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Cinderella Writes Back: Sara Jeannette Duncan's Mary Trent as Canada Personified

Cendrillon répond : Mary Trent de Sara Jeannette Duncan, le Canada personnifié

Tihana Klepač

Abstract

Sara Jeannette Duncan concerned herself overtly with the debates about the status of Canada within the British Empire by critiquing Canada's place within that empire. Her Mary Trent of *Cousin Cinderella* arrives in London at the height of the preferential trade debate, thus enabling Duncan to illuminate the issue of Anglo-colonial relations. Formulating Mary as ignorant of her wealth and potential (and thus personifying Canada), and positioning her against Evelyn, an American social climber, gives Duncan the opportunity to depict what it means to be Canadian. While Mary comes to London with the idea that England is home, we observe as her pride in her Canadian origins increases. Additionally, through Mary's unique female Canadian vantage point, as we watch her develop from a raw product commodified by the London market into a writer through the creation of her autobiographical narrative, one with increased confidence in herself as a Canadian and a woman, we learn how economic and political workings of imperialism affected women. At the nexus of imperialism, nationalism and feminism emerges a narrative of Canadian modernity.

Keywords: Sara Jeannette Duncan, *Cousin Cinderella*, Anglo-colonial relations, imperialism, nationalism

Résumé

Sara Jeannette Duncan s'intéressait ouvertement aux débats sur le statut du Canada dans l'Empire en critiquant la position du Canada dans l'empire. Sa Mary Trent de *Cousin Cinderella* arrive à Londres à l'apogée du débat sur échanges préférentiels permettant ainsi à Duncan d'éclairer la question des relations anglo-coloniales. Elaborer Mary comme ignorante de sa richesse et de son potentiel (et ainsi personnifier le Canada), et la positionner contre Evelyn, un grimpeur social américain, donne à Duncan l'occasion de décrire ce que signifie être Canadien. Pendant que Mary vient à Londres pour interpréter l'Angleterre comme son chez-soi, nous voyons s'accroître sa fierté de ses origines canadiennes. De plus, grâce à l'unique point de vue féminin canadien de Mary, tandis que nous la voyons se développer à partir d'un produit brut transformé par le marché de Londres



en écrivaine à travers la création de son récit autobiographique, celle dont une confiance en elle-même en tant que Canadienne et femme s'accroît, nous apprenons comment les fonctionnements économiques et politiques de l'impérialisme ont affecté les femmes. À la croisée de l'impérialisme, du nationalisme et du féminisme ressort un récit de la modernité canadienne.

Mots-clés : Sara Jeannette Duncan, *Cousin Cinderella*, relations anglo-coloniales, impérialisme, nationalisme

In the 2003 Introduction to her influential *Survival*, Margaret Atwood claims that although “The erstwhile molehill of Canlit has grown into a mountain” (11), one still has to deal with the issues of its existence and its distinctness as Colonial Mentality, a belief “that the Great Good Place, was, culturally elsewhere” (5), is still present in Canada. In the chapter “Family Portrait: Masks of the Bear” Atwood, discussing the period of the formulation of the nation following exploration and settlement, fittingly detects three symbols of vital importance for Canadian identity: “the English Island, the American Frontier and the Canadian Survival” (2003: 157) as dominant concerns of the period. And yet, even though it is precisely those symbols that Sara Jeannette Duncan concerns herself with in her two most popular novels – namely, *The Imperialist* and *Cousin Cinderella* – she remains off the edge of Atwood’s study.

Faye Hammill gives two reasons for this. She claims that Duncan’s writing was too self-aware to fit the model proposed by Atwood, arguing that “instead of unconsciously accepting a limited range of recognizably Canadian (and largely nature-based) symbols, she invented new ones” (2003: 59). Consequently Hammill describes Atwood’s, Frye’s and D. G. Jones’s frame of reference in reading Canadian literature as too restrictive and, ironically, accuses them of “garrison mentality” (2003: 60).¹ The other reason is the fact that Duncan never closely identified herself with a national literary tradition (2003: 60). Hammill suggests that the reason for that may be that there was no literary tradition she could identify with.

In contrast, I would argue that in the modernist age of increased interaction between nations and intercontinental exchange of ideas Duncan, who according to Tausky was “always conscious of being a modern woman” (1980: 20–21), wished to participate in those and deal with the above-mentioned English Island, American Frontier and Canadian Survival by putting them in the context of Canadian modernity, rejecting

1) The term “garrison mentality” was actually coined by Northrop Frye in his 1965 “Conclusion” to the *Literary History of Canada* in 1965. It was further explored by Margaret Atwood in her *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (originally published in 1972).



