

**Encountering the Cultural Other:
Virginia Woolf in Constantinople and
Katherine Mansfield in the Ureweras**

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Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield were important figures of British literary modernism who shared, among other things, the common goal of making that movement answerable to questions of gender. Significantly, both women also spent time travelling nationally and abroad before making their names as writers. It is my contention that the experience of being forced to confront a people of varied appearance and cultural beliefs had a powerful influence on their development as writers and contributed to the ideas that would catapult these two women to the forefront of the modernist movement.

The journey that was to prove pivotal to Mansfield's career as a modernist writer occurred in 1907, when she was nineteen. During this year she embarked on a camping trip with a group of friends that took in the sights of both the central and thermal districts of New Zealand's North Island. This tour was the New Zealand equivalent of the European Grand tour in that it functioned as a rite of passage into the independence of adulthood. Further, it educated Mansfield about the Maori. The route taken by the small group was through an extremely remote and hilly part of the North Island known as the Ureweras—a region inhabited by the Tuhoe people who had retreated there after the Land Wars of the 1860s. Mansfield kept a journal filled with evocative descriptions of the landscape and of Maori, not intended for publication, but rather a space to experiment with her writing style. This journal was later referred to by Mansfield's critics as *The Urewera Notebook* (Gordon 38). Less than a year before, Virginia Woolf, twenty-four years old and yet to be married, had visited the remote city of Istanbul then known as Constantinople in the company of a female friend and two of her siblings (MacGibbon 33–36). Like Mansfield she recorded her impressions

in a journal, and like Mansfield the style she adopted for this exercise did not accord with popular travel writing.

This article gauges the extent to which, in each of their journals, unknown places and people function as a metaphor for the new sense of cultural identity Mansfield and Woolf were fashioning and which was to become such an important part of literary modernism. The cultural identity I find in Mansfield's journal stands in marked contrast to the one underpinning Woolf's, not just because Mansfield challenges the moral authority of European civilization, but also because she reveals a more romantic response to the other. I do not want to suggest that Mansfield's sense of cultural identity was free of racist assumptions, especially about Maori since there is much in the notebook that aligns it with the same Darwinian ideology of the late colonial era that Woolf subscribed to. A similar ambivalence characterizes Woolf's journal—while on the one hand its author appears to have been attracted to many aspects of Turkey's culture, on the other, she expresses a negative attitude towards the Islamic faith and the impact this religion was having on women's lives.

Mark Williams and Jane Stafford, writing about Mansfield's New Zealand short stories, say that she found a way of to respond to the unfamiliarity of the bush by converting it into symbolism and introjecting it into the consciousness of her autobiographical protagonists. But they also see this same characteristic at work in *The Urewera Notebook*, where she

employs the symbolist techniques she had learnt from Wilde and the Decadents while at school in London; however, she uses the symbolism not only to represent the dissatisfied consciousness of young female protagonists (in this case that of the authorial self recording her experiences in her diary) but also to add complexity to writing about a colonial landscape. (42)

Similarly, in Woolf's writing there is seldom a moment when we are not aware of her habit of self-reflection and her constant attempt to foreground the subjective nature of her response. Doris Lessing, in a comment on Woolf's rejection of the realist school of fiction writing, observes that, "Her styles were attempts to use her sensibility to make of

the living the 'luminous envelope' she insists our consciousness is, not the linear plod she perceived writing like [Arnold] Bennett's to be" (ix).

For Woolf, the point of travel writing, as for other prose writing, was what it could tell us about the "state of one's mind" (Woolf *Correspondence* 1). Jan Morris, editor of Woolf's travel notebooks, says that Woolf was sceptical of conventional travel writing and feared "becoming that perennially grim figure of tourism, the travel bore" (2). Morris further comments that "time and again throughout her life, especially in letters to her sister Vanessa, Woolf cut short her accounts of places, and laughed at herself when she succumbed to the temptation of writing them or found herself listing sights in the Baedeker manner" (2).

Both writers were keeping not travel diaries so much as writer's notebooks; in each case their aim was to produce material that could be worked up into something more substantial at a later date, or if not worked up then at least mined for the ideas it contained. But while it is reasonable to assume the notebooks were to be used for later fictional writing, it is also reasonable to consider the ways that they helped Mansfield and Woolf fashion a sense of cultural identity, unclear though this may have seemed to them at the time. Identities, so psychoanalysis tells us, are always formed in relation to an Other. It is only when we experience ourselves as distinct and different from other forms of being that we gain a sense of self. Cultural identity is formed in a similar manner; it is formed in relation to foreigners or people whose lives and behaviours make them seem unfamiliar.¹

When Mansfield undertook the camping trip into New Zealand's interior, she was living in what must have seemed like a cultural limbo. Only eighteen months before she had returned to New Zealand after spending three years at Queens College in London where she belonged to a bohemian reading group organized by her teacher Walter Rippmann. She had undertaken regular trips to art galleries, libraries and concerts (Rickets 38). Now she was on the verge of departing for London again, only this time she was going to forge her career as a writer, a pursuit she realized would keep her away from New Zealand for many years. Knowing that she would not return for a long time, she viewed the camping trip as an opportunity to learn more about her native New Zealand, and especially that aspect of colonial life that distinguished

her from the British, namely her greater proximity to and experience of Maori culture. That Mansfield was thinking along these lines is suggested by the fact that she used the trip to learn as much as she could about Maori customs and the Maori language.

