

# Three Ways of Looking at Kalymnos: Charmian Clift's Differing Versions of One Greek Island

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## Introduction

In 1951, married Australian writers Charmian Clift and George Johnston, feeling stifled by post-war conservatism, left Sydney behind to find a more 'authentic' way of living. They went first to London, the mecca for Australian literary expatriates, where there was no shortage of work and culture, but where they quickly felt trapped by the 'rat-race' mentality of a modern city. So in 1954 they left again, this time for the Greek islands, disposing of material possessions and cutting many of their personal ties. Hoping for a permanent shift from mundane to romantic, they embraced the shining ideals offered by Greek island life: other-worldly beauty; 'simple' Greek lifestyles, and freedom from the many pressures of the 'real' world.

The literary texts that resulted from Clift and Johnston's time on the islands of Kalymnos (1954–55) and Hydra (1955–64) offer an interesting perspective—that of outsiders who, as represented in their own works, stayed long enough to be able to speak for, and sometimes as, insiders. Further, while claiming to be exiled and estranged from Australia and London, their fiction was directed to readers resident in those places. Indeed, while on Hydra both Clift (*Walk to the Paradise Gardens* (1960)) and Johnston (*My Brother Jack* (1964)) returned to Australia as a setting for their fiction. In Clift and Johnston's texts, the 'studies' of Greek life, if their writing can be called that, are troublingly tinted by their own status as 'mainlanders.' Their near obsessive devotion to the Greek islands is why their work is best viewed through the lens of the emerging field of Island Studies (also referred to as 'Nissology'). According to Godfrey Baldacchino, some writing about islands can be viewed 'not as a pursuit *by* islands/islanders, or *with* them, not even *for* them, but *of* them,' and this complicates how communities are represented and all too often, misunderstood (37). Islands are by their very nature both separated from the mainland by a body of water and connected to the mainland by shared language, culture, and material dependency. Unfortunately, the myth of insulated, resistant, insider islands/islanders is what often attracts attention to them in the first place, resulting in 'mainland subjugation' (Baldacchino 38). Through such objectification, particularly by 'literary content [that] is dictated and penned by "others"' (Baldacchino 38), complex island communities are ultimately romanticised and reduced to stereotypes.

The memoirs and fiction of Charmian Clift that explore Kalymnos are anything but cursory or one-dimensional; they are nuanced, varied, consumed with the sea, the landscape, and the people who inhabit the places where land and sea converge. And yet at times, Clift's work is informed by a cocktail of Orientalism and mainlander bias, employing the Greek islands as 'a "looked at" reference group; stages for the enactment of processes dictated from elsewhere' (Baldacchino, 38–39). Certainly, the insider versus outsider paradigm is present throughout Clift's writing, at all stages: between foreigners and native islanders; between Clift's ideas and the published work of

her husband; and certainly between men and women. And underlying it all is the myth of the Greek island, which is for Clift both setting and character, shifting and steadfast, desired and unattainable.

### **Narrative structure**

To understand fully the dynamics portrayed across Clift's work, it is necessary to grasp that at times Clift the author was excluded from her own work. This exclusion is most obvious in *The Sponge Divers*, which was published in 1955 and co-authored and heavily influenced by Johnston. According to Nadia Wheatley, Clift's role was that of the 'hod-carrier,' bringing back stories and local color to Johnston who, by virtue of being the primary writer, worked more inside the house 'writing up the material' (296). If this account is true, while Clift was more active in Kalymnian society than her husband—attempting to learn Greek, interacting with locals, cooking island fare—her voice on these matters was filtered, edited, and ultimately diminished through Johnston's typewriter. Clift later said that the book was a 'phony collaboration because I was beyond the stage of collaboration and I wanted to do my own work, in my own way' (quoted in Genoni and Dalziell 339). Essentially, as the writing progressed, Clift was omitted from her own story.