“aggressive parochialism” (Tausky in Hammill 2003: 61). In her journalistic piece “Saunterings” of 30 September 1886 Duncan writes:

A spirit of depreciation of such faint stirrings of literary life as we have amongst us at present has often been remarked in Canadians, a tendency to nip forth-putting buds by contemptuous comparison with the full blown production of other lands, where conditions are more favourable to literary efflorescence. This is a distinctly colonial trait; and in our character as colonists we find the root of all our sins of omission in letters. ... Our enforced political humility is the distinguishing characteristic of every phase of our national life. We are ignored, and we ignore ourselves. A nation's development is like a plant's, unattractive under ground. So long as Canada remains in political obscurity, content to thrive only at the roots, so long will the leaves and blossoms of art and literature be scanty and stunted products of our national energy. (Duncan in Ballstadt 1975: 35)

Rejecting what Margaret Atwood could in 1972 refer to as Colonial Mentality (or in Australia the Cultural Cringe),² Duncan resembles Atwood and the nationalist critics much more than they are ready to admit.

Yet, as a result of Duncan's specific historical moment – namely, that of Canadian modernity – her literature blends loyalty to and faith in her country and the social order with her commitment to the future of the Empire and her personal identification with British history and British mission. Like many of her contemporaries, she saw the Empire as a bulwark against the destructive social effects of materialist capitalism; an effective check on US militarism; and a preserve for the ideals of justice, disinterested debate, altruism, and community which were threatened by the conditions of modern life. Her work speaks to the contradiction, as common among Canadians of her day as of ours, between commitment to the ideals of our European heritage and suspicion of its imperialist motives, to the difference that is Canadian point of view. (Dean 1991: 4–5)

This interpretation of Duncan's attitude toward Britain and America, as well as her vision of Canada, stems, I would argue, from the understanding of modernity as that slippery term which, to use Susan Friedman's words, “has no single meaning, not even in one location. This polylogue...voices particular views shaped by different planetary

2) The term “cultural cringe” was introduced by the noted Australian commentator A. A. Phillips in his 1950 *Meanjin* essay of the same name; there he put a name on the submissive mentality from which a settler colony is not released following its nominal independence: “We cannot shelter from invidious comparisons behind the barrier of a separate language; we have no long-established or interestingly different cultural tradition to give security and distinction to its interpreters; and the centrifugal pull of the great cultural metropolises works against us. Above our writers – and other artists – looms the intimidating mass of Anglo-Saxon culture. Such a situation almost inevitably produces the characteristic Australian Cultural Cringe...” (299).



positionalities. Globally and locally, modernity appears infinitely expandable” (Friedman 2010: 473). She adds

Modernism became a reflection of and engagement with a wide spectrum of historical changes, including intensified and alienating urbanization; the cataclysms of world war and technological progress run amok; the rise and fall of European empires; changing gender, class, and race relations; and technological inventions that radically changed the nature of everyday life, work, mobility, and communication. Once modernity became the defining cause of aesthetic engagements with it, the door opened to thinking about the specific conditions of modernity for different genders, races, sexualities, nations, and so forth. Modernity became modernities, a pluralization that spawned a plurality of modernisms and the circulations among them. (Friedman 2010: 474)

Understanding modernity in its plurality, understanding that in Canada cultural nationalism and modernism can and do work side by side in the production of modernity,³ one cannot but say that each modernity produced its own modernism, and Duncan's is one of the many on the international stage at the turn of the nineteenth century; it is one fraught with identification of Canadianness against former colonial masters, and against its aggressive southern neighbour. This is especially evident in Duncan's *Cousin Cinderella*.

The novel describes the visit of two Canadian siblings, Mary and Graham Trent, children of a rich Canadian businessman, to England at the beginning of the twentieth century. There they encounter their rich American friend Evelyn Dicey, who has quickly become part of the London society. She introduces the Trents to the Pavisay-Doleford family, and it soon becomes clear that she has an interest in marrying young Lord Peter Doleford. However, it is Mary who ends up marrying Peter, while Graham (though for a time blinded by his infatuation with the Pavis Court which is the Doleford family home and intending to marry Peter's sister Barbara), ultimately realises the mistake he was about to make, breaks off the engagement, and returns home to Canada.

