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**Nomadic Texts: Travel Narratives and Interwar
Women's Writing**

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**A Thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the
School of Histories and Humanities**

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Declaration

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Summary

The years between the wars saw many changes in perceptions of geographical distance, reconfigurations of national boundaries, the destabilization of colonial empires, aesthetic experimentation, and new considerations of the nature of gender and subjectivity. Each issue arguably has an impact upon the composition of women's travel writings, and in an effort to extrapolate these themes, each chapter in this dissertation will address one of the topics of geography, nationalism, imperialism, genre and identity through the lens of a single woman author's texts.

The first chapter examines Vita Sackville-West's representation of locations in England as inconducive to women's creativity and suggests that she presents an environment abroad in *Passenger to Teheran* which nurtures women's writing. Using feminist geographers' theories on the *flâneur* and on women's access to space, I will look particularly at Sackville-West's geographical representations of both the city and the country as ill-suited for women. I argue that she indicates a discovery of new spaces abroad corresponding to the 'in-betweenness' of her garden environment, which serves as a source of creative inspiration, and resonates with Foucault's vision of the heterotopia.

The second chapter explores how Rebecca West views England, in a manner similar to Sackville-West, as a country where women are denied participation as nationalist subjects, and argues that West finds alternative feminine locations abroad. Within the pages of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, composed at the end of the 1930s, West remaps Britain onto the feminized Yugoslavian landscape, reconfiguring room for the feminine in the nationalist arena. The complication with her portraiture, however, is that her appropriation of space abroad for a political end resonates with colonial projects.

The questions raised by West's work lead into the third chapter which scrutinizes Karen Blixen's 1937 *Out of Africa* in order to address how women's travel writing participates in the theatre of imperialism. In many cases, women's accounts access a voice of command by 'borrowing power' at the expense of the subaltern. In this regard, women writers perpetuate the native inhabitant's 'otherness' as a means of augmenting their own sense of literary authority. I suggest that Blixen's work is quite subtle and that while seemingly adopting an authoritative stance, her infusion of a mixture of tones and genres into her piece offers a nuanced mimicry. Her work reveals her writing as performative which destabilizes the very notion of a masterly voice; the presence of moments of writing that corresponds to *écriture féminine*, undermines the very authority of the writing, and reveals her text to be a masquerade.

This amalgamation of genres, narrative voices and disguise leads to the fourth chapter which concentrates on Rose Macaulay and her nomadic movement through literary genres. Using a framework of intertextuality, I argue in this chapter that Macaulay collapses the distinction between travel writing and fiction by engaging a myriad of voices. Macaulay challenges the traditions of women's writing as autobiographical and subverts the conventions of the interwar travel narratives which usually unveil the author's consciousness; the presence of an 'authentic' Macaulay cannot be distinguished behind the layers of narrative masks and through the layers of quotations.

The final chapter argues that Kate O'Brien is interested in examining representations of split subjectivities. O'Brien's characterization in both her fiction and

her travel writing, particularly *Mary Lavelle* of 1936 and *Farewell Spain* of 1937, presents women's movement away from home as essential to the formulation of new, multiplicitous and creative subjectivities. Distance facilitates space for new consciousness, including the artistic 'I' which makes writing possible. Applying Rosi Braidotti's notion of the nomadic consciousness to O'Brien's texts, I argue that O'Brien presents a vision of travel as fostering the creation of both new gender and artistic identities. This notion, of course, leads back to Sackville-West's understanding of travel as an opening out of new spaces for female creativity.

I am interested in demonstrating how these women travel writers were nomadically traversing generic and gender boundaries in a quest to seek out new literary landscapes, uncover new locations for female creativity, and map out alternative female identities. At a time when travel and wandering became representative of the modernist consciousness, these women sought out room for a female writers' subjectivity, and found an 'elsewhere' within their textual spaces.

Acknowledgements

In his poem, 'The Importance of Elsewhere,' Philip Larkin wrote: 'Lonely in Ireland, since it was not home / Strangeness made sense.'¹ Like Larkin, the 'elsewhere' of Ireland has helped me make sense of strangeness and has, I believe, contributed to my understanding of other women's travel narratives; without leaving home and arriving in Dublin, I doubt that I could have written a dissertation on women's travel writing. What was unexpected during this process, however, was the manner in which Ireland would become home; numerous people have offered conversation, company, support and advice which have helped me create a home here. Thank you to Elizabeth Aracic, Zélie Asava, Bettina Baldeschi, Anthony Blackwell, Bart Budding, John Carr, Félicie Cazes, Suzanne Dow, Kristen Durkan, Emily Edwards, Erin Finucane, Susan Fiscus, April Gallwey, Keren Hanan, Libby Hanna, Ross Higgins, Leah Hollstein, Johanna Hoorenman, Mary Jauregui, Maxime des Longchamps, Naro Longchar, Edward Madigan, Louise McCaul, Alexandra Murphy, Clarence Nihon, Erin Nugent, Deirdre O'Donnell, Chessa Osburn, Leigh Redemer, Jennifer Redmond, Janejai Sererat, Sarah Shamim, Jeanne Spillane, Ashley Temin, Maryann Valiulis and Laura Zetterberg.

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¹ Philip Larkin, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. 105.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: The Importance of 'Elsewhere'

*'Women will find the unknown!'*¹

A protagonist in Rose Macaulay's 1934 novel about a group of English tourists in Spain, *Going Abroad*, muses upon the modern youth's proclivity for travel, concluding that:

'The young are always in such a hurry to be somewhere other than where they are.'²

Two years earlier, the Vicar in Elizabeth Bowen's *To the North* expressed a similar sentiment in a conversation with Emmeline and Sir Roberts in his reflection that

'[n]owadays, the whole incentive to motoring seems an anxiety to be elsewhere.'³ Both

excerpts capture the sense of movement and restlessness that dominated the artistic

sensibilities of the interwar period, and they articulate the era's preoccupation with the

possibility of existing elsewhere, of an identity in motion. The impression that Bowen

and Macaulay each cultivate in their quotations is one of a generation experiencing a

general, inchoate, dissatisfaction with life in the present and seeking out parallel lives and

subjectivities in removed spaces and locations; each author draws attention to the

permeating urgency and drive to *be* at another site. The emphasis that both authors place

upon 'elsewhere' exemplifies the mood of writers who belonged to what Gertrude Stein

deemed 'The Lost Generation' of artists who felt disconnected from the traditions of the

past and from their position at home. Stein herself morosely declared that 'there is no

there there'⁴ upon her return to her native home of Oakland, California in 1937,

¹ Simone de Beauvoir and H. M. Parshley, trans., *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage Books, 1997), p. 723.

² Rose Macaulay, *Going Abroad* (London: John Lehmann, 1948), p. 19.

³ Elizabeth Bowen, *To the North* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 64.

⁴ Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (London: Virago Press, 1985), p. 251.

emphasizing the loss of any association with a previously existing sense of home in that location. Reading Stein's declaration of the impossibility of *being* in a present place in tandem with her recognition of an artistic sensibility of the generation highlights the impact which the perception of displacement, detachment, estrangement, and the resulting incessant movement in the era had upon artistic creations.

Indeed, Modernist literature, which displays new understandings of consciousness and explores innovative forms to present selfhood, is dominated by writers who shared a restless anxiety following the war and who examined their domestic nations from expatriate communities. Malcolm Cowley describes in his 1934 *Exile's Return* how the period bred a class of writers who were perennially unhoused and searching for a new location of belonging. Monsignor Darcy in Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* summarizes the pervading sentiment of the period in his discussion with Amory Blaine: 'With people like us our home is where we are not.'⁵ Although Cowley's text is primarily concerned with American authors such as Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Pound and Eliot and their commonality in exile, his words describe themes significant to a wider group of European writers, including Joyce, Lawrence, Greene, and Waugh. The years between the First and Second World Wars mark an historical moment where the perception of uprootedness prompted renegotiations of identity. The propensities towards travel and motion were reflected in the creation of new literary forms by writers originating from both sides of the Atlantic.

Considering the circumstances, it is unsurprising that the amount of published travel narratives was considerable during this period Paul Fussell refers to as 'the final

⁵ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 25.

age of travel.’⁶ Many reputed authors who had earned fame as novelists and critics ventured across generic boundaries to compose travel accounts and described their experiences of movement through landscapes elsewhere. Fussell’s exploration of British travel writing in the 1920s and 1930s, *Abroad*, which has proved to be a foundational study for most subsequent examinations of the travel writing genre, examines how the claustrophobic dis-ease of home life prompted many authors of the period to dream not only of imagined territories abroad, but to contribute to the textualization of other spaces.

In Fussell’s estimation, the youth’s tendency towards restlessness was sparked by the conditions that resulted from the outbreak of the First World War: ‘The fantasies of flight and freedom which animate the imagination of the 20’s and 30’s and generate its pervasive images of travel can be said to begin in the trenches.’⁷ Fussell’s theory that the collision of a variety of cultures, the mass displacement of people, and the remapping of national boundaries after the war exposed a new generation to the thrill of adventure resonates with the Cowley’s descriptions of the generation:

It was lost, first of all, because it was uprooted, schooled away and almost wrenched away from its attachment to any region or tradition. It was lost because its training had prepared it for another world that existed after the war. (and because the war prepared it only for travel and excitement). It was lost because it tried to live in exile.⁸

The cataclysmic circumstances of the war within which Cowley’s contemporaries matured cracked the very foundations of the provenance they had known. Out of the ruins of an old world came a frenzied lust for ‘travel and excitement’ and a search for

⁶ Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. vii.

⁷ Fussell, *Abroad*, p. 4.

⁸ Malcolm Cowley, *Exile’s Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 9.

meaning from the perspective of distance. In the words of Fitzgerald's Blaine, it was a generation 'grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken.'⁹

Notably absent from Fussell's work on British travellers, which primarily focuses on Lawrence, Greene, Waugh, Byron and Douglas, is any recognition of women writers' presence amongst those enraptured by the prospects of movement abroad and enthralled by the potential of an existence elsewhere. Of course, as Fussell points to the experience of the war as a significant factor in shaping writers' imagination of distant territories, it does, perhaps, follow that women, whose first-hand participation in the war effort was relegated to work as ambulance drivers, nurses, Voluntary Aid Detachments, and other form of auxiliary services, might not have been as prone to the 'fantasies of flight and freedom' as the men of their generation. Yet, in light of women's social position as representatives of domesticity, women's dreams of escape and of leaving could prove even more urgent than those of their male counterparts who theoretically faced fewer restrictions to movement. The existence of a plethora of works published by female travel writers of the period, further, offers evidence that a considerable number of women were travelling and were recording their voyages throughout the time. Several anthologies of women travellers that have emerged in the last decade or so, the titles of which include Jane Robinson's 1991 *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travellers*, Shirley Foster and Sara Mills' 2002 *An Anthology of Women's Travel*, and Mary Morris 1994 *The Virago Book of Women Travellers*, contain sections on writers who were producing accounts during the 1920s and 1930s. The presence of so many travellers amongst the pages of these anthologies attests to the fact that women were frequently in

⁹ Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*, p. 260.

transit crisscrossing the globe, and that they expressed the thrills and delights, as well as the tribulations, of travel within writing.

Considering, further, the feminist argument that women exist on the borders of a cultural scene raises significant questions regarding women's experience as wanderers.

According to some theorists, women are not only often relegated physically to the private sphere, but are pushed to the margins of the governing order; although they are cosseted within the home, women, as the Other, are thus themselves 'unhoused,' and represent boundary subjects. Julia Kristeva has suggested that all women are both strangers to themselves and are foreigners on the cultural scene: 'All women are female voyagers in perpetual transit over foreign lands in which they never quite feel at home.'¹⁰ This notion echoes Beauvoir's view that 'overburdened, submerged, she becomes a stranger to herself because she is a stranger to the rest of the world.'¹¹ This notion of 'perpetual transit' resonates with theorist Rosi Braidotti's perception of female identity as a nomadic subjectivity moving between selves.¹² The understanding of the position of women as exiles or nomadic figures fundamentally primed for transition and movement suggests that women's travel writing might potentially offer an insight into a particularly female experience. Naturally, any attempts to piece together a narrator's perception or uncover an author's voice from the traces of a carefully crafted text must consider the restraints of production and narrative discourse that influence the authors' compositions. Examining women's travel accounts is thus as much a project to explore aspects of women's writing as it is an investigation of representations of female subjectivity.

¹⁰ Anna Smith, *Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), p. 29.

¹¹ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 353.

¹² See Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

While some academics have scrutinized women's negotiations of the travel culture and literature in the context of the Victorian period, and Sidonie Smith has fascinatingly explored women's travel writing throughout the twentieth century, few scholars have examined women's expressions of their travel experiences composed at a time when movement was frequent, and perceptions of nationalism, language and identity were subject to immense reconfiguration. The numerous works on Victorian women travellers range from Dea Birkett's celebratory overview of what she sees as the eccentric escapades of *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers*, to Sara Mills' more critically founded study in *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, which engages a Foucauldian framework to analyze women's adaptations of the travel writing discourse.

In this work, I hope to build upon the existing arguments surrounding female travel narratives by concentrating on the as yet unexamined terrain of women's travel accounts within the interwar context and their intersections with fictional texts. The exploration of representations of travel in other generic forms by the same authors illuminates themes that re-emerge in their travel writing, and offers a point of comparison and contextualization of the women writers' narrative voices. I am interested in how women's travel writing of the period opens out new geographies for women's subjectivity of a female in transit, and in how negotiations of a traditionally male genre reveal new literary landscapes. I argue that examining women's *écrits de voyage* within the context of an historical period when travel was conflated with being, and when the concepts of both gender and writing were contested and transformed, yields formulations

of new spaces for women's identity, for women's writing, and for women's identities as writers.

Historical Contexts of the Period

The First World War and Technological Advances

As Paul Fussell has already convincingly argued in *Abroad*, the First World War saw a series of conditions converge to generate a pervading sentiment of restlessness and an exodus of writers and artists in the years of peace following combat. Echoing sentiments articulated by Cowley, soldiers' experience of intense stimulation on the battlefield primed them for a life of exhilaration which a return to mundane existence at home could not reproduce. In his evocation of the post-war atmosphere that he provides in the Prologue to *Exile's Return*, Cowley emphasizes the stagnant boredom of a return to peace and the incompatibility of an energized generation with the conventional civilian life:

Soon they would be leaving for the army in France, where they would be subjected together to a sudden diversity of emotions: boredom, fear, excitement, pride, aloofness and curiosity. During the drab peacemaking at Versailles they would suffer from the same collapse of emotions. They would go back into civilian life almost as if they were soldiers on a long furlough.¹³

For Cowley, the war deeply impacted its participants in that the return to a routine way of life was unfathomable.

Other authors record a different experience of the return to domestic life, but similarly emphasize the difficulty in resuming a pre-war existence. Vera Brittain, who worked as a VAD nurse at the Front in France, reflects in *Testament of Youth* on how the

¹³ Cowley, *Exile's Return*, p. 5.

time of peace, which the world anticipated as 'divine normality,'¹⁴ in truth ushered in a bleakness. Brittain describes her sense of loss and her outlook on the world through 'dull eyes, into a singularly empty future.'¹⁵ When resuming her interrupted course at Oxford, Brittain is struck by a sense of the futility of her studies. She explains how 'going back felt disturbingly like a return to school after a lifetime of adult experience.'¹⁶ After seeing the horrors of a world at war, settling into the same cloistered and Arcadian life that Brittain had left seemed to her a dismissal of the experiences she had gained.

Those persons who witnessed the war first hand, however, were not the only ones influenced by the experience of transitioning from battle into peacetime agreements; civilians, circumscribed within the space of their own national boundaries during the war, were once more granted access to other landscapes. As might be expected, the circumstances of the War limited commercial travel, and regulations such as the Defence of the Realm Acts (DORA) of 1914 and 1915 in Britain restricted international movement. Throughout the continent, posters dissuaded unnecessary travellers from expending scarce resources on leisurely excursions within the country. The rationing of food and coal meant an augmentation of physical constraints fastening people to the circumference of their homes.¹⁷ Before the outbreak of the war, the only countries to require passports were Russia and the Ottoman Empire and citizens were met with few impediments to a liberated wandering abroad. With a widespread introduction of passports in 1915, travellers' fluid transitions across national borders were significantly

¹⁴ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co., 1979), p. 467.

¹⁵ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, p. 469.

¹⁶ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, p. 474.

¹⁷ Fussell, *Abroad*, p. 9.

curbed.¹⁸ The portrait Fussell paints of the English perception of the atmosphere on the home front is of a crushing claustrophobia.

In stark contrast to the caged limitations of the war, peacetime was marked by a monumental global migration and by the increased access to technologies which affected perceptions of geography and distance. The modes of transport which had been implemented during the war for battle and troop transportation were made available for public voyages. Critic Alison Light notes that 'the war left a surplus of transportation which saw former destroyers turned into luxury liners and cruisers, and made possible the growth of air travel. Tour companies expanded as did scheduled flights.'¹⁹ The remnants of the war, which had forced stringent regulations on touring, played a role in making travel accessible to the general population. Travel became commercialized, evidenced in the burst of advertising campaigns, and those who could afford the luxury of holidays travelled abroad with increasing frequency.

Rose Macaulay illustrates the post-war era in her survey of English society through the ages in *Life among the English* as one bursting with a glittering energy and an indulgence in freedom and movement: 'Travel was resumed, and more people escaped to the continent than ever before. The roads were jammed with cars; cocktails and successive dances crossed the Atlantic; swinging old rhythms gave place to monotonous jogging.'²⁰ The impression Macaulay gives is of a world opened up to travel with fluid exchange between cultures. For her, the pace of life itself altered in accordance to the pulse of new tempos. The mood that Macaulay attempts to capture in the text is the

¹⁸ Fussell, *Abroad*, p. 24.

¹⁹ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), p. 89.

²⁰ Rose Macaulay, *Life among the English* (London: Prion, 1996), p. 89.

scintillating spirit and momentum of 'The Jazz Age,' characterized by the spontaneous verve of innovative patterns of music. The improvisational aspects of jazz, which disrupt the expectations of musical form, have come to represent the hedonistic indulgences of the first years following the war; it is a dazzling atmosphere of dancing and motion and 'escape' to other locations. The shower of 'successive' trends indicates that the world is in a perpetual flux and is shifting and changing with a frenzied rapidity; no longer is distance an impediment as fashions traverse continents and cars accelerate movement.

The car, as scholar Andrew Thacker describes in his examination of modernity's changing spatial perceptions, *Moving Through Modernity*, 'symbolizes an absolutely modern experience,'²¹ and the speed and ease of transport is emblematic of the period. Macaulay herself was notorious for her enjoyment of the momentum and thrill of the hurried pace that driving a car provided, and several of her biographies draw attention to her love of motoring and her reputation as a rather reckless driver. Knowledge of Macaulay's delight in cars comes from her own descriptions. From the first lines of her section on 'Driving a Car' in *Personal Pleasures*, Macaulay articulates the ecstasy of movement in mythical terms:

To propel a car through space, to devour the flying miles, to triumph over roads, flinging them behind us like discarded snakes, to rush, like Mulciber, from morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve, a summer's day, up hill and down, by singing fir woods and blue heath, annihilating countries and minifying kingdoms—here is a joy that Phaethon, that bad driver, never knew.²²

The long sentence with its rush of images and rapid transition between scenes and countryside demonstrates in the very text the heady whirl of speed and motion. Time is condensed as the hours blend from 'morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve,' and the

²¹ Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 175.

²² Rose Macaulay, *Personal Pleasures* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1968), p. 129.

juxtaposition of images such as 'fir woods' and 'blue heath' similarly minimizes the distance and they become momentary flashes in an inextricable flurry. As the brief quotation demonstrates, the car represents an access to travel and movement across borders; it is a vehicle for transport which intensifies nomadic wanderings.

Virginia Woolf similarly expresses her pleasure in motoring, and she emphasizes in her diary the impact cars have upon modern society:

We talk of nothing but cars...This is a great opening up in our lives. One may go to Bodiam, to Arundel, explore the Chichester down, expand that curious thing, the map of the world in one's mind. It will I think demolish loneliness, & may of course imperil complete privacy.²³

The car is a pioneering technology offering freedom and mobility; it provides a means to reduce geographical distances and human separation. For Woolf, the automobile represents an increase of interaction and exchange which stimulates the imagination of distant territories; driving, in her opinion, 'expands...the map of the world in one's mind.' The availability of automobile technologies which increased the speed and ease of individual movement had an impact on the modern perception of space and geography.²⁴ The commercialization of travel machinery made the awareness of speed a condition of modernity and influenced a shift in emphasis on, as Kimberly J. Healey articulates, auto-examination during travel: 'the destination became less important than the extracorporeal means of locomotion...[as] technological innovations race against time as well as toward a destination.'²⁵

²³ Virginia Woolf and Anne Olivier Bell, ed., *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 3: 1925-1930* (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), pp. 146-147.

²⁴ For a study on Virginia Woolf and the automobile, see Makiko Minow-Pinkney, 'Virginia Woolf and the Age of Motor Cars,' in Pamela L. Caughie, ed., *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000).

²⁵ Kimberly J. Healey, *The Modernist Traveler: French Detours, 1900-1930* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), p. 54.

The sense of increased travel speed is of course best represented by the airplane, which was first employed for commercial flights between Paris and London in 1919.²⁶

Emmeline, one of the female protagonists in Bowen's *To the North*, takes a plane to Paris with her lover Mark, and observes the process of flight with fascination:

The roar intensified, there was an acceleration of movement about the aerodrome as though they were about to be shot out of a gun; blocks were pulled clear and they taxied forward at high speed, apparently to the coast. For Markie the earth was good enough, he could have asked no better; he observed, however, from Emmeline's face of delight that something had happened: earth had slipped from their wheels that, spinning, rushed up in the air. They were off. Dipping, balancing, with a complete lack of impetus and a modest assurance the plane returned to her element over the unconcerned earth.²⁷

As an employee in a travel bureau, Emmeline is an instrument of commercial travel, but the agency's motto of 'move dangerously'²⁸ as well as Emmeline's enthrallment with speed and motion suggest her passion for adventure. Although the character is not herself a pilot, her portrait of the experience of flight prefigures some of the travelogues documenting aviatrixes' journeys such as Amelia Earhart's 1928 *20 Hrs., 40 Min.* about her historic transatlantic flight of the same year, and Anne Morrow Lindbergh's 1935 *North to the Orient*. Interestingly, Sidonie Smith argues that the influx of female aviators and the feminization of air space helped commercialize flight:

With her historic flight across the Atlantic in 1928, Amelia Earhart was drawn into the selling of aviation. In order to domesticate aviation and to facilitate the development of commercial aviation—to make the skies a safe and comfortable space for consumers of air transport—the earlier representations of flight as daring, dangerous, remote, and romantic had to be displaced by another kind of representation.²⁹

Bowen's piece, however, seems to contradict Smith's argument; while Emmeline's flight is commercial and the plane itself is feminized, the text emphasizes the hazard, peril and

²⁶ Healey, *The Modernist Traveler*, p. 56.

²⁷ Bowen, *To the North*, p. 135.

²⁸ Bowen, *To the North*, p. 23.

²⁹ Sidonie Smith, *Moving Lives: 20th Century Women's Travel Writing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 93.

uncertainty of dangerous movement. Further, several women's texts from the era, including Beryl Markham's *West with the Night*, which was published in 1942 but chronicles her flights through the 1930s, and, as we shall see, Karen Blixen's 1937 *Out of Africa*, maintain the romance and masculinised daring of aviation and celebrate the vantage points that flight produces.

Other technologies that gained ubiquity in the years following the war arguably influenced a shift in the awareness and experience of the world. The initiation of BBC radio broadcasts in 1922 connected localities and linked countries with a 'simultaneity that made physical travel seem antediluvian by comparison.'³⁰ News from the far reaches of the globe could be ascertained without any lapse in time so that distant communities gained immediacy and knowledge of home could be consumed in remote areas. During her travels around Iran which she documented in her 1926 *Passenger to Teheran*, Vita Sackville-West, for one, reflects in wonder upon the juxtaposition of different nations that radio induces when she articulates how 'you may hear Big Ben striking on the wireless in Teheran—with such discrepancy in time that although black night covers Persia, London still basks in a June evening—news comes to us no later than it flickers round the electric sign in Trafalgar Square.'³¹ The relative accessibility of radio broadcasts signals that the sense of a shrinking world generally pervaded all classes and was not an impression exclusively cultivated among the privileged. The historian Eric Hobsbawm suggests that the radio, in part, revolutionized the life of disenfranchised subjects and distorted perceptions of geographical distance and divisions by conveying information about the world into the private realm: 'It is perhaps not surprising that the

³⁰ Michael North, *Reading 1922: A Return to the Scene of the Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 16.

³¹ Vita Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran* (London: Arrow Books, 1991), p. 61.

radio audience doubled in the years of the Great Slump, when its rate of growth was faster than before or later. For radio transformed the life of the poor, and especially the housebound poor women, as nothing else had ever done. It brought the world into their room.'³²

Similarly, the booming Hollywood movie industry of the 1920s created ubiquitous icons such as Charlie Chaplin, whom Hobsbawm deems 'the greatest personality (to whom few self-respecting modern poets failed to address a composition).'³³ The widespread popularity and accessibility of films helped to formulate a cultural point of reference that transcended languages and national boundaries, and facilitated the universalization of entertainment. Michael North underscores the correlation between film and travel and describes how cinematic depictions of distant spaces were accessible to widespread audiences. North highlights the 'association...between travel in space and the aesthetic transposition of film. The ease with which the new media could bring ancient Egypt to Seattle or Los Angeles made everyone a potential world traveler in a world of manufactured representation.'³⁴

The rise of the British documentary over the next decade offered, according to the historian Peter Watson, 'a very different way of filming the 1930s,'³⁵ and had the capacity to present a visual image of the daily concerns of distant lives such as the tea pickers depicted in Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon*.³⁶ Documentaries of the period provided a removed audience insight into how other people from foreign environments

³² Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century: 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1998), p. 195.

³³ Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 183.

³⁴ North, *Reading 1922*, p. 24.

³⁵ Peter Watson, *A Terrible Beauty: A History of the People and Ideas that Shaped the Modern Mind* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), p. 327.

³⁶ Watson, *A Terrible Beauty*, p. 328.

experienced life. Similarly, the proliferation of personal cameras influenced the documentation of quotidian life through a visual frame as 'men and women learned to see reality through camera lenses.'³⁷ Such sentiments are exemplified by the famous opening lines of Christopher Isherwood's 1939 nostalgic account of Germany before the war, *Goodbye to Berlin*: 'I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking.'³⁸ Cinema emerging from both sides of the Atlantic during the interwar era thus influenced outlooks by emphasizing the acquirement of knowledge through observation and presenting innovative perceptions of time and space. Films' omnipresence across cultural divisions, juxtaposition of locations and condensation of temporal units, minimized geographical breadth and shaped the perception of time.

The advent of documentaries and the 'motion picture' contributed to the installation of a perception which began in the last few decades of the nineteenth century of the 'the world-as-exhibition.' Within the book *Colonising Egypt*, Timothy Mitchell, referencing Heidegger's 'The Age of the World Picture,'³⁹ argues that at the end of the nineteenth century Western modes of knowledge 'set the world up as a picture...and ordered it before an audience as an object on display, to be viewed, investigated and experienced.'⁴⁰ In her study on women and the Modernist visual culture, Maggie Humm describes how new specularity was fundamental to modern epistemologies: 'The production of new representations of cognition, of new ways of seeing and knowing the world, became the common project of the Modernist writers Woolf, Joyce and Richardson as well as Modernist artists, such as Picasso and Braque in their cubist

³⁷ Hobsbawm, *Age of Extreme*, p. 193.

³⁸ Christopher Isherwood, *The Berlin Novels* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 243.

³⁹ Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy: Humanism, Antihumanism and Being* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 182.

⁴⁰ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 6.

periods.’⁴¹ This European tendency to consider the world available for visual consumption, able to be dismantled and reconfigured, and perhaps redefined, is most explicitly exemplified by the popularity of photomontage amongst Dadaist artists in the 1920s. Examining the ‘cutting up [of] the world picture,’ North describes how ‘in 1922 photomontage was the preferred form of Berlin dada, of Alexander Rodchenko in Russia, and of Max Ernst.’⁴² Arguably, the increased proliferation of images in the period reified the notion of the world as available for interpretation, discovery and exploration.

Changes in Geographical Space

One result of the widespread implementation of new technologies such as the automobile, film and radio was the sense of a decrease in geographical expanse, and a renegotiation of space. The emphasis on the pulse of motion and speed that resulted from the production of new machinery had an influence on the modern experience of place and perspective, evidence of which is reflected in art forms ranging from futurist sculptures to city planning. Stephen Kern examines in his fascinating text *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918* how, in part, the advances in steel production and concrete allowed for the development of architecture devoted to the ‘art of space,’ which influenced redesigns of city skylines and environments in the early twentieth century.⁴³ The 1920s saw an explosion of interest in the urban landscape with movements headed by architects such as Le Corbusier who proposed designs for an ordered city triumphing over the chaos of nature. In his publication of *Urbanisme*, later translated into *The City of Tomorrow* in

⁴¹ Maggie Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Culture: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography and Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), p. 2.

⁴² North, *Reading 1922*, p. 137.

⁴³ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 157.

1925, Le Corbusier intertwines identity with the urban, and recasts the metropolis in terms of poetic inspiration: '[Towns] use up our bodies, they thwart our souls...A town is a mighty image which stirs our minds. Why should not the town be, even to-day, a source of poetry?'⁴⁴ Le Corbusier's recognition of the essential importance of space on the individual experience underscores the significance of design upon the modern identity. The heightened flux of movement, speed and energy from the presence of cars and transportation in the modern metropolis informed urban 'designs [which] embodied the idea that the modern individual, living his or her life in a city, is always in a hurry, anxious to be on his or her way to work or home. The core structure therefore became the street, rather than the square or vista or palace.'⁴⁵ This theme of change in the modern city is one that I will revisit in the context of Vita Sackville-West's writing, with particular attention to women's experience of the urban environment.

On a larger scale, the advent of new travel forms was a factor in the change in perception of geographical boundaries, which were subject to colossal reconfiguration following the peace treaty process of the First World War. Many writers have implicated both automobiles and airplanes as contributing to the redesign of maps and redrafting of national frontiers. When Rose Macaulay describes the pleasures of speed in 'Driving a Car,' she emphasizes the impression that motoring brings of 'annihilating countries and minifying kingdoms.'⁴⁶ The violence implicit in the phrase is overshadowed by the sense of release from constructed political divisions. In a reference to the ascent of aviation at the turn of the century, the journalist Victor Lougheed expressed a similar

⁴⁴ Le Corbusier and Frederick Etchells, trans., *The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning* (London: The Architectural Press, 1971), p. xxi.

⁴⁵ Watson, *A Terrible Beauty*, p. 34.

⁴⁶ Macaulay, *Personal Pleasures*, p. 129.

view regarding the machine's potential impact on space by claiming that airplanes effaced 'the artificial barriers of nations' boundaries.'⁴⁷ The increase of speed and movement thus diminished the perception of difference through distance and offered the illusion of uniformity in a fractured world.

Problematically, implications of imperialism exist beneath the surface of such statements celebrating the 'annihilation of countries.' While the interwar era saw the incipient fissures in the authority of western empires, the figurative re-mapping of the globe without the details of cultural distinction re-inscribes a sense of colonial domination in its elimination of the traces of other subjects. Several authors admonished the flattening out of views that the universalizing of perspectives entails. Malcolm Cowley describes how the period saw an erosion of cultural differences with the explosion of the mass-market as 'regional traditions were dying out; all regions were being transformed into a great unified market for motorcars and Ivory soap and ready-to-wear clothes.'⁴⁸ Author Kate O'Brien similarly anticipates a narrowing of geographical distances with the increased frequency of scientific advances and writes in her introduction to her 1937 travel book, *Farewell Spain*:

The woes and beauties wrought hitherto upon the map by differences of language, faith and climate will be no longer worth consideration, for even if they are still potential—they will be controlled, patrolled by science, the international dictator, which in any case, by air-travel, radio, television will have made all possible novelties into boring fireside matters-of-fact. The world will be flat and narrow, with the Golden Horn a stone's throw from the Golden Gate and nothing unknown beyond any hill.⁴⁹

O'Brien underscores how the development of air-travel, radio and television have negated the novelty of difference and left a monotonous global landscape. All the world, in O'Brien's description, is already 'known,' has been mapped out, conquered,

⁴⁷ Quoted in Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, p. 244.

⁴⁸ Cowley, *Exile's Return*, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁹ Kate O'Brien, *Farewell Spain* (London: House of Stratus, 2001), p. 3.

dominated and grasped. There are no new geographies to explore that remain untainted by the incursion of new technologies. The universality of locations, in her opinion, has flattened out topography; space itself has contracted to the extent that the Golden Horn is easily accessible from the Golden Gate.

Interestingly, O'Brien indicates her consideration of this 'narrowing' of the world as the source of a generation's esteem of the vagabond and the tendency towards wandering. In a later travel piece documenting her impressions of her native Ireland, O'Brien answers her own query: 'So why do the children stray? The world has narrowed; mere mechanics have brought it all into one habit, and a transistor or a tube of Pepsodent in Ballyhaunis is indistinguishable from its equivalent in Mexico City.'⁵⁰ The quotation suggests that not only does the diminishing of cultural frontiers make travel effortless but that the collapse of geographical distinction creates an emptiness which compels wandering or 'straying' and stimulates dreams of an imaginary 'elsewhere;' with the dissatisfaction of a shrinking globe came frequent envisioning of 'other' environments abroad.

Imaginative Geographies of Elsewhere

Richard Pine posits that: 'To leave the hearth, for whatever reason, is to look for an *other* place.'⁵¹ In recent decades, theorists have drawn attention to the 'kind of fetishization of other cultures, of the elsewhere, or of the image and figure of travel'⁵² that have informed

⁵⁰ Kate O'Brien, *My Ireland* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1962), p. 69.

⁵¹ Richard Pine, 'Where is this Place? Kate O'Brien, Autism and Modern Literature,' in John Logan, ed., *With Warmest Love: Lectures for Kate O'Brien, 1984-1993* (Limerick: Mellick Press, 1994), p. 81, italics his own.

⁵² James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 43.

representations of the perception of nomadism and of alternative spaces. The 'fetishization of other cultures, of the elsewhere' during the interwar era might be best exemplified by events which bookend the two decades: in 1939, the release of *The Wizard of Oz*, which includes the now classic 'Over the Rainbow,' offers what Salman Rushdie has since described as 'a celebration of Escape, a grand paean to the uprooted self, a hymn—the hymn—to Elsewhere,'⁵³ while the phenomenally popular film version of *The Sheik* starring Rudolph Valentino was released in 1921. Billie Melman describes how the interest in Arabia as an exotic location supplanted Africa and India as the usual backgrounds to romance. 'The switch,' she argues, 'was provoked by the mystique of the Arab revolt, and the romantically supercharged legend of Lawrence of Arabia.'⁵⁴

Egypt was similarly fetishized as a scene for the imagination, and 1922 saw the explosion of Egyptomania throughout Europe and America. When the archaeologist Howard Carter unearthed King Tutankhamen's sumptuous tomb in the Valley of the Kings, he sparked such an interest in the event that women's fashion and architectural design boasted an Egyptian influence.⁵⁵ The glimpse into a historical era that the excavation exposed sparked a cultural fixation on the evidence of a now lost past. Considering the sublimated sense of uprootedness and rupture with historical continuity that Cowley describes as characteristic of the generation, the interest in archaeological expeditions and the study of ruins that blossomed in the 1920s and figure in many writers' works (including those by Agatha Christie and Rose Macaulay), signals the project of a renewed search for origins; the search for 'elsewhere' might be understood as

⁵³ Salman Rushdie, *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002* (London: Vintage Books, 2003), p. 14.

⁵⁴ Billie Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination of the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988), p. 94.

⁵⁵ North, *Reading 1922*, p. 19.

an attempt to recover both an alternative location and a search for a lost time. Historian Peter Watson describes how 'much of the fascination in Middle Eastern archaeology, however, lay not in finding gold but in teasing out fact from myth. By the 1920s the biblical account of man's origins had been called into question time and again.'⁵⁶

The widespread fascination with archaeology in the western world during the period mirrors the investigation and scrutiny of myths in the anthropological sphere as a way of tracing human origins. James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, originally published in 1890, examined the universality of myth and religion and influenced the classicist Jane Harrison and the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. Malinowski, who developed the process of ethnographic fieldwork, composed his own study on *Myth in Primitive Psychology* in 1926. Andrew Von Heady argues in his book *The Modern Construction of Myth* that the literary Modernist fascination with myth originated from a celebration of 'a condition of group-think sharers of an organically unified society,'⁵⁷ the reclaiming and re-appropriation of ancient myths in the creative sphere was a means of connecting with an established tradition. T.S. Eliot described in a review of Joyce's *Ulysses*, '*Ulysses, Order and Myth*,' how myths such as Homer's epic function as 'a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.'⁵⁸ Von Hendy suggests that Yeats, Eliot and Lawrence

agree in their conviction that the distance can be annihilated, that in myth we experience the racial past immediately. In reply to the melancholy historicism of their Victorian predecessors, they develop concrete phenomenological accounts of transactions that

⁵⁶ Watson, *A Terrible Beauty*, p. 249.

⁵⁷ Andrew Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 203.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Stephen Coote, *T.S. Eliot: The Wasteland* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 28.

occur in a special space, comparable to Bergson's 'intensive manifold,' outside of clock-time and history.⁵⁹

The anxiety over origins that accompanied the break with aesthetic and historical heritage contributed to the quest to seek out 'other' settings elsewhere that corresponded to an imagined ideal. After confronting the knowledge of horrors that emerged from the experience of The Great War, the writers and artists were bereft of a sense of belonging, home and placement within a traditional lineage; cast out of the metaphorical garden of Eden, the 'Lost Generation' considered themselves doomed to wandering in search of a revised arcadia beyond the wastelands. Both utopian and dystopian literature of the period, which includes Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* published in 1932, arguably grew out of a re-imagining of possible alternative realities and locations.

One of the most prominent examples of an author dispirited by the stain of a post-war world that all of Europe displayed was D. H. Lawrence, whose pessimism 'about the loss of organic community, rural mystery, and human vitality in a Europe desiccated and sickened by modernity,'⁶⁰ triggered his search for a naturalistic alternative space. Lawrence's fascination with the fantasy of cultures unfettered by the weight of modernity reflected a more pervasive interest in primitivism as an appealing alternative to the turmoil and commotion of contemporary existence. The writer's desire to uncover a community more accommodating to his preference for an organic and rural experience pressed him to travel extensively around the world. In his quest for belonging and rootedness, Lawrence's ever thwarted discovery of an 'elsewhere' compelled him to

⁵⁹ Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, p. 135.

⁶⁰ Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 48.

remain *en route*, so that ultimately, like many of the writers in this study, 'the place he finally belonged was in transit.'⁶¹

Changes in Perceptions of Gender and Women's Access to Space

Included in the awareness of and relation to shifting borders and spaces that developed during the interwar period was the transformation of gender boundaries. These changes developed from new views on women's roles and social positions as well as from new attitudes towards women's bodies and femininity. Recent feminist scholars have argued for an examination of women's experiences in spatial terms as a means of drawing attention to the overlooked social barriers limiting women's movement. Shirley Ardener describes how 'societies have generated their own rules, culturally determined, for marking boundaries on the ground, and have divided the social into spheres, levels and territories with invisible fences.'⁶² Underlying Ardener's statement is the notion that feminist advances help challenge the geographical limitation imposed upon women. Rose Macaulay prefigures the more recent feminist geographers when she connects the women's movement and the claim on space through the narrative voice in *Told by an Idiot*. The novel traces the saga of an English family from the last decades of the nineteenth century through the tumultuous changes of the early twentieth century:

There was proceeding at this time a now long forgotten campaign called the Women's Movement, and on to the gay youthful fringe of this Stanley and her friends were catching. Women, long suppressed, were emerging; women were to have their share of the earth, their share of adventure, to flourish in all the arts, ride perched in hansom cabs, even on monstrous bicycles, find the North Pole...⁶³

⁶¹ North, *Reading 1922*, p. 12.

⁶² Shirley Ardener, ed., *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps for Women* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), pp. 1-2.

⁶³ Rose Macaulay, *Told by an Idiot* (London: Virago Press, 1983), p. 30.

The quotation associates women's suffrage with a reclaiming of space on 'their share of the earth.' In the passage, participants of the Women's Movement are adventurers and travellers crossing innumerable boundaries to explore new territories. Indeed, the success of women's political movements, such as the suffragettes' gain of votes for women over 30 in England in 1918,⁶⁴ translated into geographical changes as some women's sphere of political influence widened and they gained access to a public domain beyond the cordon of home.

One way in which women were able to demonstrate political clout was in the Feminist Pacifist Movement that gained force in the 1920s. Organizations such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) sought influence over the decisions made in the League of Nations and argued that women had a stake in the outcome of international affairs that exceeded both gender and national limitations. Jo Vellacott, who traces the projects of such women's groups, describes how the leaders of the organizations strove to express opinions and 'take action as women, not as citizens of Britain, France, Germany or any other country.'⁶⁵ Woolf masterfully maps out such notions in *Three Guineas*, where she draws a link between the increase in women's sphere of influence and the potential for peace. Numerous women of the period considered females exemplary pacifists since, as many believed, motherhood had primed women for roles as nurturers and protectors. Muriel Mellown describes Vera Brittain's views of women's inherently peaceful attributes:

Brittain connected pacifism with feminism since she felt that women's basic nature, both psychological and physiological, impels her to create and preserve rather than destroy

⁶⁴ Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties*, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Joe Vellacott, 'Feminism as if All People Mattered: Working to Remove the Causes of War: 1919-1929,' *Contemporary European History*, 10:3 (2001), p. 387.

life. The male principle she generally associated with power, domination, and aggression, while the female she linked with love, compassion and forbearance.⁶⁶

Other writers including Rose Macaulay and Winifred Holtby, however, were more cautious about making broad connections between femininity and pacifism, preferring instead to emphasize women's potential contribution as citizens: 'Winifred Holtby's feminism and her pacifism were slightly different. She was reluctant to believe in an innate femininity and masculinity, adhering instead to an ideal society.'⁶⁷ These issues of gender and political influence were of interest to Rebecca West and I will explore the concept of women and nationalism in further depth in the context of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*.

Yet despite some advances to women's legal status, the interwar era in Britain was marked by a pervasive conservative ethos as women were encouraged to remain circumscribed within the realm of the domestic. Studies such as Alison Light's *Forever England*, Deirdre Beddoe's *Back to Home and Duty*, and Gail Braybon's *Women Workers in the First World War*, examine the media's impact on conservative values as circumstances dictated women's place in the home. Any progress in employment women had made during the war including strides towards acceptance into unions and higher paid work was negated in the years following the war. Naturally, female workers voiced understandable frustration when the 'Restoration of the Pre-War Practices Act' of 1918 mandated the discharge of women from their wartime jobs. 'By 1921 the female

⁶⁶ Muriel Mellown, 'Reflections on Feminism and Pacifism in the Novels of Vera Brittain,' *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 2:2 (1983), p. 223.

⁶⁷ Marion Shaw, "'Alien Experiences': Virginia Woolf, Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain in the Thirties,' in Steven Matthews and Keith Williams, eds., *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After* (London and New York: Longman, 1997), p. 49.

participation rate in the workforce was 2 per cent lower than that for 1911.⁶⁸ Although there were some changes to the structure of the labour force to compensate for those killed in the war, men's job security was the government's most salient concern and women were pushed to return to their previous posts or back to their 'duty' as homemakers. The media was instrumental in reflecting the shift in the cultural climate as newspapers abounded with hostile articles and advertisements which emphasized the significance of domesticity. Scores of new magazines bearing titles such as *Mother*, *Woman and Home*, *My Home*, *Modern Home* and *Good Housekeeping* were launched between 1920 and 1945.⁶⁹ The pervading sense of the years following the war was that women's access to public space was significantly curtailed as they were pressured to remain within the constraints of the home.

Women's bodies, further, were themselves the site of considerable transformation as the discourse of the period contested the boundaries of gender categorizations. The proliferation of new images of young women with boyish frames and short hemlines as emblems of the decadent indulgence of the age signals a shift in perceptions of women's sexuality and form. Billie Melman, in her study of representations of the flapper in popular discourse, unpacks some of the cultural anxieties surrounding the new styles:

after the First World War there was a change in the physical appearance of women that made them—both in the literal and in the metaphorical sense—figures of fun. No other topic, it seems, inspired contemporaries with greater ribaldry and witticism. The character of the contemporary woman is familiar. The tube-like silhouette is that of a juvenile androgyne, exaggeratedly emaciated and curveless... To the contemporary mind there was something alluring in the blurring of the distinctions between the sexes, in the very unwomanliness of the modern young woman. On the other hand, the effacement of gender seemed to be, and was interpreted as, a symptom of decay, an outward sign of an internal racial degeneracy and moral decline.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars, 1918-1939* (London: Pandora Press, 1989), p. 48.

⁶⁹ Beddoe, *Back To Home and Duty*, p. 14.

⁷⁰ Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties*, p. 22.

The 'effacement of gender' distinctions indicates a renegotiation of traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity and a remapping of the boundary separating the two sexes. Melman argues that the flapper represented an androgynous neutrality which attracted a significant amount of criticism and disdain.

For many female writers of the period, however, androgyny was embraced as an alternative to biological essentialism and the constraints of femininity. Authors such as Rose Macaulay and Kate O'Brien played with depictions of androgynous characters in their novels, and Vita Sackville-West described in her memoir, *Portrait of a Marriage*, her views on the converging similarities between the sexes: 'I hold the conviction that as centuries go on, the sexes become more nearly merged on account of their increasing resemblances...I advance, therefore, the perfectly accepted theory that cases of dual personality do exist, in which the feminine and the masculine elements alternately preponderate.'⁷¹ Recognizing the embodiment of both male and female aspects, Sackville-West undermines the distinctions between genders as her unification of binary pairs challenges the very notion of oppositional dichotomies. The most recognized celebration of androgyny is Woolf's articulation of the 'androgynous mind' belonging to the ideal artist that she sets out in *A Room of One's Own*. Elaine Showalter has criticized Woolf for her projection of a sexless writer, but while Woolf is calling for an effacement of gender categories, she is simultaneously seeking out room for the female experience. Woolf's concept of an androgynous consciousness is of particular importance for women as her project demands a reconsideration of gender boundaries in order to claim new territories for the female voice.

⁷¹ Vita Sackville-West and Nigel Nicolson, ed., *Portrait of a Marriage* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), pp 107-108.

Travel Writing in the 1920s and 1930s

With the sense of dislocation, restlessness and detachment that characterized modern consciousness in the years between the wars, it is understandable that much of the writing that emerged during the period reflected an interest in the search for a location of home, and that the publication of travel writing flourished; the modern tendencies towards travel had an impact upon writing across a variety of forms. Travel and writing have come to be recognized as intricately interlaced as travel is frequently employed as a metaphor to illustrate the author's process of creation and the readers' experience of literary encounter. Grewal and Kaplan describe in *Scattered Hegemonies* how 'writing is travelling from one position to another.'⁷² Similarly, Anna Smith uses travel as a symbol to expatiate on Kristeva's views of language, claiming that 'when we read or write, we inevitably follow the traveller's impulse and steer a course across unknown countries with the help of a map.'⁷³ Writing offers the imagination space for exploration and the text itself becomes a landscape through which the reader can wander. With the close associations between travel and writing, then, it is hardly surprising that in a time when rootlessness and homelessness were part of the modern condition that writing itself would transform. Indeed, it was in this time period that the concept of the novel was re-examined and revolutionized and that travel writing changed significantly from its previous objective and scientific mould.

In fact, the terms that critics have used to describe the changes in modern literature in the twentieth century suggest that the generic distinctions between travel

⁷² Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds. *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transitional Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 143.

⁷³ Smith, *Julia Kristeva*, p. 11.

writing and fiction were collapsing since the novel displayed characteristics of the *récit de voyage*, and travelogues became, in Samuel Hynes' words, 'parabolic journey[s], then, into the self and into the past, in search of meaning.'⁷⁴ George Lukács, reflecting on the form of the novel, argued, as Edward Said explains, that 'the compelling force that the novel, a literary form created out of the unreality of ambition and fantasy, is the form of "transcendental homelessness."⁷⁵ Echoing the terminology of displacement, some scholars argue that the creation of fiction manifests out of a desire to position an identity within language. Rosemary Marangoly George, for instance, posits that the 'search for the location in which the self is "at home" is one of the primary projects of twentieth-century fiction in English.'⁷⁶ Andrew Gurr similarly voices this view when he argues that 'this sense of home is the goal of all the voyages of self-discovery which have become the characteristic shape of modern literature.'⁷⁷ The writing of the modern novel is marked by an attempt to map consciousness onto a literary terrain, and this description of the novel parallels the project of travel literature to record the protagonist's wandering and homelessness. The genres of travel writing and the novel have, of course, always overlapped and are not rigid classifications. The scholar Percy G. Adams has traced many of the traits commonly associated with the novel, such as the use of the narrator, the development of character and the progression of action, back through other historical forms of writing. In *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*, Adams points to

⁷⁴ Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: The Bodley Head, 1976), p. 230.

⁷⁵ Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Publications, 2001), p. 181.

⁷⁶ Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 3.

⁷⁷ Andrew Gurr, *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1981), p. 13.

the expectation of *vraisemblance* of distant locations within the emerging novelistic genre which depended upon historical accounts and other *récits de voyage*.⁷⁸ But while Adams demonstrates how travel writing has always been closely linked with the novel, the changes to both generic traditions in the years following the war reveal how the two forms became even more inextricably connected; just as the novel incorporated literary voyages, travel writing exhibited aspects often associated with fiction.

Fussell has described the difficulty in categorizing travel writing within simplistic generic traditions as it is often an intersection of such types as autobiography, quest romance, memoir, and the comic novel.⁷⁹ The complexity of classification is exacerbated by the changes within the conventions of modern travel writing; one of the subtle distinctions that set the travel literature of the interwar era apart from the tendency towards exploration and documentation of works from previous centuries, what Sara Mills deems 'factual' texts,⁸⁰ is the emphasis on the interior journey of the narrative voyager. No doubt this shift in the vision of travel was influenced by the interest in Freudian psychology and the exploration of the unconscious. Samuel Hynes' understanding of Graham Greene's *Journey Without Maps* is as an 'interweaving of two strands: the narrative of the actual journey, with its particular observations, and the interior journey, composed of memories and reflections of the personal life.'⁸¹ Greene himself points to the psychological significance underlying his decision to explore Africa, and the journey hints of colonial implications and an attempt to locate past civilizations:

⁷⁸ See Percy G. Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983), p. 15.

⁷⁹ Fussell, *Abroad*, p. 206.

⁸⁰ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), p. 81.

⁸¹ Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 230.

There are times of impatience, when one is less content to rest at the urban stage, when one is willing to suffer some discomfort for the chance of finding...as Her Heuseur puts it in his African novel, *The Inner Journey*, one's place in time, based on a knowledge not only of one's present but of the past from which one has emerged.⁸²

Greene's incorporation of his personal experience into his observations of another culture, and his technique of 'making landscape and incident—the factual materials of *reportage*—do the work of symbol and myth—the materials of *fable*,'⁸³ illustrates a chief feature of the travel writing of this period.

To describe the accounts that emerged following the First World War as uniform is, of course, misleading; the plethora of works convey a variety of moods and the general tone of travel narratives shifts with the inexorable approach of the Second World War. Mirroring some of the broader changes to literature within the two decades, travel writing of the 1930s is marked by an awareness of political urgency and a post-ideological ennui. Maroula Joannou rightfully warns against any crude division of 1920s and 1930s writing as a movement from aesthetic experimentation to political diatribes:

While the literature of the period certainly acquired a more materially grounded dimension and somewhat different ethical concerns than before, the interest on aesthetic experimentation which had marked the 1920s was not simply replaced by a new interest in politics in the 1930s as is often supposed.⁸⁴

The demarcations between decades are mere signposts, useful for description but hardly definitive classifications, yet many studies, including Bernard Schweizer's *Radicals on the Road* and *Cultural Encounters*, edited by Derek Duncan and Charles Burdett, are dedicated to exploration of the particular political circumstances that produced travel writing in the 1930s. They argue that the cultural climate of the period was charged with sentiments of nostalgia and a search for a 'primitive' past by a generation of discontents.

⁸² Graham Greene, *Journey Without Maps* (London: Vintage, 2006), pp. 19-20.

⁸³ Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 228, italics his own.

⁸⁴ Maroula Joannou, ed., *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender, Politics and History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 5.

Compared to the attitude towards travel as an escape and a veritable pleasure of movement that Vita Sackville-West communicates in the 1926 *Passenger to Teheran*, those pieces written with the recognition of the violence of the Spanish Civil War and the acknowledgment of another looming global war exhibit a mournful sense of loss for a pervious existence and for irrecoverable spaces. As I will examine further in the context of Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, the 1930s marked the finale of insouciant exploration. The myriad titles of canonical travel texts written about the period indicate the intense nostalgia inherent in the works as their authors lament the diminishing pleasures of a travel culture. Waugh's *When the Going Was Good*, Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*, not to mention Blixen's *Out of Africa* and O'Brien's *Farewell Spain*, all invoke sentiments of an irreclaimable time and location. A perception of inevitable movement away from a climate of innocence and possibility pervades much of the period's textual productions; Andrew Thacker notes that as early as 1931, D.H. Lawrence lamented how 'superficially the world has become small and known [...] we've done the globe and the globe is done.'⁸⁵ Inherent in Lawrence's declaration is the weight of the absence of mystery and potential exploration and frontiers, and a nostalgic harkening back to a time, however illusory, when 'the unknown' conjured romantic expeditions.

Like Lawrence, many writers such as Waugh and O'Brien bewailed the irrevocable changes to the travel experience that they had enjoyed. Waugh's introduction to *When the Going Was Good* predicts an end to carefree wandering when impediments to movement and the rise of commercial voyages began to hinder the crossing of

⁸⁵ Andrew Thacker, 'Journey with Maps: Travel, Theory, Geography, and the Syntax of Space,' in Charles Burdett and Derek Duncan, eds., *Cultural Encounters: European Travel Writing in the 1930s* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), p. 17.

boundaries that was once permissible: 'My own travelling days are over, and I do not expect to see many travel books in the future... There is no room for tourists in a world of displaced persons.'⁸⁶ Kate O'Brien similarly envisions the cessation of idle meandering in *Farewell Spain*, which was written as a response to spectacle of a country she adored in the process of self-destruction. O'Brien forecasts that 'there will be no more sentimental travellers anywhere.'⁸⁷ Without question, the impression these writers portray is of the interwar era as a golden age of wandering, but they further demonstrate how the celebratory exploration of 'elsewhere' of the 1920s was slowly replaced by an elegiac sentimentality for freedom and movement when the shadow of a new war threatened to reconfigure the global landscape.

Explanations of Travel

With the emphasis on psychological aspects of the journey in interwar travel writing, as well as the pervading nostalgic tone in the texts published in the years leading up to The Second World War, it is appropriate to examine the psychoanalytical explanations underlying the desire to leave home. Freud wrote about his own visit to Athens in a paper published in 1936 entitled 'A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis,' where he reflects upon the fulfilment of his desire to visit the ancient city. Dennis Porter interprets a sentence in Freud's work where the analyst confesses how he 'had long seen clearly that a great part of the pleasure of travel... is rooted... in dissatisfaction with home and

⁸⁶ Evelyn Waugh, *When the Going Was Good* (London: Methuen, 1993), p. 9.

⁸⁷ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 2.

family,'⁸⁸ as evidence of Freud's understanding of travel as 'clearly centred on the persistence of conflicts deriving from an imperfect resolution of the Oedipus complex.'⁸⁹ This explanation suggests that travel is founded upon a longing to re-establish a connection, a place of belonging, or a sense of home that the individual lost when developing a subjectivity that is separate from the mother. According to Freud's views that he maps out in 'The Uncanny' in 1919, the original 'home' that all humans experienced was a link to the mother's body. The uneasy familiarity of the uncanny, of *unheimlich*, is a recognition of a location that reminds the observer of a long-forgotten or repressed memory of the initial place of belonging:

This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former Heim of all human beings; to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that 'Love is home-sickness;' and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: 'this place is familiar to me, I've been here before,' we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body.⁹⁰

The search for 'elsewhere' is, thus, an attempt to recover a territory or a space that replicates that sense of security the self once knew. The experience of other geographies is always tainted by the traveller's projection of desires onto the landscape. The wanderer is, as Porter describes, always haunted by his or her own past in an attempt to seek out a new location of 'home.'

Both Lacan and Kristeva have echoed Freud's sentiments and articulate the consequences that the wound of loss has upon the experience of a new country. Lacan argues that the lack of fulfilment in the past frequently transfigures and manifests in the

⁸⁸ Sigmund Freud and James Strachey, Alix Strachey, Alan Tyson, trans. and eds., and Anna Freud, collaborator, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXII 1932-1936* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 247.

⁸⁹ Dennis Porter, *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 197.

⁹⁰ Sigmund Freud and James Strachey and Angela Richards, trans. and eds., *Sigmund Freud: Volume 14, Art and Literature* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 368, italics his own.

form of unconscious desires. Thus, as Porter explains, the 'embracing or rejection of the countries through which one travels often derive from identifications dependent less on objective factors than on the projections of early prototypes onto geographical space.'⁹¹ Kristeva similarly emphasizes the search to reclaim a 'home' which stems from a past loss when she writes that 'a secret wound, often unknown to himself, drives the foreigner to wandering.'⁹² The traveller is searching for a reconciliation with the past within a substitute land which he or she has imagined: 'he seeks that invisible and promised territory, that country that does not exist but that he bears in his dreams, and that must indeed be called a beyond.'⁹³

It seems fitting that a generation of travellers, following the unprecedented terrors of the First World War, would have experienced a sense of formidable loss and, in an attempt to return to a location of stability, would have envisioned a life elsewhere. The nostalgia that marks many of the travel tomes produced in the late 1930s reflects that fundamental desire to return to a 'home;' the etymological root of 'nostalgia' is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the Greek 'nostos,' meaning 'return home.' The explosion of writing in the interwar era might be understood as a social phenomenon resulting from population disillusioned by the colossal violence of a world at war and left with an impression of homelessness, displacement and exile. Although rootlessness is occasionally a source of freedom and celebration, it often sparks a need to reclaim a sense of belonging.

⁹¹ Porter, *Haunted Journeys*, p. 11.

⁹² Julia Kristeva and Leon S. Roudiez, trans., *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 5.

⁹³ Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, p. 5.

A re-examination of Freud's supposition that the impetus to travel derives from a dissatisfaction with home and family, however, suggests an alternative perspective on the motivation to wander; travel is arguably less a project to seek out new locations that correspond to an ideal of the past than an escape from the oppressive tethers of home; home is not a space to be replicated, but one to be left. Rather than a search for a space of belonging, travel in these terms is an evasion of the stifling circumstances of home. Although Freud does not specifically gender the wanderer, many scholars equate their explanations of the escape from the domestic to an escape from women. Porter's reading of Freud's explanation of travel as a dissatisfactory resolution of the Oedipus complex casts the figure of the mother as central to the motivation to leave. Paul Zweig dedicates an entire chapter to the subject of 'The Flight from Women' in his work *The Adventurer*, which examines travel in literature throughout the centuries and writes:

The unrelenting masculinity of adventure literature—from the *Iliad* to James Bond—has often been remarked. What has not been remarked is the enveloping influence of the feminine which haunts adventure tales in subtle but definite ways. His life is a flight into danger, as if he were pursued by an enemy which he feared more than danger itself. And this appearance of flight is altogether apt, for the adventurer is in flight from women.⁹⁴

Zweig argues that male travellers require distance from the stasis of home life to reinvent themselves as masculine. The traveller, in this view, is the hero whose experience of an epic journey and encounter with adversity is a rite of passage into manhood. Eric J. Leed deems the event of leaving the constraints of home a 'Spermatic Journey,' emphasizing how the home itself is considered feminine while the act of leaving is masculinised. 'In

⁹⁴ Paul Zweig, *The Adventurer* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1974), p. 61.

patriarchal cultures, the mobility of men—especially of young, unattached men—is overdetermined and powerfully charged by the reigning images of masculinity.⁹⁵

The interwar era saw a proliferation of the view that travel demonstrates or tests masculine prowess. Some critics have implied that the proclivity towards travel amongst young civilians following the global skirmish was an attempt to create a substitute challenge to the adversities of warfare. Particularly for some of the travellers who made voyages in the 1930s, the interest in adventure was to compensate for perceptions of marginality during a war in which they were too young to participate. An analysis of Waugh's work by the critic Martin Stannard proffers the notion that the explosion of exploration and wandering which characterized the inter-war era was the result of the young generation's desire to display the heroism associated with soldiers on the battlefield: 'There is, for instance, the suggestion that difficult and dangerous journeys represented for his generation "an initiation into manhood."' ⁹⁶ Samuel Hynes considers how the period of the 1930s saw a concern with heroism which created a desire to travel: 'Travel offers the possible return of adventure, even of personal heroism, and the more so as it moves beyond the familiar civil landscapes, into the heart of darkness, or into war.'⁹⁷ With such an emphasis on travel as a demonstration of masculinity and an escape from the feminine sphere of 'home,' it is hardly surprising that women's travel writing has been omitted from studies scrutinizing the portraits of heroism and the adventurer in travel texts. Women, in this binary, are not entitled to experience the pleasures of

⁹⁵ Eric J. Leed, *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), p. 220.

⁹⁶ Martin Stannard, 'Debunking the Jungle: The context of Evelyn Waugh's Travel Books 1930-9' in Philip Dodd, ed. *The Art of Travel: Essays on Travel Writing* (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1982), p. 106.

