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**Problems of Connection : The Critique of Englishness, Empire,  
and Nationhood in E.M. Forster's A Passage to India, Virginia  
Woolf's Orlando and George Orwell's "England Your England"**

Alexandra Megan Schultz

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PROBLEMS OF CONNECTION: THE CRITIQUE OF ENGLISHNESS, EMPIRE,  
AND NATIONHOOD IN E.M. FORSTER'S *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*,  
VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *ORLANDO* AND GEORGE ORWELL'S  
"ENGLAND YOUR ENGLAND"

By

Alexandra Megan Schultz

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Masters of Arts

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College of Humanities and Social

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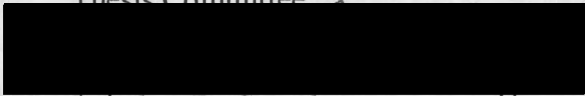
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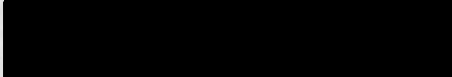
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## Abstract

In the introduction to *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939*, Richard Begam and Michael Moses state that the “historical and cultural reality of modernism more often than not challenged the prevailing values of English culture, including its most powerful institution, the British Empire” (6). The problem of connection can be considered one of these troubled established ideologies. The English not only promoted relations between those of the same socioeconomic status and cultural upbringing, but actively discouraged connections of any other kind. This value system barred the English from any kind of social or political mobility because connections were continuously made within familiar circles and those that were different were considered off limits. An even larger result of this mentality was the indeterminacy of what it meant to be “English,” as this system denied the shared characteristics of people born and raised within the same country.

Through readings of E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*, Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* and George Orwell’s essay “England Your England,” this thesis explores how the Empire functioned without an emphasis on forming and sustaining relationships within and beyond the boundaries of England, and to also show how these works are in many ways a critique of the imperial system. The larger thematic implications of this thesis seek to examine the various ways these authors defied traditional notions of Englishness and Empire, and to re-negotiate a place for these texts in the Modernist canon as part of a tradition specifically writing on the subjects of colonial critique, and political and ideological renovation.

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"ENGLAND YOUR ENGLAND"

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in English

by

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Montclair, NJ

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Thanks must also be extended to the beautiful and brilliant Graduate Assistants of the Montclair State English Department. Whether it was brainstorming, looking at drafts, listening to ideas, or just being there to console and commiserate with, I probably would have given up long ago if it was not for them.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Paula and Bob, who are unequivocally my biggest fans to date. They might not have known anything about British Modernism, but somehow knew exactly how to support me through every page I wrote.

*“And so at last she reached her final conclusion, which was of the highest importance but which, as we have already much overpassed our limit of six lines, we must omit...”-Virginia Woolf, Orlando*

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## Introduction

When Margaret Schlegel is formally introduced to the Wilcox “set” in E.M. Forster’s *Howards End*, Margaret cannot help but notice Henry’s lack of sentiment for anyone at the gathering. The narrator accounts for this by stating that Henry privileged business over friendship and thus made great investments, but bad connections. And yet, Margaret is different; she “connected, though the connection might be bitter, and she hoped that some day Henry would do the same” (194).

This small yet significant moment within Forster’s text identifies a much larger problem among the English within the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The difficulties of connection within the boundaries of England and abroad were often reflected in mindsets such as Henry Wilcox’s that privileged the power of business over the importance of social relationship. While some would argue that Henry was the definitive “good Englishmen,” it was this emphasis on politics and financial conquest that in some ways informed the British Empire’s decline. And as the Wilcox men are earlier described in the novel as having the “colonial spirit, making for some spot where the white man might carry his burden unobserved,” Henry’s lack of connection within his own circle is part of a larger discussion about these issues of nationalism and Empire (190). Not only does the idea of a “colonial spirit” produce images of conquest and Empire-building, but this tradition has also been passed down through generations of his family, and thus it is a practice of social disconnection that has yet to be broken.

And yet in this same moment we see Margaret Schlegel as representative of the possibility for connection. Although we are told that in her youth she finds this action difficult, Margaret overcomes her detachment and acknowledges the need for not only



civility, but some type of harmony among people. Forster's early juxtaposition of Henry and Margaret, which eventually culminates in Henry's ultimate embrace of connection, illustrates that while it is difficult, connection is necessary for the survival of the *English* spirit. Not only civility, but social harmony, must exist in the type of connection Forster advocates for; it is a relationship of mutual respect, tolerance, and more importantly a connection which values the difference between those considered dissimilar in social, economic or cultural terms.

It is with this same outlook that Virginia Woolf and George Orwell shared their own concerns of the political and social climate of early twentieth century England. In the introduction to Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939, Richard Begam and Michael Moses state that the "historical and cultural reality of modernism more often than not challenged the prevailing values of English culture, including its most powerful institution, the British Empire" (6). Acknowledging both the historical and cultural elements of modernism such as colonization and notions of Englishness, is important, as it places this confrontation of English ideology not only in terms of *what* was written, but also on the idea that modernist authors like Forster, Woolf and Orwell put an intentional emphasis on these issues in their writing, not necessarily advocating for the project of Empire but often critiquing its shortcomings. These authors accomplish this by writing about national issues in smaller-scale representations of the larger problems of Empire. Allowing these issues to exist microcosmically not only allows for a deeper understanding of the inner workings of Empire, but also poses the question, can solving problems on a smaller-scale help to resolve the injustices of imperialism?



The problem of connection can be considered one of the troubled established ideologies these authors hoped to resolve. The English not only promoted relations between those of the same socioeconomic status and cultural upbringing, but actively discouraged connections of any other kind. This value system barred the English from any kind of social or political mobility because connections were continuously made within familiar circles; those that were different were considered off limits. An even larger result of this mentality was confusion about what it meant to be “English,” since this class-based system denied the shared characteristics of people born and raised within the same country. The vastness of the British Empire further complicated notions of Englishness as designations such as “Anglo-Indian” made it even more difficult to determine what was acceptably “English” and what was not to English society.

It is because of this insularity among social classes and ethnic-national groups that problems of connection are undeniably tied to Empire. This “stick with your own kind” mentality within the boundaries of England made it near impossible for any connection to exist beyond those boundaries. Part of what this thesis aims to examine is how the Empire prevented the formation and sustenance of relationships within both spaces. Moreover, often the failures of Empire in modernist novels are tied to these personal failures, and the spotlight on the devaluation of connection promotes the importance of connecting even more. How can an Empire survive when the only relationship it has with its subjects is power and dominance? Is a space for connection even available abroad when the people at home are not able to connect?

This latter question brings up another important discussion. Through their critique of the microcosmic values of Empire, Forster, Woolf and Orwell perceive an opportunity

to depict more progressive ways of managing the vastness of the Empire beyond the boundaries of England. In his study of English identity within this context, Ian Baucom cites Salman Rushdie as saying, “the empire is less a place where England exerts control than the place where England loses command of its own narrative of identity. It is the place onto which the island kingdom arrogantly displaces itself and from which a puzzled England returns as a stranger to itself” (3). This “arrogant displacement” came in many forms, including the English attitude of superiority, as well as the denial of the need for social connection between ruler and subject. So while England looked upon its Empire as a site of power, it in fact destabilized and complicated notions of Englishness through expanding the English identity across the world, thus confusing the perceived core values of English life. The modernist authors included in this study recognized this loss of identity on the part of the English, and through their narratives show that an *alternative* way of looking at Empire may have been the *better* way not only to live among natives, but to live as Englishmen and women. Essentially, all three authors emphasized the need of a stronger more tolerant English tradition over notions of power and conquest. In *A Passage to India*, Forster embodies this alternative in Mrs. Moore and Cyril Fielding, two characters who experience a transformation of ideals, recognizing both the need for connection and the importance of understanding and respecting Indian culture. While Woolf concludes *Orlando* with the title character letting traditional English values prevail, her connection to the gypsies and their appealing, simpler way of life is forever engrained in her mind. For Orwell, the hypocrisies of the Empire are remedied through a stronger national tradition and the acknowledgment of the merits of other political and social systems.

So while Empire is widely accepted as a theme among modernist writers, it should also be acknowledged that each writer in this study responded differently to this issue. This thesis, then, also aims to examine these authors' varying responses to issues of Empire, and how each participated in what Begam and Moses called "the radically different conception of England, one in which the shadow of Empire would fall less darkly and less comprehensively around the globe" (13).

Chapter One looks at E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) as a call for a more unified Empire through a complication of boundaries between Indian and English. Previous readings of Forster's text see the possibility of connection as dismal and unlikely, but through an examination of both character development and narrative structure, this project examines the way in which Forster creates a world where two spaces, Indian and Anglo-Indian, can in fact interact and co-exist. Utilizing Frederic Jameson's theory of the Imperial experience, Gauri Viswanathan's study of hegemonic ideology in India, and Jed Esty's work on the relationship between Englishness and (de)colonization in the modern British novel, this chapter seeks to not only examine the effects of dislocation on the English citizen in India, but to offer a re-reading of Forster's text as a narrative that shows there can indeed be harmonic relations between two cultures even though one is hegemonic.

Chapter Two examines Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), a novel that illustrates a more pessimistic view of the possibility for the English to connect abroad. In contrast to Forster's cautious optimism, Woolf uses Orlando's evolution as a character and his/her inability to form relationships with the non-English as a way to critique the faults of the Empire. In the past, the criticism of *Orlando* has been predominantly within the realm of



gender and sexuality. While these themes are paramount to any discussion of the novel, this reading seeks to interpret how issues of nationalism and colonialism inform Orlando's gender; as a male Orlando attempts to fill his national role as imperialist, where as a woman she performs her national duties as a wife and mother. But although Orlando's inevitable fulfillment of these roles shows him/her clinging to English traditions of empire building and social insularity, Woolf's use of the mock-biographical form offers its own opportunity for political critique. Playing with both the formal demands for historical accuracy and the opportunity to exert authorial control over her fictional narrative, Woolf, by foregrounding what is included or omitted from Orlando's history offers a poignant critique of Empire and the portrayal of a different, and perhaps better, way of looking at the world through English eyes.

In Chapter Three my project moves away from fiction and looks at George Orwell's 1941 essay "England, Your England" as an account of England's failures as both a community and a superpower. Orwell blames the failures of Empire on problems of social class, and subsequently calls for a stronger national tradition among English of all classes for the country to remain a powerful force in Europe. A connection is made between England's relationship to Empire and to other European nation-states because it is through a fixed form of Englishness that the country has been barred from a real understanding of either people. However, the essay ultimately proposes solutions to problems of Empire and nationalism that merely imitate those that have already been attempted and failed, as the fixed form of Englishness Orwell speaks against is the same national tradition he believes will bring the country together. Chapter Three rounds out this thesis by showing a critique of Empire that addresses the same issues that Forster and

Woolf, but in the form of a political essay rather than a biography or novel. Also acknowledged in this chapter is that while many modernist authors *wrote* against the existing order, some like Orwell presented contradictions through both their participation in the system and a denial of their own faulty politics.

Interestingly, Orwell “memorably placed his origins in the ‘lower-upper-middle class’ which included mid-level imperial officials, like Orwell’s father, as well as bohemian intellectuals such as E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf” (Rose 29). These three authors were participating in the same literary tradition while also living in the same kind of England; a country that at its highest peak boasted 25% of the world’s land, but by the time these authors were publishing these texts had nearly halved in size. The following study identifies one response to the failing Empire in the critique of the problems of connection, but the larger thematic implications seek to examine the various ways these authors defied traditional notions of Englishness, and to re-negotiate a place for these texts in the modernist canon as part of a tradition specifically writing on the subjects of colonial critique, and political and ideological renovation. It is in Forster, Woolf and Orwell’s individual discussions of Empire that a changed set of English values are represented as integral to the success of England abroad.

## Chapter 1

Cultural Fusion in the Colonial Space: E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*

In E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, questions of nation are complicated by the blurring of boundaries between the 'dominant' English and the Indian "other." While the "theme of separateness" does appear in the novel within the social sphere, it does not govern the novel as critics like Lionel Trilling have asserted (20). Rather, it can be argued that there are vivid moments of fusion in which Forster gestures towards a cultural synthesis of both Indian and English. As a result of this amalgamation, "colonial otherness" within the novel becomes not only a representation of native Indians, but of some of the English characters themselves, creating a colonized "imperial Englishness" that clashes with the mindset of the complacent, devoted Englishmen. This reading makes the novel's ending a more hopeful view of the future for British/Indian relation, a claim often contested by critics of the novel. The novel seems to ask, can not only civility, but harmony, exist within a colonized space?

In his study of radical English thought, Francis Mulhern claims that there was an intellectual project occurring at the time Forster was writing in which "an unprecedented political and ideological fusion of 'the social question' and 'the national interest'" was being explored and advocated in England (Esty 26). In other words, the emphasis on instilling English ideology into colonized nations began to be seen as innately connected to the survival and progress of the Empire. The "social question," especially in a post-Mutiny India, was rooted in maintaining order, and socializing the natives seemed to be best way to keep this system of rule intact. This assessment suggests a few things relevant to Forster's text. For one, it implies that sites of political power were being challenged by



the social question; if keeping the hegemonic system of colonialism intact was the political and thus national prerogative, the emphasis on cultural ideology and native socialization would have complicated any kind of social order that was predetermined in the colonial space.

And yet it was the political body that deemed socialization as the linchpin of imperial success. As Gauri Viswanathan discusses in *Masks of Conquest*, British colonials determined that the “superior personal conduct of Britons and not the superiority of the system” were what “social harmony” (and a secure hegemony) rested upon in British India (72). Forster challenges this ideology in *A Passage to India*, as we see that neither the conduct nor the system of rule is exemplary, despite the presence of characters such as Mrs. Moore and Cyril Fielding, who are able to break through the confines of the imperial English ideology. It is in the recognition of the hypocrisies of this “superior” system by these specific Britons that harmonic relations begin to form within the novel.

What Mulhern’s assertion also suggests is that the question of what it meant to be English was being reconsidered. If the social question was being juxtaposed to national interests, the face of Englishness was subsequently altered in light of these melding ideologies. Ian Baucom explores this idea in *Out of Place*, naming the difficulties in defining Englishness as being “understood as struggles to control, possess, order, and disorder the nation’s and the empire’s spaces” (4). In other words, the idea of Englishness is undoubtedly connected to the idea of empire. In order to truly define what it meant to be English, it was necessary to define what was *not* English, and Forster created a colonial



space where this crisis of English identity was experienced by both the characters and the dust of the land itself.

