"We are ourselves *fremdsprachig*": Foreign Literature Studies in the Twenty-First Century

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Let me begin with a remark on the title of the volume for which this article is written. "Remaining Relevant," it would seem, begs the question of relevance, containing the proposition that foreign language studies and the research carried out within its various disciplines have at some time been considered "relevant" in one or more senses of that word. And yet the word "remaining" introduces a degree of doubt, as if change—changing times, changing conditions—were afoot, about to put that relevance under pressure, or perhaps even under threat of erasure.

It is not that it is difficult to make a case for the relevance of foreign language *studies*—in terms of practical skills, competence, intercultural communication, and the like. Nor would one be hard put to explain that the various disciplines—linguistics, literature, cultural or area studies—are all useful to that end. Questions start to arise when it comes to the kinds of *research* carried out in the various disciplines: what, for instance, is the relevance of research—conducted in a medium-sized Norwegian university—in areas such as French linguistics, Russian literature, Latin-American history and culture?

With the changes in research policies and funding that have taken place in recent years, questions like the above have become at once increasingly complex and urgent, since research in the humanities, as elsewhere, is expected to address global challenges and present solutions for the future, with "relevance" measured not only in terms of dissemination and outreach, but also in *impact*. In what follows, I want to consider the issue of relevance with reference to my own discipline, that of foreign language literary studies. How can research in this area help us think

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about, if not solve, the deeply intricate questions we are asked to tackle: the challenges of creating "inclusive, innovative and reflective societies," "engaging together globally," improving "mutual understanding" and "cultural literacy"?[1]

It may be argued that literary research in general has at least the potential to help us address such challenges, given that we think of literature as composed of texts that are intentionally wrought and imagined; representations that combine the powers of *Vorstellung* with those of *Darstellung*, using the textual space as a testing ground for alternative ways of modelling past and future worlds and narratives. What I want to make a case for in this article, however, is the particular heuristic, cognitive and ethical potential implicit in reading literature in a language that is not one's own. While foreign-language literary research spans a variety of methodologies and practices, the position of the foreigner, of being a stranger in another language, as well as in the place in which that language is grounded, brings with it a stance and a methodology that not only unites the field across languages, but also, I argue, translates into other disciplines and areas of enquiry as a comparative approach; a form of relational thinking that is especially important in a world that is becoming increasingly integrated and yet fractious.

As a way of exploring what such a stance might entail, I want to consider the case of a novel, Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle* (1913), written more than a century ago by one of the servants of the British Empire, which provides an early example of how thinking-through-fiction and thinking-through-another-language may have significant political and ethical repercussions. Before I turn to a discussion of the novel, however, it is pertinent to probe more deeply into the question of relevance in literary studies in general, to consider how questions of the type we are now being asked to address—of equality, fairness, mutual understanding, and cultural literacy—have impinged on, and actively shaped, the objectives and methods of literary studies, whether of national or "world" literatures, in the past.

1 See for instance the European Commission "Horizon 2020 Work Programme for 2016–2017: Europe in a Changing World—Inclusive, Innovative and Reflective Societies." (European Commission 2015).

1. Literary studies and geopolitical contexts: evolving definitions, paradigms and methods

In a European historical perspective, the case for the relevance of literary studies has been made with varying urgency and arguments over the years, depending on which understanding of relevance (and literature) is dominant at any particular time. Roughly speaking, relevance has been presented variously in social, moral and/or ethical terms: as promoting sensibility and sympathy in the nineteenth century; cultural integration and citizenship for large periods of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and critical literacy and understanding of otherness from the late twentieth century. Literary studies, in other words, have never taken place in a vacuum. In some senses, they have always been conducted in response to historical and socio-economic developments, with such developments impacting on practices of reading and interpretation, theories and research methodologies, as well as, most fundamentally, on different historical constitutions and reconstitutions of the discipline itself.

As an example of the latter in relatively recent history, it is instructive to consider the establishment of comparative literature as a discipline in American and European universities in the 1950s as a reaction to the climate of the cold war and growing nationalism. As pointed out by Susan Bassnett (1993) and others, the shift towards an increasingly formalist model of comparative literature after the Second World War was a consequence of a century with two major wars that had arisen from nationalist and territorial conflicts (Bassnett 1993, 36). In the Cold War era of imperialist nationalism, comparative literature, "the study of literature independent of linguistic, ethnic, and political boundaries," in the words of René Wellek, came with "a sense of transcendence of the narrowly nationalistic," which entailed an idealistic transnational approach and an idea of an inclusive world literature (Chow 2004, 294). Comparison, in this newly constituted discipline, rested on notions of parity, of peer-like equality and mutuality among those being compared: "communication, comingling, sharing were key words in this view of comparative literature, which depoliticized writing and aspired towards universal concord" (Bassnett in Chow 2004, 290).