Woolf was no less keen to extend her cultural horizons. Not generally thought of as an inveterate traveller, she did in fact undertake regular trips around England and abroad, mainly to the continent, either accompanied by friends or family (the early years) or her husband (later years). On the other hand, she travelled beyond Europe only twice (the trip to Constantinople in 1906 and a fleeting excursion to Asiatic Turkey in 1910 when she went to rescue her sister Vanessa who had fallen ill); and when she travelled, she always stayed in expensive English hotels, “followed well-worn and limited routes” and stuck to British company (Morris 5, 7). In 1906, besides having holidayed in Cornwall, she had visited Wales, France, and Andalusia in Spain. What the expedition to the East afforded her was the opportunity to experience people with vastly different customs, languages and religions and, in visiting the Ottoman Empire, an entirely new order of civilization. Constantinople was after all the legendary meeting place of East and West.

But cultural identity is not formed only in relation to people; it is also shaped by a sense of place. Edward Said, in “Invention, Memory and Place,” refers to the way that memories of landscape fill people with an indelible sense of belonging that is crucial to their sense of identity. He further notes that representations and memories of a landscape are never coterminous with some stable reality; rather they are the products of invention and consequently they have different symbolic meanings for the people who inhabit those landscapes. As Said remarks, this is never more so than when a landscape is shared by an occupying power and a subjugated population (2–3). Importantly, when non-European landscapes become the playgrounds for Western tourists what is experienced and portrayed as one landscape becomes subject to other very different sets of imaginings.

For Woolf the place that represented the greatest difference from the English lifestyle in which she grew up were the countries that formed the furthest reaches of Eastern Europe, especially those parts like Turkey that had never been subject to any form of British control.

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While the Balkan countries of Albania and Greece were not strictly part of the British Empire, there was a sense in which they were already known, having been on the one hand heavily constructed ideologically by Europe, and on the other a popular destination for British travelers. The city of Constantinople in Turkey represented a truly radical otherness, having rarely been visited by the British; indeed, few English women writers had ever ventured there, with the exception of the intrepid Lady Elizabeth Montagu, who had visited in the eighteenth century.

The place that represented for Mansfield the greatest sense of difference from colonial as well as British culture was the magical bush-clad landscape to be found at the very heart of the Urewera Mountains deep in Te Kooti country. This was a place that had escaped the ravages of colonial occupation, betrayed by scenes of burnt and blasted vegetation Mansfield glimpsed on the train journey from Wellington to Masterton. The dense bush in the Urewera Mountains was so pristine and sheltered from the modern world that even the Tuhoe, the local Maori tribe that dwells in the bush, could not stay there all year round. Rather, the men had to regularly journey to the Hawkes Bay region for paid work. Consider the following description of the region:

We begin to reach the valley broad and green— red and brown butterflies— the green place in vivid sunlight slanting in to the trees— an island — then a river arched with tree fern— and always through the bush the hushed sound of water running on brown pebbles— it seems to breathe the full deep bygone essence of it all— a fairy formation of golden rings —then rounding a corner we pass several little whares deserted— and grey— they look very old and desolate— almost haunted— on one door there is a horse collar and a torn scribbled notice.
(Gordon 55–56)

With its abandonment of the sentence and total reliance on the dash, the writing here in many ways constitutes an attempt to record a fleeting sensory impression, a sign perhaps that Mansfield was beginning to edge towards the realist style of the later stories. On the other hand, the passage indicates a strong psychological response in which Mansfield imparts the idea that in this enchanted landscape she has at long last

found an authentic New Zealand that she can identify with. Unlike the New Zealand of colonial society, it alone satisfies her yearning for a place whose beauties are equal to the beauties of art. Mansfield further implies that the bush invokes an invisible life force or spirit that seems aeons old. That she associates this spirit with the Tuhoe seems clear from the vignette that she worked up from her initial notebook description of this scene. In this vignette, the bush is imbued with a mass of romantic conceits; moreover, the landscape itself is conflated with the Tuhoe. It is as if the two are been seen by Mansfield as part of some strange and perfect world from which Pakeha are exempt; but importantly, it is as if the Tuhoe are being portrayed as belonging to the precolonial world.

