleat of sheep, the croak of rooks — were deadened. The

uproar of the traffic merged into one growl. Now and then as if a door opened and shut, or the veil parted and closed, the roar boomed and faded. (*Y*, p. 287)

The end of the war brings a heavy atmosphere, covered with mist. The war has been long, bearing “a many folded veil, so fine-meshed that it made one density”. Adverbs such as “here and there”, mentioned twice and “now and then” bring confusion and the signs of an unstable situation. These expressions accompanied by the calmness around suggest the change in time, the change and transmutation that occurred once the war was over. The temporality has changed over the course of the years due to the war. The markers of colonial time are visible in this excerpt. Moreover, “the November sky” precisely evokes the end of an era since the First World War ended on November 11th, 1918. The use of the adverbs “here and there”, typical for Woolf, makes location and time really relative and unstable.

The narration continues with a monologue of the character Crosby:

‘Dirty brute,’ Crosby muttered as she hobbled along the asphalt path across Richmond Green. Her legs were paining her. It was not actually raining, but the great open space was full of mist; and there was nobody near, so that she could talk aloud.

‘Dirty brute,’ she muttered again. She had got into the habit of talking aloud. There was nobody in sight; the end of the path was lost in mist. It was very silent. Only the rooks gathered on the tree-tops now and then let fall a queer little croak, and a leaf, spotted with black, fell to the ground. Her face twitched as she walked, as if her muscles ground. Her face had got into the habit of protesting, involuntarily, against the spites and obstacles that tormented her. She had aged greatly during the past four years. She looked so small and hunched that it seemed doubtful if she could make her way across the wide open space, shrouded in white mist. (*Y*, p. 287)

Silence reigns all over the place, just like during the war itself: “The roar boomed and faded”, “there was nobody near”, “There was nobody in sight; the end of the path was lost in mist. It was very silent.” The heavy atmosphere from the beginning of the chapter described by the weather is transferred here into a metaphorical image, still deep and heavy, as the first one: “Her face twitched as she walked, as if her muscles ground.” For this time, it is not nature, but the character whose image is affected by the passage of the war time. The noun “muscles”, which in itself indicates heaviness, is accompanied by the verb “ground”, the latter suggesting thickness, weight. The image formed here is the result of a long and difficult period such as the war. An explicit signifier is in the sentence: “She had aged during the past four years”. We are in 1918, the year when the war is over.

The war has left marks on people and these four years since the war started have generated a change.

The significance of the war is well emphasized in *The Years* by the three of the chapters' titles, referring to the chronology of World War I: "1914", "1917" and "1918". The importance of the event also lies in the fact that right after the end of the war (the chapter called "1918"), what comes is "Present Day", as if up to 1937, the narration's chronology in *The Years*, there were no major event in the novel, and it is, of course, the case in history. It is only in 1939 that World War II erupted. Thereby, the focus of the narration is being directed onto the importance of the two World Wars. The novel talks about the war, or rather implies it, and it is only towards the end that the word "war" itself is revealed; it is the case in the chapter "1917", through which we also have a confirmation of the images that have been described from 1914 to 1918.

"We all think the same things; only we do not say them."

"Coming along in the omnibus tonight," she began, "I was thinking about this war — I don't feel this, but other people do . . ." She stopped. He looked puzzled; probably she had misunderstood what he had said; she had not made her own meaning plain.

"I mean," she began again, "I was thinking as I came along in the bus —"

But here Renny came in.

He was carrying a tray with bottles and glasses.

"It is a great thing," said Nicholas, "being the son of a wine merchant."

It sounded like a quotation from the French grammar.

The son of the wine merchant, Eleanor repeated to herself, looking at his red cheeks, dark eyes and large nose. The other man must be Russian, she thought. Russian, Polish, Jewish? — she had no idea what he was, who he was.

She drank; the wine seemed to caress a knob in her spine. Here Maggie came in. (*Y*, p. 268-269)

This is the first occurrence of the word "war" and it is rather uncertain, the first time actually facing the reality of the war happens in 1917, three years after it has begun. To do so, the narrator uses the metaphor of the wine; thus, there is no clear perception of the reality of the war. The metaphor of the wine is present throughout the whole novel. By having a close look at this paragraph, we can sense a hesitation when tackling the subject of the war: "'Coming along in the omnibus tonight,' she began, 'I was thinking about this war — I don't feel this, but other people do . . .' She stopped. "; after a moment of rest, but also puzzlement and hesitation as the text itself puts it, the argument continues: "'I mean,' she began again, 'I was thinking as I came along in the bus —'", followed by a new pause or ellipsis in the course of the narration: "But here Renny came in." It seems that there is no chance to express one's ideas about the war, because after the wine-war episode, "Here

Maggie came in.” It is as if colonial time did not have the chance to come to the surface. The presence of dashes, ellipses and fragmentation reveals the hesitation, but also tension and anxiety that lie behind the idea of war. This thin borderline between war and reality takes over the text. Auerbach connects Woolf’s

narratives of consciousness to the cultural upheavals during and after the First World War: “in a Europe unsure of itself, overflowing with the unsettled ideologies and ways of life, and pregnant with disaster – certain writers distinguished by instinct and insight find a method which dissolves reality into multiple and multivalent reflections of consciousness. That this method should have developed at this time is not hard to understand.<sup>422</sup>”

Thus, “in a Europe [...] present with disaster” the fragmentation and ellipsis, but also temporary transfiguration of reality gain meaning all at once. The temporal consciousness that Woolf gives evidence of is precisely the awareness that Auerbach observes. Woolf shows a mastery of temporal markers delicately integrated and used throughout the narration.

In the same chapter, “1917”, the metaphor of the wine is reinforced. Thus, the previous episode that ended with Eleanor and the wine caressing her spine, continues here with Eleanor’s thoughts once again: “Take care, Eleanor felt inclined to say to her; the wine goes to one’s head. She had not drunk wine for months. She was feeling already a little blurred; a little light-headed. It was the light after the dark, talk after silence; the war, perhaps, removing barriers.” (Y, p. 271) In both passages it is the narrator that grasps the reality of the situation; without telling it directly. The narrator leaves the situation ambiguous in order to describe the social reality. Here, it happens through the following temporal consciousness: “It was the light after the dark, talk after silence; the war, perhaps, removing barriers.” Whether it was the wine or the war that removed Eleanor’s barriers, does not really matter, since both have a hypnotizing effect upon the mind. The reality and harshness of the war seem sometimes surreal and dreamlike, just like the wine that makes one’s head turn.

Three pages later, the wine-war alliteration becomes even clearer and more significant. The narrator picks up on the topic touched upon earlier, highlighting for this time the blurry border between people’s perception or the illusion, and the reality of the war.

The pepper-pot’s a dark moor, Eleanor thought, looking at it. A little blur had come round the edges of things. It was the wine; it was the war. Things seemed to have lost their skins; to be freed from some

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<sup>422</sup> Bonnie Kime Scott, *Virginia Woolf and Consciousness* in Patrick Parrinder, Andrzej Gasiorek (eds.), *The Reinvention of the British and Irish Novel 1880-1940*, Bodmin and King’s Lynn, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 551.



surface hardness; even the chair with gilt claws, at which she was looking, seemed porous; it seemed to radiate out some warmth, some glamour, as she looked at it. (*Y*, p. 274)

Through a lyrically charged strategy, “It was the wine; it was the war”, the narrator (in this case Eleanor) reveals her intent and previously begun metaphor. Beyond the metaphor of the wine, the war-wine alliteration is used here. The two terms become almost interchangeable in the construction. It seems that by disclosing this information, things seem to be revealed: “Things seemed to have lost their skins; to be freed from some surface hardness”. A certain relief is also synonymous with the year 1917, since we are not far from the end of the war. Suddenly, the long-drawn note of a siren floats out its melancholy wail of sound; then, there is a dull explosion: “‘Then guns again’, Crosby muttered, looking up at the pale-grey sky with peevish irritation. The rooks, scared by the gun-fire, rose and wheeled round the tree tops. Then there was another dull boom.” (*The Years*, p. 289) The hypnotizing ambiance announced earlier by the wine-war metaphor does not last for too long, because shortly later the reality hits people in the face. As we can see, once the war is introduced, the guns appear. Nevertheless, suspense reigns all around:

A man on a ladder who was painting the windows of one of the houses paused with his brush in his hand and looked round. A woman who was walking along carrying a loaf of bread that stuck half out of its paper wrapping stopped too. They both waited as if for something to happen. (*Y*, 289)

Then, the situation turns again, and the rhythm of the narration changes anew. It is like a roller coaster of emotions and perceptions of the reality of the war. Between the explosion of the guns and someone who announces the end of the war, the boundaries between the war and the actual reality or its end are unclear, imperceptible:

A tangle of smoke drifted over and flopped down from the chimneys. The guns boomed again. The man on the ladder said something to the woman on the pavement. She nodded her head. Then he dipped his brush in the pot and went on painting. The woman walked on. Crosby pulled herself together and tottered across the road into the High Street. The guns went on booming and the sirens wailed. The war was over — so somebody told her as she took her place in the queue at the grocer’s shop. The guns went on booming and the sirens wailed. (*Y*, p. 289)

It is the Modernist techniques of the time that stops that contribute to rendering such a floating and uncertain atmosphere. The reality of the war being described, the end of the war that everybody is expecting comes gradually. The following excerpt is part of chapter “1917”, its title representing the year before the end of the war.

They all looked as if they were waiting for something to happen. Maggie came in carrying a plum pudding. [...]

“But if the guns . . .” She began, helping the pudding. Another gun boomed out. This time it was distinctly louder.

“They’ve got through the defences,” said Nicholas.

They began to eat their pudding.

A gun boomed again. This time there was a bark in its boom. “Hampstead,” said Nicholas. He took out his watch. The silence was profound. Nothing happened. Eleanor looked at the blocks of stone arched over their heads. She noticed a spider’s web in one corner. Another gun boomed. A sigh of air rushed up with it. It was right on top of them this time. There was profound silence. Nothing happened. Nicholas looked at his watch as if he were timing the guns. [...] The Germans must be overhead now. She felt a curious heaviness on top of her head. (*Y*, p. 276-8)

The narrator gives a sense of spontaneity and alertness to the narration. The passage then goes on:

One, two, three, four, she counted, looking up at the greenish-grey stone. [...] “On top of us,” said Nicholas, looking up. They all looked up. At any moment a bomb might fall. There was dead silence. In the silence they heard Maggie’s voice in the kitchen.

“That was nothing. Turn round and go to sleep.” She spoke very calmly and soothingly.

One, two, three, four, Eleanor counted. [...] Then a gun boomed again. It was fainter — further away. (*Y*, p. 277)

1917: everyone was waiting for the war to be over. Rhythmic and auditive images between silence and bombing occur at any step, accompanied by the fear and anxiety that the Pargiters experience. If earlier the pauses were generated by the hesitations of talking about the war, now the situation gets more serious, so that the conversations are interrupted by the sound of guns. Silence is mixed up with alertness, the two alternating. Then, the passage follows its course and leads us to the denouement:

“That’s over,” said Nicholas. He shut his watch with a click. And they all turned and shifted on their hard chairs as if they had been cramped.

Maggie came in.

“Well, that’s over,” she said. [...] Again she felt that they had been in the middle of saying something very interesting when they were interrupted. But there had been a complete break; none of them could remember what they had been saying.

“Well, it’s over now,” said Sara. “So let’s drink a health — Here’s to the New World!” she exclaimed. She raised her glass with a flourish. They all felt a sudden desire to talk and laugh.

“Here’s to the New World!” they all cried, raising their glasses, and clinking them together. (*Y*, p. 277-8)

Changes express tension in writing, especially when the situation is fragile and unsure, but then, when the war is over, relief is expressed: “The war was over”. Even the fragmentation of the text expresses tension as well. The writing mode expresses the times lived during the war; the war is unstable, like the writing itself. Expressing the war never comes easily, it is difficult to introduce the war as we have previously seen, but it also takes a temporal gap, a conscious act indeed, to realize it is over: “Again she felt that they had been in the middle of saying something very interesting when they were interrupted. But there had been a complete break [...] ‘Well, it’s over now,’ said Sara.” After the war comes, the New World and the course of life seems to quickly come back around: “They all felt a sudden desire to talk and laugh.” The end of the war marks a new beginning, that of the “New World”, a capitalized phrase combining a temporal rupture caused by the war. The fractured time awareness shows the way Modernism intervenes to describe the war.

Once the chapter recalling the year 1917 is over, a short one of around two and a half pages comes picturing the year 1918, followed this time by a pause in narration. The narrator skips 19 years and introduces the reader to the pre-Second World War period in a chapter called “Present Day”. Chronologically speaking, this chapter is a description of the 1937 pre-war England:

It was a summer evening; the sun was setting; the sky was blue still, but tinged with gold, as if a thin veil of gauze hung over it, and here and there in the gold-blue amplitude an island of cloud lay suspended. In the fields the trees stood majestically caparisoned, with their innumerable leaves gilt. Sheep and cows, pearl white and parti-coloured, lay recumbent or munched their way through the half transparent grass. An edge of light surrounded everything. A red-gold fume rose from the dust on the roads. Even the little red brick villas on the high roads had become porous, incandescent with light, and the flowers in cottage gardens, lilac and pink like cotton dresses, shone veined as if lit from within. Faces of people standing at cottage doors or padding along pavements showed the same red glow as they fronted the slowly sinking sun.

Eleanor came out of her flat and shut the door. Her face was lit up by the glow of the sun as it sank over London, and for a moment she was dazzled and looked out over the roofs and spires that lay beneath. (Y, p. 290)

The description of the sun setting comes three times in this short paragraph. First, “The sun was setting” but “here and there [...] an island of cloud lay suspended.” Then, people attend the sunset with “slowly sinking sun” and finally Eleanor’s face lights up by “the sun as it sank over”, which metaphorically speaking marks the end of an era and ultimately the beginning of a new one. The approaching of the war is subtly portrayed here by Woolf’s nature descriptions. We have “[a]n edge of light” and the villas “incandescent with light”, the flowers that “shone veined as if lit from within” and then we also have the “red glow” of people’s faces and the “red-gold fume [that] rose

from the dust on the roads”. Just like in the previous passages analyzed where the “searchlight” was as an indicator of the war coming, here there is also the metaphor of the light that foresees the war.

There is a certain calmness specific to a pre-war period — also found in the first lines of chapter “1914”, describing the peaceful spring before the war would burst out — that is found towards the end of the said chapter. When approaching the end of the novel, the reader of *The Years* is left with a peaceful and serene ambiance, as it comes:

An air of ethereal calm and simplicity lay over everything.

‘And all the tubes have stopped, and all the omnibuses.’

[...] A breeze went through the square. In the stillness they could hear the branches rustle as they rose slightly, and fell, and shook a wave of green light through the air. (*Y*, p. 412)

The narrator turns once again to the metaphor of nature, which reflects the reality of the war, more precisely the end of it. It pictures the society as it is, in this case, the Second World War. The end of the novel shows a peaceful and open atmosphere through a dialogue between Maggie and Eleanor. It is a way to prepare the reader for the war that comes, the novel being published in 1937 before the Second World War. Woolf’s power of anticipating the Second World War brings to light the historian that lies within her. Modernism is used by Woolf in order to describe the atmosphere: “‘And all the tubes have stopped, and all the omnibuses.’” This sentence put into quotation marks gains in meaning. Through Modernist tools of descriptive awareness and lively narration, the war is announced, by indirectly opposing two states of mind: the calmness before the war and the agitation and rustling sound of the war itself. Auditive images help in doing so:

“How beautifully you’ve arranged them!” she said. “Look, Eleanor!” She turned to her sister.

But Eleanor was standing with her back to them. She was watching a taxi that was gliding slowly round the square. It stopped in front of a house two doors down.

“Aren’t they lovely?” said Delia, holding out the flowers.

Eleanor started.

“The roses? Yes . . .” She said. But she was watching the cab. A young man had got out; he paid the driver. Then a girl in a tweed travelling suit followed him. He fitted his latch-key to the door. ‘There,’ Eleanor murmured, as he opened the door and they stood for a moment on the little thud behind them. (*Y*, p. 412/3)

Woolf's choice of roses for her pre-war atmosphere novel ending is not arbitrary. Roses have been symbols of war and politics, as the History of Roses from the University of Illinois states.<sup>423</sup> In addition, they are originally, beside other spaces, from North Africa, a particularly important geographical point in this novel; let us only think of North who came back from Africa. The attention of the roses is directed towards the world outside “‘The roses? Yes . . .’ She said. But she was watching the cab”, which finally alludes to the same societal aspect: the war. The curiosity of the character towards the outside world showcases even more the London scene, which acts here almost as a character. Then, the passage goes on:

Then she turned round into the room. ‘And now?’ she said, looking at Morris, who was drinking the last drops of a glass of wine. ‘And now?’ she asked, holding out her hands to him.

The sun had risen, and the sky above the houses wore an air of extraordinary beauty, simplicity and peace.  
(*Y*, p. 412-413)

In this ending passage, Woolf uses the war-wine metaphor evoked earlier. The hypnotic atmosphere created by the wine in conjunction with the uncertainty of the war — the latter acts here as anaphora as well, since the First World War described earlier in the novel is coupled with incertitude and instability — are well emphasized by the rhetorical question appearing twice: “And now?” Apart from naming the chapter “Present Day”, which stands for 1937, the reader also relies on his/her previous reading and earlier descriptions in order to interpret the coming of the war here. Woolf proves once again her knowledge and finesse of temporal techniques in order to talk evoke the war.

The interaction of Modernism and the war describing an unstable and fragmented time, as seen in the textual analyses pushes our research further: it helps us demonstrate that war is part of a colonial time, more precisely the global aspect of the First World War and the Second World War are the pillars on which I found my argument. Spatial markers, such as nature, the weather, and London's representative monuments blend in with the unquestionable temporal aspect of the war through temporal awareness, time-gap and comparisons meant to introduce the crisis that England and the world itself are submitted to. Woolf's mastery of Modernist techniques revolutionizes not only Modern literature but also contribute to the awareness of the colonial side of the war. Modernism and the war meet in her work and this fusion is unavoidable given England's history and the political situation at the time. It is a double tension that occurs: on the one hand, it is the

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<sup>423</sup> <https://web.extension.illinois.edu/roses/history.cfm>, last accessed October 19, 2020.

beginning of the war that approaches, and on the other hand, it is the end of empire that was foreseen, as Vincent Sherry underlines in his work, *The Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire: The Years* was “written as conflict was growing in Europe and the end of empire was in sight.<sup>424</sup>”

An example in this sense is in chapter “1911” from *The Years* when the war in Central Europe is somehow predicted: “[...] then began to discuss the situation in the Balkans. / ‘There’s going to be trouble there in the near future,’ Sir William was saying. He turned to Morris; they discussed the situation in the Balkans (*Y*, p. 191). Woolf does not say a lot about what they discussed; we only know that they “began to discuss the situation in the Balkans” and that “they discussed the situation in the Balkans”, the repetition of the same sentence, in which only the tense changes is striking here. We know from the *Penguin Dictionary of Twentieth-Century History 1900–1978* that in 1911, the Balkans was already a region of considerable instability owing in large part to the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of numerous national states (e.g., Bulgaria, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia). Territorial disputes between the new states, the old empire and the western European powers continued throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the First World War began here on 28 June 1914.<sup>425</sup>

A couple of pages later in the chapter called “1913”

Martin sat in his room reading his newspaper. The war in Balkans was over; but there was more trouble brewing — that he was sure. Quite sure. He turned the page. The room was very dark with the sleet falling. And he could never read while he was waiting. Crosby was coming; he could hear voices in the hall. How they gossiped! How they chattered! He thought impatiently. He threw the paper down and waited. Now she was coming; her hand was on the door. But what was he to say to her? he wondered, as he saw the handle turning. He put down the paper. He made use of the usual formula: “Well, Crosby, how’s the world treating you?” as she came in. (*Y*, p. 210)

We know from the *Penguin Atlas of World History* that The “First Balkan War” officially ended with the May 1913 Peace of London. Dissatisfied with the division of the spoils, Bulgaria attacked Turkey in late June 1913, initiating the short-lived “Second Balkan War”, which ended with the August 1913 Treaty of Bucharest. The division of territory was not resolved until the September 1913 Treaty of Constantinople.<sup>426</sup> We are clearly told that this episode occurs in January 1913, before even the first treaty has been signed. Martin may be reading in his newspaper of the

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<sup>424</sup> Vincent Sherry (ed.), *The Novel and the First World War* in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, (p. 428.?)

<sup>425</sup> Alan Palmer, *The Penguin Dictionary of Twentieth-Century History 1900–1978*, London, Penguin, 1979, p. 35–6.

<sup>426</sup> Kinder and Hilgemann, *The Penguin Atlas of World History: from the French Revolution to the Present*, volume II, London, Penguin, 2004, p. 121.

December 1912 London Conference of Ambassadors at which Germany and Britain sought to bring the conflict to an end, but it had not actually ended. The further “trouble brewing” must surely be the First World War, as the explanatory notes tell us.<sup>427</sup> Martin reads about the war environment that he experiences: “[t]he room was very dark with the sleet falling”. The fact that the sleet is falling suggests that things are not yet finished, just as the war that he reads about, and that there is certainly “more trouble brewing”. All these world war questions trouble the character who has already travelled in India and Africa. His trips are also a reason why he does not seem to know how and what to communicate with the other, Crosby for instance, who enters the room. He is not interested in the gossiping and chattering that characterized the others; he is rather interested in world war questions. When Crosby enters the room, he decides, “to [make] use of the usual formula: “Well, Crosby, how’s the world treating you?”, which only highlights the difference of perspective between him and the others. His trips to the colonies generated a time-lag and a difference of perception and understanding of things. This usual formula denotes once again that the Pargiters talk about everything and nothing at the same time or as Bradshaw and Blyth underline: “The Pargiters talk about nothing that matters and hold back what should be said even as one World War is negotiated and an even more cataclysmic conflict hangs ominously in the wings.”<sup>428</sup>

Another crucial work encapsulating the poetics of war is *Jacob’s Room*, which unlike *The Years*, a family novel, focuses on the representation and study of a single character: Jacob Flanders, the protagonist of the novel. He is mainly observed and represented via the other characters’ perceptions and impressions.

### **War as colonial time: *Jacob’s Room* and *Three Guineas***

“‘So of course,’ writes Betty Flanders, pressing her heels rather deeper in the sand, ‘There was nothing for it but to leave.’”<sup>429</sup> This sentence echoes Mrs Flanders’ “many-paged, tear-stained letters” (*JR*, p. 4) to Captain Barfoot. Woolf chooses to open her novel with a powerful war image: a sorrowful illustration caused by the trauma of war. A couple of lines later, the narrator amplifies the disappointing picture formerly presented: “‘nothing for it but to leave’, she read.” (*JR*, 4) Woolf

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<sup>427</sup> Notes by Jeri Johnson in Virginia Woolf, *The Years*, online edition, Penguin, 1998, p. 673.

<sup>428</sup> David Bradshaw and Ian Blyth (eds.), “Introduction” to Virginia Woolf, *The Years*, op. cit.,

<sup>429</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Jacob’s Room*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 3.

chooses to begin her novel with the image of Jacob's departure to war, even if that truly happens only at the end of the novel. This temporal framing creates the war setting and also an important issue of the novel. By choosing to begin and end her novel with the image of the war, Woolf's temporal choice signifies the fact that the war is overwhelming and present everywhere.

### **The representation of the war in *Jacob's Room***

The war times experienced by the writer represent a powerful influence in her narratorial choices. Woolf's brother comes back from Flanders, just like Woolf's brother did. As Dannell Jones observes in the *Introduction to Jacob's Room*:

With her third novel, *Jacob's Room*, Virginia Woolf's style became indisputably modern.

Throwing off novelistic conventions, she devised a radical new book shaped by the memories of a lost brother, a clear-eyed feminist sensibility, and a fierce pacifism. Using a condense, imagistic method, Woolf tells the story of Jacob Flanders, a young man destined for the trenches of World War I.<sup>430</sup>

It is ultimately the memories of a lost brother — but different than in Mansfield's case with Leslie who died during the war — that opens up her interest to write about the war. Woolf becomes endowed with “a clear-eyed feminist sensibility, and a fierce pacifism”. Woolf's colonial sensibility can be read in her choosing to write this novel. Vincent Sherry also explains the direct link between the use of the name “Flanders” as in “Betty Flanders” and the symbol of World War I: “It is recalled through the family name of Betty *Flanders*, which summons the site and symbol of the mass deaths of the first mass war [...].”<sup>431</sup> The Flanders family name thus becomes a tool for illustrating the human suffering of World War I. It is not the first time that Woolf has hidden powerful images in her characters' names; we can think of the character North from *The Years* whose experience in the colony altogether with the temporal changes stressed by Woolf between the imperial centre and its colonies are of significant importance and in a way shielded by the character's name itself.

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<sup>430</sup> Danell Jones in *Introduction to Virginia Woolf, Jacob's Room*, New York, Barnes and Noble of Essential Reading, 2006.

<sup>431</sup> Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.



The blank and the lack of meaning generated by Jacob's departure at the beginning of the novel is rendered in the title as well. Kate Flint observes in the Introduction of the Oxford edition of *Jacob's Room* the emptiness characterized by the title of the novel:

From its conception, *Jacob's Room* was seen by Virginia Woolf as a structure, as an architectural space. [...] The title itself draws attention not so much to an individual, Jacob, but to the poignant emptiness of his immediate environment after his death in the First World War. At the same time, the title points one towards the notion of enclosing, constricting walls: the rigid expectations of the social structure that made death in this war a strong possibility for a young man of Jacob's generation [...] (*JR, Introduction*, p. xii)

The title itself reminds us the war by implying the protagonist's "poignant emptiness of his immediate environment after his death in the First World War". The room as an enclosure is a limited space designed by Woolf.

As regards the argument and illustration of war as a colonial time, *Jacob's Room* is undeniably a crucial work. One of the main reasons is that we deal with a novel that was written during the war. The novel deals with questions about the war and its consequences. An experimental novel, *Jacob's Room*, places in the centre the character of Jacob Flanders, a young man passionate about classics and ancient cultures, who goes to Cambridge to study, and towards the end of the novel, experiences war. This is a reference to Toby, Woolf's brother. In chapter five, when Jacob moves to London, the narration shows the same room enclosure:

These houses (Mrs. Garfit's daughter, Mrs. Whitehorn, was the landlady of this one) were built, ay, a hundred and fifty years ago. The rooms are shapely, the ceilings high; over the doorway a rose, or a ram's skull, is carved in the wood. The eighteenth century has its distinction. Even the panels, painted in raspberry — coloured paint, have their distinction. ... (*JR*, p. 93-4)

The novel interestingly begins and ends with the same image of the tradition, early culture, rendered by what is old, but what lasts at the same time, and the doorways bearing a rose and a ram skull carved in the wood, which underlines its duration, as if the war, or at least its consequences, would last forever, a perception proper for those having a direct experience of it. It could also mean that England will last beyond the experiences of war. We can see once again that the novel was written during that period of suffering and death. Even if we had not known this writing detail, we would probably have guessed it.

The image of the skull lying in bed at Jacob's feet is in itself a frightening image that is rendered even more gothic by the details that come up next. The ram skull becomes identifiable for this time and has teeth in it. Jacob is lost, he weeps absent-mindedly. After moments of hesitation,

he decides to hold the skull in his arms, a possible reference to Shakespeare's Hamlet here who holds Yorick's skull in his arms while realizing the inescapable disintegration of the human body, a process that happens to everyone, even to the best of people. Jacob holding the skull can be interpreted as a premonitory act of embracing death, one that occurs once involved in the war: "There he stood. His face composed itself. He was about to roar when, lying among the black sticks and straw under the cliff, he saw a whole skull — perhaps a cow's skull, a skull, perhaps, with the teeth in it. Sobbing, but absent-mindedly, he ran farther and farther away until he held the skull in his arms." (*JR*, p. 7) Jacob holding the skull in his arms is a sacred moment at which he feels attuned to death, followed by a break in narration, about two lines left empty, which gives the reader the opportunity to better perceive what is being said. Then, the narration takes up again and Jacob is asked to let down the skull ... but he does not want to:

'There he is! Cried Mrs Flanders, coming round the rock and covering the whole space of the beach in a few seconds. 'What has he got hold of? Put it down, Jacob! Drop it this moment! Something horrid, I know. Why didn't you stay with us? Naughty little boy. Now put it down. Now come along both of you,' and she swept round, holding Archer by one hand and fumbling for Jacob's arm with the other. But he ducked down and picked up the sheep's jaw, which was loose. (*JR*, p. 7-8)

The image of Jacob's anticipatory death comes along once again in the structure: "Something horrid, I know. Why didn't you stay with us?", completed by Mrs Flanders' sweep. It is as if Jacob were stuck to his skull, the sheep's jaw. The image of the war amplifies when Mrs Flanders tells, "the story of the gunpowder in which poor Mr Curnow had lost his eye". The sacred act or moment of union with death previously spoken of gets a clearer significance as the narration unfolds: "There on the sand not far from the lovers lay the old sheep's skull without its jaw. Clean, white, wind-swept, sand-rubbed, a more unpolluted piece of bone existed nowhere on the coast of Cornwall." (*JR*, p. 8) The sacred image of the sheep jaw is now purer than ever: "Clean, white, wind-swept, sand-rubbed, a more unpolluted piece of bone existed nowhere on the coast of Cornwall." What comes next is even more surprising: "In the other bed by the door Jacob lay asleep, fast asleep, profoundly unconscious. The sheep's jaw with the big yellow teeth in it lay at his feet. He had kicked it against the iron bed-rail." (*JR*, p. 13) Jacob brings the skull from outside to the inside, next to his feet, while being unconscious, another sign of death. The skull outside signifies the war; by bringing it inside, it makes it present everywhere, the whole space is invaded with features that remind us the war, thus colonial time is everywhere.

The end of *Jacob's Room* is particularly telling in the way it contributes to the expression of war as colonial time. Two pages before the end of the novel the reader acknowledges that “the ships in the Piraeus fired their guns<sup>432</sup>”. The image of the war is rendered from Greece:

The sound spread itself flat, and then went tunneling its way with fitful explosions among the channels of the islands. Darkness drops like a knife over Greece.

‘The guns?’ Said Betty Flanders, half asleep. [...]

‘Not at this distance,’ she thought. ‘It is the sea.’

Again, far away, she heard the duck sound, as if nocturnal women were beating great carpets. There was Morty lost, and Seabrook dead; her sons fighting for their country. [...] The nocturnal women were beating great carpets. (*JR*, p. 245-246)

The place is again a reference to Toby since Greece was the last trip that the Stephen family did before Toby was enrolled. Just like in *The Years* where the image of the wine becomes confused or infused with that of the war: “It was the wine, it was the war”, here the war is once again mistaken with something else. First, the sound of the guns overlaps with that of the sea, and then with that of beating carpets. A typical, almost cliché, image of women staying at home while men fight for the country. An ironical hint is felt in the last sentence: “The nocturnal women were beating great carpets”, present for the second time in the same paragraph. War becomes a central metaphor for loss and death. Jacob is gone to fight for the country: “He left everything as it was,” Bonamy marvelled. “Nothing arranged. All his letters strewn about for anyone to read. What did he expect? Did he think he would come back?” he mused, standing in the middle of Jacob’s room.” (*JR*, p. 246) As the novel comes to its end, there is a reference to its title and the emptiness that haunts it almost like a shadow. Bonamy muses over Jacob’s departure while being left alone in the middle of the room.

The novel goes on with a passage that has already appeared in chapter five, slightly different for this time. The image of death haunts the novel; it accompanies it almost throughout the whole course of the novel. Death and war go together in *Jacob's Room*; Woolf uses the metaphor of death to present the war and its consequences. In Chapter XIV, on the last page of the novel, Jacob’s room is still discussed as it follows: “Listless is the air in an empty room, just swelling the curtain; the flowers in the jar shift. One fibre in the wicker armchair creaks, though no one sits there.” (*JR*, p. 247) The exact same paragraph also appears on page 49, chapter III, at the beginning of the novel,

while describing Jacob's room. We once again witness a premonitory situation, as if things were pre-established. The same enclosure, silence and emptiness inhabit Jacob's room at the beginning and end of the novel. A perpetual ambiance that he would not want to leave the room, as if it were something eternal. The image of death as a consequence of the war accompanies him all over.

The end of the novel portrays the interior space, such as the houses, which in this case are empty because people are at war. This emptiness lies in contrast with the jammed and loaded urban space from the outside. The opposition is even more obvious since the paragraphs expressing the two different ambiances come one right after the other:

Bonamy crossed to the window. Pickford's van swung down the street. The omnibuses were locked together at Mudie's corner. Engines throbbed, and carters, jamming the brakes down, pulled their horses sharp up. A harsh and unhappy voice cried something unintelligible. And then suddenly all the leaves seemed to raise themselves.

"Jacob! Jacob!" cried Bonamy, standing by the window. The leaves sank down again.

"Such confusion everywhere!" exclaimed Betty Flanders, bursting open the bedroom door. (*JR*, p. 247)

The novel ends in an affective and mournful tone with "confusion everywhere", "confusion" that in this case I think refers to the chaos and uncertain situation generated by the war. As Kimberly Engdahl Coates points out in her essay on *Virginia Woolf's Queer time and Place: Wartime London and a World Aslant*, "The war indeed has turned London and its inhabitants upside down.<sup>433</sup>" The ending that Woolf chooses is undeniably shattered by the reality of war. The last sentences of the novel show Bonamy's uncertainty and inability to make any sure decisions, while picturing her at the window: "Bonamy turned away from the window. 'What am I to do with these, Mr Bonamy?' / She held out a pair of Jacob's old shoes." (*JR*, p. 247) The expression "old shoes" marks the opposition between the "old Jacob", who used to wear those shoes, and the "new Jacob", the one who is at war now. War changes people. Colonial time changes people. The novel ends with the image of shoes, an object to walk; consequently, the sad image of the departure on the front is delicately but meaningfully portrayed here. I see this as a powerful colonial image, the time spent on the front or at war is mixed with the time being experienced from home, during and after Jacob's departure, and, of course, the sorrow left. The reminiscences of this colonial time are underlined in this novel ending. Colonial time gains a primordial place, since Woolf chooses to end her novel in this fashion, and let us not forget about the beginning: "'So of course,' wrote Betty Flanders,

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<sup>433</sup> Kimberly Engdahl Coates, "Virginia Woolf's Queer time and Place: Wartime London and a World Aslant", in Brenda Help and Madelyn Detloff (eds.), *Queer Bloomsbury*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 284.

pressing her heels rather deeper in the sand, ‘there was nothing for it but to leave.’” (*JR*, p. 3) There is a similarity between the picture of the “old shoes” from the end and Betty Flanders’ “pressing her heels deeper in the sand”: they both hide a painful, stagnant way of walking.

*Jacob’s Room*, a novel inventing the poetics of war, also bears an important London feature and by that it explores the city’s wartime ambiance. It is thus interesting to have a look at the precise scene in which the war takes place, the metropolitan scene of London. Chapter five abounds in various descriptions of London, among which its streets:

Long past sunset an old blind woman sat on a camp-stool with her back to the stone wall of the Union of London and Smith’s Bank, clasping a brown mongrel tight in her arms and singing out loud, not for coppers, no, from the depths of her gay wild heart — her sinful, tanned heart — for the child who fetches her is the fruit of sin, and should have been in bed, curtained, asleep, instead of hearing in the lamplight her mother’s wild song, where she sits against the Bank, singing not for coppers, with her dog against her breast.

Home they went. The grey church spires received them; the hoary city, old, sinful, and majestic. One behind another, round or pointed, piercing the sky or massing themselves, like sailing ships, like granite cliffs, spires and offices, wharves and factories crowd the bank; eternally the pilgrims trudge; barges rest in mid stream heavy laden; as some believe, the city loves her prostitutes. (*JR*, p. 89)

The streets of London are filled with all kinds of people, from sinful women to pilgrims and all the way back to prostitutes, an “eternally [...] heavy laden” vicious spiral. In contrast to the “hoary”, but also “old, sinful, and majestic” city where a wild-hearted woman stands, with a sinful, tanned heart” lay the pilgrims who eternally trudge. The cities’ opposed sides are described here one paragraph after the other, showing the diversity of what we can find in London ... but in the end “The city loves her prostitutes”, or it is eventually what some may believe. Just like in Rhys’s novels, the city is inhabited by prostitutes. A couple of pages later, the reader finds out about the innocent soul of “these little prostitutes”:

Great men are truthful, and these little prostitutes, staring in the fire, taking out a powder-puff, decorating lips at an inch of looking-glass, have (so Jacob thought) an inviolable fidelity.

Then he saw her turning up another Greek Street upon another man’s arm. (*JR*, p. 127)

Similar to the image that Rhys has built vis-à-vis women, where the whole context in which they are immersed makes them “choose” a poor life, full of sacrifices, Woolf attempts to express here through the eyes of a man — a powerful attempt indeed — the double forces that lie inside a

woman. The “inviolable fidelity” that they possess is hidden by the mask-like face, covered by the make-up that these women wear. Then, it turns out that they are not that innocent: “Then he saw her turning up another Greek Street upon another man’s arm.” The fact that Woolf uses once again a reference to Toby’s Greece as in “Greek street” could possibly lead us to think that under Jacob’s character lies Toby. He is the one who saw the women “turn up another Greek Street”.

Reading these lines one might recall another Woolfian novel, namely *Mrs Dalloway*. A couple of years after having published *Jacob’s Room*, Woolf writes about the same habits that characterize “these little prostitutes”, but for this time describing the changes brought by the war. After coming back from the colonies, Peter Walsh describes a post-war London:

That you couldn’t have done ten years ago — written quite openly about water-closets in a respectable weekly. And then this taking out a stick of rouge, or a powder-puff and making up in public. On board ship coming home there were lots of young men and girls — Betty and Bertie he remembered in particular — carrying on quite openly; the old mother sitting and watching them with her knitting, cool as a cucumber. The girl would stand still and powder her nose in front of every one. And they weren’t engaged; just having a good time [...] (*MD*, p. 78)

followed by a description of the way women look. The effects on war upon women and their social status is an important aspect that preoccupies Woolf’s post-war novel. Then, there is an even more central question that of London’s prostitutes and the social system that is at fault, according to the narrator: “prostitutes, good Lord, the fault wasn’t in them, nor in young men either, but in our detestable social system and so forth” (*MD*, 127). Donald J. Childs in *Modernism and Eugenics: Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, and the Culture of Degeneration* notes that “Richard Dalloway [...] favors an environmental explanation of prostitution, and so he refuses to accept the eugenical belief that prostitution is innate.<sup>434</sup>”

London women and their link with prostitution is something that preoccupies Woolf at an early stage of her career. In her first novel, *The Voyage Out*, published in 1915, a dialogue between Rachel Vinrace and Helen Ambrose offers a perfectly clear answer on the matter:

“Tell me”, (Rachel) said suddenly, “what are those women in Piccadilly?” “In Piccadilly? They are prostitutes”, said Helen.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> Donald J. Childs, *Modernism and Eugenics: Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, and the Culture of Degeneration*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 43.

<sup>435</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

Woolf is direct and candid about this topic from her first novel, which shows once again the writer's feminist side by bringing to light the damages of society upon women's destinies.

The Woolfs were indeed preoccupied and contributed to the creation of a "war writing" of the period. The Hogarth Press did not only publish war veteran Herbert Read's autobiographical *In Retreat* (1925), a pure war reportage story, but the Woolfs included this fragment of war documentary in the same series of Hogarth essays such as *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* along with other works on Modernist aesthetics such as Roger Fry's *The Artist and Psychoanalysis* and Robert Graves's *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry*, Graves being another war veteran<sup>436</sup>. Throughout their publications, the Woolfs have contributed and shown at an early stage the undeniable link between Modernism and war writing.

