Colonial and Postcolonial Aspects in the Short Stories in English
A Critical Journey from the Victorian Empire to Modern Times

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Declaration

I hereby confirm that this MA thesis entitled "Colonial and Postcolonial Aspects in the Short Stories in English: a Critical Journey from the Victorian Empire to Modern Times"

is the result of my own independent academic work. All sources (books, articles, essays, dissertations, the internet, etc.) are cited correctly in this paper; quotations and paraphrases are acknowledged. No material other than that listed has been used.

I also certify that this thesis or parts thereof have not been used previously as examination material (by myself or anyone else) in another course at this or any other university. I understand that any violation of this declaration will result in legal consequences possibly leading to my expulsion from the University of Graz.

Graz, 18th May 2015

Anna Giordani
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1. Introduction

The aim of my thesis is to undergo a critical journey through the British colonial and postcolonial times by reading and analysing the short stories written by relevant authors who wrote under the British Empire and/or after its dissolution.

I have decided to deal with the short story genre, as it allows me to offer a broad spectrum of different experiences and settings. We will ‘travel’ to India by reading Rudyard Kipling’s “Lispeth” and “Beyond the Pale”, with Joseph Conrad's “An Outpost of Progress” we will move to Africa, and W. Somerset Maugham's “The Force of Circumstance” will lead us to South-eastern Asia. In the context of postcolonial discourse, by reading the short stories “Swimming Lessons” and “The Courter”, respectively written by Salman Rushdie and Rohinton Mistry, two authors of Indian origins, we will be introduced to the experiences of immigrants who moved from India, a former British colony, to Great Britain and Canada.

My literary journey begins in the nineteenth century and ends in the 1960s, showing how the conception of empire and colonialism has changed throughout the centuries and how it is interpreted by different authors. The main focus of my thesis, however, will be on the nineteenth century, as it was at that time that the British Empire reached its climax. Furthermore, I have decided not to restrict my analysis to one particular geographical setting, but I shall deal with British imperialism in India, Southeast Asia and Africa, whereas the postcolonial short stories that will be analysed are set in Great Britain and Canada.

So far I have mentioned relevant terms such as colonialism, postcolonialism, imperialism and empire, and indeed, these are the key words that will accompany us throughout my thesis. I believe that it is essential to become more familiar with these concepts, and for this purpose, I will dedicate the first chapters of my thesis to the definition of important key terms. The theoretical introduction also includes an overview of the features and development of the short story genre in England during the nineteenth century. A more analytical part shall then follow and I will focus on the selected authors and their short stories which will take us on a critical ‘journey’ from the colonial time of Rudyard Kipling to the modern time of Salman Rushdie’s story.

1. Definitions of Terms: a Theoretical Introduction

1.1. The Concepts of Colonialism and Imperialism

The Oxford English Dictionary is always a good source to start from when looking for general definitions of terms. First of all, I shall focus on the key concepts of colonialism and imperialism. According to the OED colonialism means: “[t]he colonial system or principle.
Now freq. used in the derogatory sense of an alleged policy of exploitation of backward or weak peoples by a large power.” In our case, England would be the ‘large power’ while the natives who populated the colonies would be the ‘weak peoples’. On the other hand, the OED provides the following definition for imperialism:

The principle or policy of empire; the advocacy of holding political dominion or control over dependent territories; spec. (in 19th cent. British politics) the principle or policy of seeking or allowing the extension of the British Empire to protect trade and investments, and of uniting separate and distinct parts of the British Empire for the purposes of defence, commerce, communication, etc., esp. as propounded by Benjamin Disraeli in the 1870s and denounced by his opponents. Now hist.

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica the term ‘imperialism’ is defined as follows:

Always involves the use of power, whether military force or some subtler form, imperialism has often been considered morally reprehensible, and the term is frequently employed in international propaganda to denounce and discredit an opponent’s foreign policy. (online)

The definition of ‘imperialism’ offered by Cain and Hopkins proves to be more illuminating with regard to my approach:

The distinguish feature of imperialism is not that it takes a specific economic, cultural or political form, but that it involves an incursion, or an attempted incursion, into the sovereignty of another state. Whether this impulse is resisted or welcomed and whether it produces costs of definition is that one power has the will, and, if it is to succeed, the capacity to shape the affairs of another by imposing upon it. The relations established of imperialism are therefore based upon inequality and not upon mutual compromises of the kind which characterise state of interdependence. (2013: 54)

The terms ‘colonialism’ and ‘imperialism’ are often used as synonyms as they both refer to the suppression of a group of people by means of the power of another stronger group. However, the concept of colonialism seems to be more related to cultural aspects while the term imperialism seems to refer to the financial and political side of the expansion of the British Empire. In fact, as Nicholas B. Dirks argues, “[c]olonialism […] was itself a cultural project of control.” (2006: 58) The British colonialists’ mentality was based on the idea that all what was British was superior and preferable to any other form of culture or thinking. Indeed, the British colonizers felt superior to the people who lived in the colonies mostly because they saw them as different. In particular, the British considered the natives to be savage, uneducated and wild, since they were not as 'civilized' and technologically developed as the English conquerors. As we have seen in the OED definition of colonialism, the natives are described as weak people. However, according to the British colonizers, this weakness referred to the fact that these people were not educated in the British sense of the word. In fact, they had not gone through the same
formation they would have gone through in England, and it is true that they were technologically less advanced. However, they had their traditions and their specific culture and, for instance in India, people had a stronger relation to nature and the spiritual aspect of life. For example, as Elleke Boehmer suggests: “the people of India […] were typically characterized as passive, soft, seductive, languid, and generally effeminate when compared to the robustly male personae of the colonizers.” (1995: 86) The colonizers could not easily empathise with a lifestyle that was very different from their own and for this reason they found that the natives had to be educated according to the British attitude, as they believed it to be the only legitimate perspective on life.

In her book, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, Elleke Boehmer reflects on the ‘justifications for Empire’ (1995: 36) which the British colonizers promoted as sufficient to allow the imposition of their power over other populations. Especially, Boehmer observes that among these argumentations there was “the need to ‘civilize’ natives. […] Enterprise [England] […] would secure the happiness, prosperity, and salvation of dark tribes sunk in barbarism.” (36)

However, as scholars tell us, the expansion of the British Empire was not only a cultural mission of civilization, as it was firstly prompted by the desire for control in Europe and in the world on a political and financial level. In fact, the *OED* definition of imperialism that was cited earlier, seems to suggest the same idea: “[t]he principle or policy of empire; the advocacy of holding political dominion or control over dependent territories.”

Furthermore, Boehmer asserts that “[p]rosperity, material improvement, treasure […] were the most desirable prizes of expansion.” (1995: 37) In particular, the extension of the territory was seen not only as a source of development of the British economy and of the British commercial business, but it was also believed to be a successful way to impose the supremacy of England in Europe. In fact, the intention seemed to be that the more colonies were obtained the more England could reinforce its power and show its greatness to the other nations. Specifically, the British Empire “was a style and a boast; an eye-catching assemblage of hero cults, exhibitionism, rituals of self-glorification.” (Boehmer 1995: 32)

### 1.2. Who are ‘The Others’?

As a matter of fact, through its imperial dominion England aimed at enforcing its identity which “was defined against the inferior state of being which the colonized were said to represent.” (Boehmer 1995: 32) Thus, we have the opposition between “the conqueror [who] is of British
(in the Greater Britain sense) birth and breeding” (Tiffin, Lawson 1994: 2) and the natives or ‘the Others’ as they were usually named.

As far as the concept of ‘the Others’ is concerned, I believe that Elleke Bohemer provides a good explanation of the term. Namely, she refers to the process of ‘othering’ which could be seen as the conquerors’ way to interpret the natives’ cultures and life-style. The concept of ‘the Others’ developed on the basis of the colonizers’ perspective on the colonies and their inhabitants. However, this perspective was often created by false stereotypes which were inculcated in the British citizens’ minds since their primary formation in schools. For instance, young boys learned on:

Textbooks with fantastic accounts of family life in Africa and the West Indies [which] are read year after year, and [which are] never revised […]. Books with information like this, for instance: “Father; Mother; Child: Brave; Squaw; Papoose: Pappy; Mammie; Pickaninny. (Salkey 2009: 75)

Therefore, since the first year of school education, British men grew up believing in a derogatory perception of the native, who they associated to a black man “who’s as wild as hell, running amok with painted face and curare darts, tribal markings and distended ear lobes.” (75)

In addition, by using Boehmer’s words, “colonized peoples were represented as lesser: less human, less civilized, as child or savage, wild man, animal, or headless mass.” (1995: 79)

Consequently, these beliefs furthered the emergence of a sentiment of fear regarding the natives and this uneasiness was mainly caused by the incapability of the colonizers to understand and empathize with the culture and traditions of those ‘other’ populations. In particular, “[c]olonialism, like other dominant discourses, alternately fetishized and feared its Others – both race and place – depending on its sense of the threat posed by the Other.” (Tiffin, Lawson 1994: 5) Therefore, as the British colonizers could not understand ‘the Others’, they imposed their rules as the only valid system and they often did so by resorting to violence. In fact, the use of force was an easy way which allowed them to gain control quickly, as the natives were not technologically prepared to fight against the guns of the conquerors. Therefore, we could argue that from its beginning the conflict between the colonizers and the colonized was an unfair struggle.

1.3. Social Darwinism and the Vindication for Empire

The British colonizers had always looked at colonialism as a legitimate matter and, as scholars tell us, they justified their imperial expansion by invoking the Darwinian theory of natural selection:
as many more individuals of each species are born than can possibly survive; and as, consequently, there is a frequently recurring struggle for existence, it follows that any being, if it vary however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be naturally selected. (Darwin 1859: online)

In this context, Tiffin and Lawson observe that:

Inscribing the natives as primitive and unable to make use of the natural resources around them allowed [...] the Darwinian theory of natural selection to justify their dispossession as part of the plan of Destiny. Resistance was seen has malignant treachery and a justification for brutal suppression and even annihilation. (1994: 5)

Therefore, the belief in an innate superiority of England and its peoples contributed to the development of a new ideology called Social Darwinism. According to this ideology what Darwin had discovered about the natural selection among animals and plants could also be applied to human beings. Precisely, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Social Darwinism is:

The theory that persons, groups, and races are subject to the same laws of natural selection as Charles Darwin had perceived in plants and animals in nature. According to the theory, which was popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the weak were diminished and their cultures delimited, while the strong grew in power and in cultural influence over the weak. (online)

Specifically, the British used Social Darwinism as a justification for imperialism and they applied this principle to the natives living in the territories that would be conquered. In fact, they were convinced that the indigenous tribes were naturally meant to live in ignorance and that alone they would not have been able to improve their vulnerable condition. In fact, the British colonizers believed in the natural legitimization of England as a great nation and they were convinced that the British peoples were meant to dominate on the basis of natural laws:

The laws of selection and adaptation were natural laws; laws which were necessary rather than contingent, and absolute rather than conditional. [...] On this view, the reason of the individual agent was dispensable, but the rationality of the laws of society was incontrovertible. [...] Social Darwinism rested on a belief in the superiority of social to individual reason and on a belief in social evolution as an occurrence independent of individual agency. (Halliday 1971: 397)

Therefore, by applying Social Darwinism to imperialism the British colonizers promoted the idea that there was no chance for the individual belonging to a lower and weaker social group to prevail and improve his/her situation over the other members of the group. For this reason,
all natives had to be subordinated, since they were incapable to advance their social status by resorting only on their resources. However, as Halliday explains:

In the end the science of social evolution amounted to a practice of culling the socially and economically deprived. […] the decision about inferiority and superiority being taken either upon the basis of (disputable) scientific “truths”, or because of a prejudice against relative deprived groups. (1971: 404)

Consequently, the colonizers were convinced that Britain was meant to rule and extend its power because it was naturally established that, as a strong nation, its potential could only grow; “Britain was set on a path of progression that led in one direction only: upwards.” (Boehmer 1995: 43)

1.4. The Importance of Literature in shaping British Identity

So far, we have observed that the idea of power and superiority of Great Britain was well established in the minds and traditions of its citizens. Therefore, as my paper approaches the theme of British colonialism and postcolonialism mainly from a literary point of view, I would like to include a short digression about the importance which discourse and words played in the promotion and celebration of the greatness of England. The influence of literary works in the formation of attitudes is not to be underestimated. As Anyang Agbor notes, “a piece of literature emotionally and intellectually educates us about the world around us emotionally and intellectually. […] through a careful reading of a text, literature sharpens our analytical sensibilities.” (2010: 18)

I shall present two literary examples which openly glorify England and arouse a nationalistic passion. The first example is a passage from the history play Richard II written by William Shakespeare in 1595. In particular, it is the famous speech of John of Gaunt that provides a persuasive and superb portrayal of England which is described as:

This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands;

This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
[...] This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,
John of Gaunt’s speech is an example of how words could be effectively used to convey meanings and affect people’s consciousness. In fact, these lines set the emphasis on the strength of England, a country blessed by God and built by nature as strong as a fortress. Especially, the belief that England had been elected by God and that it was under His protection developed during the times of the Tudor dynasty. Particularly, the Tudor Myth implied that God watches over England and it granted the divine right of Kings. Furthermore, in John of Gaunt’s speech Britain is defined as a “little world”, and we could argue that with the acquisition of territories around the world, England gained the semblance of a small globe, as its Empire was extended to different corners of the world. In fact, “[a]t its height […] this Empire covered a fifth of the world’s surface and incorporated a quarter of its population.” (Kumar 2003: 35) In addition, Britain is compared to other lands, presumably France, Italy and Spain, which look at Britain with envy as they are not as great as it is, since they ‘lack happiness and power’. Clearly, a strong nationalistic sentiment emerges from these words, which aim at celebrating England as a nation, a concept which Cole describes as follows:

The nation relates to people, to an ethnic group whose characteristics (whatever they may be), being prevalent, lead us to consider it a group apart. It is a group most members of which are relatively similar in certain respects to each other, while being dissimilar in those respects from most members of other groups. The most common of these characteristics are language, traditions, mores and culture, a degree of common descent. (Cole 1971: 164)

Furthermore, as Kumar tells us:

It is common enough for nations, as for individuals, to develop a sense of themselves by a process of opposition and exclusion. What they are […] is defined by what they are not […]. The content of national identity is more often than not a counter-image of what is seen as distinctive in the culture of the other nation or nations. (2003: ix)

The second example we will look at is the British patriotic song “Rule, Britannia!” a poem originally composed by James Thomson in 1740 and later transposed into a song by Thomas Augustine Arne. Especially, in the third and fifth stanzas there are clear references to the splendour of England. In addition, I find these stanzas to be interesting as there is also an allusion to British colonial power:

3.
Still more majestic shalt thou rise,
More dreadful from each foreign stroke,
As the loud blast that tears the skies
Serves but to root thy native oak.
England is defined as ‘majestic’, but there is an invocation to make this great nation even more marvellous. Definitely, the expansion of its power over territories overseas improved its industry and bettered its citizens’ lifestyle. In fact, in the fifth stanza we read that “[t]hy cities shall with commerce shine”, and trade definitely knew a remarkable increase with the establishments of the colonies. Furthermore, the refrain reiterates the importance of the English navy and its hegemony over the sea:

Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;  
Britons never will be slaves. (Arne. “Rule, Britannia!” Online)

In addition, these lines inspire a sense of security and pride as they assert that the British people will never be dominated.

I think that both John of Gaunt’s speech in Richard II and the patriotic song “Rule, Britannia!” show how language can be powerful and effective in influencing people’s perspectives on reality and in inciting strong feelings; in the examples provided sentiments of nationalistic and patriotic excitement. Literally, “Language is a system of sounds, word patterns used by human beings to communicate thoughts, feelings, desires and experiences. […] language is the essence of man because it is the instrument through which man expresses himself/herself in dialogue.” (Anyang Agbor 2010:161)

1.5. The Dominance of the British Culture over ‘the Other Cultures’

After looking at the examples provided in the previous chapter, we should not be surprised by the fact that the citizens of England developed such a strong sense of nation and superiority, which they had been able to nurture and maintain over the centuries. Consequently, as scholars tell us, the British colonizers presumptuously thought that the only acceptable world view was that established by Great Britain, hence their objective was to export and establish their attitude among the natives living in the colonies:

In the far corners of the Empire, the New Brightons and New Londons […], the British introduced their language, methods of town planning, upholstery, cuisine, ways of dress, which were believed, as a matter of course, to be superior to other cultural forms. Churches and esplanades were constructed in imitation
of parish churches and beach fronts back home. Plans for Houses of Parliament followed the lines of official buildings in the old country. (Boehmer 1995: 65)

As far as food and architecture were concerned, there was the possibility for the British culture to mix with the local culture “but under Empire such hybrids were represented as peculiarly a part of British colonial culture, safely adapted for use by the English, or, [...] in the case of architecture, set up as an expression of British imperial magnitude and expertise.” (65)

Therefore, thanks to its colonial expansion, Britain took the opportunity to show to Europe and the world the pride of its people and the strength of its navy and army:

English people were most eager to stress the ways in which their nation was unique, culturally as well as topographically. The trope of the island, in other words, although long powerful in imaginary literature and material policies, began to serve not only as metaphor but also as explanation for English dominance and superiority in arts and arms. (Wilson 2006: 5)

Indeed, the British navy played an essential role for the Empire, and as Lloyd explains:

The navy dominated the seas of the whole world to an extent that had no parallel. No other country had a comparable force, and no country was likely to throw away its money in a competition with the formidable fleet already in existence and the immense industrial power behind it. The navy retained its three historical role of making the country safe from invasion, of protecting trade, and of defending the colonies. [...] Its role in diplomacy became more explicit during the first half of the [nineteenth] century: it could be sent all over the world, and could be used to make Britain’s power supreme at any point which lay within a cannon-shot of the sea. (1985: 138)

Furthermore, “[a]ll British peoples, whether at ‘home’ or ‘abroad’, were seen as members of a single imperial nation. The flow of influence was two-way, even though the English nation was the inspiring and guiding spirit.” (Kumar 2003: 36)

1.6. The Empire is a Men’s World

We could argue that the Empire was a men’s world, a concept which was applied both at ‘home’, in Great Britain, and in the colonies. In fact, according to the idea of Britishness, the proper British is a strong, educated man belonging to the middle class. Therefore, “[f]rom the beginning of the Empire, the expanding colonies had offered the ‘mother country’ a practise and testing ground for its manhood.” (Boehmer 1995: 71) In addition, as Bohemer further notes:

Empire was male also in inspiration. The examples which men followed in the imperial field, the ideals of valour and personal glory to which they marched, were those found in imperial histories, colonial tales of masculine achievement, and the Victorian reinvention of the chivalric code. (1995: 72)
Thus, we can assert that the Empire is a place of manhood for two main reasons. First of all, men, and not women, were sent to work in the colonies and, secondly, relationships between men were essential to survive in the hard life conditions that they encountered. In fact, living in the colonies could be very exhausting not only physically (for instance because of the condition of the weather, think of India and its high temperatures) but also psychologically. In fact, the British officers not only had to live far away from home but they also had to face different realities that they could find very hard to understand and quite impossible to adapt to; especially for those men who had left ‘the mother country’ with many stereotypes or prejudices about the natives in their minds.

Among the selected short stories that will be considered here, Rudyard Kipling’s collection of stories *Plain Tales from the Hills* and Conrad’s tale “An Outpost of Progress” provide us with good examples of how life was like in the colonies; we will closely analyse the mentioned tales later in this thesis.

### 1.7. Are ‘Colonialism’ and ‘Imperialism’ Synonyms?

In the first chapter we have considered the terms ‘colonialism’ and ‘imperialism’ which we have then used interchangeably throughout the first introductory chapters. Even though we could argue that the two terms can be used as synonyms, we should concentrate on some aspects which differentiate the two terms.

