

Sara Jeannette Duncan A Canadian Girl in London¹

Criticism on Sara Jeannette Duncan has focused overwhelmingly on her 1904 novel, *The Imperialist*. This has been read as both her most Canadian and her most politicized novel. *Cousin Cinderella* (1908) is another of Duncan's novels in which the politics of Canadian national identity are paramount, as well as the text in which she explores the relationship between women and imperialism most explicitly. Through the first-person voice of her female protagonist, Mary Trent, Duncan investigates Canada's position, post-Confederation, of semi-nationhood (with Britain still controlling security and foreign affairs) and articulates a feminist critique of imperial policy. By placing her Canadians outside Canada, Duncan depicts a complex nexus of imperialism, nationalism and feminism. I want to argue, in particular, that she sets the novel, and Mary's arrival in London, in the context of the topical preferential trade debate, in order to illuminate the question of Anglo-colonial marriage. Mary is a raw product, launched on and commodified by the London market. Duncan's is a rare and subtle look, for the period, at how the economic and political workings of imperialism affect women and the private sphere of personal relations.

Cousin Cinderella needs to be read in conjunction with *The Imperialist*. In a letter to John Willison, editor of the Toronto *Globe*, Duncan makes the link clear: "I now think of a novel bringing Lorne Murchison over here and giving the critical colonial view of London society, marrying him eventually" (Duncan, *Imperialist* 309-10). Writing the novel three years later in 1907, Duncan turned Lorne into Graham Trent, but the project underwent

more dramatic changes. The critical, colonial viewpoint belongs primarily to a woman, Graham's sister, Mary, thus making the novel Duncan's only extended portrait of a colonial woman in London.

The plot, briefly stated, concerns Canadians Mary and Graham Trent, sent to London by their wealthy father to represent their homeland. After bumping into their American friend, Evelyn Dicey, they find themselves moving in London's upper-class, imperial circles, meeting, in particular, Lord and Lady Lippington, the Duke and Duchess of Dulwich and the impoverished Lady Doleford and her two children Barbara and Peter. It soon becomes clear that the Trents are desirable to the British for their fortune and ability to rescue the Dolefords and their ancestral home, Pavis Court. Lady Doleford has her sights on wealthy Evelyn as a match for her son Peter, but when Peter will not oblige, Graham feels duty-bound to assist and proposes to Barbara. Immediately he starts pouring money into the restoration of Pavis Court. Barbara later realizes that Graham has fallen in love with the house rather than her, and calls off the engagement. Mary, whom Mrs Jarvis has selected as a potential match for her rather ineffectual son, Billy Milliken, becomes engaged instead to Peter, thus rescuing the Dolefords. Evelyn marries eccentric Lord Scansby, Lady Doleford's brother, and the conclusion sees the Trents returning to Canada. It remains unclear whether Mary and Peter will settle in Canada or England.

The setting in London, heart of empire, opens up a crucial aspect of Duncan's writing life: her literary representations of London, and the time she spent year after year living and writing on her own in the capital. Her connections with her London publishers, reviewers, readers and agent, A. P. Watt, were obviously essential to her. In *Cousin Cinderella* (the American edition of which was subtitled, *A Canadian Girl in London*), she depicts the "voyage in," a journey she herself made repeatedly from Canada and India. In *Set in Authority*, the novel she published after *The Imperialist* and before *Cousin Cinderella*, Duncan looks at the question of justice in the fraught context of colonial India, but importantly she moves the setting back and forth between the drawing rooms of Westminster and Bloomsbury, and Anglo-Indian society. This approach, as in *Cousin Cinderella*, highlights the relationship between colony and imperial metropolis, and the shifting perspectives on that relationship. In both novels, London must concern itself with happenings on the periphery: "the centre of the Empire became vaguely aware that far out upon those circling boundaries which she manages with such magnificent unconcern something was happening"

(Duncan, *Set* 206). In *Cousin Cinderella*, Mary and Graham require London aristocracy to take note of Canada, Mary's "voyage in" providing the context for Duncan's deliberation on the colonial woman's relationship to politics and society in the imperial centre. The spatial politics of Mary's London—in particular the Trents' choice of a flat over a house—is an integral part of *Cousin Cinderella's* critical, colonial point of view.

The most important link between *Cousin Cinderella* and *The Imperialist*, however, is the imperial policy debate which informs both novels: tariff reform. The preferential trade debate is central, both literally and metaphorically, to the narrative of *Cousin Cinderella*. Critics such as Thomas Tausky and Alfred Bailey have placed *The Imperialist* firmly in the context of this debate, but the latter also has links with *Cousin Cinderella*. Duncan examines the economics of imperialism and imperial federation, and places women at the heart of that debate.

Imperial Federation and Tariff Reform

The Imperialist was not well reviewed in London: readers found the topic of imperial trade "wearisome" and wanted a novel rather than a "fiscal pamphlet" (*The Spectator* 647). But Duncan felt that her British readers should concern themselves with Canada's role within the empire. A re-packaging, from small-town Ontario to aristocratic London society, would perhaps captivate a British audience. Duncan returned to the format of *An American Girl in London* (1891), the "foreigner"-in-London novel of social observation, and complicated the feminist politics of that early text by including the weighty, topical question of imperial trade.

The future and financial viability of the settler colonies was the subject of much debate at the turn of the century, separatists of the Manchester school arguing that gains in trade did not justify the bill for colonial administration and military protection. The campaign for imperial federation grew up in response to Little Englanders, and came to denote any strengthening of the bonds of empire, although concrete proposals included tariff benefits, an imperial penny post, navy, army and court of appeal. Joseph Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary (1895-1903) and the model for Wallingham in *The Imperialist*, became the chief advocate of preferential tariff, or *Zollverein*, as a means to imperial federation. In a speech entitled "The True Conception of Empire" given in 1897, Chamberlain declared his belief in "the practical possibility of a federation of the British race" (5). Federation was a means of cementing the "sentiment of kinship" so central to the self-governing

