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# Empire and Commerce in Latin America: Historicizing Woolf's *The Voyage Out*

*Patricia Novillo-Corvalán*

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In this article, I seek to recuperate the overlooked Latin American contexts that inform Virginia Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915). Integrating archival research and a historicizing approach, I utilize documentary evidence drawn from the research notes that Virginia Woolf conducted for Leonard Woolf's study *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (1920), namely, empirical data relating to political-economic issues in Latin America and, more specifically, to countries such as Argentina and Brazil. In so doing, I demonstrate that Virginia Woolf puts the complex issue of Great Britain's neocolonial domination in Latin America squarely on the cultural agenda of *The Voyage Out*. In particular, I suggest that the archival documents (housed at the Leonard Woolf archive, University of Sussex) acutely illustrate the extent of Britain's disproportionate economic control of Argentina through the development of the meat industry that turned the Argentine Republic into the abattoir of the British Empire. I argue that this documentary evidence complements and complicates the overall political message of *The Voyage Out*, whereby Woolf mercilessly denounces Britain's attempt to gain economic control of the continent through the predatory figure of Willoughby Vinrace and his high stakes in the meat and rubber trade. His involvement in the latter, meanwhile, is discussed in the second part of the article, where I shift my attention to the rubber boom in early twentieth-century Amazonia. Specific references in *The Voyage Out* adumbrate Virginia Woolf's awareness of human rights abuses perpetrated in the upper Amazon basin, testifying to her engagement with the geopolitical issues of her time, especially the vexed relationship between empire, capitalism, and modernity.

Michèle Barrett has recently unearthed significant archival material preserved at the Leonard Woolf Archive, which has revealed Virginia Woolf's extraordinary contribution to her husband's book, *Empire and Commerce in Africa: A Study in Economic Imperialism* (1920) in her role as research assistant or, even more appropriately, collaborator. Leonard Woolf's book had been commissioned by the Fabian Society and was published under the imprint of the Labour Research Department and George Allen & Unwin in 1920. According to Barrett, the complex research and analysis of empirical data that Virginia Woolf conducted for the project in 1917 sheds new light on her "relationship with her husband, and the critical and intellectual and political ideas they shared about British imperialism" (83). She also observes that the research reveals an image of "Virginia Woolf as a meticulous, even slightly pedantic scholar [with a remarkable] facility with factual data" (83). Crucially, Virginia Woolf's research notes are not just confined to Africa but

also cover extensive empirical data on Latin America, since Leonard Woolf had originally signed a contract for a more ambitious book on International Trade, yet gradually reduced its scope by specifically focusing on a single continent. Therefore, in the early stages of the research for the global version of the project, Virginia Woolf made copious and detailed notes of British Consular Reports concerning international trade relations with Latin America. The research notes are ordered alphabetically and begin with the Argentine Republic, a country to which she devotes 13 pages of notecards (most of them neatly written in longhand in her distinctive purple ink). The notes are itemized under the heading “Return of Foreign Trade of the Argentine Republic during the years 1893-1891.”<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that this research was undertaken two years after the publication of *The Voyage Out*, I suggest that Virginia Woolf’s knowledge of political-economic issues related to the Latin American nations (her reports cover a wide range of countries, including Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Cuba, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Argentina) can, potentially, seriously reconceive her depiction of the continent in the novel. In concert with Barrett and Anna Snaith, I recognize the significance of performing an “intertwined reading” of the Woolfs’ engagement with imperialism (Snaith 20), particularly as this article seeks to provide a conceptual framework that strategically reads *The Voyage Out* alongside *Empire and Commerce*, while also paying rigorous attention to Virginia Woolf’s research notes held at the Leonard Woolf Archive.<sup>2</sup>

In this way, I seek to explicate the way in which Virginia Woolf’s research for the original International Trade project can retrospectively “legitimize” her aesthetic engagement with Latin America, in an attempt to challenge a critical paradigm that has anchored Woolf’s knowledge of the continent in a rhetoric of exoticism and orientalizing images of butterflies linked to the Argentine writer, critic, and feminist, Victoria Ocampo. This implies that the “spatial” dimension of the novel, which E. M. Forster once dismissed as “a South America not found on any map and reached by a boat which would not float on any sea” (172), may be taken more seriously. Critics such as Fiona Parrot, Laura Lojo Rodríguez, and Giulia Negrello have shown that Woolf’s imaginary excursions to South America anticipated her final and most significant encounter with the continent that was embodied in the larger-than-life figure of Ocampo. Parrot states that “Woolf enjoyed Ocampo’s company but often imagined her as a fabulous character from a strange and distant land she knew little about” (1), while Lojo Rodríguez notes that “for Virginia Woolf, Victoria Ocampo was an example of remote and exotic exuberance” (219) and, in a similar vein, Giulia Negrello concludes that “Woolf projected onto Ocampo her

<sup>1</sup> Leonard Woolf Archive, University of Sussex Library Special Collections, Work Life section SxMS-13/I/L/6.

<sup>2</sup> Other crucial points of intersection in the Woolfs’ shared concerns with Empire include their so-called “village in the jungle” novels. See Wollaeger, “The Woolfs in the Jungle.”

idealised vision of South America” (122). Though it cannot be denied that in her correspondence with Victoria Ocampo Woolf narrowly defines a continent of the scale, diversity, and complexity of South America as “a land of great butterflies and vast fields” (L5 365), it must be borne in mind that such remarks were prompted by the lavish and stereotypical gifts that Ocampo bestowed upon Woolf:

You are too generous. And I must compare you to a butterfly if you send me these gorgeous purple butterflies [orchids]. I opened the box and thought “this is what a garden in South America looks like!” I am sitting in their shade at the moment, and must thank you a thousand times (L5 348-9).

If Ocampo willingly encouraged Woolf’s exotic fantasies through her extravagant gifts, it has to be said that she also patiently tolerated the latter’s orientalizing responses. As Gayle Rogers points out, in her transmission of Woolf’s works in her native Argentina, Ocampo tactfully revised “Woolf’s Eurocentrism” (143) in order to convey her cultural politics as part of a liberating feminist agenda that the two women passionately shared through their aesthetic commitment to gender equality. The powerful confluence between two icons of twentieth-century feminism—one English, the other Argentine, one publisher of the Hogarth Press, the other of Editorial Sur—initiated an aesthetic fulcrum that played a decisive role in the formation and circulation of transatlantic modernist practices.

In the course of this article, though, I shall question some of the assumptions undergirding Woolf’s relationship to Latin America in an endeavor to challenge the prevailing view that her knowledge of the continent was vague, deficient and, at its worst, non-existent. Rather, I seek to show that she was the possessor of a complex socio-economic knowledge of a country such as Argentina, a claim based not only on crucial documentation gathered from the research notes she undertook for *Empire and Commerce*, but also on textual evidence drawn from *The Voyage Out* and *Melymbrosia*. By elucidating Woolf’s complex awareness of pressing geopolitical issues in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Latin America, I seek to move beyond the romanticized rhetoric that constitutes an integral part of her epistolary relationship with Ocampo and that has so far framed the majority of scholarly work on this subject. Whereas my present intention is to historicize the contemporary political-economic contexts of *The Voyage Out* by recuperating Woolf’s more sophisticated knowledge of crucial Latin American issues, this does not suggest that I am critically unaware of the novel’s exoticizing proclivities nor, for the same matter, of its equally noticeable inattention to regional details. A number of scholars have drawn attention to the contradictory ideology underpinning the novel, a political tension marked by Woolf’s strong anti-imperialist and feminist agenda, on one level, and by a tendency to orientalize and stereotype colonized nations, on another. Critics such as Mark Wollaeger,

Steven Putzel, Alissa Karl, Carey Snyder, and Andrea Lewis are among those who claim that Woolf's resistance to British imperialism and patriarchal institutions has been partially undermined by her dehumanizing depiction of the native women in *The Voyage Out*. For example, Wollaeger states that whereas Woolf "clearly indicates that the gender politics informing Rachel's life also govern the native village," her colonial critique is further complicated by the fact that she is transforming "the native women into a mere backdrop for Rachel's inner drama," which "partially reproduces the imperial hierarchy the novel otherwise attacks" ("Postcards" 66). Meanwhile, Jane Marcus's oft-quoted observation that in *A Room of One's Own* Woolf was not immune to racial prejudice despite her best intentions to "dissociate herself from the racism of her family and class by announcing that she could pass even a 'very fine Negress' without wanting to 'make an Englishwoman of her,'" further exposes her complicity with orientalism (149). At the same time, John Batchelor has devoted some thought to Woolf's deeply problematic representation of the tropical setting in South America, a continent she had never visited. He claims that Woolf "makes elementary mistakes: forgetting that the seasons are reversed in the Southern Hemisphere, she has the climate in this imaginary country advancing from mild early spring to intolerably hot summer between the months of March and May" (13). Batchelor is referring here to the way Woolf's Georgian personages often make embarrassing geographical slips, such as forgetting that in South America the month of March should announce the arrival of autumn, not spring:

The three months which had passed had brought them to the beginning of March. The climate had kept its promise, and the change of season from winter to spring had made very little difference, so that Helen, who was sitting in the drawing-room with a pen in her hand, could keep the windows open though a great fire of logs burnt on one side of her (*VO* 103).