Precisely, as scholars tell us, the word ‘colonialism’ refers to the desire of one nation to exercise its power over another nation or population or tribe. In addition, it is implied that the conquering nation will take the advantage of the resources of the latter and it will earn great profits from it. In addition, as Dirks argues:

Colonialism transformed domination into a variety of effects that masked both conquest and rule. Not only did colonial rulers align themselves with the inexorable and universal forces of science progress, rationality and modernity, they displaced many of the disruptions and excesses of rule into institutions and cultures that were labelled as tradition. Colonialism came to be seen as ascendant and necessary precisely through the construction of the colonial world, with its naturalized oppositions between us and them, science and barbarity, modern and traditional. (2006: 60)

On the other hand, when we use the word ‘imperialism’ we specify an economical and/or political control over the colonized nation. The term ‘imperialism’ more than the word ‘colonialism’ underlines the idea of a nation whose purpose is that of expanding its borders and establishing an Empire. Therefore, as far as British imperialism is concerned we refer to the British Empire as a whole, where Great Britain, or ‘the mother country’, is at the centre and it exerts its political power over the colonies, which provide economic benefits.
In this context, I find Thornton’s argumentation to be quite interesting, as it provides a good explanation of the British expansionistic purpose. He suggests that:

Colonialism is a word more recently coined than imperialism, and the coinage itself is baser. Imperialism, with its many enemies, had also its many friends. In the past there have been men who admitted cheerfully to the title of imperialist, insisting on their sense of mission and declaring their faith in the future. They saw themselves as the trustees of civilisation, and they reckoned it their duty to see to it that civilisation was disseminated to as many beneficiaries as could be contrived. They wanted to leave the world better than they found it, and it has yet to be proved that they did not succeed. (1962: 335)

By reflecting on the aspects that somewhat differentiate the terms ‘colonialism’ and ‘imperialism’, we are now more aware of the significance of these words. Even though they do not carry a completely identical meaning, we now have an awareness as to their different semantic dimensions. I shall therefore use these terms from now on, as it is often done, as synonyms.

Another important aspect that has to be kept in mind is the perspective from which we look at colonialism. In fact, the British colonizers believed that their intervention in the conquered nations would have brought hope and civilization, but this was not the case if we look at imperialism from the perspective of the natives. As a matter of fact, the arrival of the European colonizers often produced disastrous consequences, as they brought diseases and wars which caused the premature death of innumerable innocent people.

In his book *Les damnés de la terre*¹, the French psychiatrist and writer Frantz Fanon extensively reflects on the negative impact that colonialism had on the dominated populations and he claims that:

La nomination coloniale, parce que totale et simplificante, a tôt fait de disloquer de façon spectaculaire l’existence culturelle du peuple soumis. La négation de la réalité nationale, les rapports juridiques nouveaux introduits par la puissance occupante, le rejet à la périphérie par la société coloniale des indigènes et de leurs coutumes, l’expropriation, l’asservissement systématisé des hommes et des femmes rendent possible cette oblitération culturelle. (1961: 225)

The colonial appointment, because total and simplifying, quickly disrupts dramatically the cultural existence of the subjugated populations. The negation of national reality, the new legal reports introduced by the occupying power, the rejection at the periphery of the natives’ colonial society and of their customs, the expropriation, the systematized enslavement of men and women makes this cultural eradication possible.²

¹ English translation: The Damned of the Earth

² Translation mine
1.8. Key Terms in Context: the Victorian Era and High Imperialism

In the previous chapters we have mainly dealt with the relevant theoretical terms which will accompany us throughout this paper, and in this chapter we will have a quick look at the historical context in which these terms are set and which is also the background of the short stories that we will analyse. In fact, as far as colonialism and colonial literature are concerned, the selected short stories are set in the late nineteenth century, the period when Britain reached the peak of imperialistic dominance. The authors of the colonial short stories that will be analysed, Kipling, Conrad, and Somerset Maugham, lived in this period of British colonial splendour. In order to provide a short historical overview, I will refer to Elleke Boehmer’s books titled *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870-1918* and *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*.

As a matter of fact, the expansion of the British Empire began in the sixteenth century under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I who promoted explorations and expeditions to unknown and exotic places. In particular, in the first years of colonial expansion:

Colonizers’ interpretations of the beyond were as extensive as were their knowledge and experience of stories. They borrowed conceptual schemes […] from oral narrative […]. They had recourse to early travellers’ tales of the distant and the barbarians […]. Spreading themselves abroad […] travelling Europeans sketched imaginative and special contours in what was, from their point of view, largely a broad, flat unknown. (Boehmer 1995: 15)

Since those years, the British Empire continued to expand its boundaries, but the most significant period for English imperialism were the years between 1815 and 1914, which mostly correspond to the Victorian Era; Queen Victoria reigned in England from 1837 to 1991. Some scholars, as for instance Boehmer, refer to this period as ‘high imperialism’:

What formally distinguished the period of high […] imperialism was, in particular, a more officially expansionist, assertive, and self-conscious approach to empire than had been expressed before. Under pressure of competition from other European nations, Britain was extending its colonial responsibilities, taking over more territory, and formalizing sphere of influence especially in South East Asia, Africa, and the South Pacific. […] this was the empire on which the sun never set. (1998: n.p.)

Furthermore, Boehmer explains that the start of high imperialism was prompted by two main events. First of all, the opening of the Canal Suez, which took place in 1869 and which made it easier to sail from Great Britain to India. Secondly, Boehmer interprets the Crystal Palace speech given by Benjamin Disraeli³ in 1872 as an important event which played a decisive role

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³ British conservative politician, writer, aristocrat and twice prime minister.
in supporting a further expansion of the British Empire. In fact, in his speech, Disraeli, who was at the time Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, directly addresses the citizens’ conscience and “by admonishing Britons to recognize and live up to their imperial responsibilities, he laid the groundwork for his time as pro-imperial Prime Minister.” (Boehmer 1998: n.p.) Below you find the persuasive and effective final words of the Crystal Palace speech:

When you return to your homes, when you return to your counties and your cities, you must tell to all those whom you can influence that the time is at hand, that, at least, it cannot be far distant, when England will have to decide between national and cosmopolitan principles. The issue is not a mean one. It is whether you will be content to be a comfortable England, modelled and moulded upon continental principles and meeting in due course an inevitable fate, or whether you will be a great country, - an imperial country - a country where your sons, when they rise, rise to paramount positions, and obtain not merely the esteem of their countrymen, but command the respect of the world...

(Disraeli 1872: online)

Furthermore, as we have already mentioned, high imperialism roughly coincides with the reign of Queen Victoria which was an era of “territorial expansion, occupation, and symbolic investment on a massive scale.” (Boehmer 1995: 14) In particular, as Bohemer asserts, there are some significant elements which characterized the Victorian Era and its phase of high imperialism. She refers, for example, to the geographical eminence of Great Britain, but also to the social organization and the institutional structure established in the colonies, which, according to her, favoured the development of a violent nationalism. In addition, Boehemer explains that during the high empire period new theories spread, especially concerning race and the concept of ‘the Others’. For instance, the “[British] identity was defined as against the inferior state of being which the colonized were said to represent.” (Boehmer 1995: 32)

However, towards the end of the nineteenth century some doubt began to arise concerning the worth of financing the expansion of the Empire which was costing England a considerable amount of money. Actually, in his speech, Disraeli referred to this situation, but he attempted, with his powerful words, to persuade his companions and the population that Great Britain should carry on the establishment of its world dominance:

It has been proved to all of us that we have lost money by our colonies. It has been shown with precise, mathematical demonstration that there never was a jewel in the crown of England that was so truly costly as the possession of India. How often has it been suggested that we should at once emancipate ourselves from this incubus. Well, that result was nearly accomplished. Well, what has been the result of this attempt [...]? It has entirely failed. [...] They have decided that the empire shall not be destroyed, and in my opinion no minister in this country will do his duty who neglects any opportunity of reconstructing as much as possible our colonial empire. (Disraeli, 1872: online)
The Prime Minister’s words were reassuring words, but, as scholars tell us, it is without doubts that towards the end of the nineteenth century the Britons underwent a period of crisis concerning their identity as a population and a nation. Especially, the English citizens were afraid of miscegenation in the colonies, i.e. the mixing of the British white race with the natives. In fact, it was believed that miscegenation would have led to cultural digression and degeneration. Consequently, these ideas and feelings of preoccupation and fear favoured the development of patriotism or jingoism, a more violent form of nationalism. However, according to Boehemer, patriotism “was perhaps the most powerful medium through which the belief in the Empire was maintained.” (1995: 35)

Despite the doubts which afflicted part of the British population, it was unquestionable that colonialism was decisive for the increase of the British economy and also brought benefits to people’s everyday life. For instance, some products imported from the colonies had been integrated in the British eating habits, such as the consumption of tea, sugar and jam. Moreover, the idea that Great Britain had been elected by God and legitimised by nature to spread its superiority was still rooted in the minds of British people:

And with the passing of time, Empire developed its own form of self-validation. Being in charge had created a momentum, encouraged by a widely pervasive sense of imperial rightness. Empire had come to seem inevitable. A benign force of fate. By definition, any extension of British influence would widen the skirts of light, would increase the total quantity of good in the world. Whether through influence or coercion, Empire distributed to those in need values which upheld a fair and democratic culture. (Boehmer 1995: 41)

2. (Post)colonial Literatures and the Short Story Genre: Further Definitions
2.1. Colonial Literature

In the second theoretical chapter of my thesis I shall first focus on the definition of the term colonial literature with the purpose of better defining the setting and background of the selected short stories. As I have anticipated in the introduction to this paper, the focus will be on the short story genre. In this chapter, however, we will concentrate on colonial discourse in general terms, before we come to the definition of the short story genre in England.

In chapter 1.4 we have argued that literary texts played a relevant role in the shaping of the British mentality by fostering patriotic feelings and sentiments of national power. Now we will focus in more detail on the importance of literary texts in the context of Empire as they “helped sustain the colonial vision, giving reinforcement to an already insular colonial world.” (Boehmer 1995: 44)
Colonial discourse is a broad field which already started to develop during the first years of Empire. In fact, among the earlier evidence of colonial literary texts we find the travel diaries, letters and annotations of the first explorers of those territories which would then become part of the British Empire. Boehmer For instance asserts that writers such as Conrad often wrote on the basis of what they learned from the travellers’ tales and not only from self-experience. Therefore, “[t]exts also shaped […] personal expectations of the world beyond Europe” (Boehmer 1995: 50) and they contributed to the spreading of commonly accepted images of the empire and its inhabitants. However, these tales often provided stereotyped illustrations which did not always coincided with reality:

Colonialist discourse can be taken to refer to that collection of symbolic practices, including textual codes and conventions and implied meanings, which Europe deployed in the process of its colonial expansion and, in particular, in understanding the bizarre and apparently unintelligible strangeness with which it came into contact. Its interpretations were an expression of its mastery, but they also reflected other responses: wonder, bewilderment, fear. (Boehmer 1995: 50)

Literary texts did not only provide the readers, at home and in the colonies, with commonplaces about the colonized exotic places and the natives but they were also used to affirm and reinforce British colonial power. In fact, “Colonialist discourse […] embraced a set of ideological approaches to expansion and foreign rule. […] colonialist discourse thus constituted the systems of cognition […] which Europe used to found and guarantee its colonial authority.” (Boehmer 1995: 50) As a matter of fact, literary texts contributed to the promotion of Great Britain as the dominating nation, whose officers were sent to the colonies with the purpose of educating the natives and bring the hope of technological and cultural advancement. For instance, in colonial discourse natives often took up positions of weak and ignorant servants, while the British officers were portrayed as part of an exclusive group. Therefore, “Colonialism […] is an operation of discourse, and as an operation of discourse it interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation.” (Tiffin, Lawson 1994: 3)

Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that colonial discourse was characterized by a set of terms and expressions which added up to a specific colonial vocabulary. For instance, as Boehmer explains, since the time of Columbus, Europeans have got used to the term ‘Indian’ to refer to the inhabitants of the colonies in the Americas and the Pacific. Consequently, people easily began to generalize about the colonies, their population, and traditions:

By metaphoric association based on their perceived difference, peoples [natives] […] geographically and culturally far apart were cast in the same perceptual mould. […] From one point of view of the power which distributed the dominant meanings, one set of colonized was pretty much like another. It was possible to find homogeneity in areas as far apart as India and the South Seas. (Boehmer 53)
Therefore, as some scholars argue, colonial discourse and literary texts could dissemble the reality of life in the colonies, by conveying distorted meanings rather than offering a trustful source of information and experience:

up till the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, perspectives on other lands continued to be directed through the prisms of inherited tropes [...]. The interlinked symbolic codes of imperial writing created a textual environment which, while interactive, was also self-repeating, and often self-enclosed. The enclosedness mirrored the insularity of the arguments legitimating Empire. (Boehmer 1995: 44-45)

Furthermore, Tiffin and Lawson reflect on the colonizers’ attitude to relegate the natives in a subjugated status in an attempt of negating their presence. These scholars refer to this process as a “depopulation of countries” and they argue that the colonizers’ belief was based on the pretension that “[o]nly empty spaces can be settled, so the space had to be made empty by ignoring or dehumanizing the inhabitants.” (Tiffin; Lawson 5) Generally, we could argue that colonial discourse accomplishes two main functions which are, though, interrelated. Firstly, colonial literary texts convey representations which are convincing but often inaccurate, and by doing so they, secondly, contribute to the promotion and enactment of the British imperialistic power:

To colonize the world, British writers both in the field and at home projected their images, like the lantern’s plates of coloured glass, on lands they claimed as new. The same images did for different places. Projection was a mode of cognition and of exerting influence across different colonial possessions. (Boehmer 1995: 59)

Therefore, we come again to the perception that colonial expansion was often seen and used by Great England as a way of showing its greatness, not only in practise but also through literary texts, which were successfully used to influence the point of view of the public opinion. Especially, as the Oxford Dictionaries Online suggest, the word ‘projection’ means “[t]he presentation or promotion of someone or something in a particular way” but also “[a] mental image viewed as reality”. Especially, it is the second definition which reinforces and confirms our argumentation about the desire of Great Britain to put into practise and make real the idea of being the most powerful nation in Europe and beyond the European borders.

2.2. Postcolonialism

In chapter 1.1. we have defined the terms ‘colonialism’ and ‘imperialism’, and we come now to the definition of another relevant term which will accompany us throughout this thesis, which
is the concept of ‘postcolonialism’. Again I shall start from a general definition provided by the Oxford Dictionaries Online, which defines ‘postcolonialism’ as “[t]he political or cultural condition of a former colony” and “[a] theoretical approach in various disciplines that is concerned with the lasting impact of colonization in former colonies.” However, as scholars tell us, the term ‘postcolonialism’ or ‘post-colonialism’ is often oversimplified and its meaning is merely reduced to the historical time which followed colonialism. Therefore, postcolonialism is inappropriately believed to be another period in history which began after the colonial era. However, this is not the case, and several scholars argue that postcolonialism is actually a continuation of colonialism. In fact, postcolonialism was possible thanks to those events which happened before; namely during the colonial period. Even though postcolonialism is rooted in the colonial time, it actually began to emerge as a clearer concept when decolonization, triggered by nationalistic movements, began. Therefore, before continuing with the definition of the term, we should briefly consider the historical context in which the colonies started to claim their independence. In his volume Beginning Postcolonialism, John McLeod argues that decolonization took place in three stages. Firstly, towards the end of the eighteenth century, the accords between Great Britain and the American colonies became problematic and eventually in 1776 the independence of the thirteen American colonies was declared. Secondly, between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, it was the turn of South Africa, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand to obtain the right of forming a self-government. Thirdly, McLeod suggests that the last period of decolonization took place after the Second World War, a period which also knew the military and economic development of America and the Soviet Union. Consequently, with the loss of part of its colonies and the emergence of new powerful nations, Great Britain realized that its downturn had begun:

The British Empire was becoming increasingly expensive to administer, and it made economic sense to hand over the costly administration of colonial affairs to its people, whether or not the colonized peoples were prepared (economically or otherwise) for the shift of power. (McLeod 2000: 10)

To recapitulate, postcolonialism began at the same time as colonialism, in the fifteenth century, and it evolved as a continuation of that earlier time. However, the period of its visible development coincides with the time span between the late eighteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century when the colonies claimed their independence. In contrast to colonialism, postcolonialism has not ended and its manifestations are still evident nowadays.

In their article titled “What Was Postcolonialism?” Mishra and Hodge argue that “‘[p]ostcolonialism’ is a neologism which grew out of older elements to capture a seemingly
unique moment in world history, a configuration of experiences and insights, hopes and dreams arising from a hitherto silenced part of the world.” (Mishra; Hodge 2005: 378) Furthermore, the authors reflect on the significance of the prefix ‘post-’ that could lead people to misunderstandings and distorted interpretations of the concept of ‘postcolonialism’, which is often simply defined as the period which followed colonialism:

The semantic basis of the term ‘post-colonial’ might seem to suggest a concern only with the national culture after the departure of the imperial power. It has occasionally been employed in some earlier work in the area to distinguish between the periods before and after independence. (Ashcroft; Griffiths; Tiffin 1998: 1)

However, Mishra and Hodge explain that the prefix ‘post-’ “is relatively easy to understand, though still with complex effects. In all its compounds it gestures toward a time just after some main event that defines its existence, of which it is the shadow. […] ‘Post’ has marginality and obsolescence built in.” (Mishra; Hodge 2005: 379)

Certainly a clear and conclusive definition of postcolonialism is not easy to find and Ashcroft argues the term itself encloses a debate which divides scholars between “those who would see the post-colonial as designating an amorphous set of discursive practices, akin to postmodernism, and those who would see it as designating a more specific, and ‘historically’ located set of cultural strategies.” (Ashcroft 2003: xv) However, following Ashcroft’s point of view, we want to argue in this paper that the term ‘postcolonialism’ “is best used to designate the totality of practices, in all their rich diversity, which characterize the societies of the post-colonial world from the moment of colonization to the present day.” (Ashcroft xv)

Therefore, we should reiterate that postcolonialism began with colonialism, which constitutes the starting point of its historical background, and the term is used “to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression.” (Ashcroft; Griffiths; Tiffin 1998: 2) The selected postcolonial short stories that we will analyse in this paper are set in the modern times, in England and Canada, and they deal with characters whose cultural background has its roots in the former British colony of India.

2.3. Postcolonial Literature(s)

In the previous chapter, we have attempted to define ‘postcolonialism’, a term which turned out to be difficult to define. Now, we will proceed by focussing on one specific field of postcolonial studies, which is postcolonial literature. As for the definition of postcolonialism, we will mainly
refer to the work of Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, and especially to their book *The Empire Writes Back*.

First of all, we have to approach the term ‘postcolonial literature’ which has been adopted to define literature written by people who live or lived in territories which were formerly colonized by European nations, such as Britain, France, Germany, Spain and Portugal. However, we should specify that we are referring to postcolonial literatures, in the plural form, written in English or in varieties of the English language, hence literature produced in the former British colonies from all around the world. In fact, English had been imposed as the official language, but the influence of the indigenous languages is often evident and/or inevitable both in oral conversations and in written texts in English.

Generally, we could argue that postcolonial literature corresponds to the literary works produced in the years which followed decolonization and up to the present days. In particular, we are talking about:

The literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka [...]. The USA should also be placed in this category. [...] What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1998: 2)

The name ‘postcolonial literature’ is usually accepted by scholars as the more correct term to address the literatures coming from the former colonies. However, other less precise terms have been used and are sometimes still used to refer to this form of literature. For instance, we can come across the expressions ‘commonwealth literature’, ‘Third World Literature’ or ‘new literature in English’. Nevertheless, these definitions are not completely adequate as they are either too limited (‘commonwealth literature’) or denigrating (‘Third World Literature’). By sharing Ashcroft and other scholars’ opinion, I shall regard the term ‘postcolonial literature’ as the most accurate and acceptable as “it seems to be the choice which both embraces the historical reality and focuses on that relationship which has provided the most important creative and psychological impetus in the writing.” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1998: 24)

In *The Empire Writes Back* scholars argue that postcolonial literature evolved through various phases. In particular, the first phase correspond to the imperial period, when literary texts were produced in the colonies by British writers who wrote in the English official language. However, as these works were usually written by members belonging to the English elite, “such texts can never form the basis for an indigenous culture nor can they be integrated in any way
with the culture which already exists in the countries invaded.” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1998: 5) In fact, in these literary works the focus was usually on the ‘mother country’ and its power over the colonized people. Therefore, they did not provide a fair account of the lifestyle and of the cultural richness of the colonies.

