

“Too Inhuman”: The Destabilization of Empire in Woolf’s *The Voyage Out*

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ANT and *The Voyage Out*

Virginia Woolf closes her novel *The Voyage Out* in the lobby of a Brazilian hotel, with the character St. John lying “half asleep, and yet vividly conscious of everything around him. Across his eyes passed a procession of objects, black and indistinct, the figures of people picking up their books, their cards, their balls of wool, their work baskets, and passing him one after another as they went their way to bed” (375). The litany of objects that propagate human work or action in these last few lines contrasts with the relative inactivity of humans, lying or on their way to bed, and situates the non-human as vital agents in the creation of human activity. The realization that the “procession of objects” passing before St. John’s eyes refers to the “figures of people” serves to further confuse a traditional binary that would differentiate between the categories of human and non-human in the novel. In these final lines of *The Voyage Out*, the narrator highlights the essential role the non-human, both biological and inanimate, plays in what might otherwise be thought of as human action (and interaction).

Bruno Latour’s understanding of act-network theory, or ANT, uncovers interactions involving the non-human that may have otherwise gone unobserved. Staging an intervention into traditional meanings of the social, which view it as an explanation for certain groupings or actions, Latour understands the social to be instead a “fluid visible *only* when new associations are being made” (79). In other words, “There is no society, no social realm, and no social ties, *but there exist translations between mediators that may generate traceable associations*” (108). His theory is useful to this project in that it includes as “actors” any thing that can influence or transform a state of affairs (71); he does not relegate social interactions to humans only. He adds that “In addition to ‘determining’ and serving as a ‘backdrop for human action’, things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on” (72). He makes a careful distinction between intermediaries, which “simply transport

meaning without transformation” and mediators, “which transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning of elements they are meant to carry” (39). In *The Voyage Out* the non-human consistently acts as Latourian mediators, impacting networks as much as, if not more than, the characters in the novel, and ultimately destabilizing the efforts of anthropocentric colonial imperatives.

Latour’s theories resonate with Woolf’s own philosophy, articulated in the following oft-quoted excerpt from her “A Sketch of the Past”:

That behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art. *Hamlet* or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare; there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. (72)

Woolf’s hidden “pattern” seems similar to a Latourian social network, a fluid structure that can only be discovered by tracing the interactions or connectivity of different mediators or things. Her insistence that “we,” which initially only refers to “human beings,” must also encompass “words,” “music,” and “the thing itself,” recognizes the agency of the non-human through its involvement in what Derek Ryan has called Woolf’s “world-making,” as opposed to “simply word-making or subject-making” (2).

Uncovering the impact of the non-human accords with many of the ecocritical projects surrounding Woolf studies in the past decade, including those by Ryan and Christina Alt. Ryan, who focuses primarily on Woolf’s work between 1920 and 1930, lays important groundwork for this paper, asserting that “Woolf’s writing offers new conceptualizations of the material world where the immanent and intimate entanglements of human and non-human agencies are brought to the fore” (4). His project seeks to read Woolf’s writings in light of a post-humanist conception of the world, which “accounts for the material entanglements of humans with non-human objects, animals, and environments” (12), a theory informed by Gilles Deleuze. Ryan also draws from new materialist theory, which is helpful in that it understands all matter to have agency (13). Additional works by Liesl Olson and Douglas Mao, which examine Woolf’s objects in terms of the ordinary and consumerism, respectively, will also inform this paper’s discussion of non-human agency. None of these projects expressly link the non-human to anti-imperialist agendas in Woolf’s work, or use Latour’s theories to do so, which is where this paper hopes to contribute to the critical discussion.

Considerable attention has also been paid to anti-imperialist sentiments in Woolf’s *oeuvre* through work by Jane Marcus, Bonnie Kime Scott, Julia Briggs,

and Kathy J. Phillips. Marcus asserts that “India and often Africa is a haunting presence in all of Woolf’s fiction” (70), pointing to Woolf’s interest in exploring British colonial relations. Though Brazil, the native land featured in *The Voyage Out*, was not part of the British Empire, it still serves as a space where the British Empire may be investigated. Bonnie Kime Scott asserts that, though Woolf avoids a British colonial setting in *The Voyage Out*, like Conrad, “she invites reflections on imperialism and offers characters whose personal histories intertwine with empire” (139). Compounding this technique is the way British culture, by way of newspapers, letters, or even observance of tea times, seeps into the South American country throughout the novel. Scott speaks further to Woolf’s development of anti-imperialist sentiments explaining that, “as she became increasingly aware of feminist and pacifist standpoints, Woolf grew skeptical of “‘Englishness’—national identification with a place often used to promote patriarchal and national projects, including war” (114). Connecting the novel’s strong anti-imperialist undercurrent to the study of the non-human, I hope to put post-colonial and ecocritical scholarship into conversation with each other, and, in doing so, illuminate Woolf’s use of the non-human to undermine colonial imperatives.

