THE

RELEVANCE OF THE IDEOLOGY OF SEPARATE SPHERES

IN

NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH TRAVEL LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

THE RELEVANCE OF THE IDEOLOGY OF SEPARATE SPHERES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH TRAVEL LITERATURE BY PATRICIA ANGELA PIATT

The purpose of this thesis is to assess whether the ideology of separate spheres should continue to be used in the analysis of nineteenth-century travel literature, and to determine whether there is any justification in assuming male travellers were primarily concerned with 'public' issues and female travellers were primarily concerned with 'private' issues. To answer these questions this thesis examines a number of areas traditionally associated with each gender, and analyzes how both sexes coped with a variety of discursive pressures. It incorporates travel literature produced by both genders covering the whole of the nineteenth century, and includes travel texts from a wide range of countries.

The thesis is divided into two parts, each with two chapters. The first part focuses on areas traditionally associated with male expertise and 'public' issues. Chapter One investigates the inclusion of 'technical' subjects and finds, contrary to popular belief, that both sexes addressed these subjects in similar ways, and that there is a considerable weight of material to prove that women writers were interested in a much wider range of subjects than has been appreciated. Chapter Two explores the use of the 'Action Hero Narrator' and similarly finds that, rather than being modest and reserved, many women writers were also able to employ the use of a strong narrative voice in their travel texts. What is particularly striking regarding these 'masculine' issues is not that women were able to discuss a wide range of topics, and often do so in an authoritative manner, but that the work of many male writers was not dominated by 'technical' detail, and that they did not feel the need to portray themselves as dynamic and in control at all times.

The second part of this investigation focuses on areas traditionally associated with female expertise and 'private' issues. Chapter Three examines how sexual relationships were dealt with in travel literature and finds, unlike female writers who were generally rather circumspect when they addressed matters of a sexual nature, male writers were able to be much more open and direct. Chapter Four investigates how other areas of relationships, such as children, family life and the position of women, were discussed by travel writers, and finds that male travel literature often demonstrated a greater interest in these issues than travel accounts produced by female writers.

This thesis offers considerable evidence to prove that, in regard to male and female travel writing, there was much more commonality in subject matter than has been assumed. It demonstrates that there was a significant degree of movement between 'public' and 'private', and that assessing material primarily from the perspective of gender can be very misleading. It emphasises the importance of examining texts produced by *both* sexes before any assumptions are made about gender. Based on the evidence it concludes that it is difficult to justify the application of the ideology of separate spheres in the analysis of nineteenth-century travel literature.

TO JOHN

FOR ALL HIS SUPPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Travel literature has consistently been seen as the poor relation of literary genres, lacking the status of poetry and the novel or the reliability of scholarly reference material, and has generally been viewed as somewhat of an anomaly in literary circles, defying generic classification. As a result travel literature has tended not to be thought of as a serious field for research. Jan Borm has argued that the study of travel literature has been complicated by the fact that it is: "not a genre, but a collective term for a variety of texts both predominantly fiction and non-fiction whose main theme is travel".[1] Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs have claimed that travel writing "remains a loosely defined body of literature", primarily because it resists simple labelling,[2] and Sara Mills has contended that women's travel writing has "frequently been labelled as 'autobiographical'" and, accordingly, has been categorized as inconsequential by most academics.[3] The problem of classification, and the variety of ways in which it can be interpreted, has led to travel literature being overlooked by researchers for a number of years. Female travel writing, in particular, has tended to be ignored and regarded with some suspicion, with doubt cast not only on its veracity but also on its suitability as a subject warranting serious academic effort. However, the rise of feminist studies in the 1960s resulted in women's literature on the whole coming under close scrutiny, and this gradually led to women's travel literature being examined more seriously. Female travellers were ideal subjects for feminist scholars as their activities, leaving the protection and security of home and launching themselves out across the globe, lent themselves to being adopted as perfect feminist role-models. Although these assumptions have since been called into question, there is no doubt that these early investigations

[1] Jan Borm, "Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology", Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs, eds., *Perspectives on Travel Writing* (Hants: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2004), p.13.
[2] Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs, eds., *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, p. 2.
[3] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing & Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 12.

opened the door for travel literature to be accepted as a field worthy of academic interest.

۲/ The analysis of travel literature arising out of feminist studies, however, has had some unfortunate consequences for its interpretation. Firstly, the analysis of women's travel literature tends to be too heavily influenced by feminist ideology. As Sara Mills has observed: "the only critics who have concerned themselves with women's travel writing have been women critics, who have usually situated themselves, at least implicitly, within a feminist framework."[4] Secondly, the majority of scholars have persisted in investigating travel literature along gender lines, and by doing so have concentrated their efforts on one sex or the other; only rarely have both sexes been discussed in the same work. Academics have focused their efforts, for the most part, on finding ways in which women challenged notions of what was considered 'appropriate' behaviour for a female travel writer; there is an assumption that because masculinity is the 'norm' male writers do not resist gender stereotypes in their travel literature. Thirdly, the travel literature produced by men has tended to be neglected by many researchers. This is ironic given that, prior to the rise of feminist studies, if travel literature was given any thought, it was predominantly male travel writing that was the focus of attention. Finally, there is an uncritical acceptance of the ideology of separate spheres in most investigations into travel literature. Nineteenth-century travel writing, in particular, has been read as though men and women's actions were chiefly determined by masculine domination of the public sphere and feminine relegation to the private sphere.

۳/ My preliminary reading of nineteenth-century travel literature, however, suggested a different impression of gender roles. The more texts I read, the more I saw that in practice there was a great deal of movement between spheres, and there did not appear to be as much homogeneity within genders as anticipated, contradicting the conclusions reached by previous researchers in the field. These discoveries convinced me that current understanding of the nature of separate spheres was dubious and that the area needed to be re-examined in order to ascertain

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[4] Ibid., p. 4.

how important the ideology of separate spheres actually was in nineteenth-century travel writing.

My suspicion, that the conclusions that had been drawn about the ideology of separate spheres were somewhat questionable, was confirmed when I uncovered evidence arising out of other areas of research which similarly raised doubts about the roles of women and men in nineteenth-century Britain. Inquiries by academics such as Jon Stobart, Alastair Owens, Catherine Hall, Martha Vicinus, Penelope Lane, Neil Raven, Hugh Cunningham, Kathryn Gleadle and Margot Finn into the political, social and cultural history of Britain during the nineteenth century, have revealed that the majority of middle-class households did not conform to the stereotype of the nuclear male-dominated family unit, nor were men completely excluded from playing a formative role in the domestic environment.[5] On the contrary, during an examination of middle-class families living in an area of Glasgow, Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair discovered that there was "no evidence" that households became "more confined to the nuclear unit during the period",[6] and that a "significant feature" of their findings was the "high percentage of households that were headed by women."[7] And John Tosh, from his evaluation of masculine identity during the Victorian period, found that men played a greater role in running the home and caring for children than has been assumed, and he concluded that "never before or since has domesticity been held to be so central to masculinity."[8] The results of studies from disciplines outside the world of travel literature analysis show that the popular image of the middle-class Victorian household, comprising a father who went out to work so that he could provide for his

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[5] Jon Stobart and Alastair Owens, eds., *Urban Fortunes: Property and Inheritance in the Town, 1700-1900* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), Catherine Hall. *White, Male and Middle Class* (Cornwall: Polity Press, 1995), Martha Vinicus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (London: Virago Press, 1994), Penelope Lane, Neil Raven and K.D.M. Snell, eds., *Women, Work and Wages in England, 1600-1850* (London: The Boydell Press, 2004), Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (London: Longman, 1995), Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831-51* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), Margot Finn, *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1874* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[6] Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 69.

[7] Ibid., p. 169.

[8] John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-class Home in Victorian England* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 1.

family and a mother who stayed at home looking after her house and children, was not borne out in practice. Their research indicates that the discourse governing separate spheres was clearly not rigidly defined, at least on the home-front, and there was, in fact, a significant degree of mobility between 'public' and 'private' in nineteenth-century Britain.

These discoveries about the flexibility between 'public' and 'private' spheres in Britain during the nineteenth century clearly have important implications for the study of travel literature; for if the influence of the ideology of separate spheres in nineteenth-century British society was not as dominant as we have been led to believe, then why has travel literature continued to be analysed as though it was? This is not to suggest that the ideology of separate spheres played no role in nineteenth-century Britain. It is clear that the political, social and legal structure of Britain during the nineteenth century was organized along gender lines: the law, education, and the work-place were all governed by issues of gender. However, assuming that men and women's daily lives were strictly ruled by the ideology of separate spheres, that it applied in circumstances as exceptional as international travel, and that its influence remained consistent throughout the whole period, is too simplistic a view, and alternative approaches to understanding how men and women operated also need to be taken into account.

The influence of gender on human behaviour has, of course, been in dispute for many years. In 1949 Simone de Beauvoir penned what would become her most famous sentence: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."[9] As an existentialist de Beauvoir was principally concerned with the concept of choice; the idea that human existence had no predetermined meaning and that it was up to the individual to use this freedom to decide the way they wanted to interact with the world. Nevertheless she was aware that, although individuals had the right to choose for themselves, those choices were always situated in a social context, and she concluded that: "No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that

[9] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1976), p. 295.

produces this creature".[10] Michel Foucault agreed that to be sexed was not constructed by biology, but how one was subjected to a set of social rules and regulations.[11] Sexuality was an historical concept which enabled the operation of power relations, and these power relations were not permanent and constant but temporary and dynamic.

This idea is continuing to be explored and debated by contemporary theorists such as Judith Butler, Jonathan Dollimore, and Tamsin Spargo, who believe, like de Beauvoir and Foucault, that gender is not something that one is born with, and therefore immutable and unchanging, but a series of behaviours that one adopts in order to navigate a variety of discourses. Spargo asserts that: "We do not behave in certain ways because of our gender identity, we attain that identity through those behavioural patterns, which sustain gender norms."[12] Feminist historians Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have come to a similar conclusion during their research into middle-class families during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, claiming that: "Manliness and femininity were not fixed categories acquired in childhood, but were constantly being tested, challenged and reworked both in imagination and in the encounters of daily life."[13] In other words, identities were not fixed at birth but were fluid and changed throughout one's life depending upon one's experiences: gender was only one of a multitude of factors which might influence human behaviour; race, class, religion, age, being an only child, even hair colour could also have an effect on how one acted. Nothing was predetermined. Identity was simply a performance that one chose to put on for the outside world at any particular moment.

It is apparent that there are many possible approaches to justify why people behave in a particular manner, and this complexity needs to be taken into consideration when issues of gender are being explored. This, together with findings from other disciplines that appear to indicate that there was some overlap between the gender roles on the domestic front, raises serious questions about the value of

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[10] Ibid., p. 295.
[11] This contrasts with Sigmund Freud's assertion that sexuality was a natural force which society sought to control and manipulate. Sigmund Freud, *Abstracts of The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (New York: International Universities, 1973).
[12] Tamsin Spargo, *Foucault and Queer Theory* (Cambridge: Icon Books Ltd., 2000), pp. 56-7.
[13] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family fortunes: men and women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 450.

separate spheres to the study of travel literature. This investigation, therefore, was undertaken to establish whether the ideology of separate spheres continues to be relevant in the analysis of nineteenth-century travel literature, to examine whether male and female travellers were as different as has been supposed, and to ascertain whether gender played as strong a role in influencing nineteenth-century travel literature as has been assumed.

۹/ The decision to concentrate on travel accounts written during the nineteenth century was taken largely because it is this period which is most closely associated with the ideology of separate spheres, because of the vast numbers of travellers during this period that chose to publish records of their journeys, and because of the accessibility of these accounts for modern scholars. It is also because the nineteenth century was a very exciting period for travel and for travel literature. Although, early in the century, war with France severely limited travel, huge numbers of men and women began leaving the British Isles following the cessation of hostilities in 1815. Peace in Europe, the expansion of the British Empire, technological developments both in sea and land transportation, and the increasing wealth of the population all led to a rapid increase in the number of people travelling abroad. It was also a time of great change for British females; opportunities opened up for women in the labour market[14] and education,[15] their legal rights improved,[16] and the women's suffrage movement began to develop.[17] All these factors make the nineteenth century a particularly fascinating period for travel literature, and that is why it has been chosen for the purpose of this investigation.

۱۰/ Travel was not only becoming easier and quicker but it was also becoming cheaper. Alan Sillitoe writes that by 1840 it was possible to reach most of the major cities of Europe by boat and rail, and by 1872:

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[14] 1866 Elizabeth Garret Anderson (first woman to graduate from a British medical school, although in 1849 Elizabeth Blackwell, born in Bristol, graduated in New York).
[15] 1869 Endowed Schools Act (increased girls' access to grammar schools), 1870 Education Act (allowed women to vote for and serve on School Boards), 1877 first girls' public school opened (St Andrews), followed by Roedean in 1885.
[16] 1882 Married Women's Property Act.
[17] 1872 formation of the National Society of Women's Suffrage (there were local societies prior to this; e.g. 1867 Manchester Suffrage Committee). 1894 Local Government Act (women could vote in local elections, become Poor Law Guardians, act on School Boards).

the railway to Rome went via Paris, Munich, Innsbruck and the Brenner Pass, a distance of 1547 miles which took three days, for the fare of twelve pounds. In 1875 there were 1600 miles of railway in Italy, and 8164 by 1889. Bradshaw, in 1897, says that Rome could be reached from London in two and a half days for ten pounds.[18]

(نحوه مسافرت تا رم)

11/ An improved road system (thanks to Napoleon), a huge investment in the railway network, and an increase in the quantity and quality of facilities for travellers, accompanied by massive social changes in Britain, had an substantial impact on the way and the number of people who travelled to the continent. European tours which at the end of the eighteenth century took several months, and occasionally several years, to complete were reduced to a few weeks by the end of the nineteenth century. No longer did people rent houses in which to stay for a season or two, where time and money could be idled away leisurely perusing all the important cultural sites before moving on to the next fashionable location. As the nineteenth century progressed trips to the continent increasingly became of shorter duration. Lynne Withey found during her investigation into the history of the Grand Tour and the tours of Thomas Cook that by the 1830s over 5,000 British travellers went to Rome and that 11,000 went to Florence simply for the Christmas festivities."[19]

17/ The reduced travelling times meant that people who had to work for a living were now able to visit Europe too, as they did not need to be absent from their employment for an unreasonable amount of time. It also brought the cost of travel down significantly, and this opened up the travel market to a whole new group of consumers. Not everyone, however, was pleased about the increasing democratisation of travel. Thackeray, one of many critics, was horrified at the large number of lower-class travellers: "Times are altered at Ostend now; of the Britons who go thither, very few look like lords, or act like members of our hereditary aristocracy. They seem for the most part shabby in attire, dingy of linen, lovers of billiards and brandy, and cigars and grease ordinaries."[20] These new travellers were

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[18] Alan Sillitoe, *Leading the Blind* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 93.
[19] Lynne Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours. A History of Leisure Travel 1750-1915* (London: Aurum Press,1998), pp. 58-65.
[20] Cited in Alan Sillitoe, *Leading the Blind* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 3.

condemned for crowding popular sites, mocked for their supposed inability to truly appreciate high culture, and ridiculed about their unwillingness to engage with the local population.[21] John Murray attributed their unpopularity largely to ignorance and insensitivity, but also to their inability to speak foreign languages, their boorish behaviour as Protestants in Roman Catholic churches, and their disposition to use their fists when annoyed, observing: "It may not be amiss here briefly to consider the causes which render the English so unpopular on the Continent; as to the fact of their being so, it is to be feared there can be no doubt."[22]

13 A consequence of this unfavourable image of the British abroad was that it became increasingly important for 'serious' travellers to be able to distinguish themselves from these "unpopular" 'tourists'. Exotic and remote places remained almost totally their province but areas which developments in technology had brought closer, faster, and cheaper were more problematic, and Europe, once the playground of the rich and powerful, was increasingly reachable for a much wider range of social classes.[23] James Buzard discusses in some detail the stigma of being seen as a 'tourist', contrasting it to the more complimentary title of 'traveller', in his major investigation of European tourism during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this work Buzard assesses how the term 'tourist' was used in a derogatory sense, at least among the cultural elite, in a variety of literary genres throughout the period. He discovered during the course of his research that British 'tourists' were almost universally despised, even by many of the British, and also that 'tourist' as a pejorative term did not originate in the nineteenth century, as one

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[21] Jeanne Moskal, "Politics and the occupation of a nurse in Mariana Starke's *Letters from Italy*", Amanda Gilroy, ed., *Romantic Geographies – Discourses of Travel 1775-1844* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 159, gives a particularly crude example of bad behaviour by British tourists. Lynne Withey. *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours*, pp. 32-57 also discusses criticism of British tourists, particularly for their use of the 'Claude-glass' and John Murray's guide books.