Now that we have seen Woolf's war consequences and its feminist implications on the London scene, it is time to dive even more into Woolf's feminist approach. I propose to do that through *Three Guineas* in which Woolf combines her pacifist and feminist perspective. It is the very idea of war that awakens Woolf's feminist sensibility.

### ***Three Guineas*: when Woolf's pacifism intersects her writing**

*Three Guineas*, a three-part essay written in the form of a letter, was "published in 1938, as Europe drifted towards war with the rise of fascism<sup>437</sup>". The letter shows Woolf's pacifist and also feminist side; it is about a gentleman requesting a woman's suggestions on how to prevent war, a truly astonishing gesture for that period. In return, the writer's essay disclaims some practical steps in this sense. Woolf was a convinced and engaged pacifist, her diary being evidence in this sense, and for that reason the fictional persona (*Three Guineas*'s "author" figure) finds herself/himself willingly accepting the task: "one does not like to leave so remarkable a letter as yours — a letter perhaps unique in the history of human correspondence, since when before has an educated man asked a woman how in her opinion war can be prevented? — unanswered." (*TG*, p. 89) Woolf thus brings a Modernist and feminist critique to militarism. *Three Guineas* is not a work about war; it is

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<sup>436</sup> Marina MacKay, *Modernism, War and Violence*, London and New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, p. 12.

<sup>437</sup> *Three Guineas* as described on the website of the British Library, last accessed December 7, 2020, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/three-guineas-by-virginia-woolf#>

more than that: it is about an essay on pacifism. We are offered the development of a Modernist and feminist position on the war. Woolf's text brings out political and poetic conclusions. After embracing the novel genre through major works such as *To The Lighthouse* (1927), *The Waves* (1931), *The Years* (1936), etc., and a couple of essays representing key Modernist and feminist texts such as "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf decides to take an experiment with the anti-novel or "novel-essay"<sup>438</sup>, keeping the Modernist and feminist writing, but adding a particular colonial aspect by tackling the issue of war.

Woolf's "letter" follows a structured division, with pertinent arguments in each part. Part One underlines the lack of education accessible to women, at the same time drawing a distinction between what she calls "educated class", such as the pacifist society to which she addresses herself, and the public. She mentions the case of universities, institutions to which women have little access. Part Two goes on by plunging into the discussion of women's professions; what bothers Woolf is that women are not paid as their male equivalents. It is an issue as alarming as fighting against fascism. In Part Three, the narrator expresses her disagreement regarding the war strategies proposed by the unnamed gentleman. She thinks that women should renounce the present institutions and create new ones. The narrator goes even further by imagining a world in which women would also fight against war and manifest their discontent regarding patriarchy.

Woolf began to write *Three Guineas* in 1936, shortly before the end of the year, and a year and a half later she already had her separate and independent response to the "educated gentleman" whose name she chooses not to disclose. The essay begins with a temporal indicator of the period in question:

THREE years is a long time to leave a letter unanswered, and your letter has been lying without an answer even longer than that. I had hoped that it would answer itself, or that other people would answer it for me. But there it is with its question — How in your opinion are we to prevent war? — still unanswered. (*TG*, p. 89)

Woolf's letter starts by providing news on the war situation and she answers what the society in question was looking for in this particular matter. She also underlines her disappointment in the matter and decides to step forward. The gentleman receives the narrator's response with a three-year

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<sup>438</sup> Howard J. Booth, Nigel Rigby (eds.), *Modernism and Empire*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 108.



delay, the writer clearly stating the reason behind that delay. By this means she actually begins her argument on gender and the difference that this question implies:

When we meet in the flesh we speak with the same accent; use knives and forks in the same way; expect maids to cook dinner and wash up after dinner; and can talk during dinner without much difficulty about politics and people; war and peace; barbarism and civilization — all the questions indeed suggested by your letter. Moreover, we both earn our livings. But ... those three dots mark a precipice, a gulf so deeply cut between us that for three years and more I have been sitting on my side of it wondering whether it is any use to try to speak across it. (*TG*, p. 90)

The first half of the passage stresses the fact that, at first glance, there is seemingly no difference between (high-educated) men and women, Woolf's last argument related to women's independence being the strongest: "Moreover, we both earn our livings." The argument is then cut in two by the conjunction "but" and the precipice or deep gulf that after close examination appears unavoidable between the two sexes. As Anna Snaith notes in the "Introduction" to the Oxford University Press edition of *Three Guineas*: "*Three Guineas* is about exploring the long-term effects of deep-rooted inequality.<sup>439</sup>" She does something exceptional by taking the initiative to speak up and attempt to start bridging that "gulf so deeply cut" between men and women. *Three Guineas* has certainly changed the history of feminism and the way society looked at women, the perspective and lack of power and initiative that women underwent. A previous work in which she already started that is *A Room of One's Own*, *Three Guineas* being often seen as a sequel to the latter.

The essay *Three Guineas* covers class and gender problems, the title perfectly reflecting the colonial times of the beginning of the twentieth century, and recreating at the same time Woolf's pacifist position. She reflected on whether she should support three causes with a guinea each. The first cause was stopping the war, the second one rebuilding a women's college, and the third one promoting women's employment. Its title revolves around the idea of the insufficient financial means of women. Woolf was self-taught as we know, nourishing herself from her father's great library; nevertheless, at a certain point she and her sister Vanessa attended some College courses, which they could attend because they were held next to their home situated at 22 Hyde Park Gate. Three guineas was the cost attributed to a subject during a college year, around one guinea being required per term. In here lies the colonial sign of the title. Yet, there is also another way to interpret the title. The explanation of the title first occurs in a manuscript draft of chapter "1910" from the novel *The Years*: here, in the course of a discussion on the need for contraception, Rose points out

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<sup>439</sup> Anna Snaith, *Introduction to Three Guineas*, p. xxvi.

that the poor women from Battersea could not afford the standard three-guinea fee required for a medical consultation<sup>440</sup>: “But I don’t see that woman down there going to Harley Street? With three guineas?<sup>441</sup>”. The title, which at first could seem without much meaning, is in fact quite striking, and not just of the period covering the Second World War, but also in relation to the history of feminism, since the first occurrence of this expression dates from 1910. It thus shows that women’s situation was stagnant, something that preoccupied Woolf. By that, Woolf showcases women’s condition and their rights, especially their rights to have access to greater education. By inserting this aspect in the title, Woolf takes the opportunity to point out women’s issues, a strong stance given that what lies at the centre of her letter are rather war issues. The possible background explanations of the title untangle and clear up to a large extent Woolf’s intent regarding this essay letter.

Apart from gender problems, the class issue appears on several occasions; it is for example the case when the narrator “uses a seemingly more direct first-person address, but its play on and with terms that circulate throughout the text, and its stress on the need for new words and meanings, render it equally rhetorical<sup>442</sup>”, as Laura Marcus notes in her article on “Woolf’s Feminism and Feminism’s Woolf”. We can observe that in the pacifist position that Woolf takes in the following passage:

You have never sunk into the contented apathy of middle life, for, as your letter from an office in the heart of London shows, instead of turning on your pillow and prodding your pigs, pruning your pear trees — you have a few acres in Norfolk — you are writing letters, attending meetings, presiding over this and that, asking questions, with the sound of the guns in your ears. (*TG*, p. 89)

This is a direct address to the gentleman, a recipient of her letter, but also to the people from the highly educated class in general. Woolf accuses him of writing from the heart of London and acting passively by “writing letters, attending meetings, presiding over this and that, asking questions”, rather than taking action in that cause. He therefore chooses to keep to himself “with the sound of the guns in [his] ears”. The tone of the letter is direct, revealing the passive attitude of the high class towards the war.

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<sup>440</sup> Julia Briggs, *Reading Virginia Woolf*, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124. (*Notes* section of the previously quoted article: “The Search for Form (ii): Revision and the Numbers of Time”)

<sup>442</sup> Laura Marcus, “Woolf’s Feminism and Feminism’s Woolf” in Susan Sellers (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

Apart from the class problem that the essay develops, Woolf also makes an important gender problem case in relation to patriotism. War generates a certain sense of identity and patriotism, and to underline that, she relies on the Lord Chief Justice's words:

Englishmen are proud of England. For those who have been trained in English schools and universities, and who have done the work of their lives in England, there are few loves stronger than the love we have for our country. When we consider other nations, when we judge the merits of the policy of this country or of that, it is the standard of our own country that we apply.... Liberty has made her abode in England. England is the home of democratic institutions [... ] Yes, we are greatly blessed, we Englishmen. (*TG*, p. 94)

Nationalism goes hand in hand with patriotism: "Englishmen are proud of England." The "letter" goes on with the intellectual case developed earlier, now adding a positive note for this time. Her argument is that behind "those who have been trained in English schools and universities" there is a profound sense of patriotism. This argument goes in favour of education, and so does the entire essay. But the issue of war brings out two other powerful questions: patriotism and nationalism, usually paired to notions of masculinity/manhood, but that does not prevent Woolf from leading it to a much more challenging level: women's identity and belonging. In Part Three, she uses the well-known suffrage motto of women having no country": "as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world." (*TG*, p. 185) As we can see, Woolf goes from patriotism and nationalism and arrives to feminism, so that at the end she might mix the two, thus becoming a voice in all the feminist and nationalist noise that covers the period of the Second World War and of colonization as well. The writer relies on the previously treated condition of the outsider (for example in *The Years*, published a year prior to *TG*). As Julia Briggs points out, "she goes on to ask whether such sentiments can ever mean the same for a woman: do women have the same reasons for being proud of England, for loving England, for defending England and for feeling greatly blessed? Because of their different stakes in the community, they are made to feel like outsiders, and what can "our country" mean to an outsider?<sup>443</sup>" Briggs' argument is significant so that it encompasses the colonial or outsider condition that women are subject to. As regards nationalism/patriotism, women have probably lost their ability to experience such things due to societal issues: "how much of 'England' in fact belongs to her" (*TG*, 184) becomes a rhetorical point of the whole letter.

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<sup>443</sup> Julia Briggs, *Reading Virginia Woolf, op. cit.*, p. 199.

In *Three Guineas* we discover a Woolf actively involved in politics, taking the side of women and fighting for more liberty and equal rights with men. She proposes the “educated man’s daughter” as taking an active part in this fight, by having an influence and actually having the capacity for helping to prevent the war. Moreover, she advocates that the job done by women at home along with educating children is not even paid. *Three Guineas* is a plea for a new and different future for women, by forgetting the cliché of women who sew by the fire and men who go to war. In order to prevent war, one must stop patriarchy. She also believes in a three-level strategy, one that would simultaneously engage a fight against fascism, war and inequality.

## 2. Rhys and the war from Europe

Contrary to Woolf, who mostly portrays an image of London during the war, Rhys takes a step further and writes about Paris, London and Central Europe as well.

As in Woolf and Mansfield’s case, Rhys’s family situation and history have a great impact upon her writing about the war. Rhys’s war perception is unique and rich since she was a writer who experienced both World Wars. There are two family-related things that had an influence and thus shaped Rhys’s conception of the war: firstly, Rhys’s brother Owen left Dominica to join the British Army when World War I began, as Lilian Pizzichini stresses in the writer’s biography.<sup>444</sup> Rhys, like Woolf, was able to experience the unfortunate consequences of the war through her brother. In both cases, the question of soldiers is at stake. Secondly, an affair related to her daughter left a deep mark on her: it was during the war when she was very distressed because no news had been received of her daughter in Holland since the invasion of that country.<sup>445</sup> Rhys was found drunk on the highway at Holt uttering the following: “I am a West Indian, and I hate English. They are b— mean and dirty lot.<sup>446</sup>” In limited moments like these, Rhys’s aversion towards England came out. One colonial event triggered the other. The fact that she did not receive news from her daughter because of the war made her say things about the English people. And the list could continue with other events having an impact on the writer during the war; Pizzichini has done thorough research on them all.

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<sup>444</sup> Lilian Pizzichini, *The Blue Hour: A Life of Jean Rhys*, New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 2009, p. 118.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*

On her twenty-fourth birthday, Julian Martin Smith, Lancey's cousin fought in a battle at Mons. Lancelot Grey Hugh Smith (whom Rhys called Lancey) was a wealthy businessman and Rhys's lover. A piece of shrapnel hit Julian in the spine during the battle. He died as a result. Another war-related chief event would be Rhys's engagement to Maxwell Henry Hates McCartney, a Times journalist, which was de facto forgotten because of the war.<sup>447</sup>

Apart from the indirect ways of influence that Rhys underwent via her family members, she also had a direct experience: "Between 1914 and 1917 she undertook voluntary work in a soldiers' canteen near Euston Station<sup>448</sup>", which undeniably gave her a major knowledge and understanding of the functioning of colonial soldiers. This canteen was frequented by soldiers on their way to France, and run by a Mrs Colonel Something or Other who was very British, as Pizzichini underlines.<sup>449</sup> The experience and vision gathered during and right after World War I, both in England and outside of it, were valorized and included in her first collection of short stories, as Jean Rhys herself declares in an interview:

I went to France after the First World War, after Vienna and Budapest, came back to Paris and lived there in the 1920s. Mrs Adam, wife of the Paris correspondent of the Times had liked some stories I'd written and she sent them to Ford Madox Ford. That way I got to meet Ford and his wife. *The Left Bank*, my first short stories, were published in Ford's *Transatlantic Review*: I don't think all the stories were very good but they were my first attempt.<sup>450</sup>

In her first collection of short stories, Rhys relies on her Dominican memories, dedicating some stories to her native country, and then to her life in Europe. Being a writer in Europe in the 1920s undeniably meant facing and treating the context of the war in their writings, but the path that led there was not necessarily a smooth one. Later on, during the Second World War, writing seemed not to be Rhys's primary activity. In the same interview for *The Transatlantic Review*, Rhys talks about her absence during the war:

Burton: After the publication of *Good Morning, Midnight* you vanished completely from the literary scene; didn't you miss it at all?

Rhys: I kept on writing poetry and short stories but I didn't want them published. I didn't write much during the war, the bombing didn't tempt me to write much at all.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, p.128.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>450</sup> Jean Rhys and Peter Burton's dialogue in "Jean Rhys: Interviewed by Peter Burton", *The Transatlantic Review*, No. 36 (Summer 1970), published by: Joseph F. McCrindle Foundation, p. 105-109, p. 106.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

Rhys's writing stops in 1939, the year synonymous with the eruption of the Second World War, with the publication of *Good Morning, Midnight*; the year 1939 is also a time when British imperial power was still at its height.<sup>452</sup> The depressive tone of the novel announced the end of Rhys's literary career, at least for a moment, since in 1966 she came back with *Wide Sargasso Sea*. It was a period in which people looked for optimism given the war related events that they had to face. Pizzichini notes her perception on these events:

The war came. It came *GMM*<sup>453</sup>. [...] It was too much information. Too much reality. The urban landscape evoked a city of darkness at a time when citizens of Paris and London were preparing for their own cities' destructions. [...] The exploitation, fear and cruelty she described was happening on a massive scale.<sup>454</sup>

Rhys's long silence during the 1940s and 1950s occurred during this shift from colonial to postcolonial writing.<sup>455</sup> Even if Rhys stopped writing novels during the war, we still have an evidence of her perception of the war due to the short stories that she wrote during that time. It was a difficult and challenging time for writers and for Rhys herself, hence her declaration "The bombing didn't tempt me to write much at all." A similar frightened mood crosses Woolf's mind as well when she comments in her diary about "the bomb terror" while "Going to London to be bombed"<sup>456</sup>, around May 1940.

The war changed artists from all around the world and a sense of insecurity, unbelonging and identity crisis shortly took hold of the writers of the time. In her study of the American Modernist poet Hilda Doolittle, known as H. D., Susan Stanford Friedman observes the following:

The starting point of modernism is the crisis of belief that pervades twentieth-century western culture: loss of faith, experience of fragmentation and disintegration, and shattering of cultural symbols and norms. [...] Art produced after the First World War recorded the emotional aspect of this crisis; despair, hopelessness, paralysis, angst, and a sense of meaninglessness, chaos, and fragmentation of material reality. In a variety of ways suited to their own religious, literary, mythological, occult, political, or existential perspectives, they emerged from the paralysis of absolute despair to an active search for meaning. The search for order and pattern began in its own negation, in the overwhelming sense of disorder and fragmentation caused by the modern materialist world. The artist as seer would attempt to

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<sup>452</sup> Elaine Savory, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jean Rhys*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 21.

<sup>453</sup> "*GMM*" being the abbreviation of Rhys's novel *Good Morning, Midnight*

<sup>454</sup> Pizzichini, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

<sup>455</sup> Elaine Savory, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jean Rhys*, p. 21.

<sup>456</sup> Leonard Woolf (ed.), *A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

create what the culture could no longer produce: symbol and meaning in the dimension of art, brought into being through the agency of language, the Word or Logos of the twentieth century.<sup>457</sup>

The reality of the war has changed writers' conceptions and ultimately their writings. Literature, and art in general, offered people what was mostly needed: order and a rediscovered sense of meaning. Order is what was missing from people's lives and they needed to recentre and ultimately reset in the period that followed the war. Stanford Friedman's argument situates the Modernist literary movement as one emerging after World War I. But we can also argue that there were other writers before the war who embraced Modernism, but probably in a different way, such as Stein, Eliot, Joyce, Pound. In a post World War I period, we notice a particular type of literary Modernism, one that is already shaped and transformed by the war.

There is an undeniable link between the war and the literary genres that emerge after and during it. Rhys's short stories are an indicator in this sense, as despite her lack of motivation during the war, she still wrote some short stories, and certainly letters.

Rhys's correspondence during the war is not an exhaustive one — there is evidence of only three letters in her collection of letters — but despite the fact that it is a meaningful one. In her letters from 1931 to 1966, edited by Francis Wyndham and Diana Melly, she describes the Second World War ambiance. These letters treat war-specific aspects, such as loneliness and confinement, death and the realization of the place that her family, in this case, her brother has in her life.

The first one of these letters was written on March 21st 1941, a year and a half after the beginning of World War II, and was addressed to Peggy Kirkaldy. There she confesses the solitude that she had to endure:

I've tried to train myself to bear complete loneliness, tried hard. But the night before I left Colchester I lay awake horrified at the thought of it. Revolted — longing to come down to you and implore you to help me out of my solitary confinement. And what it's made of me.

I didn't come of course for I'm now too deeply suspicious of human beings and I'm glad I didn't. For it would have been useless.<sup>458</sup>

This letter is essentially on the loneliness that she had to confront during the confinement due to the Second World War.

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<sup>457</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H. D.*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1981, p.97-98.

<sup>458</sup> Wyndham, Francis and Diana Melly (eds.). *Jean Rhys: Letters 1931-66* [1984], Bungay, Penguin Group, 1985, p. 35.

The other two letters were written towards the end of the war, that is to say on October 10th, 1945 (one addressed to Mrs R. E. Smyser, and another one to Peggy Kirkaldy once again, the same month, without any precise date). These two letters are of great importance because they involve two men who played a major role in Rhys's life: Leslie Tilden-Smith's, Rhys's second husband, and her brother. One of the letters announces Leslie Tilden-Smith's death. Tilden-Smith was an English editor and he was the one with whom she returned to Dominica in 1936, after many years of having lived in England. He died of a heart attack in 1945. In 1947, Rhys married Maxwell Hammer, who had also volunteered during the war. In her letter to R. E. Smyser, she confesses the sorrow that she had to face:

During the last months especially [...] I saw that Leslie was ill and I was ill myself. But there was no one I could speak to.

If I had known your aunt's address I would have written to her. But I did not — and couldn't bring myself to ask. (*Letters 1931-66*, p. 38)

Rhys's first husband was Jean Lenglet, a French-Dutch journalist. They married right after World War I, in 1919 and wandered together across Europe. Leslie Tilden-Smith, her second husband, organized a retreat to the English countryside for a holiday right after World War II. The countryside was Rhys's fantasy location for gaining respite from the world.<sup>459</sup> When Leslie died she moved to London. All she had for company was “a novel half finished. I should like to finish it — partly because Leslie liked it, partly because I think it might be the one I've written that's much use — mostly for Leslie. / But I've a *horror* of London. I will go to pieces there alone.”<sup>460</sup> Rhys's destiny during the war is much like Woolf's, who also found a haven in the countryside during the bombing. London and the countryside are very much opposed during the war since the bombing is much more intense in the city.

In Rhys's last letter on the war, childhood memories come to the surface in her mind and at that point it is her brother whom she primarily thinks of. “My brother whom I scarcely knew, for I haven't seen him since I was a very small girl, has been wonderfully good to me. I don't think I could have gone through things alone.” (*L*, p. 38) Rhys's correspondence years stop a couple of years after World War II. Later on, she embraces writing, again in the form of the novel.

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<sup>459</sup> Lilian Pizzichini, *The Blue Hour: A Life of Jean Rhys*, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.



Individuals' future and also the future of writing itself were in danger and needed some immediate readjustments. Rhys lacked inspiration during the war, but still mentions it in her works. As for Mansfield, she expresses the undeniable presence of the war in her literary works. In a November 1919 letter, Katherine Mansfield expressed disappointment at Virginia Woolf's recently published *Night and Day* and asserts the need for a new type of writing after the Great War: "The novel can't just leave the war out [...] I feel in the profoundest sense that nothing can ever be the same – that as artists we are traitors if we feel otherwise: we have to take it into account and find new expressions, new models for new thoughts and feelings."<sup>461</sup> Rethinking the war and including it in the writing is where we can sense her Modernist contribution. I believe that this excerpt from Mansfield's letter shows how Modernism, as a form of expression, and the war come together. One cannot be separated from the other, as one "can't just leave the war out" from the novel. It is "new expressions, new models for new thoughts and feelings" that will shape literary Modernism and give it a new form and meaning. We cannot talk of the same kind of Modernism before and after the war. Mansfield does not imply that Woolf has done so, she simply sees that the two belong together and should be treated that way.

Rhys's stories in which we can read the poetics of war are mostly set in Paris and Central Europe. She loved Paris. Elaine Savory states that "Rhys strongly disliked London and England, and probably returned to Paris whenever she could."<sup>462</sup> She also travelled through Budapest and Vienna. Now let us see the journey that Rhys took outside England, in some other European countries. An important aspect to mention here is that all these geography were produced by the war. Rhys's first collection of short stories, *The Left Bank and Other Stories* saw the light of the day in 1927, stories that were actually written during the First World War. As the name *The Left Bank* suggests, the stories were set in Paris; nonetheless, there is a significant story in this sense, "Vienne", which as its name suggests is set in the cultural capital of Austria. Rhys was mostly interested in women's condition, their fight for financial survival such as in "Mannequin" or "Hunger", but also the sexual exploitation that women were subject to as in "A Spiritualist" or "La Grosse Fifi". Rhys's experience in Paris inspired the setting for some of her novels, such as *Quartet*, her first published novel, but also *Good Morning, Midnight, After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, and a

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<sup>461</sup> John Middleton Murry (ed.), *Katherine Mansfield's Letters to John Middleton Murry 1913-1922*. London, Constable, 1951, p. 380(?).

<sup>462</sup> Elaine Savory, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jean Rhys*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 9.

part of *Voyage in the Dark*. She published four novels in the twelve years before the Second World War.

The stories that came after World War II are the ones mostly concerned with the war. Among such stories we can list: “A Solid House” (1963), “I Spy a Stranger” (1969), “The Insect World” (1973), and “Temps Perdi” (1969).

By having a look at Rhys’s stories and her travelling across important European cities such as Paris, Vienna, or Budapest, we can get a grasp of the relationship or link between Modernism and the war, which is unquestionable. It is through the global dimension of the First *World* War and Second *World* War that I propose to demonstrate this link. The short story “The Insect World” is set in London right after the bombing of World War II. The main character, Audrey, feels frightened about physically ageing when she thinks of her next birthday. The story captures a passage about the war and the passing of time as it follows:

She could not forget, for instance, that on her next birthday she would be twenty-nine years of age. Not a Girl any longer. Not really. The war had already gobbled up several years and who knew how long it would go on. Audrey dreaded growing old. She disliked and avoided old people and thought with horror of herself as old. She had never told anyone her real and especial reason for loathing the war. She had never spoken of it – even to her friend Monica.

Monica, who was an optimist five years younger than Audrey, was sure that the war would end soon.

“People always think that wars will end soon. But they don’t,” said Audrey. “Why, one lasted for a hundred years. What about that?”

Monica said: “But that was centuries ago and quite different. Nothing to do with Now.”

But Audrey wasn’t at all sure that it was so very different.<sup>463</sup>

The question of war, as emphasizing stagnation and a certain gap due to an almost frozen period in people’s lives, intertwines here with a gender issue, that of the ageing of women: “Not a Girl any longer”. The capital “G” in the noun “Girl” redefines the feminist issue and places it at the heart of the war through the question of temporality. A double colonial issue: the woman’s condition and the passage of time occurred as a consequence of the war, the latter influencing the former. The war is defined as a machine that “gobbles up” time and people’s years.

Time has always been a significant part of Modernist studies. In this particular excerpt, we have a discussion about the duration of the war and a rather unfortunate view on it, people’s ageing. The war and the theme of ageing are linked here. The war has also shaped Modernism, even if Woolf talks about Modernism in 1910. Ageing, a time issue, occurs as a consequence of the war.

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<sup>463</sup> Jean Rhys, “The Insect World” in *Tales of the Wide Caribbean: A New Collection of Short Stories*, Oxford, Heinemann, 1985, p. 79-80.

What strikes me in this excerpt is the abundance of temporal markers, such as “not [...] any longer”, “already”, “several years”, “how long”, “five years younger”, and opposite adverbs like “never” - “always”, “centuries ago” - “Now” (the last one being capitalized here). It is as if a kind of tension prevailed in this short story extract: getting “old” versus the war that will presumably end “soon” (both adverbs appearing several times).

The short story “A Solid House”, published in 1963, talks about aging and the discrepancy between the pre-war period and the post-war period, but also between the First and Second World Wars. The following excerpt is built on a similar note as “The Insect World”, the short story mentioned above:

He told her that he thought things were going to be very difficult after this war – worse than last, which was bad enough. In 1920 he had been in Mexico, but in 1921 he was back in London. On his uppers. ‘Pop went everything except my dress suit. In 1914 . . .’

‘But you must have been very young in 1914,’ Teresa said flatteringly.

Captain Roper blinked. ‘Well, as a matter of fact I was. However, I remember . . .’

Yes, pre-war 1914 must have been a golden time.

Teresa stopped listening. When she next heard what he was saying he was no longer in 1914; he was in 1924, giving lessons in Mah Jong to keep his body and soul together.<sup>464</sup> (“A Solid House”, 116)

The war creates a gap in time. The temporal ellipsis constitutes in this passage a speeding up of the narration. We can observe a graduate pause in the narration: first, marked twice by the presence of the three dots, which covers a narrative temporal gap, however, partially substituted by the presence of the said punctuation marks; second, the narrator creates a deliberately chosen omission: “Teresa stopped listening. When she next heard what he was saying he was no longer in 1914; he was in 1924”. The temporal gap precisely covers the entire war period and the years that follow. Gérard Genette, a French literary critic and theoretician, one of the main founders of narratology, notes in his famous work *Figures III* the effect of the ellipsis inside the narration as opposed to those descriptions that act as breaks as well:

[...] il existe une gradation continue depuis cette vitesse infinie qui est celle de l’ellipse, où un segment nul de récit correspond à une durée quelconque d’histoire, jusqu’à cette lenteur absolue qui est celle de la pause descriptive, où un segment quelconque du discours narratif correspond à une durée diégétique nulle. En fait, il se trouve que la tradition narrative, et en particulier la tradition romanesque, a réduit cette liberté.<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>464</sup> “A Solid House” in *TBL* [1968]. London, Penguin Group, 1972, p. 116.

<sup>465</sup> Gérard Genette, *Figures III*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1972, p. 152.

The fact that the war is cut out from the narration has a strong meaning, which functions almost as an escape from the reality of things. The figure of speech used here suppresses the uneasy, colonial time, perceived most probably as a traumatic experience, hence the detail underlined at the beginning of the excerpt: “He told her that he thought things were going to be very difficult after this war – worse than last, which was bad enough.” The gap or more precisely leap happens not only on a temporal level, but also a geographical one: “In 1920 he had been in Mexico, but in 1921 he was back in London.” Rhys refers to the Mexican Revolution that lasted approximately from 1910 to 1920, hence Captain Roper’s return in London in 1921. The temporal ellipsis representing Teresa’s break in listening comes back with the captain’s life but ten years later for this time: “he was in 1924, giving lessons in Mah Jong to keep his body and soul together.” Even in 1924 the consequences of the war were still present and alive. The narrative break that occurs (twice) in this excerpt emphasizes the hesitation, suffering and ultimately the context surrounded by colonial history. The tone used by the narrator is situated between the pre-war nostalgia “Yes, pre-war 1914 must have been a golden age” and the harsh times experienced during the war, as if there were two separate times, hence the use of the ellipsis.

Keeping in mind the post-World War I ambiance, the short story “Vienne”, which is actually Rhys’s first short story (published in 1924 in *The Transatlantic Review*), describes the same period. The narration presents a couple who is travelling, going from Vienna to Budapest, to Prague and London. Without mentioning her name, the narrator describes the prototype of a beautiful young girl: “A fragile child’s body, a fluff of black skirt ending far above the knee. Silver straps over that beautiful back, the wonderful legs in black silk stockings and little satin shoes, short hair, cheeky little face. / She gave me the songe bleu.” (“Vienne” in *TBL*, p. 188)

The fragile girl described by Rhys could be anyone. However, it is evident that the sexuality of the girl is at stake here, furthermore, the sexual exploitation of women in general. Rhys points to the Viennese women of that period and we understand it better in the excerpt that comes a couple of paragraphs later:

Pierre (a damn good judge) raved about her. André also, though cautiously, for he was afraid she would be too expensive.

All the French officers coveted her – night after night the place was packed.

Finally she disappeared. Went back to Budapest where afterwards we heard of her.

Married to a barber. Rum.

Pretty women, lots. How pretty women here are. Lovely food. Poverty gone, the dread of it – going.

'I call them war material,' said Colonel Ishima, giggling.

He meant women, the Viennese women. ("Vienne" in *TBL*, p. 188-189)

Women like this were "too expensive", married well and thus avoided poverty. They are the "war material" women and it is the Colonel himself who names them this way. The narrator feels the need to emphasize that it is about women that the colonel talks: "I mean women, the Viennese women." We do not know for sure if that was the solution to the war, but we know that it was the path that "pretty women" (emphasized twice) took, "lots" of them. The narrator directly points out the business behind these women's affairs: "Lovely food. Poverty gone, the dread of it – going." It is a powerful story that plunges the reader into "the inexorable law of life": "eat or be eaten"(Jean Rhys, *Vienna*, 200), "a detestable world". Vienna here is an indication of the global, imperial nature of the war because it is there that the woman's situation is compromised, "the war material women" who are married to get rid of the consequences of the war, such as poverty and "the dread of it".

In another short story, "The Insect World" for this time, a similar scene is described, providing a prior and during the war period. It precisely underlines the effect and consequences of the war: "An extensive wardrobe. Expensive make-up. Having her hair and nails looked after every week at the hairdresser's. There was no end to it. Anyway, there was one good thing about the war. It had taken all that right off. Right off." ("The Insect World" in *Tales*, p. 83-4.) With the arrival of the war, women have lost wealth and a chance to get a comfortable life. Having the two excerpts in mind, one from "Vienne" and the other one from "The Insect World", a short story published later in 1976, the precarious condition of the woman is highlighted, and more precisely the near-prostitute status that we have evoked in the earlier chapters. The adjective "expensive", characterizing the "war material" woman that Rhys emphasizes here. The war put women in unpleasant circumstances; the time and context itself made them make unusual and sometimes desperate decisions. It could be one of the ravages of the war. In any case, the war, a colonial time in itself attracted another colonial issue by deteriorating women's condition. It is as if the previous excerpt from "Vienne" were an antidote to the current one exposed in "The Insect World". In both cases, we can talk of a colonial time created by the context itself. Women would get into marriages in order to assure themselves of a proper life condition during the war.

During her stay in England, Rhys returned once to her native Dominica. Soon after the visit, she wrote the short story "Temps Perdi", published later in 1969. The same year, another short story

was published, *I Spy a Stranger* (1969): set during World War II, it shows a woman trying to survive the war in a rural community in England.

“And she brooded, she worried,” said Mrs Hudson. “She worried so dreadfully about the war.”

“Who doesn’t?”

“Yes, but this was different. You’d have thought she was personally responsible for the whole thing. She had all sorts of crack ideas about why it started and what it meant.”

“Trying to empty the sea with a tin cup,” Mrs Trant said sadly.

“Yes, just like that. ‘It’s too complicated,’ I said to her one day when she was holding forth, ‘for you to talk about the why and the wherefore.’ But she had these cracky ideas, or they’d been put into her head, and she wanted to try to prove them. That’s why she started this book. There was no harm in it: I’m sure there was no real harm in it.”

“This is the first I’ve heard about a book,” said Mrs Trant. “What book?”

Mrs Hudson sighed. “It’s so difficult to explain . . . You remember all those letters she used to write, trying to find out what happened to her friends?

Through the Red Cross and Cook’s and via Lisbon, and goodness knows what?”<sup>466</sup>

Being worried and also feeling responsible for the war makes her take action in this sense by starting to write a book, something she has never done before. That makes me think of Woolf’s initiative in *Three Guineas*: while having all sorts of reflections and wanting to change the course of things, she decides to write her letter on how to prevent war. But from the tone of Rhys’s short story emanate disagreement, hopelessness and a certain lack of power on women’s part (in this case Mrs Hudson) in such “crack ideas”: “‘Trying to empty the sea with a tin cup,’ Mrs Trant said sadly.” And the argument goes on: “It’s too complicated [...] for you to talk about the why and the wherefore.” Her letter affair gets serious with a national and international dimension: “Through the Red Cross and Cook’s and via Lisbon, and goodness knows what?”. Women want to take the initiative, which already shows a colonial dimension to the war: furthermore, they want to take it to an International level, which shows the worldly aspect of the war.

A couple of pages later we can sense the war-affair getting perpetual and even more present. The escape and obsession due to the war are partly linked to the geography implied, London in this case. The countryside seems an option and a temporary escape from London’s bombings, inspired by Rhys’s personal experiences, just like in Woolf’s case, who also gets some shelter in the countryside when the war seems unbearable in London.

A mechanical quality about everything and everybody which I found frightening. When I bought a ticket for the Tube, got on to a bus, went into a shop, I felt like a cog in a machine in contact with others, not

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<sup>466</sup> Jean Rhys, “I Spy a Stranger” in *The Collected Short Stories*, ebook edition, Penguin Classics, 2017, p. 482-483.

like one human being associating with other human beings. The feeling that I had been drawn into a mechanism which intended to destroy me became an obsession.

I was convinced that coming back to England was the worst thing I could have done, that almost anything else would have been preferable. I was sure that some evil fate was in store for me and longed violently to escape. But I was as powerless as a useless, worn-out or badly-fitting cog. I told myself that if I left London I should get rid of this obsession – it was much more horrible than it sounds – so I wrote to the only person whose address I still had, my cousin Marion Hudson, hoping that she would be able to tell me of some place in the country where I could stay for a while. She answered offering me a room in her house. This was at the end of what they called the “phoney war” [...] ... the “phoney war”, which was not to last much longer. (“I Spy a Stranger” in *The Collected Short Stories*, p. 486-8)

This passage illustrates the powerful effect that the war has on London; moreover, it clearly situates the war in the metropolitan centre, where the tension is at its highest peak: “I told myself that if I left London I should get rid of this obsession”. By opposing London to the countryside the latter becomes a shelter from the great disaster. The temporality of the war, the urge that one had to know it was finished accelerates Rhys’s fiction and goes hand in hand with another temporal reality, that of getting rid of London and the obsession that it constantly provides. Woolf also wants to get rid of London and the countryside becomes a shelter for her since she is frightened of going back to London.

The “phoney war” or the beginning of such a period finds the narrator, who is also a character here, frightened and full of repulsion towards people. Pizzichini illustrates that:

The first months of the war, from September 1939 until May 1940, were quiet months, and were known as “the phoney war”. But Rhys’s fears were not phoney, they were real. In this particular period, the fascist terror was closing in on Rhys’s daughter. She was the fretful mother who couldn’t dissipate her anxiety; she was in pain and the war reinforced her isolation.<sup>467</sup>

The anxiety and fear associated with the war context of the period find their place in the writer’s works and writing style. Rhys’s narratorial choices are not arbitrary, but based on real events. The writing itself, and its very source, is ingrained in the social and political context of the period, which helps the reader contextualize the colonial time of the period.

Throughout her writing, Jean Rhys contributes to our perception and understanding of the colonial context of the war. Moreover, it helps us situate the war in the context of the mid-twentieth century colonial time. What is more, by treating it in conjunction with the women’s question, Rhys

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<sup>467</sup> Lilian Pizzichini, *The Blue Hour*, (page?)

manages to look more closely at such a multilayered issue as the war, and ultimately mirror the social context in which the women's issue was born. Rhys's contribution to observantly illustrating the British Empire's colonial context is significant and she was recognized accordingly. In 1969, Jean Rhys was given the title of Commander of the Order of the British Empire or C.B.E. for her writing<sup>468</sup>, a title usually attributed to English writers. It is among the highest-ranking Orders of the British Empire award and is usually awarded to individuals who had a prominent role at national level, or a leading role at regional level. C.B.E.s are also awarded for distinguished and innovative contributions to any area.<sup>469</sup> This prize does not only place her among the English writers, but demonstrates her contribution at a national level.

With reference to Rhys's national contribution and her contribution to the English short story genre, let me proceed with another great contribution to the short story, and poems in particular, Katherine Mansfield's. Her short prose mastery is astounding and, furthermore, contributes to complexify the image that we have had so far of this writer and her strategies of making colonial time alive in the eyes of the reader.

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<sup>468</sup> Christine Jordis, *Jean Rhys : Qui êtes-vous ?*, Paris, La Manufacture, 1990, p. 64.

<sup>469</sup> Published in The Gazette: Official Public Record, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/awards-and-accreditation/content/103372>, last accessed: November 16, 2020.



### 3. Mansfield: the impact of the war and her European journey

As we have seen so far in Woolf and Rhys's case, people's and, in particular writers' identities were shaken due to the war. Katherine Mansfield is an author whose vast majority of work and career was built during the First World War. However, only five short stories out of seventy-three directly mention the war. But we shouldn't forget her meaningful collection of poems.

During the war, Katherine Mansfield made several journeys in Europe, mainly in Germany and France (Paris and Bandol, in the south of France). For instance, her February 1915 journey to Paris provides inspiration for "An Indiscreet Journey", a short story closely related to the Great War. The consequences of the war, among others the death of her brother, Leslie, which occurred on October 7, 1915, in France, led her to write and long for her native country. In 1915 she writes the following in a journal entry called "November, Bandol, France. Brother": "Yes, though he is lying in the middle of a little wood in France and I am still walking upright and feeling the sun and the wind from the sea, I am just as much dead as he is. The present and future mean nothing to me." (*Journal*, p. 36) The title of the journal entry very well summarizes the quintessence of the Great War's conjuncture for her. When finding out about the news concerning her brother, Mansfield pays special attention to the past: "The present and future mean nothing to me". The past acquires a primordial place — the haunting of the past is a characteristic of colonial writing. The past here represents with the childhood that they spent together in their home country. She is haunted not only by her brother's death, but what weighs even more are her childhood memories, which continually come back as flashbacks. Previously to this event, in March-June 1915 she had started writing the short story "The Aloe" and began evoking her New Zealand childhood. She begins to work again on this particular work once she finds herself face to face to this family tragedy. Facing the loss of her brother triggers the meeting with her New Zealand past. Thus a selection of her fictional work is based on her childhood. Her poems and journal also abound in confessions and references in this sense. It is a moment when she starts missing her home country and plunges even more into recreating her entire childhood. By that standard, the (English) literature that she writes unites the spaces of the Empire when the English war (Leslie being a soldier in England) meets the colonial New Zealand (through their recreated childhood).