⁹⁷ Hynes, *The Auden Generation*, p. 229.

movement as 'there is no free and mobile male without the unfree and sessile female.'⁹⁸

In contrast to the vision of the liberated adventurer Odysseus is the staid, loyal and rooted Penelope.

Women and Travel Discourse

The traditional terms travel discourse employs have masculinised the act of moving and feminized the passivity of rootedness, as the project to venture off towards new lands has been cast as a chiefly male endeavour. Yet in the postmodern parlance of recent decades theorists have engaged the figure of the traveller to illustrate the perception of modern consciousness. As several feminist scholars have posited, women exist on the margins of language and the social order and have a liminal presence within a symbolic culture as, Kristeva claims, they have the 'luck and the responsibility of being boundary subjects.'⁹⁹ The understanding of identity as characterized by the nomad resonates with some of the descriptions of female consciousness, and suggests that women might be suited for the travel experience. If, as Edward Said argues in his piece 'Identity, Authority and Freedom: The Potentate and the Traveler,' the figure of the wanderer is significant as a representative of non-conformity and resistance to fixity, and is characterized by adaptability, then women, who are already disconnected from a dominating cultural order, could be primed for nomadism. Within the context of examining academic discourse, Said describes the traveller as an exemplary figure who embodies fluidity and continuous renegotiation: 'the image of traveler depends not on power, but on motion, on

⁹⁸ Leed, *The Mind of the Traveler*, p. 221.

⁹⁹ Julia Kristeva and Leon S. Roudiez, trans, *Nations without Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 35.

a willingness to go into different worlds, use different idioms, and understand a variety of disguises, masks and rhetorics...the traveler *crosses over*, traverses territory, and abandons fixed positions, all the time.'¹⁰⁰

This endorsement of a potential subjectivity embodying motion and boundary crossings is, of course, common among descriptions of the modern condition, but it also resonates with some contemporary theorists' understanding of a particularly female identity. Rosi Braidotti uses the nomad in *Nomadic Subjects* to illustrate her vision of a feminist consciousness. Braidotti adopts Foucault's terms in her consideration of the formation of subjectivity when she suggests that 'one becomes a subject through a set of interdictions and permissions, which inscribe one's subjectivity in a bedrock of power.'¹⁰¹ Identity, in her view, is fractured, fragmented and split, and the individual creates a sense of a unified subjectivity through a process of transitions and shifts between selves. Braidotti offers in the figure of the nomad a potential understanding of identity that resists conventional patterns and precedents and maps out new connections: 'The nomad is a transgressive identity, whose transitory nature is precisely the reason why s/he can make connections at all. Nomadic politics is a matter of bonding, of coalitions, of interconnections.'¹⁰² Although at times in her work Braidotti is attempting to formulate a new vision of human consciousness, she is interested in examining female identity in particular. Her use of the nomad to describe women's subjectivity reinforces a view that women, marginalized within the social order, have what Michael Cronin articulates as an increased propensity towards travel. In his opinion, there is 'at the very least a potential aptitude among women for the transactions of translations in the world of

¹⁰⁰ Said, *Reflections on Exile and other Literary and Cultural Essays*, p. 404.

¹⁰¹ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 13.

¹⁰² Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 35.

travel.¹⁰³ The formulation of a traveller's consciousness as un-rooted and outside of a dominating cultural order which has emerged in recent discourse echoes some of the vocabulary feminists have engaged to describe women's experience.

Scholars of feminist geography and women and nationalism have often expressed the view that women are threshold subjects exiled from the cultural centre. Linda McDowell, as an example, begins her work *Gender, Identity and Place* with the central question: 'Are men usually centre-stage and women confined to the margins of all societies?'¹⁰⁴ Some theorists look towards psychoanalytical explanations for the source of women's disconnected identity. Lacan, combining psychoanalysis with structural linguistics, argued that the development of identity commences with a transition from the imaginary and into the symbolic order of language. The recognition of the father's presence disrupts the child's perception of unity with the mother and forces the awareness of a separate subjectivity. Language, however, compensates for the sense of suffering as the child replaces the loss that results from the severance with an entrance into the symbolic order. For girls, though, the process of identity formation is problematic as they retain a memory of the connection with the mother, and thus the movement into the symbolic order remains incomplete. As Heather Ingman explains, 'Lacan's theory accounts for the sense of marginality women often feel to the language and culture with which they are surrounded.'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Michael Cronin, *Across the Lines: Travel, Language, Translation* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), p. 62.

¹⁰⁴ Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Heather Ingman, *Women's Fiction Between the Wars: Mothers, Daughters and Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 32.

What follows from Lacan's supposition is the view that women suffer from an incomplete disconnection from the mother and thus have no defined subjectivity, ego, or 'I.' Virginia Woolf captures this perception in *A Room of One's Own* when she describes a women's experience of consciousness as multiplicitous: 'If one is a woman one is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness, say in walking down Whitehall, when from being the natural inheritor of that civilisation she becomes, on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical.'¹⁰⁶ The female identity is alien even to itself and is continuously moving between outlooks. Women, in this understanding, are already estranged and in exile from a unified subjectivity and are therefore already exemplify the traveller's consciousness. Authors such as Janet Wolff have questioned the specious claim that women are somehow lacking in a psychological drive to travel when she reasons that:

since women are produced as gendered subjects at the expense of any clear sense of self (of definite ego boundaries)—the result of inadequate separation from the mother—one might think that women have more of an investment in discovering a 'self,' and that, if travel is a mode of discovery, then this would have a strong attraction to women.¹⁰⁷

Because women are culturally defined as incomplete subjects, and exist in a state of split selfhood, they are suited for the process of identity-renegotiation that travel forces. To reference Kristeva who is indebted to Lacan in her approach to language and the female subject, the notion that women are 'strangers to themselves,' suggests that women's consciousness is primed for the travel experience. The interest in women travellers' experience of identity is one to which I will return and provides the subject of my study of Kate O'Brien's depiction of travel and consciousness in the final chapter.

¹⁰⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 88.

¹⁰⁷ Janet Wolff, 'On the Road Again: Metaphors of Travel in Cultural Criticism,' *Cultural Studies*, 7:2 (1993), p. 232.

Moreover, Kristeva considers women's marginality and border status spanning the divide between the social and the unconscious as a potential source of revolution: 'Kristeva suggests that women, because they are always marginalized within the social order, are more likely than men to become generating spaces of a new order of meaning.'¹⁰⁸ Women's presence and positionality destabilizes symbolic significance and opens up the possibility of new systems of expression. By extension, women travellers have the possibility to subvert traditional travel encounters; because women are more apt to demonstrate a traveller's consciousness defined by a movement between a variety of disguises, masks and rhetorics, women travellers help to challenge the traditional vision of travel as an endeavour of mastery. The figure of the female traveller might, thus, serve as a disruption to conventional travel paradigms. Anna Smith's reading of Kristeva suggests a new vision of Penelope as both unsettled and unsettling:

If, like Penelope, woman's habitual task has been to transform the places of waiting into comforting homes, Kristeva's ideal woman will turn the waiting game on its head by making the familiar into something strange. Her faculty for playful masquerade, we infer, will keep this female voyager from playing the role of the conventional traveller who like Ulysses travels in order to master.¹⁰⁹

The female traveller, in these terms of masquerade, corresponds to Said's understanding of a potential traveller's consciousness which resists the rigid authority of the potentate and offers a new possibility of cultural exchange and encounters across landscapes. This consideration of the female traveller as a subversive figure who challenges the mastery of traditional forms through disguise underpins, as we shall see, my reading of Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*.

It stands to reason, in addition, that women's travel writing itself could be a space of subversion which challenges traditional forms of representation. Many feminist

¹⁰⁸ Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 151.

¹⁰⁹ Smith, *Julia Kristeva*, pp. 57-58.

literary scholars have mapped out an argument for examining women's writing from the standpoint that women's relationship to the symbolic order is compromised by virtue of their gender. The result of the multiplicitous subjectivity is the production of writing that is doubled or split. Simultaneously inside and outside of the symbolic order, women have access to an innovative voice which Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have deemed the 'schizophrenia of authorship.'¹¹⁰ The female speaking subject has the potential to produce a subtly layered text masked and disguised with a destabilizing playfulness. Kristeva describes in 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' how the poetic word can undermine significance and how the author is veiled behind the uncertainty of meaning. This is particularly relevant to women writers for whom articulation must be a self-conscious act. Smith explains her interpretation of Kristeva's views on women authors who compose 'a style that simultaneously undoes style in its double movement of distancing itself from its object (the mother is unattainable except through language) and then doubling back on itself through irony, contradiction and word play to establish a discreet site of privilege for the female intellectual.'¹¹¹ Not only, then, is the female traveller a figure of possible revolution, but women's travel narratives are a potential site for complex and innovative writing. The focus of my project in this study is to scrutinize women's travel accounts in order to evaluate the portrayals of subjectivity and to assess the creation of new literary spaces and geographies.

¹¹⁰ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer in the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 69.

¹¹¹ Smith, *Julia Kristeva*, p. 71.

Women's Travel Writing

The claim that women are not simply tethered to the circumference of home but make formidable travellers is substantiated by the considerable number of women who did venture abroad. For centuries, women were exploring the globe and writing about their experiences. Opportunities for women to travel did exist as verified by the writing of women such as Florence Nightingale, whose profession as a nurse carried her to the Crimea and to Istanbul. Privileged women in the nineteenth-century who could spare the time and money could take advantage of Thomas Cook tours which provided a 'respectable context for the "well-bred ladies" to travel.'¹¹² Yet Cheryl McEwan contends 'only those women travellers who were seen to remain within the boundaries of acceptable feminine behaviour, such as nurses and the wives of missionaries, were given any credence,'¹¹³ and that women who wished to explore as scientists, students of culture, or adventurers, had to justify and defend their desires; the supposition that travel is a specifically male endeavour casts women who wander into a position of eccentricity and exception as they are forced to negotiate the cultural impediments to women's movement.

Indeed, the first wave of feminist scholarship on women travellers has highlighted the immense social obstacles women faced in their quest to seek out distant landscapes and has emphasized the narratives of danger that particularly surrounded Victorian women's decision to travel. The goal of such an approach is to expose some of the unrecognized constraints on women's movement, and to celebrate intrepid women who

¹¹² Jenny Craik, 'The Culture of Tourism,' in Chris Rojek and John Urry, eds., *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), p. 119.

¹¹³ Cheryl McEwan, *Gender, Geography and Empire: Victorian Women Travellers in West Africa* (Aldersot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 5.

dared to defy convention by leaving home. Studies such as A.A. Kelly's *Wandering Women: Two Centuries of Travel Out of Ireland*, underscore the atmosphere of danger that experts painted in an attempt to discourage women from the travel pursuit. Quoting Dr. Abraham Eldon's *The Continental Traveller's Oracle* of 1828 which states that 'Young women travellers should be taught that the Continent is a lion's den,'¹¹⁴ Kelly illustrates the climate of concern that helped cosset women within the presumed safety of home. Similarly, both Shirley Foster's *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth Century Women Travellers and their Writings*, and Dea Birkett's *Spinsters Abroad* comment upon the fierce debate in the Royal Geographical Society at the turn of the century over the prospect of including women; both authors see it as evidence of how women's presence threatened the consideration of travel and exploration as a bastion of masculinity. To demonstrate the ridicule and scorn that accompanied the notion of a woman voyager, Foster points to George Curzon's disdainful comment that the 'genus of professional female globetrotters...is one of the horrors of the later end of the nineteenth century.'¹¹⁵ The general focus of these works is an examination of the transgressive nature of such figures as Mary Kingsley, who voyaged to Africa and Gertrude Bell, who explored the Middle East, and the way in which they were able to traverse national boundaries as women.

Building upon these studies, other feminist scholars have expressed concern that the celebration of women travellers as heroines and paradigms of female liberation occasionally effaces any of the participation women had in the colonial project. Billie

¹¹⁴ Quoted in A.A. Kelly, *Wandering Women: Two Centuries of Travel Out of Ireland* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1995), p. 8.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Shirley Foster, *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth Century Women Travellers and their Writings* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 6.

Melman's *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918*, and Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*, Alison Blunt's *Travel, Gender and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa*, Cheryl McEwan's *Gender, Geography and Empire: Victorian Women Travellers in West Africa*, and Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* have outlined how imperial women's presence in the empire has contributed to colonialism while occasionally advancing the development of western feminism. George outlines the venture of her study to 'demonstrate that the sojourn of the "Englishwoman" (that unhyphenated subject equal to the "Englishman") in the empire, writes a crucial chapter in the history of the formations that we today know as western feminism.'¹¹⁶ In this context, aspects of women travellers' liberation have come at the expense of power borrowed from colonized subjects. Women's travel writing plays a part in making the unhomely familiar, 'othering' the landscape, and domesticating the empire, and scholars who neglect to address these issues, further, risk privileging women's advances over the silencing of the subaltern.

A third approach to women's travel writing that scholars have taken is an examination of the frameworks which influenced what women wrote and the tone of their representations. *Discourses of Difference* by Sara Mills most famously unpacks readers' anticipation of women's travel texts and female writers' use of irony, humour and masquerade to engage a discourse which was previously thought to be the sole domain of the masculine voice. Mills argues that women writers do not have the authority to compose a scientific narrative; although travel narratives are seemingly intimations of personal experiences, they are actually subject to generic conventions which dictate both

¹¹⁶ George, *The Politics of Home*, p. 36.

the content and the style. The individual confessions must be couched in the context of 'factual' descriptions of the new cultural landscapes. The inclusion of 'factual' aspects is potentially problematic for women travellers who, as some authors who echo Mills claim, are excluded from the use of the scientific discourse since 'only rational, white men were able to produce reliable, scientific evidence about the world. Other sorts of people—women, 'native'—could not. They did not have the requisite powers of reason or observation.'¹¹⁷ Mills suggests that women writers must negotiate the composition of travel texts by ensuring that their presentation of 'facts' accords with general perception:

The type of 'factual' texts which can be written by women is often that which needs little authority. Examples of the latter are autobiography and travel writing, although, with both these, the 'facts' which are included have to accord with a set of discursive conventions of what females can and cannot do.¹¹⁸

Women who compose travel accounts are faced with the complication that a female voice does not have enough authorial weight to present a scientific narrative. Female writers must therefore temper their texts with strategies such as an undermining humour. James Clifford summarizes this sentiment when he writes that 'although recent research is showing that they were more common than formerly recognized, women travelers were forced to conform, masquerade, or rebel directly within a set of normatively male definitions and experiences.'¹¹⁹

Much of the discussion pertaining to women's travel writing has focused on Mary Kingsley and the publication of her 1897 *Travels in West Africa*. Kingsley voyaged out at the age of 30 after a parental death left her free of familial obligation and

¹¹⁷ Woman and Geography Study Group of the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers, *Feminist Geographies: Explorations in Diversity and Difference* (Harlow: Longman, 1997), p. 75.

¹¹⁸ Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 81.

¹¹⁹ Clifford, *Routes*, p. 32.

responsibility. Many who have read her piece comment upon the richness of comedy that she weaves into her texts and her frequent apologies for the subject of composition.

Mary Louise Pratt notes how her 'comic and self-ironic persona indelibly impresses itself on any reader of her book.'¹²⁰ Kingsley comments upon the myriad discouragements she received in her preparation for travel, and she humbly asks for her readers' forgiveness 'for giving so much detail on matters that really only affect myself.'¹²¹ Kingsley's manner of writing is considered, and embraces the seeming absurdity of a female figure adorned in skirts within Africa by folding comic aspects into her writing.

That so many contemporary scholars have dedicated attention to Kingsley's writing is appropriate considering the impact that she had upon later women travellers who followed her; *Travels in West Africa* has been a source of inspiration to other explorers in the early decades of the twentieth century. Rose Macaulay was familiar with Kingsley's work and both enjoyed and admired the Victorian traveller's adventures. In a letter to her sister, Jeanie, Macaulay describes her reaction: 'I have just been reviewing a life of Mary Kingsley. She was a most charming adventurer in West Africa—went exploring and trading in the 1890's, all alone, among cannibals and traders, and never shot wild beasts, as she didn't think it ladylike, but let them out of snares instead and then ran.'¹²² Mary Kingsley also makes an appearance in Woolf's *Three Guineas*, as a representative of women whose access to learning was limited. Imagining Kingsley voicing her complaint at the sacrifices she must make for the benefit of her brother's education, Woolf explains how 'Mary Kingsley is not speaking for herself alone, she is

¹²⁰ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 213.

¹²¹ Mary H. Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2003), p. 9.

¹²² Rose Macaulay and Constance Babington Smith, ed., *Letters to a Sister from Rose Macaulay* (London: Collins, 1964), 25 September 1932.

speaking, still, for many of the daughters of educated men.'¹²³ Even though Kingsley distanced herself from the suffragettes and depictions of The New Woman, the existence of her writing within a masculine genre set a new standard for female travel accounts.

Gertrude Bell also broke down many barriers within women travel narratives with her carefully detailed writings on the Middle East which she published in 1907 as *Syria: The Desert and the Sown*. Influential in creating the state of Iraq, Bell was well-respected for her talent, and Woolf mentions her in *A Room of One's Own* as one of the female scholars who played a part in women's foray into more scientific genres of writing: 'if the male is still the voluble sex, it is certainly true that women no longer write novels solely. There are Jane Harrison's books on Greek archaeology; Vernon Lee's books on aesthetics; Gertrude Bell's book on Persia.'¹²⁴ Bell was also of great importance to Vita Sackville-West who visited the academic in Baghdad while *en route* to Teheran. Sackville-West was awed by Bell's knowledge and enthusiasm, and writes how 'whatever subject she touched, she lit up; such vitality was irresistible.'¹²⁵ Both Kingsley's and Bell's works contributed, in some respects, to the forging of new styles of women's travel writing against which other women could compose, and the writers of the interwar period acknowledged their debts to their exploring predecessors. When Rose Macaulay illustrates her character Winifred's excitement about the prospect of a trip abroad in *I Would Be Private*, the author is humorously parodying Kingsley's work in its detached recording of highly dangerous circumstances. Winifred converses with her husband, Roland, about her discovery of women's travel writing:

¹²³ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, p. 118.

¹²⁴ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, p. 72.

¹²⁵ Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 43.

'This book here that I've got from the Library, it's all about women's travels. All over the world. They have a grand time, women that can travel have.'

Ronald turned the pages of the book. He read a passage here and there.

'The heat was terrible....The insects bit terribly, even through her clothes....she looked down and saw a snake....The brute struck, and its fangs drove in her leg. With admirable presence of mind she grasped the reptile, and, holding it, walked some distance to a rock, where she smashed its head...

'Her temperature rose to one hundred and three degrees. In addition, her leg was still very painful....She climbed over rocks and dropped down steep places, only to find fresh boulders barring the way...It began to rain; it poured. Every step was a misery...the traveller went into mud and water up to her waist. She had to leave the trail and climb precipices, pulling herself up by roots and branches. Over and over again she fell. The scenery was grand. Indeed it was...awe-inspiring....'¹²⁶

Macaulay not only gently mocks the convention of travel writing, but the passage, further, indicates the romanticism modern readers attach to the travel experience.

Macaulay suggests that the earlier standards of travel writing play a fundamental role in the perceptions of women travellers of the interwar era who learned to associate 'elsewhere' with freedom, liberation and adventure. The numerous accounts which chronicle privileged women's adventures during the interwar era when the globe was opened up for movement are a testament to the abundance of women's travel writing in the period. Some of the authors are unquestionably indebted to the women explorers who preceded them. Works such as the 1929 *The Golden Land: A Record of Travel in West Africa* by Lady Dorothy Mills, Vivienne de Watteville's *Speak to the Earth: Wanderings and Reflections Among Elephants and Mountains* of 1930, *Cape to Cairo: The Record of a Motor Journey* written by Stella Court Treatt in 1927, the 1921 *The Secret of the Sahara: Kufara* by Rosita Forbes, *Forever Wandering*, Ethel Mannin's travel text written in 1934, and Helen Hamilton who described her adventures climbing in the Alps in *Mountain Madness* published in 1922, all indicate an indebtedness to a female tradition of travel writing.

¹²⁶ Rose Macaulay, *I Would Be Private* (London: Collins, 1937), pp. 59-60.

The main impetus of this study is an interest in exploring how women writers contend with the conventions of a genre that has historically been dominated by male authors, during a period when both travel and travel writing were transformed. To investigate the production of women's travel accounts and the negotiation of the authorial voice and identity, I will examine travel texts by interwar era women writers who were also prolific writers of fiction. The women upon which this study concentrates, Vita Sackville-West, Rebecca West, Karen Blixen, Rose Macaulay, and Kate O'Brien, were chosen because of their similarities in identifying themselves as professional writers, and because travel played a significant role in each of their lives, resurfacing again and again throughout their texts. Not surprisingly, all five authors were economically privileged and well educated which made their access to travel routes easier, but their reasons for their interest in travel varied significantly. These five women's works provide a spectrum of views considering that each portrayed travel differently, and as each engaged different styles of writing. Reading their travel works within the context of other pieces not traditionally viewed as travel accounts helps to illuminate how the narrative voices that these female authors portray in their fictional works resonate with or are different from the voices in their travel writings; in other words, examining these women's travel narratives in the context of all of their writings, even those pieces composed beyond the timeframe of the interwar era, helps to establish a nest of context for each individual author and gives points of comparison for her own works. What this study offers is a demonstration of how women writers approach and subvert traditional travel narratives, a consideration of how women's experiences influence their perception of landscapes abroad, and an investigation into the ways in which travel has an impact

upon the very composition of women's writing. Rather than providing a historical catalogue of women's travel writing of the 1920s and 1930s, this study thematically examines how travel influenced women's writing at a historical moment when travel, conflated with identity, was a cultural phenomenon.

As I have demonstrated, the years between the wars saw many changes in perceptions of geographical distance, reconfigurations of national boundaries, the destabilization of colonial empires, aesthetic experimentation, and new considerations of the nature of gender and subjectivity. Each issue arguably has an impact upon the composition of travel writings, and in an effort to extrapolate these themes, each of the following five chapters will address one of the topics of geography, nationalism, imperialism, genre and identity through the lens of a single author's texts. Further, each chapter will provide its own theoretical framework as a lens through which these themes can be contextualized and understood. Naturally, all of these themes are interconnected and are certainly not limited to a particular writer's corpus. To avoid the perception of disjointed segments, however, I present in this dissertation a chain of arguments that are linked together as each subsequent chapter addresses questions raised by the previous. The concerns of each section overlap with the subsequent and the final chapter links back to the first to complete the reader's journey. What the study ultimately offers, thus, is an exploration of a variety of themes pertinent to the creation of women's travel narratives, and the significance of travel to women's experiences.

The first chapter examines Vita Sackville-West's representation of locations in England as not conducive to women's creativity and suggests that she presents an environment abroad in *Passenger to Teheran* which nurtures women's writing. Using

feminist geographers' theories on the *flâneur* and on women's access to space, I will look particularly at Sackville-West's geographical representations of both the city and the country as ill-suited for women. I argue that she indicates a discovery of new spaces abroad corresponding to the 'in-betweenness' of her garden environment, which serves as a source of creative inspiration, and resonates with Foucault's vision of the heterotopia.

The second chapter explores how Rebecca West views England, in a manner similar to Sackville-West, as a country where women are denied participation as nationalist subjects. Like predominating beliefs of the period which saw women as significant contributors to the perpetuation of the nation as mothers, West indicates throughout many of her writings a vision of femininity as central to the advancement of civilization. I argue that within the pages of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, composed at the end of the 1930s, West represents the Yugoslavian landscape as feminine. Further, she remaps England onto the geography abroad, reconfiguring room for the feminine in her perception of her home country. The complication with her portraiture, however, is that her appropriation of space abroad for a political end resonates with colonial projects.

The questions raised by West's work lead into the third chapter which scrutinizes Karen Blixen's 1937 *Out of Africa* in order to address how women's travel writing participates in the theatre of imperialism. In many cases, women's accounts access a voice of command by 'borrowing power' at the expense of the subaltern. In this regard, women writers perpetuate the native inhabitant's 'otherness' as a means of augmenting their own sense of literary authority. I suggest that Blixen's work is quite subtle and that while seemingly adopting an authoritative stance, her infusion of a mixture of tones and genres into her piece offers a nuanced mimicry. Her work reveals her writing as

performative which destabilizes the very notion of a masterly voice; the presence of moments of writing that corresponds to *écriture féminine*, undermines the very authority of the writing, and reveals her text to be a masquerade.

This amalgamation of genres, narrative voices and disguise leads to the fourth chapter which concentrates on Rose Macaulay and her nomadic movement through literary genres. Using a framework of intertextuality to support my claim, I argue in this chapter that Macaulay collapses the distinction between travel writing and fiction by engaging a myriad of voices. Macaulay challenges the traditions of women's writing as autobiographical and subverts the conventions of the interwar travel narratives which usually unveil the author's consciousness; the presence of an 'authentic' Macaulay cannot be distinguished behind the layers of narrative masks and through the layers of quotations.

The final chapter argues that Kate O'Brien is interested in examining representations of split subjectivities. O'Brien's characterization in both her fiction and her travel writing, particularly *Mary Lavelle* of 1936 and *Farewell Spain* of 1937, presents women's movement away from home as essential to the formulation of new, multiplicitous and creative subjectivities. Distance facilitates space for new consciousness, including the artistic 'I' which makes writing possible. Applying Rosi Braidotti's notion of the nomadic consciousness to O'Brien's texts, I argue that O'Brien presents a vision of travel as fostering the creation of both new gender and artistic identities. This notion, of course, leads back to Sackville-West's understanding of travel as an opening out of new spaces for female creativity.

I am interested in demonstrating how these women travel writers were nomadically traversing generic and gender boundaries in a quest to seek out new literary landscapes, uncover new locations for female creativity, and map out alternative female identities. At a time when travel and wandering became representative of the Modernist consciousness, these women sought out room for a female writers' subjectivity, and found an 'elsewhere' within their textual spaces.

Chapter 2

Vita Sackville-West and the Geography of 'Elsewhere': Travel, Gardens, and Women's Creativity

Introduction

In a period when many Modernists were expressing a sense of a change in geographical space and were experimenting with works that celebrated the figure of the *flâneur* within the flux and pace of the urban scene, much of Vita Sackville-West's writing seems, at first glance, to be harkening back to a pastoral tradition. What I will explore in this chapter is Sackville-West's representations of geography, space and 'elsewhere' in her writing as a search for a room of her own, looking particularly at her depiction of the garden as a subversive environment that resists conventional categorization, and at her representations of space abroad. Sackville-West was not alone in her sense of dissatisfaction with a variety of Modernist geographies, and this study of her representations of women and space will set a foundation for an examination of the search for 'elsewhere' that other women writers demonstrate.

To a modern audience, Vita Sackville-West is perhaps best known for her unorthodox marriage to Harold Nicolson, which was marred by several tempestuous affairs with women including Virginia Woolf, and for her role as one of England's premier authorities on gardens. The contrast between the two positions, one of which challenges domestic conventions and the other of which seems to underscore the pleasure of domestic space, marks Sackville-West as a controversial and equivocal figure cast in dualistic terms. An addition to the catalogue of ostensible oppositions is her seemingly conflicting interest in the pleasures of the domestic garden and in space abroad. Her

association with roots, both hereditary and botanical, seems distinctly at odds with the impetus to voyage. Mary Ann Caws wrote in the preface to her collection of Vita Sackville-West's work that 'it is widely argued that Vita's writing and talks on the art of gardening, along with her travel writing, count among her best works.'¹ Caws' sentence does not indicate recognition of any inherent contradiction between travel writing and gardening, yet gardens, in theory, are representative of values diametrically opposed to those of travel. Connected to the land, gardens seem a private and tranquil space removed from the transient concerns of the wider world.

As an extension of the home, moreover, the garden is commonly gendered, and is associated with the rooted, immobile domain. In her book, *Moving Lives*, Sidonie Smith scrutinizes the description of women as potted plants without the agency to move: 'to be "sessile" in botanical terms, is to be permanently planted, tenaciously fixed, utterly immobile.'² In contrast to men's unbounded freedom to wander, women are grounded and tethered to the domestic. Catherine Alexander echoes the gendered terms of the garden when she describes how 'women's virtuosity lay in her containment, like the plant in the pot.'³ The pervasive connection between women and gardens is seemingly problematic as it re-inscribes the notion that women are stationary, an extension of the domestic, and bound by the circumference of the home. As I shall explore, however, Vita Sackville-West presented the garden as a subversive space of female creativity and imagination.

¹ Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Vita Sackville-West: Selected Writings* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2002), p. 211.

² Sidonie Smith, *Moving Lives: 20th Century Women's Travel Writing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. x.

³ Quoted in Catherine Alexander, 'The Garden as Occasional Domestic Space,' *Signs*, 27:3 (2002), p. 857.

The garden, further, is a contradictory area which defies the extremes of human regimentation and natural disorder, it is in fact a porous boundary between the domestic and the wild and a 'borderland between city and country.'⁴ In 'Of Other Spaces,' Michel Foucault uses the garden to illustrate his concept of heterotopias, and claims that the garden is a microcosm of the world. In contrast to utopias which have no physical actuality in society, Foucault presents counter-locations which effectively function as fantasies of place that overlap contested sites. Heterotopias are real spaces that manifest illusions or provide compensatory alternative arrangements to the reality of an actual space. A comprehensive example is the mirror reflection which displays a reversed world that exists as an image but also has a tangible position upon the glass surface.

The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy.⁵

Although the reflection exists, the vision presents an imaginary illusion of extended space. As a heterotopia, the garden, thus, is a location that exists in reality but implies room 'elsewhere' that is an imaginary and in-between space. I argue that in her own travels, Sackville-West sought out a landscape abroad that reproduced the freedom of imagination that her garden provided and offered her the opportunity for nomadic *flânerie*; while the interest in redefining new landscapes was a pervasive theme of many of Sackville-West's Modernist contemporaries including Virginia Woolf, she highlights

⁴ Louise A. Desalvo, 'Every Woman is an Island: Vita Sackville-West, the Image of the City, and the Pastoral Idyll,' in Susan Merrill Squier, ed., *Women Writers and the City: Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), p. 112.

⁵ Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, trans., 'Of Other Spaces,' online at: <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>

within her writing a desire to discover new geographies where women have a claim to space and room to indulge their artistic inclinations. In this chapter, I will first examine the feminist theories regarding women and geography with particular attention to women's experience of the Modernist urban landscape and Foucault's perception of the heterotopia. I will then explore how Sackville-West, in contrast to Virginia Woolf who considered the tumult and chaos of the city accommodating to creativity, depicted the city as an environment hostile to women's imagination. Looking briefly at Sackville-West's representations of the rural as similarly ill-suited to women, I shall scrutinize her depictions of the garden as an alternative space conducive to women's writing. The final section is devoted to a study of Sackville-West's representation of space, landscape and gardens in her travel book *Passenger to Teheran*.⁶ Arguably Sackville-West complicates the seeming division of home and abroad as she portrays the garden space as a cultivated territory, neither country nor city, but a space apart from the extremes of the natural and man-made duality where women are able to have creative freedom; the garden is heterotopical compromise between oppositions, the result of which functions as space 'elsewhere' conducive to women's artistic production. In this respect, Sackville-West indicates her challenge to simplistic classifications, and her interest in considering new geographical spaces.

⁶ Throughout these chapters, place names adhere to the authors' spellings as they appear in the primary texts.

Biography and Background

Place and geography played a significant role throughout Sackville-West's days, and she herself territorializes her life, describing it as a 'deceitful country.'⁷ Even her biographer, Victoria Glendinning, maps out the events in the author's career according to location. With sections entitled 'Knole,' 'Explorations,' 'Sissinghurst,' 'The Enclave and the Tower,' Glendinning emphasizes the importance of travel and the search for self to Sackville-West. Born within the spreading magnitude of the country estate, Knole, in 1892, Sackville-West felt an affinity with the grounds which influenced her throughout her life. Her family had long been rooted to the land and her ancestry's claim to the property can be traced to Queen Elizabeth's cousin, Thomas Sackville. Sackville-West later fondly recalled both the physical structure of Knole and the property and gardens as a halcyon world of Edenic proportions. Devoting the space of several volumes to the estate, Sackville-West featured Knole in many of her texts, including a thinly disguised part in her short story, *The Heir*, in her 1913 poem 'To Knole,' and *Knole and the Sackvilles*, published in 1922. At the age of sixteen, Sackville-West was disinherited from Knole as a result of a legal ruling which proclaimed her uncle as the rightful heir. Denied ownership of the estate because of her sex, Sackville-West was devastated at the irreconcilable loss of her idyllic dwelling. Possibly, the loss formed the 'secret wound'⁸ Kristeva describes in her explanations of travel and Sackville-West's wanderings through distant landscapes were a quest to recover a private, separate space to re-establish her sense of self as a writer and indulge her imaginative vision.

⁷ Vita Sackville-West and Nicolson, Nigel, ed., *Portrait of a Marriage* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p. 9.

⁸ Julia Kristeva and Leon S. Roudiez, trans., *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 5.

Throughout her youth, Sackville-West enjoyed travel and spent many months in France and Italy. Spain in particular fascinated Sackville-West for its connection to her own lineage. Glendinning explains Sackville-West's romanticised view of the nation and her interest in her Spanish heredity through her grandmother, Pepita: 'Spain, because of the wildly fantasized Pepita connection, was a place of high romance for Vita. [In a letter to her future husband Harold Nicolson, she once wrote that] "it is my own country, you know, Harold, and my relations live there, and are swank, and poor, and proud, and descend from Lucrezia Borgia, as I do—Spain and Italy rolled into one."'”⁹

It was her marriage to Nicolson which provided Sackville-West with the opportunity to wander even further afield and led her to explore the Middle East; when Nicolson was posted by the British government to Teheran, Sackville-West made two excursions to visit him. The first of her trips, which stimulated her to compose *Passenger to Teheran*, published in the autumn of 1926, took Sackville-West through southern Europe, Egypt, India, Persia and Russia. The text is not focused on the journey to reunite the author with her husband, but rather concentrates upon Sackville-West's anticipation of Persia and the prospect of visiting Teheran itself. In this regard, Sackville-West reveals her adoration of the Persian landscape, and the structure of the narrative is evidence of the extent to which Persia, more than other countries, appealed to her imagination. In fact, Sackville-West's experience of the environment provided her with enough material for two volumes, for her second visit to Persia in 1927, which entailed a walk over the Bakhtiari Mountains, formed the substance of her travel publication *Twelve Days*, published in 1928.

⁹ Victoria Glendinning, *Vita: The Life of Vita Sackville-West* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 55.

In many of her writings, Sackville-West celebrates landscapes abroad for the opening up of illimitable spaces; in contrast to the restricted island that England represented, movement through other geographies offered Sackville-West the freedom of expanse. Recording her first trip to Russia in 1909 with her mother, a young Sackville-West dramatically pronounced her adoration of the country for its broad boundaries in a journal coded in Italian: “How much I loved Russia! Those vast fields, that feudal life, that illimitable horizon—oh how shall I ever be able to live in this restricted island! I want expanse.”¹⁰ The open landscape provides a significant difference to England’s bounded shores. The connotation of England as a ‘restricted island’ with conservative values, further, implies her use of the Russian landscape as a metaphor, and her emphasis on geographical breadth without limitation thus translates into an experience of liberation while away that she was denied at home.

Mary Ann Caws, further, suggests that trips abroad later provided Sackville-West with an escape from social conventions and gave her room to explore extramarital relationships. Sackville-West travelled with Woolf to France and recorded her time there, but France also served as the scene for her romance with one of her first lovers, Violet Trefusis. Caws describes how: ‘Vita’s travels in France were many, and made quite frequently with her women lovers and companions—most notably, of course, with Violet Trefusis, but also with Evelyn Irons, with Gwen St. Aubyn, and, most famously, with Virginia Woolf.’¹¹ Caws’ statement conveys the sense that Sackville-West’s crossing of national boundaries translated into a challenge of gender conventions as she defied the duties of a traditional wife and sought out new geographies with her female

¹⁰ Sackville-West, *Portrait of a Marriage*, p. 31.

¹¹ Caws, ed., *Vita Sackville-West*, p. 143.

lovers; room 'elsewhere' signified a freedom from the boundaries and traditions of home. The notion of 'abroad' as an escape from gender expectations is one that resurfaces in Sackville-West's writing as I shall later explore in the context of her fiction, and it suggests that space in distant cultures offered women a liberty from conventional female roles. Although Linda McDowell has warned that for some women 'travel tended to reinforce their subservience rather than challenge conventional gender relations,'¹² Sackville-West carefully effaces any indication of her role as a wife to Nicolson in the representations of her experience, and she highlights instead the freedom of spaces abroad.

Nowhere in her travel writing does Sackville-West devote as much attention to descriptions of landscape and her experience of geography as she does in *Passenger to Teheran*. In a work that Virginia Woolf praised in a letter to the author in spatial terms by declaring that 'the whole book is full of nooks and crannies,'¹³ *Passenger to Teheran* extols the expanse of the Persian countryside and the lack of restrictive boundaries. While Sackville-West describes her visits to numerous cityscapes on her journey, the aspects of the countries that garner her authorial attention are the pastoral spaces of gardens and the wide stretches of the landscapes. Writing about the sense of an illimitable expanse, she comments how 'Persia is a country made for wandering onward; there is so much room, and no boundaries anywhere.'¹⁴ The Persia that Sackville-West describes is a vast and open horizon without limitations or restrictions, and her portraits of the Persian gardens cast the environment as a new paradise found.

¹² Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 217.

¹³ Virginia Woolf and Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, eds., *The Letters of Virginia Woolf Volume 3: 1923-1928, Change of Perspective* (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), 15 September 1926.

¹⁴ Vita Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran* (London: Arrow Books, 1991), p. 70.

Theoretical Framework: Women and Geography

As I will later explore, Sackville-West's representation of gardens and of landscapes abroad are significant spaces 'elsewhere' particularly suitable for women. Many feminist geographers have contributed to studies on women's experience of a variety of environments, and have recognized that, as Foucault observed, 'the history of spaces also involves a history of power.'¹⁵ Feminist geographers have exposed assumptions regarding the access to space, and many have questioned women's ability to participate in the modern scene. An ongoing polemic regarding women and space has emerged centred on women's experience of the urban climate and the possibility of a female *flâneur*. This debate over the figure of the modern female *flâneur* has revealed feminist concerns ranging from the gendered gaze to the division of public and private spheres.

In the Modernist period, the urban landscape figured prominently as the space for explorations of new identities and representations of consciousness. While the figure of the *flâneur*, most famously exalted in Baudelaire's poetry, is historically linked to the particular atmosphere of an 1860s Paris, it does have significant relevance to the relationship between the individual and the experience of modernity within the shifting perceptions of the city. Characterized by a sense of dislocation and observation of the teeming crowds, the *flâneur* goes 'botanizing on the asphalt'¹⁶ and remains a compelling paradigm of the Modernist sensibility. Likened to the discrete watchfulness of the 'private eye,' the *flâneur* is an audience of the spectacle of the mass of life within the street. With intimate knowledge of the clandestine workings of the urban environment,

¹⁵ Quoted in McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place*, p. 220.

¹⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1973), p. 36.

the *flâneur* manages to wander the streets incognito, donning a mask of marginality. The emphasis on the 'peripheral vision' and the isolation of the observer associated with representations of *flânerie* resurfaces in Modernist illustrations of urban identity.

Keith Tester postulates that Baudelaire's *flâneur* is a 'poet, driven out of the private and into the public by his own search for meaning. He is the man who is only at home existentially when he is not at home physically.'¹⁷ In the quotation, he implies the impossibility for women, confined to the private realm of the home, to scrutinize the urban scene as *flâneurs*; the overtly gendered underpinning of Tester's comments is intentional as women's access to the gaze and public space of the *flâneur* has often been restricted. Griselda Pollock and Janet Wolff have examined the potential for female *flânerie* and women's ability to participate in urban observation concluding, broadly speaking, that the *flâneur* requires a freedom of 'possibility and the prospect of lone travel, of voluntary up-rooting, of anonymous arrival at a new place'¹⁸ denied most women. While Wolff does acknowledge such individuals as George Sand who managed to disregard barriers of gendered expectations and roam the streets dressed as a boy, the majority of *flâneurs* 'are, of course, all men.'¹⁹

Elizabeth Wilson, in contrast, looks to resist the assumption that women are passive victims of the geographical distinctions of public and private arenas, citing evidence of transgressive movement with the rise of shoppers in department stores in the nineteenth century where women viewed the fluctuations of the crowds. Further, Wilson portrays the prostitute as an exemplary metaphor for the nineteenth-century *flâneur*,

¹⁷ Keith Tester, ed., *The Flâneur* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 2.

¹⁸ Janet Wolff, 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity,' *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2:3 (1985), p. 40.

¹⁹ Wolff, 'The Invisible *Flâneuse*, p. 40.

defined as peripheral streetwalkers. In Wilson's estimation, to insist that the *flâneur* is inherently masculine re-instates the perception of women as fundamentally at odds with the urban construct. Wilson aims to deconstruct the gendered duality that aligns men with city and, in opposition, equates women with the natural landscape of the country. Indeed, the hazard associated with insisting on the impossibility of women's inclusion in the *flâneur* archetype is a recasting of the city/nature binary, where women's only access to power is manifested in the country. Wilson concludes her argument by deconstructing the masculine associations of the city with the bourgeois power as a means of ungendering the *flâneur*. The 'turbulent industrial city is a "transgressive" space...in the labyrinth the *flâneur* effaces himself, becomes passive, feminine.'²⁰ Although Wilson's estimation of prostitution as a form of *flânerie* perhaps overstates the possibilities of women's resistance to containment, her emphasis on the inherent gender paradoxes of the *flâneur* figure acknowledges the emergence of an urban female presence.

The urgency behind the debate regarding women's command of the *flâneur's* gaze is not simply one of access to power and subjectivity, but it is implicated in women's ability to produce artistic materials. In many portraits, like those of Virginia Woolf, the *flâneur* is described in terms of a reader or a writer, and wandering through the streets is illustrated as tantamount to the perusal of a text. Franz Hessel asserts that '*flânerie* is a kind of reading of the streets, in which faces, shop fronts, show windows, café terraces, street cars, automobiles and trees become a wealth of equally valid letters of the alphabet that together result in words, sentences and pages of a ever new book.'²¹

²⁰ Elizabeth Wilson, 'The Invisible Flâneur,' *New Left Review*, 191: January/February (1992), pp. 109-110.

²¹ Quoted in David Frisby, 'The *Flâneur* in Social Theory,' in Keith Tester, ed., *The Flâneur*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 81.

From a position of detached observation, the *flâneur* becomes an omniscient narrator, witnessing the intricacies of the urban spectacle that others overlook.

There have been fewer studies on women's access to the garden space than there have been on women's experience of the urban, yet some scholars have explored the garden as an area for women's independence and for female creativity. Wendy Gan remarks how 'as an adjunct to the domestic space, the garden occupied a liminal position; it was both part of the domestic world and yet not quite of it. This ambivalence allowed women the chance to appropriate the garden for themselves as a site of independence and emancipation.'²² Further, nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers have linked the garden space with women writing; across several literary traditions, the garden has served both as an allegory for women's blossoming imagination and as a subversive location for female creativity when circumstances denied women's artistic endeavours.

The garden has long been associated with femininity, and the perception of the garden is an extension of the domestic. Changes in gardening philosophy at the turn of the century shaped the garden into a series of outdoor rooms. The common images Edwardian England conjures up are of garden jaunts and luncheons upon the spreading lawns of an opulent country manor; hedged pathways sheltered romantic exploits, families exercised on lawn tennis courts, and the garden became the setting of social interaction. In contrast to gardening philosophy of previous landscape arrangement, the *fin de siècle* popularized a combination of structured and uncultivated designs:

The garden was thought of not as a unified vista to be viewed from the house, but as a series of outdoor rooms, each one offering a different vision of the ideal garden, based on

²² Wendy Gan, *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 30-31.

different combinations of colours, themes and styles. Movement away from the house was often a progress from formal to informal.²³

As an interior setting within the exterior world, the garden was an annexe of the domestic. Gardens, in this frame, were a demonstration of the owners' discriminating style and an accentuation of the estate.²⁴ The notion of the garden as an extension of the residence carried over into the rise of suburban housing in the post-war years where gardening was a popular pastime. Associating women with the garden, thus, problematically reaffirms the notion of women's sessile rootedness to the home and reinscribes the expectation that women lead restricted lives of seclusion detached from the authoritative institutions of politics, economics and education.

One of the most famous connections forged between women and gardens is John Ruskin's metaphorical talk on the potential benefits of women's education. In his two-part lecture of 1865, which included the essay 'Of Queen's Gardens' in *Sesame and Lilies*, Ruskin addresses which subjects women ought to examine in their quest for intellectual improvement. While ostensibly focused on literature, however, Ruskin reveals his prescription for appropriate gender binaries. Reflecting the traditional views of women as passive and men as active, he estimates that the male's attributes are as the 'doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender... But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle, - and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision.'²⁵ Ruskin emphasizes the now traditional view that women are best suited to the domestic sphere as protectors and nurtures of the home. The very

²³ Sue Bennet, *Five Centuries of Women and Gardens* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2000), p. 114.

²⁴ Bennet, *Five Centuries of Women and Gardens*, p. 110.

²⁵ John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 54.

title of his lecture, however, includes the garden in women's domain of control. As an extension of the domestic, gardens are the site where women are able to demonstrate their capacity for 'sweet ordering, arrangement and decision.' Women, in Ruskin's opinion are inextricably linked to the natural environment of the cultivated plots. Ruskin's patronizing description of women's command as 'sweet' undermines his praise as he dismisses their governance of the garden as inconsequential. Of significance, however, is Ruskin's association of the garden with a text; both plotted, the aesthetically developed land is a symbol of creativity and blossoming imagination intended for perusal. That Ruskin indicates a connection between gardens and women marks the botanical as a location conducive to women's narrative authority.

In fact, many scholars in the last centuries have used the garden as an allegory for women's creativity, linking the patient nurturers of blossoms with the cultivation of prose and poetry. In her introduction to *A Glimpse of Green*, Laurie Critchley suggests that 'the two apparent opposites often share similar places in women's lives—both as a source and expression of connectedness and creativity.'²⁶ Not only is women's writing itself a veritable garden of words and language, but the garden is a common metaphor for the imaginative territory that writing requires. The garden, thus, has been celebrated as a space conducive to women's thoughts, ideas, and creativity, which offers a sheltered, private 'room' to ponder and produce.

Across centuries and continents, Alice Walker later reclaimed the association of the garden as a location of feminine creativity, correlating the impetus to garden with the desire to write. In her powerful essay *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Creativity of*

²⁶ Laurie Critchley, ed., *A Glimpse of Green: Women Writing on Gardens* (London: The Women's Press, 1996), pp. 3-4.

Black Women in the South, she expands upon Virginia Woolf's argument in *A Room of One's Own* that the very material conditions of which women were deprived, such as financial independence and space for contemplation, are a necessary foundation for literary production. Walker recognizes that even in the direst environments of degradation and scarcity, black women managed to find alternative creative outlets to writing in their everyday life, exemplified by her mother's patient nurturing of flowers. Casting her own literary practices into a long tradition of women's invention, Walker draws a parallel between writing and gardening. While story-telling is subject to the interruptions of domestic demands, Walker describes her mother's interest in fostering plants in authorial terms:

I notice that it is only when my mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible except as Creator: hand and eye. She is involved in work her soul must have. Ordering the universe in the image of her personal conception of Beauty.²⁷

Among the flora, her mother has the agency and command of a Creator; similar to an author manipulating texts, she arranges the flowers like words and develops the plots. Gardens, in Walker's view, are a subversive feminine space where women have the power to create. They represent a potential location which stimulates women's imagination and they serve as a source for the cultivation of women's writing.

Examining the garden as an example of Foucault's heterotopia sheds light on the vision of the environment as a destabilizing space. As earlier discussed, heterotopias are palimpsests of actual locations, which manifest an imaginary realism. In his explanation of the heterotopias, Foucault uses the garden as an illustration of the overlap between the

²⁷ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (London: The Women's Press, 1984), p. 241.

physicality of a space and the presumptions of meaning an observer projects onto the location:

The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus it is that the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another; thus it is that the cinema is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space, but perhaps the oldest example of these heterotopias that take the form of contradictory sites is the garden.²⁸

The garden is, according to Foucault, an exemplary illustration of a heterotopia; the topography of the garden signifies more than just a collection of flowers and hedges, it is a symbol of 'other spaces.' Foucault continues by presenting the Persian garden in particular as emblematic of the layers of meaning that can be incorporated into a singular place:

We must not forget that in the Orient the garden, an astonishing creation that is now a thousand years old, had very deep and seemingly superimposed meanings. The traditional garden of the Persians was a sacred space that was supposed to bring together inside its rectangle four parts representing the four parts of the world, with a space still more sacred than the others that were like an umbilicus, the navel of the world at its centre (the basin and water fountain were there); and all the vegetation of the garden was supposed to come together in this space, in this sort of microcosm. As for carpets, they were originally reproductions of gardens (the garden is a rug onto which the whole world comes to enact its symbolic perfection, and the rug is a sort of garden that can move across space). The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world. The garden has been a sort of happy, universalizing heterotopia since the beginnings of antiquity (our modern zoological gardens spring from that source).²⁹

Foucault views the gardens of the Orient as microcosms containing a multitude of contradictions by symbolically intermingling various representations of the world's extremes. Incorporating allegories of other locations, the site evokes the consideration of spaces elsewhere. Although gardens can be mapped and are located in actual positions, they are simultaneously imaginary sites that provide insight into the inconsistencies of the world and challenge perceptions of reality with the portrayal of an alternative space.

²⁸ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces.'

²⁹ Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces.'

Not limited to characterization as a paradise or a utopia, the garden can be seen instead as a multidimensional environment combining reality and fantasy. Foucault's explanation of the heterotopia provides a useful framework for understanding Sackville-West's consideration of the garden as a subversive space that not only provides a location for reflection, but represents a space of female imagination. For Sackville-West, the garden is an alternative to the extremes of urban and rural geographies which, in her estimation, are environments dominated by masculine conventions. In contrast to many Modernist writers such as Woolf who celebrated the urban as a space for both women and for writing, Sackville-West sought out other, heterotopical locales.

Virginia Woolf and the City

Virginia Woolf's observation of how 'restless the English are with the waves at their very door,'³⁰ was sparked by a perusal of various titles of women's travel writing discovered during her own urban 'street haunting.' The volume of narratives spilling over the shelves of the used book store provides evidence of the tides of women who sought out distant lands, as well as casts Woolf's own localized explorations into the tradition of foreign expeditions:

There are travellers, too, row upon row of them, still testifying, indomitable spinsters that they were, to the discomforts that they endured and the sunsets they admired in Greece when Queen Victoria was a girl. A tour in Cornwall with a visit to the tin mines was thought worthy of voluminous record.³¹

Woolf's recognition of the copious amount of writing that travel stimulated in the nineteenth century complements her production of a piece inspired by her meanderings through the city. *Street Haunting* allows a glimpse into the writer's artistic technique and

³⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Street Haunting* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 10.

³¹ Woolf, *Street Haunting*, p. 11.

explores the engendering of texts. Premised on an author's imaginative impasse, the slim essay describes the interruption that manifests in the 'greatest pleasure of town life in winter—rambling the streets of London'³² in search of a lead pencil. Arguably, the necessity of a motive instigating the writer's wandering suggests an enduring illegitimacy of women's aimless strolls and reflects the residual division of gendered public and private space. However, the unfolding narrative exemplifies the connection between movement and the creative process; the journey which interrupts her composition is the material that shapes the completed manuscript. While there is no evidence of the work that required a new writing utensil, she translates her amble through the winter city into the final text. Woolf, famous for her acknowledgment of the material space necessary for the production of literature in *A Room of One's Own*, implies that access to the spectacle of urbanity is of equal importance. As Susan Squier contends, the metropolitan spectacle is an essential stimulus of the literary imagination for, 'by stripping us of the defining and limiting possessions of the private home, the city street permits imaginative passage into many lives.'³³

A significant dimension of Woolf's portraiture of the city, however, is its role as a source of creative imagination. Her own attitudes towards the bustle of London expressed in her diary were of a location ripe for exploration that influenced her imagination. Connecting her strolls through the city and the stimulation of thought, Woolf wrote in her diary: 'I could wander about the dusky streets in Holborn and Bloomsbury for hours. The things one sees--& guesses at—the tumult & riot & business

³² Woolf, *Street Haunting*, p. 1.

³³ Susan Squier, "'The London Scene': Gender and Class in Virginia Woolf's London," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 29:4 (1983), p. 494.

of it all—crowded streets are the only places, too, that ever make one...think.’³⁴ For Woolf, wandering through the city streets ignites her creative spark and provides the foundation for numerous works. In another diary entry she discusses how her movements among the animation of the London atmosphere give rise to her writing as the city ‘perpetually attracts, stimulates, gives a play & a story & a poem, without any trouble save that of moving my legs through the streets.’³⁵

Woolf demonstrates an interest in depicting various angles of the spectrum of London activity in her series of short essays, *The London Scene*, originally published in *Good Housekeeping* in 1932. As each piece highlights a particular perspective on the metropolitan experience, spaces serve as significant motifs, and each demonstrates how locations are influenced by the distribution of power. Woolf examines a range of contested terrains, from the negotiations of gender divisions within the private sphere in ‘Great Men's Houses’ to the impact of consumerist West London on the squalor of East End industrialization in ‘Docks of London.’ ‘Oxford Street Tide,’ moreover, is of interest as the text captures the vitality of shopping street scenes, often considered a female domain. As Judith Walkowitz proposes, the commercial landscape of Victorian London saw the blossoming of department stores which duplicated the private atmosphere of home with the establishment of tea shops and powder rooms on the premise. These represent spaces where ‘women safely re-imagined themselves as flâneurs, observing without being observed, constructing dreams without being obliged to

³⁴ Virginia Woolf and Anne Oliver Bell, ed., *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 1, 1915-1919* (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), p. 9.

³⁵ Virginia Woolf and Anne Oliver Bell, ed., *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume 3, 1925-1930* (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), p. 186.

buy.’³⁶

The London portrayed in ‘Oxford Tide’ recalls the pulse and agitation of the urban commotion, and the ‘swing and tramp’³⁷ described in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The cacophony of competing noise and the accelerated tempo of passing vehicles and pedestrians which stimulate Clarissa Dalloway’s enthusiastic declaration of pleasure resonate with the press and rush of the commercialised shopping space in *The London Scene*. Although ostensibly on an errand to purchase flowers for her party, Clarissa’s movement across the London landscape is anything but a linear trajectory, and her surveillance of the surrounding dynamism seems to parallel the characteristics of the meditative *flâneur*. Clarissa celebrates movement through the metropolitan landscape and the abundance of mental stimulation: “I love walking in London,” said Mrs. Dalloway. “Really, it’s better than walking in the country.”³⁸

In the opening scenes of *Mrs. Dalloway*, the London cityscape is portrayed as a text equally available for male or female perusal. When the aeroplane leaves its marks in the sky, the pedestrians below are united in deciphering the cryptic message. Piecing together the individual letters, those on the ground are both readers and writers of the urban panorama:

Dropping dead down, the aeroplane soared straight up, curved in a loop, raced, sank, rose and whatever it did, wherever it went out fluttered behind it a thick ruffled bar of white smoke which curled and wreathed upon the sky in letters. But what letters? A C was it? An E, then an L? only for a moment did they lie still; then they moved and melted and were rubbed out up in the sky, and the aeroplane shot further away and again, in a fresh space of sky, began writing a K, and E, a Y perhaps?³⁹

³⁶ Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* (London: Virago Press, 1992), p. 48.

³⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 2.

³⁸ Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 3.

³⁹ Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, p. 18.

The uncertain significance of the communication leaves room for the individual observers, including Clarissa, to construct their own understanding of the message. In this respect, the very technologies of modernity in the city allow women to create their own narratives.

The representations of women's access to the city are not, however, unambiguous. *Mrs Dalloway* presents numerous versions of the London cityscape, simultaneously depicted as a place of danger and freedom for the wandering woman; Peter Walsh's trailing of a nameless stranger is evidence of Woolf's recognition of women's risks in a city portrayed as the domain of male fantasy. Spotting an attractive woman crossing Trafalgar Square, Peter follows her as she moves towards Oxford Street, and projects presumptions of her character onto her retreating form. Yet, as the scenario takes place within the frame of Woolf's novel, there is a parallel between her position as author and Peter Walsh's fictitious constructions. While Peter trails the woman, Woolf follows the movements of her subjects and she knits the text together from the imagined motivations of her characters. Just as Peter Walsh creates personae and oversees the meanderings of individuals, so Woolf maps out the London scene and transposes her creations onto her text. As a writer, she follows his movements across the imaginary landscape and invents his thoughts. As in some of her shorter pieces, Woolf draws a connection between urban *flânerie* and the creative process. For Woolf as an author, the pulse and flux of the city and its continuous collisions between strangers and the anonymity of observers gives her the freedom to invent and produce her writing. The urban environment is a source of inspiration and allows her room to indulge her artistic sensibility.

Woolf's *Orlando*, however, depicts the negative, unsettling aspects of modern metropolitan life in the anxiety and confusion of the title character's experience of London. Written as a humorous hyperbolic tribute to Vita Sackville-West's uncommon life as a traveller, lover, and poet, *Orlando* is the biography of a young man's unceremonious transformation into a female as she enjoys adventures through a stretch of centuries. When Orlando encounters the present of the late 1920s, her impression of the urban spectacle is unfavourably contrasted to her familiarity with the Victorian London. All of the aspects of the chaotic tumult that Woolf cites as sources of excitement, Orlando finds overwhelming. While Woolf celebrates the energy of the commercial zones, the unspoken interaction between strangers and the buzz of speeding transport, Orlando deems the experience terrifying. The shopping district proves unaccommodating: the bustle of passers-by leads to an outburst of violent remarks, and the lack of privacy is demonized as the consequence of electricity in that 'one could see everything in the little square-shaped boxes.'⁴⁰ The absence of space is a persistent theme in Orlando's observations as the houses are 'little,' the clouds have 'shrunk,' and women have 'narrowed:' 'It was alarming—this shrinkage. Everything seemed to have shrunk.'⁴¹ For Woolf, as author, these are the very experiences that are the source of potential inspiration, and her writing imitates the restless atmosphere of the surroundings. The short, clipped sentences reflect the frenzy of movement as the narration leaps from one description to another:

The old Kent Road was very crowded on Thursday, the eleventh of October 1928. People spilt off the pavement. There were women with shopping bags. Children ran out. There were sales at drapers' shops. Streets widened and narrowed. Long vistas steadily shrunk together. Here was a market. Here a funeral. Here a procession with banners upon which was written 'Ra—Un', but what else? Meat was very red. Butchers stood at

⁴⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 194.

⁴¹ Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 194.

the door. Women almost had their heels sliced off. A woman looked out of a bedroom window, profoundly contemplative, and very still. Applejohn and Applebed, Undert---. Nothing could be seen whole or read from start to finish. What was seen began---like two friends starting to meet each other across the street---was never seen ended. After twenty minutes the body and mind were like scraps of torn paper tumbling from a sack and, indeed, the process of motoring fast out of London so much resembles the chopping up small of identity which precedes unconsciousness and perhaps death itself that it is an open question in what sense Orlando can be said to have existed at the present moment.⁴²

The stylistic choppiness of the passage imitates the experience of an accelerated movement of a motorcar. The consecutive 'Here was a market. Here a funeral. Here a procession' indicates the continual change of the present, and represents the pace of passage as the sites flash into view. Description is condensed into a series of impressions and individual snapshots. As Raymond Williams comments in *The Country and the City*, the narration's perpetual movement was characteristic of modern imagery evident in painting and in film, and indicates the fragmentary experience.⁴³ Interestingly, the speed of her retreat makes Orlando unable to decode the tangle of letters that flicker by; she can only discern incoherent segments of words that have lost all significance of meaning. The names, incomplete, are disconnected from any context as 'nothing could be seen whole or read from start to finish.' For Orlando, movement through the urban environment comes at the cost of piecing together writing, and it is not an atmosphere conducive to language. The inability to arrange the words into any comprehensive whole parallels the fragmentation of subjectivity. The modern experience splits the sense of self into pieces like 'scraps of torn paper' as Orlando's identity in the city becomes as inscrutable as the written words. It is only when she escapes into the country that she feels able to heave 'a sigh of relief.'⁴⁴ Orlando's flight into the pastoral among

⁴² Woolf, *Orlando*, pp. 200-201.

⁴³ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), pp. 241-242.

⁴⁴ Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 201.

the cows and cottages, offers a moment of respite as the cessation of movement and the comparative silence allows her an opportunity to collect her thoughts. Seemingly, Woolf's passage illustrates Orlando's discomfort with the stimuli of the modern urban atmosphere and her predilection for a more natural panorama; her rush out of the clamour and into the countryside appears to indicate Orlando's identification with the land. For an instance, as she passes the 'green screen' of the rural fields, the splintered self seems to regain the deception of wholeness. The momentary repose is short lived, however, as her entrance into the countryside does not provide a unified sense of identity. After the initial reprieve, Orlando realizes that the bucolic setting is equally fraught with anxiety of selfhood: 'But it is not altogether plain sailing, either....'⁴⁵ A multitude of Orlandos emerge with all the various shards of personae which constitute her identity. The recall of the various roles Orlando had assumed from a soldier to a traveller complicates the biographer's ability to pinpoint an identity for description and undermines the existence of a 'Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all.'⁴⁶ *Orlando* suggests that the realization of numerous selves is a condition of the modern experience that neither the city nor the country alleviates. For Orlando's character, the city and the country are both unsettling locations.