In recent years, and increasingly from the 1990s onwards, the impact of a renewed understanding of globalisation across the sciences, as well as in society in general, has had consequences for comparison as a

method in literary studies, and for the discipline called "comparative literature" in particular. As in other subjects and areas of research, such as history and anthropology, comparison as an approach in literary studies has been challenged, discredited and disavowed in favour of more spatial modes of analysis based on interrelations, networks, entanglements and modes of circulation. Comparison, it is often said, develops within a history of hierarchical relations and a perspective that remains Eurocentric despite its transnational ideal, distorts the specificities of the objects being compared, and fails to consider what Susan Bassnett calls "the political implications of intercultural transfer processes" (2006, 6). In literary studies, this late twentieth-century critique of comparative methods can be exemplified by two well-known books: Susan Bassnett's *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* from 1993, where she argues that the subject is "in its death throes," followed by Gayatri Spivak's radical pronunciation of the *Death of a Discipline* ten years later (2003).

Bassnett's call was for the emerging field of translation studies to take centre stage as the principle discipline, with comparative literature as "a valued but subsidiary subject area" (2006, 6). The argument was that translation studies were grounded in a sensitivity to cultural specificities and transfer processes that comparative methods did not permit. Spivak took a different approach, arguing that the way forward would be for comparative literature to reposition itself in what she called a "planetary," as opposed to global, context. Where globalisation imposes the same (capitalist) values and systems of exchange everywhere, planetarity, in Spivak's conception, could be imagined from outside the global exchange flows determined by international business. Rather than abandon comparison as a method, she calls for a comparativism of true parity that acknowledges the irreducibility of idiom, among other things (Spivak 2003). More specifically, Spivak proposes to combine area studies, with their expert knowledge of foreign cultures, with the attention to form and language that defines comparative literature, thereby allowing the difference and heterogeneity of a culturally foreign text to come into play. From Derrida, she borrows the concept "teleopoiesis" (literally "distant imaginative making") to designate a utopian practice of reading that crosses borders into foreign territory rather than accommodating the other in our own conceptual framework, reminding us that "we are ourselves *Fremdsprächig* [sic], 'foreign speakers'" (Spivak in Sorensen

2010, 22). For Spivak, then, teleopoiesis—preserving cultural-conceptual differences by way of imaginative work (whether of reading or writing)—constitutes the utopian possibility of overcoming the danger of eradicating nuances and specificities of otherness in the global market (Sorensen 2010).

Comparative methodologies and their relation to changing historical and geopolitical contexts continue to be a subject of debate in twenty-first century literary studies, as some recent issues of international literary journals suggest. Chow's reflections on "The Old/New Question of Comparison in Literary Studies" (2004), Bassnett's "Comparative Literature in the Twenty-First Century" (2006) and the *New Literary History* 2009 Special Issue on comparison, all testify to the continued relevance of this concern, along with the question of how to rethink structures of comparison in order to do justice to past and current postcolonial and global contexts. The call to rethink comparison comes with an awareness, as Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman put it, that "the renunciation of comparison [is] neither possible nor desirable," firstly, because it is an indispensable form of human cognition that is built into the "deep structures" of language and forms the basis for figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, and analogy. Secondly, as cultures are brought "into ever greater proximity through the dissemination of new media and escalating patterns of migration […] acts of comparing seem ubiquitous and inescapable." Lastly, comparison is associated with an ethical potential: rather than automatically reinforcing hierarchical standards of measure, it can serve to decentre and unsettle them, to register inequality and injustice (Felski & Friedman 2009, v).