Revealing Non-Human Mediators

Woolf’s interest in what Olsen terms the ordinary—daily, often mundane tasks, objects, and settings— informs the investigation of the non-human in *The Voyage Out*. Drawing from Woolf’s “A Sketch of the Past,” Olsen explains how Woolf differentiated between “moments of being” and “moments of non-being,” the latter of which Olsen aligns with the ordinary. While moments of being seem to represent to Woolf experiences that are mentally stimulating and vividly remembered, moments of non-being account for forgotten time, often taken up in ordinary tasks, such as “washing, cooking dinner, and bookbinding” (62), the examples Olsen lists for Woolf. In order to participate in each of these ordinary tasks, the human must rely on objects (clothes, water, food, pots, books), a trend that showcases the ordinary’s involvement with the non-human. Olsen uses her discussion of the ordinary to examine Woolf’s construction of character in *Mrs. Dalloway*, but this paper will extend her ideas to examine the impact of the ordinary, which is grounded in the non-human, on the social action of the novel.

A passage from Chapter IX of *The Voyage Out* demonstrates the impact of the non-human ordinary as it illuminates the dependence of human action on the non-human. The chapter opens with a description of the evening habits of several different characters in the hotel. The reader moves from room to room watching first Miss Allen, who “folded her clothes with neat, if not loving fingers, screwed

her hair into a plait, wound her father's great gold watch, and opened the complete works of Wordsworth" (103), then Susan Warrington, who prepares for bed by brushing her hair while looking in the mirror and recording the day's events in a journal (104). This is followed by a brief description of Mr. Elliot, who comes late to the room, and answers his wife's complaint, "You know that I can never sleep when I'm waiting for you," with a terse "Well then, we'll turn out the light" (105), and, finally, a few lines about Old Mrs. Paley, who "having woken hungry but without her spectacles, was summoning her maid to find the biscuit-box" (105). Before turning to the next scene, the narrator concludes, "The maid having answered the bell, drearly respectful at this hour though muffled in mackintosh, the passage was left in silence" (105). While these ordinary interactions doubtless offer valuable insights into the characters Woolf is introducing, as Olsen might assert, of more interest to this project is the dependence of characters in the novel on the non-human to achieve action in these few scenes. All of the actions listed above require interaction with objects: Miss Allen needs the book to read and write and the watch to mark the time; Susan Warrington uses of the brush and mirror to jumpstart musings on her physical attractiveness and its potential to secure her a husband; Mr. Elliot requires the light switch to effectively end a conversation he doesn't want to have; and Mrs. Paley demands the biscuit, and the biscuit-box, to satisfy her hunger. The grammatical positioning of "the passage" as the section's final subject also figures it and by extension the non-human as important actors in the social.

These ordinary moments of non-being actually represent the Latourian social as driven by non-human actors. Latour explains that an actor is "what is made to act by many others" (49), stressing the interconnectivity of each actor's action and the fact that not all actors may be human. The "social" interaction that occurs for example, between Mrs. Paley and her maid, is actually created through an intricate network of non-human actors: the bell that calls for the maid, the passage that allows her to reach Mrs. Paley, the biscuits which prompted the ring, and the biscuit-box which has kept the biscuits from becoming stale through interaction with the surrounding air. The absence of Mrs. Paley's spectacles, possibly hidden by another object in the room, also contributes to the action of the scene by making it necessary for the maid to come. Remove any of these pieces from the network and the "drearly respectful" (105) response from the maid, which constitutes the traditional social of the scene, could not occur. While perhaps forgettable in the span of the novel, this scene nevertheless offers one of the many instances of non-human supported networks that allow for human action, a phenomenon that this paper will now move to investigate on a larger scale.