*The Sponge Divers* (published as *The Sea and the Stone* in the USA) is the account of a single male protagonist, Morgan Leigh, who goes to Kalymnos to write a marketable narrative about the decline of the sponge diving industry from the notes of a woman he censors. And, although Clift's name appeared on *The Sponge Divers* as co-author, she was simultaneously working on her own non-fiction account of going to Kalymnos to write a book about the decline of sponge diving. Was Clift making a statement about authenticity by creating a non-fiction palimpsest of the novel even as the novel was being composed? And did she intend that authenticity to apply both to her own position in the couple's marriage, and to the depiction of the island and the islanders?

Clift's efforts to claim narrative independence and portray herself as more of an island 'insider' are visible in her memoir *Mermaid Singing*, which was published in 1956, a year after the novel. In it she refers to Greece as 'the Promised Land' (20) and insists her time on the island of Kalymnos was a 'golden year' (279). Despite such claims, and an emphasis on her family's seamless integration into Kalymnian society, Clift positions herself as a mainland outsider to a narrative of island life and focuses primarily on examining the island setting from a distance. This is for the most part deliberate—Clift is foremost an observer of Kalymnos, and only secondarily a participant. This narrative position can be most clearly seen when she regards at times the island and its inhabitants as part of a rosy, bright and seemingly infantilised world, and at others as primitive and riddled by superstition, albeit charmingly so. Despite the cheerful outlook of the narrator, who insists on the perfect happiness of herself and others, there are cracks in this perfection, and when the objective observer prevails she describes oppressed local women; sponge divers rejected by their own community; and a sense of an unbridgeable distance between the narrator and the people with whom she interacts.

In many ways, *Honour's Mimic* (1964), which was published almost a full decade after *Mermaid Singing* and *The Sponge Divers*, is a re-writing of these earlier texts. Clift's use of a foreign female visitor to the island in *Honour's Mimic* pointedly reverses the male foreign visitor of *The Sponge Divers*. This may have been Clift's response to the fact that she herself, although co-author of *The Sponge Divers*, was written out of the story. In *Mermaid Singing*, she states: 'the story [of *The Sponge Divers*] was all around us. We were living it' (156), and yet she was denied a fictional

presence in a story she had lived. In Clift's new version, the damaged female heroine of *Honour's Mimic*, Kathy, fresh from a suicide attempt, arrives without either her husband or children. Clift's response to being 'written out' of the story that surrounded her and her family was not simply to write herself in, but to follow Johnston's example of removing everyone else.

In addition, *Honour's Mimic* is the only one of the three texts in which no character comes to the island to write a story about the island in general and the sponge divers in particular, thereby altering the relationship between the protagonist and Kalymnos. The years between the publication of *Mermaid Singing* and *Honour's Mimic*, during which Clift lived on Hydra, undoubtedly gave her a greater understanding of Greek island life and proximity to her subject material. Despite the lack of overt voyeurism (the island and its people are no longer presented as material for a book within its own pages), there are tensions that Island Studies bring to light: between Clift's heroine and the people of Kalymnos; between hyper-masculine men and repressed women; and especially between Clift's perception of the island and its true form.

### Kalymnos

The representation of Kalymnos itself changes from *Mermaid Singing* to *Honour's Mimic*. While the memoir extols the ethereal beauty of the island, the same setting becomes darker and even hellish in *Honour's Mimic*. This shift is an instance of what Baldacchino describes as 'the epitome of the objectification of islands,' when the 'island metaphor' operates independently from the actual 'physicality of islands' (44). Baldacchino argues that so powerful is the illusion of the island as a metaphorical space rather than a real one, that in cultural and literary representations it often 'lurches from utopia to dystopia' (44) precisely in the way Kalymnos does in Clift's writing. In *Mermaid Singing*, Kalymnos is depicted through the lens of preemptive nostalgia, with its narrator asserting, as if to convince herself, 'George and I were very happy' (199). Kalymnos is equally romanticised throughout *The Sponge Divers*, described as 'a little Greek seaport' that is 'all crazy colours and light and sunshine' (17), although this could be a bias of Johnston's that Clift would later reject. Indeed, where there are hints of discomfort in *Mermaid Singing*, the representation of Kalymnos in *Honour's Mimic* is downright dreary: 'sky and sea and mountains were steeped in a solution of sulphur, and along the waterfront the wind came in gusts, rough as a cat's tongue' (45). The tonal shift between the earlier two works and *Honour's Mimic* is a stark one, as the narrative evolves from Charmian gallivanting in 'the land of our dreams' in *Mermaid Singing* (18), to Kathy turning into 'an animal in a trap' in *Honour's Mimic* (155). Even passages that incorporate landmarks transform them via metaphor into dreamscapes which, positive or negative, lose any real 'trace of its physical referent' (Baldacchino 44). And the danger of this, of course, is the capacity of such writing to diminish reality entirely, leaving only an ideal that swings from 'stupendous' (Clift, *Mermaid Singing* 17), to 'overpowering, smothering' (Clift, *Honour's Mimic* 177).