Duncan herself arrived in England at about the same time the Trents did, in 1903, in the year Joseph Chamberlain delivered his famous “I Believe in a British

3) Modern is, especially following Mao and Walkowitz's “The New Modernist Studies,” increasingly seen as a “critical practice, a mode of responding to social and economic modernity” (Snaith 2014: 6–7), and this new expansiveness of modernist studies enabled the inclusion of writers which would not conventionally be considered modernist – Duncan, but also Sarojini Naidu or Olive Schreiner. Their “critical engagement with modernity can be found precisely in their feminist response to colonialism. And that response, in turn, finds expression in a range of stylistic experiments with perspective, narrative voice, temporality and imagery. Their modernity resonates on many levels: as writers, as colonials, as single women on the streets of London, and through their challenging of the cultural and spatial hierarchies of global, imperial space” (Snaith 2014: 8).



Empire” speech wherein, much like in his 1897 speech “The True Conception of the Empire,” Chamberlain admitted that past relationships with the colonies were not commendable, but the “feeling of Imperial patriotism” has not been extinguished. At the beginning of the new century he wished to rekindle that feeling. The British Crown was painfully aware that the power relations within the Empire had changed: “The United States, with all their vast territory, are filling up; and even now we hear of tens of thousands of emigrants leaving the United States in order to take up the fresh and rich lands of our colony in Canada” (Chamberlain). Fearing the loss of influence, and even more importantly of wealth, Chamberlain is urging the peoples of the Empire to think what their separation from Britain would mean to their “power and influence as a country; ... [their] position among the nations of the world; [their] trade and commerce – I put that last” (Chamberlain). He openly states that the “empire could only be maintained by ‘relations of interest as well as relations of sentiment’” (Snaith 95). By singling out Canada as the most prosperous of the colonies, he reinforced “his point that only through preferential tariffs could Britain reciprocate Canada’s generosity” (Snaith 95). His final comment is the most revealing, as is his stress on a self-sustaining and self-sufficient Britain which requires British possessions all over the world:

I believe in a British Empire, in an Empire which, though it should be its first duty to cultivate friendship with all the nations of the world, should yet, even if alone, be self-sustaining and self-sufficient, able to maintain itself against the competition of all its rivals. And I do not believe in a Little England which shall be separated from all those to whom it would in the natural course look for support and affection, a Little England which would then be dependent absolutely on the mercy of those who envy its present prosperity, and who have shown they are ready to do all in their power to prevent its future union with the British races throughout the world. (Chamberlain)

As Anna Snaith writes, “In Canada, such arguments also led to concern about British self-interest and a feeling that the ideals of imperialism were being reduced to economics. This was Duncan’s anxiety” (94).⁴ *Cousin Cinderella*, as well as Duncan’s earlier writings,⁵ reveals the contradiction of Canadian writing of the time with feeling of Imperial patriotism going alongside Canadian nationalism. It is clear

4) In 1905 Adam Shortt, a Canadian political scientist, wrote a pamphlet wherein he expressed the same concerns: “The most fatal mistake which Britain could make would be to attempt the restoration of those mechanical and mercenary bonds, under whatever gilded or insinuating disguises they may be presented by Mr. Chamberlain or any one else. It cannot, however, be too strongly emphasised that Canadian attachment to Britain is in no way dependent upon the volume of trade which passes between them” (5).

5) See Faye Hammill’s *Literary Culture and Female Authorship in Canada 1760–2000* (page 50) for a study of Duncan’s earlier writings on the topic.



from her writings that Duncan placed a high value on Britain's culture and especially literature. Similarly, her work critiques British imperialist motifs. The attitude was confusing for the early reviewers of her *The Imperialist*, as they wrote that "One cannot be quite sure [...] that Mrs Coates [Duncan] herself knows at times whether she is preaching Mr. Joseph Chamberlain's doctrine, or laughing at it" (Hammill 2003: 50). Thus, old Mr. Trent of *Cousin Cinderella* "was perfectly delighted when Graham made up his mind to go out with the first contingent of Canadian Volunteers" (Duncan 1908: 3) to the Boer War and fight for the Empire, and has taught his children to perceive London as a "Mecca" as the children see themselves as "the faithful who approach from Minnebiac" (33).