colonies (Chamberlain 4). However, answering the concerns of an essentially free-trading Britain and the increasingly autonomous settler colonies was far from easy. *The Imperialist* charts the reaction to imperial federation in Canada, the self-governing colony which led the way on this issue. There was, of course, opposition, particularly from the business community who had benefitted under John A. Macdonald's National Policy and did not welcome the competition of British goods. The Canadian Prime Minister, Wilfred Laurier, had nationalist interests in mind and was hostile "to any tightening of the bonds of empire, whether through military arrangements or unifying political institutions in London" (Marsh 623), but in 1897 and again in 1900, Laurier entered into a one-way, preferential tariff relationship with Britain.² In 1902 at the Colonial Conference, Laurier pursued his key goal, promising further reductions if Britain offered tariff protection on Canadian wheat (Amery 149). Chamberlain used Canadian desire for reciprocity to argue his case in Britain: the British were getting something for nothing, and the future of the empire depended on their being able to reciprocate. If this did not happen, Canada could withdraw its tariff reductions to Britain. Canada provided a booming market for British exports, he argued, which would be in jeopardy without preferential tariff.³ The settler colonies had always been a source of raw materials for Britain, and emigration to the colonies provided an outlet for an overcrowded motherland, but around the turn of the century, as Chamberlain was quick to point out, it was clear that they could provide additional markets.

In Canada, such arguments also led to concern about British self-interest and a feeling that the ideals of imperialism were being reduced to economics. This was Duncan's anxiety. *The Imperialist*, she wrote, charts imperial relations between Canada and Britain, ideals "broken of course, on the wheel of economic fact" (Duncan, *Imperialist* 307). A theoretical supporter of empire, she feared the growth of materialism and capitalism and hoped that allegiance to British monarchy, as opposed to American democracy, would be a way of maintaining ideals of honour, tradition and loyalty. As Misao Dean has explained, Canada's position as a Dominion with a parliamentary democracy embodied the combination Duncan desired (79). In *Cousin Cinderella*, the author further questions Britain's commitment to those ideals. In her article "Imperial Sentiment in Canada" (1896) she charts Canada's reaction to imperial federation. Although she exaggerates Laurier's endorsement of Chamberlain's proposals for imperial federation based on preferential tariff, she nevertheless makes clear her support for the scheme

and the “greatness it prefigures” (Duncan, *Journalism* 62). It is imperial *sentiment* which will forge the links, however, rather than economic benefits. Canadian imperialism was a version of nationalism: federation implied that Canada was an asset to Britain as an equal partner (see Berger 9). Canada could revitalize the decaying heart of empire. This is clearly part of the colonial agenda in *Cousin Cinderella*: Graham is convinced that the people of Britain are “degenerating” (64).⁴ London, in particular, was seen as a microcosm for the diseased and decaying national body. Overcrowding and poverty turned the metropolis, in the popular imagination, into a dark abyss akin to the furthest reaches of the empire, characterised by racial and moral atrophy. Graham and Mary, as inheritors of the pioneering qualities health, energy and self-reliance, are required in the heart of empire. Without regeneration, the thinking went, the power balance within the empire would shift, leading perhaps to the fall of the British empire itself. In *Cousin Cinderella*, Graham Trent predicts Canada’s ascendancy: the country is a “one-horse show that is going some day to pull the Empire” (186).

The Trents arrive in London in August 1906, after the overwhelming Liberal victory in the General Election of January 1906 effectively put an end to protectionist policy, although the Tariff Reform League continued to campaign, and the novel ends with their departure in mid 1907. Although she wrote the novel in India, Duncan had been in London for an unusually prolonged period from early 1906 to July 1907, and therefore was attuned to political debate in London during the period covered by the novel and by the election. In particular, she was friendly with James Louis Garvin, editor of the *Outlook*, in which Duncan was published, and the *Observer*. Her friendship was partly motivated by desire to persuade Garvin to secure a position for her husband, Everard, so they could leave India, but it was surely no coincidence that Garvin was a fierce supporter of Chamberlain and later became his biographer: “tariff reform had been J.L.G.’s main platform since the foundation of Chamberlain’s reform league in 1903” (K. Garvin 56).⁵ Furthermore, as Garvin said later to Lord Northcliffe, “it was the question of Canada more than anything else [. . .] that made me throw in my whole lot with Chamberlain” (quoted in Ayerst 51). No doubt Garvin was interested in *The Imperialist*, and in Duncan herself because of this issue, and in turn, it was most likely because of his influence that she continued to think about the debate preparatory to writing *Cousin Cinderella*. Duncan had done her research on Canadian reactions to imperial federation, writing from India in 1902 to John Willison, editor of the *Toronto Globe*, for pamphlets

“dealing with *Imperial federation*,” “all Sir W. Laurier’s speeches on the subject” or anything “occupied with the practical intricacies of the question” (Duncan, *Imperialist* 306). She had undoubtedly continued to follow reactions to tariff reform and imperial federation on both sides of the Atlantic. In *Cousin Cinderella* she is dealing essentially with the aftermath of the tariff reform question, although the Tariff Reform League, set up by Chamberlain after his resignation, continued to campaign into the 1920s. The status of the self-governing colonies within the empire remained a contentious issue.

The subject may be topical, but Duncan’s implications about women’s involvement in imperial economics are, I think, both unusual and innovative. Rather than situating women’s dealings with imperialism solely within the home, much in advance of contemporary postcolonial theorists, she depicts fictionally both women’s involvement in imperial politics and the imperial consequences of domestic arrangements. This kind of reading of the novel starts with Kipling’s poem “Our Lady of the Snows (Canadian Preferential Tariff 1897),” which is mentioned in the text. The poem was published in *The Times* on April 27, 1897 and was clearly an exercise in propaganda leading up to the Imperial Conferences held during that Jubilee year: other colonies should follow Canada’s lead. Kipling’s poem revolves around the intersection of the woman’s body, the marketplace and the home, all of which are exactly Duncan’s concerns in *Cousin Cinderella*. Kipling uses the familiar, female-gendered familial relations to indicate colonial ties: “Daughter am I in my mother’s house, / But mistress in my own” (Kipling 132). The empire is one big family, presided over, and cared for by women. Kinship, rather than force, will lead to economic arrangements between the “white” colonies, as suggested by the reference to snow (Parry 86). The links created and nurtured by women become imperial policies tendered and negotiated by men. Canada is woman, the vast dominion represented by the woman’s body. But “our Lady” (still the possession of Britain) must “talk of common things— / Words of the wharf and the market place” (132). Canada has entered into economic dialogue with Britain; Kipling metaphorically allows women into the traditionally masculine domain of imperial trade.