[22] John Murray, *Murray's Handbook for Travellers in Switzerland* (Leicester University Press: Victorian Library Edition, 1970), p. 27.

[23] Lynne Withey discusses in *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours* how quickly entrepreneurs were to recognize that there was an extremely lucrative business opportunity in arranging strategies to help the 'old guard' avoid contact with these 'riff-raff'. George Pulman's luxury train travel, started in America in the 1850s, was a huge success when he moved to Europe in 1874. Georges Nagelmackers developed the first Orient Express journey in 1883 and, although a round-trip ticket cost the same as the annual rent on a London house, it was a great success. Cesar Ritz opened the Ritz hotel in Paris 1898 and the Carlton hotel in London in 1899. pp. 167-95.

might suppose because of the rise of mass tourism during the period, but had been recognised as an insult for some time:

> Gibbon had written in 1785 that 'the only disagreeable circumstance' he observed in Lausanne was 'the encrease [sic] of a race of animals with which this country has been long infested, and who are said to come from an Island in the North Ocean' [...] Montagu had complained in 1758 that 'the folly of British boys [...] have gained us the glorious title of Golden Asses all over Italy.[24]

There was a tremendous amount of snobbery associated with travel during the nineteenth century, which appears not to have diminished given the current debate concerning the positive and negative effects of travel and tourism on local economies and cultures. However, the irony is that the enormous interest generated in travel by this new generation of traveller resulted in a huge growth in the popularity of travel literature generally. Wordsworth may have bitterly complained about swarms of tourists cluttering up his beloved Lake District and peering in at his windows, but he did not complain about the increase in sales of his books.

Industrialisation, urbanisation, scientific and technological advances, and the changing class system transformed nineteenth-century culture and society as a whole, and, therefore, it was inevitable that they also influenced the approach taken by travel writers. These changes had a considerable effect on the way that travel was perceived and the way that travel was recorded. We have discussed how it was of great concern to many travellers that they were able to distinguish themselves from 'tourists' in their travel literature. The travellers whose works are included in this thesis would not have thought of themselves as 'tourists' but as explorers, adventurers, pioneers. Even those who were on their annual vacation, such as Mrs. Ernest Hart, considered themselves to be 'serious' travellers and would have been appalled to be classified as 'tourists'.

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[24] James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 97-8.

١٥/ Sidonie Smith's investigation into the impact that the new technological developments had on women's travel writing has led her to conclude that many of these advances feminised travel: "railroad companies encouraged and exploited the identification of travelling women with feminized spaces, with comfort, ease, and safety in travel". Unfortunately, this "inevitably reinforced cultural stereotypes of women's incapacity for arduous travel", and therefore made it very difficult for women to portray themselves as 'serious' travellers.[25] However, it also made it especially difficult for male travellers. Not only did they not wish to be associated with 'tourists', neither did they want to be associated with 'skirted' travellers and their association with feminization. Consequently, as the century progressed, fewer texts described the journey out to the destination, as advances in rail and steamboat technology had made this part of the trip redundant. Those accounts which continued to include the new modes of travel tended to stress how difficult and problematic they were, such as derailments and breakdowns or acute sea-sickness and shipwrecks, anything that would enable the traveller to demonstrate that they had been severely tested or their life put at risk and help represent them as a 'serious' traveller.

١٦ Not only were questions asked about the travellers' motives for traversing, and whether they were travellers rather than 'tourists', but suspicions were often voiced about the integrity of their travel texts. Women's accounts, in particular, were carefully scrutinized for any indication of deceit. However, as the century progressed improvements in transportation made many journeys more believable and women's travel texts became more readily accepted (developments in photography also enabled travellers of both sexes to furnish physical evidence of the authenticity of their accounts), although women who travelled to remote places continued to have their accounts thoroughly examined well into the next century.[26] Travel writers of both genders were aware that they had to reassure their readers about the veracity of their texts, but they were also required to produce work that was novel and original,

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[25] Sidonie Smith. *Moving Lives – 20th Century Women's Travel Writing* (USA: University of Minnesota, 2001), p. 128.

[26] For example, Sara Mills, in *Discourses of Difference*, investigates how Alexandra David-Neel's account of her trip to Lhasa (1927) sparked a huge debate regarding its authenticity. pp. 125-51.

and at the same time they also had to demonstrate that they were not a common 'tourist'. So travel writers had many obstacles to overcome if they wanted to be able to impress their audience.

There are clearly a number of factors, other than the gender of the author, such as historical context or geographical position, which influenced the content and style of a travel text, and they all need to be borne in mind. However, the purpose of this study is to investigate whether nineteenth-century travel writers conformed to the gender stereotypes prescribed by the ideology of separate spheres, and determine whether gender played as strong a role in influencing nineteenth-century travel literature as has been assumed. In order to answer these questions the thesis will consider areas traditionally associated with each sex and examine how these were dealt with by both male and female travel writers. For balance, the thesis is divided into two parts, with two chapters in each. The first part of the investigation covers issues from the public world, commonly associated with masculine endeavours, and the second part of the investigation covers issues from the private world, commonly associated with feminine endeavours.

The first part of this study examines areas usually linked with the public world and masculinity. Chapter One considers how 'technical' issues, such as politics, geography and economics, were discussed in nineteenth-century travel literature. It has been argued that because such matters belonged to the public, hence male, world, female writers did not have any need to discuss them in their travel literature, and indeed were actively discouraged from doing so. Sara Mills and Shirley Foster have contended that: "Many of their narratives are prefaced by apologia, protesting their inability to treat matters other than the social (or even trivial), in comparison with the political and scientific orientation of male texts."[27] By looking at how male and female travellers incorporated 'technical' issues in their travel writing we should be able to examine the accuracy of this statement and determine to what extent gender influenced the inclusion of 'technical' content in a travel text.

[27] Shirley Foster and Sara Mills, eds., *An Anthology of Women's Travel Writing*, p. 10.

Chapter Two investigates the role of the 'Action Hero Narrator', another area regularly aligned with masculinity. It has been claimed that adopting a strong narrative voice was especially difficult for female travel writers; on the one hand feminine discourse prevented them from asserting themselves too strongly, and yet on the other hand they were also Britain's representatives overseas, and colonial discourse required them to uphold certain standards. It has also been alleged that colonial discourse forced British male travellers to maintain a 'stiff upper lip', be in control at all times, and show no signs of weakness, in order to protect their nation's reputation as a leading world power. Discovering how the 'Action Hero Narrator' operated in nineteenth-century travel literature will, therefore, help in determining how closely each gender adhered to these expectations.

The second part of this study explores areas typically connected with the private world and femininity and, in particular, the ways that male and female writers approached the issue of relationships in their travel literature. Chapter Three focuses on areas of sexual attraction between travellers and the opposite sex, and looks at how both genders dealt with these experiences in their travel accounts. This is an intriguing subject; although it falls under the heading of 'relationships' and is, therefore, associated with the private sphere, discussing sexual matters was clearly not considered a 'proper' activity for a lady and, as such, was a problematic area for female writers. Male writers, in contrast, were not under the same restrictions governing 'correct' behaviour. Therefore the way that travel writers dealt with issues of sexual attraction in their travel literature should tell us a great deal about attitudes towards gender in the nineteenth century.

Chapter Four examines the dynamics of family relationships, and considers the way that issues such as children and the family, and the role and status of wives and mothers were addressed in nineteenth-century travel literature. These are themes with which women are assumed to have had a special sympathy, and in which men are supposed to have had little interest. Analysis of travel accounts produced by both men and women should help to identify the extent to which these contentions are accurate, and determine whether men and women were interested in gender-specific issues.

Splitting the thesis into two parts, with the first two chapters addressing areas usually associated with men and the final two chapters discussing areas usually associated with women, should enable us to arrive at a balanced assessment of the relevance of the ideology of separate spheres in the study of nineteenth-century travel literature. Each of the four chapters will assess how both sexes coped with a variety of discursive pressures, so as to resolve whether gender roles were as clearly defined as has been previously thought, and a number of measures have been taken in order to help achieve this objective. Firstly, the thesis will examine travel narratives produced by both genders. Secondly, it will utilize texts covering the whole of the nineteenth century. Finally, it will include travel literature from a wide range of countries. However, I am aware that there are potential drawbacks with adopting this method and I would like to justify my decision to take such a broad approach.

When I started this investigation in 2000 there were relatively few academics working in this field, but over recent years travel literature has become increasingly of interest to scholars. However, although there has been a growing interest in the study of travel literature, few studies have considered the primary source material produced by both men and women in this way, or on this scale, and I believe this continues to be an area of research which remains under-explored. As Mills and Foster recently observed: "it is significant that many surveys of travel literature have been written which contain reference to few or no women travel writers" and those that do "treat women's writing as a necessarily different and implicitly subordinate sub-genre".[28] The studies that have tried to redress the balance, and placed their focus instead on women's travel literature, have made similar misjudgments. They have assessed how *women* have coped with different discursive issues, but not how *travel writers* have coped with them. Male travel writers have, generally, been ignored or relegated to an aside or a footnote in these enquiries; just as female travel writers were marginalized in the past. My argument is that the travel literature of *both* sexes needs to be examined before it is possible to draw any conclusions about gender. It is difficult to make assumptions about gender in female travel literature

[28] Ibid., p. 5.

unless the approach of male travel writers is also investigated. For example, one cannot assume that women had a greater understanding of, say, clothing and appearance, without considering how men wrote about these issues too. It is reassuring to discover that other researchers are also beginning to acknowledge the importance of a bi-gendered analysis of travel literature, and that it is necessary to have: "anthologies of travel writing and critical essays on travel writing which do not make any essentialist assumptions, which refer equally to men's and women's work".[29] It is essential that the literature of both male and female travellers is considered equally valuable by researchers. Women's travel literature is not a "sub-ordinate sub-genre" but neither is male travel literature, and that it why I chose to incorporate texts from both genders in this study.

It is also important that travel literature covering the whole of the nineteenth century was included in this investigation. The nineteenth century was a period of significant social, political, and scientific change, and it would have been extremely difficult to choose one section of it without severely compromising this study (after all the Britain at the close of the nineteenth century was not the same Britain as at the start of the nineteenth century). Although this thesis is not a history either of travel or of travel literature it is essential that these major influences are taken into consideration. As previously noted social change and developments in transportation influenced the way that people travelled, and the way that they perceived their travels. Literature generally reflects the culture and beliefs of the society in which it is produced, and travel literature is no exception, so selecting texts solely from one section of the nineteenth century would have been illogical as it would have prevented any trends in literary content and style from being detected. Therefore, in order to examine how attitudes towards gender changed over time, and to see what impact external forces may have had on travel literature, I decided to include texts from the whole of the nineteenth century. However, the nineteenth century cannot be viewed in isolation, consequently I have occasionally referenced texts from the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, where appropriate, in order to highlight continuities or indicate change.

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[29] Ibid., p. 5.

It made sense for the purposes of this investigation to include texts produced by both genders, it also made sense to select texts which covered the whole of the nineteenth century. However, choosing travel literature from a wide range of countries rather than concentrating on one region was a much more difficult decision to make. Initially I intended to limit the texts to those which focussed on one area, but then the problem arose of deciding which area should be picked. Selecting texts from colonized countries would have provided some valuable information, particularly on the impact of British political/economic involvement on issues of gender, but it would also have excluded a wealth of material which would have enabled conclusions to be drawn about areas in which Britain had little or no influence. The idea of using only one location was problematic. However, the questions asked about the relevance of the ideology of separate spheres necessitated a broader approach, and I therefore elected to discuss texts from a wide range of different countries. Including texts from areas as diverse as America and India, Africa and Europe, Australia and Tibet, allows comparisons to be made across a variety of different political, social and economic systems, and enables us to get a better understanding of what influence, if any, location had on nineteenth-century travel literature. If texts from one area had been chosen for this study questions would always have been asked about how things differed in another part of the world, and what impact that had on issues of gender.

There are few studies that have considered the primary source material in this way or on this scale, probably with good cause given the amount of reading required, and, although I feel that my decision to discuss texts from both genders, the whole of the nineteenth century, and a range of different countries, is justified, I am also conscious that there are potential drawbacks with taking such a broad approach. The wide range of evidence contained in this study, not only in time but in place, could be confusing and difficult to follow, particularly for a reader not familiar with the material. In order to mitigate this problem I have tried to make it clear when and why the discussion has moved on to analyzing a text from a different period or location, and explain what contribution this new piece of evidence makes to the investigation. Texts from a different place or time are only included where essential, in order to

indicate how things have changed or, more often than one might have expected, draw attention to the consistencies in approach across time and space.

