An Englishman in Paris

A Study of Katherine Mansfield’s Construction of Englishness in Je Ne Parle Pas Français

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Abstract

The author discusses the construction of Englishness in Katherine Mansfield’s short story *Je Ne Parle Pas Français* using previous accounts for Englishness, Otherness and the context of modernism –primarily featuring imperialism. The author concludes that there is an English identity portrayed in *Je Ne Parle Pas Français*, but that it is to a greater extent associated with imperialism than other identifiable cultural traits.

Keywords

Englishness, Otherness, identity, Mansfield, empire,
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1 Introduction

“One cannot see the modern world as it is unless one recognizes the overwhelming strength of patriotism, national loyalty.” - George Orwell, 1941 (Orwell, 9)

Katherine Mansfield was born in 1888 New Zealand, and thus enjoyed the unique perspective of having been both an outsider and an insider. Outsider to the British Isles and the European political climate (as well as the topographical), yet an insider to its territorial domain as New Zealand was an integrated part of the British Empire at the time. Was she then an Englishwoman? Or a nasty foreigner, perhaps? Maybe just another colonial offspring. The notion of Englishness is a complicated thing. The term is hardly even used in the primary text this essay will focus on, Je Ne Parle Pas Français. But Englishness is a notion of what it means to be English and becomes highly relevant in a study of Je Ne Parle Pas Français nonetheless. The term is ambitious in its hope of fairly representing a group of people, but the categorizing of people is not without its difficulties. General complications like time and space factor in, as well as more specific ones like negative stereotypes and tea, a product imported from China yet seemingly an essential part of English culture; is it English enough? At this very early stage all this essay can clearly state about Englishness is its relativity.

By close-reading Katherine Mansfield’s Je Ne Parle Pas Français, this essay will convey a more comprehensive understanding of what Englishness is and how it can be constructed in a modernist piece of literature.

The natural questions then become: Why this book and why this period? Je Ne Parle Pas Français is a useful basis for furthering this discussion due to its nationalistic nature and close focus on identity. In the story, a Frenchman and an Englishman meet and one of the major themes of it is this meeting and melding of cultures. It is largely
about how they relate to one another; with more emphasis on how the Frenchman relates to the Englishman. As to the modernist period it is of great import because it coincides with a transition period in British history, as this essay will later discuss. The empire is still intact but is starting to crack under the weights of new political realities, new ideologies and so on. This became problematic to the English identity due to it for so long having been a part of an imperial identity.

To account for how Englishness is constructed in *Je Ne Parle Pas Français*, there will be a close-reading of the short story analyzing its portrayal of what is English and how it is perceived by others, with some biographical elements but with absolute focus on previous works and textual analysis. In order to properly conduct such an Analysis one must have the theoretical tools fitting to the task. These come in the form of Otherness and Englishness and are introduced in the section of Method & Theory. The construction of Englishness is not always as obvious as “because he is English he acts this way”, although those sequences do occur in *Je Ne Parle Pas Français*. It can also be subtler, a matter of slowly building a character living and breathing English tendencies and stereotypes. In summarizing the efforts made in Analysis as well as mapping out final thoughts based on those efforts, the final section Conclusion will round up this essay neatly.
2 Method & Theory
2.1 Method

The section on Englishness serves both as a theoretical tool to be applied to analysis as well as a historical and academic background to the term, supplying the reader with valuable context. All of this context will not necessarily be applied in the analysis but is a part of the process for the reader to familiarize him- or herself with the subject at hand in order to properly follow the arguments put forth in the analysis. The elements of background information in Otherness (2.2) and Englishness (2.3) are there to give a refined idea of what context Je Ne Parle Pas Français was written in. Originally they were part of a separate background section, a section that was vastly reduced and incorporated mainly into Englishness. This was done to put the structure of the essay in proportion to the priorities of the essay.

Due to the abstract nature of the topic, the analysis of it acts accordingly. Englishness is not a subject of discussion in the short story, neither is it expected to be. It is, after all, a fictional text and a fair deal of reading between the lines has been applied which gives the conclusions less of a comparative nature and more of a hypothetical yet well supported nature, in terms of arguments.

When a source is referred to simply with a page number and no last name, such as; ‘Raoul is infatuated, quoting Dick as being a “catch” (51) …’ the implied source is the primary one, namely Mansfield. More specifically it refers to Bliss & Other Stories, published in 1998. For more detailed information view the Works Cited list.
2.2 Otherness

This section will define Otherness in a context useful for analysis of *Je Ne Parle Pas Français*. It will do so by first explaining the term in a general sense then applying it to England and Englishness, segueing into the next section.

In order to understand Englishness one must also understand Otherness (Hackett, et al. 33). The term could (Brennan 17) but should not be confused with orientalism (Galchinsky 3). Otherness is a more modern approach because of its postcolonial perspective on identity. The word is dependent on some social order to relate to. It is “a social construct that is employed consciously and unconsciously in identity formation, as both individuals and groups define themselves through delimitation of and opposition towards the mythical Other in order to create an identity for themselves” (Rana 45)

Thus to “other” someone is the act of creating or reinforcing one’s own identity by looking at others which do not belong to your grouping and distancing oneself from them.