A further pattern of island literature is that of the islands being 'seen and objectified as "paradises" by mainlanders' (Baldacchino 42). Such is the case with the dream-like Kalymnos Clift understands as 'an illustration from a child's storybook' (*Mermaid Singing* 42) which is, tellingly, an allusion to a one-dimensional facsimile. Even negative descriptions mirror this romanticised type of exaggeration with a disturbing tendency toward infantilising the landscape and by extension the lifestyles of those who are insiders there. In a passage about Kos, a nearby island for which Clift proclaims an intense dislike, the shoreline is rendered as a 'dolls' town to amuse a child on a

wet afternoon' (56), further equating island living with childhood. There are fairytale-like ruminations on the topography of the Aegean in *Mermaid Singing*, with Clift remarking that, 'once upon a time there were twelve islands,' an observation that quickly deteriorates a few pages later, when the decision to settle on Kalymnos having been made, she writes, 'once upon a time there were twelve islands, and one of them got sick and died . . .' (36). These are not the only indication that while *Mermaid Singing* is full of admiration for the Greek air and the clear Greek light, Clift's impression of the expatriate lifestyle and her environment are in flux. After all, in the way one coin has two faces, island objectification manifests not only as a constructed paradise, but also as fabricated hellscapes that 'render[s] islands as victims' (Baldacchino 44). Although Clift writes more plainly negative descriptions of Kalymnos in *Honour's Mimic*, she hints early on in *Mermaid Singing* that she is not without bitterness over their commitment to the Aegean, admitting that, 'my romanticism dies hard' (43). This is evident when Clift writes about the need for the couple to find, 'besides a place to live,' a way to make money with 'an initial writing project' (34). By proclaiming that island research is her central mission, Clift also firmly establishes both Kalymnos and Kalymnians as the legitimate objects of an outsider's gaze and justifies her role as a mainlander observer who assumes free reign in interpreting the island at will.

The transformation of the island in Clift's writing is further emphasised by discrepancies in the timelines of the three books, which once again point to the metaphorical island—both bright and dark—that is seemingly so prominently embedded in the human response to islands. All three narratives commence in November, and *The Sponge Divers* and *Honour's Mimic* end around the following Easter holiday. Indeed, Morgan's departure from Kalymnos at the end of *The Sponge Divers* intersects with the departure of the sponge divers, his work completed as 'the noise of the boats faded across the empty harbor,' and the very community in which he was immersed disappears over the horizon (*Sponge Divers* 318). Of the earlier texts, only *Mermaid Singing* concludes during the summer, which could be out of the necessity to end the narrative with a portrayal of the manuscript's acceptance, as the book advance afforded the couple another year in Greece. This conclusion therefore showcased both the successful publication of the book and Clift's reluctance for the family's time in their bucolic island setting to end. The last chapter of *Honour's Mimic* alters this pattern, concluding with an inversion of renewal at the end of the Lenten season. As the inhabitants of Kalymnos celebrate the return of their saviour, Kathy is pursued by public authorities, spat on by a woman, confronted by her lover's wife, and assaulted by a boy who hits her with a stone. These disparate images, attacks on her physical wellbeing at a time when she is already facing emotional turmoil, mark the end of her privileged status and indicate a larger disillusionment. The cyclical patterns of seasons and restoration evident throughout *The Sponge Divers* and *Mermaid Singing* comes to an abrupt halt in *Honour's Mimic*, reinforcing the idea of a corrupted paradise so prevalent in island literature.