It would have been impractical to incorporate every travel account published during the nineteenth century in this study, but for comparison I have attempted to draw on a wide body of work and include as great a diversity of material as possible. The majority of the texts discussed in this thesis were written by authors from the middle classes, unless otherwise stated, as this group produced the bulk of travel literature written during the nineteenth century. Where 'Africa' has been referred to it generally means sub-Saharan Africa: Egypt, Syria, Libya, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Iran have been classed as Middle East. Occasionally lengthy quotations have been included. These have been necessary in order to illustrate the time and effort a particular writer committed to the subject, and to show that it was not just a token comment but an indication of great interest. Issues of race have not been foregrounded in this investigation, although I am aware that currently this is a popular area of research, particularly as regards the approach of women travellers towards other races and whether their gender made them more sympathetic to people of different nationalities. However, where applicable, racial issues have been considered within each chapter, including analysing the effect gender had on the way male and female travel writers interacted with people from other countries.

I am conscious that other academics have read some of the texts I have referred to in this study, and I have discussed their analyses of the material throughout this investigation. However, although it is critical to be aware of their conclusions, I propose that when these texts are put into the context of nineteenth-century political and cultural events as a whole, and seen in association with texts from other genders, alternative conclusions are justifiable.

This thesis offers an alternative view to accepted theories about the nature of gender and the role of separate spheres, although some scholars are beginning to agree with the conclusions of my research and acknowledge that gender is only one factor which influenced the way travellers wrote about their journeys in the nineteenth century. It is a mistake to assume that all female travel writers were the same, all male travel writers were the same, or that because of their gender male and

female travel writers would inevitably produce different sorts of travel literature. It is dangerous to make generalizations about issues of gender in the nineteenth century when the research is based on evidence from a single gender, a specific time, or one location, and it is only by closely examining a wide range of texts that conclusions about gender can be drawn. I hope, therefore, that this thesis will demonstrate the value of a broad approach, and that my research will make a valuable contribution to the existing wealth of knowledge in this fascinating field.

CHAPTER ONE

"the addition of stronger meat"[30]

Introduction

One of the primary reasons why it has been assumed men and women took a different approach in the production of their travel writing is that many scholars of nineteenth-century travel literature claim that men wrote about subjects more associated with the public sphere and women wrote about subjects more associated with the private sphere. These academics appear to have reached the conclusion that male travel writers generally produced serious works of a 'technical' nature, including topics such as geographical and topographical data, descriptions of the local political and economic situations, and the recording of new scientific discoveries. Female travel writers, they maintain, have tended to be more concerned with domestic issues relating to the private sphere, including subjects such as appearance, hygiene, and relationships. Many scholars agree with the view held by Sara Mills that: "The discourses of femininity, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, set out for middle-class women a range of roles, largely situated within the private sphere."[31]

On the surface it would appear that this assumption is perfectly valid, as travel books produced by male writers during the nineteenth century often contained substantial amounts of 'technical' information. The narrator's geographical position seems to have been of particular importance, with great trouble being taken to inform the reader of their latitude and longitude, or how close they were to the nearest town or major river. Distances were also extremely important, as were the times it took to travel them. Male writers also tended to take great care in recording

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[30] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa,* vol. 1 (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd., 1961), Preface.
[31] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 94.

their physical environment in terms of the heights of mountains, the lengths of rivers and the temperatures and climatic conditions. They wrote about the types of rocks, the availability of water and food supplies, the population figures of the towns and villages they came across, and the prevailing political situations; who was in control seems to have been of some significance to most male travel writers, all the sort of practical information essential for future travellers, governments, and private organizations if they wanted to be able to develop opportunities for trade and commerce in the area. Understandably these factors have led academics to deduce that male travel writers, therefore, were primarily concerned with documenting 'technical' information and practical data relating to the public sphere.

Similarly literature produced by female travel writers has been interpreted as being preoccupied with homely, domestic matters, such as clothing, food and accommodation, rather than with wider economic and political concerns. Shirley Foster has asserted that there were different expectations of travel literature produced by men and women arguing that: "when a publisher asked Sydney, Lady Morgan to write on Italy, they asked her to write on morals and manners, whilst her husband was to write on the laws and government institutions."[32] Other scholars such as Billie Melman, Alison Blunt, Mary Louise Pratt, Sara Mills, Cheryl McEwan and Amanda Gilroy have also concluded from their research into travel literature that nineteenth-century readers assumed male and female travel writers would have distinct areas of expertise. Dorothy Middleton has claimed that women travel writers "were not, with the notable exception of Mary Kingsley, very interested in politics",[33] and Mills has argued that "When women travellers do attempt to give 'scientific' accounts, their work is seen to be aberrant."[34] Admittedly the women travel writers themselves have to accept some responsibility for this interpretation of their work. Mary Kingsley, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, appeared to acknowledge that there were two separate markets for travel literature; there was a market for specialist books and there was also a market for works of a more popular nature. She herself produced two books. The first, *Travels in West Africa*, written in

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[32] Cited in Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 95.
[33] Dorothy Middleton, *Victorian Lady Travellers* (London: Routledge 1965), p. 4.
[34] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 81.

1897, was for general consumption and chronicled her adventures and experiences in West Africa. The second, *West African Studies*, written in 1899, was primarily for government, commercial and scientific organizations, and discussed trade opportunities, British colonialism and the effects of missionary activity in the area. By producing two different texts Kingsley seems to be confirming that there were distinct markets for different types of travel literature.

Many travel literature scholars seem to accept that the two sexes took completely different approaches to subject matter in their travel writing, and deem the ideology of separate spheres to be relevant in the analysis of nineteenth-century travel literature. However, I believe that there is reason to doubt this assertion and that evidence from the texts themselves strongly challenges this hypothesis. My conclusions are further supported by the results from recent investigations undertaken by academics outside the field of travel-literature analysis. Social historians Eleanor Gordon, Gwyneth Nair, Martha Vicinus, Jon Stobart, Alastair Owens, Penelope Lane, Neil Raven, Kathryn Gleadle and Margot Finn, have all concluded that in nineteenth-century Britain there was a degree of fluidity between the 'public' and the 'private'. In the course of their research Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair found that in Glasgow women were "expected to pay their way" which, at times, "could be quite a formal arrangement", and that women were more than likely to be involved in the running of the family business.[35]

Anne McClintock, in her investigation into race, gender and sexuality, contends that there was a general misconception that middle-class women were a leisured class. She argues that "By common assumption, a typical middle class home was not complete without at least three paid domestics" but "the family income required to employ this 'necessary trinity' was found only in the tiny, elite-upper and upper-middle classes."[36] The expense of running such an operation was, therefore, beyond the means of the majority of middle-class families. However, appearances were very important. Because the Middle Classes aspired to being a leisured class it

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[35] Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain*, pp. 65-6.

[36] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Imperial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 161.

was vital not to be seen performing tasks involving physical labour, even though the work had to be done. This, she concludes, has led to women's involvement in work becoming almost invisible, and helps explain why their contribution to the labour market has been easily overlooked.[37]

It is important to remember that in Britain throughout the nineteenth century married women were in the minority; single and widowed females were far greater in number and, therefore, there were likely to be large numbers of women who were reliant on their own resources to survive. Gordon and Nair discovered that these women used a variety of ways to support themselves:

> There were considerable numbers of widowed and single women with occupations, running businesses and engaging directly in the market. Women's money supported family firms; women were major investors in enterprises like the railways. Some women ran successful small (or occasionally large) businesses. Women owned property; they employed lawyers and accountants; they administered large estates. There were, of course, social constraints upon the economic freedom of women. But it was possible – indeed common - to work within these constraints to achieve real economic autonomy and influence.[38]

Catherine Hall, as a result of her investigation into the relationship between feminism and history, agrees that: "Considerable evidence has now been accumulated of the economic activity of middle-class women" and that this "evidence suggests an extremely varied range of economic activities carried on in a world dominated legally, socially and financially by men."[39] Women in Britain also played key public roles in other ways: they were involved in the temperance movement, anti-slavery campaigns and women's suffrage, as well as a variety of philanthropic undertakings: Martha Vicinus concluded from her examination of career opportunities available to women between 1850 and 1920 that by end of the nineteenth century "an upper class woman who did not do some kind of volunteer

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[37] Ibid., p. 162.
[38] Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain*, p. 197.
[39] Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*, pp. 177-8.

work would have been an anomaly among her friends. And for single women, such work had become a respectable alternative to idleness."[40] These are activities that could hardly be described as 'private', even if some of these activities were seen as 'women's' issues and therefore suitable for a 'lady'.

Although research about gender roles in Britain during the nineteenth century has indicated that households were not, in reality, as traditional as they are popularly thought, there was definitely a perception that they should try to aspire to being a 'model' family unit, and one should not summarily dismiss the influence and pressure of society's expectations. The plethora of advice books in circulation is usually cited as evidence of how prescribed people's lives were during the nineteenth century, and Gordon and Nair claim that "In large part we have derived our view of the Victorian home from the prescriptive literature of the period".[41] However, today we are bombarded with information on the dangers of overindulgence, how to eat healthily, and the benefits of regular exercise, and yet we are considered a nation of binge-drinkers who are mostly overweight and physically unfit. Therefore the amount of such literature is not proof of how people actually behaved but rather a good indication of the sort of life to which people aspired.

The conclusions drawn from these social studies indicate that there is reason to question the assumption that women were restricted to the home and the domestic space in Britain during the nineteenth century, but can the same conclusion be reached for travel literature? We have discussed how travel literature scholars have argued that male and female writers were interested in different areas: male travel writers were interested in 'technical' issues and female travel writers were interested in domestic issues. However, simply because some male travel writers chose to discuss 'technical' matters does not necessarily mean that all travel texts produced by male writers during the nineteenth century contain such information. Likewise, although there are texts written by female travel writers which include little or no 'technical' data, this does not apply to every text written by a female writer. It is

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[40] Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (London: Virago Press, 1994), p. 212.

[41] Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain*, p. 107.

only by examining a broad range of texts produced by both male and female travel writers, covering the whole of the nineteenth century and a variety of geographical positions, that a more balanced picture can be obtained.

There are, of course, a number of issues, other than gender, that might have influenced the amount of 'technical' data contained in a travel text. In the Introduction we saw how important it was for many travel writers, both male and female, to be able to distinguish themselves from being simple 'tourists'. Including 'technical' information in their travel account would lend a certain amount of gravitas to the text and proclaim the seriousness of the material. Another factor was the author's motive for travelling. If the trip was for personal reasons, for instance to escape from difficulties at home, to look for romance or to seek a cure for a health problem, there would be little reason to include either politics or economics in the story of one's travels. However, if the journey was being sponsored by a government department, or a scientific or religious organization, then it would be more important that the text contained detailed 'technical' information, if only for contractual reasons.

The country being visited also had an effect on the amount of 'technical' information provided in a travel text. For example, travellers to Japan in the early nineteenth-century might be expected to document facts that could assist the British Government in exploiting political and commercial opportunities, but travellers to Europe during the same period would not be expected to provide so much detailed political and economic data as relations were already well-established. The period of travel also had a significant impact on the quantity of 'technical' data. For instance, at the beginning of the nineteenth century very little was known about the interior of the continent of Africa, therefore it was crucial that the travel literature contained as much geographical detail as possible. However, later in the century, when the region was thoroughly mapped, less emphasis was put on providing detailed topographical data.

Finally, the amount of travel literature already in circulation also had an impact on the need for specialized information. If dozens of texts were already in circulation containing details of a scientific, political and economic nature then there

was little need for further information as it would merely be repeating what was already known. It was of great concern to both genders that the material they produced was novel, and many travel writers tried to reassure their readers that their narratives were innovative. J. L. Porter, for example, in the account of his tour of the Middle East in 1870 wrote that: "Whatever opinion may be formed as to the importance of my researches, there can be no question that the geographical information I present to the public is new."[42] Worrying that a text was failing to contribute anything unique did not originate in the nineteenth century. Gulliver's comments in *Gulliver's Travels* demonstrate that Jonathan Swift was aware of the potential danger that the reading public could soon tire of too much travel literature:

> The captain was very well satisfied with this plain relation I had given him; and said, he hoped when we returned to England, I would oblige the world by putting it in paper, and making it publick [sic]. My answer was, that I thought we were already overstocked with books of travels: that, nothing could now pass which was not extraordinary.[43]

If this anxiety was being satirized in works of fiction as early as 1726 then it must have been a concern for the non-fictional travel literature market for some time; therefore it is understandable that publishing houses would try to ensure that the travel texts they marketed were able to offer something pioneering for their customers.

A clue to the amount of control publishers exerted over their authors' work is revealed in the comments made by Richard Burton who, although a highly respected explorer, was asked by his publisher to revise his intended approach to his book on Central Africa:

> When I communicated to my friends the publishers certain intentions of writing an exclusively 'light work,' they protested against the project, stating that the public appetite required the addition of stronger meat. In compliance, therefore, with their suggestion, I have drawn two portraits of the same

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[42] J. L. Porter, *Five Years in Damascus; with travels and researches in Palmyra, Lebanon, the Giant Cities of Bashan, and the Hauran* (London: John Murray, 1870), p. 152.
[43] Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (London: Everyman Library, 1991), pp. 156-7.

> object, and mingled the gay with the graver details of travel, so as to produce an antipathetic cento.[44]

Burton's desire to produce "an exclusively 'light work'" was thwarted by his publisher who demanded that the text included the "addition of stronger meat." If a writer with Burton's reputation could have his output controlled to such a degree then it must have been even easier for publishers to prescribe content to less experienced travel writers. As well as indicating the authority of the publishing houses this comment also reveals that external forces were more likely to influence the content of a travel text than the gender of the writer (although as the publishers of travel literature were male then the effect of any external influence would, arguably, be masculine). As we have seen gender was clearly not the only influence on the amount of 'technical' information in a travel account. However, gender does need to be studied in order to determine the extent of its influence on the way 'technical' data was represented in the travel literature produced during the nineteenth century, to resolve whether or not the 'public' sphere was restricted to male travel writers, and to investigate whether the ideology of separate spheres should continue to be used in the analysis of nineteenth-century travel literature.