Woolf's depiction of Orlando's rejection of the urban environment and equally challenging atmosphere of the countryside closely parallels Sackville-West's own illustrations of the dichotomous city and country as disorientating and disruptive. In Sackville-West's depictions, however, she displays the space of both locales as constraining the female imagination. Unlike Virginia Woolf, Sackville-West does not

⁴⁵ Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 201.

⁴⁶ Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 202.

depict the city as conducive to creativity, production and language, and her literature offers a host of examples where the city, particularly, stifles women's invention.

Vita Sackville-West and the City

Throughout her writings, Sackville-West describes her distaste for urban life and her association of the metropolis with masculinity. In her depictions, women are not free to wander the cities as *flâneurs* unless they are masked as men. Only once she dons male clothing does she express her enjoyment of the opportunity to negotiate the streets. Unrecognizably dressed as a man, she describes her experience of the cities in terms that mimic those of the *flâneur*; savouring her disguise, she partakes in leisurely rambles, enjoying the ability to observe without being truly seen. She finds exhilarating freedom in her unencumbered access to the boulevards:

I have never told a soul of what I did...I dressed as a boy...It was marvellous fun, all the more so because there was always the risk of being found out...I never felt so free as when I stepped off the kerb, down Piccadilly, alone, and knowing that if I met my own mother face to face she would take no notice of me...I walked along, smoking a cigarette, buying a newspaper off a little boy who called me 'sir,' and being accosted now and then by women. In this way I strolled from Hyde Park Corner to Bond Street.⁴⁷

The passage reverberates with Sackville-West's delight in her anonymous wander through the streets and her amusement of being mistaken for a man. Meandering across London by herself, she is unbounded by the gender conventions which might otherwise restrict the destination of her walks. Her pleasure in the movement that the masquerade affords implies that the experience of a city is easier for a man and suggests that the urban environment is a predominantly masculine space. Her elation in London finds an echo in her parallel escape in Paris where she similarly dressed as her male persona

⁴⁷ Sackville-West, *Portrait of a Marriage*, p. 111.

'Julian.' Like George Sand, who traversed the Parisian landscape disguised as a man, Sackville-West transforms herself into a *flâneur*, frequenting cafés, pervading arcades, and observing the spectacle on the streets:

I used to stroll about the boulevards as I had strolled down Piccadilly, I used to sit in cafés drinking coffee, and watching people go by; sometimes I saw people I knew, and wondered what they would think if they knew the truth about the slouching boy with bandaged head and the rather *voyou* appearance.⁴⁸

Despite the illustration of her positive experience in the cities, it is only as a male that she is able to have agency within the urban environment, and access the authoritative gaze of the *flâneur*.

Elsewhere in her works, she describes the London scene in a manner similar to that presented in Woolf's *Orlando*; the city is restrictive and limiting, and the cramp of the urban experience is a constant foil to the expanse of space that permeates her descriptions of visits abroad. Following the voyages with her husband which occupied the initial period of their married life, the newlyweds settled into the London social setting. At the commencement of her matrimonial experience, she found contentment in the exposure to conversation and intellectual stimulus that the city provided. Recounting her pleasure as a significant addition to dinner parties and gatherings, she oddly exclaimed: 'Oh God, the horror of it! I was so happy that I forgot even to suffer from *Wanderlust*.'⁴⁹ The quotation is unusual in its implication of her retrospective dismay at having lost sight of her enjoyment of travel, and her longing to exchange the confinement of the rigid London social backdrop for a boundless setting of a wide geography abroad.

In other instances of her fiction, Sackville-West depicts the city as a masculine sphere in which women have no space. In *All Passion Spent*, published in 1931,

⁴⁸ Sackville-West, *Portrait of a Marriage*, p. 117, italics her own.

⁴⁹ Sackville-West, *Portrait of a Marriage*, p. 43.

Sackville-West depicts an elderly widow called Lady Slane's search for a space of solitude and peace, and describes her exploration for a location conducive to creativity outside of the distracting bustle of London. When she is young, Lady Slane stifles her ambitions as a painter after her family's pressure to accept a marriage proposal. As a widow at eighty-eight, she is finally at liberty to indulge her own desires, seeking out a location removed from the expectations of social propriety. Escaping the city for a house in Hampstead which in contrast seems 'scarcely a part of London, [as it was] so sleepy and village like,'⁵⁰ the novel engages numerous geographical allusions. London, within the context of the story, is synonymous to the limitations she felt as a result of her husband's domination, while the house outside of the city offers space for her thought. The city is a male domain constraining her sense of subjectivity, while her new, suburban house provides an expanse of room. Geography is a permeating theme throughout the text, and the terms used to describe her new space are representative of her changing sense of identity. In her portrayal, the city is a location of constraint, ill-suited to women's agency or creativity, while her new home provides her with room to contemplate. When Lady Slane purchases her new residence, she describes the effect that the space has upon her: 'the Geography had impressed itself familiarly; that in itself was a sign that she and the house were in accord.'⁵¹ Not only does the statement summarize the enormous significance of location that underpins the plot, but the statement reveals how physical surroundings may directly impact identity. The geography 'impressed itself familiarly' in stark contrast to the limiting compression of London, which signifies that Lady Slane felt restricted in the urban metropolis. As the

⁵⁰ Vita Sackville-West, *All Passion Spent* (Bath: Chivers Press, 1988), p. 62.

⁵¹ Sackville-West, *All Passion Spent*, p. 65.

city denotes the life-long deference to her husband's requirements, further, the distinction between the metropolis and her space in Hampstead is gendered. The cramped quarters of the city squeezed out any ambition she held to pursue a painting career. Reviewing the circumstances leading up to her engagement, Lady Slane contemplates Lord Slane's offer of marriage with spatial vocabulary. Although the union accompanies the prospect of financial security and a guarantee of social status, she recognizes that 'beside the spaciousness of his opportunity and experience, she might justifiably feel a little cramped.'⁵² With the quotation, Lady Slane acknowledges the consuming presence of a husband and the self-effacement expected of a wife. There is no room in her marriage for any identity save for that as supportive helpmate. Amid the tumultuous plotting of their future together dominated by his diplomatic career, Lady Slane silently ponders, 'but where, in such a programme, was there room for a studio?'⁵³ The studio naturally refers to her aspirations to paint, and her inability to carve out the necessary space for her artistic freedom. The question becomes an uneasy refrain and resurfaces a few pages later. 'And still she asked, where in this system, was there room for a studio?'⁵⁴ In the repetition of the demand, it is not simply her husband's mapping of her future that suppresses her imaginative abilities; the entire social 'system' is at odds with her hopes to pursue an artistic career. The association between the cramped living conditions of the city and the lack of space for identity highlights the implication that the urban area, representative of society as a whole, is a male domain where women are unable to make space for their female subjectivity.

⁵² Sackville-West, *All Passion Spent*, p. 117.

⁵³ Sackville-West, *All Passion Spent*, p. 122.

⁵⁴ Sackville-West, *All Passion Spent*, p. 124.

When Lady Slane describes her vision of escaping the pressures of domesticity, she imagines movement towards a foreign city where she might evade the expectations of her gender. The dream of a location abroad accompanies a change from the feminine to the masculine. Lady Slane imagines the ability to shed her female garb and gain freedom from the constraints of femininity:

They were thoughts of nothing less than escape and disguise; a changed name, a travestied sex, and freedom in some foreign city—schemes on par with the schemes of a boy about to run away to sea. Those ringlets would drop beneath the scissors—and here a hand stole upward, as though prophetically to caress a short sleek head; that fichu would be replaced by a shirt—and here the fingers felt for the knot of a tie; those skirts would be kicked for ever aside—and here, very shyly this time, the hand dropped towards the opening of a trouser pocket. The image of the girl faded, and in its place stood a slender boy. He was a boy, but essentially he was a sexless creature.⁵⁵

Lady Slane's vision of the foreign connects territory abroad with authority and power, and indicates her desire to cast aside the limiting expectations of her gender. The scheme to venture to another country is tantamount to the male fantasies of running away to sea to explore new territories unbidden. Once in a foreign environment, she imagines dismantling her feminine persona while gaining the liberty denied her at home to pursue her own artistic endeavours. The mention of the 'travestied sex' points to her recognition that a translocation of geography might instigate a change in gender, and that the move abroad might allow her to access the benefits of masculinity. Lady Slane's fantasy of escape from the demands of domesticity towards a location which allows her freedom from feminine duties reveals her understanding of gender constraints as inextricably entwined with location and space.

Only once Lord Slane dies and Lady Slane finds shelter in the Hampstead house removed from the city is she able to find the freedom and room she had desired. Long

⁵⁵ Sackville-West, *All Passion Spent*, pp. 112-113

cramped in her role as a wife where she must efface her own identity and dedicate her life to the existence of others, Lady Slane seeks out an environment, either beyond the urban or in another cultural context, where she has the room to pursue her own desires.

Sackville-West's representation of the city in both her fiction and her own memoirs suggest her perception of the urban as a space that leaves little room for women's thought and artistic production. Unlike Woolf who linked the energy of the city landscape with the possibilities of writing and portrayed an urban geography where women are free to wander as *flâneurs*, Sackville-West highlights the social constraints that limit women's access to creativity. In Sackville-West's work, women's sense of freedom and artistic proclivities are more easily experienced with a retreat from the masculine city space or in new landscapes abroad.

Sackville-West and the Garden

Contrary to expectation, Sackville-West does not compare the pastoral countryside with the portrayal of a masculine city and exalt the disorder of the natural as an area for women. Perhaps influenced by her own experience of disinheritance from her childhood country estate, Sackville-West depicts rural spaces with an absence of women. Her long poem, *The Land*, published in 1926, pays tribute to the beauty of the Sussex landscape and presents the farmlands and countryside as a domain primarily reserved for men.

With little mention of either women or children, *The Land* presents symbolic figures in the countryside. Divided into four sections, each a tribute to a season in the agricultural cycle, she celebrates a myriad of professions that constitute the spectrum of country lives. Included in her inventory of descriptions are portraits of vagrants, shepherds, peddlers,

reddlemen, and bee masters. Excluded from this fraternity of occupations is any mention of women's participation in the utilization and cultivation of the land. Acknowledged only as wives, the women play secondary roles as helpmates superficially concerned with aesthetic adornments:

The peddler and the reddleman
Go vagrant through the shires.
The peddler tempts the farmer's wife
With all she most admires,
With beads, and boxes made of shells,
With lace and huckaback,
Buckles for shoes and rings for ears,
And Old Moore's Almanack,
With tapes and bobbins, pins and thread,
'What lack you? What d'you lack?'⁵⁶

The farmer's wife has no defining identity except as a complement to her husband and a consumer of fripperies; her interest is in tending to domestic concerns such as the mending and sewing that requires her purchase of 'tapes and bobbins, pins and thread.' Perfectly contented to remain in the domestic arena, any sense of the farmer's wife's 'lack' can be readily fulfilled by the purchase of both the tools necessary to maintain a household and by superfluous ornamentation. A distinct contrast to the peddler and reddleman who 'go vagrant through the shires,' the farmer's wife is not at liberty to wander the countryside and she remains tethered to the matters of her home.

Louise DeSalvo has already noted in her evaluation of *The Land* in 'Every Woman is an Island' that the poem depicts a vision of England as a pastoral environment with a communal brotherhood that the presence of women would disrupt. Her reading of Sackville-West's work examines the depiction of woods as a treacherous environment unsafe for women:

⁵⁶ Vita Sackville-West, *The Land & The Garden* (Exeter: Webb & Bower, 1989), p. 33.

She strays, eternal nymph, and glances swift
 Into the ambushed depths on either side;
 Now fears the shadows, now the rift,
 Now fears the silence, now the rustling leaf
 That like a footfall with a nearing stride
 Startles the stronghold of her unbelief.
 Woods are her enemies, yet once she went
 Fleeing before a god, and, all but spent,
 Slipped from his arms, herself become a tree.
 She has forgotten; wood's an enemy...⁵⁷

Recalling the myth of Apollo and Daphne, where Daphne escapes Apollo's advances by becoming a tree, the passage clearly indicates the potential danger for women that the woods signify. The wilderness is not a space to which women have access as it is an 'enemy' and is the source of dread and fear. In this regard, women no more belong to the rural landscape than they do to the urban. Just as Orlando failed to find comfort once she escaped the city, so Sackville-West portrays the county as equally unwelcoming to women.

The only indication of women's productivity in *The Land* is in the section dedicated to description of the garden where Vita Sackville-West invokes a spirit of the flowers. She indicates the garden as a woman's environment:

*She walks among the loveliness she made,
 Between the apple-blossom and the water—
 She walks among the patterned pied brocade,
 Each flower her son, and every tree her daughter.
 This is an island all with flowers inlaid,
 A square of grassy pavement tessellated;
 Flowers in their order blowing as she bade
 And in their company by her created.*⁵⁸

Enjoying her command over the blossoms that she coaxed from the ground, the gardening woman is an architect of the plots and is responsible for cultivating the beauty of the environment. The budding flowers are the result of her toil and labour, and she is wholly

⁵⁷ Sackville-West, *The Land & The Garden*, p. 80.

⁵⁸ Sackville-West, *The Land & The Garden*, p. 45, italics her own.

credited for their creation. As an island, the garden is a separated space removed from the conventions of the surroundings; written in italics, the garden area is distinct from the other descriptions of the countryside that constitute the poem.

Suzanne Raitt, however, views Sackville-West's portraiture of the garden as a representation of tamed domesticity and a demonstration of her connection to Nicolson. Quoting Nigel Nicolson's sense of the garden as a symbol of his parents' union in that they both equally contributed to the development of the enclosure, Raitt writes:

Sackville-West's marriage to Harold Nicolson was mediated through their joint commitment to the creation of gardens, first at Long Barn, and then, after 1930, in Sissinghurst Castle. Gardens were the expression of their love, an example of the two temperaments working together in harmony: Nigel Nicolson calls the garden at Sissinghurst 'a portrait of their marriage. Harold made the design, Vita did the planting.'⁵⁹

The manner in which Sackville-West describes the garden within her poetry, though, suggests that the space is not an amalgamation of the male and female but rather a distinctly feminine space.

As further evidence, *The Garden*, published in 1946, Sackville-West equates the garden with the feminine, contrasting the masculine descriptions she employed in *The Land* with gentler, less brutal images. While both poems devote space to the intense labour inherent in both farming and gardening, the later poem promises a more delicate approach. Opening the piece with an explanation and defence of her authorial techniques, she hints that an accurate portrayal of gardens requires precision:

No strong, no ruthless plough-share cutting clods,
No harrow toothed as the saurian jaws,
Shall tear or comb my sward of garden theme,
But smaller spade and hoe and lowly trowel
And ungloved fingers with their certain touch.

(Delicate are the tools of gardener's craft,

⁵⁹ Suzanne Raitt, *Vita and Virginia: The Work and Friendship of V. Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 100.

Like a fine woman next a ploughboy set...⁶⁰

The list of agricultural tools hints of violence and aggression with the emphasis on their strength, jagged points and their potential for destruction. In contrast, the gardening instruments such as the 'lowly trowel' are compact, and necessitate exactitude. The 'ungloved fingers with their certain touch' underscore the gardener's nurturing hand, and suggests a maternal presence. The gendered distinction between the depictions of the rugged harvesting process and the docility of gardening as a juxtaposition of a 'fine woman next a ploughboy set' implies her impression of the garden as a feminine space. Interestingly, although Sackville-West later explicitly describes her vision of the archetypal gardener as a male fostering and protecting the fragile flowers just as she frequently defines her notion of a poet as male, she markedly indicates the garden as a women's environment. In fact, her very writing of a poem on gardening undermines her claim of male domination over both poetry and gardening; as the above quotation once again illustrates, Sackville-West relates her text to the cultivation of greenery as the garden she describes develops into the poem itself, and the 'ungloved fingers' become her own authorial hand. That she describes the characteristic gardener and poet as male, thus, is ultimately overshadowed by her presentation of the garden as a woman's setting.

Further, Sackville-West continuously emphasizes in *The Garden* the link between gardening and poetry. Not only does she often equate the gardener's arrangement of plants with the writer's assembly of words, but the result of her poetic endeavour is a veritable garden of aesthetic pleasure. The textual division into seasons marks the symmetrical foundation of a formal design, and the generally balanced meter coupled

⁶⁰ Sackville-West, *The Land & The Garden*, p. 91.

with the irregular rhyme scheme mirrors the type of garden that Sackville-West valued which displayed a mixture of carefully premeditated plots with an added measure of haphazard informality. The included dedication to her friend Katherine Drummond explicitly describes the connection with her offering of 'Half a garden, half a poem.'⁶¹ Apologizing for any textual shortcomings, she suggests that she is 'failing as a gardener, failing as a poet.'⁶² The constant conflation of garden and poetry accents her recognition that gardens are poetic and that poems are lyrical gardens. Equating growing with writing, she contributes to the tradition of those who view gardening as a creative act, describing words as seeds with the potential to blossom into unexpected patterns: 'But you, oh gardener, poet that you be / Though unaware, now use your seeds like words / And make them lilt with colour nicely flung.'⁶³ Like a gardener, the poet has the capacity to cultivate words like flowers, orchestrating elaborate configurations and flourishes. In her works, Sackville-West forged a connection between women, gardens and writing which suggests that women's writings are aesthetic displays worthy of attention, and the garden space is a subversive area of women's empowerment and creativity.

Gardens, Travel Writing and 'Elsewhere'

A section of Sackville-West's *The Garden* paints the garden space as a veritable Eden, and she illustrates travel and exploration as projects to uncover geographies that correlate with the memory of the lost paradise:

Homesick we are, and always, for another

⁶¹ Sackville-West, *The Land & The Garden*, p. 90.

⁶² Sackville-West, *The Land & The Garden*, p. 90.

⁶³ Sackville-West, *The Land & The Garden*, p. 125.

And different world.

And so the traveller

Down the long avenue of memory
Sees in perfection that was never theirs
Gardens he knew, and takes his steps of thought
Down paths that, half-imagined and half-real...⁶⁴

The section recalls the mythology of Eden and the myth that human wandering began with the expulsion from the garden. The traveller is perpetually homesick for memories of a former arcadia and is forced to seek out new landscapes. Sackville-West celebrates the garden as a scene inextricably linked to imagination and memory. The garden enclosure, as she depicts in the quotation, represents an ideal space where imagination trumps the actuality of the setting. The garden, in her words, is a 'different world,' or a heterotopia, as perceptions of the imagined location overlap the tangible site. Sackville-West suggests that travel stems from a desire to seek out new locations 'elsewhere' which correspond to an ideal that exists only in memory and in imagination; once uprooted, the wanderer searches for a space as represented by the garden. No doubt the sentiments that Sackville-West expresses are influenced by her experience of losing her claim to Knole, but they also resonate more generally with the desire of the period to discover an imaginative geography 'elsewhere.'

By using the garden as a representation of an 'other' space while suggesting simultaneously that the yearning to uncover new alternative spaces fuels the ambition to explore, Sackville-West links the garden to wandering. In another passage in *The Garden*, Sackville-West underscores how the garden space can be a location 'elsewhere' that has the capacity to transport the observer to another imagined sphere. She describes a poet's wandering into the garden for a moment of respite from the desk in terms of travel to a new country: 'warming as he emerges from his door / As though he pushed aside / The leathern

⁶⁴ Sackville-West, *The Land & The Garden*, p. 104.

curtain of cathedral porch / In Italy, and came outside.’⁶⁵ Entering the garden, the poet crosses an imaginary boundary into a new location; stepping across the threshold opens out new imaginary vistas as the poet envisions being transported to another country. In Sackville-West’s portrayal, movement through the garden is tantamount to movement into another world.

Not all writers, however, have equated gardening and travel with such ease; several women travellers have depicted an overthrow of their established lives with an escape from the garden enclosure. Explaining the impetus behind her radical voyage to the forbidden city of Lhasa, which she described in her 1927 *My Journey to Lhasa*, Alexandra David-Neel wrote: ‘I craved to go beyond the garden gate, follow the road that passed it by, and to set out for the unknown.’⁶⁶ Bound to the garden and illustrating the surrounding gate as less a fortification from the outer world than a barricade preventing departure, David-Neel suggests that women are unable to participate in the culture of modern movement as their circumstances are the antithesis of the freedom and mobility that travel requires. Describing her voyage as an escape from the constrictions of the garden, David-Neel indicates her association with the garden as an area of passive restriction. The ties to a particular plot inherent in gardening seems incongruous with wandering’s carefree abandon. Only relatively recently, the gardener Mirabel Osler questioned: ‘Is it possible to garden and to travel or are the two things contradictions in terms?’⁶⁷ Her response was a hesitant uncertainty that those who wished to enjoy the fruits of their labour would find journeying away from home difficult. Despite the

⁶⁵ Sackville-West, *The Land & The Garden*, p. 136.

⁶⁶ Alexandra David-Neel, *My Journey to Lhasa* (London: Virago Press, 1983), p. xviii.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Deborah Kellaway, ed., *The Illustrated Book of Women Gardeners* (London: Virago Press, 1997), p.153.

seeming contradiction between travel and gardens, however, gardens were historically a site of tourism, and represented a location where women had freedom to wander uninhibited.

In the eighteenth century, the garden acted as a feminine substitute for the cultivation that the Grand Tour provided men of respected classes. A turn in the garden provided an intellectual growth and improvement equivalent to that which men were expected to acquire while on their voyages abroad. Those privileged enough to venture to foreign landscapes transformed their gardens at home into horticultural souvenirs for others to appreciate. Opening up their property to select visitors, the imitation gardens themselves became destinations and tourist sites:

The fashion for foreign travel and the Grand Tour enabled nobility and gentry to see the ruined temples of Italy for themselves, as well as to buy pictures and statues as mementoes...Respectable visitors, well supplied with guidebooks and maps, followed prescribed walks along wandering paths, encountering carefully contrived surprises—grottoes, temples, and statues—all placed to provoke both contemplation and emotional response.⁶⁸

That guidebooks suggested strolls through the garden indicates that the imitation gardens served as substitutes for the experience of the original locations. The appreciation and understanding that travellers were intended to gain from their exposure to distant locations could be learnt, to an extent, at home. For women, access to 'contemplation and [an] emotional response' equivalent to men's is particularly significant as they were denied the advantage of departing on Grand Tours. The garden was a legitimate space for women to ponder the traditions and explore their creative imaginations. In her essay on the garden as a subversive space in male landscapes, Susan Groag Bell draws parallels between the notions of men's access to travel and women's frequenting of the garden:

⁶⁸ Bennet, *Five Centuries of Women and Gardens*, p. 48.

Young ladies, as a rule, had neither the freedom to make a grand tour nor the wealth to acquire large *objets d'art* to scatter over property they did not own; their exposure was of another kind. As Jael Henrietta Pye remarked when describing the famous gardens of Twickenham just outside London for her readers in 1775: 'I have observed that ladies in general visit these places, as our young gentlemen do foreign parts... These little excursions being commonly the only travels permitted of our sex.'⁶⁹

At first glance, the quotation emphasizes the oppositional duality between men who are free to wander and women who are tethered to their homes, between the free Odysseus and the sessile Penelope, yet the garden arguably transforms into a space 'elsewhere' where women have room to reflect and contemplate. While gardens and travel abroad are ostensibly opposed along the gender binary, they are similar in that travel can be viewed as a search for space 'elsewhere' and gardens themselves represent such an alternative and transformative environment.

For Sackville-West, Persia is a symbol of a site 'elsewhere' which she considers conducive to thought and writing and creativity. She frequently lauds her impression of the landscape for its sense of expanse and describes how Persia resonates with her preconceived perception of the geography. In *Twelve Days*, Sackville-West reveals the depth of her fascination and romanticised vision of Persia, and the extent to which she imagined the landscape prior to her encounters. Persia is, for her, a heterotopia, which recalls an environment cultivated in the imagination:

Since romance is the reality of somewhere else or of some other period, here, on the Bakhtiari Road, this truth is doubly applicable. Persia is certainly somewhere else, and a long way, too, in relation to England, and this Biblical form or existence certainly belongs to a period other than the twentieth century—it is an anachronism in our eyes, and therefore romantic; the double elements of space and time, geographical and chronological, necessary to romance, are thus amply satisfied.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Quoted in Susan Groag Bell, 'Women Create Gardens in Male Landscapes: A Revisionist Approach to Eighteenth Century English Garden History,' *Feminist Studies*, 16:3 (1990), p. 473, italics her own.

⁷⁰ Vita Sackville-West, *Twelve Days: An Account of a Journey Across the Bakhtiari Mountains in SouthWestern Persia* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928), p. 66.

Not only is Persia another space far removed from the familiar England, but it represents another time and is thus, in her consideration, a 'somewhere else.' I will address the problematic colonial implications of travel writer's perceptions of 'anachronistic space' in the context of Karen Blixen, but in this instance I am interested in Sackville-West's construction of Persia as a romanticised location beyond the bounded shores of England, and a landscape upon which she can project her idealised environment.

Sackville-West celebrates Persia as an 'other' location where she has room to exist, and, significantly, she portrays the area around Teheran as a place with room to write and one that inspires composition. The very fact that Persia supplied Sackville-West with enough stimulation to compose two travel books and numerous poems, including 'A Bowl of Blue Beads' and 'Persia,' both written in 1928, indicates her consideration of the atmosphere as suitable for creativity. One of her poems from 1932 entitled 'Nostalgia' extols the beauty of Persia as a place where she is able to recover a sense of calm and, once more, underscores her connection of the landscape to her perception of an idyllic space:

That day must come, when I shall leave my friends,
My loves, my garden, and the bush of balm
That grows beside my door, for the world's ends;
A Persian valley where I might find calm.

And this is no romance, the place is no
Vague lovely Persia of a poet's tale,
But a very valley where some cornfields grow
And peasants beat the harvest with a flail.⁷¹

Although Sackville-West attempts to describe a Persia that is not a mere figment of the poetic imagination but rather a location of daily tribulations and veritable labour, her lines reiterate the romantic vision of landscape; the very title suggests that Persia is

⁷¹ Caws, ed., *Vita Sackville-West*, pp. 323-324.

inextricably linked in her mind to a lost past, and that it is a space which corresponds to an imagined world.

Not surprisingly, *Passenger to Teheran* is replete with references to Persia as the destination of Sackville-West's search, and as a landscape of freedom and expanse. In the text, Sackville-West gives numerous illustrations of the Persian landscape and she evokes the sensations experienced in a spectrum of locations ranging from the bustling marketplace to the desolate desert. The text records her impressions of the geography and its impact upon her imagination; it reads more like a private, solitary journey which reflects the musing proffered in the introductory sentence which states that 'travel is the most private of pleasures.'⁷² The text is divided into several chapters each devoted to a different location. The title of some sections such as 'To Egypt,' 'To Iraq,' and 'To Isfahan,' however, emphasize the transience and movement of her sojourn and underscore Persia and particularly Teheran as the culminating point of her travels. The sentence which commences the chapter entitled 'Round Teheran' voices the sense of speed and movement of the journey:

This country through which I have been hurled for four days has become stationary at last; instead of rushing past me, it has slowed down and finally stopped; the hills stand still, they allow me to observe them; I no longer catch but a passing glimpse of them in a certain light, but may watch their changes during any hour of the day...I am no longer a traveller, but an inhabitant.⁷³

While Sackville-West interlaces the prior sections with a sense of urgency to press onward, it is only when she reaches the area around Teheran that she is able to actively examine the landscape. Describing herself as previously a passive passenger around whom the external world moves, Sackville-West is at last able to consider her

⁷² Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 7.

⁷³ Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, p. 58.

surroundings. The space becomes one in which she is able to simply exist rather than one to be traversed. Persia is the culmination of her exploration, and it is 'elsewhere' where she is able to *be*.

In one instance of the piece, Sackville-West expands upon her impression of the Persian landscape as an expansive location, and she emphasizes her appreciation of the environment for its naturalistic qualities that evade the categories of any other geography she had previously encountered. During her approach to Persia, she expresses her view of the site:

I saw, as, with the sun, we swept onwards, a country unlike anything I had ever seen before. England, France, Germany, Poland have their points in common; a sense of care and cultivation; snug little villages; homesteads tiled and self-contained; evidences of husbandry, in ploughed fields, meadows, ricks; a trim landscape, a landscape ordered by man, and submissive to his needs. Italy and Spain have their points in common; a landscape again submissive to man, though compelling him to work on lines dictated by the rougher lie of the land: he has had to make terraces for his vines, his cities wear a rude mediaeval aspect, the general wild beauty of the country has been conquered indeed, but only after a struggle; murder and pillage, Moors and tyrants, still stalk those slopes. Russia has the green rolling steppe; predominantly the face of the dry land is cultivated, it is used, it is forced to be of service to man and his creatures, it is green. But Persia had been left as it was before man's advent. Here and there he had scraped a bit of the surface, and scattered a little grain, here and there, in an oasis of poplars and fruit trees outlining a stream, he had raised a village, and his black lambs skipped under the peach-blossom; but for miles there was no sign of him, nothing but the brown plains and the blue or white mountains, and the sense of space.⁷⁴

Interestingly, the aspects in the other countries that Sackville-West bewails are the marks of the human organizing presence on the land. In contrast to the sense of violence associated with the land's submission to human domination, Sackville-West sees Persia as organically developed; even the evidence of villages, flocks of sheep, and the occasional scattered grain do not diminish from her celebration of the landscape as fundamentally natural. Her appreciation of the sense of room that Persia offers is thus connected to her perception of Persia as wholly outside the sphere of human influence. It

⁷⁴ Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, pp. 49-50.

offers a sense of space precisely because it is an alternative and 'other' landscape. Seemingly, Sackville-West's articulation of her distaste for cultivation is at odds with her own enjoyment of gardens yet her description of her experience of Persia and the Islamic gardens reveals her consideration of the garden space as a destabilizing environment, simultaneously wild and tame, which defies classifications.

Considering her work's brevity, Sackville-West's *Passenger to Teheran* spends a significant fraction of the text on an illustration of the pleasures of Islamic gardens. Devoting several pages to her impressions of the garden, she indicates how it is a space unlike any she had previously encountered. Defying her expectations and comparisons, the Persian garden is a spacious domain without exact definition. Although it does not have traditionally recognized boundaries of herbaceous borders, it is distinct from the spreading simplicity of the surrounding desert; the garden is of interest precisely because it resists categorization:

Ever since I have been in Persia I have been looking for a garden and have not yet found one. Yet Persian gardens enjoy a great reputation...But they are gardens of trees, not of flowers; green wildernesses...Such gardens there are; many of them abandoned, and these one may share with the cricket and the tortoise, undisturbed through the hours of the long afternoon. In such a one I write...Nor is it so sad as it might be, for in this spacious, ancient country it is not of man that one thinks; he has made no impression on the soil...There is something satisfying in the contrast between the garden and the enormous geographical simplicity that lies beyond. The mud walls that surround the garden are crumbling, and through the breaches appears the great brown plain...The sense of property, too, is blessedly absent; I suppose that this garden has an owner somewhere, but I do not know who he is, nor can any one tell me. No one will come and say that I am trespassing; I may have the garden to myself; I may share it with a beggar; I may see a shepherd drive in his brown and black flock...All are equally free to come and enjoy.⁷⁵

Nowhere in her text does she describe a space as potentially conducive to creativity as the garden; it is an area for Sackville-West to sit, contemplate and write without interruption, a representation of the space which resonates with other theorists' visions of the garden

⁷⁵ Sackville-West, *Passenger to Teheran*, pp. 64-67.

as an environment conducive to women's writing. Without details of the topic of her composition, the reader can only speculate that the writing Sackville-West describes at that moment might be the very words that the reader is perusing. The garden, in this regard, becomes both a thematic inspiration to Sackville-West, and a location where she is at liberty to exercise her writing abilities. The passage demonstrates how the garden environment is inextricably linked to women's writing; the garden is a penetrable space distinguishable from its environs as a location where she can create. It is a space unlike any other as she depicts it as both internal and external, both public and private. The crumbling mud walls allow Sackville-West to glimpse the dusty expanse beyond, and the garden is a porous arena. Anyone, including the beggar and the shepherd, and even the cricket and the tortoise, are free to wander through the garden domain and indulge in the garden's pleasures. Unable to discern an owner, the garden is equally available to all. Unlike Knole, which become the property of her uncle, the garden is not an exclusive domain.

Sackville-West's illustration of the garden as permeable is significantly different from the historical and conventional associations of the Persian garden as a bastion of privilege. Discussing the symbolism of the Persian gardens, Emma Clark explains that the very term 'paradise' is infused with notions of sequestered detachment as it 'comes from the ancient Persian word *pairidaēza* (the Persians being one of the earliest peoples to cultivate gardens, parks and hunting grounds)—*pairi* means "around" and *daēza* means "wall". Thus we immediately have the idea of an area isolated from its surroundings, enclosed by walls.'⁷⁶ Islamic texts, absorbing Persian customs,

⁷⁶ Emma Clark, *Underneath Which Rivers Flow: The Symbolism of the Islamic Garden* (London: The Prince of Wales Institute of Architecture, 1996), pp. 9-10.

characterize the garden as a segregated and private area only accessible to an elite few. As Catherine Alexander observes in her study on the domestic associations of the garden, 'the Islamic pleasure garden, the domain of kings and conquerors, was closed against the aridity of the deserts and the internal environment could be watered and controlled, planted with the fruits of raids and war.'⁷⁷ Reserved for the privileged, the garden is as a site of abundance in stark contrast to the bleak paucity of the surrounding deserts. Exclusive and secluded, the Islamic garden is typically a place of private isolation.

In contrast to the perception of the garden as an elite domain, Sackville-West's celebration of the space emphasizes the accessibility of the area. Yet while she presumably describes a particular location, her portrait of a Persian garden is also representational, and functions as a symbol of her exposure to a space 'elsewhere' that is unlike any other. Sackville-West's depiction of the Persian garden as neither public nor private, neither wholly at home nor abroad, neither country nor city, illustrates Foucault's perception of the space as a conflation of oppositions that provide, in her own words, 'a different world from this.'⁷⁸

A fundamental innovation of many spatial theorists is the understanding that travel creates the existence of space; it is only through movement that space is defined.⁷⁹ With the rise of the modern metropolis, new perspectives of location and distance emerged which provided some women with a sense of room to create. Vita Sackville-West, in contrast to some of her counterparts, saw the city, as well as the country, as inaccessible to women. It is the garden, which marks a borderland between the two

⁷⁷ Alexander, 'The Garden as Occasional Domestic Space,' p. 859.

⁷⁸ Sackville-West, *The Land & the Garden*, p. 144.

⁷⁹ See Michel de Certeau and Steven Rendall, trans., *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

extremes, that she celebrates as an area where women have imaginative space; a pervading theme in Sackville-West's literature is her perception of the garden as a place of retreat and productivity. As a heterotopia, the garden in Sackville-West's work is a destabilizing domain that presents an alternative version of the world where women might have freedom and the room to generate aesthetic inventions. Sackville-West's perception of the garden functions as an environment similar to that for which she sought abroad; both real and symbolic, the garden and the landscape in her romanticised Persia function for her as locations of women's creativity and serve as figurative spaces for the female imagination. Sackville-West demonstrates in her travel writing her desire to uncover alternative spaces 'elsewhere' beyond the limitations of the conventional. Sackville-West's depictions of heterotopical geographies are, as we shall see, echoed in Rebecca West's romanticised portraiture of Yugoslavia that appears in her monumental work, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. In Rebecca West's work, however, she incorporates the feminine space abroad into her imagining of an alterative sense of 'home.'

Chapter 3

Re-Mapping Home: Gender and Nationalism in Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*

Introduction

Any reader who casts even the most cursory glimpse at Rebecca West's colossal text, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia*, can attest that the sprawling five hundred thousand word work exceeds a mere journalistic record of Yugoslavia that the title suggests. Although West infuses her writing with evocative details of the sites, cities and landscapes she explored on her travels from Croatia to Montenegro in the late 1930s, the text plunges into depths far beyond the superficialities of traditional guide books. Incorporating stretches of historical background, her philosophical ruminations on the relationship between men and women, her judgements on literary talents, and her opinions about pressing political concerns in her native Britain, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* provides significant insight into West's own worldview. Like much travel writing, which concentrates on mapping the writer's political positioning rather than unveiling any insight into the culture under scrutiny, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is, as John Gunther posits, 'not so much a book about Yugoslavia as a book about Rebecca West.'¹ Considering the shadow of urgent circumstances under which West composed her text, it is not surprising that she was interested in applying her observations 'abroad' to her re-evaluation of her understanding of 'home.' Travelling when Europe was inevitably descending into another world war, and publishing in 1941 when the war was a dangerous reality for civilian Londoners bracing themselves against air raids, West naturally desired to translate the lessons of

¹ Quoted in Victoria Glendinning, *Rebecca West: A Life* (London: Phoenix, 1987), p. 155.

another culture's historical defeats and triumphs into her own experience of a critical moment of uncertainty in England's national narrative. West's explanation in the epilogue of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* outlines her motivation to compose the text:

This experience made me say to myself, 'If a Roman woman had, some years before the sack of Rome, realized why it was going to be sacked and what motives inspired the barbarians and what the Romans, and had written down all she knew and felt about it, the record would have been of value to historians. My situation, though probably not so fatal, is as interesting.' Without doubt it was my duty to keep a record of it.

So I resolved to put on paper what a typical Englishwoman felt and thought in the late nineteen-thirties when, already convinced of the inevitability of the second Anglo-German war, she had been able to follow the dark waters of that event back to its source.²

With the quotation, West underscores her recognition of the text as a reflection of circumstances in England rather than a description of Yugoslavian culture. Casting England as a new Rome under threat from a marauding invader, West outlines her sense of the perilous conditions within her homeland. Embedded within the quotation, further, are three pervasive assumptions which continually surface throughout West's writing and reflect a constellation of themes of nationalism and gender within *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* upon which this chapter will focus.

To begin, West's insistence on tracing England's current circumstances back to the Balkan Peninsula indicates an inextricable connection between England and Yugoslavia. What West reveals about Yugoslavia during her journey directly informs her perception of England. Ostensibly outlining the schisms and mapping the cultures that constitute Yugoslavia, West details significant views on her native England; while constructing a narrative of Yugoslavia culture, West really rewrites an account of English

² Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2006), p. 1089.

nationalism. Tracing the 'dark waters of that event back to its source,' West uses her relation of Yugoslavian history to explain the present conditions at 'home.'

Secondly, West's insistence that the 'source' of the Anglo-German war originated in the Balkan Peninsula casts Yugoslavia as a historical England. By presenting her investigation of history as a travel book, West is attempting to uncover the past not only as a movement through time but as a passage through a geographical landscape. Yugoslavia, in this context, represents a living past simultaneously existing with the English 'present.' When West writes, 'I was obliged to write a long and complicated history, and to swell that with an account of myself and the people who went with me on my travels, since it was my aim to show the past side by side with the present it created,'³ she indicates how she and her travelling companions are of modernity and journeying backwards through history. Throughout *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, further, Yugoslavia is celebrated as a more primitive, less evolved past; West portrays the space of the country as an Edenic landscape. Although a victim of colonial conflicts, Yugoslavia, as depicted by West, is a country as yet unscathed by the taint of modern influence. West continually illustrates Yugoslavia as a 'primordial' environment, and celebrates the raw displays of human passion and emotion. The landscape is, in her estimation, a mystical world of imagination and memory operating on a different temporal axis than her modern England. Primitivism, as an aesthetic, became popular amongst Modernist artists and the Classics scholar Jane Harrison produced studies in the period attempting to recover a feminine history which highlighted 'primitive ritual and animism, nature cults, and matriarchal origins—particularly the belief that femininity

³ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 1089.

carries a residue of the mystical and the pre-rational.’⁴ West’s emphasis on the ‘primitive,’ thus, casts Yugoslavia as a location embodying the traditional traits of feminine values. Celebrating her observations of the mysticism and naturalism of Yugoslavia, qualities which she elsewhere in her fiction aligns with womanhood, West feminizes the landscape of the Balkan Peninsula.

In the final reading of the quotation, West highlights how political affairs impact women. That she suggests a Roman woman during the sack of Rome would have opinions on and revelations about the events suggests her project within *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* to give credence to women’s assertions and political perspectives. West weaves into her text numerous illustrations of the ways women are victims of nationalist struggles and how women’s bodies are often the pawns of history. Women, in this context, are forced to absorb passively the effects of political circumstances. West’s writing is extraordinary in her unearthing of myriad representations of women, both historical and contemporary, and in her acknowledgment of women’s participation in political affairs. Comparing herself with the imagined Roman woman, West emphasizes the necessity of including women’s voices within the national arena, and declares her own text as politically significant; West advocates a space for women within the public sphere with her accentuation of women’s potential insights.

Evaluating the intersection of the three readings of the single quotation, I argue that West was interested in rewriting the narrative of English nationalism with an incorporation of feminine voices; unsettled by the lack of women’s inclusion in England’s political sphere, West uses her experiences in Yugoslavia to envision an

⁴ Jane Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 189.

alternative design of a national English identity which allows room for women's participation. In some respects, West appropriates the conventions of travel writing, which describes unfamiliar horizons, to explore an imagined geography of a modified English nationalism. While Vita Sackville-West sought out a geography abroad that recreated the creative feminine space of her garden, Rebecca West was interested in incorporating the feminine space she observed in Yugoslavia into her re-evaluation of England. Her travel writing within *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is a project to transcribe elements of 'abroad,' including gender, onto 'home.' Approbating the traditional feminine values of mysticism, primitivism and motherhood within Yugoslavia, West territorializes femininity. Persistently linking Yugoslavia and England, thus, West suggests an integration of such values into the framework of English identity. Admittedly, West's representations of gender within the immense text are diverse, occasionally contradictory, and frequently re-inscribe the gender binary, which makes overarching claims on her views about gender relations unfounded. Yet while she does not illustrate Yugoslavia as a place of individual women's empowerment, she feminizes the whole of the landscape and history. West does not present Yugoslavia as a feminist utopia, but she characterizes the nation as a representation of the feminine. Re-mapping England onto Yugoslavian geography, West allegorically composes a new English nationalism which includes women as defined by her perceptions of femininity.

This 're-mapping,' however, has colonial implications; although West voices a firm distinction between nationalism and imperialism, her absorption of the feminine Yugoslavia into her national narrative of England resonates with notions of imperialism. Her feminization of the land and her requisition of the Yugoslavian territory for her

project of charting a new vision of England run the risk of re-inscribing colonial relations. In this chapter, I will explore the intersection of gender and nationalism within *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, examine West's redrafting of an English national narrative with the incorporation of women, and scrutinize the imperialist implications of her representations.

Biography and Background

Even within her lifetime, Rebecca West earned a reputation as an acerbic commentator, a literary critic, and a novelist, much admired for her fierce intellectual intensity. Born in 1892 as Cecily Isabel Fairfield, West spent the majority of her girlhood in Scotland. As *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* reveals, West identified herself as an 'Englishwoman'⁵ but also associates Scotland with a sense of home which suggests her consideration of Scotland as incorporated into an English national identity. West commenced her lengthy journalistic career with a commanding letter to *The Scotsman* in 1907.⁶ Entitled 'Women's Electoral Claims,' West vocalised her support of the suffragette movement. In 1911, West was offered a position writing for the feminist weekly *The Freewoman*, which began to publish her biting editorials the following spring. Adopting the pseudonym 'Rebecca West' after a character in Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, West felt at liberty to brandish her signature verve within her writing.⁷ A majority of biographies and accounts posit West's father's departure from the family in 1901, and her affair with H.G. Wells as the most significant events of her life, the scars of which continually affected her. West's life, of course, cannot be simplified into an explanation of singular events;

⁵ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 1089.

⁶ Carl Rollyson, *Rebecca West: A Saga of the Century* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), p. 12.

⁷ Glendinning, *Rebecca West*, p. 36.

she proved a prolific, nuanced, complex and contradictory woman who was devoted to a variety of causes and continually re-invented herself until her death in 1983. Although *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is a masterpiece of style and structure and embodies the enormity of her mind within its multi-dimensionality, it hasn't often been evaluated with the depth that it requires. Glendinning's biography devotes a mere four pages to the text, concentrating, primarily, on the emerging political circumstances that provide the setting for the work. Rollyson's account, noticeably more ambitious, allocates a chapter to his reading of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* and supplements West's text with his examination of the relationship dynamics West effaced from her master narrative. West's initial interest in Yugoslavia was sparked during a lecture tour sponsored by the British Council in the spring of 1936. She returned on two subsequent visits, with her husband in 1937, and again in the summer of 1938,⁸ and the completed text of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* interweaves an amalgamation of the three visits into a single narrative.

Ever since the publication of Rebecca West's 'incubus of a book'⁹ in England in 1942, critics have discerned cohesive patterns within the magnitude of her writing, yet the vast and multidimensional *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* resists facile categorization. The majority of West's documenters acknowledge the myriad praises for the scope and complexity of the piece at the time of its publication, and their awareness of the intricacy of West's narrative tapestry: '*Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* interweaves characters, dramatic scenes, dialogue, description, reportage, autobiography, literary criticism,

⁸ Glendinning, *Rebecca West*, p. 154.

⁹ Rebecca West and Bonnie Kime Scott, ed., *Selected Letters of Rebecca West* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 22 December 1938.

philosophy, theology, and feminism.’¹⁰ The majority of critics received the book with a respectful admiration, yet the array of lenses through which it was scrutinized indicates how the faceted text defies most generic expectations. West’s interweaving of an extensive background and the history of Yugoslavia into her reportage of her daily excursions and routines on her visit induced many of her contemporary reviewers to evaluate her work as a historical reference book. John C. Adams wrote in the *Slavonic and East European Review* that ‘it is among other things a narrative of Serbian and Balkan history, supported by a bibliography in the western languages, and equipped with an index. Hence it deserves to be regarded as a work of history.’¹¹ Adams’ assumptions about what constitutes historical documentation and his implicit estimation of History’s superior merits aside, the belief that *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* ‘deserves’ to be viewed foremost as an account of the area’s history is at odds with several later readings. In her recent book, Janet Montefiore highlights West’s exposure of her personal experience with her praise of the text as ‘the greatest of all 1930s autobiographies.’¹² Bernard Schweizer proposes yet another approach to *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* as he analyzes the piece within an epic framework. The elevated language of West’s dialogue, the combination of factual information and the mystic characteristics of the landscape, all resonate with the conventions of epic prose writing; following the traditions exemplified by *The Odyssey* or *Paradise Lost*, Schweizer argues, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is West’s ‘quest’ for political and spiritual understanding. Ever since its publication, thus, critics have examined West’s magnum opus within a variety of schemas.

¹⁰ Rollyson, *Rebecca West*, p. 177.

¹¹ John C. Adams, ‘*Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*,’ *Slavonic and East European Review: American Series*, 2:1 (1943), p. 264.

¹² Janet Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flood of History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p. 76.

Even the briefest examination reveals how *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* oversteps all generic boundaries, and does not wholly conform to any traditions. Historians, as an example, find fault with West's disregard for chronology. In the *Journal of Modern History*, Bernadotte E. Schmitt complains that 'the only difficulty with her method is that she follows geography rather than chronology; so that, having visited Zagreb before Sarajevo, Sarajevo before Belgrade, and Belgrade before Skoplye, we read about Stephen Radich before we hear of Francis Ferdinand of Hapsburg.'¹³ Similarly, while the 1200 page-book is of epic-proportions, reading *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* solely in the context of other mythologized writings ignores aspects of West's interest in the political relevance of her work, and her urgency to underscore her vision of the history as a means of influencing attitudes of war-time England. In her biography, Glendinning offers a rare criticism of the text, suggesting that West's zealous intermingling of genres renders *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* unsuccessful: '*Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is a great work of romantic art constructed over a framework of research and scholarship. Judged by the stiff criteria of this framework, it is excessive, unbalanced, sometimes wrong, sometimes silly.'¹⁴ Glendinning dismisses West's work as an ambitious yet unwieldy text, and suggests that her combination of frameworks ultimately underscore the book's shortcoming as either a 'romantic art' or as 'scholarship.'

Along the same vein, Glendinning's editorial decision to skim over *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* reveals her opinion of the text as an unbeneficial autobiographical reference. Her lack of interest is odd, though, considering the aspects of herself that West

¹³ Bernadotte E. Schmitt, 'Book Review: *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*,' *Journal of Modern History*, 14:3 (1942), p. 391.

¹⁴ Glendinning, *Rebecca West*, p. 166.

incorporates into the narrative. To read *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* purely as autobiographical, however, would be to dismiss West's infusion of literary elements. Certain liberties such as her invention of long stretches of dialogue between herself and her husband, her condensing of several trips into a single narrative, and the representational features of some of her characters, all indicate an authorial presence. Gerda, as an example, is in part a caricature of West's views on the Germanic insistence on superiority; she is as much a literary device for the advancement of the narrative and introduction of philosophical musings as she is a historical person. The text, therefore, is more complex than an accurate reportage of West's sojourn since it is simultaneously a creative endeavour. Her decision to present historical information thematically rather than sequentially reminds the reader that the text is an artistic construct. At one stage in the lengthy epilogue which she wrote once she had returned to London, West describes the significance of art as a method of re-evaluating and comprehending past events. The artist, as she outlines, has the ability to recreate perception and restructure the past into a contextualized coherence.

For of course, art gives us hope that history may change its spots and man become honourable. What is art? It is not decoration. It is the re-living of experience. The artist says 'I will make that event happen again, altering its shape, which was disfigured by its contacts with other events, so that its true significance is revealed...It must not be copied, it must be remembered, it must be lived again, passed through those parts of the mind which are actively engaged in life...If art could investigate all experiences then man would understand the whole of life, and could control his destiny.'¹⁵

West's general views on art stand as a defence of the production of her own travel account. Presenting history unchronologically, re-patched together in the creation of her text reveals the mark of her presence throughout the piece. The work is autobiographical

¹⁵ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, pp. 1127-1128.

in that traces of West's narrative authority pervade the text, yet it is an intricately fashioned creation.

Reading *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* in the context of travel writing provides a useful point of reference with which to examine the text as the genre implicitly combines measures of autobiography, history, journalism and landscape descriptions and an emphasis on space and geography. Thematically, West's writing has much in common with other 1930s travel accounts; as I have touched upon in the introduction, some scholars have categorized 1930s travel writing as itself subtly distinct from previous eras as the decline into the Second World War necessitated cultural and political re-evaluation. Perhaps prompted by the impression of an undefined loss and the atmosphere of reminiscence, the 1930s were ripe for reflective memoirs and an indulgence in personal memories. In 'The Leaning Tower' of 1940, Virginia Woolf commented how 'no other decade can have produced so much autobiography as the ten years between 1930 and 1940.'¹⁶ In her piece, Woolf attributes increased emphasis on self-scrutiny as a reaction to the immense uncertainty and changes in the period. The emphasis on a history of the self against the background of political changes arguably influenced the travel writing genre. As I explained in the introduction, more than any previous period, travel writing of this time overlaps with the autobiographical as an exploration of other spaces became a quest to unveil aspects of identity. The passage through uncharted regions abroad was tantamount to a mapping of the author's subjectivity and personal history, and the journey across unfamiliar terrains was an exploration of the individual's past. Particularly in this decade, travel writing as a genre intersects with elements of autobiography as the voyage functions as a metaphor for self-evaluation.

¹⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays, Volume 2* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1972), p. 177.

Further, scholars have emphasized the chiefly political and nationalistic aspects of the representation of self against the background of other cultures. If the space of foreign landscapes embodies a writer's past as a scene of social ancestry, then the author elevates their point of origin as the culminating location of modernity. Assessing Greene's *Journey Without Maps*, Melanie R. Hunter in 'Travel Writing and the Imperial Authority,' posits that 'the search for the "primitive" out in the "wilds" of abroad is, in the end, a search for self and search for home...Ultimately, the journey out of England, the "withdrawal," becomes, not so ironically, the search for national memory, for civilization's "roots," the Englishman's psychologically innermost identity.'¹⁷ Hunter's conflation of individual and national subjectivity reflects the period's trend to politicize movement abroad. Adam Piette, in 'Travel Writing and the Imperial Subject in 1930s Prose: Waugh, Bowen, Smith and Orwell,' suggests that '[t]hough it may very well have been possible for intellectuals in the 1910s and 1920s to see travel as an epic journey into the mind and private relationships (as in Woolf's *The Voyage Out*), by the 1930s mobility through acts of expatriation, exploration, and repatriation had become definitively politicized.'¹⁸ Travel narratives of the 1930s are distinct in their emphasis on the representation of the individual's journey as an investigation into the politics of home.

Black Lamb and Grey Falcon shares with other travel writing of the period the characteristics of a personal, psychological voyage, an exploration of the situation of the self within the context of the wider world, and the accompanying parallel of the construction of national identity against foreign cultures. West's own emphasis on the

¹⁷ Melanie R. Hunter, 'Travel Writing and the Imperial Authority,' in Kristi Siegel, ed., *Issues in Travel Writing: Empire, Spectacle and Displacement* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), p. 32.

¹⁸ Adam Piette, 'Travel Writing and the Imperial Subject in 1930s Prose: Waugh, Bowen, Smith and Orwell,' in Siegel, ed., *Issues in Travel Writing*, p. 53.

primitivism of Yugoslavia, and her interest in re-evaluating the English identity is not atypical of the writing of her contemporaries; *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* scrutinizes 'home' from the distance of a foreign country. West's project, of course, is not limited to a construction of the 'Englishman's' subjectivity, however, as an inherent indication of the gendered word suggests that women are not participants of such national concerns; West's interest in gender relations manifests itself in a demand to scrutinize the current masculinity of Englishness. Her inclusion of gender terms sets her apart from the dominating travel writers of the period. In her text, West reflects the period's insistence that women are ensconced within their private lives when a discussion with a nurse reveals what she describes as the 'idiocy' of women:

Idiocy is the female defect: intent on their private lives, women follow their fate through a darkness deep as that cast by malformed cells in the brain. It is no worse than the male defect, which is lunacy: they are so obsessed by public affairs that they see the world as by moonlight, which shows the outlines of every object but not the details indicative of their nature.¹⁹

West's condemnation of women's lack of interest in the politics transforming their lives exemplifies the seemingly rigid binary between the female 'idiocy' and male 'lunacy,' which consistently resurfaces throughout the text. Casting her disgust at women's private 'idiocy' as her motivation to seek out her country's 'roots' in Yugoslavia, West redesigns the connection between women and the public sphere. In her very composition of the text which questions nationalism and engages historical reference, West defies the prescribed illustration of women as cosseted in the 'home.' West demonstrates in her own writing of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* that women are capable of transcribing their observations and of participating in public discourse. In this regard, she complicates her declaration that women are 'idiotic' in their privacy, providing evidence of her own

¹⁹ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 3.

engagement with public affairs. Even though some critics argue that West tempers her own narrative articulations with the measured rationality of her husband's persona within the text, West ultimately fashions both voices with her authorial influence. The emphasis in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* on her own experience signals the significance of what Mary Ellmann describes in relation to West as the 'warm human-glowing advantages of women.'²⁰ West imagines her role as a writer as offering an opportunity to revise historical events from an innovative perspective. In her case, she undertakes to present a female standpoint on politics and to spotlight women's involvement in the construction of a nation. *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* does not re-inscribe a linear master narrative, but offers a circular, un-chronological re-evaluation of the past which allows room for alternative 'feminine' histories and nationalisms. In a manner that echoes much of the feminist ideologies of her time which conflate women with femininity, West's work not only seeks to unveil women's voices which history has silenced, but the very narrative structure of her text reflects her resistance to a male-centred logic and her privileging of feminine outlooks.

Theoretical Framework: Gender and Nationalism in the Interwar Era

The context in which West began the composition of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* saw innovative modes of femininity and changes in women's struggle for acceptance as national subjects. As I explored in the introduction, English feminists encountered a regeneration of obstacles when circumstances following the First World War produced a cultural emphasis on women's function as representatives of the domestic sphere. Rather than a movement into the public area as full-fledged citizens, women remained,

²⁰ Mary Ellmann, *Thinking About Women* (London: Virago Press, 1979), p. 191.

according to Virginia Woolf in her 1938 *Three Guineas*, a 'stepdaughter of England.'²¹ A woman's association with her country was governed by her social relations; female nationality was determined by a husband as a marriage to a foreign man necessitated a surrender of her own citizenship. Women were not considered suitable participants within the national arena and were encouraged to content themselves, once more, as indirect agents with an influence on husbands and sons.

Women's circumscription to a domestic territory was often justified by the perception that femininity was incompatible with political concerns; the early decades of the twentieth century gave rise to dismissals of female participation in the public sphere on the grounds that women were inextricably bound to a primitive atavism. While Havelock Ellis was one of the first to paint women as the embodiment of Nature, it was Freud's 'Civilization and its Discontents' in the 1930s which cemented the assignation of gender to the primitive/civilized binary. He begins the essay questioning the benefits of a civilization over what he deems 'primitive conditions' and he considers the relative anxieties each lifestyle elicits. Freud, further, introduces gender into the equation when he maintains that women, burdened by the trappings of their female body, are adverse to the 'work of civilization:'

Women represent the interests of the family and of sexual life. The work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable. Thus the woman finds herself forced into the background by the claims of civilization and she adopts a hostile attitude towards it.²²

According to Freud, women are inherently ill-suited for participation in civilization as they lack the 'instinctual sublimations' that the building of a society demands. Forced

²¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 129.

²² Sigmund Freud and James Strachey and Angela Richards, trans. and eds., 'Civilization and its Discontents,' *Volume 14: Art and Literature* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 293.

into the background and to the margins as a result of developmental shortcomings, Freud aligns women with the debased simplicity of 'the primitive.'

Many feminist agendas of the interwar period attempted to challenge the supposition of a natural order to women's exclusion from the public sphere by reclaiming the notion that aspects of femininity were essential and worthy elements of a nationalist identity. Numerous writers retained the male/female duality but trumpeted values allied with the feminine as crucial to the development of an improved society. Such arguments have roots in the prominent Victorian ideology that woman's superior moral aptitude and innate purity made her an indispensable agent for the country during imperial campaigns. Exploiting dogmatic presumptions of the time, feminists managed to underscore women's critical contributions as representatives of the nation. In her review of *The New Woman at the fin de siècle*, Sally Ledger describes how New Women sought cultural acceptance by emphasizing their femininity, 'championing motherhood and ardently supporting purity campaigns.'²³ The writing in the 1920s and 1930s similarly engaged ideological views of women as linked to a primitive naturalism to argue that the key to a utopian future was in civilization's return to the feminine. According to many authors, women not only deserve inclusion into the public sphere, but their absence creates a perilous imbalance in the culture to be remedied only by an embrace of feminine ideals. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe how such sentiments saturated literature of the time, writing that 'perhaps most obviously, the intensity of the suffrage struggle was reflected in popular culture through the proliferation of male-authored dystopias and

²³ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 69.

female authored utopias about sexual battle and female rule.’²⁴ The utopian vision of female rule imagined a new formulation of the nation and cast women as capable agents of transformation.

When Woolf argued in *Three Guineas* that ‘in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world,’²⁵ she positions women as marginalized members of a nation. The quotation paints women as transgressive characters who imaginatively challenge geographical boundaries and belong to a global community of outcasts. Due to their position on the periphery, women, in Woolf’s estimation, function as redemptive agents; women have the ability to positively influence the national body politic. Woolf was not alone in her vision of a transformation of national identity with the incorporation of feminine values. In her work on British women Modernists and nationality, Jane Garrity convincingly outlines how the fiction of the period metaphorically mapped out a space which she argues ‘can be read as an attempt to recast their actual marginality and displacement by constructing an alternative *women’s sphere* that conjoins female agency, mobility, and national expansion.’²⁶ Garrity examines how interwar female writers’ engagement with geographical metaphors reflects a feminist venture to map out a space for women and for the female body within the British culture.

Academic attempts to explore representations of femininity surfaced at the turn of the century, and one of the scholars whose work was influential was the classicist Jane Harrison. Harrison was an acquaintance of many figures in the Bloomsbury scene and

²⁴ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, Volume 1: The War of the Words* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 18.

²⁵ Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas*, p. 234.

²⁶ Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, p. 26, italics her own.

Woolf even references her in a *Room of One's Own*.²⁷ In one of her most significant texts, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* published in 1912, Harrison explores the feminine Themis, belief in whom existed prior to that in the Olympian divinities. Themis ““is not religion, but she is the stuff of which religion is made.””²⁸ Representing a matriarchal mysticism of a pre-historical era, Themis, Harrison suggests, embodies characteristics of the primitive and collective experience. Harrison claims that that ‘matriarchy prevailed as the originary historical epoch, using anthropological evidence to connect the Great Mother to Dionysus who, in Harrison’s reading, is a liminal figure—in terms of gender—and is associated with mysticism, irrationality, women and [nature.]’²⁹ Harrison’s emphasis on re-appropriating feminine values suggests a project to trace a matriarchal lineage and to reclaim femininity as instrumental to the understanding of a collective consciousness. Although Harrison does not discuss models of nationalism, her work implicates the feminine Themis as the ““force that brings and binds men together,””³⁰ and thus she incorporates women into a national identity.

West’s own fiction resonates with the feminist projects of the period as she explores themes regarding the exclusion of women’s concerns from society and the redemption of femininity throughout her works. In her novel *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy*, published in 1928, West unabashedly outlines women’s potential positive influence on an international scene as Harriet, the embodiment of mysticism and nature, exerts a moral persuasion on her oppositional counterpart Arnold Conderex’s political

²⁷ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, p. 15.

²⁸ Quoted in Annabel Robinson, *The Life and Work of Jane Ellen Harrison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 228.

²⁹ Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, p. 203.

