

## *Master's Thesis Project*

### Cover page for the Master's thesis

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<b>First name:</b> Kristina	<b>Last name:</b> Svends Ricken	<b>Date of birth:</b> 11/08-1992

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## Abstract

This thesis seeks to, by way of literary analysis, determine whether it can be argued that tea has become a symbol of British national identity, despite tea's Chinese origin. The trajectory of tea and its relationship with the British Empire and the British people is summarised before doing an analysis of tea and the historical contexts of four literary works and three cartoons. These texts are *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde, *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, "Tea With Our Grandmothers" By Warsan Shire, and the cartoons "Love Snake", "Parenting", and "Cuppa", from the web-based cartoon series "Scandinavia and the World" by Humon. The texts cover the nineteenth century and the present and represent different genres and include both male and female authors. In the analyses of the works, passages that include tea are located and studied in relation to the history of the British Empire at the time of writing. Six themes uncovered by the analyses form the base of the discussion. These themes are casual references of tea, target readers, gender, time of writing, social rules, and empire and orientalism. Through the discussion it is found that the literary works use tea mainly in two different ways: the nineteenth century texts use tea, teatime and tea parties as a setting that aids the plot by creating opportunities for meetings and conversations, thus mainly using tea as a drink as a literary tool. The contemporary texts, however, use tea as a symbol of the British Empire and britishness in general. It is also found that the social gatherings prompted by tea were governed by a set of social rules, that are broken and disregarded in many of the chosen works. It is discussed how the inclusion and importance of tea in these five different works of literature and art can be used as an argument for the claim of the thesis, and because of the breadth of diversity in the authors and their historical contexts as well as their target readers it is concluded that the representations of tea in these works indicate that tea is a symbol of British national identity.

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Prof. Emily Hogg

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## Tea in Literature: A Symbol of British National Identity

### Introduction

I really do not like tea; I think that it tastes like hay smells. I love the idea of picking herbs, drying them in my sunny living room window and using them to brew a comforting, healing concoction served in a cup with a Shakespeare quote on it. However, the reality is that I do not find warm drinks pleasurable to drink; and all the amazing cups I nevertheless still keep buying will never be filled with anything other than diet soda. My strong dislike for tea goes no further than the taste and temperature though, because the history and symbolism of tea is such a rich, encompassing subject that can and do span numerous academic fields – history, culture, literature, economy, politics, and colonial studies, just to name a few. What prompted the idea for this thesis was the inclusion of the poem called “Tea With Our Grandmothers” by Warsan Shire in a lecture at the Brexit symposium held by SDU in the spring of 2019 which made me realise that I had never appreciated just how much history is found in and around the teacup. Exploring this history led to the question of how it came to be that something that was originally from India could have become so very British; the fact that I instinctively thought that tea was Indian is interesting and something I will return to. Tea is in fact not from India, but China. It is also thought-provoking how something we take for granted today once was considered exotic and unnecessarily luxurious. This is not unique to tea but

something that is mirrored in many things from our daily lives in the 21st century; things such as spices, silk, and sugar are examples of commodities we do not think twice about having readily available to all tiers of society in our local shops and stores. Tea seems to have become a common denominator, a shared experience throughout all social classes. It is now available in every supermarket, in every price class, organic or not, with fruit or liquorice or herbs, loose leaves to scoop into bags as large as you could want, or in convenient pre-packaged teabags for single cups. This paper will trace the journey of tea through history and analyse how it has been documented in literature. Locating and interpreting the clues and hints left by writers, poets, and artists to discover what they tell us of how and what they thought of tea at the time of creating their art. What was its part of their everyday life? How was it incorporated and used in the specific social class? Who drank the tea and who made it? These are some of the questions that occurred to me and that I will seek the answers to throughout this paper. To do that I have chosen to use three literary texts written by authors from the nineteenth century, as well as the works of two contemporary artists: a poet and a cartoonist; this split in time will cover a significant amount of time from when the British Empire was in power and subsequently allow for reflection on how the relationship between tea and the empire has extended into the present. While tea will remain the centre of interest through the analyses of the chosen works, the British Empire will need to be addressed and included in order to fully comprehend how, why and when tea became what we know it to be. These two have a co-dependent relationship, meaning that their histories are intertwined and complex; tea caused the empire both moral and political worries and tea might not have become as widely spread around the globe if the British had not brought it with them when they occupied new areas. We cannot know of course, if tea would have been spread without British help, but it is safe to say that the size and power of the British Empire was a factor

that contributed to the spreading of tea beyond Asia. Therefore, the empire and imperialism will have to complement the subject of tea as I go on from here.

This means that I will make use of historical sources about the empire as well as sources about tea. In my research I have found an abundance of historical material about the discovery and popularisation of tea but not much about how it is represented in literature, aside from a few analyses of tea as it appears in specific works. I will aim to make this paper fit into the academic conversation by uncovering and analysing the symbolism, history and popularity of tea as it is shown to us when we read novels and poems, watch plays and relax with cartoons; how this drink is presented in the culture. I will study how tea is included, used and talked about in literature written both during the time of the British Empire and in the 21st century, because I want to find out how tea, despite its Chinese origin, has become a symbol of britishness, so that both myself and my reader may better understand how tea has impacted the British identity and britishness in a global context.

The texts that will be analysed to achieve this goal will be chapter seven of Lewis Carroll's classic children's novel *Alice in Wonderland* which includes the Mad Tea Party. The novel was published in 1865 and the chosen chapter is a classic and well-known instance of tea in a literary work. Next will be a play by Oscar Wilde, which was first performed in 1895. It is *The Importance of Being Earnest*, where the entirety of the first act and much of the second takes place at teatime. The poem from the lecture was already on the list, adding a contemporary perspective on the extension of the empire into our time. Searching further, I looked to Jane Austen and settled on *Pride and Prejudice* for the last literary work. In this novel teatime is often used to mark the passing of time or to create spaces in which characters would be able to meet and converse. To add a final contemporary source, I chose to take a closer look at some of the cartoons by the Danish artist Humon, who is behind the series called "Scandinavia and the World". Adding a non-British, contemporary

artist only contributes to the breadth of the sources of primary literature for the paper. This will benefit the discussion by adding an international perspective on what will be perceived as being British stereotypes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This collection of comics shows anthropomorphised versions of the world's countries and they are shown as interacting with each other about everything from weird local habits, to current political or cultural events and the historical relationship between them. In these cartoons, England often has a teacup in his hands, and is acting as the father of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

For my secondary sources I have found the works of Julie Fromer, whom has been the only one to mention representation of tea in literature. She points out the rising popularity of tea in England during the nineteenth century which she also connects to representation in literature and national identity. She addresses the moral dilemma that faced the British as tea began to be a consistent and common part of their everyday lives; was it sustainable to let Chinese tea become a part of their national identity? She also correlates the effects of buying and drinking tea in the family unit and in the empire as a whole by drawing economic and moral parallels between the family and the empire. The individual family supported the empire and the economy by buying tea and when many families started drinking tea together everyday it created a feeling of togetherness across the country which became the start to a feeling of Britishness that was closely related to drinking tea.

Fromer refers to the research and publications of Erika Rappaport, who has written about the popularity of tea, which she, to a great extent, attributes to the fact that it was a non-alcoholic beverage which brought about only good side-effects. She also addresses the moral issue of the purity of Chinese tea as experienced by both individual citizens and the authorities, and she describes how the shift from Chinese tea to teas cultivated under British authority needed careful marketing because of the difference in taste. She also writes about

how large public tea parties created a sober and acceptable setting for people all kinds to meet.

In *Empire of Tea*, by Ellis, Coulton and Mauger, the trajectory of tea is meticulously laid out, from the first times it was ever mentioned in writing to tea becoming “The National Drink of Victorian Britain” (title of chapter eleven). This book shows how tea became a political tool to be used in the business of the empire and how the empire became dependent on the trade of Eastern goods to uphold their economy. On the cultural side of imperialism, the works of Edward Said are essential. His books *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* have contributed greatly to the understanding of how “the East” have been characterised and represented in many – if not all – Western artforms. His views and methods will enable me to catch between-the-lines references to the empire and see through the language used to talk about issues and commodities coming from outside the borders – cultural as well as geographical – of the British Empire.

There seems to be no lack of material about tea with political, historical, or cultural angles. There also exist stand-alone analyses of the role of tea within particular works of literature but what I will contribute with this thesis is something that will connect all of these different analytic lenses and look at representation of tea in literature in more general and cooperative terms. By analysing five different works I will be able to locate and extract the places where tea is represented in similar ways, when it is used for the same purpose and when it appears in the same settings. Differences in the inclusion of tea will also become apparent and these will be equally important to discuss. To achieve these goals, I have deliberately chosen five major works that all differ from each other in multiple ways. *Pride and Prejudice* was written by an English woman in 1813, Oscar Wilde, an Irishman, wrote *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 1895, *Alice in Wonderland*, by the English Lewis Carroll, is from 1865. These three literary works were all written in the nineteenth century

with *Pride and Prejudice* falling into the Regency period and the other two in the Victorian era. They also share similarities in their plots. They do, however, as pointed out above, differ in their authorship and time of writing and these differences and similarities will be interesting to explore. The poem was published in 2011 by a young, female poet whose parentage is ethnically mixed. Lastly, the cartoons started coming out in 2009, and are still published regularly as of June 2020. The artist is anonymous, but it is known that she is Danish, female and has spent time living in England. The cartoons and the poem have very little in common in terms of their content, but they have similarities in their authors and they of course also share their contemporary nature. Collectively, these five pieces of art can be said to represent the nineteenth century, the time when the empire was at its most powerful, the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where the empire is in the past, English writers, an Irish writer, a Danish artist, a writer with a multi-ethnic background, female and male authors, a play, a novel, a children's novel, a poem and cartoons. This will allow for an almost infinite number of cross-comparisons which will strengthen my claim that representations of tea in literature and other artforms can be used to argue that tea has become a symbol of britishness and a part of British national identity.

The thesis will be built up by first having a short overview of the historical background of tea and the empire. This section will be followed by a presentation of the analytical methods chosen to use for the individual analyses of four of the five works – for the analysis of “The Mad Tea Party” I will rely on Fromer's analysis, that I will summarise before moving on to the discussion, which will be divided into six individual topics that all surfaced through the analyses. The discussion will then lead me to my conclusion.

## Historical background of tea in Britain

During the time when tea was brought to Britain and thus the time period covered in this paper, the definition of being British was evolving. Up through the 1700s being British did not mean the same thing to everyone in the union. It was not a stand-alone, general identifier, because every individual would also have their geographical nationality, which they would often emphasise over being British. For the English it was much the same being British and English, but this was not the case for the peoples of Wales, Scotland or Ireland: “Historians of the other three nations in the United Kingdom, on the other hand, discover a much clearer sense of identity. Smaller nations gain strength from defensive distinctiveness.” (Grant & Stringer 234). The English were the privileged in the union, the most represented, and thus they had nothing to lose by being referred to as British. The Welsh, Scottish and Irish, however, maintained a clear sense of their own national identity (as well as preserving their languages and dialects) while also fitting into the British box, which can be seen as an umbrella term that the Welsh, Irish and Scottish could all fit beneath. However, they were firmly seeing being British as a supplement to their local national identity – for them, the terms were definitely not interchangeable. But trying to define Englishness as opposed to and different from Britishness would “prove fruitless” (Grant & Stringer 232), because the English were far more likely to define themselves by their specific locality than their country; being from London or Liverpool were more important to the individual than being from England. And a Londoner and a Liverpudlian would see the other as vastly different from themselves. While it certainly can be tricky, it is nevertheless important to keep these terms straight to keep the confusion to a minimum. From this point I will use the term British as default unless the context calls for further specification.

## The discovery, importation, and brewing of tea

In English, the word ‘tea’ denotes at least five separate significations: the shrub, the leaf from that shrub, the dried commodity produced from that leaf, the

infusion of that commodity, and the event for partaking that infusion. (Ellis, Coulton and Mauger 10)

“Tea” really is a word that needs contextualization before one can hope to guess what it is referring to. Thinking of just the word, a whole collage of pictures come to mind, all of these five significations included. However, the drinking of tea is in itself a much, much older practice than perhaps many westerners realise. It is widely known that tea was “discovered” and subsequently brought back to Europe by traders and explorers who had been travelling in the East. Curiously, despite its Chinese origin and how China would soon become the main importation source, tea was brought to Britain from Japan at first: “Indeed, the earliest reference to tea in an English text is from a chapter ‘Of the Iland of Japan’ in *John Huighen van Linschoten: His Discours of Voyages into the Easte & West Indies* (1598).” (Ellis, Coulton and Mauger 19). While at first considered an exotic, unnecessary luxury, tea became immensely popular rather quickly. The Dutch had started drinking tea around the middle of the seventeenth century (Ellis, Coulton and Mauger 23) and because the drink was more popular in Holland and had already gained some popularity there, initially it was easier for the British to obtain tea leaves from the Dutch than the Chinese. Along with the leaf itself, knowledge of brewing techniques was essential – something that could also be bought from the Dutch. Indeed, according to *Empire of Tea*, “Dutch scholarship about tea was nearly as valuable [...] as supplies of the leaf itself,” as “Tea drinkers required instruction on how to prepare the beverage to make use of their luxury import.” (Ellis, Coulton and Mauger 34). Eventually tensions and rivalry between The East India Company and the Dutch counterpart, the VOC (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie), would make this cooperation difficult. As the demand for tea grew steadily, so the EIC had to keep up supply by importing directly from China.