Duncan uses the poem to mount a critique of London society: Lady Lippington—hoping for a Governorship in Canada for her husband—chides Kipling for representing Canada as snowy: “these poets never know what mischief they may do” (86).⁶ She completely overlooks the subject of the poem, tariff reform, instead treating it as advertising: it may deter future

colonial administrators or potential immigrants through its negative portrait of the climate. She is not interested in imperial politics, or even Canada itself, but only the gains in status to be had from the governorship. Lady Lippington is one of the many women in the novel whose purported interest in empire is exposed as ignorance. Women are seemingly complicit in their exclusion from imperial politics.

Tariff reform is frequently mentioned in *Cousin Cinderella*. Mrs Jerome Jarvis is a “fearful Let-Things-Aloner” who is annoyed when “the other side,” the “Imperialists,” get hold of her son Billy to stand for parliament (159). Mrs Jarvis sees marriage as a way of “drawing the ties of Empire closer” without “tinkering [. . .] with the tariff” (159). Mary, talking to Graham, says that they are not supposed to mention tariff reform as the British are “tired of it,” but that reform is immaterial, confident as she is in Canadian loyalty to Britain (101). Near the close of the novel, Peter also says he cannot see his “way to tariff-reform,” preferring “ties of sentiment” over economic policy (313). The novel and its protagonist appear to be advocating ties of romance and kinship over economic bonds. Indeed critics such as Misao Dean have posited this advocacy as key to Duncan’s imperialism in general: “women traditionally have a special duty in the family to promote affection and understanding among the members, and this duty becomes a public one as women fulfil a special role in the Empire, creating the affectionate ties that are the most important part of diplomatic alliances” (Dean, *Different* 13). She argues that, in *Cousin Cinderella*, Mary “gains power through her ability to bestow the dowry that represents her nation: wealth, a field for action, and the possibility of a new social harmony” (14). This may be Duncan’s ideal position, but Anglo-colonial marriage is portrayed, I want to argue, not in opposition to, but as merely another kind of trade relation. Colonial women are raw products for export to Britain.

Mr Trent sends his two children to London as samples, as proof of his success as a colonial emigrant, a success both economic and political. The text opens with Mary’s description of her father, a man who, because of his thriving lumber business, has “simply created” a town, Minnebiac, the original seat of his “interests” (1). In fact, he is one of the legislators of the country itself: “he had a finger in every sort of national pie” (6-7). “As seems suitable,” he inaugurates the text, as he has authored his home-town and helped to create his nation. This God-like, male power is implicitly contrasted with the weak Mrs Trent, who is capable only of keeping herself alive (2). Pages later we learn that her poor health is “never bad enough to

be more than a solicitude and a subject for kind enquiry" (6), but the infantilization of Mrs Trent reinforces her husband's authority. Mary seems to have accepted this power division.

However, from the start, Duncan makes clear the gap between Mary's desires and her commentary: "we had the best influences, and even in Minnebiac were never allowed to play with interesting children or in the street, though how we longed to on big, light, empty spring evenings after tea, words can never tell" (2). The best influences are in fact the worst; Mary simultaneously accepts or reiterates the values instilled in her, and rejects them, desiring what is taboo. Her desire falls outside language, however, and representation fails even at this early stage in the narrative. As a result, the reader is given an early clue to the importance of subtext and irony to Mary's narrative.

Senator Trent sends his children not only as "samples" of his own prosperity, but as national representatives: to "show forth his country for him" (10). They are ambassadors for Canada, but also for capitalism. They stand for the way in which Canadian natural resources can be harnessed for trade and business. Graham has already been apprenticed to the business, just as he is nearly sacrificed for Canada and imperial loyalty in the Boer War. Mrs Trent's United Empire Loyalist ancestors suddenly become a burden rather than a privilege in the context of Canadian military involvement in the Boer War: "if she had come of a Revolutionary family Graham, in so far as she was concerned, would not have had to go" (3). Mary's irony and ambiguous use of pronouns are telling: "they gave him a commission" and "we got him back then" (3-4). His DSO does not make up for the typhoid fever and leg injury. Britain becomes the enemy here, the ties of family crystallizing over those of nation or empire. Graham is a carpenter, missionary of "simple purposes and fine ideas in wood" (6). He loved the "touch and the feeling and the idea of wood," seeing it as essential to the Canadian landscape and identity (6). Graham has the pioneering spirit: the enthusiasm, the affinity with nature, but instead he becomes "Son of John Trent and Son" and has to "reserve the poetry of it for his spare time" (6). Creativity is subsumed by commercialism and the Trent children become representatives of that take-over.

Mr Trent also describes his children as "nothing but a pair of colonial editions" (9), editions of popular books produced specifically (and less luxuriously) for the colonial market (see Dean, *Cinderella* 367). They are the raw products, both in what they represent (timber) and what they are (single and marriageable).⁷ Like the difference in export terms of "dressed" and "undressed" wood, the Trents are sent to be refined and polished, made

acceptable to London society, like the newly arrived Rhodes scholar who is described, in the novel, as “very raw” and in need of advice on fashion and demeanour (107). The links between colonial administration and the aristocracy made etiquette an important area in which to distinguish colonials from the metropolitan society.

This air of superiority often barely disguised ignorance about the Dominions themselves, particularly the emergent nationalisms of these countries. The Trents are constantly irritated by the condescension and misinformation they encounter. Duncan highlights the hypocrisy of those imperialists who support a united empire yet know nothing about those countries with which they would unify. Lady Doleford, for example, refers to Upper and Lower Canada (150), both terms obsolete in the 1840s. Duncan contrasts British stereotyped ideas of Canada as wild outpost (123, 151) with Mary’s complex, changing sense of London. The Trents’ American friend, Evelyn, whom they meet by chance in London, also characterizes ignorance regarding Canada’s political position. “We’ve got nothing on our side like him, have we?” (67) she says of Edward VII. “We’ve got *him!*” Mary retorts, which Evelyn turns into “he’s got you” (67). The issue of “sides” (the dividing line of ocean as opposed to government) and of ownership run through the conversations in *Cousin Cinderella*.