This is usually associated with European colonization where European depictions of foreign places as less advanced come to the conclusion that their culture is superior, Jones & Manda speaking of a “binary logic” that plagued the mentality of Western Europe during colonial times. They are describing a mentality that views the world in black and white, in actuality but also symbolically speaking - a mentality where there can be no middle ground nor equal footing; where the structure of the world is based on superiority and inferiority (Jones & Manda 198-199). Furthermore, Nnaemeka portrays othering in this sense: ‘In the colonial imagination and discourse, Africa as the epitome of “primitivism” morphed “under the generalizing and homogenizing impulse of the imperial political culture into an irreducible African Other”’ (Nnaemeka 1749). It is not always this one-sided, however, and the scientific progress of the west can even be
interpreted as a regression at times. For example, when a Moroccan traveler described France as having a beautiful landscape but a hollow one, for the Frenchmen are too sinful and blind to appreciate it; thus making Morocco the superior culture spiritually speaking (Idrissi Alami 80-81).

Othering can also occur between two supposedly equal cultures when it comes to modernization, as the term is not limited to sophisticated vs. primitive agendas. In “English, Female, Tourist” Gregorozá makes a gender and nationalism-based analysis of the 1994 novel *Foreign Parts* and arrives at some useful conclusions on what Otherness can mean, and more specifically on British people in France. Two Scotsmen traveling the French countryside are feeling uncomfortable due to the inaccessibility of the culture, Gregorozá finding it to be a more universally applicable feeling of Otherness. Once you belong to one group (in this case Scottish or British) you can never truly belong to another. The French supposedly quickly categorize the two women as English, female tourists; prematurely marking them as something else which is the essence of Otherness (Gregorozá 80). The protagonist eventually realizes that “she despairs of making Otherness familiar and chooses to reinforce sameness” by moving in with her friend once they are back home (Gregorozá 82).

What, then, is England’s relation to Otherness - i.e. its relation to other cultures? Englishness, as with any culture logically speaking, is defined by its contrasts to other cultures and would be void of meaning if the world started and ended within the English borders. Especially so since the English or British borders have been so flexible throughout the ages. In “England - whose England?” Byrne accounts for the English identity or lack thereof. She quotes Paxman as claiming the English identity is one that has been lost for many years as “England scarcely exists as a nation: nationalism was, and remains a British thing” (Byrne 510). The reason for this could be found in Kumar’s description of the English as a people occupied with “projects” (Byrne 510).
These projects were imperial or colonial affairs, acting out a part in the outside world – in the Otherness. “[T]he English could not see themselves as just another nation in the world of nations” (Byrne 511) and the imperial project, while not furthering the idea of Englishness in an original sense, did lead to the development of a superior mentality. This mentality of superiority, as it were, had racial/ethnical inclinations and, along with a close-minded idea of gender, became the lens through which English would see the rest of the world (Byrne 511). Domestic society and empire were tightly knit together and associated with one another, and so that is what Englishness/Britishness would be based upon.

What then happens when that basis is undermined? When the thing that defines you, the Otherness that was implied within the empire, crumbles? This new context for Englishness (note: not necessarily a “new” Englishness) is worth exploring and when Byrne asks herself and several interviewees about it “nostalgia” seems to be a key word (Byrne 526-528). She does so in 2007, however when one should think the transition period from empire to “just another nation in the world of nations” was already an issue of the past. In 1918, however, when *Je Ne Parle Pas Français* was written, this process had only just begun which makes the literary interpretations of Englishness of that time that much more revealing. Manfield herself had a confusing relation to this identity as a colonial offspring giving her an interesting “bifurcated” perspective on the matter (Wussow & Gillies 91). “A new understanding of modernism’s transnational aspects” is in the making when in *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays* this unique perspective of hers is accounted for. “[T]he editors of [the book] observe [that] Mansfield’s colonial status and nomadic adult life speak to ‘problems of dislocation, estrangement, and displacement’ that render her in some ways modernism’s most iconic, most representative writer” (Moran 144). Moran continues to give biographical as well as academic background to Mansfield, accounting, however
briefly, for her lesbian tendencies (Moran 145). This is more thoroughly discussed in “Mansfield – A Lesbian Writer?” by Alison Laurie, for the avid reader. These tendencies are accounted for on a separate note from (although should it be?) her Otherness within empire. “Mansfield encodes colonial otherness in a number of her stories, thereby situating otherness “within the metropolis, even within the metropolitan self” (Moran 149). So it is within this context of being part of something English yet apart from it, that this popular author constructed Englishness.