Mansfield begins as if she were describing a scene from a painting. As in the previous passage, we are presented with an evocative description of a landscape whose phantasmagorical beauty makes it seem like a ghost or fairy world, one to which the writer alone is privy:

The distant mountains are silver blue— and the sky— first turns rose then spreads into a pale amber—far away on my left the land is heavily heliotrope— curving and sharply outlined— and fold upon fold of grey sky—And far ahead a little golden moon daintily graciously dances in the blue floor of the sky— A white moth flutters past me— I hear always the whispering of the water— I am alone— I am hidden— Life seems to have passed away drifted— drifted miles and worlds so beyond this fairy sight. (84)

Mansfield relies mainly on personification to suggest the link between herself and the landscape, with the moon being likened to a fairy tripping across the sky and the plants and creatures of this ancient and undisturbed bush all contriving to speak to her in what she experiences as a hushed, primordial voice. Indeed, she not only feels completely alone; she has the sense of being light years away from the New Zealand of the modern world. But this fantastic scene, along with its intimate and privileged view of New Zealand, instantly dissolves when the writer hears footsteps. In this moment, the writer's attention shifts from the landscape to the other human presence:

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A young Maori girl climbs slowly up the hill and does not see me— I do not move—She reaches a little knoll and suddenly sits down native fashion her legs crossed (under her) her hands clasped in her lap— She is dressed in a blue skirt and white soft blouse— Round her neck is a piece of twisted flax and a long piece of greenstone —is suspended from it— Her black hair is twisted softly at her neck—she wears long white and red bone earrings— She is very young— she sits — utterly motionless— her head thrust back—All the lines of her face are passionate and violent— crudely savage— but in her lifted eyes slumbers a tragic illimitable peace —the sky changes— after the calm is all grey mist— the island in heavy shadow— silence broods among the trees— The girl does not move. But very faint and sweet and beautiful— a star twinkles in the sky— She is the very incarnation of the evening— and lo— the first star shines in her eyes. (85)

At this point what began as a portrayal of the landscape rapidly transmutes into an image of the Maori. Moreover, all Maori are represented by a single, powerful, female figure, one that despite her youth seems timeless, but also mysterious, remote, and unavailable because in part she is so closely aligned with the natural world. The young Maori girl might seem quaint and picturesque (indeed, with her romantic style of dress, long hair and looped earrings, she seems more like a gypsy than a genuine Maori of the back-blocks), but from the writer's point of view she is authentic, someone to be admired as well as envied. For it is Mansfield herself who is portrayed as the intruder; finding herself the onlooker, she feels she does not belong. Furthermore, where Mansfield seeks entry to this magical landscape, the Maori girl is automatically part of it, so much so that the Pakeha's presence is not even noticed. The young Maori girl functions as Mansfield's muse, her beauty is portrayed as being of the "primitive" kind associated with savagery rather than delicate or refined kind associated with civilization.

Evidently, Mansfield admired the proud surliness lurking behind the Tuhoe people's lined appearance quite as much as their startling physical strength and beauty:

There is one great fellow I see— who speaks English— black curls clustering around his broad brow— rest almost languor in his black eyes— a slouching walk and yet there slumbers in his face passion might and strength. (59)

The Tuhoe were the most resistant of New Zealand's Maori tribes. As followers of Rua, the Tuhoe prophet, and outspoken opponent of the white man, they were the last tribe to grant Europeans access to their land and their culture. As little as twelve years before Mansfield's journey they had organized armed resistance to European road survey parties (Introduction *The Urewera* Notebook 52). And yet while Mansfield admired the Tuhoe's spirit of resistance, she knew it could not persevere indefinitely. Already there were signs of their physical deterioration and their dependence on European culture. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the frequent absence of the men and the poor health and excessive, almost desperate friendliness of the children. It was as if the more they became accustomed to the European presence, the more their own existence was endangered:

And across the paddock a number of little boys come straggling along— from the age of twelve to three— out at elbow— bare footed— indescribably dirty— but some of them almost beautiful— none of them very strong. (59)

Here, Mansfield hints at the negative impact of European civilization. Not only were the Tuhoe succumbing swiftly to European diseases, the children's filthy appearance and lack of shoes bespoke the tribe's shocking poverty. If in real life Mansfield cannot rescue both the landscape and the Tuhoe from what she sees as the ravages of Pakeha incursion and desecration, she can at least preserve in her writing the idea of the pure Maori. That she preferred the primitive Tuhoe to the Europeanized Maori is clear from her comment that she found nothing of interest in the nearby settlement of Te Whaiti which they visited soon after. Immediately upon quitting the town she wrote: "I am so tired and sick of the third rate article—give me the Maori and the tourist but nothing between" (61).²

Mansfield despised the "between" or "hybrid" state, a product of European colonialism, and she wished to distance herself from the bour-

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geois colonial culture. The journey through the Ureweras had provided her with a glimpse of a very different New Zealand than that of British colonialism—one with whose unspoiled and sublime beauty the aspiring writer could identify. It had also made her more aware of the European settlers' undeniable role in the Maori people's displacement and decline.³ Mansfield may have shared Woolf's dislike of bourgeois culture and her preference for a style of writing that captured interiority and psychological thought, but her manner of portraying the cultural other in a strong romantic light set her apart from Woolf.