It is worth noting that the calendar offered for Kalymnos differs from that offered for Hydra. Clift's *Peel me a Lotus*, set on Hydra, runs from February to October, highlighting the summer months and good weather (the same is true of Johnston's Hydra novel, *Closer to the Sun*). Kalymnos, on the other hand, comes alive when the men are not away on the boats, and appears empty and asleep during the hot summer when they are absent. The calendar does not provide such a gendered seasonal distinction in Clift's portrayal of Hydra.

## Kalymnian women

Although both *Mermaid Singing* and *Honour's Mimic* unfold in a society governed by orthodox practices and patriarchal laws, female oppression is more readily apparent in the latter work as it affects both native islanders and the visiting foreigners. In *Mermaid Singing*, Clift feels that 'it is quite obvious' that she is 'in the way' when she tries to complete work alongside the Greek women in the kitchen (46), and she remarks several times that she looks very different from the Greek women because of her clothing. In *Honour's Mimic* the Australian protagonist Kathy is literally pressured into changing her pants for skirts (14) and is misunderstood by both her London family who she abandons for Greece, as well as her Kalymnian community which cannot comprehend her isolation. The more obvious foregrounding of female oppression in *Honour's Mimic* undoubtedly results from Clift seeking more personal and narrative freedom—after all, both *The Sponge Divers* and *Mermaid Singing* were heavily influenced by Johnston, not only in terms of the writing process but narratively. The protagonist of *The Sponge Divers* is a version of Johnston, and *Mermaid Singing* is family-oriented, rather than Clift-oriented. Ironically, Clift's freedom of expression exercised in *Honour's Mimic* results in the theme of female entrapment.

Yet another reason for the amplified attention to islander women throughout *Honour's Mimic* is suggested by the author's mainlander-expatriate identity. While Clift's writing is acutely expressive of social dynamics on the island—critiquing the disparity between Greek men and women, as well as herself and the rest of island society—it is precisely because of her outsider status that she is capable of making such observations. As Baldacchino notes, 'non-islanders, who are in a sense "non-participant" observers, unlike the socially embedded locals,' lack access to society's intricacies and are 'therefore not constrained by them' (43). Because of this exempt status and often the illusion of clear-eyed superiority, mainland observers 'may therefore find the motivation, space and audience for their comments, arrogant and mythologised though they might be' (Baldacchino 43). Both *Mermaid Singing* and *Honour's Mimic* acknowledge the outsider status of their protagonists, as well as certain limits to cultural understanding, but they also openly treat islanders as 'the passive and unwitting "objects of the gaze"' who are reduced to specimens for inspection (Baldacchino 39). This applies twofold to island women, who are viewed through overlapping lenses of objectification—as islanders *and* as women.

As outsider-mainlanders, the protagonists of both Clift's memoir and her fiction are disconnected from the daily minutiae of island life and have something of an elevated status above other women characters, although for slightly different reasons. In *Mermaid Singing*, Clift is exempt from some social rules—she is able to enter the *tavernas*, a masculine-coded 'waiting room' and meeting-place (71), with George (159) because she is a foreigner with a foreign husband and children; in *Honour's Mimic*, Kathy is also viewed as 'other' and exempt from the island's social expectations because she is a foreigner without any family and is visibly different from the traditional Greek woman, marked by her red hair and height. In *Mermaid Singing*, Clift acknowledges how crucial the privileges associated with her outsider status are to her, writing that 'outside of the coffeehouses, nothing exists' (64), suggesting her awareness that if she was cut off from the social spaces typically restricted to Greek men she would have little to observe or write about. Indeed, the *tavernas* are where 'you eat better, drink better, think better and talk better than any place,' and where 'you are moved to music and poetry and dreams,' are significant not only for her work but for her identity as an artist (159).