Although old Mr. Trent was "so rich that none of us liked ... to mention money" (7), he collects newspaper clippings of speeches delivered in England on the subject of Canadian future greatness from local newspapers with a desire to "paste them in a book, which he intend[ed] some day to publish at his own expense, so that whatever happens, they will be obliged to recognise over there that they did see it and say it once" (7), his need to demonstrate Canadian greatness before the British, revealing his colonial mentality.⁶ It is the one quality around which he is constructed: he refers to his children as "nothing but a pair of colonial editions" (9) and sends them to England for additional education and refinement. When he advises them to explain to anyone interested that the North American continent "grows something besides Americans" (11), Mary realises that "he wanted to send [them] as samples" of a new and flourishing Canadian society to England.

The new generation of Canadian-born youngsters – the Trent siblings – are, much like Duncan herself, permeated by the profoundly colonial feeling which constructs London as a Mecca. The first thing the Trents do is go sightseeing – to see the London they have been reading about all their lives: the Crown Jewels and Thomas Carlyle's house in Chelsea, Admiralty's docks and Scotland Yard, and Greenwich Observatory. The two Canadians appreciate British tradition and history. For them being in London is being near "the Royal heart of England, which has always been before beaten for [them] in a fairy tale far away" (65). Accordingly Mary finds England "nearer heaven than any other country" (248), while Graham claims that "the greatest temptation of England" (120) is Oxford, or as Mary explains: "I think he means that Oxford would tempt him to be an Englishman more than anything else over here"

6) In his *Reflections of a Siamese Twin: Canada at the End of the Twentieth Century* John Ralston Saul discusses colonial mentality by referring to it as a result of a delusional romantic view of Canadian relationship with London and Paris – a view which reflects the "growing pains of tiny colonies into an enormous complex country" (1997: 23). Ultimately Ralston claims, "The insistence on the maintenance of an illusory family relationship, where one limited only to political and financial interest existed and exists, is humiliating for those in the former/current colonies and embarrassing for the metropolitan centres" (1997: 22).



(120). Graham is uncritically fascinated by Britain and its material culture – artefacts and architecture, purchasing all he can so that it would remain “at home” and not fall into the hands of the Americans. As Canadians, the Trents interpret their arrival to England as arriving to the mother country, as “being more or less at home” (75).

But in this post-Confederation period of Canadian semi-nationhood (since Britain was still controlling security and foreign affairs) brother and sister soon learned that they were “strangers really, though [they] knew the flag so well, and had sung ‘Rule Britannia’ since [they] could sing anything” (51), and that the Britain they were taught about in school does not exist anymore, it “belong[s] to the period of Alfred the Great” (71). Namely, in spite of old Trent’s letters of introduction to higher society his children “were unfortunate in meeting these people ... they were always just going out of town; but they very kindly sent [them] tickets for Madame Tussaud’s” (69). The British are so perfectly disinterested in Canada that Graham, albeit in exasperation, makes an ingenuous comment: “I imagine we are known to their leading ethnologists and perhaps to Lord Elgin” (76). Their knowledge of Canada is extremely outdated. Lady Doleford mentions Iroquois war-whoops, while Lady Lippington refers to the difference between Lower and Upper Canada which has long since ceased to exist. Thus when British nobility makes perfectly disinterested statements such as when Lady Lippington, pretending to be fascinated with Canada while actually working on securing a governor position for her husband, says: “Its history thrill-lls me; its loyalty touches me to the heart” Graham offers a brilliantly sarcastic reply: “That would greatly gratify Canada ... if she knew” (91). As a final point, the Duchess of Dulwich, the head of the Royal Commission on the Assimilation of Aliens, finds no problem in publicly announcing: “Personally I am not very fond of aliens. I would repatriate them all” (98).

As a result of such interactions the Trents begin to assert their own national allegiance and identity. Thus when asked by Lady Barbara Doleford when her people think of coming back to England to settle Mary replies: “But they are at home now, Lady Doleford!” (170) When Lady Doleford comments how accustomed the English are to people coming home “from South Africa, and India, and even Australia” saying that “They seem to prefer it,” Mary replies: “But Canada is different ... Nobody prefers to leave Canada” (170). Canada is, through the responses of the Trents to England, formulated as a beautiful place. Thus Graham finds Canada in the sound of the sawing mills on the road along the river: “It is a delicious sound; they sing their way through it with a kind of mounting cry, that wanes and waxes and wanes again with a perpetual call and a perpetual lullaby; I like it better than any other note that you hear out-of-doors” (5).