At the other end of the spectrum, however, Woolf is not unaware of the politics of representing imperial locations, an aspect that is constantly interrogated in the novel and that is indissolubly linked to the phenomenon of economic imperialism. As Kathy Phillips points out, "despite Virginia Woolf's residual insensitivity to colonized people and her lack of first-hand knowledge of the colonies, she felt strongly that the English civilization which the British imposed on their subjects was not worth exporting" (xxxv). Her rejection of colonialism, Julia Kuehn explains, "sprang from her great-grandfather's, grandfather's and father's nationalist fervour and critique of Empire respectively [as well as] her relationship with Leonard Woolf" (168). Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the British imperial mindset, together with its ingrained sense of racial, moral, and cultural superiority is constantly questioned, mocked, and satirized in the novel. Notice, for example, the discussion that takes place at the beginning of Chapter XI:

One of these parties was dominated by Hughling Elliot and Mrs Thornbury, who, having both read the same books and considered the same questions, were now anxious to name the places beneath them and to hang upon them stores of information about navies and armies, political parties, natives and mineral products – all of which combined, they said, to prove that *South America was the country of the future* (VO 151, my emphasis).

While the above extract appears to end in a note of optimism, the assertion is ironic since to succinctly claim that “South America was the country of the future” in a politically-loaded debate about empire, cartography, militarization, and the acquisition of raw materials, implies a tacit endorsement of British imperialism, not least since the “future” of the *continent* of South America has been irreversibly blighted by the atrocities committed (or about to be committed) by the dominant European powers. Manifestly, the pompous Hughling Elliot and Mrs. Thornbury arrogantly uphold South America as the “future” of Europe, namely, as the world’s richest source of raw materials to be liberally plundered by the European colonizer. Furthermore, Mrs. Thornbury glorifies the colonial exploits of the British Empire by boasting that she has sons “in the navy [...] and in the army too; and one son who makes speeches at the Union – my baby!” (VO 125). Later on, moreover, another character raises the inevitable set of questions: “Conquer a territory? They’re all conquered already, aren’t they?” (VO 152), echoing the Conradian realization that “the blank spaces on the earth” have been conquered by Western imperialism and have inevitably “become a place of darkness” (Conrad 8-9). Such exchanges show that Woolf responded critically to questions of Empire at a time when “European imperial rule over the non-European world extended to nearly two-thirds of the Earth’s land surface, and Britain’s Empire accounted for much of those holdings,” as Andrea White points out (180).

To be sure, the ideological discourses of taxonomy and cartography remain one of the main preoccupations of Woolf’s characters; their relationship with the South American landscape is always evocative of Empire, as the Amazon is constantly refashioned into a *terra incognita* awaiting colonization (and reinvention) by the “imperial eyes” of the European explorer, in Pratt’s well-known phrase. Even Woolf’s young and naïve heroine, Rachel Vinrace, is depicted in the imperial act of scrutinizing “the soil of South America so minutely that she noticed every grain of earth and made it into a world where she was endowed with the supreme power” (VO 157). “Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence,” writes Edward Said, “through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control” (*Nationalism* 77). And yet here, by provisionally endowing a female character with imaginative power, Woolf astutely finds a new way of critiquing the intimately intertwined discourses of imperialism and patriarchy by denouncing, as Kathy Phillips points out, a masculine tradition that associates conquest and adventure as roles “traditionally reserved for men” (70).

The transnational epistemology complexly operating in *The Voyage Out* may be further contextualized within a wider Anglophone tradition that similarly embarked on the immensely challenging task of representing Latin America, a continent that was still regarded (in the Humboldtian paradigm) as a New World awaiting reinvention by the European observer. “South America was very much on the minds of novelists at the time,” writes Linda Dryden, and “was becoming fertile ground for the literary imagination at the turn of the century” (71). In a dialectical mixture of romance, ethnography, and travel writing, a cluster of imperial adventure novels set in South America including, Conrad’s *Nostromo* (1904), W. H. Hudson’s *Green Mansions* (1904), Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Lost World* (1912) and Woolf’s *The Voyage Out*, as well as (more belatedly) Evelyn Waugh’s *A Handful of Dust* (1934), give renewed and urgent meaning to the question of whether, from the point of view of Western imperialism, South America was the continent of the future. Moreover, it is possible to locate James Joyce’s short story “Eveline,” first published in the *Irish Homestead* in 1904 and subsequently reprinted in *Dubliners* in 1914 (just one year before *The Voyage Out*), as part of this tradition of narratives of “voyaging out,” even though Joyce ironically suggested the reverse, a story of paralysis and thwarted emigration in which its eponymous heroine, Eveline Hill, refuses to elope to Buenos Ayres (spelled in the story in the Edwardian fashion). Katherine Mullin has historically positioned “Eveline” within the cultural contexts of the white-slave trade in late nineteenth-century Argentina, noting that the port city of Buenos Aires rapidly earned itself an international reputation as the “the worst of all centres of immoral commerce in women” and that the semantically-loaded phrase “going to Buenos Ayres” was interpreted as “taking up a life of prostitution, especially by way of a procurer’s offices” (70-1). *The Voyage Out* similarly emerged within a European climate of anxiety about white slavery propaganda (Bradshaw) though, as Celia Marshik notes, Woolf “mocked the myth of ‘white slavery’ and encouraged her readers to confront their hypocrisy in moral matters” (Marshik 103).

Peter Childs perceives an epistemological shift in the genre of imperial adventure fiction, a marked movement from pro-imperial British authors such as John Buchan and Henry Rider Haggard—whose fictions celebrate the thin veneer of Western civilisation—to a sense of crisis exemplified by the skeptical and deeply ambivalent attitude towards Empire displayed by writers such as Conrad, Joyce, Woolf and, to a lesser extent, Kipling: “In the modernist period the gradual change from confidence to doubt comes to fruition as a literary ambivalence evidences a shift towards imperial disquiet” (17). Such sense of disquiet for the colonial enterprise is evident in Woolf’s deeply ambiguous and satirical use of the clichéd tropes of the quest romance, which are reflected in her repeated attempt to interrogate the genre by subverting it for her own aesthetic purposes and by using her European “explorers” as a foil to launch a trenchant critique of British imperialism

and gender politics. This is nowhere more evident than in her ironic construction of *The Voyage Out* as the failed *bildungsroman* of her young heroine, Rachel Vinrace. Woolf paints a largely unflattering portrait of the artist as a young woman *manqué*, whose aborted marriage, failed conquest, and untimely death seriously expose the cracks of the colonial enterprise, while foreshadowing the end of the British Empire. For Jed Esty, modernist authors such as Joyce, Conrad, and Woolf consciously destabilize the framework of the *bildungsroman* by blatantly showing that their youthful protagonists refuse to “*grow up*”: “From Conrad’s Asian straits to Woolf’s South American riverway to Joyce’s Irish backwater, colonialism disrupts the *bildungsroman* and its humanist ideals, producing jagged effects on both the politics and poetics of subject formation” (73). Woolf’s uneasiness towards Empire is also conspicuous in her problematic representation of Rachel’s fragmented consciousness, who remains inscrutable and tongue-tied throughout most of the novel, prompting her fiancé, the Cambridge intellectual and aspiring writer, Terence Hewet, to bitterly remark: “‘I don’t satisfy you in the way you satisfy me,’ he continued. ‘There’s something I can’t get hold of in you’” (*VO* 352). And, earlier in the novel, Terence is similarly baffled, yet transfixed, by Rachel’s mysterious, sphinx-like face: “‘But what I like about your face is that it makes one wonder what the devil you’re thinking about’” (*VO* 347). As Julia Kuehn points out, Woolf’s modernist innovation in this novel is manifested in her movement “from moral certainty to moral ambiguity” (185) in an aesthetic project in which “silences and ambiguities speak louder than words and deeds” (180).