1.1 'Technical' Content in Male Travel Literature

In order to investigate the role of gender on the way 'technical' information was conveyed in nineteenth-century travel literature I would, firstly, like to examine how male travel writers dealt with the issue, beginning with accounts which contained significant amounts of 'technical' information; the sort of subjects considered suitable for discussion in the public sphere. Within this category there was a diverse approach, as not all texts conveyed facts in the same way. There are numerous travel texts produced by male writers that contain maps, tables of figures and statistics, and

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[44] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa,* vol. 1, Preface.

lists of local names either in the main body of the text or, more usually, in an appendix. The Preface to David Livingstone's *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi; and its Tributaries and of the Discovery of the Lakes Shirwa and Nyassa 1858-64* indicates from the outset that it was to be a serious and authoritative text: "It has been my object in this work to give as clear an account as I was able of tracts of country previously unexplored, with their river systems, natural productions, and capabilities."[45] While John Speke, in his *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* published in 1863, claims that his "first occupation was to map the country."[46] And Hugh Clapperton's *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo* written in 1827, contains large amounts of 'technical' subject matter including climatic conditions, tribal names, agricultural data, and considerable information on the political situation throughout the region:

> The kingdom, as I have already said, is divided into the petty states of Niki, Kiama, Wawa, and Boussa, of which Boussa is considered the head, Niki the next. The governors are all hereditary as long as they can keep their place. These states sometimes make war upon one another, when the sultan of Boussa interferes, and makes both parties pay.[47]

It is hardly surprising that these texts include significant amounts of 'technical' information. Livingstone carefully explained in the Preface to his account how his trip was funded: "The Government have supported the proposal of the Royal Geographical Society made by my friend Sir Roderick Murchison, and have united with that body to aid me in another attempt to open Africa to civilizing influences."[48] Speke's expedition was also financed by the Royal Geographical Society, and Clapperton's trip was organized by Lord Bathurst, Secretary of State for the

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[45] David Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi and its Tributaries; and of the Discovery of the Lakes Shirwa and Nyassa 1858-64* (London: John Murray, 1865), Preface.
[46] John Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1863), p. 32.
[47] Hugh Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo. To which is added the journal of Richard Lander from Kano to the Sea-Coast, partly by a more Eastern route* (London: Frank Cass, 1966), p. 117.
[48] David Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition*, Preface.

Colonies, who saw the expedition as an opportunity to improve trade relations in the region. Support from sources such as these would almost certainly have put the traveller under enormous pressure to produce information which could be utilized in a practical way. Therefore one would anticipate finding significant amounts of 'technical' material in these sorts of travel accounts.

'Technical' information in a travel text was of course not only vital for government and scientific organizations. Religious institutions also needed data in order to be able to plan their missionary and evangelizing activities. Bishop Reginald Heber's publication, describing his missionary tour around Northern India in 1826, contains numerous facts on the country and people of India: "The lands are sometimes on lease for a good many years, sometimes from year to year only. The usual rent for rice-land in Bengal, at least in this part of it, is two rupees a begah, or about twelve or fifteen shillings an acre."[49] Heber recognized that 'technical' information was crucial for the Church's mission in the region and, therefore, discussed in some detail politics, education and commerce throughout the account of his visit to the continent.

Another aspect that the above examples share, other than their official reasons for travelling, is that they were all among the earliest British travellers to visit and write about their journey to a particular place. Being among the first visitors to a country was very influential on the amount of 'technical' data contained in a travel text. For example, Sir Rutherford Alcock was assigned to Japan in the 1860s during the politically difficult time of arranging treaties between the two countries, and he stressed in the account of his experiences the importance of good reliable data to the success of his mission: "One of the first steps towards the opening of a direct trade with Great Britain would seem to be a good survey of the Japanese coasts."[50] However, later travellers to the region, such as Rev. J.L.L. Thomas who visited Japan towards the end of the century, were able to take a slightly more relaxed approach in their travel narratives, and spend more time discussing the history and

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[49] Bishop Reginald Heber, *Bishop Heber in Northern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 62.
[50] Sir Rutherford Alcock, *The Capital of the Tycoon: A Narrative of a Three Years' Residence in Japan,* vol. 1 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1863), p. 44.

religions of the Japanese people rather than the geography and political structure of their islands. Thomas professed that in his book "education, religion, politics were each touched upon" but he did not feel that these issues warranted any in-depth discussion as this kind of information had been thoroughly documented by earlier travellers.[51]

Not all texts which contained large amounts of 'technical' information were funded by official bodies, but neither were they accounts of simple 'pleasure' trips. William Cobbett published a very studious and detailed account of his experiences during a self-financed visit to the United States in 1816. From the title of his account it is obvious that its content is going to include considerable amounts of 'technical' data as it declares his intention to discuss topics such as: "the Climate, the Soil, the Products, the Mode of Cultivation, the Land, the Prices of Land, of Labour, of Food, of Rainment; of the Expenses of House-keeping" but, whereas this sort of detail was usually produced for the benefit of the British government and/or British industry, Cobbett's text was written as a criticism of the British political administration.[52] As a radical thinker, political activist, and a champion for the rights of farm labourers, Cobbett was deliberately seeking to highlight the advantages open to American citizens. The vast amount of detail he recorded was necessary in order for him to be able to compare the two political systems, and demonstrate to his fellow countrymen the opportunities that were available to them across the ocean if they wanted to escape what Cobbett thought was an oppressive political system in England:

> I saw no hope of obtaining a Reform of Parliament, without which it was clear to me, that the people of England must continue to work solely for the benefit of the great insolent families, whom I hated for their injustice and rapacity, and despised for their meanness and ignorance [...] I was well pleased with America, over a considerable part of which I travelled. I saw an absence of human misery. I saw a government taking away a very, very small proportion of men's earnings [...] I saw those very Irish, to keep whom in

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[51] Rev. J.L.L. Thomas, *Journeys Among the Gentle Japs in the Summer of 1897, with a Special Chapter on the Religions of Japan* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Company Ltd., 1897), p. 46.
[52] William Cobbett, *A Year's Residence in the United States of America Treating the Face of the Country, the Climate, the Soil, the Products, the Mode of Cultivation, the Land, the Prices of Land, of Labour, of Food, of Rainment; of the Expenses of House-keeping, and of the usual Manner of Living; of the Manners and Customs of the People; and of the Institutions of the Country, Civil, Political, and Religious* (London: J M Cobbett, 1822).

> order, such murderous laws exist in Ireland, here good, peaceable, industrious citizens [...] In short, I saw a state of things, precisely the reverse of that in England, and very nearly what it would be in England, if the Parliament were reformed.[53]

Although significant references to 'technical' information in a travel narrative usually tend to indicate that the writer was a professional traveller, and the text was for serious consumption, this is not always the case. There are many male writers like Cobbett who, although travelling independently of any official body, were able to produce works that contained large amounts of 'technical' data. However, unlike Cobbett, many of them also managed to show that not all travel texts containing such details were dry and dull. In contrast to Cobbett's rather ponderous and solemn account of life in the ex-colony Henry Nelson Coleridge's narrative, *Six Months in the West Indies in 1825,* conveys a considerable amount of information regarding the political organization, infrastructure and economic conditions of the islands, but in a light-hearted and engaging way. Coleridge declared that his reason for travelling was to improve his health:

> I went simply and sheerly on my own account, or rather on account of the aforesaid rheumatism; for as every other sort of chemical action had failed, I was willing to try if fusion would succeed. This was my main reason for going abroad, to which perhaps I must add a certain vagabond humour which I inherited from my mother.[54]

Yet, despite his very personal objective for travelling, and his generally cheerful tone, he was also able to produce an account which provides some valuable information regarding the islands' social, political, and economic organizations. In his description of the commercial activities on the island of Martinique, he managed to detail the products on sale and mock the predominantly female consumers of those products at the same time: "In St. Pierre there are many shops which contain

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[53] Ibid., pp. 254-6.
[54] Henry Nelson Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies in 1825* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1970), p. 8.

nothing but bonnets, ribbons and silks, others nothing but trinkets and toys, others hats only, and so on, and there are rich tradesmen in St. Pierre on this account."[55] He also took several opportunities to spotlight what he saw as flaws in the political systems of the islands he visited: "There are 6,396 slaves in Montserrat, a considerable number of whom are entirely debarred from any mental instruction. This is the case with all those who are unfortunately the property of a noted Papist of great influence."[56] He concluded from this that "The Protestants and the Papists are as good friends in Montserrat as they are in Ireland" as, like many nineteenth-century British travel writers, he was eager to blame the Catholics for any failures he witnessed in the system.[57]

Coleridge was not a particularly creative or imaginative writer but he did have the ability to write about serious subjects in an engaging way. Other writers processing greater literary skills were also able to utilize their natural talents to convey serious information in a more easily digested way. Charles Dickens is a good example of this sort of travel writer. In the account of his trip to America in 1842 he discussed the operation of several State-run institutions including, among many others, prisons, orphanages, and the Lowell factory system. Sometimes Dickens was very appreciative about what he saw. Following a visit to a state hospital for the insane in Boston he observed: "It is obvious that one great feature of this system, is the inculcation and encouragement, even among such unhappy persons, of decent self-respect."[58] And he was similarly impressed during his trip to a school for abandoned boys: "They appeared exceedingly well-taught, and not better taught than fed; for a more chubby-looking full-waistcoated set of boys, I never saw."[59] The sharp contrast with the workhouse experience of the eponymous hero of *The Adventures of Oliver Twist*, published three years previously, would not have been lost on Dickens's readers. There can be little doubt that this was his intention as Dickens often used his fiction as a voice for social commentary.

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[55] Ibid., p. 145.
[56] Ibid., p. 184.
[57] Ibid., p. 175.
[58] Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 97.
[59] Ibid., p. 99.

Dickens was not unreservedly complimentary in his account, however, and he was not afraid to complain about what he disliked or criticize what he viewed as failings in the American regulatory systems. He was, for instance, highly critical of some of the penal institutions he was shown: "In the outskirts, stands a great prison, called the Eastern Penitentiary: conducted on a plan peculiar to the state of Pennsylvania. The system here, is rigid, strict, and hopeless solitary confinement. I believe it, in its effects, to be cruel and wrong"[60] (he was also unimpressed with the British penal system). However, on a less sombre note he moaned that Philadelphia was: "a handsome city, but distractingly regular. After walking about it for an hour or two, I felt that I would have given the world for a crooked street."[61] Dickens wanted to discuss politics, economics and social welfare in his travel narrative so as to contrast the American and the British systems and draw attention to areas where he believed improvements could be made. He recognised, however, that dry facts and figures would not be very appealing to his readership but, by using his immense literary skills, he was able to discuss these weighty subjects in an interesting way and so not alienate his audience.

Dickens was not the only successful writer of fiction who also had a flourishing career as a travel writer. Thackeray, Trollope, Haggard, Stevenson and Ballantyne, to name but a few, all used their creative abilities to record their experiences of foreign travel. Their literary talents gave them a huge advantage over travel writers not blessed with such skills, as they were able to convey matters of a serious nature in a much more engaging way (we shall discuss this area in greater detail in section 1.4). However, although they chose to employ a relatively light-hearted approach to convey such details, it is significant that scholars have not accused them of undermining the seriousness of their material. The same, as will become clear, cannot be said for the critical approach to female travel writers.

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[60] Ibid., p. 146.
[61] Ibid., p. 145.

1.2 'Technical' Content in Female Travel Literature

There are obviously several reasons why male writers of nineteenth-century travel literature chose to include substantial amounts of 'technical' information in their texts, and a large variety of ways in which they chose to convey this type of subject matter. This would appear to confirm the view of many scholars that it was male travel writers who wrote about public issues and that: "women's texts are not supposed to be 'scientific' and authoritative."[62] Yet, if this is the case, why did so many nineteenth-century travel texts written by women include such topics? Not only did female travel writers regularly discuss these matters but some were actively engaged and well respected in fields not normally thought of as suitable for a woman, women such as Isabella Bird for example. In the account of her journey around China, published in 1899, Bird provided information on the topography and geography, including distances and heights, of the places she visited in the Far East. She also supplied details of the trading situation in the region:

> I cannot omit all mention of kerosene oil, the import of which increases "by leaps and bounds," American taking the lead, and which is greatly diminishing the production of the native illuminating oils [...] Hankow has eight regular guilds, which are banks and cash shops, rice and grain dealers, clothiers and mercers, grocers and oilmen, ironmasters, wholesale dealers in copper and metals, dealers in KIANGSI china, and wholesale druggists, Hankow having one of the largest and best drug markets in China.[63]

In this particular text Bird not only described the political situation in the region but, in common with some of the male travel writers already mentioned, her comments were not always in favour of the approach taken by the British Government: "To write of the Yangtze Valley, the British 'sphere of influence' (a phrase against which I protest), without any allusion to such an important factor as its inhabitants, would be a mistake, for sooner or later, in various ways, we shall have to reckon with

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[62] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 83.
[63] Isabella Bird, *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond: An Account of Journeys in China, Chiefly in the Province of Sze Chuan and Among the Man-tze of the Somo Territory* (London: Virago Press Ltd., 1985), p. 64.

them."[64] And she goes on to warn how: "there is a risk of our coming to think only of markets, territory, and railroads, and of ignoring the men who, for two thousand years, have been making China worth scrambling for."[65] Although she claimed she "went to Western China solely for interest and pleasure" her text contains considerable amounts of 'technical' detail.[66] This implies that she thought previous studies had been somewhat deficient in their research, and she was especially disparaging of earlier writers' "ignoring" of the local inhabitants and failing to include their influence and contribution to China's success in their observations.

It is evident that Bird was confident about her ability to discuss political and economic issues in her travel literature, and that her contribution to existing knowledge was valued in many areas. In 1890 she accompanied Major Herbert Sawyer on a military/geographical reconnaissance of South West Persia. It was all part of the 'Great Game', played out among the competing powers of the Government of India and Russia in order to gain control of the region. It is extraordinary that a woman, particularly one who was middle-aged and in poor health, was permitted to travel on such a mission, but it is also indicative of the esteem in which Bird must have been held. The quality of the information she supplied in the records of her many travels around the world was also deemed weighty enough to earn her the respect of arguably the most influential independent institution in Britain during the nineteenth century, and in 1892 she was made a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. Other lady travellers, such as Lady Anne Noel Blunt, Gertrude Bell, and Mabel Virginia Bent, were also admitted to the Society, proving that not only did some women enter the public arena, but, in some quarters anyway, they were highly regarded for doing so.[67]

Mary Kingsley is one of the few women mentioned in studies of nineteenth-century travel literature who are in any way associated with the scientific community. The two books she published on West Africa are highly unusual as there

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[64] Ibid., p. 10.
[65] Ibid., p. 11.
[66] Ibid., p. 190.
[67] The RGS was not wholly in favour of admitting women to its society. In 1892 fifteen women were made 'Fellows' but then controversially banned. It was not until 1913 that women were allowed back and 1933 before any women were elected to the Council. Even Isabella Bird was refused a ticket to their annual dinner.

are few examples of any other authors, either male or female, producing two separate works for the same journey. For this reason scholars have tended to dismiss her as being exceptional and therefore not representative of her gender. However, if one ignores *West African Studies* and concentrates on *Travels in West Africa,* the book she claimed was for general consumption, a different picture emerges.[68] In *Travels* she not only staunchly defends her reputation as a seaman, and vehemently guards herself against any criticism of her nautical abilities, but she also provides a detailed account of her position, the direction in which she is travelling, and the local names of villages and rivers. Taking great care to record practical details such as these is, as noted previously, not what one would expect from a female travel writer, especially in a text supposedly of a less serious nature than *West African Studies*.