Canada is, importantly, also a place of freedom from social bondage, while “blinkered vision and ... snobbery ... are shown to be part of the British ‘condition’”



(Hammill 2003: 71). Peter Doleford envies Graham for being Canadian: “No bother in seeing your way out there. No impedimenta” (Duncan 1908: 142). In contrast, when Mary admires England before Peter Doleford, in one sentence he formulates English history and society as very restricting: “I sometimes envy people who are free to come and look at it.” (248). Because Peter Doleford is trapped in the English social system, and under pressure to marry rich to save the family estate, the Pavis Court, as well as to keep pretence of power and authority by going into politics. Exasperatingly he concludes: “Bah – birth’s a rotten borough!” (142)

Finally, Canada is a place of enormous possibilities, and as Graham comes to believe: “It’s a one-horse show that is going some day to pull the Empire!” (213) While Canada is thriving, Britain is falling into a racial and moral abyss, as is evident from the above given examples, as well as from Duncan’s description of British upper class youth and their preoccupations with their public image. When learning the story of one Ambrose Lane-Gwithers’s concern about being called a “dancing man” by the *London Daily* and his subsequent disclaimer which he demanded be published, Graham can only conclude that he probably never earned a penny in his life, and that “nothing so contributed to the swelled head as a false relation to the economic basis of society” (136). Additional proof of this is how the British upper class court both, American and Canadian money to rescue their family fortunes. Thus “Graham and Mary, as inheritors of the pioneering qualities of health, energy and self-reliance, are required in the heart of the empire” (Snaith 2014: 95). They will bring the regeneration desperately needed if the ball of the Empire was to be avoided. This is the reason why Canadian modernity is characterised by seemingly contradictory imperialism and Canadian nationalism: “federation implied that Canada was an asset to Britain as an equal partner. Canada could revitalise the heart of the empire” (Snaith 2014: 94).

Duncan’s attitude toward America is equally complex, and it, too, reveals the contradictions of the day. As Janice Fiamengo detected, based on Duncan’s writings in *The Week*, Duncan’s “account of American institutions and social habits was designed to be appreciative and friendly while also piquant and critical – a form of appraisal intended to enable readers to see past the broad-brush rhetorical strokes of national rivalries” (2010: 467) Duncan claimed that Canadians and Americans were alike in many ways, and it was foolish to pretend otherwise: “We have greatly their likings and their dislikings, their ideas and their opinions,” Duncan commented in an 1887 article that suggested the inescapability of American influence. “In short, we have not escaped, as it was impossible we should escape, the superior influence of a people overwhelming in numbers, prosperous in business, and aggressive in political and social faith, the natural conditions of whose life we share, and with whom we are brought every day into closer contact” (Duncan in Fiamengo 467). But they are not the same, and both “the similarities that nationalists denied and the genuine



differences of history and culture were worth considering as a means to greater mutual understanding” (Duncan in Fiamengo 467).

The differences that Duncan focused on were threefold: problems with America’s claims to freedom and human flourishing, the power of wealth in America, and the excess of American Anglophobia. The first can best be summed up in an incredibly witty piece Duncan wrote for the *Montreal Star* on American cultural practice of the publication of White House recipes, in this particular case, of the brown bread recipe by the First Lady of the United States, Mrs. Grover Cleveland, in the *New York World* wherein Duncan refers to the “dear cousins the Americans” as “such sincere Democrats” mocking them for claiming that “the incidents of place and power mean so little to them” and that “the hideous distinctions of caste are so little known in their free, equal and enlightened midst!” (Duncan in Fiamengo 2010: 471) She continues by saying that Mrs. Cleveland’s recipe can undoubtedly be depended on, but it is most definitely “as light and crumby and crusty as the same article upon the plebeian table of Mrs. Jones in Jonesville” (Duncan in Fiamengo 2010: 471). However, the recipe will never be published, since it would never be “religiously followed by a large majority of good American housekeepers, and carefully pasted in several thousand gilt-edged scrapbooks” (Duncan in Fiamengo 2010: 471). Not unless “Mrs. Jones had forsaken a noble husband and a promising family to become a society actress, or had the honor of placing the art of female pugilism on a professional basis, or had walked abroad a startling illustration of some pronounced theories of dress reform, in any of which cases her attention would have been temporarily diverted from brown bread” (Duncan in Fiamengo 2010: 471). And this is where Duncan makes a crucial point: “Mrs. Cleveland’s recipe is really a rather curious comment on Republican notions. In allowing it to be published she does the most democratic thing possible herself, and directly encourages precisely the opposite thing in her fellow citizens. I had almost written subjects” (Duncan in Fiamengo 2010: 471).