In the opening pages of the novel, Forster immediately distinguishes the English from the Anglo-Indian in Chandrapore, acknowledging a type of transformation that occurs from “Anglo” to “Anglo-Indian” within the colonized space. This difference is articulated while Dr. Aziz and Hamidullah debate the characteristics of the English and Aziz argues, “They all become the same, not worse, not better. I give any Englishman two years...and I give any Englishwoman six months.” Hamidullah does not agree and claims to see “profound differences” among the English (7). This discussion acknowledges that there is indeed a change that occurs when the English come to India; they “become” something else. Although Aziz does not initially say whether this change is agreeable, a dichotomy is created between English characters introduced in the novel as new to India and their counterparts back at home: the former will be somehow transformed by their new surroundings. While the British government assumed rule over countries like India in order to change them, here we see the Indians claiming the English themselves were changed.

While Aziz and Hamidullah experience the results of this change as servants of the British Raj, English characters also acknowledge their difference in behavior when becoming “Anglo-Indian.” New to India, Adela Quested speaks about the question of Anglo-India while conversing with Dr. Aziz. In speaking of the need for “something universal” between the natives and the English in India, Miss Quested cites her own marriage to a British Civil Servant, Mr. Heaslop, as a transformation into a bad kind of Englishwoman. She says, “by marrying Mr. Heaslop, I shall become what is known as an

Anglo-Indian...I can't avoid the label. What I do hope to avoid is the mentality...some women are so...ungenerous and snobby about Indians, and I should feel too ashamed for words if I turned like them." Further on, Miss Quested also mentions her inability to "resist her environment" (161).

Forster illustrates a few different things during this conversation. For one, "Anglo-Indian" as a socio-political designation is seen here as a much more complicated and loaded label; it does not merely describe an English person living in India but rather, an entire frame of mind. According to Miss Quested, it is an attitude that closely resembles the stereotypical view of the English: narrow-minded, and stuffy with a kind of superiority complex. Miss Quested's view is further characterized later by a nameless English character who later claims that "any native who plays polo is all right" (204). Here Forster offers a satirical critique of the English mindset, purposely creating moments like these which portray the Anglo-Indian in cliché form, a way which Miss Quested understands and sees as someone new to British India.

And yet, we see Miss Quested attempting to reject this mindset, and instead live among the Indians without her typical English sensibilities. She resists the change that Aziz and Hamidullah speak of. Further, Miss Quested's admission of an inability to "resist her environment" raises the question, which environment is she speaking of? Is it her inability to resist the environment and influence of Anglo-India, or the entire experience of India all together?

Frederic Jameson addresses this problem of the imperial experience for the English in his article "Modernism and Imperialism." He states:

Colonialism means that a significant structural segment of the economic system as a whole is now located elsewhere, beyond the metropolis, outside of the

daily life and existential experience of the home country, in colonies...whose life experience and life world – very different from that of the imperial power – remain unknown and unimaginable for the subjects of the imperial power, whatever social class they may belong to (51).

Here Jameson gestures towards an English subject who never moves past the boundaries of his home country, while a piece of the English economy itself is relocated. But what about the Englishmen *in* India? In “Only Connect...Forster and India,” K. Natwar-Singh cites Jawaharlal Nehru as saying that the English in India, “lived in a narrow, circumscribed world of their own – Anglo-India – which was neither England nor India” (51). When compared to Forster’s Anglo-India, Jameson and Nehru’s interpretation of the colonial experience for a subject of the imperial power would be completely dislocating and for some, liminal. So while a woman like Miss Quested living in England cannot understand this experience, moving into the colonized space forces her to interact and undergo a change in this unknown and unimaginable place vastly different from her “life world” at home. She cannot resist her environment in India because it is the unknown known, and the unimaginable imagined. This may be why she eventually has a possibly imagined crisis within the imperialized land – it is a place that, as Jameson asserts, is outside of her existential experience of everyday life and therefore dislocates her entire frame of reference. Baucom speculates that the empire “may have been truly beyond the boundaries of Englishness, a radically alien outside within which the colonist would inevitably confront the spectacle of himself or herself ‘going native’” (6). This assertion is accurate juxtaposed to Miss Quested’s comments about the Anglo-Indian character; she is aware that a breach of the boundaries of both England and Englishness occurs, and confronts this transformation head on. Her expedition into the Marabar Caves



is an attempt at confronting this spectacle as Miss Quested attempts to see an India otherwise absent to the rest of Anglo-India; in speaking of the trip with Aziz she says, “tell me everything you will [about the caves], or I shall never understand India” (79). Yet she can not go all the way in this confrontation. Her transformation is incomplete because this “alien outside” is potentially too far removed and too dangerous from her “life world” and therefore untranslatable.

And yet, no other character portrays this transformation better than the English Mrs. Moore. Lionel Trilling’s interpretation of the novel states that the story is “essentially concerned with Mrs. Moore’s discovery that Christianity is not adequate” and that through the narrative “[she] moved closer and closer to Indian ways of feeling” (22). This description shows not only Mrs. Moore’s dismissal of English conventions but also her movement towards cultural fusion. Her rejection of the attitudes of the Anglo-Indian community and the English community at large, culminated by her ultimate transformation into “colonial other,” exemplifies the kind of cultural synthesis Forster wanted for British India. While it would be difficult to attain this level of accord on a more global scale, with Mrs. Moore Forster identifies an entire frame of reference within the colonial space that was trying to do what Margaret Schlegel yearns for in *Howards End*: “Only Connect!...Live in fragments no longer” (174).

Mrs. Moore’s transformation begins when she comes face to face with Dr. Aziz in the mosque right after her arrival in India. While Aziz is at first offended at her presence in this holy place, sure that she has left her shoes on, Mrs. Moore has indeed performed the traditional holy act of her own volition. Participating in this ritual that Aziz states, “so few ladies take the trouble [to do], especially if thinking no one is there to see,”

characterizes Mrs. Moore as someone different than the typical Englishwoman in India (18). She takes her shoes off for no one but herself. Positioning the “newcomer” Mrs. Moore within this mosque immediately places her within the dislocated space of the unimaginable colonial world Jameson speaks of. And yet, this world is not unknown to her; she is aware of the Moslem tradition of taking off her shoes before Aziz ever arrives.

This episode in the Mosque also establishes an immediate intimacy with Dr. Aziz, a native Indian. They not only speak about their personal lives, but actually critique some of the other Anglo-Indians in the community. This kind of relationship between the English and the natives is later described by Mr. Turton, a typical Anglo-Indian, as nothing but a disaster in every situation: “Intercourse, yes. Courtesy, by all means. Intimacy – never never...if there has been mutual respect and esteem, it is because both peoples kept to this simple rule” (182). And yet, what is simple about this? How can two cultures co-exist without understanding or the kind of “universal” something Miss Quested yearns for?

Through this exchange in the Mosque, we see Mrs. Moore begin to evolve into “the ‘other.’” She is not Indian, and yet she is not completely English either. Further, Mrs. Moore goes against the typical behavior of her people by breaking the rules of the Anglo-Indian community, rules which are established to keep the English from what Baucom calls the “immense dangers that are attached to any significant contact between the English and their colonial subjects” (101). Her intimacies with Dr. Aziz make her a threat to the established structure, and yet, she is merely trying to reach out and connect. Forster’s call for co-existence of these two cultures begins the very moment Mrs. Moore

surprisingly adheres to the Moslem tradition, thus defying the expectations of both England and India.

But Mrs. Moore does not stay in India for very long. Her son expedites her trip back to England because she not only sides with the natives in Miss Quested's trial, but has also begun to lose her sense of "good Englishness," a further echoing of Baucom's assertion that the empire forces the English to confront the idea of "going native." Further, Mr. Heaslop cannot handle his mother's disagreement with the "simple rules" set up by the civil servants of British India, thus he attempts to remove her from the colonial space and send her back to a place that is more familiar, more "civil" to him, where the idea of Englishness has remained intact. In a significant moment of truth about her view of the "English way," Mrs. Moore tells her son and Miss Quested:

I have spent my life in saying or in listening to saying; I have listened too much...Why can't I finish my duties and be gone? And all the time this to do and that to do in your way and that to do in her way...Why all this marriage, marriage?...The human race would have become a single person centuries ago if marriage was any use (222-4).

Here Forster universalizes the injustices of the "simple rules" instated by the British Empire in India by blending them with the "simple rules" of English duty, once again bringing up the project of fusing the social question and national interest. As a subject of the empire, Mrs. Moore has listened too long to the voices of imperial England, thus when she says she's spent her life listening to men like her son, she is in fact referring to all men who rule over the empire. This microcosmic representation is taken further when she rejects the English conventions of social duty and marriage, the ways in which women were often seen as contributing to the strength of the empire. Like all English women in society, Mrs. Moore is supposed to feel a social and political obligation to both



England and her family, but here she questions, even criticizes, this obligation as hindering her ability to be an individual or even further, to fade away and just “be gone.” She seeks alienation from her homeland as well as the land she is about to leave because while she rejects the conventions of England, it may be that she too cannot handle this “life world” outside of the English space, no matter how appealing it is. India is vastly different from the insularity she has always known and as Mrs. Moore is nearing the end of her life, it may be too much too late.

And Mrs. Moore is actually eager to get a passage back to the motherland. While it could be that she is ready to return to the familiarity of home, she could also have become so enveloped and transformed by the Indian culture that she cannot stand feeling obligated to be “truly English” in India, thus having to flee:

As soon as she landed in India it seemed to her good, and when she saw the water flowing through the mosque-tank...or the moon, caught in the shawl of night with all the other stars, it seemed a beautiful goal and an easy one. To be one with the universe! So dignified and simple. But there was always some little duty to be performed first, some new card to be turned...and placed (231).

Mrs. Moore sees dignity in India, a characteristic typically associated with English life. Rather than dignity being associated with social class as it is in England, here it is a part of the tranquil and everyday life of the Indian landscape. Jed Esty discusses Mrs. Moore’s sense of cultural displacement in *A Shrinking Island*, arguing that English characters within the novel “regularly cast the unknowability of Indian landscape against the familiar green core of England” (78). In other words, Mrs. Moore’s literal placement of English sentiment onto the colonized landscape forever binds her to the problems of fusion between the two cultures by attempting to fuse two opposing entities. Furthermore, the crisis of defining what exactly it means to *be* English is at play here, as we see Mrs.



Moore attempting to evaluate her life, and placing the national characteristic of dignity on the Indian landscape instead of on herself. These images of unity within the Indian landscape are not available to Mrs. Moore because she is English, and she therefore lives a life of duty in a society which demands social separation and a unity exclusively with those within the same *economic* space. Her only choice is to leave India because she can never fully grasp its mindset, its own unique kind of dignity.

But Mrs. Moore never makes it back to England. She dies on the passage home, and one of the final images she sees is “the end of the rails that had carried her over a continent and could never carry her back” (233).<sup>1</sup> It is undeniable that Mrs. Moore has been irrevocably changed by her experience in this colonial space, and her rejection of English convention and thus her acceptance of the Indian way of life do not allow her passage back to where she once was. Although she cannot remain in India, she can never go complacently back to her old way of life in England, thus Mrs. Moore cannot remain in either space; Forster’s only choice is kill the character that can no longer be English in India or in England.

Here a more pessimistic view of Anglo-India is illustrated, and yet, Mrs. Moore’s death becomes the most pivotal cultural fusion of all. The subsequent “echo” of Mrs. Moore in India is heard throughout the rest of the novel, and her figurative presence at the trial of Dr. Aziz and Miss Quested is a moment in which Forster illustrates a total synthesis of both cultures.

When Mrs. Moore’s name is said in the courtroom, it provokes a response from the Indians that even the city collector Mr. Turton calls “unexpected” (250). Having been

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Said argues that she is “ultimately killed by her vision” of India (203).

sent away before having the opportunity to speak on behalf of Dr. Aziz, his lawyer Mahmoud Ali argues that Mrs. Moore was “kept from us until too late – I learn too late – this is English justice, here is your British Raj. Give us back Mrs. Moore for five minutes only, and she will save my friend...oh, Mrs. Moore...” (249). Not only do we see a critique of British politics here on the part of an Indian, Forster also makes his own slight jab at the injustices of the British Raj. As Forster was known to be critical of the ideologies of the British Empire, imbedding his own political commentary within the context of an unfair trial makes Mahmoud Ali’s words even more powerful. So while it is Mahmoud Ali, an Indian, critiquing English justice, we can also see an Englishman doing it as well.

This outburst leads to Mahmoud Ali’s rash departure from the courtroom:

The tumult increased, the invocation of Mrs. Moore continued, and people who did not know what the syllables meant repeated them like a charm. They became Indianized into Esmiss Esmoor, they were taken up in the street outside...Esmiss Esmoor, Esmiss Esmoor, Esmiss Esmoor, Esmiss Esmoor... (250-1).

Here Mrs. Moore transcends the label of Anglo-Indian and is likened to the image of an Indian Goddess. The syllables of her name are “Indianized,” thus her spirit is brought out of the realm of Anglo-India and fused with that of the native culture. The language barrier is shattered, and using their own language, the natives colonize their oppressors, silencing the English with their own voices and dominating English culture with their own cultural tradition.

As this chant is described as an “invocation” and a “charm,” Forster writes in a moment of mysticism and establishes a mood in which anything, including a transformation, can occur. It is as if something beyond the boundaries of reality takes

place, and as readers we are bombarded with a complication of this colonial space, of these cultural boundaries. How can we reconcile a moment in which the English *becomes* the Indian?