³⁰ Quoted in Robinson, *The Life and Work of Jane Ellen Harrison*, p. 228.

and imperial advances. Harriet is inextricably connected to the natural world and her garden is a space of numinous transformation. Bonnie Kime Scott expresses how: 'Harriet situates herself in gardens, both the parks of London where she strolls with Condorex and her own piece of an old Kensington garden.'³¹ Similar to Vita Sackville-West's representation of gardens as a feminine sphere, West depicts Harriet's grounds as a space of female mysticism; her residence 'fantastically enough...[had] no entrance'³² and can only be accessed through the garden. Private and isolated, Harriet's realm is one where fables of sisters transforming into trees might have factual credibility and where Harriet can gain insight into Arnold's thoughts despite his feeble reminders that 'this is the real world...Such miracles of thought cannot occur.'³³ Reciting a poem commencing with the line '*I have a garden of my own*,'³⁴ Harriet conjures a musical marvel as the piano reverberates with her voice. Harriet is the epitome of innocence and she has a natural enchantment operating against Arnold's dry, logical rationality. Despite his callous dismissal of his connection to Harriet, further, her presence exerts a dimension of moral integrity on his project to advance the British Empire. West challenges the assumption of civilization's benefits, celebrating instead women and nature as the genuinely civilized aspects of a society. According to the novel, however, women's power to influence positive change is curbed by their relegation to the private sphere. Towards the end of the story Harriet questions: 'Why, what was the use of me being so innocent in this g-g-garden...when I had no power to impose my state on the rest of

³¹ Bonnie Kime Scott, 'Refiguring the Binary, Breaking the Cycle: Rebecca West as Feminist Modernist,' *Twentieth Century Literature*, 37:2 (1991), p. 182.

³² Rebecca West, *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* (London: Virago Press, 1980), p. 13.

³³ West, *Harriet Hume*, p. 32.

³⁴ West, *Harriet Hume*, p. 33.

society? I may have been innocent, but I was also impotent.'³⁵ In *Harriet Hume*, thus, West characterizes traditionally feminine traits as critical to the salvation of English culture, yet laments women's unfortunate inability to exercise any influence over a social transformation.

Along the same vein, West censures the state of the nation and the absence of room for women's concerns, and describes the widespread impact of such exclusions in her novel *The Judge*, which is set in Scotland. Published in 1922, the book depicts how the iniquities of sexism have effects on a chain of generations. Ellen Melville struggles to sustain her attachment to Richard Yaverland while both tend to the wounds their respective mothers suffered from their patriarchal communities. Before encountering the worldly Richard, Ellen, a young suffragette in Edinburgh, feels limited to a life of daily drudgeries and insipid interactions. Ellen longs to escape abroad where she might evade the trappings of her gender and partake in adventurous escapades: 'I-I'll die if I don't get away.'³⁶ Unhappy with the outlook of her future at home, she envisions 'elsewhere' as a sublime space where she might emerge transformed: 'Perhaps if she could go to some new country she would escape from this misery.'³⁷ She has no capacity to blossom while tethered to home and only locations abroad offer her the same privileges as a man: 'her face was haggard, in spite of its youth, with appetite for travel in the hard places of the world, for the adventures and achievements that are the birthright of any man.'³⁸ There is no room for the enormity of Ellen's imagination at home and she hopes to seek out the vast unmapped territory of a foreign land to live as she is capable.

³⁵ West, *Harriet Hume*, p. 266.

³⁶ Rebecca West, *The Judge* (London: Virago Press, 1980), p. 19.

³⁷ West, *The Judge*, p. 121.

³⁸ West, *The Judge*, p. 33.

Ellen finds herself attracted to Richard because he represents the promise of escape to distant locations. The couple, however, is unable to realize the potential of their happiness abroad because of Richard's sense of duty to offer his mother Marion the affection previously denied her. Impregnated by Richard's father, the unmarried Marion suffered a stoning in the street by local villagers and was further wounded when a husband she married for protection rapes her. When West quotes on the title page that 'every mother is a judge who sentences the children for the sins of the father,' she spells out how the poisons of a culture where women are degraded affect an entire community. In this context, Ellen's reverie of a foreign geography is perhaps a hope for a new environment outside the patriarchal logic in which she resides; she dreams of mapping out a space in which women are granted the respect and autonomy they deserve.

I argue that West's travel writing echoes the attitudes which she displays in her novels as she maps out a geography of women's empowerment abroad and incorporates the imaginative space into her description of an English identity. Like *Three Guineas*, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* argues the fundamental necessity of a place for women's involvement in the country in order to create a balanced, civilized England:

Both *Three Guineas* and *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* close, then, with the idea of a civilization under threat, and it is a civilization in which women have a stake...The argument that develops through their careers is that only through a critical engagement with gender—a public as well as a private category, and therefore implicated in public violence—does it become possible to transcend idiocy and attack lunacy.³⁹

West views gender as a critical factor in political discourse and she displays her perception of femininity as civilization's potential redeemer in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. By incorporating her notions of gender into her travel writing, West describes

³⁹ Marina Mackay, 'The Lunacy of Men, The Idiocy of Women: Woolf, West and War,' *NWSA Journal*, 15:3 (2003), p. 142.

the territory abroad as an imaginative female space where the values of mysticism and primitive naturalism dominate the cultural order. As I shall explore in the following sections, West's recurrent juxtaposition of locations in England and Yugoslavia signals her sense of the Yugoslavian scene as a supplementary component of the English landscape. Territorializing femininity, thus, West's project to examine the nationalist narrative of a distant country becomes an attempt to explore and integrate a space for femininity into English political considerations; West, in other words, reinvents her perception of home by imagining the assimilation of a space for women in the public sphere.

English and Yugoslavian Nationalisms in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*

As much as *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is a record of West's multiple journeys through Yugoslavia and an evocative account of a particular landscape at a pivotal period in European history, West's magnum opus offers a window into her consideration of her contemporary English life and culture. The epilogue, composed entirely in retrospect, is a powerful display of an English nationalism emphasized by her juxtaposition of England and Yugoslavia. The urgency which characterises the tone of the final chapter manifests itself in her defence of her home nation in the face of the incursion of fascism, and a nostalgic mourning for the losses Yugoslavia endured.

The Yugoslavian landscape, as West signals, is a palimpsest, layered through centuries of cultural conflict and suffering from the friction of other nations' schisms. In her descriptions of travels, West's attempt to translate her views of Yugoslavia for the particular benefit of her immobile readership in England results in an imprinting of both

English and Scottish landmarks onto the Yugoslavian countryside. Scattering references to prominent districts and celebrated attractions across the pages of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, West dismantles her reader's understanding of a modern England and rearranges the fragments into an innovative configuration within the perimeter of the Yugoslavian boundaries. In other words, West reconstructs and remaps her native land onto the Yugoslavian landscape, reconfiguring and redefining her sense of 'home.' Several scholars who have examined West's travel writing have noted the hierarchies of allegory embedded in the text. Bernard Schweizer comments how: 'in the mythical design of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, the fate of Serbia is merely an allegory for the fate of Yugoslavia as a whole, which in turn, becomes an allegory for the fate of England, and ultimately for Western civilization at large.'⁴⁰ In this manner, England and Yugoslavia are inextricably linked in West's work; not only does Yugoslavia supply 'the source' of concerns surfacing in her present-day England and thus serve as a manifestation of England's history existing on another temporal axis, but her representation of the country is itself an imaginative reinvention of an alternative England. As previously mentioned, the epilogue offers evidence of West's application of the lessons she observed while abroad to her impressions of the circumstances of war facing her modern England. Her witness of the senseless sacrifice of a black lamb which she signifies in the book's title shapes her opinion about the futility of her generation's call for a passive resistance against the impending threat of fascism in England. The Yugoslavia in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is thus a foil for understanding modern England as the historical events that impacted Yugoslavia offer a sketch of an alternative English life. West often contrasts

⁴⁰ Bernard Schweizer, 'Epic Form and (Re) Vision in Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*,' in Bernard Schweizer, ed., *Approaches to the Anglo and American Female Epic, 1921-1982* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), p. 74.

England with Yugoslavia in terms of both landscape and traditions, and the differences between the two illuminate the nuances of West's home.

While in Macedonia, West visits a fresco painted on a church wall in Neresi which conjures up a memory of a Blake poem, and the painting strikes her as a veritable illustration of the images that Blake's language brought to mind. The remarkable effect of the unusual juxtaposition highlights unrecognized aspects of both the church fresco and the written words. Marvelling at the unexpected collision of ideas and images which her visit to the church instigates, West comments on how 'the verse was written one hundred and fifty years ago by a home-keeping Cockney and the fresco was painted eight hundred years ago by an unknown Slav. Two things which should be together, which illuminate each other, had strayed far apart, only to be joined for a minute or two at rare intervals in the attention of casual visitors.'⁴¹ Likewise, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* offers a 'rare interval' when two incongruent cultures, the English and the Yugoslavian, are brought together and 'illuminate each other' for the reader's attention. The fresco provides a metaphorical understanding of West's attempts to shed light on English circumstances through her careful and captivating scrutiny of the Yugoslavian nation. In *Inventing Ruritania*, Vesna Goldsworthy describes how writers have constructed a binary opposition between England and Yugoslavia and emphasizes the differences between the two locations: 'In terms of an imagined map of Europe defined in the way, "Britishness" and "Balkanness" stand at opposing ends of the hierarchical diagonal.'⁴² West certainly does frequently position Yugoslavia and England as diametrically opposed. Yet as exemplified by the moment of appreciation for the Neresi frescos which function as an

⁴¹ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, pp. 690-691.

⁴² Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 9.

allegory for the connection between Yugoslavia and England, the two countries are not always on 'opposing ends of the hierarchical diagonal,' but they intersect and overlap. In the case of the frescos, even when they are temporally disjointed, the poem and the visual painting find commonality in the space of the church.

West's representation of the relationship in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* of Yugoslavia to England is not of an 'othered' geography but more in line with Mary Louise Pratt's notion of 'contact zones.' Outlined in her work *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt discusses how travel promotes coterminous regions which highlight interactions. Arguably, Yugoslavia in West's portrait is not oppositional to England but a parallel landscape; West collapses the duality by interpreting Yugoslavian history through the politics of present-day England. 'The allusion to Jarrow and South Wales, then proverbial for poverty and unemployment, makes a Tsar's historical tragedy intelligible by interpreting him through a classic image of 'present -day' 1930s England.'⁴³ Travel increases 'contact zones,' as the collapse of distance between disparate cultures naturally brings together and juxtaposes ways of life which would otherwise remain separate. Travel writing in Pratt's estimation is not reduced solely to a hierarchical relationship between the traveller and his or her power of observation over the lands they visit, but both parties are influenced by the encounter. England and Yugoslavia are not, in West's case, always interlocked in a binary relationship defining one another by their differences, but their intersection generates a new space where both cultures exist. In *Representing Lives*, Alison Donnell and Pauline Polkey describe how 'contact' helps to shape relations between colliding cultures:

⁴³ Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s*, p. 10.

A 'contact' perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travellers and 'travelees,' not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.⁴⁴

In *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, West's project does not merely critically contrast the foreign landscape with her ingrained cultural presumptions, but her views on 'home' are drastically re-evaluated by her experience abroad. The relationship between England and Yugoslavia, according to West, is a complex constellation of interface as each country informs her perceptions; she uses the plight in England to understand Yugoslavia and the history of Yugoslavia to make the events in England intelligible.

Throughout the text, West draws upon comparisons between England and Yugoslavia, presumably to cast the country into a context her readership might comprehend. The effect, however, is that West draws a veritable map of England upon the existing Yugoslavian background. Describing the country as layered in her declaration that the landscape is in fact a palimpsest, West overlays England onto Yugoslavia, refiguring English geography in the process. Even at the moments when West chooses to emphasize distance between Yugoslavia and England both in terms of geographical proximity and the vast cultural differences, West uses England as a point of reference from which all locations in Yugoslavia are measured: 'Ochrid is a long way from London.'⁴⁵ In this respect, West traces a map of England onto a Yugoslavian nation. Smatterings of interjected references to regions conjure the English countryside in the midst of Yugoslavia. The 'broken Serbian county...reminds Somerset men of

⁴⁴ Alison Donnell and Pauline Polkey, eds., *Representing Lives: Women and Auto/biography* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 15.

⁴⁵ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 707.

Somerset and Scots of the Lowlands,⁴⁶ and Montenegro is 'Buckinghamshire on this cool northward slope'⁴⁷ In Old Serbia, 'the lower half of the hillside was entirely covered with villas of the Golder's Green sort.'⁴⁸ The diverse sites resituated in innovative relation to each other onto the new location of the Yugoslavian territory reorders, re-scrambles and thus imaginatively reinvents the old landscapes of West's home.

In *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, West favourably compares the Yugoslavian countryside to a myriad of English locations. West does occasionally indicate the likeness between the less aesthetic aspects of industrialized Yugoslavia and England with a richness of metaphor; Skoplje displays the same lack of concern for aesthetics as some of England's urban centres where 'the same impression that the scalp of the years has become dandruffed with undistinguished manufactured goods.'⁴⁹ Yet the majority of West's descriptions of the variegated countryside are of a positive improvement upon even the most exquisite aspects of either English or Scottish landscapes. In Serbia, she lovingly sketches her impression of a crimson church which 'stands among land like the fairest parts of the Lake District.'⁵⁰ Many landmarks scattered around Yugoslavia have counterparts in England which merit description, but more importantly they often supersede the original template. Driving through Belgrade she encounters a topography, as an example, that was 'the spit and image of Lowland Scotland, though richer to the eye by reason of the redness of the earth.'⁵¹ In Montenegro, she passes a scene that 'save for a peppering of graves by the roadside, this might have been a better Lake District, a

⁴⁶ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 918.

⁴⁷ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 1011.

⁴⁸ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 920.

⁴⁹ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 633.

⁵⁰ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 540.

⁵¹ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 486.

lovelier Coniston.'⁵² While the contrast saves West the effort of detailed description by conjuring up the impression of the Lake District or Lowland Scotland, her steadfast insistence that they are illustrations of lovelier versions than those with which her readership would be acquainted subtly suggests that the entirety of Yugoslavia is an improvement on the geography of her home.

The lengthy description of West's delight in her time spent conferring with Gospodin Mac, the Scottish manager of a Serbian mine near Kossovska Mitrovista, offers the reader another example of West's assumption of an overlap between Yugoslavia and England, and reveals the extent to which she considers Scotland as included in her understanding of 'home.' West relishes the location and takes pleasure in the company's conversation which nostalgically recalls the attractions of her home. With Gospodin Mac's wife, West enjoys an exchange of reflections upon the cultural differences between the town's inhabitants, and with Gospodin Mac himself, the group discusses the friction caused by the intermingling of ethnicities and religions. Although West acknowledges how Gospodin Mac's wife was weighted by homesickness and 'had long been an exile,'⁵³ West's time spent casually conversing with the couple represents a homecoming for her and imaginatively transports her to both England and Scotland. During her reluctant departure, West comments on how the movement away from Gospodin Mac's residence was a withdrawal from home as 'at last we slid down the hillside that was like Golder's Green, that was like Chislehurst, that was truly very Heaven, and the dark, proliferating complexity of Slavonic life again absorbed us.'⁵⁴ West considers the area with its mixture of locations a veritable heaven. The landscape is

⁵² West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 1014.

⁵³ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 943.

⁵⁴ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 953.

not a mere replica of the English original as the differences offer a superior improvement. West once more reinterprets the geography of her home nation and maps out an innovative alternative to the place from which she ventured. The Yugoslavia West describes is layered, a point she emphasizes during her visit as the conversation with the couple elicits new views on the vista: 'half her talk made a palimpsest of the scene before us, overlaying old Serbia with Ayrshire, coloured as it lives.'⁵⁵ This 'doubling' of nations creates, thus, a new and redefined country. The amount of text dedicated to her time spent with Gospodin Mac and his wife is evidence of the influence the encounter had upon West's experience. Their house provides one of numerous pockets within the Yugoslavian landscape where the foreign territory is juxtaposed with England and Scotland, and the layering suggests a redesigned 'doubled' perception of her home geography.

West's reinvention of her home country's identity with intermingled aspects of a new culture prefigures precisely what Homi K. Bhabha later prescribes for a reinterpretation of national self-definition. Applying 'travelling theory' with its collision of various backgrounds to the construction of a modern nationalism, Bhabha considers how:

If, in our travelling theory, we are alive to the metaphoricality of the peoples of imagined communities—migrant or metropolitan—then we shall find that the space of the modern nation-people is never simply horizontal. Their metaphoric movement require a kind of 'doubleness' in writing: a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a 'centred' causal logic.⁵⁶

The increase of movement and exchange of cultures requires, according to Bhabha, a new form of representation beyond the linear and 'centered' logic. West's *Black Lamb and*

⁵⁵ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 943.

⁵⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,' in Homi K. Bhabha, ed. *Nation and Narration* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 293.

Grey Falcon arguably presents a new version of nationalism that is not horizontal but a layered palimpsest of identities. Bhabha's emphasis on the significance of writing in the construction of a country's self-perception accords with West's attempts to write a new narrative of her nation. Her travel writing, which records the intermingling of different cultures and brings together 'two things which should be together, which illuminate each other,'⁵⁷ is an attempt to create a new sense of identity not just for Yugoslavia but for England by association. Bhabha's call for a new 'doubleness' in writing which resists the causative nature of most authoritative works, further, reminds the reader of the manner in which the text is a new version of travel writing which mitigates a variety of genres to produce an innovative voice which is part confessional, part historical and part literary device. West's interweaving of her husband's views into her own account is a manifestation of the very 'doubleness' Bhabha later specifies. In this sense, not only does Yugoslavia provide West a space with which she could reflect upon and reform her native England, but the text itself offers an inventive 'doubling' form.

Often, the comparisons West utilizes are to a fictional or historical England which simultaneously posits Yugoslavia as a site of living history and emphasizes West's sense of nostalgia for a lost England. In Bosnia, as an illustration, when West suggests that the social custom of a domestic visit with the Bulbul 'recalled Jane Austen's Bath; such pleasantries might have enlivened a drawing-room in the Crescent,'⁵⁸ West contrasts the polite protocol of the company with a literary scene written in the previous century. The exchange is not only fictionalized through West's lens of nostalgic appreciation, but the distinguished structure of the Crescent is transplanted onto the Yugoslavian city.

⁵⁷ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, pp. 690-691.

⁵⁸ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 440.

Similarly, the visit to the monasteries of the Frushka Gora takes West through a plot of land that prompts her to imagine that:

It was as if one should drive along the South Downs, turning off the main road and following by-roads in to the downlands at Sullington and Washington and Steyning, and should find buildings where persons involved in the tragedy of Richard II had but newly cast aside their garments in mourning, where the sounds of their weeping was hardly stilled.⁵⁹

The vague map of hidden roads in the South Downs which could potentially lead a traveller to an area untouched by the progress of time is of note as it not only suggests unseen pockets of history in England but it once more transposes the entire area onto Yugoslavia. Her vision of the country is as a reproduction of England reinvented with the potential mystical happenstances. West complicates the abnormalities of the particular view by introducing a comparison with an imagined location; her mixture of a precise geography and a fanciful environment transforms the Yugoslavian landscape into a distorted substitute England. Not only is West, thus, comparing the landscape to an English region, but she is comparing it to an England which does not actually exist. West is refiguring and rearranging the map of an imagined England onto the space of the Yugoslavian territory.

Yugoslavia's Edenic Primitivism

Throughout her journey in Yugoslavia, West admires the geography for what she perceives as the pure, raw qualities of the landscape unpolluted by any taint of modern interference. In many of West's scenic portraits of the topography, the villages and the culture she observes exude a sense of a fictional otherworldliness as though the sites exist in an imaginary location elsewhere. West's valorisation of the Yugoslavian

⁵⁹ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 509.

panorama prompts the reader's impression of the country as representing a lost idyllic haven. Loretta Stec deems West's relation with Yugoslavia as a 'love affair,' implying a blind and passionate attachment to the land. Indeed, the language of West's staunch dedication to representation of Yugoslavian culture and history occasionally borders on ardent adoration. Stec aligns West's trumpeting of Yugoslavia with a yearning for a pastoral alternative to the jaded modernity of England:

Despite the hardship and the results of oppression she encountered in her travels, West's portrait of Yugoslavia in *Black Lamb* is that of a land with all the glories Western Europe lacks, full of the best and purest sentiments, art and heroism, a veritable Eden. In this way, West participates in the mode of nostalgia Raymond Williams analyses in *The Country and The City*, that of longing for the 'organic community' which is an imaginative substitution for England.⁶⁰

Williams' study that Stec mentions contrasts the associations of the city and the country, and discusses English attitudes, as revealed through fiction, and the associations between metropolitan industrial development, capitalism, and the exploitation of man. Williams, in one aspect, examines some Modernist writers such as D.H. Lawrence who championed the innocence and simplicity associated with primitivism, defined by 'contact with natural processes,'⁶¹ and attempted to negotiate a new English nationalism. New explorations in the urban experience and an emphasis on the details of the city environment led some writers, including Vita Sackville-West, to reject the dictates of a modern urban life and find inspiration in new terrain abroad.

Rebecca West, similarly, celebrates her perception of Yugoslavia as inextricably linked to nature and to natural processes uncomplicated by technological interference. West pinpoints in the fictionalized character Gerda, the converse of all positive aspects of

⁶⁰ Loretta Stec, 'Female Sacrifice: Gender and Nostalgic Nationalism in Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*,' in Suzanne Kehde and Jean Pickering, eds., *Narratives of Nostalgia, Gender and Nationalism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997), p. 141.

⁶¹ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 266.

Yugoslavia personified, the fundamental flaw of lacking any 'sense of process.'⁶² Like all of the characters in the work, Gerda is a fictional device useful for the presentation of political commentary. The lengthy invective against Gerda is voiced through West's husband's persona and details how their unwelcome companion desires the benefits of an end result without the required labour. As the member of a conquering race, Gerda is accustomed to reaping the riches and rewards of others' toil without an awareness of or appreciation for the arduous creative procedure. West's narrative husband mentions one condition perpetuating a deficiency in understanding any process is the 'modern machine civilization, where a small but influential proportion of the population lives in town in such artificial conditions that a loaf of bread comes to them by cellophane wrapper with its origins as unvisualized as the begetting and birth of a friend's baby.'⁶³ Advances in technology have disconnected consumers from any consideration of the product's source. West's proclaimed desire to 'follow the dark waters...back to its source'⁶⁴ is a purposeful attempt to avoid Gerda's ignorant oversights and to scrutinize and to value the figurative process of formation.

During her travels through Macedonia, West encounters a community of 'gipsies' performing a kolo, or collective dance. Gerda's reaction to the display is one of haughty disgust, and both her refusal to delight in the demonstration and her insistence that West's own appreciation is misguided precipitates a furious rebuttal from the author. Gerda accuses West's persona of romanticizing the incomprehensibility of a foreign culture: "You are mystical about them, you think they have occult knowledge; I know

⁶² West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 799.

⁶³ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 802.

⁶⁴ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 1089.

what you think.” She did not.⁶⁵ West defends herself against Gerda’s charge by explaining her appreciation for the production of aesthetics in all forms. It is the juxtaposition and intersection of a variety of cultures and peoples which gives Yugoslavia the richness West so admires. In the challenge to Gerda’s insidious disdain for what she sees as an uncivilized and unstable nation, however, West’s illustration of the country does seem to demonstrate Gerda’s claim that West the writer exalts the arcane aspects of the area. As exemplified throughout her text, Yugoslavia is for West the writer an area representative of an untainted purity, and a location of simplicity despite the tangles of political turmoil; Yugoslavia, in West’s estimation, is closely connected to the primitivism she celebrates in her other writings and operates in a state of naturalism long forgotten in modern England.

West’s casting of Yugoslavia as an ‘othered’ space existing on a temporal axis separate from England and the west is not, however, unusual; Yugoslavia, as Vesna Goldsworthy investigates, is often depicted in literature as on the margins of what was considered European modernity. Goldsworthy suggests that while the English were not political colonizers of the Balkans, the perception of the geography that English writers conjure contributes to a literary imperialism and influences the Yugoslavian national narrative. Perhaps influenced by the Balkans’ position at the crossroads of eastern and western cultures, authors have long illustrated the area as a scene of fabled mysticism: ‘[The Balkans] in British literature [is used] to signify all-purpose semi-mythical remoteness, an imaginative “end of the known world.”’⁶⁶ As one of the only European nations occupied by an eastern empire, writers have associated Yugoslavia with qualities

⁶⁵ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 661.

⁶⁶ Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*, p. 9.

of exoticism usually reserved for countries outside the continental boundary; the area of Yugoslavia has been reinvented in British literature as a enchanted location of Edenic proportions. West proves in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* that she is no exception as her depiction of Yugoslavia contains numerous references to the fantastical elements of the land.

While no doubt attempting to translate her experience of Yugoslavia into terms that her English and American readership could digest, West endorses a vision of Yugoslavia as a veritable fairyland removed from the actualities of modern life in the west. At points in West's writing, Yugoslavia is at such variance to England that she describes aspects of the land in mythical terms. Chancing upon an attractive family of nomads, West comically explains how they must be the product of an alternative world: 'he hurried us across the road to see a family of gipsies who were clearly natives of fairyland. Only there could a father and mother still shapely as gazelles and bloomed with youth have eight children.'⁶⁷ Despite the humorous implication of the impossibility of eight siblings' parents maintaining their youthful appearance and demeanour, West's use of 'fairyland' imagery underscores the perception of Yugoslavia as divorced from modern reality.

Particularly in the Macedonian section of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, West emphasizes her delight with the captivating landscape; Macedonia, more than other locations, resonates with West as a site of fantastical primitivism. She opens a chapter describing the assembled view beyond her lavatory window in Skoplje as a reflection of a 'vapid romanticism' she considers characteristic of the entire area. West exploits

⁶⁷ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 657.

comparisons of the scene to a jejune animated Disney world which cements the reader's impression of Macedonia as an imaginary setting:

These stucco houses are designed in a vein of pleasantly vapid romanticism. Minnie Mouse might well have chosen one for her first home with Mickey, for they bristle with towers and loggias and a great many silly little balconies, on which she could be discovered by Mr. Disney's lens, watering flowers and singing a tender lyric in that voice which is the very distillation of imbecile sweetness.⁶⁸

West's association of the view with a Disney concoction suggests that her portrayal of the landscape is necessarily couched in whimsical expressions as it is incomparable to any Anglo-American reality; Yugoslavia exists in a world of the imagination. The dismissive tone West engages within the passage, where she gently mocks the overwrought details of the 'silly little balconies' and the configurations of 'towers and loggias,' emphasizes an impression of bucolic naivety and an 'imbecile sweetness' that can only subsist in fantasy. Gazing down through the window frame, West transforms the glass pane into a movie camera lens as she captures the visual of the unfolding daydream. For the brief duration of the paragraph, the scene indicates cinematic qualities as the reader assumes the position of the film's audience. The effect of the Disney juxtaposition is the reader's sense of Yugoslavia as a distant, unfathomable and imaginary location consisting of towns that exist only in the fictional space of page or screen.

The parallel in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* between characteristics of the town and attributes of a Disney environment defines the site as charmingly puerile and innocently picturesque. This emphasis on the foreign land as operating in a different time shares with other travel narratives, as exemplified by Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*, a representation of distant terrains as naturally primitive. West writes that 'I realized

⁶⁸ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 645.

Macedonia to be the bridge between our age and past,⁶⁹ suggesting that her descriptions of Yugoslavia celebrate an emergent 'primitivism,' connected to undeveloped youth. Rather than illustrating the location in terms adopted by some travel writers who portray the geography as a *terra incognita* fraught with the danger of unmapped obscurity, West describes the land as a dreamscape with resonances of her young imagination; Macedonia, in West's estimation, is positively unaffected by the march of modern progress.

The element of nostalgia that pervades *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* contributes to the sense of Yugoslavia as a pastoral location. Written in retrospect and during the war as Janet Montefiore indicates in *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s*, West's text has an element of reflective wistfulness for all of the qualities of the land that the conflict will inevitably destroy. Dedicated to West's 'friends in Yugoslavia, who are now all Dead or Enslaved,' the book is a bitter tribute to a means of life obliterated by the war. West paints Yugoslavia with a nostalgic inventiveness, mourning in advance the irrevocable changes violently inflicted upon the country. As a result, her portrait is a melancholic reverie for a vanished scene of innocence. In the extensive epilogue written in reflection after the completion of her journey, West expresses her experience of Yugoslavia as the existing location of her childhood imaginings. Even while West outlines the pain of experience that Yugoslavia has been forced to withstand in the form of invasion and colonialism, the area appears in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* as a veritable dreamscape encompassing all the characteristics lost in England: 'Macedonia is the country I have always seen between sleeping and waking; from childhood, when I was weary of the place where I was, I wished it would turn into a town like Yaitse or

⁶⁹ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 765.

Mostar, Bitolj or Ochrid.⁷⁰ These towns she mentions, although not all in Macedonia, are the manifestation of her childhood dreams and represent the perfected form of the flawed cities of her youth. West's suggestion that the geography corresponds to a reverie of her youthful imagination both emphasizes her perception of Yugoslavia as natural and innocent of development, and underscores her vision of the Yugoslavian landscape as a superior version of England.

In the Dalmatian section of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, however, West portrays the land in a somewhat different light and the area, distinctly experienced after centuries of suffering, is primitive in the sense of simplicity rather than childlike innocence. West again challenges the typical illustration of distant lands as fraught with danger as she scrutinizes the motivations behind the cultural differences. Defending the country against other foreigners' estimations of the various social barbarisms inherent in the mosaic of Yugoslavian cultures, West reveals a portrait of a wounded nation stripped of frivolity; the result of years of imperialistic turmoil is a return to unflinching interactions unembellished by social protocols. While her companion tourists deem a Dalmatian who creates a minor commotion a 'maniac,' 'frightful,' and 'savage,'⁷¹ West traces the ardour of the man's reaction to a historical cause. West embraces the Dalmatian man's response to discovering an increased ticket price as a product of his location, and she celebrates his passionate intensity. Although her fellow travellers utter derogatory terms frequently used by colonialists to underscore what was seen as a native population's uncivilized shortcomings, West commends his lack of interest in social decorum. In a later explanation for the Dalmatian's unprecedented behaviour, she warns

⁷⁰ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 1088.

⁷¹ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 118.

how 'the stranger will be vastly mistaken if he regards this attitude as petulant barbarism.'⁷² West contests the traditional representation of an 'othered' land as perilously uncivilized and celebrates instead a country of honest sentiments. The effect of centuries of political struggles, in West's view, is a return to an essentialism and a renewed reliance upon simplicity for survival. In this instance, the primitivism which the other visitors abhor in their ignorance is cause for commendation and approval for its raw naturalism.

In numerous ways, West's representation of Yugoslavia in the text as a land steeped in otherworldly mysticism closely connected to the primitive aligns the country with female characteristics and feminizes the territory. Studies on Freud and Jane Harrison's work illustrate how the conflation of primitivism with femininity and motherhood was common in the interwar era, and West often juxtaposes nature and the occult with femininity throughout her fiction. Even a marginal comment on a Dalmatian fairy tale summarized in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* offers a glimpse of West's associations between women and naturalism. Recounting a discussion with her husband regarding the plot of a tale about a king who kills all his barbers save for one whose mother bakes the king a cake using her own breast milk, West describes the intervention of the mother as a representation of nature undermining the dominating male order: 'But here nature speaks, through the mother...She pulls down what men have built up by an appeal to the primitive facts of life which men have agreed to disregard in order that they may transcend them.'⁷³ West's valorisation of the mother as the protector of the family and as counterbalancing force against the often barbaric strides of institutions resonates

⁷² West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 154.

⁷³ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 189.

with the notions Freud posits in 'Civilization and its Discontents' which draws a divide between women's 'primitive' roles as nurturers and the dealings of public establishments. Further, the proposal that nature speaks 'through the mother' forges the association between the landscape and motherhood. Applying the connection to West's celebration of Yugoslavia as a veritable preserve of naturalism, the country is by implication feminized as a mother.

At another moment in the text when West is exploring Old Serbia, she presents a sweeping review of the entire country, the language of which prefigures Kristeva's theories on the semiotic. Intending to describe how her sojourn in Yugoslavia brought to light enumerable insights into the human condition and the complications of conventions of sacrifice and passivity, West asserts: 'This I had learned in Yugoslavia, which writes obscure things plain, which furnishes symbols for what the intellect has not yet formulated.'⁷⁴ The language and terminology West uses to convey her sense of Yugoslavia's connection to a primitive simplicity outside the boundaries of reason anticipates Kristeva's notions of the semiotic as an alternative to the symbolic order which she first introduced in '*La Révolution du Langage Poétique*' in 1974. The semiotic is linked to Lacan's Imaginary and to an awareness of sounds, rhythms, and musicality that precedes formal symbolic language. These semiotic pulsations are collected and are registered in what Kristeva labels the *chora*, a Greek term derived from Plato signifying a womb or enclosed position. While according to Lacan, entrance to the Symbolic Order is through the Law of the Father, Kristeva's semiotic is associated with the maternal body: 'Drives involve pre-Oedipal semiotic functions and energy discharges

⁷⁴ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 914.

that connect and orient the body to the mother.’⁷⁵ For a modern reader, therefore, West’s regard for Yugoslavia as a location, which precedes the formulation and articulation of ideas, associates the country with the mother’s body. While nations are frequently feminized and cast as mothers in political discourse, West’s description offers an alternative opportunity to examine her link between her views on the geography and on femininity.

Although West often articulates her belief that Yugoslavia is a nation where ‘men are still men and women still women,’⁷⁶ the overall impression of her illustration is that the space itself is feminine. As I shall examine, the representation of Yugoslavia in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is of a utopian, feminine location where the elements of female characteristics are celebrated and acknowledged. Even though the text contains a multitude of accounts of individual women disenfranchised by the circumstances of their culture and environment, Yugoslavia itself is a landscape embodying female characteristics, and the space of the nation is not defined by the summation of the population within. West’s attitude towards gender expressed throughout the text is complex and contradictory but she seems to draw a distinction between the essentialized genders of the population and the general atmosphere of the country as a whole.

Representations of Gender in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*

In several instances such as her visit to Dalmatia, West indicates her preference for the masculinity of the Yugoslavian workers over what she considers the effete Englishmen: ‘Here, as in Serbia, there is very little effeminacy, and no man puts himself under

⁷⁵ Kelly Oliver, ed., *The Portable Kristeva* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 37.

⁷⁶ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 208.

suspicion by praising another.'⁷⁷ From this particular quotation, a reader would arguably interpret the Yugoslavian nation as decidedly male and so rooted in masculinity that even occasional feminine gestures cannot jeopardize the overall sense of the population's heroic bravado. Simultaneously, however, she characterizes the country itself as embodying 'the primitive' and 'the natural,' features she chiefly attributes to women throughout her literary corpus. By distinguishing between the qualities of the myriad persons West encounters on her sojourn from her perception of the landscape, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* manages to illustrate Yugoslavia as a feminine environment even if it is not a site for individual women's empowerment.

The character of West's husband chastises West's narrative voice for her tendency to conflate the personal with a broader, national perspective when he declares during a discussion that 'the rules that apply to individuals do not apply to nations...the situation is quite different.'⁷⁸ The comment anticipates the inquiry of a reader and is a response to a moment when West attempts to understand the absurdity of some political disputes and the hypocrisy of empires through the lens of her personal relations, a technique she engages throughout the text. *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* gives evidence of West's tendency to use the microcosm of individual interactions to offer insight into national disputes; private affairs between men and women provide West with a useful metaphor to describe her vision of Yugoslavian political interactions to her readership. These allegories, however, only solidify the impression of Yugoslavia as a feminine space as she consistently personifies the country as a female.

⁷⁷ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 158.

⁷⁸ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 281.

Translating her understanding of historical events into the drama of personal romantic relations, West repeatedly casts Yugoslavia as the female in the liaison struggling against the oppression of a dominating lover or spouse. To explain the Habsburgs' betrayal of the Croats when the monarchy returned the colonized nation to Hungarian rule in the mid-nineteenth century, West colourfully describes how:

It was a kind of lowness that is sometimes exhibited in the sexual affairs of a very vulgar and shameless people: a man leaves his wife and induces a girl to become his mistress, then is reconciled to his wife and to please her exposes the girl to some public humiliation.⁷⁹

Not only does the comparison inform the reader in no uncertain terms how West regards the Austrian treachery, but the description positions Croatia as a hapless, and feminine, prey to the machinations of a greedy and devious opportunists. West engages the imbalance of male and female relations to better exemplify her understanding of the national power dynamics of the country's history. When West elaborates upon her metaphor and suggests that 'again we must go for an analogy to the sexual affairs of individuals,'⁸⁰ she reiterates her opinion that gender relations are the most apt comparison for understanding national struggles.

At another point in the *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, West continues her practice of recounting historical conflict through the perspective of male and female interactions and reifies the notion that the conquered, in this case the Dalmatians, are feminized. During a visit to the remains of the Roman city Salonae in Dalmatia, West encounters a group of nuns leading young school girls between the ages of twelve and sixteen on an educational excursion. She questions whether the teachers are properly instructing their young pupils about an accurate history of the Roman invasions into Dalmatia. Decrying

⁷⁹ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 54.

⁸⁰ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 55.

the catastrophic effects of the Roman thirst for imperialism, West openly questions if the few years of peace that the colonialists secured were worth the centuries of war and bloodshed. The female students function in the text as representatives of their country, and West's admonition that they need to beware of male deceptions and sexual manipulations serves as a far more urgent warning to Dalmatia against the incursion of hostile imperialists.

The unflinching portrait in the passage, further, offers a dim view of the historical conquest and implies that invasion is inevitable; by personifying the Yugoslavian territory in the collection of adolescent girls, West seems to suggest that submission to a foreign invader is as unavoidable as the girls' future inability to confront their sexual partners as equals. In other words, West not only feminizes the country by using the girls as symbolic figures, but she illustrates the bleak sentiment that women are unable to combat the terms of male control. In this respect the passages also reveal aspects of her views regarding gender dynamics. West concludes her musings by addressing the girls with the resigned declaration that: 'in love-making you might meet him with lies of equal force, but there are few repartees that the female governed can make to the male governors.'⁸¹ Only on occasion can girls approach power balance with men, and their allegorical counterparts of colonized natives are without any means of establishing equality as they lack even the language to answer their masters. West's use of gender in the section exemplifies how she feminizes Yugoslavia as a nation and it also introduces one aspect of her attitude towards the struggle for power in male and female relations.

Many critics who have examined the text from a gender perspective have faulted some of West's portrayals of women in Yugoslavia, arguing that the essential dualism

⁸¹ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 166.

between her depictions of male and female resorts to a traditional gender binary and re-inscribes conventional divisions between the sexes. Loretta Stec suggests that although West valorises Yugoslavia, she fails to challenge established gender balances as her depiction is of a geography where women remain subservient to male domination:

Black Lamb and Grey Falcon imaginatively creates another country as a community that is utopian in its ability to defend itself and its creative culture but nevertheless figures as a dystopia for women; West's text becomes anti-utopian in her inability to imagine a possibility of change in gender relations, and ultimately provides a conservative vision of traditional male violence holding sway at the expense of women.⁸²

In this quotation, Stec claims that the negatively depicted treatment of the individual female characters that West observes during her travels in Yugoslavia necessarily negates any of the praise she heaps upon the country as a location of endurance and resistance. Yet arguably, West disconnects the nation space from the illustrations of female acquiescence within its boundaries. The result of her representation of Yugoslavia combined with her proclivity to cast the country as a female character in political dramas is a celebration of a feminine territory. Ignoring West's gendering of Yugoslavia as a whole overlooks one aspect of West's use of gender in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*; while arguably not a utopia for women, Yugoslavia itself is a feminine utopia. Stec's assumption, further, that West only portrays a uniformly negative image of women's docile passivity in the country discounts the complex variety of portrayals of male and female relationships throughout the text, and disregards the moments of women's agency that West presents.

Certainly, many aspects of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* reflect West's tendency to draw oppositional divides between her views of male and female characteristics. Her

⁸² Loretta Stec, 'Dystopian Modernism vs. Utopian Feminism: Burdekin, Woolf and West Respond to the Rise of Fascism' in Merry M. Pawlowski, ed., *Virginia Woolf and Fascism: Resisting the Dictators' Seduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 179.

labelling of 'idiocy,' or the indulgence in a myopic concentration on private matters, as a female affliction and the 'lunacy' of men as those who engage in a discourse of sweeping generalisations on a global scale as a male concern, re-inscribes a rigid gender binary and marks the differences between women and men as natural. Even the narrative structure of the text reveals West's perception of a gender dualism as she contrasts her husband's interest in historical and political contexts with her own character's attention to the details of personal interactions and accounts. Intertwining aspects of the two approaches as a means of depicting a foreign culture offers an innovative subversion of conventional travel writing, but it still maintains a fundamental distinction between women and men. Many descriptive flourishes throughout the text, further, offer evidence of her sense of a permanent gender dualism. Her sketch of a Croatian church justifies the congregation's physical separation as a natural extension of the oppositional outlooks of male and female members:

The men stood on the right of the church and the women on the left. This is the custom also in the Orthodox Church, and it is reasonable enough. At a ceremony which sets out to be the most intense of all contacts with reality, men and women, who see totally different aspects of reality, might as well stand apart.⁸³

The male and female experiences of the world are, West believes, so incongruent that the partition of the church design offers an apt visual for the differences in perspective.

Although on occasion West implies that the discrepancies between women and men are not inherent but culturally learned, she frequently resorts to an emphasis on biological distinctions by exposing her desire to recognize women's contribution to the national agenda as mothers, and thus essentializes women for their procreative abilities.

⁸³ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 65.

One of the scenes that inspires West's most extensive scrutiny of dynamics between women and men is her short visit to the Skopska Tserna Gora, Skoplje's Black Mountain, in Macedonia, where she discusses colonialism with some members of a cluster of villages. Taken aback by the regard the men paid a vocal female resident during the discussion when all other appearances indicated a general disdain for women as an inferior sex, West commences a thoughtful investigation into her perception of the different genders' experiences. In her invective against both men in the village and against men in general, West strikes a curious balance between criticism of men's struggle for dominance over women as an absurd cultural creation and simultaneously a biological necessity. The section is rife with evidence of West's sense of an inherent gender dualism as she includes flippant introductory remarks such as: 'If there is one certain difference between the sexes it is that men lack all sense of objective reality and have a purely pragmatic attitude to knowledge.'⁸⁴ She continues by describing her estimation of men's desire to dominate women as a reassurance of their superiority and women's acceptance of a submissive role in exchange for the pledge of protection from foreign aggressors. While West emphasizes the implicit injustice in the tacit social contract, she cannot envisage an alternative circumstance of political concord in which women would not be forced to defer to the physical strengths of their male counterparts, for 'if the community is threatened... women will be fools if they do not accept that declaration [of men's superiority] without dispute.'⁸⁵ Even if West's intention is to subvert the conventional gender hierarchy, her emphasis on biological differences and her

⁸⁴ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 678.

⁸⁵ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 678.

implication that women require safeguarding certainly essentializes both women and men.

Without question, West hopes to indicate the absurdity of women's subjugation and insists on a renewed respect for the contributions women make, and she frequently returns to an emphasis on a woman's worth as inextricably linked to her potential as a mother. In West's view, the presumption of women's subservience is nonsensical as they are essential, yet un-credited, contributors to the welfare and perpetuation of the future generation. Although this notion of women's merit as defined by the ability to procreate is one that some feminists of the period used as evidence of women's significance, it unfortunately also mimics some of the fascist dictates of reproduction which reduce women to corporal entities. Even when West encourages the development of women's minds as she does through the voice of a young boy in *Old Serbia*, women's ability to access intellect is a reward for the contributions of their bodies: 'it is evident that you have conquered your animal instinct to oppress the female and have accepted intellectually and emotionally the point of view that by child-bearing she contributes as much to the state as the male by his characteristic activities.'⁸⁶ In this regard, West reinscribes the notion of women as passive vessels, for she contends that mothering is women's input to the national project which is equivalent to men's 'characteristic activities.'

West's witness of the degradation and labour of a female peasant in Kossovo is forced to endure at the hands of her slovenly husband causes the author to reflect upon the condition of women's experiences. As the pair of peasants proceeds slowly towards West, she notes how the woman, forced to bear their collective loads, 'had grown

⁸⁶ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 973.

careless of her womb. She had forgotten that she must use herself delicately, not out of pride or cowardice, but because her body was an instrument of the race.'⁸⁷ At the moments which incur an element of outrage at the treatment of individual women throughout Yugoslavia, West often accompanies the sentiment by chastising the general disregard for women's reproductive organs as the site of potential life. Gospodin Mac's wife reflects the sentiment when she voices her disgust at the rampant sexism in the country:

'But it is terrible here in some ways! The way they treat the women! And the law's behind them, mind you!'...She spoke as one who had savoured the full horror of the subjection of women, as it is when it is actually practiced and not merely dreamed about in a voluptuous reverie: a plundering, a mutilation, an insult to the womb and life, an invocation to mud and death.⁸⁸

The prejudice and lack of regard for women is tantamount to an alignment with everything caustic and injurious. West clearly draws a divide between women's association with life and birth and men's propensity towards death and destruction. West's repeated emphasis on the womb and upon motherhood as a positive attribute which ensures women's contribution to the nation detrimentally essentializes the female body even as she hopes to rescue women from political oversight.

However, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* does illustrate moments when the women West depicts undermine the pretence of masculine power and control and display subversive agency. In another example of her technique of equating historical events to private interactions in order to better elucidate the concerns of the invested parties, West depicts the Slavic community, once more in the female role, as in possession of an element of power. Writing in Bosnia about the ramifications of the 1389 Battle of

⁸⁷ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, pp. 895-896.

⁸⁸ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 945.

Kosovo, West describes her view of the Slavic response to the wily infiltration of the Turkish armies and culture into the area; she paints the Slavs as ostensibly conquered yet maintaining an element of subversive non-compliance:

It was only then that a certain peculiar and awful characteristic of human nature showed itself, as it has since shown itself on one other occasion in history. There is a kind of human being, terrifying above all others, who resist by yielding. Let it be supposed that it is a woman. A man is pleased by her, he makes advances to her, he finds that no woman was ever more compliant. He marvels at the way she allows him to take possession of her and perhaps despises her for it. Then suddenly he finds that his whole life has been conditioned to her, that he has become bodily dependent on her, that he has acquired the habit of living in a house with her, that food is not food unless he eats it with her.

It is at this point that he suddenly realizes that he has not conquered her mind, and that he is not sure if she loves him, or even likes him, or even considers him of great moment... Twice the Slavs have played the part of this woman in the history of Europe.⁸⁹

Certainly, the interjected clause in the opening sentences obscures the significance of the subsequent description of women who only give the impression of agreement. Without further explanation, West deems this type of person as 'terrifying above all others' and in possession of a 'peculiar and awful characteristic of human nature.' Considering West's negative opinions on passive opposition which the epilogue elucidates, to 'resist by yielding' is dangerous precisely because it is not a definite and active confrontation. Yet despite West's caveat, she indicates how the assumed victims preserve an element of control and are not hapless sufferers. Once again likened to women, the final line in the quotation casts Yugoslavia as a female staving off the advances of a masculine Europe. In this instance, the movement by the imperialists into the colonised territory is described in terms of an undesired betrothal. Positing the Slavic people as resistant females who appear to accept their domestic domination only to cultivate the ignorant suitor's dependency, West suggests that Bosnia's capitulation to the Turkish invaders was countered by the native culture's refusal to relinquish psychological sovereignty. The

⁸⁹ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, pp. 301-302.

allegory, thus, offers an insight into the complexity of West's view of gender power dynamics; beneath the surface of conventional interactions, male supremacy is a potential illusion since it is the women who subversively dictate the terms of the relations. Even at those moments when women seem the most submissive in their sacrifices, West hints at the possibility that beneath the exterior of subservience, women preserve their own values and attitudes and refuse to abdicate completely to the coercions of their masters.

West indicates her own uncertainty of how to categorize the Bosnian women who, although seemingly docile and submissive, carry themselves with an unfathomable pride which suggests that 'these women had never been enslaved. They had that mark of freedom, they had wit.'⁹⁰ The section provides West with an opportunity to voice some rather convoluted musings upon the nature of the male and the female divide. These women in the Bosnian markets that West observes are not, in her opinion, overly feminine in spite of their charade of passivity and domestic acquiescence. West indicates her own uncertainty of the veracity of the gender dynamic, and hints at the possibility of an alternative relationship behind the masks of docile tractability:

I suspect that women such as these are not truly slaves, but have found a fraudulent method of persuading men to give them support and leave them their spiritual freedom...honour is due to one so far successful that it produces these grimly happy heroes, these women who stride and laugh, obeying the instructions of their own nature and not masculine prescription.⁹¹

West suggests her mistrust of accepting the superficial appearance of women's lack of power, offering instead a glimpse of a community of women who do not wholly efface themselves for the benefit of their male masters, but who maintain an element of control beyond the parody of compliance: 'Yet I wonder. Dear God, is nothing what it seems?

⁹⁰ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 328.

⁹¹ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 330.

The women of whom this tale is told, and according to all reliable testimony truly told, do not look in the least oppressed...I will eat my hat if these women were not free in the spirit.'⁹² These Bosnian women, West suspects, subvert the masculine authority by knowingly participating in a pageantry of inferiority, an act which underlines the assumption of women's submissiveness as performative. The women offer an example of the tangled complexity of male and female power dynamics, and exemplify a warning against the tendency to base evaluations on initial appearances.

The confession that an innovative matrix of relationships possibly exists beyond the author's understanding defies the travel writing dictates that the voyager is an omniscient observer who can translate views of a foreign land into a logic that the reader can easily consume and comprehend. West's admission that the rapport between the women and the men in Bosnia might function in a way that neither her nor the readership can grasp is an unconventional avenue in the travel writing tradition. The revelation of West's incertitude runs the risk of negating the reader's perception of West's reliability as a witness and correspondent, but instead her inquiry that perhaps 'nothing is what it seems' suggests the necessity of disregarding a trust in tradition and appearances. The description of the Bosnian women complicates the assertion of a hierarchical power of men over women as West hints at the potential for a subversion of control and indicates the existence of a space for women's self-definition.

West's attention to the market women in Bosnia resonates with a wider project within *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* to recover an understanding of women that historians usually leave unexamined. Along her journey throughout Yugoslavia and her reflection upon the history of the land, West searches out instances of women's existence

⁹² West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 327.

which retrospective scholars have neglected. The text, in this manner, is itself a space where West gives credence to women's contributions to the political arena. In her scrutiny of the lives of women such as Jeanne Merkus⁹³ and Draga,⁹⁴ West sheds light onto a supplemental history underlying the traditional accounts of national circumstances. Once introduced to the sister of Chabrinovitch, Franz Ferdinand's first attempted assassin, West considers how 'it has always interested me to know what happens after the great moments in history to the women associated by natural tie to the actors.'⁹⁵ The sentiment summarizes an aspect of West's project to seek out the forgotten impact of events on women. West indicates that women's perspectives are worthy of investigation when she compares her text to a Roman woman's account, declaring her book a useful record of her own thoughts in the midst of a turmoil of events. The notion finds resonance throughout *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* as West excavates stories of women as pawns in political machinations. Her consideration of young girls married off to rival families as a means of securing peaceful negotiations leads West to describe how 'their services are insufficiently recognized, those girl children who held together the fabric of history by leaving their nurseries and going into far lands to experience the pains of rape and miscarriage.'⁹⁶ West recognizes how history has often played out on women's bodies, and how their actions have never been sufficiently acknowledged. In her re-evaluation of the history of the Yugoslavian nation, West attempts to unveil a space for the recognition of women's contributions to the struggle to shape a nation-state. Peering

⁹³ According to West, Jeanne Merkus was born in 1839 in Batavia and joined the Bosnian revolt against the Turkish in the 1870s. See West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, pp. 271-273.

⁹⁴ According to West, Queen Draga was the wife of the King of Serbia, Alexander Obrenovitch, and the couple was assassinated in 1903. See West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 11.

⁹⁵ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 418.

⁹⁶ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 855.

beneath the surface of a conventional historical account West shows, as she does with the Bosnian women, how assumptions of women's passivity are not accurate, and she illustrates the extent of women's contributions to political endeavours on a national scale. Without argument, West does often problematically re-inscribe the assumption of women's connection to the nation as potential mothers of a future race, yet she simultaneously carves out room to recognize women for their sacrifices for the nation apart from bearing children. As a book, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* offers a space where women's voices throughout history are given expression. In this respect, her text on Yugoslavia is the site where women's voices gain articulation.

Further, West's interests in elevating awareness of women's active contributions to historical events is not limited to a rescue of Yugoslavia's female narratives, as her undertaking in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* has implications for similar re-evaluations of English nationalism. As demonstrated, England and Yugoslavia are intricately intertwined throughout the text and West represents Yugoslavia as a re-mapped and redefined England. Because West undeniably genders the Yugoslavian landscape by portraying the country as representative of sublimated femininity in the form of mysticism and naturalism, she creatively reinvents an English environment where women are integral to the national agendas. Jane Garrity claims that female Modernists desired to 'refashion England into a feminized Paradise,'⁹⁷ and West is no exception; through her travel writing, West locates an area abroad as the feminized territory which might be imaginatively assimilated into notions of Englishness. Reconfiguring 'home' in relation to a feminized Yugoslavia, West incorporates room for women into her illustration of a new England. The act of representing a distant country in a gendered light for political

⁹⁷ Garrity, *Step-daughters of England*, p. 6.

advancement, though, is riddled with insidious connotations. As the final section will explore, West's project to seek out room for femininity is concomitant to colonial ventures.

Nationalism and Imperialism in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*

The complication with West's vision for an alternative England, her attempts to claim a new nationalist narrative, and her aspiration to remap 'home' in order to shape new feminine territory, is that her descriptions edge towards the imperialistic endeavour to claim and remould a foreign land in the image of the colonizing nation. Even though West arguably uses the invented space of Yugoslavia in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* as an opportunity to celebrate a supplementary feminine nationalism of her country, the result is that Yugoslavia emerges as auxiliary homeland. To return to the scene in Old Serbia where West visits the Gospodin Mac residence, her suggestion that the wife's conversation 'made a palimpsest' is laden with the sentiment of colonized ownership as the two survey their domain below them with imperial eye. Perched above the land and gazing out, the pair imaginatively overlay the Yugoslavian landscape with visions of both England and Scotland. It is unclear that in her attempt to incorporate aspects of Yugoslavia into her impressions of her native land and reshape her experience of her own country, West does not instead force her pride of home onto her portrayal of foreign territory.

West was certainly aware of the violence of empires and includes numerous arguments against even her own country's practice of imperialism within the text; she saturates her historical reportage of a country subject to the senseless destruction and

ravaging of a parade of invaders throughout the centuries with an incensed criticism. At several points throughout her journey, she questions the legitimacy of previous colonizer's beliefs such as the Roman presumption that their presence was a positive improvement upon the civilizations they conquered: 'We have no real evidence that the peoples on which the Roman Empire imposed its civilization had not pretty good civilizations of their own, better adapted to local conditions.'⁹⁸ West challenges the common assumptions that the gains of conquest justify the violence of seizure. She does not couch her opinions on the functioning of empires into any uncertain terms, as evidenced by her vehemently livid comments in reference to the history of colonization in Herzegovina: 'I hate the corpses of empires, they stink as nothing else. They stink so badly that I cannot believe that even in life they were healthy...Empires live by the violation of the law.'⁹⁹ While she acknowledges the notion that imperial institutions bring uniform rationality and ordered logic to the cultures they overtake, she emphasizes without dispute the conviction that the 'hideousness outweighs the beauty.'¹⁰⁰ West's political convictions regarding the devastating impact of violence, both economic and cultural, which colonial states inflict upon the nations they overpower, resurface throughout the text. West's husband's voice provides a counter argument for the benefit of empires against whose estimation she may position her views. When her husband insists during the debate that 'an empire...can perform certain actions which a single nation never can,'¹⁰¹ West counters with an illustration of the 'hypocrisy of empires,

⁹⁸ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 164.

⁹⁹ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 280.

¹⁰⁰ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 280.

¹⁰¹ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 281.

which pretend to be strong and yet are so weak that they constantly have to defend themselves by destroying individuals of the most pitiable weakness.’¹⁰²

Her condemnation of empires is not moderated by the fact that her own home is implicated in imperial practices, and her musings upon the areas of Yugoslavia which have been subject to foreign rule offer her an opportunity to reflect upon English attitudes towards their own colonial history. Yet despite her strong criticisms, West fails to notice occasions when her comments re-inscribe a binary of cultured colonizers against the primitive colonized in the context of the English occupation. Interestingly it is Gerda who most ardently voices sentiments of the English guilt on the colonial stage. While Gerda could potentially function as a mouthpiece for West’s self-critique, her frequent demonizing of Gerda’s personality and viewpoints suggests that West the writer aligns herself with political stances diametrically opposed to the German. Gerda points to the English struggle for power in India as evidence of West’s persona’s hypocritical anger at the mistreatment of the Serbians. Even though West paints Gerda’s views as woefully ignorant and rife with stubborn misunderstandings, her German companion makes a convincing case when she underscores the English tendency to rationalize their invasions as philanthropic improvements upon the fabric of the colonized society. When Gerda argues against some of the regulations which require Serbian workers to hold posts in Macedonia for a period of time, the persona of West’s husband uses the English presence in India as a point of comparison which serves as a reminder of the parallel between his views and the traditional imperialist project of bestowing civilized order upon a nation:

‘We have had to do exactly the same thing in India.’ ‘You have done exactly the same thing in India?’ repeated Gerda. ‘Yes, there are many English people in India who spend their lives doing such work among the natives, both missionaries and civil servants.’

¹⁰² West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 281.

Then, as Constantine took his place at the table, she said to him in Serbian, 'Here our friend is telling us that the English do all sorts of philanthropic work among the natives in India. It is wonderful what hypocrites they are.'¹⁰³

The inclusion of the conversation follows a litany of examples of Gerda's innumerable negative qualities that defy all comprehension of essential social protocol, but the effect of West's recounting of the exchange is that her husband emerges as supportive of the English struggle for imperialistic control. West's persona's alliance with her husband and West the writer's failure to condemn his position in her literary portrayal along with her adamant distaste for anything Gerda supports, further, implicates her by association. The fact that West the writer fails to challenge her persona's views suggests that as an author she aligns herself against Gerda's assessments. The other instances where West adamantly censures empires mediate the implications of the situation and indicate the complexity of West's political position, but a reader is hard-pressed to deny the validity of Gerda's accusation of West's hypocrisy. At another stage, Gerda similarly tempers the English couple's vocal admiration of a carved iconostasis on display in a church in Skoplje in Macedonia when she quips: 'Now, I suppose, it will go to the British Museum.'¹⁰⁴ West's persona dismisses Gerda's utterance as bitterness towards the 'representatives of one of the powers which had conquered Germany,'¹⁰⁵ yet West's persona fails to appreciate that the statement is a rather humorous remark on England's former tendency to lay claim to and exhibit the spoils of their empire. Even though Gerda is otherwise presented as a vile and distasteful character who frequently voices disturbing positions on the native population of her adopted country, on a few occasions she highlights some of the inconsistencies of West's persona's views on imperialism

¹⁰³ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 691.

¹⁰⁴ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 654.

¹⁰⁵ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, pp. 654-655.

when related to her own nation. Admittedly, West the writer is aware of what she deems the 'room for roguery and stupidity as well as magnificence'¹⁰⁶ in relation to English imperialism, yet she more readily aligns England with Yugoslavia than with any of the imperial invaders.

That West is nationalistically trumpeting the accomplishments of the English is beyond dispute, but is understandable considering her perception of her nation as under threat from the larger forces of Fascism. The lengthy epilogue is an attempt to apply the lessons of her experience to her modern understanding of England's current dilemma, and it functions as a manifesto to rouse her fellow countrymen's will to defend itself against the incursion of fascism. West is determined, however, that her nationalist spirit is not concomitant with imperialism, and she wilfully defends her stance against the trend of her intellectual compatriots to conflate the two ethoses: 'Any discussion of these points was complicated by the tendency of these intellectuals to use the words "nationalism" and "imperialism" as if they meant the same thing.'¹⁰⁷ By distinguishing imperialism from nationalism, West manages to celebrate her regard for her home within the text; her praise of the English in the rousing finale of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* displays an unabashed pride in the prospects of England and a defence of the nation in spite of a catalogue of shortcomings.

My civilization must not die. It need not die. My national faith is valid, as the Ottoman faith was not. I know that the English are as unhealthy as lepers compared with perfect health. They do not give themselves up to feeling or to work as they should, they lack readiness to sacrifice their individual rights for the sake of the corporate good, they do not bid the right welcome to the other man's soul. But they are on the side of life, they love justice, they hate violence, and they respect the truth. It is not always so when they deal with India or Burma; but that is not their fault, it is the fault of Empire, which makes a man own things outside his power to control.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, pp. 1090-1091.

¹⁰⁷ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. 1101.

¹⁰⁸ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, pp. 1060-1061.

West recognizes England's myriad imperfections but she considers the pursuits of the nation as a whole noble and worthy. The violence in India, in her estimation, is an unfortunate result of her country's movement away from its traditional values of 'life,' 'justice' and 'truth.' West draws a distinction between the fundamental ideals which define a country's character and the militant brutality of imperialism by describing it as an unfortunate circumstance with which a country can become entangled. West suggests that the beliefs upon which her modern nation was established are 'valid' but that they have somehow been marred by interests which stray from the original political instincts of the country. *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* offers a revolutionized portrait of a potential England, rejuvenated by a return to basic principles such as equality and respect for all the nation's inhabitants. The nostalgia that pervades her depiction of Yugoslavia is in fact a desire to reconnect with her own nation's past.