### “The country of the future”: Argentina, Modernity, and the Meat Trade

In *The Voyage Out* Woolf provides vital links with New World historiography, its discovery, exploration, and conquest, having as its main satirical target Western notions of “progress,” European racial superiority, and the economic exploitation of the New World’s natural resources and their local inhabitants. Set in the fictitious British colony of Santa Marina, Woolf provides an imaginary “history” of the South American settlement by deploying an unmistakable parody of European travel writing and mythologized accounts of the conquest. At the heart of Woolf’s fabricated “history” of Santa Marina is the deployment of a critique of British imperialism and an unmistakable parody of early modern travel writing in the mode of Sir Walter Raleigh, intertwined with mythologized accounts of the conquest and Renaissance anti-Spanish propaganda:

Three hundred years ago five Elizabethan barques had anchored where the Euphrosyne now floated. Half-drawn up upon the beach lay an equal number of Spanish galleons, unmanned, for the country was still a virgin land behind a veil.... When the Spaniards came down from their drinking,



a fight ensued, the two parties churning up the sand, and driving each other into the surf. The Spaniards, bloated with fine living upon the fruits of the miraculous land, fell in heaps; but the hardy Englishmen . . . despatched the wounded, drove the dying into the sea, and soon reduced the natives to a state of superstitious wonderment (*VO* 96).

Note, for example, Woolf's deliberate use of the trope of the gendered "virgin land" commonly employed by early European explorers, whose accounts portrayed the New World as an uninhabited paradise, a new Eden waiting to be ravished by the European colonizer. Woolf emphasizes how Santa Marina was fought over by Spanish, Portuguese, and British powers, describing their warring over the colony in a satirical manner reflected in her use of the mocking epithets, "the hardy Englishmen," the "vengeful Spaniards," and "the rapacious Portuguese" (*VO* 96) that turn the three leading imperial nations into recognizable caricatures symbolizing the reckless arrogance of European expansion and their failure to occupy the area and establish a settlement. Meanwhile, after three centuries of Spanish rule, the peripheral Santa Marina has been finally reclaimed by the British and is now a far-flung neocolonial destination for British tourists seeking an exotic getaway in the exuberant tropics of South America. Crucial to this transatlantic Empire is the figure of Willoughby Vinrace, proud owner of the *Euphrosyne*, the cargo ship that transports the British tourists to Santa Marina. The name of the colony, meanwhile, is not bereft of symbolic connotations, absorbing a semantically-loaded imperialist signification. The word "Marina" literally signifies "born in the sea" ("nacida en el mar"), and it is obviously linked to the activities of shipping and maritime affairs, creating, by extension, associations with Christopher Columbus's largest ship, *La Santa María*, a near-namesake of Santa Marina. Additionally, the name of the colony may open further associations with Doña Marina, Hernán Cortés's interpreter and alleged concubine, known as La Malinche. According to Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, the figure of La Malinche "serves as an icon to remind us that a dominant metaphor of colonialism was that of rape, of husbanding 'virgin lands', tilling them and fertilizing them and hence 'civilizing' them" (4).

As far as spatial economics is concerned, the reader learns in Chapter One of *The Voyage Out* that the transatlantic route of Willoughby Vinrace's commercial enterprises ambitiously extends between "London and Buenos Aires" (*VO* 18), therefore specifically situating the Argentine capital as the final, strategic destination in a long chain of global networks. Willoughby's capital investment in southern South America is centered on the agrarian market and it is based on the commerce of "poor little goats" (*VO* 18), as his daughter Rachel laments, which has apparently generated enough wealth to pay for her music education, among other things, as well as advancing the expansion of his "empire" in the Southern Hemisphere. "Willoughby, as usual, loved his business and built his Empire,"

muses his sister-in-law, Helen Ambrose, neither approving nor condemning the imperialist ideology of her brother-in-law (*VO* 19). When the crusty Cambridge scholar and fellow traveler Mr. Pepper brusquely asks the pragmatic Willoughby to deploy one of his cargo ships to “investigate the great white monsters of the lower waters,” the latter amusingly replies:

“No, no,” laughed Willoughby, “the monsters of the earth are too many for me!” Rachel was heard to sigh, “Poor little goats!” “If it weren’t for the goats there’d be no music, my dear; music depends upon goats,” said her father rather sharply, and Mr. Pepper went on to describe the white, hairless, blind monsters lying curled on the ridges of sand at the bottom of the sea, which would explode if you brought them to the surface... (*VO* 18-9)

Woolf uses this seemingly causal exchange to articulate the two men’s opposing conceptions of imperialism. While the eccentric Mr. Pepper casts himself as an Elizabethan explorer and harks back to a bygone era of Renaissance voyages of discovery and travelers’ tales populated with images of oceanic monsters (illustrating Stephen Greenblatt’s notion of “the production of a sense of the marvellous in the New World” [73]), Willoughby, by contrast, exemplifies a late nineteenth-century model of capitalism in South America as he “sharply” reminds his daughter that “music depends upon goats.”<sup>3</sup> Here, Woolf seeks to emphasize the uncomfortable truth that the genteel lifestyle, privilege, and education of a British lady such as Rachel Vinrace is intricately connected to Britain’s imperial history and to Willoughby’s concentration of capital in South America. Alissa Karl rightly situates *The Voyage Out* within the context of the publication of Vladimir Lenin’s pamphlet *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917) in order to argue that Woolf participates in “a rendering of imperialism as function of capitalism’s development that was undertaken not only by Lenin, but by theorists like J. A. Hobson” (Karl 45). In effect, the laborious composition of *The Voyage Out* (written between 1907-1915) emerged in the wake of Hobson’s devastating critique of British imperialism in his groundbreaking work, *Imperialism: A Study* (1902) while, within the space of two decades, Leonard Woolf would emerge as the foremost critic of imperialism with the publication of *International Government* (1916) and the aforementioned *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (1920). In the latter, Leonard Woolf defines economic imperialism as:

The international economic policy of the European States, of the U.S.A., and latterly of Japan, in the unexploited and non-Europeanized territories

<sup>3</sup> Note, too, the symbolically-loaded name “Pepper” that is evocative of the spice trade, especially since Christopher Columbus had originally sailed to India in search of lucrative spices, leading to his inadvertent “discovery” of a new continent.

of the world... I call it imperialism because the policy always implies either the extension of the State's territory by conquest or occupation, or the application of its dominion or some form of political control to peoples who are not its citizens. I qualify it with the word economic because the motives of this imperialism are not defence nor prestige nor conquest nor the "spread of civilization" but the profit of the citizens, or of some of the citizens, of the European State (*Empire and Commerce* 19).

Dominic Davies points out that the anti-imperialist tradition of thought developed by Leonard Woolf, Hobson, and Lenin precisely interrogated "the interrelation between capitalism and imperialism as two separate, but mutually sustaining, modes of exploitative practice" (47). Whereas Leonard Woolf's study primarily focuses on the economic exploitation of Africa by Western imperial nations, his exposé of the rampant inequalities created by a profit-driven capitalist system is also applicable to Latin America. Europe's desperate need for raw materials and natural resources led to aggressive competition for the acquisition of new colonies in the "underdeveloped" world, whether in Africa, Asia, or Latin America. Virginia Woolf, who deemed *Empire and Commerce* "masterly and brilliant" (L2 416), attentively utilizes the epistemology of a global economic system regulated by the leading European nations as the cornerstone of *The Voyage Out*, a rapacious capitalist system that she mercilessly critiques via the figure of Willoughby Vinrace.

After most Spanish colonies gained independence in the first decades of the nineteenth century, ending three grievous centuries of Spanish rule, the Northern European powerhouses (especially Britain) responded swiftly to this geopolitical change by forging trade relations with the young republics as part of a concerted plan of global economic expansion. Mary Louise Pratt has shown how the nineteenth-century European "scramble for Latin America" was complexly tied up in a neocolonial capitalist project that went hand-in-hand with travel writing, particularly the ambitious task of reinventing America through totalizing methods of classification and geographical rediscovery. According to Pratt, the towering figure of Alexander von Humboldt remains the single most influential author in the conception of Latin America as a "virtual *carte blanche*" in need of reinvention: a virgin land ready to be exploited by enlightened Europeans (115). Building on Pratt's work, postcolonial critic Jennifer L. French claims that Britain's aggressive policies of economic "development" in the young republics rapidly supplanted imperial Spain as the foremost exploiter of Latin America's natural resources. As political and military intervention in postcolonial Latin America were quickly replaced by the economic system and ideology of capitalism, Britain pursued what French calls an "invisible" Empire there: "A hegemonic formation that was effective enough to dominate economic (and consequently, social and cultural) life in Latin America, and yet almost imperceptible" (7). This is precisely what the British

historian Eric Hobsbawm implies when he refers to countries such as Argentina and Chile as Britain's "honorary dominions" in what was largely conceived as Britain's "informal" Empire (125).