As Fiamengo accurately points out, this is not an ordinary recipe. Instead it speaks volumes about American republicanism. Namely, “while on the surface [it] appears to be testimony to the democratic nature of American society, [it] is also a betrayal of it” (Fiamengo 2010: 471). The baking of bread, while meant to stand for domestic virtues all republican homes share, and with them their First lady as well, is revealed as a sham when the recipe is published, when the First Lady, “offers the bread recipe to her fellow citizens (who declare themselves *not* British subjects)”. Rather than confirming her ordinariness,

it reveals that everything the First Lady touches is news, her bread recipe worth publishing not because of its intrinsic merit but because of the First Lady’s proximity to power. It is not an ignoble power – unlike the other, more objectionable routes to celebrity that



Duncan mentions – but it is foolish for Americans to boast of equality while bowing down before a secular idol. In Duncan's estimation, social hierarchies can be changed by human institutions, but hierarchy itself, stemming from human nature, is probably ineradicable, whatever the triumphalist prophets of progress might declare. (Fiamengo 2010: 471)

In *Cousin Cinderella* this elitism is exemplified in Evelyn's social class – “her father owns any number of the Thousand Islands (in the River St. Lawrence)” (Duncan 1908: 70); it is only the rich who can afford to send their children to Europe. Also, her father's connections got her a ticket to the Parliament the day the King delivered his speech there, and she offers to “work that for” the Trents (77), as the American Minister is “always ready to oblige” (77).

Commenting on the King being “a dear” (75), Evelyn notes that the North Americans have nothing like him over there to which Mary exclaims: “We've got him!” Evelyn's flippant “To be sure; I forgot. He's got you.” (75) reveals a particular American attitude toward Canada. Americans feel superior. The thesis finds support in Evelyn nicknaming Mary Miss Canada and Graham the Maple Prince, as well.⁷ It is because of what Duncan termed the American Anglophobia that Americans cannot approve of Canadian loyalty to the British Crown. In a number of her articles in *The Week*, Duncan focused on “the excess of American

Anglophobia, reading it as a kind of disavowal – a declaration of rejection so insistent as to seem a disguised confession of what is denied, an admission of guilty attraction” (Fiamengo 469). She critiqued American rebellious inheritance of revolutions and overthrowals committed in the attempt to achieve distinction, as she believed that “genuine differences can develop gradually and naturally” (Fiamengo 2010: 469).

She often pointed to the hypocrisy of American behaviour: “Theoretically, well-regulated Americans hate a lord, but only theoretically ... Practically they dine him and wine him, and are not averse to marrying him” (Fiamengo 2010: 469). The plot of *Cousin Cinderella* is largely based on such cross-Atlantic attractions. Evelyn preys on Britain, she does not admire it, and she does not appreciate the Old World culture. Listening to the Trents listing what they went to see once in London, she laughs it all off saying she is in London “for tons of other things” (Duncan 1908: 74), referring primarily to social affairs. Thus she leaves room for Graham to mention the institution of the American duchess. Evelyn is not offended. On the contrary, her response confirms Graham's suspicions that she came over to Britain to find an aristocratic husband: “The American duchess is a deservedly popular institution – good for the Duke and improving for the American. Do you know any?” (76) It is in the financial collapse of the British aristocracy before the challenges of the capitalist system that

7) Graham's flippant response to Evelyn: “American titles are great. They carry no responsibility.” (93) reveals Duncan's ingeniousness.



Evelyn sees her chance of getting an aristocratic title. Or, as Carrie Macmillan put it, “Evelyn, with no self-consciousness whatsoever, is in England to wed her American fortune to an English title. Duncan presents the American as openly self-interested and uninhibited by questions of local custom and manners, whereas the Canadians are much more socially sensitive” (Macmillan). The Dolefords are in such dire financial straits that they had to pawn their furniture, and yet Evelyn is amused by the attention the Earl of Doleford is showering her with, all the while both of them knowing it is her money that is being courted. Later, in a private conversation with Mary Evelyn sums up the situation “with brilliant and unblinking clarity” (Thomson):

“When it comes to the gold attraction I am not taking any... and this is the place,” she went on with conviction, “to make you thankful to be able to say so. It’s simply disgusting, the importance of money over here – just the dead importance of it. They don’t like talking about it any more than we do – or have as much as we do – about the food they are digesting; but it’s just as necessary to keep them morally healthy and socially alive. They’ve never had to earn it; it’s always been there, like the air, to exist by, and they’ve got to have it – it’s a matter of self- preservation. When they absolutely haven’t got it and finally can’t get it, there’s no sort of way for them to live – they become extinguished.” (Duncan 1908: 182)

Even though Evelyn is clearly manipulating the weaknesses of her British friends throughout the novel, here the full extent of the morass of decay Britain is wallowing in is revealed.