The difficulty with West's division between the projects of imperialism and nationalism is that she fails to consider that imperialism need not be founded upon a forceful overthrow by military invasion; imperialism can manifest from the perhaps more insidious route of negative representation as many post-colonial studies have explored. As already mentioned, Vesna Goldsworthy regards English literature as having contributed to the current consideration of the Balkans as a geography of mythical proportions. Although West exhibits an enormous amount of respect for the area, she still engages with the typical view of the country as rooted in mysticism. West's characterization of Yugoslavia as a more primitive, simpler and even feminine space, thus, does not challenge traditional views of foreign landscapes as sexualized territories

ripe for invasion. Themes of gender are implicit in imperialism and West's experimentation with territorialized femininity moulds a representation of the Yugoslavian nation to her politicized ends. West's tendency to underscore Yugoslavia's femininity falls into the relation described by Anne McClintock between gender and imperialism where colonial powers normalize their aggressive overtake of nations by engaging the terms of dominant masculinity and submissive femininity. McClintock opens her book, *Imperial Leather*, with a deconstruction of Henry Rider Haggard's map included in his 1885 bestseller *King Solomon's Mines* which 'abstracts the female body as a geometry of sexuality held captive under the technology of imperial form.'¹⁰⁹

Mapping out a feminine territory onto a distant geography primes the space for imperial forays and reflects the command of authorial representation. While West's creative control of her text gives space for articulation of feminine voices, West submerges the individual pronouncements within the expression of her own agenda as she speaks for the subaltern. West uses her 'doubling' narrative where she resists a masculine authoritative rationalism and constructs a textual space which privileges feminine voices, yet she imposes a representational order onto her description of another culture and thus imaginatively colonizes the foreign geography. *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* reflects West's desire to seek out room for femininity and to redefine her notions of home with room for women as national citizens. By re-mapping England onto the Yugoslavian landscape West incorporates the feminized nation and the representations of women's history into her narrative of home, but simultaneously exploits the Yugoslavian landscape for her own project. West is not alone in her engagement of foreign territories

¹⁰⁹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 4.

as a space for women's empowerment as already seen in the study of Sackville-West's *Passenger to Teheran* which privileges distant lands as an environment conducive to female creativity; the issues that *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* raises regarding representational imperialism and the authorial command of narrative structures within women's travel writing resurface in readings of Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* and form the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Imperialism, Authority, and Masquerade in Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*

Introduction

As one of the most recognizable examples of twentieth-century women's writing, *Out of Africa* provides a compelling illustration of the inextricably entwined representations of race and gender within the imperial sphere, and of how themes of domesticity, survey, and authority are negotiated in women's travel narratives. Although Karen Blixen, who wrote under the penname Isak Dinesen, subscribes to hackneyed portrayals of the native Africans that reinstate racial hierarchies, I am interested in how her destabilization of the gender binary influences her engagement with the discourse of empire. Both Rebecca West and Vita Sackville-West disturb dichotomies and challenge binary oppositions: West with her interweaving of a male and female voice into her narrative and Sackville-West with her depiction of commonalities between the heterotopical spheres of the rooted and domestic garden and of space abroad. In a manner similar to both these authors, Blixen amalgamates masculine and feminine perspectives in her text and complicates the distinction between 'home' and 'abroad.' A close scrutiny of Blixen's *Out of Africa* reveals the extent to which she challenges, in Billie Melman's words, the conventional 'oppositional "pairs" of the house and the open road, the garden and the "natural" non-domestic landscape, the hearth and the river, Penelope and Odysseus, a feminized static place and a dynamic space.'¹

¹ Billie Melman, *Women's Orient: Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion and Work* (London: Macmillan Press, 1992), p. 17.

Further, examining the ways that Blixen modifies expectations of such themes as domesticity and objectification along gender lines, reveals how she manipulates their colonial implications. While the text has often been approached as a celebration of female liberation at the expense of the native Kikuyu, I suggest that Blixen's interest in gender performance, masquerade, and costume yields a more nuanced reading of her work as a subversive mimicry of the male voice of authority that pervades the travel writing genre. She presents in her writing the possibility of a voice that is both of the rooted Penelope and of the wandering Odysseus.

Arguably, *Out of Africa* differs from other travel writing with its emphasis on domesticity, which causes it to be read more productively in tandem with the genre of colonial women settlers' fiction than scrutinized as a voyager's narrative. The association of Blixen's home with perceptions of fixity, refinement and improvement resonates with those colonial writers who envisioned their presence as an ennobling mission, and described their homes as a fortress defending civilization against the incursion of barbarism. Within the imperial project, the sphere of home was intended to be a private enclave of exclusion. In her study of the significance of 'home' within the empire, Rosemary Marangoly George asks: 'What are the dimensions of "home"? I would like to suggest that the basic organizing principle around which the notion of the "home" is built is a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions.'²

Unlike many women of the interwar era who portrayed Africa as a location on the twentieth-century global Grand Tour, and rapidly traversed the continent to collect

² Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fictions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2.

experiences,³ Karen Blixen felt she belonged in Kenya. While numerous other women published personal accounts of their adventures in Africa in the interwar era, these works highlight the enterprise of the journey and travel rather than fixity and stasis. While the texts share with *Out of Africa* romanticized illustrations of safaris, flight and untainted nature, they emphasize motion and transitions. Blixen, in contrast, recounts her personal experiences on the farm and concentrates on the incidents and tribulations of her Kenyan household. Sara Mills warns that 'a distinction should be made between women settlers and women travellers,'⁴ as each type of writing adheres to a particular discourse and each plays a unique role within the imperial theatre. Women writing about their experiences in Africa as transient explorers are influenced by a distinct set of expectations that define travel literature; textual representations are effected by the conventions of the genre, especially as 'travel, and that too through a hostile world, was represented as the very antithesis of being at home.'⁵ Imperial literature written by women settlers, alternatively, conventionally advocated the female's role in domesticating the empire and advancing nationalist agendas. These texts are saturated with portrayals of hearty, strong, independent females striving to hack out a 'home' beyond the circumference of their country of origins. Certainly, such illustrations of domestic mastery resonate with the portrait of self-sufficient womanhood that pervades *Out of Africa*.

³ See, Stella Court Treatt, *Cape to Cairo: The Record of a Historic Motor Journey* (London: George G. Harrap & Company, 1927), Vivienne de Watteville, *Speak to the Earth: Wanderings and Reflections among Elephants and Mountains* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1935), and Beryl Markham, *West with the Night* (London: Penguin Books, 1988).

⁴ Sara Mills, 'Knowledge, Gender and Empire' in Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, eds., *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1994), p. 38.

⁵ George, *The Politics of Home*, p. 73.

Yet although Blixen does exalt the sense of rootlessness seen in her lionization of the Masai, and in her celebration of existing 'where [she] ought to be'⁶ in the open, de-territorialized air of the speeding plane, *Out of Africa* indicates a sense of plantedness within the Kenyan landscape. As Blixen's biographer, Judith Thurman, contends:

There is in Dinesen's work and thinking a frontier—more of a fixed circle, like an embroidery hoop—that separates the wild from the domestic. Within it there is firelight and women's voices, beyond it there are passions, spaces, grandeurs; there lie the wilderness and battlefields.⁷

The impression of regimented domesticity set against the shadowy milieu of uncontrolled nature that Thurman senses in Blixen's writing is nowhere more apparent than in *Out of Africa*. The farm seems to mark the focal point of the 'embroidery hoop' around which the textual events unfold. The metaphor conjures an image of Penelope, rooted and fixed, weaving her tales from the hearth. In this regard, Blixen is the opposite of the original meaning of 'eccentric,' as she places herself and her home at the centre of civilized order.

In emphasizing the significance of domesticity, Blixen thus re-instates many of the colonial depictions within *Out of Africa*; she subscribes to characteristically imperialistic assumptions of the necessity of white rule, superiority, and entitlement to the land that she desired to resist. Even when Blixen concedes her farm's intrusion on Kikuyu geography, she undercuts the severity of her presence, emphasizing instead her supremacy and authority: 'My squatters, I think, saw the relationship in a different light, for many of them were born on the farm, and their fathers before them, and they very likely regarded me as a sort of superior squatter on their estates.'⁸ Indeed, as I shall

⁶ Karen Blixen, *Out of Africa* (London: Penguin Books, 1954), pp. 13-14.

⁷ Judith Thurman, *Isak Dinesen: The Life of Karen Blixen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 45.

⁸ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 18

explore, throughout much of the text, Blixen's authority seems to be attained at the expense of the native Kikuyu. Marking herself as a masterful God-like-figure of creation, Blixen wields power and control over the workers. Further, although portraying herself as a woman of influence, ostensibly toppling gender expectations, she projects the female/male duality onto her relationship with the Kikuyu. By endowing her servants with feminized characteristics, she thus re-inscribes the gender divide as her use of a male voice underscores the male-possessor/female-possessed binary.

However, despite the arguments for approaching *Out of Africa* as a colonial settler's novel, reading it as a subversion of the travel writing genre sparks a more fruitful interpretation of Blixen's work and offers an alternative view of her approach to imperialism and domination. The pervasive vocabulary used in examinations of voyagers' accounts pertaining to notions of 'spectacle,' 'setting' and 'theatre' is appropriate for understanding the complexity of her interests as an author. In her textual fascination with the theatrical, Blixen follows the traditions of women travel writers such as Mary Kingsley, who, according to Karen Lawrence, challenged the conventions of travel in her awareness of her role as an object of scrutiny and her embracing of the performative aspects of her voyage. Mary Kingsley published *Travels to West Africa* in 1897, marking her as one of the first women to voyage unaccompanied through the previously uncharted areas of what was considered some of the most dangerous territories of east Africa. Accompanying her notoriety as an intrepid female traveller was her fame for donning highly feminine Western dress throughout her adventures: '[Kingsley's] narrative self-representation acknowledges that the Western observer is the Observed as well, both performer and makeup artist...Kingsley represents her travelling and writing

as participating in such masquerade.’⁹ That Lawrence interprets Kingsley’s attention to costume as a device used to exaggerate her femininity in order to mediate the threat she posed as a woman composing within a masculine genre underscores Kingsley’s understanding of the significance of gender. In a similar vein, Blixen experiments with the notions of theatre and performance as a means of questioning conventional gender dichotomies, evidenced in her decision to write under a masculine penname, Isak Dinesen. While many critics have drawn attention to her adopted moniker, they have often conflated author and persona. Indeed, the slipperiness between Blixen and Dinesen is accented by the thinly-veiled autobiographical nature of the text, and the current trend to publish *Out of Africa* under her original name. As I shall examine in further detail, Blixen’s choice of pseudonym raises poignant questions about the authorial voice she desired to portray, her perceptions of gender differences, and her intentions as a writer. Apart from an illuminating study by Susan Hardy Aiken,¹⁰ the canon of *Out of Africa* studies is bereft of any notion of Blixen’s assumption of a masculine mask as a means of garnering male authority, or, moreover, as a parody of men’s literary clout and domination. With this reading, the possessive gaze Blixen casts over her domain shifts from ‘seen’ to a ‘scene’ as the text becomes a stage for commentary on women’s access to authority, creativity and power. Blixen’s *Out of Africa* may be viewed as a performance of travel writing which functions as a knowing challenge to masculine traditions.

⁹ Karen R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages: Women and the British Literary Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 149-150.

¹⁰ See Susan Hardy Aiken, *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering of Narrative* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990).

In this chapter, I will examine how Blixen manipulates the gendered conventions of imperialist travel writing, and the effects these challenges have upon her perpetuation of colonial representations. Looking at her treatment of the stereotypical divide between the active, possessive 'surveyor' and the passive, possessed 'surveyed,' I argue that Blixen indicates the agency and power the subalterns maintain with their reversal of gaze. I will also scrutinize how Blixen's emphasis on illustrations of domesticity, while complicating travel writing conventions that polarize notions such as home/nature, rooted/wandering, and Penelope/Odysseus, play a part in the empire as a representational bastion of exclusion and civilization. After examining the evidence of Blixen's adherence to gender binaries within the domestic sphere which appear to perpetuate imperialistic associations of masculinity/white and femininity/black, I explore Blixen's interest in gender performance, proffering the theory that *Out of Africa* is a knowing imitation of the male authoritative voice, and that her undermining of gender dichotomies simultaneously destabilizes constructions of racial hierarchies. Examining Blixen's fascination with disguise and cross-dressing and her distinction between the author and narrator, I argue that her treatment of gender in her writings is what Butler would later describe as 'performative.'¹¹ My interest is in exploring how Blixen's perceptions of gender help her manipulate the amalgamation of a male and female voice within *Out of Africa*, and in how her play with gender distinctions undermines the authorial, imperialistic aspects of her writing. Within *Out of Africa*, Blixen is both Odysseus and Penelope: she is both the weaver of stories and the wanderer.

¹¹ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999).

Biography and Background

Written in English and published simultaneously in England, Sweden and her native Denmark with her own translation in 1937, *Out of Africa* chronicles the years spanning 1914 to 1931 that Blixen spent on a coffee plantation in the Ngong Hills in Kenya.¹² Although she was born in Rungstedlund, Denmark in 1885 as Karen Dinesen, Blixen most associated Africa with a sense of 'home.' Susan Hardy Aiken describes how Blixen's forced return to Denmark following the economic collapse of the plantation meant exile from a geography to which she felt to belonged:

Paradoxically, going 'home' to 'the fair woods of Denmark' in 1931, after seventeen years in Kenya, seemed to her tantamount to entering a condition of permanent exile, a forced dwelling in a space—psychological as well as geographical from which she had felt herself estranged since early childhood.¹³

From a young age, travel offered Blixen a source of escape. When her father, an avid adventurer who had lived with the Chippewa Indians in Wisconsin, committed suicide in 1895, Blixen found some comfort in a later trip to Switzerland to study French and painting.¹⁴ When she married Baron von Blixen-Finecke and the couple began their union, which was riddled with complications, land in Africa offered the opportunity for a new beginning.¹⁵ Both *Great Women Travel Writers* and *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering of Narrative* attribute Blixen's move to Kenya as the source of her creativity. Despite the daily tribulations involved with running a coffee plantation, Blixen's time in Africa symbolized the 'place she saw as the matrix of her creativity, the

¹² See Thurman, *Isak Dinesen*.

¹³ Aiken, *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering of Narrative*, p. 49.

¹⁴ Alba Amoia and Bettina L. Knapp, eds., *Great Women Travel Writers: from 1750 to the Present* (New York and London: Continuum, 2005), p. 180.

¹⁵ Amoia and Knapp, eds., *Great Women Travel Writers*, p. 181.

place where she had begun to “speak freely and without restraint.”¹⁶ Blixen ‘led a double life in Africa. As mistress of a coffee farm, she was forced to deal with the vagaries of drought, crop and failure, her husband’s infidelities, and his financial incompetency. As incipient writer and painter, she was wrapped in subliminal spheres.’¹⁷ Africa functions for Blixen as Vita Sackville-West’s vision of a creative space; her time in Africa, thus, provided both the subject matter of *Out of Africa* as well as the access to a creative voice that made the writing of the text possible. A collection of vignettes that outline her experience, *Out of Africa* both details the daily tribulations and illustrates the general atmosphere of colonial life. The book is a weaving together of individual sections, which, when read as a whole, provide an impressionist portrait of her experience in Africa. Some of the episodes are only paragraphs or pages long and seem to spotlight moments of being on the farm. Including sketches of ‘A Kikuyu Chief,’ ‘The Fireflies’ and ‘The Eclipse of the Moon,’ *Out of Africa* does not have a foundational plot, but instead binds together glimpses of individual instances, a style which arguably echoes Modernist aesthetics.

The critical reception of Blixen’s writing has varied extensively over geography and time; it has been embraced by some as a feminist work delineating a space of women’s liberation while questioned more recently as romanticizing the contact sites of imperialism. Authors such as Eudora Welty and Truman Capote praised Blixen’s tender illustrations of personal triumph and endurance, while recent critics articulate their concern about the unsettling trend of ‘current resurgence of colonial nostalgia and its particular manifestation of portraying heroic white women in colonial settings, a kind of

¹⁶ Aiken, *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering of Narrative*, p. 49.

¹⁷ Amoia and Knapp, eds., *Great Women Travel Writers*, p. 180.

converse of the destructive memsahib.’¹⁸ Critics such as Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’O have criticized the derogatory parallels between native people and debased primitivism, where ‘Africans are a special species of human beings endowed with a great spirituality and a mystical apprehension of reality or else with the instinct and vitality of animals, qualities which “we in Europe” have lost.’¹⁹

Interestingly, some scholars, including Susan C. Brantly in *Understanding Isak Dinesen*, have pointed to evidence that Blixen intended to criticise the effects of the British colonial power’s policies and conduct within Kenya. Indeed, in her early observations of the racial divide of imperial Africa, Blixen voices her distaste for the blatant brand of discrimination she witnessed among her European counterparts:

Where the natives are concerned the English are remarkably narrow-minded; it never occurs to them to regard them as human beings, and when I talk to English ladies on racial differences and such matters, they laugh patronizingly, touched by my eccentricity.²⁰

Although Blixen differentiated herself from her fellow colonizers, painting her beliefs as ‘eccentric’ in her recognition of the native’s humanity and in her respect for the Kikuyu’s traditions and outlook, her illustration of Africa as a region of liberation where women have access to authority at the expense of the original inhabitants endorses an imperialistic mode of description that is no less insidious. As seen in the Rebecca West chapter, colonialism is not enacted by military influence alone, but is dependent upon the ‘othering’ of the Orient through discourse and representation. Edward Said asserts that the interwar era saw a shift in the West’s regard for distant lands: ‘By the end of the

¹⁸ Quoted in Mills, ‘Knowledge, Gender and Empire,’ p. 39.

¹⁹ Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’O, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Oxford: James Currey, 1986), p. 92.

²⁰ Karen Blixen and Frans Lasson, ed. and Anne Born, trans., *Isak Dinesen: Letters from Africa, 1914-1931* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981), 1 April 1914.

World War I, both Africa and the colonized countries formed not so much an intellectual spectacle of the West as a privileged terrain for it.²¹ The Africa in Blixen's work, celebrated for its offerings of liberty from the constraints of conventions and its connection to nature, appears to perpetuate the destructive portraiture of 'othered' territories that Said describes. In a blistering condemnation of the tendency to romanticise women's portrayal of unfettered independence in Africa, Anne McClintock derides modern nostalgia for 'an era when European women in brisk white shirts and safari green supposedly found freedom in empire: running coffee plantations, killing lions and zipping around the colonial skies in aeroplanes.'²² Without naming Karen Blixen, the comment leaves no uncertainty about implicating *Out of Africa* as instrumental in influencing the continent's creation in Western imagination as a theatrical background.

As critics such as Karen Lawrence and Dea Birkett have examined, women travellers found the autonomy denied them in Europe within the distant setting of the 'Dark Continent' which provided a scene for their exploits and a 'stage upon which their new experiences as travellers could be realized.'²³ Through the discourse of travel writing, Africa loses its geographical tangibility and becomes an idealized symbol of a site where individual adventures unfold. In this regard, despite her attempts to criticize British imperial practices, Blixen has unintentionally become central to the colonial discourse as she follows a tradition of writers who celebrate other locations as settings for their personal introspections. In many ways, the very act of writing a survey of a

²¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 104.

²² Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 15.

²³ Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages*, p. 126.

foreign landscape seems to position Blixen in a situation of power and authority usually reserved for men, and appears to contribute to the colonial project. A close scrutiny of *Out of Africa* through a postcolonial lens and a narrative framework will reveal the extent to which Blixen negotiates narrative conventions.

Theoretical Framework: Women Writers, Survey, Domesticity and Imperialism

As I explored in the introductory chapter, inventions such as photography influenced the modern propensity to 'survey and simulate experience,'²⁴ and provoked a cultural emphasis on the gaze and visualization. *Out of Africa* is of interest as it overtly provides an instance of a woman's access to the entitled stance of observer. In general, women have primarily been the object of scrutiny rather than the empowered spectators as '[t]his high point of view—the panoptical stance—is enjoyed by those in privileged positions in the social structure, to whom the world appears as a spectacle, stage, performance.'²⁵

Elsewhere in her writing, Blixen acknowledges that women have chiefly been the focus of a male audience as a character voices the sentiment that: 'the loveliness of woman is created in the eye of man...A goddess would ask her worshipper first of all: How am I looking?'²⁶ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's claim that the increased consciousness of gender identity that culminated in the twentieth-century influenced women writers' experimentation with gender performance as they 'perceived the dissonance between "surveyor" and "surveyed" far more clearly than their nineteenth-

²⁴ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 122.

²⁵ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 122.

²⁶ Isak Dinesen, *Seven Gothic Tales* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 159.

century precursors had.’²⁷ Of interest is the way in which Blixen negotiates the gendered categorizations of the observer and the observed that came to the forefront of exploration during Modernism. Further, the gendered distinction between the agency of the spectator and the spectacle has implications within imperialism as the subaltern, like the female, has traditionally lacked an influential voice.

As the conventions of travel writing dictate the witness of foreign cultures from an impartial standpoint, *Out of Africa* ostensibly maintains the distinction between the voyeur and the object of survey with its extensive descriptive portraits of individuals on the farm. In this regard, while subverting gender expectations, Blixen seems to reinforce the traditions of the imperialist theatre where the colonized ‘other’ is reduced to a passive entity. However, the surveillance of the daily life and pageantry in *Out of Africa* is occasionally interrupted by Blixen’s voiced awareness of a reversed gaze; she expresses her understanding that her workers have an imbalanced access to information and knowledge about her that she cannot reciprocate. McClintock’s study on imperialism and gender references the panoptic which recalls Foucault’s examination in *Discipline and Punish* of how visibility has been manipulated historically to reinforce power relations. Foucault’s theories of power/knowledge modified the assumptions that power is monopolized by individuals with control, contending that it circulates through all aspects of society; even the disenfranchised wield agency through their perspective and insight on the circumstances of the privileged. Arguably, Blixen’s subversion of the distinction between those watching and those being watched may be read in light of

²⁷ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, Volume 3: Letters from the Front* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 72.

Foucault's philosophy, as her reversal of the performer's gaze throws traditional assumptions of power/knowledge into question.

As the title of Mary Louise Pratt's book, *Imperial Eyes* implies, the connection between visual survey and mastery is significant, and the text demonstrates how travel narratives engage the reader in the colonial project and create a 'domestic subject of European imperialism.'²⁸ In her estimation of women's accounts, though, Pratt argues that females' landscape descriptions might subvert the male version of dominant ascendancy; whereas men tend to concentrate on objective, scientific observations of the people and country, women emphasize personal, sensual descriptions. Moreover, the tendency to project the private realm of 'home' onto the foreign landscape is a hallmark of women's travel literature, further differentiating their work from their male counterparts. Pratt contends, in part, that women's experiences as objects of survey generate a distinct female voice within the genre of travel writing, defined by its emphasis on the private and domestic aspects of the landscape. Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa* offers a description that concentrates on views from the ground and gives textual space to evocative illustrations of the campsite. Pratt argues that the text juxtaposes the natural world with a residential home:

As much as I have enjoyed life in Africa, I do not think I ever enjoyed it to the full as I did on those nights dropping down the Rembwe. The great, black, winding river with a pathway in its midst of frosted silver where the moonlight struck it; on each side the ink-black mangrove walls, and above them the band of stars and moonlight heavens that the walls of mangrove allowed one to see. Forward rose the form of our sail, idealised from bedsheetdom to glory; and the little red glow of our cooking fire gave a single note of warm colour to the cold light of the moon. Three or four times during the second night, while I was steering along by the south bank, I found the mangrove wall thinner, and standing up, looked through the network of their roots and stems on to what seemed like plains, acres upon acres in extent of polished silver.²⁹

²⁸ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. xi

²⁹ Mary H. Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2003), p. 338.

Pratt reads the passage as a juxtaposition of the natural world with the residential home and argues that the inclusion of domestic details indicates a particularly feminine style:

What world could be more feminized? There shines the moon lighting the way; the boat a combination bedroom and kitchen; Kingsley the domestic goddess keeping watch and savouring the solitude of her night vigil. Far from sharing her joy, the party, thank goodness, are asleep. The place is almost subterranean—like a mole, the traveller peers through roots and stems.³⁰

Pratt's question assumes an implicit connection between a female mode of writing and trope of domesticity. Although Kingsley's emphasis on an underground, subterranean world marks a stark contrast to Blixen's evocative exultation of flight and air, Blixen shares with Kingsley a similar stress upon house and home, which seems to suggest her engagement of a female voice.

The depiction of domesticity, however, can be problematic, as projects to formulate notions of 'home' in other locations suggest a colonial venture. Anne McClintock argues that Victorian obsessions with domestic orderliness were projected onto the imperial sphere as colonialism became an enterprise to tidy up the provinces and cleanse the perception of degenerate sordidness within the subaltern territories. Imperialism, in this perspective, is inextricably linked to the notions of 'home' as colonizers endeavoured to domesticate the empire in all the myriad meanings of the word. Included in the numerous entries for 'domestic' in the Oxford English Dictionary are overlapping notions of home, country, nature and civilization. The range of definitions include: 'pertaining to one's place of residence or family affairs; household, home, "family;'" 'pertaining to one's own country or nation; not foreign, internal, inland "home;'" 'of men: having settled abodes; not nomad or wild;' 'an inhabitant of the same country; a native, fellow-countryman.' The gamut of meanings implicate the creation of

³⁰ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 214.

'home' abroad into a larger project of civilization and cultivation; the empire saw an establishment of a family structure that mirrored the ideal of the private household; within the hierarchy of imperialism, the white middle-class male was considered the archetype of evolutionary progress, whose duty entailed the fostering of the less developed 'children' of the empire. The colonial mission, thus, aspired to civilize, improve, and tame all members comprising the Family of Man.³¹

The emphasis on the paradigm of family within the imperialistic theatre underscores how seemingly private affairs of the sphere of 'home' had an impact that resonated on a global scale. As representatives of domesticity, women thus play a critical part in the perpetuation of national 'domestic' concerns abroad. As colonial wives, women's prescribed obedience and inactivity serve as a crucial symbol of cultivation and refinement. Hilary Callan and Shirley Ardener explore the political ramifications of women's roles as figures of domesticity within imperialism: 'The presence of [colonial] wives did very much more. They were representatives of the home culture, and of its moral standards. The function of these women, in this regard, was to assist in the maintenance of the "dignity" seen as politically essential.'³² Depictions of docile femininity, in short, are 'politically essential' to the continuation of colonial control. In their disregard for the strictures of gender expectations and their movement away from the stability of 'home,' women travellers arguably subvert the imperialistic connotations of domesticity and challenge the notion of the delicate and idle housewife. As scholars such as Dea Birkett have contended, however, some female voyagers have engaged the model of the family to their advantage, casting themselves into dominating roles by

³¹ See McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, pp 232-257.

³² Hilary Callan and Shirley Ardener, eds., *The Incorporated Wife* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 169.

claiming status over the foreign people they encounter. One such strategy that exploits the power dynamics within the family construct and highlights the women's sense of command is an infantilization of the subalterns. Birkett comments that: 'As adults, the travellers described the Arabs as "babies," Albanians as "child-people," and Tibetans as "wild children of the wild heights."' ³³ By juxtaposing themselves with the 'wild' juvenility of the native population, the women travellers accentuate their own civilized, mannerly natures.

Another means by which white women managed to increase their standing on the racial hierarchy within the empire was to apply gender dichotomies to variations of race, for 'the rhetoric of gender was used to make increasingly refined distinctions among the different races. The white race was figured as the male of the species and the black race as the female.' ³⁴ The link between the ideals of femininity and the native population not only served to validate the subjugation of the 'weaker' and 'irrational' subaltern, but it offered colonizing women the opportunity to exercise power; by distinguishing themselves from the feminized Africans that they encountered, white women travellers, as a contrast, aligned themselves with the masculinity and authority associated with western Europeans. Highlighting the subaltern's womanliness, in short, allowed the 'memsahibs' and 'msabus' to exercise the privileges and benefits of mastery generally accorded to males. Evidence of the emasculation of non-western men pervades imperial discourse and is manifested in a multitude of sources. Scrutinizing an advertisement illustrating male native servants delivering an elaborate tea to an assembly of white men on safari in the jungle, McClintock suggests that 'two things happen in such images:

³³ Dea Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 126.

³⁴ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 55.

women vanish from the affair of empire and colonized men are feminized by their association with domestic servitude... Imperial domesticity is therefore a domesticity without women.'³⁵ The responsibilities usually performed by women are, in the setting of the empire, fulfilled by native men shown in a domestic capacity.

The assumption of a male position of authority arguably finds a parallel in the very creation of a narrative, considering that women's ability to 'author' a text is complicated by the historical association with writing as a masculine endeavour. Edward Said, as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar explain, first drew attention to the etymological association between the terms, accentuating the author's wielding of inventive power and accompanying rights of possession. In their compelling investigation of women writers' negotiation of the anxieties of female creativity, Gilbert and Gubar posit that Said's connection between terms implicitly echoes historical associations of authority and masculinity: 'The patriarchal notion that the writer "fathers" his text just as God fathered the world has been all-pervasive in Western literary civilization, so much so that, as Said has shown, the metaphor is built into the very word, *author*, with which writer, deity and *pater familias* are identified.'³⁶ In other words, according to Gilbert and Gubar, authorship has consistently implied a male perspective.

Gilbert and Gubar suggest that one strategy women employ to counter the literary exclusions of their sex is to don the male mask of a penname:

Disguised as a man, after all, a woman writer could move vigorously away from the 'lesser subjects' and 'lesser lives' which has constrained her foremothers...the 'male-identified' woman writer felt that, dressed in the male 'costume' of her pseudonym, she could walk more freely about the provinces of literature that were ordinarily forbidden to ladies.³⁷

³⁵ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, pp. 219-223.

³⁶ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer in the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 15.

³⁷ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 65.

Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* exemplifies the complexities surrounding women's admittance into a traditionally male genre, and offers an interesting study on how women manipulate the dictates of the convention in order to relate their experiences. Gilbert and Gubar phrase the underlining contention as: 'Since his is the chief voice she hears, does the Queen try to sound like the King, imitating his tone, his inflections, his phrasing, his point of view? Or does she "talk back" to him in her own vocabulary, her own timbre insisting on her own viewpoint?'³⁸ The question of whether *Out of Africa* is written in a male or a female voice elicits concerns over the differences between women's and men's travel writing, the ways in which gender is manipulated to indicate agency within the theatre of imperialism, and the means by which women negotiate their various narrative subjectivities.

Implicit in Gilbert and Gubar's quotation, however, is a notion of an irrevocable gender divide as women writers' options are either to engage a female voice or to mimic a male's. The danger of imitation is the production of 'male manqués' who compose a 'literature of bad faith and inauthenticity.'³⁹ Such a sentiment is at odds with the Modernist perceptions of gender contemporaneous with Blixen's writing; the interwar era saw innovative changes to the concepts of essentialism and to the rigid gender binary. I suggest that although Blixen engages a male voice of authority that echoes the gendered pseudonym, she endeavours to destabilize gender dichotomies as her mimicry of a male narrative is punctuated by subversive challenges to the logic of men's travel accounts. The shifts between the male Dinesen and the female Blixen underscore the plasticity of her gendered subjectivity and unfix her from categories of sex. Blixen is a rootless figure

³⁸ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 46.

³⁹ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 72.

whose border crossings of her transitory sojourn in Kenya are reflected in the structure of her writing. Under the guise of a male *nom de plume*, *Out of Africa* becomes a figurative model of authorial cross-dressing and represents a literary example of what Marjorie Garber highlights as a 'third space' where the 'third term is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility.'⁴⁰

Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*

In the opening pages of *Out of Africa*, Karen Blixen describes the setting of her lost Kenyan farm with a tender lyricism, evoking the sights and scents of the landscape and conjuring impressions of a brutal beauty seen from the panoramic view of an airplane. Marvelling at the stark splendour of the geography, Blixen casts her authorial gaze over the rugged variety of the horizon, poetically illustrating the sensation of experiencing the vision of trees, mountains and plains; her narrative parallels the sweep of the plane as the reader is lifted off from surface descriptions of the grass, fauna and woods, to the views from the elevated heights of the sky.

In the wildness and irregularity of the country, a piece of land laid out and planted according to rule looked very well. Later on, when I flew in Africa, and became familiar with the appearance of my farm from the air, I was filled with admiration for my coffee-plantation, that lay quite bright green in the grey-green land, and I realized how keenly the human mind yearns for geometrical figures.⁴¹

The lofty perspective underscores the distinction between Nature's arbitrariness and the precise design of the geometrical farmlands. Surveying the terrain, Blixen admires the visual results of her efforts at cultivation, emphasizing her sense of possession over the plots and her claim to the land. As Mary Louise Pratt indicates that the 'monarch of all I

⁴⁰ Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 11.

⁴¹ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 16.

survey' is a trope where the 'explorer-man paints/possesses newly unveiled landscape-woman,'⁴² Blixen's representation ostensibly defies the traditional gender dualism of travel writing; whereas Pratt cites Mary Kingsley as an exemplary female traveller who chooses to occupy the swamps in stark contrast to her male counterpart's 'gleaming promontories,'⁴³ Blixen takes to the air. Her panoramic view from the plane challenges what Inderpal Grewal discusses as the Victorian insistence that women remain 'within' the landscape rather than transcending it. Describing George Eliot's character Dorothea Casaubon's revelatory experience gazing from her window at the fields stretching beyond, Grewal suggests that: 'This location "above" is a dislocation of women's proper place within English nineteenth century culture.'⁴⁴ As a result of the advent of technological developments, women travellers speeding over the land in the airplanes of the twentieth century were allowed access to an outlook, perspective, and narrative voice they were previously denied.

However, while Pratt suggests the result of Kingsley's renegotiation of the landscape is a 'female voice that asserts its own kind of mastery even as it denies domination and parodies power,'⁴⁵ Blixen's sense of command over the region reinscribes notions of imperialism and supremacy. In the above quotation, the geometrical precision of the cultivated, domesticated farm is exalted above the inferior untamed wilds. In this respect, Blixen's vantage from the plane reflects her position 'above' earthly concerns. The admiration of the land from an aerial perspective engages sentiments common to an imperialist discourse: 'The very acts of observing and

⁴² Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 213.

⁴³ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 213.

⁴⁴ Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and The Cultures of Travel* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), p. 23.

⁴⁵ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 213.

describing have implications for the relative position of authority obtained by white women abroad; observation and description were also means of mastering and appropriating the landscapes.⁴⁶ Within the passage, Blixen constructs a visual hierarchy and reinstates traditional dualisms in her contrast of the 'human mind' to the 'wilderness and irregularity of the country.' From the text's beginning, Blixen rises above nature, distancing herself from the minute details on the ground.

Further, Blixen simultaneously links the advantageous perspective flying offers to both the masculine gaze and imperial survey in her close association between plane travel and the spirited temperament of her lover and companion Denys Finch-Hatton:

Then, flying suits Denys so perfectly. I have always felt that he has so particularly much of the element of air in his makeup, —(sanguineous, wet, and warm, or how does it go?)—and was a kind of Ariel. There is a good deal of heartlessness in this temperament,—where the heart predominates, the character feels most at home on earth where things grow and blossom; a garden and a cornfield can be so full of heart, —and Ariel was in fact rather heartless, as you can see if you read 'The Tempest' again, but so pure, compared with the early beings on the island, clear, honest, without reservation, transparent, —in short, like air.⁴⁷

Finch-Hatton, likened to Ariel with his insouciant indifference, represents a stark contrast to the earthy rootedness of the ground where the proximity to Nature induces 'things [to] grow and blossom.' In her reference to *The Tempest*, Blixen reinforces the conventional juxtaposition of airy freedom represented by Ariel beside the weighted, wild, enslaved Caliban. Aligning Finch-Hatton with the elements of air and height positions him against the native Africans confined to the earth who, by opposing definition, are dishonest, opaque and unintelligible. Relating flight to Finch-Hatton's commanding masculinity, Blixen re-inscribes the conventional binary which links the power of imperial survey to

⁴⁶ Cheryl McEwan, *Gender, Geography and Empire: Victorian Women Travellers in West Africa* (Aldersot: Ashgate Press, 2000), p. 66.

⁴⁷ Dinesen, *Letters from Africa*, 12 October 1930.

the male gaze. Celebrating her own place alongside Finch-Hatton among the privileged spectators, Blixen casts herself into a masculine role of authority over the earthly 'Calibans' confined to the ground.

However, like Caliban, who displays agency in his resistance to the imposition of an imperial language and culture, Blixen questions the traditional illustration of an objective, possessive colonizer over the possessed object of the colonized in her depiction of the native Kikuyu's reversed gaze. Blixen recognizes that the distinction between the observer and the observed is not absolute, and she dismantles the assumption of an observer's powerful omniscience, indicating that her farm workers, with their insight into her affairs, have access to a knowledge and control from which she is excluded:

On our safaris, and on the farm, my acquaintance with the Natives developed into a settled and personal relationship. We were good friends. I reconciled myself to the fact that while I should never quite know or understand them, they knew me through and through, and were conscious of the decisions that I was going to take, before I was certain about them myself.⁴⁸

Prefiguring Foucault, who identifies nodes of power and agency in unexpected locations, Blixen reveals how the 'natives' are able to preserve their privacy by disclosing only aspects of themselves to scrutiny so that she 'should never quite know or understand them.' They, in contrast, are privy to observe all aspects of their supposed master's actions and gain knowledge of which the colonizer is not aware. In her description of the inversion of the presumed distinction between the 'surveyor' and the 'surveyed,' Blixen overturns the expectations of imperial power, marking an instance where the colonizer, operating under the assumption of control, in truth lacks the capability of command. *Out of Africa* thus defies the conventions of imperialist writing as it is the 'observed' who

⁴⁸ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 27.

have the true power of observation. The seemingly passive object enacts the role of spectacle, all the while active in their attention. Shedding light on the agency of the colonized, Blixen emphasizes the theatricality of the positions of the exhibitor and the audience.

Domesticity, Domination, and the Gender Politics of 'Home'

There is an implication in *Out of Africa* of, as Thurman proffered, an 'embroidery hoop' of domesticity as Blixen centres her personal experiences around her farm, describing it as a bastion of civilization and stability. There are glimpses within the text of some of the imported luxuries that comprised the backdrop of her experience, including references to books, music, clocks and rugs. In her biography, Thurman details the extent of the sundry possessions Blixen conveyed from Denmark:

She had, even before she left Denmark, the ambition to make her house an oasis of civilization. She took a set of flat silver, crystal goblets, china, furniture, linens, paintings, jewellery, carpets, a French clock, photographs in ornate frames, an exercise machine, her notebooks, her grandfather Westenholz's library, and favourite wedding present, a Scottish deerhound she called Dusk...⁴⁹

Thurman underscores the vast collection of material goods Blixen transported with her in order to construct a sense of domesticity and an 'oasis of civilization.' What is implied by the litany of materials is that very colonial notion that Blixen intended to create a European oasis within the African landscape. The portrait continues with a description of the improvements Blixen made on the house to differentiate the plot from the natural habitat of her surroundings:

[Blixen's] first project was an ambitious renovation of the bungalow, which took almost a year and turned it into something more like a villa. She had a porch

⁴⁹ Thurman, *Isak Dinesen*, p. 136.

enclosed and made into a pretty garden room where she hung her pictures and laid her Persian rugs; she built a pillared veranda and a wing of offices and workrooms, laid out a garden, landscaped the lawn, excavated a little duck pond, and planted creeping vines that eventually grew up over the ugly brick.⁵⁰

The opulence of the inventory and the inclusion of such extravagant non-essentials emphasize Blixen's desire to establish herself within Kenya, and to create an environment of refinement. Thurman's description indicates that the measures necessary to cultivate the unformed wilderness into a genteel residence include the removal of traces of either nature or Africa from the locale. The bungalow transforms into an Italian villa, Persian rugs adorn the floor, French clocks decorate the interior, a Scottish deerhound monitors the property, the garden is cultured and contained indoors, and the lawn is developed, shaped, and controlled. Blixen's articulated regard for the geometry of her cultivated land from the view of the plane seems to find an echo in her aspirations for the design of the house.

The farm, moreover, is illustrated in the text as a nexus of ideas and discussion; it was a refuge for visitors such as Denys Finch-Hatton who, after extended expeditions, were 'starved for talk.'⁵¹ The depiction of the successive stream of guests that comprises the section devoted to 'Visitors to the Farm,' emphasizes Blixen's grounded immobility amidst the flurry of movement passing through the house. Numerous personalities, including, Knudsen, Emmanuelson, Somali women, and Choleim Hussein, find refuge in their sojourn, and the house becomes a location of cultural collisions, marking a point of intersection between African and European traditions. Blixen paints herself as a veritable hostess, providing a refuge for all of the passing migrants. Reflecting on the departure of

⁵⁰ Thurman, *Isak Dinesen*, p. 154.

⁵¹ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 141.

her visitors, Blixen differentiates her fixity with the wanderer's unconstrained freedom: 'I felt my heart filling with the love and gratitude which the people who stay at home are feeling for the wayfarers and wanderers of the world, the sailors, explorers, and vagabonds.'⁵² Deeming Africa, 'home,' in contrast to the prospects of travel, Blixen defines herself as rooted and settled.

On the other hand, despite the general sense of a traditional notion of 'home' within *Out of Africa* as a site of stability and fixity, Blixen qualifies the illustration by excluding significant specifications of the complex; the text lacks any meticulous description of the architecture. In a manner that reflects the larger design of her narrative, Blixen offers an impression of the home rather than concentrating on the more concrete details of structure. Particulars of the house are only included in secondary sources such as Thurman's biography, while *Out of Africa* only leaves the reader with a vague impression with its passing references to books, furniture and technology. Further, Thurman's choice of words to describe the 'oasis of civilization' indicates that the farm is wholly detached and separated from any incursion of nature. The impression of Blixen's farm, however, is less of a rigid barrier than a permeable and porous frontier. Not only do the wanderers move in and out of the farm, but Blixen confounds the divide between the domestic and the wild; Lulu, for example, the rescued gazelle coming 'from the woods,'⁵³ is seamlessly adopted into the household. What is traditionally excluded from the sphere of 'home' is offered access to the interior in *Out of Africa*, defying the expectation of domestic privacy. Blixen, in fact, draws attention to the public elements of her house:

⁵² Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 176.

⁵³ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 63.

My dining-room looked west, and had three long windows that opened out to the paved terrace, the lawn and the forest...The wind blew from the east: the doors of my dining-room to lee, were always open, and for this reason the west side of the house was popular with the Natives; they laid their way round it, to keep in touch with what was going on inside.⁵⁴

Boundaries become indistinguishable as dwelling melts into garden with the gradation of rooms, paved terrace, lawn and forest. From the passage, the structure seems to spring up from the forests and come out of Africa, rather than staving off its encroachment. The description of the house, thus, does not entirely correspond to the conventional expectations of 'home' as a site of exclusion and segregation. It is instead a space which overlaps a variety of cultures and ideas. Further, the farm is not marked as a rooted and stable place; the reader is aware from the nostalgia of the opening pages that Blixen's stay in Kenya is transient and that the loss of her farm inevitable. From the very first description of the property, one understands that her possession of the farm is not permanent. With her use of the past tense in her explanation that: 'I had a farm in Africa, at the foot of the Ngong Hills,'⁵⁵ the reader is made aware that her home no longer exists. In this regard, Blixen challenges the presumptions of 'home,' sketching her farm as inclusive, ambiguous and mutable.

Despite the nebulous borders of the house, however, the notion of domesticity remains a central theme to the book as the farm marks an unequivocal point of focus around which the described events unfold. Even a casual reader understands the tribulations of the coffee harvest, the necessity of measures used to protect the livestock and domesticated animals from prowling predators, and the difficulties involved in preparing a meal that meets the culinary criteria of the Prince of Wales when the royal

⁵⁴ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 48.

⁵⁵ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 13.

arrives for a visit. Highlighting the rigors of establishing a sense of home, however, Blixen seems to overturn a tradition that undermines any domestic exertions.

Unlike previous representations of middle-class women's role as an 'Angel of the House' that strove to efface evidence of the burden of housekeeping, *Out of Africa* vividly describes the complications of maintaining domestic standards within a foreign landscape. The portraiture of Victorian femininity was of a languid, ornamental passivity cosseted in the privacy of the home. In 'Professions for Women' of 1931, Virginia Woolf indicated the residual prevalence of perceptions of idle womanliness, suggesting that women writers must first kill the 'Angel' who was 'intensely sympathetic, she was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily...in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others.'⁵⁶ In tandem with the erasure of Victorian women's opinions and sense of self was an assumption of inactivity and leisurely inertia that became an impression that those who desired admission into a 'respectable' class cultivated. Deemphasizing the magnitude of household tasks was thus a necessary strategy to accentuate the characterization of women's passivity. By detailing the intensity of her labour with quotations such as 'there is always something to do on [a coffee plantation]: you are generally just a little behind with your work,'⁵⁷ Blixen appears to shatter suppositions of women's tendencies towards frailty and indolence.

Out of Africa's recognition of the efforts of maintaining a household, though, does not fully dismantle the gender binary that relates domesticity with womanliness, for

⁵⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays, Volume 2* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1972), p. 285.

⁵⁷ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 16.

Blixen frequently feminizes her servants and underscores her own masculine traits. In this respect, by gendering her native African workers within the domestic sphere, Blixen borrows power and claims status at their expense as she participates in the tradition of colonialism that engages gender dichotomies to justify the distribution of authority and control. Blixen, further, re-inscribes the imperialistic parent/child dichotomy in many facets of *Out of Africa*. Blixen illustrates the peculiarities of the young boy who works in her kitchen, Kamante, with a maternal tenderness and devotion. In one instance, describing the remarkable scene of a herd of wild dogs stampeding the plain, she claims her assistant, Farah, and her dog's keeper as confirming spectators, stating: 'I have told this tale to many people and not one of them has believed it. All the same it is true, and my boys can bear me witness.'⁵⁸ Although of indeterminate ages, Blixen identifies her servants with a pejorative 'my boys,' illustrating herself as a protective guardian figure.

Out of Africa does not ostensibly challenge the colonial propensity to categorize races along gender lines as Blixen explicitly compares ethnic relations to those of sexual differences and often accentuates the traditionally feminine roles of her male characters. In a section of 'From an Immigrant's Notebook,' Blixen elucidates her opinions on the relationship between 'The Two Races.' In an effort to renegotiate the stereotypes of white superiority, Blixen engages terms of a husband and wife's mutual dependence: Blixen herself pointedly draws a parallel between gender and race when she states:

The relation between the white and black races in Africa in many ways resembles the relation between the two sexes. If the one of the two sexes were told that they did not play any greater part in the life of the other sex than this other sex plays within their own existence, they would be shocked and hurt... The tales that white people tell you of their Native servants are conceived in the same spirit... which prove the all-absorbing interest of the white people in the Kikuyu or Kavirondo, and their complete dependence upon them.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 271

⁵⁹ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 227.

Although Blixen attempts to overturn assumptions regarding white people's indifference to the local inhabitants by suggesting that the colonized and colonizers share a reciprocated regard, her suggestion that the connection can be viewed from a gender perspective casts the Africans into a feminine light.

In both the text and in her letters to Denmark detailing her initial impressions of her Kenyan experience, Blixen endows the locals with feminine traits. Blixen claims that 'Pooran Singh was no devil, but a person of the meekest disposition; out of working hours he had a little maidenly affectation of manner.'⁶⁰ In an unexpected comparison to the image of a virulent worker, Pooran Singh is illustrated as possessing a delicate elegance. Blixen, further, deplors the disappearance of the Masai tribe in terms that stresses their emasculation. 'They were fighters who had been stopped fighting, a dying lion with his claws clipped, a castrated nation. Their spears had been taken from them, their big dashing shields even, and in the Game Reserve the lions followed their herds of cattle.'⁶¹ Embedded within the lamented erosion of the Masai's self-determination is a sense of their increasing femininity that accompanies the loss of their phallic spears. In another instance, Blixen emphasizes the protean nature of a Kikuyu's gender characteristics. Describing a father's passionate production to solicit mercy for his son, she writes: 'His bones creaked in the dance, he was even changing his sex in it, and had taken on the appearance of an old woman, a hen, a lioness—the game was so plainly a feminine activity.'⁶² Although arguably, the quotation explores the performative aspects of masculinity and femininity and reflects Blixen's interest in the tentative nature of

⁶⁰ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 267.

⁶¹ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 119.

⁶² Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 120.

gender identity, the references to female animals recalls the tradition equating African males with women. Not only does Blixen repeatedly associate the Kikuyu with beasts, she often employs female creatures as a point of contrast.

Within the circumference of the home, Blixen similarly endows her workers with feminine attributes. Her assistant Farah who is responsible for a range of duties including translator, cultural authority and financial supervisor is, in a moment of praise, declared 'better than a white lady's maid'⁶³ Whether read as a statement on Farah's improvement over European women's servants or on his superior efficiency to white workers, Blixen classifies him in with female labourers and underscores his domestic position. Similarly, Blixen details the oddities of Kamante's dinner preparations and her admiration for his skills are replete with hints of his femininity as he surpasses her talents in the kitchen: 'He thought out schemes for improvement of my table, and by some means of communication from a friend who was working for a doctor far away in the country, he got me seed of a really excellent sort of lettuce, such as I had myself for many years looked in vain.'⁶⁴ In their adept attention to the particulars of the house, Kamante and Farah assume the function of colonial wives while Blixen slips into the role of master.

Blixen's comparative masculinity that results, in part, from the feminization of her male workers accentuates the sense of her command and authority. From the beginning of the account she appears to take pains to conceal her sex, as the scant textual evidence that she is female manifests only in passing references to her association with 'lionesses' and the observation that 'the Natives use this Indian word when they address

⁶³ Dinesen, *Letters from Africa*, 1 April, 1914.

⁶⁴ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 42.

white women.’⁶⁵ In another instance, she likens herself to a male commander, positioning herself into a figure of masculine domination with the analogy.

‘The love of war is a passion like another, you love soldiers as you love young womenfolk—to madness, and the one love does not exclude the other, as the girls know. But the love of women can include only one at a time, and the love for your soldiers comprehends the whole regiment, which you would like enlarged if it were possible.’ It was the same thing with the Natives and me.⁶⁶

Quoting her father’s musings on his involvement in the military, Blixen again reshapes racial differences into a gender binary, and highlights her own described affinity to the male soldier.

The negotiation of the gender divide is a pervasive subject in women’s travel writing. Authors such as Mary Kingsley have, as Dea Birkett contends, had to mediate portrayals of their femininity within their texts. Defending herself against the claim of her engagement of an overly masculine narration, Kingsley protested that ‘I really cannot draw the trail of the petticoats over the coast of all places...I went out there as a naturalist not as a sort of circus.’⁶⁷ Despite her desire to avoid a spectacle, however, Kingsley arguably used the very theatrical aspects of her travel to reconcile its unconventionality. Blixen similarly indicates an interest in experimenting with the performative aspects of gender identity, a project which becomes a challenge to the expectations of women’s writing. Virginia Woolf argues in ‘Professions for Women’ that the only avenue available to female authors is to kill the ‘Angel of the House’ who dictates passive femininity and a containment of opinions which questions the demands of domestic womanliness. Woolf writes:

⁶⁵ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 33.

⁶⁶ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 25.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Dea Birkett, *Mary Kingsley: Imperial Adventuress* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1992), p. 27.

I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her. My excuse, if I were to be had up in a court of law, would be that I acted in self-defence. Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart of my writing. For, as I found, directly I put pen to paper, you cannot review even a novel without having a mind of your own, without expressing what you think to be the truth about human relations, morality, sex. And all these questions, according to the Angel of the House, cannot be dealt with freely and openly by women; they must charm, they must conciliate, they must—to put it bluntly—tell lies if they are to succeed.⁶⁸

In contrast to the demands on women writers to deal in 'lies,' Blixen pointedly outlines her ambition to 'veritatem dicere,' or to tell the truth, in the opening quotation that precedes the text. It would seem, thus, that the necessary thwarting of the 'Angel' is only achieved in *Out of Africa* at the expense of the disenfranchised subalterns, and that Blixen's voice of masterly authority is found only through the silencing of others. I contend, however, that a scrutiny of Blixen's interest in gender and performance yields a more nuanced understanding of her writing which, at times, offers a subtle imitation of imperial male narratives. Just as Homi Bhabha argues that mimicry may operate as a complex undermining of the authenticity of the original, where 'excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely "rupture" the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a "partial" presence,'⁶⁹ so too may Blixen's work be examined as a challenge to the categorizations of gender identity.

⁶⁸ Woolf, *Collected Essays Volume 2*, p. 286.

⁶⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture: Critical Theory and the Postcolonial Perspective* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 86.

The Mask of Isak Dinesen

When Donald Hannah queries 'In what sense are Isak Dinesen and Karen Blixen really one and the same person?',⁷⁰ he undermines Blixen's interest in complicating the affinity between author and narrator, and her recurring challenges to the reader's assumptions of accuracy and authenticity. According to Judith Thurman's biographical study, Blixen adheres to Gilbert and Gubar's contention that women found freedom from literary constraints when disguised as male writers in her expression that the pseudonym allowed her 'imagination a free rein.'⁷¹ By publishing under the mask of a male name, Blixen not only divorces the author from the narrator, but disengages the writer from assumptions of gender. In her exploration of women writers and their poetry, Cheryl Walker examines uncertainties of women authorship that may be applied to *Out of Africa*. Rather than insisting on a sense of unified self underlining the works, Walker praises such theorists as Ostriker, who emphasizes the performative nature of composition, where:

The author is also on stage in the poem. This does not mean—as it does for Bennett's most approved models—that in the best poems, women have discarded their masks...Furthermore, for Ostriker there is no true self or core of identity to which we can refer the final meaning of the poem. The split selves in women's poems are both true, both false.⁷²

Both within *Out of Africa* and in several of her short stories, Blixen celebrates the divide between narrative and authorial selves, and implicitly destabilizes expectations of an underlining essential identity. One instance of *Out of Africa* indicates the chasm between the writer's intentions and the reader's anticipation of receiving discernable

⁷⁰ Donald Hannah, *'Isak Dinesen' and Karen Blixen: The Mask and the Reality* (London: Putnam & Company, 1971), p. 12.

⁷¹ Thurman, *Isak Dinesen*, p. 105.

⁷² Cheryl Walker, 'Feminist Literary Criticism and the Author,' *Critical Inquiry*, 16:3 (1990), p 562.

information about the author. Interpreting the passage describing the complication of deciphering the literary missives her workers sent upon her return to Denmark as a metaphor for a reader of her own text, Blixen devalues the prospect of uncovering any sense of authorial intention beneath the words.

The professional writers do not know much English either, and can hardly be said to know how to write, but they themselves believe that they can. To show off their skill they enrich the letters with a number of flourishes, which makes them difficult to decipher... There is a depth in the letters that I get; you feel that there is some vital communication which has been heavy on the heart of the sender, which has made him walk a long way from the Kikuyu Reserve to the post office. But it is wrapped up in darkness. The cheap and dirty little sheet of paper that, when it comes to you, has travelled many thousand miles, seems to speak and speak, even to scream to you, but it tells you nothing at all.⁷³

Deconstructing the passage as an analogy for her own endeavours to relate a story to her audience, the 'professional writer' who interprets the accounts and contributes her own 'flourishes' is 'Isak Dinesen,' while Karen Blixen, who experienced the events, 'tells you nothing at all.' Although the writing indicates a depth of significance, the meaning is obscured when transmitted through the author's pen. The final product is 'difficult to decipher' and appears to disclose an important communication but, underneath, reveals nothing of substance about the person behind the authorial mask. The excerpt hints at the necessity of recognizing the persona of the 'professional writer' as a distinctive voice. In this respect, Blixen echoes Walker's sentiment that the author dons a performative mask, and that no 'true self or core identity' can be discerned underneath the camouflage. Blixen's decision to cloak herself within a male disguise, further, yields interesting consequences upon her treatment of gender within her texts. Her use of an ostensibly male 'professional' voice signals that her writing may be 'cross-dressed' in a masculine style.

⁷³ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 76.

Blixen's interest in masks, performance, costume and cross-dressing is apparent in the references that pervade her literary oeuvre. Gilbert and Gubar pay tribute to Blixen in their volume on twentieth century women writers, claiming that several of her short stories are historical costume dramas which imply 'that the women of the twentieth century have liberated themselves by learning how to manipulate costumes, even to play with them.'⁷⁴ The story that opens her first published book preceding *Out of Africa*, *Seven Gothic Tales*, published in 1934, depicts a young Danish man on a journey of self-discovery whose encounters with various characters entangle him in the love affairs of a dramatic community. On more than one occasion, the protagonist Augustus' assumption of another's gender proves false as the addition of costumes transfigures women into men and men into women. The result is confusion in his discovery 'that he had been treating a young lady as a boy,'⁷⁵ and that an 'old man' was in fact 'a fine old lady:'

The old man turned his eyes upon her. 'Put on my bonnet,' he said. The maid, as Augustus found her to be, after some struggle got hold of a large bonnet with ostrich feathers, and managed to get it fixed on the bald head. Fastened inside the bonnet was an abundance of silvery curls, and in a moment, the old man was transformed into a fine old lady of imposing appearance. The bonnet seemed to set her at ease.⁷⁶

Like Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, the modifications of gender within Blixen's 'The Roads Around Pisa' occur without prodigious disturbance to the characters, and are accompanied by an insignificant adjustment of clothing. The narrative continues uninterrupted and with a minor correction of the pronoun. The story offers an illustration to Derrida's pronouncement that 'man and woman change places. They exchange masks

⁷⁴ Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man's Land, Volume 2* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 354-355.

⁷⁵ Blixen, *Seven Gothic Tales*, p. 22.

⁷⁶ Blixen, *Seven Gothic Tales*, p. 11.

ad infinitum.⁷⁷ The effortless movement from male to female with the adornment of costume challenges the notion of a stable gender identity. In her monumental work on gender and performance, Judith Butler establishes the theory that femininity and masculinity are culturally constructed and naturalized through repetitive posturing that, in turn, offers the illusion of a 'prediscursive' sex as a 'politically neutral surface on which culture acts.'⁷⁸ Blixen's emphasis on gender plasticity and her challenge of an authentic identity beneath the mask anticipates Butler's axiom that gender performance destabilizes the notion of a natural binary.

The significance of clothing and costumes manifests in Blixen's *Shadows on the Grass*, which chronicles the same period of her time in Kenya as *Out of Africa* and might be considered an addendum to the original text. Offering insight into her daily relations with her workers, the tone of *Shadows on the Grass* is without the weight of nostalgic loss that characterizes her previous writings on her experiences. Including one exchange with a Kikuyu chief about the appropriateness of her dress, Blixen both dismisses and highlights the emphasis others place upon gendered attire. After appearing in an elegant frock for the Prince of Wales' visit to the farm, Blixen receives criticism from the Kikuyu leaders about her ordinary lack of fashion acumen:

I did not contradict him. Generally on the farm I wore old khaki slacks stained with oil, mud and fouling. I felt that my people had dreaded, that upon a historical occasion on the farm and at a moment when I had called upon them to do their utmost, to see me let them down.

For the sake of my female readers I shall here insert that at the time of the Prince's visit I had not been to Europe for four years and could have no real idea as what fashions there were like.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Quoted in Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man's Land*, Volume 2, p. 370.

⁷⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 11.

⁷⁹ Isak Dinesen, *Shadows on the Grass* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 44.

That Blixen's usual clothing is soiled with the efforts of her farm work indicates that she is not interested in playing the role of well-maintained 'Angel of the House;' although she qualifies her fashion oversight, she does not apologize for her masculine attire. The assumption of women's thematic predilections evident in the explanation that follows her clothing confession is an unsettling re-inscription of the very gender binary that she dismantles with her own choice of dress. The defensive stress of the concluding sentence is discordant to the style she engages in *Out of Africa* where, in contrast, she seems to subdue evidence of her sex within the opening chapters. Blixen, in fact, highlights her masculinity throughout *Out of Africa*, and uses a male voice of authority which offers her access to a sense of command and mastery.

Engaging an analogy of a commander's devotion to his troops and as a young male's affections for a variety of lovers to describe her relationship with the native Kikuyu workers, Blixen parallels her position of influence on the farm with other dominant male roles. Echoing the language of conventional travel writing which sexualizes the colonized landscape as female, Blixen casts herself into traditionally male situations of an explorer penetrating unmapped territory. Her description of Nairobi emphasizes her sense of possession over the city as it is portrayed as a blossoming town with tantalizing opportunities: 'Nairobi said to you: "Make the most of me and time."' ⁸⁰ The quotation recalls Robert Herrick's poem, casting Nairobi as the feminine, uncorrupted maiden and Blixen as her ravisher. Obscuring her femininity under a mask of male mastery, Blixen accentuates her access to a power and domination that would have been denied her outside of the imperialist sphere.

⁸⁰ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 20.

Further, Blixen likens her writing to a god-like ability to create. Crediting herself with the manifestation of the literary portraits of individuals on the farm, Blixen describes her connection with the worker Kamante as his originator in her announcement that 'I may have looked upon him with something of a creator's eyes.'⁸¹ Animating the characters through her sketches, Blixen, as the author, demonstrates her generative powers. In an overt example of the association drawn between writing and godly creation, she juxtaposes the circumstance of her spelling of Jogona's Kanyagga's name with images of genesis. As Blixen composes a statement of Jogona's relations with a child shot in an accident, he is filled with solemn reverence for her markings:

Such a glance did Adam give the Lord when he formed him out of the dust, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. I had created him and shown him himself. . . When I handed him the paper, he took it reverently and greedily. . . He could not afford to lose it, for his soul was in it, and it was the proof of his existence.⁸²

Only through Blixen's writing is the character's presence confirmed; she becomes a creative artist who shapes and forms and breathes life into her workers. In this regard, her authorial voice depends upon the Africans as objects of raw material and establishes a hierarchical relation of mastery. Such equations of textual accomplishments to that of an all-powerful entity are not unique, however, but propagate a legacy of conflating 'author' and 'authority.' Donning the cloak of the male pseudonym and mirroring the language of authority allows Blixen access to what has conventionally been an exclusive privilege of a male voice.