Reorganizing Networks

The non-human in *The Voyage Out* generates many of the pivotal scenes for Rachel Vinrace, the protagonist, a fact that may upset readings of the novel that figure it as a type of bildungsroman or journey to sexual and social maturity. These types of readings would take for granted that, more than anything, people stimulate the protagonist's development—those who teach her, wrong her, inspire her, rescue her, or love her—and fail to take into account the other actors that may be involved. But, scenes seemingly indicative of Rachel's development, including Rachel's kiss with Richard, first meeting with Terence, and debate with Terence after their engagement, also promote anti-imperialist sentiments when understood by Latour's actor-network theory. The revelation of non-human impact on what may have been considered human action works as part of an effort to destabilize an anthropocentric imperialist system, for it minimizes the impact of humans in the larger network of the world.

Before analyzing this effort, it is necessary to fully explain the difference between Latourian mediators and intermediaries. An intermediary, as mentioned earlier, "transports meaning or force without transformation," while mediators "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning of elements they are meant to carry" (Latour 39). Put another way, intermediaries have no effect on the world around them; they do not stimulate action. An example might be a piece of mail waiting on a doorstep to be read. Unread and unnoticed, it remains an intermediary. It would also remain an intermediary if it was read but forgotten or disregarded. But, if someone reads it and responds to it, sending another letter, that original piece of mail becomes a mediator; it has effected change. A mediator also possesses the power to "make others do unexpected things" (Latour 106), while for an intermediary, "defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs" (Latour 39). Mediators set chains of action in motion, often in multiple directions, while intermediaries do nothing to effect the current network.

Rachel's kiss with Richard Dalloway marks a first place where non-human mediators effect change in humans. Upon leaving his cabin, Richard encounters a mediating wind that "buffet[s]" him, causing him to walk with "his head slightly lowered" as he "sheer[s] round the corners" (75). His responsive posture then couples with the physical dimensions of the boat, the next set of mediators, and cause the "collision" between him and Rachel that jumpstarts their conversation. Because they are "too blown about to speak," Rachel opens the door of her cabin and "steps into the calm. In order for him to speak to her, it was necessary that Richard should follow" (75). The weather and the ship's particular geography, including the calm cabin, modify what might have been a casual greeting offered in passing.

Once in the room, the surrounding objects encourage conversation, such as the papers, music, and the books *Cowper's Letters*, and *Wuthering Heights*. The two try to communicate for a moment without the aid of objects, though Richard's question to her, "What are your interests and occupations?" (76), relies inadvertently on things. Rachel's response, "You see, I'm a woman," allows him to begin to express his admiration for her—"How strange to be a woman! A young and beautiful woman . . . what couldn't you do" (76)—and seems to set the stage for romantic, human-generated action. Had he made the move to kiss her right then, it would be easy to only read the scene as an initiation into an adult world of gendered roles. However, their kiss comes as an unexpected result of the interaction between the ship and ocean, two non-human mediators. The narrator explains that, in the midst of Richard's speech, "The ship lurched. Rachel fell slightly forward. Richard took her in his arms and kissed her," making the kiss seem an accidental aftereffect of a fall caused by the interaction of the waves and the ship rather than a human-initiated action. The moment of the novel that might otherwise be read as the awakening of Rachel's sexuality by a sexually-experienced male is actually caused by an elaborate interplay of non-human mediators. Human intention becomes irrelevant as the novel shows the most influential actions to be accidental and generated by the non-human.

Rachel and Helen's subsequent visit to the hotel, where they first meet Rachel's future fiancé Terence, is likewise made possible by nonhuman mediators. The women are guided up to the hotel by a "completely straight" "avenue of trees" that runs alongside the road (100). Then, "the trees suddenly came to an end; the road turned a corner, and they found themselves confronted by a large, square building." (100). The juxtaposition of verbs modifying the non-human, such as "turned" and "confronted" with the verb modifying the humans, "found," points to a network generated by the former. The fact that "found" is used as a reflexive verb points to the self-interested, anthropocentric tendency of humans, at this point in the novel, to believe they themselves are effecting all change.