Katherine Mansfield is well known in the field of English literature and instantly associated with the short story genre, though she also wrote poems. Her poems are less known and less

studied, hence one of the reasons I study them here. Another reason would be the fact that they treat the poetics of the war in a meaningful way.

Several of Mansfield's significant poems evoke and are inspired by Leslie's death; three of them notably have drawn my attention. Mansfield wrote these particular poems during the war, in 1916, roughly a year after her brother's death, and in 1918. Before going into the analysis of the poems, I think it is essential to evoke a journal entry written right before Leslie went on the front. On October 7, 1915, Leslie Beauchamp is killed in France, while demonstrating how to use a hand grenade. He dies young, at the age of 20-21. Mansfield plunges into depression.<sup>470</sup> She then remembered the latest things discussed with her brother. She kept a trace of these in her journal. They discussed their home country and were sure of going back together one day. Vegetation landmarks are evoked, such as the pear tree from the pink garden with "pears so bright" (*Journal*, 33) that they used to eat; some of them had "the marks of a snail on (them)" (*Journal*, 33) and some other "(they) found used to have little teeth marks in them" (*Journal*, 34). They recall an almost Edenic garden:

"Do you remember sitting on the pink garden seat?"

"I shall never forget that pink garden seat. It is the only garden seat for me. Where is it now? Do you think we shall be allowed to sit on it in Heaven?" (*Journal*, 33)

What follows is a reference to the context of the war and the New Zealand past:

"We shall go back there one day — when it's all over."

"And find everything —"

"Everything!" (*Journal*, 34)

The three lines above consist of spatial and temporal markers. The first sentence is of great importance: in a single utterance Mansfield manages to capture a complex colonial temporality: "We shall go back there" is a reference to the colonies, associated with their childhood, and "when it's all over" pertains to the context of the war, the current times that England was going through. We can read this journal entry, resuming the conversation that the Mansfield siblings had before the war, in conjunction with the poems that were written once the drama of losing Leslie occurred. The pronoun "everything", appearing twice, encapsulates all their cherished childhood memories.

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<sup>470</sup> Katherine Mansfield's life structured in a *Timeline* established by the Katherine Mansfield Society: <https://www.katherinemansfieldsociety.org/timeline/>, last accessed on June 19, 2020.

The first important poem, which indirectly provides some insights into the poetics of the war, entangles death (caused by the war) and the origins of creation, synonymous with the beginnings, their childhood and the New Zealand recollections associated with it. It is called “To L.H.B. (1894-1915)”; as its title suggests, the poem was dedicated to her brother, Leslie Heron Beauchamp, or “Chummie” as she used to call him. Leslie was a Second Lieutenant in the First World War in the Lancashire regiment. In February 1915, he arrives in England for military training. Mansfield’s 1915 journal entries contain significant information about colonels and soldiers and the military atmosphere of the Great War. For example, in February 1915, two weeks after Leslie arrives in England for military training, Mansfield writes from Paris an unposted letter written in her diary:

England is like a dream. I am sitting at the window of a little square room furnished with a bed, a wax apple, and an immense flowery clock. Outside the window there is a garden full of wall flowers and blue enamel saucepans. The clocks are striking five and the last rays of sun pour under the swinging blind.  
[...]

I have had some dreadful adventures on my way here because the place is within the Zone of the armies and not allowed to women. The last old Pa-man saw my passport, “M. Le Colonel,” very grand with a black tea-cosy and tassel on his head, and smoking what lady novelists call a “heavy Egyptian cigarette,” nearly sent me back.

But, my dear, it’s such wonderful country — all rivers and woods and large bits that look blue in the sunlight. I keep thinking of you and L. The French soldiers are *pour rire*. Even when they are wounded they seem to lean out of their sheds and wave their bandages at the train. But I saw some prisoners to-day — not at all funny. Oh, I have so much to tell you I’d better not begin. We shall see each other some day, won’t we, darling? (*Journal*, p. 23-24)

During the war, Mansfield finds herself in Paris. It is a particular time that makes everything seem far away: “England is like a dream.” The war slows things down and gives space to an analytical type of writing, that has the ability to examine every hour and detail: “The clocks are striking five and the last rays of sun pour under the swinging blind.” People are more likely to be at home during war times, which gives them time to write. The text also reveals women’s positioning vis-à-vis their limitations and restrictions during this time: “I have had some dreadful adventures on my way here because the place is within the Zone of the armies and not allowed to women.” The army smokes “heavy Egyptian cigarette[s]”, a sign of the soldiers’ circulation around the world created by the Great War. It is a time when Mansfield gets to appreciate France, even though her usual feelings and opinion of this country and their people are not particularly positive. The fact that her brother, Leslie, is a soldier in Paris during the war makes her situate and project herself in a closer and more

intimate way to the whole enterprise of war. It was probably a letter addressed to J. M. Murry; Mansfield is overwhelmed with doubt but also hope to survive the war: “We shall see each other some day, won’t we, darling?”

The short story *An Indiscreet Journey* (1915) along with her journal entries from that period is also about the same Parisian journey that she took during the war.

The two poems that I will analyze “To L.H.B. (1894–1915)” and ““Last night for the first time since you were dead”” were not included in previous editions of Mansfield’s collection of poems. The latest 2016 edition of Mansfield’s poems, edited by Gerri Kimber and Claire Davison, includes some additional poems, never published before. Having this perspective in mind, it is thus interesting to look at these poems, especially since they are new to the current public and thus less researched. The first one goes like this:

“To L. H. B. (1894–1915)”

Last night for the first time since you were dead  
I walked with you, my brother, in a dream.  
We were at home again beside the stream  
Fringed with tall berry bushes, white and red.  
“Don’t touch them : they are poisonous,” I said  
But your hand hovered, and I saw a beam  
Of strange bright laughter flying round your head  
And as you stooped I saw the berries gleam.  
“Don’t you remember ? We called them Dead Man’s Bread !”  
I woke and heard the wind moan and the roar  
Of the dark water tumbling on the shore.  
Where — where is the path of my dream for my eager feet?  
By the remembered stream my brother stands  
Waiting for me with berries in his hands ...  
“These are my body. Sister, take and eat.”

The poem begins with a powerful temporal image created by adverbial constructions such as “last time”, “for the first time”, “since you were dead”. The temporally charged first line of the poem continues then with spatial markers, such as “walked”, “were at home”, “tall bushes”, these two markers being in a constant interaction throughout the whole poem.

There is an undeniable reference to the origins of creation, which I analyze together with the references to childhood: the poisonous “tall berry bushes, white and red”, followed by a similar

image in: “Don’t you remember ? We called them Dead Man’s Bread !”, and then the final construction: “These are my body. Sister, take and eat”, an obvious reference to the Eucharist.

This poem is primarily a reference to Mansfield’s suffering after her brother’s death, but it is also an allusion to the mourning that so many women had to endure after losing their family during the war. Mansfield’s poetics and ultimate critique show the collective trauma and suffering manifested during the First World War. Up from this point, Mansfield’s Englishness is undeniable. Firstly, nationalist, because she reviews the issues occurring at a national level, mainly the Great War. And secondly, colonialist, because she does not only cover nation-impacted events, she does also involve New Zealand and we shouldn’t forget that she writes her poem from Bandol, the south of France. There are three geography that covers up the colonial context, in Europe under the influence of an emerging literary movement, Modernism.

Geographically speaking, we are witness to a turning point: England and its colony meet (again) through war and death — colonial times attributes — and the intersection of space and time. We have access to colonial time through temporal adverbs such as “again” and verbs referring to temporality directly or implicitly (New Zealand’s temporality) such as “remember”, the past tense form of the verbs employed: “were”, “called”, etc., but also to the colonial space through nominal groups such as “berry bushes, white and red”.

There is a first-person narration throughout the whole poem. The first part of it evokes a dreamlike atmosphere, in which we can read a direct dialogue with her brother, whereas in the second part, the last six lines, the dream is over; the direct speech through the “you” pronoun is replaced by the “I” pronoun. A temporal rupture in writing has thus been created, which separated the dream from life, past from present, but also New Zealand from England, or the spaces where the actions take place.

The quotation marks in the construction “Don’t you remember ? We called them Dead Man’s Bread !” are a sign of the dreamlike atmosphere that takes place. The dream is interrupted when the narrator wakes up: “I woke and heard the wind moan”, and later on plunges back into it when the other character, supposedly embodying Leslie, utters the following : “These are my body. Sister, take and eat.” The dreamlike atmosphere and representation from the end, reminding the reader of Jesus: “These are my body. Sister, take and eat”, idolize the image of the lost brother, and simultaneously the image of her home. It is the spatial representation of home that gives her access to New Zealand: “We were at home again beside the stream, / Fringed with tall berry bushes, white and red.” When the dream ends, a shift of perspective takes place as well: a shift of distance and perspective. Questions such as “distance” and “perspective”, as Genette explains, take place at the

level of the mode, and we talk here about the narrative mode<sup>471</sup>. The change occurs in several instances: first, when she wakes up: “I woke and heard the wind moan and the roar”, followed by another one introducing the rhetorical question: “Where — where is the path of my dream for my eager feet?”. What comes next is outside the dream, hence the present tense used: “By the remembered stream my brother stands / Waiting for me with berries in his hands ...” The final line again reaches towards the dream manifested earlier. Through these shifts of perspective and distance, Mansfield establishes a temporal distance between the time of the story (of the events that have taken place) and the real time of the narrator, at the moment that she narrates these events, just as is the case of an autobiographical novel as A. A. Mendilow explains.<sup>472</sup> Mansfield is an exceptional author, given the fact that she wrote short stories and became famous for that, an unusual thing for the English literature of that period. But as we can see, her poems also bear a complex situation, she does things that we would usually expect to find in the novel form. The ruptured temporality that she creates here, a shock for the reader, is unusual in short works such as poems. The lyrical genre, granted for its short length, is ruptured and cut even more, which makes her writing extremely vivid and concentrated. Mansfield brings the reader from here to there through a journey of time and place.

“To L.H.B. (1894–1915)” is the embodiment of an irregular temporal pattern. The narration jumps from one temporality to the other. Towards the middle of the poem, we can find an analepsis: ““Don’t you remember ? We called them Dead Man’s Bread !””, which refers to their New Zealand past. Genette defines analepsis as “toute évocation après coup d’un événement antérieur au point de l’histoire où l’on se trouve<sup>473</sup>”. There is an anachrony, discrepancy between two temporal orders,<sup>474</sup> between what is remembered and what took place in the past, a kind of flashback. The analepsis enlightens the past of the characters. Later on in the poem, a second analepsis is introduced, using the same verb “remember”, in the form of the adjective “remembered” for this time: “By the remembered stream my brother stands”. There is a back and forth temporal movement in this poem, going in and out of the dream, sometimes almost imperceptibly; the temporal plans overlap at a certain point, so that sometimes we do not know for sure in which plan we are: the reader is suspended in time.

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<sup>471</sup> Gérard Genette, *Figures III*, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

<sup>472</sup> A. A. Mendilow, *Time and the Novel*, *op. cit.*, 1952.

<sup>473</sup> Gérard Genette, *Figures III*, p. 95.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*

The second poem dedicated to her brother is called ““Last night for the first time since you were dead””. It could be seen as a sequel to the one previously analyzed, “To L. H. B. (1894–1915)”, because it takes over some previously mentioned ideas and poetics. The poem uses the same structure; some words are changed here and there, and more importantly, there are two lines that are radically changed. By changing the two lines, Mansfield makes the narration evolve. Firstly, we have the line “Where — where is the path of my dream for my eager feet?” from To “L. H. B. (1894–1915)”, later changed into three lines in ““Last night for the first time since you were dead””:

Come back, oh darling dear! my brother stands

Waiting for me and holding out his hands

Full of the shining berries.

The rhetorical question, “Where — where is the path of my dream for my eager feet?” emphasizes an in between dream and reality universe, which she gets aware of once she wakes up: “I woke and heard the wind moan and the roar”. In ““Last night for the first time since you were dead”” the situation evolves and the narrator is worried of losing her brother and wants him back: “Come back, oh darling dear!”. The end of the two poems also differs in several aspects. Whereas the first poem invites the narrator to taste the berries, “These are my body. Sister, take and eat”, as in the well-known parable of Jesus, in the second poem the gesture of the brother is similar by handing out the berries, but here the narration goes further since there is a rejection of the berries:

Waiting for me and holding out his hands

Full of the berries that I did not eat.

The end of the poem suggests that there is an impossibility for the two siblings to meet. The possibility of reliving their New Zealand childhood represented by the berries and the meeting of the two in the dream fails when she rejects the berries, which metaphorically constitutes the impossibility of recreating their previous New Zealand common experience. The apple, the original forbidden fruit emphasized in the Bible is replaced by the New Zealand berries, found in bushes, a typical colonial image, and ultimately illustrating the loss of the colonial Eden:

We were at home again walking by a stream

Fringed with tall berry bushes

The act of rejecting the berries marks her brother's death and implicitly the sorrow that she feels. It is nonetheless an assurance for the fact that the childhood that she mourns is never coming back, it is dead now, and so is her brother. That is how the war, represented by the brother who dies during the war, and the colonial, expressed by their childhood, meet.

It is as if the poems "To L. H. B. (1894–1915)" and "Last night for the first time since you were dead" represented a sequel to the October journal entry. But at the end of "Last night for the first time since you were dead" we sense a clear sign of Leslie's death through the inability of accessing childhood again.

Even if Mansfield usually does not directly mention the war, there are still stories that cover the poetics of the war and the issues that surround it, such as the question of marriage as an after-war project. "The Indiscreet Journey", published in 1915, approximately a year after the war bursted out. Mansfield's pain is also reflected in her short stories. An immediate short story followed Leslie's death is "The Aloe", which she began earlier, but started again working at it after being affected by her brother's loss. "The Garden Party" (1922) was another story influenced by Leslie's loss. "Six Years After" (1923), an unfinished short story, published posthumously by John Middleton Murry, traces the consequences of the war along with individuals' destiny covered up by trauma and memory. Another one would be "The Fly", written in the last year of Mansfield's life, on March 18, 1922. Her death occurred a couple of months later on January 9th, 1923.

Mansfield's short stories and poems both contain a poetics of war. For example, the poem the short story "In a German Pension" (1911) covers some common aspects with the collection *The Earth Child (The Collected Poems)*, p. 85); then, there is also central Europe, more precisely the Hungarian influence in "Night-Scented Stock" (1917).

Mansfield's short stories, just like Rhys's cover several territories outside England. Apart from France, with Paris and the south of France, we also have Germany and her collection of short stories inspired by this country. *In a German Pension* (1911), Mansfield's first published collection, contains thirteen short stories written in 1909 after her paying a visit to the German spa Bad Wörishofen. The stories are all set in a specific pre-war environment, which we can see through the opposition or contrast that the writer makes between German and English people. This collection is particularly revealing the way Mansfield situates herself outside England in a pre-World War I



Europe. Originally published in 1911, they were almost reprinted in 1920, but Mansfield did not accept it for fear of not being sufficiently mature and also of bearing an excess of nationalism. However, John Middleton Murry still published them after her death in 1926.

The collection of stories abounds in stereotypical images about the Germans and their food and culinary habits; interest in the war; men's attitude towards women; the poor life, with numerous typical children, etc. In short, cultural differences come repeatedly at hand, mainly through feminist issues. The ambiance is typical for a Europe that approaches the Great War.

The first short story of this collection, "Germans at Meat" is less than four pages long, but it communicates a large number of impressions and general ideas on Germans and the German culture through a multitude of literary tools and techniques. As its title suggests, the main cultural aspect through which the characterization is made is the food and the way Germans — usually characterizing men here — relate to that through the food that their wives cook them: "What is your husband's favourite meat?", being a notable sentence towards the end of the story. The cultural stereotype of women who should be highly preoccupied by satisfying their husbands' tastes, keeping up with household tasks and giving birth, is critiqued and interrogated here by Mansfield. The topic of womanhood is all the more revealing given the extra layer added to the narration: the time in which this issue is discussed, the pre-war period, in which Mansfield situates and actually writes the short story.

The first person narration used in "Germans" represents England and English habits. The culinary habits that the German character Herr Rat has are rather English and the breakfast he serves also is of English inspiration, which puts in perspective the narrator who comes from England, but does not share those very habits:

"Now at nine o'clock I make myself an English breakfast, but not much.

Four slices of bread, two eggs, two slices of cold ham, one plate of soup, two cups of tea — that is nothing to you.

He asserted the fact so vehemently that I had not the courage to refute it.

All eyes were turned upon me. I felt I was bearing the nation's preposterous breakfast — I who drank a cup of coffee while buttoning my blouse in the morning. ("Germans", p. 683)

"That is nothing to you", the pronoun "you" in this context sounds rather like "you, English". The national commentary that follows is even more illustrative: "He asserted the fact so vehemently that I had not the courage to refute it. [...] I felt I was bearing the nation's preposterous breakfast", as if

her eating habits had suddenly gained great meaning, especially since the narrator's Englishness lies far away from her morning eating habits: "I who drank a cup of coffee while buttoning my blouse in the morning." Coffee is intentionally used here, as opposed to tea, what English people are mostly known for, once again a stereotype hidden in between the lines. In this short story, Mansfield is extremely ironical: she uses irony to showcase the stereotypes and the superficial nature of people's judgements that lie behind cultures. Mansfield wrote this short story only three years after having returned to London, this time for good. She certainly had a desire to identify with English people and at a certain level she certainly did, hence the short story that she has imagined, which was inspired by her real-life events and journey to Germany. Outside England she was seen as an English woman, but that does not necessarily mean that it was also the case once she returned to England; that is maybe one of the reasons why she chose to live the rest of her life away from the English borders, only her early years being actually spent in England. The general stereotype of English people, eating much (at breakfast) expressed through the general subject "they" quickly narrows down to a single gender, "the ladies", and all the more into "especially the ladies":

"Do they really eat so much?" asked Fräulein Stiegelauer. [...] All the ladies eat too, especially the ladies?"

Certainly, I myself have noticed it, when I was living in a hotel in Leicester Square," cried the Herr Rat. "It was a good hotel, but they could not make tea — now —" ("Germans", p. 684)

Judging English people and their values from a hotel, where the public is usually composed of tourists, expresses the hypocrisy but also irony vis-à-vis Germans' knowledge and capabilities. Given that usually foreigners or tourists are the main visitors of a hotel, in this case an English hotel, it is less disturbing that they do not know how to make tea. The narrator then shares her secret to "mak[ing] very good tea": "The great secret is to warm the teapot." ("Germans", p. 684) Shocked, the German replies with "a thousand premeditated invasions": "So that is the great secret of your English tea? All you do is warm the teapot?" The expression used here, "Your English tea" qualifies the narrator as someone English, but without even mastering the basics of the English culture. Mansfield uses here a mocking tone in order to criticize the way people judge nations, according to some basic stereotypical skills, when in fact the narrator "wanted to say that [that] was only the preliminary canter, but could not translate it so was silent." ("Germans", 684) The narrator does not get the chance to express her Englishness because of the language barrier, and thus remains humiliated and mocked vis-à-vis her identity and also silent. Irony is mixed up with the illusion in Mansfield's "Germans" short story, what Julia van Gunsteren qualifies as the "projection of a

character's erroneous interpretation of events<sup>475</sup>". A propos of Mansfield's short stories, she also highlights "the ironic and problematic disparity between truth and illusion in everyday life<sup>476</sup>", which is precisely the case here.

An extra layer added to judging the English as a nation is while judging their women:

But you never have large families in England now; suppose you are too busy with your suffragetting. Now I hav had nine children, and they are all alive, thank God. Fine healthy babies — though after the first one was born I had to —"

"How *wonderful!*" I cried.

[...]

"Germany," boomed the Traveller [...] "is the home of the Family."

Followed an appreciative silence. ("Germans", p. 685)

"Suppose you are too busy with your suffragetting" is an ironical way addressed to women as if "suffragetting" did not actually defend women's rights. A lack of knowledge on the Germans' part is revealed here. Irony is followed by hypocrisy and duplicity when the narrator interrupts the German woman expressing her fake astonishment: "How *wonderful!*" — the italics used here are a sign of the irony hidden behind the narrator's sentiments — followed by a gesture of weeping. The irony does not end here, because shortly after, it is precisely the Traveller who notices that "Germany [...] is the home of the Family", "followed [by] an appreciative silence". This final comment is once again opposed to the one from the beginning of this scene, where it is acknowledged that English women are "too busy with [their] suffragetting."

Another way for Germans to fail is when tackling the world of national arts and artists and the recommendations that they make:

"But you must go to München. You have not seen Germany if you have not been to München. All the Exhibitions, all the Art and Soul life of Germany are in München. There is the Wagner Festival in August, and Mozart and a Japanese collection of pictures — and there is the beer! You do not know what good beer is until you have been to München. Why, I see fine ladies every afternoon, but fine ladies, I tell you, drinking glasses so high." ("Germans", p. 685)

The complete lack of knowledge can be observed in the things that are included in the cultural heritage for a local German. The first suggestion, Wagner and the festival dedicated to him, is

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<sup>475</sup> Julia van Gunsteren, *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Impressionism*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1990.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

correct, but the other two — Mozart, who is originally from Austria, and the “Japanese collection of pictures”, which has nothing to do with the German or even European culture — are not at all appropriate suggestions when speaking about “all the Exhibitions, all the Art and Soul life of Germany”.

The topic of war is of great importance here since it situates and reminds all the issues discussed in this short story. It is once again the Traveller who seems to master the important topics and better handle a conversation than even local people do:

“Said the Traveller: I suppose you are frightened of an invasion too, eh? Oh, that’s good. I’ve been reading all about your English play in a newspaper. Did you see it?”

“Yes.” I sat upright. “I assure you we are not afraid.”

“Well, then, you ought to be,” said the Herr Rat. “You have got no army at all — a few little boys with their veins full of nicotine poisoning.”

“Don’t be afraid,” Herr Hoffmann said. “We don’t want England. If we did we would have had her long ago. We really do not want you.”

[...]

“We certainly do not want Germany,” I said. ( “Germans”, p. 686)

In this context the “we” - “you” identity play is of importance because it situates once again the English narrator representing England and actually identifying with it: “I assure you we are not afraid.”, “Well, then, you ought to be,” [...] “You have got no army at all”. This aspect is particularly revealing vis-à-vis Mansfield’s positioning outside England, after only around three years spent there. This short story denotes that she already identifies as English.

Then, the situation gets even more tense and there is a “battle” between England and Germany: “We don’t want England. If we did we would have had her long ago. We really do not want you”, uttered by the German while the English narrator responds: “We certainly do not want Germany”. The reality of the war is a serious and actual issue here and “Mansfield depicts the process of perceiving reality in an unstable changing world.<sup>477</sup>” The world experiences an important shift and it is the Great War that brings the change with it.

The short story ends dealing with a feminist issue once again, the place and attributions of a woman:

“What is your husband’s favourite meat?” asked the Widow.

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<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24-25.

“I really do not know,” I answered.

“You really do not know? How long have you been married?”

“Three years.”

“But you cannot be in earnest! You would not have kept house as his wife for a week without knowing that fact.”

“I really never asked him; he is not at all particular about his food.”

A pause. They all looked at me, shaking their heads [...]

“No wonder there is a repetition in England of that dreadful state of things in Paris,” [...] “How can a woman expect to keep her husband if she does not know his favorite food after three years?”

“Mahlzheit!”

“Mahlzheit!”

I closed the door after me. (“Germans”, p. 687)

Ironically, it is the widow who gives advice to the young lady: “You would not have kept house as his wife for a week without knowing that fact.” English and French people are both mocked in this excerpt in a previously asserted stereotypical way. The final lines denote isolation and disconnection, while the narrator wishes “Mahlzheit!” (The equivalent of “Bon appétit!”) while closing the door after her. As Gunsteren notes: “Her [Mansfield’s] short stories often suggest a situation in which, in the end, the individual is basically alone and insignificant.<sup>478</sup>”

Irony and isolation coexist in Mansfield’s short stories. It is the case in “Prelude” as Julia van Gunsteren underlines, but also here I think: “There is continual irony as characters misunderstand each other, fail to communicate or remain trapped in solipsistic isolation from each other.<sup>479</sup>” There is a clear confusion and incomprehension between the narrator and the Germans, which ultimately generates isolation, as the character is left alone at the end of the short story:

The tone of her stories is one of apprehension, irony and cynicism, born of isolation and uncertainty, in which the characters seem to be stranded on isolated stumps in an environment which they cannot comprehend.<sup>480</sup>

The tone of Mansfield’s short story is truly part of the context in which it takes place: the war that awaits Europe. Thus, the writer recalls the theme of war not only in her short stories, but also in her poems. It is for instance the case in poem *XIX* from the Collection *The Earth Child*. The poem was

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<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184-5.

published in 1910, the year that Katherine Mansfield came back to London, after going back to her home country for a couple of years:

I found a little cave powdered thickly with moss  
I curled up inside it, pretending it was my home.  
‘O my hands and my feet have regained their power  
Tell me what it is that they are touching, and that it is good’.  
I wanted to sing a triumphant song that the war was over.  
But my joy was too great — I smiled shaking the tears from my eyes.  
[...]  
I lifted the branch and it floated in  
We played a game without any words, like two children . .  
That frightened me  
I left my green home and wandered deeper into the forest  
I found a pool set about with sweet bushes.  
From the cup of my hands I drank some of the water  
Bitter and warm to taste — like the blood of the earth.  
‘Now, I can never go back!’  
But the tree sang:  
‘Listen, a stranger is among us, Listen, a robber is hunting our paths,  
Light! Protect us!’  
Dawn fastened the sky with his great red hands  
And the battle began again. (Collection *The Earth Child*, p. 85)

The poetics of war is strongly related to feelings associated with home: the desire to go back to one’s roots, which a couple of lines later transforms into fear. She longs for the New Zealand landscape and tries to recreate home:

I found a little cave powdered thickly with moss  
I curled up inside it, pretending it was my home. (*Earth*, p. 85)

and later

I left my green home and wandered deeper into the forest

I found a pool set about with sweet bushes. (*Earth*, p. 85)

Several trials to find home end up in failure: even nature and the sweet bushes that remind her of home act strangely and even consider her a stranger:

‘Listen, a stranger is among us, Listen, a robber is hunting our paths,

Light! Protect us!’ (*Earth*, p. 85)

The fear of the war reminds her that she is on an unknown land and is a stranger. The reference of the Christian mass evoked in the poem “To L. H. B. (1894–1915)” is found here as well:

From the cup of my hands I drank some of the water

Bitter and warm to taste — like the blood of the earth. (*Earth*, p. 85)

But for this time, the cup that she holds with the red wine is an echo to the later “great red hand” that the battle once started recalls. Mansfield makes a powerful gesture here by connecting the image of the home, represented by the wine, with that of the war that is about to start. By that, she shapes the image of a double-edged colonial time: a lost colonial time that she attempts to have access to and recreate, which is reshaped this time by the war, another manifestation of colonial time. The layers of colonial time overlap one another.

The fear of not being able to go back to her home country once the war bursts out again mainly emphasizes the dynamics of colonial time. Two temporal scenes overlap in this poem: one representing a time spent in her native country, surrounded by the “sweet bushes”, and another one back in England, a land “pretending it was (her) home”, describing the Great War. It is just like in the previous poems analyzed, when the dream that takes place in New Zealand switches to her “dark” London reality once she wakes up, is then followed by the dream once again. This overlapping of temporalities and at the same time spatial representations gets even more prominent due to the absence of stanzas. Thus, on the one side we have the Modern writing attributes, and on the other side the two colonial environments represented by the two colonially charged spaces: the Great War in London and the native soul and soil to which “[she] can never go back!”. Genette talks about a sort of “alternance dans la temporalité de l’histoire<sup>481</sup>” while referring to Tzvetan Todorov’s 1966-elaborated study:

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<sup>481</sup> Gérard Genette, *Figures III, op. cit.*, p. 192.

L'analyse du discours narratif [est] essentiellement, l'étude des relations entre récit et histoire, entre récit et narration, et (en tant qu'elles s'inscrivent dans le discours du récit) entre histoire et narration. Cette position me conduit à proposer un nouveau partage du champ d'étude. Je prendrai comme point de départ la division avancée en 1966 par Tzvetan Todorov . Cette division classait les problèmes du récit en trois catégories : celle du *temps*, "où s'exprime le rapport entre le temps de l'histoire et celui du discours" ; celle de l'*aspect*, "ou la manière dont l'histoire est perçue par le narrateur" ; celle du *mode*, c'est-à-dire "le type de discours utilisé par le narrateur". J'adopte sans aucun amendement la première catégorie dans sa définition que je viens de citer, et que Todorov illustrait par des remarques sur les "déformations temporelles", c'est-à-dire les infidélités à l'ordre chronologique des événements, et sur les relations d'enchaînement, d'alternance ou d' "enchâssement" entre les différentes lignes d'action constitutives de l'histoire.<sup>482</sup>

The chronological order of the narration is clearly affected in Mansfield's poems. It is thus a change at the level of rhythm. We have a double temporality here, as Todorov notes, between the time of history, represented by the Great War, and the time of discourse, or the home country setting. It is all the more difficult to differentiate and draw a line between the two since it is the same temporal marker that is used, mainly the past tense, as in: "found", "wanted", etc. The only time that Mansfield uses the present tense is when she expresses universally true facts: "Now, I can never go back!" or "Listen, a stranger is among us, Listen, a robber is hunting our paths".

The period covered by the Great War that Mansfield experienced was a complex one and the traces of this can be found in her works. World War I ended on November 11th, 1918, and in December the same year Mansfield was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Both personal and professional paths were affected by this harsh experience. The war but also her illness made her move to the South of France where she could get the necessary treatment.

Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys were displaced by the war in countries such as Germany, France, Austria or Hungary. Their works are a testimony in this sense, and also the fact that temporality and location go hand in hand, previously demonstrated in chapter three. The current chapter goes further and shows that war because of its temporal and spatial attributes can be qualified a colonial time. The movements from one place to the other both of the soldiers on the front, but also of the writers generate the worldwide dimension of the First *World War* and Second *World War*. This aspect reveals the colonial feature of the war. Apart from the fictional works of our authors that are a testimony of the war and of the colonial time overall, there are important non-

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<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84-85.



fictional works, namely letters, diaries and autobiographical works, which also in turn reveal important aspects of the History that lies behind their works: both fictional and personal writings.

## V. The Private Writings and the Poetics of Colonial Time

*We can't all be happy, we can't all be rich, we can't all be lucky — ant it would be so much less fun if we were. Isn't it, Mr Blank? There must be the dark background to show up the bright colours.*  
(Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight*, p. 26)

On January 20th, 1919, Woolf writes:

I have just re-read my years' diary and am much struck by the rapid haphazard gallop at which it swings along, sometimes indeed jerking almost intolerably over the cobbles. Still if it were not written rather faster than the fastest type-writing, if I stopped and took thought, it would never be written at all; and the advantage of the method is that it sweeps up accidentally several stray matters which I should exclude if I hesitated, but which are diamonds of the dustheap. (*Diary*, p. 7)

Woolf's description of the pace of diary writing and the effect that it has upon the revealed content itself is like an epiphany. By these means, she realizes that diary writing reveals the unexpected, the accidental and most importantly the "diamonds of the dustheap". The diamond - dust metaphor used here lays the foundation for this particular chapter. The poetics of such private writings, whether we think of diaries, letters or autobiographical works, are its highlight. If an early stage of this dissertation studied the context in which these writers write and from which come from, this final chapter is a flipping over, in the sense in which this time we are not interested in the actual and raw biographical content that they may contain, but in the poetics of the writers' works, with a greater asset after the analysis that has been done on the works. My aim here is to show that Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys's private writings also contain the colonial time that their literary works do.

This new specific corpus is composed of Virginia Woolf's diaries and letters, Katherine Mansfield's journal and letters, and also her *Urewera Notebook*, and Jean Rhys's collection of letters and her autobiography, *Smile Please*. Mansfield's works include a significant, still under-researched work, *The Urewera Notebook*, a travel journal that she wrote in 1907 during a camping trip in Te Urewera, a large national park in New Zealand. She went there right after coming back from her first experience in England related to her studies. This work is essential because of the writer being caught between her New Zealand's colonial past and her English experience. The existence of this corpus calls for a study at this most crucial, final point in the thesis, because it will help us complete the circle of the argumentation. The early chapters have shown the existence and pointed out where exactly colonial time can be found and identified in the text. The aim of this final chapter is to show the transformation that was made by including the colonial perspective. How do our perception and understanding of Modernism change and in what way, by taking these three writers and looking at them through the colonial angle?

In the diaries, we discover what is underneath the author's lives and more precisely underneath the works that we study, and we are precisely interested in a flipping over, in order to show the transformation that is taking place at the level of the poetics of the text. We talk about

things that are beyond the walls that protect people from, for instance, the war happening outside; we thus have access to the historical context from underneath, but also to the very personal vision and intimate poetics of the writers, their perception and sensibility, experiencing the war from inside the houses. This presents a crucial space for my conclusive analysis of Modernism, and of its linkage with colonialism. Digging into the diaries brings the reader something raw, unpolished, and dusty. On September 25th 1940, once again in full wartime, Woolf notes:

All day — Monday — in London; in the flat; dark; carpets nailed to windows; ceilings down in patches; heaps of grey dust and china under kitchen table; back rooms untouched. A lovely September day — tender — three days of tender weather — John came. We are moved to Letchworth. The Garden City was moving us that day. Roger surprisingly sells. The bomb in Brunswick Square exploded. I was in the baker's. Comforted the agitated worn women. (*Diary*, p. 338-339)

The metaphor of the dust continues and it shows that inside people's houses lie "heaps of grey dust" while the "carpets [are] nailed to windows". It is as if there were a barrier between the world inside and the world outside, where war is raging; as if there were two different worlds. Woolf's existence is limited to a closed space — her London's flat or Letchworth, where Leonard and herself moved — and her writing, whereas outside the bombs fall one after the other.

Woolf confesses not re-reading her letters: "I can only write, letters that is, if I don't read them: once think and I destroy." (*A Change*, August 1923, p. 63) It is the spontaneous act of writing characteristic of private writings that reveals history itself, the latter being representation, construction, discourse. In addition, private writings are a question of being ready or not, that is why one cannot read them very early, otherwise the reader gets uncomfortable. They are rich and extremely telling of the context and period in question. In private writings the writers act as observers, hence their look on society is extremely refined and attentively done. In contrast with history, where we have actual facts, illustrated from an objective perspective, in private writings the perception of the writer is also part of the discourse. By reading an author's letters/diaries, we have access and discover the author from another angle: a more personal or more spontaneous one, in other words, less restrained, but that is something that we do not know in advance. Letters and diaries also help in understanding the (fictional) works better. Most of the authors conduct a diary while writing their works. That is also the case for the three writers. But that is something that they write to guide them, not in order to be later published.

Besides the diaries and journals already present in this corpus that helps in demonstrating the linkage between Modernism and colonialism, it is also today's research and publications that

support and require the writing of this chapter. These publications have shown us that research is interested and goes more and more towards the discovery and perhaps rediscovery of these personal writings. The intimate life of the writers is more and more at stake. Virginia Woolf's personal life has certainly gained the writers' interest during the last years in France. Let us think about Emmanuelle Favier's *Virginia* (2019), whose fiction embraces and narrates Woolf's life. It is through fiction that Favier proposes a discovery of Virginia Woolf as a powerful writer and personality. Then, there is also Woolf's new biography (published in February 2021), in French this time. After the revolutionary landmark written by Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (1996), Henriette Levillain, emeritus professor at Paris Sorbonne University publishes *Virginia Woolf : Carte d'identité* (2021), a recent biography. The writer's personal life is also shown through the movie *Vita and Virginia* (2018) (with Chanya Button as director).

A recent number of the journal *Europe*, dedicated entirely to Virginia Woolf, contains Anne Besnault's article entitled "Tuer encore et toujours 'L'ange du foyer' : Relire Woolf avec Despentès", which highlights the need to study private writing and its connection to history, in the case of Woolf:

Selon Despentès, l'histoire personnelle que construit Woolf est toujours en lien avec la grande histoire. Ses récits sont toujours forcément empreints des marques d'un temps subjectif et monumental ; si l'irréversible y est un événement collectif, il est aussi un "bombardement intime". [...] Son "accablement" ou ses accès dépressifs l'isolent parfois, mais finissent toujours par l'ancrer dans le réel. Ses mots, phrases et signes de ponctuation font naître autant d'idées que d'événements "sensuels", historiques et politiques. Sa façon de "couler", *to sink*, terme si proche de *to think* n'est jamais qu'une autre façon de penser.<sup>483</sup>

Besnault's reflection on the relationship between personal history and history itself represents the basis of this chapter. Personal writings are rooted in the depth of things, whether they are political or historical, as this passage suggests, and this is ultimately the goal of this chapter. This rootedness will not be similar in the case of the three writers and the propositions will vary. But how does this sit with the classic views of Modernism? It is also a question that I am regarding in this chapter.

More and more writings study the colonial and historical background of its writers. It is also the case of Katherine Mansfield whose father gained the interest of a researcher, Kevin Boon, who wrote a book about him. Kevin Boon's study, *From the Colonies to Katherine Mansfield: The Life and Times of Sir Harold Beauchamp*, was published in Wellington in March 2021. Boon, known for

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<sup>483</sup> Anne Besnault, "Tuer encore et toujours 'L'ange du foyer' : Relire Woolf avec Despentès" in Jean-Paul Goux, "Virginia Woolf", *Europe*, janvier-février 2021, Paris, p. 162.

the publication of over one hundred books about prominent personalities and historical events, “traces the path of a remarkable man who rose from humble beginnings to become a leading figure in colonial New Zealand.<sup>484</sup>” Boon is interested in highlighting the influence that Harold Beauchamp had on his daughter, the success that she experienced, as well as the important literary figure that she became. Apart from her father, Mansfield was also influenced by her grandmother, whose name she wears. In her early years in London, when she started writing, Kathleen Beauchamp, as was the writer’s birth name, decided to take her grandmother’s name, by whom she was raised, and became “Katherine Mansfield”. The mark of her New Zealand ancestry and background have left a significant mark on her. Her father’s contribution is important in several areas linked to New Zealand, such as banking, trading and also the arts. His success was at a time when New Zealand itself was beginning to bloom and gradually achieve full development. The emergence of New Zealand’s history goes hand in hand with the birth of the prolific author that was Katherine Mansfield.

As regards biographies, Jean Rhys’s life is also a current issue among researchers and writers. Caryl Phillips’s *A View of the Empire at Sunset* (2018) represents a case in point. Just like Favier does with Woolf, Phillips recreates Rhys’s life through a fictional narrative. Phillips is a Kittitian-British novelist in quest of revealing the experience of descendents from diasporas but living in England, the Caribbean and America. The novel is inspired by Jean Rhys’s life, who lived in the Caribbean until sixteen years old, then in London and later Paris. Nevertheless, her adult wish was to see her native land one last time, which she eventually did. After a couple of weeks spent on location, she left Dominica with bitterness and a feeling of estrangement, and disappointment I believe: “Phillips’s gripping new novel is equally a story about the beginning of the end of a system that had sustained Britain for two centuries but that wreaked havoc on the lives of all who lived in the shadow of the empire: both men and women, colonizer and colonized.<sup>485</sup>” This is a very important text, especially if we think of the comparison between Rhys’s texts and his, and their respective treatment of coloniality. What he does with her can be compared to what she does rewriting *Jane Eyre*. Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* influences the common reading and understanding of the matrix novel, as it rewrites crucial parts of *Jane Eyre*. Jean Rhys attempts to write a

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<sup>484</sup> Description found on the website of the Katherine Mansfield Society: [katherinemansfield.com/product/from-the-colonies-to-katherine-mansfield](https://katherinemansfield.com/product/from-the-colonies-to-katherine-mansfield), last accessed June 4th, 2021.