Therefore, Willoughby's emphatic retort, "No, no," to Mr. Pepper's outmoded rhetoric of "white monsters," and his repeated insistence on the trading value of domestic goats that have enabled Rachel's education, exposes the wide-reaching impact of the "invisible Empire" in the exploitation of southern South America's natural wealth. A shrewd British financier such as Willoughby would have bred goats for their valuable skin and for their meat. This offers a more complex image of Willoughby as a daring British entrepreneur willing to take risks in a constantly shifting and volatile world market, yet deriving handsome profits as a result. If anything at all, the "white monster" metaphor that looms large throughout the novel is none other than the exploitative forces of economic imperialism represented by Britain's aggressive capitalist penetration in South America and what Christine Froula interprets as the "living allegory of realities drowned by the exigencies of empire" (40). Consequently, Woolf's strategic choice of Buenos Aires as the final commercial hub in Willoughby's lucrative empire should not be underestimated, not least since the Argentine capital remains the only "real" Latin American location in the novel, particularly if compared with the "unreal" Santa Marina. As the "rising star in an internationalized economy" (Rocchi 1), Argentina is, indeed, a case in point and it is undeniable that in identifying Buenos Aires as one of the commercial arteries of Willoughby's South Atlantic route, Woolf would have been cognizant of the close links that developed between British capitalists and Argentine producers. Winthrop Wright notes that during the second half of the nineteenth century Argentina became an important agricultural producer and exporter and that the railway network built there by the British with the backing of President Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (a supporter of economic liberalism, in office between 1868-1874), helped to transform "Argentina from a backward rural country into a modern food producer" (Wright 4-5; see also Lewis 5).

The so-called Argentine economic "miracle" was owed both to the export of meat and raw materials such as wool, gaining the country, as Argentine historian Hilda Sabato remarks, "a significant place in the world market, thus developing its internal productive capacity and promoting a rapid process of capital accumulation centred in Buenos Aires" (23).<sup>4</sup> During his visit to Argentina in 1929, the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset summed up the vastness and richness of the fertile pampa with an essay appropriately entitled: "La Pampa ... promesas" ("The Pampa ... promises").<sup>5</sup> One major technological factor responsible for Argentina's colossal

<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Stephen Bell pertinently notes that "by the 1860s, wool had become Argentina's most valuable export and was already offering serious competition to the American producers" (306).

<sup>5</sup> All Spanish translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.

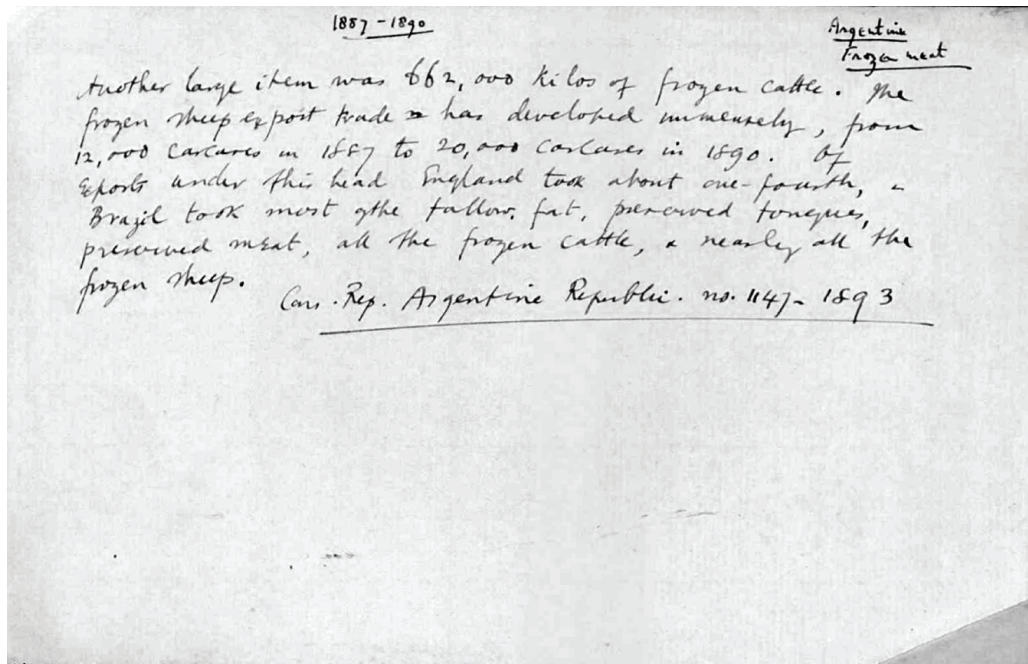


Figure 1: Virginia Woolf: Notecard from British Consular Reports, Argentine Republic, 1893. With the permission of the Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of Leonard Woolf.

economic growth was the modern development of industrial refrigeration units that permitted the transportation of large quantities of meat across the Atlantic (Cardoso and Helwege 43). It is therefore hardly surprising that Argentina's beef-export boom made repeated appearances in the handwritten notecards Virginia Woolf copied out for *Empire and Commerce*. Consider, for example, the following stomach-turning account she extracted from the British Consular Reports:

Another large item was 662,000 Kilos of frozen cattle. The frozen sheep export trade has developed immensely, from 12,000 carcasses in 1887 to 20,000 carcasses in 1890. Of exports under this head England took about one-fourth & Brazil took most of the fallow, fat, preserved tongues, preserved meat, all the frozen cattle & nearly all the frozen sheep.

What was Virginia Woolf thinking as she methodically copied out this gargantuan catalogue of frozen animal parts in her trademark purple ink? This report, evidently, emphasizes the impact of modern technological advances (in this case artificial refrigeration) that turned the Argentine Republic into the abattoir of the British Empire. Leonard Woolf later added the underlined heading "Argentina Frozen meat" on the right-hand side of the notecard: the capitalized adjective

Value of exports and imports to and from Argentine Rep., 1901	1901		Argentine For trade
	Imports	Exports	
United Kingdom	7,292,160	5,984,150	
Germany	3,344,908	4,295,976	
United States	3,106,726	1,859,290	
Italy	2,947,220	863,790	
France	1,991,908	5,727,424	
Belgium	1,737,730	2,691,546	
Brazil	877,208	1,940,496	
Spain	782,506	426,342	
Paraguay	353,528	43,210	
Uruguay	135,846	742,132	
Netherlands	114,632	350,786	
Bolivia	27,736	108,208	
West Indies	8,734	73,236	
Africa	48	578,250	
Other Countries	48,833	7,744,730	
	22,791,949	33,543,220	

C.R. No. 2867 Buenos Ayres. 1902

Figure 2: Notecard from British Consular Reports, number 2867, Buenos Ayres, 1902. With the permission of the Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of Leonard Woolf.

“Frozen,” again, accentuates the tremendous economic impact of the new technology that significantly increased the consumption of meat worldwide. At the same time, Anglo-Argentine trade relations are indicated in the numerous economy tables reproduced by Virginia Woolf. As the table in Figure 2 indicates, Britain enjoyed the lion’s share of the value of exports and imports to and from the Argentine Republic: in the year 1901 alone imports reached £7,292,160, and exports came to £5,984,150. Britain’s overwhelming monopoly is further accentuated when compared with Argentina’s economic activity with other Western nations (Germany ranks second).

In the context of Argentina’s spectacular agro-export “boom,” Rachel Vinrace’s pointed exclamation “poor little goats” acquires an even more sinister political-economic signification. The Consular Reports clearly show the extent of Britain’s economic colonization of the country through the development of the meat industry (especially meat-packing plants), whereby Britain not only consolidates its hegemony in the Argentine market but also becomes the foremost consumer of the country’s natural resources. In this way, the Consular Reports reflect the overall political message of *The Voyage Out*, in which Woolf denounces Britain’s attempt to gain economic control of the continent through the predatory figure of Willoughby and his high stakes in the meat trade. Considering that Woolf compiled these reports only two years after the publication of *The Voyage Out*, she would have

been in a privileged conceptual position to understand the empirical data she was gathering, essentially associating issues pertaining to empire, commerce, and food markets with the economic maneuvers of Willoughby Vinrace and his aggressive capitalist infiltration in the Latin American market.