Rachel and Helen realize they are on the terrace, next to "a row of long windows...They were all of them uncurtained, and all of them brilliantly lighted, so that they could see everything inside. Each window revealed a different section of life in the hotel" (100). The architecture of the hotel, along with the help of the electric lights, make possible Rachel and Helen's first interaction with its guests, compelling them to move closer to look and mediating the network about to be created. Unbeknownst to them, even as they watch the others, Rachel and Helen are watched by St John, who goes unnoticed at first because he is hidden behind "a spot where the curtain hung in folds." The non-human dominates the scenes framed by the windows as well, such as the chessboard, books, newspapers, letter, and sewing materials. The meeting of our main characters, Rachel and Helen, with

Terence and St. John is the effect of the interaction between trees, the road, windows, electric lights, and curtains. The meeting then allows the next to occur—the voyage up the mountain—which is, of course, arranged by letter (125), as so many of Rachel and Terence’s future interactions will be (222-3). Woolf’s emphasis on the non-human in these interactions deconstructs human intent and impact and begins to underscore an anti-imperialist agenda.

In addition to heightening the action generated by the non-human, the novel concurrently works to minimize the effect of human action. A notable example occurs when, newly engaged, Terence and Rachel begin debate the merits of music and poetry, but turn to discuss their understandings of how they are connected to the world (or network) around them. In defense of poetry, Terence decides to read Rachel some unnamed verse:

But she paid no attention, and after an interval of meditation she exclaimed:
. . . . “Does it ever seem to you, Terence, that the world is composed entirely of vast blocks of matter, and that we’re nothing but patches of light—” she looked at the soft spots of sun wavering over the carpet and up the wall—
“like that?”

“No,” said Terence, “I feel solid; immensely solid; the legs of my chair might be rooted in the bowels of the earth”

Rachel continued, “The day your note came, asking us to go on the picnic, I was sitting where you’re sitting now, thinking that; I wonder if I could think that again? I wonder if the world’s changed, and if so, when it will stop changing, and which is the real world?” (292-3).

This exchange is notable because of the characters’ dependence on the non-human in the room to express their connection to the network surrounding them, but more importantly it demonstrates a change in perspective for Rachel, one that is different from that of Terence. Terence’s understanding of himself as “immensely solid” and unmoving implies a positioning of himself as central in his world, a sun around which everything else orbits, the British Empire itself. For all intents and purposes, he is his world, connected directly to its center. Rachel, on the other hand, sees the transience and the minimal impact humans have on the larger world around her. The “real world,” which she is just beginning to discover, is one where humans do not have complete control, but merely pass through as “patches of light” in a room, impacting change when they work as mediators, but otherwise leaving the non-human, “the vast blocks of matter” ready for the next human to pass over. Rachel sees herself and other humans as mere intermediaries.

The timing of this realization is also important, for it occurs in the first scene where the reader observes Rachel since the trip upriver, where she presumably

caught the disease that will kill her. She has, at this point, been contaminated by a mediator that will produce most unexpected effects, and her understanding of the world begins to change accordingly. Her description of the world as “vast blocks of matter” echoes Woolf’s labeling of the world as a “vast mass” in “A Sketch of the Past”. It seems that, for Rachel, the “cotton wool” has been lifted as a result of her interactions with mediators on her voyage upriver. The focus of the novel becomes less about Rachel and more about the ways in which the non-human, as mediators, progressively destabilize human imperatives like love, or even empire. “Humans beings,” so often the subject of Rachel’s gaze (135) and thoughts are revealed to be controlled by non-human mediators, a revelation that upsets anthropocentric imperatives in the novel.

Love and empire are more connected than they may appear to be. Throughout the novel, Rachel searches to find unity and connection, most especially to Terence, and repeatedly fails to do so. Shortly after the “patches of light” discussion, she wonders “Would there ever be a time when the world was one and indivisible? Even with Terence himself—how far apart they could be, how little she knew what was passing in his brain now!” (296). Similarly, Terence later resents “the force outside them that was separating them” (332). It is not until Rachel is dead that Terence notes, “They had now what they had always wanted to have, the union which had been impossible while they lived” (353). Only at the extreme intervention of a non-human mediator can the two young lovers connect. The impossibility of direct human to human connection discredits any larger human project, such as imperialism, that would require humans to join together, forming a unified, dominant network.