Why write at length about the theoretical debates surrounding comparative methodologies in a discussion of foreign-language literary studies, one may ask. The answer, I suggest, lies in the points made by Felski and Friedman above, concerning the ubiquity, as well as the particular actuality, of forms of comparison in the current geopolitical context. In foreign-language literary studies, comparison does not define the discipline, nor has it been given particular prominence or subjected to much debate as a methodology—and yet comparison is implicit in what we do, informing our position as well as our approach as scholars and students. The study of literature in a foreign language as it is practiced within the foreign-language disciplines, sets out to realise precisely the forms

of relational thinking Bassnett and Spivak have called for. For Spivak, the question "Who are we?" is fundamental to redoing Comparative Literature (Spivak 2003, 22). The answer, for the scholar and student of foreign-language literature, would be that we are *fremdsprachig*, foreign speakers, a definition and placement that is, in itself, "a shock to the idea of belonging." Occupying this position, learning to inhabit the cultural idiom of another place, and to see the other precisely as "placed, native," is to become aware, as Spivak points out, of the role of the interpreter, "of inter-diction, speaking between the two sides" (22, 38, 39). When the placement of the foreign speaker is refracted further through fiction as teleopoiesis, it becomes a place from which to not only interpret and translate, but also, significantly, to imagine.

How to understand the foreigner, the alien and outsider in our time, is both a political and an ethical question. In her book *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* (1988), translated as *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), Julia Kristeva concerns herself with the notion of the "stranger"; of what it entails to be positioned between languages and places. She advocates an ethic of cosmopolitanism and a recognition of the foreigner that is deeply indebted to Freud's discussion of *das Unheimliche*: "[Freud] teaches us how to detect foreignness in ourselves. That is perhaps the only way not to hound it outside of us […] If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners" (191–92). Spivak, too, acknowledges her debt to Freud: "I cannot forget that Freud urges us to investigate the uncanny because we are ourselves *Fremdsprächig* [sic], 'foreign speakers'" (22).

My argument in this article is not framed in psychoanalytic terms. My objective is simply to make a case for the connection between foreign-language competence and a set of (conscious and unconscious) operations that are set in motion by the linguistic encounter—interpretation, translation, comparison, analogy, etc.—which may have wider (meta-) cognitive and ethical implications. Of course, it would be absurd to claim that mastering a foreign language somehow comes with an ethical stance. As history has shown over and over again, linguistic proficiency may well be used to control and oppress, and even the most liberal and well-intentioned approach to intercultural literacy may be riddled by mistranslation, miscommunication and misperception. Nonetheless, I want to argue, occupying the position of the stranger in another language, seeing one's own language as foreign, letting oneself "be imagined […] without

guarantees, by and in another culture" (Spivak 52), may allow for a rethinking of singularities as well as collectivities. What interests me here then, is the relational thinking that occurs when one immerses oneself in another language and when literary texts serve, through teleopoiesis, as agents of comparison. The question I address is how this can help us think about the challenges that define the current European horizon: how to create "inclusive" and "reflective" societies that are able to engage productively with global flows of people, ideas, languages and cultures. To investigate this, I turn back in time to a moment in the history of globalisation that anticipates and may serve to illuminate current discussions. Leonard Woolf's novel *The Village in the Jungle* is a textbook example of a work of fiction that enables its author, as well as its readers, to think relationally in a manner that promotes understanding, solidarity and justice. Written by a servant of the empire from a position that attempts to be *fremdsprachig*, the novel facilitates the analysis and act of imagination that constituted Woolf as an anti-imperialist thinker and that he drew on in later political and historical works. The analogical thinking involved in writing the novel also gave rise to a transnational understanding of entangled, mutually constituted histories, and of how patterns of transfer, interpretation and translation may serve to illuminate one cultural experience by means of another.

2. A Foreigner in Ceylon: thinking through language

Today, Leonard Woolf is often thought of in connection with his wife Virginia Woolf and with "Bloomsbury," the liberal artistic and intellectual elite that was key to the construction and dissemination of modernism in Britain. My interest here, however, is in Leonard Woolf the writer and political activist, who argued against the empire as an economic and moral-political construct in major works such as *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (1920), *Economic Imperialism* (1920), and *Imperialism and Civilization* (1928), and who, by the 1920s had become established as the Labour movement's leading anti-imperialist thinker, working for the Labour Party's Advisory Committee on International and Imperial Questions. This is also the Leonard Woolf whose analysis of global inequality and theory of international cooperation and arbitration played a central role in the development of the League of Nations (Boehmer 2015, 182–83), and who thought of his years as colonial administrator in

Ceylon (1904–11) as laying the foundation for Leonard Woolf the anti-imperialist and left wing thinker on international relations.