Woolf recorded her first thoughts of Constantinople from the deck of the steamer on which she and her companions were travelling. Naturally it was the immense temple on the skyline that immediately caught her attention:

At six I was on deck, & suddenly we found ourselves confronted with the whole of Constantinople; there was St Sophia, like a treble globe of bubbles frozen solid, floating out to meet us. For it is fashioned in the shape of some fine substance, thin as glass, blown in plump curves; save that it is also as substantial as a pyramid. Perhaps that may be its beauty. But then beautiful & evanescent & enduring, to pluck adjectives like black berries—as it is, it is the fruit of a great garden of flowers. (Leaska 347)

Woolf's high regard for Eastern culture, as well as for the legendary temple itself is noticeable. St. Sophia, for example, is so beautiful that it elicits a whole string of extravagant adjectives. Most of all, it was the stunning effect created by the great dome that impressed Woolf, its contradictory qualities making its construction seem like an impossible feat. Indeed, her admiration for the skill and artistry that went into the making of this wondrous object lasted well beyond the duration of the visit. Later in her novels when Woolf wanted to suggest the paradoxical quality of a place, idea, or person, she invoked the image of this dome.

But if the vision of St. Sophia on the skyline was unforgettable, so too was the stunning image formed by the roofs of the town seen from the high ground of Pera; for Woolf, this scene was near to perfection:

But on the whole the most splendid thing in Constantinople . . . is the prospect of the roofs of the town, seen from the high

ground of Pera. For in the morning a mist lies like a veil that muffles treasures across all the houses & all the mosques; then as the sun rises, you catch hints of the heaped mass within; then a pinnacle of gold pierces the soft mesh & you see shapes of precious stuff lumped together. And slowly the mist withdraws, & all the wealth of gleaming houses & rounded mosques lies clear on the solid earth, & broad waters run bright as daylight through their midst. It is such a sight as you can watch at all hours, for it is so large & simple that the eye has always much to speculate upon; & there is no need to compose it with careful forefinger. Nature & art & the air of Heaven are equally mixed, in vast quantities, with a generous hand. (347)

This time a string of metaphors is used to capture the subtle visual effect of the climbing sun on the distant rooves. The shapes that appear before Woolf are first veiled and mysterious, then vivid and solid, though they remain sufficiently luminous to suggest the sumptuous riches traditionally associated with the East. And once again the scene is described as if it were a painting, but one that was completely ephemeral through the combination of human perception and the natural world.

From these two passages we gather that Woolf was attracted to the rich, exotic appearance of St. Sophia and the city, that the views of each cast a magical spell over her artistic imagination, and in turn rendered her mind open to the many different experiences the East had to offer. Yet it is equally important to note that both scenes represent Eastern culture as seen from a distance, and in terms of its outward visual appearance only. I would suggest that this implies a preference not to deal with a different culture in a close-up or visceral sense. Indeed, the last passage is in some respects reminiscent of the description of the European traveller availing herself to the elevated, panoramic gaze that Mary Louise Pratt elsewhere attributes to the “monarch of all I survey” syndrome of the would-be imperialist conqueror (204–5). Such a gaze relies on a relation of mastery being predicated between the seer and the seen, a mastery that in turn is derived from applying Western knowledge and aesthetic principles to the object of study. Thus, subjecting it to the metaphor of painting in particular as it allows the viewer to compose the

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scene and thereby control the subject. Woolf does not solely rely on the framing technique afforded to her vantage point; the emphasis that she places on colour also alerts us to her privileging of the visual. In a gesture reminiscent of Mansfield's own attempt to highlight the beauty of her country's virginal landscape by invoking the gorgeous tinctures used by painters, Woolf refers to the sun's golden rays acting like the vibrant colours of the artist's palette to convert the strange into a scene of great beauty and inspiration. But whereas in Mansfield's passage the painting metaphor disempowers the viewer by bathing the landscape in an ever-increasing atmosphere of secrecy—a gesture in keeping with deliberate romanticism—in Woolf's piece it has almost the exact opposite effect. Here the rising sun lifts the veil of romance and mystery from the city and lays bare all its splendid secrets to the visitor's gaze.