## Popularity and politization

The popularity of tea increased rapidly throughout the eighteenth century, which put pressure on the trade of tea. This growing need for accessible tea by the British people created an unequal power dynamic between the British Empire and China – at least as seen from a British perspective. The British government was frustrated that they did not have a commodity that the Chinese wanted to trade for tea, leaving them with the very expensive last option of having to pay for it in cash – primarily silver. Eventually the British started selling opium to China, which was already widely used in traditional Chinese medicine, but it was produced in India – which is to say that it was technically made by the British. The increased availability of opium generated a large rise in the number of people using, and thus becoming addicted to opium as a general drug. Eventually the profits from the sale of opium became larger than the costs of buying tea and this shift in the financial dynamic as well as the questionable ethics of selling drugs to an increasingly addicted population led to growing tensions between the empire and China. Ultimately these tensions resulted in two wars, known as the Opium Wars: The First Opium War in 1839-1842 and the Second Opium War in 1856-1860, although knowing the motives behind the British actions, they could very well be called the Tea Wars. (Ellis, Coulton and Mauger 213-9)

In 1784 all taxes on tea put together amounted to a staggering 119 per cent (Ellis, Coulton and Mauger 175). Taxation and smuggling being somewhat of a co-dependent relationship, it was unsurprising that increase in taxes meant an increase in smuggling. The smuggling was depriving the British government of a lot of money and the solution came in 1784 when the Commutation Bill became law in August. The essence of this bill was to cut the taxes on tea dramatically – down to just 12,5 per cent – instantly making it unprofitable to buy and sell illegal tea. This effectively gave the EIC monopoly on tea trade in Britain – but written into the law was also the condition that the EIC then would be legally bound to

always meet the British demand for tea. The result of the Commutation Bill was that the EIC went from buying a maximum of 40% of the tea from China to dominating the trade with buying 90 per cent or more in the 1790s. The bill also essentially killed the rivalling trading companies in France and Holland, because neither “survived the end of the century[...].” (Ellis, Coulton and Mauger 176-7), because the price of tea from the British suddenly dropped.

The British colonies in North America needed tea brought to them as well as many other essentials. They were all taxed under the (unpopular) Townshend Duties and they worked in the way that the revenue raised were meant to cover the costs of administrating the colonies. These duties ensured that the colonies paid their own way (Ellis, Coulton and Mauger 205). Most of the Townshend Duties were repealed as of March 1770. However,

One duty was retained in order to establish a clear precedent for taxing consumption in America: the excise on tea. This, gambled the British government, was the one British product that American consumers could not do without, and for which they would be prepared to sacrifice their principles. (Ellis, Coulton and Mauger 205).

It did work for a while, but discontent among the colonists grew and in December 1773 the tensions culminated in what is referred to as the Boston Tea Party. The dumping of the tea into the harbour in Boston was a solution to what boiled down to a practical problem; protesters were denying the unloading of the cargo (because as soon as the tea touched American soil they would be obliged to pay the taxation fee) and the ships’ captains were legally bound to deliver the tea to America – they would thus breach their contracts if they took the tea back to London. The symbolism of “making tea” in the harbour in this rebellious way is hard to overlook and it became a defining moment in the timeline leading up to the Declaration of Independence being signed in 1776.

## Domestication and consumption

The British perceiving tea “[...]as a domestic, English commodity, however, raised fears about basing ideals of domesticity and national identity on a foreign product from China – a country that, despite British attempts to penetrate it, had remained frustratingly unknown.” (Fromer, “Indebted to the Tea Plant” 532). It does seem illogical to partially attribute national characteristics to a product imported from abroad and the British were very much aware of this dilemma; thus they needed to find a way to grow tea on their own soil – or, that is to say, soil they were in control of. That would solve the problems of buying it from China – financially as well as the emotional and moral problems. A stable, accessible, inexpensive and, above all, *pure* tea would be the answer. They looked to India for places to plant and cultivate tea and

[...]an astonishing (re)discovery was made: a variety of tea[...] was already growing there. [...]it promised to reduce Britain’s discomfoting dependence on China for its tea supplies, thus addressing the vast imbalance of payments occasioned by the East India trade. (Ellis, Coulton and Mauger 203).

It took time before the cultivation of Indian tea was organized enough to create a steady supply and once the Indian – or British, as it was proudly called – tea was ready for consumption at home it needed heavy marketing. It was a different type of tea and it did not please the taste buds of the British people at first. They considered the new tea inferior to the traditional Chinese tea that they were used to, “but promoters and advertisers stimulated a taste for them by emphasizing the adulteration of Chinese teas against the purity of teas grown under the British flag.” (Fromer, “Indebted to the Tea Plant” 532). By the late 1880s the imports of tea from India and Ceylon exceeded that of Chinese tea and the British people could drink their tea with peace in mind.

When tea was brought to Europe, so were many of the ways in which it was used in China and Japan, where “[...]tea was afforded a privileged significance within religious and political rituals, and granted a pervasive power to facilitate temperate

sociability. It was also widely eulogized as a universal medicine.” (Ellis, Coulton and Mauger 14). The drinking of tea became both a social situation and an opportunity for calm reflection and meditation. As tea made its way down through the social classes, they all made specific changes to the way of consumption that best fitted their everyday life. An example of this evolution of the tea table through society is the food served along with the drink. In the higher classes they would serve light, sweet and expensive foods such as cakes, fruits and cucumber sandwiches, whereas in the working class homes tea would be accompanied with more nutritious, heavier and cheaper foods, like boiled bacon or ham, vegetables and dark bread: “The presence of ham and eggs at the [...] tea party, however, further marks their gathering as working class, contrasting with the exotic coconut cakes and fresh fruit that the [high class] would serve[...].” (Fromer, “A Necessary Luxury” 123-4). Working class people needed their food to sustain them and give them energy for their work, and spending money on foods that did not serve this purpose was not an opportunity for them. The positive effects of drinking tea were nevertheless universal, creating a shared experience throughout all layers of society; everyone could agree that tea was a calming (but at the same time stimulating), healthy, pleasant and graceful drink – and tea-time was an important part of the day for all types of families to connect. To be invited to tea as a guest was something of an honour, meaning that you would be part of this intimate ritual with another family – a sign of trust and respect. You would then be able to converse and enjoy the company away from the prying eyes of the public, perhaps talking business or making proposals. This was common all through society, although the topics of conversation would surely vary between the classes.

In Britain tea also quickly acquired a reputation as the cure for all sorts of ailments: “[...]tea was efficacious in healing illness in the mouth and throat, stomach, bowels, blood, brain, eyes and ears, chest, bowels and belly, kidneys and bladder.” (Ellis,

Coulton and Mauger 41). Another significant advantage of tea was its way of bringing all the desired effects of alcohol without any of the disadvantages associated with alcoholic beverages:

These drinks [coffee, tea, red.] were stimulants, but their consumption did not lead to inebriation or other forms of rowdiness, as did alcohol. So although the psychoactive effect of tea and coffee on drinkers was conspicuous, the forms of behaviour associated with them were broadly congruent with the programmes of moral reform and regulation promoted by Protestant sects of the period. (Ellis, Coulton and Mauger 35)

These effects were unsurprisingly very desired and so the demand for tea kept growing throughout the eighteenth century. Tea was thus used for – and in – a broad variety of situations. In solitude for calm, tranquillity, and healing, in the family (perhaps including a few invited guests) for connecting and nourishment and in larger groups for tea parties that could be both social and political in nature. An example of using tea for their cause was the large tea parties arranged by the Temperance Movement, where

[...]hundreds, and at times thousands of working- and middle-class men and women gathered in a beautifully decorated setting to drink tea and coffee, feast on sugary foods, sing hymns, and listen to reformed drunkards and others preach the righteousness of sobriety. (Rappaport, 992).

These occasions and others like it gave men and women a chance to meet and connect in a setting where respectfulness and sobriety were required to participate and thus it was a safe way of social interaction between classes and genders. Drinking tea was for everyone and although most often prepared by women, it was not unsuitable for men to handle the brewing of the tea for their family and guests. Even in the upper parts of society, where household tasks were done by servants, making tea was an exception: “Tea preparation was one of the few tasks that women and men of the higher stations were proud to be seen perform themselves.” (Ellis, Coulton and Mauger 142). “Tea preparation” in this context would however only include the very last stages of the process; adding the leaves, letting it steep the exact acquired number of minutes and pouring it into the cups. Setting the table, preparing

the food, boiling the water, and carrying in the kettle were less attractive tasks and not something the master or mistress of the house would do themselves. Even as tea became part of everyday life for all classes, it retained its initial status as a luxurious, exotic product and therefore wealthy men and women could prepare it without the shame that doing a household task would otherwise entail.

Essentially it can be summed up that once tea came to Britain its popularity grew faster than the authorities could adjust the laws of import and taxation. Chinese tea, although pleasant to drink, became a moral and economic burden on the British Empire and people, and the solution was found when tea was discovered to be growing naturally in India. Tea had many appealing qualities, the primary ones being that it was non-alcoholic and healthy. Drinking tea became both an established event for social gatherings and a regular part of the daily routine for families of all social layers of society.

## Methods of analysis

My goal for this paper is to find the places in my chosen works where tea is present in some way or other. I want to find the places where the characters are drinking it, or preparing it, or when it is only casually mentioned – maybe even just between the lines. I also want to find scenes taking place during teatime and tea parties and look at how these social events are described. I also need to use – and therefore analyse – the historical context of the works in order to compare it to the textual references to tea. To accomplish these goals, I have decided to rely on a variety of analysis methods. A close reading of the chosen excerpts will be complemented by a thorough look at the historical context of the work, following the rules laid out by the method called New Historicism. I will also use the idea of *orientalism* as put forth by Edward Said in the books *Orientalism – Western Conceptions of the Orient* and

*Culture and Imperialism*, as well as a taking a close look at the culture represented in and by the works.

Doing a close reading of a literary work means getting immersed in the text as it is and nothing else; the text itself is what is important. It is the words, the symbols, the meaning, the grammar that, in relation to the form and genre, make up the building blocks of the work. The analysis will consist of a scrutinising of each of these parts before looking at the whole that they create. It is “the detailed analysis of the complex interrelationships and *ambiguities* (multiple meanings) of the verbal and figurative components within a work.” (Abrams 242-43). Using this method will enable me to open up the text to locate where tea is present, what it represents in these places and how it is discussed; is it described in detail, is it being made or being consumed? Is it part of the setting (as when characters interact at a tea party) or part of the scene (as when a character is drinking/making/feeling the effects of tea)? It will allow me to immerse myself wholly into the scenes and focus on what the texts says about tea, the situation, and the characters around it. A close reading should also reveal one or more central themes in the text: “The linguistic elements, whatever the genre, are often said to be organised around a central and humanly significant *theme*[...]” (Abrams 243). Locating this theme (or themes) will then surely be a helpful element in the analysis of the representation of tea in the text, acting as the lens through which the text is viewed.

### *New Historicism*

The New Historicism method of analysis emphasises that a work of literature (or any other type of art) is firmly embedded in its historical context and it cannot be fully appreciated if taken out of this context. The time of writing is essential to the work because the author could never not have been influenced by the time they are living in – it will have affected their cultural values and their worldview. Even if an author actively tried to ignore their

environment and not let it affect them as they write, the decision to do so would tell us that something in their environment was bothering them to the point of working around it in their art. This also means that the author's gender, class, race, and age will be factors that could affect the text – and therefore the analyst should not ignore these circumstances.

New Historicists conceive of a literary text as “situated” within the totality of the institutions, social practices, and discourses that constitute the culture of a particular time and place, and with which the literary text interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes. (Abrams 244)

For this paper New Historicism will work well because I will need both the very close, textual reading of the scenes including tea to know exactly what the texts say about tea and the practises and traditions surrounding the drink, but I also need to place the texts in their historical environment and culture to be able to connect the findings from the textual analysis to the historical timeline of tea. It will be the time and place of writing that dominates this part of the analysis, more so than the gender, age or sexuality of the author.

Almost anything can be the object of a cultural analysis because culture is such a broad term that includes everything from fast food chains, fashion shows, graffiti, and comic books.

Typically, cultural studies pay less attention to works in the established literary canon than to popular fiction, best-selling romances (that is, love stories), journalism, and advertising, together with other arts that have mass appeal such as cartoon comics, film, television “soap operas,” and rock and rap music.” (Abrams 72).

Cultural studies also look past the white, western, and/or male artists and instead look to the women and the ethnic minorities – that is to say, the under-represented artists. When looking at a work of art – in the case of this paper the art will primarily be literature – through a cultural analysis, the goal is to figure out how this piece of art came to be, how was it influenced by the situation in which the author found themselves in, how was their work received and how did the finished product function?

Lastly, Orientalism (and imperialism) will be a general theme throughout the two stages of analysis mentioned above and it will return as a subject in the discussion. This term can be placed under the larger umbrella of postcolonial studies, which covers the “critical analysis of the history, culture, literature, and modes of discourse that are specific to the former colonies of England[...].” (Abrams 306). Orientalism is the theory that because of the intense domination of almost all of Asia by Western countries, much of what we know about Asia has been in some way filtered. This filter could very appropriately be called something like “The Exotic East” or “The Wild Orient”, clearly establishing an “us” and a “them”, setting up Asia as a complete Other, that we as westerners should perceive as possessing a different sort of intelligence (if not lesser or even irrational), that we need to translate, study or help them progress from (insinuating that they would need to progress towards western values). Said connects orientalism with imperialism and argues that these concepts are so closely related that they are hard to separate. So when the empire (or some specific place within it) is used “As a reference, as a point of definition, as an easily assumed place of travel, wealth, and service, the empire functions for much of the European nineteenth century as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence in fiction[...].” (Said 63). Said argues that because of the often surprising subtlety of the hints towards imperialism and the orientalism that often naturally follows, it can be difficult to see this pattern – but once you start actively looking for it, it will turn up everywhere in the literature: “And turn up not only with the inert regularity suggesting something taken for granted, but – more interestingly – threaded through, forming a vital part of the texture of linguistic and cultural practice.” (Said 82-3). He suggests that to find hints of both the empire and orientalism in a text it would be beneficial to look away from what seems central and look at what is being marginalised or minimise, using his term “contrapuntal reading” which essentially asks the reader to always remember the empire while reading the text itself; because the existence of the empire (or a more

specified place or single commodity therefrom) is vital to the existence of the plot in the fictional text. As an example, he uses the plot of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* in which the protagonist's father own a plantation in Antigua. This is absolutely central to the plot, but the existence of this plantation is rarely mentioned, and thus it is the reader's responsibility to keep this other place in mind, for the plot to make sense – the reader needs to read *Mansfield Park* contrapuntally if they want to fully understand it. (Said 83-5). Finding instances of these pieces of text that hints at something taken for granted and connecting them to the imperialist and orientalist practices of the time, not only related to tea drinking, will aid me in my analysis of these major works.