The importance of raw materials and the discourse of food is widely acknowledged in the novel. In Chapter XIV, Hewet brings to the fore the interplay between Empire and excessive meat consumption. Utilizing predatory imagery such as, “the animals had been fed” (*VO* 198), to evoke the stifling after-dinner atmosphere of the Santa Marina resort, each British resident is reimagined as an extreme example of a rapacious form of capitalism, “each beast holds a lump of raw meat in its paws” (*VO* 198). The degrading imagery continues, as Hewet compares the residents with, among others, “the half-decayed bodies of sheep” (*VO* 198), evoking both the “hunger” of the colonizer for foods and essential commodities and the industrial machinery of the slaughterhouse driven by the voracious consumption of food in the imperial metropolis. The ethical, political, and economic issues I have outlined so far would have led to Virginia Woolf’s decision to set her colonial novel in South America, a continent that had become utterly subservient to Britain’s capitalist maneuvers. As Said points out, “at the end of the nineteenth century, scarcely a corner of life was untouched by the facts of Empire; the economies were hungry for overseas markets, raw materials, cheap labour, and hugely profitable land” (*Culture and Imperialism* 6-7). Furthermore, the interplay between Empire, food, and commodification reappear in Woolf’s political essay “Thunder at Wembley” (1924) that undermines the imperial project by ridiculing Britain’s excessive consumption of foreign foods: “They say, indeed, that there is a restaurant where each diner is forced to spend a guinea upon his dinner. What vistas of cold ham that statement calls forth! What pyramids of rolls! What gallons of tea and coffee!” (*E3* 411).

Whereas the arrival of industrial refrigeration methods proved highly advantageous for the British investors involved (and the ruling Argentine oligarchy), its overall effect manifested itself in an ever-increasing demand for more arable land. This rocketing demand detonated Argentina’s genocidal military campaign against its indigenous population, known as the “*Campaña del Desierto*” (1878-79; “Conquest of the Desert”). Led by future President General Julio Argentino Roca (a supporter of liberal economics; in office between 1880-86 and 1898-1904), and undertaken by the Argentine armed forces, Roca’s brutal extermination of the Amerindian communities was intended to send a clear message to European investors that the Argentine Republic was open for business and had finally cleaned up its “uncivilized” backyard. For Roca, therefore, the indigenous peoples, “who were believed to embody racial inferiority, stood in the way of civilization and modernity” (Nouzeilles and Montaldo 104). Carlos F. Díaz Alejandro notes that at the time

“public lands were quickly turned over to private owners in large chunks, mainly as a result of pressing government financial needs” (38). It is significant, in this respect, that in *Melymbrosia* Woolf satirizes Britain’s insatiable “hunger” for land and raw materials by showing a picture of a megalomaniac Willoughby Vinrace obsessively building his mercantile empire and shipping “thousands of tawny little goats” for the future prosperity of the Vinrace family and, by extension, for the glory of the British Empire:

Ships went out at his command and lured thousands upon thousands of tawny little goats from the uplands of South America into their holds. To have established one’s family, so that they need only draw dividends as long as the world lasts, and to be able to do something for one’s country by the time one is forty is a great achievement; it was probable that Willoughby Vinrace would be one of the exceptional people who make an accurate image of themselves in some kind of substance before they die, and render it back to the world. (*Melymbrosia* 19)

The historical, political, and economic significance of European capital investment in late nineteenth-century Argentina is also the subject matter of several of Virginia Woolf’s notecards for the International Trade project. Woolf astutely perceived the complex relationship between capitalism, Empire, and modernity, especially within the context of British neocolonialism in Latin America. Therefore, she revisits these problematic issues in one of the handwritten cards from the British Consular Reports. Here, British economic interests in Argentina are clearly indicated through the imminent arrival of electricity and tramways to the city of Buenos Aires (note, though, how she transcribes the old British spelling of “Buenos Ayres” in contrast with her use of the modern spelling in *The Voyage Out*):

Also two new electric light companies will shortly be in a position to give current in the City of Buenos Ayres, & a third is likely to be established; of these one is worked by English & the other two by German capital. An English tramway company has also been acquired by German capitalists, & an Argentine company has been taken up by capitalists of German nationality. In fact, German capital is flowing into the River Plate & is commencing to take up public works, wh. until quite recently were almost exclusively capitalised by British financiers.

It is clear that Woolf is witnessing here the sudden irruption of Western modernity in the sprawling Argentine metropolis, as part of a historical process which, in this case, serves as further proof that for imperial Europe, Argentina was “the country of the future.” Above all, the notecard reinforces the notion that the process of



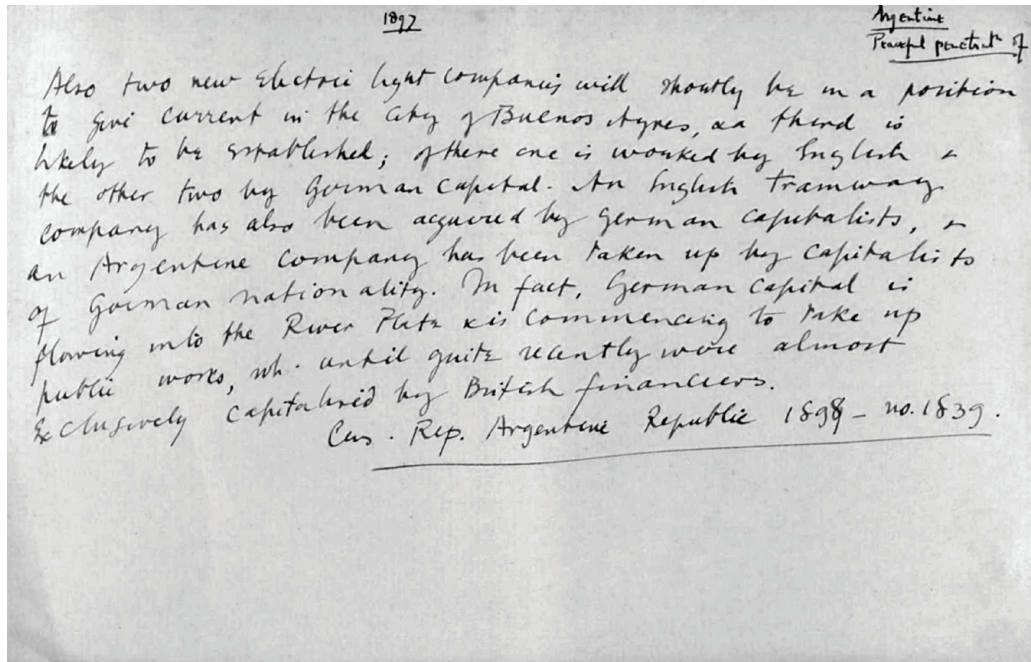


Figure 3: Notecard from *British Consular Reports, Argentine Republic, 1898, number 1839*. With the permission of the Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of Virginia Woolf.

modernity is inextricably bound up with the ideologies of empire and capitalism. Consequently, the accelerated urbanization and Europeanization of the port city of Buenos Aires (soon to be reinvented as the “Paris of South America”) went hand-in-hand with British and German economic penetration during a historical period in which the country experienced the unprecedented phenomenon of mass European immigration, aptly captured in the famous slogan pronounced by the political theorist, Juan Bautista Alberdi, “governar es poblar” (“to govern is to populate” [219]). More specifically, the card highlights the economic “scramble” for the Argentine Republic between British and German financiers fiercely competing for the monopoly of the country’s economic resources (i.e. the banking, transportation, and public utilities sectors). The last sentence unequivocally states that the vast riches of the River Plate had so far been “almost exclusively capitalised by British financiers” and that such monopolization had, of late, been challenged by German investors. The fierce economic competition between Great Britain and Germany for the control of Argentina’s wealth recalls Lenin’s definition of capitalist imperialism as “a world system of colonial oppression and of financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the population of the world by a handful of ‘advanced’ countries” (28).