However, things changed when postcolonial literature entered the second phase of its development. In particular, this period corresponds to the nineteenth century, when literary texts began to be produced by natives who belonged to the upper classes. Certainly, these texts, also written in English, offered more accurate impressions of life in the colonies. Especially, readers could have access to a new point of view, which was no longer that of the colonist but of the colonized. However, in these texts readers would not find explicit denouncements of the imperial system and of its tragic impact on the indigenous people and their territories:

The potential for subversion in their themes cannot be fully realized. Although they deal with such powerful material as the brutality of the convict system […], the historical potency of the supplanted and denigrated native cultures […], or the existence of a rich cultural heritage older than that of Europe […] they are prevented from fully exploring their anti-imperial potential. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1998: 6)

This situation was mainly due to the fact that, in the earlier years of postcolonialism, literature was still under the control of the British authority that had the right to censure literary texts written by native authors. However, with the passing of time and the definite acquisition of independence, also literature from the colonies became more autonomous and it eventually developed into its ‘final form’ of postcolonial literature. A sort of literature which “widens our horizons about the world. Through novels, plays, and poems and short stories, we come into contact with the experiences of many other people across Commonwealth nations.” (Agbor 2010: 16)

As far as postcolonial literature is concerned, there is one last aspect which we should take into account, and this is the importance of language. In fact, as it has been mentioned before, the English language was introduced in the colonies by the colonizers who settled there and who imposed it as the official language to the detriment of the many dialects and language variations which existed in the conquered territories. Therefore, authors of postcolonial literary texts find themselves in a unique double position. Authors of postcolonial literature write in English, but they often enrich their writings with words belonging to the endemic languages of the former colonies. By doing so they emphasize the importance of their origins and of their strong cultural heritage which has survived in spite of many years of suppression. Especially, what these authors attempt to do, and what authors in the earlier time of postcolonialism tried
to put into practise, is to use the English language with the aim of adapting it to the colonized environment. Therefore, language is used as a means to express their identity and influence.

In particular, scholars assert that the achievement of this result was possible thanks to two processes which they call ‘abrogation’ and ‘approbation’. Abrogation or “the denial of the ‘English’ privilege involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication.” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1998: 38) Approbation in turn is defined as the “reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages.” (38) Moreover, scholars suggest that abrogation consist in negating the British culture which, for a long time, was imposed with great force, and through approbation former colonized people can emphasize their own culture in contrast to the English traditions.

2.4. The Development of the Short Story Genre in Britain

In this paper I have decided to focus on the short story genre, as I believe that it will offer me the possibility to include a wide range of different settings, perspectives and experiences coming from the (former) colonies. As far as stories written during the colonial time are concerned, we will deal with some of the most famous and prolific authors of the time, such as W. Somerset Maugham and Rudyard Kipling. Furthermore, the choice of focusing on short stories is also informed by the fact that “the short story […] has played an important role in the literature(s) of Britain, and the culture(s) of Britain have produced some of the most internationally popular exemplars.” (Korte 2003: 8) This thesis will address and explore short stories written by British authors and in English. Throughout my overview, I shall refer to Barbara Korte’s book *The Short Story in Britain*. In fact, Korte is an expert on the short story genre and her volume provide a precise and concise guidance.

As far as Great Britain in concerned, the short story genre developed relatively late in comparison to other nations. In fact, it emerged in the late nineteenth century, but the genre had already flourished years before in nations such as Germany, France, America, and Russia. In this thesis the focus is mostly on the modern short story, whose father, as scholars argue, is believed to be Edgar Allan Poe, who lived and wrote in the first half of the nineteenth century. Even though before Poe there had been forms of short fiction, it was only in the 1890s that the genre would flourish in England. Even though it developed some decades later than in other countries and “[i]nfluences from the United States have been noted widely […]”. There was also a considerable impact from the European continent.” (Korte 9) One main reason why the emergence of the short story in Britain was delayed, was the dominance of the novel, especially
of the Victorian novel. In fact, the period of time we are referring to is actually the age dominated by the reign of Queen Victoria, who ruled throughout almost the entire nineteenth century. Therefore, during the first half of the nineteenth century the short story had to compete on the market against the already well settled genre of the novel. Even though short stories were published in magazines, publishers preferred the serial novels over the short stories as they could earn more money from that business. In fact, a short story could be read by buying one issue only, but in order to finish a serial novel readers had to carry on purchasing few more issues of the same magazine, hence it was more profitable.

However, due to the transformation, throughout the nineteenth century, of British society, which was “[f]aced with the consequences of massive urbanization and industrialization, challenges to traditional class structures, political and social reforms, the new imperialism, and an increasing secularism” (Korte 2003: 91), the novel was not meant to dominate the literary scene much longer. In fact, readers became to appreciate the short story genre which seemed to better satisfy their taste, which was gradually changing together with the transformation of society:

The traditional understanding of the novel, with its emphasis on mimeticism and didacticism and authoritative narrators, found itself in a state of crisis. […] but the short story, with its capacity to focus on minor, fragmentary and momentary experiences, was now also perceived as an adequate mode of rendering the idiosyncracies of contemporary life. (Korte 2003: 91)

Consequently, the literary market gradually began to believe more in the potential and credibility of the short story. For the authors in particular this was an achievement both on a financial level, as they received better salaries, and on a professional level as “the genre also gained a new reputation as a form of artistic expression, and ‘little’ magazines even encouraged the avant-garde art story.” (90)

As this brief survey has shown there are several reasons why the short story in Great Britain developed only at the end of the nineteenth century. However, the short story did not only know a gradual affirmation in the ‘mother country’, but also throughout the whole British Empire. In fact, the short story was the most popular and suitable literary genre in the (former) colonies, where short stories were mainly distributed by publications in magazines. Eventually, in the colonies the short story grew at the point that it constituted a separate market from the one in Great Britain:

the short story has had a particular impact in colonial and postcolonial societies of the English-speaking world, both articulating cultural experiences on the ‘margins’ of the British Empire and of the subjects of colonization as well as playing an important role in the development of an independent literature. The
short story has been attributed with a special suitability for expressing marginalized positions. (Korte 2003: 7)

Korte’s argumentation thus supports the choice that underlies this thesis to analyse and interpret the aspects of the colonial and postcolonial time thought the reading and understanding of the experiences, images, and metaphors mediated in the selected short stories.

2.4.1. Features of the Short Story

By definition the short story is “[a] story with a fully developed theme but significantly shorter and less elaborate than a novel.” (Oxford Dictionaries Online) However, apart from its shortness, there are other features which contribute to distinguish this genre from other literary genres. In particular, Barbara Korte provides a detailed overview of the characteristics which scholars agree to be specific of the short story and that we will now briefly consider.

First of all, the short story is ‘short’, which means that it can be read within a time-span of half an hour and two hours, as Edgar Allan Poe states in “A Review: Twice-Told Tales” (1842). Specifically, scholars refer to this brevity as ‘calculated brevity’, which also implies that everything in the story is condensed. For instance, the short story gives more space to the portrayal and investigation of the individual in the society of his/her time rather than on the totality of people and their interactions. In addition, the short story often focuses on one moment in the life of the individual and it describes his/her reactions and feelings of that specific moment.

Differently from the novel where more space is dedicated to detailed descriptions of characters, settings, and circumstances, in the short story, as Korte explains, a careful selection has to be made. Therefore, we usually encounter one main character located in one context and the exploration of his/her feelings and impressions in a particular instant. For instance, in Kipling’s collection of short stories Plain Tales from the Hills, each story focuses on the protagonist and his/her interactions with secondary characters, the setting is always India in a colonial context, and the protagonist’s behaviour and reaction to particular events are observed.

According to Poe and Korte, the isolated incident described in the short story contributes to the totality of effect, and Korte also refers to the elemental human experience, or the description of a slice of a character’s life. Furthermore, what the main character experiences of a specific moment of his/her life often leads him/her to an epiphany which is “[a] moment of sudden and great revelation” (Oxford Dictionaries Online); epiphany is a typical feature of modernist stories, such as James Joyce’s works. In addition, this sudden revelation often leads,
at the end of the story, to a reversal of things and to an unexpected ending, as the character looks at his/her condition with different eyes and the truth becomes clearer.

The brevity and condensed form of the short story notably distinguish this genre from the novel, and Poe praises the short story, or short tale as he calls it, by arguing that the ordinary novel:

As it cannot be read at one sitting, it deprives itself, of course, of the immense force derivable from totality. Worldly interests intervening during the pauses of perusal, modify, annul, or counteract, in a greater or less degree, the impressions of the book. But simple cessation in reading, would, of itself, be sufficient to destroy the true unity. In the brief tale, however, the author is enabled to carry out the fullness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control. There are no external or extrinsic influences--resulting from weariness or interruption. (1842: online)

It is interesting that Poe underlines that while reading a short story the soul of the reader is at the author’s control. In fact, as the short story can be started and finished without intervals, it means that the reader’s mind is totally focused on the text and the reading process is (ideally) not affected by external inputs. According to Poe, the short story could be compared to the poem, which has also the effect of deeply captivating the reader's mind. However, the short story is a more suitable genre when horror, terror, and passion are to be shown, as poetry is a preferable medium for the beauty and “the author who aims at the purely beautiful in a prose tale is laboring at great disadvantage.” (Poe 1842: online)

As we could observe, the short story is characterized by several features, but scholars are still struggling to find one adequate definition of the genre. In fact, the short story is one of the most versatile genres and can, in fact, be anything the author decides it should be. However, in order to perfectly develop its brevity, its condensed form, and its totality of effect it is of great importance that the short story is well built, from its start until its end. Therefore, authors have to pay attention to use the most effective words and well-structured sentences, whereas useless digressions and details should be avoided.

3. British Colonialism in India, Southeast Asia, and Africa: the Historical Background
As far as our critical journey throughout the colonial time is concerned, we will deal with short stories which are set in India, South-eastern Asia, and Africa. In the following chapters the reader will be provided with a concise overview of the historical background of these areas, as I believe that this could be of help for a better understanding of the short stories that will be
analysed. Furthermore, this overview will provide a more defined context in which these stories are set.

Firstly, we will deal with India, as Kipling’s collected short stories *Plain Tales from the Hills* are set in ‘the jewel of the crown’, as India used to be called. Secondly, we will have a look at Southeast Asia, where Maugham’s stories take place. Finally, as Conrad’s short stories are set in Africa, we will take into consideration the Dark Continent. We will especially focus on the colonial history of the Empire during the nineteenth century, as the tales that we will analyse were written in those years and they show sketches of colonial life at the time.

3.1. India

The first contacts between Great Britain and India date back to the seventeenth century, when Britain began developing its trading routes. Commerce with India was carried on by the East India Company and it involved the exportation of raw material and exotic products. For instance, tea, jute, rubber, and cotton were exported, but also textiles, gems, and spices; these products became part of everyday life in Great Britain and this can still be observed today, as for example the case of tea testifies.

The presence of the British in India during the seventeenth century was limited to issues of commerce. However, in the eighteenth century, Great Britain made its first attempts to occupy the country on a military and politically basis. Especially, as scholars argue, the British Empire was established in India after the battle of Plassey, which was fought in 1757 and determined the beginning of the British influence on the territory.

Nevertheless, it is with the advent of the nineteenth century that the British power was permanently established and the Empire was enlarged and stabilized. According to Dengel-Janic, the British governance was instituted on two levels. On one hand the Indian population was controlled by direct military rule, and on the other hand governance was based on the collaboration with princes, maharajas, and local rulers. Above all, the British colonizers believed that “British rule would do more for the people of India than the continued rule of the Indian princes who had been supple enough to ally themselves with the British during the great period of expansion.” (Lloyd 1985: 174) Actually, we could not completely contradict this belief, as the British dominance in India brought great technological development. For instance, the railway and long, big roads were built, like the one connecting Calcutta and Peshawar which “opened up a route that united northern India in a way quite unlike anything before it.” (Lloyd 1985: 172) In addition, the electric telegraph wires for carrying messages in Morse or other codes, and a good postal system were introduced. Therefore, we could argue that the British
colonizers were carrying out their objective of bringing knowledge and hope to weaker countries. However, as we have already discussed, the arrival of the British rulers also caused violent submission and the deaths of innocent people. In particular, I would like to cite an excerpt from Schama’s work *A History of Britain*, as it represents the hypocrisy that could often be observed in India, were British officers like Curzon, the protagonist of the Schama’s book, run the risk of degenerating into reproachful attitudes:

What in God’s name had happened? The white sahibs and memsahibs who sat at their desk, played out their chukkas, danced and drank in the clubs, lorded it in the courts, gathered the revenues, built the railways and extolled the blessings they had brought were not monsters of hard-hearted callousness. They had – most of them – only the very best of intentions. They shared Curzon’s confidence that the British Empire was the greatest the world had ever seen. Its splendour was, its celebrants believed, to be measured not by square miles or millions of subjects, still less by battleships and Gatling guns, but by its incontrovertible altruism. (2003: 199)

Despite the compliance which the British could sometimes be arranged with the Indian rajas, the situation had never been totally under control and the Indian soldiers eventually revolted in 1857 against the British rulers, scholars refer to this rebellion as ‘the Mutiny’ or ‘First War of Independence’. Lloyd further explains that when the British soldiers had to face the Indian mutineers “they proceeded on the principle that any mutineers, or anyone who was thought to have helped the mutineers, should be executed.” (2003: 175) Lloyd continues as follows:

A large number of people had thrown off British rule, even if they had not worked with the mutineers. It is hard to say whether this was a matter of Hindi-speaking nationalism, or of a return by local chiefs to the local anarchy of the period between Moghul rule and British rule. Undoubtedly, they could see the British as foreigners and resist them accordingly. (175)

The Indian soldiers’ attempt to put down the British dominance had not been successful and it did not stop the expansion of Great Britain’s colonial power, which became even stronger. In addition, as scholars argue, after ‘the Mutiny’ it became safer to travel through the Suez route and this gave British women the possibility to reach their husbands in India more easily. The husbands, in turn, became more careful in keeping the distance from the Indian population. However, throughout the eighteenth century relationships between the British officers and the Indians had been less tense and:

Englishmen had enjoyed close and widely accepted relationships with Indian women that sometimes led to marriage, and certainly led to a better understanding of Indian attitudes, and this was sometimes contrasted with the more repressed Victorian Englishmen and the stricter attitudes that prevailed as more women made the journey in the later nineteenth century. (Lloyd 2003: 179)
Twenty years after ‘the Mutiny’, Queen Victoria was given the title of ‘Empress of India’ and the imperial sovereignty of the crown over India was officially established. In particular, India was often referred to as ‘the Jewel of the Crown’, and this name was given on the basis of two main reasons. Firstly, India was among the most populous and big colonies of the British Empire and its territory offered abundant resources, as has been mentioned before. Secondly, India was placed in a favourable geographical position, as it provided an easy access to other areas in Southern Asia.

Even though ‘the Mutiny’ of 1857 did not have a positive outcome, the Indians did not give up fighting for their independence and in the second half of the nineteenth century they began claiming their right for a self-government. In addition, national movements started to emerge and turn more force against the British dominance and the most well-known national movement in India became that led by Mahatma Gandhi, who promoted a nonviolent rebellion based on ‘civil disobedience’. The desire for self-government and the rising of nationalistic feelings among the population eventually led, in 1885, to the achievement of the Indian Congress, whose main role, according to Dengel-Janic, was to obtain more participation in governance.

However, at the beginning of the twentieth century the relationships between India and Great Britain became tenser and the situation eventually degenerated in 1919, when the British soldiers fired on a crowd of disarmed people who were demonstrating; this tragic event is remembered as the Amritsar Massacre. Consequently, the national movement led by Gandhi increased its actions of ‘civil disobedience’ to the point of threatening the British rulers, who had to put the leader into prison.

Nevertheless, during and after World War II, Great Britain had to face a difficult period that more and more questioned its military and economic power. In fact, the British began to think about the value of carrying on their dominance in India, as the situation in the colony was turning into something difficult to supervise and the risk of causing more innocent deaths and of drastically affecting the British finances was highly probable:

This transformation of the way in which empire ended was in part a recognition of how much weaker Britain was than had been realized in 1945. The economic position of the British at the end of the war showed what an odd empire they ran. Their problems were matched by the increased prosperity of several colonies. (Lloyd 2003: 322)

Eventually, after War World II elections were held in India and on August 15th of 1947 the independence of the country was proclaimed. However, problems had not ended for India which
had to face unrestrained tumults which generated after the partition of the former colony into India and Pakistan and which saw the rising of violent conflicts between Hindu and Muslims.

3.2. Southeast Asia

Among the colonies of the British Empire, Southeast Asia was a particularly important region for trade, as raw materials and other resources were exported to Great Britain, and many lands could be used for plantations. Nowadays, the area of Southeast Asia includes the states of: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (formerly Burma), Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand (formerly Siam) and Vietnam.

As in the case of India, the British appearance in Southeast Asia dates back to the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, when the East India Company extended its trading relationships to the territory. In particular, it was in the second half of the eighteenth century that the Company developed its commerce by moving from India eastwards to China; Great Britain had a particular interest in China, from which tea was imported to the ‘mother country’. Therefore, Britain became more concerned with Southeast Asia as it provided an easy access to China. As the editors of the Nelles Verlag Guide: Malaysia – Singapore – Brunei recounts, the Malay Peninsula and Borneo lay on this “vital trade route” (Schwarz, Midgitte, Radkai 1997: 23), and the British intervened in the area by establishing their military bases. Specifically, as some scholars claim, territories in Southeast Asia were conquered “as a strategic and economic adjunct to the Indian Empire.” (Hack, Rettig 2006: 229) However, “[w]hat started as a policy of establishing bases to secure sea routes and outposts for overseas trade soon became blatant British intervention in the region’s domestic affairs.” (Schwarz, Midgitte, Radkai 1997: 23)

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, according to historians, only the Spanish Philippines and the Dutch East Indies were under the colonial statute, but little by little European colonizers, especially the British and the Dutch, extended their control over the whole region. In particular, in 1824 with the Anglo-Dutch Treaty a compromise was reached between the British and the Dutch, and the Malay Archipelago was divided between the two nations:

According to this treaty, the area north of the Straits of Malacca would be relegated to the British, while the area south of the Straits of Malacca would be assigned to the Dutch. This explains the strong and still-resistant residual influence of Dutch culture on the Indonesian islands. The Straits were, in effect, a base for British expansion into the Malay Peninsula. (Tan 2007: 159)
However, as some scholars argue, the East India Company was interested in dominions in the Straits because it served for the British as an easily accessible passage to China.

Furthermore, in 1867 the Straits Settlements began to be governed as a Crown Colony, which means that “they would receive orders directly from the Colonial Office in Britain.” (Tan 2007: 159) However, according to the editors of the Nelles Verlag guide, “the British colonialism in Southeast Asia was still, at that point, limited to the policy of establishing trade bases in a region eventually meant to deliver raw materials, provide land for plantations and become a market for product made at home.” (Schwarz, Midgitte, Radkai 1997: 24)

Nevertheless, Great Britain was soon to change its approach, and from the 1870s it began to impose its will in the region’s internal affairs. For instance, the opening in 1869 of the Suez Canal played a decisive role in promoting a better organized and more efficient colonial system in the colonies; in effect, “the new, shorter sea route to Asia gave a whole new importance to the Straits Settlements; shipping traffic to Australia and New Zealand increased dramatically, as well. And in England, the mother country, the industrial revolution was in full swing.” (1997: 27)

Great Britain developed an efficient trade relationship with its colonies in South East Asia and greater and greater quantities of raw material and products where exported to the ‘mother country’. Therefore, more labour force was needed and Britain succeeded in solving the problem by employing workers coming from China and India. This historical event, in fact, explains why Southeast Asia nowadays is characterized by a mixture of different cultures and races.