<sup>485</sup> Farrar, Straus and Giroux’s on Caryl, Phillip’s *A View of the Empire at Sunset*: <https://us.macmillan.com/books/9780374283612>, last accessed June 4th, 2021. The published review was among *The New York Times Book Review* Notable Books of the Year.

postcolonial version or a postcolonial response to *Jane Eyre*<sup>486</sup>, by creating a character, Mrs Rochester, who is subject to patriarchal and imperialistic oppression<sup>487</sup>. It is notable how Phillips chooses to focus on that particular aspect, Jean Rhys's coming back to the Caribbean after a life lived in the Modern capital cities of Europe. The Modern life versus the colonial existence, which has always been by her side, are put in balance here. The Modern and the colonial accompanied all the way Rhys's existence. By choosing to put the emphasis on the colonial return, Phillips stresses this particular linkage between the colonial and the Modern.

As we can see, the study of Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys's private biographical life naturally works its way through and among today's research, hence the crucial place of this chapter.

In conclusion, the role, power, and potential of the intimate are precisely the substructure of the last chapter of my dissertation, in which the question of the personal writings is at stake. It is in the intimate that we can find the extraordinary, just like the "dustheap" that hides diamonds, to recall Woolf. Ann Stoler has actually studied how the intimate can reveal surprising relations, facts or attitudes. In her study *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, Stoler treats the link that exists between feminism and colonialism, by particularly examining, "the critical role played by sexual arrangements and affective attachments in creating colonial categories and distinguishing the ruler from the ruled, arguing [at the same time] that social classification is not a benign cultural act but a potent political one."<sup>488</sup> The articulation of several issues, such as race, intimacy and sexuality treated in conjunction with colonial theory and analysis offers a compelling study and a fresh perspective on the colonial practice. The hybridity of these concepts brings with it struggles of liminality — so common in postcolonial theory — between the colonizer and the colonized. Stoler also argues that the hybridity that she treats here is not just a theoretical issue, but also one deeply rooted in the historical ethnography more broadly, and historical reality more precisely. The juxtaposition of the colonial, the Modern and the feminine is part of Stoler's argument; in the family archives we can see the gender-based constructions and relations, inside the families themselves, something that national archives could never do or offer to the public.

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<sup>486</sup> [grin.com/document/170690](http://grin.com/document/170690), last accessed February 4th, 2022.

<sup>487</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" in *Critical Inquiry*, 12:1 (Autumn 1985), 235-61, [knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/spivak.html](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/spivak.html), last accessed February 4th, 2022.

<sup>488</sup> University of California Press informing on their book: Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* [2002], London, University of California Press, 2010: <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520262461/carnal-knowledge-and-imperial-power>, last accessed on June 29, 2021.

## 1. Woolf's approach to the empire

Virginia Woolf, apart from her impressive collection of fictional and critical works, has also an immense collection of letters and diaries, or “life-writing”, in her own terms. She even studied diaries and reflected upon their purpose and the impulse that one gets while writing them:

I'm reading the Countess Tolstoy's diaries, and his diaries, and both their public diaries and their private: and wonder what the diary instinct is — since it caused them both infinite anguish. But how the Russians always triumph over us when they take up the pen!<sup>489</sup>

Woolf's study and interest in this particular field of private writing is not just a passing coincidence. Her lifelong work and reflection on the biography, or “life-writing” are reflected in several works, such as the “Lives of the Obscure”, extract from *The Common Reader* (vol. 1), memoirs such as *Moments of Being*, essays written with the aim of reading them at “The Memoir Club”, a gathering that first met in 1920 and which later became the famous Bloomsbury Group.

Woolf's study of diaries seems to have encouraged the writer in the immersion in this specific genre, hence the numerous diaries and letters that she wrote. The interest in private writings associated with the politically charged events of metropolitan London that she had access to make her diaries and journals an extremely valuable tool in the study of its poetics, deciphering at the same time Woolf's literary writing choices. Personal experience and politics thus meet in Woolf's writings, as the writer herself recognizes. In a letter to T. S. Eliot, Woolf confessed:

Please remember that I am always glad if you will write and tell me anything about yourself: or politics: and it would be a great pleasure to me to read some of your writing, and criticise it: so think of writing your life, and if you only write a few pages at a time, I could read them and we could discuss it.<sup>490</sup>

This passage concisely shows what Woolf cares about: “tell me anything about yourself: or politics.” The succession of colons used here relates and unifies the two spheres: letters (more specifically biography) and politics. The writer is herself attentive to her own love for this literary genre:

“[...] of all literature (yes, I think this is more or less true) I love autobiography most.

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<sup>489</sup> Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (eds.), *Leave the Letters till We're Dead: The Letters of Virginia Woolf 1936-1941*, Edinburgh, Chatto & Windus, 1980, p. 107.

<sup>490</sup> Joanne Trautmann Banks, *CS*, p. 399 - letter written on February 9th, 1938.



In fact I sometimes think only autobiography is literature — novels are what we peel off, and come at last to the core, which is only you or me. And I think this little book — why so small? — peels off all the things I don't like in fiction and leaves me the thing I do like — you.” (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, volume five 1932-35, letter to Hugh Walpole, December 28, 1932, 142)

In this passage we can see Woolf's fascination for personal history and interest in subjectivity. This “little book” that Woolf talks about is probably Hugh Walpole's last novel *The Killer and the Slain*. If “we peel off” the fictional part of this book, what remains is “you or me”. It is in private writings that Woolf shapes her Modernism, and the form of aesthetics and subjectivity is a large part of it.

Autobiographies, such as *Moments of Being*, from a contextual perspective, are similar to diaries. Nonetheless, the latter's power to recreate the political events and their significance is all the more meaningful. The spontaneous nature of journal writing in conjunction with the time that the writers had available due to social circumstances, such as the war, makes the reader stick more with it and grasp a more complex meaning of the colonial time that is in the text. The previous analyses have shown that colonial time is a time vividly painted in the authors' writings, with the aid of Modernism, and which has its roots in the colonial and social background of the period analyzed.

Private writings are like a journey in the workshop of the actual literary works. *Mrs Dalloway*, a novel shaped in a Modernist fashion, contains important societal aspects and critiques, recognized by the writer herself. In 1923, during the conception of the novel, Woolf notes in her diary apropos of *Mrs Dalloway*:

But now what do I feel about my writing? — this book, that is, *The Hours*, if that's its name? One must write from deep feeling, said Dostoievsky. And do I? Or do I fabricate with words, loving them as I do? No, I think not. In this book I have almost too many ideas. I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense. (*A Writer's Diary*, 56)

*Mrs Dalloway*, which has been called “Modernist” because of the poetics that emerges in the work, bears important colonial and political marks, a fact that Woolf herself recognizes: “I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense.” The underneath level of this work is of colonial inspiration, and it is interestingly the diary — a writing offering information from underneath — that offers an explanation in this sense. She could say so much about the social and political context in which she lived that she ended up saying: “In this book I have almost too many ideas.” These ideas are likely to be political and social

primordially. The war and its consequences, the tension brought by those times in conjunction with the criticism and the ideas accumulated make her feel the need for a whole adventure, that of rewriting the novel. Woolf is interested in how one writes a post-war novel, given the chaotic context, specific after the war, that she describes in this passage.

## **Woolf's colonial context and her attitude towards it**

The colonial context by which Woolf was surrounded can be seen in her fictional works throughout the numerous instances that we have analyzed in the previous chapters. My aim here is to show that private writings also bear the mark of the colonial, and that by pointing to the poetics of the texts. In the private writings there is something more than that: we also have access to Woolf's attitude and the way it changes throughout the years. Let us first see how she talks about attitude and change in one of her letters, dated February 19th, 1937. It is a letter addressed to Ethel Sands, an American-born artist and hostess who lived in England from childhood. She studied art in Paris, where she met her life partner Anna Hope Hudson (Nan), to whom she makes allusion in this letter. What is unique and interesting to know about this letter is that it covers up all the important layers on which this dissertation is built, Modernism, colonialism and feminism, all three in one letter. This is how the letter begins:

The difficulty wh. now faces me is how to find a public, a way of publishing, all the new ideas that are in me? [...] there's in my drawer several I think rather good sketches; & a chapter on biography. Clearly I have here in the egg a new method of writing criticism. I rather think so. I feel that I want some private way of producing these studies; these adumbrations. If one writes them for a paper the attitude changes. They're not Times articles or N. S. Articles: yet I don't want to keep them till they're books or flatter them out separately ... Lord knows. Anyhow I like the fruitful sense it gives me.<sup>491</sup>

Private writings, apart from letters and diaries, also contain biographies. And Woolf was someone who enjoyed "life-writing" very much. That is why she wants more, she wants to create "a new method of writing criticism". The fact that she "want[s] some private way of producing these studies" shows that she appreciates the private quality of life-writing. The adjective "private" here

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<sup>491</sup> Anne Oliver Bell and Andrew McNeillie (eds.), *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, volume 5 1936-41, St Ives, Penguin Books, 1984, p. 58. - letter written on February 19th, 1937.

is inspirational and calls for a brief observation. I have decided to use the construction “private writings” in this chapter, on the one hand, to call a separation between the fictional work reserved for the public, and the private writings, which were initially not meant to be published. On the other hand, I wish to highlight the particularity of these writings, because they are those whose poetics show the way our conception of Modernism is transformed through a consideration of colonialism. Woolf is very clear here in saying that “[i]f one writes them for a paper the attitude changes”. With this statement, she draws the line between private and public writings, and the main difference lies in the attitude of the writer. The word “change” is a strong word in Woolf’s case, one that she explored in her writings. In her essay “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown”, Woolf talks about the fact that “on or about December 1910 human character changed<sup>492</sup>”. On the next page of her essay, she continues by explaining that: “And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature. Let us agree to place one of these changes about the year 1910.<sup>493</sup>” This change is, first of all, the birth of what we later on call Modernism, and also of what Woolf alludes to in this letter, that is to say that it is also written for a paper (periodical, magazine, newspaper) that changes.

Woolf talks about the difference between writing a biography for an official journal and “a new method” which consists in “some private way of producing these studies”. There is another layer of thought here, and that is between writing biography and writing journals and diaries. The latter is not meant to be published. It is therefore rough, raw and unpolished, as we saw at the very beginning of this chapter.

In her latest study *Virginia Woolf’s Unwritten Histories: Conversations with the Nineteenth Century*, Anne Besnault talks about the Woolfian change by dedicating a chapter to it called “Rewriting History: Contexts for Change”. There she makes the parallel between the change that Woolf underlines in her essay “Character in Fiction” and the Modernist’s view of the past as part of the present:

The perception of a necessary break with the past [...] implied both a reconsidering of the whole social and cultural system, and a new sense of direction. [...] To do so, she kept unwriting the past and rewriting the present. [...] she also understood that one does not contribute to change by erasing the past but rather by clarifying it to create the contexts for change.<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> Leonard Woolf and Virginia Woolf (eds.), *Virginia Woolf: Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown, op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>494</sup> Anne Besnault, *Virginia Woolf’s Unwritten Histories: Conversations with the Nineteenth Century*, New York and London, Routledge, 2022, p. 66.

This is exactly what Modernism was about. And history was a large part of it. In a response to Strachey who communicated to Woolf his intention to write about George IVth, Woolf writes: “The worst about George IVth is that no one mentions the facts I want. History must be written all over again. It’s all morality — & battles, I added”. This was a “call for change<sup>495</sup>”. It was indeed a “call for change”, as Besnault points it out. “Woolf’s reflections on history, time and change<sup>496</sup>” were at a time in history when the whole literary scene was changing, and by that I mean the rise of a movement that would bring chaos by breaking the traditional temporality of narration (Modernism) and also by rewriting History. Woolf fought for History, for its place to be recognized.

Let us now go back to Woolf’s letter to Ethel Sands, which begins with a section on biographies and private writing, which then switches to politics:

Yesterday Ethel Sands in black & silver fur to tea; [...] Ethel flitting by the rich dusk of high liberal life; full of swerving half sentences; betwixt & between. [...] — Then L. came & we talked about India. E. had been impressed by the Eng. Civilian; most of all by the rains: how the temp. fell, like this, she drew her finger along the table cloth. Then I forget — I flirted with old Ethel — about her golden wedding present. Nan (Hudson) used to know about water gilding. The Sinclairs see no danger ahead for England. One of her nephews tho’ says this is his last winter’s hunting. (*Ibid.*)

Ethel Sands, according to Woolf, lived a “rich dusk of liberal life”. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party, was Ethel Sand’s nephew. There is a succession of colonial related issues that Woolf writes about in this letter. In the presence of her husband, Woolf talks about colonialism and politics. In the end, discussions with Leonard were the ones that Woolf was constantly used to. This shows once again how Leonard influenced her in her colonial thinking and vision: “Then L. came & we talked about India.” Apart from the pronoun “we”, the whole passage is marked by an absence, as if Woolf were absent from the picture. She narrates what happened for a period of time, then the rhythm of the sentences is interrupted by the syntagm “Then I forget”, which leaves Woolf uninterested. There is a lack of substance; Woolf’s attitude is meaningful here. The fact that she mentions “England”, not Britain, as if once again she wanted to stay outside the context in question, is meaningful here. She is interested but still manifests a reserved attitude. Just as when she talks about Leonard being a Jew, which she cannot accept and is still reserved towards that, but at the same time she points out that “it interests me immensely”. Woolf’s concern for England seems to be a rather passive one since she uses the third person plural, “the Sinclairs”, to

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<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

talk about it: “The Sinclairs see no danger ahead for England. One of her nephews tho’ says this is his last winter’s hunting.”

Harry Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951) was an American writer. In 1930 he was the first writer from the United States to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. Sinclair’s works are known for the critical views regarding American capitalism in the interwar period, and for his strong characterizations of modern working women. He is part of Woolf’s inner circle. I feel that in the letters and journal the presence of the colonial is more explicit and easier to grasp, hence the presence of words that clearly denote the colonial: “Indian”, “England”, “liberal life”, etc. The sense that Woolf makes here is more direct than in her fictional works. At the same time, there is a certain distance towards the colonial that she manifests in her private writings, using several techniques such as reported speech. Almost as if she were an observer. Woolf uses a third person pronoun when the colonial issue comes up: “The Sinclairs see”, “one of her nephews”. Woolf also relies on the technique of the reporting speech, as in the following sentence: “one of her nephews tho’ says this is *his* last winter’s hunting” — implying the war here. She also uses the third person pronoun “his” in “his winter hunting”, as if she were excluded. That means that colonialism is not that important for her poetics.

Just as Woolf says at the beginning of the letter, I think that in the private writings, it is her attitude that changes, not exactly changes but *reveals itself*, more than in her fictional works. We could say that it changes from an indirect way of approaching it (which is the case in her fictional works) to a more direct and raw way (in her private writings). It is a more direct approach. Her attitude is one of looseness, directness, writing as if she wouldn’t be published. She distances herself from the colonial whenever she wants to or feels like it. It is the spontaneity of the private writings that makes us perceive the colonial better. Colonialism, when perceived through the lens of private writings, changes.

Let us go back now to Leonard and the influence that he had on Woolf. “Leonard is a shifty character, entirely given up to Colonial Office, India Office, Labour Party etc etc etc.<sup>497</sup>”; so Virginia Woolf characterizes her husband in the third volume of her collection of letters, on May 29, 1924. This argument comes after having established that their life is settled and in order now: “It would be very nice to see you again, now we are really settled in life”, Woolf inviting her friend,

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<sup>497</sup> Nigel Nicolson & Joanne Trautmann, *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, 1923-1928*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1977, p. 113.

Margaret Llewelyn Davies, to come to dinner. Even if their lives seemed to have got in order, the politically involved part is still a shifty or deceitful matter, as Woolf herself underlines. Leonard Woolf had a series of political functions among which secretary of the Labour Party's advisory committee on Imperial and International Affairs and co-founder of the *Political Quarterly* magazine in 1930 and co-editor until 1959<sup>498</sup>. His participation in the colonial system in Ceylon, today's Sri Lanka, which lasted around seven years (1904-1911), is also noteworthy. Ceylon found itself under British control at the time. His militant experience, that of a colonial civil servant more precisely, will be later valued in the works that he publishes and which were inspired by his journey. Nevertheless, his love for Virginia made him interrupt the political career that he was pursuing, as Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann underline in the *Introduction* to Virginia Woolf's second volume of letters:

He was an ex-colonial civil servant who had resigned mid-career (for no other reason than his love for Virginia), without money, job, prospects, or friends in high places. Ten years he was the acknowledged Labour expert on imperial and international affairs, on Co-operation and several branches of economics; he had published four political books and two novels, besides many pamphlets, translations and articles; he had edited, or helped to it, three reviews; he had founded the Hogarth Press; he stood for Parliament.<sup>499</sup>

In the passage above, there is an explicit case of Leonard Woolf's coloniality and its complexity, as he was "Labour expert on imperial and international affairs", also involved in economical and political issues. All these functions and the context in which Woolf was writing, among other things, raise a couple of important questions on her role as a writer and the influence exercised on her writings. Do these private writings contain traces of Leonard's influence and his colonial related issues, which in turn had an influence on Woolf? In what way did that have an impact on the writer Virginia Woolf and the writings that she undertook?

Starting with 1912, the year Woolf and Leonard married, Woolf's most immediate companion became her husband. The letters and diaries testify to his influence and also an extra layer to the colonial context which she was immersed. Apart from the London in which she lived, the immediate colonial influence was Leonard for this time. But how does she cope with this?

In 1924, as soon as Woolf refers to her husband, she immediately begins by mentioning that he is a Jew: "What is my husband like? / A Jew: very long nosed and thin [...]" (*The Letters of*

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<sup>498</sup> CS, footnote page 392.

<sup>499</sup> Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (eds.), *The Question of Things Happening: The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, volume II 1912-1922, London, The Hogarth Press, 1976, p. xxi/ii.

*Virginia Woolf, Volume III 1923-28* [1977], London, The Hogarth Press, 1994, 130, letter written on September 4, 1924) or as in the following letter, right before marrying him:

[...] how am I to begin about Leonard? First he is a Jew: second he is 31; third, he spent 7 years in Ceylon, governing natives; inventing ploughs, shooting tigers, and did so well that they offered him a very high place the other day, which he refused, wishing to marry me, and gave up his entire career there on the chance that I would agree. He has no money of his own. [...] He interests me immensely, besides all the rest.<sup>500</sup>

This passage was written in June, two months before Woolf and Leonard's wedding (which took place on August 10, 1912). The letter was written to an English photographer, Madge Vaughan. Woolf describes Leonard, first of all, according to his status: "how am I to begin about Leonard? First he is a Jew". The first argument is clearly an antisemitic one. (Even after twelve years of marriage, when asked by Jacques Raverat about her husband, she begins the same way: "What is my husband like? / A Jew [...]"). Woolf then continues by listing even more things she does not like about Leonard, highlighting especially the colonial issues related to his past. She even uses the colonial cliché of "shooting tigers", relying on (a fine) irony. She perceives the colonial situation of the time and that of anti-semitism. The end of this passage: "He interests me immensely, besides all the rest" shows once again that "all the rest" was precisely what bothered Woolf, namely the aspects linked to his colonial path.

There is also another letter dated June 1912, written this time to Lady Robert Cecil, whose husband, known as Lord Robert Cecil, was a British politician and diplomat. It seems that Woolf hesitates on how to introduce her husband to this diplomat family, which she herself recognizes:

My dearest Nelly,

I wrote to you, but the difficulty of describing my husband overcame me, and I tore it up.

[...]

I think you will like him — though you will probably wonder why on earth he should marry me — considering that he has ruled India, hung black men, and shot tigers. He has written a novel; so have I: we both hope to publish them in the autumn." (*FM*, letter written in June 1912, 503)

Contrary to the other letter which was sent to a photographer, this one was addressed to people situated clearly higher in society. Woolf's attitude changes accordingly. Woolf recognizes that she tore up the letter for a simple and obvious reason: the difficulty of describing her husband. The

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<sup>500</sup> Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (eds.), *FM*, London, The Hogarth Press, 1975, letter written in June 1912, p. 503.

difficulty makes Woolf approach the matter in a different way, by reversing the perspective: it is he who should be questioning about marrying her. It is Woolf's way of hiding her insecurities about her husband. What's more, here the colonial gets a more powerful status, one that is admirable: "he has ruled India (hung black men, and shot tigers)", activities worthy of a powerful man. The issue of shooting tigers is once again covered, which basically means that you hunt everywhere when you are a citizen of the British empire. His role as a writer is also emphasized, putting herself and her husband on the same level: "He has written a novel; so have I", as if she were trying to defend him and present him in a more positive light. Here we see that Woolf clearly thinks less of Leonard and is almost ashamed of her husband's colonial journey, which was both physical and moral: physical in the way in which he was really sent away to Africa, and moral because it was an experience that made him do things that Woolf was seemingly not proud of. From Woolf's perspective, a refined English woman, these things seemed less worthy and praiseworthy.

Woolf's racist side comes out several times in her private writings, one of the most obvious and easiest to identify would probably be while characterizing Leonard. His status bothers Woolf and that is something that strikes the reader immediately. In 1905, before marrying Leonard, she qualifies Jews as follows: "Jews [...], and other repulsive objects" (*FM*, p. 184, a letter written on April 5, 1905). The adjective "repulsive" is strong enough on its own, aimed to introduce a distance, but here it is coupled with the noun "object", which characterizes the Jews as passive and lifeless.

Despite the fact that Woolf disliked the Jews, she ended up marrying one, so she had no choice but to accept them:

How I hated marrying a Jew — how I hated their nasal voices, and their oriental jewelry, and their noses and their wattles — what a snob I was: for they have immense vitality, and I think I like that quality the best of all. They can't die — they exist on a handful of rice and a thimble of water — their flesh dries on their bones but still they pullulate, copulate, and amass (a Mrs Pinto fabulously wealthy came in) millions of money.<sup>501</sup>

The pronouns "I" and "they" are clearly in opposition here. The argument itself is once again not in favour of Jews, and Woolf uses irony to mock them: "They can't die — they exist on a handful of rice and a thimble of water — their flesh dries on their bones but still they pullulate, copulate, and amass." The irony consists in the stereotypical images that we have of Jews, for instance the fact

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<sup>501</sup> Letter to Ethel Smyth, August 2nd 1930, in Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (eds.), *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, volume four 1921-1931, New York, Harcourt, 1979, p. 195-196.



that they amass or gather everything. Woolf's acceptance of the Jews came in towards the middle of her relationship with Vita, when she did not care that much about Leonard anymore, she was preoccupied instead with Vita. A couple of sentences later, she wrote: " [...] she is the most magnanimous minded of women — without a vanity in her; for which I admire her immensely." (August 2nd 1930, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, volume four, 195-196) Leonard's modesty and capability are captured in the following: "They can't die — they exist on a handful of rice and a thimble of water — their flesh dries on their bones but still they pullulate, copulate, and amass"; thanks to all his support and encouragement in all of her endeavours, Woolf's initial perspective on Jews changed. The writer's racist side comes through in this key passage. It is notable how the words she uses are pure racism: the race, the animal language, that separation or exclusion marked by the pronoun "they", and the common denominator, the fact that Jews amass money, and she ends up marrying a Jew.

Woolf admitted that Leonard was a safe place, a safe centre for her: "I have no circumference; only my inviolable centre: L. to wit." (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, volume 5 1936-41, p. 183) in her diary on October 30, 1938.

Leonard was her centre, but he was also at the centre of political life: "Oh and politics go on all day, every day. L. is entirely submerged. I might be the charwoman of a Prime Minister." (*Leave the Letters*, letter to Ethel Smyth, March 10 1936, 18) Leonard's impact was of great value/relevance and we can see that by the people that the Woolfs were in contact with and those who visited their home. In a letter to Ethel Smyth, a beloved friend of Woolf's who participated in the women's suffrage movement, written on June 6 1935, during which Leonard was secretary of the Labour Party, Woolf notes: "I'm waiting for L.: who has a man called Pannikar with him — an Indian, a Knight, a very important man. Our home is a mere meeting place for the winds of heaven [...]" (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, volume five 1932-35, p. 399.) Sardar K. M. Panikkar was an Indian statesman, diplomat, and novelist, the Woolfs' Hogarth Press also published some of his writings.

Not only did she have access to political discussions, Woolf also played host to important personalities of the time, transforming her home in a place suitable for "winds of heaven". This particular phrase is important here, because coloniality is implicit in it. So what did Woolf do with it? How did she relate to these political visits? This phrase expresses Woolf's appreciation of what was going on inside their home, and with which she could relate. This letter let us understand about the Woolfs treatment and attitude towards coloniality, which, as we can read here, was one of high

esteem and appreciation. We can see how Woolf's attitude towards Leonard's colonial implication and the colonial context in general changes as the years pass by. Woolf's letters also keep track of the political meetings happening in her house. For instance, in Monk's House: "The Labour party met here last night" (*Leave the Letters*, p. 107); on April 6th 1940, Woolf writes from Monk's House again: "We're thought red hot revolutionaries because the Labour party meets in our dining room." (*Leave the Letters*, p. 391) This last remark testifies once again to Woolf's attitude to (colonial) politics, which is one of high regard, she saw it as something of great importance, she saw value in it. She also evokes that "large Labour Party meeting(s)" were held at Rodmell. (*Leave the Letters*, p. 353) Woolf is impressed by colonial affairs; her attitude actually changes from not liking the Jews, which in itself is a colonial attitude, to actually liking being in political entourages. It seems that Woolf is bothered by Leonard's status in society, but as for positive colonial issues, such as having important colonially related guests, she appreciates and likes having them, and most of all, she likes telling other people about that. Also, in her discussions, Woolf favours the issues that are related to the imperial centre, and not the colonies. We can see her breeding and heritage of the metropolitan centre.

In November 1937 Woolf wrote to her friend, Sackville-West, during a politically intense period: 1937 was the "year of no surprises" from the dictators, but Hitler was stepping up his claim for the return of the German colonies surrendered to the Allies after World War I, and he and Mussolini continued to intervene actively in the Spanish War. (*CS*, p. 394). She thus wrote: "As you say though, Spain's burning and Hitler booming. A French politician is dining here" (*ibid.*). Colonialism gains a significant place in Woolf's argument. The German colonies that she talks about are a case in point. Also, the colonial events are expressed in a continuous present, the word "here" being significant in Woolf's case. Modernism takes shape in Woolf's argument and thus helps in expressing the colonial. Modernism is at the service of colonialism.

Her letters also tell us that she participated in those political discussions: "I'm entirely vegetable at the moment. After a long walk — all over London — alone; then political discussion; man here; then sleep." (*Leave the Letters*, letter to Ethel Smyth on November 12th 1936, p. 83) Her entire day was full of thinking and observation during her writing hours and walks around London, not to forget about the discussions that she had in her very home. It is quite comical how she describes all the events in her day, which imply almost a mechanical and passive participation on her part. We can see how Woolf becomes uneasy, almost bored with her politically charged life. She is clearly in an extremely rich political environment, but she does not seem either to appreciate or care that very much.

Outside her home, she was also surrounded by diverse politics, whether through the war that was right in the street or the Labour Party, her neighbours, and so on; even in her dreams she was haunted by the issues of the day and couldn't take a break. On October 4 1935, Woolf wrote:

I am wretched never to have written [...] But we have been trapesing off to Brighton to listen to the vociferations of the Labour Party, and then dashing to London [...] I wish public affairs wouldn't jerk their ugly heads up. When even I can't sleep at night for thinking of politics, things must be in a fine mess. All our friends and neighbours talk politics, politics. [...] Now Leonard has turned on the wireless to listen to the news, and so I am flicked out of the world I like into the other. I wish one were allowed to live in one world, but that's asking too much. [...] (We are now hearing about the war, so I can't write sense). (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, volume, p. 428-429 - letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell)

From the explanatory notes of Woolf's letters, we find out that on this day Mussolini launched his attack on Abyssinia. The tone that we can get from these lines is typical of a messy and perhaps confused world generated by the war. The "vociferations of the Labour Party" that she was listening to do not seem to delight Woolf. Now she wishes that politics or "public affairs" wouldn't *jerk* their *ugly* heads up. The sentence: "When even I can't sleep at night for thinking of politics, things must be in a fine mess" is key here. This contradicts the general idea her letters made us think so far. She therefore doesn't usually think about politics. The expression "politics, politics", containing a repetition, expresses boredom and monotony. She feels "out of the world [she] likes into the other". These two worlds that she talks about are politics and literature, or writing. The approach of a crisis, such as the war, made her come back to her initial interest, literature, even though she has difficulties in truly immersing herself in: "We are now hearing about the war, so I can't write sense".

It seems that Woolf is trapped in between two poles, on the one side by her fine Englishwoman upbringing defined by writing and literature, and on the other side by the influence that she gets from Leonard, mostly political. That is why her attitudes change so much. She is caught between the political life that she respects, esteems and appreciates, and between a different perspective, that of being fearful. Confusion and ambivalence is what characterizes Woolf. In the end, she always goes back to literature, to writing, it is the only constant thing in her life.

Woolf used to confess a great deal to her friend, Ethel Smyth, about the "distracted life" that she led, her distractions being all these political issues. Moreover, Leonard and thus his wife had direct access to political life.

We lead a distracted life — one week in London, the next here. As you can imagine, I leave there what I want here, and t’other way about. But here’s your Last card. He’s a little drop of brown quicksilver — the cleverest imp that ever was — was Lord Worley’s confidant — then, I think, [Arthur] Balfours — no, not Balfour, but some other P. Minister. He’s the great unknown behind politics; consulted, influential, anonymous. I like him; but then he thinks 3 gs. the greatest book since Mill<sup>502</sup>. However, he can’t read my novels. L. says he’s an influence rather than a writer. (*Leave the Letters*, letter to Ethel Smyth on February 20th, 1940, p. 383)

Leonard was Woolf’s first reader and constantly gave her suggestions, commentaries that helped her to continually improve her writing. In her view, he was strict, but that was the ingredient that Woolf needed in order to become a great writer: “L. may be severe; but he stimulates [...] Anything is possible with him<sup>503</sup>” Here is another meaningful comment on Leonard’s influence in Woolf’s life overall:

[...] the sales of *A Room* are unprecedented — have beaten *Orlando*; feels like a line running through one fingers; orders for 100 taken as coolly as 12’s used to be. We have sold, I think 5500; & our next years income is made.

Had I married Lytton I should never have written anything. So I thought at dinner the other night. He checks & inhibits in the most curious way. L. may be severe; but he stimulates. Anything is possible with him. Lytton was mild & damp, like a wet autumn leaf. Lonely, & growing elderly; so he compares notes with Clive apparently.<sup>504</sup>

What I find fascinating is Woolf’s direct and truthful statement when she acknowledges the radical influence that her husband played in her writing career.

At the same time, she also had access to Leonard’s notes and manuscripts, which constituted another colonial source for the writer:

I copied out the notes, have put them all in order on your table (this is a lie, but I will do so) and sent the book off. (*The Question*, letter to Leonard Woolf, 29 October 1917, 191)

The editors make clear that this is a reference to notes from a consular document on colonial trade, for use by Leonard Woolf in the book which became *Empire and Commerce* in Africa. This is a key colonial material, very much influential in the Woolfs lives. She wrote all his notes, and worked with them so that she could send them out.

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<sup>502</sup> “Mill” makes référence to John Stuart Mill who was a nineteenth-century English political economist, civil servant and Member of Parliament, actively supporting women’s rights.

<sup>503</sup> REFERENCE!!, “L.” Here standing for “Leonard”.

<sup>504</sup> Anne Oliver Bell and Andrew McNeillie (eds.) *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, volume 3, 1925-30*, St Ives, Penguin Books, 272-273. - letter written on December 14, 1929.

Beyond her husband's most certain political influence, her other relationship, the one with Vita Sackville-West might also have left a mark on her and her writing. Sackville-West had undertaken several journeys to Eastern destinations during which Woolf felt her absence greatly: "Vita was away for four months, six weeks of which were taken up by her outward journey to Persia through the Mediterranean, Egypt, India, the Persian Gulf and Iraq, and ten days by the homeward journey through Russia and Poland. Virginia missed her dreadfully.<sup>505</sup>"

Her first journey took place in January-May 1926, but she also had a second journey to Persia in 1927, during the same period of the year. Just like in Leonard's case whose African experience was later valued in his literary works, Vita Sackville-West also included the trip that she took in her works, such as *Twelve Days in Persia*, which had a great influence on Woolf. Sackville-West's trip was the inspiration behind a highly literary prose, including her personal experience, such as the encounters with the Bakhtiari tribe from South-West Iran and the annual migration that they took every year. Sackville-West also represented a model and inspiration for the character of Orlando, the eponymous novel that Woolf wrote after their separation. We can see the numerous colonial influences that Woolf had in her life, the ones listed as being the major ones. There are so many references to Empire around Woolf, but we cannot really see them, she does not really talk about them in her works.

Apart from Leonard and Sackville-West's colonial influence, there are other people that Woolf communicated with who had colonial relations. She was constantly in contact and most of all aware of the things that happened on a political level. Her diaries and letters keep track of these traces:

As you can imagine, we are all under the shadow of Hitler at the moment — even Nessa and Duncan start a conversation by saying, What is your opinion, Leonard, of whats-his-name? They ask intelligent questions about colonies. As for Leonard, he works all day, drafting measures for the Labour Party [...] (*Leave the Letters*, letter written to Julian Bell, March 11th 1936, 19)

Woolf seems to be familiar with and have an interest, even if not direct, in colonial issues, hence her remark: "They ask intelligent questions about colonies." Her letters offer an update of the historical period of the moment, the war.

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<sup>505</sup> *A Change*, introductory note to Letters from mid-January to mid-May 1926, p. 231.

Another important figure in Woolf's life was suffragette Ethel Smyth. With Ethel Smyth she communicated regularly and exposed her views on politics, Jews, London, etc. Woolf was also in contact with the Bagel family: Barbara, an artist, was the first assistant at the Hogarth Press in 1917-18, and married Nicholas in 1918 (*Leave the Letters*, 147). Nicholas, a militant and friend of Woolf's, was an activist who lectured on his war experience to the Richmond Branch of the Women's Co-operative Guild<sup>506</sup>: "Nick came and gave his lecture the other night" (*The Question*, March 8, 1918, 223), Woolf notes in a letter. Woolf also shared some political work: she "[held] a Women's Cooperative Guild meeting weekly, and politically, by work[ed] for the vote." (*FM*, August 1940) From the notes we find out that apart from the Guild meetings that she had at Hogarth House, Richmond, in 1910 she worked for Women's Suffrage.

Let us see some other important personalities who had a colonial influence over Woolf. Harriet Shaw Weaver was an English political activist who asked the Woolfs to publish Joyce's *Ulysses*. Woolf was also in contact with Ruth Fry, a pacifist who served as Secretary for the Friends War Victims Relief, 1914-18 (*Leave the Letters*, August 28 1940, 423) The short story writer, Mary Hutchinson's son, Jeremy served in the Royal Navy and Woolf was interested in reading about him: "Salute the man in your basement from me. I read his story in the paper. And to think of you on a battleship!" (*Leave the Letters*, February 10th, 1941, p. 471)

Julian Bell, Vanessa's son, also had important political connections. In a letter to her sister, Woolf highlights the political environment that Julian Bell has access to:

I was just sitting down to write to you last night when Julian came in to say that he has got the Chinese professorship. [...] I suppose it's a great chance, and means that he will easily get something in England afterwards. Leonard thinks it an extraordinarily interesting job as it will mean being in the thick of Chinese politics, and Julian also felt this — what it means Chinese politics, I don't know, nor I suppose do you. We had a long talk [...]

This is the most exciting news naturally. (*CS*, letter dated July 17 1935, p. 360)

We have once again strongly absent themes from her works for such familiarity in her life. The long political talks that Woolf was engaged in show once again her interest in politics, maybe not so much England for this time since England comes as a second option: "I suppose its a great chance, and means that he will easily get something in England afterwards."

Woolf's family nourished some political leanings as well. Next to Adrian Stephen, her brother, Woolf took part in anti-Fascist meetings as well:

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<sup>506</sup> *The Question*, footnote, letter written on March 8, 1918, p. 223.

We had such a meeting at Adrian's last night to form a group to encourage the French [anti-Fascists], Tessa will tell you what for. I was dumb with helpless wonder at the competence of the political; and his loquacity. (CS, letter to Julian Bell on December 6th 1935, p. 367)

Here again Woolf's positioning is what interests us. Her clear and direct statement: "I was dumb with helpless wonder at the competence of the political; and his loquacity" positions herself as inferior in relation to political thinking and the activity around it. Once again, she is surrounded by people who are competent and have a good loquacity as regards politics. The pronoun "we" expressed that Woolf herself was part of those organized meetings.

All these letters let us enter Woolf's private world and let us know her attitude towards things, and mainly towards politics. We talk about her attitude as the author of her work. Over the years her attitude changed and also evolved, I would say, from a person who was less interested in the political, but becomes — once marrying Leonard and spending time a politically active man — a writer who respected, esteemed and most of all understood politics and the events that took place. That does not mean that politics replaced her main interest, writing, but it gained a place in her life, reflection and way of perceiving the things around her.

## **London and its political implications**

Woolf's private writings testify to a perpetual stimulation on Leonard's part, but there is also the city of London that constitutes an infinite source of stimulation and creativity for her. In a letter to feminist Ethel Smyth, she writes:

But what I want of you is illusion — to make coherence and all that makes me wish to write *The Lighthouse* etc. unless I am perpetually stimulated. Its no good sitting in a garden with a book; or collecting facts. There must be this fanning and drumming — of course I get it tremendously from London — but differently — Lord Lord how many things I want — how many different flowers I visit — and often I plunge into London, between tea and dinner, and walk and walk, reviving my fires, in the city, in some wretched slum, where I peep in at the door of public houses. (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, volume four 1921-31, August 15 1930, 200.)

Woolf's novels already picture the appreciation and stimulation that she gets from London, but her letter here states it clearly. At times we can also observe the lack of such stimulation and its effect on the writing process, as a contradiction:

Really it is a disgrace — the number of blank pages in this book. The effect of London on diaries is decidedly bad. This is I fancy the leanest of them all, and I doubt I can take it to Rodmell, or if I did, whether I could add much. (*Diary*, December 21 1924, 68)

Here London is contrasted with the countryside, in this case Rodmell, where she had her country house (and lived a large part of the time). It is after all in London that she can truly write; it is her true and only city where she can let herself go. There may be an exception to this: the writings of the diaries. The fact that she could not add much to the diaries in London shows that life — and by that I mean real, active life — happens in London. It may not exactly be the appropriate city to write private writings, and the adjective “private” is meaningful in this sense.

Once the war comes, London gets an even more significant place in people's minds. The war awakens feelings of patriotism. The following passage shows how London is the centre of the British empire, around which everything revolves:

Only the fire sets me dreaming — of all the things I mean to write. The break in our lives from London to country is a far more complete one than any change of house. Yes, but I haven't got the hang of it altogether. The immense space suddenly becomes vacant: then illuminated. And London, in nips, is cramped and creased. Odd how often I think with what is love I suppose of the City: of the walk to the Tower: that is my England: I mean, if a bomb destroyed one of those little alleys with the brass bound curtains and the river smell and the old woman reading, I should feel — well, what the patriots feel. L. & Sally arrive. (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, volume 5, 1936-41, diary entry written on February 2nd, 1940, 263.)