Nowhere is the fall from romance to unadorned realism, in which attraction invariably gives way to disappointment, more obvious than in those passages where Woolf describes what it is like to encounter the city at close quarters. What this close proximity reveals to Woolf is a culture in which the intellectual and artistic achievements of previous centuries are not just in abeyance, they are desecrated. The occasion when this is most apparent is soon after she enters the interior of St. Sophia. The walls and floor been stripped bare of ornament, and there no longer exists any sign of the profoundly spiritual atmosphere that abounded when Christianity and Islam were worshipped equally. Instead, the whole great hall has a decidedly secular feel despite the fact that it is the centre of vigorous religious activity. And there lay the problem for Woolf; for if there was nothing of interest within St. Sophia it was precisely because the religion practised there seemed so utterly mindless:

Crosses have become safe patterns without meaning; sacred heads have been obliterated from the wall & shields of wood proclaim the true faith where Christian angels used to spread their wings. There is a niggardly temper in all this that makes the great mosque not very sympathetic to the stranger . . . If it is not a temple of religion as we understand the word it is surely a temple of something; so much you may read in the fanatic

nodding of so many turbans, & the earnest drone of so many voices. (Leaska 226)

The fanatic nodding of so many turbans? The earnest drone of so many voices? Woolf is clearly repulsed by modern Islam's decision to clamp down on the very qualities—namely the marrying of art and religion and free intellectual inquiry—that had once rendered the civilization so great. But even before she sets foot in St. Sophia there are signs that her enthusiasm for things Eastern is on the wane. The first sign of deflation occurs when the small party sets out on an adventure into town. Unlike the commanding prospect afforded by Pera's hilltop view, the plunge into the intimate life and substance of Constantinople ends up in disappointment:

There are few experiences more exhilarating than the first dive into a new town— Even when your plunge is impeded— as ours was this morning by a sleek Turkish Dragoman. Still, when the driver cracked his whip & the horses started down the hill, all our obstacles were forgotten. Innumerable pages have been turned in the history of Constantinople, but this, the last, was turned fresh for us. And yet, apart from the chafing of strange sights upon our senses, there was really nothing memorable in our descent upon Stamboul. A view does not by any means promise beauty of detail; & the streets were insignificant, & the national dress— fez & frock coats— is a disappointing compromise. (349)

Clearly, by travelling in one of the local pony carts through Istanbul's narrow streets Woolf was hoping to see more of the charming views that Europeans associate with the East. But instead of encountering the picturesque, the drive uncovers only the most mundane scenes. Nor, it seems, were her feelings of disappointment limited to the men's costumes; it extended to women's clothing and in particular that legendary object of Western fascination—the veil. Woolf begins an entry in her diary by invoking the romantic stereotype of the Eastern woman who hides her legendary beauty beneath the veil to protect her from the rapacious gaze of men; but then she abruptly follows this with a wry comment based on her encounter with one of Constantinople's veiled women:

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And that veil which we heard so much of— because it was typical of a different stage of civilization & so on— is a very frail symbol. Many native women walk bare faced; & the veil the worn is worn casually, & cast aside if the wearer happens to be curious. But it does have so much virtue in it as to suggest that it hides something rare and spotless, so that you gaze all the more at a forbidden face. And then the passionate creature raises her shield for a moment— & you see — a benevolent old spinster, with gold rims to spectacles, trotting out to buy a fowl for dinner. What danger has she got to hide from? Whom would a sight of her face seduce? (353)

If the plunge into the city and the interior of St. Sophia proved disappointing, then Woolf's encounter with the veiled woman turns out to be equally void of romance. Far from being the alluring and erotic figure that Westerners imagine her to be, this veiled woman is just a plain-looking, ordinary housewife going about routine domestic chores. Indeed, Woolf would have us believe that the veil is a sham put there to uphold a culture of male misogyny.

On the other hand, as in Mansfield's writing, the landscape and people of Istanbul constitute a cultural and racial other that is both resentful of, and resistant to, foreign control:

We gazed as we might have gazed at creatures behind a cage; only the truth was that these creatures were neither our captives nor our inferior; they suffered us to watch them; but they would not suffer us to pray with them. (356)

Woolf ends her notebook entry on a reflective note about the eternal gulf separating East from West, and yet she offers no explanation for the source of this gulf other than the differences of race:

No Christian, or European, can hope to understand the Turkish point of view; you are born Christians or Mohammedans as surely as you are born black or white. The difference is in the blood that beats in the pulse. (355)

This conviction that East and West will never be able to understand one another is in direct contrast to Mansfield who, upon encountering

the Tuhoes, chose to play string games with the children and laugh and gossip with the women despite the fact that she knew only a smattering of Maori. Furthermore, where Mansfield romanticized the Tuhoes and their culture, Woolf seems to have held the citizens of Constantinople in fairly low regard. Despite her claim that the Turkish people were not her inferiors we know she judged them to be just that—how else can we explain her almost patronizing description of them as “puppets of an unseen power” (356) and her patriotic declaration that the English are “a great and generous race” (354) after being obliged to pay what she considered to be an outrageously high price for Turkish silk at a local bazaar?