Social climber Evelyn draws Mary and Graham into aristocratic society and reminds them of their position: “Do you realise that you represent between you a good quarter of the mining interests of Nova Scotia, and enough New Brunswick timber to buy a county town with?” (67) She implies that they should realize their purchasing power and live more extravagantly, but it soon becomes clear that they are attractive “products” themselves. They not only represent the market back home, but have been launched as valuable commodities on the London marriage market. Evelyn openly talks of the Trents in terms of the stock market. The only reason the English haven’t considered the colonial market thus far, she says, is that it’s so small: “Maple princes and princesses [. . .] have only lately been quoted in the share lists. But prices are firm, Marykin—and rising. And Mrs Jerry [. . .] declares that it’s a Heaven-sent way of drawing the ties of Empire closer without tinkering [. . .] with the tariff” (159). The society magazines pick up on Evelyn’s nickname for Graham, the Maple Prince, thus connecting them to the basic commodity which renders them so desirable (113).

The climax of the text, and a crucial passage for my argument, occurs when Mary fully realises the extent of her power. This scene highlights how

the siblings' gender difference determines their reactions to their desirability. After a night out with Mrs Jarvis, and an introduction to her son Billy, Mary, riding home in the brougham, feels "the definite thrill of a new perception, something captivating and delicious" (111).

Suddenly, without Graham, without anybody, moving through the lovely, thronged, wet, lamplit London streets in Mrs Jarvis's electric brougham, I felt myself realised—realised in London, not only by the person who happened to be near me, but in a vague, delightful, potential sense by London. Realised, not a bit for what I was—that wouldn't, I am afraid, have carried me very far—nor exactly for what I represented, but for something else, for what I might, under favourable circumstances, be made to represent. (111-12) ⁸

Mary's realization that her dowry brings her influence and worth, importantly comes when she is separated from Graham, her interests momentarily given primacy over his. She is interested not so much in the marriage itself, as in the "solicitation [. . .] of London" (112). Her epiphany can only come in the "lovely, thronged, wet, lamplit London streets": the anonymity of the crowd is alleviated by the "value of having" (112). She views herself literally as a commodity: "a possibility, a raw product, to be melted or hammered or woven into London" (112). At this point, the rhetoric is one of sacrifice: "one would be obliged, in a way, to hand oneself over", but Mary is delighted that London should "take one into account at all" (112). The passage is immediately complicated, however, by her realization that her worth gives her "a point a view" which allows her to feel "disdain" for London. She is no longer in its thrall, but rather "behind the scenes" with her (112). The potential of the situation gives her a voice in London, a way of seeing. Her excitement at her revelation in the brougham is never repeated. She becomes more and more disillusioned and frustrated with her role. As Graham is drawn further into colonial politics ("Lord Selkirk chaffed him openly about the probability that he would one day fill the official shoes of the High Commissioner" [137]), and Mary realizes her relatively "small allotment" in the form of Billy Milliken, she gradually withdraws from the situation. She feels, she writes, "like a mouse in the paws of Mrs Jarvis, her own small Colonial trophy, which she would presently drop at the feet of Society" (137). Mary becomes increasingly aware that her commodification extends to her colonial identity.

The fairy-tale motif found in the title and throughout the text ironizes Mary's elevation from her inferior position by London and by Peter Doleford. Although her "humble airs" seem to Evelyn like "something out of a fairy tale" (68), she, unlike Cinderella, has chosen to live in a flat. She

does not need Mrs Jarvis, the “fairy godmother,” who is in fact offering Mary, not a dream come true, but her own son (114). Through the fairy-tale motif, Duncan not only critiques the “white knight” scenario (Mary takes that role herself), but also underlines the discourses of imperialism. But initially the Trents see London and England in idealized, magical terms: “the Royal heart of England, which had always before beaten for us in a fairy tale far away” (59). London is mediated through fiction and myth. Their points of reference include Dickens and Thackeray (164, 190).⁹

These associations gradually unravel and Mary’s anger intensifies as she realizes Graham and Barbara’s own position within the all-pervasive marriage market. Mary begins to identify with Barbara, as she too is launched, a lure for Graham’s fortune. If Evelyn will not marry Peter, the same ends can be achieved by marrying Graham to Barbara. Mary likens Barbara to a pound of tea, a commodity intimately associated with colonialism and trade, and also to “a distinguished expensive product of nature” “very much aware [. . .] of what ought to happen to her”: marriage (97-8). Barbara is a national treasure, “a Gainsborough out of the National Gallery,” there to be gazed at and bought (98). At Mrs Yilke’s ball, Mary sees the men as similarly implicated in the transaction. They, including Billy, are “perfectly produced,” “prime stock upon exhibition” (117).

One way of reading Mary’s marriage is that she sacrifices herself to save Graham’s freedom: “That Graham should cherish his freedom seemed indispensable and necessary. My own sex, I found myself thinking, were more or less born into a state of bondage—it would not have mattered nearly so much if it had been me” (268-69). Mary and Peter’s marriage is perhaps more heartfelt than the union of Graham and Barbara would have been, but Duncan plays down the romance. Marriage, as in many of her novels, comes as somewhat of a surprise, tacked on as if only in capitulation to convention. Mary seems to feel that she has much less to lose than Graham by rescuing Pavis Court, and that Canada has much more to gain from Graham than herself. Her awareness of her own commodification is still subordinated to the needs of the male nation-builder.

For Duncan’s British characters, however, Anglo-colonial marriage is an inevitable part of imperial economics and social engineering. Instead of the conventional pattern of sending British women to the colonies to ensure colonial loyalty, improve the racial stock and deal with the problem of “surplus” women, the voyage is reversed. Colonial women prove useful in rejuvenating British stock: “a certain number of the daughters of our own kith

and kin beyond the seas’—the Duchess smiled at me benevolently—‘might very well help to replenish—might very well make good English wives [. . .] And if such ideas seem in any way sordid or grasping, it should be remembered that the Colonies pay nothing, for the protection afforded them by the British navy’” (301-2). Colonial women are to be offered in marriage as repayment for military protection and security. The Duchess advocates a trade in women, another kind of tariff reform. Her subsequent comment “I understand [. . .] that the preference they are supposed to give us commercially does not amount to a row of pins,” places the marriage question firmly within this context (302). She disapproves, however, of Graham’s marriage to Barbara: “it does not seem desirable that the men of younger countries should look for wives to England” (301). Mrs Jarvis tells Mary, too, that “the marrying [male] foreigner is usually perfectly unscrupulous” (111). Women are merely the breeding vessels, mating with superior British male genes. The problem arises when the male genes are colonial: “Look at the Billingers—Lady Marjorie married Australian mutton. They have no family” (301). Mary seems complicit in this social Darwinism. Her first impressions of Peter are that his features suggest “a race and then a type and then an order, and a kind of direct correspondence of character—he was written beautifully plain” (96-7). His sister’s features, however, fall short of the “original nobility” (97).¹⁰ Mary’s realization and use, in London, of her own economic and political significance as a single, colonial woman, makes the tariff reform debate, not an incidental backdrop, but central to Duncan’s portrayal of Edwardian imperial policy and its effects on women.