We can get a sense of London being the centre of the empire in Woolf's private writings, and that is also the case in her fictional writings. It is for instance the case when she talks about the Thames that crosses London as in *Mrs Dalloway*; other times, she mentions the women who walk in London and who discover the real life of the city, with Jews on the sidewalks, poverty and a harsh existence in every corner, as in *Street Haunting* for instance. In her private writings, she gets even more personal: “that is *my*<sup>507</sup> England”. The colonial comes alive through the pronoun “my” since she appropriates herself this country. In this passage we see Woolf's feelings of patriotism. There is still a reluctance on her part when she employs for instance “England” instead of “Britain”, a very

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<sup>507</sup> my Italics.



common Woolfian usage, or the verb “suppose” in “what is love I suppose of the City”, which expresses uncertainty, hesitation or doubt. The last sentence of this passage is also of great importance because it contains colonialism alongside with feminism: “if a bomb destroyed one of those little alleys with the brass bound curtains and the river smell and the old woman reading, I should feel — well, what the patriots feel.” Patriotism is combined with literature. Patriotism, alongside with war, is described using a very lifelike present atmosphere. Woolf is once again hesitating, she is not sure whether she is a patriot or not: the verb “should”, the interjection “well” followed by the usage of the third person plural in the syntax “what the patriots feel”. She feels the necessity to conjure up the bomb that could destroy the city with the river Thames and the “old woman reading”. This is an extremely accurate colonial image of the 1940s, a time during which people experienced the Second World War. The Modern characteristic is also there with the flânerie or “the walk to the Tower”. Woolf seems to be preoccupied by questions such as “Odd how often I think with what is love I suppose of the City”.

The relationship with London and England is in a constant change and evolution. Woolf’s feelings regarding the city, and the country overall, evolve from one idea to the other, and from one period to the other. In a letter to Ethel Smyth, dated June 7th 1938, Woolf makes an unexpected revelation about her identity and patriotic feeling, but also about her being an outsider:

3) Patriotism. My dear E ... of course I’m “patriotic”: that is English, the language, farms, dogs, people: only we must enlarge the imaginative, and take stock of the emotion. And I’m sure I can; because I’m an outsider partly; and can get outside the vested interest better than Leonard even — tho’ a Jew. (*Congenial Spirits*, p. 403)

For Woolf, “patriotism” (the italics here mark the distance that she takes with the real sense of this term) comes first with language: “that is English, the language”. This quality of the outsider that she alludes to here is key. Leonard was involved in political issues, whereas Woolf was much of an observer to all that, hence the phrase “can get outside the vested interest better than Leonard”. She can even afford not to be patriotic in the true sense of the term, because the power that she holds is through words; it is the language that comes first, and “people” come only at the end, according to her: “English, the language, farms, dogs, people”. She can get less patriotic, even less patriotic than Leonard, because she is not involved in politics as he is. This reminds us once again of Woolf’s one and only centre, literature, or writing.

On 29 August 1939, Woolf is even more sure of not being a patriot, which is also stated outright: “Of course, I’m not in the least patriotic.” After almost a year and a half of war, in full war time, Woolf assumes her lack of patriotism:

How odd it is being a countrywoman after all these years of being Cockney! For almost the first time in my life I’ve not a bed in London. D’you know what I’m doing tomorrow? Going up to London Bridge. Then I shall walk, all along the Thames, in and out where I used to haunt, so shall buy macaroni and lunch. No. You never shared my passion for that great city. Yet it's what, in some odd corner of my dreaming mind, represents Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens. It's my only patriotism: save one vision, in Warwickshire one spring [May 1934] when we were driving back from Ireland and I saw a stallion being led, under the may and the beeches, along a grass ride; and I thought that is England. (*Leave the Letters*, letter to Ethel Smyth, Monks House, Rodmell, [Sussex], January 12th 1941, p. 460)

Woolf compares the countryside with the city of London by revealing herself a Cockney, or somebody from London’s East End. It is, on the one hand, the way she sees herself that matters here, and on the other hand — and that is the most important part — the way she acknowledges and talks about it. She is a true Londoner: she used to haunt the city; London and haunting are very much specific to Woolf and Woolf’s writings. Haunting the city is how Woolf’s Modernism takes shape through the urban context, which is thus brought to life in her writings. For her, being passionate about London and being “patriotic” come down to literature. Her “patriotism” goes again to English literature: “Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens”. Modernism is in the way she sees patriotism: beyond the political, through art. Her unconventional way of seeing it is the mark of Modernism. Colonialism passes through Modernism, and eventually comes back to the colonial: “It’s my only patriotism: save one vision, in Warwickshire one spring [May 1934] when we were driving back from Ireland and I saw a stallion being led, under the may and the beeches, along a grass ride; and I thought that is England.” The notion of “patriotism” is followed by a description emphasizing an extremely vivid present moment, which eventually goes back to colonialism: “and I thought that is England.” It goes in circles: Modernism emerges out of colonialism, and then circles back around to colonialism. This spiral shape argument that is created only shows the dependence between Modernism and colonialism. The fact that one needs the other to exist. Woolf needs Modernism to explain colonialism.

As soon as she gets to live in the countryside, her first impulse is to go to London, to “that great city”. She evokes the Thames, which is where *flânerie* happens: “I shall walk, all along the Thames, in and out where I used to haunt”. The Thames represents a colonial metaphor, a river that is so much more than that: it represents the quintessence of the British empire. The Thames was

from the very beginning a centre of commerce and all kinds of trades that went on between England and the colonies, as Paul Morand underlines in *Londres*<sup>508</sup>. Woolf evokes the Thames in most of her writings; it is for instance the case in *The Voyage Out* where “the Thames washed the roots of the city of London<sup>509</sup>”. This alludes once again to the beginning and the way London was shaped as a commercial city. Joseph Conrad in his famous *Heart of Darkness* also expresses how this river has become a dark space used for commerce and trading.

by this time it [London] was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery [...] it had become a place of darkness. But there was in it one river especially, a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land. [...] Then I remembered there was a big concern, a Company for trade on that river. Dash it all! I thought to myself, they can't trade without using some kind of craft<sup>510</sup>.

The plot is set in the late 1890s, a time when British Imperialism was shaping its path in the whole world. The main character, Marlow, like Conrad himself when he wrote the novel, is returning from a voyage. He then pictures the grand image that the Thames had at the time, as a metropolitan centre: “I had no difficulty in finding the Company's offices. It was the biggest thing in the town, and everybody I met was full of it. They were going to run an over-sea empire, and make no end of coin to trade.<sup>511</sup> The war and patriotic feelings revolve around the idea of London and the countryside. In 1914, during World War I, Woolf lived in the countryside, and likewise in 1940, during World War II. The life dynamics changed because of the war. In 1940 she wrote: “This diary might be divided into London diary and country” (*Diary*, 315), which means that London life is no more compact as it used to be, because Londoners oscillate between the city and the countryside. Once again, private writings show how places of writings change, which implies a change in the writer's perception as well.

Being outside London, in the countryside is one thing, but being even further from her “great city” is even more difficult to bear and her letters show this estrangement. In 1904, when Woolf finds herself in Florence, she writes to Emma Vaughan:

Couldn't you write me a long letter as soon as you get this [...] I want to hear everything: especially Fisher news, music news, any news. Everything English sounds clean and beautiful: we seldom see the

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<sup>508</sup> Paul Morand, *Londres suivi de Le nouveau Londres*, Paris, Folio, 2012.

<sup>509</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

<sup>510</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* [1902], St Ives, Penguin Books, 2012, p. 11-12.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

papers, and to live in a degenerate tho' beautiful country is depressing. Thank God, I say, I was born an Englishwoman. (*FM*, p. 139)

Being outside the country for a while and employing a sense of comparison, England and its news instantly become something vital that she wants more than anything. Her imperial viewpoint is clearly what is at stake here. While she misses England, feelings of patriotism and that of being an Englishwoman come to light. She uses the noun "Englishwoman", thus making allusion to a double entity: that of an English, which, politically speaking, occupies a distinct and high hierarchical place, and that of a woman at the same time. We can identify a form of dominant chauvinism here. In this particular context, by joining the two terms, Woolf elevates women's status, an initial step for the later coming powerful feminist work, *Three Guineas* (1938), which is not so imperialistic any more. At the same time, it is important to emphasize what is behind her choosing the word "English: "everything English sounds cleans and beautiful" and "Thank God, I was born an Englishwoman." It does not have the same meaning of distance, as we are used to with Woolf, but her choice here emphasizes the hunger and need for hearing "everything" that is English.

## **The First and Second World Wars**

The beginning of the war, or the pre-war ambiance, as it is called, comes out of comparison with the previous years. On August 24, 1939, the whole world seems to be "very different" from the temporal atmosphere noticed in times of peace:

Perhaps it is more interesting to describe "the crisis" than R.'s love affairs. Yes we are in the very thick of it. Are we at war? At one I'm going to listen in. It's very different, emotionally, from last September. In London yesterday there was indifference almost. No crowd in the train — we went by train. No stir in the streets. One of the removers called up. It's fate, as the foreman said. What can you do against fate? Complete chaos at 37. Ann met in graveyard. No war, of course now, she said. John said "Well I don't know what to think." But as a dress rehearsal it's complete. Museums shut. Searchlight on Rodmell Hill. Chamberlain says danger imminent. The Russian pact a disagreeable and unforeseen surprise. Rather like a herd of sheep we are. No enthusiasm. Patient bewilderment. I suspect some desire "to get on with it." Order double supplies and some coal. Aunt Violet in refuge at Charleston. Unreal. Whiffs of despair. Difficult to work. Offer of £200 from Chambers for a story. Haze over the marsh. Aeroplanes. One touch on the switch and we shall be at war. Danzig not yet taken. Clerks cheerful. (*Diary*, p. 304-305)

It is interesting to have a look at the way Woolf's diary testifies to the coming of the war and the temporality already present in the city. Unexpected things have come by surprise, such is the war atmosphere described by Woolf. Nevertheless, signs of war are everywhere: an atmosphere "very different, emotionally, from last September", characterized by "indifference almost", similar to what fate would be, etc. Beyond even the indication of the date of the diary's entry, the text abounds in war references, and the reader can even recognize the period described, in the early period of the war. Uncertainty and the desire to know more: "Are we at war? At one I'm going to listen in." is mixed up with a comparison: "It's very different, emotionally, from last September. In London yesterday there was indifference almost. No crowd in the train — we went by train. No stir in the streets.", thus trying to identify the new and rough events of the period in question. The collective pronoun "we" shows a patriotic understanding of the situation. A sense of emptiness, specific to the war period, has already taken hold in London. People begin to lose their jobs: "as a dress rehearsal it's complete. Museums shut", but also their desire for work, only waiting "to get on with it." Then, it is as if there were a rupture in the writing: the rhythm of the sentences changes and a fragmentary writing takes its place. The almost dead atmosphere, without the usual crowd and the indifference that reigns over the city suddenly changes into an alarming and unreal one with people (Aunt Violet) in refuge and full of despair. For this time, the jobs are no longer about the desire with which people do them, but instead the difficulties encountered concerning her work: "Difficult to work. Offer of £200 from Chambers for a story. Haze over the marsh." Woolf goes as far as practicing minimalism, by creating sentences of one or two words: "Unreal"; "Aeroplanes"; "Whiffs of despair.", recreating the essence of the pre-war period, or maybe the sound of bombs that could drop at any moment. Nonetheless, one thing seems to be sure: "One touch on the switch and we shall be at war." The rhythm of the writing is accelerated while tackling the subject of war. This particular rhythm that the text generates makes it belong to the war period in question; it is the rhythm of the war mirrored in the poetics of the diary itself. Woolf speaks of a colonial issue using Modernism.

A couple of days later, on September 6 1939, writing from the countryside, the fear of London finds its source in the war: "Yes, it's an empty, meaningless world now. Am I a coward? Physically I expect I am. Going to London tomorrow I expect frightens me." (*Diary*, p. 305) Here we have fear again, fear of the colonial. She is frightened to go back to London because of the war that she might find there. It is notable how diaries, and in particular Woolf's diary, follow the course

of events, in this particular case that of war. Woolf was pondering upon the implications and ultimately solutions to end the war and this is where her feminist side comes alive:

I become steadily more feminist, owing to the Times, which I read at breakfast and wonder how this preposterous masculine fiction [the war] keeps going a day longer — without some vigorous young woman pulling us together and marching through it — Do you see any sense in it? I feel as if I were reading about some curious tribe in Central Africa — And now they'll give us votes; and you say — what do you say Miss Ll. D.? I wish I could borrow your mind about 3 days a week. (*The Question*, January 1916, p. 76)

Seeing the war as a “preposterous masculine fiction”, the solution that she immediately thinks of would undeniably come from a “vigorous young woman”. Her sentence gathers war and feminism and by this means the superiority of women over men, or at least, the importance of the former’s presence within a resolutely masculine world and literature. Moreover, the comparison that she makes with “some curious tribe in Central Africa” is noteworthy here. One colonial issue, in this case the war, comes after the other, that is to say Woolf’s feminist approach or issue, which in turn closes on another colonially related issue, the Central African tribes. A rare, remarkable direct allusion to colonized lands and cultures. What fascinates me is how Woolf prepares this last powerful remark, by first introducing us to the idea of war, then by tackling the feminist issue of it and only afterwards she mentions her powerful statement related to “some curious tribe in Central Africa”. One colonially related issue comes after the other in Woolf’s diary, in a natural way that follows Woolf’s pen and ultimately defines her poetics. The natural and fluent rhythm of the writing is induced and activated by the colonial.

Woolf introduces the reader to the rhythm provided by the war while writing a letter to her friend, “Miss Ll. D”:

I’ve been meaning every day to write to you — that is I stop in the middle of something else and address a remark to you — but the moment never comes. [...] Yesterday we were up in London, and there was a crowd at Meck Sqre: a policeman stopped us: we got out — saw that the house just opposite ours across the road had been entirely crushed that night. A direct hit on top. It was nothing but a heap of bricks, something still. And we weren’t allowed to go to 37, as a bomb was still in the square unexploded. Our house wasn’t touched, but the windows are broken. So there was nothing for it but to come away. Everyone apparently in that house — one of those lovely houses at the side — had sheltered in the basement. All killed I suppose. We got up on Friday to arrange about moving to Press. and to bring back some of our valuables. That is if we’re allowed. But everyone has been evacuated; the press can work — And then we went and saw Holborn — my word — its like a nightmare. All heaps of glass, water running, a great gap at top of Chancery Lane; my typists office demolished.  
[...]

That's why it's so difficult to write a coherent letter. I try to write of a morning. Its odd to feel one's writing in a vacuum — no-one will read it. I feel the audience has gone. Still, so oddly is one made, I find I must spin my brain in a vacuum. (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, volume five, letter to Ethel Smyth, September 11th 1940, p. 430)

This letter is notable for the question of poetics tackled by Woolf: “That’s why it’s so difficult to write a coherent letter. I try to write of a morning. It’s odd to feel one’s writing in a vacuum — no-one will read it. I feel the audience has gone.”. Art affected by the war. Once again we see how the nature of Modernism-colonialism is one of interconnection: one depends on the other. There are several war references and descriptions, especially from the beginning of it, during the period 1939-40. As a consequence, Woolf feels the need to take action and it is through the pen that she knows she can contribute the most. Let us think of her diary entry dated March 14, 1940: “This idea struck me: the army is the body: I am the brain. Thinking is my fighting.” (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, volume 5 1936-41, 285) Here we find Woolf’s patriotism — which she sometimes proclaims or denies — through a statement of commitment, of her own commitment and belonging.

The effect of the war on the writing is certain: “1940: Virginia had ten years’ worth of ideas in her, she said, provided Hitler did not stop her. [...] her spirit was dampened because the war forced her to write in a vacuum: ‘The audience has gone.’” (*Congenial Spirits*, p. 426) She declared *Three Guineas* as “my war book”. (December 30, 1935, 361)

Leaving aside the turbulent life that she lived because of her eventful childhood and adolescence, the war played a great influence as well. Woolf eventually committed suicide during the Second World War.

London looked merry and hopeful, wearing her wounds like stars; why do I dramatize London perpetually? When I see a great smash like a crushed match box where an old house stood I wave my hand to London. What I’m finding odd and agreeable and unwonted is the admiration this war creates — for every sort of person: chars, shopkeepers, even much more remarkably for politicians — Winston at least, and tweed wearing sterling dull women here, with their grim good sense: organising First aid, putting out bombs for practice, and jumping out of windows to show how. (*Leave the Letters*, letter to Ethel Smyth on September 25th 1940, p. 434)

Woolf describes the damages made by the war, the way the city and the houses get deteriorated, but the war can also be felt inside people’s homes. Woolf thus recreates the relationship between war and writing, and especially letter writing:

I make this mark to show the point at which a bomb shook the window so violently that the pen jumped out of my hand. (*Leave the Letters*, letter to Hugh Walpole, September 29th 1940, p. 435)

She also offers extremely lifelike descriptions. Private writings are a first laboratory of Modernist writing:

[...] you don't know what a queer place London is — Here we are running in and out of each other's houses with torches and gas masks. Black night descends. Rain pours. Vast caterpillars are now excavating trenches in the Square. Shops shut at 5 or so. Many windows remain black all day. The streets are a hurry scurry of people walking. Ambulances abound. Very stout women wear blue trousers. No one ever sits down. The buses are quick but rare. And in short — I've just pulled down the black blinds — rats in caves live as we do.

That's all I can think of. And I hope you've recovered; and that Charleston remains as sane and sound as ever. (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, volume five, letter to Angelica Bell, October 16 1939, p. 364)

In a letter written on the 12th of August, 1914 we can find a couple of references and descriptions on the war. The beginning of the First World War is described as the end of civilisation in Woolf's letters:

It is thought that you are probably doing service somewhere, either as a nurse, or part of the military. I never felt anything like the general insecurity. We left Asheham a week ago, and it was practically under martial law. There were soldiers marching up and down the line, and men digging trenches and it was said that Asheham barn was to be used as a hospital. All the people expected an invasion — Then we went through London — and oh Lord! what a lot of talk there was! Roger [Fry], of course, had private information from the Admiralty, and had been seeing the German Ambassadress [Princess Lichnowsky], and Clive was having tea with Ottoline, and they talked and talked, and said it was the end of civilisation, and the rest of our lives was worthless. I do wish you would write and tell him what you hear — They say there must be a great battle [...] (*Congenial Spirits*, p. 82)

This passage proves Woolf's access to direct news from power: "through London [...] what a lot of talk [...] Roger [Fry], of course, had private information from the Admiralty, and had been seeing the German Ambassadress [Princess Lichnowsky]". In the notes of this letter, an important information is highlighted: the war had been declared on August 4, which means that for the first eighteen months Woolf made almost no written comments on it, apart from this letter. The passive participation on Woolf's part is to be observed here: "they talked and talked, and said it was the end of civilisation", "They say there must be a great battle", "it was said that Asheham barn was to be used as a hospital" and "All the people expected an invasion". The use of the third person singular and plural is also a sign of the "general insecurity" that the writer says she had never felt before.



The same description of war as “the end of civilisation” is used in a letter to Lytton Strachey written on February 26th, 1915:

[...] a bright idea strikes me. Let us all subscribe to buy a Parrot for Clive. [...]

The thing is for us all to persuade him that the love of birds is the last word in Civilisation — You might draw attention, to begin with, to the Pheasants of Saxby, which heard the guns on the North Sea before the Parson did<sup>512</sup>.

In this passage, we have, on the one hand, the last word in civilisation, and, on the other hand, the new or the beginning: “heard the guns on the North Sea before the Parson did”. The new is expressed by the presence of the guns. What represents the new in Woolf’s poetics is the colonial. Modernism and colonialism are on the same level, they merge.

In a letter to Philip Morrell, dated February 3 1938, Woolf notes: “I’m so glad Ottoline is better. I always hope you both realise what a part — and an unthanked part — you both played in the old civilisation. But why don’t we renew it? Perhaps when I’m up and about you’ll come to tea.” (*Congenial Spirits*, p. 397) The “old civilisation” that Woolf relates to is the old world that they used to be part of.

The Second World War approached and the discussions about the war were topical: “[...] In London it was hectic and gloomy and at the same time despairing and yet cynical and calm. The streets were crowded. People were everywhere talking loudly about war. [...] we sat and discussed the inevitable end of civilisation.” (*Leave the Letters*, Letter to Vanessa Bell, 1 Octobre 1938, 275) The expression “end of civilisation” is used by Woolf to characterize the Second World War, spiced with descriptions of the possible war coming.

With Woolf London comes alive each time and with each writing. Her texts picture the reality of the metropolitan centre. It is for instance the case in the next paragraph where London resembles a dead city:

The other day we drove through an air raid. London like a dead city. Wimbledon in a gun emplacement with an East End family whose house had been bombed. There they were as cheerful as grigs with a rug a kettle and a spirit lamp: had been there for 3 nights: wind blowing through gun holes.

Oh dear! I’m worried to think of you with an incendiary next you. (*The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, volume five, letter to Ethel Smyth, September 20 1940, p. 433)

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<sup>512</sup> Footnote reference, p. 85: “On 28 January 1915 the vicar of Saxby, Lincolnshire, the Rev. W. L. Evans, wrote to The Times to say that the pheasants at Saxby Hall begun clutching at an early hour when they heard the guns of the Battle of the Dogger Bank on 24 January. The bombardment had been inaudible to humans.”

The gerund verb “blowing” in the construction “wind blowing gun holes” shows how submissive everything around has to be, even the wind itself, as for gun holes.

Woolf’s worry and uneasiness about her friends being bombed is pictured for instance in a letter to William Plomer on September 15th, 1940:

I wish you were out of London. The bombs are getting much too close to one’s friends. What a sight Holborn was, my word! I don’t much like driving in London during an air raid, but night must be much worse. Its odd, though, that one can’t take it altogether seriously. Its like a very dreary game of hide and seek played by grown ups. Twice while playing bowls raiders have come over and been shot down in full view. One day they hedge-hopped over the tree at the gate. But its over so soon one hasn’t time to think. Not at night though. They circle round like airy omnibuses: I wish they weren’t going to you. (*Leave the Letters*, p. 431-432)

We can see once again Woolf’s fear of the colonial, of the war: “I wish you were out of London”. Woolf, in a possible attempt to accept, and perhaps also to mock or deride, the harsh reality, chose to describe the war through a comparison involving a children’s game played by adults.

The colonial context comes more to the surface in letters than in journals, whenever Woolf has a chance for a dialogue, other than the inner dialogue that she performs in the journals. It is not therefore their common “private” nature that is relevant, but rather the social nature that the letters bear. With the presence of a recipient, the reader has the chance to dig deeper into the context and society that surrounds those who exchange the letters.

Sometimes, letters arrive with a bit of delay due to the war. On September 20th 1940, Woolf writes to Ethel Smyth:

Your letter came this morning — the letter posted on 17th.

[...]

I’m off to lay in supplies — not that, with this gale blowing, it seems imminent. They’ve got guns in front of the garden and all down the river.

This is only a stop gap. I’ll write again.

So do you. [...] Please write. (*Leave the Letters*, p. 432-433)

An important event that we must not forget is the minors’ strikes. 1923 was a period of great social unrest. There had been strikes among miners and the farm labourers in March and April of this year, and fear of a general strike.<sup>513</sup> In a letter to Margaret Llewelyn Davies, Woolf writes:

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<sup>513</sup> *A Change*, footnote p. 53.

Can you help me to a speaker for the Guild on Tuesday 2nd and 3rd July? [...] I want a speech on the Strike. We have had nothing but brilliancy and charm the last 3 months — Morgan Forster on India, Bob Trevelyan on China, Mary Sheepshanks on Peru: now we must attend to the horrid facts. (*A Change*, letter written on 27 June 1923, p. 53)

Woolf's faint irony linked to the colonial is to be seen when using the word "charm" in the sentence "We have had nothing but brilliancy and charm the last 3 months". The list of the colonial references that she gives is thorough: "Morgan Forster on India, Bob Trevelyan on China, Mary Sheepshanks on Peru". We are in 1923, an interwar period, which is the height of the British Empire. There was also the 1926 General Strike, which both of the Woolfs, but particularly Leonard, being more directly involved in politics, tried to move towards a just end. It is finally Leonard Woolf who offered to speak for the Guild, a valuable candidate in this matter.

Leonard Woolf's political influence *per se* was irrefutable, crossing at times the destinies of important personalities such as the ones listed in the following quote:

"The activities of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco inevitably increased Leonard's political work. Virginia attempted to take part, but after a brief membership in a writers' committee to fight Fascism, she returned to the pen, producing an essay for the Daily Worker and beginning *Three Guineas*, a strong feminist statement against war. Politics became most personal when Julian Bell decided to return from China in order to participate in the Spanish Civil War against Franco". (*Congenial Spirits*, introductory part to the letters between 1936-1937)

Despite a rich colonial background that Woolf had, in large part thanks to her husband, she never really got attached to politics. Leonard Woolf once acknowledged: "Virginia attempted to take part, but after a brief membership in a writers' committee to fight Fascism, she returned to the pen". Woolf herself admitted that: "Unfortunately, politics get between me and fiction. I feel I must write something when this book is over — something vaguely political, doubtless worthless, certainly useless." (*Congenial Spirits*, June 1936, p. 376) Woolf's political side rises in this statement. She perceives the political writing as a necessity: "I must write something", but the political dimension stays at a minimal level; she is almost sorry for having to deal with such a "useless" topic: "Unfortunately [...] something vaguely political, doubtless worthless, certainly useless." She either considered herself not capable enough to master such a topic or she considered politics as something "doubtless worthless, certainly useless". Given her "patriotic" feeling for literature, I think it is rather the last option.

When it comes to choosing between poetry/literature and politics, she undoubtedly chose the former:

[...] Did you see a very good review of L's book by Laski in the Statesman? I must say I feel rather triumphant that he has come through with that book in spite of all his other occupations: and now there are seven more volumes to be written. I can't conceive how you politicians can go on being political. All the summer we had nothing but political arguments with Maynard and others; and I finally felt it so completely silly, futile, petty, personal and unreal — all this about money — that I read poetry in a rage. Well, I know you don't agree; but if everyone read poetry then there'd be no politics; no crisis; none of this place hunting and party spite. All they do is to abuse each other. This shows you how little I grasp the true meaning of events. (*Congenial Spirits*, letter to Margaret Llewelyn Davies, October 18 1931, p. 297)

Harold Laski was a political theorist who later on became the chairman of the British Labour Party (between 1945 and 1946). Nevertheless, Woolf's remark is related to Leonard's book, even if it treats politics. John Maynard Keynes was a friend of Woolf's. He was an influential economist and essayist. This is a key passage for understanding Woolf's position within her political times. Here Woolf opposes politics to poetry: "I finally felt it so completely silly, futile, petty, personal and unreal — all this about money — that I read poetry in a rage". She opposes politics to poetry and defends the latter: "if everyone read poetry then there'd be no politics; no crisis; none of this place hunting and party spite." Her voice is firm and almost angry: "I can't conceive how you politicians can go on being political." The pronoun "you" that she uses here distinguishes herself from the people, the politicians who are being political. She rejects the colonial in favour of Art.

Woolf believed in saving the nation through literature, hence her writing of the essay *Three Guineas* and her observation in the passage above: "if everyone read poetry then there'd be no politics; no crisis; none of this place hunting and party spite." I believe that what Woolf prefers is a combination between literature and politics, since she clearly dislikes the intervention of politics alone: "This shows you how little I grasp the true meaning of events." Her work, in which literature and politics cross each other, constitutes the mirror of her conviction and reality of things, and also the solution to certain aspects of life.

Politics and History were the foundation of some writers' thinking at the beginning of the twentieth century Britain. Such is the case of Katherine Mansfield as well, whose private writings bear the reality and social background of Europe but also New Zealand.

We can see how Woolf always puts literature and writing first. For her being patriotic means studying all the classical authors, it means writing, it means living through the word altogether. Private writings let us follow the events, day by day, and also the reactions of the writer and the

people that she gets in touch with, which is a particularity of private writings. The effects of the war are to be perceived in private writings, which in turn affect writing.

Nevertheless, letters seem to bear more colonial details than fictional writing does. The specific Modernist features such as London haunting, change (marking the rise of Modernism) or the life-writing that she practised and wanted to give a new form to, are all part of Woolf's world. They come to life in her fictional writings as well, but the particularity of the private writings is that they either allow the reader a kind of pre-access to Woolf's work or they complete the readers' perception once they have already read the fictional works. Private writings are a completely unique experience, in the sense in which they give access to a more intimate, more private Woolf, getting to know her attitudes, convictions and reflections. Since we acknowledge that the work is not synonymous with the reader itself, private writings are an opportunity to know the writer that stands behind those fictional works. By studying the colonial, we get a more profound and intimate access to the way Woolf thought of certain colonial aspects, which certainly makes us clarify and get more understanding of the works in question and undoubtedly of her colonial view.

## 2. New Zealand's colonial past in Mansfield's diary

In May 1908, at the age of 20, after having read a book by suffragette Elizabeth Robins, *Come and Find Me*, Mansfield comments in her journal:

I feel that I do now realise, dimly, what women in the future will be capable of. They truly as yet have never had their chance. Talk of our enlightened days and our emancipated country — pure nonsense! We are firmly held with the self-fashioned chains of slavery. Yes, now I see that they *are* self-fashioned, and must be self-removed.<sup>514</sup>

Mansfield's journal bears the mark of her native country's colonial past: on the one hand, women who "have never had their chance" and, on the other hand, the "chains of slavery" that still haunt the country and that are firmly kept. In 1907, New Zealand officially changed its status from colony to dominion, but in reality there was not a thorough and practical change involved, hence Mansfield's remark on "pure nonsense!". The prefix "self" in the adverbial construction "self-fashioned" (appearing twice) and "self-removed" (used once) makes an allusion to the historical context of New Zealand, but most of all to the personal consequences endured by the people, namely the Pakeha, also found in their private writings. This passage underlines the double conjecture that a diary consists in: the historical facts, presented in the first part of the text, and the personal experience that the diary reveals or is its foundation, the process of writing, which would be the view of poetics.

The Pakeha European descendants or settlers' condition, among them Mansfield herself, is reflected in the works of their writers: not just in their fictional works, but also in their private writings, such as diaries or letters. Christian Karlson Stead, Emeritus Professor of English from the University of Auckland, in New Zealand, known among other works for *In the Glass Case: Essays on New Zealand Literature*, underlines a link between the Pakeha identity and the literary genres that emerged subsequently, namely private writings:

even [writers], for most of the first 100 years of settlement (1820–1920), had to make conscious efforts to relocate the imagination and adapt the literary tradition to its new home. It is not surprising, then, that the most notable 19th-century writing is found not in poetry and fiction but rather in letters, journals, and factual accounts, such as Lady Mary Anne Barker's *Station Life in New Zealand* (1870), Samuel Butler's

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<sup>514</sup> Letter of May 1908, C. K. Stead, *The Letters and Journals of Katherine Mansfield: A Selection* [1977], Reading, Penguin, p. 35, 1988.

*A First Year in Canterbury Settlement* (1863), and, perhaps most notably, Frederick Maning's *Old New Zealand* (1863).<sup>515</sup>

Stead talks here about the “conscious efforts” that the colonial writers had to make to “adapt the literary tradition to its new home”. Mansfield is part of this “relocation” and the period mentioned by the author (1820-1920), her life covering the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Actually, she is already placed as a later inheritor position, which means that her production is not of the same nature as that early production. This is a clear evidence for the major place and role of private writings, such as journals, letters and in Mansfield’s case her travel journal as well.

In 1907, Mansfield went on a camping trip to Te Urewera, a time during which *The Urewera Notebook* was written. Her father insisted on Mansfield joining the camp in the hope that his daughter would get over the desire and longing for England. Despite this fact, a year later, in 1908, Mansfield did the inevitable: “Impatient at the limitations of colonial life, she relocated to London in 1908”<sup>516</sup>, as Christian Karlson Stead writes. In other words, the Urewera camping experience encouraged Mansfield’s determination to escape the tyranny and inferiority of life in Wellington.<sup>517</sup> The nineteen year-old Mansfield experiencing colonial life in New Zealand is thus of great importance in this chapter. The *Notebook* figures as evidence of the writer’s content or discontent with New Zealand, and shows most of all the reality of her historical circumstances.<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> Christian Karlson Stead, “Pakeha (European) literature”, <https://www.britannica.com/art/New-Zealand-literature/Pakeha-European-literature>, last accessed on 25 February 2021.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>517</sup> Jeffrey Meyers, *Katherine Mansfield: A Biography*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1978, p. 35.

<sup>518</sup> *General Introduction* of Anna Plumridge (ed.), *The Urewera Notebook by Katherine Mansfield*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2015, p. 2-3.

## Private writings as a laboratory for Modernism

In *The Urewera Notebook* Mansfield frequently evokes the Maori-Pakeha conflict. The notebook also offers some insights on the European world, which she recently visited and the colonial world in which she was born and raised. The notebook contains ellipses and is mostly filled with ideas and events that Mansfield has participated in at the camp. The colonial environment intercuts her writing, which is a first laboratory of Modernism. The hasty nature of the journal, due to the accelerated pace of the trip, makes it into a difficult document to analyze, which is probably one of the reasons why it is less researched. The journey that Mansfield undertakes starts in November 1907 and lasts until December the same year. It consists of extended descriptions of New Zealand nature and its vegetation; the bush, the Manuka tree; and the people). The document also contains important information on the writer's colonial identity and her insights on the matter. The recent English experience gives her the ability to have a different and thus richer perspective, one that involves historical and political/colonial edges, reflected, as Majumbar stresses, in Katherine Mansfield's understanding of the relation between the European and the Maori, which often surfaces in *The Urewera Notebook*<sup>519</sup>:

Here, too, I meet Prodgers it is splendid to see once again — real English people — I am so tired & sick of the third rate article — Give me the Maori and the tourist — but nothing between. [...] the Maoris here know — some English and some Maori — not like the other natives — Also these people dress in almost English clothes compared with the natives here — and they wear a great deal of ornament in Umuroa & strange hair fashions — I found nothing of interest here (*UN*, p. 97)

During her trip in the central North Island, she meets Charles Prodgers, an English clergyman, which triggers in Mansfield a feeling of ignorance and undervalue of the colonials, putting the spotlight on the English: “Here, too, I meet Prodgers it is splendid to see once again — real English people — I am so tired & sick of the third rate article”. The expression “third rate article” is infused with an ironic emphasis, using a clearly mocking tone, and showing at the same time disdain towards the colonials, that is to say herself as well among others. The expression “Give me the Maori and the tourist — but nothing between” has become so famous mostly because of the outsider status that Mansfield had to confront while living in New Zealand. The “tourists” are the British people. What Maori and British people had in common was that they both had roots and a well-defined cultural identity. Angela Smith qualifies the feeling that Mansfield describes as “an

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<sup>519</sup> Saikat Majumdar, *Modernism and the Banality of Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 95.



impression of living in between<sup>520</sup>”, which ultimately determined her to leave the country. The opposition with “*real* English people<sup>521</sup>” is all the more revealing. The short-term English experience (1903-1906) that Mansfield previously undertook manifests itself in her writing. There we can sense her desire to become one of those English people, by actually leaving her home country and settling down there. Later she did indeed achieve her dream of living in England, even if she probably never really succeeded in being one of those “real English people”. The passage ends with a contradiction to her earlier desire (manifested at the beginning of the passage) to see the natives: “I found nothing of interest here”. The passage thus bears uncertainty and ambiguity.

Mansfield appreciates openness and open-mindedness towards English people: “The Maoris here know — some English and some Maori — not like the other natives — Also these people dress in almost English clothes compared with the natives here —”. She comments upon these national facts as if she were an observer; it is as if she did not belong to either of these nations: either the English, or the natives.

Her disdain to see colonials of a “lower quality” goes on when she confesses her Urewera experience to Annie Beauchamps, her mother: “I’m quite fond of all the people here — they are ultra-Colonial but thoroughly kind and & good hearted & generous — and always more than good to me”. (*Urewera*, Appendix I. 87-9) The expression “ultra-Colonial” is followed by the conjunction “but”, which makes the characterization of colonials something negative, perhaps inferior. The prefix “-ultra” and the capital letter used for the noun “Colonial” also have a similar effect.

On the other side, we can find Mansfield’s criticism towards New Zealand and its population. The trip that Mansfield undertook left her with disappointment. Angela Smith suggests: “In such opinions Mansfield was like the ‘hundreds of Europeans who desire[d] nativism and *authenticity*’[...] Mansfield appears to have disliked, with greater intensity, the notion that Maori were posing as ‘authentic’ for tourists’ benefit<sup>522</sup>.” Her world is much more than being divided between natives and settler colonials, a feature that I observed at every step while reading her notebook. For instance, she distinguishes between “photos of Maoris and whites” (*Urewera*, l. 315). Maoris are different from what she represents, the Pakeha white people. In Waiotapu, “we passed over oily thick green lake — round the sides the manuka clambered in fantastic blossoming [...] Bye & bye we go to see the mud volcano — meet Maoris — oh, so different” (*Urewera*, p. 99, l. 344-48). Then, “They pass Waka (abbreviation for Whakarewarewa) — ugly suburban houses —

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<sup>520</sup> Angela Smith (ed.) in *Introduction to Katherine Mansfield: Selected Stories*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. ix.

<sup>521</sup> Italics added here

<sup>522</sup> Angela Smith (ed.) in *Katherine Mansfield: Selected Stories*, *op. cit.*, p. ix.

ugly streets old shaking buses crowds of the veiled tourists” (*Ibid.*, p. 99-100, l. 357-8). The editor informs us that the traditional whares at Whakarewarewa, or what Mansfield calls “ugly suburban houses” were replaced at the turn of the twentieth century with unattractive European-style housing; a sign of the European domination that was installed on the land.

There is a clear evidence that Mansfield oscillates between the two cultures, the Maoris and the British tourists, yet (at times) considers the Maoris strong people, having a positive opinion about them: “Then meet a Maori again — walking along — barefooted and strong” (*Ibid.*, p. 100, l. 377-8).