Morris reminds us that Woolf was not above racist generalizations, hence Germans were described as “fat brutes” and Italians were “charming”; however, when faced with the difference of the Turkish people Woolf seems to have gone out her way to keep her sense of Britishness intact. Constantinople was a threatening place for her precisely because once she was caught up in its atmosphere, London and the English did not seem to exist. In Constantinople it was possible to believe that Britain did not even form part of civilization, let alone its heart. There is a passage in her journal where Woolf voices this realization as well as the glimmerings of insecurity it provoked:

You felt yourself in a metropolis; a place where life was being lived successfully. And that did seem strange, &— if I have time to say so, a little uncomfortable. For you also realised that life was not lived after the European pattern, that it was not even a debased copy of Paris or Berlin or London, & that, you thought that was the ambition of towns which could not actually be Paris or any of those inner capitals. As the lights came out in clusters all over the land, & the water was kept busy with lamps, you knew yourself to be the spectator of a vigorous drama, acting itself out with no thought or need of certain great countries yonder to the west. And in all this opulence there was something ominous, & something ignominious. (348)

Clearly, Woolf was shocked by the realization that there were places in the world where life was being lived in a thoroughly orderly fashion without the people having any knowledge of and respect for Western

ideas and customs. What is more, the words “ominous” and “ignominious” alert us to the fact that the alternative civilization to which Constantinople belonged was perceived by Woolf as sufficiently massive and autonomous as to constitute a potential threat to the West.

How can we explain these two very different responses to the cultural other? On the one side there is Mansfield, the educated colonial, with her explicit display of compassion and admiration for the people who were the casualties of British expansion and the new colony’s pursuit of modernity. On the other hand there is Woolf, whose upper class, London-based upbringing afforded her a much stronger connection to English culture as well as a greater identification with Western civilization. Even if we attribute to Woolf the same fierce antipathy toward the excessively chauvinistic, militaristic form of nationalism that culminated in World War I, which she later vigorously lampooned in *Three Guineas* (1938), we are still left with what Sonita Sarker has called her strong affinity for “English cultural nationalism” (1–2). This term incorporates all that is best in English literature and life, including the semi-bohemian lifestyle represented by Bloomsbury, an intellectual tradition that pays more homage to secular forms of learning than religious, plus the principle of parliamentary democracy as opposed to theocracy.

According to Sarker, Woolf was careful to separate her loyalty to English culture from her obligations as a citizen of England. A severe critic of England’s international relations and of its dominant definitions of Englishness for most of her life, she was in 1906 nevertheless caught up in the atmosphere of mounting panic surrounding the supposed decline of modern civilization, should Western Europe be overrun by the fast encroaching “hordes from Asia” (Sarker 2–3). In 1906, the most likely cause of Woolf’s concern was the prevailing influence of Social Darwinism and the related concept of racial degeneration, which proposed that Oriental cultures, including those embracing Islam, were in a state of evolutionary decline.⁴

It would be wrong to conclude, however, that the disappointments caused by what Woolf characterized as the “fanatical” side of religious worship completely coloured her attitude to Istanbul’s people and its culture. Clearly there is much in her descriptions of St. Sophia’s magnificent dome and the colourful panoramic views of the city that suggest

a broadening of her sympathies to the point of intercultural identification. In these moments, it is as if the cultural markers that separate East from West are lost to individual consciousness and a new self, born from an equal blending the two takes its place. Such an experience lay at the heart of Woolf's ability to create one of the most attractive characters in English literature—Orlando, the perfect blend not just of the male and female principles, but also of Eastern and Western cultures.

In the same way that Woolf's positive comments can offset her negative vision of Turkey's modern day religion, so Mansfield's invocation of Social Darwinist beliefs and her romanticizing of the Maori can be seen as compromising her progressivism. Arguably the model of cultural nationalism that was emerging in New Zealand around this same time under the auspices of the Maoriland School of Writing and to which Mansfield seems to have subscribed, was qualitatively different from the cultural nationalism that informed Woolf's writing.⁵ It was, after all, less classed-based and aimed at eulogizing the cultural other to the point of romantic idealization; the Maori were in fact praised for being noble and warlike and their myths and legends were jealously collected. On the other hand, as Michael King has observed, the literature of this era—and we have to include Mansfield's nostalgic notebook observations of the New Zealand landscape and the Maori as type of a lost Arcadia within this category—exhibits deep feelings of nostalgia for what was passing away (282). The problem with this, as Renato Rosaldo and Patrick Brantlinger have more recently pointed out, is that such a nostalgia is insincere based as it is on that false emotion of regret where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have destroyed or transformed, while at the same time implying that it cannot be helped on account of the indigene's inability to compete with the more successful European races (Rosaldo 108).⁶