In the cultural sphere, moreover, the rapid growth of Buenos Aires into a gigantic urban conglomeration brought about “social dislocations that heightened the sense of crisis among its writers” (17), as Cathy Jade points out. Latin American writers and intellectuals reacted ambivalently to the conditions of modernity. The negative after-effects of Britain’s economic penetration in Argentina can be best explicated by examining the revisionary historicism put forth by prominent left-wing Argentine intellectuals such as Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz (1898-1959), who was writing in the wake of the Wall Street Crash and the political crisis brought about by the so-called “*década infame*” of the 1930s. In the case of Scalabrini, his idiosyncratic, anti-imperialist approach to the national dilemma was framed, according to Mark Falcoff, “in terms of an unholy alliance between ‘country-selling’ (*vendepatria*) oligarchs and foreign imperialists” (78). Attacking the positivist Roca administration that had “sold out” the nation to British financiers, for Scalabrini, Argentina rid itself of one imperial power (Spain) in order to be subjected to a new one (Great Britain). In *Política británica en el Río de la Plata* (1940; *British Politics in the River Plate*) and *Historia de los ferrocarriles argentinos* (1940; *History of the Argentine Railways*), Scalabrini adopts a Marxist approach to denounce Argentina’s subservient role as Britain’s economic “colony,” in order to push an image of the country as a “sort of gigantic estancia whose agricultural and stock-raising capacities were being mercilessly exploited by Great Britain through a pliant Argentine elite” (Falcoff 78). In *Ferrocarriles*, he laments that “the fruits of the pampas are for others ... Argentina is a representative example of America: its problems are the problems of a martyred [martirizado] continent” (Scalabrini 11). The Christian imagery denounces an agro-export economy that plunders the natural wealth of the ravaged nation for the principal benefit of the European consumer (although by “America” Scalabrini refers exclusively to the Spanish-speaking countries in the full knowledge that British neo-colonialism was being quickly replaced by the new giant of US domination).

Scalabrini’s contemporary, the Argentine writer and critic Ezequiel Martínez Estrada (1895-1964), is also representative of this anti-imperialist, anti-modernity trend. In his highly polemical treatise *Radiografía de la Pampa* (1933; *X-Ray of the Pampa*), he pessimistically utilizes a medical register to diagnose the disease afflicting the ailing *patria*, a malaise inflicted by centuries of imperialism and, more recently, by the dehumanizing advances of the industrial world. Unsurprisingly, Martínez Estrada profoundly admired the Anglo-Argentine writer and naturalist, W. H. Hudson who, as Peter Earle notes, “[was] a nostalgic defender of a pastoral and mythical golden-age Argentina of the 1850s and 1860s” (9), a rural idyll populated by heroic gauchos whose equestrian lifestyle and trademark freedom had been radically displaced by the arrival of Western modernity. Born in 1841 in Quilmes (a province of Buenos Aires) to New Englanders and later naturalized

as a British subject, William Henry Hudson (otherwise known in Argentina as “Guillermo Enrique”) earned himself a dual identity as both reserved English gentleman and semi-barbarous gaucho, his reputation fluctuating between two names, languages, and nations.

On the other side of the Atlantic, meanwhile, Hudson was the subject of intense admiration from the literary coterie associated with Joseph Conrad, Edward Garnett, John Galsworthy, and R. B. Cunninghame Graham, who gathered at the Mont Blanc restaurant in London’s Soho. Hailed by this circle as “a master of English prose” and praised by Conrad as the possessor of a unique, effortless style—“You may try for ever to learn how Hudson got his effects and you will never know. He writes down his words as the good God makes the green grass grow” (Conrad in Ford 72-73)—by the time *Far Away and Long Ago: A Childhood in Argentina* (1918) was released, the elderly Hudson was at the peak of his fame. This explains why, when *The Times Literary Supplement* asked Virginia Woolf to review Hudson’s memoir, she accepted at once. “I feel pressed & important & even excited a little,” she writes in her diary, “for a wonder, the book, Hudson, was worth reading” (D1197). Christina Alt has recently tracked the presence of Hudson in Woolf’s work, revealing a voluminous number of references in her letters, diary, and essays, including a positive nod in her 1925 essay “Modern Fiction” (Alt 152-4). Alt also describes the important link between Woolf, the study of nature, and contemporary developments in the “new biology” (2-3). She examines Woolf’s engagement with the study of nature in her fiction and non-fiction writings, particularly focusing on the late nineteenth-century shift from “the museum-based taxonomic tradition” to the “new biology of the laboratory,” an important development running broadly in parallel to evolutionary theory (2). Alt also focuses on Woolf’s subsequent interest in the theories and methods of the rising fields of ethology (the study of animal behavior) and ecology (the study of the relationship between organisms and their environment), both of which were directly associated with Hudson’s pioneering study of living birds in their natural environment. For example, in her review of Hudson’s *Far Away and Long Ago* in the TLS entitled “Mr Hudson’s Childhood” and published in September 1918, Woolf is full of praise for Hudson’s ability to conjure up “the bird flying, settling, feeding, soaring through every page of the book” (E2 301).

Considering that Virginia Woolf conducted her empirical research for the International Trade project in 1917 and, within roughly a year, published her review of Hudson’s memoir, this trajectory implies that she essentially understood the two faces of Argentina, a duality framed, on the one hand, by the vanished rural idyll depicted in *Far Away and Long Ago*—“And when I recall these vanished scenes ... I am glad to think I shall never revisit them, that I shall finish my life thousands of miles removed from them, cherishing to the end in my heart the

image of a beauty which has vanished from earth” (191)—and by the emergence of what Paula Young Lee defines as the nineteenth-century institution *par excellence*, the slaughterhouse, which radically transformed traditional agricultural methods, on the other (1, 12). Moreover, the image of the Argentine Republic as the abattoir of the British Empire later reappears in Virginia Woolf’s only poem, the lavishly-titled “Ode Written Partly in Prose on Seeing the Name of Cutbush Above a Butcher’s Shop in Pentonville” (1934).<sup>6</sup> A mock, albeit compassionately told, “ode” that chronicles the harsh working life of London butcher John Cutbush, the poem contains a crucial line about the Argentine agro-export industry:

And he hires a barrow and goes to Smithfield  
at dawn; at chill dawn sees the cold meat,  
shrouded in white nets borne on men’s shoulders;  
meat from the Argentines; from haired and red pelted  
hogs and bullocks (*CSF* 232).

The stanza signals Woolf’s continued awareness of the global meat industry and the prominent role played by Argentina’s meat packing plants in supplying vast quantities of frozen meat to Great Britain, as carcasses and animal parts are shipped from the industrial slaughterhouses of Buenos Aires to Smithfield meat market in Farringdon (London), to be finally handled, chopped, and sold by a local, hard-working butcher such as “little John” (*CSF* 231).

### **Britain, Empire, and the Rubber Trade**

By also situating the novel within the historical context of the rubber boom in Amazonia, Woolf is addressing another vital aspect of capitalist imperialism in Latin America which, once again, is embodied in the predatory figure of Willoughby Vinrace and his ballooning transatlantic Empire:

They heard of the *Euphrosyne*, but heard also that she was primarily a cargo boat, and only took passengers by special arrangement, *her business being to carry dry goods to the Amazons, and rubber home again* (*VO* 38, my italics).

Notice, for instance, how the sentence ends with a description of the alleged shipping affairs of the *Euphrosyne*, to clarify that one of *her* chief purposes as a “cargo boat” is the transportation of imported European goods to South America and, later, lucrative Amazonian rubber back to Europe. Therefore, the ship’s sole purpose is trade, rather than to give a free ticket to the pompous Conservative politician

<sup>6</sup> I am most grateful to Derek Ryan for astutely drawing my attention to this key text.

Richard Dalloway and his arrogant wife Clarissa (both featured as minor characters), to whom the plural pronoun “they” is alluding to here. In this way, an explicit link between the Dalloways (who represent the British upper-middle classes) and imperialist politics is foregrounded, “for they came of a class where almost everything was specially arranged, or could be if necessary” (VO 38). Aboard the *Euphrosyne*, Clarissa Dalloway forcefully asserts her Englishness by uttering a patriotic speech strewn with imperialistic clichés:

“D’you know, Dick, I can’t help thinking of England,” said his wife meditatively, leaning her head against his chest. “Being on this ship seems to make it so much more vivid – what it really means to be English. One thinks of all we’ve done, and our navies, and the people in India and Africa, and how we’ve gone on century after century, sending out boys from little country villages – and of men like you, Dick, and it makes one feel as if one couldn’t bear *not* to be English!” (VO 51).