She travels through several parts of the country, from one Maori hunt or “whare to Waiotapu”: “[...] and then before us Tarawera — with the great white cleft - The poverty of the country. But the gorgeous blue mountains all around is a great stretch of burnt Manuka” (*Ibid.*, p. 99, l. 329-32). She finds the vegetation enchanting: “Mist over the distant hills — The fascinating valleys of toi toi swayed by the wind. Silence again, and a wind full of the loneliness and sweetness of the wild Places” (*Ibid.*, p. 102, l. 431-4). Also, “There is no other sound except the voice of the passionate river” (*Ibid.*, p. 103, l. 480-1) ... “It seems there is nothing in the world but this shattering sound of water — it casts into the air a shower of silver spray - it is one gigantic battle — I watch it and am one with it.” (*Ibid.*, p. 104, l. 525-7). Nevertheless, she expresses her dissatisfaction to Jeanne, her younger sister: “Dear Baby — /This will, I think be my last letter to you — before I reach home — I wrote last to Chaddie from Rotorua — I must say I hated that town — it did not suit me at all — I never felt so ill or depressed — It was, I” (*Ibid.*, p. 105, l. 545-9) and disappointment towards the country: “Thursday — on the lake — A beautiful day — the people — Rotorua is not what I expect” (*Ibid.*, p. 101, l. 380-1). Moreover, Mansfield “thinks Rotorua is loathsome” (*Ibid.*, p. 100, l. 369). and a place of disenchantment: “All Sunday the further she went from Rotorua the happier she became — Towards evening - they came to a great mountain Pohataroa — it was very rugged & old & grim — an ancient fighting pah — Here the Maoris had fought” (*Ibid.*, p. 102, l. 444-7). These lines and more are also included in her journal as well. As Saikat Majumdar put it in relation to New Zealand, while discussing Mansfield’s diary, its protagonist and her trajectory:

Nothing happens here [New Zealand]; life is empty, uneventful, on the margins of human history. Temporality here is mired purely in the rhythms of the natural environment, which is iterative; unregenerative, and, in the end, banalizing next to the imagined and subsequently realized fullness of life

at the centre of imperial culture. [...] The oppressive banalization of everyday life on the margins of empire is an ineluctable experience of colonial modernity.<sup>523</sup>

This study is meaningful because the critic uses a central argument: that of time and coloniality. Majumdar characterizes New Zealand as a place “on the margins of the human history”, in other words, a primitive and colonial one. Its temporality is a passive one as well, stuck in its repetitive environment. There is no development happening in this place. He makes a clear and harsh comparison with the booming “centre of imperial culture”, bringing up once again a temporal issue: “the oppressive banalization of everyday life”, which calls for the “experience of colonial modernity”. Majumdar describes directly and effectively the two opposing worlds using a temporal perspective: “the natural environment, which is iterative; unregenerative, and, in the end, banalizing next to the imagined and subsequently realized fullness of life at the centre of imperial culture.” We can say that Katherine Mansfield’s Modernism starts in those times, back in New Zealand in an artistic current that will later be polished, refined and developed in metropolitan London. Time and coloniality are undermined by Majumdar’s argument. It is precisely another type of Modernity, full of potential and only accessible in the metropolitan centre, that Mansfield was longing for. There were, of course, some Modern characteristics to be found in New Zealand, but relatively shallow: “Modernity in the colony, I argue, is marked by a desire whose object can only be perceived from a distance.<sup>524</sup>” An unavoidable experience that can be found in New Zealand is the “colonial modernity”, which is central to our study. The banality of the country distinguishes itself despite its beautiful and at times enchanting vegetation and that’s why the centre is such a tempting territory: “As an aesthetic condition of colonial modernity, banality embodies a fractured relation to metropolitan modernity; at the same time, it remains perpetually animated by a desire to heal the fracture, to inhabit the transcendence that the centre holds out as a promise.”<sup>525</sup> Mansfield is aware of the colonial history of her country, all the more since she has just arrived from England, the latter enabling her to be in direct contact with the colonial reality and its implications; the source of her awareness lies in her English experience and the difference between England and the colonies that she became aware of and which changed her perspective. Her English experience puts her in contact with the coloniality of her country: “Visions of long dead Maoris, of forgotten battles and vanished feuds, stirred in me, till I ran through the dark glade on to a bare hill; the track was very narrow and steep, and at the summit a little Maori *whare* was painted black against the wide sky.” (*Letters and*

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<sup>523</sup> Saikat Majumdar, *Modernism and the Banality of Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

*Journals*, letter written in New Zealand, November-December 1907, 29.) This description is written almost in a gothic style with “dead Maoris”, “the dark glade” and “a little Maori [who] was painted black”.

Mansfield becomes aware of New Zealand’s past and its “forgotten battles and vanished feuds” that are reborn in her and make her uneasy, hence the use of the expression “stirred in me”. She wants to belong somewhere, to be authentic and a native after all. The Maori people’s past is not an easy one but rather a black one, emphasizing, “a little Maori *whare* [that] was painted black against the wide sky”. I think that through this image Mansfield begins to understand why New Zealand does not and probably could never have the prosperity, power and potential that she was longing for, and in turn were characteristics of the metropolitan centre. But her Modernism (what she makes of her experience of the London literary context) is not the same as the (imperialistic) Modernity of London as metropolitan colonial centre.

London is even more clearly expressed and gains a significant place in her notebook:

Next morning - mist over the whole world - Lying - her arms over her head - she can see - faintly like a grey thought the river & the mist - they are hardly distinct she is not tired now only happy - Goes to the door of the tent - all is very grey - there is no sun - first thing - she can see the poplar tree mirrored in the water - The grass is wet - there is the familiar sound of buckets - As she brushes her hair a wave of cold hair strikes her - lays cold fingers about her heart it is the wizard London - Gradually the sun comes - the poplar is green now - the dew shines on everything [...] there, just on the bank the flowering manuka is a riot of white colour against the blue water [...] The mist seems rising & falling here comes the theme again for the last time - & now the day fully enters with a duet of two oboes - you hear it - Sunshine had there ever been such sunshine (*Urewera*, p. 104, l. 491 - 506)

The “wizard London” is of particular interest here. The imperial power is presented here as having magical powers: “the wizard London”. It is like the central point that changes everything around. The misty, cold and grey atmosphere that rules over the surroundings is quickly changed at the appearance of the “wizard London”: “[g]radually the sun comes”, and everything around regains its brighten colour in perfect harmony: “the poplar is green now - the dew shines on everything [...] there, just on the bank the flowering manuka is a riot of white colour against the blue water [...] The mist seems rising & falling here comes the theme again for the last time - & now the day fully enters with a duet of two oboes - you hear it -”. It is as if by having contact with London, Mansfield would have regained something lost, even more: something that has perhaps never occurred before: “Sunshine had there ever been such sunshine”. The contact with the centre, namely London changes her perspective, but also the colonies; it also points to the relationship and dominion that London

occupies in relation with the colonies that are under its power — the whole colonial reality in a word. It is like making a bow in front of the empire's centre. She was transformed, the writer's departure was therefore imminent. The presence of the lexical field of nature, characterized by brightness which, at first sight, seems strange in this urban landscape, certainly used by Mansfield to reinforce or underline the power of the city, which awakens, or is born from, her observational sensitivity, acquired in her native New Zealand. We have also established links with the colonial reality, the image of the powerful and charming London, a world of possibilities, seen clearly as such by the writer given the description.

Mansfield uses the third person singular "she", but also the name "Kathie" to talk about herself. For instance, she says that she does not like Rotorua, something that she also tells her mother in one of the letters she sends her. This shows that the diary is Mansfield's first attempts towards writing. The diary is actually the first laboratory of Modernism.

Mansfield goes further by naming her own feelings and characterizing the person that she feels she is:

Monday night

Dear Man -

I am a vagrant - - a Wanderer, a Gypsy tonight (*UN*, l. 541-3)

A "gypsy" is a British word for designating a traveller, somebody who travels from place to place, without establishing a home of its own. Synonymous with "vagrant". The wanderer has no clear aim while travelling, a quasi-equivalent of Woolf and Rhys's *flâneuse*. Here it is not the feminine or the Modern side that is highlighted, but rather the colonial one. Woolf and Rhys's *flâneuses* wander on the streets and contemplate the surroundings, whereas for a Gypsy this is a way of living, so I believe it is stronger. Mansfield's vagrant encompasses a cross-country dimension, whereas Woolf's encompass an urban one. Katherine Mansfield also makes the distinction between a tourist and a traveller. She seems to hate the former one. Her disregard towards tourists is expressed at several occasions: "I confess, frankly that I hate going trips with a party of tourists - they spoil half my pleasure - don't they yours? (*Ibid.*, l. 402-3), while writing to her mother. This happens after visiting Rotorua, which changed her initial reflection on tourists: "Give me the Maori and the tourist — but nothing between." (*Ibid.*, 97)

Mansfield considers herself "a vagrant - - a Wanderer, a Gypsy" even in New Zealand therefore. It is actually the Urewera trip that makes her aware of her being a wanderer, which I think

also contributes to her feeling less at home in New Zealand, and deciding to leave for England again, and for good. The Urewera trip is a trigger in her decision making process, reinforcing what she really wants and longs for, and ultimately who she really is: just “a vagrant - - a Wanderer, a Gypsy”.

Despite all that, the environment of the Urewera camp is pleasant: “The wind is our lullaby” (*Ibid.*, l. 651) and conducive for her writing: it represents a source of inspiration for her later works: both poems and short stories. It is for example the case of the poem “In the Rangitaiki Valley”. The short story “The Woman at the Store” was also created having in mind the remarks written down in her diary: “Come and sit down. I’ll make you a cup of tea. I haven’t got me drorin’ room boots on!” (*Urewera.*, footnote section, p. 109). “This blossom flaming yellow & pale gold” (*Ibid.*, p. 109, l. 686) will according to Ian Gordon later be used in her short stories such as the opening section of the short story “At the Bay”, in which Linda Burnell contemplates the “falling yellow petals of the manuka” (*Ibid.*, footnote p. 109). The presence of the “yellowish flower” in “At the Bay” is also of interest here: “She looked up at the dark, close, dry leaves of the manuka, at the chinks of blue between, and now and again a tiny yellowish flower dropped on her” (*The Collected Stories*, p. 220) and also “the slender trees with yellow leaves down drooping” (*Ibid.*, p. 332) used in Miss Brill.

Most of her short stories abound in images of the New Zealand vegetation. We now know how significant were all Mansfield’s encounters with, or “glimpses” of, as she would say, her native land. Moreover, all her short stories abound in references to the New Zealand landscape, such as the bush, the river, all kinds of trees, the gardens, etc. “M.” is without doubt an abbreviation for the later imagined character of Millie Parker: “M. and I sitting opposite each other” (*Urewera.*, p. 110, l. 717).

Apart from the *Urewera Notebook*, there are also Mansfield’s journals and letters in which the poetics of the colonial, and of colonial time in particular can be stressed and of use in the current chapter.

While *The Urewera Notebook* delivers an in between state of mind in which Mansfield tries to situate herself between England and New Zealand, the works and the period that come after pictures a Mansfield away from home, still trying to find herself and name what she might call “home”. In 1909, roughly a year after having left for Europe, Mansfield evokes her home country in a poem called “To Stanislaw Wyspianski”, also present in her journal, a passage of which is

particularly revealing in our analysis. Even when she finds herself in Bavaria, Germany, she writes as if she were at home, in New Zealand:

From the other side of the world,  
From a little island cradled in the giant sea bosom,  
From a little land with no history,  
(Making its own history, slowly and clumsily  
Piecing together this and that, finding the patterns solving the problem,  
Like a child with a box of bricks)  
I, a woman with the taint of the pioneer in my blood  
Full of a youthful strength that wars with itself and is lawless  
I sing your praises, magnificent warrior; I proclaim your triumphant battle.  
My people have had nought to contend with;  
They have worked in the broad light of day and handled the clay with rude fingers (*Letters and Journals*,  
*To Stanislaw Wyspianski*, written in Bavaria, 1909-10, p. 39.)

Bavaria is a new and different experience of non-home and displacement for Mansfield. The place of Germany in Mansfield's colonial geography is significant, knowing that it features in the title of one of her first published volumes, *In a German Pension*. It was among the first places that she experienced after leaving New Zealand, the first one being England. The desire to situate herself and to belong somewhere is still very strong and fresh.

The perspective that the poem is infused with is one that highlights the place where the writing takes place: "From the other side of the world, / From a little island cradled in the giant sea bosom, / From a little land with no history". The place and time are highlighted using the preposition "from", appearing three times at the head of each line. Mansfield tries to make her own way in Europe and find the pattern even though she comes from "a little land with no history". Through the appellation "My people" the writer conscientiously endorses "the other side of the world", New Zealand, and makes it her own. The famous declaration that stands almost as an identity card for the writer, "I, a woman with the taint of the pioneer in my blood", followed by the two lines that claim her as a warrior "Full of a youthful strength that wars with itself and is lawless / I sing your praises, magnificent warrior; I proclaim your triumphant battle" show her restless endurance and courage. The expression "My people" here, I think, refers to all New Zealanders (descendants of Maori settlers and white settlers). So it is the settlers here, insofar as the writer also uses the term "taint". What is her position here? And who is this "magnificent warrior" she addresses? It seems to me that what she creates or represents here is crucial. As a descendant of colonials, she brings to light the colonial context, its discourse, its system of values and

representation: the “wars”, the history of the conquest which, in the colonial gaze, is supposed to create or bring a “history”, where, supposedly, there was none before — “No history”, the indigenous history not being taken into account and completely absent or wiped out. On the ideological map of colonialism, at that (literary) age and (im)maturity, this makes her a writer at the beginning of the road. Nevertheless, her position evolves along the next years and decades. Her life was made up of short trips across Europe.

Germany and England were not the only destinations that Mansfield visited. During the war, she found herself divided between several European places. “Katherine Mansfield had been growing discontented with Murry during this period, and had been exchanging love letters with the French writer (interestingly also a Pacific colonial, born in Noumea) Francis Carco, who was then a soldier in the French army<sup>526</sup>, whom she met right before the war during a Parisian trip taken with Murry. In 1915 she found herself between Murry’s apartment in London and Carco’s apartment in Paris, while Carco was at the front.<sup>527</sup> Once Leslie was killed in the war, she moved to Bandol, in the South of France, accompanied by Murry at first. After less than six months, she returned to London and Chelsea. She later left for Bandol again, where Ida Constance Baker joined her. She then went back to London, but first she fled to Paris, where she was trapped by the German bombardment. In April 1918 both friends managed to return to London.

In May-June 1918 she spent a couple of weeks in Cornwall with Anne Estelle Rice, an American born painter and also her friend. Meanwhile, she continued to write to Murry. On June 9, 1918, she wrote: “It all feels so different today; it’s been raining and ’tis lovely air, as Mrs. Honey says. No sun — rather cold — the curtains blowing — very, very desolate and far away from everybody — 11,500 miles away at least ... Oh, dear! I wish I were in London [...]” (*Letters and Journals*, 120) She was “11,500 miles away” from her native country and also far from London, another place that was dear to her. It is notable how she evokes the two locations, New Zealand and London, when she feels “desolate and far away from everybody”. It shows once again how she is situated between the two. Mansfield’s fears and anxiety overwhelmed her: she lost weight and had her first tuberculosis haemorrhages at the beginning of the year, in January 1918. She certainly had her ups and downs, but New Zealand and England were close to her heart. On June 16th, 1918 she wrote: “[...] in spite of everything, I believed in England. Not only in England — in mankind ...” (*Ibid.*, p. 121) Interestingly, Mansfield refers to the imperial centre as England, just like

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<sup>526</sup> Note by the editor for the journal entry from January 21st 1915, p. 50.

<sup>527</sup> Extracted from KM’s Timeline provided by the Katherine Mansfield Society, <https://www.katherinemansfieldsociety.org/timeline/>, last accessed March 8, 2021.



foreigners would do. It is interesting, as in these letters, using a tone of confidence, the author lays herself bare: in her affections, transformations, changes of looks and positions, etc. The diary as a laboratory for the creation of Modernism, which has begun for Mansfield during the Urewera trip, continues a couple of years later in her journal and letters written in Europe.

Mansfield's trajectory takes the shape of a back and forth movement among several destinations: New Zealand, England, Germany, Sweden, France ... Following her letters, we cannot help but notice the nomadic or migratory nature of the writer's life path, specific to colonials. The question of the hotels, which reminds us of Rhys's short stories, is one that highlights this feature even more, as she writes in June 1918:

*Hotels*

I seem to spend half of my life arriving at strange hotels. And asking if I may go to bed immediately.

[...]

The strange door shuts upon the stranger, and then I slip down in the sheets. Waiting for the shadows to come out of the corners and spin their flow, slow web over the Ugliest Wallpaper of All. (*Ibid.*, 122)

If Mansfield spent "half of her life arriving at strange hotels", Rhys's short stories and novels practically prove a whole existence spent in hotel rooms. In contrastive experiment, what do we make of Woolf's travels? She too goes to the Riviera and Italy, for instance, but she has never the same point of view. Even if she misses England, she never identifies herself with abandoned hotel rooms, she only perceives herself as a tourist outside England. She actually belongs somewhere.

Hotels represent strangeness ("strange hotels") and the willingness to shut oneself out from the world ("asking if I may go to bed immediately"); this is what we can grasp from the first sentence. The second sentence is very similar in meaning: the "strange door" of hotels "shuts upon the stranger", which in turn "invites" her (or even constrains or forces her silently and invisibly) to "slip down in the sheets". The strangeness of these hotels — through these personified "strange doors" — also seems to emanate from a kind of supernatural existence or consciousness of which they seem animated. The word "noun", used three times, is key in Mansfield's reflection about hotels. These hotels seem "inhabited" or haunted as in the following expressions used: "slip down in", "shadows", "spin their flow", and "slow web" (the spider's web is thus being woven "slowly"). The decoration and atmosphere are "creepy", fantastic, almost gothic. The capital letters from the phrase: "Ugliest Wallpaper of All" add an extra layer to the created ambiance, possibly meaning exasperation, dejection, aversion, and frustration. The image of the hotel thus shows the limited and

“ugly” existence in which she is caught. She sees herself almost as a victim, someone that has the “Ugliest” experience “of All”.

Also, in a journal entry in Menton, on April 1920, Mansfield writes:

True to oneself! which self? Which of my many — well, really, that’s what it looks like coming to — hundreds of selves? For what with complexes and repressions and reactions and vibrations and reflections, there are moments when I feel I am nothing but the small clerk of some hotel without a proprietor, who has all his work cut out to enter the names and hand the keys to the wilful guests. (*Ibid.*, p. 173)

It is intriguing how Mansfield limits herself to being “nothing but the clerk of some hotel”, almost as a tool that does nothing but “enter(s) the names and hand(s) the keys to the wilful guests”. The characteristic of the colonial subject is the multitude of selves to which they identify, or rather have problems identifying. If in Rhys’s case, it is mostly the short stories that give evidence in this sense, in Mansfield’s situation it is via the journals that this question is pointed out. Here too, this kind of strangeness and terror reappears — this time of the self — unless the strangeness of the hotels only reflects that of Mansfield, of her self (and of her difficulty to identify herself to something)? Thus, there is a clear link between the last two quotes analyzed. In June 1918, Mansfield finds herself in Cornwall and writes the following in her diary: “If I had a “home” and could pull the curtains together, lock the door, burn something sweet, fast, walk round my own perfect room, soundlessly, watching the lights & the shadows, it would be tolerable, but living as I do in a public house — it’s très difficile.”<sup>528</sup> The so-called “home” that she dreams of is opposed to the hotel room in which she “spend[s] half of [her] life”. But even that perfect room would not be enough ... the highlighted adjective “tolerable” describes the agony and difficulty in which she finds herself. We can also find here the shadows, as mentioned in the previous quote analyzed: “Waiting for the shadows”. In fact, it seems that it is indeed the self that is inhabited, haunted, a stranger after all, carrying these internal “shadows” everywhere, in strange motels, as in the “perfect room”. It is not the first time that Mansfield uses French expressions. Let us note the famous short story, “Je ne parle pas français”. The multilingualism present here could testify to these “hundreds of selves”, swirling like “shadows”. In addition, a possible link with the war can be considered, especially given the period in which it was written (June 1918).

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<sup>528</sup> Gerri Kimber, Claire Davison, and Anna Plumridge (eds.), *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield: The Diaries of Katherine Mansfield Including Miscellaneous Works*, volume 4, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 253.

Once back to London, Mansfield feels alone: “Oh dear — Oh dear — *where* are my people? With whom have I been happiest? With nobody in particular. It has all been much of a mushness.” (*Ibid.*, 128) In February 1916, mourning her brother, she thinks of time and its implication with English history and tries to situate the people around her: “But what coherent account could I give of the history of English literature? And what of English history? None. When I think in *dates* and *times* the wrong people come in — the right people are missing.” (*Ibid.*, 128) Back in London, she looks for “[her] people” and remembers that she comes from “a little land with no history” as evoked in the poem “To Stanislaw Wyspianski”. Times and places may change, but the way Mansfield relates to the notions of home is charged with uncertainty, instability, and isolation, as she can never really create a place of her own. All this is visible or arises through the letters and the diaries written by the author. The context of these writings, that of the war, comes without a surprise given the features of insecurity and reclusiveness generated by it.

Looking at the poetics of Mansfield’s private writings, we can see how her writing takes shape: she makes the first steps of the Modernist journey, which will later be accomplished in her published works. But these are her first steps, and she makes them in a safe environment, that of the private writings. We can at the same time see her desire for art, and this art form takes place in the environment of the colonies at first, and then continues in another type of colonial environment in London. As a colonial, she can never really settle down and have her home so she “haunts” Europe’s capitals, which also allows her to have contact with a different type of Modernism.

## **Woolf and Mansfield’s letter exchanges and the hidden colonial pattern**

When we think of the writers’ private writings and the relationships that have been created between them, an important aspect is covered by the letters that have been exchanged between Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield. Apart from the literary nature of their exchange, one prevalent aspect that their friendship and exchanges imply is their colonial dimension. As we know, they were contemporaries, friends and even rivals at times. In April 1919 Mansfield writes to Woolf from London:

Virginia, I have read your article on Modern Novels. You write so *damned* well, so *devilish* well.

But I positively must see you soon. I want to talk over so much — Your room with the too deep windows — I should love to be there now. Last time the rambler roses were nearly over and there was a sound of someone sawing wood. (*Ibid.*, 133)

Mansfield esteemed Woolf very much and reciprocally. Nonetheless, there were times when Mansfield did not agree with Woolf's literary choices. As is the case, the essential characteristic of letter writing lies in the relationship between the sender and the addressee. By that means, Katherine Mansfield writes to Virginia Woolf, an Englishwoman, very much rooted at the centre of English history and the history of English letters, whereas as Woolf addresses herself to Katherine Mansfield, (an outsider and) a colonial. This is a fact and the letters are evidence in this sense. Whenever Mansfield does not like Woolf's writing, she is unable to tell her in person, she only discusses it with other people, for example her husband. Their relationship can also be read the other way round, regarding for this time Mansfield, the colonial and outsider who writes to an English woman of letters, born and raised in metropolitan London. The correspondence between the two writers has often been interpreted and analyzed from a literary and Modernist perspective, but less given the colonial angle implied. In a letter to Murry, or "Bogey" as Mansfield calls her husband, she offers her insights on Woolf's novel, *Night and Day*:

I am doing Virginia for this week's novel. I don't like it, Boge. My private opinion is that it is a lie in the soul. The war never has been: that is what its message is. I don't want (G. forbid!) mobilization and the violation of Belgium, but the novel can't just leave the war out. There must have been a change of heart. It is really fearful to see the "settling down" of human beings. I feel in the *profoundest* sense that nothing can ever be the same — that, as artists, we are traitors if we feel otherwise: we have to take it into account and find new expressions, new moulds for our new thoughts and feelings. Is this exaggeration? What *has* been, stands, but Jane Austen could not write *Northanger Abbey* now — or if she did I'd have none of her. There is a trifling scene in Virginia's book where a charming young creature in a light fantastic attitude plays the flute: it positively frightens me — to realize this *utter coldness* and indifference. But I will be very careful and do my best to be dignified and sober. Inwardly I despise them all for a set of cowards. We have to face our war. They won't. (*Ibid.*, 147 - letter written on November 10th, 1919)

Mansfield is categorical vis-à-vis Woolf and her novel, but only while addressing Murry, not Woolf herself: "My private opinion is that it is a lie in the soul." Private writings give access to the writer's "private opinion[s]", an indirect way to speak about things, as opposed to the/a public way of expression. This is the particularity of these writings which I deal with in this chapter. The frightening feelings that Woolf's writing form inside Mansfield do not let the latter play an influence on her: "But I will be very careful and do my best to be dignified and sober." Mansfield knows exactly her place and takes action in this respect. Woolf's weight and power are the ones at

stake here, which also drives a barrier between the two: “Inwardly I despise them all for a set of cowards. We have to face our war. They won’t.” The opposition that is being established between the pronouns “them”/“they” and “we” possibly sets a distance between colonizers, represented by Woolf, and colonized, in the case of Mansfield. It could also imply a separation between “we”, “as artists”, “we have to take it into account and find new expressions”, as opposed to “them” whom Mansfield despises, the ones who are cowards and lack the courage to face the war. By saying that “they” lack the courage to confront the war, she undermines their authority and implies a weakness on their part. It is noteworthy that Mansfield criticizes an imperial event, the war, even if she does not understand it as such. Her conclusion remains: “The novel can’t just leave the war out”. Mansfield’s argument touches the very heart of Modernism, the fact that Modernism is always coupled with colonialism, and the literary quality of the novel.

Also, linked to that “change of heart” evoked in the last paragraph, and the question of war, which she simply cannot picture as missing, Mansfield writes:

What is this about the novel? [...] seriously, Bogey, the more I read the more I feel all these novels will not do. After that I’m a swollen sheep looking up who is not fed. And yet I feel one can lay down no rules. It’s not in the least a question of material or style or plot. I can only think in terms of “a change of heart”. I can’t imagine how after the war these men can pick up the old threads as though it had never been. (*Ibid.*, November 16, 1919, p. 150)

Mansfield favors the place of History and historical facts in the novel, that of the war more precisely, which explains the “change of heart” that she evokes, and maybe also the damaging effects of the war on her. She writes these observations in a post-war period, which ensures even more the certainty of the issues evoked. It is a period in which Mansfield reflects on the changes that should be made in literature. The “change of heart” that Mansfield evokes in 1919 could be compared with the change that preoccupied Woolf and of which she first talks about in 1910 when “human character changed” and which represents a continual preoccupation for her. In the same year, 1919, Mansfield “draw[s] a modernist manifesto that advocate[s] a ‘new word’<sup>529</sup>”:

It only makes one feel how one adores English prose, how to be a writer — is *everything*. I *do* believe that the time has come for a “new word” but I imagine the new word will not be spoken easily. People have

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<sup>529</sup>Alice Borrego in “‘The time has come for a new word’: Katherine Mansfield’s Literary Ethics”, *E-rea* (Revue électronique d’études sur le monde anglophone, online since 15 June 2020, last accessed April 28, 2022, <https://journals.openedition.org/erea/9596?lang=en>).

never explored the lovely medium of prose. It is a hidden country still — I feel that so profoundly.  
(*Letters and Journals*, July 1919, p. 136)

Just like in Woolf's case, for whom being patriotic means reading and writing literature first and foremost, Mansfield finds herself in a very similar situation when she advocates that “to be a writer — is everything”, the dash used offers a certainty and reassurance. Just like a pioneer of English writing, which she undoubtedly is, she announces the following: “I do believe that the time has come for a ‘new word’”, even if she knows the difficulty of the task. The change that she considers is in the medium of prose. She writes that in 1919, in full war time, which could make one think that “the war progressively led Mansfield to draw a modernist manifesto that advocated a ‘new word’”.

Let us just come back to the relationship between Woolf and Mansfield and how it is expressed in the letters that they wrote to each other. The climax of Mansfield's opinion on Woolf arrives a couple of days later, on November 13, 1919, when Mansfield starts her letter to Murry as follows:

... I am reviewing Virginia to send tomorrow. It's devilish hard. Talk about intellectual snobbery — her book *reeks* of it. (But I can't say so.) You would dislike it. You'd never read it. It's so long and so tāhsōme ... (*Ibid.*)

The letter starts and ends in the same fashion, with three dots, implying hesitation on Mansfield's part, which is also the tone of the letter itself. However, she seems to have strong feelings and opinions when she calls Woolf out, and the entourage that she was part of or her “intellectual snobbery”. The verb “reek” is also a powerful one. “But I can't say so” in between brackets shows the secret dimension of the information, an opinion that must remain silent even if the exercise proves to be “devilish hard” for her, and the book “so long and so tāhsōme”. The word “tāhsōme” here denotes a class issue, combined with the colonial. Mansfield's belonging, both as class and origin, comes to the surface in the poetics of the text that she writes. The fact that she must be careful of making a good impression situates her below the “intellectual snobbery”, which Woolf and the Bloomsbury members are part of. It's as if the colonized had to fear the colonizer, but Mansfield is not in the colonized position here. As a result, this secret dimension, this concealment to which she submits and knows she must obey, testifies to the beginning of this relationship of power, revealed through these letters to her husband; the terms “reeks” or “intellectual snobbery”

reveal her anger, which bursts out and can finally come out into the open, paradoxically, in these letters and thanks to this writing of intimacy, of confidentiality, of the hidden ...

It is clear that the novel form does not suit Mansfield and she assumes that on several occasions, such as while talking to Murry: "If I did not review novels I'd never read them." (*Letters and Journals*, 181) It is perhaps her disagreement vis-à-vis the novel and what it should do or do not contain that has a word to say in her decision. Mansfield feels reluctant while telling the truth and assuming herself in front of Woolf, which compromises her relationship with the letter form. But she also has less sympathy towards the journal form:

The Journal — I have absolutely given up. I dare not keep a journal. I should always be trying to tell the truth. As a matter of fact I dare not tell the truth. I feel I *must* not. The only way to exist is to go on and try to lose oneself — to get as far as possible from this moment. Once I can do that all will be well. So it's stories or nothing. (*Ibid.*, p. 183)

The necessary context to understand what each term means in this passage is the colonial one, the colonial context and tension that exists between Woolf and herself. Mansfield associates the writing of a journal with telling the truth. She cannot tell the truth as an outsider, and by that I mean someone coming from a foreign land. She feels that she "*must*" not tell the truth because that would certainly ruin her. For example, if she had told everything about what she thought of Woolf's novel, it would certainly have affected her career and evolution as an author. As she said to Murry in the letter that we just analyzed: "But I can't say so". The colonial life comes with secrets and limits as well. "So it's stories or nothing", a decision that has certainly impacted Mansfield's literary career. Mansfield's reluctance towards private writings is found in her feeling not to tell the truth: "I dare not tell the truth. I feel I *must* not." Does her status as a colonial, who is "allowed to look, perhaps, but not to linger" (*Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, 106) (as she states in 1908, the year of her arrival in England), interfere and thus influence her private writings? If so, the same could be applicable to Jean Rhys, who only has a brief collection of letters, from 1931 to 1966, and no journals, whereas Woolf has written a large collection of letters and diaries. Is it hard, as a colonial, to assume oneself and, perhaps even more, when one is far away from his/her native country, and lives her life in London, the centre of the empire. But we should not forget the historical fact of journal writing as an early, foundational genre for colonial literature, in New Zealand, as in the US, etc.

Rhys and Mansfield experienced repression and also an indirect way of expressing oneself through fiction. While writing to Hugh Walpole, Mansfield confesses:

I sympathize more than I can say with your desire to escape from autobiography. Don't you feel that what English writers lack today is experience of Life. I don't mean that superficially. But they are self-imprisoned. I think there is a very profound distinction between any kind of *confession* and creative work — not that that rules out the first by any means. (*Ibid.*, p. 190, letter to Hugh Walpole, October 27, 1920)

Autobiography is another form at issue. The pronoun “I” from the beginning of the passage expresses her conviction and certainty about this genre, a point interestingly made by using the essence of autobiographies: the “I”. Woolf also liked autobiographies very much. Let us only think of *Moments of Being*, a revolutionary work written in a Modernist fashion. The phrase “experience of Life<sup>530</sup>” that Mansfield uses is like Woolf's poetics. The English writers that Woolf talks about while tackling the issue of patriotism are back in Mansfield's letter for this time, which only reinforces the literary quality of these writers.

Mansfield was not an enthusiast of the autobiographical genre but did encourage the first person usage while dealing with reviews and literary works. She talked about the short versus long papers and the habits that writers should embrace:

In my reckless way I would suggest all reviews were signed and all were put into the first person. I think that would give the whole paper an amazing lift-up. A paper that length must be *definite, personal*, or die. It can't afford the “we” — “in our opinion”. To sign reviews, to put them in the 1st person stimulates curiosity, makes for correspondence, gives it (to be 19-elevetyish) GUTS. (*Ibid.*, p. 204, letter to J. M. Murry, December 5th, 1920)

Coming back to the question of writers who rule the ground such as Woolf, the hypothesis stated earlier regarding the relationship between private writing and coloniality finds an answer in the following argument: “Don't you feel that what English writers lack today is experience of Life.” This remark of Mansfield could be linked to what she said to her husband about Woolf's *Night and Day*: “Inwardly I despise them all for a set of cowards. We have to face our war. They won't.” In this context we implied a separation between “we”, “as artists”, as opposed to “them” whom Mansfield despises, the ones who are cowards and lack the courage to face the war. Therefore, pronouns such as “we” and “our” in the sentence “It can't afford the “we” — ‘in our opinion’” could also be interpreted as referring to the colonized people, Mansfield included, who can't afford the autobiographical “I” because of her status in London.

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<sup>530</sup> My italics.



Mansfield and Rhys's colonial status accompanied by the lack of a sense of belonging is essentially what sets them apart from Woolf. But it is, after all, also a question regarding their own decisions. Mansfield and Rhys never settled down; in fact, they never bought a house, unlike Woolf, who purchased houses along her life. Mansfield treats the question of housing in relation to Woolf's situation: "How I envy Virginia; no wonder she can write. There is always in her writing a calm freedom of expression as though she were at peace — her roof over her, her possessions round her, and her man somewhere within call" (*Ibid.*, p. 158), Mansfield writes in 1919. Material things defined by a house: "her roof over her, her possessions round her" are a woman's necessary attributes for writing, as Woolf herself defined it later in *A Room of One's Own* (1929). For Mansfield, a house contains a "man somewhere within call", which is evidently a question that troubles her. This reminds me of the quotation treated above, where Mansfield says she wants "[her] own perfect room". Related to the question of colonial that Mansfield's condition embodies and that of a man "somewhere within call", which Woolf can claim to have, Mansfield expressed her ideas in a poem with a suggestive name "The New Husband":

Someone came to me and said  
Forget, forget that you've been wed.  
Who's your man to leave you be  
Ill and cold in a far country?  
Who's the husband — who's the stone  
Could leave a child like you alone? (*Letters and Journals*, p. 158)

It is clearly her status as a colonial "in a far country" that is associated with the absence of a husband. Mansfield's security provided by a home and a husband seemed unfulfilled. Alone and an outsider: that's what defined Mansfield while being in London. Nevertheless, she missed it when being away from it. On February 29th, 1920 she wrote from Menton, France:

Oh, I failed today; I turned back, looked over my shoulder, and immediately it happened, I felt as though I too were struck down. The day turned cold and dark on the instant. It seemed to belong to summer twilight in London, to the clang of the gates as they close the garden, to the deep light painting the high houses, to the smell of leaves and dust, to the lamp-light, to that stirring of the senses, to the languor of twilight, the breath of it on one's cheek, to all those things which (I feel today) are gone from me for ever ... (*Ibid.*, p. 170)

The metaphorical images of a lost London paint a nostalgic Mansfield, who misses the city, the same way she would miss her native country: "All those things which (I feel today) are gone from

me for ever". She perceives it as a failure and her whole world turned into a dark place: "The day turned cold and dark on the instant".

On the other hand, she began to like Menton once she identified it with her native country. The vegetation from the south of France, similar to New Zealand's, took her back to her home country. From Menton, France, she wrote to J. M. Murry:

I love this place more and more. One is conscious of it as I used to be conscious of New Zealand. I mean if I went for a walk there and lay down under a pine tree and looked up at the wispy clouds through the branches I came home plus the pine tree — don't you know? Here it's just the same. I go for a walk and I watch the butterflies in the heliotrope and young bees and some old bumble ones and all these things are added unto me. Why I don't feel like this in England Heaven knows. But my light goes out in England, or it's a very small and miserable shiner ... (*Ibid.*, p. 191/2)

There is a situation involving three places here: New Zealand, France, and England: "I came home plus the pine tree" (representing New Zealand); "Here it's just the same" (pointing to France); "Why I don't feel like this in England Heaven knows" (a thought that makes her reflect upon her relationship with England). Nevertheless, she sees England as an exile: "But my light goes out in England, or it's a very small and miserable shiner ...". She thinks home is England, but in reality it's not, or she would like England to be her home, but her situation is more complex than that. In terms of the Modernist world and the geography of the empire(s), the situation works out in an interesting way. The Mansfieldian chaos is precisely this division between three places: New Zealand, France and England. Mansfield here covers the two dimensions, colonial and Modernist, in one passage, the two being inseparable as regards the New Zealand writer.

## New Zealand and the private self

Towards the end of Mansfield's life, the New Zealand memories gain an important place. On November 1st 1920, she writes: "*Dream I* — I was living at home again in the room with the fire escape." (*Ibid.*, 196) Two days later, on November 3, 1920, she realizes that writing about New Zealand gives her space and order in her thinking: "Here it is under my hand — finished — another story about as long as *The Man Without a Temperament* — p'raps longer. It's called *The Stranger*, a 'New Zealand' story. My depression has gone, Boge; so it was just this. [...] What a QUEER business writing is!" (*Ibid.*, p. 198-9). Letters allow the author to step back from herself and her own writing process. New Zealand becomes a literary category, a category of Modernism. Mansfield shapes Modernism while writing about New Zealand. It is something that could only happen far away from home, in a place such as the South of France, which awakes her memories of New Zealand. It becomes part of her writing, part of her Modernist writing. This is how Modernism gains a new meaning and expands itself through the colonial, and, of course, through the medium of private writings.

The tension is rising and in September 1921 Mansfield's hopes loom on the horizon: "I wish I could go back to N.Z. for a year. But I can't possibly just now. I don't see why not, in two years' time though." (*Ibid.*, 231) The same happens to Jean Rhys, when towards the end of her life she realizes that her dream and wish is to see Dominica just once more. The same month, Mansfield writes from Switzerland to her aristocratic friend (born in a British family) and American painter, the Hon. Dorothy Brett:

I've just finished my new book. [...] The title is *At the Bay*. That's the name of the very long story in it — a continuation of *Prelude*. [...] I've wandered about all sorts of places in and out [...] It is so strange to bring the dead to life again. There's my Grandmother, back in her chair with her pink knitting, there stalks my uncle over the grass; I feel as I write, "You are not dead, my darlings. All is remembered. I bow down to you. I efface myself so that you may live again through me in your richness and beauty." And one feels *possessed*. And the place where it all happens. I have tried to make it as familiar to "you" as it is to me. You know the marigolds? You know those pools in the rocks, you know the mouse trap on the washhouse window-sill? And too, one tries to go deep — to speak to the secret self we all have — to acknowledge that. I mustn't say any more about it.

No, we certainly shan't be back in England for years. Sometimes, in bed at night, we plan one holiday a year, but everywhere else feels nearer than England. If we can get the money we shall build here in two or three years' time. (*Ibid.*, 232/3)

She returns to New Zealand via her stories, “Prelude”, “At the Bay”, and then “The Garden Party”. However, the ambivalence is still there: she thinks of New Zealand, but of England as well, at the same time. There is a multitude of times, played out at the same time in her writing. There is a continuous display of colonial time in her journal, and also in her fictional writing. The journal gives access and clears up fictional aspects and choices of the writer. In November 1921 she explains: “[...] I began to write, seriously, *The Weak Heart*, — a story which fascinates me *deeply*. What I feel it needs so peculiarly is a very subtle variation of ‘tense’ from the present to the past and back again [...]”. (*Ibid.*, 240) This is her proof of her Modernist writing, which gives rise to “the secret self” we all have”. That secret self belongs, as for Mansfield, to the colonial.

By means of her writing, feelings of uncertainty deepen in her heart, when in January 1922 she writes from Switzerland:

Wrote and finished *Taking the Veil*. It took me about 3 hours to write finally. But I had been thinking over the *décor* and so on for weeks — nay, months, I believe. I can’t say how thankful I am to have been born in N.Z., to know Wellington as I do, and to have it to range about in. Writing about the convent seemed so natural. I suppose I have not been in the grounds more than twice. But it is one of the places that remains as vivid as ever. (*Ibid.*, p. 252)

The writing opens up nostalgic feelings that evoke a lack of landmarks inside Mansfield. She writes from Switzerland, a place where she barely lived, about something that she hasn’t seen “more than twice”, from a country that “remains as vivid as ever” in her mind. She never had the chance to go back and see those places once again, but she did it over and over again through her writing and that’s how those places remained “as vivid as ever”.