Significantly, as Woolf himself observed in his autobiography, the process of writing the novel was key to translating the essentially fraught experience of colonial service into an analytic political and ethical stance. *Growing* (1961), the volume of his autobiography that deals with his time in Ceylon, describes the time as deeply traumatic and himself as increasingly ambivalent and "politically schizophrenic" (Woolf 1961, 25), an impression that is borne out by the texts he produced during his time in the colony. The Official Diary details the routine business of a dedicated and extremely capable colonial officer, while the private letters give vent to self-loathing and despair through satire of colonial life. Ethnographic vignettes show a mind split between sympathy with the indigenous population and abject disgust; "either gods or animals" (Woolf 1992, 69), the Sinhalese and Tamil people appear in a series of perplexing incidents and tableaux with Woolf himself staged alternatively as observer and agent, witness and perpetrator, in the endless series of degradations that is colonial life. "Some of the inhabitants of this place are scarcely human," he writes in a letter to his friend Saxon Sydney-Turner in October 1908, describing "wild savages from the hills, spectacles incredible to anyone who has not seen them" (Woolf 1992, 140–41). This, as Douglas Kerr phrases it, is "the orient as the spectacle of abjection," placing the "I" of the letters in the position of the spectator in a thwarted narrative of impotence, insufficiency, and disgust (1998, 263–64).

Begun in 1911, *The Village in the Jungle* is a fiction that sets out to process the experience of Ceylon and mediate this to a metropolitan audience. More than that, however, it offers an opportunity for analysis, for staging and perhaps resolving some of the contradictions outlined above. Since its rediscovery in the 1960s, the novel has been regarded as a seminal text by South-Asian scholars—the first novel in English to describe imperialism in Sri Lanka, and a significant social document about colonial Ceylon (Gooneratne 2004; Goonetilleke 2007). For Woolf himself, writing it was an attempt "vicariously to live their lives"; a "symbol of the anti-imperialism which had been growing upon me more and more in my last years in Ceylon" (Woolf 1964, 47). Set in the Hambantota district, the area that Woolf administered as an Assistant Government Agent during the last three years of his time in the country, the narrative centres

on life in a small village community of peasant-cultivators. Drawing on Woolf's own observations of the region in his capacity as administrator, adjudicator and magistrate, and on his studies of the languages and customs of the different ethnic and religious groups, the novel incorporates indigenous beliefs, customs and tales, as well as oral forms and modes of address that imitate the local Sinhalese idiom. The narrative is unusual for its time in being focalised mainly through the indigenous characters, revealing from within the colonised society how colonial bureaucracy and structures of power intervene in traditional forms of life, gradually unsettling and destroying a community.

At the centre of the novel are Silindu and his daughters, bound by subliminal ties to the jungle, marginal to a village life that is increasingly marred by the institutionalised power of colonial bureaucracy. Life in Beddegama turns upon a system of credit, debt, and exploitation instituted and sanctioned by colonial authority. The local headmen and moneylenders, whose power derives from their place in the colonial system, which gives them the right to issue taxes and licences for cultivation of crops, gun licences for hunting, etc., exercise control through a system of debt management. The narrative turns on the machinations directed against Silindu by these men and his consequent encounters with local and government authorities, including the white magistrate—a figure clearly modelled upon Woolf himself—who represents the legal apparatus of the colonial state. The encounters show how the British administrative and legal system were subverted by the manipulation and corruption of native officials, though fundamentally by its own incomprehension, irrelevance, and impotence. The analysis the novel offers by means of Silindu's story is of a hybrid society in which images of modernity and empire coexist with a pre-modern world ruled by superstition, fatalism, and tradition; and in which modern utilitarian rationality and capitalist economy function as ineffectual and violent impositions that rip apart the fabric of village life. While in tribal society the rights of the individual and his influence upon the powerful are safeguarded by public opinion, imperialism intervenes into this balance, producing a society ruled by colonial discourse and its literalisations; where power is secured by access to, and manipulation of, language and linguistic representations.

It is significant that Woolf's analysis is linguistically (and discursively) staged and performed. On the one hand, colonialism as a textual