To consider *Out of Africa* only as an accurate imitation of male writing, however, is to underestimate subversive aspects of the text and efface the differences it presents to

⁸¹ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 37.

⁸² Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 110.

other travel narratives. One of the principal features of the book is the notion of Blixen's weaving together of evocative scenes that conjure up the sensations of the daily tribulations on the farm. Rather than a chronological summary of events, the vignettes skip through time, offering an alternative to linear travel plots that, in sum, are more suggestive of how life in the period was experienced. These deviations from the mandates of traditional travel writing correspond to the hallmarks of *l'écriture féminine*; Blixen's conflation of past and present resonates with Kristeva's notion of 'Women's Time' as an opposition to a linear order. In this regard, Blixen's authoritative male voice is punctuated by a female perspective.

In her explanation of her variance to the concept of an overriding Monumental Time, Kristeva emphasizes the significance of cycles and recurring temporal patterns that are overshadowed by the perception of progressive march: 'As for time, female subjectivity seems to offer it a specific concept of measurement that essentially retains repetition and eternity out of many modalities that appear throughout the history of civilization. On the one hand, this measure preserves cycles, gestation and the eternal return of biological rhythm of nature.'⁸³ The sense of time in *Out of Africa* corresponds more closely to Kristeva's concept of the 'eternal return of biological rhythm of nature' than to any perception of a linear narrative as evidenced in the cyclical structure of the account and the accent on the landscape. Time, as portrayed within the text, is neither constant nor invariable, for the pulse of nature overrides the significance of demarcations of the clock. Describing the setting of her farm, Blixen highlights how the daily

⁸³ Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time' in Kelly Oliver, ed., *French Feminism Reader* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), p. 184.

functions within her home accord to the tempo of the river and wind while the cuckoo-clock that adorns the wall is merely displayed as an ornamental extravagance:

You could not see the river itself from the house, but you could follow its winding course by the design of the dark-green big acacias which grew along it...The central symbol [of civilization] was an old German cuckoo-clock that hung in the dining room. A clock was entirely an object of luxury in the African highlands. All the year round you could tell, from the position of the sun, what the time was, and as you had no dealings with railways, and could arrange your life on the farm according to your own wishes, it became a matter of no importance.⁸⁴

Although by traditional standards of progress the clock ought to make reading the sun's position anachronistic, the clock itself is deemed obsolete; conventional schedules and austere divisions of time have no application within the country. While the clock is admired as a curiosity, its function as an instrument of systemization and order is inconsequential. Rather than criticizing the inefficiency of a lifestyle that refuses to adhere to a timetable, Blixen questions the assumed necessity of a clock, exalting instead the irregular flow of the river.

Further, *Out of Africa* emphasizes nature's cyclical continuity, exemplified by the complementary depiction of the features of the landscape that open and close the text. The description of the geography that commences with her measured claim that 'I had a farm in Africa, at the foot of the Ngong Hills'⁸⁵ is revisited in the concluding 'Farewell to the Farm,' returning full-circle to the beginning of the work:

From there, to the south-west, I saw the Ngong Hills. The noble wave of the mountain rose above the surrounding flat land, all air-blue. But it was so far away that the four peaks looked trifling, hardly distinguishable, and different from the way they looked from the farm. The outline of the mountains was slowly smoothed and levelled out by the hand of distance.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, pp. 48-49.

⁸⁵ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 13.

⁸⁶ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 330.

The principal quality underlining the first pages is the sense of dispossession marked by the past tense of the starting lines; the description of her time in Kenya begins at its very end, emphasizing the inevitability of her departure and the perspective of hindsight. The immediate notion of loss that accompanies the first sentence is countered by the sense of timelessness and a space impervious to change as the sensuous sketches of the surrounding geography collectively create a portrait of 'a landscape that had not its like in all the world.'⁸⁷ She indicates how the location is more symbolic than actual, composed in memory and recreated on the page when she writes that 'it was an Africa distilled up through six thousand feet, like the strong and refined essence of a continent.'⁸⁸ In her final view of the horizon, the Ngong Hills remain immutable and stoic, although Blixen's relative movement away creates the perception of transformation. Leaving the farm, it is Blixen's memories rather than the landscape that are changed and 'levelled out by the hand of distance,' emphasizing that her account was written in retrospect and her experiences cannot be recreated except for within the sphere of her writings. The controlled nostalgia of *Out of Africa* functions as an elegy for a lost past, yet the vividness of her descriptions of locations conjure up the notion that the past is linked to the timelessness of the illustrated geography. Even while Blixen acknowledges that the 'colony is changing and has already changed since I lived there,'⁸⁹ the continuity of the descriptions of landscape that bookend the text indicate that the world of her past perpetually endures within Kenya alongside her European present. The correlation between time and location is emphasized by several of Blixen's critics who argue that her interest in the eighteenth century, which featured in many of her short stories, found

⁸⁷ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 13.

⁸⁸ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 13.

⁸⁹ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 28.

substantiality in Africa where the 'clock was not so much standing still—it had been put back.'⁹⁰

The concurrent presence of contradictory times that Blixen utilizes in *Out of Africa*, however, frequently figured as a common trope within imperialist literature, and echoes J.M. DeGerando's sentiment that 'the philosophical traveller, sailing to the ends of the earth, is in fact travelling in time; he is exploring the past.'⁹¹ Anne McClintock describes this ability to consume a variety of moments within a glance as Panoptical Time. McClintock argues that this notion of time as a spectacle engendered from nineteenth century empirical efforts and the advent of Darwinism, when natural space and 'historical time could be collected, assembled and mapped onto a global science of the surface.'⁹² In this regard, as anthropology globalized history, time became spatialized. Africa was considered by many prominent thinkers to exist within an 'anachronistic space' removed from the European axis of modernity. Hegel claimed that Africa 'is no Historical part of the world...it has no movement or development to exhibit.'⁹³ The contradiction of two versions of temporal history unfolding simultaneously proved problematic for Enlightenment thinkers who maintained a sense of chronological progression:

The Great Map of Mankind was a paradox, for it pictured the world as made up of different times that coexist on the same geographical globe. In other words, the anachronistic fetish-lands beyond Europe coexisted in the same time—clock time—as imperial modernity. Seeing the world as a simultaneously inhabiting different time dimensions evoked precisely the fetishistic notion of multiple, discontinuous time that the Enlightenment claimed to have transcended and which it set itself to violently reorder into a global regime of linear time and hierarchical continuity.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Hannah, *'Isak Dinesen' and Karen Blixen*, p. 32.

⁹¹ Quoted in McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 40.

⁹² McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 36.

⁹³ Quoted in McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, pp. 40-41.

⁹⁴ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 188.

Certainly, Blixen's portrayal of an Africa untouched by the negative aspects of modern development re-inscribes the representations of 'primitivism' and reinforces the depiction of the continent as inextricably linked to the past. Yet rather than advocating a violent imposition of a 'global regime of linear time,' Blixen celebrates the different rhythms and tempo of her African life, and challenges the perception of unified monolithic order. Reflecting on her treatment of time, Blixen indicates in her letters her disregard for the rigidity of monumental time and her alignment with the notion of relativity: 'I now think about myself that I have always unconsciously been an Einsteinian; for instance, I have always been convinced in my heart that time was an illusion.'⁹⁵ Associating herself with Einstein's radical revision of time as inconstant, subject to modification and dependent upon perspective, Blixen questions the traditional nineteenth-century perception of an overarching linear time. The quotation indicates Blixen's dismissal of Enlightenment convictions of standard time and accentuates her sense of time's plasticity. In this regard, Blixen distances herself from previous imperialistic visions of Africa's ahistoricism; by embracing the significance of context and perspective in regards to time, she throws the entire hierarchical categorizations that oppose 'European advancement' with 'African atavism' into dispute. Indeed, with her emphasis on a variation of tempo within *Out of Africa*, and the sense of circular continuity of nature that opens and closes the text, Blixen closely follows Kristeva's alternative version of temporality that 'preserves cycles' and mirrors the 'rhythms of nature.'

⁹⁵ Dinesen, *Letters from Africa*, 20 November 1928.

Blixen's interest, however, is not in representing the experience of the female body as she continually destabilizes such illusions of an essential woman behind the male mask. By including both a male and female voice, she offers a new style of travel writing, and parallels Michel Serres' innovative reading of the figure of Penelope as endowed with creative control and authoritative inventive power. She is:

the queen who weaves and unweaves, the originally feminine figure who, become male, will be Plato's Royal Weaver...Penelope is the author, the signatory of the discourse; she traces its graph, she draws its itinerary. She makes and undoes this cloth that mimes the progress and delays of the navigator, of Ulysses on board his ship, the shuttle that weaves and interweaves fibers separated by the void, spatial varieties bordered by crevices. She is the embroideress, the lace-maker, by wells and bridges, of the continuous flux interrupted by catastrophes that is called discourse.⁹⁶

In her weavings Penelope's creativity renegotiates the border between subject and object, categories of author and text, movement and stasis, and, as Karen R. Lawrence notes, 'the slipperiness of boundaries between inside and outside, male and female, domestic and exotic. Penelope/Hermes destabilizes these borders and remaps the geography of narrative and narrative theorizing.'⁹⁷

In an exchange in *Out of Africa* with the dubious Kamante, Blixen aligns herself and her story with the disruptive Penelope as she questions the male primacy of travel writing. What begins as a dialogue centred on the process of constructing her work spirals into a representative discussion of women's struggle for inclusion within the male travel canon. The book Kamante provides as the paragon of enviable craft is the prototype of quest writing itself, the *Odyssey*. Although Kamante's comments ostensibly pertain to the book's physical structure, his suspect comparison between Blixen's flimsy

⁹⁶ Michel Serres and Josué V. Harari and David F. Bell, trans. and eds., *Hermes: Literature, Science and Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 49.

⁹⁷ Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages*, pp. 9-10.

scribbling and the weighty, substantial heft of Homer's epic resonate with the disparaging disbelief in women's ability to pen travel accounts.

One night as I looked up I met these profound attentive eyes and after a moment he spoke. 'Msabu,' he said, 'do you believe yourself that you can write a book?'

...Kamante now made such a long pause, and then said, 'I do not believe it.'

I had nobody else to discuss my book with; I laid down my paper and asked him why not. I now found he had been thinking the conversation over before, and prepared himself for it; he stood with the *Odyssey* itself behind his back, and here he laid it on the table.

'Look, Msabu,' he said, 'this is a good book. It hangs together from the one end to the other. Even if you hold it up and shake it strongly, it does not come to pieces. The man who has written it is very clever. But what you write,' he went on, both with scorn and with a sort of friendly compassion, 'is some here and some there. When the people forget to close the door it blows about, even down on the floor and you are angry. It will not be a good book.'⁹⁸

Kamante's overt praise for the *Odyssey's* connected pages shrouds an underlying appreciation of narrative coherence. Reading the above passage as a commentary on the expected standards of travel writing, Kamante's pronouncement epitomizes the criticism Blixen may have anticipated for her own publication. In stark contrast to the *Odyssey's* linear thrust of a singular pursuit to return home, Blixen's text is a disjointed jumble of personal recollections and private reminiscences, 'some here and some there.' Rather than emphasizing an unswerving goal to return home against myriad challenges, Blixen illustrates her endeavours to establish a home within a threatening and unstable climate. Bereft of a singular quest, Blixen instead portrays her experiences with details of her daily tribulations, weaving and unweaving the narrative threads as she skips through the past to create an overall impression. Defending her text against its negative comparison to the *Odyssey*, Blixen subtly challenges the conventions and content of the travel writing corpus. The scene places *Out of Africa* within the same tradition as the *Odyssey* as both are Western accounts of adventures and adversities in foreign landscapes. In this regard, Blixen challenges the prerogative of the male narrative, simultaneously casting herself as

⁹⁸ Blixen, *Out of Africa*, p. 50.

Odysseus, the intrepid nomad, and the provocative Penelope, who represents the creative artist and guardian of the home.

Out of Africa has generally been examined as either a female voice yielding an elegant pastoral elegy about a woman's intrepid struggle against the harsh backdrop of nature, or as a male voice which reinforces the colonizers' power and authority over the native Africans, yet neither reading does justice to the nuances within Blixen's text. Little attention has been paid to her subversive plays on gender identity that suggest her interest in challenging the male/female binary. Blixen's interest in the fluidity of gender manifests itself in a style of a travel narrative that combines the hallmarks of the male and female experiences, creating a third space of writing that calls into question the very existence of the gender divide. Recognition of Blixen's deviations from the gendered traditions of travel writing indicates a destabilization of a litany of binary oppositions. As the representations of race and gender are irrevocably intertwined within the discourse of empire, Blixen's manipulation of the male/female dichotomy arguably translates into challenges to the colonial project. Although *Out of Africa* problematically reinforces racist perceptions, reading the text as performative undermines the authenticity and authority of the very narrative voice which dictates such imperial conventions. Blixen's play with masks as a means of destabilizing presumptions about male and female voices in her piece results in a new type of travel narrative distinct from a conventional and linear work. Along a similar vein, Rose Macaulay also plays with narrative disguises and moves between a plethora of voices and genres within her works. As I shall explore, her nomadic wandering through generic conventions operates as a device to undermine the

sense of a defined, and gendered, authorial identity, and suggests that her travel writing is a performance to mask the reader's autobiographical understanding of the text.

Chapter 5

Imaginary Voyages: Gender, Genre and Travel in Rose Macaulay's Writing

Introduction

As I have demonstrated in relation to both *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* and *Out of Africa*, travel writing in the 1920s and 1930s frequently trespassed literary boundaries; travel writing became an amalgamation of a plethora of styles including those of travel guides, historical accounts and epic quests. One of the features that distinguishes travel writing of the interwar era from the previous years is, as I have outlined in the introduction, an emphasis on the autobiographical aspects of the text. The 1930s in particular commonly saw authors use descriptions of voyages in travel accounts as allegories for self-examination and exploration of the writer's psyche; travel writing more frequently merited readings through the lens of autobiography. In general, the reader of a travel narrative approaches the text with the presumption that the work accurately records a verifiable experience. Travel accounts theoretically offer an intimacy with the narrator as the reader, the imaginary companion and confidant, gains access into the hero or heroine's personal perspective.

Some critics, such as Vesna Goldsworthy, have understandably celebrated the travel writing genre as a textual space where women can validly express their personal experiences: 'Travel writing is one of the more obviously "self-legitimizing" genres which has offered women a space in which to inscribe their experiences and views.'¹ While this is true, other critics have suggested that the label of women's narratives as

¹ Vesna Goldsworthy, 'Travel Writing as Autobiography: Rebecca West's Journey of Self-Discovery,' in Alison Donnell and Pauline Polkey, eds., *Representing Lives: Women and Auto/biography* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 87.

'autobiographical' is problematic considering how the term has been used historically to debase women's accounts for what was seen as their distasteful over-emphasis on the personal. Sara Mills, in *Discourses of Difference*, examines the particular constellation of restrictions with which women writers must contend. She argues that women, denied the freedom to engage a masculine scientific discourse, must couch their writing within accepted forms of personal history. The result is that women's travel writing 'has frequently been labelled "autobiographical,"'² which diminishes women's status as creators. Women's writing, Mills argues, is expected to adhere to particular discourses and to keep within the boundaries of certain generic categories. While women can access an authoritative voice and gain legitimacy for their travel narratives by emphasizing their personal experiences, the inclusion of autobiographical aspects problematically runs the risk of undermining the objective perspective of factual texts. Even during a period when travel writing was increasingly becoming intertwined with personal reflections, women still had to contend with the demands of generic conventions. This chapter will examine how one author negotiates the pressures to create a personal travel account while resisting the pejorative perception of non-factual travel writing. By moving across generic boundaries, Rose Macaulay defies any indication of a definable authorial subjectivity within her writing and presents instead what Karen Blixen deems the voice of a 'professional writer.'³

One of the themes that frequently surfaces throughout the appraisals of Macaulay's work and her life is an adamant resistance to labels, types and classifications. Many who write about her career highlight her dismissal of static categorizations and

² Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), p. 12.

³ Karen Blixen, *Out of Africa* (London: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 76.

emphasize instead her passion for travel, speed and motion. Following her death, several of her friends and acquaintances from the literary world contributed short tributes to the author offering different views on her personality. The compilation entitled 'The Pleasures of Knowing Rose Macaulay,' offers numerous references to her tendency towards movement. Alan Pryce Jones, for example, describes how 'nobody ever zig-zagged more, either driving a car or walking through life; yet the essential part of her was perfectly still.'⁴ Macaulay's 'zig-zagging' suggests a circuitous dash fuelled by curiosity rather than an efficient, linear trajectory towards a given destination. The sentiment that the comment evokes is an overall sense of motion that defined Macaulay's outward character.

Rosamond Lehmann, reflecting on Macaulay's life, similarly pays tribute to the sense of activity and motion which seemed to constitute the writer's personality. Like Pryce-Jones, Lehmann implies that the state of transit is a trait that somehow defines Macaulay, and that movement is an inherent part of her subjectivity. In this regard, Macaulay resists categorization:

She was forever in transit, physically, intellectually, spiritually; energetically, not eating, not drinking or sleeping, so it seemed; yet such was her transparency and charity of spirit that she seemed universally available to her friends. She had been called child-like; but to me she suggested youth, a girl of that pure eccentric English breed which perhaps no longer exists, sexless yet not un-feminine, naïve yet shrewd; and although romantic; stripped of all veils of self-interest and self-involvement.⁵

The quotation intermingles many of the concepts which will re-emerge throughout this chapter. In the portrait she suggests that the author was of a 'breed which perhaps no longer exists,' which only reifies the notion that Macaulay was difficult to define and

⁴ Alan Pryce Jones, 'The Pleasures of Knowing Rose Macaulay,' in Constance Babington Smith, *Rose Macaulay* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 227.

⁵ Rosamond Lehmann, 'The Pleasures of Knowing Rose Macaulay,' pp. 225-226.

impossible to classify. Lehmann, further, juxtaposes her view of Macaulay's intrinsic movement with the perception of Macaulay's androgynous bearing, 'sexless yet not unfeminine.' Linking these two notions, Lehmann thus draws a parallel between transit and gender and she gives the subtle impression that Macaulay moved between gendered identities; Macaulay is an author of layered complexity who resisted definition and defied categories.

Considering that Macaulay was a figure of many layers and a composite of numerous selves, it seems fitting that she would later find satisfaction in the study of ruins and archaeology. Her book, *Pleasure of Ruins* published in 1953, examines how layers of history have left their traces upon locations scattered about the world, the sum of which constitutes the present understanding of the site. In the text, she investigates the significance of ruins as a visible reminder of a vanished past, and proposes the sentiment that ruins help maintain the fantasy of nostalgic imagination. Ruins can only hint at the full range of lives that must have once been and now, to borrow Lehmann's words to describe Macaulay, 'no longer exists.' This image resonates with the descriptions of Macaulay's identity.

I argue that one way in which Macaulay resists portraying a static subjectivity and thus undermines the assumption of women's writing as autobiographical is her engagement with a multitude of voices and genres within her narratives; her works resist categorization. Macaulay explored new representations of self and identity, and she created new modes of writing in her challenge of generic distinctions. Although contemporary critics do not often associate Macaulay with the high Modernist interest in re-evaluating the formal structure of poetry and novels, examining her works in the

context of travel writing exposes her play with generic conventions. One of Macaulay's biographers, Jane Emery, contrasts Woolf's and Macaulay's divergent approaches to literature in her article 'Virginia and Rose' and suggests that unlike her Bloomsbury counterparts, Macaulay lacked interest in questioning the structure of literature: 'Rose was never interested in aesthetic theories; in fact, although her literary and historical knowledge was formidable, she knew little about painting and thought discussion of the art of the Novel tedious.'⁶ By wholly dismissing Macaulay's concern, however, Emery overlooks the author's trespass of literary boundaries and her presentation of new forms amalgamating fiction and travel writing. While Macaulay might not have shared with Bloomsbury the sense of urgency to develop new artistic creations which better reflect modern sensibilities, Macaulay arguably engaged several generic styles within her writing, and the scholar J. V. Guerinot touches upon Macaulay's success at amalgamating numerous authorial techniques in his discussion of the 1956 *The Towers of Trebizond*. Guerinot's account of Macaulay composition of the fictionalized travel narrative subtly implies that her stumbling upon the notion was a fortuitous accident. In his words, she 'hit on the idea of using the form of a travel book. She had always written splendidly about places and history; now she can do it through her pleasing narrator.'⁷

While Guerinot's comment alludes to the complexity of Macaulay's work as a mosaic of forms including history, a guide book and novels, it doesn't indicate any recognition of the layering of generic styles within a significant proportion of her texts; many of Macaulay's compositions demonstrate an interplay between literary forms. Emery, cataloguing the texts that constituted Macaulay's library, examines how a variety

⁶ Jane Emery, 'Virginia and Rose,' in Hugh Lee, ed., *A Cézanne in the Hedge and Other Memories of Charleston and Bloomsbury* (London: Collins & Brown Limited, 1992), p. 95.

⁷ J. V. Guerinot, 'The Pleasures of Rose Macaulay,' *Twentieth Century Literature*, 33:1 (1987), p. 123.

of genres informed Macaulay's own works, and traces some of the styles back to their foundation:

The contents of her 'necessary shelves' help us understand the form of her fiction: her love of biography attests to her interest in character and temperament; her love of homilies and essays is reflected in the commentary on behaviour and ideas in which she embeds the action of her novels; her pleasure in plays is compatible with her heavy use of dialogue to display a spectrum of opinions; her passion for accounts of voyages is seen in the various quests of her fiction and in her successful travel books; her absorption in history explains her tone—that of the distanced spectator who observes human folly with amusement and compassion, *sub specie aeternitatis*. And her childhood books and the records of exploration always nourished her love of escape.⁸

Her texts are not easily classified as they can be examined through innumerable lenses; Macaulay incorporates a variety of templates into her works and thus challenges the very presumption of literary divisions. The interwar era saw a great deal of generic experimentation as questions about the assumption of a unified subjectivity influenced representation. Virginia Woolf famously overlapped the conventions of biography and novel in *Orlando*, and she interwove aspects of the essay into the novel in her composition of *The Years*. Vera Brittain, although seemingly less experimental in terms of form, consciously used fictional works as templates for her autobiography. Maroula Joannou draws attention to the fact that Brittain describes her text published in 1933, *Testament of Youth*, as ““an autobiography masquerading as a novel.””⁹

Rose Macaulay's writing offers an interesting opportunity for analysis of the permeable boundary between travel writing and fiction as she herself constantly undermines the distinction; her fiction incorporates travel voyages and her travel narratives resist the categorization of an accurate memoir or autobiography. Macaulay interlaced themes of travel into a volume of her writing, and careful study of these works

⁸ Jane Emery, *Rose Macaulay: A Writer's Life* (London: John Murray, 1991), p. 196.

⁹ Quoted in Maroula Joannou, *'Ladies, Please Don't Smash These Windows: Women's Writing, Feminist Consciousness and Social Change, 1918-38'* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1995), p. 42.

composed predominantly in the interwar era sheds light upon her play with generic form and helps to emphasise her later travel writing as performative.

In this chapter, I will explore Macaulay's destabilization of generic boundaries in her amalgamation of fiction and travel writing, and I will examine how this movement between literary conventions has an impact upon her presentation of an authorial travel narrative voice. I am interested in considering the dilemma Macaulay faces, for she, like Sackville-West, depicts space abroad 'elsewhere' in her fiction as sites of escape and liberation for women from traditional roles. Yet when describing her own voyages, she is met with generic dictates that constrict the manner she, as a woman, can compose her account. I argue that her masking and play with generic conventions help her to evade expectations. Although Macaulay's own adventures away from home inspired some of her fictional portraits of exotic locations, her imaginary voyages reflexively influence her later forays into the more conventional travel writing genre; her treatment of foreign environments, seen in the record of her own journey through Spain in 1949, entitled *Fabled Shore: From the Pyrenees to Portugal*, exhibits a regard for the cultural setting and a movement through the landscape that resonates with the representations that appear in her interwar fiction. This portrayal of Spain as a location of the imagination shaped by others' writings on the country helps her challenge an autobiographical reading of the work; any attempts to approach her text as a personal account are undermined by the residue of others' articulations, and her identity remains masked behind the quotations of a chorus of authorial voices.

Biography and Background

Rose Macaulay was famously private and many aspects of her life were only revealed posthumously. Perhaps in response to the revelation that Macaulay was conducting a secret affair for decades, Elizabeth Bowen wondered in her introduction to *Staying with Relations* whether 'during the years when she was seen as diamond bright, diamond hard, another Rose Macaulay ran underground?'¹⁰ Arguably, scrutinizing Macaulay's writing in light of her personal history runs the risk of over-emphasizing the author's presence in her narrative, and tracing the writer's personality back to a childhood source seems to reveal a project to uncover a crystallized identity of a woman who was interested in destabilizing the notion of a single subjectivity. However, in order to untangle the braids of fiction and autobiography within Macaulay's texts, it is necessary to first examine some of the events of her life that informed her outlooks. Since I am interested in uncovering the existence of layers of subjectivity and the instability of the representations of her personal identity, it seems obligatory not only to delve into her personal history, but to examine briefly the ways in which Macaulay's biographers, Constance Babington Smith, Jane Emery and Sarah LeFanu, have interpreted her life story as influencing her writing. That each biographer intertwines accounts of Macaulay's life with examinations of her texts suggests that each consider the traits of her experience as having informed her work.

Emilie Rose Macaulay was born in Rugby, England in 1881, but from the time in her youth when her family uprooted from their traditional English life to seek out a more comfortable existence in Italy, Macaulay found personal pleasure in the lure of lands 'abroad' and she continually made travelling a priority in her life. Distant locations

¹⁰ Rose Macaulay, *Staying with Relations* (London: Collins, 1969), p. 4.

served as a source of inspiration and an escape from the dictates of conventional society. Macaulay later recounts the time in the Mediterranean as an idyllic experience where she was at liberty to explore her environment with four of her siblings, and she had the freedom to wander without adherence to any social prescriptions dictating a reticent and passive girlhood. The chapter title which heads Emery's account of the time the Macaulay family spent in Genoa, 'The Island Colony,' clearly offers an impression of Macaulay's experience in a foreign country as a space apart.

When the family returned to England after seven years, Macaulay was forced to begin what was considered a more adult existence by conforming to the role of demure femininity. Both Smith and Emery indicate the return to her native country as a defining moment in Macaulay's life as she was forced to transition from the masculine freedom she had in Italy to the constrained feminine passivity expected of her in England:

To please and compensate the mother who was disappointed at the birth of a second girl, Rose had begun very early 'being a boy'. And she had discovered that the spontaneous, active life open to her brothers suited her. Now, suddenly, at an age of inner change and in a changed world, her myth of a male self was disapproved by both parents. Her task was to devise a happy alternative...The boy-self lived on but in a hidden world.¹¹

The passage reflects the desire which all the biographers exhibit to address Macaulay's interest in androgyny. Throughout her life, Macaulay was interested in destabilizing gender categorizations, and in one instance of a letter to her friend the priest Hamilton Johnson on the subject of Donne's poetry, Macaulay articulates her distaste for Donne's unexamined supposition that women belong to a separate category from the rational male and ought to be treated accordingly: 'what a bore he was about women—all that anger and hate and scorn; that eternal tendency to regard women as a peculiar section, instead

¹¹ Emery, *Rose Macaulay*, p. 46.

of ordinary human beings.'¹² The critic Jeanette N. Passty maintains that Macaulay's novels 'constitute a deliberate act of rebellion against the cultural myths that pin both men and women to Procrustean standards of masculinity and femininity,'¹³ and indeed *The Towers of Trebizond* serves as an exemplary illustration of the irrelevancy of gender distinctions as the narrator's sex remains uncertain. Perhaps the text was inspired in part by *Orlando* as Macaulay was most enthusiastic about the new vision of biography and gender which Virginia Woolf displayed in her mock-biography. Woolf's treatment of Orlando's extraordinary transformation from a male to a female in an un-extraordinary manner must have resonated with Macaulay's own project to present gender differences as fundamentally insignificant.

Nevertheless, Macaulay herself undermines her own positioning of gender equality in her recurrent presentation of masculine traits as more favourable. As Heather Ingman demonstrates in her study of Macaulay's fiction, Macaulay frequently suggests through her fictional representations that women's physicality is at odds with intellectual and artistic pursuits. Apart from a handful of female characters such as Helen in the 1950 *The World My Wilderness* who is both an artist and 'one of the rare women who are almost as highly sexed as a man,'¹⁴ Macaulay indicates her belief that, in fact, 'there were irreducible differences between the sexes and moreover, differences that were not culturally constructed but rooted in biology.'¹⁵ As Ingman explains in the context of the 1921 *Dangerous Ages*, 'women are presented as having two choices: either to identify

¹² Rose Macaulay and Constance Babington Smith, ed., *Letters to a Friend from Rose Macaulay: 1950-1952* (London: Fontana Books, 1961), 14 January 1951.

¹³ Jeanette N. Passty, *Eros and Androgyny: The Legacy of Rose Macaulay* (Madison, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1988), p. 11.

¹⁴ Rose Macaulay, *The World My Wilderness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958), p. 29.

¹⁵ Heather Ingman, *Women's Fiction Between the Wars: Mothers, Daughters and Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 56.

with the mother and become marginalized (Neville) or to repress the mother and identify with the father (Nan). But this latter choice involves repressing the body as well so Nan loses the man she desires.’¹⁶

Further, despite Macaulay’s aspiration to overlook distinctions between genders and challenge presumptions of sex, her writing remains subject to readers’ assumptions about generic conventions; however much she desired to dismiss gender differences as negligible within her novels, as a female author she was pressured to adhere to a particular narrative tradition. Jane Emery raises the issue concerning Macaulay’s desire to provide works that appealed to the public and fulfilled her publisher’s demands in the context of her second novel, *The Furnace*, written in 1907. In Emery’s opinion, Macaulay faced the dilemma of producing works that accorded to her own imaginative vision or tailoring her writings to the tastes of her general readership. Having been convinced to alter the ending of her first novel, *Abbots Verney*, with the addition of an epilogue to render a more felicitous finale, Macaulay felt pressure to conform to the readers’ expectations. Emery argues that the product of Macaulay’s earliest works is moulded, however subtly, by the dictations of generic conventions at odds with her imaginative vision: ‘There is a conflict: her imagination is not in harmony with “what is liked”... Women writers, she rightly inferred, were expected by the male publishing world of London to write romances for women readers.’¹⁷ Women authors, as Macaulay well understood, are thus categorized and subject to the demands of the assumed tastes of their readers and encouraged to compose within a narrow tradition of writing.

¹⁶ Ingman, *Women’s Fiction Between the Wars*, p. 55.

¹⁷ Emery, *Rose Macaulay*, pp. 104-105.

Like Karen Blixen, who obscured the gender of her own authorial voice by publishing under the deliberately ambiguous name, Macaulay originally masked the sign of her sex by writing under the neutral signature R. Macaulay. Biographer Sarah LeFanu suggests that many of Macaulay's initial readership believed that the writer was male and approached her texts accordingly: 'It was generally assumed that R. Macaulay was a man.'¹⁸ Constance Babington Smith, however, detects in Macaulay's writing traces of distinctly feminine sentences. Smith, knowingly aware of Macaulay's reluctance to define the protagonist in *The Towers of Trebizond*, discloses her own perception of stylistic modes associated with a female writing when she posits in her biography that aspects of Laurie's tone gender her narrative voice. Elaborating on Macaulay's own admission of Laurie's 'rather goofy' narrative style, Smith defines the writing technique as decidedly feminine: 'Yet could anyone really have taken Laurie for a man? The narrator's "rather goofy" rambling prose style (as Rose herself called it) is essentially feminine, not masculine, in flavour, as also is the psychology behind it.'¹⁹ Smith's insistence on discovering a gendered voice within the text reveals more about her expectations of women's writing and female psychology than it describes the narrative tone; her sense that a 'rambling prose style' is indicative of a feminine sensibility reiterates the very gender distinctions Macaulay hoped to question. Smith's assumption reveals her sense of the existence of a specifically gendered voice, a concept which reflects the arguably essentialist views of more recent feminists such as Cixous and Irigaray on *écriture féminine*. Considering Macaulay's aversion to sexual distinctions, though, she most likely would have resisted categorizations within feminine writing.

¹⁸ Sarah LeFanu, *Rose Macaulay* (London: Virago Press, 2003), p. 65.

¹⁹ Smith, *Rose Macaulay*, p. 205.

Perhaps she would have considered her works more in line with Woolf's vision of the androgynous mind where 'the normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two [masculine and feminine] live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating.'²⁰ Smith's comment, however, signals the pervasive existence of authorial conventions and literary expectations that Macaulay could not fully disregard; as evidenced by Smith's assumptions of the character Laurie's feminine voice and the pressures regulating the formation of her writings, readers' expectations of gender are an inescapable force with which Macaulay must contend.

Each of the biographers who have recorded Macaulay's life emphasizes the author as a complex woman difficult to define. LeFanu deems Macaulay a 'paradox' and articulates her subscription to a plethora of subjectivities. On the subject of Macaulay's simultaneous indulgence in and discipline against an excess of pleasure, LeFanu questions:

was Rose's pleasure in pleasure another paradox in this paradoxical woman, who wrote more than twenty novels and didn't believe she was a novelist; who was both an insider and an outsider in British intellectual life; this English Rose who was most at home abroad? Harold Nicolson described her as being a 'combination of opposites' which well describes her pleasure seeking and ascetic selves.²¹

Macaulay, in LeFanu's estimation, defies singular classification and traverses numerous identities. Macaulay is thus presented as a figure who attempts to challenge classification in traditional schemas and finds an existence on the margins. The composite form that Macaulay's biographers present is characterized by both her resistance to masculine and feminine categorizations and by her search for a sense of home or a space of belonging; that Macaulay's childhood foundations took root outside of her native England, and that

²⁰ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 88.

²¹ LeFanu, *Rose Macaulay*, p. 258.

she resisted traditional feminine roles of wife and mother, indicate that the author defies crude categorizations. In part, Macaulay manages to maintain her paradoxical stature by engaging a series of textual masks and authorial disguises which obfuscate any sense of a singular authorial voice. Before launching into an in-depth examination of Macaulay's literary oeuvre, it will be necessary to first dissect some of the concepts regarding the study of genre and masking in the context of intertextuality.

Theoretical Framework: Intertextuality

As I explored in the introductory chapter in regards to the scholar Percy G. Adams' work on the overlap between travel literature and the novel, differences between generic categories are not always easily distinguishable as aspects of each tradition surface in a variety of literary styles. The structural elements that constitute travel writing are closely related to those of the novel, and indeed both the use of the imaginary voyage in the novel and the fictionalization of travel writing signal that any sense of a division between the two is illusory.

Exaggerated elements of some accounts gave rise to fabricated texts which were published under the guise of factual works and challenge what Adams deems the Truth-

Lie Dichotomy:

[C]losest of course to the novel is the story put together by a real traveler, or by a fireside traveler, who employs accounts already published and creates a narrative partly or wholly fake but at the time so realistic; so much like other books that he is able to deceive readers for a few years, perhaps for a century, perhaps forever.²²

²² Percy G. Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983), p. 73.

The two categories of the novel and travel writing frequently influence the other, and authors commonly trespass the generic divide. The notion of interplay between a variety of texts echoes Kristeva's view of intertextuality, which she founded upon the works of Bakhtin.

Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian scholar and linguist, is credited with some of the first theorizations of generic differences in literature which resulted from his considerations of the complex intersection of languages that manifest within novels. In his essay, 'Discourse in the Novel,' first published in Russian in 1934, Bakhtin differentiates between the use of language in poetic forms where words carry the symbolic weight of the author's meaning and that within fiction where the language is layered with a multiplicity of voices including those of the author, the narrator and the characters. While a reader can certainly extract a variety of connotations from an individual poetic statement, Bakhtin differentiates between what he considers the 'true double-voicedness in fictive practice and the single-voiced double of multiple meanings that finds expression in the purely poetic symbol.'²³ For Bakhtin, the significance of poetic language is dependent upon the contextual situation of what has been said before and to whom the utterances are addressed. Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, the potential coexistence of numerous linguistic codes within a single narrative, is in part what defines the novelistic form. The interaction and conflict between the layers of speech types typifies the fictional discourse. In this regard, Bakhtin identifies the novel as a distinct genre marked by the multifaceted interplay between numerous speaking subjects.

²³ Mikhail Bakhtin and Michael Holquist, Caryl Emerson, and Vadim Liapunov, trans. and eds., *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 329-330.

Thus heteroglossia either enters the novel in person (so to speak) and assumes material form within it in the images of speaking persons, or it determines, as a dialogising background, the special resonance of novelistic discourse.

From this follows the decisive and distinctive importance of the novel as a genre: the human being in the novel is first, foremost and always a speaking human being; the novel requires speaking persons bringing with their own unique ideological discourse, their own language.

The fundamental condition, that which makes a novel a novel, that which is responsible for its stylistic uniqueness is the speaking person and his discourse.²⁴

Bakhtin introduces in the quotation the concept of the novel as identifiable by its discourse rather than the subject matter or characterization. To follow his argument through to a logical conclusion, Bakhtin seems to imply that each category of genre can be classified by the use of language and speech within the text. This notion resonates with the Modernist project of the period to reinvent genres such as the novel and biography through a rupture of formal and linguistic conventions. Bakhtin's emphasis on the infinite intersections of language within fiction adds an innovative dimension to the notion of genre as rooted in a particular discourse.

Bakhtin's proposition of the text as a 'living'²⁵ dialogue and the novel's polyphony were introduced to a Western audience when Kristeva incorporated the theorist's views into her approach to language and literature. In her 1969 article 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel,' Kristeva combines Bakhtin's concept of poetic language as dynamic and dialogical with Saussurian linguistics to reconsider the "'literary word'" as an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning).²⁶ Kristeva coined the term 'intertextuality' to describe how all configurations of language exist

²⁴ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 332.

²⁵ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 331.

²⁶ Julia Kristeva and Leon S. Roudiez, Thomas Gora, and Alice Jardine, trans. and eds., *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 65, italics her own.

within a constellation of historical and cultural contexts and that each textual permutation is informed by other writings. In Kristeva's words, 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.'²⁷

Kristeva introduces several themes in her presentation of intertextuality which are particularly appropriate to a close study of Macaulay's work, and which find resonance in the English author's writings. To begin, Kristeva emphasizes how the poetic language challenges the linear hierarchical dynamic of a word and its meaning. The result of multiple significances is an opening out of spaces of potentially infinite and unbounded meaning. Kristeva offers a new understanding of language in spatial terms, where a text yields room for numerous readings rather than a singular understanding: 'if there is a model for poetic language, it no longer involves lines or surfaces, but rather, space and infinity.'²⁸ The layers of connotations and the interaction between types of writing reveal new expanses of textual spaces. Further, Kristeva suggests that suitable appreciation of the complexity of poetic language engenders from a position on the cultural margins, for 'the poetic world, polyvalent and multi-determined, adheres to a logic exceeding that of codified discourse and fully comes into being only in the margins of recognized culture.'²⁹ In this regard, innovative readings of dialogical language spring from outlooks removed from the logic of a centre. The new understanding of words that Kristeva offers reconfigures the perception of textual space as vast, and incorporates perspectives from the periphery.

Also prevalent in discussions of intertextuality is the notion of literature as a link to history. If a piece is a mosaic, layered with the words of previous authors, then a work

²⁷ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 66.

²⁸ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 88.

²⁹ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 65.

can be examined as a collection of textual ruins. Incorporating and quoting language by preceding authors, each text functions as a reminder of the historical writings' existence. The scholar Leon Burnett writes that '*intertextuality* acted as a kind of bridge that linked the unattainable past and the inescapable present,'³⁰ which suggests that layers of history can be traced through the permutations of poetic language. In his book, the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault argues that all texts are layers of other works and ideas which cannot be extracted: 'The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences.'³¹ This suggests that a work can be examined for the relics of a textual past and that the strata of textual meanings correspond to the incorporated layers of history which archaeology makes manifest.

A final concept that emerges from Bakhtin's and Kristeva's understanding of language's polyvalence and the acknowledgment of a multitude of articulations is the recognition of the strata of words and the presence of masks. Discussing Bakhtin's theories on the carnivalesque as a literary performance, Kristeva describes how the playfulness of the form masks a seriousness which in turn undermines the sincerity of the original. Not only is the style of writing a mask for a more urgent project of literary destabilization, but the narrative voice itself functions as an authorial mask. The writer's identity remains enshrouded behind the veil of a textual discourse. Should the mask prove convincing, a reader might have difficulty in divorcing the narrative voice from

³⁰ Leon Burnett, 'Cultural Continuities,' in Emily Salines and Raynalle Udris, eds., *Intertextuality and Modernism in Comparative Literature* (London: Philomel, 2002), p. 42, italics his own.

³¹ Michel Foucault and Alan Sheridan, trans., *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 25.

that of the author and approach a text as an autobiography. Any search for evidence of the writer's presence within the text, however, is futile as the author's voice is obfuscated by the cover of the narrative language. The author, in this context, remains anonymous behind the façade of a imagined speaker: 'within the carnival, the subject is reduced to nothingness, while the structure of *the author* emerges as anonymity that creates and sees itself created as self and other, as man and mask.'³² The emphasis on the author's anonymity and disappearance from a text that Kristeva outlines is one upon which Barthes expanded when he declared his now famous 'death of the author.'

In Barthes' view on intertextuality, he considers the impact of the cultural context and expectations that influence a reader's contemplation of a work; the reader's response trumps any significance of the writer's intention, and thus the author's presence becomes negligible. The reader does not simply absorb signification from the page, but he or she is directly involved in determining the very meaning of the text; the reader is an active agent in shaping the understanding of writing, and the infinite reactions to a singular work ensure that a text is never static. As Mary Orr articulates,

The reader is therefore no passive vehicle, or echo chamber, but the reagent of the text. Depending on how arresting, pleasurable, seductive the text is, a whole gamut of potential reactions could then occur, from quixotic, whimsical, perverse, blasphemous, philistine, erudite to bored and distracted like a child. Since there is no authority or intention to regulate this playtime or its responses, the writer becomes impresario, the one who stages in the text the possibility of its pleasure or *jouissance*.³³

Orr's description of Barthes concepts accents the theorist's perception of the theatricality of a piece, a notion which accords with Bakhtin's sense of the carnivalesque. The writer is nothing more than an 'impresario' who orchestrates the textual recital for the benefit of the reading public but has no power over determining the text's reception. Literature,

³² Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 78, italics her own.

³³ Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p. 35, italics her own.

from this perspective, is a veritable performance and the author is relegated to a negligible position behind the scenes. The supposition of writing as theatre emphasizes the element of entertainment that a work provides. Orr's statement, along this vein, signals Barthes understanding of the text as a site for pleasure or *jouissance*. More than other theories on intertextuality, Barthes's view of writing is the most 'performative, entertaining, entrancing, seductive, erotic or gratuitous.'³⁴

These theories on intertextuality and the understanding of language as an interplay between contexts and meanings, and of writing as a dynamic and pleasurable celebration provide a useful perspective to appreciate Macaulay's own works. Not only does she play with miscommunication and demonstrate a regard for the carnivalesque in her novels, but she layers her texts with references to other writings. In particular, Macaulay's account of her voyage in *Fabled Shore* lends itself to intertextual examination as her fictional representation in her imaginary voyages informs her approach to her own travel narratives; her travel writing contains elements of her novelistic portrayals and a plurality of articulations. In this regard, the narrative which seems at first to reveal Macaulay's private considerations in truth serves as a screen which obscures any sense of the author's undiluted voice. The reader's assumption of an intimate account is subtly subverted by the traces of others' experience within her text. In the following section I will explore Macaulay's writing in depth as a means of unearthing the various strata of generic conventions in her texts. First, I will examine briefly her interest, as illustrated in her fiction, in the pleasure of words and the play of meanings, and her regard for ruins as bridges to the past as evidence of the suitability of an intertextual analysis for the scrutiny of her works. I will then consider Macaulay's

³⁴ Orr, *Intertextuality*, p. 36.

interest in challenging essentialized, gendered, subjectivities. This project, I argue, carries over into her travel account as she attempts to destabilize the assumptions of an autobiographical text. The next section will explore Macaulay's representation of imaginary voyages and her fictional spaces 'elsewhere' as environments liberating for women in her novels. The following section will explore the textuality of these descriptions which, I argue, informs her own travel account which becomes as much a voyage of the imagination as her novels. Finally, exposing the layers of fictional depictions and intertextual quotations in *Fabled Shore* reveals Macaulay's masking of an authorial voice within the piece and her challenge to the autobiographical characteristics of the genre.

Rose Macaulay's Writing

Included in the list of Macaulay's delights in *Personal Pleasures* are both 'Telling Travellers' Tales,' and 'Writing.' Her passion, she explains, is not found from the structure of intricate plot or the evolution of complex characters. Instead, she finds *jouissance* from moulding the textures and sentiments of language shaped by history: 'And so we come to words, those precious gems of queer shapes and gay colours, sharp angles and soft contours, shades of meaning laid one over the other down history, so that for those far back one must delve among the lost and lovely litter that strews the centuries.'³⁵ Certainly, Macaulay proves her infatuation with the historical significance of words in her composition of *They Were Defeated*, published in 1932. In the text Macaulay only uses language that existed in the 17th century context of the story. Throughout many of her novels, though, Macaulay expressly plays with the multiple

³⁵ Rose Macaulay, *Personal Pleasures* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1968), p. 268.

significances of words. As several of her fictional works are set in foreign countries and involve exchanges based upon the misunderstanding of unstable meanings, Macaulay demonstrates Kristeva's notion of words as intersections of meanings by teasing out instances of language's polyvalence.

Going Abroad, as an illustration, portrays the comedy inherent in the miscommunication of a population of predominantly English tourists in the Basque country who are unable to make their attempts at Spanish understood. Although Macaulay facetiously holds the Basques responsible for their lack of comprehension, the true source of confusion is a language learned from a phrasebook which offers sentences outside of any contextual framework:

What Mrs. Aubrey found in her Spanish and Basque phrase-book on the subject was 'Have you rooms for us? We need three rooms, clean and agreeable, hot water, cold water, how much each per day?' She experimented with the first part of these remarks...But the Basques, who seemed like so many foreigners, to be slow in understanding their own tongue as spoken by the British...seemed unable to realise that their visitors desired to retire.'³⁶

Mrs. Aubrey's articulations are disconnected from any significance that her listeners can glean; they are unable to decipher the particular contextual meaning Mrs. Aubrey attaches to her utterances. The instance exemplifies how different speakers can supply a variety of meanings to a language which defies a singular understanding of the words.

The Towers of Trebizond describes an entire episode founded upon miscommunication when Laurie mistakenly memorizes the wrong Turkish phrase for the inquiry 'I do not understand Turkish.' Laurie unknowingly asks everyone she encounters whether they will 'call Mr. Yorum.' It is not until she poses the question in a hotel and is subsequently introduced to a gentleman called Mr. Yorum that Laurie eventually

³⁶ Rose Macaulay, *Going Abroad* (London: John Lehmann, 1948), pp. 147-148.

recognizes her error. In the meantime, the two share several polite but uncomfortable drinks together, each uncertain of the other's motivations. The absurdity of such circumstances emphasizes the precariousness of understanding and the possibility of language to obfuscate meaning. Laurie believes that she is admitting her inability to communicate, but her utterances only entrench her into a deeper linguistic muddle as her interaction reveals a different signification of words; Laurie's blunder indicates how language in contact zones is dialogical and subject to misinterpretation as each speaker brings a different contextual understanding to words and phrases.

Perhaps best demonstrating the themes of intertextuality and the instability of language and the layering of meaning is Macaulay's 1922 *Mystery at Geneva*. The text is a veritable challenge to signification as meaning is frequently undermined with layers of disguises and the carnivalesque atmosphere. The main protagonist, Henry, who is investigating a series of disappearances among an assembly of international representatives in Geneva is found to be a cross-dressed woman, while the detective, Signor Cristoforo is similarly undercover. The layers of disguise are reflected in the layers of the city when Henry discovers that the delegates are smuggled through a system of tunnels that pass beneath the streets. Meaning in the text is never stable as significance is always subverted; nothing in the work can be approached as definite or an end in itself, as the unveiling of layers of masquerade keeps opening up new understandings of the circumstances. Macaulay's presentation of meaning as not bounded by cultural signifiers and subject to multiple interpretations finds echo in the discussion of the passageways beneath the cities. When Henry attempts to pursue what he believes to be the villainous kidnappers, he loses his quarry and encounters an

apparent end to the tunnel: 'There was no trap-door: it was merely a cul-de-sac.'³⁷ It turns out, however, that the 'kidnappers' Henry pursued were in truth detectives, and that the ostensible dead-end disguises another passage. Signor Cristofero explains how 'it [only] seems to be a cul-de-sac, I made the discovery that it is not a cul-de-sac. The earth wall is a skilful disguise; it swings back and the passage continues.'³⁸

The image of a cul-de-sac first appears in Henry's ruminations on the nature of art following a conversation about literature's suggestiveness: 'Suggestiveness. Henry could never understand that word as applied in condemnation. Should not everything be suggestive? Or should all literature, art and humour be a cul-de-sac, suggesting no idea whatsoever.'³⁹ Henry proposes that literature, art and humour ought to suggest other works, other meanings, and other contexts. The notion of writing reminiscent of other pieces draws in Kristeva's ideas of intertextuality and the mosaic of quotations. Texts are not cul-de-sacs and they do not exist on their own divorced from reference; they are instead frequently 'suggestive' of other pieces, offer passage to other textual spaces, and contain the ruins of other articulations.

The image of ruins as a metaphor to conceptualize intertextuality and the traces of past utterances is particularly apt for examining Macaulay's work considering her extensive research on the subject of decomposed civilizations. *Pleasure of Ruins* catalogues an array of ruins from vanished cultures around the world and thoroughly describes the haunting presence of ruins as an indication of past lives. She acknowledges

³⁷ Rose Macaulay, *Mystery at Geneva: An Improbable Tale of Singular Happenings* (London: Collins, 1922), p. 207.

³⁸ Macaulay, *Mystery at Geneva*, p. 224.

³⁹ Macaulay, *Mystery at Geneva*, pp. 40-41.

her fascination as 'less ruin-worship than the worship of a tremendous past.'⁴⁰

Incidentally, Macaulay's historical survey references other authors' musings on the enjoyment of ruins; the content reflects Georg Simmel's considerations of the significance of ruins set out in his 1911 essay 'The Ruins.' In the short piece, Simmel considers the remnants of human architectural endeavours to force reconciliation between the past and the present.⁴¹ Not only is Macaulay interested in examining the historical layers of the past which a study of ruins forces, but her own text on the matter contains the traces of previous writers' perspectives.

Arguably, *Pleasure of Ruins* even references Macaulay's own writing as ruins figure predominantly in some of her previously composed fiction. *The World My Wilderness*, as an example, depicts a young displaced girl who takes pleasure in exploring the ruins of a London destroyed during the blitz. Macaulay emphasizes how the ruins are representative of the world's state of decay in her description of the story in a letter to Father Hamilton Johnson: 'It is called *The World My Wilderness* and it is about the ruins of the city, and the general wreckage of the world that they seem to stand for. And about a rather lost and strayed and derelict girl who made them her spiritual home.'⁴² Although the ruins prove a tangible danger for the protagonist, Barbary, when she slips while running along the cragged edge of a wall, they are the only site that serves as an imaginative escape from her dissatisfaction with city life. Barbary's pleasure in ruins as a bridge to another atmosphere foreshadows Macaulay's descriptions of her own

⁴⁰ Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1977), p. 26.

⁴¹ See Georg Simmel and Kurt H. Wolff, trans. and ed., *Georg Simmel, 1858-1918: A Collection of Essays* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1959).

⁴² Macaulay and Smith, ed., *Letters to a Friend*, 30 August 1950.

enjoyment in *Pleasure of Ruins*. In this regard, Macaulay's own writing exhibits the traces of her past works.

The short story 'Miss Anstruther's Letters,' which portrays a young woman's grief over the loss of her flat and all of her possessions during a bombing raid in London, depicts writing as itself a ruin. Bereft of all of her works, Miss Anstruther has only the fragmented memories of words once committed to paper: 'She did not really know what she might not have written, in that burnt-out past when she had sat and written this and that on the third floor, looking out on the green gardens.'⁴³ Without her letters, Miss Anstruther feels severed from her former self, and her sentiments highlight how texts and words function as a link to an unattainable past. Writing, as Macaulay demonstrates, contains depths of past identities, layers of others' articulations, and the residue of history.

Layers of Self in Macaulay's Writing

The most explicit illustration of resistance to a unified selfhood that occurs in Macaulay's works is the depiction of Daisy's split subjectivity in *Keeping Up Appearances*. Without elaborate fanfare, the narrator steadily informs the reader that 'Daisy and Daphne, these apparently two young women, were actually one and the same young woman.'⁴⁴ The treatment of Daisy's two personas as though they were individual characters suggests that every personality contains a multitude of selves that cannot be defined by any traditional characterizations such as age, taste or occupation. Daisy's publication of works on subjects far less political than she would desire under the pen name 'Marjorie Wynne' indicates the presence of yet another layer of persona, the summation of which delineates

⁴³ Rose Macaulay, 'Miss Anstruther's Letters' in Smith, *Rose Macaulay*, pp. 162-163.

⁴⁴ Rose Macaulay, *Keeping Up Appearances* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 101.

the individual. Part of Macaulay's interest in portraying the depths of personality might be influenced by the ubiquitous discussion of psychoanalysis in the period, and Freud's introduction to the concept of the psyche as splintered into conscious and subconscious thoughts. The notion that each human's development is shaped by his or her experiences reveals a view of subjectivity as haunted by the ruins of the past. Macaulay indicates her awareness of psychoanalytical discourse when she describes how 'Daphne is Daisy's presentment, or fantasy (as the psychologists call it), of herself as she hoped that she appeared to others.'⁴⁵ Macaulay's very presentation of a fractured identity demonstrates her recognition of the depth and complex arrangement of the layers of personality which make classification problematic.

Macaulay tests the reader's tendencies towards classification in *The Mystery at Geneva*. While the story seemingly exaggerates the customs and ethnic stereotypes of the delegates, the unfolding plot highlights the danger of categorical assumptions when most of the personalities prove to be masquerades. Near the beginning of the story, Henry ponders the authenticity of each ambassador, and his suspicion sets the tone for the destabilization of identity that the subsequent events propel. Henry doubtfully examines the procession of representatives and wonders if there are any delegates 'who had come here by ruse with forged authority, or by force, having stolen the credentials from the rightful owner.'⁴⁶ Henry subtly reminds the reader that character traits can be forged or performed and that personalities or backgrounds cannot be assumed or recognized at a glance. As Henry proves when he unveils himself to be a woman, any presuppositions of masculine or feminine characteristics can be dismissed as performative. Even before

⁴⁵ Macaulay, *Keeping Up Appearances*, p. 101.

⁴⁶ Macaulay, *Mystery at Geneva*, p. 34.

Henry is unmasked and shown to be Miss Montana Beechtree, he considers the differences between the sexes and contemplates the existence of space between the extremes: 'In between these is the No-Man's Land, filled with mental neutrals of both sexes.'⁴⁷ The androgynous neutrality of the 'No-Man's Land' provides an autonomous territory beyond classification or distinctions. Macaulay indicates throughout her fiction a desire to seek out such liberating spaces.

Women's Space Elsewhere

Throughout her interwar fiction, Macaulay writes about spaces abroad as locations for escape and adventure which prompt the reconsideration of perspectives. Many of Macaulay's heroines articulate their equation of travel abroad with freedom from identification with traditionally feminine characterizations; the space of distant countries represents room for redefinition and for new roles as women. Imogen, the blossoming heroine of *Told by an Idiot*, is last depicted *en route* towards realizing her longstanding dream of visiting a distant tropical island. Her enjoyment of her voyage is tainted by her grief over the loss of a relationship which would have impeded her travel. For Imogen, the decision to adventure to territories abroad is an agonizing choice which necessitates the severing of relations with her lover, but it grants her an opportunity to gain perspective on the suffocating London environment and the confusion of her emotional attachments. London, in her description, is the epicentre of action, crowded and cramped with motion:

In London all values and all meaning were fluid, were as windy clouds, drifting and dissolving into strange shapes. Life bore too intense, too passionate an emotional

⁴⁷ Macaulay, *Mystery at Geneva*, pp. 150-151.

significance; personal relationships were too tangled, clear thought was drowned in desire. One could not see life whole, only a flame, a burning star, at its heart.⁴⁸

The urban milieu of London consumes the individual and muddles with its activity and flux; even meaning is fluid and uncertain amidst the passage and burning fray of the modern city. Movement to the marginal location offers a space removed from the clutter and intensity of affairs, as well as the occasion for new outlooks. Like Vita Sackville-West's depiction of the capital as ill-suited to women's creativity and contemplation, so Macaulay indicates Imogen's view of London as inextricably bound with her sensation of powerlessness. In contrast, Imogen imagines the expanse and the calm of an island oasis with its illimitable horizon:

The perfect life, she had once believed this to be. And still the thought of coral islands, of palm and yam and bread-fruit trees, with the fruits thereof dropping ripely on emerald grass, with monkeys and gay parakeets screaming in the branches, and great turtles flopping in blue seas, with beachcombers drinking palm-toddy on white beaches, the crystal-clear lagoon in which to swim, and, beyond the blue, island-dotted open sea—even now these things tugged at Imogen's heartstrings and made her feel again at moments the adventurous little girl she had once been, dreaming romantic dreams.⁴⁹

Imogen's view of the unnamed tropical paradise is saturated with sensations and images of the emerald, blue and white scene, and the screams of monkeys and parakeets. Unlike London life, though, the stimuli are not overwhelming; Imogen emphasizes her anticipation of an experience of space and freedom rather than tightness and confinement. The literary critic Susanne Howe, in her survey of stories about colonial sites from the 1880s to the 1940s in *Novels of Empire*, concludes that characters from works of the period commonly suffered from claustrophobia, remedied only by an escape to a non-European context: 'in this new country they recover from their claustrophobia very quickly. They are intoxicated by space. The world has stretched in space and time to an

⁴⁸ Rose Macaulay, *Told by an Idiot* (London: Virago Press, 1983), p. 310.

⁴⁹ Macaulay, *Told by an Idiot*, pp. 309-310.

extent unimaginable in Europe; days and distances are no longer on the European scale.⁵⁰ Howe's deductions correspond with Imogen's contrast of London to her vision of a tropical oasis. Despite being an island, the territory in Imogen's visualization opens out into the unbounded sea thus offering the sense of infinite possibilities; Imogen associates her impression of the vast space with her desires as an 'adventurous little girl' for whom life was yet an unwritten story with immeasurable promise. Imogen's yearning to leave the muddle of London for a distant land is an attempt to recapture the sensation from her past of the freedom and hope of an existence not yet formed by social expectations. The islands thus serve as a symbolic space elsewhere outside of the pressures of cultural dictates. Further, all of the images that Imogen envisions are of nameless, unidentified, universalized locations, inspired by the fantasies she concocted as the 'adventurous little girl.' Her perceptions of the environment are not rooted in any geographical or cultural reality, but her description is a hackneyed portraiture of a typical island experience and the evocative images resonate with the idyllic scenes in stylized travel posters. Imogen is searching not for a specific site, but for a generalized atmosphere upon which she can project her ideal sense of space.

In another instance of Macaulay's novels, a character expresses the incompatibility of women's desire to adventure and the social expectations which command females' rootedness, marriage and attachment. A young girl in *Keeping Up Appearances* writes stories depicting bold women's fantastical encounters during their jaunts across the globe. Cary describes the themes of her epic literary creations, which seem to exhibit traces of the *Odyssey*, to her older brother Raymond:

'[They are] about adventures. It has no love or men in it, it's all adventures.'

⁵⁰ Susanne Howe, *Novels of Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), p. 84.

'Where do they happen?'

'Round the world. They have an adventure in a place then they take a train or a ship for another place and have more adventures.'

'I see. But why no men?'

'Well, when men come in there's love. If it's all girls there can't be love, only adventures. But I have monsters, and sea leopards, and sea lions.'⁵¹

Love, in Cary's mind, is linked to marriage and domesticity, and amorous relationships thwart the ability to voyage. Her fictional personas must remain free from romantic entanglements so that they are at liberty to wander. As the author of texts concentrating on unattached women's travel, Cary reveals her impressions of the freedom of space available to women who manage to resist customary feminine responsibilities of caring for men.