And yet while Clift's memoir portrays women with this all-important social, economic, and physical mobility—even local Greek women seem to have the option of leaving their husbands and, indeed, the country—her fiction challenges this theme. Kathy is afraid to participate in community events because she knows that, 'the priests and women would regard her presence among them as an insult—or worse, as bad luck' (Clift, *Honour's Mimic* 207). Manoli, in *The Sponge Divers*, takes a similarly dismissive stance, regarding and treating women as inferior sex objects. This becomes especially obvious during a scene in which Irini expresses a desire to escape the island, and Manoli argues she will never be able to board a sponge ship because any woman would be bad luck, thinking to himself, 'You couldn't mix women with work. They were two different things, demanding opposite attentions, needing different parts of your body' (*Sponge Divers*, 125). As happens with Kathy, Irini exists in a context that robs her of agency, instead assigned the passive role of receptacle for a particular kind of male 'attentions.'

While Morgan in the *The Sponge Divers* experiences mainlander otherness at times, it is less severe by virtue of being a man. Like Kathy, he is occasionally made 'sharply aware' of the town around him, experiencing the sensation 'of a person staring intently at him when his back was turned' (160). However, for Morgan, the feeling of displacement is softened by his gender. As a foreign man in this heavily masculine society he only experiences the discomfort of being foreign. In the fictional Kalymnos of *Honour's Mimic*, Clift seems more able to report on the gender biases she encounters, noting that on the island 'girl babies aren't classified as children' (22) and Kathy observes that 'the *tavernas* and coffeehouses were crowded with men, and only men were out of doors' (45).

### **Outsiders see, women are seen**

*Honour's Mimic* is striking not only due to its representations of confinement but because it lacks the same narrative foundation that is present in the other works. Unlike *Mermaid Singing* and *The Sponge Divers*, in which the act of writing is a central narrative element, no character is writing a book about Kalymnos in *Honour's Mimic*. Considering the extent to which the other two texts focus on documenting and interpreting the island, this lack of voyeurism redefines the protagonist and restructures the plot of *Honour's Mimic*. This could be a conscious effort on Clift's part to examine the island from a perspective akin to that of an 'insider.' Although Kathy bears physical and cultural otherness, she is integrated within the social fabric of a Greek family, and less overtly interested in romanticising the island. Rather than focusing attention on externals, such as a manuscript-in-progress or means of subsistence, this narrative instead emphasises Kathy's emotional response to her surroundings. Her very reason for moving in with Milly and Demetrius is a matter of *her* feelings: 'I am healing, she thought,' (35), although her condition hardly improves as she begins to feel suffocated by the island traditions which bring other women comfort while her 'rasping and tight' lungs feel 'encased in a subcutaneous film of ice' (210) in the face of so many Greek rituals. When Kathy's feelings drive her to the island, the type of observation she participates in is not limited strictly to what she can see, as it is for Morgan in *The Sponge Divers*. Kathy also engages in observation of island rituals, but to a more limited degree than other Clift and Johnston characters. And while she notices changes taking place on the island, she is far more concerned with changes in her own emotional state.

Like a lot of island literature, observation-gathering is the engine that propels *The Sponge Divers*. The entire mission is sparked when Morgan, in a chance encounter with Telfs, is told, 'You want

something to write about? . . . Go to Kalymnos. . . . All there right in front of your eyes. The world changing' (16). The same is true with *Mermaid Singing*, in which Clift and Johnston venture into the unknown to act almost like third-person omniscient narrators, although Clift sometimes writes of 'I' and 'we.' Such is the case when she describes the house they will live in, writing of how perfect it is for a writer without indicating for which writer this might be true—for her or for George. The impersonal, non-fiction approach that she uses for these passages may indicate her deep, matter-of-fact belief that the house, indeed, 'could not have been more strategically situated,' for observation and writing (70), but it is also evidence that Clift is not truly claiming these statements in her own voice. This is particularly clear when Clift demands they move into the yellow house, declaring 'we couldn't go on any longer' without settling down for a 'proper family life again' (60), despite her own admitted passion for having set aside materialism and her renewed sense of personal vitality. This conflict is more apparent in *Honour's Mimic*, in which at times Kathy exhibits voyeuristic tendencies pertaining to her status as an imprisoned female in 'the Dark Ages' (14) as well as her relationships with the life she left behind, her Greek acquaintances, and herself.