2.3 Englishness

Otherness is clearly a vital part of what made Englishness what it was and is. It would be a tough argument to prove otherwise, but are Otherness and Englishness interchangeable to a degree where separate sections in an essay would seem superfluous? Below text can be interpreted as a very long way of saying: No, they are intertwined but not interchangeable.

What is English then? Is it Robin Hood, Bobby cars, afternoon teas and J.K. Rowling? Is it London, Derby, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Northern Ireland and Brighton? Or is it a way of being? What defines a national identity is not easily distinguishable as it, like so many things, is relative. It is relative to whom you ask, relative to when you ask them and relative to what nationality, in itself, means in the context.

What is England then, so as to turn this conundrum on its head? What is a nation? It is closely knit together with its people and those people’s language, traditions and appearance – neatly summarized as race should one ask a 19th century researcher (Young 86, 88). Race and nationalism were clearly important concepts in the 1800s. Along with the idea of nationalism gaining ground in this era, the concept of
Englishness in its more modern understanding came to be at around 1875-1900 (Hackett, et al. 98). Nationalism, at this point of time, became the antithesis of dark colonialism, thus giving nationalism an image of freedom and constructive organizing (Wiebe 81). The term was perceived in a progressive, positive light and its PR representatives would have been pleased. Since then a lot has changed and nationalism gained strong negative connotations such as Nazism, racism, dangerousness and a hotheaded mentality of stubbornness (Wiebe 81-3). Nationalism based on the “English race” would not be uncomplicated however. What was the English race if not a mix of several migratory cultures? The Celtic and Saxon heritage was by some thought of as glorious though and its mix with each other and other cultures (Norman, Briton et cetera) a proof of Englishness as something unique (Young 80-82). There has indeed been a movement in the British Isles likening the British culture(s) to Hellenic and Hebrew cultures, finding common ground with the unlikely candidates Phoenicians and Jews (Young 84). This could be seen as an extension of that search for uniqueness, attempting to separate the English from continental Europe. The Jews and Phoenicians were seen as strong and prosperous, the Jews’ “financial skills and enterprise” was something that was also seen in England (Young 84).

In the late 19th-century British competitiveness and industry were starting to fall behind and the increasingly nationalistic United States and Germany gained ground. What was England without its hegemony? Was being English forever to be synonym with being in a superior relation to other cultures or could a new identity take shape? Although English patriotism was alive and well in the Modernist period, criticism of its imperial heritage had begun to arise and the English nationalistic feeling would switch focus away from being defined by its territorial possessions toward a humbler identity.

The answer was to be found domestically and, perhaps, to be imaginative; in the rural idyll (Hackett et al. 98-9). Particularly the southern parts of the country and its
manor houses and peaceful villages would be raised to the skies as something good, but those ideals depended upon “a social harmony that had never really existed” (Hackett et al. 98-9). What, then, made the English identity turn to such a petty landscape when they still, technically, had the world in the palms of their hands? The answer: it was slipping through their fingers, creating an identity crisis.

In the world of novels and poems the idea of Englishness had long been present, as discussed in The Englishness of English Literature by Peter Conrad. Although Englishness was not necessarily the actual term used but rather the idea was alive. In his book Conrad brings forth a later important characteristic of the English novel and Englishness which is that of privacy. de Staël (as explained by Conrad) finds that England by 1800 has abandoned the need for “public broils and exertions” and instead emphasizes the importance of “domestic peace” (Conrad 165). Woolf goes down the same line of reasoning with her somewhat famous expression “a room of one’s own” roughly a century later, again stressing the importance of clear boundaries to achieve peacefulness (Conrad 165). What gave it even more of an English feel was the perception that American counterparts had “built doorways without doors”. Conrad argues further that “silence is the mood - the beatitude - of the English novel.” (Conrad 166) This style of writing is then thought to be appealing to the English reader and the modest and isolating elements of the English novel representative of its people. Not to say that Englishness in the modernist era had cut all cords with colonialism and the idea of the global empire, but it had started to define itself based on what was English to some degree, rather than what was not (Otherness) and privacy could be seen as an extension of the political isolation that was clouding the imperial sky.

Sylvia Townsend Warner is a pertinent example of this wavering imperialism and the implications on Englishness as well as its (imperialism) retained relevance. Warner, a popular modernist English author, published stories like Mr. Fortune’s Maggot in
which a calm Englishman, Timothy Fortune, ventures to a South Sea island as a missionary hoping to convert the local populace to Christianity (Hackett, et al. 72). The mission is completely unsuccessful it seems and the only heathen he thought he had converted, coincidentally also fallen in love with, turned out to have been deceiving him (Hackett, et al. 72). Timothy comes to the realization that his modern tools and Christian faith was not a necessity to be crammed down the throats of heathens and sails off the island a new man. This rather obvious critique of the logic of imperialism sets the tone for a sequel novel of Warner’s named *The Salutations* (Hackett et al. 72-3).