## Analysis of Pride and Prejudice

Jane Austen was born on December 16, 1775, the second anniversary of the Boston Tea Party. This means that she was 7 months old when the British Empire lost the Thirteen Colonies in North America and thus, she grew up in a time where the empire was undergoing significant changes all the while still being immensely powerful and very large. She published six novels throughout her short life (she died at 41 years old in 1817) and they were all, “in Austen's words, ‘pictures of domestic life in country villages.’” (Norton 524). Both in terms of her writing style and her topics, themes, and messages, she was a revolutionary in the literary world:

Austen's example is so central to what the novel as a form has become that it can be difficult from our present-day vantage point to recognise the iconoclasm in her depictions of the undervalued business of everyday life. It can be hard to see how much her originality – her creation of characters who are both ordinary and unforgettable, her accounts of how they change – challenged her contemporaries' expectations about novels' plots, setting, and characterization. (Norton 524)

At this time, tea was considered an essential part of everyday life for the British and in the higher classes (to which her main characters belonged) tea was a very important part of their

daily routines. It took place after dinner and served as the catalyst for recreational activities such as card play, music, and dramatic readings. The nature of her works being “pictures of domestic life” and her characters being “ordinary”, the representation of tea in her novels can be assumed to be fairly accurate according to history. “References to tea in Jane Austen’s stories reveal the significant part that tea played, the times at which it was drunk, and the gradual shifting of mealtimes in late Georgian and Regency England.” (Pettigrew & Richardson). Tea was still served after dinner in this time, but as dinner gradually began to start later and later, eventually the two meals switched places and tea was served in the early afternoon, followed by a later dinner (Skinner 35). Tea happens in all of her novels and some also have references and hints to the fact that beyond the small community in which the characters live their everyday life there was a vast and powerful Empire. Her themes revolve around these values of domestic life and ordinary people – their love stories, whether it be family love, platonic love or romantic love.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, I have found ten mentions of tea that I will focus on. Individually and textually at first, then collectively with a broader, historical lens. It is fairly safe to assume that whenever something takes place in the drawing-room, it is either teatime or almost teatime. In chapter eleven Elizabeth takes her sick older sister Jane into the drawing-room. They then have a conversation with Mr. Bingley by the fire, with no eating or drinking being mentioned at all. The next paragraph opens with the words “When tea was over[...]” (Austen, “PaP” 58), showing how natural and imbedded in the time it was that going to the drawing-room meant going to *have tea* in the drawing-room. As a modern reader this may not be clear, and while being told that they were actually also having tea while they were in the drawing-room would be fine and certainly make the situation clearer for us, it makes no noteworthy difference to the conversations they had while in there. Adding the drinking of tea would not have seemed like an important detail for Austen. In the drawing-

rooms presented to us in Austen's works there would be comfortable furniture, musical instruments and/or games to play. We see that card games are played after tea at Longbourn, the home of the Bennet family: "When the gentlemen had joined them, and tea was over, the card tables were placed." (Austen, "PaP" 157). In *Pride and Prejudice* the drawing room at Longbourn is described in a way so as to feel large and airy; it is large enough for smaller groups to separate themselves and have private conversations and when Elizabeth tells the reader that "Darcy had walked away to another part of the room" (Austen, "PaP" 306) it indicates that they are then quite far away from each other, far enough for it to be impossible for them to talk. The size of the room indicates that it had be large enough to allow for groups of guests to be invited and for them to be comfortable and able to have important conversations there as well as tea.

Starting a sentence with the words "By tea-time[...]" (Austen, "PaP" 72), marks a passing of time while simultaneously letting the reader know what time it is now. This particular teatime was followed by Mr. Collins reading aloud to the ladies from a sermon (having rejected the novel they gave him initially). His reading aloud is pointedly taking place after tea is over, indicating that there may have been too much chatter and noise while tea was being served for a reading to be appreciated. The girls at Longbourn are proud and honored to have been invited for tea with Lady Catherine; that it was an honour and a privilege to be invited to tea with a lady like Lady Catherine De Bourgh is evident by Mr. Collins saying:

'I confess,' said he, 'that I should not have been at all surprised by her Ladyship's asking us on Sunday to drink tea an spend the evening at Rosings. I rather expected, from my knowledge of her affability, that it would happen. But who could have imagined that we should receive an invitation to dine there (an invitation more-over including the whole party) so immediately after your arrival!'" (Austen, "PaP" 152)

Though close with the Lady, her invitation surprised him with its haste and the prospect of tea and dinner at Rosings makes for much conversation at Longbourn:

Scarcely anything was talked of the whole day or next morning[...] Mr. Collins was carefully instructing them in what they were to expect, that the sight of such rooms, so many servants, and so splendid a dinner might not wholly overpower them.” (Austen, “PaP” 152).

In this instance tea and dinner are both exciting prospects; being invited to spend this time with the Lady Catherine at Rosings was evidently an occasion that needed preparedness.

Later, in chapter 33, Elizabeth is having a headache and therefore decides not to go to Rosings “where they were engaged to have tea” (Austen 176, “PaP). Her declining the invitation displeases Mr. Collins, who is anticipating that Lady Catherine De Bourgh will be disappointed – probably even insulted – by this rejection of spending teatime with her. The excitement brought by invitations to tea or dinner at Rosings suggests that the location and the company plays a role in how honoured one would feel by being invited to a tea party.

“We have dined nine times at Rosings, besides drinking tea there twice! How much I shall have to tell!” (Austen, “PaP” 202), is exclaimed by Maria Lucas, clearly underlining the fact that having tea was a more exclusive social situation than having dinner; two times at tea seems a bigger deal to her than the nine dinners and it all happening at Rosings makes this experience something that Miss Lucas can hardly wait to share with her friends and family when she comes home.

When tea is casually mentioned in a sentence like this: “It was not till the afternoon, when he joined them at tea[...]” (Austen, “PaP” 270) it establishes a feeling of routine and security; tea happens every day, it is a constant in their everyday life; it is the company and location that is the variable at this time. Having tea was not the question, it was the question with whom they were going to have tea. It seems that each member of the family had their own habits around tea time – perhaps Mr. Bennett most of all: “After tea, Mr. Bennet retired to the library, as was his custom[...]” (Austen, “PaP” 309). Mr. Bennet is a

pleasant man who loves his daughters (although his enthusiasm for his daughters' marriages is not at all near the passionate level of Mrs. Bennet) but participating at tea time is enough socialising for him – “his custom” is then to retract from the company and presumably spend the rest of the night reading by himself. The women, however, seem to be less restricted to a specific behavioural pattern, because as shown in this example: “Elizabeth, who had a letter to write, went into the breakfast room for that purpose soon after tea[...].” (Austen, “PaP” 311), Elizabeth is not compelled to do something pre-determined after having tea, she is free to use this time for whatever pressing matter is at hand; in this case the writing of a letter.

One very important scene takes place in chapter 54, where we get a rare mention of the process of brewing the tea: “the ladies were crowded round the table, where Miss Bennet was making tea, and Elizabeth pouring out the coffee, in so close a confederacy, that there was not a single vacancy near her[...].” (Austen, “PaP” 306). This would certainly be an instance of servants having prepared and brought in all the components and the ladies then doing the last stages of the work for show in the drawing room. The ladies share the tasks at the table and Elizabeth, being responsible of the coffee, has looked forward to tea time all through dinner, where she and Mr. Darcy (whom, at this point, she is hoping will repeat his proposal) were unable to talk. Tea would then be the opportunity to move more freely among the participants and to initiate conversations – if not for the fact that she was confined to the serving table and the tight group of women around her did not make it easy for Darcy to come to her at first. Eventually he approaches her to have his coffee cup refilled and they engage in a short conversation (small talk at best, by modern standards) followed by his standing silent next to her “for some minutes” (Austen, “PaP” 306). In this scene tea implies two different things. It means tea time, the social situation of having tea with the family and guests and the possibilities this scenario offers a young woman in love, and it means tea, the actual drink being made by steeping the dried tea leaves in hot water and then

subsequently strained, poured and drunk. This is the only instance in this novel where the process of brewing the tea is described somewhat, which indicates that here it is important for the plot that the reader knows that Elizabeth is unable to leave the area around the table because she is serving the coffee. It cannot be concluded that this is the only time in the time covered in the novel that this happens. At Longbourn it could very well be the custom for the Bennet sisters to be in charge of this part of teatime. At Rosings, however, it is not likely that Lady Catherine De Bourgh would brew the tea herself for her guests. Mr. Collins does mention the larger number of servants at Rosings, and these extra servants would surely be the ones to prepare tea in its entirety. Throughout the novel there can be counted 31 mentions of servants, a large number that may be surprising, because they are very nearly invisible in the story. However, despite being hard to pinpoint and remember, the servants do much work that aids the plot of the novel. They deliver letters, drive coaches, tend the gardens, cook the food, and gossip about their masters: “‘He is the best landlord, and the best master,’ said she, ‘that ever lived.[...]There is not one of his tenants or servants but what will give him a good name.’” (Austen, “PaP” 226). These words spoken by the housekeeper at Pemberley about Mr. Darcy contradicts the way Elizabeth feels about him at that point, but “‘what praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant?’” (Austen, “PaP” 227) she asks herself. As shown when Mr. Collins warns the girls about the number of servants they will see at Rosings, their number show both the characters and the reader the social status of the master an/or mistress. Having servants was normal in the time and the society of Jane Austen’s writing and it mirrors the fact that it was also the time of slavery in the empire. While servants in the high society homes in the Regency period were not slaves per se, they were close enough for it to be an uncomfortable reminder that this was the practice. Their general tendency to be invisible and forgettable in literature tells us that the lives they led were done so in the outskirts of the reality Austen presents us with. She was a product of her time and

Said argues that we cannot hold it against her so long as we as modern readers keep this in mind:

Yes, Austen belonged to a slave-owning society, but do we therefore jettison her novels as so many trivial exercises in aesthetic frumpery? Not at all, I would argue, if we take seriously our intellectual and interpretative vocation to make connections, to deal with as much of the evidence as possible, fully and actually, to read what is there or not there, above all, to see complementarity and interdependence instead of isolated, venerated, or formalized experience that excludes and forbids the hybridizing intrusions of human history. (Said 96)

There may not be any mentions or hints to the empire that the Bennets were living in, but the presence of servants to the degree of them being barely noticeable shows a nonchalance towards the idea of having people work and live in the house of someone who was supposedly better born. As argued by Said above, the existence and acceptance of servants in Austen's works should not be grounds for discarding them but rather modern readers should embrace them as an opportunity to interpret and delve even deeper into the texts.

The practices around tea in this novel echo those of the time in which it was written. As readers we are presented with the established ritual of having tea at the same time every day. We see that invitations to tea are being given and received between the characters, some being the occasion for much excitement and pride and some being the events that lets future husbands and wives meet and develop relationships. Tea is being made ready by servants and finished by the ladies, and it is followed by merriment such as reading (alone or out loud), music and gossiping. Austen does not dwell on any of the technical sides of tea. We are not told what types of tea are being consumed or what it cost or from where it comes. This could either be because these facts would not contribute to the plot or because Austen wrote in a time where these things were everyday knowledge and she simply did not think that her work would be read and analysed 200 years in the future where these details could be found interesting

## Analysis of The Importance of Being Earnest

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin in 1854. He was the son of a surgeon and he studied at Trinity College and while studying classics he won a scholarship to Oxford, where he “established a brilliant academic record” (Norton 1720). He wrote literary reviews and a single novel before he resolved to write plays, of which he wrote four. His most successful play is *The Importance of being Earnest*. Christopher Morrison points out that, ironically, Wilde “was raised among the privileged Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland and wrote a great English comedy set in London’s high society[...]” (Morrison 119) – the success of the play shows that Wilde had adapted to London and felt at home there, thus he was able to portray life in the city absurdly and accurately. The play was first performed in early 1895, just before he was sentenced to two years in prison for having committed homosexual acts and upon his release he emigrated to France and he died a few years later in Paris in 1900. In the latter half of the nineteenth century (in which Wilde spent all his life) – the Victorian Age (1837-1901) – tea was well established in all layers of society and imports were steadily starting to come from India:

By the dawn of the twentieth century, the origin if tea being imported into Britain had shifted dramatically. In the 1850s, nearly all the tea brought to London was Chinese in origin. Fifty years later, English tea’s origin had shifted to teas grown in a larger number of places and under imperial control: 55% percent of tea was grown in India, 30 percent in Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka), roughly 7.5 percent in Indonesia, and only 7.5 percent in China. (Skinner 53)

That tea was deeply ingrained in the British society is evident in the play by the 26 references to tea, or something in relation to the tea table – mostly the foods served on the side. It was also during the Victorian age that tea started to become an afternoon refreshment instead of it following dinner: “By the 1860’s and 1870’s, afternoon tea began apperaring in middle-class homes, and by the end of the century the meal or its slightly more filling counterpart, high tea, which emerged later, had been embraced by all social classes.” (Skinner 35). In *The Importance of being Earnest* this is established from the very start with the first stage

direction being: “Lane is arranging afternoon tea on the table” (Wilde 1). It is further supported by adding a specific time: “Algernon: [*Stiffly.*] I believe it is customary in good society to take some refreshment at five o’clock.” (Wilde 5)

The audience is immediately shown that this story takes place in the upper part of society, by the presence of the servant Lane and the “luxuriously and artistically furnished” morning-room in Algernon’s flat. (Wilde 1). Another clue shows up on the next page where Algernon asks about the cucumber sandwiches, he has ordered for his aunt who is coming for tea. This is a light, expensive dish and it is referred to as being out of the ordinary, something that will please the Lady Bracknell. Algernon, however, seems to forget this part:

Algernon: And[...]have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

Lane: Yes, sir. [*Hands them on a salver.*]

Algernon: [*Inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa.*] (Wilde 2)

As Jack arrives he notices the tea table being extraordinarily laid out as well and he asks: “[...]Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Why such reckless extravagance in one so young? Who is coming to tea?” (Wilde 6). These sandwiches become the crucial point of the first instance of absurdity:

[Jack puts out his hand to take a sandwich. Algernon at once interferes.] Please don’t touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. [*Takes one and eats it.*]

Jack: Well, you have been eating them all the time.