As Rachel’s sickness progresses, Terence too becomes aware of their limited impact on networks around them. Rachel’s “real world” realization is echoed in Terence’s thoughts as Rachel is dying. The “picture of all the world that lay outside his window” (345) is overwhelmed by dominant nature—“the immense river and the immense forest,” “the vast stretches of dry earth and the plains of the sea,” the “enormous” sky—which seems all the more powerful when contrasted with the “tiny men and women” living in the “few” towns “scattered here and there” (345). More abstractly, he moves to think of the world as “vast” and “a great space” (345), terms reminiscent of those Rachel uses in her realization. Dwarfed by the natural non-human, Terence concludes:

Oh, it was absurd, when one thought of it, to sit here in a little room suffering and caring. What did anything matter? Rachel, a tiny creature, lay ill beneath him, and here in his little room he suffered on her account. The nearness of their bodies in this vast universe, and the minuteness of their

bodies, seemed to him absurd and laughable. Nothing mattered, he repeated; they had no power, no hope. (345-6)

The powerlessness, minuteness, and ineffectiveness of the humans Terence describes continue to showcase the futility of human imperatives, such as imperialism. The “cotton wool” that might have perpetuated anthropocentric views of the world’s networks has been ripped away.

Perhaps the most compelling example of the impact of the non-human world over humanity occurs through Rachel’s death by disease, one which makes her bed “become very important, and the world outside, which when she tried to think of it, appeared distinctly further off” (329). The disease works effectively to separate Rachel from the human-oriented world in which she has been participating: “Every object in the room” becomes “more important to her,” until she is “completely cut off, and unable to communicate with the rest of the world, isolated in her own body” (330). Importantly, these effects are caused not by another human in general or Brazilian in particular, but by a native organism. By attributing her death to a non-human, Woolf transcends a conflict that would have pitted British citizen against Brazilian native, a conflict that certainly would have highlighted tension between the two cultures. In this way, she destabilizes the established binary of colonizer vs. colonized, and takes another important step to disempowering the imperialist project.

Dissolution of Empire

Woolf solidifies her anti-imperialist stance, which is highlighted by Terence’s and Rachel’s transformed world-views and furthered by Rachel’s meaningless death, through her critical portrayal of the environment and commodities. She problematizes imperialist agendas through the tension produced between the ideology of British patriotism and the physical reality of the island’s size. Clarissa Dalloway’s impassioned exclamation that “one couldn’t bear *not* to be English!” (51) exemplifies a type of blind patriotism required to engage in colonial imperatives. But patriotism becomes limited as a country’s non-human resources fail to sustain its population. The novel addresses this problem in its opening sentence, which features England as too small for the current population to act effectively (or together): “As the streets that lead from the strand to the Embankment are very narrow, it is better not to walk down them arm-in-arm” (9). Later, Brazil becomes similarly overcrowded with the English, as “every ship that came from England left a few people on the shores of Santa Marina” (220), hinting again at the inability of humans to sustain themselves, much less their anthropocentric ideologies without the non-human.

Off-shore, patriotism is espoused and satirized through the figures of Richard and Clarissa Dalloway, who are traveling due to “one of the accidents of political life” that has presumably left Richard unelected to Parliament for a term, “with a view to broadening” his mind (39). The narrator remarks that “For this purpose, the Latin countries did very well, although the East, of course, would have been better” (39), alluding to the Dalloways’ understanding of foreign countries as a type of commodity used to help bolster both Richard’s career and England’s larger imperial project. In fact, the Dalloways are encircled by commodities from the moment they enter the novel. Clarissa appears “wrapped in furs, her head in veils” while Richard stands “surrounded” by “many solid leather bags of a rich brown hue” (40). Richard also “carried a dispatch box, and his wife a dressing-case suggestive of diamond necklaces and bottle with silver tops” (40). Surrounded by objects and objectifying other cultures, the Dalloways work to dominate the things around them, an effort that accords with their imperialist sympathies.

Mao accounts for how modernist theoretical problems were connected to practical confrontations with objects in commodity culture, asserting:

The two questions of the existential dilemma—that of how meaning can inhere in Being, and that of how human lives can be lived meaningfully—both seem to find a possible resolution in production, inasmuch as the subject appears to do something meaningful in leaving a trace on the object world, while the object world appears to accede to meaning through the work of the subject upon it. (20)

Acting upon objects gives the Dalloways the illusion of productivity, of a meaningful life; yet their reliance on these commodities to validate their positions as subjects demonstrates their dependence on the non-human in their world-making.