Alison Blunt has argued that: "Kingsley's humour throughout *Travels in West Africa* destabilizes any fixed authority of the narrator"[69] but Kingsley's approach towards travel was not casual but very earnest.[70] A less committed traveller would not be inclined to recommend thorough preparation for anyone considering a similar endeavour: "I went out with my mind full of the deductions of every book on Ethnology, German or English, that I had read during fifteen years."[71] However, she also declared that theoretical knowledge was not a substitute for practical experience: "One by one I took my ideas derived from books and thoughts based on imperfect knowledge and weighed them against the real life around me, and found them either worthless or wanting."[72] Mary Kingsley was not the only traveller who found the quality of research material somewhat dubious. John Speke, for example, questioned the value of the data supplied by John Petherick: "Petherick's book I have never read and moreover do not wish to read it as it is well known that he never

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[68] An indication of the popularity of T*ravels in West Africa* is demonstrated by the number of re-issues that it has undergone. It ran into several editions during Kingsley's lifetime and has never really been out of print since, whereas *West African Studies* has only been reprinted once since Kingsley's death (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1964).
[69] Alison Blunt, *Travel, Gender & Imperialism- Mary Kingsley & West Africa* (New York: Guildford Press, 1994), p. 72.
[70] I believe the humorous literary style belies the seriousness of her work. Later we shall see how humour was used as a literary device by many travel writers, not to undermine the narrator but to engage the reader.
[71] Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa* (London: Everyman, 1996), p. 164.
[72] Ibid., p. 15.

used an instrument by which he could tell where he went to."[73] It is clear that not all earlier travel accounts were considered reliable sources of information, and copious amounts of research prior to a journey was not, therefore, a guarantee of success. Also if previous accounts were deemed to be inaccurate it was additional validation for daring to publish another text.

Like many men who travelled to Africa, Kingsley engaged in trading activities during her stay and dealt in tobacco, ivory and rubber goods, therefore it is unsurprising to find that in *Travels* she referred frequently to the local economic conditions and the role Britain played in them:

> This labour question out here, a question that increases daily with the development of plantation enterprise, I do not think will ever be solved by importing foreign labour. Nor is it advisable that it should be, for our European Government puts a stop to the action of those causes that used to keep the native population down, intertribal wars, sacrifices, &c., &c.; and to the deportation of surplus population in the form of slaves, and so unless means of support are devised for 'the indigenous ones' [...] Africa will have us to thank for some smart attacks of famine, for the natives, left to their own devices, will never cultivate the soil sufficiently to support a large population.[74]

In *Travels* Kingsley also demonstrated a grasp of the global political situation, and how world events impacted on West Africa. She warned her readers that to discuss the situation: "with any justice would occupy more space than I have at my disposal, for the subject is extremely intricate", but she did write that it "would be a very interesting thing to compare the various forms of European government in Africa – English, French, German, Portuguese and Spanish" and she concluded that "Each of these forms of government have their good points and their bad. Each of them are dealing with bits of Africa differing from each other."[75] Not only was Kingsley conscious of world events, but she also claimed that such subjects were "very

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[73] Cited in Laura Franey, *Victorian Travel Writing and Imperial Violence: British Writing on Africa, 1855-1902* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 179.
[74] Mary Kingsley, *Travels*, p. 40.
[75] Ibid., p. 230.

interesting"; this is not consistent with the rules of feminine discourse, nor does it conform to the separate spheres ideology of women being confined to private spaces.

Like Isabella Bird, and some of the male travel writers mentioned previously, when discussing wider public issues Kingsley was not afraid to criticize western influences if she thought they were misplaced. Although very much admiring and respecting the commitment of individual missionaries she met on her travels, she was apprehensive about missionary activities in general in the region and their influence on local people:

> Nothing strikes one so much, in studying the degeneration of these native tribes, as the direct effect that civilization and reformation has in hastening it. The worst enemy to the existence of the African tribe, is the one who comes to it and says:- Now you must civilize, and come to school, and leave off all those awful goings-on of yours, and settle down quietly.[76]

Kingsley claimed that such interference was in danger of undermining the stability of local communities and she vehemently warned against it in her texts. She would not have done this unless she was determined to be taken seriously. Kingsley's trip, as was customary with female expeditions, was self-financing and therefore she was not under any obligation to provide 'technical' information for any particular group or organization. The themes she addressed in *Travels* were primarily of her own choosing and not dictated by outside influences and yet she still chose to write about politics, economics, and colonial enterprises as well as lots of other subjects associated with the public sphere. This demonstrates that she was interested in a wide variety of topics and not just domestic questions, even in a text which she stated was for a general readership.

Kingsley is often seen as an anomaly in women's travel writing and therefore dismissed by many academics as not being typical of her gender. However, Kingsley was not the only female travel writer who travelled for pleasure and who was eager to include 'technical' data in their texts, nor was this sort of information restricted to remote or exotic parts of the globe. Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon was a leading

[76] Ibid., p. 158.

participant in several influential feminist campaigns during the nineteenth century. She fought for married women to be granted legal recognition, to have the right to work, the opportunity to vote, and to have access to a decent education. Although Bodichon travelled to America for pleasure, given her highly political nature and her enthusiasm for women's rights, it was inevitable that she would utilize her trip across the Atlantic in 1857-8 in order to examine how women fared under a different political regime. Consequently the record of her visit to America contains large amounts of political and economic information. On one evening during her visit she went to a gathering at the home of Dr. Bayley, the editor of the *National Era* whose house was the headquarters of the Liberal party, and she recorded: "I have never met so many agreeable men in one evening in my life. There were Senators and Members and writers and travellers and all as pleasant as if in their own homes [...] Tonight we go to Mrs. Johnson's and meet some abolitionists (M.P.'s)."[77] Following her meeting with Lucretia Mott, Quaker minister, member of the American Anti-Slavery Society, and women's rights activist, she wrote:

> She put her hands on my shoulders and said how happy it made her to see that the young women of England were thinking about their rights and trying to do something for justice and freedom. She asked me about Eliza Ton and Bessie Parks and Mrs. J. Shill especially and I told her as well as I could the number of women and principal powers on the side of *Women's Rights* in England. When she was in England (1840?), she says, the idea was scouted and no women she met in England dared to advocate the rights of women.[78]

This statement is very revealing in what it tells us about the changing state of women's suffrage in England in the nineteenth century, and how the movement was growing from what appears to have been very modest beginnings. It also points to a lively exchange of political ideas between British and American women during the period, and a determination to promote a 'women's' agenda to a wider audience.

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[77] Barbara Bodichon, *An American Diary 1857-8* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1972), pp. 134-6.
[78] Ibid., p. 140.

Bodichon's text, however, was not simply a polemic on "*Women's Rights*". She also frequently commented on American commercial and economic activities, including recording the salaries and opinions of migrant workers: "A German railway labourer came and sat by me. He gets forty dollars a month. He does not like America so well as Germany (Saxony), but, 'this is a free country and I have a vote, so I shall stay.'"[79] And she also noted the price of goods on the open market:

> We pass plots of ground which the Captain says he knows have grown from 60 to 75 bushels of wheat for 57 years, and he knows a man here at Kickman City (which I have drawn) who grew 125 barrels of potatoes on one acre and sold them on the land for one dollar and a half a barrel. He put them into barrels on the land; barrels cost him one quarter of a dollar each.[80]

This type of detail is common in her account, and it shows a woman who was interested in a range of different subjects as well as a woman who was passionate about achieving equal rights for her gender.

Not all women who were interested in political and economic issues were advocates of women's suffrage, and there are many accounts written by female writers which contain references to 'technical' matters without also having a feminist agenda. Florence Nightingale gives a hint of what was to come in the account of her visit to Egypt between 1849 and 1850. Written before her famous nursing career, and long before her less well-known political campaigning, *Letters from Egypt* shows that she was already concerned about public issues as the text repeatedly refers to Egyptian political and economic matters. Most of her remarks were critical of the Egyptian regime: "The state of things here is horrible. Every man is a conscript for the army, and mothers put out their children's right eye, cut off their forefingers, or lamed them, to save them from conscription, till Mehemet Ali, who was too clever for them, had a one-eyed regiment."[81] And she thoroughly disapproved of the way the country was administered: "How can it be otherwise, when government fixes the

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[79] Ibid., p. 78.
[80] Ibid., p. 60.
[81] Florence Nightingale, *Letters from Egypt: A Journey on the Nile 1849-1850* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1987), p. 24.

price of produce, buys it, compels work by bastinado, and not by the natural incentive – interest – and leaves the wretched fellah nothing but taxes to live upon?"[82] Her political comments were not confined to Egypt but, whatever the situation was elsewhere in Europe, she argued it was preferable to what was happening in Egypt:

> Greek affairs go ill. I cannot very well tell what we shall do. European politics are disgusting, disheartening, or distressing - here there are no politics at all, only harem intrigues, and deep, grinding, brutalising misery. Let no one live in the East, who can find a corner in the ugliest, coldest hole in Europe. Give me Edinburgh wynds rather than Cairo Arabian Nights.[83]

Writing two decades later Lucie Duff Gordon also published an account of life in Egypt and her text reveals that, at least in her opinion, very little improvement had been made since Nightingale's visit. *Letters from Egypt* is a remarkable work as in it she wrote passionately about what she believed were failings in the political and economic administration of the region. Egypt in the 1860s was governed by an Ottoman ruler Ismail Pasha. He was determined to modernize the Egyptian economy and would use any means in his power to achieve this goal. Whilst not objecting to his 'progressive' desire to expand the country's canals, railways and industries, Gordon was extremely contemptuous of the manner in which these developments took place. These capital projects were expensive, especially the scheme to build the Suez Canal, and financed by foreign loans. In order to repay the huge debts heavy taxes had to be imposed: "In Egypt we are eaten up with taxes; there is not a penny left to anyone. The taxes for the whole year *eight months in advance* have been levied, as far as they can be beaten out of the miserable people",[84] and a forced labour policy introduced: "Now let me describe the state of things. From the Moudeeriat of Keneh 25,000 men are taken to work for sixty days without food or pay; each man must take his own basket [...] of whom a third will very likely die of

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[82] Ibid., p. 64.
[83] Ibid., p. 176.
[84] Lucie Duff Gordon, *Letters from Egypt* (London: Virago Press,1983), p. 322.

exposure to the cold and misery."[85] Gordon found the exorbitant taxes and forced labour policy unacceptable, and deliberately used her writing to highlight the suffering of the ordinary Egyptian to the outside world: "I wish you to publish these facts, it is no secret to any but to those Europeans whose interests keep their eyes tightly shut, and they will soon have them opened. The blind rapacity of the present ruler will make him astonish the Franks some day, I think."[86]

Gordon undoubtedly felt that her audience would be willing to hear about such political issues in a travel text, even one produced by a woman, and the popularity of *Letters* justifies this confidence.[87] She exploited the opportunities her success gave her and tried to educate her English readership to the realities of life in Egypt: "Distress in England is terrible, but, at least, it is not result of extortion, as it is here, where everything from nature is so abundant and glorious, and yet mankind so miserable."[88] *Letters* also demonstrates that she was aware of how valuable publicity was to her efforts to expose injustice. She wrote about "the Bey's dread of the English Lady's pen"[89] and discussed with her mother the global impact of her writing:

> You will be amused and pleased to hear how Sheykh Yussuf was utterly puzzled and bewildered by the civilities he received from the travellers this year, till an American told Mustapha I had written a book which had made him (the American) wish well to the poor people of this country, and desire to behave more kindly to them than would have been the case before.[90]

This extract is significant as it indicates that Gordon's work was read not only in England but also across the Atlantic. It is also evidence that an American readership found it acceptable for female writers to incorporate these sorts of subjects in their travel texts, and it reveals the positive impact a travel text could have on the behaviour of subsequent travellers.

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[85] Ibid., p. 257.
[86] Ibid., p. 259.
[87] It was reprinted three times within the first six months of publication. Ibid., p. xv.
[88] Ibid., p. 343.
[89] Ibid., p. 226.
[90] Ibid., p. 271.

There were many women like Nightingale and Gordon who, although seemingly travelling for their own personal non-official reasons, included 'technical' information in their travel literature. Mrs. Ernest Hart, for example, chose to publish an account of a holiday she took with her husband to Burma during the 1890s. Its title, *Picturesque Burma Past & Present,* is very misleading as it suggests a feminine aesthetic influence and does not give any indication that the contents will include whole sections on Burma's government, local commerce and natural resources. Unlike some women writers, Hart was not derogatory about the workings of local government in her account, but was very complimentary about its achievements: "Rangoon has made rapid progress. Its growth has been quite marvellous. A strong Government has taken the place of one ferocious, and justice has stepped into the seat of tyranny."[91] She acknowledged that there were a number of reasons why the country was so prosperous:

> There is no grinding poverty in Burma; a bounteous soil, a hot sun, a religion with a fine moral code, and the absence of intemperance have combined to make the Burmese a happy and contented race. There is also no caste with its cruel divisions of class; the women are free, children are adored, and marriage is respected.[92]

Although she painted a rather idealistic picture of Burmese life, *Picturesque Burma* also contains quite precise figures on Burmese economic trade: "revenue from liquor and opium licenses in Upper Burma rose to Rs.210,480, and in two years to Rs.511,700, and in 1893 stood at Rs.3,103,104."[93] Hart was disappointed by the lassitude of previous British explorers who she criticized for having failed to provide detailed and accurate information on the area: "It is a subject of constant regret [...] that investigations of a truly scientific character have not yet been made", and she acknowledged that other nations would not have been so lax: "if the land had been conquered by the French, an army of archaeologists, botanists, geologists, zoologists,

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[91] Mrs. Ernest Hart, *Picturesque Burma Past & Present* (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1897), p. 16.
[92] Ibid., p. 25.
[93] Ibid., p. 229.

&c., would have followed."[94] By discussing these sorts of issues in a text which was supposed to be a record of a holiday Hart illustrates that there were some women who were prepared to address matters of political and economic importance in their travel literature. She also demonstrates, in a similar way to many male travel writers, that it was not only travellers who journeyed on official business who included such material in their travel accounts.