While this synthesis poses a problem for the reader's ability to differentiate between English and "other," it is a deliberate attempt at complicating our notions of "otherness" so that at this moment, we can not tell who is "other," and who is "dominant." Here is where Forster achieves a harmony even beyond the colonial space. It is the Indians and their chanting of "Esmiss Esmoor" that give them the power in the courtroom; they cannot be silenced, and the English cannot be heard over them. As this agency has now come full circle from the English to the Indian, it is the English subjects who now figuratively become "other." The effects of the chant within the narrative itself are "unimaginable" as Jameson would reflect, and as "Esmiss Esmoor" pours into the street, the only remarks the English members of the court can make are excuses as to why her name was mentioned at all. While the English are appalled at the words surrounding them, as readers we see a poetic justice infuse the courtroom in which the biggest Empire in the world is no match for the solidarity of India. There is harmony because in this moment there is not only one culture that dominates, and it is the spirit of English dissent, that of Mrs. Moore, that enables this to happen. Power has come around full circle.<sup>2</sup>

This moment in the trial brings up another national question. When Mahmoud Ali chides the English for sending Mrs. Moore away, he claims that the two counsels are, "not defending a case, nor are you trying one. We are both of us slaves" (249). Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* further explicates the truth in this shared label. While Mr.

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<sup>2</sup> Esty argues that *Passage* shows the "instability...of Britain's overseas rule" (78). Here in the courtroom we see this very idea being played out, witnessing a disempowerment of the British Raj.



Turton and the other imperial officers believe they have control, the lordship and bondage dialectic tells us that in fact the English rely on the Indians for their own existence, the lord “achieves his recognition through another consciousness” (Hegel 116). Indeed if there were no Mahmoud Ali, Aziz or further, no India, there would be no “other” to dominate. While this further proves the indubitable connection between the two cultures, more importantly it characterizes the English as bound by their colonized subjects, and therefore unable to fully retain hegemony over the Indian people.

Forster here also anticipates the view that George Orwell offers in his biographical short story “Shooting an Elephant”:

When the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys...For it is in the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the ‘natives,’ and so in every crisis he has got to do what the ‘natives’ expect of him. He wears a mask and his face grows to fit it (4).

In light of Orwell’s experience, while the natives in India are choiceless in their subservience, Mahmoud Ali’s description of the English as slaves inevitably resonates; they are at the mercy of the Empire, performing their tasks not as English citizens, but as servants of their country. The “simple rules” Anglo-India has developed within the colony are just a disguise and the citizens living there are in a liminal space, no longer fully English and thus subject to a new face, a mask which they must grow to fit. All of the characters in Forster’s novel experience this to some extent, but while some passively allow this process to happen, others resist it. In the courtroom, Forster establishes a space in which “colonial otherness” defines both Indian and Anglo-Indian alike, and in the chanting of “Esmis Esmoor,” a kind of “passage” is created in which the fate of the trial

travels from one culture to the other: "You can make India in England apparently, just as you can make England in India" (79).

Cyril Fielding, the voice of this proverbial saying, is another character who tries to reconcile the relations of Indian and English. While Fielding is not transformed in the same way as Mrs. Moore, he represents the possibility that there can in fact be both civility and harmony in British India. One of the biggest indications of this is his loyalties to the Indians above his own people. The narrator tells us that Mr. Fielding "was a disruptive force....the world, he believed, is a globe of men who are trying to reach one another and can best do so by the help of good will plus culture and intelligence – a creed ill suited to Chandrapore" (64). Forster is not elusive in his description of Fielding; we are told from the very beginning that he will be "disruptive" to the flow of the Anglo-Indian narrative in Chandrapore as his convictions are "ill suited" to this space. However, Fielding's belief in the need for connection between men directly mirrors Forster's narrative which, as we have seen thus far, seeks to create a kind of universality between the two cultures. While Forster recognizes the difficulties in holding such beliefs, characters such as Mrs. Moore and Fielding enable him to not only write in sites of resistance to imperial control, but show that an alternative to total domination is possible.

Fielding's behavior preceding and during the trial shows him to be deeply conflicted about the British Raj, and consequently willing to reach out to other men. It even seems as though Fielding, and not Dr. Aziz or Miss Quested, is the focal point of the narrative throughout the duration of the trial. We do not hear and hardly see Dr. Aziz until the trial is over, and Miss Quested is only seen in moments of doubt relating to her accusations. Forster does this to emphasize the importance of Fielding's presence to the

narrative and to the trial itself. Mr. Fielding, along with Mrs. Moore, are the only two English characters who side with the Indians and in keeping the focus on them, Forster in turn keeps the focus on those who have successfully crossed over the boundaries of the colonial space.

Forster's courtroom structure in which Fielding plays a paramount role symbolically shows the push-and-pull of oppressed and oppressor. While the trial begins with both Indian and English sitting together as equals, Major Callendar insists that a faint Miss Quested be allowed to sit on the platform at the head of the room in a "special chair." While the judge agrees to only Miss Quested's move, the rest of the English members of the court proceed to follow her to this higher ground – all except Fielding, who is described as "the renegade with an Indian child perched on his knee" (246-7). Visually, this image does portray a literal separation of Indian and English, and yet Mr. Fielding remains amongst the natives with the country's future, an Indian child, resting in his lap. His place amongst the oppressed in the courtroom makes a complete separation impossible. Eventually, all but Miss Quested are forced to step down and, "the news of [the English] humiliation spread quickly [so that] they were too much agitated with the defeat to British prestige to be interested [in Miss Quested's nerves]" (246). So while the two groups begin the trial blended, the English attempt to exhibit their influence only to be forced back down in embarrassment. Here we not only see the two cultures forced to physically interact, but also Forster's creation of a room which demands equality and the sharing of power.

This theoretical cultural fusion between the English and Indian people is repeatedly emphasized by the narrator throughout Forster's text beyond character action.



Often revealing the ironies and injustices of the British rule in India, the narrator offers a critique with which the reader navigates between the Indian and Anglo-Indian space. One particular example of this is the recurring image of “dust” throughout the novel which comes to represent the countries themselves, and whoever the dust covers is “other” and thus powerless at that point in the text. We first see this image at the beginning of the narrative when two English women take the carriage meant for Dr. Aziz and do not thank him for giving it up. While he accepts this, he cannot accept what this action represents: “But to shake the dust of Anglo-India off his feet! To escape from the net and be back among manners and gestures that he knew” (15)! At this point, the dust is attributed to the Anglo-English. It has a binding effect on Dr. Aziz, and he imagines the joy in ridding himself of this net which traps him, and from which he cannot escape at this moment in the text. Here Dr. Aziz, and by proxy the natives, are “other”; the dust is all around him, and keeps him away from the familiar signs of his culture.

Later, we see a description of dust from the narrator which shows the symbolic switch from Indian “other” to Anglo-English “other.” In this moment the narrator describes the “punishment of crime with the thermometer at a hundred and twelve” (233). An analogy is made between these unlivable seasonal temperatures of India and the failures of the “orderly hopes of humanity” to be in a constant climate of success (234):

The triumphant machine of civilization may suddenly hitch and be immobilized into a car of stone, and at such moments the destiny of the English seems to resemble their predecessors’, who also entered the country with intent to refashion it, but were in the end worked into its pattern and covered with its dust (234).

Here, a few pages after Mrs. Moore’s passage home, we see the dust go through a transformation in which it is now the English who cannot escape being covered. Mrs.



Moore does indeed have an experience similar to that of Dr. Aziz's dust-covered shoes. It is no coincidence that this heat wave comes directly after her departure; Mrs. Moore never fully rids herself of the dust, or influence, of India, making it impossible for her to ever return to England. Said argues that Mrs. Moore especially and Fielding too are "clearly meant to be understood as Europeans who go beyond the anthropomorphic norm in remaining in that (to them) terrifying new element" (Said 200). In other words, the narrator's inscription of dust as a symbol of the changing social landscape serves as not only a device with which the reader can navigate from Indian to English "other," but can also illustrate how Mrs. Moore's crisis of identity could be connected to the land itself. In transforming India's physical landscape to a socially charged one, the narrator also anticipates a problem in the progress of the British Empire in India. Throughout the novel, Forster continuously critiques the Anglo-Indian way, and if England and its Empire are the "triumphant machine" described, a "hitch" and "immobilization" of this civilization machine at the conclusion is merely a result, a culmination, of what he has been anticipating throughout the entire narrative: a breakdown of power.<sup>3</sup>

Here in the dust Forster also acknowledges the predecessors to the English (France, Portugal and the Netherlands) who have attempted to "refashion" India. The choice of the word "refashion" is interesting as it implies that the imperialist history of India is not limited to land ownership but rather, it is likened to a transformation of sorts. Ironically, the refashioning of India by England, according to Forster, actually refashions the English themselves. This is where the image of dust plays its pivotal role. Rather than

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<sup>3</sup> Said argues that the novel neither "goes all the way and condemns (or defends)" British colonialism or Indian nationalism (203). This is true, as Forster's acknowledgement of the glitches in colonization are not inevitable though undeniably real.

transforming India, England is mixed into its very foundations, covered in the figurative dust of the native country.

The working of these two cultures “into a pattern” is an interesting image of a cultural harmoniousness as well; it implies a kind of natural motion in which one thread is combined with another into one pattern. The dust then reminds the reader that although one united pattern has been made with distinctive threads, there is still a cover of dust dominating it, and here that is India. In this way, the narrator uses dust to show again that England has now become “other.” While they have become part of this “common thread,” they are still covered by the dust of the original culture, and according to Forster, it cannot be lifted.

The narrator offers a final reference to this symbol at the conclusion of the trial:

Unaware that anything unusual had occurred, he continued to pull the cord of his punkah, to gaze at the empty dais and the overturned special chairs, and rhythmically to agitate the clouds of descending dust (257).

“He” in this instance is the punkah wallah, the Indian man pulling the fan back and forth through the courtroom during the trial. Insignificant at first, Miss Quested looks at him as though he were “controlling the proceedings” and “something in his aloofness impressed her.” The narrator even refers to him as a god who was created as a result of the Indian race coming “near the dust” (341). As aloof as this character is for the short period of time we see him, there is something special about his evocation. This man is representative of the common people of India; he is of low birth working a common job, and is quite unaware of the importance of the events going on around him. And yet, he is the kind of God that lives in India, the “dignified and simple” kind that Mrs. Moore respects so much. His resurrection “from the dust” of the Indian race is a powerful image

of a people that will continue to live simply, but thrive. We know this by the overturned “special” chairs which the judge has forced the English to vacate earlier in the trial; the Indians were triumphant in the space this man occupies, and after the courtroom has emptied, he agitates the English dust which is now falling, and which will eventually combine and settle with the dust of the Indian people.

And yet, it would be inaccurate to portray the book as entirely dedicated to the union of both cultures; it is important to acknowledge such moments in the novel which do illustrate the difficulties in the mixing of English and Indian. One such example is the Bridge Party given at the beginning of the narrative. Ironically named in light of the English card game Bridge, it is described as, “a party to bridge the gulf between East and West; the expression was [Mr. Turton’s] own invention, and amused all who heard it” (26). While the idea is promising initially, the party is unsuccessful, and we see a distinct barrier between the two peoples. The English and the Indian guests stand on opposite sides, and even Mr. Turton, the party organizer, “was under no illusions, and at the proper moment he retired to the English side of the lawn” (45). While there is an attempt at union in playing tennis, “the barrier grew impenetrable. It had been hoped to have some sets between East and West, but this was forgotten, and the courts were monopolized by the usual club couples” (47). While this is only the beginning of the novel, Forster’s portrayal of the Bridge Party shows a bleak vision for British/Indian relations. While an attempt is made at literally “bridging the gap” between the two cultures, we see a reluctance on both sides to cross over.

However, the failure of this party is reconciled by other moments in the text in which East and West do in fact interact and combine. While many of these moments have



already been examined, the end of the novel portrays this as well, as the two worlds literally collide during the Indian Torchlight Procession. While Mr. Fielding and his wife, Mrs. Moore's daughter Stella, travel through the water watching the procession, Dr. Aziz and Ralph, her son, travel in another boat. Dr. Aziz talks about a "cycle" which he believes is beginning again between himself and Mrs. Moore's son and when they are on the water watching the procession, the two men hear a chant of *Radhakrishna* which "suddenly changed and [Aziz] heard, almost certainly, the syllables of salvation that had sounded during his trial at Chandrapore" (352). These syllables are of course, "Esmis Esmoor," the Indianization of Mrs. Moore. Moments later, the two boats collide.

This collision, seen as the "climax" of the entire procession, is a culmination of all moments of cultural unification throughout the novel. The boats collide in a literal sense because Dr. Aziz is immersed in the cultural display before him, and it is the English that yell out "Take care!" before the two boats hit. But to look deeply into this moment is to see that this concern for the members of the other boat on the part of the English is a final message to the reader that there is a possibility of harmony between the two cultures; both boats will suffer as a result of a crash, so to protect one, is to protect the other.

Further, the moments leading up to the crash allude to one of the more poignant and significant parts of the narrative: the transformation of Mrs. Moore into an Indian Goddess. The reference to that event is a testament to this moment as Mrs. Moore's Indianization is also a kind of collision of culture. Aziz also talks about a cycle which itself infers a harmony between two points which is occurring between Aziz and Mrs. Moore's son. Critic Barbara Rosecrance says the cyclical nature of the novel "appears in the progressions of Forster's expanding imagery...in its climaxes and returns the action

too illustrates the cyclical movement.” She goes on to connect this cyclical nature with a theory that the book is “essentially a revelation of unity, a declaration of independence from earlier repressions” (84). Seen in this way, the collision of the two boats is a microcosmic event which represents an entire book seeking to harmonize previous relations, and interpretations, of British India. These boats need to crash in order to fully realize the need for unity in the colonial space.

Rosecrance’s words also speak to the final pages of the book, in which harmony and unification are encouraged between England and India. While Dr. Aziz and Mr. Fielding discuss whether they can be friends, “the horses didn’t want it – the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds...they didn’t want it, they said in their hundred voices, “No, not yet,” and the sky said, “No, not there” (362). While the rest of the novel would promote unification in this scene, Aziz and Fielding’s final ride is more ambiguous. The meaning of the scene has been debated by scholar after scholar, most arguing for a dismal or incomplete prediction for cultural relations. Said argues there is “resolution and union, but neither are complete,” and further, that there is no possibility for completion now or ever (201). Esty too concludes that there is “no final reconciliation of Aziz with Fielding, of English sensibility with Indian life” (78).