At the same time, the crucial use of the semantically loaded word “rubber” situates the novel within a recognizable colonial discourse of slavery and exploitation, while establishing vital links with the “scramble for Africa” depicted in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Nonetheless, by strategically setting *The Voyage Out* in South America (rather than Africa), Woolf is drawing attention to the troubled history of the rubber trade in the Amazon region and, more specifically, to the so-called “Putumayo scandal” that made startling newspaper headlines in London in 1909 and that run in parallel with Roger Casement’s denunciation of human rights abuses in South America (1910/1911) in his capacity as British consul-general in Rio de Janeiro, having previously exposed the atrocities committed in the Congo (1903).

The principal detonator of the highly inflammatory revelations of human rights abuses committed in Amazonia was the American engineer and explorer, Walter E. Hardenburg, who strategically decided to publish his highly sensitive material in the British periodical *Truth*. Founded in 1877 by the Liberal politician Henry Labouchère, *Truth* operated as a whistle-blower publication widely known for its ruthless “exposé of financial swindlers and [for its role as] public watch-dog” (Weber 38, 41). Hardenburg originally travelled to the Amazon basin motivated by greed as he was lured by the promise of fabulous riches in the lucrative rubber trade. However, in an ironic twist of fate, the self-styled conquistador suffered innumerable hardships, including unfair imprisonment at the hands of corrupt Peruvian rubber traders, an experience that exposed him to the systematic abuse and exploitation of the Amazonian Indians. Upon his release, however, the one-time conquistador astutely reinvented himself as a great humanitarian resolutely determined to air the atrocities in the British press. Michael Stanfield notes that

Hardenburg's sensationalist allegations, first published in *Truth* under the explosive headline, "The Devil's Paradise: A British-owned Congo" (Hardenburg 663-6), "were reported in the same sober voice used by Bartolomé de las Casas some 370 years earlier when he decried the excesses of Spanish colonialism in the Americas" (Stanfield xv). But, crucially, Hardenburg pointed the finger of blame at the British government. Westminster, he argued, was at the heart of the exploitative rubber industry in the Amazon (*The Putumayo* 21; 29; 31; 33-4). The unscrupulous Arana rubber company that enslaved the natives and used them as sources of cheap labor was in fact owned by British investors, hence denouncing Great Britain as the chief culprit in this tale of horror.

The so-called "rubber fever" that held sway at the end of the nineteenth century was the culmination of a long series of scientific discoveries that had revealed to the modern world the remarkable versatility of natural rubber and its potential manufacturing uses. Prominent among these pioneers is the Scottish chemist, Charles Macintosh (1766-1843), celebrated for the invention of waterproof garments by ingeniously creating a rubber-coated fabric that was extremely versatile and impermeable (the "mac" or "mackintosh" with an added "k," takes its name after him). Another seminal figure is the American chemist Charles Goodyear (1800-1860)—nowadays a name associated with a global brand of tires—who has been credited with discovering the vulcanization of rubber in 1839, a discovery that, in turn, proved crucial to the development of the first pneumatic tire by another Scotsman, Robert William Thomson (1822-1873) in 1867. The latter invention, not least, would trigger the archetypal emblem of modernity: the motorist revolution. Even Leonard Woolf, the arch-anti-imperialist, would later admit in his autobiography: "Nothing ever changed so profoundly my material existence, the mechanism and range of every-day life, as the possession of the motor-car" (*Downhill* 78).

These scientific breakthroughs notwithstanding, the fact remains that "Indians had been making expert use of rubber from time immemorial," writes Alain Gheerbrant, and it was the Indians who first showed the Portuguese "how latex could be moulded into boots and containers, or used as a waterproof coating for canvas" (79). World demand for rubber, by implication, brought into existence a plethora of industrial and domestic products, ranging from telephone cables to new "rubber" domestic products such as boots, bands, toys, erasers, gloves, and a long et cetera. The mythical legend of "El Dorado" fantasized by greedy conquistadors in search of precious metals during the Spanish conquest of America rapidly mutated into the ultimate capitalist dream symbolically described as "white gold," denoting the milky color of the liquid latex extracted from the rubber trees autochthonous to the Amazon region. The great rubber "boom" led to the destruction of the Amazonian ecosystem and to the slavery, murder, and forced prostitution of the native indigenous population, most of whom were forcibly "recruited" to work in the rainforests

under threat of death, as Casement reports in the *Amazon Journal* that contains his harrowing reports of the official investigation:

[The Indians] are not only murdered, flogged, chained up like wild beasts, hunted far and wide and their dwellings burnt, their wives raped their children dragged away to slavery and outrage, but are shamelessly swindled into the bargain. These are strong words, but not adequately strong.... It far exceeds in depravity and demoralisation the Congo regime at its worst (294-5).

Casement soon realized, as Helen Carr points out, that “much of colonialism was about capitalistic profit, not about improving the conditions of the indigenous people; the colonialists, he began to realise, were in fact only too ready to use these so-called primitive races as subhuman instruments for the accumulation of European wealth” (177). Predictably, implicit parallels were quickly drawn between the Congolese and Putumayo atrocities, although Casement went so far as to contentiously claim that the latter even exceeded the former. For Casement, if the genocidal acts in the Putumayo held a mirror to the unspeakable atrocities committed in the Congo, there was a crucial difference underlying both forms of human exploitation: Rule of Law. Whereas King Leopold II’s ironically-named “Congo Free State” represented a form of “legalised tyranny,” Casement asserts, the disputed territory of the Putumayo remained a “lawless tyranny,” implying that “slavery under law” is better than “slavery without law” (295). This alarming “lawlessness” made the region an easy target for unscrupulous exploitation, opening a backdoor to corrupt rubber enterprises such as the infamous Casa Arana (later renamed the Peruvian Amazon Company). Founded by the Peruvian entrepreneur Julio César Arana, the company rapidly grew into a multimillion-pound empire financed by British foreign capital (with London, the imperial capital, as its headquarters) and enabled by the ideology of economic imperialism. Angus Mitchell underscores Britain’s economic interest in the area through the backing of the first steamboat company in the upper Amazon basin and by forging British-South American banking alliances (50). The latter, precisely, are the types of trade networks that Virginia Woolf had painstakingly copied out from the British Consular Reports. For example, one notecard from the British Consular Report, Brazil, 1890, states that two central banking institutions in Brazil are owned and controlled by British financial establishments, thus exposing, once again, the profound economic penetration of the invisible empire:

Other native banks are spoken of, but I am assured, on the best authority, that neither these nor those already in existence can in any way interfere with the two English financial establishments here i.e., the London & Brazilian Bank Ltd, & the English Bank of Rio de Janeiro, which continue their operations steadily & creditably.

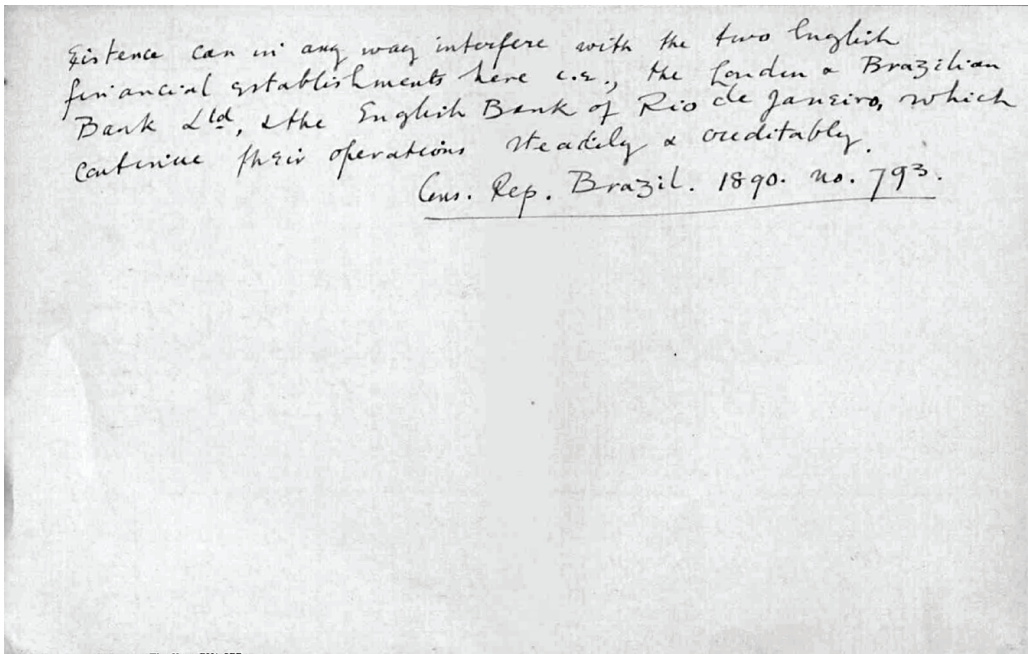


Figure 4: Notecard from British Consular Report, Brazil, 1890, number 793. With the permission of the Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of Virginia Woolf.