Algernon: That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt. [*Takes plate from below.*] (Wilde 8)

We are laughing at this scene because not only is Algernon’s argument ridiculous, but he eventually eats the entire tray of sandwiches by himself before Lady Bracknell arrives. This is of course extremely impolite and socially unacceptable. When Lady Bracknell and Gwendolen arrives, the lady excuses and explains their lateness and then says: “And now I’ll have a cup of tea, and one of those nice cucumber sandwiches you promised me.” (Wilde 25).

Algernon obliges, but the tray is of course empty now: “Algernon: [Picking up empty plate in horror.] Good heavens! Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them specially.” (Wilde 26). With the responsibility now on him, Lane, who is seemingly used to this behaviour from his master, calmly replies that he was unable to acquire any cucumbers. She is quite forgiving and while she starts talking, Algernon brings her a cup of tea (Wilde 27). The entire first act takes place in this setting of afternoon tea. As an object though, tea is only an active part in the beginning, but they stay in the room and presumably keep their respective cups in their hands and occasionally sips the tea – this could only be confirmed by watching the play performed. There are no stage directions reminding the actors to drink their tea.

The second act opens in the garden at Jack’s estate where Cecily is studying with Miss Prism. They are joined by Dr. Chasuble, who eventually takes Miss Prism for a walk. This prompts a very clear reference to the fact that they are part of an empire:

Miss Prism: That would be delightful. Cecily, you will read your Political Economy in my absence. The chapter on the Fall of the Rupee you may omit. It is somewhat too sensational. Even these metallic problems have their melodramatic side. (Wilde 74)

The mention of the Rupee, the Indian currency, lets us know that India is present in their studies and everyday narrative, and this apparent drop in value of the Rupee is even deemed “too sensational”, implying that it has been the subject of much discussion in their society. It does not seem interesting to Cecily however, because as soon as Miss Prism has gone away, she throws the book back on the table. As of this moment in the act there is no mention of the time. Algernon arrives, introducing himself as Ernest Worthing (the brother that Jack has pretended to have), and in a matter of minutes he and Cecily have become engaged. Cecily is again alone in the garden, when the arrival of Gwendolen is announced by the servant Merriman, and Cecily says: “Pray ask the lady to come out here; Mr. Worthing is sure to be back soon. And you can bring tea.” (Wilde 114). In this situation it is unclear whether tea is

requested because it is time for tea anyway, or because they now have two guests at the Manor and social convention dictated that guests should be offered tea. Likely, it is a combination of the two. The two women soon realize that they seem to be engaged to the same man and the situation becomes very tense, but they are interrupted:

[Enter Merriman, followed by the footman. He carries a salver, table cloth, and plate stand. Cecily is about to retort [to Gwendolen]. The presence of the servants exercises a restraining influence, under which both girls chafe.] Merriman: Shall I lay tea here as usual, Miss? (Wilde 125)

Cecily offers tea and Gwendolen reluctantly accepts: “Thank you. [Aside.] Detestable girl! But I require tea!” (Wilde 127). She declines the offer of sugar on the grounds of it not being “fashionable any more” (Wilde 127) and Cecily secretly and deliberately adds four lumps of sugar. She repeats this trick when Gwendolen asks for bread and butter instead of cake; Cecily cuts a very large piece of cake and gives it to Gwendolen who is angry and much insulted now:

You have filled my tea with lumps of sugar, and though I asked most distinctly for bread and butter, you have given me cake. I am known for the gentleness of my disposition, and the extraordinary sweetness of my nature, but I warn you, Miss Cardew, you may go too far. (Wilde 128)

In this scene tea is almost weaponised – Cecily certainly and purposely escalates their conflict by ignoring Gwendolen’s requests. It is telling that Gwendolen clearly does not enjoy being in the company of Cecily, but she “requires tea”, making tea the reason for her to stay in the garden. Christopher Morrison speculates that this scene could have even ended in physical violence:

When Gwendolen realizes what Cecily has done to insult her over a superficially polite afternoon tea, she finally shows her real feelings and the two become openly irate. It is easy to imagine that the confrontation could have resulted in physical attack had the men not entered to explain the mix-up.[...] (Morrison 118)

Going out of her way to do the opposite of what her guest asks for (she not only adds unwanted sugar, but *four lumps* of it and gives Gwendolen a *large* piece of cake instead of

the bread and butter she requested) shows Cecily's blatant disregard for not only the social rules around the tea table but good manners in general. As seen both when they first meet and when the misunderstanding has been cleared up, Cecily is more than capable of being civil and welcoming, meaning that her behaviour during their dispute in this scene is an active choice of breaking the social rules in order to hurt and anger her – at this point – rival for her husband-to-be. Their anger towards each other disappears instantly when Algernon and Jack join them and the misunderstanding is explained and they instead direct their anger at the men and leave them at the tea table, walking away arm in arm. The men are thus left alone to deal with their mistakes. However, their discussion soon turns into a dispute over the muffins at the table; Algernon keeps eating muffins instead of dealing with the crisis at hand:

Algernon: When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me.[...]At the present moment I am eating muffins because I am unhappy. Besides, I am particularly fond of muffins. [Rising.]

Jack: [Rising.] Well, that is no reason why you should eat them all in that greedy way. [Takes muffins from Algernon.] (Wilde 139-40).

The plate of muffins changes hands (by force) multiple times and they both suggest the other to leave the muffins and eat the tea-cake instead – but neither of them likes tea-cake. This raises the question of why the tea-cake is even on the table in the first place when no one likes it – Gwendolen certainly did not want cake either. This could be an instance of keeping hold of something out of habit or tradition without actually realising that no one appreciates this dish anymore. The presence of a cake no one wants to eat suggests that the customs at the tea table, while of course subject to change over time, were surrounded by firm traditions. While the fight over muffins is described over several pages, there are no stage directions telling us whether or not they were drinking tea along with the muffins. The matter is cleared up, however, when scene (and the act) ends with these lines:

Jack: Algernon! I have already told you to go. I don't want you here. Why don't you go!

Algernon: I haven't quite finished my tea yet! And there is still one muffin left. [Jack groans, and sinks into a chair. Algernon still continues eating.] (Wilde 144)

We must then assume that they have been drinking tea the entire scene although it is not apparent in the text; stage directions telling the actors to drink tea in this scene would have seemed superfluous.

From the window of the morning-room in the Manor, Gwendolen and Cecily are looking at Algernon and Jack in the garden. They observe the spectacle about the muffins and come to this strange conclusion: "Cecily: They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance." (Wilde 147). All through the play food is being eaten, talked about, refused, fought over and used to inflict insult, whereas tea is just *there*, because of course it is. It is only evident that it is interacted with by small hints such as a cup being handed to Lady Bracknell, tea things brought out by Merriman or the fact that Algernon "haven't quite finished [his] tea yet!". They are not speaking of tea in the same way as they do the food, which appear to have a much stronger and distinct symbolism in the play. The characters are all connected to specific foods:

Gwendolen loves bread and butter, and Lady Bracknell requires cucumber sandwiches. Algernon and Jack scuffle over and are associated with muffins and tea cakes, respectively. Even Lane has a distinct affinity for champagne. The only exception to this identification with specific foods and with eating is, possibly, Cecily; but, as we have seen, she certainly knows how to humiliate a rival with strategically mistaken foodstuffs. (Morrison 112)

The lack of attention that tea gets in the play underlines the naturalness of its presence and that carries a symbolism in itself; tea was part of the structure of everyday life, it did not need to be attached to a specific person or for someone to proclaim that they liked or disliked it; because everyone drinks tea.

The play takes place in the upper parts of the social hierarchy and it shows through the furniture, servants, and the food; having a cake made that nobody seems to like

should indicate that the household is not in a situation where money is sparse. It is also a culture of young, single people, and they do not seem to have much to do during their days than taking turns being the guest at each other's houses – they certainly do not need to work and this is reflected on their tea tables. Youth, friendship and honesty are the main themes of this play, that, despite its absurd and sarcastic nature does leave the audience with the message that your worth is not determined by your family tree.

### Analysis of “Tea With Our Grandmothers”

Warsan Shire is a young contemporary poet, born in 1988. “Born in Kenya to parents from Somalia, Shire grew up in London, where she always felt like an outsider[...].” (Okeowo). Shire brings no less than three cultural backgrounds together in her writing, where she makes poetry out of her own, her family's and her friends' experiences, memories and thoughts relating to the question of finding oneself in this hybridity of belonging to vastly different cultures while also feeling as if not truly belonging anywhere. She “embodies the kind of shape-shifting, culture-juggling spirit lurking in most people who can't trace their ancestors to their country's founding fathers, or whose ancestors look nothing like those fathers.” (Okeowo). Describing her background and the nature of her repertoire can initially sound both incredibly narrow and extensive at the same time and one could easily wonder who and how many would find that her poems resonate with them. However, this extraordinary combination seems to be just the thing that appeals to readers. As of June 2020, she has 80,5 thousand followers on Twitter and 48,2 thousand followers on Instagram. “The simultaneous specificity and breadth of her appeal, across gender, race, and nationality based on her self-professed fans, is remarkable[...].” (Okeowo). It should not be underestimated how many people are living away from their original culture in our times, and the size of Shire's number of readers reminds us of this – relocating is easier today than ever before. For this paper I

have chosen a poem from her first collection, published in 2011, called “Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth”. This strange title is a translation of a Somali proverb (Reid). The poem is called “Tea With Our Grandmothers”.

The poem is built up of four stanzas each with seven lines. Each stanza revolves around a specific grandmother with the first two stanzas being about the speaker’s grandmothers, and the second two are about the addressee’s grandmothers. Each stanza features clues about the cultural background of the grandmother and the struggles she has faced – or still faces; in stanza number three, the maternal grandmother of the addressee is described in present tense, indicating that she is not yet lost to her grandchild. The poem has a first-person speaker, an I, who starts to think about their grandmothers upon learning of the death of the paternal grandmother of the addressee, the “you”. We are not given any clues regarding the relationship between the speaker and the You, making all guesses valid – to me, this kind of intimate knowledge about someone else’s grandparents and the compassion of the words indicate a romantic relationship or otherwise very close friendship. Despite the much different backgrounds of these four women, they have something in common: tea. They are all connected with either an ingredient used in tea or a way of making tea. The ingredients are cardamom seeds and cinnamon bark, both very exotic in nature. These ingredients are evidence of the global context of tea consumption; they certainly are not native to anywhere within the United Kingdom. One lady dreams of having clotted cream in her tea although being diabetic and the last one, the one who just recently passed away, would cool the tea of her grandchild – the addressee – by pouring it back and forth between a cup and a bowl.

The first stanza features the speaker’s Ayeeyo, her father’s mother. Ayeeyo is the Somali word for grandmother, leading us to conclude that the I must be Shire herself, with her Somali parentage. This lady “died grinding cardamom”, leaving us to wonder whether she was grinding cardamom because she wanted to have this ingredient ready for her

own tea, or because she had to; the ominous absence of her sons does not suggest a safe and happy environment and it is not unthinkable that this old lady was kept working for someone else despite her age.

The second stanza is about the speaker's maternal grandmother. We are starting to think of the speaker as the voice of Shire herself, and the ethnicity of this second grandmother strengthens this suspicion. The geographical clues we get about her is the fact that she speaks "broken Swahili and stubborn Italian". Swahili is the official language in Kenya, where Shire was born, and Somalia was an Italian colony up until 1941. Being stubborn about speaking Italian and not fully mastering Swahili suggest that she was a Somali immigrant in Kenya, learning Swahili as her second language. She "broke cinnamon bark between/ her palms[...]" while taking care of the ailing family members, insinuating that both acts carried a significant weight of responsibility. Both Kenya and Somalia have been part of the British Empire, and given Shire's age, her grandmothers would have lived before either declared independence.

The third stanza is about Doris, the Welsh mother of the addressee's mother, who "dreams of clotted cream in her tea", despite being diabetic. She is presumably alive at the time of writing, and she is the only one of the women who is not preparing tea for others to drink. She is "from the land/ of Cymry" (the Welsh word for the Welsh people) and it is therefore fairly safe to assume that this lady is from a white family, and raised in a culture of white privilege, which could explain why she dreams of this luxurious way of having her tea, not having to make it or prepare the ingredients herself. She would have had access to ready-to-steep tealeaves in a store.