While these interpretations are hinged upon different readings of the text, scholars such as Baucom and Rustom Bharucha find a more positive outlook for the future. Baucom suggests that a “postponement” occurs between the friendship of Aziz and Fielding, but that the text in no way “announces an absolute refusal” (130). Likewise he cites Bharucha as being dissatisfied with readings like Said’s, suggesting that this final scene can be read as, “a moment in which through loss, friendship triumphs – not as mere

connection or affirmation, but as a translation of identity...There is no otherness in this friendship...the categories of 'you' and 'me' are dissolved...By implication, Fielding can become an Indian and belong to Aziz..." (132)

Indeed if we look at this moment as an expansion of previous imagery, we see that even among the voices that do not want this fusion to take place, it can and will. It happens in the courtroom when the people do not want it, it happens between Dr. Aziz and Mrs. Moore whom he calls "his best friend," and it also occurs on the boats; they collide whether "Take care!" is said or not. Whether they are ready now does not matter, because the possibility is there. Although the horses are pulling them apart, Dr. Aziz and Mr. Fielding *are* still together in the "globe of men" reaching out for one another just as Fielding had always wanted.

Related to the hope for unification at the conclusion, Forster ends the narrative with the signature "Weybridge, 1924." Critic Brian May takes this to be an indication of Forster's limitations on questioning colonialism and the British Empire. He says, "[Forster's] own point of view may be partial and restricted, but by dislocating it from the center, by relocating it along a divergent axis of perception, he raises the possibility of producing a kind of cultural anamorphosis" (May 13). Seen in this way, Forster's ending to *A Passage to India* concludes with the hope for harmony. While we learn at the very end that this narrative, which exists within the colonial space, has been written from the space of the motherland, it is yet another indicator that the fusion of both cultures is not only possible, but happening at the very moment we conclude the text.

While there are numerous examples of it throughout the narrative, the question of whether civility *and* harmony can exist within the colonized space is illustrated at the



moment in which the natives prepare to symbolically “throw God away” into the storm. The representations of God are referred to as, “emblems of passage; a passage not easy, not now, not here, not to be apprehended *except* when it is unattainable” (353, my emphasis). The Indian/Anglo-Indian relationship at the beginning of *A Passage to India* seems to be just that, unattainable, so that the passage to harmony by the end can be apprehended, here and now as God wills it so. Forster’s novel not only shows the possibility for relations between these two cultures, but creates an imaginary space in which the two can interact, and co-exist within the same pattern.

## Chapter 2:

### Failed Connections and the Critique of Empire in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*

While *A Passage to India* speaks to Forster's optimism for forming successful relationships between English and non-English, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* suggests that notions of "Englishness" do not allow for stable connections with foreign 'others.' As the novel is a kind of *bildungsroman*, Orlando's evolution and growth as a character through the centuries is set against the backdrop of an imperial England, and it is through the relationships Orlando attempts to form with foreign characters which inevitably fail that we see both the English emphasis on separateness and subsequently a critique of Empire. Additionally, Woolf inscribes Orlando with attributes of Empire *building*, and heterosexual sex in the novel becomes a signifier of the different roles a man and woman were expected to fill for England. It is only as a woman and with Shelmerdine, her English counterpart, that we see Orlando sustain a human connection, thus the failures of Empire revolve around Orlando's inability to sustain a relationship outside of an English framework.

Previous criticism of *Orlando* has been dominated by the discussion of gender and sexuality. While these themes are paramount to any discussion of the novel, little attention has been paid to how gender and sexuality are *informed* by issues of nationalism and colonialism. The concept of "gender" itself denotes a set of rules, and here in Woolf's narrative these rules are determined through the obligation to Empire. In this context then, "colonialism" and "Empire" are loaded terms, bringing with them notions of privilege, language, history and sexuality.

In considering Woolf's fiction as an example of how "modernist writing framed its historical relationship to colonialism," Jed Esty cites the use of the *bildungsroman* form as a way in which Woolf, among other modern writers, cast doubts on "the ideology of progress through the figure of stunted youth" (73). For Woolf, this form was used as a way to critique the ideologies of Empire, and as Orlando has lived through four centuries and is only in her thirties at the conclusion of the novel, his/her biography is in fact an experience of the most extreme form of endless youth. Orlando's "stunted growth" is emphasized by the fact that his/her inherent sense of Englishness remains intact. So while the change in sex halfway through the narrative denotes a change in national duties for Orlando, she still privileges the company and landscape of England over any other. Although old age never reaches Orlando and no major physical growth is achieved, the world instead transforms around him/her while he/she attempts to change with it.

Although Woolf's narrative is not a typical *bildungsroman*, this structure helps to emphasize the fact that Orlando never fully achieves adulthood, and thus the strong convictions that accompany old age are replaced by the inevitable *questioning* of ideologies that occur within the young age Orlando remains a static part of. As Orlando does not commit to a changed outlook of Englishness and Empire, he/she does examine the English way of life in comparison to foreign 'others.' M.M. Bakhtin's description of the *bildungsroman* further explains the significance of the structure to both Orlando's evolution and his/her difficulties with Empire:

A type of novel that provides an image of man in the process of becoming... Changes in the hero himself acquire plot significance... Time is introduced into man, enters into his very image, changing in a fundamental way the significance of all aspects of his destiny and life. This type of novel can be designated in the most general sense as the novel of human emergence (Esty 75).



This description applies to Orlando on multiple levels. For one, we see that the plot itself does revolve around Orlando and the different locales he/she is set in, providing a kind of fusion of individual experience and social development; while he psychologically grows, so too does the Empire. Further, as time moves on in the novel, we see Orlando's process of becoming centered on sex, which is directly connected to notions of Empire building and national duty. Orlando's development is inscribed with the impossibility to ever live where "there was neither ink nor writing paper, neither reverence for the Talbots, nor respect for a multiplicity of bedrooms" (150). He/she cannot hold on to a stable connection with foreign 'other' because the *buildingsroman* sends *him* on a journey which brings *her* right back to where *he* began: living an English life among English people. But although attempts at connection fail abroad, these encounters still provide Orlando with a changed view of the world.

Thus through Orlando we see Woolf not only critique the British Empire, but perhaps show that an alternate way of thinking is possible and in some ways necessary. One critic has stated that Woolf "allows historical reading to be saturated with a sense of 'otherness' so that reading the past – even for the English reader, the English past – must be approached as a task in transposition and translation" (Cuddy-Keane 160). Keeping this in mind, it seems that Orlando's history is an attempt at refiguring the English past, forcing the reader to renegotiate his or her original conceptions of the events Orlando participates in – perhaps with a new more tolerant view of 'other.'

The narrative begins with an image of imperial violence, a teenage Orlando cutting at the head of a Moor while reenacting his father's customs of conquest. Orlando vows that he too will "strike many heads of many colors off many shoulders" and hang

them from the rafters of his home (13). And yet, Orlando's vow goes unfulfilled. Not only does he abandon the imperial-minded life of his forefathers, the novel concludes with Orlando as a woman contemplating the words of the gypsies who represent the foreign 'other': "What do you need with four hundred bedrooms and silver lids on all the dishes, and housemaids dusting?" or rather, why do you need the English aristocratic life (326)? This scene begins what inevitably becomes an ongoing critique of the English and their treatment of the non-English. Orlando is just a boy, and he is already attuned to colonialism and its policies. The fact that this violent desire goes unfulfilled and is replaced by the *contemplation* of the "others" view of the English show Woolf's wish for a less violent and more accepting climate between the English and their colonies.

This beginning scene also establishes important thematic elements which appear throughout the novel. For one, the narrative is set in motion by barbarous colonial customs which "alert the reader to the history of imperial violence that bolsters Orlando's position" (Johnson 118). It is acts of violence such as these that have enabled England to expand the empire, thus Orlando's existence is immediately tied to ideas of Empire building. The narrator also begins here to describe Orlando's lineage and how "his fathers had been noble since they had been at all...they came out of the northern mists wearing coronets on their heads" (14). So, while the Empire is at its greatest in this moment, so too is Orlando's family. The biography begins with the image of the dead Moor because it shows exactly how Orlando gained his wealth and his status: through violent conquest.

Additionally, although Orlando is not old enough to ride with his father and "strike heads," he mimics this action against the backdrop of the English countryside, a disjointed image of serenity and violence which portrays him as "vigorous, manly and

English” (398). And yet, these are characteristics we see him gradually lose as the narrative progresses. While here in the sixteenth century we see male Orlando encouraged by an act of violence against a “vast Pagan in the barbarian fields of Africa,” by the end of the novel a female Orlando, in the midst of marriage and procreation, claims that the twentieth century Empire is bound by “anything that interrupts and confounds the forging of links and chains” (294), which implies both an anti-colonial and pro-feminist attitude towards the British Empire. A disruption of the building of chains does in some ways imply dissent towards dominance. This shows a critique of the colonial mindset which is powerful in the first pages and waning in the last. Woolf is aware that the power to rule with a violent hand is not successful in the existing, fading twentieth century Empire, so beginning the novel with violent success but ending with defiance and inevitable failure further illustrate the problems of the British Empire.

The inability for Orlando to ever become his father and achieve his own colonial conquests also suggests that by the end of the novel there has been a shift in reason and priorities; Orlando has gone from male to female, imperialist to anti-imperialist. These overwhelming changes juxtaposed to the first image of the novel, the beheaded Moor, allow the biographer to further define what it means to be a British man and woman throughout four centuries of English history. Because Orlando changes, so too must the ideological landscape change with him, thus is it necessary to continue to define and redefine through Orlando what it means to be English.

But while still a man, Orlando sustains an affinity towards imperialism which bars him from connection. His failed relationship with the Russian Princess Sasha during the Great Frost illustrates an impossibility of union for Orlando and ‘other’ because of his



deeply rooted English aristocratic temperament. While at first he is attracted to Sasha specifically because she is like nothing he has ever known, an absence, Orlando inevitably begins to associate her with English attributes, things present, and in the end as the ice melts, so too does this space of interaction.

The Great Frost itself provides an interesting setting for this relationship. In her study of haunting in Woolf's novel, Erica Johnson argues that it is "terrain itself that Woolf reveals to be a signifier of national identity" (117). Following this theory, there are in fact elements of Englishness frozen within the icy landscape. Indicative of this is that the social sphere remains stratified; the lower classes are partitioned off from the aristocracy and the peasants "suffered the extremity of want" (34). While this literal separation and deprivation of the lower classes clearly mirrors the economic structure of the typical green landscape of English life, it is the *upper* class setting that is transformed. We are told that London, the scene of Orlando's experience with Sasha, "enjoyed a great carnival of the utmost brilliancy" during the Frost (34). Since a carnival setting within literature usually invokes Shakespearean elements of suspended authority and social transgression, this change in landscape demarcates a different set of rules for Orlando. While Johnson believes this frozen terrain to be "nonnegotiable," keeping Orlando's roots "locked into place," on the contrary it is only when London has in a sense put on a costume that Orlando can engage Sasha's 'otherness' (117).

It is Sasha's dissimilarity from the English, as well as her mysteriousness, that initially appeal to Orlando. While the biographer tells us that little is known about Sasha's Muscovite culture, Orlando is enthralled with her image on the ice and the "seductiveness which issued from her whole person" (37). The use of the word

“seductiveness” is important as it implies that Orlando has little control over this desire for Sasha, and her entire being draws him forward. This initially defies English conventionality which dictates that connection should only occur between those of the same national and economic group. But after the biographer gives us a vivid and implicitly sexual description of this seduction, she concludes with telling us that as it occurs, an English lady “hung upon his arm” (38). This serves as a reminder that while Orlando is about to stray away from his sense of Englishness, he still remains rooted in English culture as he escorts an aristocratic British woman across the ice. And yet this image also portrays Orlando as caught between these two women and thus trapped between the push of curiosity and the pull of his innate English culture.

Although the image of Sasha initially seduces Orlando, it is language that initially connects and tears them away from the English Court. Sasha comes to London speaking French, a language we are told is “little spoken” in London society, and yet Orlando can speak to her “with a perfect accent [and] spoke the tongue as his own” (41). As the novel continuously evokes the discussion of language, here we initially see it as a way with which Orlando navigates from one culture to the other, in this case English to Russian. And because no one can understand Orlando and Sasha’s language, these verbal exchanges become dangerous to the social norms of the Great Freeze as the biographer describes the Court as “outraged” at their relationship (43). Although language connects them, it does not allow for interaction with the rest of the Empire. It also eliminates an aristocratic bachelor from the English Court, and for Orlando to choose a foreigner over his potential English match, Lady Margaret, is near treason. Orlando, and Orlando alone, attempts to form relationships with those considered ‘other’ among the English, and this

action is unacceptable to the rest of the English Court. Again we see a moment critiquing the English. Not only are they unwilling to initiate connections with the non-English, they also do not have the language to try; Woolf may be saying that while connection is necessary, it would not be easy to achieve.

This connection threatens what Jamie Hovey calls the “National Symbolic” within the novel (397). This concept is defined as the collective consciousness or national subjectivity derived from the “general law” of the land, a law physically defined by the boundaries set-up on the ice between the upper-class English, and everyone else. Orlando’s intimacy with Sasha is a breach of what Mr. Turton preaches in Forster’s text: “Intercourse, yes. Courtesy, by all means. Intimacy – never never...” (182). In other words, if the English perception of ‘other’ is that anyone who is not English should be treated with civility and no more, Orlando’s obsession with and love for Sasha crosses both national and ideological boundaries. So while we see some Anglo-Indian relationships thrive right till the end in Forster’s text, here during the Great Frost we see the Anglo-Russian relationship wither, and Orlando forced to eventually cling to his English sensibilities.

And language does inevitably fail Orlando and Sasha. This way of passage between the English and Russian collapses when their cultural boundaries become too thick to navigate and Orlando cannot let go of his Englishness. First, Orlando begins to describe Sasha in terms of English culture and landscape:

He called her a fox...like the waves of the sea when you look down upon them from a height; like an emerald; like the sun on a green hill which is yet clouded – like nothing he had seen or known in England...words failed him. He wanted another landscape, and another tongue (47).