Mansfield carried important conversations with her father, Sir Harold Beauchamp, who was known for his love of New Zealand. In a letter dated March 18th, 1922, Mansfield acknowledges to her father the following fact:

The more I see of life the more certain I feel that it’s the people who live remote from cities who inherit the earth. London, for instance, is an awful place to live in. Not only is the climate abominable but it’s a continual chase after distraction. There’s no peace of mind — no harvest to be reaped out of it. And another thing is the longer I live the more I turn to New Zealand. I thank God I was born in New Zealand. A young country is a real heritage, though it takes one time to recognize it. But New Zealand is in my very bones. What wouldn’t I give to have a look at it! (*Ibid.*, p. 260)

For this time, the nostalgic feeling that she had was not for London but New Zealand. The tone of her letter is filled with maturity, and a realization that it is after all New Zealand that “is in her very

bones”, although she previously wanted England very much. The “young country” and “the heritage” that she associates it with seem an antithesis, as if there were a confusion in Mansfield’s mind and perception. A heritage would more likely be considered what Woolf had and lived in.

It is mostly in her journal and in her letters to her family, that is to say her father that she gives free course to her feelings about the times that she experiences as a colonial. Her correspondents are mostly members of her family, from New Zealand, who appear on the colonial geographical map. Jean Rhys, on the other hand, was not very much linked to her family, and thus communicated very little via letters.

In another letter to her father on March 6th 1916, from Villa Pauline, Bandol, Mansfield realizes that England is not exactly what one calls home, since she uses quotation marks: “I shall be very glad to be ‘home’ in England, although I am very thankful for this experience here and it has by no means be[en] wasted.<sup>531</sup>” Her father was without doubt well situated to understand her situation, colonially speaking. Her father was the one who supported her financially when she left for England and the years that followed her departure.

Let us remember that Mansfield left New Zealand with the desire to become a successful writer. And where else could her ambitions and dream become a reality, if not in the metropolitan centre? But her career started even before, while still living in the colony. Before leaving for England on July 6, 1908, Mansfield had published her works in the New Zealand press. In June 1908, Mansfield attended a “violet tea” party, which inspired her to write and then publish a poem in the social column of the *New Zealand Free Lance*<sup>532</sup>. She continued her collaboration with the New Zealand magazines a couple of years after she left the country. On October 11th, 1913 she wrote to her sister Jeanne Beauchamp:

My dear, I wrote a story called “Old Tar” the other day, about Makra Hill, and sent it to the Westminter who accepted it. I’ll send you a copy as soon as it appears which will be next Saturday, I hope. [...] They asked for some more New Zealand work so I am going to write one on the Karori School.<sup>533</sup>

We can see how she nourishes her relationship with her sister, and her colonial past that she did not forget. It is the people from the colony, on the one side, and the place itself, that she cares about. Her “New Zealand work” is a case in point. Her writing inspiration also comes from New Zealand.

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<sup>531</sup> *Collected Letters*, volume 1, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49n.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Old Tar: “A Karori Story”, published in the *Westminster Gazette* on 18 Oct 1913, was set on Makara Hill, above the Karori Valley where Mansfield lived from ages five to ten, as the notes of the edition inform the reader.

The veritable moment of literary insertion in the European/English literature was when she met J. M. Murry — greatly involved in literature but also politics. Just like Leonard Woolf, John Middleton Murry, who became Mansfield’s husband, was declared unfit for participating in the Great War and performing military service, but was still involved in the political service of the War Office, being the editor of the private *Daily Review of the Foreign Press*. Apart from being an editor, he was also a writer and a literary critic. He published a large number of works: approximately sixty books, thousands of reviews and essays on a range variety of subjects including politics, religion, societal issues, literature, etc. He was also the editor of *Athenaeum*, which later became *The Nation and Athenaeum*. He later changed his direction and became the founding editor of *The Adelphi*, a review uniting among other literature and politics (the majority being of Marxist orientation).

Thanks to Murry, Mansfield gained access to political backgrounds: “I ought to write something brief for the Nation today & earn a bit more money: a little lunch at the Club or something of that kind. It’s not difficult, in fact it is too easy for me because if I err more on one side than t’other — I’m over fluent<sup>534</sup>”, notes Mansfield in an October 1918 journal. We learn from the footnotes that *The Nation* was a British weekly newspaper that focused mainly on political events and debates and that it merged with the *Athenaeum* in 1921, the editor being Murry. Mansfield’s constant attachment to her colonial past and its integration in her writing denotes that coming to London has not shaped the Modernist culture, but preserved the colonial one as well, thus making the two function simultaneously. Her writing gave her access to the political field, once again an example of how Modernism and colonialism intercut and coexist.

The general impression of Mansfield’s early private writing is that of “home being neither here nor there<sup>535</sup>”. Mansfield spends her life floating mainly between England and New Zealand, with significant stops in Switzerland, France and Germany. Her private writings show a Mansfield that is more mature, one who is certainly closer to the eyes of the reader. Nevertheless, it is a Mansfield that bears the same issues of “a little colonial” coming from a foreign land who tries to find her way in London, and more widely in Europe. Europe opened up the door to the Modernist

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<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>535</sup> Angela Smith in Katherine Mansfield, *Selected Stories*, *op. cit.*, p. ix.

culture and literature. Her private writings actually show us that Mansfield is like a *flâneuse* who, instead of embracing the city, discovers Europe and its specific nations, always ready and intrigued to find and also identify with times and places where she belongs or might belong. On the other hand, there is also a non-national specificity of “flânerie”, which changes the meaning of the figure and adds on a colonial ingredient, for instance “the gypsy”. I would like to stress the colonial critique of the *flâneuse*, as the *flâneuse* was already a feminist critique developed by Baudelaire: a figure of the *flâneuse* of “la Modernité”. Throughout the art of private writings, Mansfield also discovers and is delighted to by writing about the places she went to, a bridge between her old self represented by her colonial past and new self embodied by London.

By analyzing Mansfield’s journey through *The Urewera Notebook*, continuing with some letters and journals written in the capital cities of Europe, bearing in mind the perception of both colonialism and Modernism, we can see Mansfield’s eagerness to find authenticity and a true sense of herself. She wanted to belong somewhere. The Modernity that she was longing for and that she started in New Zealand was the one that would define her whole future existence. However, the metropolitan centre that she envisioned was different from the one that London really offered. The secret self that shows up throughout the private writings is one that belongs and is specific to the colonials. Secrets are embodied in a colonial existence and through the private writings we can have access to this secret self, one that is most of the time seeking affirmation and authenticity, just as in Mansfield’s case.

The secret self also reveals itself in the correspondence that Mansfield has with Woolf. The colonial angle through which I proposed to study the correspondence between the two eminent women of letters has new and perhaps unexpected findings. Both of the writers were brilliant in their respective fields, but the colonial context that surfaces thanks to this reading is surprising and revelatory. The hierarchical implications are unexpected and absolutely true to the reality of the period.

In a word, it is the colonial self that rises through Mansfield’s private writings, and that changes the way we perceive her as a Modernist writer.

Another writer that represents the channel between Europe and another country, Dominica, situated in The Caribbean Islands, is Jean Rhys. Her autobiographical work and letters testify to the bond between the two places, born from colonial relations, but also the way in which the writer’s

mastery, creativity, and literary artfulness create and recreate our colonial understanding of her writings.

### 3. Rhys's development as a writer

When I think of Jean Rhys's colonial context in which she was immersed throughout her lifetime, I see a Rhys impacted by the history of Dominica; and her private writings bear traces of the writer's roots, and of the colonial time that I analyzed so far mostly via her fictional works. The goal of this section is precisely to shed some light on the poetics of these private writings and the way Rhys reinvents herself through writing, during the time that she wrote this body of work and, of course, in discussion with the research that does not cease to develop on this writer. Her private writings, which include *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography*, edited by Diana Athill, and her collection of letters published under the title *Jean Rhys: Letters 1931-66*, have been studied less, especially her autobiography. This is a perfect opportunity to have a look and enrich this aspect of research on Rhys.

*Smile Please* was first published in 1979 (the year of Rhys's death) but nonetheless refers to a prior period of her life. Rhys wrote it in the late years of her life. The first part of the autobiography, originally entitled "Smile Please", embodies Rhys's childhood in Dominica, whereas the second one, "It Began to Grow Cold", was inspired by her life abroad: in England and Paris. We follow Rhys's early period of life along with the career path that she then pursued; also, an early (Dominican) life spent in the colony followed by a shift that meant embracing the imperial centre. Rhys did not want any written biography of her to appear during her lifetime, but there is still a track of her life assured by the autobiographical and private writings. Regarding her editorial connections, Rhys corresponded with several editors, two of whom are the most present in her collection of letters: Francis Wyndham and Diana Athill. Diana Athill gained her reputation based on the memoirs she herself wrote. Her collaboration is noteworthy since she edited her autobiography, finished in a way, we could say, by giving titles and subtitles, for instance, in a word by making important literary choices. In 2010 she publishes *Life Class*, a collection of four of her



mostly loved memoirs. There she devotes a whole chapter to Rhys's mastery and the relationship they had, the former's knowledge being gained by the latter: "In fact *Smile Please* is an extraordinary example of Jean's ability to condense: everything about her that matters is in it, though sometimes touched in so lightly that it can escape the notice of a reader who is less than fully attentive."<sup>536</sup> Rhys's capacity to condense was similar to Mansfield's, who also shared this ability via the genres that she consecrated herself to, short stories and poems.

Then, there is Rhys's collection of letters or as the writer herself declares: "The letters I write — trying to sort things out!" (*Jean Rhys: Letters*, 266). The affirmation points to the nature and purpose of the letters. "The letters begin in 1931, taking up Jean's story roughly at the point where it was abandoned in *Smile, Please*,<sup>537</sup>" her editor writes in the Introduction, and end on March 9th, 1966, with Rhys finishing *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a synonym for the writer's comeback. Therefore, we can follow the writer's development at every stage of her life.

Correspondences and autobiographies represent an important trace/mark with respect to a writer's private writings, which in turn epitomize, apart from the writer's journey and literary choices, the historical period of the time. The two can be read while pointing to the poetics of the works themselves.

### **Rhys's colonial existence through *Smile Please***

*Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography*, as its title suggests (not Rhys's for this time), portrays a fractured and elliptical existence. The work is divided into three parts, the first two corresponding to her childhood and adult life. The first part, "Smile Please", pictures her early life as a young girl in Dominica until the age of sixteen when she left her country and was enrolled in a school in England. This particular period served as an inspiration for her well-known novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in which she pictures a life surrounded and affected by a colonial society. The second part bears the title "It Began to Grow Cold", a title given by her editor Diana Athill since Rhys did not have the chance to revise it. It displays a European setting this time in capitals where Modernism was at its peak: London and Paris, Rhys manifesting a preference for the latter. The book finishes with a short section containing notes in the form of an appendix called "From a Diary:

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<sup>536</sup> Diana Athill, *Life Class: The Selected Memoirs of Diana Athill*, Granta, Croydon, 2009, p. 490.

<sup>537</sup> As her editor, Francis Wyndham mentions in the *Introduction* of the Penguin edition of Rhys's letters.

At the Ropemakers' Arms". Concerning Rhys, there is no official diary published, but this section resembles one, hence its title. There, Rhys reveals some thoughts about her life as an outsider through the way she sees English people and how she feels among them. It contains some inner thoughts that Rhys wrote down, each thought or paragraph having a title given by the editor. It also bears a kind of dialogue, in which Rhys would ask and answer questions at the same time.

Rhys's autobiographical work embraces a first-person narration that starts with the little girl back in Roseau. A family moment is immortalized through the photographic camera, a Modern gesture per se for that particular time and place. The following scenario, picturing a photographic act in a white family in Dominica makes me think of a fresco or historical saga in which the dominant power and those who obey it are clearly recognizable, and their roles clearly distinguished:

"Smile Please", the man said. "Not quite so serious."

He'd dodged out from the dark cloth. He had a yellow black face and pimples on his chin.

I looked down at my white dress, the one I had got for my birthday, and my legs and the white socks coming half way up my legs, and the black shiny shoes with the strap over the instep.

"Now," the man said.

"Keep still", my mother said.

I tried but my arm shot up of its own accord.

"Oh what a pity, she moved."

"You must keep still," my mother said, frowning.

The chosen photograph in a silver frame stood on a small table under the sitting-room jalousies of our house in Roseau. It pleased me that it was by itself, not lost among the other photographs in the room, of which there were many. Then I forgot it. (*Smile Please*, p. 3)

This is the beginning of a scene that dramatizes an impossibility to immortalize the picture, which stands in relation to the fleeting nature of Rhys's life: "she moved". The scene goes on: "Now", the man said. By using the third-person mode, Rhys clearly takes a distance. She takes a distance from the colonial context through the use of the third person. The colonial nature of the scene is realized through the use of the Modernist technique. Rhys uses Modernism to render the colonial alive. Rhys would eventually leave her home country, which implies a change in the colonial time that she experiences in her life. The white dress and her white socks, a synonym of cleanliness, wealth, and innocence, cannot last forever. The little girl cannot keep still: "I tried but my arm shot up of its own accord." It is a meaningful scene for the family considering that the photograph was "not lost among the other photographs in the room, of which there were many." This one was singled out.

The writer perfectly remembers the initial condition of the pampered child that she was, and this has a crucial significance for her later development. In London, things will change and her privileged status will be lost.

Rhys distances herself for a while leaving the photograph scene; three years later we find ourselves in the same house:

It was about three years afterwards that one early morning, dressed for school I came downstairs before anyone else and for some reason looked at the photograph attentively, realising with dismay that I wasn't like it any longer. I remembered the dress she was wearing, so much prettier than anything I had now, but the curls, the dimples surely belonged to somebody else. The eyes were a stranger's eyes. The forefinger of her right hand was raised as if in warning. She had moved after all. Why I didn't know, she wasn't me any longer. It was the first time I was aware of time, change and the longing for the past. I was nine years of age.

The writer distances herself via a temporal marker, "It was about three years afterwards", but also some important markers, mostly pronouns, which mark the change that the girl was subject to, such as "*she* was wearing", a *stranger's* eyes", "*her* right hand", "*she* had moved", and "she wasn't me any longer".

Jean Rhys began to think of writing an autobiography several years before her death on May 14, 1979, as Diana Athill notes in the "Foreword" to the work (*Smile Please*, vii). The expression "Smile Please" characterizes and also defines Rhys's colonial existence, which is why it is a recurrent expression throughout the book. First, there is the autobiography as a whole called *Smile Please*, divided in turn into two parts, the first itself entitled "Smile Please". The passage with the girl who does not want to obey standing still represents the beginning of the first part, which in turn is also divided into several parts. The very first of these smaller parts is once again called "Smile Please". This specific expression is a Rhysian one *par excellence* since the writer is automatically associated with it. It is also key in this work, which is why the analysis of this particular passage is crucial. The autobiography begins with the expression, appearing consecutively for the fourth time. What strikes me is that each time the phrase is used there is an absence of punctuation marks: no comma following the vocative "Smile" and no exclamation mark punctuating the sentence. There is an urgency of the things that need to be done, combined with passivity that would later on accompany the tone of Rhys's works. The passage from the beginning of the book is like a serious and lifeless scenario, staged, as observed in the following statements: "So serious"; "You must keep still" — "Oh what a pity, she moved."

There is a significant colour palette that is striking to the “eye” of the reader: “yellow black”, “white”, “black” ... The white socks on the girl’s white body emphasize the colour of her skin, and the fact that she is white, standing in direct contrast to the black man. The white family is in opposition to the “yellow black face”, the former representing the colonial power over the colonized ones: the dominant versus the dominated.

The first nine lines representing the dialogue between the narrator’s mother and the man evoke the colonial world, which Rhys characterizes as “dark”. Submission is being asked (“You must keep still”) from a woman (a girl wearing a “white dress”). It is also a dialogue in which the little girl has no voice, the discussion taking place between the two adults. The work actually opens with a man asking a girl to smile, and pretend to be something she is not: “‘Smile Please’, the man said.” But the little girl is not that kind of girl, she moves instead. What is at stake in this complex scene is the nature of the dissimilarity between Rhys’s “I” and the girl. Is or was Rhys the little girl? If yes, what is it that produced the change? It is certainly the perspective and experience that she had after having lived in both Dominica and England, given the fact that Rhys wrote her autobiography towards the end of her life, after having spent a lifetime in the metropolitan centre. A couple of lines later, the gesture of the little girl is revealed: “The forefinger of her right hand was raised as if in warning. She had moved after all.” She has no voice, but is full of desperation, hence her body that sends signals. From that moment on when she was a child, one could see her warning and wanting to escape from that colonial world in which she felt trapped, which she later did by leaving for England. This book combines not only the writers’ early colonial background, but also her wisdom and the change of perspective that she obtained via her rich European experience. Rhys escaped from the colonial straitjacket in which her condition and her skin colour enclosed her *de facto*. However, it is to go to the very heart of the colonial empire ...

A couple of sentences later an important moment of self-awareness is staged: “It pleased me that it was by itself, not lost among the other photographs in the room, of which there were many.” Then, we find out why: “It was about three years afterwards that one early morning, dressed for school I came downstairs before anyone else and for some reason looked at the photograph attentively, realising with dismay that I wasn’t like it any longer.” It is all alone, “before anyone else” that she realizes the change that has taken place inside her. The two images that clash show a moment of self-awareness, a moment that reveals the power that is inside the heroine. It is like a moment of victory and self-identification. She has ultimately outgrown herself and her own condition. The use of the third person pronoun “she” is striking here, thus placing a distance from

her earlier self. She does not recognize herself any more: she was “somebody else”. “A stranger’s eyes” refers to the colonial child raised in the colony, and someone she was, a couple of years later, still in the past. The moment of dislocation is already there, in the past. There are actually three layers in this scene: the first one is in the past when the photo is taken, the second one is still in the past when she is nine years old and is aware of time and change for the first time, and then there is the moment when she writes that, towards the end of her life. The way she sees herself at an adult age, after all this time and all these experiences lived in both Dominica and Europe is meaningful, and most of all the writer that she has become after having contact with the Modern type of writing and the colonial world.

Three years after the picture was taken, at nine years old, something happens inside her and her perception changes. She leaves behind her old self and a change begins to occur ... so that four years later at the age of sixteen she leaves for England to complete her education at Cambridge. She gets more and more distance from her old colonial self, the one that was raised in the colony; that is also why she leaves for England later. There are two qualities of movement in this passage: one physical as in the construction “Oh what a pity, she moved”, uttered by the photographer, a movement that not only precedes but anticipates the later one: “She had moved after all”. Temporal and spatial markers are wrapped in the unity of recollection.

The way Rhys decides to end the scene has a powerful meaning for the way colonial time unravels itself: “I never looked at my photograph again but I often thought of it. Over and over I would remember that magic dress. It had been given to me on my sixth birthday which had been spent at Bona Vista. But Bona Vista too had vanished.” (*Smile Please*, 5) Her colonial past, that is to say her past as a member of a colonial family, is deeply rooted in her being: “I never looked at my photograph again but I often thought of it”. Everything has changed, times and places at the same time, but more importantly her own self. There are explicit traces of autobiographical nostalgia here: “Over and over I would remember that magic dress. It had been given to me on my sixth birthday which had been spent at Bona Vista. But Bona Vista too had vanished.” (*Smile Please*, 5) A powerful rupture can be sensed in this passage: a temporal and geographical one at the same time; a collapse between two worlds. The phrase containing the adverbial repetition “over”, “over and over” followed by the conditional “would” recounts the Rhysian specificity of time: dullness associated with the desire but incapacity to do things or move one’s life forward. This particular feature resonates with the cliché representation of colonial leisure and languor. The Rhysian time is characterized by slowness, stagnation, and the inability to change. In this sense, Majumbar

out the significance of the colonial dullness: “banality and boredom [acting] as a function of the political relation between the imperial metropolis and the colonial periphery”<sup>538</sup>. The colonial periphery is represented by banality and boredom, and a life that has the incapacity to move forward or to induce change, whereas the imperial metropolis is the opposite of that, in terms of development, capacity to move and make things happen. The temporalities of these two poles are completely opposed, which clearly denotes the relationships of power that lay at the foundation and way of functioning of the colonial enterprise. This boredom and incapacity of the colony to move forward were also at the heart of Mansfield’s desire to leave New Zealand. Rhys’s poetics (“never”, “over and over”) denote here the radical shift that operates between the colonial periphery and the imperial metropolis. Another adverb of great importance is “too”, found in the last sentence of this final paragraph: “But Bona Vista too had vanished.” The adverb refers to the colonial subject, in this case the little girl who has vanished as well. Rhys (the little girl from the colony) has also vanished. The colonial identity that she carries bears in itself an ever-changing aspect. The writer also refers to a historical fact: the postcolonial transition of Dominica. The territory gained independence by becoming a republic inside the Commonwealth, which means that it was no longer under England’s authority from 1978. This event coincides with the date of her writing the autobiography *Smile Please*. Also, there are two little girls, two places, and ultimately there is one childhood split into two. A parallel can be drawn with Mansfield, who experienced a division in her childhood due to the Maori-Pakeha situation in which her country was immersed. During Rhys’s childhood the Creole versus black people populated the country, a much powerful division if we think in terms of slavery, for example.

Rhys’s situation in Dominica raises a series of important questions, but perhaps the most important and ultimate question that preoccupies and shapes the writer’s work is the strangeness that defines someone’s existence, someone who is from Dominica and who lives in London. The colonial raises different questions in each country or area where it took place. As her editor Diana Athill underlines in *Life Class*: “In a colonial society people only had to be white to feel themselves upper-class, in addition to which they hung on with determination to awareness of gentlemanly forebears if they had them, as the Lockharts (Jean’s mother’s family) did. So normal life to the child Jean was life at the top of the pile.”<sup>539</sup> The condition of the white woman that Rhys experienced in Dominica translates into something less significant and perhaps forgotten once she arrives in

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<sup>538</sup> Saikat Majumdar, *Modernism and the Banality of Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 14/15.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 472.

England, which could explain why most of the time she felt like a ghost in the English environment, even after having lived a whole life there.

This division, which is due to a historical background, is very relevant in Rhys's narration. For instance, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* a similar narratorial scheme is used. First, there is the double perspective emphasized by the two narratorial voices, Antoinette and her husband's: the first part is narrated by Antoinette herself, the second one by her husband whose name is not revealed, and the third part comes back to Antoinette's voice. A split image is revealed here, similar to what happens in *Smile Please*. In Rhys's 1966 novel, an important historical act is staged: Jamaica's Emancipation Act passed in 1833, which caused the death of numerous white slave owners and ultimately gave freedom to (black) slaves. This is what happens at a historical level. At a more personalized level of the narration, in part three, Antoinette finds herself in England, but without having a sense of time and place. Her memory is also impaired, and her state is characterized by madness. We can perhaps establish a connection between her madness, the degradation of her memory and the death of the slave owners. The fact that she finds herself in London is also suggestive. This connection pictures colonialism in the West Indies; Rhys uses all these narratorial techniques to paint entire historical pages, full of significance and colonial reality.

In conclusion, the autobiographical quality of *Smile Please* is of great strength and its voice resonates for a long time. The power of Rhys's autobiography lies, first of all, in the distance that the writer is capable of having vis-à-vis her own past, and that is precisely because of the colonial gap that she experienced. It is a more mature Rhys that we encounter, who is capable of drawing a panorama of her life and of the pictures that have changed meanwhile.

### **Dominica and the change of perspective in "Temps Perdi"**

Apart from *Wide Sargasso*, another work that I think should be studied from an autobiographical perspective is "Temps Perdi". The short story was first published only in 1969, although the text itself bears some marks that it was written much earlier, after the visit that she paid to her native island in 1936. Ambivalent feelings arise inside Rhys once she returns to the island,

such as nostalgia, just like in *Smile Please* (“I had forgotten the lovely sound of horses’ hooves in water, that I hadn’t heard for so many damnable years<sup>540</sup>”), and also regret:

There was a flamboyant tree with a few flowers out. Next month, I thought, it will be covered; next month all the flamboyant trees will be — the flame trees — will be covered, and the immortelles will flower, but I shan’t be here to see them. I’ll be on my way back to England then, I thought, and felt giddy and sick. (*Ibid.*)

The emphasized temporal marker “next month” (appearing twice) directly refers to her future, which represents a shift in Rhys’s enunciative perspective, since her constant preoccupation and perspective are directed towards her past. Whether it is past or future, at stake are the West Indies. The course of the things goes on but Rhys will cease to be, she vanishes, just like in *Smile Please*: “The immortelles will flower, but I shan’t be here to see them.” This is a moment of self-awareness, generated by her visit to Dominica, which in turn generates another one in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), and also *Smile Please* (1979).

Rhys’s metaphor of vanishing does not only include herself; for instance, in “Temps Perdi” when “next month” she won’t be there to see and admire “all the flamboyant trees” or in *Smile Please* when “Buona Vista too had vanished” (*Smile Please*, 5), a powerful metaphor for her own eradication is set in place.

The writer is very clear when she explains the meaning of her title: “Temps Perdi is Creole patois and does not mean, poetically, lost or forgotten time, but, matter-of-factly wasted time, lost labour.” (*Ibid.*, 155) This is found at the very beginning of the third part of the narration. This feature of colonial time seems of utmost importance to her since she feels the need to express it. That reminds me of the cliché of the colonial figure of dullness, slowness, and lacking the ability to move or change, analyzed earlier. There is once again a historical and also a personal experience of “temps perdi”. The plural form “perdi” that Rhys recreates here is also an indication in this sense. The expression (the actual Creole form gives “temp pedi”) refers to the indolence, a time during which she is not working, but the slaves are. Rhys also alludes to the historical rupture that took place, the time before and after Dominica’s liberation. Rhys provides significant historical facts evoking “that book written by an Englishman in the 1880s” (*Ibid.*, p. 157):

‘The original West Indian, is he?’

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<sup>540</sup> “Temps Perdi” in Kenneth Ramchand (ed.), *Jean Rhys: Tales of the Wide Caribbean*, London, Heinemann, 1985, p. 158.



‘Oh no, that’s a Carib. The original West Indians were killed by the Spaniards or deported to Hispaniola. Well, most of the men were. The Spaniards told them they were going to the cannibals, came from the mainland of South America and killed off the few men who were left.’ (*Ibid.*)

The intertexts evoked by Rhys suggest James Anthony Froude’s *The English in the West Indies* (1888) and the American ethnographer Frederick Ober’s *Camps in the Caribbees* (1880)<sup>541</sup>. Rhys plays the role of a historiographer by returning to the origins of Dominica and the events that (could have) impacted it, and most of all contributed to the creation of the Caribbeans who live on the land today. Three pages later, “a beautiful Carib girl” is described in an episode that can be compared with *Smile Please*:

The girl appeared in the doorway of the dark little bedroom, posed for a moment dramatically, then dragged herself across the floor into the sun outside to be photographed [...] There she sat in the sun, brown eyes fixed on us, the long brown eyes of the Creole, not the small, black, slanting eyes of the pure Carib. And her hair, which hung to her waist and went through every shade from dark brown to copper and back again, was not a Carib’s hair, either. She sat there smiling [...] (“Temps Perdi”, p. 160)

The photography scene seems to be a recurrent one in Rhys’s autobiographical writings. Contrary to *Smile Please*, here the girl smiles, but before that, she “posed for a moment dramatically, then dragged herself across the floor”. She does not compose or simulate; on the contrary, she is herself (“dragged”). The description of the girl and the milieu in which the scene takes place evoke a clear colonial context: the girl *dragging* herself across the floor, then going *outside in the sun*. Her brown eyes were not the eyes of a *pure Carib*. The colonial cliché image appears once again; it seems that Rhys uses these very expressive visual images to ridicule the colonial cliché that is attributed to colonials. The girl “*dragged herself across the floor into the sun outside*”; “*she sat in the sun, brown eyes fixed on us, the long brown eyes of the Creole*” with “*her hair, which hung to her waist and went through every shade*”<sup>542</sup>. Irony is a tool that characterizes Rhys’s writing. Contrary to *Smile Please*, here Rhys uses visual representation, a technique frequently attributed to describe colonial situations, clichés or shortcomings (poverty), and puts it in relation with temporal representation. In this passage, we can identify three different perspectives: there is the girl that is not pure Carib (neither her eyes nor her hair), then there is the Creole girl that is implicit, and then there is “us”, the people from outside the colony, presumably from the imperial centre. Photography, as a modern gesture at the time, is here once again. The girl sits there smiling, which intrigues the photographer:

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<sup>541</sup> Veronica Marie Gregg, *Jean Rhys’s Historical Imagination: Reading and Writing the Creole*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

<sup>542</sup> My Italics.

We took a few photographs [...] ‘Will you turn your side face? Will you please turn your full face? *Don’t* smile for this one.’ (‘These people are quite savage — quite uncivilized.’)

Her mother who looked like an old Chinese woman, told us that in her youth she had lived in Martinique with a French family and then had been taken to Paris.

‘I come back here,’ she said, ‘because I want to see my mother before she die. I loved my mother. Now I must stay because I am old, I am old and who will take me away?’

‘She like that since she four,’ she said, pointing to her daughter.

‘Hélas!’ she said, gesticulating. She had thin, lovely hands. ‘Hélas, hélas!’

But the girl, sitting in the sun to be photographed, smiled contentedly at us, pushed a strand of hair from her shoulder to her back, smiled again. And all the Virgins and saints on the walls smiled at us too. (*Ibid.*)

The photographer’s condescending attitude, as in “‘Will you turn your side face? Will you please turn your full face? *Don’t* smile for this one’”, does not seem to bother the girl, who continues to smile. This passage is interesting, especially because of the attitude of the Creole woman who poses, smiles, as if frozen in the performance, and fixed by the other ... This scene is extremely modern regarding the change in people’s attitude and behaviour. We can see the advancement and the temporal gap between *Smile Please* and “*Temps Perdi*”. The *few photographs* that are taken, the attitude of the photographer who sees these people “quite savage” and “quite uncivilized”, and the mix of nationalities are all signs of a world that has changed. The poetics related to nationalities are strong; they are all compacted in one sentence, featuring an old *Chinese woman*, who had lived in *Martinique*, with a *French* family and then had been taken to *Paris*. I couldn’t imagine this short story being written by a young Rhys. It makes sense when we think that she wrote it after having her whole experience in England, and then returning to see Dominica. The information given in the paragraph is once again a proof for the period in which the short story was written and the inspiration that Rhys’s journey to her home land manifested on her. Temporally speaking, there are two parallel planes that are being distinguished in this passage: the girl whose photograph was taken, which reminds us of the girl from *Smile Please*: “‘She like that since she four,’ she said, pointing to her daughter”, and the adult that comes home to see her mother before she dies. However, the two planes are not clearly separated, and the two temporal axes are not always easy to distinguish. Meanwhile, there is one fundamental and striking difference: in “*Temps Perdi*”, as opposed to *Smile Please* the girl kept smiling: she “smiled contentedly” and then “smiled again”, and the whole world around them did the same. What’s more, not only the “whole world”, but precisely “all the Virgins and saints on the wall”, which evokes the colonial world of that time. In the Caribbean, how many homes (especially at that time), had on their walls images, posters,

paintings of Jesus, of the Virgin Mary. The Catholic religion, very present in the West Indies, among other religions (Protestant), is a strong historical and symbolic marker, testifying to slavery and colonization, the religion, its Bible, being that of the master, of the colonist, recovered and practised by the slaves, their colonized descendants. Carol Dell'Amico in her essay on "Jean Rhys's 'Temps Perdi': Space, Disability, and the Second World War" expresses the colonial arguments of Rhys's text:

To the European eyes for whom these images were produced, the mixing of registers (man or women? murderous or childlike?) amounted to a monstrousness that produced both feelings of disgust and a comfortable sense of superiority. Yet, in keeping with the narrator's questioning of the ideological work of the illustration, the Carib woman's beauty is finally her most important feature of all, vying with the sun [...] She is both spectacle *and* a kind of deity, her habitat both a colonized space and shrine to which pilgrims journey.<sup>543</sup>

Apart from the colonial cliché and comfortable sense of superiority felt by the Europeans to whom these images are addressed, there is also the positive and noble image of a kind of deity, illustrated in her sacred and natural habitat.

Generally speaking, the narration of "Temps Perdi" is divided by the first-person narrator herself, between the European time and the earlier life of the character spent in the West Indies, without a clear separation between the two. However, the story is structured in three parts: the first one called "Rolvenden", the second one "The Sword Dance and the Love Dance", and the third, "Carib Quarter". The first takes place in England in a disruptive war period with certain cheerful memories from Vienna by way of distraction: "There was a smell of lilac when you got out into the street, of lilac, of drains and of the past. Yes, that's what Vienna smelt of then ...<sup>544</sup>" Evelyn J. Hawthorne, in her research work on the "Persistence of (Colonial) Memory: Jean Rhys's Carib Texts and Imperial Historiography" states that "Rhys's first-person narrator is a middle-aged woman living the disruptions of wartime in a small English community<sup>545</sup>". Meanwhile, while "[t]rying to escape the harsh realities of wartime Rolvenden, the narrator indulges in pleasant memories, especially of Vienna.<sup>546</sup>" This evocation of Vienna is also used as a transition into the next part, which focuses mainly on Vienna in the period following the First World War, the narrator

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<sup>543</sup> Carol Dell'Amico, "Jean Rhys's 'Temps Perdi': Space, Disability, and the Second World War", *Anthurium*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2020, p. 8., last accessed April 30 2022.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>545</sup> Evelyn Hawthorne, "Persistence of (Colonial) Memory : Jean Rhys's Carib Texts and Imperial Historiography", *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 32:3, July 2001, p. 101.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

being connected to the “Japanese Commission” (“Temps Perdi”, 148) responsible for the disarmament of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The earlier war-triggered memory is later confirmed: “Perhaps the streets were lovelier or more deserted than usual. Then there was that smell of lilac and of the past. Vienna still smelt very strongly of the past. We walked along, keeping rather close together.” (“Temps Perdi”, 152) The last part, “Carib Quarter”, engages a trip that takes place back in the West Indies, on an unspecified Caribbean island, probably between the two World Wars. Given the geographical features evoked, the narrator definitely describes Dominica, and the trip matches Rhys’s brief return to Dominica in 1936. The Modernist ambiance is introduced in the first two chapters by treating England, Central Europe and the First World War, then the narration diverts in a way with a trip in the West Indies, in the colonial world, with the stereotype of a girl bathed in the sun who, contrary to *Smile Please*, wants her photo to be taken. Thus “Temps Perdi” shows once again how Rhys’s world is dominated by these two centres, England and Dominica, (and possibly other optional places), but also the colonial and the Modern world.

This particular narratorial division among three places, England, Central Europe and the West Indies, is typical of Rhys’s signature style. For instance, *Smile Please* involves Dominica and later on England and Paris; *Wide Sargasso Sea* is also split between Roseau and London, *Voyage in the Dark* also functions in a similar manner. It seems that Rhys needs this split narration to cover her whole experience and spectre of living. It is not just the place that is split, but also the time experienced. The specificity in this short story is that the third place engaged is Central Europe, and that is the product of the war. Austria-Hungary was one of the central powers in the First World War, which ended in 1918 with its dissolution and the separation in different parts. In 1936 before the Second World War, Rhys decided to briefly go to Dominica but was not happy about the conditions that she found there: related both to her family and the island itself. The English editor and literary agent Leslie Tilden-Smith, to whom she got married in 1934, accompanied her in the journey. In December 1935, full of hope, Rhys writes to Evelyn Scott, an American poet, novelist and playwright: “We’ll go to the West Indies a long way round via Spain. That’s the present idea — I suppose going back to Dominica is foolhardy but I want to so much — I can’t help risking it. You can imagine the wild and fantastic plans and hopes.” (*Jean Rhys: Letters 1931-66*, 27). Peter Hulme, whose research among others includes history and postcolonial studies, notes in his article on “The Locked Heart — The Creole Family Romance of *Wide Sargasso Sea* — An Historical and Biographical Analysis” that Rhys’s visit “initiated or at any rate intensified, the collection of West

Indian material and memories which Rhys later refers to as ‘Creole’<sup>547</sup>”. It was thus a decisive visit, which later impacted the writer’s worldview and vision as an outsider. While trying to understand Rhys’s intention, Hawthorne observes: “In ‘Temps Perdi,’[Rhys] tries to rediscover the histories that had promoted her impressions of, and some confusions about, the Carib; she is successful in locating one of these<sup>548</sup>”, while drawing a significant conclusion in this sense: “The tripartite narrative represents Rhys’s most direct confrontation with the biases of Carib historiography.<sup>549</sup>” Rhys seems to be on a quest for her own experience of colonial time, its explanation and mapping at the same time. Rhys divided her narrative into three parts and undertook a historiography of the Caribbean, thus representing the split colonial time of the island, a time for which it is predisposed, if I may say so, given its history. “Temps Perdi”, even if written sometimes after her 1936 visit but published only in 1969 in the collection *Tigers Are Better Looking*, was close to the two other works, given the Caribbean background, which we are concerned with here: *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966 and *Smile Please*, in 1979.

An unnamed narrator is used in “Temps Perdi”, which is also the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea*’s second narrator. This triangle composed of *Smile Please*, “Temps Perdi” and *Wide Sargasso Sea* evokes and focuses on a Caribbean time *per se*. Something has become estranged. Another episode revealing the same type of estrangement takes place towards the end of the first part of *Smile Please*, in an episode called “Leaving Dominica”, when Rhys prepares to go off for England:

Down in the cabin which I shared with my aunt I saw that the little coral brooch which I was wearing had been crushed. I had been very fond of it; now I took it off and put it away without any particular feeling. Already all my childhood, the West Indies, my father and mother had been left behind; I was forgetting them. They were the past.” (*Smile Please*, p. 78/9)

The crushing of the brooch — additionally made of coral (specific of a Caribbean vegetation) — is symbolic and represents her breaking away from the West Indies and the end of a period of time. An object that used to mean the world to her is now crushed and she is not even affected: “without any particular feeling”. Here once again the childhood is split in two: “Now I took it off and put it away without any particular feeling”. The temporal adverb “now” is extremely suggestive and links the old past with the new present, as if the past were cut up by the present. Rhys’s childhood — the

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<sup>547</sup> “The Locked Heart — The Creole Family Romance of *Wide Sargasso Sea* — An Historical and Biographical Analysis” in Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen, *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*, Manchester, St. Martin’s, 1994, p. 76.

<sup>548</sup> Evelyn Hawthorne, “Persistence of (Colonial) Memory : Jean Rhys’s Carib Texts and Imperial Historiography”, p. 96.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

essence of *Smile Please* — along with the West Indies “had been left behind”. The adverb “behind” makes again reference to her past. This division is similar to the one in the episode that opens the autobiography, featuring a split between herself and the colonial world in which she was immersed.

A famous biography followed *Smile Please* in 2009 written by Lilian Pizzichini and published under the title *The Blue Hour: A Life of Jean Rhys*. Her letters were also published in 1984, five years after the writer’s demise.

Rhys plays with a change of perspective in “Temps Perdi”, in which the little girl, contrary to a similar scene from *Smile Please*, “smiled contentedly” and “smiled again”. There is without doubt a clear link between Rhys writing the short story right after her trip to Dominica and the change of perspective or stimulus that this particular trip represented for Rhys. If Rhys hadn’t paid the visit to her home country in 1936, her path would have possibly turned out differently. She needed that visit to set things straight and realign the colonial and the Modern, the two governing forces of her poetics. The mastery of her writing is precisely due to this new perspective that the writer acquires, and that we will see in the upcoming section.