Here the idea of hens and their adaptive nature is remarked upon. Much like Englishmen you can place a hen almost anywhere in the world and it would feel at home to some degree. The universal sense of home for Englishness is tied to materialistic connections. Being a global empire, its (and in this case Spain’s since Mr. Fortune is now traveling the Argentine La Plata) material goods and tools are to be found in most places and gives a feeling of safety (Hackett, et al. 74-5, 77). You could say that the English global empire and its spread of technology and ideology has extended Great Britain’s borders both geographically but also mentally, which is the crucial part in this analysis. “National identity, in Warner’s story, is both arbitrary and coercive, a product of small sounds like coughs and props, like suspenders and gloves, that despite their pettiness engender their subject” (Hackett, et al. 74-5). This national identity is, as is here mentioned, introduced and reinforced in a subtle way yet much can be understood from it. One of the characters reflects over the English behavior and desire: “to make the world ‘orderly’ by using ‘manly implement[s]’ such as hammers.” (Hackett, et al. 75). The protagonist himself goes on to mock his cultural heritage as imperialist Englishman, satirically imagining him filling a museum back home with the sad findings of his journeys (Hackett, et al. 80). Additionally, crime fiction of the time tended to show Englishness in a sense that was self-critical, making parody of the
English vs. Foreigners dogma that imperialism produced (Hackett, et al. 32-9). There seems to be a confusing mixture of pride and self-loathing when it comes to the Englishman’s sense of identity.

George Orwell offered his take on his homeland as he in *The Lion and the Unicorn* describes a sentimental people, unwilling to change (Orwell 32). His observations were done in 1941, it should be noted and quite colored by the ongoing World War II and its fascist turmoil in Europe. On speaking of the World War I, however, which incidentally ended the same year “Je Ne Parle Pas Français” was published (1918), he found that the English working class had gotten close to other European nationalities in a way they would not usually have done.

In four years on French soil they did not even acquire a liking for wine. The insularity of English, their refusal to take foreigners seriously, is a folly that has to be paid for very heavily from time to time. But it plays its part in the English *mystique*, and the intellectuals who have tried to break it down have generally done more harm than good. At bottom it is the same quality in the English character that repels the tourist and keeps out the invader. (Orwell 24)

Yet break it down we shall. An important thing to break down is Englishness and empire, as one can seemingly not discuss one without the other. Even after World War I and the fundamental changes starting to take place in the mentality of people (Orwell 11), the “[i]mperialist sentiment remained strong in the middle class . . . but the job of administering the Empire had ceased to appeal. . . [and] the general weakening of imperialism” was to be faulted the left-wing intelligentsia, Orwell concluded (Orwell 37). Who was at fault for the decline of imperialism is less interesting but what happened in the modernist literary period is relevant, a period in which British imperialism also reached its “peak” (Esty 6).
This means that modernist literature is influenced both by the peak of imperialism as well as the decline of it that followed. Esty discusses the subject in detail in his book *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England*. He concludes that Edward Said’s old claim of the importance of “cultural integrity of empire” stands true, further saying that the “effects of imperialism in the colonies” cannot be separated from “its effects in the center” (Esty 6). This imperial presence in national English culture had room to grow and fester due to the previously mentioned lack of locality or sense of an English identity outside of the confines of British Empire (Byrne 510-511). This, as mentioned, influenced modernist texts. However, even modernist texts where empire and its themes are completely absent should be considered within the context of imperialism (Esty 6). Esty attempts to further understand English modernism and the international versus local sense of identity “in terms of the imperial hollowing-out of national culture”.

From this perspective, English culture does not engender a radical modernism because it is already universalist and metacultural. The Arnoldian absence of national essence makes the ground unripe for the kind of dramatic clash between the national and international that marks high modernist aesthetics. In short, with its transcultural languages already framed by the model of imperial humanism and its implied distance from the restrictions of a given culture, England stands as a paradigm of modernization, but not of modernism. (Esty 35)

England did thus not “clash” (Esty 35) with the implications of universalism as other places might, yet the search for an Englishness separate from imperialism remained as new times were coming. English modernist literature was deeply
connected with the rising and falling “quality of imperialism” over the period of 1890-1930, according to Esty (Esty 35). How was modernism then connected to imperialism in 1918 when Je Ne Parle Pas Français was published? Without going into a deep historical analysis one can conclude that Great Britain was in great debt that was only to be repaid more than a hundred years later, in 2015 (McTague). This is not to say that the decline was obvious but it is a factor to recognize.

With all of this in mind, let us then dive into the subject at hand. What happens when a self-loathing, universal, rural-idyll-loving, materialistic, metacultural, Hebrew-likened, conquistador of a tea drinking Englishman travels abroad to, say Paris?