Generally, scholars argue that Great Britain managed to maintain its control over the region relatively well until the outbreak of World War II. The war, indeed, drastically affected the economy of the nation and it forced Britain to take some decisions concerning the colonies, as it was not possible anymore to sustain the whole Empire. Clearly, nationalist movements had already been active for a long time in the states of Southeast Asia which, throughout the twentieth century, gradually obtained their independence. Anyway, as we have seen in the case of India, apart from subordinating the natives and imposing their rule on them, the British colonizers also brought innovation to their colonies. For instance, in many areas of South-eastern Asia the school system is still organized on the base of the one introduced during the colonial period.
3.3. Africa

As far as colonialism in Africa is concerned, we will in this chapter briefly look at the beginning of the European colonialism in the ‘dark continent’ and at the motivations which led the European powers to occupy Africa. In addition, we will look at the African Scramble, as scholars call it, or the competition among the European nations in order to obtain territories in Africa.

The first relationships between Great Britain and Africa were established in the sixteenth century and they were mainly based on the traffic of African slaves. In fact, Britain began to ship natives from the ‘dark continent’ to other colonies were they would have worked in the plantations. However, it was not only Great Britain that was interested in Africa, but also other European powers occupied the territory:

Africa entered into a unique relationship with Europe that led to the devastation and depopulation of Africa, but contributed to the wealth and development of Europe. […] Africa was impoverished by its relationship with Europe while the human and other resources that were taken from Africa contributed to the capitalist development and wealth of Europe and other parts of the world. (Adi n.p.: online)

The slave trade was carried on throughout the all seventeenth century and historians argue that the European powers shipped about eleven million Africans out of their country; more than three million only on British ships. However, in the eighteenth century something changed and Britain began to bring back its slaves to Africa; “it was almost as if a switch was flicked in the British psyche”, (2004: 115) as Ferguson puts it. Eventually, the slave trade was abolished in 1807. However, Africa would now have had to face the increasing colonization of its territories by the European powers:

In the mid-nineteenth century, apart from a few coastal outposts, Africa was the last blank sheet in the imperial atlas of the world. North of the Cape, British possessions were confined to West Africa: Sierra Leone, Gambia, the Gold Coast and Lagos, most of them left-overs from the battles for and against slavery. Within twenty short years after 1880, however, ten thousand African tribal kingdoms were transformed into just forty states, of which thirty six were under direct European control. Never in human history had there been such drastic redrawing of the map of a continent. (2004: 222)

Also in the case of Africa, imperialism and colonization were believed to be something legitimate, which would help the native populations. In fact, as scholars argue, the British intentions in the ‘dark continent’ throughout the nineteenth century were to save the black population from ignorance as “[i]t was no longer enough for them [the colonizers] to exploit other races; now the aim became to improve them. Natives peoples themselves would cease to
be exploited, but their cultures – superstitious, backward, heathen – would have to go.” (Ferguson 2004: 113)

Anyway, as we have already mentioned, Great Britain was not the only European power interested in the ‘dark continent’, but France, Germany, Portugal, Italy and Belgium were also attracted by the resources that Africa had to offer; diamonds were at the top of the list. Britain and France occupied the majority of the territories, while Great Britain extended its power from Cairo down to Cape Town, and also controlled Nigeria and a few western regions, the French dominance was settled in the eastern part of the continent and in Madagascar.

However, it was between 1884 and 1885 that an official division of Africa among the European powers began to be debated. Eventually, on February 26th of 1885 the Berlin Conference established that “Africa was to be partitioned among five primary European national contestants – Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, and Italy – and King Leopold II of Belgium.” (Harlow, Carter 2003: 1)

According to Ferguson, the event which mainly triggered the African Scramble was the occupation of Egypt by the British. Even though, Britain argued that its presence there was “only a temporary expedient” (Ferguson 2004: 253), the other European nations understood that it was time to take action and claim their territories before Great Britain could expand its influence over the entire continent.

Due to the decisions taken by the Berlin Conference, the map of Africa was drastically changed and the areas under European influence were clearly defined: “[r]ed marked the spaces claimed by England, blue those of the French, orange those of the Portuguese, and purple those of the Germans. […] But the scramble for Africa was not only a variegated collage; it was also a struggle between black and white.” (Harlow, Carter 2003: 13) I agree with Harlow and Carter about the fact that the conflict in Africa was in great part between the natives and the white colonizers. In fact, while the European nations were fighting to obtain the better territories, the black population was the one who was being abused and would directly suffer the consequences of those battles. Even though the European colonizers were trying to justify their intervention in Africa as an honourable mission of civilization, the reality was that the natives would did not gain any benefits, as the only ones who were developing their power and economy where the conquerors. Therefore “[t]he imperial project was, in that regard, a white and black one; the other colours […] came from the political and economic competition among the European powers themselves for control over the resources of the continent.” (14)
4. Rudyard Kipling and his Experiences of the British Empire

Our literary travel throughout the British Empire begins with Rudyard Kipling: an Anglo-Indian novelist, poet, journalist, and one of the most well-known short stories writer in England. Kipling was not only known in Great Britain but also worldwide and his success was awarded in 1907, when he was the first British writer to receive the Nobel Prize for literature.

As far as this thesis is concerned, dealing with Kipling and his short stories will provide us with interesting insights into the time of British colonialism in the nineteenth century with a focus on India, where the author had spent a considerable time of his life. As a matter of fact, it is almost impossible to think of Kipling without mentioning India, as the experiences that the author made there definitely shaped his persona and his perception of empire. In particular, some scholars argue that Kipling would not have reached such a great success without India, and others claim that “Kipling ‘belonged’ to England and wrote in English, but he became a writer in India and wrote best about India” (Trivedi 2001: 188)

In the following chapters we will investigate the strong relationship between the author and India by especially focusing on Kipling’s childhood and youth. We will also consider how experiencing colonial life in the Empire and living in direct contact with the native population shaped the author’s imperialistic view. Moreover, we will look at his collection of short stories Plain Tales from the Hills, by especially referring to the short stories “Lispeth” and “Beyond the Pale”. The focus of my analysis will be on the colonial aspects and the significances hidden in these tales and Kipling’s responses to British imperialism and colonial life.


The origins of Kipling’s relationship with India date back to the first years of his life. He was born in Bombay in 1865 by Anglo-Indian parents and he spent there the first six years of his life. In 1871 he was sent to England, but he came back to Bombay at the age of sixteen and he remained in India until 1889. Kipling’s parents decided to send him to ‘the mother country’, as it was often the case with Anglo-Indian children, because they believed that ‘at home’ he would receive a more adequate education, but also in order to avoid the risk that his British cultural background would be contaminated by the Indian traditions. For instance, as a child, Kipling could speak Hindustani more fluently than English and his parents often urged him to speak English to them. Kipling notes in this context: “[s]o one spoke ‘English’, haltingly translated out of the vernacular idiom that one thought and dreamed in.” (Kipling 1865-1936: online)

Designating a person of British descent born or living in India; of or relating to people of British descent born or living in India. Now chiefly hist. (OED)
However, Kipling’s parents could not imagine how much the Indian culture had already influenced young Kipling who, for all his life, would be torn between his British and Indian cultural background.

As a child he used to play with the servants’ children and he used to accompany his bearer wherever he was going. In fact, as he was very young, the rules of the caste, which prohibited adult foreign people to enter certain spaces only open to native Indians, could not be applied. Therefore, Kipling got into direct contact with native culture and tradition more than most other British men. In fact, as Kipling accounts in his autobiography *Something of Myself*: “Meeta, my Hindu bearer, would sometimes go into little Hindu temples where, being below the age of caste, I held his hand and looked at the dimly-seen, friendly Gods.” (Kipling 1865-1936: online)

Even though his parents thought that living in India could have had a negative affection on Kipling’s formation, he always remembered with great pleasure the years he spent there, and, as scholars tell us, he often referred to India as a ‘lost paradise’. In particular, in his autobiography, Kipling provides idyllic images of Bombay and the surrounding landscape:

> My first impression is of daybreak, light and colour and golden and purple fruits at the level of my shoulder. This would be the memory of early morning walks to the Bombay fruit market with my ayah and later with my sister in her perambulator, and of our returns with our purchases piled high on the bows of it. (online)

Furthermore, he recalls “evening walks […] by the sea in the shadow of palm-groves” (n.p.) and he remembers with contentment: “I have always felt the menacing darkness of tropical eventides, as I have loved the voices of night-winds through palm or banana leaves, and the song of the tree-frogs” (n.p.) and “[f]ar across green spaces round the house was a marvellous place filled with smells of paints and oils, and lumps of clay with which I played.” (n.p.) These beautiful and peaceful images of India would always accompany Kipling throughout his life and we could even argue that his first six years in India had been the best of his life, in effect, Kipling starts off his autobiography with this powerful statement: “Give me the first six years of a child's life and you can have the rest.” (n.p)

However, on his parents’ will, Kipling had to leave India and in 1871 he and his sister were sent to England, to a suburb of Southsea, where he lived in “a new small house smelling of aridity and emptiness, and a parting in the dawn with Father and Mother, who said that I must learn quickly to read and write so that they might send me letters and books.” (n.p) Kipling had been removed from a ‘lost paradise’ to be confined in “The House of Desolation” (n.p).
This forced separation from India had significant consequences on Kipling’s personality, in effect, as McBratney argues, he felt “the sense of being cast out of Eden” (2011: 25) and this feeling “burdened him with an abiding sense of dislocation – of not knowing to which society he belonged.” (25) Since his childhood Kipling had been torn between England and India, as he could feel neither entirely British nor entirely Indian and his struggle for identity permeates his literary work; this fear also makes it difficult for scholars to determine to which society the author belongs:

There are not many instances on the history of world literature of a major writer with such an intricately intertwined relationship between two countries. He belonged to one country by lineage and race but was born and bred in the other, was schooled in the one but began his working and literary career in the other. (Trivedi 2011: 188)

Kipling could not stay away from India long and in 1882 he travelled to Bombay where he spent some time with his parents whom he had not seen since his departure in 1871. Kipling refers to these events as “a joyous home-coming” (Kipling 1865-1936: n.p.). Even though most of what he was seeing in Bombay was familiar to him, he also experiences a feeling of alienation: “I found myself at Bombay where I was born, moving among sights and smells that made me deliver in the vernacular sentences whose meaning I knew not.” (n.p.)

Kipling found himself in a singular position, on one hand he felt very close to the Indian world with its perfumes, rituals, and traditions, but on the other hand he realized that during his years in England he had lost some of his knowledge of this world from which he now was excluded. For instance, he could no longer have access to the temples and the private Indian spaces as he could have when he was a child.

Shortly after his arrival in India he began working as a subeditor and then as a journalist for two Anglo-Indian newspapers, at first in Lahore for the Civil & Military Gazette and then in Allahabad for the Pioneer. For both journals, he wrote reports and “occasional pieces which could be regarded as either expanded anecdotes or very short stories.” (Steward 1966: 45) Kipling began publishing his short stories in the Civil & Military Gazette, and, as he states in the preface to Plain Tales from the Hills, twenty-eight out of the collected tales appeared originally in this journal. In his stories he talks about India, the native population, and the British colonizers’ interactions with the natives. His tales provide a good insight into colonial India and generally into life in the Empire, but we will focus on this aspect in chapter 4.3. where we will deal more closely with Kipling’s Plain Tales from the Hills.

Kipling was a “bright, curious reporter who revelled in exploring ‘native’ haunts that no respectable Anglo-Indian gentleman would be caught entering” (McBratney 2011: 25), an easy
task for someone, who had a special feeling for India and its cultural idiosyncrasy, while Indian rituals and traditions often appeared very weird to other British gentlemen. Even though Kipling was doing a good work as a journalist and as a short stories writer, he looked with admiration at those men who were part of that elitist group of men “who did the hard work, practical, day-to-day work of running an empire and who embodied what Kipling called ‘the Law’, that set of moral principles that formed the bedrock order of the British Raj, and, by extension, western civilization.” (McBratney 2011: 25) Furthermore, as Moss argues:

Though Kipling had few of the characteristics of the traditional snob […] he exhibited a natural affinity for centres of power and for the well-connected few, the movers and shakers who control the machinery of these centres. Despite his evident pleasure in knowing such people, Kipling, always a man of exceptional reserve, gave no sign at any point in his career of having sought them out. Indeed, if anything, one is tempted to say that his level of awareness in this area was so low […] that he hardly realized how rich in powerful, influential and glamorous associations he really was. (1982: 12)

Wherever he was Kipling hardly ever seemed to feel at home at a place, in effect, by using McBratney words, he was “[u]nwilling to go native and yet unable to attain the status of a pukka sahib⁵, he felt stranded between the unofficial world of the indigenous and the official realm of Anglo-India.” (2011: 26) However, as scholars argue, Kipling experienced a sort of feeling of belonging by joining the Masonry, and this was of good help for the author, who, in his autobiography, accounts:

In ’85 I was made a Freemason by dispensation (Lodge Hope and Perseverance 782 E.C.), being under age, because the Lodge hoped for a good Secretary. […] Here I met Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, members of the Arya and Brahma Samaj, and a Jew tyler, who was priest and butcher to his little community in the city. So yet another world opened to me which I needed. (1865-1936: n.p.)

In 1888, at the age of twenty-three, Kipling decided that it was time to go back to London, where he wanted to make a career as a writer. In fact, his short stories were quite successful in India and he wanted to keep on writing about India and the Empire, but for a British audience: “Kipling brought British India to London – he presented the Anglo-Indian of the official world […], the peasant, the English woman and the English child of the Indian scene, to a marvelling and clamant public. Kipling and his India had arrived.” (Williams 1936: 67)

Furthermore, as Gilmour explains in his book The Long Recessional: The imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling, living India gave Kipling the opportunity to visit other colonies of the Empire. As he did not travel directly to London but visited places such as Southeaster Asia and the Canadian colonies, and this gave him the chance to look at India from outside and find a

⁵Hindu term used to refer to a ‘European gentleman’.
meaning in the British imperial plan. Moreover, Gilmour is convinced that Kipling’s struggle for belonging was at the basis of his work and he argues that Kipling was a British writer who had his heart in India.

4.2. Kipling the Imperialist

During the years he spent in India, Kipling could directly observe and experience what the British imperial plan was and how it took action in the colonies of the Empire. As scholars argue, among the authors of colonial literature, Kipling took up the role of the “laureate of empire” (McBratney 2011: 23) and he generally supported the imperialist enthusiasm and propositions. In particular, Kipling believed in the Victorian assumption that Great Britain had been legitimised by God to rule over the weaker and ignorant population with the objective of improving their societies. He was a supporter of the idea that the strong British man had to bring his knowledge and technological advancement to overseas territories in order to take their inhabitants out of the darkness of ignorance. For instance, just like the Victorian colonizers, he looked at Indians as if they were children who had to be helped to know the world which surrounded them in order to make profit from the sources that their territory had to offer. In fact, Kipling agreed with the imperialistic belief that the natives could not have been able to improve their condition without the British guidance.

As we have discussed in the previous chapter, Kipling had the chance to directly experience the Indian culture for which he felt a great respect. However, there were some aspects that he did not like and that he refused as morally unacceptable. In particular, as Gilmour explains, he did not agree on infant weddings and on women’s discrimination. In addition, he believed that more should have been done in order to save those more unfortunate natives who were living in the dirt of the poor and dangerous districts. However, in opposition to the Victorian colonizers’ mentality, Kipling did not refer to the natives as ‘savage’, but he respected them. He was convinced that if they were condemned to live in such a poor condition, it was not because of their own fault and for this reason they should be helped.

The fact that Kipling matured such a respect for the Indians could also have arisen from the fact that he often felt out of place in his life, since he felt neither entirely British nor entirely Indian. He therefore did not share the vision of the Indians as ‘the Others’, as he knew what it was like to be an outcast, in effect, “there was even an unpleasant rumour that Rudyard was a half-caste.” (Mallett 2003: 18)

He refused every sort of violent imposition over the natives, as he believed that their culture, even though it could sometimes appear strange and incomprehensible, should not be
destroyed, but that they should be free to be Indians. Clearly, this idea was not shared by the Victorian colonizers whose objective was to eradicate the Indian traditions that they believed to be reprehensible, in order to impose the only and legitimate British culture. In addition, Kipling was against the imposition of Christianity and he did not appreciate the missionaries’ objectives, since he believed that:

Occidente, según él, no debía interferir con los credos no cristianos, porque eran vitales para las costumbres y sistemas sociales de sus fieles. Pero también pensaba que la Cristiandad no poseía una historia tan impoluta como para sentirse justificada a dar lecciones a otras religiones. (Gilmour 2003: 107)

The West, in his opinion, should not interfere with the non-Christian creeds, because they were essential for the traditions and the social system of his believers. However, he also thought that Christianity did not have such a blameless history that could legitimate it to give lessons to other religions.\(^6\)

To recapitulate, Kipling was convinced that British imperialism could bring order and development to the colonies, but he was against the denigration and annihilation of the natives’ culture and traditions:

We can now see that his imperialism […] constituted a serious call to return to the instinctual morality of corporate face-to-face groups in place of the hypocritical moral absolutes of depersonalised society. […] And there is a strongly contemporary note in his aim of restoring a balance to over-urbanized, over-intellectualized industrial society by linking it in service with the underdeveloped world and renewing it spiritually by fresh contact there with Nature and ‘otherness’. […] Like all the great imperialist Kipling was haunted by a sense of the mortality of empire. (Strokes 1972: 96)

As we will shortly see, in his short stories Kipling tries to convey, though often implicitly, his viewpoint on colonisation and imperialism. In order to understand the author’s messages, the reader has to look behind the metaphoric meaning and symbolism of his words. I shall now take a look at his tales which were written in India and which were meant for English readers living in the colony.

### 4.3. Introduction to Plain Tales from the Hills

*Plain Tales from the Hills* is a collection of forty short stories written by Kipling between 1886-7 and published in 1888. Thirty-two among these tales had already appeared in the magazine the *Civil & Military Gazette*.

In the introduction to the collected stories published in 1987 by the Oxford UP, Andrew Rutherford explains the significance of the title where words are used to create a pun. In fact,\(^6\)

\(^6\)Translation mine
the adjective ‘plain’ refers to the fact that these stories are concise, simple and straightforward, but it also refers to the ‘Plains’ where the natives had to live, in contrast to the ‘Hills’ where the Anglo-Indian population lived. Over the hills the air was chillier and it was a good escape from the high and unbearable temperatures of the plains, and “[t]his opposition, geographical, social and psychological, was a major factor in the life of British India in Kipling’s day.” (Rutherford 1987: xii) In fact, it contributed to create a gap, a separation between the British, who stood at the top, dominating, and the natives, who were looked down at as poor and ignorant. As we can notice, in the title of the collection, Kipling conveys some implicit strong messages by hiding them behind words, and, while reading his short stories, we should always be aware of this feature of Kipling’s writing style.