enterprise comes under scrutiny by means of heteroglossia and multi-voicedness, as well as by staged encounters between linguistic and cultural paradigms that draw attention to mistranslation and misunderstanding, along with the implications of intercultural transfer processes; i.e. the transplantation and imposition of colonial language. Moreover, the novel's linguistic plurality produces a thick representation that enables narration from within, imaginative identification and, ultimately, understanding of the cultural and individual ramifications of colonial rule. The linguistically oriented analysis and Woolf's mode of narration both depend on a high level of linguistic proficiency and deep immersion into Ceylonese language and culture. Woolf's fluency in the Tamil and Sinhalese languages far exceeded the requirements of colonial administration, and he took great pride in his extensive knowledge of local history and culture. In the novel, explanatory footnotes reminiscent of the traditional Victorian ethnographic or anthropological narrative coexist with transliterated Sinhalese words and other local linguistic features indicative of a different kind of embeddedness and interiority. Almost every sentence contains a Sinhalese word; local terms for plants, crops, implements and methods of cultivation, animals, diseases, time, space and distance, family relationships, religious beliefs, social roles and functions—all are rendered in the local language. New terms are explained in approximate terms in footnotes and become part of the novel's vocabulary. The result is a form of linguistic density, a thick representation, which constructs a world as far as possible from within. There is also a sense of the irreducibility and singularity of language, of individual words, of rhythm and idiom. Footnotes and occasional commentaries by the narrator perform the work of translation, analogy and comparison, but still the words insist in their foreignness, in their attachment to and grounding in the world in which they came into being and where they circulate.

Woolf's choice of narration is central to the novel's imaginative thinking, as the unnamed narrative voice occupies perspectives from inside and outside the colonised community, creating an impression of "multi-voicedness," to use Elleke Boehmer's term, allowing different voices to interrogate and relativise each other, each rendered foreign by turn (Boehmer 2015). Much of the story is told from the perspective of the victim, even that of the doubly victimised. The chief protagonists, the hunt-

er and cultivator Silindu and his two daughters, Hamehani and Punchi Menika, are *veddas*, outcasts. With minimal distance to the characters, and a degree of imaginative sympathy unusual for its time, the narrative reveals the family's precarious position in the community, mediated through the protagonists' senses and perceptions. The storyline shows how Silindu and his family fall victim to the machinations of the village headman Babehami and the debt-collector Fernando, whose positions in the colonial order allow them to manipulate the colonial economic and bureaucratic machinery to their own ends. Silindu and his son-in-law Babun are brought before an English judge, the white *Hamadoru*, on a false charge of theft, with the ensuing trial set up as a strikingly illuminating encounter between different gazes and voices, the indigenous and the colonial. The narrative consciousness occupies different minds, juxtaposing and comparing the perspectives of the judge—the role Woolf had himself taken in numerous court cases—and the accused. Colonial discourse is rendered strange and out-of-place as the text foregrounds failures of interpretation and translation:

> From time to time the judge said a few sharp words in English to the interpreter: Silindu and Babun were never quite certain whether he was or was not speaking to them, or whether, when the interpreter spoke to them in Sinhalese, the words were really his own, or whether he was interpreting what the judge had said. (115)

Mistranslations and miscommunication multiply as the judge proceeds to ask the accused and the complainant questions that are misunderstood or answered partially and untruthfully. At the end of the trial the judge is left baffled and frustrated by his inability to get to the bottom of the case. Reading out his verdict "in a casual, indifferent voice, as if in some way it had nothing to do with him," the judge clearly feels estranged from the words he has written, from his own function in colonial rule as well as from the arbitrariness and incommensurability of the proceedings (126).

The novel's court scenes allow Woolf to stage his own role in the system of colonialism and as foreigner in another culture, a position that renders him as strange to himself as to the others. Not only are the failures of communication evident, but also his attempts at interpretation, at filling in the lacunas produced by miscommunication. Fundamentally

strange to each other, Silindu and the magistrate still experience moments of understanding, allowing the latter to sense and privately articulate the underlying story of colonial exploitation and corruption to which the legal document cannot testify, and against which the law provides no recourse (Boehmer 2015; Davies 2015; Mukhopadhyay 2015). For the reader, in turn, Silindu's story provides an understanding of the ramifications of imperialism at the level of the community and the individual. Such understanding is also provided by Silindu's contact with the various literalisations of empire that regulate everyday life: the permits, licences, certificates and legal documents that make government manageable but also open to manipulation. Through the machinations surrounding the *chena* permits, the reader comes to understand the workings of the enforced system of cultivation, the so-called *chena* economy with its oppressive cycle of poverty, debt and exploitation, which benefits the middlemen, the headmen and moneylenders. As the novel explains:

> The life of the village and of every man in it depended on the cultivation of *chenas*. A *chena* is merely a piece of jungle […] The villagers owned no jungle themselves; it belonged to the Crown, and no one might fell a tree or clear a *chena* in it without a permit from the Government. It was through these permits that the headman had his hold upon the villagers. (27)

> With the reaping of the *chenas* came the settlement of debts. With their little greasy notebooks full of unintelligible letters and figures, [the moneylenders] descended upon the *chenas*; and after calculations, wranglings and abuse, which lasted for hour after hour, the accounts were settled, and the strangers left the village […] In the end the villagers carried but little grain from his *chena* to his hut. (26)