Lastly, Duncan dismisses the American delusion of being free and independent individuals, claiming that they are ruled by wealth: “Theoretically, the American citizen is a free and independent personality. Practically, he is dominated, to some extent at least, by what seems to him a worthier master than rank” (Duncan in Fiamengo 470). Thus when first encountering the Trents in London and upon hearing what they have been doing, Evelyn reminds them of their position in terms of money, she implies that they should be aware of their purchasing power and live extravagantly: “Do you realise that you represent between you a good quarter of the mining interests of Nova Scotia, and enough New Brunswick timber to buy a county town with?” (Duncan 1908: 75) Also, Evelyn is the first to mention the Trents’ wealth presenting Graham to the British high society as “the biggest berry on the bush over there” (92) and naming him “the Maple Prince.” As Anna Snaith has detected “Evelyn openly talks of the Trents in terms of the stock market” (2014: 99). Indeed, the only reason why the English have not considered the colonial market thus far is because it is small: “Maple princes and princesses ... have only lately been quoted in the share lists. But prices are firm, Marykin – and rising. And Mrs Jerry ... declares that it’s a Heaven-sent way of drawing the ties of Empire closer without tinkering...with the tariff” (Duncan 1908:



181). “The society magazines pick up on Evelyn’s name for Graham, the Maple Prince, thus connecting them to the basic commodity which renders them so desirable” (Snaith 2014: 99). The climax of this commodification, claims Snaith, occurs when Mary is riding home in an electric brougham and feels

the definite thrill of new perception, something captivating and delicious. Suddenly, without Graham, without anybody, moving through the lovely, thronged, wet, lamplit London streets in Mrs Jarvis’s electric brougham, I felt myself realized – realized in London, not only by the person who happened to be near me, but in a vague, delightful, potential sense by London. Realized, not a bit for what I was – that wouldn’t, I am afraid, have carried me very far – nor exactly for what I represented, but for something else, for what I might, under favourable circumstance, be made to represent. (Duncan 1908: 126)

Anna Snaith perceptively claims that London at that moment becomes a giant market whereon Mary is floated. It is at that moment that she recognises her worth. Significantly, Snaith claims that it is not marriage that Mary is interested in, but rather the “solicitation...of London” (100). “Her value as a commodity, ‘a possibility, a raw product, to be melted or hammered or woven into London’, is a route to recognition in London. The potential of the situation gives her a voice in London, a way of seeing,” (100) argues Snaith. This excitement is never repeated, and from that moment on Mary becomes increasingly disillusioned with Britain. This is why Snaith’s point is extremely important – even at the height of excitement “immediately the rhetoric is one of sacrifice: ‘one would be obliged, in a way, to hand oneself over” (Snaith 2014: 100). Mary, however, resists the temptation. Significantly, she is the character that most clearly identifies herself with Canada. Her personal and artistic development throughout the novel can be identified with Canadian path to national self-assurance.

In any case, the novel’s autodiegetic narrator is Mary. She, however, begins the novel by introducing herself through her father, senator John Trent of the Minnebiac Planning Mills – “I will first introduce our father, as seems suitable” (Duncan 1908: 1), and then moves on to introduce the mother. When she presents herself, she does so in “we-form” or use Hammill’s term that of the “composite protagonist” (66) – “We ourselves are Graham and Mary Trent” (1). Having introduced the family, and drawing authority as a narrator from this respectable and influential family, Mary only then moves onto her story of being sent to Britain “to be finished” (11). As the father sent them off, Mary feels as if “he had handed us a banner”; however, she is “glad that Graham, who would have to carry it most of the time, was better qualified than [she]” (11). As it turns out, it will be Mary who will remain true to her Canadian identity and will correctly recognise insincere imperial designs in