Imperial London: The Empire on Display

By focusing on colonial subjects in London, Duncan explores the links between imperialism, capitalism and urbanization. Mary realizes in the brougham that only on the London market will she be valuable. Duncan, in line with other cultural theorists of modernity identifies the metropolis with commodity capitalism. Mary soon learns that “money economy dominates the metropolis” (Simmel 411): everything is determined by its exchange value, including her. The metropolis foregrounds the “purchasability of things” (179). By the late nineteenth century, Britain had become the world’s financial centre, and “the City was the colossus of commerce and credit throughout the Empire” (Sheppard 313). The very architecture of London, both in its building materials and its purpose, is symbolic of the imperial project and the interrelations between metropolis and periphery. The colonies were

not just “out there”; colonial subjects were both present in London and were greatly responsible for the capital’s wealth. Colonialism and urbanisation were inextricably linked, the former accelerating the latter (King 34).

Anthony King estimates that in 1887 out of London’s 4.3 million population, only a few hundred were colonials, but twenty-five years later, Edwin Pugh, in *The City of the World*, writes of the “Colonials and Yankees everywhere” (Pugh in King 75). In the years before WWI, the largest group of immigrants came from the settler colonies (Walvin 74). Evelyn muses on the presence of Canadians in London: “The American duchess is a deservedly popular institution—good for the Duke and improving for the American [. . .] I expect Canadians are something new over here—that’s what it is. Americans were new once, and frequented Bloomsbury boarding-houses and brought introductions from Emerson and Thoreau, and wrote their experiences in the magazines. Now you are” (68-9).

Duncan’s depiction of colonial “products” on display in London, invites comparison with the numerous imperial exhibitions staged in London, starting with the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851. These were a “justification” of imperialism through the display of bountiful commodities and indigenous peoples. British spectators could feel a sense of ownership: the colonies, like the Maple Prince and Princess, had come to them to be gazed at and consumed. Reading Mary as colonial export highlights the complex status of Canadian women within the empire.¹¹ She is produced in the dominion, but returns to be, in her eyes, sold to the motherland. While both Mary and Graham are on exhibition, the commodification is intensified for the woman. Mary is excluded from an active role in imperial politics.¹² She is repeatedly ignored in favour of Graham: she is not invited to the lunches, the meetings. Her position behind the grille at the Houses of Parliament symbolizes her place on the periphery (139). For Graham, on the other hand, saving a “sacred folio,” a “Jacobite collection” and finally Pavis Court from foreign purchasers increases his sense of belonging (130). Sent to London as a “sample,” Mary is constantly referred to as “Miss Canada,” whereas Graham, although he is given nicknames, never stands for the country itself. The Duchess, Mary thinks, “seemed literally, as she sat on the sofa and considered me, to come, like the early discoverers, within sight of land” (245). The Duchess surveys her, a new territory to exploit, and even asks Mary if she has Native blood in her family, as though she, as the country, encapsulates the indigenous inhabitants.

On her arrival in London, Mary is receptive to the city and considers at

great length her position in it, but by the end of the text she is not “keyed up to the Empire” (305). She opts out, her world narrowing to Minnebiac and concerns of marriage and family. She becomes increasingly resentful of the ways in which she is represented. The Trents’ “voyage in” can be seen, in part, as a rebellious act. Their very presence in London does appear to some, like the Duchess, as an implicit challenge: a daring reclamation of a privilege not rightly theirs. As Mrs Jarvis says: “I’ve no patience with the Colonies, wanting this, that, and the other thing, telling us what to do. Teaching their grandmothers to suck eggs” (58). The Trents serve as reminders to the British that development and “progress” in London cannot be separated from colonial nation-building. The colonial subjects, who are of course colonizers themselves (and Duncan treats the relations between settler and Native Canadians in *The Imperialist*), keep reminding themselves that they do have a claim on Britain. Graham wants to claim “his moral birthright,” his “share in the commonwealth that is so much richer and more rewarding where the Empire began” (131). Barbara is part of this share. His actions are in part determined by admiration for British culture, history and tradition, but they are also a demonstration of Canada’s power to save the mother country. Mary sees this belonging as another type of colonization. She feels like an intruder and her enjoyment at “discovering” Britain is described in such terms: “I wonder if they [the English] know any satisfaction, planting their flag in the ends of the earth, that equals the joy of exploring England” (195). As Mary becomes more disenchanted with Britain, she imagines a reversal of colonial acquisition: “I had distinctly, now that I come to dissect it, a plundering feeling toward the mother country.” “There was a good deal that one could remove, and I wanted to fly back with it,” “clothes and ideas and old china, anything portable” (129-30). Evelyn is the consummate colonizer, taking possession of “vast tracts, in the name of her Republic” (180). She is like the Elizabethans, Duncan writes, except that she knows where the treasure is and her voyage is mapped out (180). She, of course, gets the trophy, not the impoverished Peter Doleford, but Uncle Christopher, next in line to inherit the Duke of Dulwich’s title. With these images of reverse colonization, Duncan decentralizes empire, one of the agenda behind imperial federation itself.

Furthermore, Mary continually dismantles the dichotomy between home and abroad. As she says, “we were strangers really, though we knew the flag so well [. . .] such strangers that I felt sometimes as if we had rifled the flag out of Westminster Abbey” (47). Familiarity with cultural icons does not

equal familiarity with location. She reasserts Canada as home, as the centre, countering Lady Doleford's anglocentrism: "can one be at home out of England?" (150) She asks whether Mary's parents intend to come "home to England to settle" and Mary replies, "But they are at home now, Lady Doleford!" (149). Duncan sets imperial arrogance against Canadian nationalism when Lady Doleford says, "'But we are so accustomed, you know, to people coming home—from South Africa, and India, and even Australia. They seem to prefer it'" (150). Mary replies "Nobody prefers to leave Canada" (150).¹³ Christmas, in particular, emphasises the Trents' outsider position: "The occasion proved us aliens" (192). They are awash on "the great vague, friendly, impenetrable ocean of London" (49), the friendliness never quite making up for the impenetrability. Duncan's own homeless, denationalized position enabled her to envisage fully this position (see Peterman 58).