**Figure 1.** The 'yellow house' on Kalymnos where Clift and Johnston lived with their children. At the time, the water in the port reached up to the curved sidewalk in the bottom left corner of the photograph, where there is now a street. The shop beneath was then 'a sponge-clipping room,' but now sells, among other things, souvenirs of the island's former sponge industry.

Although Kathy has freed herself from her children and husband, with whom, ‘like the roots of the bindweed,’ she is left ‘feeling choked, bound, stiflingly entangled’ (*Honour’s Mimic*, 42). This is a text that far from endorses the act of a woman leaving home. Unlike Clift in *Mermaid Singing*, the women of *Honour’s Mimic* are there to stay and have few options. This is true even of brief, everyday interactions between women on the island, which are at times closely monitored by men. When Kathy tries to visit Irini to offer her money to bring her sick child to the doctor, she is unable to speak with her alone and unable to leave until Irini’s husband allows them to get up from their chairs (67). In this scene, Clift writes that Kathy ‘and Irini would just have to go on sitting there formally awaiting his pleasure and signal for release’ (67). On Kalymnos, Kathy is even more restricted than in the place from which she came, implying that no matter where Clift goes, Charmian will never truly be free.

By abandoning the observational writer in her fiction, Clift could also be seen to be moving to reject and rebuke Johnston’s influence over her writing. Although Clift writes for art and to support her family, the fictionalised version of herself, Kathy, chooses instead to abandon her family, fling herself into a love affair and, eventually, abandon her home. She is at once more and less liberated than the community of island women around her. Although as a foreigner she is understood as being beyond prohibitive rules, capable of sneaking away for solitary walks and behaving contrary to local expectations, she also lives beneath a magnified male gaze. In an inversion of the usual dynamic of mainlander observing islander, at times Clift’s heroine feels as though others are voyeurs into her life, especially when she is in pain—Clift writes that Demetrius is engaged in ‘lechery’ when he comes to her room one night to perform the gross ‘observation of pain, particularly human pain, and heightened more when the victim is a woman. A desired woman,’ such as Kathy (49). Furthermore, Clift accuses Demetrius of both the gaze-like observation of women as objects for sex and the literal observation of patriarchal conventions, writing that he takes pleasure that Kathy is ‘utterly degraded before him, stripped down more absolutely’ by his controlling behaviors more so than even during any sex (50). And though Demetrius is the instrument of that masculine gaze in *Honour’s Mimic*, the whole town is lumped together in lechery, demonstrated when Kathy walks outside in what should be the beautiful ‘sunshine among the tossing orange-trees’ with Milly and Demetrius, who stands ‘waiting . . . to escort them—his foreign women, one for each arm—through the envious and admiring town’ (15). Like the island itself, she is alternately romanticised and seen as deficient: and as a result she is sometimes desired, and sometimes persecuted.

The only release Kathy finds—and which ultimately results in her destruction—is through her love affair with Fotis, who is a rewritten version of Manolis, the personification of sponge-diver masculinity in *The Sponge Divers*. If Kathy is the feminine cross-section of ‘otherness’ paired with Clift’s vision of island ‘insiderness,’ than Fotis is the masculine version. Like the foreign Johnston, Fotis has ‘a face so bleak, so bare, so pillaged, so utterly divested of every hope or joy that her [Kathy’s] heart constricted,’ drawn to his vulnerability (*Honour’s Mimic* 100). And yet the enigmatic Fotis fluctuates between stereotypical masculinity and vulnerability, similar to the ‘strength and bigness, that was the picture of Manoli,’ an islander (*Sponge Divers* 43). There is nothing sweet about Fotis, who after sex, during which Kathy ‘wept because she could not help it’ (*Honour’s Mimic* 110), is described as being ‘as harsh and bare as the mountainside’ as he tugs on her eyelids until she cries (127). In the same scene, Kathy tells her ‘lover’ that he is hurting her, physically and otherwise, as he demands that she ‘say yes’ until she does, even when she means no. ‘He could have killed her,’ Clift writes, in a single, telling line of indirect discourse, as Kathy



says ‘I love you’ (126). Beyond highlighting the imbalance of power between a Greek man and a foreign woman, such a passage hints at the confused, antiquated idea of islanders equating to “‘savages’”: be they noble, lethargic, lustful, uncultured, or virtuous’ (Baldacchino 39). Fotis does not explicitly demonstrate any one of these attributes—rather, he is a compilation of contradictory islander clichés.