*Plain Tales from the Hills* offers a panorama of how life was carried out in the Anglo-Indian society, as we are shown how the Anglo-Indian population interacted among themselves, but also with the natives. These short stories, in fact, resemble sketches of life experiences rather than tales, and they can be seen as fictionalized accounts of what Kipling directly experienced in India and of what he observed there. Even though we are not sure whether the narrator coincides with Kipling, it is a matter of fact, that the narrator is both involved in what is going on and he knows a lot about Indian life, as he says: “I am only the chorus that come in at the end to explain things” (Kipling 1888: 184). However, I would not agree that he does clarify what is going on in the stories, as we often have the feeling that the tales are left open and that the reader is left free to come up with his/her own interpretations and conclusions. In addition, the fact that the narrator knows a lot is demonstrated by some statements that he often makes, such as “[b]ut this is another story” (12) which implies that he knows much more. In this context, Rutherford explains:

Kipling was pre-eminently ‘one who knew’, and if his knowingness is sometimes overdone, this is partly due to a youthful simulation of maturity and partly to an exuberant sense of how much he really did know, from experience and observation, of the multifarious world of India. (1987: xx)

Referring to this aspect, McBratney talks of an “irritating knowingness” (2011: 26) which is perceivable throughout the stories, for instance, when the narrator, addressing the readers, exclaims: “[o]f course you don’t believe it! […] but a little bit of sober fact is more than you can stand.” (Kipling 1888: 158) Page, in turn, defines the narrator as a “man of self-confidence, even audacity, as well as being possessed of much worldly-wisdom.” (1984: 39)

Kipling is recounting, through his narrator, the stories of men, women and children belonging both to the Anglo-Indian group and the native population, and his purpose is that of
“[d]epicting settings, manners and types of Indian colonial society.” (Korte 2003: 96) I would like to cite here an excerpt from “The House of Suddhoo”, a tale collected in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, where, at the beginning of the story, Kipling introduces, in a few lines, people from almost all the social statuses:

The House of Suddhoo […] is two storied […] Bhagwan Dass, the bunnia, and a man who says he gets his living by seal-cutting, live in the lower story with a troop of wives, servants, friends, and retainers. The two upper rooms used to be occupied by Janoo and Azizun and a little black-and-tan terrier that was stole from an Englishman’s house and given to Janoo by a soldier. (1888: 183)

I believe that this passage offers a good example of the variety of people and stories that are present in *Plain Tales*.

What is particularly interesting about Kipling’s *Plain Tales* is the fact that the author looks at the Indian society from two different points of view. In fact, as he never felt neither really British nor really Indian, he could shift between the two perspectives when describing what was going on around him. In particular, as Sullivan claims, Kipling could observe from a western perspective, as he was part of the Anglo-Indian group, which “stereotypes, categorizes, and universalizes absolute knowledge about the Orient and its Orientals” (1993: 49) However, he was also able to observe the colonial system from a more Indian perspective, “from the vantage point of the internalized Other, the underground Indian child who is always and unavoidably within him.” (49) As a result, this double position does not allow for one unitary vision on the whole collection and therefore the readers are called into action, as they always have to understand from which point of view the story is told. Clearly, there are stories in which Kipling’s perspective is more obvious, but this is not always the case.

The short stories of *Plain Tales* could be easily read separately, in fact there is no need to follow a particular order and this is due to the fact that most of the tales had been previously published in various issues of the *Civil & Military Gazette*. Nevertheless, there are characters who appear in more than one story. Moreover, Kipling deals with different themes, as I shall demonstrate when analysing the short stories “Lisbeth” and “Beyond the Pale”. Among these themes are love affairs between British men and Indian women, the magical element of Indian traditions, the exotic strangeness of the Indian culture, craziness, and death, alcoholism, depression, and crime, the supernatural, the description of Anglo-Indians’ life and society. The themes are many and varied and they definitely contribute to the great impact of this collection.

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7 “Bhagwan Dass is an extortionate and an adulterator. He is very rich.” (Kipling 1888: 184)
8 “Janoo and Azizun are Kashmiris, Ledies of the City, and theirs was an ancient and more or less honorable profession.” (Kipling 1888: 184)
4.3.1. “Lispeth”

“Lispeth” is the first short story of *Plain Tales* and it originally appeared in 1886 in the *Civil & Military Gazette*. In this short story we have a theme which often appears throughout the collection, which is the impossibility of love relationships between the white British race and ‘the Others’. In this story it is hard to clearly understand Kipling’s opinion on the matter, but I would assume that he was not against miscegenation, as the characters of his short stories are often depicted as weak men or women who suffer from not being able to carry out their love affair with the beautiful native girl or the white British man they love.

The main character of this tale is Lisbeth, an orphan girl, who was born from Indian parents, but who had grown up in an Anglo-Indian Christian family. In this story, Kipling reflects on the effects of Christianity in the colonies which constitutes another major theme. As we have mentioned in the previous chapter, Kipling was against the objectives that Christian missionaries where carrying out in the colonies, as he believed that it was unjust to impose a new religion on the natives, as their creeds were fundamental for their life and social stability. Furthermore, Kipling did not agree with the ‘superiority’ of Christianity as a better religion than others, as Christians, back in history, had also committed cruel crimes. Kipling’s doubts about the effectiveness of Christian intervention in India are expressed throughout the story in several passages as, for instance, when the narrator states: “[w]hether Christianity improved Lispeth, or whether the gods of her own people would have done as much for her under any circumstances, I do not know: but she grew very lovely” (Kipling 1888: 3), and also “[i]t takes a great deal of Christianity to wipe out uncivilized Eastern instincts, such as falling in love at first sight.” (5) This latter statement refers to the fact that Lispeth has fallen in love with a young English man whom she found injured and unconscious on her way back home. However, her foster parents cannot understand how she could suddenly have fallen in love with a stranger. As ‘good Christians’, they “lectured her severely on the impropriety of her conduct” (5) and the use of the verb ‘to lecture’ clearly indicates the Christians’ attitude to impose their morality and their creeds on the Indian population as the only acceptable and true religion, without caring about the natives’ convictions. As opposed to her foster parents Lispeth is a spontaneous young woman and “[b]eing savage by birth, she took no trouble to hide her feelings”. (6)

It is sometimes hard to understand to what extent Kipling is being neutral in considering the distinctions between races and when he tends to be in favour of one over the other. Scholars claim that he does sometimes use a racist vocabulary, and I would argue that he does so in order to categorize the characters more easily in two distinct groups. For instance, in the citation above, Lispeth is described as a ‘savage by birth’ and this seems to influence and
determine her vision on life, though Lispeth has grown up in Anglo-Indian family, she would never be able to totally loose her ‘savage side’.

Kipling’s personal struggle for belonging also surfaces in his stories, where characters like Lispeth are not fully part of one group or the other. In fact, as Kipling was sometimes believed to be a half-caste, Lispeth’s own people “hated her because she had, they said, become a memsahib\(^9\) and washed herself daily”. (Kipling 1888: 4)

As soon as Lispeth meets the Englishman she decides that she will marry him and she pursues her decision straightforwardly without thinking about the consequences of her actions. However, her foster parents, as the majority of Christian British people would have done, are firmly against her will as they believe that it was ‘wrong and improper’ of Lispeth to think of marriage with an Englishman, who was of a superior clay, besides being promised in marriage to a girl of his own people.” (7) In this passage we can observe how Lispeth’s foster parents describe their own people, the British, as superior, implying a pre-eminence in education, in moral behaviour and technological development. Therefore, we have again an implication that even though Lispeth has been raised among British people, she would never reach their social status, as ‘savage blood’ runs in her veins. This shows that the British colonizers were convinced that they could help the natives to improve their condition and match the British standard. We have a reference here to the idea that imperialism could bring order and development in the colonies, which was a plan supported by Kipling.

Lispeth and the young Englishman have some private moments for themselves that they both enjoy, but these moments of amusement “meant nothing at all to him, and everything in the world to Lispeth.” (6) In fact, the Englishman has to leave India soon to go back to the ‘mother country’ where his future wife is waiting for him. Even though Lispeth’s foster parents try to explain the situation to her, she refuses to understand and she is sure that the Englishman loves her. In reality, however, he did anything to avoid her company and by doing so he deceived her. At this point, we come to another main theme of this short story which is the contrast between the honesty and spontaneity of emotions of Lispeth, the ‘savage’, and the falsity and trivial morality of the British men and women. For instance, Lispeth’s foster parents convince her that the young man would go back to Great Britain only for a short time and then come back and marry her, but this is clearly a lie. Consequently, Lispeth waits for months for the Englishman, “her temper grew very bad” (7), and eventually she is told the truth. Lispeth is profoundly offended and humiliated and, in a sort of epiphany, she suddenly realises that she

\(^9\) “Indian: A married white or upper-class woman (often used as a respectful form of address by non-whites).” (Oxford Dictionaries Online)
has lived all her life in a lie, and she cannot believe her parent’s words: “How can what he and you said be untrue?” (Kipling 1888: 7) In particular, we have a stress here on the fact that the ‘good Christians’ pretend to profess positive principles which they wanted to impose on ‘the Others’ but which they actually do not respect themselves.

At the end of the story we have the significant image of a disillusioned Lispeth who climbs down the Hill, where the ‘superior’ and rich Anglo-Indian live, in order to go back to her people: “‘I am going back to my own people’ said she. ‘You have killed Lispeth. There is only left old Jade’s daughter – the daughter of a Pahari and the servant of Tarka Devi. You are all liars, you English.’” (7)

Moreover, we have one final bitter comment on Christian morality. After all that has happened, Lispeth’s foster mother claims that “Lispeth was always at heart an infidel” (7), implying that they should have foreseen Lispeth’s instinctive reaction because she is a native by birth and she cannot change. However, as the narrator states: “[s]eeing that she [Lispeth] had been taken into the Church of England at the mature age of five weeks, this statement does not do credit to the Chaplain’s wife.” (7) I would argue that Kipling’s message behind this statement is that Christianity had failed its mission in the colonies and that Christians’ operations throughout the Empire were not bringing any benefits to the native peoples. As Korte suggests, “Lispeth” and other short stories of Plain Tales are “critical of the whites and their value systems and betray a sympathy for those who are violated by white supremacy.” (2003: 97)

4.3.2. “Beyond the Pale”

“Beyond the Pale” is among the eight stories which were not published in the Civil and Military Gazette but appeared for the first time in Plain Tales. As “Lispeth”, this story mainly deals with the problems which derive from the interaction between the Anglo-Indians and the natives, and the title already suggests the risk of overstepping a boundary. The matter is observed from another point of view than in “Lispeth”, as we are presented with the consequences an Englishman has to face when he decides to begin an affair with an Indian woman, and the story, in this case, is narrated from the British man’s perspective.

The protagonists of this story are Bisesa, a young Indian widow, and Trejago, an Englishman, a character who seems like a persona of Kipling himself. In fact, like the author, Tribajo knows a lot about the Indian culture and “He took too deep an interest in native life.” (Kipling 1888: 213) In particular, in India Trejago, just like Kipling, led a double life. During the day he fulfilled his duties at the Civil and Military Gazette, but once his busy work day was
over, he liked wandering around the city in order to get closer to the native population and in order to revive the magical moments of his childhood. The young Englishman of this story is also leading a double life, as “in the day-time, Trejago drove through his routine office work [...] at night [...] came the walk under the evel-smelling boorka” (217) which eventually led him to Bisesa and the beginning of a “double life so wild.” (216)

From the beginning of the story the readers are warned about the dangers of interrelation between different races and the narrator claims that: “[a] man should, whatever happens, keep to his own caste, race and breed. Let the White go to the White and the Black to the Black.” (213) However, it is unclear whether this is Kipling’s perspective on the matter or just that of the narrator. As I have argued in chapter 4.1., Kipling had always felt divided between the two cultures, which suggests that it is possible that someone can stand in a half-way position, with the awareness of the problems that this might cause. In addition, Kipling had always felt a certain respect for the native people and he attempted to know as much as he could about their traditions in order to reduce the cultural gap which leads to incomprehension.

While in “Lispeth” we could observe how a British family reacted to a relationship between an Englishman and a native woman, in “Beyond the Pale” we are introduced to the native peoples’ reaction about the affair. In particular, we will observe how Trejago “wilfully stepped beyond the safe limits of decent everyday society, and paid for it heavily” (213), as “[h]e knew too much in the first instance; and he saw too much in the second.” (213)

This story offers also interesting insights into the Indian moral code of the nineteenth century. For instance, we are shown how women were often confined to their houses, as Indian men and/or husbands did not approve “of their women-folk looking into the world.” (213) In effect, Bisesa was confined to a room which “looked out through the grated window into the narrow dark Gully where the sun never came.” (213) This image of a dark room with a window from which the sun never enters, could be interpreted as a metaphor of a life without hope of happiness, a condition which, in the case of Bisesa, is aggravated by the fact that she is a widow. However, as soon as she meets Trejago she experience a new feeling of joy that she had not felt for a long time.

“Beyond the Pale” deals with the theme of the desire for ‘the Other’, that in this story is impersonated by Bisesa who “was an endless delight to Trejago.” (Kipling 1888: 217) Bisesa stands for the stereotypical image of the exotic women who the British wives feared and the English men looked at with lust. In particular, we are looking at Bisesa throughout Trejago’s eyes which eroticise her figure by describing her as a ‘child’ and a ‘bird’, two images that refer respectively to the attraction for younger women and the desire incited by what is different.
Trejago is attracted by Bisesa’s “rose-leaf hands” (217) and by her “little-feet, light as marigold flowers, that could lie in the palm of a man’s one hand.” (217) Bisesa is described as a rare beauty whose charm Trejago cannot resist, though “[m]uch that is written about ‘Oriental passion and impulsiveness’ is exaggerated and compiled at second-hand, but a little of it is true.” (218)

Bisesa and Trejago declare their love to each other, but a voice reaches Bisesa’s ear that he has been seen walking with an Englishwoman. Bisesa is very offended by this information and she feels betrayed by Tejago to whom she shouted: “[y]ou are an English man. I am only a black girl.” (218) This statement carries a powerful implicit meaning, as it condemns the colonizer’s presumption that he is allowed to do whatever he pleased without caring about the natives’ feelings. However, Trejago is a good man and he tells her that she is unjustly accusing him, as she “did not understand these things from a Western standpoint.” (218) In fact, the incomprehension between the lovers derives from a different perception of reality due to their different cultural backgrounds. According to Caiter this story:

goes beyond depicting the tragic ending of a mixed-racial relationship which must needs succumb to the demands of social propriety and/or necessity (a well-established topic of Anglo-Indian literature in general). It shows instead a tragedy originating in the ultimate opaqueness of other cultures […] Colonial reality remains inexplicable, inscrutable, like the silent “pitiless walls” against which Trejago rages uselessly. (Online)

Trejago thinks he knows a lot about the Indian culture but he is overestimating his knowledge, and he will be faced with the dramatic consequences of his superficiality. He will find out that Bisesa has been severely punished for having had an affair with him and Trejago will also be disgraced; Bisesa’s uncle cuts off the girl’s hands, while Trejago is injured at the groin.

Towards the end of the story the situation degenerates and we have a change in the narrative style which, as it often happens in Plain Tales, becomes more dramatic. This building up of suspense is further increased by the mysteriousness of the circumstance which Trejago cannot fully understand. For instance, he is injured at the groin by someone or something that “grunted like a wild beast” (Kipling 1888: 219) and, as Caiter claims:

Who draws the grating away? Why did Bisesa's hands get cut off? And when? And by whom? Is the grunt a warning? An expression of “Oriental innate bestiality”? What gets thrust at Trejago? Why is the grating replaced? Why does nobody react to Trejago's rage and shouting, why does nobody interfere - if only to finish Trejago off? To the very end, the reader cannot be sure of anything. Not even if it really was Durga Charan, Bisesa's uncle, who attacked Trejago. (Online)

“Beyond the Pale” offers an account of the difficulties of cultural communication and of interrelations in colonial India and of how this could lead to unsolvable misunderstandings. At
the end of the story, as I would argue, Bisesa is the one who really suffers and who is negatively affected by the all circumstance. In fact, Trejago keeps on living his life in freedom and people still consider him a “decent sort of man” (Kipling 1888: 220), but Bisesa is condemned to a segregated life in isolation and humiliation. In particular, she is disgraced both morally, as her family would always condemn her for having had an affair with a white man, and physically, as she has been deprived of her hands, which means she would depend on someone else for all her life.

Moreover, through the character of Trejago and his actions, Kipling seems to condemn the hypocrisy of the Anglo-Indian society. Trejago is definitely responsible for what has happened to Bisesa, however he does not do anything to understand what has happened to her and why, but he only justifies himself by saying that “[h]e cannot get Bisesa – poor little Bisesa – back again” (219). Trebajo seems to be afraid of transgression and he prefers to be recognized as a decent man, than to fight for Bisesa’s love. Clearly, Trejago is afraid of his own people’s judgement, for instance he is concerned about the “ladies of the Station” (216) and “how long they would know him if they knew of poor little Bisesa.” (216)

As in “Lispeth”, at the end of “Beyond the Pale”, the readers are called into action, as the narrator does not explicitly comment on the positive or negative behaviour of Trejago, but he only implies that this ‘decent sort of man’ might, in the end, not be so honourable, expressing, probably, Kipling’s prejudices against the Anglo-Indian society.

5. Joseph Conrad and W. Somerset Maugham: Imperial Experiences in the Congo and Southeast Asia

5.1. Conrad: from Seaman to Acclaimed Writer

Before becoming a well-known writer, Joseph Conrad worked for fifteen years, from 1878 to 1993, as a British sailor for the British Merchant Service. Conrad was born in Podolia, now Ukraine, which at the time was dominated by Russia and it is in 1878 on the steamer Mavis that Conrad got in touch for the first time with the English language. It is in 1886, after having chosen England as his home, that he obtained the British Nationality. Interestingly, as a child, Conrad had a direct experience of how life was like in a subjugated land and during his later travels throughout the Empire on British steamers he could also witness the operations of the European imperial power. Since his childhood, Conrad had dreamed to travel around the globe and working at the office of the British Merchant Service allowed his dream to become true.
His adventures on the sea began in 1878 when he left Marseilles on the British steamer *Mavis* to travel, during the following years, to faraway places such as the Far East, the West Indies, Australia and Africa. However, as far as this paper is concerned, we are particularly interested in Conrad’s experience in Central Africa and the Congo. In the Congo, Conrad worked as a steamboat captain and during the six months that he spent there he could observe how European colonizers were exploiting the native populations and the resources that their territory had to offer; the Europeans were mainly interested in the trade of ivory.