While arguably these things can be found anywhere, we are told by the biographer that these images come directly from Orlando's youth, a time which is also for the reader associated with his swinging at the head of a Moor. The biographer also tells us that it is "out of the question" for her to inquire about the reasons behind this connection between Sasha and these images of his past. Thus as it is left completely up to the reader to decipher, it is difficult not to associate Orlando's imperial past with this current relationship. The same youth who vowed to make conquests in "Africa and France" in the first pages of the novel seems to now desire another kind of conquest, a romantic one, with someone whom he initially connects with through the then unknown French language (13).

In this way, Sasha can also be viewed as a kind of colonial image. As an unknown territory within an Empire setting is typically means for conquest, here Sasha can be seen as the unknown territory Orlando wants to understand and, in a way, colonize. Indicative of this is that Orlando ceases speaking French to her and instead chooses English, reminiscent of the Imperial way of cultural assimilation. He even uses the language of conquest in describing his initial desire for her, wanting "means of making her irrevocably and indissolubly his own, obstacles there were and hardships to overcome" (50). In using this kind of language, Orlando participates in an on-going tradition of men describing love in terms of possession and conquest. This sense of irrevocable ownership Orlando longs for seems to be a manifestation of his initial desire to go out into the world to dominate people and land like his father. But as Orlando transforms this colonial desire into his own, instead of representing this as imperial domination it is instead presented to a lesser degree, that of a brief love affair. This juxtaposition of the first images of

Imperialism and Orlando's brief moment with Sasha not only substantiate the claim that the Empire cannot allow for this love to last, but also that this affair is doomed for failure.

And it is Orlando's inherent national duties as an English aristocrat that drives him back towards thoughts of England and away from cultural fusion. The notion that Orlando believes he has never "seen or known" foxes or green hills in England is a lie substantiated by the biographer herself in telling us their past significance; all of these things are present in Orlando's England but he cannot think of any other way to describe Sasha than in familiar terms. An innate English tendency seems to take over Orlando, and language, the one thing that initially sets them apart from the English court, is that which tears through their relationship and brings Orlando back into the realm of English life.

But Orlando does, in fact, desire completion and permanency with Sasha, and as much as he wants to be able to describe her in terms she can understand, "in another tongue," he cannot. Interestingly, Orlando recognizes that language has failed him, and yet he still chooses to abandon French, their common language, and instead use the "frank and honeyed" mother tongue he knows she cannot fully understand (47). Why would Orlando bring himself further away from understanding Sasha, while at the same time desiring permanency? Perhaps this is Woolf's way of showing the possibility of a delayed connection. As Aziz and Fielding can not *yet* be friends at the end of *Passage*, here we see Orlando reveal a desire for cultural harmony without the capacity to achieve it. Here Woolf offers hope in a moment of pending failure by showing Orlando at the very least *wanting* an otherwise unattainable connection.

Another direct connection can be made here between Orlando and the Empire itself. While at this point in the novel he is living in the sixteenth century and thus before

the major rise in land acquisition, Woolf is writing this fictional biography from the twentieth century, after the Empire's peak and during its decline. Orlando is in some ways mirroring the actions of England: he is a nobleman attempting to gain dominance over foreign 'other' but inevitably failing. In addition, as the modern use of the *bildungsroman* was a way to protest the ideologies of progress, here we see an Englishman wanting to connect with a foreign culture, but by the wrong means; Orlando wants to steal her away, but cannot fully understand who she is or what she wants. Just as the British Empire underestimated the ability of their colonies to resist, so too is Orlando naïve to Sasha's ability to abandon him. Woolf is also protesting progress here by illustrating an alternative way of strengthening the Empire; instead of denying his feelings, Orlando seeks connection with someone normally considered "off-limits" to a member of the English upper class.

But while continuing to describe the Princess in English terms, Orlando finally comes to realize that she cannot fully live up to the English standard: "In all she did there was something concealed. So the green flame seems hidden in the emerald, or the sun prisoned in a hill. The clearness was only outward; within was a wandering flame. It came; it went; she never shone with the steady beam of an Englishwoman" (47). Here we see language, their original means of connection, fail the two even further as Orlando begins to see that Sasha cannot live up to English expectations. While she initially evokes strong images of his past, making absent things present again, Orlando cannot sustain these thoughts of her, and Sasha once again becomes a stranger – hidden, concealed. He makes a direct comparison between her and an Englishwoman, arguably seeing the latter as more knowable and "steady." This "steady beam" Sasha will never have implies a kind



of strength in English women, a consistency, a flame that ceases to wander or extinguish. And while Orlando still desires to “chase” Sasha’s flame, this desire is inevitably incomplete. Like Aziz and Fielding, the possibility of connection is there but not attainable within English standards.

The final failures of language come soon after Sasha ceases to speak at all, remaining silent and unable to provide Orlando with the language of a familiar culture he yearns for. While Orlando asks her questions about her history through the colonial discourse of his own, boasting of his established family and their aristocratic privileges with Caesar “reserved for those with imperial blood,” Sasha can say nothing (48). Although Orlando convinces himself that her silence is a result of her shame “of the savage ways of her people,” he still cannot connect with her. Not only is she not English, but her silence refuses any sort of connection between them at all. Further, when he suspects that she has had inappropriate relations with a Muscovite sailor, Orlando immediately begins to see “something rank in her, something coarse flavoured” (52). So while Sasha’s interactions with Orlando fail, it is also in the sight of her communication with her own foreign commoners that destroy the possibility for Orlando to see her as anything but different and crude.

It is through this relationship that we begin to see the Empire itself failing Orlando. At the beginning of the book we see Orlando vow to carry on his forefather’s imperial work, and here with Sasha we saw him “vowing that he would chase the flame, dive for the gem” (47). And yet he is unable to do either of these things. In the case of earlier violent imperialism, Orlando’s changing temperament, not to mention his change in sex, bar him from conquest, and here both his inability to find a sufficient means of

communication and the inevitable difference between him and Sasha do not allow for permanent connection. And the Empire literally tears them apart as eventually the ice melts, carrying Sasha away on the Muscovy boat. When the Great Frost ends so too does the carnival, and the rules which were easily broken in costume are reestablished when the English landscape once again shows the “sun on a green hill” (47). Their space of interaction is impermanent, and Sasha has no place in real London and thus no place with Orlando.

Although Orlando’s next attempt at connection comes with the gypsies, it is also important to note times in the novel in which Orlando chooses alienation, and puts forth no effort to connect. As a Duke in Constantinople, Orlando “seemed to have made no friends [and] as far as it is known, he formed no attachments” (125). As Constantinople itself is an imperialistically named city, it would seem logical within the current discussion that any attempt at connection within this space would fail. And yet, we are given this information from a biographer who also claims that most records of this period in Orlando’s life have burned away, forcing her to use “imagination” to fill in the spaces (119). Thus, it is likely that there could have been attempts at connection, possible successfully, that were lost. Why would Woolf make the stylistic choice of omission, especially at the site of Orlando’s transformation from man to woman?

It seems what Woolf leaves out of the biography would make it easier for England to cast out Orlando. The English do not want to see intercultural intimacy, nor do they want to see a woman continue working as a Duke, so the choice of omission keeps Orlando within the proper English sphere. Jaime Hovey also speculates the following about Orlando’s stay in Constantinople:

The incongruence of Orlando's gender [in Constantinople] means that she is neither English nor a lady in the eyes of a respectable British society; thus the text renders her a biographical puzzle and an unintelligible exile (399).

Keeping this reading in mind, Woolf satirizes English society while Orlando is in Constantinople through the idea of sex. Orlando cannot fulfill his national duties as Duke in Constantinople because *he* becomes *she*, but this is inconsequential in comparison to Orlando being considered "un-English" in no longer having the ability to complete his administrative tasks for the Empire as a man. This seems extremely satiric as not only is a woman unable to do a man's job, but a former man cannot even do a man's job.

On the other hand, in acknowledging that there is potentially information missing, Woolf allows us to infer that connection, as well a woman in charge, were at least possible. Ironically, what is left out then actually renders an even more "imagined" interpretation on the part of the reader of what Orlando could have experienced in this foreign land.

The male Orlando in Turkey is strong, intelligent, militaristic and in charge, so with this critique of English culture after Orlando's change in sex also comes a critique of British dominance in foreign countries in the form of Orlando's Dukedom party. The biographer, through information from an English naval officer's diary, tells us that, "people of all nationalities were packed like herrings in a barrel" in the courtyard, creating what seems to be a close space of interaction between multiple cultures (126). However, the only other parts of his burnt diary that are readable are about the impression the British celebration makes on the natives:

when the rockets began to soar into the air, there was considerable uneasiness among us lest the native population...fraught with unpleasant consequences to all,...English ladies in the company...I own that my hand went



to my cutlass.. Happily, these fears seemed, for the moment, groundless and, observing the demeanor of the natives,...I came to the conclusion that this demonstration of our skill in the art of pyrotechny was valuable,...because it impressed upon them...superiority of the British (127).

This is all the information we receive about this event, and it portrays the natives as somehow dangerous to the English while it is they who are setting off fire rockets, not to mention claiming ownership over their land. These single pieces of information about the party here show a stereotypical side to the English: presumptive of “barbarous” natives and focused on looking superior to other cultures. While the officer admits that his fears are unfounded, he still manages to look at the moment through an imperial lens. And yet what the officer thought the natives might do, what “consequences” might be faced as a result, or what, in addition to superiority, it may have impressed upon them is not made available. Again we see Woolf letting the reader fill in the blanks, potentially limiting the information purposely as a means of portraying the English as they really are. So while the biographer tells us Orlando forms no attachments in Constantinople, this fact is emphasized by not only the British anxiety of ‘other,’ but also that no other Englishmen attempts to form a connection either. Instead of taking this moment to forge bonds in celebration, the English choose to stereotype the natives as violent and uncivilized, a fictional representation of what actually occurred in the Empire on a regular basis.

Orlando’s next attempt at establishing a relationship abroad comes soon after as she leaves Constantinople to join with the gypsies, the people she first attempts to make connections with as a female. Orlando’s initial view of the gypsies is not unlike Mrs. Moore’s view of the Indians in *A Passage to India*; she admires their simpler and more fulfilling life as compared to that of the materialistic and privileged British. But while

Forster has Mrs. Moore permanently maintain her connection with 'other' (we see this in the courtroom when her name is forever fused with the Indian goddess Esmiss Esmoor), Orlando cannot sustain her relationship with the gypsies, and eventually abandons them for the "gentle sighs and shivers of a summer's day in England" (151). Although she does return to her roots, the gypsies remain an important point of reference throughout the rest of the narrative as Orlando continues to question her way of life in comparison to theirs. Orlando's attraction to the gypsies offers a further critique of English culture; although this is another connection she is not able to sustain, her sustained *interest* in the gypsies illustrates that at the very least, a re-examination of English convention must take place.

Orlando's sojourn with the gypsies is spontaneous, and yet we are told that they "must have been in secret communication before the revolution" and additionally, that they looked upon her as one of themselves because of her "dark hair and dark complexion" (141). This image of cultural ambiguity initially fuses Orlando with the gypsies; she is obviously not like them and yet they accept her as one of their own, even using her skin tone as a signifier of their commonality. And yet this image does not and cannot last. The reader becomes privy to this relationship after it has already begun, and again the biographer chooses only to fill us in on the moments leading up to cultural conflict and the subsequent cutting off of Orlando from the gypsies. This again narrows the focus onto Orlando's inability to sustain connection with 'other.' As with Constantinople, the successful moments of this relationship could have been included within the narrative, but the only details the reader is given are those which show a lack of cohesion between the English and non-English.

The demise of this connection arrives with one of the only values Orlando retains throughout the narrative: a love of nature. Described as one of the English “customs or diseases (whatever you choose to consider them) which cannot, it seems, be expelled,” there is again a critique of a quintessential part of English culture (142). In his essay “England Your England,” George Orwell comments that “a love of flowers is one of the first things that one notices when one reaches England from abroad” (England 294). And yet, in calling it a “disease” the narrator seems concerned with this collective feature of the English: is this what England wants as its defining characteristic? While the gypsies use nature as a tool, a means of production, Orlando focuses on its beauty (the gypsies do not even have a word for “beautiful”), thus their rejection of nature as an aesthetic object also calls into question this major tenet of Englishness. Nineteenth century British poetry, as well as the popularity of country life, show nature in some ways defining English life and this “English disease” of loving nature not only marginalizes Orlando from the gypsies, but forces her to assess if Nature is “beautiful or cruel?” (145). As a result, a line is demarcated for Orlando between employing or enjoying nature, or in other words, choosing between her beliefs as an Englishwoman and a “pseudo” gypsy. But here we also see Woolf possibly taking the side of the gypsies; the aesthetic aspects of nature may be no match for its usefulness that the English overlook, and further, that there should be more profound ways of defining English culture than a “love of flowers.”

But inevitably Orlando chooses these English roots:

Slowly she began to feel that there was some difference between her and the gypsies which made her hesitate sometimes to marry and settle down among them forever. At first she tried to account for it by saying that she came of an ancient civilized race, whereas these gypsies were an ignorant people, not much better than savages (147).



Orlando's attempt at rationalizing her difference from the gypsies has clearly imbedded notions of imperial ideology. While she begins to realize that they do not approve of her nature-loving attitude, the only way for her to account for it is to liken them to ignorant savages, rather than perhaps acknowledging their difference in beliefs. Even after Orlando realizes that her "long" history is brief compared to that of the gypsies, she still seeks to "answer such arguments [about her ancestry] by the familiar if oblique method of finding the Gipsy life itself rude and barbarous" (149). The word "oblique" is an interesting addition as the narrator again satirizes the English way; dismissing foreign 'other' as merely "barbarous" is routine to Orlando, as instead of understanding other colonized subjects as merely different, the British looked upon natives as "lacking mental and moral cultivation" (Viswanathan 5). So while Orlando chooses to remain separate from the gypsies, her actions are not surprising through a twentieth century lens which is aware of the cultural prejudices of the British Empire. Woolf brings this to light as a further critique of the established tenets of Englishness. This method of reducing natives to a primitive-like state is "familiar" because it is regularly in practice by the English. By presenting it as slanted and narrow-minded, Woolf protests this system of labeling and casting out natives, making the reader aware of how insular the English can really be.