3 Analysis

3.1 Introducing Je Ne Parle Pas Français

“Je Ne Parle Pas Français” or JPPF as it will be referred to from here on starts out in a café in Paris depicting its surroundings (43-45) from the perspective of the protagonist, a small French, olive-skinned man called Raoul (49). This artistic and flamboyant writer meets an Englishman in the midst of his everyday life; a life he finds to be predictable and boring yet delightful at the same time. The stark contrasts between these two men are at the core of the story and this odd couple quickly become good friends. The protagonist’s attempts to understand this Englishman, Dick Harmon, are continually based upon his Englishness. When Raoul observes a mannerism in Dick, he quickly assumes it is connected with him being English. At one point, for example, when Dick is being quite serious Raoul ponders on it and finds it must be the “famous
English seriousness” (56). This way of identifying makes Dick his construct of
Englishness, or extension of it; a living embodiment of a culture. This could be argued
is Raoul projecting a strong sense of Otherness onto him thus prematurely marking him
as something else, something English.

Throughout Mansfield’s writings, it should be noted, characters are often given
one particular trait which is reinforced in almost every further depiction. Even the
smallest of characters get one or two adjective to identify to. The garçon, the bellhop of
the hotel they are staying in, repeatedly described as pale and sweaty, for example (59-
60). Note also the tendency for Mansfield to use French expressions within her texts,
whether it is in France or not, like garçon.

Her use of French expressions in JPFF may not raise any eyebrows but other short
stories from Bliss & Other Stories not situated in France are littered with them. The
following example shows Mansfield enamored opinion on the French language in a
story called The Man Without a Temperament as an English character speaks but one
word in French and the girl reacts emphatically: “‘Très rum!’ said he. Très rum! Oh, she
felt quite faint. Oh, why should she love him so much just because he said a thing like
that. . . . To be so wonderful, so brilliant, so learned, and then to say it in that queer,
boyish voice . . . She could have wept.” (102)

These uses of random French words instead of English are very present in the
short stories of Bliss & Other Stories. These are found on pages 50, 59, 60, 73, 80, 88,
102, 110, 123 for example, always in italic letters and often in the sense of giving class
to the situation much like the quote from 102 shown above. This is done to an extent
that raises eyebrows as to why this stylistic choice was made. Mansfield’s writing
signifies she held France in high regard as a fine culture with a language that possessed
sophisticated or “learned” qualities.
With this supposedly “learned” Frenchman (as he speaks the language that was so admired) Raoul and Dick becoming friends, they get to know each other. Raoul proves to be very fond of his new friend and his English ways.

It [the song] seemed to hold, in its gravity and muffled measure, all those tall grey buildings, those fogs, those endless streets, those sharp shadows of policemen that mean England. And then – the subject! The lean, starved creature walking up and down with every house barred against him because he had no ‘home’. How extraordinarily English that is… [---] What more do you want? How profound those songs are! There is the whole psychology of a people; and how un-French – how un-French!

(50)

The semi-romanticizing picture of what is English as grey, boring, predictable yet colorful, exciting and unpredictable that Mansfield constructs throughout this story could very well be argued starts off in this quote. Fog, policemen and tall grey buildings are depicted as defining to England. Fog conveys an element of mystery while tall grey buildings and policemen are more structural, tangible things that give a sense of order and discipline. The “mystique” spoken of by Orwell (Orwell, 24) may be related to this sense of England that Raoul has. As a place and a people that does not want to be European and their unwillingness, their mystique, has an exotic effect on his mind. This mixture of exoticness and orderliness (one could even argue for orderliness as being exotic) is also present when, at an evening party, everyone is walking around randomly socializing when he, the lone Englishman, simply stays put and with coolness replies to people who approach to speak with him. His way of just leaning against a wall was unfamiliar to the French party scene and sparked curiosity and interest (51). Dick is
reserved and passive yet socially inclined in a climate very much the opposite, a world of posers. Dick is real and more earthbound and so are the English, if this modernist text is any indication.