In chapter 3.4. I have talked about the African scramble and the European powers’ fight for the territories of the ‘Dark Continent’. As far as the Congo is concerned, in 1855 the Berlin Conference decided that the region was to be given to King Leopold II of Belgium who, consequently, “[i]n 1875 […] founded the International Association for the Civilization of Central Africa with results as abominable for the African as they were lucrative to His Majesty.” (Warner 1951: 48)

Though it is difficult to know what had aroused Conrad’s interest in going to the Congo, “[i]t may have been chance, the job merely coming at the end of a chain of contacts, or it may have been that tropical Africa attracted him” (Baines 1971: 135), Baines explains that Congo had always attracted the white men, among whose:

> there were men, impatient with the humdrum routine of highly organised civilized life, who were constantly attracted by the unknown and felt that they could only express themselves amid the freedom of unsubdued humanity and nature; among them were Conrad himself. (145)

The experiences which Conrad made in the Congo became fundamental for the writing of some of his most important pieces of work, such as the short story “An Outpost of Progress” and the novel *Heart of Darkness*. However, his childhood’s visions of Africa as an exotic and idyllic place dissolved during the months he spent in Africa and his voyage became a travel of disillusionment. In fact, “[t]he journey into the heart of the Congo, which had once inflamed his childish imagination, turned out to be a gray, somber struggle for survival – a most unexciting context which offered neither glory nor victory.” (Gillon 1982: 17)

His stay in the Congo profoundly affected Conrad both at a psychological and physical level. He witnessed the violence and exploitation exercised by the white men on the native population and he could observe how the imperial plan of bringing order and civilization to the colonies was carried out differently from what he had believed. The natives were treated like animals and they were shown no respect from the white colonizers:
He [Conrad] probably did not realize at the time to what extent these four months in the Congo had affected his health. It had never been very strong and the Congo climate permanently undermined it so that for the rest of his life he was dogged by recurrent fever and gouty symptoms. Nor was his body alone affected. It would be absurd to attribute his long periods of despair to the Congo experience […] ‘An Outpost of Progress’, for all its irony and macabre humour and Heart of Darkness […] show how deeply he was affected emotionally by the sight of such human baseness and degradation. (Baines 1971: 151)

Scholars argue that it was during the time he spent in the Congo that Conrad began thinking of a career as a writer, in effect, “[h]e began to be aware of a certain duality in himself. The romantic sailor had turned into a lonely thinker with a passion for introspection. […] Conrad the sailor was dead […] he never sailed again; out of his misery and disenchantment Conrad the writer was born.” (Gillon 1982: 17) In his work A Personal Record: Some Reminiscences, Conrad recounts that:

The necessity [to write] which impelled me was a hidden, obscure necessity, a completely masked and unaccountable phenomenon. […] Till I began to write that novel [Almayer’s Folly] I had written nothing but letters, and not very many of these. […] The conception of a planned book was entirely outside my mental range when I sat down to write; the ambition of being an author had never turned up amongst these gracious imaginary existences one creates fondly for oneself at times in the stillness and immobility of a day-dream. (1912: 68)

Conrad was to become an acclaimed novelist and story tellers and his life experiences around the world provided him with a lot of material from which he could take inspiration, in effect, “[s]eldom would he have to meet a writer’s common problem – lack of a plot. […] The urge to write came from within ant it was insistent. Bet of all his mental as opposed to his bodily energy was liberal and untapped.” (Warner 1951: 61) Even though Conrad’s voyage to the Congo had been “humiliating, frustrating and distasteful, as well as disastrous in terms of his future health” (Sherry 1972: 57) it was essential for the writing, as scholars agree, of his best short story “An Outpost of Progress”, which I will shortly analyse. In particular, in an unsigned review published in 1898 on the Daily Mail and collected in Sherry’s Conrad: The Critical Heritage, a critic claims:

Mr. Conrad has lived intimately, familiarly the sailor’s life he describes, and he brings us from its monotony, its routine, its hardships, and its vast strangeness, a world of beauty intensely real, intensely delicate. He has seen. […] The quality of Mr. Conrad’s art is seen in his faculty of making us perceive men’s lives in their natural great world of Nature, and the sea, land and sky around them. (n.p. 1893: 106)

At the beginning of his career as a writer, Conrad preferred the short story genre over the novel, as the publication of stories on magazines would give him a regular and good income. Conrad’s first collection of short stories titled Tales of Unrest was published in 1898 and “An Outpost of Progress” appears in this collection together with other four stories written during the years
1896-7. “An Outpost of Progress” and three of the other five stories had originally appeared on English and American magazines. In particular, Conrad’s tales are not as condensed as Kipling’s one and more space is given to the description of the setting with a particular focus on nature. As it is stated in the unsigned review of *Tales of Unrest* published on the *Daily Mail* in 1898:

The quality of Mr. Conrad’s art is seen in his faculty of making us perceive men’s lives in their natural great world of Nature, and the sea, land and sky around them are not drawn as a mere background, or as something inferior and secondary to the human will, as we have in most artist’s work. This faculty of seeing man’s life in relation to the seen and unseen forces of Nature it is that gives Mr. Conrad’s art its extreme delicacy and its great breadth of vision. (1898: 106)

Furthermore, in an article published on the *Academy* in 1899, collected in Sherry’s *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*, an anonymous reviewer claims that:

Mr. Conrad tells his tales of strong men fighting the elements, of emotional crises, of settlers in foreign lands among alien people, by the conflict of the East and the West, of savagery and civilisation. This contrast between his own calm and the turbulence of his subject-matter lends his work a peculiarly impressive character. […] Another of Mr. Conrad’s distinguishes qualities is that he keeps man in his place. He has an eye ever vigilant both for the transitory persons of his drama and for the permanent forces at their back. He blends human beings and nature. […] Everything is related and harmonised. […] he is more than a story teller. […] his work belongs never to cheerful literature; it is sombre, melancholy, searching. (1899: 109)

Apart from one story which is set in London, all the short stories collected in *Tales of Unrest* are set in Malay and Central Africa and they present the readers with moments of life in the colonies showing the consequences that the European imperial plan had on the native populations but also on the British officers who were working in the colonies. The title of the collection suggests that the author will deal with a delicate theme, which is the observation and description of the disturbance and turmoil that in determined circumstances of discomfort affects men and/or women at a psychological and physical level. The ‘state of unrest’ which Conrad investigates is the uneasiness which often disturbed the white colonizers who, for instance, had to confront themselves with the detrimental effects of imperialism, the direct contact with nature and its greatness, and the feeling of loneliness that European officers had to face when living for a long time in isolated outposts. In effect, “[In the Congo] [i]nstead of Romance, Conrad found the horror of the jungle and its savage laws, the utter degradation of man isolated in the wilderness” (Gillon 1982: 17); the themes of betrayal and escape are also encountered in these tales. In the next chapter I shall closely look at the short story “An Outpost of Progress” which, as far as this paper is concerned, I believe to be the most significant, as
Conrad presents his perspective on imperialism and an “uncompromising analysis of the mechanisms of imperialism” (Hawthorn 1992: 168).

During his youth and during the first years he worked as a sailor, Conrad did not refuse the imperial mission and its purpose of bringing the natives out of the darkness of ignorance and underdevelopment, but he experienced at the same time a feeling of uneasiness towards imperialism due to his childhood in occupied Poland. However, it was during his travels throughout the colonies that “his scepticism about the claims to moral improvement of the ‘civilizing’ endeavour deepened.” (White 1996: 184), as he saw empire from a closer perspective which allowed him to witness the brutalities of the colonial system. As scholars argue, it is in the short story “An Outpost of Progress” that Conrad clearly expresses his position towards imperialism and his lack of confidence in the benefits it would bring to the colonized peoples. Moreover, it is interesting to notice that in this story he does not only focus on the condition of the native population under imperial power, but Conrad also analyses the consequences that imperialism had on the white colonizers.

5.2. “An Outpost of Progress”

This short story is the product of the experiences that Conrad made in Central Africa during his travels at the office of the British Merchant Service. Even though there is no explicit reference to the setting, it is highly probable that the story is set in the Congo basin, an area rich in ivory and other natural resources which attracted the European powers. As we have mentioned before, the area was eventually subjugated to the power of King Leopold II of Belgium and the two main characters, who are representatives of a European trading company, are probably two Belgian officers.

In this short story Conrad addresses some relevant themes concerning colonialism and the imperial plan of civilization of the colonies. The author presents the readers with a cynical comment and analysis of the consequences that imperialism had in the colonies and which affected not only the native populations but also the white colonizers. To begin with, I would like to refer to M’hamed Bensemmane argumentation, as he interestingly identifies throughout the story three elements which symbolise the presence of the European power in Central Africa. Bensemmane argues that the steamer and the outpost are both symbols of ‘civilization’, as the steamer brings the two white ‘civilized’ men to Africa, while the outpost epitomizes the penetration of Western civilisation among the savages. Furthermore, ivory is both a symbol of European technological advancement, as it was used to produce refined pieces of work, but it
also carries a negative meaning, as the European traders obtained it by illegal means, such as slave dealing, as it happens in the story. We also have a reference to the exploitation of the colonies and its resources by the European imperial powers.

One of the relevant themes that is to be found in an “Outpost of Progress” is the description and contraposition of the white colonizers’ society and the natives’ world. These two spheres are respectively represented by Kayerts and Carlier, two white officers, and the black people working at the trading station. To be more precise, Kayerts and Carlier have been sent to Africa in order to supervise the trade of ivory and they are settled in an isolated outpost. They both conform to the Western attitude based on the idea that the white colonizers were superior to the native populations and they often refer to the native people by using denigrating and racist terms. For instance, the black workers are described as “those savages” (Conrad 1898: 90), “the funny brute” (93), “[f]ine animals” (93) and as “rather aromatic” (93). Kayerts and Carlier, who have faith in the imperial mission, look down at the natives and they consider them to be savages and primitive people who they should enlighten and instruct. However, as scholars argue, the two officers are mock-heroes and they will not succeed in bringing any benefit to the native population, on the contrary, they will eventually turn out to be as primitive as the native people that they despise. “An Outpost of Progress” is a scornful and provocative critique of the imperial plan of bringing civilization to the colonies, and it is through the figures of Kayerts and Carlier that Conrad develops his subtle cynical examination of the operations of imperial power in the colonies.

From the beginning of the story Kayerts and Carlier are described as weak men, “imbeciles” (88) who do not seem suitable for the job in the outpost, in effect, they appear completely lost in “this vast and dark country” (89), at direct contact with nature and far away from civilized Europe. Conrad carries out a fine criticism of the imperial propaganda of the superior European civilized culture and he does that by showing how Kayerts and Carlier find themselves armless and vulnerable away from the “safety of their surroundings” (89), meaning the rules and organization on which their society back home is based. Therefore, Kayerts and Carlier are ‘civilized’ when they are in their home-country, as they limit themselves to follow what the crowd does and they fulfil their duties, but they “felt very much alone when suddenly left unassisted to face the wilderness; a wilderness rendered more strange, more incomprehensible by the mysterious glimpses of the vigorous life it contained.” (89) The two white officers feel lonely and lost in the middle of the jungle where “they had the same […] sense of danger” (89), in a place where no other white man lives. Kayerts and Carlier are totally dependent on the civilized norms of their society back home, and they do not know how to
behave in Africa, where they are “physically free but mentally still imprisoned.” (Hawthorn 165) They are physically free as they are at direct contact with nature, but mentally imprisoned because they do not understand how they should act in such a wild setting:

the contact with pure unmitigated savagery, with primitive nature and primitive man, brings sudden and profound trouble into the heart. To the sentiment of begin alone of one’s kind, to the clear perception of the loneliness of one’s thoughts, of one’s sensations – to the negation of the habitual, which is safe, there is added the affirmation of the unusual, which is dangerous. (Conrad 1898: 89)

Civilized Europe has not taught his men how to face the wilderness of the colonies and Kayerts and Carlier are unable to understand what surrounds them and they see nature as something dangerous. For instance, they do not enjoy the beautiful landscapes and the freedom that such environment offers:

They lived like blind men in a large room, aware only of what came in contact with them (and of that only imperfectly), but unable to see the general aspect of things. The river, the forest, all the great land throbbing with life, were like a great emptiness. Even the great sunshine disclosed nothing intelligible. (92)

In this context, they look at the native people with disgust because they appear as something different and with whom they are not acquainted, in effect, their feeling of antipathy has no real reason and the black people are referred to as ‘the Others’ only because they do not match Kayerts and Carlier’s standard of human being. For this reason the natives are looked down at as animals or primitive uneducated individuals:

They were naked, glossy black, ornamented with snowy shells and glistening brass wire, perfect of limb. They made an uncouth babbling noise when they spoke, moved in a stately manner, and sent quick, wild glances out of their startled, never-resting eyes. (92)

The two officers are defined as “insignificant and incapable individuals” (89) who do not match the idea of the white enlightened colonizer who was supposed to bring development and education. Particularly, they are unable of personal judgement and they do not understand what is going on around them. In spite of that, they are convinced to have been sent to Africa in order to carry out the imperial mission of bringing progress. In a relevant passage Conrad implicitly makes fun of the two Europeans by using fine irony, as he often does through the story. In the mentioned passage, Kayerts and Carlier find some novels and begin to discuss about them, but the irony in this episode is quite clear. The two officers pretend to have literary knowledge and to be educated men, but they have no idea about what they are dealing with. For instance, they get involved in “silly discussions” (94) and the narrator tells that “[i]n the centre of Africa they
made acquaintance of Richelieu and of d´Artagnan, of Hawk´s Eye and of Father Goriot, and of many other people” (Conrad 1898: 94). The narrator is implying that the two European men are uneducated individuals, but in Africa they take up the position of civilized men and they pretend to be literate people. We could argue that Conrad criticises the imperial propaganda and its mission to bring enlightenment through the empire and he does that by showing how Kayerts and Carlier are totally influenced by this idea. Their conviction becomes even stronger when they find and read an article which talks about the European expansion:

It spoke much of the rights and duties of civilization, of the sacredness of the civilizing work, and extolled the merits of those who went about bringing light, and faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth. Carlier and Kayerts read, wondered and began to think better of themselves. (94-95)

In this passage of the story Conrad is being quite ironic, as the readers are aware of the condition of the two Europeans, what is stated in the article sounds improper. In fact, it contributes to make the idea of progress more like an illusion than something that can actually be easily achieved, as the readers is led to think that if the European officers who are sent in the colonies are like Kayert and Carlier nothing would be achieved. In particular, as Hawthorn claims:

Critical reading, of novels and as much as newspapers, requires the ability to cut oneself off from immediate impressions, to step back from these and to consider alternative explanatory structures into which these can be fitted. Imperialism is able to lie and deceive about what it actually involves, because its servants are either unable or unwilling to question the reports they are given. (1992: 165-166)

According to Hawthorn, Kyerts and Carlier, though they do not really understand what is going on around them, do not question the imperial operations in the colonies, but they simply accept them. In particular, Conrad expresses his criticism of the imperial system in a passage in the story when Kayerts and Carlier witness an encounter between a slave trader and Makola, a black man who is in charge of the outpost together with the two European officers. Even though they know what is actually going on, they pretend not to understand and by doing so they disguise their innocence, but the readers know that they are involved in the imperial plan as much as the slave traders are. As scholars argue, Conrad seems to condemn the system of which he was also part when he was working at the service of the British Merchant Service and he makes a sort of “self-examination” (Bensemmane 2001: online) of the experiences he made in the colonies:

As a foreigner with a very finely developed perception of his own, Conrad realised that he did not necessarily see events in the same way as the majority of the British, or indeed western Europeans as a whole. He was writing at the time of expanding colonisation, and having experienced the effects of imperialism was sceptical about its benefits, during a period when such activities were more celebrated.
The idea which stands behind the passage of the story that we have previously mentioned is that it was often the case, during the colonial time, to pretend not to know too much about the imperial business in the empire in order to manage to remain indifferent to the cruelties which were carried out in the colonies. It is at this point of the tale that we observe how Kayerts and Carlier are unable to take action either to change their condition or to fight against what they do not believe to be right, such as the slaves trade, in effect, “they have no critical judgement; they are unable to distance themselves from their immediate circumstances, or to see these in any larger, explanatory context.” (Hawthorn 1992: 165)

It becomes clearer that Kayerts and Carlier actually depend on Makola, their African colleague, who, for instance, has coped with the trade of slaves instead of the two white men. “An Outpost of Progress” is a provocative story as, in the case of Makola, the role of the colonizer and the native are switched. In fact, “[h]e [Makola] is in control because he is able to adapt to the dominant needs of imperialism: maximal extraction of wealth disguised by the most convincing lies” (1992: 160), while Kayerts and Carlier are little by little negatively affected, both at a physical and psychological level, by the imperial system. They are aware of being useless at the outpost and to be unable to impose their authority and “[w]henever they mentioned Makola’s name they always added to it an opprobrious epithet. It eased their conscience.” (Conrad 1898: 106) The irony of the circumstance is again evident, as it is Makola, the native, who is able to take decisions and not the ‘superior’ white men.

Kayerts´s and Carlier´s physical and psychological condition gradually deteriorates and the ‘progress’ which they were supposed to promote turns into a mere illusion. Therefore, we understand that the title of the short story itself carries a mocking implication, as the trading station eventually becomes the setting of savage and primitive behaviours. With an “Outpost of Progress” Conrad wanted to attack the imperial slogan of ‘progress’ which was promoted during the colonial time and he “demonstrates an enormous discrepancy between imperialist rhetoric and reality.” (James, Johnson 1996: n.p.) By observing Kayerts and Carlier away from their own, supposedly civilized, society and at direct contact with the wilderness of nature and the ‘strangeness’ of the native tribes we realize that the imperial system had not properly prepared his men to work in the colonies:
Society, not from any tenderness, but because of its strange needs, had taken care of those two men, forbidding them all independent thought, all initiative, all departure from routine; and forbidding it under pain of death. They could only live on condition of being machines. And now, released from the fostering care of men with pens behind the ears, or of men with gold lace on the sleeves, they were like those lifelong prisoners who, liberated after many years, do not know what use to make of their freedom. They did not know what use to make of their faculties, being both, through want of practice, incapable of independent thought. (Conrad 1898: 91)

We witness how the two men progressively turn into the savages that they despised so much. They become more and more impatient about the delayed return of the steamer which should take them back to Europe and “[d]ays lengthened into weeks, then into months” (108) and “[d]ays passed silent, exasperating, and slow. When the two men spoke, they snarled; and their silences were bitter, as if tinged by the bitterness of their thoughts.” (110) The loneliness they feel at the outpost and the lack of a system which tells them what to do lead Kayerts and Carlier to a state of depression and resignation which eventually turns into madness. Their psychological state gradually degenerates and they start behaving like brutes, for instance, they stop talking in a civil manner and a feeling of reciprocal hate arises. However, it is in this condition of discomfort that they realize how much they are involved in the system which they have served but that has ruined them. Towards the end of the story, Kayerts shouts to Carlier: “I hate hypocrites. You are a hypocrite. You are a slave dealer. I am a slave dealer. There’s nothing but slave-dealers in this cursed country.” (Conrad 1898: 110) As Bensemmane argues, “[t]hey are in the first place overpowered by an environment which they thought they could control, a ‘wilderness’ which simply has activated their basest instincts and has led to their moral and physical annihilation.” (2001: online) In “An Outpost of Progress” Conrad shows that primitive behaviours are common both to civilised and uncivilised societies and he condemns the colonizer’s belief that the European white races were superior to the natives.

In the second half of the tale we have an increasing climax which arises suspense and prepares the readers to the outburst of something terrible. Eventually, in a moment of madness, Kayerts kills Carlier because he refuses to bring him some sugar. Kayerts’s reaction is instinctive, as that of an animal, and it is unjustified, and, after realizing that he has killed his colleague, he hangs himself:

His toes were only a couple of inches above the ground; his arms hung stiffly down; he seemed to be standing rigidly at attention, but with one purple cheek playfully posed on the shoulder. And, irreverently, he was putting out a swollen tongue at his Managing Director. (Conrad 1898:117)

This final image carries a deep and bitter ironic significance, first of all because Kayerts kills himself right before the steamer that he has waited for so long arrives, and secondly because it metaphorically shows the failure of progress promoted by the European civilized society.
Kayerts “irrevently” (117) pulls his tongue out at his Managing Director, as if he wants to say that he has finally freed himself from the hypocrisy of the imperial system and its deceptive plan.

An “Outpost of Progress” shows the failure of the imperial plan which the two European officers have not been able to accomplish and we are left with “a feeling that Kayerts and Carlier have been consumed by the monster which they served and encouraged.” (Hawthorn 1992: 160) Even though Conrad is critic throughout the all story, we are not indifferent to the condition of the two officers for whom we feel pity, as they are victims of the system which they have served and which has lied to them by not revealing its true principles. Moreover, Conrad criticizes the imperial propaganda that the European powers were promoting during the colonial times and which deceived the common people by showing them a prosperous and peaceful image of the empire, but also by spreading stereotyped images of the native peoples which contributed to arise a feeling of fear for the inhabitants of the colonies.