We also see the gypsies reject Orlando, which offers up a further critique of English culture. When Orlando boasts of her past as an aristocratic Englishman, the gypsies are appalled and offended at her belief that English history is somehow more firmly rooted than their own: "where the shepherd boy had a lineage of such antiquity, there was nothing specially memorable or desirable in ancient birth; vagabonds and beggars all shared it" (148). The biographer here disguises a somewhat radical idea about

English privilege in the language and thoughts of the gypsies; perhaps there isn't anything "special" about English history. If people considered as "lowly" as the gypsies are more deeply rooted in the past, how can the English claim superiority? And although it is gypsies who are allegedly dismissing Orlando's history as inconsequential, it is the biographer that gives us this information herself. As we are aware of the biographer's deliberate subjective tendencies, Woolf uses this as an opportunity to give her own opinion of English privilege and the philosophy of entitlement when in reality antiquity is "shared" by people of all cultures. This moment gestures towards a cultural commonality, a shared history between the English and those considered lowly, common. Orlando refuses to recognize this similarity, but the author forces us to acknowledge it.

Seen in this way, Orlando's inability to sustain a stable relationship with the gypsies is a microcosmic version of England's failures at connection. And yet we see the biographer offer an even more explicit critique of English culture and imperialism within the gypsy space. There is an important break in the narrative where the biographer directly connects Orlando's situation with that of England:

A million martyrs have suffered at the stake rather than yield an inch upon any of the points here debated. No passion is stronger in the breast of man than the desire to make others believe as he believes. Nothing so cuts at the root of his happiness and fills him with rage as the sense that another rates low what he prizes high. Whigs and Tories, Liberal party and Labour party – for what do they battle except their own prestige?...Each seeks peace of mind and subserviency rather than the triumph of truth and the exaltation of virtue (149).

Here the biographer is referencing the "bad blood" that is bred between Orlando and the gypsies, and yet we see her attempt to globalize this situation in terms of hegemonic ideology and English politics. While she says that "millions" have felt these

unchangeable differences, it is British political parties that she uses as a concrete “real world” example above all others. Harking back to Bakhtin’s description of the *bildungsroman*, Orlando’s failures at connection are the way in which her social development is stunted, and in using English politics as a parallel to the failures of connection between Orlando and the gypsies, the growth of the Empire too is portrayed as in some ways stunted. While spatially the British Empire is in the midst of its greatest strength at this point in the novel, Woolf’s readers, equipped with a twentieth century lens, are aware that the inevitable decline and fall of the Empire was due in part to its inability to negotiate cultural terms and cultivate relations with native ‘others.’ Thus Woolf’s inclusion of this failure further emphasizes British imperialism as an unsuccessful endeavor, and the problems with connection are identified as a destabilizing factor in the Empire’s inability to thrive and grow.

Orlando’s Englishness, “the English disease” of loving nature, is what drives her away from the gypsies and inevitably calls Orlando back home: “then Nature, in whom she trusted, either played her a trick or worked a miracle” (150). After this turning point, the biographer henceforth acknowledges the alternate view of nature as seen by the gypsies; now nature can *either* be Orlando’s god bringing her home, or possibly the cruel earth pulling her away from peace, and back towards an England which is later described as a place of “national crisis” (274). And while the relationship with the gypsies does fail, they also in fact make a notable impression on Orlando as she continues to evoke their ideologies in comparison to her own. The question of “What is your antiquity and your race, and your possessions compared with this?” is one that Orlando ponders till the very end of the biography (326). So although this relationship is incomplete and temporary, it



is a connection not easily forgotten. If Orlando is in some ways representative of England and Empire, then this alternate consciousness she carries into the twentieth century encourages a more progressive level of Englishness that does not necessarily exist.

This new, progressive consciousness carries over into her relationship with Marmaduke Bonthrop Shelmerdine, Esquire, an Englishman who is not surprisingly the only connection Orlando sustains. Through Shelmerdine, we see Orlando participate in the economically useful aspects of Empire building by both forming the ultimate connection of marriage with a strong representative Englishmen and producing a son, heir to the Empire. As the prescribed gender roles for women at this time were of wife and mother, Orlando fulfills this role tenfold; not only does she marry an English sailor who has served the Empire himself, but she gives birth to a male child who will produce subsequent generations that will continue in the traditions of his father, just as we saw Orlando do at the beginning of the narrative. Orlando's ultimate locating in England and occupation as mother and wife show that this may be the only type of connection, and action, an Englishwoman is capable of completing.

In The History of Sexuality, Michel Foucault states that nineteenth century Victorian sexuality was motivated by one basic concern: "to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations...in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative" (892). This speaks directly to Orlando's case, for soon after her relationship fails with the gypsies in the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century Orlando's focus becomes "Life and a lover," and her frame of mind remains incomplete until the moment she meets Shelmerdine, whom she becomes engaged to mere moments after first acquaintance (185).

There is a sense of desperation within the pages leading up to their first encounter, as Orlando constantly evokes the idea of the “spirit of the age” as something she is lacking, and something she must inevitably give in to. This “spirit,” we are told, is to “take a husband” (243). Orlando does not really have a choice in this, as when speaking about her need for someone to “lean upon...it was not Orlando who spoke, but the spirit of the age” (246). In other words, this Victorian emphasis on domesticity and family is an expectation that must be met. Just as Woolf labels nature as somewhat trivial in describing the English people, here the “spirit of the age” is also unconvincing; is there not something deeper, or more worthy, of such a title?

It would be difficult to view this portion of the biography as anything but a deliberate attempt at drawing attention to the roles of women in the nineteenth and twentieth century. While Orlando is a man, we see him fulfilling the roles expected of him as an English aristocrat, and now we see the female Orlando attempting to enact her roles as a British woman of wife and mother. In fact, in describing the tone of the nineteenth century, we receive direct information about these roles from the biographer:

The life of the average woman was a succession of childbirths. She married at nineteen and had fifteen or eighteen children by the time she was thirty; for twins abounded. Thus the British Empire came into existence (229).

This is a fascinating moment, as we see the biographer connect the evolution of the Empire not to conquest, but to procreation. And indeed, as Foucault suggested, it is the birth of children that proves most economically and politically useful; the more able bodied men, the stronger the Empire. Within both gendered roles, Orlando strives towards the fulfillment of her duties: the male Orlando who yearned for imperial journeys

now yearns for “someone she can lean upon,” and to be “mated” like every other woman in London so that she too can help build the Empire (246).

Foucault’s words also echo within Orlando’s need for connection because while her sexuality is indeed ambiguous for much of the novel, here we see a definitive gendered role for her as a woman, and one she is inevitably willing to fill. She says, “I am a woman, a real woman, at last” only after she has become attached to the English Shelmerdine (253). For Orlando, being a woman is not an anatomical matter but rather, a national duty. It is in her ability to fall in love and be able to produce children under the laws of marriage that she is able to fully connect to her role as Englishwoman. Woolf may be commenting on the priorities of women here. Is there not something more for women to cling to as definitive of their sex? Orlando goes through a sex change, going to bed one day as a man and examining herself naked in the mirror as a woman the next morning, and yet she *only* feels like a real woman in connection with being a wife. The “spirit of the age” falls short of any substantial place for women in the British Empire, who are expected only to marry, and conceive.

And who better to form this connection with than Shelmerdine?: “He had a castle in Hebrides...had been a soldier and a sailor, and explored the East” (251). In other words, Shelmerdine is the perfect English gentleman.<sup>4</sup> Hovey argues that “Orlando and Shelmerdine participate in the cultural values of empire, which uphold the fictions of national belonging tied to dictions of racial belonging and heterosexual, middle-class respectability (400). In other words, the match between Orlando and her English

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<sup>4</sup> We do, however, see both Orlando and Shelmerdine acknowledge that they were once of the opposite sex. This does not necessarily complicate the reading; it does perhaps show why they were even more representative of the roles of men and women in the Empire: both knew what it was like to fill the others gendered role and therefore participated tenfold in the act of supporting England.



gentlemen is supported by the English ideologies not present in any other erotic relationship of Orlando's throughout the rest of the novel. Orlando's successes seem to rely on Hovey's assertion that "real" English connections must uphold the "cultural values of empire"; with Sasha, notions of racial belonging are unattainable, and the gypsies not only lack racial and economic continuity with Orlando, but are anti-establishment as well, participating in no form of cultural community but their own. And while we see Woolf critiquing this system throughout the novel, ultimately it remains in place, again showing a realist, yet also satiric, image of the English. Woolf encourages change, but is also aware of the difficulties in actually achieving it.

The birth of Orlando's son brings this discussion to a climax as the act of procreation becomes a way in which "desire simultaneously interrupts the bureaucratic machinations of empire and binds the empire together" (Hovey 402). The moments leading up to this event give us no indication that a birth is about to take place. It is called an "undeniable event whatever it may be...the moment it is impossible to deny is coming [which] Orlando herself is clearly unable to ignore any longer" (292). Even when the midwife announces that Orlando has had a boy, the biographer finds it necessary to tell the reader "*In other words*, Orlando was safely delivered a son" (295, my emphasis). Shrouding Orlando's giving birth in the language of necessity further promotes the idea that she is fulfilling her national duties as a woman; it does not matter what it is, so long as it is done with her country in mind. And yet, this duty is encouraged as both a means of disrupting and uniting the Empire:

Hail! natural desire! Hail! happiness! divine happiness! and pleasure of all sorts... anything, anything that interrupts and confounds the tapping of typewriters and filing of letters and forging of links and chains, binding the Empire together (294).

This moment of pleasure glorification seeks to both substantiate and destabilize the meaning behind Orlando's giving birth to a son of the Empire. While the biographer celebrates the pursuit of pleasure and desire inherent in creating a child, she also admits that the pursuit of any desire should in some ways disrupt the general flow of the Empire's solidarity. We see this earlier in Orlando's pursuance of Sasha where his desire for her overshadows his duty as both an English aristocrat and available bachelor to an Englishwoman. The image of an interruption of the "forging of links and chains" here puts the focus of this disruption on notions of imperialism and colonialism, harking back to the image of the moor hanging from the rafters of Orlando's attic. In other words, while the ultimate goal is to bind the Empire, it is not by means of violent conquest and the construction of chains that "links" should be made. So while giving birth to a "very fine boy" allows Orlando to participate in the building of the Empire, it should not encourage the practices she vowed to as a boy of enslaving and murdering those that were not "noble since they had been at all" (14). Woolf is aware that duties must be fulfilled but illustrates that an alternative method of filling them must be found. The concealment of this event in terms of inevitability, juxtaposed to the biographer's emphasis on fulfillment of natural desire, illustrates that while giving birth is a participation in the economic sphere, it is also fulfilling a natural desire, a point which should not be forgotten. Allowing it to be seen as such interrupts the "forging of links and chains" because it takes the emphasis away from performing a national duty, and puts it back on the natural desire for a woman to want to be a mother.

This attitude towards the Empire is also woven into the final pages of the novel. Even as she enters the twentieth century and has fulfilled her duties as an Englishwoman through her marriage with Shelmerdine, Orlando sees the foreign 'others' of her past within the English space, and her failures at connection stay with her till the end of the narrative, presenting themselves (as with Sasha during the Great Frost) in English terms: "Nothing is any longer one thing...someone lights a pink candle and I see a girl in Russian trousers...When I step out of doors—as I do now,' here she stepped on to the pavement of Oxford Street...'I hear goat bells. I see mountains. Turkey? India? Persia'" (305)? Orlando's loss of ability to see the world through a single lens hints at the possibility that she could perhaps develop a new way of looking at the world. There is no longer *just* the English street, but a world beyond those boundaries that leaves "nothing" the same. So while Woolf has inscribed Orlando with notions of Empire *building* through her gendered roles, here we also see her inscribed with notions of foreign 'other,' haunted by the failed connections of her past.

Erica Johnson discusses the idea of national haunting in *Orlando*, saying:

The dynamic of haunting not only enables those living in the present to become aware of histories that have been erased by dominant historical narratives, but also potentially signifies the unrepresentable moment of trauma, be it the trauma of an individual's experience or the collective trauma of genocide or slavery (110).

Orlando's inability to discard her past indicates that she has in some ways been changed by the narratives of 'other' she was originally unable to identify with. While she consistently participates in the dominant historical narrative of the British Empire throughout the narrative, here at the end we see the strongest attempt at inclusion, a Forsterian "No, not yet...No, not there" mentality (Passage 362). There is potential for



progress here even if it is impossible right now or must be postponed. The haunting of Woolf's past encounters does not allow her to move forward without her senses being engaged by those moments which saw her interacting, and often relating, to those outside of the English sphere. If Orlando can be influenced by those connections that could not be sustained, a maintaining of a stable connection with foreign 'other' could have even further transformed his sense of Englishness. Furthermore, the biographer may be telling us that connection was not possible yet by leaving out these moments of permanency through the act of omission. The reader is left with the task of interpreting fact from fiction throughout the biography as a result of the biographer's taking "imaginative" liberties with Orlando's story, and our task may not only have been to *decipher*, but to *fill in* moments of ambiguity that may have allowed for successful relationships. Orlando undoubtedly emerges from the biography changed, but the combination of both Orlando's newly formed cultural awareness and the potentially omitted moments of sustained connection prove that foreign encounters keep the possibility for larger change alive. The narrative then not only presents itself as a critique, but also a call to action which asks the Empire to re-examine its belief system and consider shedding the old traditions of insularity.

That, it seems, is how Woolf reconciles her own critique of the British Empire and Orlando's representation of its faults. Although the final image of Orlando adheres to the idealized Englishwoman's role, the haunting presence of her foreign adventures and the individuals she connected with feed her sense of Englishness after four centuries and on till "the twelfth stroke of midnight, Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen Hundred and Twenty-eight" (329).