However, this does jar somewhat with the concept of the Picturesque indicated by her title. William Gilpin would not have seen her addition of facts and figures as either beautiful or sublime, but including them in her text enabled her to distinguish herself from other travellers who journeyed for pure pleasure, and give the account of her travels a weight and feeling of substance. Gilpin first introduced the aesthetic ideal of the Picturesque in the closing decade of the eighteenth century in his *Observations on the river Wye,* a record of his journey down the river in the summer of 1770 and, although his ideas continued to influence much nineteenth-century travel literature, they became increasingly less popular as the century progressed. Hart published her travel account in the last decade of the nineteenth century, which was also a period when women were striving to be taken more seriously in the public arena, therefore her inclusion of "stronger meat" and her lack of effusive descriptions of the landscape is a good reflection of the changing taste in travel literature at the end of the nineteenth century. However, it does raise the question of why she felt she had to hide her serious purpose behind such a deceptive title. Hart seems to have lacked the confidence of many other female writers, even those from earlier in the period, but perhaps her marital status restricted her in her writing. Her precise motives are unrecorded.

So far we have studied the approach to 'technical' issues in texts written by women who travelled for their own amusement, across a range of different countries and time periods. There are, however, texts written by women who travelled around the world in a type of semi-official capacity which also debated these issues. Not journeying out of any particular academic interest, or for pleasure, these women found themselves leaving their homeland as a result of family obligations. They

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[94] Ibid., p. 111.

accompanied parents, husbands, and brothers, on their undertakings, acting as unpaid assistants and hostesses, and often recorded their experiences along the way. The most well-known example of this kind of travel writer is Emily Eden. Between 1836 and 1842 Emily Eden, along with her sister Fanny, spent six years travelling across India with their brother George, Lord Auckland, who had been appointed Governor-General to the region. Emily Eden was unhappy about having to leave her life in England but she felt it was her duty to be with her brother as he needed a capable hostess to assist him in his new position. In the account of her adventure, *Up the Country,* published in 1866, it initially appears that Eden was not particularly interested in public affairs as she complained that: "I think politics look ugly enough."[95] This statement enabled her to comply with feminine discourse and reassure her readers that she was not prepared to compromise her femininity by discussing such public affairs in her text. However, later she appears to have had a change of heart as she declared: "I am interested in Indian politics just now, but could not make them interesting on paper."[96]

Despite claiming politics was "ugly" and impossible to make "interesting" she continued to make regular observations on the condition of local politics throughout her account:

> The Khan of Khelat was by way of being our ally and assistant, and professing friendship; did himself the pleasure of cutting off the supplies of the army when it was on its way to Cabul; set his followers on to rob the camp; corresponded with Dost Mahomed, &c.
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> There was no time to fight with him then, and I suppose he was beginning to think himself secure; but G. directed the Bombay army, on its way home, to settle this little Khelat trouble.[97]

Generally in favour of British involvement in the area she was, nevertheless, not reluctant to comment on some of the negative effects of imperial expansion: "such stupendous remains of power and wealth passed and passing away – and somehow I

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[95] Emily Eden, *Up the Country* (London: Virago Press, 1983), p. 90.
[96] Ibid., p. 145.
[97] Ibid., pp. 348-9.

feel that we horrid English have just 'gone and done it,' merchandised it, revenued it, and spoiled it all. I am not very fond of Englishmen out of their own country."[98] And she was scornful about the manner in which some of the locals were exploited: "common English magistrates [...] It is horrible to think how this class of Europeans oppress the natives."[99] These comments show that though Eden was a female writer and an official, if unpaid, representative of the British Empire, she was willing to discuss a broad range of issues in her travel text. However, she did not voice any criticism of her brother's, sometimes disastrous, political and military decisions, and she remained a loyal and dutiful sister to him throughout his turbulent career.

Around the same time as the Eden sisters were touring India across the world in South America Madame Calderon De La Barca, née Frances Erskine Inglis, was also engaged on a semi-official expedition. In 1839 Calderon accompanied her husband, who had just been appointed as Spain's first ambassador, to Mexico. In *Life in Mexico,* her account of their two and a half year adventure to the newly independent Republic, she professed to have no particular interest in politics. She even apologized for having attended the opening of Congress: "No ladies were in the house, myself excepted; which I am glad I was not aware of before going, or I should perhaps have stayed away"[100] and claimed to be indifferent to political issues: "All these gentlemen are praised or abused according to the party of the person who speaks of them; but I not interfering in Mexican politics, find them amongst the most pleasant of our acquaintances."[101] However, these claims are difficult to accept at face value as not only did she move in highly influential circles but she also took great care in describing the significant political events in Mexico at this time. She carefully documented two major revolutions that took place during her stay, providing biographical information on all the main protagonists and recording their correspondence, and she meticulously chronicled their demands:

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[98] Ibid., p. 98.
[99] Ibid., pp. 304-6.
[100] Madame Calderon De La Barca, *Life in Mexico During a Residence of Two Years in that Country* (Garden City (New York): Doubleday, 1966), p. 71.
[101] Ibid., p. 218.

> To-day is published the plan which was formed by the federalists for the 'political regeneration of the republic.' They observe, that it is six years since the federal plan, adopted freely by the nation in 1824, was replaced by a system which monopolises all advantages in favour of the few [...] They then proceed to lay their plan, consisting of ten articles, before the public.[102]

She also went on to record each of these ten articles in her travel account, ostensibly contradicting her previous assertion that she had little interest in politics. She was, however, aware of this apparent inconsistency and attempted to justify her actions:

> I shall close this long letter, merely observing, in apology, that as Madame de Stael said, in answer to the remark, that 'Women have nothing to do with politics;'- 'That may be, but when a woman's head is about to be cut off, it is natural she should ask why?' so it appears to me, that when bullets are whizzing about our ears, and shells falling within a few yards of us, it ought to be considered extremely natural, and quite feminine, to inquire into the cause of such phenomena.[103]

Interestingly, rather than her femininity restricting her from addressing politics in her literature, she asserted that in certain circumstances it was precisely because she was a woman that she *had* to be interested. Like many female travel writers Calderon seems to be acknowledging feminine discourse while, at the same time, evading it.

As well as discussing the political situation in Mexico Calderon also showed a curiosity about other issues usually associated with the public sphere, such as trade and commerce. In her account she discussed the economy not only at a micro level but, more significantly, at a macro level: "But industry is not of the nature of a hothouse plant, to be forced by artificial means; and these grants of funds have but created monopolies; and consequently added to the general poverty."[104] It could be argued that because it affected her day-to-day life, i.e. the goods available in the shops, she could write about the local economy in her travel text as women were bound to be interested in buying things for themselves and their household.

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[102] Ibid., p. 247.
[103] Ibid., p. 247.
[104] Ibid., p. 335.

However, speaking in general economic terms is more associated with the public sphere, an area in which women were not supposed to be interested, and, therefore, her comments are particularly enlightening about how some women actually felt about public issues.

Calderon also frequently commented on other public issues such as the Mexican infrastructure. She wrote about their prison system, which she felt was inferior to that in Britain because it "makes no distinctions between different degrees of crime",[105] and their education system, which she believed was neglected by the State: "There are no circulating libraries in Mexico [...] due to the unsettled state of the country; for the blight of civil war prevents the best systems from ripening."[106] *Life in Mexico* manifestly demonstrates more than casual interest in wider public issues, notwithstanding Calderon's claims to the contrary. The frequency and detail her account provides of the political, economic, and social affairs of Mexican society illustrates that as well as fulfilling her domestic duties as a wife she also managed to involve herself in what many scholars assert are male concerns.

Not all women involved in the public arena chose to write about 'technical' subjects in their texts. Margaret Fountaine was highly respected in the field of lepidoptory. She received commissions from museums and independent collectors to travel around the world collecting specimens of rare butterflies, and she kept up regular correspondence with the British Museum. Mary Slessor was a mill hand from Aberdeen who became a missionary in Africa in the 1870s. She was employed as a government agent representing British interests in the region because of her expertise in dealing with local disputes. Amelia Ann Blandford Edwards explored the Nile delta and translated an impressive number of hieroglyphic inscriptions. She became known as the 'queen of Egyptology', founded the Egypt Exploration Fund and produced several respected works about Egypt and Egyptian history. Marianne North travelled for almost twenty years on a mission to make a pictorial record of the tropical and exotic plants of the world, and amassed an amazing collection of over 800 paintings. Their importance to the scientific community was such that a gallery

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[105] Ibid., p. 450.
[106] Ibid., p. 212.

was specifically erected to display them at the centre of British horticulture, Kew Gardens. The gallery is still open today. These women, and many others, although involved in a diverse assortment of what might be called 'public' pursuits chose not to address 'technical' subjects in their travel texts in any significant way. Maybe they did not feel it was particularly vital to reflect their public activities in their literary output or, alternatively, possibly their reticence was a strategy adopted in order to reassure their readers that despite their public activities they could continue to behave in a lady-like and feminine manner.

Perhaps it is not so extraordinary that some women, even those who were involved to a certain extent in the public arena, decided not to address 'technical' issues in their travel literature. Scholars have stated that female travel writers during the nineteenth century did not address these subjects because of discursive pressures prevalent at the time. Mary Louise Pratt, among many others, has argued that female travel writers' "territorial claim was to private space, a personal, room-sized empire."[107] Yet we have seen that many women did tackle issues of a more public nature. What is even more remarkable is that there are women authors, like the male writers discussed previously, who produced travel literature that contained 'technical' information although they were not engaged in any public enterprise but were travelling for their own pleasure. Vesna Goldsworthy found in the course of her research into travel in the Balkans that: "Some of the most interesting accounts [...] were written by women, perhaps precisely because they travelled without a set professional agenda", and that they "often reported being asked for political opinions and advice."[108] Goldsworthy's findings are further evidence that British women in the nineteenth century were more than willing to include 'technical' information in their travel accounts regardless of whether they were travelling for business or pleasure.

So far this investigation has demonstrated that the gender, location or period appears to have had much influence on whether or not an author addressed public

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[107] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing & Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 160.

[108] Vesna Goldsworthy, "The Balkans in Nineteenth-Century British Travel Writing", *Travel Writing in the Nineteenth Century: Filling the Blank Spaces*, ed. Tim Youngs (London: Anthem Press, 2006), pp. 29-30.

issues in their travel text. However, there was one commercial activity that preoccupied a number of, not male, but female writers, and that was the manufacture and distribution of textiles. This included items such as fabrics, stockings and shawls, and women who wrote about their journeys to India almost always made some reference to these items in their travel narratives. For example, both the Eden sisters were in raptures over the quality of Indian shawls, with Fanny, in particular, making several references to them in her narrative: "If you could only just see the shawls and gowns which came to us today straight from Cashmere!"[109] Some British women were so impressed by the materials and workmanship they observed that they considered the merchandise too good for the local people. Honoria Lawrence rather resentfully thought that Indian gentlemen could not possibly appreciate the quality as much as an English lady: "I do long to lay hold of the beautiful shawls some of these grandees wear. It seems to me as if the men had no business with them, and they would be so nice to send home."[110] Fanny Eden was shocked to find that even the lower classes had access to beautiful fabrics, and observed rather enviously: "There was a native come out to look as us in such a shawl. No, I never saw such a tempting article! I would have offered an elephant for it, only William would make some foolish objection. The man in rank must have been a pendant to our English farmers."[111]

Although women admired the textures, colours and details of the fabrics, other comments made by female travellers reveal that there was also a more serious side to this interest. Apart from noticing superficial issues such as whether the material looked good or felt soft, women also often remarked on the effects that economic conditions and market pressures were having on the Indian textile industry. Fanny Eden observed that there were bargains to be had for the wily shopper: "There are some excellent shawls to be bought here. If I had not spent so much of your money lately, I should have been much tempted to make you buy a real good shawl. I am sure that for £30 here I could get you as good a one as you pay

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[109] Fanny Eden, *Tigers, Durbars and Kings* (London: John Murray Ltd., 1988), p. 171.
[110] Honoria Lawrence, *The Journals of Honoria Lawrence: India Observed 1837-1854* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1980), p. 93.
[111] Fanny Eden, *Tigers, Durbars and Kings*, p. 11.

£80 for in England."[112] However, other writers warned their readers to be cautious as not all products on sale were genuine Indian articles. Honoria Lawrence was stunned to discover that some stockings were from: "Liverpool, Mem Sahib, Liverpool."[113] And Mrs. Alan Gardner was equally amazed to learn that all was not what it seemed: "I admired some Oriental-looking cotton [...] and lamented that such things could not be bought at such prices in England. It was rather a shock when Mr. Rustomyee quietly said; 'Oh! These all come from Manchester!'"[114] As well as warning other travellers about the possibility of counterfeit goods, Fanny Parkes Parlby's narrative also raises the issue of the disastrous effects that some of these British imports were having on the local economy: "I visited a manufactory for Indian shawls, lately established by the Hakin to support some people who, having come from Cashmir, were in distress [...] the English have spoiled the market."[115] She exposes the sinister aspects of cheap foreign imports, and discloses some of the unfortunate consequences of the British laissez-faire attitude towards trade and commerce.

Nupur Chaudhuri has done some interesting research in this area which indicates that many female travellers were eager to learn about the commercial opportunities available in India because they recognized that there was a profitable market for foreign goods at home. A variety of newspapers and magazines such as *The Ladies Companion* (1850), *The Ladies' Treasury* (1867), *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* (1870), *Queen* (1870), and *The Young Ladies' Journal* (1864-86) carried advertisements both requesting and offering a variety of objects from overseas. Objects such as shawls from Kashmir, which sold from between £70 and £100 in the 1810s, muslins and silks from Delhi and Madras, jewelry, ivory, peacock feathers, and even furniture were all offered for sale on the British market. Chaudhuri has argued that the high demand for these products is a good indication of the dramatic influence foreign culture had on nineteenth-century British consumers adding that: "Memsahibs not only injected Oriental elements into the Victorian

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[112] Ibid., p. 180.
[113] Honoria Lawrence, *The Journals of Honoria Lawrence*, p. 55.
[114] Mrs. Alan Gardner, *Rifle and Spear with the Rajpoots: being the narrative of A Winter's Travel and Sport in North India* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1895), p. 10.
[115] Fanny Parkes Parlby, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 313.

fashion scene, but also introduced new tastes in interior decoration to many Victorian families."[116] Emily Eden's observations confirm this: "We have forsaken the buying of shawls and trinkets, and have gone into the upholstery and furniture line."[117] The fact that some foreign items were seen as highly desirable is also reflected in some of the fiction of the period. Mrs. Gaskell, in *North and South,* acknowledged the prestige associated with the ownership of Indian shawls:

> 'I have spared no expense in her trousseau,' were the next words Margaret heard. 'She has all the beautiful Indian shawls and scarfs the General gave to me, but which I shall never wear again.'
>
> 'She is a lucky girl,' replied another voice, which Margaret knew to be that of Mrs Gibson, a lady who was taking a double interest in the conversation, from the fact that one of her daughters having been married within the last few weeks. 'Helen had set her heart upon an Indian shawl, but really when I found what an extravagant price was asked, I was obliged to refuse her. She will be quite envious when she hears of Edith having Indian shawls. What kind are they? Delhi? with the lovely little borders?'[118]

It was not solely Indian products which were fashionable. There were also phases of African, Egyptian, Japanese and Chinese and many other cultures throughout the nineteenth century, all of which demonstrate how open British society was to foreign influences. However, Indian travel texts are especially informative and clearly show that many women were interested, not only in the appearance of things, but also in the more serious aspects of mercantile activities, activities that have customarily been associated with masculine endeavour. Although Chaudhuri's research reveals the variety of products traded and the large numbers of women interested in selling them, it is critical to remember that the majority of these women were not in the wholesale business. Female travellers tended to deal in individual, one-off items, and were not generally concerned with mass imports or

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[116] Nupur Chaudhuri, 'Shawls, Jewellery, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain', in *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance,* eds., Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 237.
[117] Emily Eden, *Up the Country*, p. 284.
[118] Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (London: Everyman, 1996), p. 3.

bulk buying. However, it does illustrate that they had a broader understanding of trade than they have been given credit for, albeit on a small, rather domestic, scale.