British colonial policy. While Mary is a little naïve at the beginning of the novel, throughout the narrative she comes to represent the balanced Canadian viewpoint, one which negotiates between the Americans and the British. Hammill correctly concludes that “The detailed explorations of perception and subjectivity in the novel reveal the ways in which Duncan – through Mary Trent – creates herself as a Canadian author and responds to her identity as such” (Hammill 2014: 66). She ends with a crucial argument: “I contend that the processes of *self-realization* and the *recognition* of difference are as central to the novel as the precise contours of the national characteristics and identities which are presented” (2014: 66) [italics in the original]. Mary’s naiveté in the course of the novel develops into recognition as she comes to understand that she is “like a mouse in the paws of Mrs. Jarvis, her own small Colonial trophy” (Duncan 1908: 155). Once she understands it, she is able to resist it; she is able to avoid being intimidated by the weight of English cultural traditions, and even prevent Graham’s marriage arranged only because he wants to claim his moral birthright, his share in the commonwealth that is so much richer and more rewarding where the Empire began” (Snaith 2014:105), and Barbara is part of this share.

While Mary does marry Peter Doleford, a different colonization is at stake here – it is “reverse colonization”, as Mary has a “plundering feeling” about the empire, wishing to take home with her clothes, ideas and old china “anything portable”. She “reorders the geography of the empire by refusing to read the “voyage in” (Anna Snaith) as homecoming. She reasserts Canada as home, as the centre, countering Lady Doleford’s anglocentrism: ‘can one be at home out of England?’” (Snaith 2014: 105). Thus this incredible young woman arrives to London with her parents’ point of view, with an inherited point of view, and leaves with her own, and with her own mature voice.

At first glance Graham might be taken to exemplify the position of a Canadian artist at the beginning of the twentieth century. Namely, if Duncan’s writings in the *Saunterings* are taken into account, Graham is a perfect fit. In her famous passage in the *Saunterings* Duncan claims that the greatest impediment to the development of Canadian art is the Canadian orientation toward practicality: “We are indifferent; we go about our business and boast of the practical nature of our aspirations; we have neither time nor the inclination for stargazing, we say. The Province of Ontario is one great camp of the Philistines” (Duncan in Ballstadt 1975: 34). And Graham is, indeed, formulated as a missionary “of simple purposes and fine ideas in wood” having built a “mantelpiece ... with a design of fir-trees”, which was to Mary “like a line of poetry, or a bar of music” (Duncan in Ballstadt 1975: 6). However, even though he had built himself a “workshop for composing and carving things out of wood,” that was never to be as “Instead, ... he was the Son of John Trent and Son; and with the business



extending the way it has done and seems to do, he has been obliged to reserve the poetry of it for his spare time..." (Duncan in Ballstadt 1975: 6).

Thus Graham stands for most Canadian artistically inclined youth of the day – he never really develops as an artist. Instead as a potential Canadian artist Graham is developed in relation to English culture. Carrie Macmillan detects it marvellously:

Graham falls in love with England, and more particularly its fine old artifacts. He selects the flat in which they will stay on the basis of its old furniture and a seventeenth-century wood engraving. He also starts collecting fine old pieces of wooden furniture. However, it is significant that in Canada he was a craftsman in wood, an artist, albeit part-time, whereas in England he only collects. Also, he is himself unsure of his complete devotion to English art, for he says to Mary at one point that everything in England seems so completed. The Canadian boy senses a tiredness to the English scene that was lacking in his own more dynamic country. Respect for England while preserving his own character would be appropriate for Graham, but loss of self is the danger he courts there. (Macmillan)

It is a trap that his sister, however, never falls into. Instead, Mary Trent writes herself "into existence both as an author and as a Canadian" (Hammill 2003: 77). Through this process of self-realisation and recognition of difference Mary writes a new and contemporary narrative of Canada, one that will counter the obsolete and external view of the land and the continent such as the one offered by Lady Doleford based on the eighteenth-century letters by her great-grandfather from Quebec (Duncan 1908: 172).

Thus it is Mary who represents the future of the Canadian artist. She is the one who counters colonial mentality. It is Mary who in writing finds a basis for self-definition and writes both herself and her country into being. In the process she recognises the importance of England as a source of tradition, and the importance of America as the entrepreneurial neighbour, but also stresses the importance of preserving the national distinctions.



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Cinderella Writes Back: Sara Jeannette Duncan's Mary Trent as Canada Personified

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