Lastly, in the fourth stanza we are told of the addressee's paternal grandmother, whose death prompted the poem. She is called Habooba, the Sudanese word for grandmother.

She is described as having “three lines on/ each cheek, a tally of surviving”. These lines would be tribal marks cut into her cheeks when she was a child. The fact that she has these marks places her in time because these marks are no longer the norm. She used to cool the addressee’s tea by “pouring it like the weight of deeds/ between bowl and cup”, another instance of the making and/or preparing of tea being assigned a sense of work; it seems to be either a job or a chore that needs doing, but is done willingly in order for the grandchild to enjoy their without the worry of the work behind it – or the chance of being burnt by too-hot tea. This woman would have been alive before Sudan was declared an independent republic in 1956, completing the circle of four grandmothers coming from different places and cultures while still all living within the British Empire. The addressee would also have to be multi-ethnic by having a Welsh and a Sudanese grandmother, something they would have in common with Shire.

Throughout reading this poem it feels as if covered by a nostalgic blanket; we get a strong feeling of flashbacks to the days of when the British Empire was so large and spanned so many countries, that the sun would always be up somewhere; “the sun never sets on the British Empire” was a phrase used to emphasize just how much land was under British rule. It does not, however, feel celebratory in its nostalgia but rather leaves the reader feeling melancholic about the past and hopeful for the future, where nations and people are now free to govern themselves independently. Reading through the experiences of these four women we get a sense of how they lived and worked and served their family. Shire is recognising the value of their work and their dedication: “It’s a first-generation woman always looking backward and forward at the same time, acknowledging that to move through life without being haunted by the past lives of your forebears is impossible.” (Okeowo). It also shows us that despite how immensely large the empire was, some things would be part of the lives of all the inhabitants, and tea was one of these things that was shared between all the colonies.

Shire and her addressee both have roots in different areas of the empire, but they share the experiences and memories of having their grandmothers make tea, or of drinking it with them. The relationship between Shire and the addressee is, as stated, unknown, but as a reader it is beyond evident that it is a close, emotional relationship, even before reading Shire say that “I either know, or I am every person I have written about, for or as.” (Shire qtd. in Okeowo). The intimacy is palpable and the condolences for loss of the recently passed grandmother is present even through the parts about the other three.

The central theme of tea in the poem is significant because representation of small, everyday occurrences like preparing tea may be easily overlooked, but over time they carry an immense amount of meaning and symbolism, not only for the individual but for the culture: “Culturally, there are things we don’t feel the need to mention because they’re normal. But they’re also not.” (Shire, qtd. in Reid). Shire expresses the need to mention these small everyday things, giving them the attention, they deserve. Tea being such an integrated part of the life of so many people, in so many different places all at once is something extraordinary, it creates a shared experience that connects otherwise very different people.

## Analysis of cartoons from Scandinavia and the World

In the series of cartoons called Scandinavia and the World, the artist known as Humon depicts the countries of the world in anthropomorphised form. Information about her is very sparse. From the website (which links to her Twitter account) and through the small accompanying descriptions of the cartoons we can figure out that she is Danish but has lived in England for some time. The cartoons are being published continually, with the oldest being from June 2009 (<https://satwcomic.com/sweden-denmark-and-norway>) and the newest being from June 2020 (<https://satwcomic.com/may-i-offer-you-some-jesus>). They are published to

the official website as well as the various social media accounts and are thereby entirely web-based and extremely accessible. Often a cartoon will come out with the subject being a recent political issue or international affair. However, while they can sometimes be very political in nature, they are also often light-hearted and funny, exploring stereotypes, historical events and international relationships.

The countries wear their flag as their shirt and the ones who are used most frequently have something that sets them apart and symbolises their country – these are quite stereotypical items. Norway is often portrayed with a fish on his head (they are male by default but they all have a sister, when the situation calls for a female), Denmark has a beer in his hand, Iceland is sparkly, America is larger than the others and often has a little eagle on his shoulder, and England has a cup of tea in his hand and a monocle. These cartoons are used to show the relationship and quirks between the countries both in general terms and in very specific situations, like the Eurovision Song Contest or Brexit.

For my analysis I have chosen three cartoons: “Parenting”, “Love Snake” and “Cuppa”. They are all featuring England and his teacup (not pictured with teacup in “Love Snake”), one of them includes England and India and one has England and Ireland. The last one features the relationship between England and America, and it is shown as that of father and son. In this universe, England has many children:

He is the father of the Australias, the Americas and Sealand with New Zealand being the family pet. He is also the adoptive father of Canada, France’s son. Despite being a father of strict discipline, he is a kind man to children of other nations.  
(<https://satwcomic.com/wiki/england>)

In “Parenting” we see America depicted as a little boy, who wants to show his father, England, what he made in the garden. He is rejected with the words “Not now, America. I’m reading”. America tries again for his father’s attention, asking him for a bedtime story. England tells him to “Go ask Ireland”. In a last attempt, America seeks comfort after hurting

his hand, but England is watching birds. America being of a rebellious nature, proceeds to throw all of England's tea into the harbour (that they are now standing on) and England is now yelling "NOOOOO!!! NOT THE TEA!!!", finally giving America the attention that he wanted. The text underneath the cartoon reads: "Bad parents get bad children, England. >:C. Every time USA acts up, it's just because he wants his father's attention."

(<https://satwcomic.com/parenting>). This comic is clearly referencing the Boston Tea Party of 1773, with America resolving to use the tea as means to show England that he is now very upset; tea is being weaponised in a conflict because America knows that this is the item that will inflict the most pain on England/his father. Even though America ends up having the upper hand in this particular dispute, it is established that England is the authority, the father, the elder, the caregiver. This is a reflection of the relationship of the nations in the colonial period, before America became independent. Somewhat simplified, this comic summarises the break between America and England as America not having his voice heard by the authority and, like an angry child, breaking the most valuable thing in the house he can find, and slamming the door as he runs away. While this is an amusing, light-hearted take on a historic event, it also contains grains of truth and it embraces and recognises the fact that tea played an essential role in this period of time.

In the comic titled "Love Snake" the plot is derived from an incident in India while they were under British rule. Humon tells us that an attempt was made to control the number of snakes in India, and a reward was promised for handing in a dead snake to the authorities (i.e. the British). The local population saw a lucrative opportunity and began breeding snakes. Realising that the idea was not well thought out, the British retracted the offer of a bounty, leaving the people with worthless snakes that they simply set free instead of killing them; thus significantly increasing the number of snakes. The cartoon does not include tea in any way, but it does have an interesting line about the relationship between England/the British

Empire and India at the time where the tea plantations were branded as a way of making British tea. It occurs in the very first frame, where the conversation goes as follows:

England: Now that India is my country-

India: Is it really though?

England: - I want all these snakes gone.

India: I don't mind them.

(<https://satwcomic.com/love-snake>)

This conversation very much exemplifies the sentiment that colonising a country made it “yours” and it is interesting that Humon chooses imperialism and entitlement as defining personality traits for a character meant to be stereotypical. The British making this kind of decision shows that they were acting on an impulse that came from their own culture and experience – but snakes were not perceived as a problem for the Indian population because snakes were part of their natural reality. This behaviour is classic for the Europeans, as argued by Said: “European culture often, if not always, characterized itself in such a way as simultaneously to validate its own preferences while also advocating those preferences in conjunction with distant imperial rule.” (Said, 81). The conquering and colonising British relished their own culture, values and traditions and they brought them with them and sought to keep living this way – only not at home in England, but in all the world. The failure to realise that India is not like England and snakes naturally belong there resulted in a badly executed plan to control the amount of snakes, thus giving the Indian people an opportunity to show their new authorities that they were a force to be reckoned with.

In the last comic chosen, we get to meet redhaired Ireland. It is called “Cuppa” and it shows England offering Ireland a cup of tea. He accepts and the next frame is a very surprised-looking England, followed by a frame showing Ireland standing with a comically large cup in his hands. England holds out the teapot and Ireland holds out his cup, expecting

England to pour tea into it. However, the flabbergasted England instead places the entire teapot into the giant cup. Ireland then proceeds to drain the cup at once and immediately asks for more. The accompanying text says: “England may be famous for their tea drinking, but Ireland drinks more tea than all of Britain combined.” (<https://satwcomic.com/cuppa>). The plot of this cartoon is very different from the other two by being non-political and non-historical. It is simply a creatively drawn representation of a statistic fact that Humon found and wanted to share with her readers. When first reading this it may not seem neither significant nor interesting, but looking closer it shows that in 2015 it was considered a “fun fact” that England actually was *not* the biggest consumer of tea despite “being famous for their tea drinking”.

The representation of England in these cartoons is, as said above, quite stereotypical and it is interesting that one of the items he is most often depicted with is a teacup. He will also often be drawn as drinking tea with the other countries. A contrapuntal reading of his character is almost not necessary because England’s imperialistic tendencies are not attempted to be hidden. They are plain to see by his fatherly role towards countries that were once colonies and in his relationship with India. Having England be defined by either tea or imperialism is very telling about what is perceived as being British symbols. The contemporary nature of these comics lend credibility to the claim that tea is indeed a symbol of Britishness, something we can laugh at when reading through the comics and think that yes, England really would carry around a teacup and drink tea with Japan if he was a person.

### Summary of the analysis of the Mad Tea party by Julie E. Fromer

Alice felt dreadfully puzzled. The Hatter’s remark seemed to have no meaning in it, and yet it was certainly English. ‘I don’t quite understand,’ she said, as politely as she could. (Carroll 72).

Trying to understand, while also trying to be polite about it, quite accurately sums up how Alice feels when she finds herself at this very strange tea party in Wonderland. *Trying to be polite* may be her intent, but she is not altogether successful; she does manage to join a party where she is told there is no room for her, interrupts the Dormouse constantly when he is telling the story about the sisters living in a well, and although not intentionally, she insults the Hatter and the March Hare numerous times when she challenges their reality, for example when she is puzzled by the Hatter's watch that tells the date and not the o'clock. In *A Necessary Luxury*, Julie Fromer analyses this chapter of Alice in Wonderland with focus on "class, connection and communitas". In the situation of a tea party at the time this novel was written – in 1865 – there would be a number of social rules (and these rules would be varying between classes) to govern the proceedings, allowing the attendees to be aware of what to expect and how to behave. "Carroll thus plays on the idea of expectations; he assumes that we as readers, like Alice, have certain expectations of what a tea party offers, and he continually frustrates those expectations through his depiction of "A Mad Tea-Party." (Fromer, "A Necessary Luxury" 169). However, neither the reader nor Alice can feel at home or at ease at this particular tea table and Alice, who is already starting to be fed up with the journey through Wonderland, keeps feeling lost and confused, before eventually growing angry. When she sees the tea table on her way through Wonderland, she is at first immensely relieved and hurries to join the March Hare, the Dormouse and the Hatter. She is, however, disappointed. They protest her sitting down on the grounds of there being no room – but Alice points out that they are currently sitting cramped together at one end of a very large table laid out for "a great many more than three" (Carroll 79) and sits down anyway. She is offered wine, notes that no wine is present on the table and tells the March Hare off for being uncivil by offering something that he cannot give her – he replies that it was uncivil of her to sit down uninvited. This dispute is quickly forgotten though, and they move on to the famous

riddle comparing a raven and a writing desk, which cheers Alice up. She does, however, get annoyed again, when it seems that nobody knows the answer, and calls it a waste of time.

Alice is a child in her family and a stranger in Wonderland, which are both positions that make her dependent on the helpfulness of the adults and hosts. She does not receive much guidance or goodwill from the inhabitants of Wonderland, and she is left to fend for herself:

When her position as child/guest is ignored by the Hare and the Hatter, however, Alice reverses her position. She forces herself past the boundaries of intimacy and family by inviting herself to the table, and she attempts to wrest power away from the hosts by establishing herself as a parental figure of authority and discipline. (Fromer, "A Necessary Luxury" 172)

Being faced with this total abandonment of the rules that have been ingrained in her she seems to make the conscious decision to try and make these illogical and strange beings comply with her idea of a real tea party; but joining a tea party uninvited and then proceeding to offend and correct the hosts make Alice as rude as the people she is trying to discipline. Fromer goes on to another of the major factors that makes this tea party "mad", which is the fact that time is standing still. The Queen has offended Time on behalf of the Hatter, resulting in this peculiar situation where it is always teatime, discarding the whole concept of having a specific time of day dedicated to having tea:

In this situation, teatime cannot function as a crucial moment within an interval, because time does not advance. There is nothing different before or after, so there is nothing to transition into or out of. And interminable teatime mocks the very phrase "tea-time," highlighting the traditional use of the meal as a way to mark time with a cup of tea. (Fromer, "A Necessary Luxury" 173)

The fact that the big table is full of used tea things suddenly makes sense to Alice because she realises that they never have time to clean up – it is just always time to drink tea, and they simply move around the table. It also clears up why the Hatter's watch does not tell the time – because why should it? It does not change from being six o'clock. In this whole chapter

nothing works the way it should be, according to the logic of the real world which up until she leaves the tea party has been Alice's frame of reference. It matters little how she expects a tea party to go, just that it is certainly not what she finds in Wonderland.

Tea is supposed to be a healing, calming and restorative substance, but it does not help fix the watch which the March Hare dips into his cup because putting butter on it did not work either. Why it *would* have fixed the watch is illogical, but this is the premise of Wonderland. Alice never gets to enjoy her tea either, because just as she has finally gotten her cup filled and bread and butter on her plate, the whole party moves down the table:

“Alice does not gain physical sustenance from the presumably wondrous powers of restoration offered by tea and bread and butter. [...] Thus, Alice's hopes for both spiritual comfort and physical nourishment are frustrated by this mad tea party.” (Fromer, “A Necessary Luxury” 174).