Such sentiments might be easily dismissed as the humorously immature perspectives of an adolescent were they not echoed in the views of the main protagonist who is attempting to consider the possibility of a future with Raymond. Part of Daisy desires the stability and belonging that her relationship with Raymond affords, as well as the approval that the attachment garners in her social scene, while another wishes to overthrow the pressures to cohabit and pursue a life of perpetual nomadism. Interestingly, Daisy's two opposing sides are presented as individual personas within the novel and the cautious, unsociable Daisy is continuously contrasted with the vivacious and gregarious young woman whom her fiancé knows as Daphne. Although Daisy envies Daphne for her boldness, her social ease, and her fearlessness, it is she who demonstrates an adventurous streak and the reckless abandonment of conventionality:

Daisy thought that when she should be old enough, if she should have any money at all, she would be one of these spinster ladies who reside in hotels abroad, roaming from hotel to hotel, with their little spirit lamps, their tea-infusing spoons, and their chatty friendships with one another and the chaplain. The state of these gentle nomads is very gracious; if they become bored they have but to fold their tents like the Arabs and silently steal away, transferring themselves, their spirit lamps, infusing spoons, hot bottles and

⁵¹ Macaulay, *Keeping Up Appearances*, p. 92.

chat to a new place, where also they shall find sunshine, a chaplain, new lady friends, and the enchanting music of foreign tongues. Single, as the world counts singleness, they are freed from household cares: rootless, they flourish in any soil; depatriate, they have for country the world. And never have they need to cross those narrow but unpleasant dividing seas, for they are already where they would be.⁵²

The image of the wandering spinster is often a comical archetype, but to Daisy's mind these women pursue a satisfactory and admirable lifestyle. Single, the trekkers are unencumbered in their movement and have access to any location they desire. The women's independence manifests in their lack of obligation and attachment; disconnected from any individual or nation, the travellers, as Daisy imagines them, are able to belong anywhere. The quotation anticipates Virginia Woolf's now famous maxim from *Three Guineas*, that 'as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.'⁵³ By trespassing the boundaries of social expectations, the women of Daisy's vision have transcended any commitment to a location or a homeland. In Daisy's eyes, travel represents an insouciant freedom from cultural demarcations.

For several of Macaulay's fictional personalities in her novels, travel is motivated by a desire to escape. Nan in *Dangerous Ages* needs to remove herself from a romantic muddle when the object of her affection becomes engaged to her niece. Distraught by the pain of the loss, Nan seeks distance from the couple and distraction from her agony in the company of her friend, Stephen: She wishes 'to saunter round the queer, lovely corners of the earth with Stephen, [and] light oneself by Stephen's dear, flashing mind...Life would then sometime become an adventure again, a gay stroll through the fair, instead of a desperate sickness and nightmare.'⁵⁴ Even though Nan previously believed herself to

⁵² Macaulay, *Keeping Up Appearances*, p. 43.

⁵³ Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 234.

⁵⁴ Macaulay, *Dangerous Ages*, p. 253.

require an anchor, stillness and rootedness, she finds solace and contentment in the thrilling uncertainty of perpetual movement. The space that Nan searches out is not within any particular location, but a generalized elsewhere that offers freedom for her to flee from the suffocating familial concerns, and to re-examine and redefine her life.

For Mrs. Dixon, a figure in *Going Abroad*, it is precisely the desire to evade social categorizations and identities that compels her to seek out new territories elsewhere at the end of the story. Following a fiasco involving the kidnapping of British holidaymakers in Spain, the characters in the novel extricate themselves from the intimate tangle and resume their individual lives. A satiric work, *Going Abroad*, offers Macaulay's commentary on the tourist's tendency to evade absorption of another culture. While the destination in Spain exhibits the same social strata of the communities in England, Mrs. Dixon's endeavour to pursue further travel abroad on her own indicates the potential to encounter new territories with space for redefinition:

Mrs. Dixon's train ran in the opposite direction towards Bilbao. She did not desire to see again any of the visitors at the Hotel Miramar, or, indeed, her native land. She plunged into Spain; she would wander through it and thence perhaps to Portugal, to Africa, anywhere; believing that thus, despite the identifying labels of passport and credentials without which men and women are prohibited in these days from straying over the face of their own globe, she could, in a manner, lose herself and her melancholy and ruined identity, become an anonymous wanderer, observing the cities and lands of the earth, but not by them observed.⁵⁵

Moving away from home, Mrs. Dixon hopes to discover a space beyond 'identifying labels' in order to wholly lose herself. In a manner similar to Daisy in *Keeping Up Appearances*, Mrs. Dixon ventures to transcend her identifying features and her national affiliations to become an 'anonymous wanderer.' In the novel, traces of home are evident in the existence of the Hotel Miramar, and it is necessary for Mrs. Dixon to travel even

⁵⁵ Macaulay, *Going Abroad*, p. 227.

further abroad to escape the influences of her own culture and the rumours of her separation from her husband. Mrs. Dixon is, again, not searching for a specific environment, but room elsewhere that allows her space to renegotiate her sense of subjectivity apart from the identity which the atmosphere of home has shaped. Mrs. Dixon's desire to shed her distinguishing characteristics and encounter new landscapes under the protection of anonymity casts her into the role of an unidentified narrator. The object of her quest, the effacement of her identity and observation without being observed, indicates an aspiration to formulate her own understanding of what she witnesses. Travel, in this sense, is inextricably linked with the creation of stories and with writing and finds resonance in Macaulay's own endeavour to fashion a travel account. As many instances in Macaulay's novels demonstrate, though, it is writing that influences travel as the experience of particular spaces is determined by other texts relating to the location.

The Textuality of 'Elsewhere'

Many of the landscape descriptions of foreign spaces in the works are a collage of suggestive images which paint a generalized atmosphere rather than specific settings. Characters in the novels reveal their evocative associations with locations influenced by visual and literary illustrations. Macaulay emphasizes the textuality of these locations as her characters' regard for distant environments is influenced by impressions gathered through literary representations. As already demonstrated, several of her protagonists articulate their desire for space which offers room for a renegotiation of identity. But this sense of space is textually constructed.

As an example, The Thinkwell family, voyaging out across the Pacific in *Orphan Island*, hints at the impact literature has had upon their expectations of the environment. The father, two sons and a daughter, Rosamond, commence their adventure in the hopes of re-discovering an island where a boat of orphans shipwrecked. The descendants have established a colony under the auspices of the austere Mrs. Smith in the image of the English society of the mid-nineteenth century from which they sailed. For Rosamond in particular, the prospect of an island life is highly idealistic, and she enjoys any discussions revolving around the subject of faraway archipelagos. On board, the crew considers the relative merits of Herman Melville over Charles Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle*:

You read Herman Melville, I infer,' Charles said to Captain Paul, as they watched the mountains of Tahiti recede. Charles admired this writer a good deal....
'He is uncommonly good,' said Charles, who knew what was what in literature.
Rosamond, though she did not know what was what, thought so too, for Melville wrote of voyages and islands.⁵⁶

Rosamund's anticipation of the island is wholly shaped by the depictions she has encountered within scientific travel accounts and fictional works. Other texts' representations of the South Seas permeate Rosamond's perspectives, and influence her romanticized impressions of the tropical location once the crew reaches its destination. Reciprocally, the descendants of the original orphans form all of their understanding of England from the images found in a salvaged copy of *Wuthering Heights*: 'This strange, storm-ridden epic of Yorkshire, this wild vision of the lonely parson's daughter, was all the presentiment that the Orphans had of family life in England.⁵⁷ Literature has an equally significant impact upon the islanders for whom England is a distant and

⁵⁶ Rose Macaulay, *Orphan Island* (London: Collins, 1961), p. 44.

⁵⁷ Macaulay, *Orphan Island*, p. 175.

inscrutable landscape. Macaulay emphasizes the textuality of locations or the manner in which the expectations of experience of spaces abroad are created by literature.

For Daisy in *Keeping Up Appearances*, the southern hemisphere holds a similar attraction as an environment where she can escape as an exotic 'elsewhere.' Just as Imogen's and Rosamund's islands are concocted from impressions and literature, so Daisy's 'South America' is a fantasy collage of a variety of different descriptions. Considered within quotations, the continent is a cliché of itself, informed by images evoked from maps and crossword puzzles:

Whenever Daisy thought 'South America,' her heart was accustomed to miss a beat and then to race ahead, and she blushed as if she heard the name of a lover mentioned. For this continent had always seemed to her infinitely desirable, romantic, and good. To think of the Amazon or of the Chico, to see on maps the range of mountains that compress Chile between Argentine and the Pacific, or the scatter of islands in the Chonos Archipelago, to encounter in cross-word puzzles such clues as 'A tour in Ecuador,' to read in the newspapers of the League of Nations Assembly in Geneva ... gave to Daisy a reaction of romantic joy that not all the pagodas of China, the Cherry blossoms of Japan, the spiced winds from Ceylon, the bells of Mandalay, or any of the glamorous calls from east and south could afford.⁵⁸

In the context of the story, Daisy dreams of flight to South America as a means of eluding confrontation between her relatives, to whom she is known as Daisy, and Raymond's family who think she is Daphne; Daisy dreams of an existence in South America where she would never have to reconcile her socially constructed persona with the self by which her own family recognizes her. Daisy's passion for an imagined life in South America is not rooted in any scientific knowledge or cultural understanding of the differences between countries, but it is a romanticized view highlighted by newspaper accounts and cartography. The space of South America is appealing by the virtue of its very distance and removal from the world she knows at home; it is not a perceptible landscape, but a wholly invented location inspired from other texts.

⁵⁸ Macaulay, *Keeping Up Appearances*, p. 104.

I Would Be Private tells the comical story of a couple whose birth of quintuplets launch them into an unwanted notoriety. The mother, Win, dreams of travel to distant locations but her new motherhood makes any jaunt inconceivable. However, voyaging soon becomes a necessary escape from the local fame. Win's fantasies are inspired by women's travel writing which she discovers in the library, and she describes the book to her husband:

'Who said we would be going travelling in wild countries? What countries? And what for would they be wild?'

'Countries are,' Win explained. 'The countries people travel in. They come home and write books about them. With Rod and Gun Through Darkest Africa.'⁵⁹

Macaulay includes excerpts from the imagined texts which highlight the danger and adventure of other environments. Travel writing informs Win's vision of spaces abroad, and, as I explored in the introduction, Macaulay's reference to the pieces indicates her understanding of the conventions of travel writing and the process by which spaces become texts which reflexively impact perceptions of 'abroad.'

Macaulay actively recognizes the textuality of countries and indicates the overlap between writing and an understanding of location in *The Towers of Trebizond*.

Macaulay's last novel is a humorous account of a young protagonist's adventures in Turkey among a cast of eccentric characters. The central heroine, Laurie, voyages with her Aunt Dot and family friend Father Hugh Chantry-Pigg, a High Anglican clergyman, as a means of extricating herself from the complication of a hopeless love affair at home. The tragic and melancholic aspects of a woman struggling with the guilt of adultery and the search for a spiritual resolution are mediated, in part, by the comic absurdity of the interactions between archetypal figures. The cacophony of disparate voices offering

⁵⁹ Rose Macaulay, *I Would Be Private* (London: Collins, 1937), pp. 58-59.

perceptions on the state of Turkish life, including opinions from missionaries, BBC journalists and Turkish feminists, provides evidence of the way in which sites are created through the collection of depictions; the experience of Turkey is fashioned through an amalgamation of myriad descriptions.

Macaulay even gestures to historical personages who influenced Western understanding of the location with the mention of Gertrude Bell. When Laurie describes Aunt Dot's nostalgic wistfulness for an alternative experience of the sites, she conjures the image of a landscape untainted by western presence save for the company of the well-travelled woman: 'She looked back at the great open spaces of her youth, when one rode one's camel about deserts frequented only by Arabs, camels, flocks of sheep and Gertrude Bell.'⁶⁰ Aunt Dot's nostalgia for unblemished blank areas emphasizes how territories are only defined and delineated once they are catalogued and mapped out; spaces are created through their representations in writing. In another instance, Laurie similarly draws a connection between the textuality of locations in her aside comment on the abundance of travel writing pertaining to Turkey:

The trouble with countries is that once people begin travelling in them, and people have always been travelling in Turkey, they are apt to get over-written, as Greece has, and all the better countries in Europe, such as Italy and France and Spain.⁶¹

The notion of countries as 'over-written' suggests that nations themselves are created through the production of texts. Travel produces writing which reflexively demarcates the location; 'other' spaces are formed through their representations.

Critic Sara Mills demonstrates her understanding of the statement as Macaulay's subtle acknowledgment of previous travel writers whose works echo throughout her

⁶⁰ Rose Macaulay, *The Towers of Trebizond* (London: The Folio Society, 2005), p. 46.

⁶¹ Macaulay, *The Towers of Trebizond*, p. 74.

piece. Mills approaches *The Towers of Trebizond* as a humorous imitation of the travel writing genre which juxtaposes fatuous adventures with the dignified tone of most accounts. In Mills' view, Macaulay's reminder of other narratives pertaining to the 'over-written' Turkey situates the novel within a tradition of travel writing endeavours: 'Macaulay's narrator frequently mentions other travel writers she has read who serve as a framework for her descriptions.'⁶² Mills detects the evidence of Turkey's over-writing in the echoes of other travel pieces in Macaulay's work, and suggests that the calculated paralleling with other travel accounts positions *The Towers of Trebizond* as a mischievous challenge to the travel writing genre. From this perspective, Macaulay's last novel engages a variety of voices, including those of other authors, to play with generic conventions.

This approach is useful when scrutinizing the seemingly straightforward narrative of Macaulay's *Fabled Shore*, which was published in 1949. The text similarly challenges generic boundaries in its references to other writings on Spain, and the presentation of a myriad of pronouncements demonstrates how Macaulay's vision of Spain is informed by other textual representations. The travel narrative is itself a depiction of a fictionalized 'other' space that is so elemental to the preceding novels; the portrait of Spain that surfaces in the writing is just as much an imagined territory as the depictions of countries that form the background of many of her novels. Her voyage is around a *fabled* shore, and is through an imagined landscape concocted by the vision and images of other writings; her travel is as much to an illusory location as it is a tangible site. Macaulay's Spain is a 'mosaic of quotations' and is layered with the ruins of others' experiences of the 'over-written' country. The introductory quotations that open the text offer a litany of

⁶² Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 73.

other travellers' perceptions of Spain, ranging from Rufus Festus Avienus from the 4th century to Theophile Gautier of the 19th.⁶³ What initially appears as an individual and personal exploration of a location, *Fabled Shore*, read in tandem with her novels, becomes a palimpsest, layered with the voices and visions of earlier visitors.

The Layers of Macaulay's Travel Writing

Fabled Shore presents Macaulay's interest in the past and continually reveals her recognition of the long history of travellers and colonizers who have traversed the territory. She interweaves the account of her journey with an examination of the ruins of others' visits; Spain in her work is littered with 'ghosts of the past'⁶⁴ and is a layered site. Macaulay is concerned with investigating how the interaction of the traces of various cultures has created the Spain she experiences. In a manner reminiscent of her study in *They Went to Portugal*, which was published three years prior to *Fabled Shore* and offers the history of British presence in Portugal, Macaulay examines the influence of the preceding travellers. A quotation in the introduction to the text outlines Macaulay's perception of the country as a palimpsest of visitors, and her recognition of her participation in the formation of new histories. Macaulay casts herself into the category of the Greek, Roman and Moorish journeyers whose paths she is retracing:

But all the way down this stupendous coast I trod on the heels of Greek mariners, merchants and colonists, as of trafficking Phoenicians, conquering Carthaginians, dominating ubiquitous Romans, destroying Goths, magnificent Moors, feudal counts, princes and abbots. History in Spain lies like a palimpsest, layer upon layer, on the cities, on the shores, on the old quays of little ports, on the farm-houses standing among their figs, vines and olive gardens up the terraced mountains. Ghosts from a hundred pasts rise from the same grave, fighting one another still....⁶⁵

⁶³ Rose Macaulay, *Fabled Shore: From the Pyrenees to Portugal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 11.

⁶⁴ Macaulay, *Fabled Shore*, p. 113.

⁶⁵ Macaulay, *Fabled Shore*, p. 14.

The quotation provides a concise survey of the Spanish landscape as Macaulay's narrative eye roves around the nation, moving from a solitary farmhouse to the coast and up through the mountains; Macaulay offers a panoptical perspective of the country at a glance. The images she selects as representative of Spain as a whole indicate how Macaulay characterizes Spain as an amalgamated image in her mind. In the description, it is not just the history of Spain which is a palimpsest, but the understanding of Spain as a nation; the 'ghosts from a hundred pasts...fighting one another still' hint at the remains of each era, the combination of which defines the setting. Spain is not a monochromatic landscape but it is textured with layers of different pasts, the interaction among which creates the uniquely Spanish atmosphere. *Pleasure of Ruins* exposes how the fragments of different pasts can force an innovative mental visualization: 'All these castles in ruin, and a thousand more, climb a composite fantasy of castlery, about the hills and winding roads of the mind.'⁶⁶ The Spain that surfaces in the pages of *Fabled Shore* is a fictionalized elsewhere, and is more a 'composite fantasy' than a specific geographical location.

Macaulay provides a metaphor for the overall effect of the conglomeration of influences which have shaped Spain in her discussion of the Alhambra within the chapter on the Andalucian Shore in *Fabled Shore*. She describes how the once magnificent structure had fallen into a state of disrepair and ruin following centuries of looting and plundering. The attempts to restore the edifice, however insufficient, have veiled the evidence of destruction with a veneer of tiles and stucco. The combination of different

⁶⁶ Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins*, p. 226.

styles is not, Macaulay argues, distasteful, but rather it indicates a unified goal through the ages to create and preserve an exquisite monument:

Yet, when one sees it, it remains startling in its beauty and in its impact on the imagination. Here is an Arabian Nights' palace. Here are the Arab centuries delicately gushing in fountains and streams. There is no need (unless you are interested and armed with copious books of information) to be curious in inquiry as to which parts of the work are Arab of fourteenth century, which Spanish of the nineteenth and twentieth; the whole effect is enchanting....⁶⁷

Macaulay is interested in the effect of the Alhambra as a whole. Although she recognizes the individual layers which over time have contributed to the formation of the façade, she is primarily concerned with the impression that the entirety of the structure offers. Her concentration on the overarching sense of the architectural formation as an amalgamation of past styles reflects her approach to Spain itself as a location; Macaulay is concerned with unearthing the historical ruins of the country only to better appreciate the kaleidoscopic impact of the composite upon the imaginative experience of the space.

For the length of her journey, Macaulay maintains her fascination with the layers of the past and at several moments in the account her attention to the details of ruins casts *Fabled Shore* into the genre of an archaeological document. While in the region of the Catalonian Shore, Macaulay drives to Ampurias to visit the ruins of Emporium. Delving into an in-depth history that lasts for five pages, Macaulay explains the existence of both the numerous cities that have since sprung up upon the site, and the many writers who have chronicled their rise and fall. The location is a palimpsest of history and provides traces of the various settlements:

Neapolis has been revealed, layer below layer, each period identifiable by its fragments of pottery and sculpture and its coins, from the Visigothic town superimposed on it by the barbarian invaders through the Roman city of splendid and ornate buildings...Neapolis was, when Strabo described it in the first century A.D., a double city divided by a wall...Livy's account is more detailed.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Macaulay, *Fabled Shore*, p. 160.

⁶⁸ Macaulay, *Fabled Shore*, pp. 34-35.

The pages exemplify, further, Macaulay's tendency in the text to quote writing on the geography that the visitors who previously traversed the landscape produced. Rather than recording her own experience of the location, Macaulay screens her personal revelations behind the mask of historical accounts. The narrative of her visit to Ampurius does not offer any details regarding Macaulay's own impressions of the site or even if she found pleasure in the stop. Even when the description tracks Macaulay's actions in the area, from her wander through a city a few hundred yards along the sea road to her lunch in a pine wood, it remains a scientific litany without offering penetrating insight into the author's tastes. Macaulay instead makes reference to other writers' words and conjures up their perceptions on the space. In this regard, *Fabled Shore* intertextually signals the presence of other literature from the past; the text is layered with the ruins of previous author's phrases, and 'overwrites' upon the traces of the past words. Not only is Spain itself an 'over-written' landscape, but Macaulay's account contains many layers of a myriad of writings.

Fabled Shore pays homage to other works by travellers who have frequented the Spanish countryside. The book includes references ranging from the ancient colonialists who settled in the territory, to the recent guidebooks such as Baedeker '(who does it very well)',⁶⁹ which supply the information to modern tourists who flit across the map. One of the travellers who Macaulay most frequently quotes is Richard Ford, whose extensive writing on his journey through Spain a century before sets a course and an example for her own movements. Although Macaulay often expresses disdain for what she perceives as Ford's arrogance and his inattention to locations she considers historically significant,

⁶⁹ Macaulay, *Fabled Shore*, p. 180.

her continual allusion to Ford's voyage keeps his figure a pervading presence as his writing is a ghost haunting Macaulay's own text. Driving to Amposta, in her section on the Catalanian Shore, Macaulay humorously quotes Ford's derision of the town as it used to be:

Amposta was always, it seems, as hard to capture as it looks. Richard Ford, with his usual arrogance, called it a century ago 'a miserable, aguish, mosquito-plagued port on the Ebro, with some thousand sallow souls...miserable Amposta.' He made no reference to its past, to the days when it was Iberia, described by Livy as *urbem a propinquo flumine Iberam appellatam opulentissima regionis ejus*, the richest town of the Ebro region.⁷⁰

While it might seem that Macaulay's approach to Amposta would offer a correction or addendum to Ford's opinion, the only description that she includes is her concession that 'Amposta was always, it seems, as hard to capture as it looks.' Macaulay's only addition to Ford's opinion in this instance is Livy's articulations. Thus rather than expressing her own sentiments, she provides another citation. The text is a mosaic of quotation, collating the existing views on the locations to provide a multi-faceted perspective.

The ruins of Ford's visit are omnipresent in Macaulay's account, and she dedicates an enormous amount of textual space to his opinions. Macaulay, in her section on the Valencian Shore, quotes Ford's estimation of the Valencians at great length and follows his path through the city: '[Ford] advises us to walk round the walls and observe the eight gates with the towers (alas, only two remain) and calls the city "very Moorish and closely packed."'”⁷¹ Macaulay acknowledges how Ford's course has shaped her own movement through the city, and how more generally he has impacted her fantasy of the land; she recalls and considers his words throughout her journey:

Crossing from the kingdom of Valencia into that of Murcia, I remembered the learned, prejudiced and passionate Richard Ford's description of the Murcians of a century ago;

⁷⁰ Macaulay, *Fabled Shore*, p. 99.

⁷¹ Macaulay, *Fabled Shore*, p. 117.

how he had condemned this region...I do not know how Ford knew all his scandal, but he had a great appetite for it. So it was with some apprehension that I drove into and through that golden and westerling land, the setting sun in my eyes, the spires and towers of the capital rising against an orange sky.⁷²

Ford's portrait of Valencia generates Macaulay's sense of apprehension while *en route* as she follows his trail. His account impacts her current experience and shapes her anticipation of the location. Writing on the same subjects that entranced Ford, Macaulay's present passage is 'overwritten' on the pattern of Ford's earlier journey and his words are a shadow over her own. The citations that Macaulay includes in *Fabled Shore* are a testimony of the history of travellers who have wandered through Spain, and her referencing layers her own text with the traces of others' expressions.

The result of Macaulay's frequent use of quotation is that her narrative self is perpetually obscured behind the mask of other authors' writings. *Fabled Shore* cannot be examined through an autobiographical lens since the presentation of a single voice is constantly destabilized. Even at the moments when the audience expects a glimpse of Macaulay's private musings, she resists offering any insight into her personal subjectivity by plunging into a historical report:

Next morning I saw the Villa Romana, being admitted through its wicket gate by a kind and handsome woman caretaker, who fed me with blackberries from the bramble bushes as she intelligently discussed to me about the villa...If they go on excavating in and round Tossa, more Rome will turn up, and possibly, below Rome, Greece. It is interesting to read the account of Tossa in Pella y Forga's sixty-years-old *Historia del Ampurdán*, and to note that he, of course, knew nothing about the Roman villa.⁷³

While Macaulay appears to juxtapose the personal with the historical, her account often defies the reader's assumption of accessing an intimate portraiture of the author. At the moment when the audience anticipates a relation of Macaulay's exchange with the caretaker and her impressions of the atmosphere, she offers instead Pella y Forga's

⁷² Macaulay, *Fabled Shore*, p. 145.

⁷³ Macaulay, *Fabled Shore*, p. 63.

commentary from the sixty-year-old text. Enwrapping her text within a tissue of quotations, Macaulay eludes her audience's expectation of unveiling a sense of the author's subjectivity through the lines of the account just as she eludes the curious children who 'stalk'⁷⁴ her through the mediaeval streets of Tortosa in the hopes of understanding the mindset of the solitary traveller. Although Macaulay documents the fact of her presence through the entirety of the narrative, she rarely provides a singular voice considering that she interjects the text with a multitude of other articulations. An examination of the intertextuality of the piece reveals not only the layers of expression with her writing, but also Macaulay's resistance to a unified narrative identity.

The portrait of Macaulay as a layered personality obscuring versions of herself with social masks and defying categorizations is reflected in her composition of travel writing, for *Fabled Shore* exhibits an understanding of landscapes abroad as textually constructed and as influenced by other writings. The litany of texts influential to the construction of her narrative includes her own fictional works where imaginary voyages to distant territories serve as a chance to renegotiate women's roles; just as she presents a space in her fiction for women to defy conventional expectations, so she manages to offer a textual space in her travel narrative which resists the presumptions of women writers' personal displays. The intertextuality of *Fabled Shore* establishes a distance between the reader and the author as the narrator is masked behind layers of quotations. In this regard, Macaulay's weaving of other texts into her account allows her to evade the expectation of women's travel narratives as autobiographical. Macaulay manipulates the narrative conventions that dictate women qualify their experience as subjective.

Although her work is seemingly autobiographical, she challenges any notion of an

⁷⁴ Macaulay, *Fabled Shore*, p. 101.

essentialized narrative identity behind the veil of quotations. The concept of a destabilized subjectivity within the context of travel will provide the focus of the following chapter on Kate O'Brien.

Chapter 6

The Artistic 'I': Exile, Gender and Identity in Kate O'Brien's Travel Writing

Introduction

Kate O'Brien shares with Rose Macaulay an interest in Spain as an imagined landscape, and O'Brien's 1937 travel account, *Farewell Spain*, is similar to *Fabled Shore* in that it moves between fictional and historical influences. Continuing from my study of Macaulay's interest in how her play with genre masks her representation of a single authorial identity, this chapter will instead explore the impact of a fractured subjectivity on the engagement of a narrative voice; O'Brien presents travel as engendering the creation of multiple selfhoods which allows the writer to nomadically wander between literary voices.

The sentimental title of Kate O'Brien's travel memoir *Farewell Spain* is, in retrospect, a suitable lament considering her inability to return to the nation for twenty years following the publication of the text. As a result of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the dissatisfaction of Franco's regime with her representations, O'Brien became estranged from the very country that served as a literal and imaginative location 'elsewhere.' Not surprisingly considering the circumstances, the theme of exile surfaces continuously throughout her writing. Interestingly though, O'Brien's novels also present her characters' sense of estrangement and alienation from their Irish homeland. In many instances in her fiction, most of which is set in Ireland, O'Brien depicts wandering and exile as particular imperatives for her heroines who exhibit artistic sensibilities. These characters are unable to assert themselves as individual creators within the inflexible nationalist agenda of the blossoming Irish nation-state. Her fiction mirrors her own sense of displacement from her native country which accompanied the censorship of her works as O'Brien belonged to a

legion of writers of the period who perceived the atmosphere in Ireland as hostile to creative production. Although many academics have acknowledged a number of notable male Irish authors such as Joyce and Beckett who viewed themselves as spiritual exiles,¹ few have considered how women's experience of exile engenders from a unique matrix of female dictates. An examination of Kate O'Brien's reflections on the connection between movement from home and the production of art that she presents in both her novels and travel narratives provides a useful point of exploration as she is interested in the intersections of gender, identity, travel, and the particular necessity of exile for the female artist.

For O'Brien, travel functions as a catalyst for the assumption of an imaginative subjectivity; exposure to unfamiliar stimuli and various cultural nuances instigates a heightened awareness which compels the wanderer to scrutinize the landscape with an artistic gaze. In *Farewell Spain* itself, O'Brien demonstrates how her voyages abroad have shaped her authorial voice; addressing the reader directly, O'Brien emphasises that her writing is a re-creation of a memory and vision of a now lost Spain, and she highlights her engagement of the 'first person singular.'

Dear reader, I plunge you straight into the first person singular. I am going to take you on my own journey and narrate in *oratio recta* all that I remember of Spain and desire to see again. That is best, I think.

But my journey will be a composite one made up on many, and without necessary chronological reference.²

O'Brien identifies herself as an artistic 'I' whose gaze on experiences can be translated into textual art; in *Farewell Spain*, she simultaneously celebrates the formulation of a creative sense of self and conflates the artistic 'I' with the ability to travel. Even in her

¹ See Barbara Freitag, 'From George Moore to Brian Moore: Irish Writers Making a Fetish of Exile,' in Anthony Coulson, ed., *Exiles and Migrants: Crossing Thresholds in European Culture and Society* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1997).

² Kate O'Brien, *Farewell Spain* (London: House of Stratus, 2001), pp. 14-15.

fiction, O'Brien explores how travel and removal from the confines of 'home' help shape the emergence of her characters' artistic identities as expatriation creates a distance which facilitates the space for artistic production. Throughout a wide swathe of her writing, O'Brien indicates how travel allows the formulation of innovative identities.

On a theoretical front, O'Brien anticipates many current scholars who acknowledge the possibility that movement across boundaries instigates a dissolution or re-negotiation of identity. As Rosemary Marangoly George outlines in her work *The Politics of Home*, subjectivity and identity are connected with the body, and the self is conflated with home. "Location" in the context of this study suggests the variable nature of both "the home" and "the self," for both are negotiated stances whose shapes are entirely ruled by the site from which they are defined.³ With this view, perceptions of the self as predicated on the body must be subject to change with movement away from a particular location. Writers often portray exile as a rootlessness and a lack of home, thus, in theoretical terms, travel away from home may be viewed as movement away from the body and the avenue towards the forging of new definitions of identity. Travel, therefore, potentially allows for the reinvention of subjectivity.

The question remains, however, as to what impact travel or exile has upon gender identity. If the rootlessness of travel accompanies a redefinition of subjectivity as situated on the body, then perceptions of gender might also be subject to re-evaluation. In a conversation between Stuart Hall and James Clifford, the two theorists consider the dissolution of identity that travel engenders:

Hall: "The question is: "What stays the same even when you travel?" ..."

³ Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fictions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2.

Clifford: 'What components of identity are "deep" and what are "superficial?" What is "central" and what "peripheral?" What elements are good for travelling and what for dwelling?'⁴

Although the dialogue does not engage in any reflection on whether gender functions as a 'deep' or a 'superficial' component of identity, both masculinity and femininity are subtly implicated in the discussion as the binary opposition of 'travelling' and 'dwelling' has gendered connotations; history and culture have often coupled travel with masculine traits and dwelling with feminine ones.

Arguably, however, in much of Kate O'Brien's writing gender does not function as what Clifford deems a 'deep' aspect of identity since her characters' exploration of new terrain abroad translates into transformations of gender and sexual roles. Throughout O'Brien's oeuvre, her characters' movements to foreign environments accompany their exploration of sexuality and their refusal to adhere to pressures as wives or daughters. O'Brien demonstrates Olivia M. Espín's claim that: 'For both heterosexual and lesbian women, the crossing of borders through migration provides the space and 'permission' to cross boundaries and transform their sexuality and their sex roles.'⁵ Both the 1936 *Mary Lavelle* and the 1958 *As Music and Splendour* present non-judgemental representations of homosexual romances while her other works offer illustrations of women who reject domestic expectations in favour of intellectual pursuits. O'Brien's portrayals of what some in her Catholic-dominated Ireland might view as extraordinary and unnatural relationships presented in a natural light led to the banning of *Mary Lavelle* and the 1941 *The Land of Spices* within her own homeland. With such stringent

⁴ James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 44-46.

⁵ Olivia M. Espín, *Women Crossing Boundaries: A Psychology of Immigration and Transformations of Sexuality* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), p. 5.

ensorship laws and rejection from her native country, it is understandable that O'Brien felt a sense of exile from Ireland, and that she portrays the 'artistic gaze' as a refusal of domestic values and a perspective acquired only away from home. In O'Brien's portraits, though, the ability to access an artistic identity suggests a re-evaluation of gender subjectivity. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, O'Brien's characters are nomadic subjects whose negotiation of gendered roles offers them a space within which they can create. Her protagonists' engagement of an artistic voice which she exemplifies in *Farewell Spain*, requires a self-imposed estrangement which in turn facilitates a re-invention of a gendered sensibility. In *Farewell Spain*, O'Brien describes how travel prompts the acquisition of 'multiple consciousness,'⁶ and her novels often portray her characters as split subjectivities divided between their present lives and the haunted parallel selves that might have existed at home. The shattered identities which travel instigates prove necessary for the adoption of an artistic outlook. The sum of O'Brien's descriptions of an innovative consciousness resonates with Rosi Braidotti's vision of a 'nomadic subject,' which formulates a new feminist identity where women travel between fluid subjectivities.⁷ O'Brien presents a view of travel which yields the development of a new consciousness where identity, including gender identity, must be renegotiated. This nomadic subjectivity, which demands a spiritual exile from home, is tantamount to an artistic sensibility and is conducive to innovative writing. Thus, like Rose Macaulay's view of space abroad as an escape for women from domestic roles and Vita Sackville-West's search for a heterotopia inspiring female creativity, O'Brien maps

⁶ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 9.

⁷ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

out a location for the women artist where she is in exile even from her gender and where she is at liberty to create through the lens of an artistic 'I.'

To begin with, this chapter will examine the cultural context of Irish nationalism which, in O'Brien's eyes, restricted women's participation as autonomous subjects and made exile an artistic imperative. I will then outline the theoretical foundation for my analysis, looking specifically at Braidotti's notion of the nomad as a figure who constructs new spaces for women's subjectivity which will provide a useful framework for the subsequent exploration of O'Brien's fictional representations of the constellations of travel, subjectivities and art. O'Brien presents a vision of spaces abroad, particularly evident in her representations of Spain, which occasion an awareness of new consciousnesses and perspectives. In the final section, I will investigate *Farewell Spain* as an example of literary nomadism in itself, and consider the narrative voice as a wanderer moving through several generic traditions. Just as O'Brien presents characters whose boundary-crossings create in-between spaces for innovative identities, so her wandering between textual conventions maps out a new literary terrain for women's writing.

Biography and Background

In a letter written years after retiring from travel, Kate O'Brien reflected upon her frequent wanderings between homes and countries, emphasizing her sense of compelled migration and the pain associated with the loss of a home: 'I've been a mover all my life, not exactly by choice—indeed there have been uprootings from places which I thought

would break my heart.'⁸ In the course of her life, O'Brien settled in a number of locations and nations, including Spain, England and Italy, yet her native country is a recurring background in many of her novels. Throughout much of her work, Ireland is prominently associated with a domestic setting of tradition and restrictive convention, and the composite of her portraits reveals a claustrophobic environment from which the artist must escape. While Ireland would always represent a source of familial tenderness and inspiring raw naturalism, O'Brien frequently portrays the rigid social order as limiting women's creativity. Other Irish writers who felt the necessity to leave the island for the liberating atmosphere of foreign locations have voiced the incompatibility of Ireland with artistic proclivity; writers such as Joyce underscored the imperative of intellectual exile from Irish shores. Kate O'Brien's position is of interest, however, as she concentrates on the particularly urgent compulsion of female artists to leave. Considering the climate of the period in which efforts to redefine Irish nationhood led to overtly nationalistic sentiment where women were relegated to positions representing 'Mother Ireland' or passive domestic servitude, it is understandable that O'Brien felt pressure to travel and that the theme of exile frequently manifests itself in her writing.

Born in 1897 into a comfortable middle-class family in Limerick, O'Brien was just five years old when her mother died of cancer, an event that led to her being uprooted and sent to a convent school. O'Brien would suffer further losses when her father and two brothers died within the following six years. Scholars such as O'Brien's biographer, Eibhear Walshe, have emphasized the period of misfortune as contributing to her later proclivity towards isolation. Walshe comments, 'this early loss meant that Kate came to

⁸ Quoted in Eibhear Walshe, *Kate O'Brien: A Writing Life* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), p. 82.

see loneliness as essential and even nurturing for the creative process.’⁹ In 1922, O’Brien made the decision to travel to the Basque Country in Spain as a ‘Miss,’ the experience of which would influence her later piece *Mary Lavelle* and *Farewell Spain* and spark a fascination with the nation. As the considerably nostalgic tone of *Farewell Spain* suggests, the country had an immense impact on shaping O’Brien’s literary imagination, and it was a location with which she felt a particular affinity. In her Irish travel book *My Ireland*, published in 1962, O’Brien underscores the connection between Spain and Ireland:

Ireland, Spain and Palestine: between the three there cannot be many points of resemblance that the eye or the camera immediately takes in [but]...The Imagination feels a kind of sisterhood. It is elusive, maybe an illusive, hint; truly not to be caught in this curve or that break of stone or grass, or in any memory-stirring smell or sound. Yet it is there, a spiritual association, a likeness in virginity, austerity; a theme heard in one place which sets up echo of another.¹⁰

Something that doubtlessly contributed to her sense of double exile from each of her beloved countries, her native Ireland and her adopted Spain, was her inability to re-enter Spain and the censorship of her writing at home.

The two texts banned in Ireland were *The Land of Spices* and *Mary Lavelle*, both of which were censored on the ground of sexual content. *The Land of Spices* was condemned for the inclusion of a single passage describing Marie-Hélène’s observation of her father’s sexual liaison with another man. O’Brien’s illustration of homosexuality in the text, as well as the lesbian relationship between Claire and Luisa in *As Music and Splendour*, were perhaps troublesome to a conservative culture for their unflinching and exonerating depictions. *Mary Lavelle* offers an equally incendiary subject with its description of her heroine’s affair with a married man. In his biography of O’Brien,

⁹ Walshe, *Kate O’Brien*, p. 7.

¹⁰ Kate O’Brien, *My Ireland* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1962), p. 32.

Eibhear Walshe asserts that: 'with the banning of *Mary Lavelle*, Kate O'Brien's attitude towards the ruling class in Ireland changed. Her relationship with the Ireland of the 1930s was now a hostile one, increasingly antagonistic towards the kind of Ireland that de Valera and his supporters, among others, were creating.'¹¹

The Ireland of the 1920s and 1930s proved to be incompatible with many writers' efforts to create as the introduction of the Irish Censorship Board in 1929 stymied open discourse and demonized the artist as a threatening figure at odds with cultural improvement. The nationalist ethos of the newly independent Irish state emphasized the establishment of a racially pure and spiritually untainted identity for the country, and thus any art that edged towards the boundary of what the Board deemed decent was subject to proscription. The consensus among Ireland's literary intelligentsia was that the Censorship Board bound and stifled the voices of the country's artists and the widespread blacklisting of the country's literary output met with much determined criticism. In 1932, Liam O'Flaherty angrily bewailed the tendency in the Ireland of the time to support repression and ignorance at the cost of intellectual dialogue and innovative conceptualization. His disdain for the circumstances prompted him to regard an Ireland with censorship as a location where 'instead of being a passport of Heaven, makes this pretty earth a monotonous Hell.'¹² Numerous other artists, including Beckett and Shaw, voiced their dissent over the puritanical vision of the censorship board and the suffocating ramifications on Ireland's authors.

The consequence of such sweeping condemnation of literary works is an estrangement between the writer and their readership as the community learns to be

¹¹ Walshe, *Kate O'Brien*, p. 77.

¹² Liam O'Flaherty, 'The Irish Censorship,' in Julia Carlson, ed., *Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish Writer* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 140.

vigilant against what has tacitly been presented as the artist's amoral incursion. Given the pervading impression of art as potentially undermining the newly independent nation's endeavor to mould an inviolate identity, it is understandable that a significant number of Irish writers considered themselves unappreciated at home. Describing Ireland, Joyce wrote: 'This lovely country that always sent / Her writers and artists to banishment.'¹³ Several artists engaged the metaphorical weight of exile terminology to convey their painful sense of marginalization. In her study of the tradition of Irish exile writing, Barbara Freitag articulates these authors' imperative to leave as a struggle to maintain a voice against the pressures of censorship:

What is at issue here is that, in an attempt to justify their leaving, Irish writers draw on the traditional pictures of enforced exile. Enforced in the sense that the writer has no choice but to flee. The anti-individual forces they are up against are intent on pressuring them into complete submission. These forces are poised to trap them, gag them, pinion them down, thwart them mentally and psychologically, or, to apply the most frequently used term to describe this deplorable condition, paralyse them.¹⁴

Many Irish writers were compelled to leave the boundaries of home and to seek out a space abroad where they could exercise relative freedom from the restrictions that the conservative cultural atmosphere of the island imposed.

Further, as a woman author, O'Brien's sense of belonging to her homeland was additionally strained as attempts to fashion a distinctive Irish nationalism cast women into formulated representative roles as a means of perpetuating an image of moralistic purity. Like their counterparts in England, Irish women were encouraged to tend to the domestic realm and were generally excluded from participation in the public sphere. As we saw in the context of Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, English women of the period were not accorded equal positions in the cultural arena, and Irish women's

¹³ James Joyce and J.C.C. Mays, ed., *Poems and 'Exile'* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 107.

¹⁴ Freitag, 'From George Moore to Brian Moore,' p. 74.

capacity to contribute to the development of the blossoming nation was even more constrained. Of course, in the years leading up to independence, there were established movements for the emancipation of women in Ireland, and women such as Constance Markievicz and Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington were instrumental in indicating how the desires for national autonomy and women's suffrage were intertwined. Organizations such as Inghinidhe na hÉireann (Daughters of Ireland) and later Cumann na mBan (the Woman's Association) helped to galvanize recognition for women's rights.¹⁵ Following the achievement of independence, however, women's access to the political realm was arguably even more compromised in Ireland than England as Irish nationalism of the period was inextricably bound with gender ideology. Maryann Valiulis describes how the post-colonial government in Ireland attempted to distinguish itself from an imperialistic England on a moralistic front, and women, as transmitters of the culture, were pressured to conform to domestic roles. 'Removing women from public life, when countries such as Britain had given women access, however limited, to the public sphere, would supposedly demonstrate that the Irish lived by a higher set of morals and embraced a higher moral code.'¹⁶

No doubt the growing authority of the Catholic Church during this period helped to curb women's rights by influencing such legislation as the overturn of lawful divorce in 1925 and the ban on disseminating information regarding contraception that

¹⁵ Carol Coulter, *The Hidden Tradition: Feminism, Women and Nationality* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993), pp. 20-21.

¹⁶ Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, 'Power, Gender and Identity in the Irish Free State,' in Maureen Coulter and Jan Hoff, eds., *Journal of Women's History: Irish Women's Voices: Past and Present*, 6:4 (1995), p. 129.

accompanied the 1929 Censorship of Publication Act.¹⁷ Such measures implied that a woman's primary role was that of a loyal wife and mother of a future generation. A series of political restrictions, including laws restricting women's ability to join the work force and participate in civic duties, further demonstrates the reduction of women's involvement in public life. The 1924 Juries Bill allowed women to refuse service for jury duty on the grounds that as wives and mothers they had more pressing obligations as homemakers. In 1932, a marriage bar prohibited women's employment in the civil service implicating women's familial responsibility as trumping occupational ambitions. The interwar years saw a clear emphasis on women's place in the home.¹⁸

The movement towards a moral religious state diametrically opposed to the perceived depravity of England accompanied an emphasis within de Valera's 1937 Constitution on the significance of the family unit. Cultural and literary historian Terence Brown describes how 'the Constitution asserted that the state recognized "the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society" and guaranteed its rights "as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and State," forbidding in further clauses any enactment of laws permitting divorce.'¹⁹ For women in Ireland in the period, their primary occupation was a cultivation of hearth and home.

In several of O'Brien's novels, she criticizes the female characters such as Hannah in *The Last of Summer* and Una in *Pray for the Wanderer*, who represent the cult of the domestic. While both women are revered in their local communities as paragons

¹⁷ Caitríona Beaumont, 'Gender, Citizenship and the State in Ireland,' in David Alderson, Fiona Becket, Scott Brewster, and Virginia Crossman, eds., *Ireland in Proximity: History, Gender, Space* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), p. 97.

¹⁸ Beaumont, 'Gender, Citizenship and the State in Ireland,' pp. 97-98.

¹⁹ Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), p. 152.

of duty and defenders of family life, they are, in contrast to the heroines of the texts, incapable of involvement in the exchange of ideas beyond their cosseted position in the household. The traits of idealised femininity against which O'Brien was writing were those which would support husbands and brothers within the private realm.

In the formulation of the character of the new nation, Irish writers of the early twentieth century joined a long tradition of artists who, as C. L. Innes describes, frequently gendered the country as feminine within their works, and conjured representations of the virginal Hibernia, Cathleen Ni Houlihan, Roisin Dubh, and Mother Ireland: 'For Yeats and Joyce, and sometimes Synge, women become identified with Ireland, both as images of an ideal order which they sought to restore, and as images of an Ireland that had been betrayed or had collaborated in its own betrayal.'²⁰ In part, women were cast as representatives of the nation while simultaneously stripped of their means to partake in nationalist discussion in the political sphere. Women in Ireland, thus, were circumscribed within the boundary of the home and celebrated as the site of the burgeoning notion of 'homeland:' 'The triumph of nationalism resulted in the subordination of women.'²¹ O'Brien makes clear her distaste for the Irish dictates of the female domestic role in her numerous depictions of alternatives for women's thought and education in convent schools and spaces abroad. Her heroines find other avenues beyond the narrow opportunities as dutiful wives and daughters once they have a means of escaping the claustrophobic Irish atmosphere. Given the culture's limitations on women's activity beyond the threshold of the domestic, it is unsurprising that O'Brien

²⁰ C.L. Innes, *Women and Nation in Irish Literature and Society: 1880-1935* (Hertfordshire: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 178.

²¹ David Cairns and Toni O'Brien Johnson, eds., *Gender in Irish Writing* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1991), p. 5.

looked outward from Ireland for a space where women were unfettered by familial demands.

O'Brien's estrangement from her home contributed to her sense of dislocation and her attempts to seek out a territory where she was at liberty to create. Lorna Reynolds insists that '[Kate O'Brien] never felt herself an exile in Europe or Britain,' but that she was a spiritual exile who 'belonged to the world of writers and artists who traditionally are at home any place where they may live in peace and practise their art.'²² Reynolds hints at O'Brien's challenge to discover new definitions of 'home' within the domain of the artistic community. In this sense, relinquishing her connection to her own nation, O'Brien managed to unveil new terms of home within her own creative endeavours. O'Brien's interest in a renegotiation of her relationship with a sense of belonging resurfaces throughout her writing and culminates in her publication of her travel book *My Ireland*.

Despite her articulations of dislocation from the Irish nation which are echoed in the works of many other artists and writers, O'Brien retained a good deal of affection and tenderness for her native country. The very title of *My Ireland* is testament to her regard, and the dedication reveals her affection for 'Limerick, my dear and native place.' Even while unable to consider herself fully embraced by the nation, O'Brien naturally felt a decisive pull towards the land. Casting her developed artistic eye over the topography of her own country, she indicates the complex connection upon which she has gained perspective. *My Ireland* is a far richer text than a cursory reading suggests, and it reveals numerous layers of O'Brien's relationship as a female artist with her gendered homeland.

²² Lorna Reynolds, *Kate O'Brien: A Literary Portrait* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987), p. 106.

At first glance, *My Ireland* appears to contribute to a convention of writing on Ireland which privileges the untainted landscape of the west; in the tradition, the romanticized naturalism of the Atlantic coast provides a favourable alternative to the vulgarity of modern life. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, authors such as Yeats and Synge mythologized the western landscape and the rural culture as quintessentially Irish. Some of the idealisations common amongst writers of the Irish Literary Revival continually resurface throughout later texts and can be traced even within the pages of travel writing. In *Journeys in Ireland*, Martin Ryle carefully investigates how the manifestation of a post-colonial Irish identity separate from England contributed to a vision of the nation as raw and untainted: 'From the 1930s on, and more especially in the period since the Second World War, Ireland's "underdevelopment" has enticed visitors...the notion that the west offered an antidote to urban industrial modernity was a leitmotif [in travel writing on Ireland].'²³ With her languid descriptions of the countryside and her inclusion of photographs of exquisite expanses, O'Brien appears to endorse a custom that paints the Irish landscape as rugged, edenic, and unpolluted by urban squalor. These images of pastoral idealism are at odds with the illustration of a nightmarish conservatism that appears throughout censored writers' portrayals of the life and culture of the island. In this regard, O'Brien's engagement of idyllic terms to profile Ireland harkens back towards traditional representations.

Further, seemingly woven into her portrait of the country are hints of the conventional assumption of the land as female; O'Brien's illustration at times reaffirms the perception of Ireland as maidenly and virginal. She warns wanderers, for example, to

²³ Martin Ryle, *Journeys in Ireland: Literary Travelers, Rural Landscapes, Cultural Relations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), p. 4.

be wary of the country's innocence when she advises 'exploratory Don Juans that, no matter their global experiences in brothels and palaces and shady lanes, they move carefully over Ireland's virgin territory. (I use this adjective with conviction).'²⁴ This adamant desexualization of the country simply re-inscribes the braided associations of Ireland with purity and femininity. Yet the parenthesised admission following the characterization indicates O'Brien's understanding of the depiction as problematic. While she does engage traditional terminology to describe her home, she sets out from the beginning of the text to complicate the one-dimensional vision of a 'Mother Ireland.' While other authors conjure up images of the country as 'a tinker, a Reverend Mother, a swan, a street girl, or just Anna Livia for a while, or turned into a serpent or a saint,' O'Brien recognizes the limitations of such metaphors vowing that the 'symbols [are] outworn, and I wash my brain of them, and promise to keep them out of the pages that follow.'²⁵ O'Brien thus acknowledges the limitations of the gendered depictions and she outlines her intention to challenge the hackneyed portraiture, presenting instead an innovative vision of her own home.

Recognizing the layers of female nationalist symbols with which a woman writer must contend, O'Brien anticipates the poet Eavan Boland's later musings on the dilemma facing women artists. Boland, an exile from Ireland 'in search of a self,'²⁶ seeks out a place at 'home' and finds herself negotiating the nationalist tradition which defines women as objects. In order to access the voice of a female Irish poet, Boland finds that she must reverse

²⁴ O'Brien, *My Ireland*, p. 57.

²⁵ O'Brien, *My Ireland*, p. 15.

²⁶ Eavan Boland, *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (London: Vintage, 1996), pp. 50-51.

the powerful relations between subject and object which were established there. That in turn involved disrupting the other values encoded in those relations: the authority of the poet. Its place in the historical legend. And the allegory of nationhood which had customarily been shadowed and enmeshed in the image of women.²⁷

Boland's distance from Ireland prompted her understanding of a confining convention in Irish nationalism which dictates women's positions as objects. For her to have a literary subjectivity or artistic 'I' she must transgress conventions and thresholds. O'Brien similarly categorizes herself as marginalized from the nation, a condition which allows her multiple perspectives through which she can compose an innovative text.

One of the ways in which O'Brien offers a new perspective on Ireland is through a constant commingling of an impartial outsider's and an intimately connected insider's view. Unlike her cab driver in *My Ireland* who is unable to fathom what motivates the tourists to visit various locations, O'Brien can gaze upon the land through a foreigner's lens. The driver is too immured in the tribulations of daily life to observe the pleasures surrounding him, voicing his bewilderment with his question: 'You'd have to wonder sometimes what brings [the tourists].'²⁸ O'Brien, however, does not have to wonder what brings visitors since she herself is following a tourist route. She, thus, has the benefit of a distanced view of her own native island. The result of her measured evaluation is that *My Ireland* categorizes O'Brien as estranged from her place of origin and casts her as a foreigner first experiencing an unknown locale.

In other instances, however, O'Brien underscores her personal association with the country. Even when she eschews the suggestion of an autobiographical work she emphasizes her sense of possession of the country in the very title of the piece. O'Brien

²⁷ Boland, *Object Lessons*, p. 184.

²⁸ O'Brien, *My Ireland*, p. 163.

admits that sketches within the book are personal and she outlines her motivation to write:

The intention is to recall, revisit and recreate scenes, places, moods and manners of Ireland that have been a part of my experience, and to share these, for their possible entertainment, but anyhow for their judgement, with readers who may know Ireland better than I do, or in a manner different from mine; but also with those who come in from outside, to whom we are foreign, but who hope that, moving amongst us in holiday or study, they may be entertained, refreshed, surprised—or even reassured.²⁹

The tone of the subject matter here is deeply intimate and shaped by her experiences in Ireland; O'Brien indicates her belonging to the nation in her alignment against those 'to whom we are foreign.' Written for the benefit of local natives and foreign visitors alike, *My Ireland* indicates the author's complex relation to her own country. While simultaneously acknowledging that she is not a stranger to Ireland, she can also comprehend the view of one unfamiliar with the land. O'Brien, thus, is both an insider and an outsider as she has knowledge of the sites not wholly accessible to the typical tourist but she is simultaneously alienated from the nation. Her illustration promises to provide a new rendering of the Irish countryside through a narration of an artistic 'I.' The result of O'Brien's sense of distance is that the space generates an innovative perspective as her position on the margins allows her an understanding of multiple viewpoints. When O'Brien describes Ireland as a 'protean' nation and questions the 'schizophrenic' 'splits' within the country with her query 'how does science subdivide a schizophrenic...how many splits do they count?',³⁰ she really characterizes her own relation to her nation. Her estrangement from Ireland offered an innovative viewpoint which prompted her flexible association with definitions of 'home' and a renegotiation of belonging. Travel outward

²⁹ O'Brien, *My Ireland*, p. 16.

³⁰ O'Brien, *My Ireland*, p. 15.

beyond the boundary of her country allows O'Brien to access multiple perspectives and to gain the objective outlook of the artist.

Theoretical Framework: The Exile and the Nomad

Some writers of the interwar era acknowledged the melancholic aspects associated with the condition of estrangement and illustrated the communities of exiles as visible representations of displaced, marginal outsiders unable to conform to social conditions at home. In his travels through Spain in 1930, Evelyn Waugh negatively viewed the cluster of expatriates in Seville as fundamentally lacking the adeptness to reintegrate into their home culture: 'It seems to me that there is this fatal deficiency about all those exiles, of infinitely admirable capabilities, who, through preference or by force of untoward circumstance, have made their home outside the country of their birth.'³¹ In Waugh's perception, it is the exiles who are 'deficient' in their incompatibility with their native country, yet for many other writers, the space of 'home' is at odds with creative productivity, and the experience of marginalization allows a perspective conducive to writing. In other words, although estrangement is burdensome, the existence 'elsewhere' offers potential access to innovative voices and insights. Caren Kaplan acknowledges the pervading connection between estrangement and artistic creativity in her claim that 'Euro-American literary criticism throughout the century has proposed a model of aesthetic gain through exile.'³² Terry Eagleton is one of the most prominent critics to articulate the perceptual advantage of marginalized outsiders in the construction of

³¹ Quoted in Martin Stannard, 'Debunking the Jungle: The Context of Evelyn Waugh's Travel Books, 1930-9,' in Philip Dodd, ed., *The Art of Travel: Essays on Travel Writing* (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1982), pp. 112-113.

³² Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 36.

pioneering literature. In *Exiles and Émigrés*, Eagleton underscores the tension his selection of significant twentieth-century writers in English experience as strangers to a foreign cultural climate. Surveying the English literary canon, Eagleton suggests that the most momentous texts of the period were fashioned by artists who, as exiles, were cast into an ambivalent position of both belonging and detachment. It is not, Eagleton, argues, the state of exile in itself which fosters artistic creation, but the complex movement between an interior and exterior viewpoint: 'In each case, great art is produced, not from the simple availability of an alternative, but from the subtle and involuted tensions between the remembered and real, the potential and the actual, the integration and dispossession, exile and involvement.'³³

In a more theoretical vein, Julia Kristeva connects the figure of exile with the potential of literary production when she celebrates the infinity of language and the ameliorative aspects of the poetic word. As I have outlined, Kristeva, building upon Lacanian psychology, posits that the process of becoming a subject and belonging to language commences with a child's initial separation from identification with the mother. Kristeva considers language as the nurturing compensation for the excruciating suffering of the original severance that establishes subjectivity. The very moment that one becomes an exile from the mother through an entrance into language is the point that one gains a tool to turn the crisis into a literary revelation.³⁴ This notion of literature as a means of understanding and compensation for the pangs of loss is a theme that resonates throughout Kate O'Brien's writing, and Kristeva's thoughts on the cathartic benefits of

³³ Terry Eagleton, *Exiles and Émigrés: Studies in Modern Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 18.

³⁴ See Anna Smith, *Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 1996).

literature will provide a useful framework when closely examining O'Brien's fiction. For Kristeva, further, the ability to write necessitates a rejection of what Anna Smith deems a 'narcissistic regression to maternal origins or in clinging to a singular identity.'³⁵ Inherent in Kristeva's vision of the exile is a refusal to return to a unified subjectivity with the mother, and the exile is in turn a representation of heterogeneity. The loss of identification with the mother fosters the perspectives of both an insider and an outsider as we become, in Kristeva's words, 'strangers to ourselves.'³⁶ This intrinsic sense of the exile's split subjectivity explains why the term has been appropriated to illustrate current understandings of identity.

In recent decades, vocabulary like 'migrant' and 'exile' have become literary tropes for an unfixed identity and fluidity of thought as theorists have engaged the terminology's associations with movement and displacement to illustrate the modern perception of subjectivities' plasticity. Theorists have moved away from scrutinizing the exile as an uncommon presence who offers rare insight into the cultural milieu and instead have appropriated the notions of displacement inextricably tied to exile to describe a general state of modernity. In *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said acknowledges the pervading use of exile to illustrate recent perceptions of subjectivity. In postmodern parlance, the experience of exile is representative of the modern subject's relationship to society: 'We have become accustomed to thinking of the modern period itself as spiritually orphaned and alienated, the age of anxiety and estrangement.'³⁷ The

³⁵ Smith, *Julia Kristeva*, p. 5.

³⁶ See Julia Kristeva and Leon S. Roudiez, trans., *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

³⁷ Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Publications, 2001), p. 173.

malaise of exile, as Said recognizes, is not a state experienced by an unfortunate few, but rather a condition typical amongst modern subjects.

In his essay, Said addresses the problematic employment of exile which controversially effaces the sense of insurmountable loneliness involved with the dislocation from a native place. Implicit in his examination is not only his recognition of the frequency with which critics have used the term, but the celebration of the concept as a model for a subject position which defies an essentialist identity. Theorists have championed the exile as an aspirational state which yields innovative outlooks. New connotations of exile in writings such as those by James Clifford have emphasized the figure as one who negotiates various cultures and roles through the movement across borders. The exile functions, as Anthony Coulson articulates in the introduction to *Exiles and Migrants*,

as a literary and cultural metaphor of a movement between worlds: one in which there is no certain home or destination, and in which personal and group identities are both a presence and an absence. These figures who, by choice or necessity, distance themselves from one culture as they approach another, and are, or become, strangers to both.³⁸

The accent on movement reflects Eagleton's nuanced view of the exile as constantly transitioning between external and internal viewpoints as opposed to inhabiting a fixed position on the margins of a cultural scene. Critics have regarded the exile, thus, as a character of adaptability, transformation and constant renegotiation with new environments. With the crossing of national and cultural boundaries, the exile exemplifies mutability and defies rigid essentialist definitions.

The exile's traits which theorists most habitually emphasize are those of flux and motion, and the figure of the exile resonates with the definitions of nomadism which have

³⁸ Coulson, ed., *Exiles and Migrants*, p. 3.

similarly surfaced as a paradigm of a splintered subjectivity. The use of nomadism as a metaphor originated with Deleuze's publication of *Nomad Thought* which describes a pattern of deliberation, exemplified by Nietzsche, which functions beyond the limitations of an established tradition. Deleuze praises Nietzsche for resisting the pressures of expected traditions and paints the nomad as an idealized figure of movement based on continual dislocation.

There is a kind of nomadism, a perpetual displacement in the intensities that interpenetrate one another at the same time that they are lived, experienced, by a single body. Intensity can be experienced, then, only in connection with its mobile inscription in a body and under the shifting exterior of a proper name, and therefore the proper name is always a mask, a mask that masks its agent.³⁹

In this portraiture, the nomad is capable of travelling through a myriad of personas, adopting a variety of masks of transient selves in different circumstances. The nomad shifts between identities without succumbing to the pressures of any particular system or organization. Deleuze highlights the nomad as a figure outside of any culture who continually evolves new subjectivities in accordance to his or her new environment while moving between societies. The mask of identity, thus, changes with geographical transitions as travel destabilizes the presumption of a fixed subjectivity.

In her work *Nomadic Subjects*, Rosi Braidotti engages the trope of the nomad to formulate a new feminist identity where women travel between subjectivities. Braidotti's new conceptualization of women's experience as one of perpetual renegotiations of subjectivities within a variety of circumstances provides a solution to some of the concerns circulating in feminist discussions regarding the opposing dangers of essentialism and the complete dissolution of identity.

³⁹ Gilles Deleuze, 'Nomad Thought' in David B. Allison, trans. and ed., *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1994), pp. 146-147.

The nomad does not stand for homelessness or compulsive displacement; it is rather a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity. This figuration expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity. The nomadic subject, however, is not altogether devoid of unity; his/her mode is one of definite, seasonal patters of movement through rather than fixed routes. It is a cohesion engendered by repetitious, cyclical moves, rhythmical displacement.⁴⁰

The nomad in *Nomadic Subjects* is a configuration of subjectivities who resists settlement in any specific governing systems. Braidotti clarifies that her interpretation of the nomad is not wholly detached from social classifications, but he or she continually moves through a variety of identities which in turn destabilizes the very notion of a fixed, unified subjectivity. Braidotti exalts the perpetual displacement or movement between beings which engenders new encounters, interactions and interconnections; the nomad blurs the boundaries and operates as a bridge between categories.