No wonder, then, that Julio César Arana knocked on the doors of British financiers to secure the multimillion-pound loan for his rubber empire. In effect, British capital flowed freely to fund the Casa Arana, a company that operated a labor system based on slavery conditions thinly disguised as debt-peonage. In the aftermath of the abolition of slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean in the nineteenth century, debt-peonage rapidly became the successor to formal slavery. In his *Amazon Journal*, Casement exposes the harsh reality behind modern-day slavery practices operated by *aviadores* (middlemen), with whom the *seringueiros* (rubber tappers) exchanged their rubber for imported goods (tinned meats, sugar, beans, and candles). Casement makes overwhelmingly clear that these basic goods were only worth a miniscule fraction of the real market value of the latex (see, for example, 294-5).

If read within the context of *The Voyage Out*, such historical evidence raises renewed questions about the exact provenance of Willoughby's income. Where, once again, does the money that pays for Rachel's music education come from? Clearly, the source of his wealth originates from two separate transatlantic enterprises: the commerce of goats and the rubber trade, although Willoughby refrains from acknowledging the latter in his conversation with Mr. Pepper and Rachel,



presumably due to the morally questionable nature of this “other” income. The import/export business of the *Euphrosyne*, the “cargo ship” that arrives to the Amazon crammed with European “dry goods” and later sails back home loaded with rubber, indubitably places Willoughby at the epicenter of the corrupt *aviador* hierarchical system of exchange, whether he traded directly with the *seringueiros* or whether he operated under the assistance of further intermediaries known as *patrones*, who were in direct contact with the workers. Of particular relevance here is a letter from Willoughby that Helen Ambrose reads in Chapter XV of the novel. Utilizing the epistolary form as a vehicle to address ethical and political concerns, Woolf unfailingly satirizes Willoughby’s complicity in the exploitation of the natives. While, from the outset, the letter portrays Willoughby in his role as *pater familias* concerned with “his daughter’s manners and morals” (VO 220), it gradually shifts into a less courteous and vulgar account:

And then [the letter contained] half a page about his own triumphs over wretched little natives who went on strike and refused to load his ships, until he roared English oaths at them, “popping my head out of the window just as I was, in my shirt sleeves. The beggars had the sense to scatter” (VO 221).

In casting the otherwise “honourable” Willoughby into an immoral rubber baron who subjects his laborers to the type of bullying, ill-treatment, and forced labor that Casement had documented in his Amazon diary, Woolf is subversively emphasizing here that Britain—the archetypal progressive and humanitarian nation that had proudly abolished slavery in 1807—is in fact the main economic engine driving the genocidal acts committed in the Amazon. What Woolf makes overwhelmingly clear in the above extract is that the rubber industry was operated by an army of unscrupulous British investors eager to cash in during a period of record demand for latex, while blatantly turning a blind eye to the genocide of the native population, whether such capitalists operated remotely from London (a global financial center) or, in the case of Willoughby, were directly involved in the abuse of the workers. In many ways (again), the Putumayo recalled the horrors of the Congo, which means that Leonard Woolf’s critique of the European mentality that sees the natives as disposable sources of cheap labor can be equally applied to the Amazonian system: “But ivory and rubber were of no value to Leopold unless he had the labour to collect them and to bring them to the coast for transport and sale in Europe” (*Empire and Commerce* 311).

At the same time, Virginia Woolf’s satirical purpose is to attack the jingoistic patriotism of the British imperial colonist/adventurer who is ridiculed through Willoughby’s grotesque account of his “triumphs” against defenseless indigenes. His callous behavior can be associated with Hobson’s definition of jingoism as

a form of “inverted patriotism whereby the love of one’s nation is transformed into the hatred of another nation, and the fierce craving to destroy the individual members of that other nation” (1). Furthermore, Woolf’s anti-imperialist condemnation (albeit couched in the guise of social satire) is intricately connected with the militaristic fervor of Richard and Clarissa Dalloway (cited earlier). In keeping with the pervasive anti-imperial tone of the novel, Woolf sets in motion a wider cast of nationalistic characters, disreputable minor figures who either flirt with extreme forms of patriotism (the Dalloways) or are abiding symbols of the ensnaring forces of capitalism (the Flushings). The latter are depicted in the novel as eccentric art-collectors eager to capitalize on the cheap labor generated by the Amazonian natives. Scholars such as Alissa Karl, Andrea Lewis, and Anna Snaith have persuasively shown the link between capital and empire in *The Voyage Out*, particularly the role played by the Flushings in reinforcing the “uneven relationship between native producer and imperialist consumer” (Karl 51) that is justified by the assumption that the colonized people occupy a “zero-degree of existence” (Lewis 116) and that is further propelled by “a metropolitan fetishization of the ‘primitive’ as the sign of the modern” (Snaith 31). Thus, cheap labor and colonial exploitation emerge as the chief concerns of the novel, whether the white colonizers are business magnates such as Willoughby Vinrace who have robbed “a whole continent of mystery” (*VO* 220) or, as exemplified in the extract below, small-scale opportunists such as Mr. and Mrs. Flushing:

Mrs. Flushing came up once more, and dropped a quantity of beads, brooches, earrings, bracelets, tassels, and combs among the draperies.... “My husband rides about and finds ’em; they don’t know what they’re worth, so we get ’em cheap. And we shall sell ’em to smart women in London” (*VO* 272).

Woolf strategically uses this unscrupulous English pair as the embodiment of a deeply corrupt and unregulated system that shamelessly exploits the local indigenous communities, especially the labor produced by its women. Ultimately, their function in the novel is to illustrate the deeply intertwined relationship between imperialism with a “small i” (the Flushings) and a “big I” (Willoughby Vinrace). In the case of the former, the exotic jewelry and accessories crafted by the natives will be sold at inflated prices to wealthy women in the imperial metropolis, eager to purchase the types of tribal artifacts they would have seen exhibited in British Imperial Exhibitions, such as the 1924 Wembley Stadium Exhibition that Woolf described in apocalyptic undertones in “Thunder at Wembley.” Part of what *The Voyage Out* sharply critiques, therefore, are the inner workings of imperial commerce in South America, particularly Britain’s increasing reliance on both cheap labor and raw materials from its “honorary” dominions, exemplified in

Willoughby's commercial ventures. Consequently, Woolf presents a complex picture of Britain as one of the leading capitalist economies that has become overwhelmingly dependent on what Fredric Jameson defines as an economic system "located elsewhere, beyond the metropolis, outside of the daily life and existential experience of the home country, in colonies over the water whose own life experience and life world—very different from that of the imperial power—remain unknown and unimaginable for the subjects of the imperial power" (50-51). Informal colonies in the Tropical and South Atlantic rapidly emerged as the Empire's workshops, abattoirs, and suppliers of essential commodities such as rubber, wool, and beef.

By critically positioning *The Voyage Out* within the political-economic history of early twentieth-century Latin America, it is possible to reconceive the novel as an aesthetic platform for a scathing critique of an emergent global capitalist modernity, particularly the economic impetus behind Britain's disproportionate presence in Buenos Aires and Amazonia. The archival evidence in the form of Virginia Woolf's notes for the early International Trade project preserved at the Leonard Woolf Archive in Sussex has enabled the recuperation of the largely overlooked Latin American historical contexts embedded in the novel. At the same time, the notes seriously revise and rectify our understanding of Woolf's awareness of geopolitical issues pertaining to Latin America, enabling us to firmly situate *The Voyage Out* within a transnational economic network that serves as further proof of Woolf's concern with both "political space" and "global space" (Snaith and Whitworth 2), even if she was writing from the center of Empire and had never visited Latin America. Above all, her merciless critique of British imperialism opens up new routes of enquiry that delineate an economically-focused trajectory involving, in this case, Britain's overseas honorary dominions, which were crucial in supplying the privileged European consumer with essential raw materials. Highly attuned to the geopolitical changes of her time, Virginia Woolf, as Barrett has demonstrated, may now be firmly positioned as a political commentator (113-5), advancing, in the case of *The Voyage Out*, an unflinching denunciation of British economic imperialism in post-independence Latin America. This also means, as I suggested earlier, that the longstanding critical assumption that Woolf's knowledge of the continent was hopelessly vague and deficient can be conclusively put to rest.

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