As a final remark, Fromer points out that the Mad Tea Party is not the only reference to tea in the novel; when Alice wakes up from her dream about Wonderland, she tells her sister all about it, whom then tells her: “It was a curious dream, dear, certainly; but now run in to your tea: it's getting late.” (Carroll 121). So, upon waking up from her strange dream where nothing made sense, she is now back in a world where time progresses in a normal fashion and she happens to wake up just in time for tea. “Tea restores Alice to the real world and brings her fully out of Wonderland. Tea represents progress, moving forward to the next part of the day.” (Fromer, “A Necessary Luxury” 176). From her analysis I note her emphasis on Alice's unfulfilled expectations and her failed attempts at getting the other characters to comply with her vision of manners and civility. Fromer furthermore highlights the themes of helplessness and madness as well as overcoming obstacles and finding your way.

## Discussion

For the discussion I have picked out six subjects that arose throughout the five individual analyses. These are points I wish to highlight further by discussing them in relation to each of the works. For each theme there will be a comparative discussion about how the subject is represented in each of the works and how it matters in relation to tea in the text – if it does at all. In some cases, the subject will not apply to a text, and then it may prove interesting to explore the reasons for its absence.

The subjects for discussion will be casual references, social rules, gender, time of writing, target reader, and empire and orientalism. All of these have been slightly touched upon in the analyses where they were most important, but they are all interesting points that can be found in all – or almost all – of the texts. By the end of the six sub-discussion the subjects will be put together to create the base for a discussion about whether British national identity can be defined by how these topics and tea work together in the literature presented in this thesis.

### Casual references

While the five texts all refer to tea in obvious, distinctive, and metaphorically loud ways, there are also instances where the mentions are quite subtle, casual, and on the verge of not being there at all. Paradoxically, these are the times where the popularity and naturality of drinking tea are most obvious because they show how the authors were products of their time; in some situations they simply do not seem to feel the need to add the tea explicitly, because they take its presence for granted. When Jane Austen tells us that Jane and Elizabeth were going to the drawing room and what conversations were had in the drawing room, she then starts the next sections with “When tea was over[...]

(Austen, “PaP” 58). It is an exceptionally subtle of telling us that they also had tea in the drawing room. A reader at the time of publication would not need to be told this, but the modern-day reader may only

realise that tea was happening during this time when reading these four words on the next line. Another example from *Pride Prejudice* is in chapter 48, where this is said of Mr. Bennet: “I was not till the afternoon, when he joined them at tea, that Elizabeth ventured to introduce the subject[...].” (Austen, “PaP” 270). This sentence portrays the recurring act of having tea every afternoon in a very matter-of-factly tone. It adds to the feeling of the days being very structured and predictable; of course her father would join them at tea! A small detail is also that it is written as “at tea”, not “for tea”; “at tea” implies the event of teatime, including the social interactions and the accompanying food, whereas “for tea” would have implied only drinking tea. Because both *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) were also written during the time of a large and powerful British Empire they share the same matter-of-fact attitude towards the daily, recurring event of teatime, as when Wilde has Algernon say, in the last line of Act two, “I haven’t quite finished my tea yet! [...]” (Wilde, 144) when there has been no mention of either of the men having poured a cup of tea – they have just been fighting over the muffins. The two teatimes that act as the setting in Act one and two of the play are treated as perfectly usual occurrences (besides the unusual extravagance of the cucumber sandwiches for Lady Bracknell), and while the tea party that Alice sits down to is in many ways an extremely strange affair, the usual components are all present and Alice is at first quite relieved to find a situation that she recognises from her own world and that she knows how to navigate.

The two modern-day pieces are very different to each other in this aspect, because in “Tea With Our Grandmothers” nothing is casual. Every line is saturated with meaning and tea, alongside the grandmother in question, is the centre of every one of the four stanzas. It is not surprising to find nothing casual in a poem, however. Had there been subtle hints, they would have been deliberately planted and made to be subtle for effect, as opposed to the casual references in the three nineteenth century texts, where the casualness around tea

could simply be the authors taking for granted that their readers would know that, for example, going to the drawing room would also mean having tea. Their subtle hints were possibly accidental.

In the comics, looking for casual remarks about tea is very interesting, because they vary between the individual cartoons. For a start, the general depiction of England with his monocle and teacup is casually stereotypical, in a way that makes the reader think “Yes, this is England” – confirming that these stereotypes have some foundation in truth (or historical truths, when it comes to monocle-wearing). In the strip called “Cuppa”, England is intimidated by the size of Ireland’s cup, and as readers we are meant to be surprised that England is in fact not the biggest consumer of tea in the world. While tea and the drinking of it is the only plot point in this cartoon, it remains very casual in tone; we get no other action than England resigning to putting the entire tea pot into Ireland’s cup and then not having any left for himself. In the strip “Parenting”, where America unsuccessfully tries to have his father’s attention and resolves to throw tea in the water, is on the opposite end of the scale of casualness with the very clear reference to the political and historical event of The Boston Tea Party. “Love Snake” does not mention tea.

The casual references that Austen uses in *Pride and Prejudice* reveal a lot about the place of tea in her time, and in the social class that she writes about: it was as essential a meal as any other, and a steady chance of social interaction that was depended upon by everyone for reasons such as getting your daughters engaged. That Carroll does not in the same degree use this tool in his writing does not necessarily mean that tea was in some way perceived differently or that the society had changed its opinion about it since the time of Austen’s works, but rather the explanation can be found in the text itself; at the Mad Tea-Party, tea has a much more central and important role than in the scenes taken from Austen and Wilde, in which the setting of the drawing room and the garden at teatime were used in

order to bring certain characters together to move the plot along. The fact that they are drinking tea at the same time as having these important conversations is essentially a small detail. In neither “Cuppa” nor “Parenting” is tea a small detail, but the tone is more casual in one than the other – not because of the importance of tea in the specific comic but in the sense of action and urgency. Tea’s role in “Cuppa” can be compared to the use of tea in the Mad Tea Party, where its presence is crucial but in and of itself it is not incorporated into the plot, it just needs to be there for the setting to work. This is not exactly casual, but it far from carries the same meaning as the tea does in “Tea With Our Grandmothers”. The use of tea in the poem cannot be compared to any of the other works, it is simply too essential and significant how tea has a symbolic relationship to every of the four grandmothers.

### Social rules

Through the analyses of the five works it becomes apparent that often we will have to deduct what was considered good and proper behaviour at the tea table by recognising the times a character was doing the opposite. We do, however, get good examples of accepted behaviour from Jane Austen where we see Elizabeth and her friends and family all acting – or worrying about acting – as proper as possible. The exception may be this situation, where Mr. Collins is reading aloud after tea was over: “he chose Fordyce’s Sermons. Lydia gaped as he opened the volume, and before he had, with very monotonous solemnity, read three pages, she interrupted him with, ‘Do you know, mama, that[...].’” (Austen, “PaP” 72). As readers we are already aware that Lydia is prone to rebellious and cheeky behaviour, and in this scene, we are in doubt that she is extremely rude to Mr. Collins. Through the depiction of teatimes and social situations in general in *Pride and Prejudice*, we can assume that while having a conversation with the opposite sex was fine at these moments, it was most appropriate to be in the presence of others and for the man to initiate the exchange of words. We see the women entering the drawing room together first, and the men arriving together later (Austen,

“PaP” 58), and we see Elizabeth hoping that Darcy will come to her at tea, but she does not entertain the idea of approaching him herself (although perhaps this is because she was in charge of pouring the coffee in this scene) (Austen, “PaP” 306). In her eagerness to see her daughter engaged, Mrs. Bennet tries to get Jane and Mr. Bingley to be alone in the drawing room, with the biggest obstacle being the fact that Jane resists: “But when her mother was gone, Jane would not be prevailed on to go down without one of her sisters” (Austen, “PaP” 309). They do, however, get to be alone and during this time they become engaged – suggesting what was presumed to be happening when young men and women would be left unsupervised. If the examples set forth by Austen are clues suggesting what is considered good and appropriate behaviour at teatime, we are seeing the opposite in both *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Although these two share the fact that many – if not all – social rules for good conduct are being broken, they differ immensely in their intentions and motivation for the rule-breaking, with the pivotal point being intention. In the play, the rules are broken intentionally and strategically, when it is beneficial to the character’s own agenda. The play is meant to be absurd and comical, so when Algernon eats the cucumber sandwiches and proceeds to scold Jack for wanting one as well, the argument that Algernon is allowed to eat them because they are for his own aunt, is one of these instances of absurdity. However, it is also very rude and bad hosting to eat all of the food before the guest arrives. Untroubled by his deed, he lets his servant, Lane, come up with an excuse when put on the spot, and Lady Bracknell is none the wiser about the true fate of her sandwiches. Looking further into the play, to the scene in which Gwendolen and Cecily realise that they are both engaged to “Ernest Worthing”, they are both manoeuvring around the fact that they are very angry with each other, but not alone and therefore openly fighting would not do:

Strong underlying codes of behavior apply here, and – with servants setting the table for afternoon tea – manners dictate that neither woman should openly insult the other. Instead, they first engage in mutual under-cuttings taking the form of malicious pleasantries. Gwendolyn condescends to Cecily's countryside upbringing and Cecily deflects the attack to insult Gwendolyn's London background. (Morrison 109)

Up until this point one is as bad as the other and the situation is only kept in check by the presence of the servants. Still, Cecily goes above and beyond in order to irritate Gwendolen, and she is now demonstrating a complete disregard for niceties and abandoning the role of gracious hostess. What follows is the scene where Cecily ignores what Gwendolen requests for her tea (no sugar, and bread with butter instead of cake). The fact that it is a deliberate act on Cecily's part makes the difference; her intent is to annoy and provoke Gwendolen and she breaks the social rules to do so. We know that she is capable of adhering to them in other situations and we see that she is quick to calm down when the gentlemen have cleared up the misunderstanding of their names. The fact that Gwendolen is so insulted by Cecily's provocations – Morrison even suggests that their dispute could have ended in physical violence (110) – is certainly exaggerated for comedic purposes, but it nevertheless shows that a certain type of behaviour was expected and deviating from the social code of conduct would not be well received.

While it is intentional and calculated when the rules for a tea party is broken in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the opposite is the case at the Mad Tea Party in Wonderland. In this novel, the premise of the story is that in Wonderland, neither Alice nor the reader can possibly guess what will happen next. Nothing works as in the real world and the inhabitants are all either clueless, confused, or unhelpful. When Alice sees the tea table, she is relieved:

Alice assumes that at least here, in this most sacrosanct of domestic activities, she will be able to follow her instincts and relax[...]she assumes that a tea party will provide her with everything that she has lost since her descent into Wonderland – a place that feels like home, with all of its connotations of moral,

spiritual, and physical comfort and solace. (Fromer, “A Necessary Luxury” 171)

Alice does not yet know that her hopes will be in vain and she immediately sits down despite being told that there is no room for her (Carroll 70), thus being the first one in this chapter to break with the etiquette. She soon realises that she is not going to fare any better here than anywhere else in Wonderland and in the end of the chapter she angrily leaves the party; this experience has turned her confusion into anger. Throughout the chapter all of her experience and knowledge of manners and protocol from her world and reality are rejected by the rest of the party. The Mad Hatter, the March Hare and the Dormouse each represent different forms of rudeness and together they squash Alice’s attempts of correcting their behaviour. The Dormouse is asleep for most of the affair and he starts a story but does not finish it before falling asleep again. The Hatter makes rude and personal remarks such as “Your hair wants cutting” (Carroll 71), and ‘You can draw water out of a water-well,’ said the Hatter; ‘so I should think you could draw treacle out of a treacle-well – eh, stupid?’ (Carroll 77). He often assumes a demeaning and patronizing attitude:

‘If you knew Time as well as I do,’ said the Hatter, ‘you wouldn’t talk about wasting it. It’s *him*.’ ‘I don’t know what you mean,’ said Alice. ‘Of course you don’t!’ the Hatter said, tossing his head contemptuously. ‘I dare say you never even spoke to Time!’ (Carroll 73)

The Hatter is also the source of the riddle with no answer and Alice does not take kindly to his rudeness. She often unintentionally insults him right back with her curiosity of their world and her attempts at civility. The March Hare does not have the same aggressive attitude as the Mad Hatter but he offers non-existent wine and engages in discussions of grammar and semantics: ‘You might just as well say,’ added the March Hare, ‘that “I like what I get” is the same thing as “I get what I like”!’ (Carroll 71). The tea party is described by Julie Fromer as seemingly “devoid of human sympathies” (Fromer, “A Necessary Luxury” 169) but very little of the chaos is intentionally meant to cause harm to Alice or the others. Aside from the

hostile bickering between The Mad Hatter and Alice, every instance of rule breaking is a consequence of the illogical laws of Wonderland; the fact that Time is a person who has punished them with it being forever teatime is one of the main factors of the madness. This detail lets us know that teatime in the world of Wonderland is 6 o'clock, which also fits into the timeline of how teatime was in the progress of happening earlier and earlier in the day throughout the nineteenth century. The constant teatime is the root of many of the problems that the characters face in this chapter, including the need for a large table decked for more than three people – because they have to go around the table and have no time to clean up. It also explains the Hatter's frustration and how sleepy the Dormouse is – this reality keeps them from exercising free will and never lets them go to bed properly, making their moods somewhat understandable. Alice, however, is a child and does not possess the skill of analysing the situation logically. She suffers in the absence of the adult leadership that she is accustomed to, and subsequently tries to fill this position herself:

Because the participants of the tea party clearly do not understand how to behave at such an important domestic event, Alice attempts to take on the role of authority, teaching the uncivil, rude, nonsensical creatures of the tea party how to act." (Fromer, "A Necessary Luxury" 171).