Reinforcing this claim is the fact that the *Notebook* says little about the real causes of the Tuhoe people's ill health. Nothing is said, for example, about the severe floods and famine that had struck the valley in 1904 causing crop failure and potato blight for the next three years, or about the fact that the Tuhoe's children were dying of typhoid, measles, whooping cough, mumps and influenza—all treatable European-introduced diseases. By simply noting the children's frailness, she implies like

the Social Darwinists that their poor health is the result of being a physically weaker race, and that nothing can be done. Nor does Mansfield refer to the political problems that were plaguing the Tuhoe people. There is no mention, for example, of the New Zealand government's confiscation of thousands of acres of Tuhoe land in the 1860s, which robbed the people of their livelihood, and caused them appalling economic hardship; or of Rua the Prophet, who was in the area at the time of Mansfield's visit and to whom the people had turned for help in their time of despair.⁷ In other words, what we are looking at is a cultural practice that admits of a staple of Social Darwinism, the dying race theory, which implies a failure to take responsibility for the violent dispossession of a whole population and instead blames it on the evolutionary forces of nature.

A further problem haunts the *Notebook's* reliance on primitivist tropes, as seen for example in the description of the Maori girl. While a schoolgirl in London, Mansfield had visited the galleries and seen the primitivist paintings of Gauguin, Matisse and Picasso, so she was aware of European artists' growing fascination with non-Western art forms. According to Helen Carr, this preoccupation is "inextricable from an anxious loss of faith in the Western imperialist project; indeed, a loss of faith in the Western project as a whole" (65). But, as Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush have observed, "this kind of primitivism [also] denotes an Occidental construction, a set of representations whose 'reality' is purely Western" (2). In Mansfield's case, there is no escaping the fact that she readily imposed European literary conventions on both the Tuhoe and the surrounding landscape without stopping to think how this might negate Maori feelings and ideas about these phenomena. Added to this, we cannot rule out the possibility that Mansfield failed to recognize that Tuhoe resentment at Pakeha incursion might have extended to herself and the party she was travelling with; after all, they had come by the very road whose construction the Tuhoe had fought so hard against. All these features suggest that Mansfield's knowledge of the Tuhoe remained fairly superficial, and that despite appearing sympathetic and admiring, she was really interested only in their aesthetic possibilities.

I have already referred to the way that Woolf used some of her notebook entries and her memories of Constantinople as inspiration for her

later modernist writings. The floating bubble effect of St. Sophia's dome was several times taken up and used as a metaphor for expressing the paradox of "weight and weightlessness, granite and rainbow," and "delicacy of treatment with strength of form" (Briggs 179). And although it was the product of a controlling gaze, the memory of the city viewed from the high ground of Pera would serve repeatedly to suggest those epiphany-like moments when light, shape or form suddenly emerge from out of what seems like the prevailing pattern of dark and chaos that characterizes both human consciousness and history.⁸ Highlighting the clash between the sensible world and the idealistic structures of the mind not only helped usher in Woolf's revolutionary realism, or what Eric Auerbach refers to as her "radical transforming of the Western traditions of mimesis" (551), it enabled her to invent characters in whom the sudden "surrender without prejudice" to the "random moment" (552), was felt as tantamount to a momentary glimpse of truth. Finally, Woolf's direct encounter with Turkish women's oppression, and her belief that this had combined with the complete suppression of secular thought to ruin a once great civilization, helped lay the foundation for the strong antipathy towards British patriarchal practices that was to be a defining feature of all her modernist writings.

For her part, Mansfield had in 1908 moved to England with a storehouse of imagery that was specific and unique to New Zealand that she would use in her later fiction. But at this stage of her writing career she was more given to writing about the colliding worlds that modernity had unleashed upon British society. In New Zealand this collision had been obvious in the conflict between the Maori and settler ways of life, but in England it was manifest in the mounting conflict between men and women, the cultural contrasts produced by the class system, and the sudden arrival of swathes of foreigners, including expatriate writers like Mansfield herself for whom class discrimination only added to the shock of exile.⁹ As Vincent O'Sullivan has observed, Mansfield took precisely that aspect of her New Zealand experience that was concerned with the dark or hidden side of colonial culture, and "rephrased it in a way that was central to Europe" (14). This is to suggest that both the writing style and the imagery in *The Urewera Notebook* contributed to the off-beat, anti-bourgeois sensibility that Mansfield cultivated during

her early career as a British-based modernist writer, which she used to mount repeated and scathing attacks on English society. In the same way that it would be misleading to regard Woolf as uniformly condescending towards what she regarded as her cultural others, so it would be wrong to attribute the Mansfield of both the early and late short stories with a fully fledged anti-colonial sensibility. Despite her rebelliousness, she too was a product of European colonialism, as my allusions to her romanticism, her unconscious adherence to Social Darwinist tropes, and her blindness to the Tuhoe's political plight have indicated. Indeed, for all her claims to be alienated from New Zealand's colonial culture, it is safe to assume that many elements of this culture, especially individualism, assertiveness, innovation and women's rights, rubbed off onto her since these are some of the more noticeable qualities that surface in the protagonists of her later short stories.¹⁰