“The Invisible Chain”: The Need for Connection among the English and Abroad in  
George Orwell’s “England Your England”

When Mahmoud Ali makes the ironic parallel between Indian and English subservience to the Empire in *A Passage to India*, he initiates an important discussion about the relationship between English subjects and their country. While the English are indeed the governing class, they are still bound by their duties to the Empire. George Orwell’s statement in “Shooting an Elephant” that the white man “wears a mask and his face grows to fit it” speaks to this point as every English citizen is representative of the face of Empire and expected to conform, or grow into conformity, of this prevailing attitude towards the management of the colonies (4). Seemingly this would unify the country, and yet authors like E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf and George Orwell directly oppose this blind conformity. Even with the shared goal of cultural continuity overseas, England in the 1920s and ‘30s could not maintain cohesiveness with such clashing ideologies among its own people about the way to rule the Empire. The disintegration of the Empire would seem to make sense in this context. While former colonies such as New Zealand and South Africa were given independence within this time period, larger colonies such as India and other parts of the Middle East were still under British rule for many years. It was a time of transition, but also a time of tension both within and outside the boundaries of England. How can an Empire survive when its people are wary of their role in it? Orwell’s essay “England Your England,” speculates about the reasons behind the waning of the Empire while also critiquing the lack of connection among English subjects. Writing during wartime in 1941, Orwell examines a time of great transition not only for the Empire, but for the rest of the world. For Orwell, at the root of both problems

lay a combination of class ideology and what he calls “power-worship, the new religion of Europe” (295). While he is critical of the current structure of power in the Empire, Orwell is still an advocate for unity and connection among the English in England. The solution he advocates is not only political but cultural—a shared national tradition. However, Orwell is contradictory throughout the essay in not only advocating for change while clinging to past ideologies, but often disguising his own political agenda in what is good for England. Drawing from his experiences as a member of the imperial army and his own political views, Orwell asks: how can we expect England to connect abroad in its colonies when the country itself is not united?

At the beginning of the essay Orwell claims that the “divisions between nation and nation are founded on real differences of outlook” (291). Whether it is socio-political or merely the treatment of animals, the lack of agreement between, for example England and Spain, can be seen as a difference between cultural qualities specific to each nation. But while Orwell initially positions his essay to be a discussion of these international differences, it becomes apparent almost immediately that his critique is aimed at a different end; Orwell identifies the root of international strife not in cross-national disparity, but in a lack of connection within the boundaries of England itself. There are fundamental divisions among the English people themselves that bar them from any kind of solidarity with other nations, and one of the biggest sources of these divisions for Orwell is the subject of Empire.

What Orwell calls a major “hypocrisy” of the English people is having an anti-militaristic mindset while at the same time “absorbing a quarter of the earth,” by means of violent conquest (296). At this time, the military dictatorships that surrounded England



such as Nazism in Germany and Communism in the USSR appeared to him like echoes of the British tactics against poorer, less developed countries of the Empire, and yet the English looked upon war with deep hatred. What made this denial of the violent work of Empire run even deeper according to Orwell were the differences in opinion among the social classes; much of the working class was not educated enough to grasp the nature of the Empire's existence, the governing-class was, according to Orwell, too "stupid" to care, and the intellectual Left was "ashamed of their own nationality," choosing to embrace a more Europeanized culture over their own (311). Although this assessment is more opinionated than factual, the subject of Empire, especially in this time period, was undoubtedly one of great debate. In this way, Orwell is just another participant in the discussion. While he may not have been a consistent advocate for the survival of the Empire, he was undoubtedly a nationalist and for Orwell, the conflicting opinions held among each social group did not just deny the work of Empire, but jeopardized the success of England as a world power. How then can an Empire survive when it cannot maintain social continuity among its own citizens?

Orwell's own conflict about the work of the British Empire is further illustrated in his semi-autobiographical essay "Shooting an Elephant." At its most basic level, "Shooting an Elephant" is the tale of an imperial police officer's killing of an elephant. The narrator is stationed in Burma, then part of the British Empire, and he describes his choice to kill an elephant that was ravaging the city and killing "coolies" (1). However, the reader is made aware from the beginning of the story that there are deeper conflicts going on within Orwell's mind about imperialism, colonialism, and the "futility of the white man's dominion in the East" (4).

It is when Orwell realizes that he is irrevocably bound to shooting the elephant that he fully represents the “hollowness” of imperialism. In the most famous moment of the story, the narrator describes the large crowd of natives that follows him towards the location of the elephant and his subsequent revelation regarding the decision he is forced to make:

Suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. Here was I, the white man with his gun...seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys...For it is in the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the “natives,” and so in every crisis he has got to do what the “natives” expect of him. He wears a mask and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant. (4)

While in the first half of the story Orwell discusses his dilemma in shooting the elephant, by the end he realizes that as a British imperial police officer, he has no choice. As the agent of imperial rule, he needs to exhibit this control in order to maintain it: “A sahib has got to act like a sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things” (4). In other words, had he not shot the elephant the Burmese would have looked upon him as weak, an impossibility for a representative of the biggest empire in the world. Orwell’s inability to decide for himself as to whether or not to shoot the elephant is not decided by the British, but by the influence of the Burmese. The absurdity of this situation is that a person in charge should makes decisions based on his own will, and yet he must shoot the elephant to maintain literal and symbolic order. To keep people

in line, he has to look as though shooting an animal is the same as shooting an aggressive native; they expect him to do it, so he must. He must also maintain social order and portray himself as above the people, superior and authoritative, because it is his obligation as a representative of the ruler of this country. Thus the all-powerful imperialist becomes, in Orwell's eyes, nothing more than a subject of his own rule. He wears the mask of an imperialist, and must do whatever he can to make it fit. Orwell, according to one commentator, "came less to identify with the Burmese and other oppressed races of the Empire than to see the whole process as debasing the ruler even more than the ruled" (Rossi 2).

While this portrait of an Englishman's relation to Empire shows his ability to maintain an individualist spirit through self-reflection, the narrator is still not a "free agent" and acting as a part of the imperial system (Ingle 11). So while he thinks like an individual, his actions are still bound by his role as a representative of the British Empire. Orwell's critique of the Empire in "Shooting an Elephant" shows that while Englishmen can have dissenting opinions, they are still strongly tied to their country: "above all, it is *your* civilization, it is *you*... Good or evil, it is yours, you belong to it, and this side the grave you will never get away from the marks it has given you" (292).

The questioning of the Empire's ability to lead within "Shooting an Elephant" speaks to Orwell's larger discussion about problems of personal connection. In "England Your England" Orwell asks, "Are there really such things as nations? Are we not 46 million individuals, all different" (292)? Seen in this way, connection is impossible because while the idea of "nation" implies a solid unit, as individuals no one person completely mirrors another in political, social or religious ideology. This bleak vision of



fragmentation is reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which may be why Orwell later claimed that if you were intelligent enough to understand Eliot, you were considered "suspect" and not fit for Empire work; intellectuals such as Eliot and Orwell recognized that the Empire was in a state of crisis. There was a lack of human connection both within and outside the boundaries of England, and this issue was something to be confronted, not avoided. Jed Esty recognized this shared view between the two authors and claimed that "like Eliot, Orwell expressed dissent from ruling ideologies not by eschewing national tradition but by attempting to extract a good nationalism based on ordinary, quotidian, shared English habits" (Esty 220). In other words, continuity and a shared national culture were necessary according to Orwell, but needed to come from somewhere different from a love and respect of Empire.

This is where Orwell ties the question of Empire, and the relationship of Britain as a nation-state to other European nation-states. Up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, England was at the top of what eventually became the other European superpowers because of the size of its domain. The Empire's eventual decline began around the same time that countries such as Germany began to match England in power, and thus the problems of Empire are linked to the formation of the larger European political machinery. According to John Newsinger, Orwell's attitude towards the British Empire changed over time: "He was certainly consistently anti-Imperialist, but his anti-Imperialism was affected by, conditioned by, his more general political stance" (9). In other words, Orwell's attitude towards imperialism was informed not only by the practices of the British Empire, but by the political state of Europe and the world. But while Orwell identified as a Socialist throughout his life, it was not of the totalitarian kind being practiced abroad. Nor were his

political motives within “England Your England” to espouse Socialist ideology. Rather, Orwell seemed to be exposing England’s refusal to understand the political systems of other countries and how this refusal actually impaired England’s ability to rule. Orwell argues that this problem stemmed from the governing class, those who “escaped into stupidity...by keeping society in its existing shape only by being *unable* to grasp that any improvement was possible” (306).

The governing class then, was at the root of the problems abroad. When Orwell says earlier in the essay that differences in outlook deny relations between nations, he inevitably identifies those in charge of administering the law as the ones barring the English from establishing social relations with those abroad. Because the English have the “all important trait” of believing the law to be “incorruptible,” Orwell suggests that the working classes are unable to question or oppose the governing class, thus if the law-makers deny the need for international and political understanding, so does everyone else (298). It was, in a sense, the blind leading the blind:

[The ruling class] could not struggle against Nazism or Fascism, because they could not understand them. Neither could they have struggled against Communism, if Communism had been a serious force in Western Europe. To understand Fascism they would have had to study the theory of Socialism, which would have forced them to realize that the economic system by which they lived was unjust, inefficient and out of date. But it was exactly this fact that they had trained themselves never to face (307)

The danger of ignorance and denial that Orwell describes here is twofold, affecting both national defense and political progress. The governing class’s lack of understanding of

the neighboring political systems would have made it difficult for England to defend itself against the Nazis and Fascists, the “truly modern men” (307). While Orwell in a later essay calls these political movements “lunacy...the disease of nationalism,” he still maintains that a thorough knowledge of other systems is necessary for the survival of your own: “Anti-Semitism should be investigated--and I will not say by anti-Semites, but at any rate by people who know that they are not immune to that kind of emotion” (Anti-Semitism 856). In other words, England’s lack of understanding not only left it defenseless against other countries, but also against the threat of a totalitarian system such as Nazism unconsciously infecting its own way of life.

But Orwell fails to acknowledge that in order to defend England against such political systems as Nazism, England would need to use the same overt military power he directly opposes. Critic James Wood has recently commented on the contradictory nature of Orwell’s political critique, saying Orwell “never really reconciled his hatred of what he called the ‘power instinct’ with a candid assessment of the power instinct that would have to be exercised to effect revolution” (2). In other words, while Orwell wanted political progress, he may not have been willing to implement the tactics needed for such a change.

Just as Orwell was avoiding the truth of his own flawed views, so too did the rejection of foreign knowledge make the English in some ways deny their own faulty politics. This fact is undoubtedly tied to notions of Empire. In 1924, England claimed 25% of the world as its own, but by 1941 much of the Empire had been dissolved and its former colonies declared independent ([britishempire.co.uk](http://britishempire.co.uk)). It is possible that the failure to sustain the strength and size of the Empire was due to the inability of the governing



class to embrace and understand the process of modernization going on right in their backyards; war was everywhere, even within the boundaries of the British Empire, and without a thorough understanding of politics abroad, the English were no longer fully in control of their Empire.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps this denial of change was also due to Orwell's idea that "the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communist' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist and feminist in England" (Road to Wigan Pier). In other words political ideologies like Socialism and Communism went against the traditional, conservative view of politics in England and were considered for the more liberal and progressive. In "training themselves" not to face these modern politics, the English in some ways lost their Empire, which suggests that the waning of the Empire was connected to the increased strength of other European nation-states.

A connection can be made here between Orwell's essay, and both Forster's and Woolf's novels. In *A Passage to India*, the Mr. Turtons and Mr. Heaslops of the novel disrupt the English ability to socially unify by denying the intelligence of the natives and refuse to acknowledge the faults of their own people, such as Adela Quested's wrongful accusations against Dr. Aziz. Just as in Orwell's account the governing class in England barred its citizens from real understanding of those unlike them, so too did the governing class in India dissuade their people from real connection. In *Orlando* we see the biographer controlling Orlando's story so as to avoid the exposure of any kind of sustained or successful connection between Orlando and the non-English. While Orlando could have formed a relationship with non-English characters, this connection would

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<sup>5</sup> The Indian Mutiny in 1857 and the Boer War in West Africa at the turn of the 20th century both signaled the decline of the British Empire. (<http://www.britishempire.co.uk>)

have meant rebelling against traditional notions of Englishness and thus these moments of rebellion in connection are conveniently “lost” in history. The story of Orlando is a story of an aristocrat attempting to navigate his/her way through the centuries while remaining loyal to the Empire; in order to do this Orlando’s understanding of foreign cultures is inevitably suppressed, and in the end she gives up foreign connections in favor of her Englishness.

But while Orwell echoes Forster in acknowledging the barring of foreign social relations, he does not cite cultural differences as the fundamental problem as Forster does throughout much of his writing, including *Passage*. Rather, Orwell places the problem of international disconnect on economic differences within the English class system. While the governing class may have been to blame for barring connection abroad, Orwell cites the divide between them and the common people as the source of England’s disparity. He asks, “Is not England notoriously two nations, the rich and the poor? Dare one pretend that there is anything in common between people with £100,000 a year and people with £1 a week” (299)? Orwell is not only claiming that this difference keeps the English from relating to one another, but if each of these economic classes is seen as a “nation,” then it is implied that each has its own government and laws. Although the lower-middle and working class look to the law of the “people with £100,000 a year” as their own, Orwell argues that they still live to some extent *against* the existing order; they drink excessively, gamble, use foul language, and the majority do not participate in organized religion (294). While the governing classes are bound to conservatism, keeping order, and maintaining the political status quo through the exertion of power, the working classes, according to Orwell, thrive off a more simple pleasure-seeking life. While this characterization may

contain elements of truth, Orwell describes this divide between classes in extremely superficial terms. The differences in income are obvious hindrances to connection, but he discounts the contributions of the English working class. Are they not the real backbone of the Empire? It was the working classes that served in the imperial army and also worked in the factories that supplied everything from weaponry to automobiles for the governing classes. Orwell's sociological analysis falls short because while it does stress the need for the unification of classes, it is not a fair assessment of the working class's contributions to both English culture and Empire.

Throughout the essay Orwell does not advocate for a dissolution of Empire, or boast its strengths, so much as outline who and what is to blame for its failure. Although Orwell is himself an Englishman and former member of the imperial army, he never places any of the blame on himself. There is a contradiction between Orwell's anti-imperialistic view in "Shooting an Elephant" and his arguments in "England, Your England"; while his experiences in Burma force him to reflect on his own role in Empire, here 20 years later he omits an examination of his own personal role and avoids his own inevitable blame, participating in the very act he criticizes in the English governing class.