Trying to assume this position as the adult in the party makes Alice seem rude to the others and thus it does not help her at all. Clearly, there is rudeness and rule breaking on both sides of the table in this situation and it comes to a climax when the Hatter interrupts her with "Then you shouldn't talk" when she says "I don't think" upon being asked by the Dormouse if she ever saw "a drawing of a muchness" (Carroll 77) and she gets up and leaves, having had nothing to eat or drink at all.

When comparing the way that the social rules are broken in these two texts it is a crucial point to keep in mind that despite the similarities on the surface – people being rude, too much or too little food being eaten, fighting and bickering – the premises of the texts are

fundamentally different. However, they both teach the reader what was considered good behaviour at the tea table by way of doing the opposite. In “Parenting” and “Tea With Our Grandmothers”, Humon and, to some degree, Shire may engage in another type of rule breaking: breaking ethical and/or political rules. In the comic strip “Parenting”, America is depicted as a little boy, wanting his fathers – England’s – attention. When his third attempt fails, he becomes angry and throws England’s tea in the water. The strip is meant to be a funny simplification of the Boston Tea Party, an event that is widely known in the target audience. There are several political layers to this cartoon, but the question is, if it is appropriate to, in this way, simplify and make a joke of such a pivotal and significant an event. Of course, the artist enjoys freedom of speech, no actual laws are broken, but one could say the same of Wilde’s play and Carroll’s novel. This type of historic event, where an occupied area rebels against their oppressor are very sensitive matters and every artist that uses them must tread carefully so as not to offend any of the parts. In this case, Humon keeps it on the neutral and acceptable side, by not letting either of the characters utter a political statement or any type of praise for their own country. It is a sober and funny reframing of the events, using her own characterisations of the countries and placing them in a modern-day timeframe. On the far end of the scale, catching any sort of rules being broken in the poem by Shire has proven difficult, although it does raise some ethical questions about the fact that some of the grandmothers seems to have been kept working right up to their death, especially in the first stanza, where the speaker’s paternal grandmother literally “dies grinding cardamom” (Shire). Reading through the poem and noticing the geographical clues, there seems to be only one white grandmother, whom we are told is Welsh. She is incidentally also the only one of them whose story does not involve working with ingredients, brewing, or pouring tea, but rather, her dream is of having her tea with clotted cream. The fact that the white woman is the only one not described as working is hinting at the enormous span of

cultural differences that were present in the empire. This will be further discussed below, under the subject of Empire and National Identity.

## Gender

In the five works there are three female artists (an author, a poet and a cartoonist) and two male authors represented. Likewise, the protagonists are also varied with *Pride and Prejudice*, “Tea With Our Grandmothers” and *Alice in Wonderland* being female driven and *The Importance of Being Earnest* and the characters from Scandinavia and the World mostly having males as the protagonists. Only in the cases of Scandinavia and the World and *Alice in Wonderland* do the genders not match between artist and protagonist(s). Through all the texts, we do not see a single male character make tea and they rarely even pour it themselves – the exception being when Algernon pours tea for Lady Bracknell (Wilde 27), but that would be the respectful thing to do, as she is both his guest and his elder. As pointed out in *Empire of Tea* (142), it was not frowned upon for high class men to prepare (the last stages) their own tea, but it was nevertheless still mostly a task that women undertook. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the scene previously described where Elizabeth cannot go to Darcy because she is stationed at the tea table where she is assigned to pouring the coffee, shows us a setting where it seems that tasks were regularly given out to the women of the household that hosted teatime. The situation is different when they attend tea at Rosings, where we are not told who has been making the tea, and we must assume that it was the many servants. Servants do seem to take on the task of preparing the tea in most of these works; Lane is certainly laying the table for tea in the first act in the play, and Merriman is doing the same in the garden of Jack’s estate in act two. Lane and Merriman are both male servants and their making tea cannot be compared to the master of the house making it – in this case, social class matters more than gender. At the Mad Tea Party, the tea is already in the teapot when Alice arrives. Nothing indicates who made it, but it is unlikely to have been servants. They would

presumably have to brew some more tea regularly – but it does not matter to the plot whom this task is given to. The Hatter, the March Hare and the Dormouse all being male does little for the plot except making Alice seem all the more out of place – and perhaps it makes their uncivil behaviour more noticeable, if Alice in her head is comparing them to the gentlemen she knows from the real world.

In the comics from Scandinavia and the World, the countries are usually male. They do all have a sister who will make an appearance if the subject calls for it or if they are depicted in large groups, but in most of the comics the characters are all male. Having searched them all for England and tea it is apparent that the closest we get to see him making tea is in the comic “Cuppa” where he is offering tea to Ireland – he only pours it from the pot (before handing over the entire pot). Comic strips are a media that have no room for unnecessary details and using space to show us who made the tea is not pertinent to the plot. Therefore, the absence of these details is not surprising. The same is true for poems; nothing is irrelevant or unnecessary in a poem, and through the four stanzas in “Tea With Our Grandmothers” tea and the making of it is anything but irrelevant. The poem does not make a single mention of a male – we can only speculate about the gender of the addressee. The poem is overflowing with senses of work, love, care, empathy, condolences, and dreams. These are all bound together by grandmothers making or dreaming of tea. Looking at the five works from this angle, they are remarkably similar. If not servants, it is the women who are preparing the tea.

### Time of writing

I deliberately sought to include both modern-day and older pieces of work to allow a more broad and general discussion to unfold. Two of the artists of the works are contemporary and they both make use of the Internet to share their works on social media, making their work much more easily accessible than writers of the nineteenth century could have ever imagined.

The contemporary artists also have the benefit of being able to incorporate the history and see the empire with a modern perspective and this gives them opportunities for reflection and commentary on the times in which the other three writers lived in. Of these, Wilde and Carroll are from the Victorian age (Carroll in the middle part and Wilde in the late), and Austen is from the Regency period, resulting in their works covering almost all of the nineteenth century. All of the works except the comics share the fact that they take place in the same timeframe as they were written – although in the poem, Shire is remembering events of the past and the act of remembering takes place in present, prompted by the death of the addressee’s paternal grandmother. The memories are in the past of course, and their dominating role let the reader forget that we are not actually in the past with the women.

As Austen, Wilde and Carroll all wrote contemporarily for their time it gives us, as modern readers, the opportunity to make reasonable claims about mannerisms and recurring acts and events of their time. Readings from Julia Skinner’s *Afternoon Tea* confirms that throughout the nineteenth century, tea gradually moved away from being the last meal of the day that would follow dinner. Tea would then serve as the first step of the evening activities. Through the century it started to progress into the meal between lunch and dinner, which was subsequently becoming a later affair. Reading the novels of Austen and Carroll and Wilde’s play, we notice this shift in the texts as well. In the world of *Pride and Prejudice*, tea follows dinner and is then followed by such things as music, readings, and conversation. In *Alice in Wonderland* teatime is six o’clock, earlier than in the start of the century and by the very end of the 1800’s Wilde tells us through Algernon that “it is customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o’clock.” (Wilde 5). Shire’s age taken into consideration (born in 1988), we can assume that her grandparents lived to see the last days of the empire, impacting their upbringing and lives. The memories she writes about will not necessarily have happened sometime between 1988 and 2011, they could very

well be the retelling of stories told to her about her and her addressee's grandmothers. This composition of the poem gives us a glimpse into the lives of women during the first half of the twentieth century and how racial and cultural differences affected their lives – and lets us marvel at the fact that four women (and of course, the four grandfathers) with such different backgrounds are now connected by family.

### Target reader

Looking at the target readers of the works will highlight the fact that tea and tea-related events and actions were part of life for everyone, a common denominator for a whole population. If tea was not a shared experience across all of society it could not reasonably be argued as being part of the national identity. However, target readers for the five works vary greatly. *Pride and Prejudice* was aimed at young women. Novels at the time were not considered good or accepted literature – as we see when Mr. Collins refuses to read aloud from one, and from *Northanger Abbey*, another novel by Austen, where the protagonist, a young woman, excuses herself for reading a book with the words “Oh, it is only a novel![...]while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame.” (Austen, “Northanger Abbey” 974). This condescending attitude towards novels were changing through the nineteenth century however, and novels began being aimed at children as well – which was the case in 1865, when Lewis Carroll published *Alice in Wonderland*. In this fantastical and funny novel, kids would identify with curious and confused Alice as she tried to navigate Wonderland. They would be as relieved as her to see a tea table on the horizon:

As readers, we expect to be welcomed into a scene just as we expect to be welcomed to a tea party – we look forward to being invited into an intimate space where we can hope we will be nourished, sustained, and comforted by food, drink, and polite conversation. (Fromer, “A Necessary Luxury” 169-70)

The children reading the book would feel the same as Alice; that this was a situation that they knew and assumed that it would mean a break from the madness of Wonderland. An

afternoon tea table was a reassuring and recurring place of comfort for children – and we do in fact get to see Alice run to the tea table in the end of the story, when she is awoken from her dream and tells her sister about it, who answers: ‘It *was* a curious dream, dear, certainly; but now run in to your tea: it’s getting late.’ (Carroll 121). The prospect of a completely normal and civil teatime would be reassuring to Alice.

Another, very distinctive target for the art was the people who went to the theatre in London, for whom Wilde wrote his plays. These would be the high-class Londoners and they would recognise the circumstances and settings of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and they would see themselves in the characters. They would also recognise that cucumber sandwiches probably meant that a respected guest would join the two young men and they would laugh at the exaggerated rudeness of Cecily towards Gwendolen. Perhaps they would sometimes have found themselves in similar situations, where social conventions kept them from acting in their feelings and seeing this play would then have felt like compensation.

Shire and Humon have a much broader group of readers, not necessarily because their target group is that much larger, but they reach a greater number of people because modern technology allows them to spread their material much more efficiently. It is important to separate the amount of readers and the amount of target readers here, because, as an example, Jane Austen’s target reader is still the same today as it was when she published her books – even though today she is read by a much more diverse crowd of people. Material on the Internet can get shared between an enormous amount of people. Ergo, the cartoons and poems will reach people who would not have actively sought out their art, but who might enjoy it anyway, and choose to seek out more. That does not mean that there is no narrower group of target audience in mind for the creators; Shire would surely want to catch the interest of other multi-ethnic people, who would relate to the stories her poetry tells. Humon

may appeal more to the younger generation, to the high schoolers and college students, perhaps also the historically interested.

What can be derived from the various intended readers of the novels, the play, the poem and the cartoons, is that teatime, tea tables and the social gatherings that were a result of these components were something that everyone knew, intimately, from their own lives. It underlines the fact that tea has played a part in both the history and lives of these artists, their characters, and their readers.

### Empire and orientalism

In various ways all of the texts include one or more hints to the empire – either obvious and explicit or concealed between the lines. Imperialism and orientalism in literature and art reveal the extent to which being part of the empire affected the three authors of the nineteenth century, and their way of thinking about the availability and usage of such things as servants, privilege, wealth, and luxuries like tea. “Islam excepted, the Orient for Europe was until the nineteenth century a domain with a continuous history of unchallenged Western dominance. This is patently true of the British experience in India[...].” (Said, “Orientalism” 73). This was the reality of Austen, Wilde, and Carroll: they were in privileged positions in their society because they were British, more so than any other factor.

In *Pride and Prejudice* as well as *The Importance of Being Earnest*, servants and luxury is to some extent and by some characters taken for granted. There are 31 mentions of servants throughout Austen’s novel and 13 times in the play, although the interactions between masters and servants are very different in nature. In the novel, the servants are almost invisible, and they are very rarely given names. They do much critical work that aids the plot; delivering letters, driving carts and cooking, as well as the pivotal point where the servants of Pemberley praise Mr. Darcy for being a great and kind master, and Elizabeth is inclined to believe them because she deems the praise of an “intelligent servant” (Austen,

“PaP” 227) extremely valuable. Elizabeth’s reality is that servants are a natural part of life, although the wealthy Lady Catherine has so many, that Mr. Collins feels the need to warn them before their first visit, so that they are not surprised by the number. There are no real conversations between masters and servants, every exchange consists of an order and a version of “Yes master”.

The relationships between Algernon, Jack and their servants Lane and Merriman is very different from how Austen describes them, in the play they are almost akin to friendships. They are all single males, and while Lane and Merriman could be much older than their masters, it does not matter when reading the play – the tone is comradely and quite relaxed, although still upholding the dynamic of servants and masters. Given the absurd and comical nature of the play, the servants often contribute to the laughter, as when Merriman happens to intrude on an intimate scene between Algernon and Cecily: “When he enters he coughs loudly, seeing the situation.” Then he says: “Ahem! Ahem! Lady Bracknell!” (Wilde 153). He is also faced with orders being given and cancelled on a whim and having to lay out the table for tea while the women are in the midst of a conflict on the verge of physical abuse. Cecily also gives him the plate of cake to give to Gwendolen, actively putting him in the middle of the battlefield that the tea table has become. Lane is the servant in Algernon’s house, and he has several rather long conversations with his master. In the first of these, Algernon insinuates that Lane has been drinking his champagne to which Lane very nonchalantly confesses with the excuse that wine in bachelors’ homes is of “superior quality” (Wilde 3). The fact that both Algernon and Jack are young bachelors may be the reason for this relaxed relationship to their servants, but they nevertheless rely on having them obey their orders. The fact that servants was a regular occurrence in this time can be read contrapuntally as mirroring the existence of plantations around the empire at which indigenous were living and working for their white and privileged masters. In the play there

is another small detail that hints at the empire; Cecily is told to read along in her book when Miss Prism is going to stroll with Dr. Chasuble, but she is specifically instructed to skip the part about the “Fall of the Rupee”, because it is “somewhat too sensational” (Wilde 74). The Rupee is the currency in India, which seems to have been a “sensational” topic in England, letting us know that Wilde was politically aware and affected by his time.