3.2 Raoul & Identity

Raoul is infatuated, quoting Dick as being a “catch” (51) and his smile as “dreaming” (50). Whether this infatuation was based on sexuality or literary comradery, as they were both writers, is unclear. Had it been another character describing Dick in this way, most readers would agree it is a case of homosexual love. Raoul, however, is consistently very open and flamboyant in his observations – perhaps trying to make his life more meaningful by dramatizing things. He does so not only with Dick but of the café and with a character later introduced called Mouse and on it goes. So his personal relationship with the Englishman is unclear, but his relationship with Englishness as an overarching concept rings clearly as love. This love Raoul feels for the English way stems from how he perceives his own Frenchness, thus it is a case of Otherness creating identity. This is interesting because most instances ‘Otherness’ is used is in contexts of stigmatizing, exclusion or negative stereotyping; but here the concept is harnessed by Raoul as something arguably positive. Much like when the characters in Foreign Parts were marked as something else, something British (Gregorozá, 80), so is Dick. However instead of showing disdain for this Otherness, Dick can revel in it. As for Raoul, instead of reinforcing or appreciating his own identity in its contrast to Englishness, he appreciates Englishness due to its contrast with his own identity. This gives a sense of the effect politics had on people’s perception of different identities. Without having any discernible personal connection to England and Englishness, Raoul
puts it above his own identity. Why? Is it because of the “fog” and the “endless streets”? No, I would argue those depictions are rather just physical representations of a softer power. A similar street with similar fog in another country with less international prestige would not provoke such an emotion in Raoul. This emotion is hardly anything revolutionary, however, and can cynically be boiled down to admiration; yet for Mansfield to construct Englishness from this outsider perspective is worth discussing. Mansfield herself being an Otherness in many ways, through her New Zealander origins and her lesbian tendencies. This is not to say she was stigmatized because of her being an outsider but Mansfield could be using this technique to take on Englishness because that was her experience. Admiring London hypothetically as the center of the world, bored by the smallness of New Zealand she is using her own experience and putting it into Raoul. While she may have felt like an outsider the world certainly did not seem to regard her that way, she is even categorized under “British authors” in Encyclopædia Britannica (EB), one of the most renowned digital encyclopedias of its kind. At the same time as one can argue she is an object of Otherness to European Englishmen, she is also a product of othering the same colonial subjects that her fellow Englishmen were. Being part of the colonial world and privy to the “bifurcated perspective” (Wussuow & Gillies 91) she is likely influenced by the separation of white and other, English and Māori. Thus her identity would be formed within the same imperial sphere as Englishmen but in another part of that sphere, an outsider to the domestic culture of the British Isles. Concerning this outsider perspective, however; is that where the similarities stop between Mansfield and Raoul? If Raoul was meant to be a representation of herself to some extent that says a great deal of how she constructs Englishness – it would mean she admires it from afar.

One could daringly claim that they were both bisexual, Katherine being known to have both male and female companions and Raoul, as proven, has his ambiguities with
much written between the lines. A “little” (49), young writer living in France with a liking to English culture. This description fits Raoul perfectly and Mansfield as well as she was quarantined there for the last years of her life, sick in tuberculosis. Concerning their respective relation to England and Englishness, they both view it at a distance but to different degrees. Mansfield is clearly closer to London on a cultural level but not on a geographical one, Raoul could possibly be an exaggeration of her own feelings of fascination and/or exclusion. But not all speaks for these biographical hypothesis’ in JPPF, if that were the case Mansfield was showcasing a remarkable level of self-criticism. For, as Dunbar concludes, the protagonist is truly a social outcast and is portrayed as a “parody of the Romantic artist” (Dunbar 3). She furthermore argues that Mansfield’s idea with writing JPFF was for it to function as critique against the new aspect of self in modernist writing, dismissing it as something silly and too abstract (Dunbar 4-5).

While Raoul’s identity and sense of self are conflicted and his thoughts riddled with philosophical monologues (43, 48, 54), one trait stands out as clear as day – his nationality. To be French is perhaps a comforting notion for him, to be as mentioned a “social outcast” he is, at least, still part of this grouping. He criticizes France, but in a way that also conveys love for his country. France, Raoul says, is “incredibly old-fashioned and out of date still in some ways” (49). The context of this is the protagonist ordering a whisky, despite disliking it. He ordered it because he was in the process of writing a story about an Englishman and remarks on the sentiment behind this line of reasoning as archaic, thinking he might as well have ordered “a pair of tweed knickerbockers, a pipe, some long teeth and a set of ginger whiskers” while he was at it (49). This reflects his (and, by extension, the author’s) view on what used to be considered English, implying the defining factors are now something else. What?
3.3 Gender, Fox-Terriers and Big Brothers

Raoul seems to be of the opinion that Dick is the living embodiment, maybe even the epitome, of Englishness. If this is true it would mean the new defining factors of what is considered English can be found in Dick’s personality and attributes. Raoul refers to what Dick does as English, what is generally thought of as English reflected in Dick and, additionally, perceives Dick as first English then writer or a unique individual. The national identity is prioritized and prevails in all scenarios as what is essential, both to him as a Frenchman but primarily to the English characters. It is characters here because Dick leaves Paris and then later returns in the company of a young woman only to be known as Mouse, which is Dick’s endearing nickname for her.

Mansfield’s tendency to reiterate the core of every character is showcased again as Mouse’s actions and clothes are consistently referred to as mouse-like. This way of reinforcing characters’ main traits give them a very distinguished mark and, although the stories are rather short, makes them memorable in a way they would not otherwise have been. Mouse-like or not the theme of nationality shines just as bright in Dick’s female companion. Upon being introduced to Raoul she “held out her hand in that strange boyish way Englishwomen do.” (56). Here a distinction of what is male English and female English is depicted, or perhaps the opposite as the Englishwoman is acting as if she is an Englishman. The possible lack of distinction in their mannerisms is a familiar and interesting road to go down. The gender neutral is not foreign to the modernist times but still a debated subject and Mansfield’s only female character in JPFF is progressive. In contrast there is the Frenchman, from a conservative country as Raoul himself established, remarking upon this supposedly progressive handshake, as “strange”.