5.3. The ‘Exotic Fiction’ of W. Somerset Maugham

Somerset Maugham is considered to be one of the most prominent writers of the twentieth century and his short stories are well-known. As Kipling and Conrad, he also wrote about the colonial times, but with a focus on the late Empire which was weaker than in the nineteenth century, but still existing. In contrast to Kipling and Conrad, as scholars argue, in Maugham's works we do not find any attempt to criticise or support imperialism and it is probably for this reason that critics did not always give him the merit he deserved. For instance, it is difficult to find critical literature about Maugham or detailed biographical information. As scholars argue, he might not have attracted the critics’ interest because his stories were rather conventional and he rejected any modernist experiments which, for instance, can be found in Conrad’s works. In his biographical work The Summing Up, Maugham explains: “I never had much patience with the writers who claim from the reader an effort to understand their meaning. […] you may find it difficult to understand the thought of Hume […] but no one with any education at all can fail to understand exactly what the meaning of each sentence is.” (1938: 21) Maugham was a successful author and he knew what his readers wanted. His tales are characterized by a good structure, an easy plot and suspense, which are elements that contribute to make his tales gripping, as Cordell notes “Maugham likes a plot. […] He likes the kind of story one can tell at the club or dinner table.” (1961: 141) In this context, Cordell argues that: “for though the medium of the magazine, radio, film, and television – particularly the popular magazine – his [Maugham’s] short stories reached hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, who never attend
the theatre and seldom read a book.” (1961: 138) The short story is definitely the genre which made Maugham popular and it was the genre he also liked the most, as he explained: “I saw the short story as a narrative of a single event, material or spiritual, to which by the elimination of everything that was not essential to its elucidation a dramatic unity could be given.” (1938: 143)

As Kipling and Conrad, Maugham was not born in Great Britain, but in Paris where his father was working in the British embassy. When he was still a child he lost both his parents and he moved to London under the care of an uncle. He went to school in Canterbury and then in Heidelberg, Germany, but he eventually returned to London to study medicine. However, he did not undertake a career as a doctor, but he dedicated his life to writing. Between 1921 and 1931 Maugham left England and he travelled around the world, for instance, he visited Africa, the United States and the Far East. As far as this thesis is concerned, I shall focus on his experiences in Southeaster Asia where he especially spent time in the Malay Archipelago and Borneo. The time he spent there was of great inspiration for the writing of his most well-known stories which are defined by scholars by using the term ‘exotic fiction’. In the following chapter I shall focus on the short story “The Force of Circumstance”, which is included in his third collection of short stories titled *The Casuarina Tree*. The collection was published in 1926 and it contains six short stories that Maugham wrote while he was in Malaya. Scholars argue that these tales are often the result of Maugham’s own life experiences and as the author explains:

> I have used in my writing whatever has happened to me in the course of my life. Sometimes an experience I have had has served as a theme and I have invented a series of incidents to illustrate it; more often I have taken persons with whom I have been slightly or intimately acquainted and used them as the foundation for characters of my invention. (Maugham 1938: 1)

Maugham’s stories are also the product of the author’s imagination at the point that, as he notes, “[f]act and fiction are so intermingled in my work that […] I can hardly distinguish one from the other.” (1) In his short stories Maugham investigates how the British colonizers deal with life in Malaya and he especially focuses on the themes of interrelation between races, miscegenation and the desire for ‘the Other’. As Muir notes in a review about Maugham’s work “[w]e feel that he is dealing with his themes seriously, and with a permanent sense of the nature and ends of human existence. This endows his stories with the dignity of good writing; we have the sense that we are contemplating and judging a section of experience as well as feeling it.” (1926: 170)

*The Casuarina Tree* is an interesting title and, as Maugham claims, “a good title should, […] vaguely, have a reference to all the stories gathered together.” (1921-1940: 118) In particular, the Casuarina tree is to be found in Southeaster Asia and it appears as a gray and
harsh plant in contrast to the abundant vegetation which surrounds it, however, as Maugham
recalls, “the Casuarina tree stood along the seashore, gaunt and rough-hewn, protecting the land
from the fury of the wind.” (118) Maugham confers to this tree a metaphoric meaning, in fact
he suggests that this tree, even though imperfect, has a useful function in the protection of the
land and he believes that in the same way the British colonizers who moved to Southeaster Asia
“with their short-comings, have after all brought to the peoples among whom they dwell,
tranquillity, justice and welfare.” (118) Just as the Casuarina tree, in hard circumstances, was
fighting for survival, the British people who moved to the colonies were also fighting to adapt
to harsh condition and they saw in the Casuarina tree “a symbol of their own exiled lives.” (118)
Furthermore, Maugham believed that the Casuarina tree could be, for the exiled, a reminder of
Great Britain, as it recalled the “heather on a Yorkshire moor” (118) or “the broom on a Sussex
common.” (118) Therefore, as the title implicitly suggests, this collection of stories deals with
the life of British people who moved to the colonies of Southeast Asia and who were struggling
to adapt to the environment and the population of such a faraway and different land, as Phillips
suggests:

In every case the character occupying the center of the stage stands grimly in the shade of the Casuarina
tree with a Malay kris or curse, climate or custom, lurking in the background. There is something sinister
in the air that seems to `get´ them down around Singapore and Borneo like the sting of a strange insect
that changes their very identity and poison their lives. (1926: 172)

In the short story “The Force of Circumstance”, that I shall consider in the following chapter,
Maugham deals with the life of an exiled British couple living in Borneo whose happiness is
disturbed by the intrusion in their lives of a native woman.

5.4. “The Force of Circumstance”
“The Force of Circumstance” is part of Maugham´s ‘exotic fiction’ and it provides a good
example of the author´s writing style, in effect, it is a well-structured tale, permeated by a
feeling of suspense which makes the story gripping. Phillips argues that “‘Force of
Circumstance’ is a dull title for a brilliant story” (1926: 173), but I do not agree that this is a
dull title, as I believe that the it clearly suggests that something inevitable is going to happen
and that the protagonists cannot fight against the ‘force’ of the circumstance they are living in.
At the beginning of the story everything seems to be perfect, but an increasing climax leads the
story, as I shall consider, to an unexpected ending. Among the colonial short stories that are
analysed in this thesis, “The Force of Circumstance” is the only one which has a British woman
as protagonist and I find it interesting to investigate a woman's experience of colonial life.
Doris, the protagonist, has moved to Southeaster Asia in order to join her husband who is in charge of an outstation and here she has direct contact with the native population. As far as my analysis is concerned, I shall focus on Doris's experience of colonial life, by especially referring to the themes of miscegenation and the fear of the ‘Other’ woman.

As it is often the case in Maugham’s tales, the characters of “The Force of Circumstance” might have been inspired by people that the author met during his travels. For instance, Doris’s husband, Guy, recalls a man with whom the author had contacts while he was in South-East Asia. In the story, Guy is described as a “little round man, with a red face like the fall moon, and blue eyes” (Maugham 1951: 481) and in his biographical work A Writer’s Notebook Maugham describes a man he met in Borneo as follow: “H. is dressed in a khaki shirt and khaki shorts. He wears brown shoes and stockings that come to just below the knee. He is a man of about the middle size, fat, with a red face shining with sweat and a hooked red nose. He has blue eyes and fairish hair receding on the forehead.” (1949: 211) Maugham's travels provided the author with a lot of material and inspiration which he used to create stories which are a good mix of personal experience and fiction.

In the context of colonial literature, I have chosen this story as it shows an English woman’s attitude towards ‘the Other’, especially towards the ‘other’ woman, and I find it interesting to look at this matter from a female perspective. Without doubts Doris’s attitude was shared by the majority of British women who moved to the colonies, who had a fear of the consequences of miscegenation, that they believed it could ‘corrupt’ the British race and culture. Maugham addresses these themes without taking any position and he limits his narration to the description of facts, as Hartley notes “[t]he dominion of fact and events lies heavy upon Mr Maugham’s world, and these facts and events are like crimes reported in the newspaper – sensational rather than strange. […] Within its limits Mr. Maugham’s work is nearly perfect.” (1951: 169)

In “The Force of Circumstance” we are shown an English woman's reaction when she is faced with the evidence of the mixing between races. Doris cannot bear the possibility of a British man having a sexual relationship with a native woman and her beliefs remain unchanged even when she meets the half-caste children who live around the outstation. She is not touched by these innocent creatures and when she refers to them she pronounces racist remarks, for instance she comments: “[i]sn’t that baby a duck?” (Maugham 1951: 488) or “I’m not hard. But I’m thankful you [Guy] never had a Malay wife. I should have hated it. Just think if those two little brats were yours.” (1951: 485) On the contrary, Guy is not critical or offensive with regard to half-caste people, but he tries to explain to his wife why there are half-caste children around
the outstation, and he observes that “[a] lot of [British] fellows have native wives, and then when they go home or marry they pension them off and send them back to their village” (1951: 484) and he tries to justify the British men by saying that: “[i]t’s awfully lonely on an outstation. Why, often one doesn’t see another white man for six months on end. A fellow come out here when he’s only a boy […] there are excuses, you know.” (1951: 485) Guy’s attitude arises some suspicion about the fact that he might also have had an affair with a native woman, but if the reader has some impression of this, Doris does not take the case into consideration. However, in the second half of the story, as we will shortly see, Doris’s opinion of Guy will drastically change.

As we have already observed in Kipling’s and Conrad’s stories, it was sometimes difficult for the colonizers to control their desire for ‘the Other’ and also in “The Force of Circumstance” we have a reference to this theme. For instance, the mother of the half-caste children that Doris has met, is a native woman “slight and small, with the large, dark, starry eyes of her race and a mass of raven hair” (1951: 488), she is a pretty woman and Doris cannot avoid noticing that she has hands and feet like those of a duchess. Doris is very curious about this woman and her children, but Guy does not want to talk about them. It is at this point of the story that the reader finds out that, when he was just a boy, Guy could not resist the native woman’s beauty because, as Guy recalls, “[s]he was awfully pretty.” (1951: 494) Guy kept her in his bungalow until the day he met Doris and then he sent her away. At this point of the story the significance of the title becomes clearer and, in the case of Guy, it refers to the impossibility for him to have avoided what he has done. In fact, he looks for justifications, but none of them is enough to save his marriage. Doris is shocked by this revelation and she is extremely disgusted by her husband multiracial relationship. As Lowrie argues: “[w]ith the conception of a child the ‘other’ woman is not only merely a sexual partner. The colonised woman fulfils her other role in the colonial imagination by becoming mother. She is now mother of the colony or nation, displacing the white woman.” (2005: 142-143) On one hand, Doris feels a physical repulsion for the native woman and she cannot look at his husband with the same eyes. She believes that Guy does not belong to her anymore and she looks at him as if she is looking at a deformed and disgusting individual and she confesses to him: “[w]hen you wanted to kiss me on the lips last night I – it almost made me sick.” (Maugham, 1951: 498) As Lawrie notes: “[a]s a result of sexual relations with the ‘other’ woman and the conception of a child, the European male becomes bonded to the land and people. His familiar ties make his place in the colony assured and permanent. (2005: 129) Metaphorically, the native woman has ‘conquered’ Guy, the British colonizer, who has ceased to his weakness, but, from Doris’s perspective, the native
woman has also corrupted him. From the moment Doris has been told the truth, she thinks of Guy in the same way as she thinks of the native woman, and she cannot avoid hating him: “[t]he touch of you is odious to me. Each night, when I've kissed you, I've had to brace myself up to it, I've had to clench my hands and force myself to touch your cheek”. (Maugham, 1951: 501) Doris does not try to find a compromise in order to save her marriage, but she surrenders to the will of fate. The title of the story becomes clearer now, as Guy could not repress the physical attraction for the native woman, Doris cannot avoid hating his husband and she ‘punishes’ him by leaving the outpost and going back to England. Before leaving Doris tells Guys: “I thought I'd get over it. I can't, and now I never shall. I've brought it all on myself; I'm willing to take the consequences; if you say I must stay here, I'll stay, but if I stay I shall die [...] I am so sorry, Guy. I've broken your lice, but you've broken mine too. And we might have been so happy.” (502) They could have lived a happy life together, but the circumstance has changed and it does not make it possible for Doris to stand a life in the colony any more. Doris considers Guy's relationship with a native woman as a betrayal not only against her but also against her nation, Great Britain, as he has contributed to the ‘corruption’ of the British race. According to Lawrie, in the ‘exotic fiction’ such as “The Force of Circumstance”, the Malay women “are imagined as providing a home and family for the white colonial male. The white woman is neither sexual partner nor mother nor homemaker.” (2005: 129) On one hand I agree with Lawrie, as in “The Force of Circumstance” the native woman emerges as highly sexualized, and in a way it is true that she also represents ‘family’, as she gave birth to Guy's children. On the other hand, it is with Doris that Guy is thinking to spend his life and building his ‘true’ family, one built on honest love and not on instinctive passion. However, Doris has taken her decision and there will not be a way back for her, as she is not strong enough to face the situation. She is scared of the native woman and she confesses to Guy: “[w]hen I see the woman and her children in the village I just feel my legs shaking.” (Maugham 1951: 501) Doris does not feel jealousy towards the native woman, but an inexplicable fear, which probably arises from the strangeness of ‘the Other’ with whom Doris cannot empathize. At the end of the story, by using Lawrie's words, the “Malay ‘Bitch’” (Lawrie 2005: 147) wins, while the British woman returns to her home country. The weak Guy, after losing his respect, cannot do anything than surrender to the native woman and give hospitality to his ‘family’, he is unable to escape the ‘force of circumstance’ and he binds himself to the colony and its people.
6. Postcolonial Aspects in Mistry's and Rushdie's Short Stories: a focus on the Indian Diaspora

In the context of postcolonial literature I shall deal with the short stories “Swimming Lessons” and “The Courter”, respectively written by Rohinton Mistry and Salman Rushdie, an Indo-Canadian and an Indo-British writer. In both stories the protagonists are Indians who have decided to emigrate, as the authors, to Canada and Great Britain, where they begin, not without troubles, a new life. In their short stories Mistry and Rushdie investigate relevant themes which are recurrent in postcolonial literature, such as the sense of belonging, the creation of a hybrid identity, home-sickness and memory. As the protagonists of their stories, Mistry and Rushdie were born in Bombay, now Mumbay, but they left their home country to emigrate to the West. Interestingly, in 1995 the name Bombay was changed to Mumbay, as the nationalist movements claimed that the name Bombay was a British corrupted pronunciation of the original name, thus the city was named Mumbay by using the Marathi diction.

Mistry and Rushdie write in the contexts of what scholars call ‘diaspora writing’, or writing away from home, in fact, the term ‘diaspora’ means “[t]he dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland.” (Oxford Dictionaries Online) These authors personally experienced the problems which immigrants have to face when they move to a new land, where culture, traditions, religion, and language are different. At the age of twenty three Mistry moved to Toronto, where he studied English and Philosophy at the University while he was working in a bank. Rushdie left India when he was still a boy and he was educated in England where he attended the University of Cambridge from which he graduated with a Master Degree in History.

During the last couple of centuries a large amount of Indians have chosen to emigrate to Canada and Great Britain. Northern Canada, in particular, is seen as “a land where adventurous individuals can realize their private dreams free of the constraints imposed by conventional society” (Shailaja 2006: 42), while England has often been considered the land of opportunities, especially for the younger generations who could aspire to a better educational and professional formation. As Shailaja explains, the first Indians who touched the British soil arrived in the seventeenth century and they were sailors and servants who worked for the East Indian Company or at the service of the British families who left the colonies to return home. However, it is during the nineteenth century that the Indian immigration in England drastically increased. As far as Canada is concerned, the first Indian immigrants arrived during the 1890s.

In the following chapters I shall consider Mistry's and Rushdie's short stories which deal with the topic of Indian diaspora. Though these stories are not autobiographical, the authors
directly experienced the struggle for belonging and the sense of loss which affect the individuals who move to a new country and this aspect contributes to make their stories realistic.

6.1. “Swimming Lessons”: from India to Canada

“Swimming Lessons” is the last tale included in Mistry's short stories cycle Tales from Firozsha Baag, firstly published in Canada in 1987. Even though it is part of a short stories cycle, “Swimming Lessons” can be read independently from the other stories, in fact, it carries a meaning by itself, but when it is read together with the other stories, the tale acquires a broader significance. In Tales from Firozsha Baag we find two levels of meaning: the individual meaning of each short story and the meaning of the cycle as a whole. In the short stories cycles the last stories are usually the most important and “Swimming Lessons” is fundamental in Tales from Firozsha Baag, as only after reading this tale the reader realizes that all the stories of the cycle are migration stories. Tales from Firozsha Baag is constituted by eleven short stories which are set in Bombay, but “Swimming Lessons” is set in Canada and it explores the protagonist's struggle to adapt to the Canadian environment and culture. Throughout the cycle the reader meets different characters in different stories and, even though there is not a chronological consistency, all the stories are linked. Tales from Firozsha Baag is set in the 1960s and it is narrated by a first and third person narrator. The first person narrator is a young Indian man called Kersi, who, as we find out in “Swimming Lessons”, is also the ‘fictive’ writer of all the short stories of the cycle. By reading Kersi's stories we accompany him through his physical journey and his life journey, which respectively lead the protagonist from Bombay to Toronto and from “innocence to experience.” (Morey 2004: 31) In the eleven stories set in India Kersi recounts episodes of life in Bombay which especially rotate around the apartment block Firozsha Baag where his family and other characters live. Interestingly, when Kersi moves to Canada he finds an accommodation in an apartment complex which recalls Firozsha Baag and this element creates a sort of continuity with Kersi's life back in India and a link to the other stories. As I have already mentioned, Rohinton Mistry also moved from India to Canada, where he has been living since 1975, but Tales from Firozsha Baag is not an autobiographical work. However, Mistry has taken inspiration from his own life experiences both in India and Canada and he can be defined “a chronicler of the experience of migrancy.” (2004: 5) The author, as the protagonist of his short stories cycle, belongs to the Parsi community. A Parsi is “a member of a group of followers in India of the Iranian prophet Zoroaster” (Encyclopaedia Britannica) and, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica:
The Parsis, whose name means “Persians,” are descended from Persian Zoroastrians who emigrated to India to avoid religious persecution by the Muslims. They live chiefly in Bombay and in a few towns and villages mostly to the north of Bombay, but also at Karachi (Pakistan) and Bangalore (Karnataka, India). Although they are not, strictly speaking, a caste, since they are not Hindus, they form a well-defined community.

In *Tales from Firozsha Baag* we observe that Kersi has to face a double struggle for belonging both in Canada and in India, where, as a Parsi, he does not feel totally at place. Morey provides a justification for the alienation of the Parsis from the Indian society and he explains that the Parsis are not fully accepted because of the relationship they established with the British power in India:

> The rise to power and wealth of a number of Parsis in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was, perhaps unsurprisingly, accompanied by an increasing cultural and political identification with their British colonial masters, with whom they worked so closely, and in whose imperial grandeur they saw both echoes of their own lost Persian greatness, and a model for the future of their community. (2004: 10)

In this context, Tanja Cvetkovic claims that in Mistry's cycle the Parsi community is depicted as “a closed ghettonized community” (2009: 155) and she explains that “[t]he alienation of Parsis from postcolonial India has led them to move to the West, primarily to Canada and the U.S.A.” (2009: 155) In the apartment block where Kersi lives in Toronto there are both Canadian and foreign lodgers and this aspect stand for the Canadian multicultural context. Metaphorically, the apartment block symbolises Canada and the lodgers represent some of the different ethnic groups which populate the broad territory of this country. For instance, in Kersi's condominium, the building superintendent comes from Yugoslavia, while a neighbour comes from Scotland and another from Portugal. As scholars argue, in Canada there is an institutionalised multiculturalism, and, for instance, writers belonging to ethnic minorities, such as Mistry, are given a specific consideration. The migration short stories cycles, such as *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, written in English by writers of non-Canadian origins, are an accepted genre and a suitable one to mirror the cultural hybridity that can be found in Canada. As Cvetkovic argues, “[w]hat Mistry powerfully invokes in his stories is the issue of place and a true sense of belonging, assimilation in multicultural surroundings and the creation of hybridized identities.” (2009: 153)

The formation of a hybridised identity is a gradual process and in “Swimming Lessons” we observe how Kersi goes through the stages of this process, not without difficulties. From the beginning of the short story we find continuous references to India, Bombay, Firozsha Baag, and the people and relatives that Kersi has left in his home country. For instance, his old neighbour reminds him of his grandfather and the snowflakes falling from the sky recalls
“childhood thoughts and dream, built around snowscapes and winter wonderlands on the Christmas cards so popular in Bombay.” (Mistry 1987: 244). According to Morey, in Mistry's tales there is “a tension between the desire to belong in the new host society and the urge to hold onto something of the old one.” (2004: 20) Memory plays an important role in the creation of a hybridized identity and it helps the immigrants during the first stages of their arrival in a new land. Recalling places and people belonging to their home-country helps the immigrants to feel still part of a group and nation where their origins are set and this is an important aspect to keep their own traditions alive, and to feel part of a community, even though it is far away. In this context, memory helps the immigrants to make a comparison between the new nation where they have moved and their home-country in order to evaluate the advantages of having made the choice to migrate to another land. For instance, in “Swimming Lessons”, Kersi, who is worried for his old neighbour, reflects: “[m]aybe the old man is not well, it's an emergency. [...] this isn't Bombay, an ambulance would have arrived.” (Mistry 1987: 242) According to Cvetkovic, in Tales from Firozsha Baag, “[s]everal stories are structured in a way which allows for narrative shifts between India and Canada. They deal with the clashes between Eastern and Western cultures, articulating the drama of doubleness.” (2009: 155) Kersi often recalls the Indian traditions, as an attempt not to forget them, but this attitude contributes to the arising of the “problem of double perception” (2009: 155), as the immigrants find themselves in an in-between position. On one side, Kersi wants to be part of the new cultural context, but on the other he cannot avoid thinking of what he has left back home. In this context, Kersi's attempt to adapt to the Canadian or Western reality is held back by the fact that he feels to be look down at as ‘the Other’. For instance, when he goes for the first time to the swimming pool, in the dressing room some young men behave oddly and they pronounce racist comments: “[o]ne of them holds his nose. The second begins to hum, under his breath: Paki Paki, smell like curry. The third says to the first two: pretty soon all the water's going to taste of curry.” (Mistry 1987: 238)

As in the colonial short stories that we have analysed, also in postcolonial literature we find the theme of the desire for ‘the Other’. In “Swimming Lessons” we observe how Kersi is a ‘victim’ of two white women who live in his apartment block and who are clearly attracted by him, and Kersi is aware of his “delectable Asian brown body” (236) and of his “strangeness” (236). The two women talk to him in an intriguing way which makes it clear that they are flirting with him and that they would be pleased to spend some time with this young Indian man: “[y]ou are not a stranger, dear, […] you live in this building, we've seen you before. Besides, your hands are clean, […] you can touch my things any time you like.” (242) The two women are
using very kind words with Kersi, but they are doing so because they want to obtain something. The way they talk to him shows their physical attraction towards Kersi and their desire to experience something ‘new’ and ‘different’. It is the idea of the ‘strangeness’ of ‘the Other’ which intrigues them, and even though they tell Kersi that he is not a stranger, they involuntarily make him feel like one. For instance, they point out that his hands are clean, as to say that compared to his fellows he is more ‘civilized’, thus he can have their attentions.