Wonderland is full of whimsical, supernatural, mad characters, making Alice the one to stand out during her time there. It is possible to interpret the characters present at the Mad Tea Party as symbolising the different sides of the power structure of the empire, where the European ideals, values, culture, and sense of entitlement was the privileged standpoint.

Indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. There is in addition the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness, usually overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter. (Said, “Orientalism” 7)

Alice is the stranger, the one who looks and acts different, whose ideas of civility and manners are at odds in the world she has entered, and thus she can be seen as the Other, the oriental and exotic entity. She is not being listened to and her suggestions are rejected. She is met with condescension when she refers to time as “it” and at no point do any of the three other tea-party-guests stop and think that her reality could be different from theirs and yet still valid. In the beginning of the chapter, the sleeping Dormouse is being used as an armrest for the March Hare and the Hatter. He is woken up, poked and pinched to tell stories and made to move when the Hatter wants to move – he is even subjected to having tea poured on his nose. One could interpret the Dormouse as symbolising the oppressed colonies, whom had their sovereignty and freedom taken away by the empire, who would impose the Western

rules, values and habits upon a people that they felt were “doing it wrong”. The empire itself could be embodied by the Mad Hatter. He dominates the setting and is continually aggressive and demeaning towards Alice, whose occasional rudeness often comes from ignorance of the ways of Wonderland, rather than malice towards the Hatter himself. He, however, does not see the reason for her questions and reacts as if Alice had intentionally tried to insult him. He commands the rest of the party and does not sympathise with them, exemplifying all the imperialistic traits as listed by Said:

Almost all colonial schemes begin with an assumption of native backwardness and general inadequacy to be independent, “equal,” and fit. Why that should be so, why sacred obligation on one front should not be binding on another, why rights accepted in one may be denied in another, are questions best understood in the terms of a culture well-grounded in moral, economic, and even metaphysical norms designed to approve a satisfying local, that is European, order and to permit the abrogation of the right to a similar order abroad. (Said, “Culture and Imperialism” 80-1)

Lastly, the March Hare could be interpreted as symbolising the East India Company, following the orders of the empire/the Hatter. He is more confident and outspoken than the Dormouse and he does at times contribute to the bullying of Alice, but he is not in a position of power in the same way the Hatter is. He has his own ideas – like using butter and tea to try and fix the watch – but when they do not work or when he is not forceful enough when speaking up, he gets trampled by the Hatter.

Interpreting the characters to symbolise the empire in this way is in line with the contrapuntal reading developed by Said, which enables the reader to read the text while also reading the historical (imperial) context and how the text cooperates with its time. In Shire’s poem there is Empire in every stanza. Each of the grandmothers represent a different place: Ireland, Sudan, Somalia, and Kenya, all of which would have been British colonies during some part of their lives. Reading through the poem lets the reader travel to each of the places through the double filter of Shire’s fond memories of the experiences of the women. This

filtering means that what we are told, we should be wary of accepting as the whole truth. It is very possible that the memories are clouded by time, love and nostalgia and a grandparent might not tell their grandchildren if their lives were hard and dreary. Therefore, what Shire is remembering of her own grandmothers and what she has been told of her addressee's grandmothers cannot be considered credible sources – but they still matter and they still tell us something about their lives, even if what they tell us is found by what they did not choose to share.

First, we are told of Shire's grandmothers, one referred to as "ayeeyo" who Shire tells us that she is named after. This woman "died grinding cardamom/waiting for her sons to come home" (Shire). In the second stanza it is about Noura, whose title presumably was the Italian word for grandmother, Nonna. She "broke cinnamon barks between/her palms". They were both Somali but by Noura's "broken Swahili" we can deduce that she must have crossed the border to Kenya as Shire's parents did – perhaps with them – therefore having to learn Swahili. The perspective then shifts to the grandmothers of the addressee, the Doris from Wales and Al-Sura, the recently deceased habooba from Sudan. Ayeeyo and Noura are mentioned working with cardamom and cinnamon, two exotic spices used in tea. Before tea gained popularity and began dominating the import from the East, spices were one of the most popular luxury commodities, ergo the empire is doubly represented by these items. Welsh Doris is the only one referred to in present tense, and she is dreaming of a very British addition to her tea; clotted cream. Habooba is not connected with any specific ingredient, instead she is remembered in connection with tea itself; she is recalled in the action of cooling down her grandchild's tea, a caring act which also underlines that tea really is for everyone – children included.

Lastly, in Humon's cartoons, England's characteristics include the English flag of a red cross on a white field and a monocle. Often, he will also have a teacup in his hand,

and he is depicted as being and acting as the father figure for America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In the strip “Love Snake”, he is acting out the sentiment of becoming the owner of a country upon colonising it, further establishing his personality as being imperialistic. Here, he is exemplifying many of the ways of dealing with the Orient that Said is listing in *Orientalism*:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (Said, “Orientalism” 3)

Not only does he refer to India as now being his own country, the strip is illustrating an incident where England saw a local, natural phenomenon as problematic and wanted it changed to suit his taste. This incident seems to be the perfect example of the situation mentioned by Said in the quote above: that the oppressing, European powers saw their reality as being the best and felt entitled to bring this reality with them on their conquests around the world.

Through the discussions of these six themes – casual references, social rules, gender, time of writing, target reader, and empire and orientalism, the literature on which this thesis is based has proved in many ways to agree upon the fact that tea is a staple product in British society. Not just a staple product, but a vital part of life by being the base of social gatherings and an important everyday occurrence that offers stability, structure, and nourishment. Nourishment, however, seem to be absent from all the texts. Nowhere is the restorative and healing abilities of tea mentioned by the authors, except perhaps when The March Hare attempts to fix the broken pocket watch by dipping it into his tea. This absence is important because initially it seems strange to overlook this aspect of tea. The positive effects of tea and its supposed ability to cure and protect against one condition after the next were

significant factors that helped tea to grow in popularity, but it seems that once it was cemented as part of society, when teatime came at the same time every day and when supply was steady (and British), this side of tea was not as central anymore. The benefits to the mental and physical health of the drinker – or the belief that such existed – would not have disappeared, but in the five examples of literature shown and analysed here, they are not mentioned. By the nineteenth century, however, these benefits could have become common knowledge, something that everyone agreed to be true and thus not something Austen, Wilde or Carroll deemed important to acknowledge through their characters. In the contemporary works, tea is treated more as a symbol than a physical drink, and upon reflection, not mentioning the health benefits does not seem strange, because the characters are not drinking it to cure them, they are drinking it out of habit and preparing it out of duty.

Tea have become more than just a physical foodstuff; it seems to take on a psychological dimension as well. A national identity is a complex matter consisting of a broad spectrum of shared history, experiences, and values, that all should include the whole nation both in geographical and social terms. It cannot rest upon the values of the just the citizens of the capital or exclude the experiences of the lower classes. So when Jane Austen just needs to tell us that Elizabeth and her sisters are going to the drawing room to indicate that it is now teatime at Longbourn, when tea tables are the settings for almost half a play but the actual drinking of it is hardly mentioned, and when the sight of a tea table is a relief to a distressed child in an unknown environment, we are also being told about the degree to which these three different authors of the nineteenth century were accustomed to tea. If we were to remove tea from these texts, their plots would be significantly altered, and some scenes would completely fall apart, showing how the presence of tea was a given. As tea became a regular part of the lives of the British families and societies an unspoken social contract about appropriate behaviour arose around the tea table. Through the literature we are told about

these rules mostly when they are broken, and we must recognise this by seeing the characters' reactions in the situation. As in *Wonderland*, when the reader is as confused as Alice when there is no room for her at a large and almost-empty table and she is made to abandon her finally tea-filled cup because the Hatter decided it was time to move places. The strong reactions to certain behaviour at tea-related social gatherings imply the existence of a moral code that dictates the opposite. The almost total absence of these kinds of situations at the teatimes portrayed in *Pride and Prejudice* lets us deduce that Jane Austen is describing the proper conduct as was expected by the society she wrote about.

Through the discussions about gender and the target readers of each of the texts it became apparent that these authors and their works have covered an enormously diverse group of readers. People of all genders, all ages, and ethnicities, and in all layers of society can find themselves represented or spoken to by reading one or more of these works. To have such a broad group of readers engaged by works that all feature tea in the central and important ways as described through this paper is proof that tea, in all the meanings of the word, was and is a relatable part of life and society for all Britons. Not only in the role of a nice drink to share in the company of family and friends, but in the historical, political, and economical role, tea is present in the subconscious of British people, and all of the works, in some way or other, show this. In the nineteenth century the representation of tea was not necessarily political in nature, but its existence alongside the existence of servants would hint at the political and imperial political landscape. Through history tea had prompted changes in import strategies and taxation laws, and it became a central part in a significant, historical event: the independence of the American colonies. The fact that an artist from another country used tea, tea parties and imperialism as personality traits and personal characteristics in an anthropomorphised version of England further establishes these stereotypes, because it is not only the Britons themselves that see this pattern – it is internationally recognised that

tea is a symbol of Britishness and Humon's cartoons show this. Additionally, the extensive scope of time covered by the literary works leads to another conclusion and an indication about what the future holds: that tea has had this role in British society for centuries, without becoming unfashionable or being replaced by something else. To be so deeply ingrained in both history and the everyday lives of contemporary British families and individuals indicate that the position tea holds in the mind and diet of the British will not be expected to change in the future. Tea has come to stay.

## Conclusion

Through this paper I have analysed four different works of literature and three cartoons with the goal of locating their mentions of tea. Two novels aimed at different groups of readers, a play, and a poem, both with their own target audience as well, and three cartoons drawn and written by a non-British artist. Jane Austen, Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde, Warsan Shire and Humon demonstrate that they all live in a reality where tea means more than a cup of hot water infused with dried leaves. By closely reading the individual passages where they make mentions of tea or the social events that bloomed around the drink, while simultaneously reading the historical context in which each piece was written let me discover that, despite their differences all these texts had an inclusion of tea that was meaningful and in keeping with the society and reality in which the author lived and worked. The texts that were written in the nineteenth century had a similar approach to tea, expressed by a tendency to have tea work in the background of the plots. Tea, teatime, and tea parties serves as opportunities to let characters meet someone they would not otherwise have met, have private conversations and often the event of tea is included as a marker of time. At the time, tea was in the process of changing from the last meal of the day to becoming an afternoon refreshment, and this shows in the literature: in *Pride and Prejudice*, from the start of the century, tea occurs after

dinner. In *Wonderland* (1865), teatime is six o'clock, and in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, 1895, tea is served at five o'clock. In these works, tea also serves as a symbol of the British Empire, along with existence of servants. The British Empire had an inarguably substantial and important influence on the whole world, and this is shown in the works by the two contemporary artists, both of whom are young women. Warsan Shire, with her multi-ethnic background and memories speaks to and about the minorities and the former colonised people through her poem about four grandmothers from four different places in the empire. The Danish artist Humon uses stereotypes and simplified characteristics to anthropomorphise the countries and draws them in situations that varies from being political, historical, or just funny in nature. Her inclusion of tea and imperialism in the personification of England highlights the fact that these are traits perceived as characterisations of the English people; she separates England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland into four different people.

Through the analyses, six general themes were surfaced, and these became the basis of the discussion. By recognising that all of the texts represented these themes – or had a natural reason not to – it can now be concluded that tea has become a part of the British national identity. Being a tool for the author to use in the setting of a scene, being used in texts with diverse and large groups of target readers, having a central plot point revolve around the tea table and appearing in texts over centuries, are all arguments to the fact that tea is so deeply embedded in the culture that it is sometimes almost invisible. Casual references where we as readers must assume or remind ourselves that tea is being drunk or when there is no stage directions reminding the actors to drink from their cups reveal that in the nineteenth century tea was a given. In the contemporary works, however, tea has a different function. It becomes less about the drink in itself and more about what tea represents and symbolises. It becomes a tool to use in politically natured poems and cartoons. In the poem and the

cartoons, tea is used to symbolise the empire and its problematic nature of oppression and overruling of the local culture.

Tea, by its very distinct appearances in five such different works lends credibility to the claim, that it has had, and still has, historical, political, economic, physical and psychological impacts on the lives of the British people, as well as the peoples that were colonised by the British Empire. Even today, when the empire has long been out of power, there are noticeable traces of it all around us, including in countries that were never part of it. The stereotypical characteristics of Humon's England shows that the international society is not blind to the history and the fact that we can all go to the nearest supermarket and buy multiple kinds of tea shows us that we are all affected by the empire, even now. Because the empire made sure to take their tea with them wherever they went, and they went far. In itself tea is a simple drink, that brings comfort and healing to the drinker. When visiting a friend or family member, one will often be asked "Coffee or tea?", as if the answer will reveal intimate details about one's personality. Tea was a common denominator, a shared experience, already in the start of the nineteenth century, when Jane Austen wrote her famous novel as well as 81 years later when Oscar Wilde had his play performed; tea was represented in both popular and academic circles of the societies and it had significance in both. Just as tea is central and symbolic in the academically esteemed poem by Warsan Shire it is also used in popular and informal cartoons made for fun.

British national identity cannot be defined only by tea preferences and generational memories of the empire that brought these valuable dried leaves back to the motherland, but it certainly cannot be defined without them.

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