Urban alienation is central to Duncan's exploration of women and imperialism. Simmel's notion of the urban stranger characterized by "indifference and involvement" (404) is complicated by the colonial subject who both belongs in London yet is foreign. Mary is not only under the male gaze on the streets of London, but under the imperial gaze in the private spaces of London drawing rooms. As the novel progresses, fog descends on London, symbolizing the claustrophobia and oppression of even London's public arenas for Mary.¹⁴ Jane Jacobs has noted the "primacy of the spatial in imperial projects" but also that "in recent social theory the spatial is metaphorically everywhere but oft-times nowhere" (3). *Cousin Cinderella* merges the metaphorical spaces of the colonial perspective with the real, lived space of the colonial in London.

The Spatial Politics of Duncan's London

The spatial politics of *Cousin Cinderella* revolves around "the psychology of flats" (Duncan, *Two* 64). The siblings' flat in Kensington is central to their identity and their self-presentation on the London scene. It marks them as modest in their way of life: it is the "unpretentiousness of Kensington that most appealed" (14). Evelyn cannot believe they make do with, or choose to make do with, such accommodation (146). Duncan attributes to the Canadian character an unpretentiousness which she does not find in Evelyn or in the British.¹⁵ After her marriage in 1890 to Everard Cotes, then superintendent of Calcutta's Indian Museum, India became Duncan's home, but her trips to London were made alone and she rented furnished flats in

Kensington. The freedom and stimulation she found as a cosmopolitan writer in London runs through her writing. In particular, the flat reappears constantly as a haven for women. The flat signifies temporality of existence and the Trents' place as foreigners in London, undecided whether to commit to the city or not. As Duncan writes in *Two in a Flat*, "there is a vast amount to be said for flats. I feel sometimes as if I could never consent to be pinned down to the ground under a house again" (35).

The Trents rent in an apartment block rather than a house, which identifies them with other middle-class inhabitants, rather than with the upper-class circles in which they are moving. As the demand for inner-city dwellings increased in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, more of these mansion blocks went up, particularly in Kensington and Chelsea, part of a new wave of experimental housing in the first decade of the twentieth century (Walker 82). Importantly, as Anthony King points out in his investigation of the links between urbanization and colonialism, Kensington was favoured by the colonial returned (80).¹⁶ During Duncan's stay in London from early 1906 to July 1907, she lived in just such a newly built, five-storey, apartment block at 40 Iverna Court in Kensington (Fowler 274). Duncan links the Trents' choice of a flat with these new fashions in housing: "a flat seemed to be the best way, seemed to be the only way. I don't know what may have happened by this time—very likely a reaction in favour of caves in a Garden Suburb" (12). Their choice of housing puts them in opposition to the conventional circles in which they are soon to move: "the London of that autumn simply sang and shouted flats, announced and imposed flats as the one possible form of housekeeping" (12-13). Command over space and the lengthy negotiations with Miss Game, the owner, are the Trents' initiation to London. The modishness of the Trents' flat in *Cousin Cinderella* has to be contrasted, of course, with Pavis Court, and its associated permanence and tradition. Pavis Court represents England—decaying and mouldering—the weight of tradition neglected. Mary is rendered deaf and speechless by the house, seeing it as a monster, a devourer of lives and fortunes (210). Her brother is to be sacrificed to its "uplifted ideal" (210). The future is not with Pavis Court and Mary has to stop Graham from marrying a doomed way of life.

The significance of the flat changes, however, as it becomes a retreat and a fortress rather than an entry point. It is their "stronghold," their "own for retreat and reflection, always invitingly there" (145). As Mary says: "The flat stood for us, just for Graham and me. Here, we could say, we are; here is our

wandering tent" (145). The flat protects them from false grandeur, reminding them, when London labels them provincial, that they "made no particular pretensions, that nobody could be more honest" (145-46). Mary pities "Colonials" without flats who are "exposed" (146), liable to be swept up by decadent, cosmopolitan airs.

Duncan raises issues of class through Mary's relations with Towse, the servant whom they are expected to hire with the flat (25): "there was not a soul," Mary writes, "except Towse, upon whom we had any claim" (47). She feels uncomfortable with the formal behaviour of British servants, and yet exhibits the classist assumptions which perpetuate that behaviour, by attempting to rename Towse, Kalifa, for example (43). The attempted renaming is motivated by respect: Mary and Graham find calling Towse simply by her deceased, first husband's surname a bizarre, British convention, and feel Kalifa, "the skilled one," is indicative of her gender and generally more complimentary. In *Two in a Flat* and in *Cousin Cinderella*, the narrators do however exhibit interest in their servants' lives, but find the intimacy of flat-living conflicts with the barriers of propriety between servant and mistress. However much the narrators question the barriers stipulated by social convention, the divisions nevertheless remain: "the gulf is ordained, as narrow as you can make it, but it must be there; you cannot live with a little kitchen-maid however you may love her" (*Two* 38).

Mary's privileged position is mirrored in her selective view of London. There is a surprising absence of references to the suffragettes, whose militant campaign began in 1906, and who would have been an obtrusive presence on London streets, engaged in protest as well as selling newspapers (see Dean, *Introduction* xx). Given that Duncan was a supporter of women's suffrage and given the awareness of imperial politics in her work, this seems to be a deliberate omission. Female imperialism and suffrage were not mutually exclusive concerns: women such as Louisa Knightley and Frances Balfour supported both of these causes (Bush 146). Duncan perhaps wants to make it a sign of Mary's own political naiveté that her character does not register this aspect of public London, but the omission also illustrates the narrow social circle in which Mary finds herself moving. A network of clubs, colonial lunches, talks and events underscores the workings of upper-class, imperial London society. Duncan herself was a member of the Ladies Empire Club in Grosvenor Street, established by the Victoria League in 1902, which served as her London postal address (Morgan 263). In 1904 the Club had 900 members; one third of these were colonial women (Bush 136). Similarly,

one of Mary and Graham's first stops upon arrival is the Royal Colonial Institute (66), founded in 1869 and located metaphorically and literally at the heart of imperial London, in Northumberland Ave, WC, off Trafalgar Square. Mrs Lippington invites Graham to her club, Daughters of the Flag. A club with "real purpose," it is hosting a talk on "Canada at the Present Time" complete with lantern slides (84). She also hosts "Colonial lunches" in "great houses of London," intent on impressing colonials with all elements of British culture and acutely aware of her duty in "backing up the King" (204).