The idea that women are infrequently viewed without attention to their sexual value is present in both Clift’s and Johnston’s sole-authored works. Wheatley writes that Johnston saw the young Clift not only as beautiful and desirable but also as a creature who was more ‘wild, free’ than himself (180), and ‘exactly the same sort of person who would be depicted in *Cressida Morley*’ [the Clift *alter-ego* character Johnston would later insert in his autobiographical fiction] (198). Such evidence indicates that while Johnston’s reading of Clift as ‘free’ has pushed *Mermaid Singing* to represent Charmian as less restricted than she was, he may have done so inadvertently, because, shielded by his own masculinity, he interpreted this as the truth. It is noteworthy that in Johnston’s novel *Closer to the Sun* there is a scene between Kate Meredith (Johnston’s ‘Charmian’ insert) and Jacques—of whom Kate’s husband David (Johnston’s ‘George’ insert) is intensely jealous—in which Kate is ‘captivated’ and allows herself to be made love to, without apparent active participation. That scene, in which Johnston writes of Kate’s passive infidelity with Jacques, is replicated by Clift in the scene between Kathy and Fotis.

Detailed sexual encounters between Kathy and men who work to assert their dominance over her are not Clift’s only representations of masculine privilege in *The Sponge Divers* or *Mermaid Singing*. Whereas Morgan in *The Sponge Divers* is able to use his masculinity to his benefit, working to observe the island and islanders while avoiding the repercussions of its inhabitants’ gaze on himself, neither Clift-as-Kathy nor Clift-as-Charmian is as successful because while she is able to benefit from that masculine influence, just as she is from ‘otherness.’ Indeed she suffers the consequences of using any power that comes from her appeal to men. Masculine power is far from beneficial throughout these texts, wielded by women or not. In a brutal scene that spares nothing, Demetrius—an islander man self-proclaimed as Kathy’s protector and brother—appears in her room at night and rapes her, ‘quickly and brutally’ with ‘ferocity’ so that even the backs of her knees ‘hurt cruelly’ (177). However, Clift writes here that he does it more for the ‘formal acknowledgement of victory’ than the actual ‘point of the struggle,’ and indeed, the act itself seems unfulfilling, as afterward Demetrius moves ‘wearily’ like a ‘gladiator after combat’ (177). The true battle, to reaffirm his masculinity by dominating and degrading the defiant Kathy, is indicative of an ongoing focus throughout Clift’s work in showing how some violence against women is a natural part of the setting. This is the case with both Fotis and Manolis, who are painted as savage and innocent in turn, and also to highlight that there is some difference between their attacks and those of characters like Demetrius, who commit in addition to rape, the crime of betrayal. Kathy’s rape by her ‘brother’ figure is essentially her rape by a man who, though he is an islander and has lived on the island for a very long time, was still educated abroad, in the society that Kathy herself comes from, and it cannot be considered part of a ‘nature’ shared with Fotis and Manolis. Although not every scene in *Honour’s Mimic* is so extreme, even daily life springs from gendered interactions that are less apparent when Johnston is one of the writers, and the primary typist. In *Honour’s Mimic*, the assertion of masculinity is neatly juxtaposed with a tableau of women attempting to manipulate what ‘feminine’ power they have under a patriarchal structure in order to cope with and survive the barren reality of Kalymnian island life.