Mouse’s behavior continues to fascinate Raoul. Being worn out from her long trip to Paris she arrives to hers and Dick’s hotel room expressing a desperate longing for tea. Raoul, who Dick insisted made them company, keenly observes as she cries out to the sweaty and pale garçon: “Tea. Immediately!” (60). “This seemed to me so amazingly in the picture, so exactly the gesture and cry that one would expect . . . to be wrung out of an Englishwoman faced with a great crisis, that I was almost tempted to hold up my hand and protest” (60). Raoul becomes obsessed with Mouse as well (58), although one must not see his obsession as something stemming solely from a love of Englishness. As Dunbar remarks in a review of the story, much of Raoul’s personality can be explained by him being sexually abused by his households’ laundress, an African woman who then went on to reward him with a sweet pastry after the deed “corrupting . . . his character—chiefly by encouraging him to connect sexual adventure with reward” (Dunbar 2).

Sexuality and/or gender appears to be impossible to omit even from an analysis of JPFF with a focus on nationality. Both nationality and gender are forms of identity, however. Them being subsumed under the umbrella of the ever-so abstract idea of identity is not the only thing that binds them together. Gender is important to consider as part of the relations of power in this short story. The two nationalities in the limelight (English and French) are not only portrayed as different in style but also in value, much like the different sexes are portrayed in gender studies. Raoul becomes inferior to Dick (54) even though they are territorially speaking on Raoul’s turf Dick could ask for anything of Raoul. At least before he promptly travels back to England, at which point Raoul is truly insulted, feeling like a dismissed “woman” (53). However, once Dick returns with his fiancée Mouse to Paris expecting help from Raoul, he (Raoul) seems to slip back into his previous attitude toward the English, although with some bitterness. Raoul the helpful, energetic happy one is both by himself and Dick being called the
French fox-terrier (e.g. 52, 60, 61). One would be remiss not to mention the symbolism in that. The obvious symbolism is that of a dog as a subject to man, but the fox-terrier has a special place in English history being bred from there and dogs of origin being observed as early as 54 BC by Romans (Vanderlip 5-6). This idea then of the eternal English companion/subject is fitting to the tale. At one point in the story Dick calls out to his “[p]arisenian fox-terrier” to “[a]muse these sad English! It’s no wonder they are such a nation for dogs” (60). Raoul questions why he should fill this role but nevertheless tries to fulfil his wish. Why does he, his dramatic flair in spite, not give in to his anger or feelings of humiliations after being scorned like a woman? (53) Dick is generally kind to Raoul but far less inclined than he is to keep the friendship alive, as showcased by his casual and prompt goodbye as he left for England. Dick did not even consider any emotional repercussions, whereas Raoul was devastated, saying to himself:

‘But after all it was you who whistled to me, you who asked me to come! What a spectacle I’ve cut wagging my tail and leaping round you, only to be left like this while the boat sails off in its slow, dreamy way . . . Curse these English! No, this is too insolent altogether. Who do you imagine I am? A little paid guide to the night pleasures of Paris? . . . No, monsieur. I am a young writer, very serious, and extremely interested in modern English literature. And I have been insulted – insulted.’ (53)

This infuriated monologue was never to be uttered, he did not say it when Dick was leaving and certainly not when Dick came back to Paris, even though feelings of resentment still lingered (54). The “wagging” of his “tail” would cease! He would no longer be the fox-terrier to its master, for he was independent, powerful and serious. As he is reading a letter from Dick he expresses vulnerability. “Having been up for my first
ride in an aeroplane I didn’t want to go up again, just now”, he states, indicating emotional turmoil. (53). Months pass before Dick informs Raoul of his return to Paris. At this point Raoul had almost forgotten him, possibly as part of his quest to be the strong independent and brilliant writer he thinks he is. Raoul thinks highly of himself yet become very obliged to Dick, wanting Dick’s approval. The flamboyant Frenchman practices ways of lying to Dick, in the mirror before his arrival. Raoul is intended on lying about how successful he has been since last they met (54).

Despite being a social outcast Raoul does actually have confidence in himself – thinking very highly of himself philosophically as mentioned (43, 54) and having a clear picture of what he is, or is supposed to be (“young writer, very serious, and extremely interested in modern English literature” (53)). This does not, however, prevent him from trying to pander to Dick, and it is not just the way he values all his friends, if he ever even had any others. Raoul feels close to Dick in a way he feels to no one else, confiding in him dark secrets (51). This, again, is the power of Englishness. An identity with many definitions, some even claiming its non-existence (Byrne 510), yet powerful enough to make a grown man confide and wag his tail. Which is precisely what Raoul does upon Dick’s return. “I waited for him [in the train station] and was even conscious of venturing a fox-terrier wag or two to see if he could possibly respond, in the way I said; ‘Good evening, Dick! How are you, old chap? All right?’” (56). This eagerness to please is consistent in JPFF and Raoul, as the infatuated fox-terrier he is, comes across as inclined to obey what Dick says or asks of him. This becomes even more clear as Raoul reintroduces Paris and become Dick’s and Mouse’s self-proclaimed guide once more in pages 56 to 59. As they meet at the station Raoul is intended on taking the “métro” home, possibly as a way of avoiding old habits of being a “paid guide” (53) or a result of a vow he made not to submit to the Englishman again: “For I intended to take a new line with Dick this time. No more confidences and tears on
eyelashes. No, thank you!” (54). Whatever resolution Raoul thought he had, it quickly diminished.