Duncan has come under criticism for her focus on middle and upper-class society (see Tausky, *Novelist* 77-8 and Hubel 439), when in fact her depictions are invariably critical. Edwardian, imperial London eventually stifles Mary. The Lippington's departure for Canada, an "Imperial occasion" itself, is the turning point (273). She decides against lunch at her club afterwards with Graham, because it will be "full of them": "I wanted to part with everybody, to get away from all those people" (273). She wants to recapture the London they found on arrival, when, as she puts it "we didn't know anything and enjoyed ourselves" (273). At one point she refers to her early days in London as "the other side of the Flood" (291): the deluge has now overtaken her experience of Britain. She becomes critical of the city, once it becomes synonymous with the people they meet. After Lady Lippington's departure, Graham and Mary travel to lunch on a bus, symbolic of her desire to return to their early simplicity. Mary's final farewell to upper-class imperial London comes at an Empire First tea party given by the Duchess of Dulwich. Mary is disappointed that the guests are not better advocates of imperialism. She identifies several women of principle "in whose hands I felt sure all national issues would be safe" (304), but most of the women, as she puts it, "must always [. . .] have had before them or behind them their adorable clothes" (304). Mary sees clearly how status and materialism take precedence over imperial interest. Peter's entrance from "the more private part of the house" suggests her rejection of public for private concerns (306).

Duncan's fiction is often concerned with the intersection of politics and the quotidian, whether it be the politics of domestic spaces (as in *On the Other Side of the Latch* [1901] and *Two in a Flat*) or, as in *Cousin Cinderella*, the impact of national politics on daily life. It is significant that Duncan gave Mary the position of narrator, as we have seen, because of her cultural background and her gender, but also for her ordinariness. In a letter about *The Imperialist*, Duncan writes: "It seems to me that among the assumptions

and disputes over here as to what the 'colonial view' really is, it might be worth while to present the situation as it appears to the average Canadian of the average small town, inarticulate except at election times, but whose view, in the end counts for more than those of those pictorial people whose speeches at Toronto banquets go so far to over-colour the British imagination about Canadian sentiment" (Duncan, *Imperialist* 310). Invariably, however, that "average" voice is female. *A Social Departure* narrates "the ordinary happenings of an ordinary journey of two ordinary people" (Duncan 40) and we are told that Mrs Browne in *A Simple Adventure* is not extraordinary or original but certainly not dull (Duncan 26 and 290). By calling her unconventional and adventurous heroines "ordinary," Duncan expands the scope of women's activities.

On the other hand, the Canadian girl in London, not the British New Woman or the American girl, suggests a fresh perspective, and hence a new genre. Duncan's *An American Girl in London* (1891), which acknowledges its debt to Henry James's American girls, is in some ways a precursor text to *Cousin Cinderella*, which one reviewer called Jamesian (Duncan, *American* 2 and *The Saturday Review* 20).¹⁷ The later text is much less conventional, however, in its discussion of imperial politics, its narrative style and the way in which it complicates the theme of the "foreigner-in-London." Duncan's use of a first-person narrator further emphasizes that her character's perspective is her own both in generic and political terms. Mary arrives in London with an inherited view, her father's, and leaves with her own.¹⁸ The modernity of the text and its critical perspective are highlighted by this intimate and subjective colonial voice. Mary is clear about the kind of text she wants to write: "It is along the ordinary ways of life and among the people one would naturally know that the really most interesting things happen to one" (62). However, the text which begins with a detailed description of London flat-hunting and domestic living, similar to *Two in a Flat*, becomes a more conventional tale of London society, when the narrative is usurped by the Dolefords and the Lippingtons. Of course, "Towse is the very first to go" (89). Mary writes:

I knew exactly how it would be. As soon as I let myself begin to tell about the people we came to know and the things that happened to us, all the wonderful daily romance that London has for the stranger, from the hour when "Ulk" sounds with a clatter of tins through the cold grey dawn, to the last irresponsible beat of a hansom in the abysmal streets, would simply swim and melt away and refuse to compete, as it were, in one's memory, with such centres of interest as the Lippingtons and Lady Barbara. (89)

Society women walk in “without any special invitation, and take possession of this page” (89). Mary and Graham’s lives are taken over, their identities defined by London society. “Dear, homely details” disappear “out of the back-door of her mind” (89). Duncan’s exploration of women and colonization becomes meta-textual when Mary’s voice is re-colonized by imperial London.

By highlighting Mary’s position as a product, Duncan points out the limitations of women’s role in imperial relations. While the text is not anti-imperialist—Graham is vice-president of the Dominion Club (61)—a united empire in which the former colonies are judged by the value of their exportable commodities is far from desirable. The colonial subject’s attempt to enter and contribute to the metropolis paradoxically results in a reassertion of British superiority and dominance, as Canadian nationalism and imperial goals prove incompatible. Mary’s freedom as a writer allows her to both document and critique her re-colonization. In *Cousin Cinderella*, Duncan shows herself to be an important writer of the metropolis, exploring the ways in which the colonial woman is constructed by imperial Edwardian London, but also writing against an empire in which both Canada and women have a subservient role.