The price of release via masculine influence is again made clear by the conclusion, in which a village boy throws a rock at Kathy, who ‘scarcely felt the stone when it hit her’ (*Honour’s Mimic* 211). Biblical allusions aside, such an image evokes a very different meaning from that of *Mermaid Singing*, in which Charmian merges into a collective ‘we’ who ‘are transformed’ and ‘freed of their weight’ as they become one with the sea (319). Even the less-romanticised finale of *The Sponge Divers*, in which ‘Morgan went inside and began to pack his bags,’ establishes a type of freedom—to live, to leave, and presumably, to rejoin the ‘civilised’ reality of the mainland (318). These endings may be peaceful because, rather than a feminine presence defying cultural protocols as happens in *Honour’s Mimic*, male characters retain control. Even in *Mermaid Singing*, where Clift strives to tell her story without the compositional interference of Johnston, the presence of her husband shields her from more severe repercussions for her actions, such as wearing a bathing suit.

According to Wheatley, however, the end of *Honour’s Mimic*, far from signaling an end to hope, instead represents ‘the apotheosis of the author’s view that love overrides any other consideration’ (417). Kathy does sacrifice her reputation, as well as her actual affair with Fotis, in order to gain him passage on one of Demetrius’s boats; indeed, the title of the novel, after John Donne’s poem ‘The Sunne Rising,’ about lovers who are twinned souls, supports that theme, though even Wheatley acknowledges that this affair has a particular ‘ruthless intensity’ (186). If this is Clift’s way of affirming love, the fact that it comes at the cost of Kathy’s wellbeing is telling. For her, perhaps, happiness and life cannot successfully coexist—and certainly not within the confines of an island, even though one of the motivations she has for coming to the island, rather than writing a book, is to recover after her attempted suicide. Like the characters in the other texts who are coming to the island and planning to leave once their manuscripts have been accepted, her stay is also without a defined length of time—she will be there until she feels well again.

If *Honour’s Mimic* is understood as an extension of *Mermaid Singing*, then the protagonist transforms from a sensitive, creative expatriate liberated from menial chores who is temporarily trapped on a diseased, dying island; to an alienated, victimised foreigner oppressed by that very space in which she seeks refuge. By the end of Clift’s novel, Kathy is not only persecuted but now incapable of feeling anything—even pain.

## Conclusion

In Clift’s work, the idea of ‘the island’ transcends the physical—it is both character and stage, perfect and flawed, subject and object. While in *The Sponge Divers* Kalymnos acts as a curiosity and an object of study for a foreign mainlander, in *Mermaid Singing* Kalymnos turns into a romanticised, almost mythical space for its female observer to strive for integration. Later the island becomes the spoiled paradise of *Honour’s Mimic*, in which the protagonist treads the boundary between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider.’ A number of influences are responsible for this change: the different relationships between characters and setting; varying timelines; the personal connection to memoir versus the freedom allowed for fiction; the insertion of Johnston’s voice, and Clift’s eventual assertion of her own identity as a writer and as a woman. And so too is the force of the island ideals which, through repetition and prevalence, ‘actually threaten and dismiss . . . islands as “real,”’ rather than mythological constructs (Baldacchino 44). Much in the way the feminine ideal renders women as one-dimensional objects, stereotyping islands also amounts to a deprivation of agency and a denial of islanders’ rights to assert their own identity. And while Clift’s work offers so much more than landscape, it is important to note instances that reinforce, inadvertently or

intentionally, the trap of the island metaphor that threatens to diminish complex island communities. For as Clift knew better than anyone, awareness is the first step toward real freedom.

But *Honour's Mimic* may also reveal Clift's self-consciousness that her passionate attachment to Greek islands was flawed. *Mermaid Singing* and *Peel Me a Lotus* assert, indeed might protest a bit too much, that Clift did have a foot, or a toe, in the 'insider' camp and her presence was accepted by the islanders in a way that other outsiders were not. In both books, this commitment to the island is demonstrated not by Clift herself, but by her children, as if whatever authentic insider status she has is borrowed. By the end of *Honour's Mimic*, there does not seem to be one islander who still wants Kathy there, if they ever really did. In this book, there is at least a recognition that the subjects have an opinion about those who come to write about them, and it may not be as welcoming as Clift's memoir suggests.

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