In the last paragraphs of his chapter on Woolf, “The Test of Production”, Mao considers *Between the Acts* and indicates that “abstract domination over objects can converge with actual domination of humans and the actual destruction of the object world” (88). This philosophy is contextualized in the following passage from *The Voyage Out* where Rachel gazes at a view of the Brazilian shore: “The water was very calm Probably no human being had ever broken that water with boat or body. Obeying some impulse, she determined to mar that eternity of peace and threw the largest pebble she could find. It struck the water, and the ripples spread out and out” (210-11). Rachel’s “impulse” to “mar” or make her mark on the non-human situates the desire to conquer as an innate human imperative, one that even the most innocuous character could embody. It also

highlights the human's dependence on the non-human to create this effect. Rachel could not "mar" without some thing to mar. Her interaction with the environment serves as a microcosm in which human action requires the non-human to sustain it.

The non-human in the form of commodities also inspires the trip up-river. Seeing that Rachel has become "restless" as she watches her paint in her hotel room, Mrs. Flushing encourages her to "'Open the wardrobe . . . and look at the things'" (234), which include "shawls, stuffs, cloaks, embroideries . . . beads, brooches, earrings, bracelets, tassels, and combs" (234) that Mr. Flushing buys "cheap" off of natives and sells to "'smart women in London'" (235). It is the mediating capacity of the things themselves that allow for the economic gain of the Flushings as well as the visual perpetuation of social class in London. Regarding the objects then motivates Mrs. Flushing to travel upriver herself—an idea she and Rachel flesh out during the remainder of the scene on various slips of paper (235).

Imperialist characters are so entrenched in their dependence on the non-human to perpetuate their agendas that they frequently figure other humans as objects in their interactions with them. Like the objects used to perpetuate empire, women are used—objectified through marriage and commodified for their (re)productive capacities—in the interest of empire. The projection of the human/object dynamic onto one of the few instances where humans act as mediators (procreation) again diminishes human agency. It shows that humans must act as objects in order for humans to be mediators.

The unexpectedness of Rachel's death in what seemed to be a traditional marriage plot has generated multiple readings of the text's stance on marriage and larger questions of gender, class, and race, as June Cummins and Andrea Lewis have shown. In particular Christine Froula's understanding that Rachel died rather than enter, by marriage, into the patriarchal society of England provides compelling insight into the novel's final chapters. However, so many other couples abound in the novel, including the newly engaged Susan Warrington and Mr. Venning, that Rachel's death, as a statement against marriage, seems to be somewhat obscured. Additionally, there are several female characters that are able to refuse marriage while remaining alive, including the much-sought after Evelyn Murgatroyd and Miss Allen, who supports herself by writing scholarly texts. Given the actions of these other characters, this paper will extend Froula's reading of Rachel's death as a statement against the patriarchy to one that reads it in terms of its relation to empire. As already mentioned, Rachel's death by disease serves to demonstrate the agency of the non-human mediators over human ones. This is especially the case here, as her death before marriage prevents her from procreating, one of the very few interactions that requires only human mediators to effect change.

Through marriage, English women legally became the “property” of their husbands (Marcus 26), relegating them to object status. Woolf’s labeling of English marriage as slavery (Marcus 26) infuses this status with anti-colonial sentiment. It is no surprise then that Richard Dalloway, the novel’s staunch patriot, also expresses the “utter folly and futility” of women’s suffrage (43), for empire is inextricably linked with the oppression of women in the novel. Peopling land, and even sending people to a land, like the fictional Santa Marina, is accomplished institutionally through the objectification of women in marriage and childbearing. After the Elizabethans conquered the land through the extraction of its commodities—“bars of silver, bales of linen, timbers of cedar wood, golden crucifixes knobbed with emeralds” (68)—the narrator explains, “Settlement was made; women were imported; children grew. All seemed to favor the expansion of the British Empire” (89). The description shows a chain of events where native goods are exported while women are imported, both for the perpetuation of empire. Figuring women as commodities links issues of marriage and procreation to the “abstract domination of objects” that Mao warns can turn into “actual domination of humans” (88): the imperialist agenda. Concerns of production inform concerns of reproduction.