So although Orwell fails to recognize the working class's contributions, he does mention that both the workers and the rulers contributed to the *fall* of the British Empire and additionally the hatred of England by other countries. Orwell claims that the "power worship" among the governing class leads to both its decay and by extension the decay of the Empire. Further, as a result of its refusal to move away from conservative ideology, the governing class was unable to maintain order within their own country: "only when the money and power are gone will the younger among them begin to grasp what century



they are living in” (309). It is when the old politics of Empire failed that the modern world truly caught up to the English governing class. And although Orwell is critical of the governing class, the working class would not have been willing or able to make connections abroad more successfully without them either. According to Orwell, “even when they are obliged to live abroad for years [the English working class] refuse either to accustom themselves to foreign food or to learn foreign languages...it is the same quality in the English character that repels the tourist and keeps out the invader” (301). So while the governing class was too power hungry, the working class was too narrow minded. Even Orwell’s label of every foreigner as either *tourist* or *invader* contributes to the problem of connection abroad as it does not allow any class the ability to see foreigners as anything but *not* English. In advocating for change, Orwell still acts in the same ways he previously criticized about the English.

In another parallel between class and Empire, the relationship between the governing and working class in England mirrors that of colonizer and colonized. At its most basic level, it is a relationship based on power; one group is in charge while the other is subservient. In addition, the working class, like the natives, is bound by different laws than the upper class even though they are all under the same “British” umbrella. Hegel’s master/slave dialectic describes this relationship; the upper class relies on the lower class for its existence; it needs something below itself, something to control as well as something to profit from. Thus without one, there is not the other. Orwell in fact describes the lower classes’ ability to control their rulers:

The nation is bound together by an invisible chain. At any normal time the ruling class will rob, mismanage, sabotage, lead us into a muck; but let popular opinion

really make itself heard, let them get a tug from below that they cannot avoid feeling, and it is difficult for them not to respond (303).

This invisible chain is an interesting image. While a chain is made of different links there is still a connection from one to the next, a unity of parts. However, the chain that Orwell describes cannot be seen. This makes sense within the boundaries of England; it is inconceivable that the governing class is in any way controlled by those below them, thus the invisible chain enables the action to occur, but still allows the governing class to continue denying what it does not care to see. The social divide within the boundaries of England mirrors the divide between colonizer and colonized that the narrator saw in "Shooting an Elephant": "When the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys" (4).

For all of the above reasons, Orwell appeals to England for a shared national tradition that is distinct, knowable, and above all devoid of class distinction and will provide an "emotional unity" for the country (303). Orwell even cites the creation of an "indeterminate" social class, one that is "most definitely *of* the modern world" and includes occupations that are neither of the governing nor working class such as film producers and industrial chemists. In calling for a new shared tradition Orwell looks forward to modernity as a time of constructive change, where the creation of new jobs allows for a breaking down of the older class distinctions (314). This new indeterminate social class, of course, is an extension of the middle class. This hope for universal class status is suspect, however, as Orwell himself "memorably placed his origins in the 'lower-upper-middle class,' a truly indeterminate designation" (Rose 29). So although he

looks to a new social order as a solution to class divide, he seems to only elevate the interests of his own social status.

But according to Orwell, a national tradition can emerge stronger in this climate because it denies the governing class power; this new middle class was educated, progressive and evolving with the rest of the world and thus more in touch with the changing needs of England. Although it is not the complete answer to a more unified England, Socialism is inevitably part of Orwell's solution to England's discontinuity, as it creates a more level playing field for all English citizens, while also establishing a more acceptable definition of Englishness that does not include the abuse of power or political ignorance. But here Orwell seems to disguise his own political agenda in talk of "national unity." While he looks at Socialism as a way to bring people of all classes together, it would mean a complete transformation of a centuries old way of rule, not to mention giving a governing, ruling body even more strength. Orwell wanted the dramatic change in class structure but without, as Wood earlier suggests, an abuse of power, which is unrealistic in light of such an enormous political transition. His argument is therefore limited because what he is proposing as a solution in some ways just strengthens the old way of doing things he claims to want to eradicate.

But the "emotional unity" Orwell calls for seems to be a response not only to the need for reconfiguration of politics and class, but also to the "fragmentation" of English characteristics noted earlier (292). While there is no doubt of the recognizable aspects of English culture, many of these habits such as the love of flowers and stamp collecting are, according to Orwell, part of private life, and even the communal ones such as "the pub, the football match, the back garden, the fireside and the nice cup of tea" are "unofficial"



and thus not able to firmly connect the people (294). While these activities and attributes establish community, they are still a part of an individual culture which sees citizens choosing what they want and do not want to participate in. Additionally, they are simple pastimes that Orwell does not deem serious enough to establish a firm connection.<sup>6</sup> That is not to say that Orwell advocates for an authority over culture; rather, it seems that only when England can come together through something *shared* and *official* that points of connection can occur and that a pattern can be made “out of the muddle” (292).

Orwell’s identification of “emotion” as the binding force between all English citizens is made explicit through his metaphor of England as a family:

It is a family in which the young are generally thwarted and most of the power is in the hands of irresponsible uncles and bedridden aunts. Still, it is a family. It has its private language and its common memories, and at the approach of an enemy it closes its ranks. A family with the wrong members in control – that, perhaps, is as near as one can come to describing England in a phrase. (304)

While Orwell remains critical of this “English family,” the image provides a sense of emotional unity through a shared history, bound by blood. Every family has its dysfunctional members and often those at the top of the hierarchy are not meant to lead, but you cannot avoid the fact that you are forever connected to these members just as they are connected to you, no matter how problematic it is to define any nation by bloodline. But therein lies the opportunity for deepest connection among the English; it is a country with its diversity of habits and ideologies, but an emphasis on patriotism,

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<sup>6</sup> This is ironic considering the national traditions that have formed since. England’s national traditions, according to those abroad, are still associated with this realm of simple pleasures such as tea time and football.

national safety, and a collective memory can bring the English people closer together, and thus more likely to sustain connections abroad: “English civilization is somehow bound up with solid breakfasts and gloomy Sundays, smoky towns and winding roads, green fields and red pillar-boxes” (292). Orwell seems to say that the sooner the people acknowledge connection through these shared moments between *individual* families, the sooner England can move confidently into modern life as one larger family. And yet, Orwell again contradicts himself in not only calling for an emphasis on private life, but pushing for an insular and conservative image of what it means to be English. Although the image of the family is one that cannot deny connection among its people, it goes against Orwell’s earlier critique of the governing class as too reliant upon old traditions and habits. So while emotional unity is a solution, it may again only occur within the constraints of old notions of Englishness.

Orwell also believes that in order for emotional unity and the movement towards a more modern nation to occur, patriotism needs to come together with intelligence (312). This seems to be a fusion of both his argument for political renovation and the need for a common nostalgia for England’s past. Not only does England need to acknowledge its shared history but also move towards the future, embracing industrial progress and the possibility of new forms of government with new people in charge. The Empire saw its demise partly through the governing class’ inability to evolve with the rest of the world, and it is Orwell’s hope that England can have the “power to change out of recognition and yet remain the same,” or in other words maintain a sense of solidarity while moving into the future – an ambitious if not utopian dream (315). Lest we forget that less than 20 years later Orwell would be predicting an England filled with brainwashing and the same

militaristic “boot crashing down on a face” step he claims the English would mock if ever performed by the British army (297)?<sup>7</sup> As a 21<sup>st</sup> century reader, it is difficult to read Orwell’s solutions to the waning Empire and national disparity as anything but doomed for failure.

Orwell took the title of his essay from W.E. Henley’s poem “For England’s Sake,” which asks “What have I done for you, / England, my England? / What is there I would not do, / England my own” (Hammond 204)? In light of “England Your England,” this poem reads like an outline for Orwell’s analysis of England and his hopes for its future. While he identifies the ways in which the country is failing, Orwell still maintains that there are distinct national characteristics that cannot be denied that call for every Englishman and woman to stand up and take ownership over his country’s future. It is these notions of Englishness, for Orwell, that can truly bind the country together and allow England to remain “an everlasting animal stretching into the future and the past” (315). But as Orwell calls this strong national tradition the site of both England’s strength and the cause of its weak relations abroad, this essay stands as a testament to how little Orwell’s suggestions could have really done to change to England.

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<sup>7</sup> This phrase is used both in this essay and in 1984.



## Conclusion

In speaking of James Joyce's *Ulysses* as having postcolonial tendencies, Declan Kiberd argues the following:

What Joyce showed is that growth—the encounter with others—is more a matter of happy accident than deliberate design. It is what happens to the older Leopold as well as the younger Stephen, when the desire for mastery is ablated, when old routines are challenged, and the new practices which might replace them have not yet hardened into a system. (285)

If Kiberd's assertions are true, then here in this context *Ulysses*, a canonical modern British novel, can be seen as wound up in issues of the postcolonial, the challenging and critique of old ideologies and the proposal of new ones. While Joyce was speaking on a different subject matter, these themes are also directly addressed in Forster, Woolf and Orwell's writing, and conceptually then this thesis engages in a discussion of "postcolonial modernism," a hybrid genre that takes modernist tropes and overlaps them with postcolonial concerns. While each author subjects his or her narrative to individual viewpoints, the topics of colonialism and imperialism are clearly imbedded in all of the texts examined within this thesis, and thus have implications for not only the study of Empire, but a new understanding of the modern British novel as having a connection with postcolonialism.

The importance of such a pairing is partially explained by Pericles Lewis in *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* in which he asserts that the social and political events of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as the rise of British Empire, contributed in one way or another to the rise of modernism. He argues that, "in a sense, the crisis of liberalism was itself a crisis of representation, that is, of political

representation...” (16) In other words, the growth of modernism was in part a response to the questionable realities of established politics in England. If the foundations of modernism were built to a certain extent on notions of a crisis in political representation, then the connection of the postcolonial critique to this movement actually allows for a better understanding of why modernism was founded in the first place. Imperialism became suspect at the same time that modernists became suspicious of other social systems, and thus “postcolonial modernism” is a way of organizing one crisis of representation into a category which is inclusive of other authors writing about and critiquing the same issues.

If modernist writers did feel that they were “living through the ends of an old order,” then the call for friendship between Aziz and Fielding at the end of Forster’s *A Passage to India* could not have spoken louder (Kiberd 269). A connection, to use Kiberd’s term, must be a “happy accident” for these two men, since transnational relationships are shown in the novel to be based on power, not friendship. But the *possibility* for a delayed connection that Forster predicts looks forward into a time where the Empire’s strength has either waned to the point that it can no longer dictate the terms of any relationship, or has put into practice new traditions and practices that would allow for a more stable relationship between ruler and ruled based on mutual respect, rather than power and control. The last conversation Aziz and Fielding have even speculates, and in some ways predicts, the formation of India as a nation: “No foreigners of any sort! Hindu and Moslem and Sikh will all be one!...India a nation! What an apotheosis! Last comer to the drab nineteenth-century sisterhood! Waddling in at this hour of the world to take her seat! (361) So although in actuality India is a latecomer to independence from

the Empire, Forster's inclusion of this moment relishes a time of change while at the same time shedding light on the injustices of current practice; Fielding pokes fun, but as 21<sup>st</sup> century readers we are aware that India does succeed in achieving nationhood.

England was changing around Forster while he was writing this novel; through the modernist tendency towards realist representation Forster shows the reality of Empire, while through a post-colonial lens he projects change and growth.

Woolf's critique of English values in *Orlando* follows this thread as Orlando's historical reality is filled with images of imperialism, privilege, and national duty that not only illustrate the make-up of Empire but expose this reality as flawed and in need of renovation. The biographer's conclusion that "society is one of those brews such as skilled housekeepers serve hot about Christmas time, whose flavour depends upon the proper mixing and stirring of a dozen different ingredients" speaks loudly to this point as a traditional image of English culture is combined with the larger implication of a society that depends on the "proper" mixing of ingredients (193). Although Orlando inevitably clings to this notion, it is in his/her inability to change that we actually see Woolf encouraging what Orlando cannot yet do. Woolf wants a new kind of Englishness that not only accepts and connects with other cultures, but one that also considers adapting its ostensibly superior way of life. This is why Orlando cannot forget the gypsies in the last pages of the novel; their simplicity is appealing to her although she does not yet have the ability to conform to it. Like Forster, the *possibility* for new practices is the message to be carried away from the novel, and Woolf embraces the idea of progress while both recognizing and challenging the current system.



According to Kiberd, “few [modernist] writers ever carried their radicalism so far as to endorse George Orwell’s critique of British imperialism” (270). Orwell’s account of the failures of Empire combined with his call for connection among the English actually deepens our understanding of *Orlando* and *A Passage to India*. While both these novels criticize the Empire and emphasize the need for transnational connection, Orwell locates the fundamental problem of connection directly within the boundaries of England.

Although his essay is undoubtedly the most explicitly critical of Empire out of the three primary texts examined in this thesis, his solutions for change are somehow more limited than those of Forster and Woolf. Perhaps the *possibility* of change in the fictional narratives produces a stronger response than Orwell’s proposed solutions because as 21<sup>st</sup> century readers, we know socialism never does take the place of the established political system in England. But it seems that time and history allow Orwell the ability to fine tune his opinions; rather than proposing changes, he eventually gives in to the inevitable outcomes of war and imperialism and writes about the consequences instead. For Orwell, “England Your England” is just the beginning. In subsequent years, his non-fiction as well as novels like *Animal Farm* and *1984* illustrate the results of political systems gone wrong as a result of the wrong people in charge.

Modernism as both a movement and field of criticism is a broad category, composed of novels, essays and poetry reaching across continents and spanning over a 50-year period, and the discussion of this literature is at its best only when it is broken down into specific lines of inquiry, such as that of British colonialism, imperialism, and nation. This subcategory is just gaining ground in the field of modernist criticism, and this thesis seeks to participate in this new conversation which offers a stronger emphasis

on issues of Empire. Furthermore, as the idea of “blurred boundaries,” was at the center of Forster’s novel, so too must the cross-discipline of modernism and postcolonialism be acknowledged as a way to negotiate between a modern novel’s tendency towards social critique, and the specific critique of an Empire which saw both its peak and decline within the timeframe labeled “modernism.” While all three authors were critical of the British Empire within these texts, a better understanding needs to be developed of how their responses not only informed the subject of Empire, but actually became a part of its narrative, so that Forster, Woolf and Orwell not only wrote of Empire, but helped define it in history.

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