What the novel describes here, as critics have pointed out, is a socio-economic predicament that follows from the structures of imperialism and global capitalism. The introduction of the *chena* system, with its conceptions of property alien to rural Ceylonese societies, was a direct consequence of Ceylon's development into a plantation economy governed by the networks of colonial capitalism and global trade (Davies 2015). Significantly, it is the novel's immersion into a local habitat, its victim-

oriented perspective (from within the local culture), and its accommodation of different languages, that allows it to uncover the ramifications of these global imperial structures at the level of the local community and the individual life. The life situation at the margins of an unevenly developed governmental apparatus, subject to a systemic corruption that exploits the poorest and most peripheral, is more than a narrative setting, it is what makes possible the machinations against Silindu and his family—the cause of his entrapment in a cycle of abuse and the cause of his tragic end.

The hybrid community created by colonialism permits scapegoating, as Silindu's narrative is intended to show. An understanding of these structures presupposed detailed insight into local cultural and social mechanisms, as I have argued. Strikingly, understanding in this novel is also enacted though another form of linguistic operation: the novel's transposition of racist discourse from the European to the Asian context, highlighting analogies in oppressive logic and scapegoating. In a recent article, the critic Janice Ho has shown that Woolf's representations of the colonial other in the novel are bound up with his Jewishness, the awareness of being part of a minority population in Britain that was systematically discriminated against. The novel draws on the representational practices of European anti-Semitism, such as racial stereotypes of the hypersexual and degenerate Jewish body in its descriptions of the indigenous population (Ho 2013, 715). More specifically, Woolf deploys the trope of the unjustly persecuted and suffering Jew in his depiction of Silindu, whose double victimisation, at the hands of his fellow villagers and through the machinery of colonial law, allows Woolf to interrogate the logic of scapegoating as it plays itself out in a community where communal law and public opinion have been suspended. Such a discursive transposition does not involve or assume a one-to-one relationship between entities, but constitutes a form of relational, comparative thinking between languages and cultures. In the novel's textual politics, recognising and representing the other as "the Jew" is not a form of erasure of difference; it serves as a form of comparison that establishes analogies and global connections between histories of racial oppression, between domestic discrimination and foreign domination, opening up the possibility of reading one story in light of another within a perspective of solidarity and justice.

The Village in the Jungle is remarkable as an early attempt to think in transnational and what Gayatri Spivak might call planetary terms, which describe global networks without reducing singularity and difference. For Spivak, the literary as teleopoiesis—preserving cultural-conceptual differences by way of imaginative work—constitutes the utopian possibility of overcoming the danger of eradicating nuances and specificities of otherness in the global market. At the same time, the consciousness of cultural specificity and singularity, and the irreducibility of idiom, does not exclude the comparative thinking involved in transcultural and transnational paradigms. Woolf's transposition of representational practices from the European (anti-Semitic) to the colonial (racist) space has broader methodological implications, pointing towards a transnational, planetary framework within which to conceptualise commonality as well as singularity, a form of comparative thinking that does not involve discrete entities but entanglements and transfer processes. As I have shown, the other aspects of the novel's poetics are also associated with a stance and a methodology that have a similar transfer value. *The Village in the Jungle* helped Woolf think, and serves to demonstrate modes of thinking and reading that are transferable to other situations, not least to the present challenges of creating inclusive and reflective societies, of understanding Europe within a planetary context.

What we have considered here is a novel that was produced by a writer with a high level of linguistic and cultural competence, combined with the awareness of being foreign, of not being native or properly placed. Woolf's immersion in Sinhalese language and culture allowed him to construct a linguistic space that accommodates different languages, in which each language occupies the position of being foreign in turn. It is a space that draws attention to failures of translation and interpretation, and to the irreducibility of idiom and the heterogeneity of the foreign, as well as to attempts at inter-diction, of speaking between, of negotiation and imaginative identification; i.e. to commonality as much as singularity. What results is a form of linguistic reflexivity and meta-discursivity, a teleopoiesis that opens up to other subjectivities, facilitating analysis of social, political, and economic structures, as well as a position of solidarity and justice. In this way, Woolf and *The Village in the Jungle* may have contributed to what Felski and Friedman call "the archive of comparative scholarship"; modelling alternative forms of relational thinking

that "decenter […] our standards of measure rather than reinforce them" (2009, v), establishing analogies and points of contact that do justice to past and present planetary contexts.

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