Other feminist critics, however, have questioned the pervasive use of figures such as the exile and the nomad for the supposition of equal mobility. The roles accessible to women are limited, and some theorists have voiced concerns over the universal assumptions implied in the use of recent travel metaphors which obfuscate the social barriers inhibiting movement for some. Janet Wolff, as an example, examines how the application of travel images to identity descriptions overlooks inherent differences in cultural circumstances. In one article, Wolff deconstructs the terminology and suggests the necessity of locating identity by specifying the contexts of various subjectivities and of acknowledging the impact of the body's physical presence upon the sense of self. As the public sphere in part formulates understanding of the body, the corporeal thus needs to be taken into account when considering even theoretical movement between cultures:

⁴⁰ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 22.

In the same way, I think that destabilizing has to be *situated*, if the critic is not to self-destruct in the process. The problem with terms like 'nomad', 'maps,' and 'travel' is that they are not usually located, and hence (and purposely) they suggest ungrounded and unbounded movement—since the whole point is to resist fixed selves/viewers/ subjects. But the consequent suggestion of free and equal mobility is itself a deception, since we don't all have the same access to the road.⁴¹

Wolff is interested in exploring the ways that some critics' widespread use of travel imagery presupposes a uniform and equivalent 'access to the same road.' In practice, cultural differences and, by extension, physical differences can impede individual movement. Wolff suggests that women, subject to distinctive experiences as a result of the cultural emphasis on the body, do not have the same availability of travel as do their male counterparts. The use of the nomad and the exile as an emblem of modern subjectivity runs the risk of effacing material distinctions between circumstances. Wolff calls for a re-examination of postmodern suppositions of universal movement and for a re-mapping of identity with an awareness of the body as situated within cultural frameworks.

In her recognition of the impact 'place' has upon identity, Wolff participates within a tradition of feminist writers who have emphasized the imperative of positioning women's subjectivity within a particular location. Since Adrienne Rich's publication of the 'Politics of Location,' where she describes how 'wherever people are struggling against subjection...our location in a female body, from now on has to be addressed,'⁴² many theorists have underscored the necessity of considering women's individual identities as the product of a cultural environment. Rich emphasizes the urgency of situating an understanding of women's subjectivity as predicated on their body and

⁴¹ Janet Wolff, 'On the Road Again: Metaphors of Travel in Cultural Criticism,' *Cultural Studies*, 7:2 (1993), p. 235, italics her own.

⁴² Adrienne Rich, 'Notes Toward a Politics of Location' in Seung-Kyung Kim and Carole R. McCann, eds., *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 449.

influenced by specific political and historical contexts. In this regard, Rich advocates a reassessment of how subjectivity is circumscribed by location, and thus advocates new configurations of feminist geographies.

In her vision of a nomadic subject, however, Braidotti does not wholly overlook Wolff's reminder of the body's presence as a limitation on avenues of movement and a factor determining various subjects' mobility through cultural contexts. Braidotti's answer to the question of how fluid transitions between identities can operate with the material existence of the body is to offer a reconfiguration of the body itself as a complex nexus of overlapping symbols and categorizations rather than a static physicality. In other words, the body cannot be singularly defined, but is at various moments a biological, a sociological or a symbolic entity:

[R]ethinking the bodily roots of subjectivity is the starting point for the epistemological project of nomadism. The body, or the embodiment, of the subject is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological.⁴³

The body is not an irreducible absolute as it can be defined in a variety of ways depending on perspective, and a subject is able to nomadically pass through a myriad of bodily perceptions. Transformations of identity are not limited by the body's physical presence, therefore, for materiality is only one of the many elements that constitute its meaning. With Braidotti's illustration of the body as multiplicitous, she implies that movement across cultural landscapes can influence a subject's sense of identity through the body. A reader of Braidotti's work can infer that ventures into territories with a distinctly different configuration of symbolic and sociological categories would influence

⁴³ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 4.

understanding of the body and yield new formulations of subjectivity. Braidotti, presenting a theoretical approach which will prove particularly useful for an analysis of *Mary Lavelle*, seems to suggest that travel can impact perceptions of the body.

Braidotti does not stipulate the gender of the nomadic figure but instead applies the characteristics of fluidity, travel and in-betweenness associated with the wanderer to perceptions of women's subjectivity. Although the nomadic persona is not often recognized as feminine, she uses the characterizations to illustrate a vision of female identity. The scholars Eeva Jokinen and Soile Veijola, on the other hand, take the metaphor a step further by substituting the gender neutral nomad with the feminized *au pair*. Like the nomad, the *au pair* passes into other localities, traverses national boundaries, enters the space of other language systems, and participates in a cultural exchange. Jokinen and Veijola give credence to the movement of young women who choose to fashion an independent life for themselves abroad:

Still, young girls want to leave, perhaps they have to leave –to free themselves from fathers, mothers, possessive boyfriends. This is, after all, a relatively acceptable way for a girl to get on the road...In more than one sense, she has left all her homes/houses, in order to enter a totally strange symbolic order; a configuration of a foreign culture/language/household.⁴⁴

Both the nomad and the *au pair* function as symbols of transgressive mobility across borders, and both denote an opening up of space for new identities. While the theoretical difference between the nomad and the *au pair* is minimal save for the specifications of gender, the use of the *au pair* as a figure of 'in-betweenness' is particularly apt for examination of O'Brien's work considering the subject matter of *Mary Lavelle* and the author's personal experience as a governess in Spain. As I shall explore in greater detail

⁴⁴ Eeva Jokinen and Soile Veijola, 'The Disoriented Tourist: The Figuration of the Tourist in Contemporary Cultural Critique,' in Chris Rojek and John Urry, eds., *Touring Culture: Transformations of Travel and Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 44.

in the following section, O'Brien indicates her interest in subjects of wandering and the forging of new identities throughout all of her writing, but it is in *Mary Lavelle* that O'Brien best demonstrates the correlation between travel and the impact on the female body which gives rise to new formulations of female subjectivities. In the final section, I will apply the concept of the nomad to Kate O'Brien's literary style in *Farewell Spain*. I argue that *Farewell Spain*, especially when read in tandem with *Mary Lavelle*, exhibits O'Brien's own engagement with the artistic 'I,' which her travel made possible.

Kate O'Brien's Writing

Fiction

Throughout the corpus of her fiction, O'Brien presents characters whose wandering creates split consciousnesses and myriad identities. Further, she displays a keen interest in an individual's process of formulating independent subjectivities along with the marginalized displacement associated with the rejection of uniformity and fixity. Once they recognize a variety of selves, many of her protagonists select a life of exile and travel as an antidote to the debilitating domestic environment: 'Kate O'Brien knew well that while it was necessary to have a sense of rootedness, of belonging, it is equally important to recognize the necessity of exile as a natural corollary of having a home.'⁴⁵ The unaccommodating circumstances of Irish life initiates her characters' desire for travel, and the distance from home compels the unravelling of a unified sense of self which offers access to new artistic perspectives and a capacity to articulate insights through literary production. O'Brien's portraits anticipate, on an international scale,

⁴⁵ Richard Pine, 'Where is This Place? Kate O'Brien, Autism and Modern Literature,' in John Logan, ed., *With Warmest Love: Lectures for Kate O'Brien, 1984-1993* (Limerick: Mellick Press, 1994), p. 80.

Kristeva's theories regarding the individual subject's development of an identity distinct from the mother through an entrance into language. Kristeva's sense that a subject can achieve the facility to wield the poetic word only upon forgoing identification with the mother resonates with O'Brien's illustrations of personas whose rejection of a stagnant domestic life at home and movement beyond the motherland yields a plethora of subjectivities and new territories for imagination. Just as a child must detach itself from identification with his or her mother, many of O'Brien's heroes and heroines distance themselves from the limitations of a conservative Ireland. The experience of exile, further, generates interior and exterior viewpoints. The awareness of 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives excludes the possibility of an integrated subjectivity and allows for the procurement of a literary or artistic voice. Projecting Kristeva's concepts back onto O'Brien's work, several of the author's characters can be read as embracing the split subjectivity that accompanies severance from the motherland as they find comfort in the patterning of language or art. As I shall now examine in greater depth, the central characters of O'Brien's fiction demonstrate how departures from the point of dwelling instigate recognitions of multitudinous identities and create space for the assumption of a creative perspective or an artistic 'I.'

In her 1938 novel *Pray for the Wanderer*, O'Brien depicts protagonist Matt Costello's hope to return to the stability of his rural childhood roots after a devastating break-up in London. Matt aspires to settle into the comforts of a familial environment and to temper his lifestyle as a London playwright with a more traditional domestic environment in the Irish countryside. Matt defines himself as a writer and views his work as translating his particular perceptions into the illimitable expanse of words. In his eyes,

texts are not intended to mimetically represent the world, but language is the membrane through which events are processed: 'I speak for myself when I say that my job is to re-create life, not as it is, good God, but as the peculiarities of my vision and desire assume it. I give you life translated to my idiom.'⁴⁶

Ultimately, however, Matt finds the conservative convictions of the area unpalatable to his creative sensibilities and he is unable to produce his art while at home. He resigns himself, as the title implies, to an unfixd life of wandering. Matt's artistic gaze requires distance and his writing is predicated on a movement away from the security of the domestic: 'For all the safety and comfort in Ireland, Matt cannot stay there and remain a writer. That smug obstinate island cannot permit him to be himself. He must go off—the wanderer for whom we are asked to pray. There is no going back to Mellick for the individual artist.'⁴⁷ The text illustrates the necessity of the writer to renounce identification with the location of the childhood dwelling in order to nurture the spark of creativity and to forge new identities; Matt chooses the state of exile and movement over a static, established domesticity so that he can better explore his linguistic capabilities and fashion new identities 'to be himself.' While *Pray for the Wanderer* can be read as recording the essential process of an artist's development away from home, the text is unquestionably a response to a specific political climate and it functions as a particular commentary upon the position of the writer in Irish society. The novel originated as a rejoinder to the censorship the Board imposed upon *Mary Lavelle* and serves as an analysis of the suffocating effect of the cultural environment of the period upon Irish writers.

⁴⁶ Kate O'Brien, *Pray for the Wanderer* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1938), p. 198.

⁴⁷ O'Brien, *Pray for the Wanderer*, p. 58.

In another of her texts, *The Last of Summer* published in 1943, O'Brien similarly paints Ireland as irreconcilably at odds with an artistic temperament. The novel tells the story of a young actress Angèle's attempts to establish roots with her family. Growing up in France the daughter of an Irishman who is deemed 'the ideal exile,'⁴⁸ Angèle returns to her father's home in an effort to connect to her estranged relations. Unexpectedly enamoured with her cousin Tom, Angèle makes arrangements to settle down with him and sacrifice her career. The matriarch of the family, Hannah, disapproving of the relationship, uses Angèle's artistic identity against her and convinces Tom of his cruelty in 'trapping' his fiancée. Hannah equates Angèle's creative tendencies with an inability to remain fixed or located and insinuates that artists are inherently nomadic and fickle in their desires: "You see, son—she's an artist. Artists are creatures of quick, warm feelings and sudden dreams. But they are not to be held to their dreams. And we shouldn't, we just shouldn't ask them to shoulder the whole of life with us, no matter how they seem to want it."⁴⁹ Indeed, Angèle's decision to renege on her marriage agreement with Tom seemingly confirms Hannah's vision of the intrinsically itinerant characteristic of the artist. Yet it is the Irish location's inability to accommodate Angèle which necessitates her departure and not any innate desire to be gone, as Hannah suggests. The traditionalist persuasions of the newly founded Irish nation-state barricading itself against the approaching storm of the looming Second World War leave no room for artistic imagination. With the impending conflict, travel is increasingly difficult as Ireland becomes cemented in its own neutrality. All of the characters who exhibit an impulse towards self-fulfilment, including Martin and Jo, arrange to leave the country and seek

⁴⁸ Kate O'Brien, *The Last of Summer* (London: Virago Press, 1990), pp. 230-231.

⁴⁹ O'Brien, *The Last of Summer*, pp. 230-231.

out their lives elsewhere. In these instances, O'Brien indicates how the unique constellation of political events influences her view of Ireland as a site particularly incongruent with the display of creative ambition.

The Land of Spices intertwines some of the themes circulating throughout O'Brien's writing including the development of an identity and the necessity of exile, yet the text is of particular interest for its emphasis on the significance of gender and its presentation of a female writer coming to terms with her artistic consciousness. Charting the heroine Anna's intellectual progress in a convent school under the supervision of Belgium Reverend Mother, Marie-Hélène, *The Land of Spices* conveys, as Patricia Coughlan articulates, 'the possibility of *female* creativity, an active aesthetic role for a woman.'⁵⁰ Described as a feminine parallel to Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*,⁵¹ the novel culminates in Anna's revelatory epiphany of the transformative potential of language. Observing her classmate Pilar's graceful exuberance during their preparation for exams, Anna demonstrates an artist's talent for recognizing beauty:

So Anna beheld her; something that life can be about, something with power to make life compose around it. She stared at her in wonder, hardly seeing her anymore but realising her lustrous potentiality, and feeling that for her, the watcher, this moment was a long-awaited, blessed gift; that in seeing this grace, this volatility, flung in a sweet summer hour against great ilex-trees, against the evening star, she was encouraging, alone and in terms of her secret need, a passage of beauty as revelatory and true as any verse of the great elegy.⁵²

The passage is weighted with reference to the gaze and O'Brien marks the instance when Anna demonstrates her remarkable capacity to sublimate her visions of exquisiteness into luminous words. Having previously exhibited her enjoyment in the various textures and

⁵⁰Patricia Coughlan, 'Kate O'Brien: Feminine Beauty, Feminist Writing and Sexual Role,' in Eibhear Walshe, ed., *Ordinary People Dancing: Essays on Kate O'Brien* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993), p. 80.

⁵¹ Ann Owens Weekes, *Irish Women Writers: An Uncharted Tradition* (Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 1990), p. 111.

⁵² Kate O'Brien, *The Land of Spices* (London: Virago Press, 2002), p. 272.

'colours of words,'⁵³ Anna's observation of Pilar promises to fuel her launch into a literary sphere. Learning to structure aesthetics into comprehensible patterns, Anna indicates the evolvment of her artistic 'I.'

As a female, however, Anna's ambition towards the realization of her literary potential is riddled with obstacles, the most immediate of which is her grandmother's disapproval of women's pursuit of higher degrees; until Marie-Hélène adamantly defends Anna's desire to attend university, the pupil's grandmother threatens to squander Anna's talent and limit her to a domestic life. Nor is Anna's grandmother alone in her view of women's tutelage as superfluous as the sentiment resonated throughout nationalist documents of the period which encouraged women's position as representatives of the domestic sphere. A visiting bishop, who is opposed to the teaching emphasis on broader foreign outlooks, articulates the sentiment that women's access to ideas beyond the sphere of Irish influence undercut the attempts to formulate a unified Irish identity. For her part, Marie-Hélène 'disliked [having] nationalism intruded on religion, or on education,'⁵⁴ and she manoeuvres to maintain the ambitions of her school. Ann Owens Weekes' assessment of the bishop's disapproval of a foreign influence on education reveals his dualistic nationalist and sexist beliefs: 'The fear that intellectual and gender liberty will clash with political liberty underlines his comment and underscores the nationalistic belief in the pre-eminence of national independence above all other interests.'⁵⁵ O'Brien's glimpses into the narrow mindsets restricting women's access to new outlooks which would allow the budding writer to flourish illustrate her perception of the Irish cultural environment as particularly incongruous with the female artist.

⁵³ O'Brien, *The Land of Spices*, p. 112.

⁵⁴ O'Brien, *The Land of Spices*, p. 247.

⁵⁵ Weekes, *Irish Women Writers*, p. 126.

Interestingly, it is the convent, often shown as a site of repression and restraint, which offers a space conducive to women's creativity. As Adele M. Dalsimer claims, the school is an environment where 'nuns sustain each other and the girls in their charge.'⁵⁶ During a period when the energies of the country were concentrated on shaping a new sense of a nation founded upon tenets which curbed women's autonomy, the convent's school presents a location dedicated to women's enrichment. It is unsurprising that in the circumstances of nationalist insularity, Anna's opportunity to become a female writer requires her to reject the values of home and homeland in order to seek out a new space of unconstrained liberty. By following her creative instincts, the reader suspects that Anna's future will be one burdened by loneliness, isolation and exile.

The cost of Anna's privileged insight into artistic perspectives and her flair for conjuring words is the traditional comforts of family life. Anna understands that her disregard for her grandmother's expectations and her travel into the academic sphere will be accompanied by a deep sense of 'loneliness,' where the weight of her own solitude will be 'the black dog on her shoulder always now.'⁵⁷ Anna's description of her estrangement again bears a resemblance to Kristeva's theories on a subject's movement into the realm of language through the repudiation of the comforting identification with the original sense of 'home' of the mother's body. The reader suspects that Anna is bound for a life of rootlessness and exile which will allow her the benefit of indulgence in language and in her creative imagination.

Of course, Anna's plight finds a foil in Marie-Hélène's character as the nun considers herself an exile within Ireland, but the young student's circumstances also

⁵⁶ Adele M. Dalsimer, *Kate O'Brien* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), p. 70.

⁵⁷ O'Brien, *The Land of Spices*, p. 269.

resonate with those of Marie-Hélène's father, Henry. Marie-Hélène views Henry's desire for other men as the force that necessitated his move to Belgium. In reflection, Marie-Hélène deems Henry an exile compelled to leave the country: 'Thereafter, she guessed, in his first pain and excitement of self discovery he fell into some offence against society, some stupid sin which made it necessary or at least wise for him to live in exile.'⁵⁸

Henry's sexual transgression parallels Anna's crossing of gender boundaries in her interest in intellectual development as neither character can subordinate their attitudes to the conventional expectations of their homes. Both Anna's and Henry's choices of paths of 'self discovery' and creativity sentence them to identify as exiles.

In *As Music and Splendour*, as another example, O'Brien similarly presents characters for whom movement away from Ireland instigates a sense of a splintered consciousness, and allows access to a multitude of subjectivities. The novel weaves together themes such as the transgression of sexual roles, necessity of exile and the loneliness that accompanies artistic pursuits in the story of two young Irish girls groomed for an operatic career on the continent. Educated against the backdrop of a bohemian Paris and Rome, Rose and Clare change irrevocably from the parallel selves which might have remained in Ireland. Although in her introduction to *As Music and Splendour*, Anne Enright suggests that the characters maintain a 'core that does not change,'⁵⁹ Clare in particular demonstrates a split sense of identity which signals her inability to integrate into a space allotted her at home. All the while Clare progresses with her studies and ventures into a professional career on the stage, she is shadowed by the reminder of an alternative identity which would have matured in the familiar setting of the Irish

⁵⁸ O'Brien, *The Land of Spices*, p. 144.

⁵⁹ Kate O'Brien, *As Music and Splendour* (Dublin: Penguin Books, 2005), p. viii.

landscape. It is when removed from the traditions of Ireland, further, that Clare falls in love with another woman and has some freedom to explore her relationship with her partner, Luisa. Her crossing of borders translates into a renegotiation of both her identity as an artist and her sexual identity.

Distance from her point of origin creates the imaginative space for a variety of consciousnesses and destabilizes any sense of an essentialist self. One of Clare's conversations with a fellow opera student provides testimony of the presence of a multitude of subjectivities:

'I can't understand that split in you.'
'Split? How do you mean, Thomas?'
'I mean, pet—sit down, don't look so furious—I mean, this unlucky *schwärm* you have for Luisa.'⁶⁰

Away from the sphere of the domestic, Clare's sense of self is not confined to traditional roles as she reveals a split consciousness and uncovers new dimensions of her identity. Unbounded by the conventional expectations she faced at home, Clare gains new insights and perspectives: 'nevertheless, it was only one-half of her that lived to that degree and in relation to that image. Another Clare, the familiar one of always, was about her usual business, and was able to watch this newcomer coolly enough from the wings.'⁶¹ The description of Clare's sense of multiple consciousnesses indicates how travel functions in O'Brien's work as a catalyst for the unravelling of a distinct identity; Clare's life in Rome opens out new spaces for her persona which yields new roles as an artist and a lesbian.

Anne Fogarty characterizes the lesbian attachment between Clare and Luisa in terms that echo modern perceptions of the nomad. In her reading, the affair manifests in

⁶⁰ O'Brien, *As Music and Splendour*, p. 207.

⁶¹ O'Brien, *As Music and Splendour*, p. 255.

the unspoken emotion of the music and 'finds expression in stolen moments between the performance of an opera and the return of real life and in various transitional passing phases of the lives of Luisa and Clare. It lies in a space in-between.'⁶² I would stress that it is Clare herself who belongs to a location 'in-between,' which allows a space for the sexual experimentation. O'Brien unflinchingly presents Clare's lesbianism as no more outrageous than Rose's own illicit liaison with a young French tenor; both couplings transgress the moral dictates of the Catholicism within which they were raised. In this regard, both Rose's and Clare's movements from home and perpetual displacement have opened up new landscapes of desire. In the same essay, Fogarty emphasizes O'Brien's protagonists as nomads traversing urban settings scattered across France and Italy: 'Her heroines, like the principal figures in Baudelaire's poetry, are roving and restless. They are flâneurs who wander the streets of numerous cities, including Paris, Rome, Naples, Venice and Milan, which form the backdrop to their lives.'⁶³ In this depiction, Clare and Rose are figures of displaced homelessness as they pass between sites. Not even limited to a meandering through a particular city, the protagonists of *As Music and Splendour* float across national and social borders. The women are nomadic subjects in Braidotti's sense of the term, and their frequent transits signal their own position in-between categorizations. Just as Braidotti perceives the nomad as resisting an adherence to any established classification, so Rose and Clare discover new formulations of subjectivities in the liminal spaces between cultures.

⁶² Anne Fogarty, 'The Ear of the Other: Dissident Voices in Kate O'Brien's *As Music and Splendour* and Mary Dorsey's *A Noise from the Woodshed*,' in Eibhear Walshe, ed., *Sex, Nation and Dissent in Irish Writing* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), p. 177.

⁶³ Fogarty, 'The Ear of the Other,' p. 177.

Despite spending the majority of her time away plotting her return to Ireland and her resumption of a more pastoral life amid the comforts of her house in Ballykerin, Clare discovers at last her inability to return to her former existence:

Clare spent a lonely summer, cold and lonely, in Ballykerin. She was shocked at how difficult she found the primitive life of her own people, and it saddened her to realize that *prima donna* or not, she could not ever live now the simple, clean, courageous and uncomforted life from which her grandmother was departing in holy and collected peace.⁶⁴

'Lonely,' Clare recognizes the impossibility of finding contentment in a domestic setting and resigns herself to the position as an outcast and exile. It is not that Clare's travels have cultivated her taste for refinement, but that the magnitude of her consciousness has outgrown the narrow space of her home. Unable to return to a conventional life in Ireland, Clare will continue to wander nomadically through environments and experience the freedom of unbounded movement. Adele M. Dalsimer explains how 'Clare expresses not only Kate O'Brien's loneliness but also her hope. For though alone and, for the moment, loveless, Clare has her talent to develop, her art to improve.'⁶⁵ Her lack of attachment to any cultural establishment indicates that she will be at liberty to explore her musical virtuosity. Clare's movement from her comfortable domestic circle reveals an expanse of space to explore new sexual and artistic subjectivities. This multiplied consciousness defies regimented categorization and cements her inability to ever permanently assimilate to a traditional familial setting at home. Clare's crisis of exile is compensated for by her independence and her capacity to explore the breadth of her artistic horizons.

⁶⁴ O'Brien, *As Music and Splendour*, p. 349.

⁶⁵ Dalsimer, *Kate O'Brien*, p. 123.

Travel Writing and the Imaginary Landscape of Spain

As I have discussed, a common vein coursing through most of O'Brien's fiction is the sentiment that travel beyond the familiar home front yields new perceptions of spaces in-between cultures where the formulation of new identities is possible. The distance of foreign landscapes offers new perspectives on subjectivity and creates room for new negotiations of selfhood. In O'Brien's own life, Spain took shape in her mind as an environment where visitors become aware of the emotions blazing beneath the surface of consciousness; the nation came to represent in O'Brien's imagination a space removed from her view of the narrow-minded nationalism of the newly-formed Irish state. Many writers and scholars have discussed the significant role Spain played in O'Brien's life and her works and some have outlined how Spain functions as an 'othered' Ireland.

O'Brien's friend and colleague Lorna Reynolds suggests that such similarities as Spain's Catholicism influenced a natural affinity between the two countries. On the topic of *Mary Lavelle*, Reynolds writes: 'Spain, it seems to me, was chosen not merely because Kate O'Brien knew the country well, but because Spain, like Ireland, was a Catholic country.'⁶⁶ The natural parallels between Spanish and Irish cultures offer O'Brien an alternative arena within which she can explore themes and produce veiled commentary on otherwise inflammatory subjects. The parallels between the countries resonated enough that O'Brien could re-appropriate the space of the Spanish landscape to address issues relevant to concerns in Ireland within a context removed from the immediacy of Irish politics. In Reynolds' understanding, Spain served as a façade behind which O'Brien could safely examine subjects relevant to the Irish political scene.

⁶⁶ Lorna Reynolds, 'The Image of Spain in the Novels of Kate O'Brien,' in Heinz Kosok and Wolfgang Zach, eds., *Literary Interrelations: Ireland, England and the World: Volume 3, National Images and Stereotypes* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1987), p. 184.

That Lady

Anne Fogarty similarly recognizes O'Brien's national doubling in her reading of *That Lady* as a cultural analysis on the collapse of the public and private spheres that O'Brien interpreted in the pervasive Irish censorship. The critic understands *That Lady* as offering an oblique commentary on O'Brien's own situation in Ireland as an artist forced to justify her creations to nationalist authorities. Fogarty argues that 'in a subtle overlay of contexts, O'Brien hence uses the struggles of her heroine against authority in order both to attack the repressiveness of Irish censorship and to point to the moral deadlock that results from a self-regarding pursuit of national interests.'⁶⁷ *That Lady* exemplifies O'Brien's engagement of a Spanish setting to flesh out issues pertinent to her concerns over issues in Ireland. Some of the themes that develop as the plot of the novel unfolds, such as the emphasis on individual privacy, have relevance when transposed to O'Brien's Irish context.

That Lady ostensibly depicts a specific historical moment in Spain's past where the King, Philip the Second, jealously imprisons the widower Ana de Mendoza, the Princess of Eboli, once he discovers her affair with one of his advisors. Ana resists Philip's pressure to terminate the relationship, remaining steadfast in her belief that her private desires are extricable from the state's concerns. In a pivotal scene in the text when Philip confronts Ana with his knowledge of the liaison, Ana defends her right to conduct her life as she wishes and emphasizes the irrelevancy of her behaviour. Rather

⁶⁷ Anne Fogarty, 'Other Spaces: Postcolonialism and the Politics of Truth in Kate O'Brien's *That Lady*,' *European Journal of English Studies*, 3:3 (1999), p. 349.

than flattering Philip's sense of command by remorsefully ending her contact with her lover, Ana articulates her entitlement to conduct her own private affairs:

But my private life is truly private. There have been, Philip, as long as I can remember, thoughts and even acts in that private life which, presented to the world, would seem to injure this or that. That is so, I should think, for everyone from cradle to grave. But I do not present my private life to the world. Which is not the same thing as saying that I sacrifice it to the world. I own it, Philip. If I do wrong in it that wrong is between me and Heaven. But here below, so long as I don't try to change into public life, I insist that I own it.⁶⁸

Ana's sentiment of ownership reifies her right to claim a space for individuality impervious to public pressures; Ana maintains her ability to carve out room for herself outside of the political sphere while still reserving her privilege to participate in the nation's concerns. As Fogarty comments, the Princess of Eboli's desire for personal freedom mirrors that of O'Brien's portraits of Irish characters and her own claim on artistic liberty as a writer. In a manner similar to Rebecca West's remapping of England onto the Yugoslavian landscape in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, O'Brien uses the imaginative space of Spain to untangle issues pertinent to her contemporary Ireland. Fogarty explains how 'Spain in this fiction acts not as a self-confirming mirror image but as a discomfiting and potentially liberatory other space which might free its Irish audience from smug isolationism.'⁶⁹ The combination of similarities and differences between Spain and Ireland that many scholars recognize all highlight O'Brien's vision of Spain as an in-between landscape amalgamating aspects of the foreign and the familiar. O'Brien fashions Spain as an imaginative space where she can challenge the boundaries of provocative subjects such as censorship and rights to privacy.

The fact that *That Lady* is set in Spain may reveal more about O'Brien's stance on political issues in Ireland than paint an accurate portrait of a particular circumstance in

⁶⁸ Kate O'Brien, *That Lady* (London: Virago Press, 1985), p. 236.

⁶⁹ Fogarty, 'Other Spaces,' p. 353.

the course of Spanish history, but it also offers evidence that women's struggles for autonomy are not limited to Irish shores. *That Lady* provides evidence that the author does not merely sentimentally regard Spain as an Edenic land above the issues O'Brien considered were plaguing Ireland; even Spain is an environment where women lack space as Ana is literally imprisoned in her own home. In spite of Ana's celebrated androgyny, her sex limits her options to marriage and she expresses her wish for more than a tangential influence on politics declaring: 'I wish I'd been a man.'⁷⁰

In *Farewell Spain*, the landscape is not always depicted as a space for females, and O'Brien occasionally describes how the Spanish women she observes are not 'at home' in their surroundings: 'The men of Spain are related deeply to their landscape, but the women—in their florid youth at least—seem grotesquely out of touch with it.'⁷¹ O'Brien highlights her opinion on women's fundamental incongruity with the landscape. The slight could be read as evidence on how even Spanish women do not belong to the country but remain disconnected members. In historical truth, the very period in which O'Brien was writing was a turbulent time in Spanish feminist history as, for example, 1936 was the year that 'groups of women in Madrid and Barcelona founded *Mujeres Libres*'⁷² which was dedicated to empowering individual and collective women's rights. Spain is thus not a model nation for women's empowerment but it instead represents room 'elsewhere' where both O'Brien and her character, Mary Lavelle, can access new modes of self-awareness and new voices of artistic consciousness. Spain, in this manner, functions as both a geographical location but also an imagined space removed from

⁷⁰ O'Brien, *That Lady*, p. 339.

⁷¹ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 82.

⁷² Martha A. Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 1.

Ireland. The Spain which emerges from O'Brien's texts is not a meticulously detailed representation of a cultural scene but it is a territory created by O'Brien's own impressions of a country within the boundaries of which her characters are at liberty to explore 'the extremes of possibility that life contains instead of the narrow pathway of conformity which conditions at home had indicated.'⁷³ O'Brien does not wholly romanticise the reality of circumstances with which the Spanish must contend, but Spain still serves as a location where her characters, particularly women, might assert their claim to an individual consciousness and own an identity outside the expectations of the collective public.

Mary Lavelle

In both *Mary Lavelle* and *Farewell Spain*, Spain provides the setting and the impetus for the development of new registers of awareness. The generic differences between the two publications might suggest that the representation of the nation in *Farewell Spain* would, by the book's nature as a travel narrative, offer a greater sense of verisimilitude, yet Spain remains in O'Brien's writings a created location which instigates the development of an artistic 'I.' Spain functions in both works as a nurturing space for the blossoming artistic identity for the character of Mary and for O'Brien herself. Reading the fictional piece alongside the travel account helps elucidate how an experience of Spain in each text engenders new consciousnesses, promotes the maturation of the authorial voice and prompts the sense of exile. Scrutinizing first *Mary Lavelle* and then finally *Farewell Spain*, I will argue that, for O'Brien, Spain is an in-between space of exchange which advances the understanding of an artistic consciousness; for both Mary and the narrative

⁷³ Reynolds, 'The Image of Spain in the Novels of Kate O'Brien,' p. 185.

voice of the travel narrative, movement to Spain opens out space for new modes of nomadic subjectivity.

For her novel, O'Brien used her own memories as a governess in Spain in 1922 as the setting for her heroine's transformation into an independent subject. Engaged to be married to an Irish boy at home, Mary Lavelle uncharacteristically chooses to spend some time removed from the domestic atmosphere before settling down to conjugal life. Enjoying her access to a world of impassioned dancing and bullfights where violence and beauty are intertwined, Mary emerges from her experience changed. Further complicating her return to a traditional existence in Ireland is the consummation of her love for her employer's married son. Mary learns to submit to her desires and understands that her actions condemn her to an unconventional life of wandering and exile. I suggest that O'Brien presents in *Mary Lavelle* the figure of Braidotti's nomad; Mary's travel away to Spain and away from the traditional atmosphere of her native Ireland as a governess marks her as a transgressive character whose movement across boundaries includes a transformation of her understanding of the body. The young Irish woman's exposure to the new cultural order in Spain is accompanied by a reconfiguration of her sense of self and, moreover, her gender identity. O'Brien first plunges the reader into a scene universal to the experience of travelling as she describes a governess' encounter with a Customs Officer who thoroughly inspects the contents of her luggage. O'Brien makes apparent in her writing that this moment of frontier-crossing concurrently represents an instance on the edge of transition. Mary has packed her trunk with contents befitting her image with objects appropriate to her status and 'the innards of Mary's trunk—her private self—have yet to acquire distinguishing traits. They have been

“packed” and “labelled” by others at home.’⁷⁴ The officer, who barricades the threshold, dismantles the ordered system she has constructed. The baggage seems an apt metaphor for Mary’s own internal unravelling which occurs as she enters into the new culture where she will spend ‘a time-marking year or two, under a strange sky, among voices and faces that will say nothing relevant to her.’⁷⁵ Mary’s travels between households and languages complicate, in the course of the story, her sense of a unified subjectivity; her travels help her to develop new consciousnesses including an awareness of the artistic which makes her return home inconceivable. Mary is an illustration of the feminized nomad, whose presence in-between cultures creates new spaces for innovative identities.

For Mary, return to her former life with its threat of stifling conventionalism is unthinkable, and unlike the heroine of Maura Laverty’s *No More than Human*, who rounds out her own adventures as a governess in Spain by settling down to conjugal bliss with an Irish man, O’Brien illustrates Mary Lavelle as embracing a perpetual nomadic lifestyle. For Laverty’s protagonist, her motivation to leave Ireland is the scent of escape and adventure, but her distance from the familiar perpetuates an acute homesickness which eventually leads her to adopt a domestic role in Ireland.⁷⁶ For Mary Lavelle, in contrast, exile becomes a necessary condition once she gains new perspectives and new subjectivities. Mary describes her desire to leave Ireland and seek out a life abroad in geographical terms, and she articulates the necessity of discovering a location where she is not identified by her gendered role.

As a child, reading the same books as Jimmy and Donal, she had dreamt as perhaps they had, on the break-room window-seat, until her heart was near bursting with her desire, her intention, to go everywhere one day, know everything, try everything, be committed

⁷⁴ Dalsimer, *Kate O’Brien*, p. 34.

⁷⁵ Kate O’Brien, *Mary Lavelle* (London: Virago Press, 2000), p. xiv.

⁷⁶ See Maura Laverty, *No More than Human* (London: Virago Press, 1998).

to nothing. She would wander always, be a free lance always, belong to no one place or family or person.⁷⁷

In the quotation Mary compares her desire to wander with that of her brothers' and subtly hints that she does not have access to the same ability to travel as they do. Even when young she craves the opportunity to venture off, and the freedom she describes is linked to a release from a traditional gender role. In a later passage that closely resonates with the previous, Mary underscores her impression of Spain as a location where escape from gendered expectations of family is feasible.

To be alone for a little space, a tiny hiatus between her life's two accepted phases. To cease being a daughter without immediately becoming a wife. To be a free lance, to belong to no one place or family or person—to achieve that silly longing of childhood, only for one year, before she flung it with all other childish things upon the scrapheap. Spain!⁷⁸

Spain functions in the novel as the site where displacement and detachment are possible. Abroad, Mary will not be defined by her association with men, as a daughter or wife. The country is a 'No Man's Land' or in-between space where she can be the nomad or the 'free lance' at liberty to explore various subjectivities. The final emphatic 'Spain!' suggests that the country is the embodiment of all the characteristics she most desires; Spain is a terrain somehow outside the suffocating cultural pressures she experiences at home. Mary repeatedly articulates her distaste of attachments, and her desire to travel over national boundaries into a new landscape hints at a yearning to remove herself from the traditional responsibilities associated with her role as a woman.

In the description of the bullfight, one of the pivotal moments in the text, Mary connects her presence in Spain with the assumption of multiple identities. Her witness of the spectacle, symbolically representative of the country, allows her an insight into the

⁷⁷ O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle*, p. 24.

⁷⁸ O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle*, p. 30.

culture and ushers in her awareness of new consciousnesses. Observing the sheer cruelty of the display intermingled with an elegance of form, Mary is driven to gaze upon the event through the perspectives of multiple consciousnesses. The narration draws attention to the situation in the subtle display of bafflement as she acquires a split subjectivity. 'She was—perhaps this is the easiest phrase—outside herself.'⁷⁹ Neither the narrator nor Mary can fully articulate the oddity of the experience, yet the bullfight instigates her development of several selves. Mary is no longer a fixed, immobile subject tied to a particular outlook but can move between identities.

There was no escape from that and even now, in this moment of detachment from herself, this moment of queer dreaminess, its truth knocked and she admitted it. But meantime another, newer self stayed musing in the minutes just now spent.⁸⁰

Watching the bullfight, Mary becomes several subjectivities; simultaneously inside and outside herself, she is a nomadic subject and is capable of moving between selves. The bullfight is a catalyst for her awareness of the fluidity of identity. Mary's reaction to the event suggests that her experience in an alternative culture influences her renegotiation of identities as contact with new perspectives ushers in new consciousnesses. Mary's experience in Spain transforms her irrevocably as her travel instigates the formation of new identities.

Further, the bullfight is the moment in the text where Mary recognizes the sublime capabilities of art. Mary allows Spain to influence her and surfaces from the event with a new awareness of her own innovative perspectives which facilitates her engagement of an artistic 'I.'

But the wound of the bullfight was in fact—though she tried to forget and ignore it—the gateway through which Spain had entered in and taken her. She did not know how much an afternoon in the bullring had changed her. But, young and very conventional, to have

⁷⁹ O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle*, p. 100.

⁸⁰ O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle*, p. 101.

learnt through the movements of one's own nerves the difference between shock and revulsion; young, virginal and virtuous to have learnt in one's own breast that emotion at its most crude can by relation to a little art enchant, overwhelm, and seem eternal—that is an awful lesson, most disconcerting to the gentle and orthodox.⁸¹

The passage is weighted with sexual reference, mirrored later in the description of her liaison with Juanito, and it casts a masculine Spain as Mary's lover as she emerges from the event experienced and remade. Previously 'virginal and virtuous,' Mary is entirely changed by her vision and recognizes the possible enchantment 'of a little art;' her revelation is the potential to transform a brutal act of destruction into a creation of beauty. The performance is an insight into how the sufferings of life can be digested through the 'patterning of art.'⁸² During the bullfight, Mary acknowledges the imperative of the artist to comprehend and translate violence into aesthetic creations. At this moment of maturation, Mary's exposure to the Spanish culture allows her to fully appreciate the potentially sublime aspects of artistic creation.

That Mary develops a myriad of consciousnesses from her vision of the bullfight and her time in Spain suggests that she herself has unveiled her own artistic identity. Returning to Ireland, Mary receives a matador cape as a gift which casts her into the role of the bullfighter. By the end of her time in Spain, Mary is like a matador and is able to transform pain into beauty; she has gained an artistic perspective, having acquired the capability to transform her affair into a strength that will allow her to refuse the constraints of her impending marriage. The small cost of her new perspective is that she will be destined to a life of wandering exile as 'she would take her godmother's hundred pounds and go away. That was all....Yet there it was—a real story. As real as the

⁸¹ O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle*, p. 112.

⁸² Walshe, *Kate O'Brien*, p. 100.

bullfight—and, oh God, oh God, as beautiful.’⁸³ Mary’s experience in Spain leaves her transformed as her assumption of an artistic sensibility or multiple consciousnesses predicated upon the perspective of distance precludes domestic settlement. As an artist she is forced to a life of exile and movement, yet she is happily estranged from the provincial lifestyle to which she has been expected to conform. With plans to call off her engagement, Mary rejects the pressures to perform her feminine role and will seek out a life of freedom elsewhere.

Throughout the text, other characters comment upon a change in Mary, perceptible yet difficult to define. One of the children she teaches, Mila, queries:

‘Do you think Spain is having a marked effect on you?

‘What do you think?’

‘Well, honestly, I think it is. I—I think it’s changing you in some absolutely visible way—and yet, why on earth should it?’⁸⁴

Despite the bewilderment Mila expresses, Mary is indescribably transformed by her experience. Mary herself is not fully aware of the extent of the changes yet others frequently remark upon the evident traces of the location’s influence. Exposure to a new cultural order has a bodily impact upon Mary. It is Mary’s movement to a distant nation which serves as a catalyst for the transformation of her subjectivity.

The change in Mary, further, is accompanied by her renegotiation of her femininity as her time abroad instigates a shift in her gendered identity. There is an abundance of narrative reference to Mary’s physical attributes which are described as neither wholly masculine nor feminine. While the opening illustration implicitly suggests gendered neutrality, the end of the text reveals a pervading emphasis on the inability to

⁸³ O’Brien, *Mary Lavelle*, p. 300.

⁸⁴ O’Brien, *Mary Lavelle*, p. 200.

categorize the gender of her traits as 'almost androgenous.'⁸⁵ Frequently, other characters such as her lover and his father, Mary's employer, marvel at her androgynous features:

Yet now, looking at Mary's contentedly-drinking mouth, at her down-drooped eyelids and the long, uneven fringe of her lashes, measuring the androgenous, speckles beauty of her head and throat and bony, vigorous hands.⁸⁶

In another instance, Mary adopts the stance of a boy, shedding all signs of feminine sexuality. Rather than a traditional heroine, Mary is delineated as more masculine than feminine:

The dark blue, careless clothes and composed, braced attitude of mediation gave her for the moment the non-voluptuous, introverted air of a boy.⁸⁷

Throughout the text, Mary's gender is subject to flux as she shifts between various identities along the gender spectrum. Her gender is difficult to categorize as she continually reshapes and transforms. From an observer's perspective Mary nomadically travels between various representations of gender identity and she resists rigid definition. She is the free-lance she once imagined, defying all expectation of her gender role. Mary's identity, like that theorized by Braidotti, is fluid and malleable with movement through variations of social settings, and she illustrates how travel across national boundaries translates into movements across gender boundaries.

As evidenced in a variety of her writings, O'Brien continuously explores themes of the importance of new perspectives and the concomitant development of artistic identity. Her representations of exile are of interest as she presents wandering as a particular imperative for the female artist and she examines how the state manifests

⁸⁵ O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle*, pp. 278-279.

⁸⁶ O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle*, p. 211.

⁸⁷ O'Brien, *Mary Lavelle*, p. 215.

differently for women. As in *Mary Lavelle* where Mary emerges from her experience in Spain with an artistic sensibility and is transformed in gendered terms, O'Brien's works offer nuanced depictions of how women's adoption of the artistic 'I' influences gender subjectivity. O'Brien illustrates how travel can unravel identity, and how the perspective of split subjectivities facilitates the assumption of an artistic 'first person singular.' For women, this change in viewpoint prompts the renegotiation of a gendered subjectivity and makes a return to traditional values of home impossible.

Farewell Spain

Farewell Spain explores some of the same themes as *Mary Lavelle* in its interest in articulating multiple perspectives and demonstrating the artistic 'I.' Rather than recounting the effects of the country on a young Irish woman, O'Brien's narrative exhibits her sense of Spain as conducive to creativity within the fabric of the text itself. O'Brien's travel piece records her impressions of her experience in Spain both as a governess to a family in the Basque country, and her numerous travels around the nation. Written, in part, as a reaction towards what she viewed as the disintegrating effect of the Franco regime on her beloved town and landscapes, the text is a sentimental recollection of her experience composed while the world was on the brink of an impending conflict of epic proportions. Her narrative conflates her experiences, depicts un-sequential events, and the authorial voice vacillates between that of an objective and informative guide book and a novel with fictional characters. O'Brien underscores her awareness of her unreliable reportage:

But my journey will be a composite one made up of many, and without necessary chronological reference. The route will be a plaiting together of many routes; seasons and cities will succeed each other in reminiscence as almost certainly they did not in fact;

companies and chance acquaintances of travel will crop up, interrupt, disappear and return without sequential accuracy, and with no justification from all those useful diaries, which I never keep. But their roles will be true, each in its place, as memory can make them—so long as no one asks for dates.⁸⁸

O'Brien recognizes her own authorial presence as a creator of the book, weaving together the representation of events according to aesthetics as opposed to chronology. Although the text is engendered from her first-hand observations, they are processed through the lens of her own artistic gaze. Michael Cronin comments on O'Brien's conscious choice to accentuate her own perspectives in his opinion that 'imagination and memory are motivating forces behind O'Brien's travel writing and not the linear chronological positivisim of the didactic travel text.'⁸⁹

From the opening of the book, *Farewell Spain* resists the conventions of traditional educative texts. O'Brien begins by singling out a geographical location suitable for the launch of her travel narrative, randomly selecting Santander 'without waste of time' as Santander is, in her estimation 'comparatively safe from pottering memory.'⁹⁰ O'Brien sheds all pretence of a historically accurate travel manual for the edification of mass travellers when she continues to glorify Santander as a location 'lively enough to make it easy for your author to mislay those bulky tourists.'⁹¹ O'Brien humorously illustrates a scenario of the narrator abetting the reader's evasion of the burdensome tourist within the energetic fray of the vivacious city. Seemingly offering the reader a glimpse of Spanish cultural regions unusually inaccessible to typical vagabonds, O'Brien simultaneously articulates her refusal to compose a conventional guide book for the amusement and instruction of travellers.

⁸⁸ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 15.

⁸⁹ Michael Cronin, 'Moving Pictures: Kate O'Brien's Travel Writing,' in Eibhear Walshe, ed., *Ordinary People Dancing: Essays on Kate O'Brien* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993), p. 141.

⁹⁰ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 14.

⁹¹ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 14.

Heading her first chapter 'Adiós Turismo,' O'Brien reflects her lament of the potential cessation of free wandering which global circumstances will impede. Yet the reader can also understand the title as a Spanish phrase to the conventional tourist left behind as she plunges into an untraditional overview of the nation from an insider's perspective. In other words, the Spanish farewell marks the boundary of the typical holiday-maker's foray into the Spanish culture; the opening departure promises the reader a more in-depth exposure of the country than the tourist usually receives. The 'Adiós Turismo' written in Spanish also arguably demarcates the boundary between the English and Spanish culture and echoes Mary Lavelle's border-crossing. The heading marks the threshold into new literary territory as O'Brien's representation of Spain promises to be unconventional and unsettling. Further, the 'Adiós Turismo' which signals the entrance in Spain is a direct contrast to the English title of the text. This juxtaposition reaffirms that the text was composed upon exit from Spain and underscores how the book is a composite of recollections and reflection where she 'look[s] backward, self-indulgently.'⁹² *Farewell Spain* is a sentimental and nostalgic traipse through her own memory.

O'Brien justifies the self-indulgent tone of her retrospective work by celebrating unconventional distinctions of individuals. *Farewell Spain* articulates the author's concern that the devastating violence of the approaching global war will obliterate any differences between 'language, faith and climate'⁹³ producing instead a 'flat and narrow'⁹⁴ landscape of monotonous uniformity. O'Brien explains the motivation to create her account as a testament of the individual, commenting that 'there is no help for

⁹² O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 1.

⁹³ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 3.

⁹⁴ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 3.

us all in living through the day to which we have been appointed, if it takes away our egoists' courage to go on being ourselves.'⁹⁵ Implicit in her worry of a singular world culture effacing the ego is the sense of an exposure to new environments as necessary to the development of individual identities. O'Brien accents how multiple perspectives foster new consciousnesses of subjectivities; O'Brien's travel through 'pottering memory' is thus an exercise in enunciating the first person singular, or artistic 'I.'

In a passage which sets out her own pleasure in 'idle travel in Spain,' O'Brien closely connects the notions of travel, art and multiple consciousnesses, presenting the hypothesis that travel generates artistic sensibilities. Vaulting from a description of her peripatetic wanderings through Spain to a reflection on the artist's appreciation of intermittent moments of heightened awareness, O'Brien insinuates that movement across borders facilitates a sharpening of artistic perceptions.

For idle travel as it has been cheaply and unceremoniously dispensed to my generation has assuredly been one of the deepest and most secret of all personal pleasures. Not, for me, idle travel, here, there and everywhere—my heart is narrow—but idle travel in Spain.

If it be permissible, if indeed it be not positively dangerous to quote Pater at this date, I venture here to quote these over-quoted words: 'For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.'...Artists, whether or not they justify their classification, or even reveal at all that they carry the stigma, know themselves. They know their handicaps and, perhaps somewhat smugly, their advantages...And the rest of us, wherever we find ourselves in the card index—are we not occasionally cross-referenced in relation to Pater's statement? Are we not visited, too, however intermittently and unrewardingly, by 'this quickened sense of life,' 'multiplied consciousness' which is the daily bread of the artist?⁹⁶

Although there are instances of clarity when one has the privileged opportunity to peer through the lens of 'multiple consciousness,' O'Brien suggests that travel increases the possibility for new perspectives. Skipping from reflections on travel to a musing on

⁹⁵ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 2.

⁹⁶ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, pp. 8-9.

artistic outlooks, O'Brien connects the movement into new frontiers and cultures with 'this quickened sense of life' and with recognition of new consciousnesses.

O'Brien, further, suggests in the quotation that all artists 'know themselves' as a result of an access to a myriad of outlooks. In this regard, O'Brien reveals her perception of an artistic self-awareness forged with the formulation of new identities. The passage thus maps out O'Brien's view which she continually illustrates throughout her fiction that travel instigates new subjectivities which serve as a catalyst to creative viewpoints.

Farewell Spain complements the vision O'Brien demonstrates, particularly in *Mary Lavelle*, which depicts how nomadism unravels a single identity to open out new spaces of subjectivity necessary for artistic creation. Mary's appreciation of the beauty and patterning of the violent bullfight which causes her to experience the scene from outside of herself as through an alternative consciousnesses, finds philosophical foundation in O'Brien's later text. While the earlier novel naturally illustrates O'Brien's sensibility, her travel narrative is itself the product of an artist's foray into distant territories. *Mary Lavelle* portrays a young Irish woman's development of new subjectivities, but *Farewell Spain* is composed in the multi-registered voice of the exiled artist. By emphasizing her authorial presence as the narrator in *Farewell Spain*, O'Brien underscores how she is the artist, whose multiple-consciousness helps shape the form of her work. The harmony of a plethora of voices which characterize the piece signals her as creator benefiting from the travel away from home.

Paralleling the bullfight scene in *Mary Lavelle*, *Farewell Spain* portrays the brutal spectacle through multitudinous perspectives; the narrator offers a range of views from a variety of audience members including an American millionaire and an artist named

Mary, who regard the display with opposing reactions. Another two witnesses, alarmed at their own enthrallment, are 'shocked indeed, but not, as they expected, to the exclusion of every other emotion.'⁹⁷ The spectrum of perspectives exemplifies O'Brien's interest in a variety of views, and her rendering of the myriad outlooks through the membrane of her authorial voice indicates how her artistic 'I,' which has composed the text, is constituted by multiple consciousnesses. Like Rose Macaulay, O'Brien weaves a plethora of voices, including fictional voices, into her writing, and she highlights how her work is an artistic creation.

In spite of the heading and the lengthy musings on '*le temps perdu*,'⁹⁸ a title which naturally conjures up Proust and the piecing together of a sense of subjectivity through memory, the chapter is at times deceptively impersonal as O'Brien guides a fictional tourist through the cities. The technique exposes O'Brien's tendency to interweave novelistic aspects in to her text. Recommending the cafés in Burgos, O'Brien shapes the reader's imagined vision: 'But the cafés are good....A band plays under the trees; as you sit you buy shares in lottery tickets, and beautiful long ties to take home to gentlemen friends. The weather is too cool for iced beer, so you drink manzanilla or coffee.'⁹⁹ While the actions and thoughts no doubt reflect O'Brien's, in this case the 'you' deflects the intimacy of the narrator and indicates the multiplicity of the first person singular. O'Brien places the reader into the position of the wanderer and recreates the sights and contemplations that the visit might occasion. The fictionalized traveller becomes a character with 'gentlemen friends' and a taste for coffee. While trumpeting the personal elements of the account, O'Brien simultaneously mingles aspects of the

⁹⁷ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 93.

⁹⁸ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 142.

⁹⁹ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 134.

novel into her work. In a more overt example, O'Brien invents a fictionalized couple as a means of expressing the disappointments of typical holidaymakers. Creating names and backgrounds, O'Brien verbalizes the banality of their experience:

George and Daisy stare at each other, and decide it is chilly, they'd better walk. They walk, among tamarisks and red-hot pokers, in the little park above the sea... They stare at the sea, and think of the children at Broadstairs with Mother. They agree to take the tram to Santander again, and find a warmer café, an indoor one.¹⁰⁰

George and Daisy's presence casts *Farewell Spain* into the realm of fiction and reaffirms the text as an amalgamation of genres; the text clearly does not adhere to the traditional standards of travel writing as O'Brien incorporates a variety of voices into her own account.

Along another vein, *Farewell Spain* is, of course, very politically motivated in its unmasked criticism of the Franco regime and defies any label of a mere personal reflection. O'Brien's banishment from Spain is testimony to the book's inflammatory edge as she makes explicit her preference for Castilian aspects of Spain. Her valorisation of what she views as the embodiment of Spanish civilization occasionally manifests as outright prejudice against the Moorish influence in culture and architecture. O'Brien equates the 'interfering doctrinaires'¹⁰¹ of the Moors with the modern imposition of the communist regime upon the will of the people. O'Brien lionizes her understanding of a characteristic Spain and offers no excuse for her vocal backing: 'It is enough that it should be clear, as we approach the capital of the 'all-Spains', that the writer is on the side of the Republic.'¹⁰² *Farewell Spain* illustrates O'Brien's political slant and complicates the traditional understanding of the

¹⁰⁰ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 19.

¹⁰¹ O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 83.

¹⁰² O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 84.

boundaries of conventional, objective travel writing. Part fiction, part guide book and part political manifesto, *Farewell Spain* traverses the boundaries between genres.

These moments in *Farewell Spain* prove that, like Rose Macaulay's works, O'Brien's writing does not adhere to the stringent standards of traditional travel writing as she incorporates a variety of voices into her account. The plurality suggests the multi-consciousness that O'Brien attributes to the artist; as the writer of the text, O'Brien articulates her artistic 'I,' or the first person singular, through the myriad enunciations of a variety of perspectives. By celebrating her own construction of the narrative, O'Brien underscores her authorial voice as creative and she becomes the female artist. O'Brien nomadically transgresses numerous generic boundaries, and as she seamlessly moves through genres like fiction and travel guides, she contributes to a new form of writing by a woman.

Throughout her fiction and her travel writing, Kate O'Brien describes nomadism as an imperative for the production of new artistic forms, and she underscores the necessity of breaking away from domestic tethers. Pervading her novels is the sense of dissatisfaction with the isolationist Irish nationalism of the period which encouraged women's familial roles. In her representations, movement across geographical borders and exposure to differing social contexts is a particular necessity for the female artist as the existence in-between cultures instigates a diversity of perspectives and a multitude of consciousnesses. For O'Brien's characters, the traversing of physical boundaries translates into fresh understandings of sexual and gender identities as the definition of the body must be negotiated within another symbolic order. The consequence of new perceptions of subjectivity and the artistic 'I' that travel prompts is an inability to conform to the circumscribed environment of home, which in turn results in a state of

exiled wandering. O'Brien's own adventures abroad helped formulate her artistic subjectivity which resulted in a new type of storytelling within travel narratives. Like Vita Sackville-West, O'Brien viewed 'elsewhere' as offering room to access female creativity, and her experiences abroad helped her own formulation of a literary nomadism and an artistic 'I.'

Conclusion

It seems appropriate that the themes of identity and artistic production that underpin my consideration of Kate O'Brien's writing should lead back to the examination of Vita Sackville-West's interest in the search for a space for female creativity; the return to the place of origin is common to all the women writers in this study. For the five authors in this exploration, the composition of their travel texts took place as a retrospective exercise of memory. The nostalgia that pervades so many of the pieces engenders from recognition that the experience of a particular location is lost upon the return home. Blixen wrote *out* of Africa, Rebecca West mourned the loss of the Yugoslavia she knew, Macaulay recollected her own travel through imagined and fabled territories, and O'Brien bid farewell to Spain. Sackville-West suggests that she recorded her journey whilst *en route*, but the shape of the text only appeared upon reflection:

The book was always on my mind, teasing me, and little by little, as time receded, it began to take shape, a meaning began to rise up out of the welter, a few definite conclusions which really had some bearing on half-formulated ideas; besides, the fingers which have once grown accustomed to a pen soon itch to hold one again.¹

The women of this study all identify themselves as writers and, in all of their cases, travel fosters the inspiration to write; considering that they each wrote travel narratives, travel thus facilitates the composition of texts. What I have shown in this dissertation are the ways in which travel offered exposure to new landscapes which represented spaces 'elsewhere,' I have outlined some of the reasons why travel is significant for women, and I have explored the ways in which some of these women writers have negotiated their literary voices within the context of travel accounts.

¹ Vita Sackville-West, *Twelve Days: An Account of a Journey Across the Bakhtiari Mountains in Southwestern Persia* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928), p. 9.

Examining Vita Sackville-West's representations of women's experience of geography within the theoretical framework of feminist geography helps to contextualize her illustrations of space abroad as landscapes of freedom and expanse. Similarly, Rebecca West's depictions of the Yugoslavian landscape as a feminine geography in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* stem, as I argue, from a discontentment with women's position as citizens in England. In both of these women's cases, their experiences as women in their homeland have an impact upon the very landscapes that they perceive abroad. My approach to both Blixen's and Macaulay's writing address the ways in which women negotiate the conventions of the travel writing genre itself. While travel writing has a tradition of offering a voice of colonial mastery and of scientific objectivity, Blixen's *Out of Africa* can be seen as a mimicry of a male authoritative voice, which somewhat tempers the suggestions of imperial domination that course throughout the work. Along a similar vein, an intertextual analysis reveals how Macaulay navigates the assumption of women's writing as autobiographical by writing a travel account that obscures the author's voice behind layers of quotations. The final chapter on O'Brien investigates, within the context of theoretical works explaining the nature of women's selfhood, the ways in which travel and the exposure to spaces 'elsewhere' contribute to the adoption of an artistic consciousness and foster the formulation of an identity of the female artist. In this regard, these studies of women's travel narratives composed during a period when travel, writing and identity were closely linked, offer insight into depictions of women's identities, women's writing, and women's identities as writers.

As I suggested in the introduction, it is precisely women's position as boundary subjects on the margins of the cultural order which allows them access to multiple

consciousnesses which in turn informs their literary voice. As Braidotti's vision of nomadic subjects² and Kristeva's view of strangers to themselves³ moving between a myriad of identities and selfhoods, simultaneously inside and outside of themselves, women are privy to innovative insights through movement which grant the possibility of transgressive forms of writing. If identity in the interwar era was considered to be discovered only in transit and women are defined by their movement between selfhoods, then the examples of women's travel writing that have comprised this study offer a glimpse into the manner in which women, doubly propelled into motion by estrangement, might negotiate new representations of authorial identities.

As a result of their experiences as women writers and travellers, the authors that this study scrutinizes have produced texts that resist narrow categorizations; their writings have continually challenged and defied oppositional distinctions between fiction and travel literature, home and abroad, masculine and feminine voices, Penelope's domesticity and Odysseus' wandering. Sackville-West intermingles roots with routes, West collapses representations of the domestic and the foreign, Blixen resists gender categorization in her narrative, Macaulay blurs generic boundaries, and O'Brien depicts the movement between an insider's and an outsider's perspectives. The works can be viewed as texts of transport which nomadically move through categorizations and open up 'in-between' spaces of writing. These examples of women's travel accounts indicate how female authors, forced to confront the dictates of discourse, the expectations of

² Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

³ Julia Kristeva, and Leon S. Roudiez, trans. *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

genre and of female identity, and the exclusion of women from avenues of movement, have managed to negotiate new literary geographies.

The preceding illustrations of women's interwar travel writing represent the voice of the *flâneur*-as-writer and are consummate manifestations of Edward Said's understanding of the traveller who crosses over, 'abandons fixed positions,'⁴ and offers points of intersection and exchange. Moving through rhetorics and discourses, several of these writers, as I demonstrated, engage a series of narrative disguises and intertextual masking techniques to negotiate literary conventions. The result is an unveiling of the performativity of travel writing, and a destabilization of the rigid narrative boundaries. These women's works offer a palimpsest of identities and juxtapose a number of authorial voices. These texts arguably offer a heterotopical literary space and function as sites of subversion which challenge the tacit dictates of traditional standards.

Simone de Beauvoir, referencing Rimbaud, prophesized that once women were not socially bound to immanence, then they, too, would have the capacity to experience a poetic and transcendent existence: 'she too, will be poet! Woman will find the unknown!'⁵ As travellers, both physically removed from home and positioned culturally as nomadic subjects, the female travel writers who wrote primarily in the 1920s and 1930s within this study were able to access a myriad of poetic voices which, in turn, opened upon new literary horizons. Even before Beauvoir composed *The Second Sex*, many women who had the means were wandering the globe in search of the unknown and they were producing works in quantities that exceed the scope of this current study.

⁴ Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Publications, 2001), p. 404.

⁵ Simone de Beauvoir and H. M. Parshley, trans., *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage Books, 1997), pp. 723-724.

Their writings have often been overshadowed by those of their more famous male counterparts, but my examination of these women's travel accounts helps to shed light on the rich texture of their narratives. It is through the process of writing and translating experience through the membrane of language that each woman mapped out a representation of another space. In this regard, the 'elsewhere' which served as a motivation for travel and which shaped the vision of an 'other' space is ultimately found in literature and in writing itself.

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