1.3 Justifications for the 'Technical' Content in Female Travel Literature

The writers of travel literature were under some pressure to reassure their readers about the veracity of their work. Doubts were often raised about the genuineness of women's travel texts in particular, and many women felt it necessary to stress the authenticity of their accounts. Anna Leonowens, for example, in her Preface to *The Romance of the Harem* wrote: "'Truth is often stranger than fiction,' but so strange will some of the occurrences related in the following pages appear to Western readers, that I deem it necessary to state that they are also true."[119] Directly addressing the reader was not sufficient by itself; evidence was required in order to prove that the account was authentic and, therefore, including 'technical' elements was a crucial method of bringing some authority to a text. It was also a means of establishing one's credentials as a serious traveller and distinguishing oneself from mere 'tourists'.

Not all travel books, however, contained such information. Texts which contained no, or very little, 'technical' detail tended to be accounts written about journeys whose authenticity was unlikely to be seriously challenged. As male travel texts were less likely to be doubted than those written by female travellers, it was not as essential for their accounts to contain masses of data. For example, although both Mungo Park and Thomas Skinner were on official business, neither felt it was necessary for their travel texts to include large amounts of 'technical' information. Mungo Park was a national hero following a two and a half year expedition to discover the source of the Niger and, despite the fact that at the beginning of his text he asserted that he was hired for the specific mission of mapping the river Niger: "My instructions were very plain and concise [...] I should ascertain the course, and,

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[119] Anna Leonowens. *The Romance of the Harem*, ed. Susan Morgan (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), preface.

if possible, the rise and termination of that river. That I should use my utmost exertions to visit the principal towns and cities in its neighbourhood",[120] as a percentage of the total content of the text, and given his stated objective, there is very little 'technical' data in the account of his journey. Thomas Skinner was a valued officer in the British Army who went on to have a very distinguished military and civilian career. In the 1820s Skinner had attained the rank of captain and was stationed in India; as a member of Her Majesty's military one could assume that he would be interested in incorporating political and economic information in the account of his time in the region. However, he claimed that his desire: "is not to give a scientific account of the phenomena of these regions, but to convey, as truly as I can, a picture of the most delightful scenery, and most lovely spots on the face of the earth."[121] These two examples are of authors who were highly respected in their fields; as their observations were unlikely to be questioned neither felt the need to prove the veracity of their accounts with large amounts of corroborating data.

Other writers who chose not to include substantial amounts of 'technical' information in their texts were those who discussed areas of the world with which their readers were already familiar. In this situation such detail would have been superfluous as simply repeating information that consumers already possessed would not be particularly appealing, would not sell, would not be profitable and, therefore, was unlikely to be published. In 1844 Alexander Kinglake advised his readers from the outset that it was not his intention to write a travel narrative which contained copious amounts of 'technical' detail:

> It is right to forewarn people (and I have tried to do this as well as I can, by my studiously uncompromising title page) that the book is quite superficial in its character. I have endeavoured to discard from it all valuable matter derived from the works of others, and it appears to me that my efforts in this direction have been attended with great success; I believe I may truly acknowledge, that from all details of geographical discovery, or antiquarian research – from all display of 'sound learning, and religious knowledge' – from all historical and scientific illustrations – from all useful statistics –

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[120] Mungo Park. *Travels into the Interior of Africa* (London: Eland, 1983), p. 2.
[121] Thomas Skinner, *Excursions in India; Including a walk over the Himalaya Mountains, to the source the Jumna and the Ganges,* vol. 1 (London: Richard Bently, 1833), p. 247.

> from all political disquisitions [sic] – and from all good moral reflections, the volume is thoroughly free.[122]

And he explained why he was at liberty to omit such information from his travel narrative:

> My notion of dwelling precisely upon those matters which happened to interest me, and upon none other, would of course be intolerable in a regular book of travels. If I had been passing through countries not previously explored, it would have been sadly perverse to withhold careful descriptions of admirable objects, merely because my own feelings of interest in them may have happened to flag; but where the countries which one visits have been thoroughly and ably described, and even artistically illustrated by others, one is fully at liberty to say as little (though not quite so much) as one chooses.[123]

Even when 'technical' information was included, some writers doubted whether it would be accepted as truth. Writing about his trip to America in the 1860s Anthony Trollope observed: "I know that all statistical statements are tedious, and I believe that but few readers believe them."[124] The accuracy of the data of most travel texts was questioned, and even accounts by 'respected' explorers occasionally found their information challenged. For example, Joseph Thomson wrote in a letter to *The Times* that Henry Morton Stanley: "makes certain statements about the Masai route which are somewhat misleading" and he constantly queried the facts Stanley provided in his reports home: "I am again at issue with Mr. Stanley's figures."[125]

There is unquestionably considerable evidence to challenge the theory that it was predominantly men and not women who wrote about wider public issues in their travel literature. I am not claiming that every nineteenth-century travel text written by a woman contained 'technical' information. There are obviously texts written by both genders that make little reference to anything which could be considered 'in the

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[122] Alexander William Kinglake, *Eothen* (London: Heron Books, 1969), pp. 3-4.
[123] Ibid., p. 5.
[124] Anthony Trollope, *North America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), p. 109.
[125] Joseph Thomson, letter to *The Times* 12th February 1887.

public sphere'. However, there are also many texts written by women which did and which, to some degree, have been ignored or dismissed by other researchers. When researchers have commented on the inclusion of 'technical' information in women's travel literature, it is usually to question the quality of their material. An observation which has often been made is that female travellers did not write about truly 'technical' subjects. Sidonie Smith's view is typical of many scholars: "The woman travel narrator also had to negotiate the propriety of topics she explored when she wrote home about her travels. Her attention could most properly be trained upon social arrangements, domestic relations, and the activities and lives of women."[126] The value of female travel writers' contribution to existing knowledge has also been questioned; they have often been accused of being less 'scientific' than their male counterparts and of being involved in more 'amateur' fields, such as archaeology, botany or activities which involved collecting and amassing material. Sara Mills has argued that "women's texts are not supposed to be 'scientific' and authoritative, but rather, supposed to be amateurish."[127] However, it must be remembered that this study is concerned with researching *travel literature* and not scientific publications.[128] Travel literature, although a very broad and fluid genre, should not be expected to contain copious amounts of detailed charts, statistics or measurements, as there was a wealth of academic material being produced during the nineteenth century which fulfilled that requirement.

Another comment which has been made about the way 'technical' information was included in women's travel literature is that when women did include such details they were put in an appendix. However, Mary Louise Pratt has argued that:

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[126] Sidonie Smith, *Moving Lives – 20th Century Women's Travel Writing* (USA: University of Minnesota, 2001), pp. 18-19.
[127] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 83.
[128] Later we shall examine David Gill's argument that his wife's non-scientific record of their mission to study the transept of Venus contributed as much, if not more, than any scientific account This illustrates that it was recognized that travel literature had a different market from purely scientific publications. (Mrs. David Gill, *Six Months in Ascension: An Unscientific Account of a Scientific Expedition* (London: Murray, 1878), Introduction).

Descriptions of flora and fauna were not in themselves new to travel writing. On the contrary, they had been conventional components of travel books since at least the sixteenth century. However, they were typically structured as appendices or formal digressions from the narrative.[129]

Therefore confining 'technical' detail to an appendix was not determined by gender but by literary convention. Using an appendix for this purpose was not confined to women's travel literature as many male travel writers also chose this method to present 'technical' details to their readers. For example, Edward John Eyre preferred to give the details of the reptiles, insects, fish, and birds he came across in an appendix.[130] J.L. Porter included an appendix to contain his drawings and maps.[131] Hugh Clapperton had several appendices which detail his translated Arabic papers, geographical descriptions of rivers, lakes, and towns, maps, meteorological tables, and a list of the vocabulary of the Yourriba and Fellatah tribes.[132] And Richard Burton declared in the Preface to his work on Central Africa: "I have not attempted to avoid intruding matters of a private and personal nature upon the reader; it would have been impossible to avoid egotism in a purely egotistical narrative. The official matter, however, has been banished into Appendix II."[133] So, evidently, it was not only women writers who used appendices as a means of presenting 'technical' data in their travel narratives. It was an approach which was common throughout the nineteenth century and popular in male travel narratives. It cannot, therefore, be used to justify the presence of 'technical' content in female travel literature.

One area where female travel writers do seem to have differed from male travel writers was that quite often they claim to have had no interest in outside issues and so, on the surface at least, they appear to have been adhering to the rules of feminine discourse. And yet the evidence plainly demonstrates that there are numerous texts which contain significant references to 'technical' themes. Some

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[129] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 27.
[130] Edward John Eyre, *Journals of Expeditions of Discovery into Central Australia & Overland from Adelaide to King George's Sound in the Years 1840-41* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1964).
[131] J. L. Porter, *Five Years in Damascus.*
[132] Hugh Clapperton, *Journal.*
[133] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*, vol. 1, Preface.

scholars have contended that when women addressed these 'public' issues in the body of the text they used humour or they were self-effacing. Sara Mills has argued that: "This self-depreciating humour can be traced in much women's travel writing",[134] which corresponds with Alison Blunt's analysis of Mary Kingsley that humour, when used by female travel writers, tended to subvert the narrative and that it also: "denies a stable position to the text as whole."[135] Mary Kingsley did use humour, as did other female writers such as Madame Calderon De La Barca and Lucie Duff Gordon, in order to convey information about the local economic and political conditions. However, we have seen that this does not necessarily mean that their texts should be treated as less serious, less reliable, or as providing less valuable information.[136]

There is also much evidence of the self-effacing narrator in women's travel literature to support Mills and Blunt's assessment. In the Preface to the account of her visit to China Isabella Bird begins with an apology to her readers, and a confession that her work may contain factual errors: "I am painfully conscious of the many demerits of this volume" but despite this she requests that her text should be "accepted as an honest attempt to make a contribution to the data on which public opinion on China and Chinese questions must be formed."[137] Although she is seemingly apologetic, she is also saying the information she provides contains enough substance for her readers to be able to make judgments about the Chinese. She does not, therefore, genuinely think her data is worthless. This is a skillful literary device as it enabled her to temper any criticism she may have provoked by entering the public arena. Emily Eden also wrote in her dedication to *Up the Country* that "I know no one but yourself who can now take any lively interest in these Letters."[138] And yet if this were really true why bother to publish at all?

Although there is evidence to show that female travel writers did use modesty, humour and self-depreciation to highlight public issues it is essential to remember that these literary techniques were not exclusively feminine devices, and

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[134] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 152.
[135] Ibid., p. 197.
[136] See Chapter Two for further information regarding the use of humour.
[137] Isabella Bird, *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond*, Preface.
[138] Emily Eden, *Up the Country*, p. 90.

arguing that they were only used by female travel writers certainly needs to be challenged. We have already seen how both genders used appendices to represent 'technical' details in their travel literature and it was the same with humour. Both genders used irony and humour when writing about public matters in their travel literature. William Makepeace Thackeray constantly used humour in his account of his tour across Europe. When he reached Greece he found himself "Not feeling any enthusiasm for Athens" because, he wryly commented, he was: "made so miserable in youth by a classical education that all connected with it is disagreeable in my eyes."[139] And he concluded that: "And so my dear friend, you who have been reading this last page in wonder, and who, instead of a description of Athens, have been accommodated with a lament on the part of the writer that he was idle at school, and does not know Greek, excuse this momentary outbreak of egotistic despondency."[140]

It might be expected that a man with Thackeray's literary skill would use humour to convey facts as several novelists adopted this technique in their travel literature. Writers such as Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Rudyard Kipling, among others, also chose to write about public issues in an amusing way. Edward Lear, during his trip across Albania, Greece and Turkey in the 1840s is a good example of this group of authors:

> You may possibly (in spite of my begging you never to be so,) be alarmed at the accounts the English papers contain about the revolutions in Calabria & Naples – people being skinned alive & murdered etc. etc. etc. – all of which great nonsense – may have reached your ears, & have frightened you. So I hasten to add that I am neither skinned nor robbed, but quite well.[141]

By employing a less serious and more entertaining tone in his travel narrative, Lear was able to reassure his readers that he was not in any grave danger during his

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[139] William Makepeace Thackeray, *A Legend of the Rhine. Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo and The Book of Snobs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1865), pp. 121-2.
[140] Ibid., p. 129.
[141] Edward Lear, *Travels in Albania, Greece and Turkey in Europe 1848-1849* (London: John Murray, 1988), p. 33.

European tour and that any worries they may have concerning his safety were unfounded. It was not, of course, only novelists and poets that employed a humorous narrative style, as non-fictional writers also used this literary technique in their travel accounts. Writers such as George Borrow, in his account of an evangelical mission across Spain during the 1840s, wrote: "'My good man,' said I, 'I am invariably of the politics of the people at whose table I sit, or beneath whose roof I sleep; at least I never say anything which can lead them to suspect the contrary; by pursuing which system I have more than once escaped a bloody pillow.'"[142]

Investigation into male travel literature undoubtedly shows that using humour, irony, and self-depreciation to convey serious points was not unique to female travel writing. However, when women have adopted these literary devices they have been accused of undermining the gravity of their literature. Male writers have not. It has also been claimed that women were required to adopt this style because the pressures of feminine discourse prevented them from fully embracing the literary freedoms available to male writers. Yet it is clear they intended their accounts to be taken seriously and, whatever the restrictions, they continued to write about a wide range of subjects. The number of women writers who chose to discuss public issues in their travel literature, and the diversity of the subjects they addressed, demonstrates that they felt relaxed about their ability to tackle such matters. The acceptance of their texts for publication indicates that their publishers also felt confident in their expertise and believed that their travel narratives would prove to be popular with the reading public. In 1890, Lucy Mary Garnett's publisher recommended her research into the customs of Turkey for academic study proposing that: "In perusing the proof-sheets of Miss Garnett's *Women of Turkey and their folk-lore*, it seemed to me that such an unique collection of facts was presented as should not only be found entertaining by the general reader, but might also be found serviceable by the scientific student."[143] He evidently thought the public would want to purchase a book that was both "entertaining" and "serviceable", even if it was produced by a woman.