’But you’re coming back with us,’ he [Dick] cried. ‘I thought it was all settled. Of course you’re coming back. You’re not going to leave us.’ No, I gave it up. It was too difficult, too English for me. ‘Certainly, certainly. Delighted. I only thought, perhaps . . .’ ‘You must come!’ said Dick to the little fox-terrier. (57)

This willingness to please returns as they travel by car and Raoul imagines himself to behave “like a clown” singing and entertaining of the Parisian sights.

It all signifies a relation to Dick and to England as something of a big brother. Someone to look up to and seek approval from. Yet, much like actual big brothers, resentment can arise and Raoul can be dismissive of Dick. But no matter the state of their relationship Dick was never consciously unkind to Raoul and the big brother will always be the big brother. That inevitability was perhaps the notion one would have in the time the short story was written, as British hegemony had been a given fact for such a long time; how could it ever fall off of that pedestal? This reasoning has an apparent weakness, that is its farfetchedness. Surely one could not draw such broad and grand political conclusions based on a short story that is basically about one French author meeting an English author (although Dick’s authorship is hardly discussed)? There is no implicit imperial presence in the short story, no mention of wars or intrigue, just one protagonist’s thoughts, emotions and social encounters. Be that as it may, it is a modernist text which arguably makes it undeniably relevant for an analysis of modernist times. It is part of that era, and what JPFF brings to the table is contemporary and can be crucial even without any imperial themes in the short story (Esty 6). JPFF is far from
the writings of Sylvia Townsend, that spoke a clearer colonial language (Hackett 72-75). One must remember, nonetheless, that Englishness is at the forefront, a concept that seemingly cannot (or could not) live with nor without empire. The English identity was so deeply rooted in the imperial one that “the English could not see themselves as just another nation in the world of nations” (Byrne 511).

4 Conclusion

The construction of Englishness in Mansfield’s short story seems on the surface as something tangible and easily discernable. For example, when at the French party scene, Dick is the only one standing still and waiting for others to come to him (51). That could be claimed to be typically “English”. And this essay is not arguing for the opposite - empire or not, social passivity or coolness (depending on the perspective) could be a distinguishable trait to people from England. However, it must be understood within the wider context of the short story, the interplay of Raoul and Dick, where fox-terriers and gender equations add up to something more abstract. The English identity is veiled by the fog of the British global power it would seem, and outsider observers like Mansfield and Raoul cannot see through that fog. Or if they manage to see something, perhaps a tall gray building, they cannot neglect the presence of the fog as part of the big picture.

In JPFF Englishness is something exciting to Raoul both because it is different and because he craves its approval. Despite obviously regarding French highly, English is put above it. The big brother complex is emphasized by this and apparent. At this point one cannot help but wonder of the Englishmen themselves, the Dicks’ of that
world. Did they, living inside the fog have another understanding of what it meant to be English? As readers of JPFF you are not privileged to Dick’s thoughts but phrases like “[a]muse these sad English! It’s no wonder they are such a nation for dogs” (60) and the fact that he revels in the position France and Raoul’s friendship are putting him in tends to suggest he accepts the big brother role being put forth for him. And why should he not? After all it is the way that was paved before him (Byrne 511) as Otherness forms identities. In the case of Dick, he enjoys both parts of that spectrum – English creating English based on what it is not (historical othering) and Others creating English based on their own Otherness to it. With powers like that at play, it is hard to criticize Virginia Woolf and Conrad for trying to highlight an identity separate from the spectrum of Otherness and empire (Conrad 98-99, 165-166). Such efforts are not necessarily useless. JPFF does obviously have an understanding of English as something tangible, something unique and more than just empire. But no matter the social coolness, cries for tea or grave songs, Englishness could not escape the influence of empire. Mansfield’s construction of Englishness should not be misperceived as a repetition of an old recipe or backwardness. On the contrary she was very clearly an author with an idea as to how the English behave. If JPFF is any indicator Mansfield should be seen as a progressive to that end, but even progress a history dragging behind it. Old habits die hard and so does this big brother complex. Whether it is/was forever to be synonym with Englishness is a bigger question that a time-sensitive analysis like this cannot answer. It can however conclude that it was the case in modernist times.
Works Cited


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