NOTES

- 1 I am grateful to the late Professor Thomas E. Tausky for his advice and assistance on matters relating to Duncan. He is deeply missed as a friend and fellow Duncan-enthusiast. I would like to acknowledge the Canadian High Commission’s support of my research in the form of a Canadian Studies Faculty Research Award which enabled a research trip to the Sara Jeannette Duncan archive at the University of Western Ontario. Thanks also go to John H. Lutman, Head of the J. J. Talman Regional Collection at the D. B. Weldon Library at UWO, and his staff for their assistance during my visit.
- 2 Taxes were lowered on British goods coming into Canada by 25% in 1897, increased to 33.3% in 1900 (Amery 43; Marsh 423).
- 3 Since the introduction of Canadian preference, the value of annual British export to the Dominion increased from 6.5 to 11 million pounds. A preferential arrangement with Canada would also ward off competition from Germany and the United States (Garvin, *Imperial* 8).
- 4 I am using the British, as opposed to the American, edition of the novel given that I am dealing with Duncan in London. There are many slight differences between the editions, some of which Misao Dean outlines in her edition of the text.
- 5 See J. L. Garvin, *Tariff or Budget*, articles reprinted from the *Observer*, 1909 with a preface by Joseph Chamberlain. Garvin also wrote a series of pro-Chamberlain leader articles for the *Daily Telegraph* reprinted as *Imperial Reciprocity*.
- 6 Lady Lippington’s comment may also be an allusion to the Canadian reaction to the poem. Kipling visited Canada on an official tour in late 1907, as Duncan was writing her

novel. J. Castell Hopkins, in an article in the *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs* for 1907, while writing about Kipling's tour, also noted that "Our Lady" had not been popular "among a people unduly sensitive to the injury which American misrepresentation of English ignorance of their climate had done to their country" (quoted in Wilson 253). Lady Lippington, like the Canadian readers, views the poem as advertising, but for immigration rather than the preferential tariff.

- 7 At the turn of the century, timber was Canada's second most important industry after agriculture (*The Wood Industries of Canada* 4). The years 1896 to 1914, as world markets recovered, were a boom time for Canadian exports, particularly wheat and minerals, although timber and forest products remained a crucial export to Britain. For a detailed contemporary analysis of Anglo/Canadian trade relations, see J. W. Root. Timber and related products, such as pulp and paper, were a major Canadian export to Britain but the state of the exports was a tariff issue: "an immense foreign demand prevails for its [Canadian] forest produce, and there is naturally a desire to export it in as finished a state as possible, but almost everywhere differential duties are imposed as between undressed and dressed wood" (Root, *Tariffs* 216).
- 8 In *Set in Authority*, too, Lavinia Thame has a revelatory moment in an electric brougham travelling through London, when she decides to use her money to finance an Irish-American's hunt for Herbert Tring, a man with whom she is in love: "The motor halted, trembling, behind a policeman's hand, and in the motionless carriage, with the tides of Piccadilly checked and fretting outside, Lavinia Thame encountered one of those decisive moments [. . .] She took it in silence, appearing to consider only the impassive rear of the liveried servant on the other side of the glass, all that was between her and the void, between a well-brought-up young Englishwoman and plunging initiative" (Duncan, *Set* 99). As with Mary, it is the public spectacle of London crowds, her proximity yet tenuous separation from them, that facilitates her awakening.
- 9 In *An American Girl in London*, Mamie Wick attends a lecture on Dickens's London (10) and in *A Daughter of Today* Duncan makes reference to Thackeray's London (80).
- 10 Duncan's reference to a best-selling book, *The Anglo-Saxon*, underpins the novel's preoccupation with British racial superiority as a justification for imperialism (78). The Duchess' work for a Royal Commission into the Assimilation of Aliens, following the Aliens Act (1905) is important here. Her brief to investigate "how best to understand them, and deal with them without damage to their national, political or religious prejudices" (88) is actually research into "the quickest and most effective methods of turning them into loyal British subjects" (88). Eventually she admits, "Personally I am not very fond of aliens. I would repatriate them all." (88) In this context, Graham is firmly complimented by the Duchess when she remarks that he's "not a foreigner" (220). Her declared interest in the "repatriation of the Jews" is undoubtedly inspired by anti-Semitism and xenophobia, rather than sympathy for Zionism (88).
- 11 Duncan's thinking about the colonial woman in London may well have been influenced by the arrival of her old school friend Pauline Johnson in London in 1906, prior to the writing of the novel. Johnson came from the Six-Nations Reserve near Brantford, Ontario, her father was a Mohawk chief, and she would board in the town during the school term. Johnson became a poet and travelled to London, first in 1894, then again in 1906 and 1907 to give readings and performances. Her first book *The White Wampum* was published in England. Her 1906 tour opened in London's Steinway Hall. Johnson wore traditional Mohawk dress for her performances. London welcomed this colonial

- woman, thrilled by her "exoticism": "no Canadian who had gone to London up to her time had received quite so warm a welcome" (Van Steen 22).
- 12 In Duncan's *A Social Departure*, by contrast, the women travellers very much realise their purchasing power, Orthodocia going against her name by buying land, selling it, and making a £4000 profit (54).
 - 13 Duncan's own national allegiance is complicated in the British review which calls her one of "our novelists" (*The Saturday Review* 533).
 - 14 The delegation to London in *The Imperialist* have similar experiences: "London, beating on all borders, hemmed them in; England outside seemed hardly to contain for them a wider space." They "longed for an automatic distributing system for the Empire" to combat the "sluggish over-population" (117).
 - 15 In one of twelve unpublished plays by Duncan called "Billjim From Down Under," performed in Adelaide by Robert Courtneidge's London Comedy Company at the Tivoli Theatre, an Australian soldier comes to stay in Lady Laughton's Knightsbridge flat. One of the characters, Mr Thurloe says: "A flat is a very levelling form of residence. That's why I avoid it" (5). I am grateful to John H. Lutman for permission to quote from the Sara Jeannette Duncan papers.
 - 16 Renamed The Royal Borough of Kensington by Edward VII, the presence of Kensington Palace, opened in 1899, and the Imperial Institute gave the area a distinct flavour (Walker 92): it was prosperous, inhabited largely by government officials, lawyers and other professionals (94).
 - 17 Duncan seems to have cultivated this alliance with James, sending him a copy of *His Honor and a Lady* and asking him if he sees similarities between their styles. "How can I tell if it's 'like me'?" he replies in 1900, praising her for her "consummately clever book," both "intelligent and observant," but lacking in "line" (James 354-55).
 - 18 See *Those Delightful Americans*, *The Simple Adventures*, *A Social Departure*, *An American Girl in London* and *A Voyage of Consolation*. The first-person voice in *Two in a Flat*, which is invariably taken to be semi-autobiographical is, interestingly, that of a long-standing resident of London. There is no mention of colonial origins.

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