## **Rhys’s colonial attitude and her reinvention through writing**

Another type of private writing is represented by Jean Rhys’s letters. The Caribbean writer’s letters are worth analyzing from the point of view of the people that she kept in touch with, but also from the perspective of their content, in which, if we dig deeper, we will find interesting colonial arguments related to time. The writer’s correspondence, apart from giving access to a more intimate Rhys, more than we are usually used to through her fictional work, testify that the writer corresponded with a series of men and women of letters. It is for instance the case of the British novelist and biographer Oliver Stonor with whom she discussed writing issues: “I did write another novel ‘Good Morning, Midnight’. It was published not long before the war, so the title was apt anyway.” (*Jean Rhys: Letters*, 97) Rhys also shared candid opinions about English people with her British friend, the British novelist E. Morchard Bishop: “please don’t think me impertinent — but I do find that so many people here are not phoney but *unreal*.” (*Jean Rhys: Letters*, 99) while feeling quite at ease with him: “I liked getting your letter. It is such a relief to hear from someone who

understands one's difficulties." (*Jean Rhys: Letters*, 98) Her correspondence with other anglophone personalities of the time is rich and extended, such as the Australian writer Charles Osborne, the American novelist Evelyn Scott, the English man of letters John Lehmann, or the British writer born in Amsterdam but who spent most of her career in England, Selma Vaz Dias. This is interesting because it is usually the case for British people from England to do so and less usual for a colonial.

There is also evidence in Rhys's letters of Mansfield's influence. She read and was certainly influenced by Mansfield:

Things aren't so good. Max has got into an awful jam at his office, has left and set up with a new partner. The less said about *him* the better. Maybe I'm wrong for I am so often — Here's hoping — Altogether I feel like Katherine Mansfield's fly after it was drowned the sixth time or was it the seventh? (*Jean Rhys, Letters*, 68)

Rhys's relationships with her daughter Maryvonne was, to a considerable extent, based on letter exchanges. While closely studying her letters, I sometimes felt the desire on Rhys's part to make her child familiar with the West Indies, a country that she did not know: "I think one can't really compare the West Indies and your present home. The West Indies are softer, and it is so easy to get up into the hills where the air is fresh and delicious." (*Jean Rhys, Letters*, 120) With the war coming, Maryvonne moved to Holland with her father, while spending her summers in England with her mother. Rhys also shared her uneasiness of being an outsider and the disturbance that comes with the lack of a (stable) home: "I am rushing about in my usual distracted way trying to collect and pack everything — including books and papers. It's strange that I spent my existence moving, and have never learned to pack calmly. Indeed I hate it more and more every time." (*Jean Rhys, Letters*, 182) What's more, she complained to her daughter about the necessity of having a place to settle down. While writing from a hotel, Rhys expresses her exasperation and desire of having a home: "I want terribly a place of my own — it's my greatest wish." (*Jean Rhys, Letters*, 125) and "pillowcases, writing paper and sometimes shillings or good ash trays get left behind and are never seen again." Then she eventually realizes she wants to settle somewhere and the verb "settle" is meaningful given her colonial condition: "I don't choose to live like this. I want to settle somewhere more and more but it is difficult to find anywhere possible. [...] I have now reached a stage of grim determination, so it may be near." (*Jean Rhys, Letters*, 126)

When analyzing Rhys's letters, time seems to be split between England and the attempt to still keep in touch with the West Indies. At the same time, she feels the need "to settle somewhere"; the verb "to settle" emphasizes a colonial condition that is doomed to lack a home per se. Rhys

confessed to Selma Vaz Dias when some West Indies book came to discussion: “I like it of course because it’s about what used to be my home. I’ve never had another anyway.” (*Jean Rhys: Letters*, 105)

In a letter to her editor Diana Athill, apart from her love for Paris that we know about, Rhys interestingly mentions the private time that she is in need of — and that she could ultimately find (only) in Paris — a time that is a synonymous with private writings. On July 7, 1963, Rhys’s letter to Athill goes like this:

Thank you for the nice things you write about my books. It was fortunate for me starting at that particularly exciting time — and in Paris — don’t you think?

Of course some people won’t admit the spirit of the place (jealous!!), but everything is so much easier, they *must* admit that. All those little cheap hotels where, rent paid, one feels so safe and not noticed and nobody cares a hoot about anybody anyway. It is a free feeling. In London and England one has to pay a high price for privacy — how can you write without that? (*Jean Rhys: Letters*, p. 226)

The “particularly exciting time” refers to Rhys’s early colonial context and the syntagm “and in Paris” underlines the Modernist period that was shaping itself in the great capital cities of Europe. For Rhys, the colonial and the Modern time belong together; they cross each other. “[E]verything is so much easier” in the colonies after all than in London and England where privacy is limited. According to Rhys, Modern cities are not compatible with private writings.

It is, once again confirmed, why private writings are not very much present in Rhys and Mansfield’s life. Just like in Mansfield’s case, who is not able to write private writings because she cannot tell the truth; on the other hand, Rhys cannot write private writings because in order to do that “one has to pay a high price for privacy” in London and England. That is probably why she prefers Paris to London.

Her preference for Paris might also lie in fact that she associates London with the colonial. In a letter to Francis Wyndham, the writer confesses by connecting her status as a writer to the places that her heart inhabits, two centres around which her fictional works revolve:

I think I had little success because I did not want it. [...] Even now I cannot connect money or publicity with writing. [...] I can only write for love as it were. [...]

When I say for love I mean that there are two places for me. Paris (or what it was to me) and Dominica, a most lovely and melancholy place where I was born, not very attractive to tourists!

(I wonder what will happen to it now?)

Both these places or the thought of them make me want to write. After “Mackenzie” I married again and lived in London. Then the West Indies started knocking at my heart. So “Voyage in the Dark”. That (the



knocking) has never stopped. “Midnight” was Paris revisited for the last time. The war killed it: and after the war was a bad time for me. I did those short stories — many got lost and some poetry. Mediocre — but what heaven to try.

[...]

As I’ve been so personal I must end by telling you that I am not a Scot at all. My father was Welsh — very. My mother’s family was Creole — what *we* call Creole. My grandfather was a Scot. As far as I know I am white — but I have no country really now. (*Jean Rhys: Letters*, p. 171/2)

Rhys’s letter gives evidence of a discontinuous and fractured existence: “I mean that there are two places for me. Paris [...] and Dominica”; “I [...] lived in London. Then the West Indies started knocking at my heart.”; then “‘Midnight’ was Paris revisited for the last time” and finally the war came.” We can see how Paris is present everywhere in the description that she makes about her works. She only mentions London once but the way she does it is revealing: “I married again and lived in London”. This sentence shows how she undeniably associates the colonial, the patriarchal society with London. This description abounds in temporal markers: “I married *again* and *lived* in London”, “*Then* the West Indies *started knocking*”, followed by “That (the knocking) *has never stopped*”, “‘Midnight’ was Paris *revisited for the last time*”, “The war *killed* it: and after the war was a *bad time* for me”, “many[short stories] got *lost*”. Through these temporal idioms Rhys shapes Modernist art, but she does it via the colonial. She speaks about all these colonially charged places: London, the West Indies and Paris. With one colonial description comes the other. Once the writer tackles the issue of colonialism, her writing goes back to colonialism, in a circular fashion: “I must end by telling you”. After a cartography of the places she has been to and in some fashion belonged to, Rhys goes back to her origins and to what the essence of her fiction represents: a white woman with “no country really”. Through her successive displacements and feeling the lack of her island, she shows an amazing self-reflexivity: “As far as I know I am white”. Her displacements, the fact of having missed a place of her own, the nostalgia ... are all aspects that have certainly allowed this deconstruction of the colonial subject. Far from the original colonial context, Rhys and her writing are both fragmented, displaced, questioning their nature, “race”, etc. This shows once again that the writers’ personal writings mirror the poetics already found in their fictional works.

But colonialism back in the colonies came with a superior, and not at all unfortunate, status for Rhys. Evelyn Hawthorne underlines and clears up some important aspects of the changing domination position that Rhys experienced throughout her life:

Rhys’s familiar projection of her marginal status in British society obscures the fact that, until the age of sixteen, she belonged to the ruling class in Dominica. Belonging to a “white” Creole family (Rhys

Williams, Welsh father; Minna Lockhart, mother and descendant of a “white” slave owning family), she enjoyed the racial privileging based on the three-tiered hierarchized structure of blacks, coloured/browns, white [...] that placed her in a position of superiority. While Rhys was colonized, she was “superior” being “white”; liberal in persuasion, she benefitted from her inherited place in the colonial power structures.<sup>550</sup>

Her superiority and “inherited place in the colonial power structures” ensured her a well-positioned life, but all that stopped when she came to London, and discovered coloniality from a different perspective. She was the same person but in a different context, and the way society “gazed” at her made all the difference.

Rhys, the white and thus upper-class girl from Dominica, will eventually turn into somebody thoroughly different throughout the writing process that she was engaged in. Athill had known Rhys more closely; numerous letters testify to their correspondence and also the function of the editor that Athill occupied in the writer’s life. In her own illuminating autobiographies, *Life Class*, Athill underlines the fact that Rhys was full of the prejudices of a white person coming from the colonies, from the colonizers’ side, but interestingly enough, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* her art took her beyond the basic racism that she experienced so far:

Jean shared many of the attitudes of other white Dominicans born towards the end of the nineteenth century. [...] Typical white liberal of the sixties that I was, I disliked hearing her talk like that, but it seemed natural: and it never failed to make me marvel that in *Wide Sargasso Sea* she had, by adhering to her creed as a writer, transcended her own attitude. [...] In that novel the story is told from the point of view of someone whose life was wrecked by the emancipation of the slaves, and who is puzzled and angry, as well as grieved, by the hostility which blacks are now free to show against whites. [...] Antoinette’s world has been poisoned, not by these people’s malice, but by their having been owned, until very recently, by her family as though they were cattle. Nowhere does Jean say this, but she shows it: Jean writing at her best knew more than the Jean one met in everyday life. (*Life Class*, p. 408/9)

Athill’s remarks are revealing. The Rhys that wrote was someone who deserved all the credentials of being a writer. She owned writing because through writing her whole attitude about life, and the colonial baggage that she came with from Dominica, changed. It is thus not Rhys’s situation that makes her writing bear Modernist and colonial characteristics — it is actually the opposite: it is Modernism, or Rhys’s artistry that makes her colonial situation revolve. It is the power of the literary text that transforms the author’s whole identity — and, precisely, the understanding of this identity — by recreating it. It is her poetics that makes all this amazing, radical and ever-changing

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<sup>550</sup> Evelyn Hawthorne, “Persistence of (Colonial) Memory: Jean Rhys’s Carib Texts and Imperial Historiography”, p. 95.

work. This reflection is crucial in my dissertation because it is not the biographical colonial condition that says that the text is colonial and crosses Modernism — it is the contrary: it is the text, the (Modernist) Art that has an effect on the colonial feature of the writer, and transforms its colonial quality, by reversing it, thus faithfully creating this salutary self-reflexivity that questions the racial and colonial.

As Rhys said in a letter to her friend, novelist and biographer, Oliver Stonor: “I don’t believe in the individual Writer so much as in Writing”. (*Jean Rhys: Letters*, 103) This reflection gives us a breath of fresh air, especially when we think of the theme regarding the dominated women’s complaints. Rhys brings something very singular and unique to the link established between colonialism, writing and Modernism or we could even say post-Modernist writing, given the publication and form of *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) — which, according to Rhys, “might be the one book I’ve written that’s much use” (*Jean Rhys: Letters*, 39).

*Wide Sargasso Sea* is about a “Creole lunatic in the 1840’s” (*Jean Rhys: Letters*, 156). The narration is split between Rochester and Antoinette and these are her reflections on the topic, found in her letters:

Another “I” must talk, two others perhaps. Then the Creole’s “I” will come to life.  
I tried this way and that, even putting her into Modern dress. No good.  
At last I decided on a possible way showing the start and the Creole speaking. [...]  
The Creole is of course the important one, the others explain her. I see it and can do it — as a book. (*Jean Rhys: Letters*, p. 157)

The letter was addressed to the British writer, actress and painter Selma Vaz Dias on April 9, 1958. After a tumultuous and rather stormy life, an event of utmost importance in the writer’s life was in 1966 when she made her literary comeback. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, apart from bearing a colonial foundation of Rhys’s works, as its writer stresses, was a revolution in a very unique and certain way, not just for Rhys herself, but for the genre that she represented and for writing itself. Rhys’s comeback made her surmount the superficial and eventual misconceptions that one might have about postcolonial literature. She got mastery over writing by proving that it is the writer’s artistry that creates and, in turn, recreates, the colonial. It is an enormous gesture, given the fact that her ambition is to give form to a Creole “I”, to represent the word. With *Wide Saragasso Sea* Rhys’s whole colonial world takes a breath of fresh air. Her writing is taken to the higher level of literary

intensity and Rhys as a colonial comfortable in her own skin, probably for the first time. As Francis Wyndham observes in the Introduction of the Penguin edition of Rhys's letters: "After the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* life became more pleasant for Jean in many ways: she made new friends whom she valued, had her cottage made warmer and more comfortable, and enjoyed yearly holidays in London as well as one in Venice, where she had never been before. But she often told people that she felt like a ghost." (*Jean Rhys: Letters*, p. 12) She is still a colonial but the road that she made through writing turned her into someone else, a Rhys completely different to the Rhys who came to London in 1906. Sixty years later she was a different person, and the proof is in her writing.

If we look at Rhys's texts, all we do is shed some light on Rhys's colonial perspective, on the way Rhys sees things from that point of maturity where she is when writing the text, which, of course, varies upon the stage that she was about to cross in her life. Rhys offers us a way of looking at things, a perspective that we, as readers, can accept or decline.

Let us briefly examine the corpus of the dissertation. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker in their study on the *Geographies of Modernism* argue this absorbing intersection between Modernism and colonialism in *Voyage in the Dark* (1934):

*Voyage in the Dark* is the novel in which Rhys most fully explores the intersection of modernism and colonialism. [...] The colonial perspective has no place in the imperial metropolis; Anna (who occupies the position of colonizer in Dominica) is colonized or commodified in London. In this way, Rhys collapses not only past and present, but colony and metropole.<sup>551</sup>

We can see how at a relatively early stage in her career, Rhys is very harsh and does not forgive when the issue of colony and metropole is at stake. As a writer, she is determined to show the reality of things, even if that means drawing a complete opposition between the colonial London and the colonized Dominica. The fact that the present of the metropole contains in itself the past of the colony is an absolutely accurate image, and this is where Rhys's mastery of Modernism and colonialism lies.

In *Smile Please* Rhys analyzes her colonial condition focalizing on her childhood and digging into her memories. Anne B. Simpson, author of *Territories of the Psyche: the Fiction of Jean Rhys*, observes Rhys's silence in writing and tries to decipher its meaning by leaning on David

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<sup>551</sup> Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (ed.), *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces*, op. cit., p. 85.

Plante's words, the novelist who helped Rhys organize the autobiographical material for *Smile Please*:

Although she loved "beautiful words" (*Smile*, p. 60), she shared with some Modernist contemporaries the concern to orchestrate moments of silence with powerful effect. In response to a comment by David Plante, [...] that "there's a sense of space around your words", she concurred: " 'Yes [...] I tried to get that. I thought very hard of each word in itself' " (Difficult 53<sup>552</sup>). As a result of this considerable economy, the quiet that surrounds the words in her fiction often gives them heightened meaning. At times her narrators and characters fall completely silent; their lack of speech creates a reverberating muteness, recalling the symbolically loaded question posed by the protagonists of her story "The Sound of the River": "The river is very silent. [...] Is that because it's so full?" (Collected 237). (17/8) (*The Collected Short Stories*)<sup>553</sup>

Rhys's true mastery lies in what she projects as a writer, in what she makes the reader understand and believe. As Athill says: "Nowhere does Jean say this, but she shows it". Silence throughout all its forms: ellipses, fragmentation, dashes or other punctuation marks used, is a mark of her Modernist writing. Let us think for instance of the passage that opens her autobiography, when a picture of the little girl is taken and she is being told not to move, but did not obey. There is a certain silence that is felt in this particular passage, and that is the submission that Rhys wants her reader to feel. Colonialism comes to the surface when submission is implied by the writer. The fact that she must obey automatically implies an image holding both superiority and inferiority.

Between her leaving Dominica and having spent a lifetime in London, Rhys goes back to her colonial past with a fresh perspective, a more mature and assumed one. She was "somebody else" then; the little girl had vanished, just like Bona Vista did ("But Bona Vista too had vanished."), as she expresses at the beginning of *Smile Please*. Just like in Mansfield's case, the coloniality that Rhys bears right from the beginning was later on shaped and even modified once she got in touch with the European cities and the Modernism that they carried. That is why Rhys's writing outgrows itself: Rhys's writing is touched by the Modernist Art, which ultimately shapes her entire works. Jean Rhys's Artistry is unimagined without the Modernism that helps her shape it. And that is why it is absolutely necessary to see this whole process through the lens of the colonial,

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<sup>552</sup> This quote is from David Plante's book, *Difficult Women: A Memoir of Three*, New York, New York Review Books, 2017. It is a book in which Plante draws a portrait of Jean Rhys in her old age, after the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the novel that made her famous and at last recognized. Nevertheless, Rhys has a rather passive attitude, definitely not enjoying her fame; on the contrary, she finds herself abandoned in a hotel room with her usual alcoholic habits. Plante looks impassively on the writer.

<sup>553</sup> Anne B. Simpson, *Territories of the Psyche: the Fiction of Jean Rhys*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 17/8.

in other words, the way the Modern Recreates the Colonial. This is the change that Modernism is subject to, which is the quintessential issue of this chapter.

Woolf's attitude towards writing and the *changes* that the writer talks about are worth considering given the present chapter. It is, first of all, about the changes in writing that she refers to; then, there is more than that: Woolf talks about the Modernist movement that begins to show itself and it is at the same time biography that suffered a change as well. What's more: such a change, that she dates around the date 1910, implies a change in "religion, conduct, politics" (*Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, 4).

Woolf's letters testify to the presence of the colonial and, more importantly, the way she relates to politics. Her attitude towards the colonial changes, and it is in large part thanks to her husband, Leonard's influence. The important personalities with whom she exchanges letters are not negligible and Woolf's attitude changes depending on the addressee. For instance, she is far more reluctant when introducing Leonard to a friend from diplomacy than to a photographer. By analyzing Woolf's letters from a colonial perspective, the reader gains access to the writer's opinion on the matter, the way she sometimes takes herself out of context and remains passive, even if she really tries to be part of Leonard's world. She esteems the colonial authorities very much and shows her British upbringing when reducing the colonies (and in particular Africa) to the cliché image of shooting tigers.

After several political moments in the company of illustrious political figures that her husband brings home and, of course, her husband himself being one, Woolf eventually returns to literature. At first glance, being patriotic does not have political connotations for her, but purely literary ones, being in love with "Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens", because "that is [indeed] England" for her (*Leave the Letters*, 460).

It is interesting to see how such a prolific writer from England actually has in herself the political, in the way in which she cannot let go of England's illustrious figures, the city of London, including her walks in the city (which she gains appreciation of during war times when she temporally has to leave London), and so on. What I mean is that she is after all extremely patriotic, denoting the true British spirit of someone who was raised in the metropolitan centre, but, first of all, she is a woman of letters. The political thus manifests itself throughout the Modern. In other words, her Modernist reaction intercuts in the colonial spirit of the period.

All her life, Katherine Mansfield was longing for authenticity and desired to actually belong somewhere. This is what she thought she would find when leaving for London. She may not have found what she was looking for, but by going to England she actually continued and refined the Modernist work that she began while she was writing her first articles back in New Zealand. In Mansfield's case, the Modern clearly intercuts the colonial and her whole life was a proof of that, given the European capital cities that she crossed and in which Modernist art was shaping itself.

By focusing on the colonial aspect of her correspondence with Virginia Woolf, we acknowledge the colonial dynamics going on inside the metropolitan centre. Both women wrote from London, at the same time, but what separated them was merely the colonial implications that were going on at that period: perhaps subtle, sometimes even unseen or forgotten, but resounding. We perceive the secret as a colonial dimension since Mansfield cannot express in public what she thinks about Woolf. This is where what I have called "private writings" are extremely valuable.

Jean Rhys's private writings complete the earlier analysis with the presence of her autobiography, *Smile Please*. In Rhys's case, just like in Mansfield's, her private writings, draw a picture of a journey from the colonies to England and other important capital cities of Europe. Private writings allow Rhys to take a distance from the little girl that she used to be while growing up in Dominica and the person she became after her lifelong and life-changing journey in the European capitals. The colonial time that she experiences changes along the road, from a girl who refuses to smile while her photograph is being taken (as in *Smile Please*) to a girl who is comfortable and even enjoys her picture to be taken (as in "Temps Perdi"). Diana Athill's view on Rhys is quite striking, especially the way she perceives her change through the process of writing. From being a girl who "shared many of the attitudes of other white Dominicans born towards the end of the nineteenth century" she managed to "[transcend] her own attitude" through writing. Writing came as a liberator that freed her from her colonial upbringing, mostly full of judgements and misconceptions, and which allowed her to go beyond that. Modernist writing made her reinvent herself and the colonial attitude that she used to have. It is like a rebirth of the Modern via the colonial.

The way the Modern intercuts the colonial is key in this chapter and telling in the case of all three writers. We thus reach a stage that reminds us of the central purpose of this chapter, which is to show in what way the Modern changes as it gets in touch with the colonial. In Woolf's case I believe that the colonial angle that we chose to analyze via these private writings made us understand and hopefully clarify the true purpose of a Modernist writer, which is not necessarily to

embrace the colonial, but to go hand in hand with it, to (re)invent its new way of dealing with it, just as Woolf did, by showing us what patriotism means, for instance. This is her own way of embracing the colonial; a colonial that is intercut by the Modern. In Mansfield's case the colonial angle that we took, I hope will help in perceiving her trajectory in a different way. She may not have found the authenticity and belonging that she initially came for in London, but the European experience certainly made her the writer that we know and appreciate today, a writer that embraces Modernism and colonialism in both her poetics and her development as a writer. In Rhys's case, the change in her attitude raises her writing to the rank of artistry. Rhys truly surpasses herself through Art and gives colonialism a new meaning and approach.





## Conclusion

The joint study of Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys allows us to have a close look at the first half of twentieth century literature, and at its politically charged context. The challenge of this dissertation was to propose a new perspective to the already established image of these authors, usually viewed as belonging to the Modernist literary movement. The new angle proposed is the colonial one, thus bringing to light the colonial characteristics of the authors' works. The analysis carried out through this study establishes the presence of the colonial in Mansfield and Rhys, which comes with no surprise, but also in Woolf, where the association is all the more challenging. Having this new colonial perspective in mind when thinking of Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys's works, an analysis of colonial time seemed necessary, especially given the place and significance of time in Modernist literature.

The several studies on Modern time require a change of perspective. The poetics of time was thus not a choice *per se*, but something generated by the already existing research on Modernism and the three writers. Thus, this research hopes to provide a breath of fresh air.

By bringing together Modernism and colonialism, the two fundamental pillars of this dissertation, the research has permitted not just to place the two in interaction, but also to unravel the way one influences and transforms the other, which in turn changes our whole perception and understanding of the works studied. I believe that a new light has been shed upon our reading and understanding of these writers' works.

This analysis of the poetics of colonial time of the three authors helps to bring literature and history closer together. The more we study the text, the more we encounter the quintessence of society, literary studies possess in themselves the power.

The study of Modernist writers shifts the classical vision of colonialism. In this research I intervene on a corpus of literature that is usually not studied from a colonial perspective. Whereas Modernism is used to shed light on questions of structure, techniques, etc., colonialism imposes a requirement of reading based on a view on society. By way of explanation, this means reintegrating the historical-ideological parameter into the formalist reading. There are also other aspects that naturally came and fitted in, they have become necessary so to speak; it is for instance the case of the introduction of the woman's question. We are talking about women who take the initiative and decide to step up. I think in particular of *Three Guineas*, where Woolf decides to speak up and help in preventing the war. In Woolf's case, the figure of the woman clearly desires to step aside from

the societal rules when it comes to assuming her gender. Woolf's ambition to place women higher on the social ladder, and actually fighting for that — "Thinking is my fighting." (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, volume 5 1936-41, *op. cit.*, p. 285) is noteworthy. Aside from that, we can also recall her contribution in changing the course of the novel. Mansfield and Rhys's influence is also of great importance, probably more silent given their outsider status, but nonetheless extremely powerful. Mansfield brings a revolution to the short story, whereas Rhys criticizes the patriarchal system that women cannot escape from by shaping the short novel genre. Thus, the Modernist-colonial centre of London as a paradox becomes an environment of avant-garde.

These writers' voices contradict and break cultural and social stereotypes, thus reconstructing women's image, role and status, precisely through the colonial dimension.

There is a richness of forms when treating the woman's condition in Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys. What this study on colonial time reveals is the necessity to look into several fields of expertise, and this explains why the bibliography of this dissertation covers a wide range of fields. Literary issues from a Modernist, feminist or post-colonialist tradition, and the combination of those (for instance, the study of Modernism through the colonial perspective), were combined with historical research, and last but not least linguistics and stylistic studies.

Even if Woolf's association with colonialism seems less obvious, the latest research in this direction is currently working to elucidate this colonial characteristic of the author's writings. In this sense, this thesis makes an original contribution, as it is among those voices that analyze this structure in depth, that is to say "colonial Woolf". After having written this thesis, I realize how much colonial foundation Woolf's works bear, her fictional works and, even more directly, her private writings. I think and hope that this is a significant contribution to the way we see and perceive Woolf nowadays.

Apart from the woman's question, another aspect that became necessary to treat is the difference in periodization and literary genres involved. The large range of works involving different time periods has allowed us to perceive the evolution in the writers' approach and the way their style has shaped and defined over the years. Let us briefly recall the journey that we undertook in this dissertation. We started by situating the writers in their colonial context — how they arrived in London —, situating them in their colonial context (in the colonies for Mansfield and Rhys) while longing for London, and in London (for Woolf) in relation to the colonies, and describing them as pioneer women but also as alienated figures. Then, we have treated time and place together inside the writers' poetics, followed by a chapter on the war as a colonial time. And lastly, we have reached their private writings with the aim to prove, among other things, that these writings also

contain the colonial time that we have been researching all along, just like their fictional works do. This final chapter is crucial and it does two things: first, it bears a biographical sense, which gives new insights and viewpoints on the genre treated in the case of the three writers, and second, it shows how diaries and letters are a laboratory for the writing of Modernism and a place for exploring the colonial. Private writings tell us something about the Modern and the colonial — they are a place for the constitution of Modernism, inside their colonial situations.

This journey — beginning with the study of fictional works and then reaching out to private writings — is proving to be a useful one since it leads to interesting conclusions about the three writers.

The comparative study of these three writers has opened up a variety of new perspectives and perceptions. Research has shown that throughout their writings, it is a journey of self-knowledge and self-discovery that the writers undertake. Their perspective of colonial time changes and evolves considerably throughout their experience in the metropolises. Imagine how their writings might have evolved without the understanding and perspective that they gained by moving to London. As to us, our journey of discovering the writers' colonial context unwraps itself as the chapters of the dissertation pass, thanks to the spiral outline that has been created for this purpose.

Let us recall some of the key conclusions that have been drawn from these chapters. Some of them may even feel surprising, but this is just another way to contribute to the core issue of this dissertation. After having drawn an extensive study on the writers' colonial background as heritage, we acknowledge Woolf's Anglo-Indian origin and the rich colonial context to which all the three writers were exposed to from an early age on, including practices such as the Dreadnought Hoax in Woolf's case or Rhys's early awareness moments in the presence of the black dolls and desire to actually be black. Rhys's practice of *obeah* is also significant when situating Rhys's colonial background. These are all markers of colonial context inside the writers' biographies. The study of colonialism then extends with the actual study of the writers' works, for this time inside the poetics of the writings themselves.

The next chapter allows us to see how time and place are interconnected and how this connection reveals the intersection between Modernism and colonialism. After having established the association between time and space, in the chapter that follows my aim was to show that war, a significant and worldwide event of the first half of the twentieth century, is also part of the colonial time. It is mainly the global dimension of the First *World War* and Second *World War* that makes them colonial. This manifests the colonial feature of war.

Then comes the last chapter of the dissertation, in which we shift our attention from fictional writings to private writings, in order to show the way the colonial dimension treated in this dissertation ultimately transforms Modernism. In Woolf's case, private writings testify to Woolf's profound immersion and access to London's colonial life and context. We realize that even her patriotism goes through literature. It might seem that with so much reference to the empire around her, Woolf's work is strongly silent about it. By analyzing Mansfield's journals we can see how these early writings are a first laboratory of Modernism, and how they are the beginning of a colonial exploration via the writing. In Rhys's *Smile Please* we can see a Rhys that is much more mature than in her previous writings and able to speak more directly about things. Also, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Rhys reaches the height of her career as a writer because it is a place where we can truly see how Modernism transforms her writing, which in turn manifests the colonial. In other words, it is the Art of writing that has an effect on the colonial feature of the writer, and transforms its colonial quality.

All this journey has been done by closely looking at the question of colonial time. This issue has guided the dissertation all along and served in a way to provide direction in situating the intersection between Modernism and colonialism at every step of the study.

This dissertation is an opportunity to look at a various palette of literary genres, all analyzed under the angle of Modernism and colonialism. We have, for instance seen how the genre of the novel, a field that is covered by Woolf, and the genre of the short story, in Mansfield's case, shape Modernism and colonialism as a piece of narrative reimagining. They shape them in their different forms and aspects, most of the time in a complementary way I would say. The common aspect that links the three writers is the way they handle the past and present times of the narration. In this sense, we have seen Joseph Frank's idea of spatial form. The intersection of Modernism and colonialism is once again used to elucidate this temporal fusion, which is actually the colonial time. In here, an important aspect that emerges from the poetics of the texts is the temporal gap established. The "time-lag" (in Bhabha's words) is a synonymous with the delay between the centre and the colonies.

In the light of the poetical imaginary of the texts and the inquiry realized, let us see the way colonial time presents itself. Apart from being Modern, time is also colonial in the writer's works. And that is precisely what I tried to elucidate throughout this writing. Colonial time is after all the intersection of Modernism with colonialism.

Modernism, as a literary movement, is indeed intercut by colonialism, a political ideology, and that is something that we can see throughout the analyses that have been done on the three writers' works. What's more, Modernism is born in the writers' works inside the colonial context of the first half of the twentieth century. Colonial time means more than just the colonial context in which the writers write and the presence of those marks in the writings: it is actually throughout Modernism that colonial time is born. In other words, Modernism brings to the surface the colonial in the text.

At this stage of the writing, after having analyzed an extensive range of the works of Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys and having made them interact, I see *colonial time* as an inextricable time, perhaps impossible to escape from, due to the historico-political implications that it entails, but whose force and understanding lie in the works created by the writers, which we researchers attempt to recreate every time we invest ourselves and get involved in a new study.

Let us draw a brief conclusion based on the several occurrences and analyses of *colonial time* throughout the dissertation. Colonial time means different things, and is approached in different ways according to the writers' texts and poetics that they entail. In Woolf's case, colonial time presents itself throughout the question of "time-lag" or belatedness, which entails the difference between the old and the new, the centre and the periphery. Woolf uses the colonial image of Africa and India to make her point and show the difference with the centre of the empire, London. Colonial time, as seen in *Mrs Dalloway* (or *The Years*) is the time lived and experienced in the centre of the empire during colonialism. That's why London is so important for this study. London is an urban (and thus Modernist) twentieth century figure that experiences the time of colonization. And not only London, but also Paris in Rhys's case.

There is an important term, that of "civilisation" that is being tackled by Woolf, as in *Mrs Dalloway* for instance where the Modern world characterized by "efficiency", "organisation", "communal spirit of London" intercuts the colonial world, a world not described here, but implied, standing in opposition to the triumphant civilization represented by the metropolitan centre. "Civilisation" is born out of this comparison between London and the colonies. This belatedness causes alienation with the aid of the space marker "settle down": "After all these years, he thought,

everyone was paired off; settled down” (*The Years*, p. 301) The figure of the outsider thus invades Woolf’s novels, especially *Mrs Dalloway*, *The Years* and *Jacob’s Room*.

In Mansfield’s case colonial time is expressed throughout the issue of belonging, for example. It is in the short story “The Luftbad” where this issue of identity comes to light: ““Then you are an Englishwoman?” / ‘Well, hardly —’”<sup>554</sup> where colonial time means the difference between someone coming from the colonies and the possible integration in the metropolitan centre, also realized through a kind of temporal gap. In this sense, we can also note Rhy’s act or feeling of belonging as in “We English are so animal-conscious” (*Good Morning, Midnight*, p. 37) where on the contrary it is about a trial of being part of the new world, in this case the centre. There is the primordial colonial time experienced by Mansfield of going back to a young age, when she had the desire to move from the periphery to the centre in order to become a writer, and it is the one that governs her later life. A similar approach is made by Rhys in *Smile Please*.

In Mansfield’s case colonialism springs throughout the characteristics of the short story and the use of the prelude, specific to the New Zealand writer. Colonial time, in “Prelude” for instance, appears as episodic, without a definite form or structure (the story lacking either its beginning or its end). Mansfield uses the specificities of the short story to create colonial time.

In Rhys’s case, an important theme through which colonial time rises is the *flânerie*. The new angle that I proposed here was to look at *flânerie* in a different way than we are used to. It is usually analysed through the Modernist angle, but it can also be regarded through the colonial one, and that is what my analyses demonstrated. That is how through the character of the woman in the street with no means and at the mercy of men Rhys manages to picture a perfect image of colonial time through the *flânerie* that women do when leaving the hotel room ashamed, the abortion that they are subject to and the meaning that it bears: the cyclical life of a woman dependent on men, which she cannot escape. In order to do that Rhys combines all three issues: Modernism, colonialism and feminism. The *flânerie* is also treated by Woolf’s “Street Haunting: A London Adventure”, where she stages the woman in the street in order to see the precarious life that is also part of society. It is not the same process though because Woolf’s *flânerie* is much more about society as a whole and the way we can see that at every step, whereas Rhys relies on feminism to do that.

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<sup>554</sup> Katherine Mansfield, Gerri Kimber and Vincent O’Sullivan (eds.), *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield* (vol.1), *op. cit.*, p. 177.

The near-prostitute status is the one that emerges through the *flânerie* that Rhys treats. Rhys takes to the extreme the *flânerie* and expands it up to the near-prostitute status that becomes almost a Rhysian symbol. Rhys's patriarchal condition does not stop there because she exploits even more the women's condition through the no-escape allegory that she proposes in her works. Women characters would even get into marriages in order to assure themselves a proper condition during difficult times such as the war. That is how feminism and war meet in Rhys's poetics. Rhys stretches so much the near-prostitute status that her writing reaches the climax of the writer's colonial context, which is the abortion scene.

Another important aspect to bring to the reader's attention is that in the case of Woolf and Mansfield colonial time is revealed through the question of war. War changes people. Colonial time changes people, just like in North's case from *The Years* and Peter Walsh from *Mrs Dalloway* who both return with a completely changed perspective from the colonies. In *Jacob's Room* the expression "old shoes" marks the opposition between the "old Jacob", who used to wear those shoes, and the "new Jacob", the one who is at war. Mansfield's change occurs after her brother Leslie's death, and her journal is a case in point. All the New Zealand writing bursts following her loss, after reliving her entire childhood.

The change is also brought to light in *Mrs Dalloway* through the way the Modernist writing that Woolf creates, in which the present encapsulates the past. The sentences "That is all" and "before the war you could buy almost perfect gloves" emphasize the present, on the one hand, and the past, on the other hand, placing them next to each other.

What counts is the way we see Modernism and colonialism after this study. Over time these two terms have been associated in critical and theoretical texts. As Maeve Tynan states:

The modernist vocabulary of exile, alienation and the fragmentation of absolutes resonated with the colonial experience. Living in London and Paris, these colonial artists [Jean Rhys, Claude McKay, Aimé Césaire, Mulk Raj Anand, Katherine Mansfield], among others, would have contributed to the cosmopolitan climate of the urban modernist avant-garde. We see therefore a two-way process in operation, from the centre to the periphery and periphery to centre, but it is not one of equal exchange.<sup>555</sup>

Then there is also Mary Louise Pratt who "has demonstrated persuasively that the centrifugal geopolitical forces of colonial expansion are counterbalanced by the centripetal cultural practices

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<sup>555</sup> Maeve Tynan, *Postcolonial Odysseys: Derek Walcott's Voyages of Homecoming*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, p. 65.



that enshrine a European centre as the norm for the non-European periphery to aspire to.”<sup>556</sup> Then there is also Elleke Boehmer who contends that “[i]n modernism the colonial world was confirmed in its status as province in the Western city”.<sup>557</sup> Elleke Boehmer and Steven Matthews also add:

This creative involvement of other cultural and national players [such as Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys] inevitably intensified those experiences characteristically associated with Modernism: “making new”; a sense of historical liminality; the fragmentation of absolutes; interests in subjective and multiple perspectives, and in the fluidity of consciousness. That is to say the preoccupation with alienation, and disoriented or displaced identity shared by the new colonial writers, related to and interacted with the breakdown in universal systems of understanding that preoccupied the metropolitan modernists.<sup>558</sup>

After having conducted this study, I can mention some interesting findings on the nature of the link that exists between Modernism and colonialism. First, I have observed that one of the main functions of Modernism in the text is to make the colonial resurge. We can see how Modernism and colonialism go hand in hand in the narration. Modernism, as a literary movement, shaping all of its methods and techniques, welcomes in its writing the colonial culture, present at that period.

One colonially related issue comes after the other in the authors’ writings, in a natural way that follows their pen and ultimately defines their poetics. The natural and fluent rhythm of the writing is induced and activated by the colonial. Modernism emerges out of the colonial.

Colonial spaces (such as New Zealand) become a literary category, a category of Modernism. That is how Modernism is changed.

By using the third-person mode, the writers clearly take a distance. That is something that all three writers do in their private writings. They distance themselves from the colonial, but that is actually one first step in shaping Modernism.

The writers shape the Modern to render the colonial alive, the colonial that is already present in society. It is colonialism that shapes Modernism.

This research is just a beginning for the chain of studies and research that will follow. I believe that this dissertation has opened up new sides concerning in particular the question of the

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<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>557</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, Reading, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 130.

<sup>558</sup> Elleke Boehmer and Steven Matthews, *Modernism and Colonialism* in Michael Levenson (ed.), *A Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (1999), *op. cit.*, p. 286-287.

essence of poetics, whose roots can be found in history itself. Shifting our focus from the Modern to the colonial has certainly opened up new territories of understanding.

Just as today's research on Woolf, Mansfield and Rhys attests, among other focal points, to the colonial dimensions of their writings, as opposed to the previous studies focusing more on the Modernist perspective, the present research will always mirror the era and society in which we live. In this sense, the study represents a very topical and modern issue, highly relevant in today's world. The study of colonial time, thus becomes not a luxury, but a necessity in order to understand the world in which we live.

I hope that this dissertation will have been a source of light on the necessity to read and reread literary works, and by doing so discover new ways to approach certain aspects of the texts perhaps less obvious, but nevertheless crucial and present from the beginning in the writings. I am positive that the research to come will *discover* and enrich our perception of the writers who are already acknowledged as classics, and of some others who are on the way to be revealed as such.

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*N.B.:* Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and Jean Rhys's writings are arranged *chronologically*, the rest of the works cited follow the alphabetical order.

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