Children, the products of marriage, are often the ones perpetuating the empire in the novel. Clarissa heralds the “boys from little country villages” that help secure land for the British (50-51). Mrs. Thronbury, who has an unidentified number of sons in the navy, two more in the army, and “one son who makes speeches at the Union—my baby” (113) further exemplifies the role of children in perpetuating empire. During the course of the novel, one of Mrs. Thornbury’s sons is even made “governor of the Carroway Islands” (294), as Terence tells Rachel when reading Mrs. Thornbury’s letter congratulating them on their engagement. He approvingly explains that Ralph is “the youngest governor in the service; very good, isn’t it?” (294). The fact that this information interrupts Rachel and Terence’s discussion of their future highlights the threat of imperialism that comes with marriage and rearing children.

Demands of the British government are further tied to the practice of childbearing through the character of Mrs. Elliot, who is unable to have children. Mrs. Elliot interrupts Mrs. Thronbury’s discussion of the roles of women in their time: “‘Dreadful, dreadful!’ exclaimed Mrs. Elliot. ‘The crown, as one may call it, of a woman’s life. I, who know what it is to be childless—’ she sighed and ceased.” (115-116). Calling children “the crown” of a woman’s life highlights the thinly veiled imperialist agenda of childbearing in the novel. Of course, Hughling Elliot, Mrs. Elliot’s husband, does not die when he contracts a disease during his stay in Brazil, but comes out of it seemingly unscathed, playing chess in the final paragraphs of the novel with the same vigor with which he plays it the first night

Rachel and Helen saw him through the hotel windows. Perhaps it is because they will not procreate that the novel allows him to live. Rachel, on the other hand, who presumably would have given birth to the children she and Terence imagine together (294), dies, demonstrating the ability of the non-human to override anthropocentric efforts.

The Brazilian landscape also overpowers humans, as it consistently dwarfs characters in another of the novel's anti-imperial efforts. When this happens, the character often has a momentary panic, as if they are remembering they do not have control over the world. Clarissa's complaint about views, "they're too inhuman" (59), articulates this fear precisely. Viewing the Brazilian landscape, or any landscape, causes a human to be confronted with too much non-human, and the subsequent realization of her relative powerlessness. Reaching the top of the mountain, the group of travelers behold "an immense space—grey sands running into forest, and forest merging in mountains, and mountains washed by air,—the infinite distances of South America The effect of so much space was at first rather chilling. They felt themselves very small, and for some time no one said anything" (131-2). Here is another moment when the "cotton wool" is lifted—when human beings in the novel realize, however fleetingly, the extensive network creating their world and their relatively small impact on it. As part of her argument that characters desire to subordinate nature to human reason, Christina Alt claims that "the travelers [in *The Voyage Out*] combat this sense of their own insignificance by offering judgments of the view—'Splendid!'—and inscribing the vastness with human meaning by iterating the points of the compass, 'North—South—East—West'" (Alt 94). The ultimate failure to withstand nature demonstrates again the agency of the non-human mediators in the novel and the relative powerlessness of the human.

Latour claims that ANT exposes asymmetries in power that the traditional understanding of the social glosses over. At the end of his book, Latour argues that the sociology of the social, which he critiques for overlooking many of the non-human mediators that generate social networks:

has always been very strongly linked to the superiority of the West—including, of course, its shame at being so overpowering and hegemonic. So if you really think that the future common world can be better composed by using nature and society as the ultimate meta-language, then ANT is useless. It might become interesting only if what was called in the recent past 'The West' decides to rethink how it should present itself to the rest of the world that is soon to become more powerful. After having registered the sudden new weakness of the former West and trying to imagine how it could survive a bit longer in the future to maintain its place in the sun, we have to establish

connections with others that cannot possibly be held in the nature/society collectors. Or, to use another ambiguous term, we just might have to engage in cosmopolitics. (262)

Latour's final message resonates eerily with the problem confronting the characters in *The Voyage Out*. Old binaries that privilege society over nature give way when examined under Latour's theory, since both categories are actually made up of interconnecting networks that include human and non-human mediators, a realization that Rachel and Terence approach by the end of the novel. Other binaries that would subjugate colonized to colonizer, or even woman to man, are likewise dissolved. ANT's shattering of the social façade that formerly empowered the West can also speak to the issues of imperialism in the novel. The British Empire, heralded as all-powerful, becomes simply a title that is used to mask a network of mediators. What actually sustains the empire is a network of non-human mediators that can easily overpower the human "patches of light" passing through.

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