In conclusion, both Woolf and Mansfield kept travel notebooks where they recorded their respective reactions to the cultural other. While Woolf, it seems, surrounded herself with the securities afforded respectively by the tourist mode of travel, the English intellectual tradition and the panoramic gaze, Mansfield was prepared to venture off the beaten track, albeit in the process she resorted to imperialist nostalgia and romanticism. The difference, I suggest was the result mainly of contrasting attitudes towards European culture, itself the result of the different class relations thrown up by European colonialism, and the different models of cultural nationalism to which each was exposed.

Notes

- 1 For a more detailed account of the concept of cultural identity, see Friedman, 2–3. Among other things, Friedman describes cultural identity as a group phenomenon that allows people to make distinctions between themselves and others on the basis that they alone share a particular structured meaningful scheme of human existence. He adds that the ties that are responsible for cultural identity are for the most part ideological and linguistic rather than biological.
- 2 The Maori inhabitants of Te Whaiti spoke English as well as Maori, and wore European hairstyles and clothing.
- 3 Mansfield's dislike of New Zealand's colonial culture is made explicit in the letter she wrote to her sister not long after she returned from the camping trip. Here she says: "I am ashamed of young New Zealand, but what is to be done. All the

firm fat framework of their brains must be demolished before they can begin to learn. They want a purifying influence — a mad wave of pre-Raphaelitism, of super-aestheticism, should intoxicate the country . . . These people have not learned their alphabet yet” (qts. In O’Sullivan 44–45).

- 4 Closely related to this question is the matter of Woolf’s attitude towards Jews. It is important to note that less than two years after journeying to Turkey, Woolf wrote what many critics have described as “a nasty little piece” about London’s Jews. See *Carlyle’s House and Other Sketches*, especially 14–15. Again, the spectre of an Eastern race and culture posing a threat to European civilization, was invoked, only this time the threat was perceived as internal to Britain. Woolf’s attitude towards Jews when she wrote this piece was probably not that much different to mainstream British attitudes. Anxieties about Jews had been building since the 1890s when it became apparent that the large numbers who had migrated from Eastern Europe in the period 1800–1850 were now threatening to become a dominant force. For example, a common perception of Jews at this time was that rather than earning their living through hard labour, they accumulated vast sums of wealth from sharp shopkeeping and money lending. A number of critics, including Marcus, have attempted to defend Woolf from anti-Semitic charges by pointing out that she married a Jew; others like Linett have argued that the scenes featuring Jews that appear especially in Woolf’s later fictions suggest an antipathy that remained unaffected by her marriage. See Marcus 106. See also Linett 344.
- 5 Williams and Stafford point out that it’s difficult to prove conclusively that Mansfield subscribed to the Maoriland School of Writing, nonetheless her romanticizing of Maori in the *Urewera Notebook* was sufficiently similar to its mythologising of Maori as to suggest a strong link. See their *Fashioned Intimacies* 32. For a more detailed account of similarities between Mansfield’s writing style in *The Urewera Notebook* and the Maoriland School of Writing see Williams 357–78.
- 6 See also Brantlinger 4.
- 7 Rua Kenana assumed the leadership of the Ringatu Church in 1906. Many thought he was the new leader that Te Kooti the famous rebel chief and founder of the Ringatu movement had prophesied. The Ringatu religion drew on aspects of the Jewish faith with its idea of “a chosen people.” It was essentially a millennial movement, with Rua offering the people the dream of a better future in a time of great pain and suffering. See Binney, Chaplin, and Wallace 188.
- 8 For a fuller account of how Woolf used the St. Sophia metaphors in her later works, see Briggs 179–86.
- 9 Mansfield had been made acutely aware of British attitudes to colonials while still at school. In a journal entry of 1916 she describes the Principal of Queens College of London thus: “I never came into contact with him but once, when he asked any young lady in the room to hold up her hand if she had been chased by

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a wild bull, and as nobody else did I held up mine (though of course I hadn't). 'Ah', he said 'I am afraid you do not count. You are a little savage from New Zealand'"(Mansfield 105).

- 10 These are the qualities of Mansfield's later works that have been singled out by Kaplan as distinguishing her from the more pro-establishment and class-bound writings of Woolf, the Bloomsbury Circle, and other British-born modernists. As Kaplan herself observes they are features of a pioneering society (14–15).

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