Furthermore, in Canada, Kersi becomes aware of the stereotypes which the Western people have about the Indians, for instance he is told that Indians cannot swim, and he has to explain that “[m]ost Indians swim like fish” (Mistry 1987: 233) and that he is “an exception to the rule.” (233) Kersi is also told that “immigrants from hot countries always enjoy the snow the first year, maybe for a couple of years more, then inevitably the dread sets in, and the approach of winter gets them fretting and moping.” (243) These are good examples which show how easy it is to come to wrong conclusions when we are not familiar with another culture, and they demonstrate that each individual should be considered for what he/she is and not on the basis of the ethnic group he/she belongs to. Even though Kersi has to face some difficulties when he arrives in Canada, he does not show signs of home-sickness, and when he thinks of India it is because there is something that reminds him of it, however, he still feels linked to his home and his family, to whom he writes frequently. As scholars argue, Mistry addresses the theme of the separation between parents and children which was often a consequence of migration. For instance, Kersi's parents are never sure whether their son is happy or not in Toronto, as in the letters he sends them, he often talks about general things without mentioning his feelings. However, they only have to wait, as Kersi will send them the novel that he has written, which is made up of the same short stories that we are reading. His parents realize that Kersi has written these stories in order to do not forget his origins and the Indian culture, but also to recount his experiences as an immigrant in Canada. In this context, I agree with Cvetkovic, who argues that Kersi writes these stories in order to “bridge the gap between his roots and his immigrant identity” (2009: 159), as he is not excluding one or the other part of his hybridized identity, but he wants to show that it is possible to integrate into a new culture without repressing your true origins.

Kersi’s integration into the Canadian culture and environment is slow and difficult and Mistry uses an interesting metaphor to show Kersi’s struggle to adapt to his new life. The author uses the image of water, an element which has always been present in Kersi’s life, in order to show how the protagonist manages to find his way in a new land, in effect Kersi reflects that: “[w]ater imaginary in my life is recurring. Chaupatty beach, now the high-school swimming
pool. The universal symbol of life and regeneration did nothing but frustrate me. Perhaps the swimming pool will overturn that failure.” (Mistry 1987: 234) Kersi is worried that in Canada he will feel uncomfortable, as he has felt in India, where he experienced a sense of alienation because of his belonging to the Parsi community. The ‘water metaphor’ is used to represent Kersi's struggle, in fact, as he was not able to learn to swim at the seaside, he is afraid of not being able to learn in the swimming pool, which means that, as he did not feel at place in India, he is now afraid of not being able to adapt to the Western culture. Water represents the cultural gap which Kersi has to overcome in order to become part of the Canadian world and only by learning how to swim he can reach his objective. In fact, metaphorically, water represents the Canadian world with its traditions and culture and the swimming lessons stand for Kersi's attempts to go through it and understand it. Kersi's effort to learn to swim mirrors his will to become more familiar with the Western society, however, soon after his arrival in Canada, Kersi loses motivation. In effect, to learn how to swim, like adapting to a new culture, is a gradual process which presents some obstacles to overcome. For instance, during the second swimming lesson, Kersi thinks: “[f]ifteen feet of water under me. I shudder and take deep breaths. This is it. I'm not coming next week. This instructor is an irresponsible person. Or he does not value the lives of non-white immigrants.” (239) Kersi is exaggerating here and he sees danger where there is not and the author's intention to link the image of water to Kersi's adaptation to a new culture becomes more explicit. In fact, we see how Kersi, in a moment of panic, believes that the aim of the instructor is not to teach him how to swim but to kill him because he is an immigrant: “[m]aybe the swimming pool is the hangout of some racist group, bent on eliminating all non-white swimmers, to keep their waters pure and their white sisters unogled.” (239) Consequently, Kersi gives up going to the swimming pool, but he then realizes that: “[t]he swimming pool, like Chaupatty beach, has produced a stillbirth. But there is a difference. Water means regeneration only if it is pure and cleansing. Chaupatty was filthy, the pool was not. Failure to swim through filth must mean something other than failure of rebirth” (240) Kersi knows that in Canada he has the possibility to begin a new and happy life that he would not have had in Bombay, but it is towards the end of the story that he really becomes aware of it. In fact, one day, while Kersi is at home having a bath, he experiences an epiphanic moment: “[i]t feels good. […] I close my eyes, hold my breath, and dunk my head. Fighting the panic, I stay down and count to thirty. I come out, clear my lungs and breathe deeply.” (248) Suddenly Kersi is less scared of water and he feels new and pleasing sensations. Many times he goes underwater with his eyes wide open and he gradually distinguishes more clearly the objects in the bath and he thinks: “[t]he world outside the water I have seen a lot of, it is now time to see
what is inside. The spring session for adult non-swimmers will begin in a few days at the high school. I must not forget the registration date.” (Mistry 1987: 249) Kersi’s attitude towards his new life in Canada has suddenly changed and he regains the motivation to do more in order to become part of the Canadian society, at the point that he decides to take other swimming lessons. Kersi is now determined to go through his new life adventure in Toronto and he is also ready to send his parents the short stories which he has written.

In “Swimming Lessons” Mistry recounts in a realistic way how difficult it is to move to another country and which difficulties an immigrant has to face, but he also shows that it is possible to find a way to integration and adaptation. Even though Kersi experiences a moment of discouragement, it is the hope for better opportunities which helps him to go on and to do not give up. I believe that by reading “Swimming Lessons” immigrants can identify with Kersi’s story and they can learn from him to fight for their dreams, while non-immigrants can experience what it means to leave your home-country and look for a better life. Mistry's story does not have a didactic aim, but it provides a good example of the struggle for belonging which troubles the immigrants' life and which is a central topic of literature about diaspora.

6.2. “The Courter”: from India to London

“The Courter” is the last of the nine short stories included in Rushdie’s collection titled “East, West”, which was published in 1994. The short stories included in the collection are divided into three sections which are titled: “East”, “West”, and “East, West”. In particular, in the section “East” we find tales which are set in India and Pakistan, in “West” the author focuses on the Western culture, while in the last section the Eastern and Western world come together and the focus is on migration and the struggle for belonging. As Goonetilleke argues, the comma in the title “East, West” “indicates a change in perspective – an understanding of separate but connected worlds” (1998: 131). I have chosen to focus on this last section because it deals with the themes of integration, struggle for belonging and homesickness which are among the most relevant topics of postcolonial writing about diaspora. In this chapter I shall consider the short story “The Courter” which mainly deals with an Indian woman’s struggle to adapt to the British culture and life-style. “The Courter”, as “Swimming Lessons”, is not an autobiographical work, but “the story is closely wedded to autobiography.” (130) As King claims in a review about Rushdie’s “East, West”, “The Courter” is the best short story of the collection and he explains that in the tale “lively autobiographical memories of Rushdie's teenage years in London conclude with inflated nonsense about being caught between two worlds and refusing to choose.” (1995: 650) As we have seen in Mistry’s Tales from Firozsha
Baag, the author’s aim is not to write an autobiography, but he takes inspiration from events which happened in his life in order to write realistic stories.

In “The Courter” we find a first person narrator, a young Indian man who moved to London where he is lately joined by his family who bring with them an ayah, or maid, an interesting character on whom I shall focus. The ayah is a sixty years old lady called Mary, who is better known as Certainly-Mary, because of her habit to use the expressions “o, yes, certainly” or “o, no, certainly”. The story mainly rotates around Mary’s troubles to adapt to the British culture and life in London, but it also deals with her relationship with the porter of the house where she is living, a man called Macir or Mixed-Up. As I have already mentioned, this is not an autobiographical story, but when Rushdie moved to London his family also joined him some time later, however, we cannot affirm whether the narrator coincides with the author. Nevertheless, in the first paragraphs of the story the narrator states:

It has become more important than ever to set down the story I’ve been carrying around unwritten for so long, the story of Aya and the gentle man whom she renamed – with unintentional but prophetic overtones of romance – ‘the courter’. I see now that it is not just their story, but ours, mine, as well. (Rushdie 1994: 178).

In the quotation above three important themes of the short story are mentioned. First of all, we are implicitly told that this is a migration story, as it is the story of an Indian woman in London. Secondly, the narrator mentions the love affair between Mary and the Eastern European porter, a relationship which stands for the multiculturalism of Great Britain, as it involves two people with a different ethnical background. Thirdly, the narrator claims that Mary’s experience in London resembles the story of many other immigrants, men and women who, like Mary, feel a sense of loss and go through a struggle for belonging. Moreover, in the story, Rushdie deals with another theme, which is the trouble for integration which immigrants face when they cannot speak English properly: “English was hard for Certainly-Mary […]. The letter p was a particular problem, often turning into an f or c; when she proceeded through the lobby with a wheeled wicker shopping basket, she would say, ‘Going shocking’, and […] ‘Yes, fleas’”. (Rushdie 1994: 176) The title of the story is an example of Mary’s improper use of the English language, in fact, she pronounces the word ‘porter’ as ‘courter’, which, however, acquires a positive meaning, as the porter is ‘courting’ Mary. In the story, the author points out little incidents and incomprehension which immigrants might have to face if they do not speak fluently the language of the land they have moved to. For instance, we are provided with a funny example which involves the narrator’s father who, at the pharmacy, asked for ‘nipples’ instead of ‘nickels’. This vocabulary mistake made the pharmacist (a woman) angry and made
her think that Indian men are impolite and insolent, and this accident contributed to the
development of false stereotypes. Nevertheless, the story seems to tell us that younger
generation of immigrants, of whom the narrator is part, have less problem than their parents to
learn a new language and this aspect suggests that younger people are also more likely to adapt
to new cultures, while their parents might have more problems to change their customs. For
instance, in London, Mary is always wearing her sari, an element which on one hand contributes
to underline her ‘strangeness’ and ‘otherness’, but which, on the other hand, helps her to still
feel linked to her home-country and the traditions that she has left there. Wearing a sari, as not
speaking English fluently, causes Mary some troubles which make her feel out of place in
London. For instance, Mary’s sari remained stuck into the elevator’s door, and after being
“saved by the porter, the ayah exclaim: ‘O, no more escaleater, courter, nevermore, surely
not!’” (Rushdie 1994: 186) Once again the narrator provides a funny episode and we have to
notice here Mary’s mistake in saying ‘escaleater’ instead of ‘escalator’. Throughout the story
we are presented with examples concerning the problem of adaptation and integration which
immigrants face and the author’s objective is to make the readers reflect about the difficulties
which immigrants encounter especially at the beginning of their new life in a nation that they
do not know. Old Mary does not have many contacts with British people and she feels more at
place with other immigrants. For instance, she begins an affair with a man who has also left his
home-country to move to London, and Mary has a good feeling with this man who, like her,
knows what it means to be an outsider. Mecir recounts her stories about his land, in effect, as
we have seen in “Swimming Lessons”, memory is important to remain linked to your origins
and keep the image of familiar landscapes alive:

‘It is like an adventure, baba,’ Mary once told me. ‘It is like going with him [Mecir] to his country, you
know? What a place, baap-ré! Beautiful and dangerous and funny and full of fuzzles. For me it is a big-
big discovery. What to tell you? I go for the game. It is a wonder.’ (Rushdie 1997: 195)

Even though Mary and Mecir cannot understand each other perfectly, as English is not their
mother tongue, they find their own way to flirt. In fact, they spend many hours playing chess
which “had become their private language” (Rushdie 1997: 194), and, in particular:

Old Mixed-Up, lost as he was for words, retained, on the chess-board, much of the articulacy and subtlety
which had vanished from his speech. As Certainly-Mary gained in skill – and she had learned with
astonishing speed, I thought bitterly, for someone who couldn’t read or write the letter p – she was better
able to understand, and respond to, the wit of the reduced maestro with whom she had unexpectedly
forged a bond. (194)
Even though Mary has found a man that she loves, her relationship with Mecir does not help her feeling more at place in London and her health condition also worsen. The old ayah is believed to have heart problems, but “Mary’s heart trouble turned out to be a mystery; unpredictably, it came and went. […] The doctors ended up shaking their heads: they couldn’t find anything wrong with her.” (208) Mary’s illness is not caused by any physical problems and she realizes that her health conditions have worsened since she left her home-country. Mary is suffering from homesickness and she is determined to return to her beloved India:

‘God knows for what—all we came over to this country,’ Mary said. ‘But I can no longer stay. No. Certainly not.’ Her determination was absolute. So it was England that was breaking her heart, breaking it by not being in India. London was killing her, by not being Bombay. (Rushdie 1994: 209)

The narrator explains that Mary’s heart is suffering because it is divided between her two loves: Mecir and India, thus it is “being pulled both East and West.” (209) Nevertheless, her love for India prevails over her feeling for ‘the courter’ and over her initial attempt to adapt to the Western culture: “‘I must go’ said Certainly-Mary. ‘Yes, certainly. Bas. Enough.’” (209)

Towards the end of the story the narrator explains how Mary’s health conditions improved after her return to Bombay and that she was still feeling well at the age of ninety-one. While in “Swimming Lessons” Kersi manages to overcome the difficulties which living as an immigrant implies, Mary cannot stand a life in England any longer. In Mistry’s tale we are offered an example of hope, while in Rushdie’s story the old Indian lady gives up her attempt to adapt and integrate in a new land. This aspect suggests that younger and older immigrants have a different perspective about moving to a new nation and beginning a new life. For instance, as Kersi, the young narrator of “The Courter” decides to remain in London, while his family leaves England for Pakistan. Mary and the narrator’s father show not to have the strength to deal with a life in a new country, while the younger characters are determined to pursue better opportunities which would not be offered to them in India. The narrator of “The Courter” manages to obtain the British citizenship and he states that: “the passport did, in many ways, set me free. It allowed me to come and go, to make choices that were not the ones my father would have wished. But I, too, have ropes around my neck, I have them to this day, pulling me this way and that, East and West, the nooses tightening, commanding, choose, choose.” (211) The passport has opened the doors of the Western world to this young Indian man, but he will always be an Indian before being an Englishman, and even though he is well integrated in Great Britain, he still feels a strong connection with his Eastern origins which, like chains around the neck, will never let him free. Differently from Mary, who cannot cope with a life in the Western
world, the young narrator of the story manages to drag the Eastern and the Western world together. In fact, he has managed to adapt to the British society without rejecting his Indian traditions which, however, keep on influencing him in his every-day life. Nevertheless, he has the strength to fight against the ropes of the Eastern world which want to bring him back to his old life: “I buck, I snort, I whinny, I rear, I kick. Ropes, I do not choose between you. Lassoes, lariats, I choose neither of you, and both. Do you hear? I refuse to choose.” (Rushdie 1994: 211) By not choosing Bombay over London, and at the same time by not refusing his true origins, the young man’s Indian identity is gradually changing into a hybrid identity which is the result of the mixing of the British and Indian tradition which come together. The young man’s hybrid identity is neither the product of the Western world nor of the Eastern world, but of both of them, and it allows him to feel at place in Great Britain without having to renounce to his cultural background.

Conclusion

The six short stories which have been analysed in this thesis allowed me to move between different times and settings and to observe (post)colonialism from contrasting perspectives. In this context, the short story genre has well supported the purpose of my thesis of identifying and analysing the aspects which characterise (post)colonial time and discourse. I have begun my critical journey in the colonial time and by reading the stories of Lispeth, Trejago, Kayerts and Carlier, and Doris I have especially observed how the interactions between the colonizers and the colonized were held and how was life in the colonies. Kipling, Conrad and Somerset Maugham looked at colonialism and imperialism from different points of view and their thoughts were influenced by the places they visited and by their life experiences. In this context, they wrote realistic stories which allow the modern readers to get involved in the character’s world and time. I have especially selected stories which deal with the colonial experience both from the colonizer’s and the native’s point of view, and from both men’s and women’s perspective. Even though the Empire was a men’s world, by analysing Maugham’s “The Force of Circumstance” I have shown that women were also involved in the colonial life and Doris’s experience of life in the colonies resembled that of many other British women. Among the authors who have been considered in this thesis, I believe that Kipling had been particularly able to express how difficult it was for the colonizers to empathise with the natives and how the first felt superior to the latter. Kipling did not condemn imperialism, and he was in favour of the imperial objective of bringing progress to the colonies, however, in his stories he implicitly criticizes some aspects that he does not consider to be right. For instance, the Christian mission
or the colonizers’ hypocrisy. While Kipling was generally a supporter of imperialism, Conrad, who was initially in favour of the imperial plan, changed his perspective after he travelled to Africa where he witnessed the brutality which spread in the colonies. Conrad’s “An Outpost of Progress” is an explicit critique of the imperial mission, but it is also offers an example of how two officers would have lived in a trading station and how they would have interacted with the native population. In contrast to Kipling and Conrad, in Somerset Maugham’s stories we do not find an attempt to attack or to defend imperialism and it is harder to understand what his position is.

After broadly dealing with colonialism and the themes which are related to it, I have continued my critical journey in the postcolonial time which, as I have argued in my thesis, should not be considered as a separate sphere but as a continuation of colonialism. The two short stories which I have analysed have allowed me to investigate relevant questions which are to be found in postcolonial discourse, with a particular focus on the themes of adaptation and the shaping of a hybrid identity. As in the section dedicated to colonialism, the stories which I have chosen give the reader the chance to empathize with the protagonists and their life experiences. Both short stories are narrated by a first person narrator and, especially in “Swimming Lessons”, this element makes it possible for the reader to look at reality through the narrator’s eyes and have direct access to his thoughts and feelings. By investigating the experiences of Indian immigrants in Great Britain and Canada I provided the reader with two examples of what it means to be an outsider and how in different settings the problems which an immigrant has to face are often similar. I believe that Mistry’s and Rushdie’s short stories, together with the colonial authors' works, show how literature can help us to know and better understand the world we live in, as these stories are like open windows through which we can look at other people’s life experiences and have access to times and places which are not familiar to us.
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