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[142] George Borrow, *The Bible in Spain* (London: John Murray, 1907), p. 237.
[143] Lucy Mary Garnett, *The women of Turkey and their folk-lore,* vol. 1 (London: David Nutt, 1890), Preface.

This reading public was not solely composed of men as Bishop Heber acknowledged: "I know my dear wife has no objection to this sort of politico-economical discussion, and therefore send it without fearing to tire her."[144] Jacqueline Labbe's research confirms that: "Travel books were read voraciously by women and even recommended as appropriate reading by sages of feminine behaviour."[145] The reading of travel literature, therefore, was popular with both genders and not restricted exclusively to male readers.

There is an important implication running through this chapter that for a travel text to be considered 'serious' and 'worthy' of perusal, it should contain scientific, political or economic information. However, as David Gill explained in the Introduction to his wife's book, an account of their time on Ascension Island in 1878 as part of a project to study the transept of Venus, a text could contain other types of information and still be considered laudable:

> A scientific expedition may be said to have two histories. The one treats of the special object of the expedition, the other the personal adventures of those concerned in it. It is only the former which finds permanent record in the Transactions of scientific societies: the other too often remains unwritten.
>
> For many reasons I think this is a matter of regret. Mere details of observations are never looked at, except by a very limited number of specialists; to the general public such details are meaningless a well as inaccessible; whilst the ordinary student usually accepts the result merely as he finds it quoted in some standard work or text-book.[146]

Despite his wife's book making no reference to astronomical data, which, after all, was their sole purpose for being on the island, he had enough confidence in the material to be prepared to recommend it to the public. He openly declared that her history of their "personal adventures" was just as significant a contribution to the record of the project as "Mere details of observations" which were likely to be ignored by the general public, male and female. This, again, illustrates the

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[144] Bishop Reginald Heber, *Bishop Heber in Northern India*, p. 120.
[145] Jacqueline Labbe, "A species of knowledge both useful and ornamental: Priscilla Wakefield's *Family Tour Through the British Empire.*", in *Romantic Geographies – Discourses of Travel 1775-1844*, ed., Amanda Gilroy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 36.
[146] Mrs. David Gill, *Six Months in Ascension*, Introduction.

recognition of publishers and authors that travel literature had a different and wider market from purely scientific publications. As Thackeray explained it was not fair to criticize a travel account for lacking 'serious' information because with travelling: "At least half its pleasures and incidents come out of inns; and of them the tourist can speak with much more truth and vivacity than of historical recollections compiled out of histories, or filched out of handbooks."[147]

One of the reasons why the inclusion of 'technical' information in women's texts has been ignored or dismissed by other researchers is the pervasiveness of Virginia Woolf's position on women's literature among academics. Woolf held that: "Imaginatively [a woman] is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history."[148] Margaret Ezell, in her investigation into women's literary history, criticizes Woolf's influence on literary scholarship. Ezell believes that women writers are "assumed to be writing within the hostile environment imagined by Woolf" and, unfortunately, this means that: "we continue to interpret them within the framework of Woolf's historical narrative [...] the study of early women's texts is encrusted with several layers of assumptions which must be dug through before their works can be re-visioned."[149] Woolf's attitude fits in nicely with feminist thinking, or vice versa, and this has led to the regrettable situation where much of the 'serious' content of women's travel literature has been undervalued by feminist scholars. It does not suit their particular political position to have female travellers write about 'technical' subjects or to do so in a confident way, as this would weaken their argument that women were unable to operate in the 'public' world. However, we have explored numerous texts written by women that contain precisely this sort of content, and which they expected to be taken seriously by their readers.

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[147] William Makepeace Thackeray, *A Legend of the Rhine*, p. 109.
[148] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1977), p. 49.
[149] Margaret Ezell, *Writing women's literary history* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 67.

1.4 Fictional Travel Literature

Throughout this chapter we have seen that there is considerable source material to prove that, when it came to discussing public issues, there was much less difference in the approach by the two sexes in their travel literature than one might have expected. This conclusion is further supported when fictional travel books are taken into account. Although the purpose of these stories was to entertain, many fictional travel books also displayed a commitment towards presenting accurate information on a variety of 'technical' subjects associated with the public sphere. This task was relatively easy for several writers of travel fiction as they were also experienced travellers themselves; Captain Frederick Marryat travelled throughout continental Europe and the U.S.A. as a member of the British Navy; Robert Ballantyne was a fur trader in British North America; both Rider Haggard and John Buchan were civil servants in South Africa; Mary Martha Sherwood accompanied her soldier husband to India; Rudyard Kipling was born in India and spent many years working there as a journalist.[150] Many writers who are known primarily today as novelists began their literary careers as travel writers, and sold more copies of their travel accounts during their lifetime than copies of their works of fiction. Jeffrey Melton's investigation into the writings of Mark Twain has revealed that:

> Twain recognised early the lucrative potential of travel books and capitalized on it throughout a varied and formidable career. Consistently, his travel books proved to be his best-sellers, especially in his formative years as a professional author. In its first three years of publication, *The Innocents Abroad* sold over 100,000 copies, just over 70,000 of them in the first year. *Roughing It* sold over 76,000 copies in its first two years and 96,000 by 1879, and *A Tramp Abroad* sold 62,000 in its first year [...] *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) sold only 24,000 copies in its first year. *The Prince and the Pauper,* published in 1882, sold around 18,000 copies in its first few months, according to Twain's estimate, but sales dropped off dramatically soon after the brisk start and became so disappointing that Twain was uncharacteristically tempted to abandon subscription.[151]

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[150] For information on backgrounds and motives of fictional travel writers see Laurence Kitzan, *Victorian Writers and the Image of Empire* (Westport (Connecticut): Greenwood Press, 2001).
[151] Jeffrey Alan Melton, *Mark Twain, Travel Books, and Tourism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), pp. 1-2.

Writers who had actually spent time in the environments they described in their books exploited their first-hand knowledge in their fictional writings and this gave enormous credibility to their work. This realism could also lead to confusion, as the quality of the information many of these fiction writers included in their stories was of such a high standard that, on occasion, they were mistaken for true-life accounts. Anna Johnston concluded during her research into Australasian travel literature that readers were right to doubt their veracity as many of the texts were not based on any actual journeys.[152] The issue of authenticity was also not helped because celebrated fiction writers such as Dickens and Trollope used their personal experiences and dramatic skills to write non-fictional travel books. The situation was further confused because there were even some works promoted as true-life travel accounts which were really works of pure fiction, solely devised to entertain the public and to profit from the high demand for travel literature, texts such as William Symson's *New Voyage to the East Indies.* Symson is a pseudonym, the story pretends to depict a real journey but much of the detail was plagiarized from other sources.[153] Consequently, there were blurred boundaries between fictional and non-fictional travel literature in the minds of the nineteenth-century reading public and, often, it was difficult for them to distinguish between the two genres.[154]

The detail that many fictional travel writers included in their stories was so accurate that they were frequently recommended as text books in schools; indeed many were specifically written for the purpose of educating children.[155] Priscilla Wakefield, in *Traveller in Africa,* claimed that her story was "for the entertainment and instruction of young persons",[156] and in one of her earliest works of travel

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[152] Anna Johnston, "Writing the Southern Cross: Religious Travel Writing in Nineteenth-century Australasia", *Travel Writing in the Nineteenth Century: Filling the Blank Spaces*, ed. Tim Youngs, pp. 201-18.
[153] William Symson, *New Voyage to the East-Indies* (London: Routledge, 1715).
[154] This confusion was not confined to the nineteenth century - see Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, pp. 156-157.
[155] Factual information was not the only reason these books were issued in schools. Their plots usually included a series of character-building challenges for the protagonist which, when faced with courage and resourcefulness, would inevitably result in him triumphing over all adversity and becoming a better person as a result, just the qualities to which an English gentleman should aspire.
[156] Priscilla Wakefield, *Traveller in Africa* (London: Darton & Harvey, 1814), title page.

fiction, concerning a tour of Britain, she stated in the title that her mission was to give an: "account of its manufactures, natural and artificial curiosities, history and antiquities" for the "amusement and instruction of YOUTH" [her capitals].[157] Although not a serious traveller, Wakefield undertook considerable research to ensure that the information she provided in her travel fiction was accurate, if second-hand: "The sources from whence the information is drawn are pretty much confined to large libraries", and she acknowledged her debt to the: "respectable travellers from whom I have derived assistance; particularly Shaw, Brown, Horneman, Bruce, Park, and Barrow."[158] This attention to detail in Wakefield's fiction is particularly striking in *Traveller in Africa*, where her description of the fattening-up process undertaken by female Moors is remarkably similar to that of true-life accounts by Mungo Park and John Hanning Speke[159]:

> It is plain that ideas of beauty are not everywhere the same: delicacy of shape is despised here: no woman being esteemed handsome who is not grossly fat. Great pains are taken to render young women corpulent, by stuffing them with balls of nourishing forced meat with as much regularity as we bolt barley-meal down the throats of turkeys.[160]

Mary Martha Sherwood also produced dozens of books expressly for the instruction of young people, including several fictional travel books. In *The Traveller* she provided detailed information on the habitat, geography, climate, and wildlife of the areas the narrator visited in the course of his travels. She also did not shrink from addressing gruesome subjects in her stories if she felt that the facts were educational rather than just sensational. For example in *The Traveller* she included details on how the Eskimos butchered their seal meat:

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[157] Priscilla Wakefield, *A Family Tour Through the British Empire; Containing some account of its manufactures, natural and artificial curiosities, history and antiquities: Interspersed with biographical anecdotes, particularly adapted to the amusement and instruction of YOUTH* (London: Darton & Harvey, 1808).
[158] Priscilla Wakefield, *Traveller in Africa*, Preface.
[159] See Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of these works.
[160] Priscilla Wakefield, *Traveller in Africa*, p. 23.

> Two elderly women standing over it, armed with large knives already bloody, their faces and hands being also smeared with blood. These women divided the animal into two parts, and the intestines and blood were then carefully put into the cooking pot, except such bits as they gave to their friends or favourites, or crammed into their own mouths raw as it was [...] How very strange, cried little Thomas, for a child to eat blubber, and suck oil...And yet my boy, said the Traveller, we are all so decidedly children of habit, and had we been born amongst the Esquimaux, we should have learnt to like what they like.[161]

Not only does this passage inform the reader about a significant characteristic of Eskimo life but it also advocates tolerance of alternative life-styles; two justifications for including it in the story.[162]

The fact that so many of these books were given as school prizes is further proof that they were seen as 'proper' literary material for the development of young minds, and in order for them to be considered 'suitable' instructional material it was crucial that the information they contained was accurate.[163] There were also very few incidents imagined by fiction writers, regardless of how extreme, that were not experienced in real life by one of the intrepid nineteenth-century travellers. For example, Robert Michael Ballantyne's *The Coral Island,* where the narrator of the tale undergoes a shipwreck, is marooned on a desert island, and kidnapped by pirates, is 'Boys' Own' material. And yet, if you examine the accounts of real explorers such as Hugh Clapperton, who is abandoned by his guides in the jungles of Africa, captured and imprisoned by Arab slave traders, threatened by the natives, and has assassins hired to kill him, which of the two is less believable?

It is also interesting to note that many of these fictional stories were considered suitable reading material for both boys and girls as many of them advertise books for *The boys' holiday library* and *The girls' holiday library* at the

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[161] Mary Martha Sherwood, *The Traveller* (London: Darton and Clark, 1840?), pp. 62-3.
[162] In her factual travel account Sherwood is very careful to reassure her readers that she is behaving in a respectable and feminine manner. However, in her fictional travel account she is less circumspect and addresses subjects not considered particularly ladylike, although it is important to remember her narrator in this case is male and therefore such subjects would have been appropriate for him.
[163] In 1897 the Leeds School Board gave a copy of Robert Michael Ballantyne's *The Prairie Chief* (London: James Nisbet, 1886) for "Good conduct and punctual attendance". In 1891 Cheadle School gave Verney Lovett Cameron's *Among The Turks* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1890) as prize for "Progress" - both in The University of Liverpool Sydney Jones Library - special archive collection.

end of the story.[164] There were considerably more male writers of fictional travel texts than women in the nineteenth century. However, the few women who chose to write in this genre worked hard to ensure that their material was exact, and taken from reliable sources and, like their non-fictional colleagues, they were not afraid to discuss issues traditionally linked with the public sphere.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that both male and female writers were interested in a range of 'technical' issues traditionally associated with the public sphere, and that both genders were able to express this interest in their travel literature. Neither the period of travel nor the location visited appears to have had any significant influence on the amount of 'technical' data a travel text contained. What did matter was the amount of material already in circulation and whether providing additional 'technical' information would add anything of value to the current wealth of knowledge. Scholars have made excuses for the presence of such material in female travel literature but not male, seemingly accepting that it was 'normal' for male travel literature to provide facts and figures but an aberration if it occurred in female travel literature (scholars also appear to have neglected to comment when male travel texts do not reference such data in their material). The texts, however, indicate a different story. But a shared interest in public matters by both sexes should not be totally unexpected. Sarah Ellis wrote in her conduct book of 1842 that "A general knowledge of the political and social state of the country in which we live, and indeed of all countries, is of great importance, not only to men, but to women."[165] She was advocating the study of these wider issues to young women in her conduct books; books which generally took a very conservative view of the role of women in British society. If books such as these were encouraging young women to learn about 'technical' matters, then surely it indicates that it was not only acceptable but

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[164] Robert Michael Ballantyne, *Life in the Red Brigade; and Fort Desolation* (London: Nisbet, 1904?), back pages - The University of Liverpool Sydney Jones Library - special archive collection.
[165] Sarah Ellis, *The Daughters of England* (London: Fisher, Son, and Co., 1842), p. 83.

expected that women would be interested in these subjects in nineteenth-century Britain.

CHAPTER TWO

Stiff Upper Lips and Good Thick Skirts

Introduction

As we saw in the previous chapter travel literature has always had credibility issues. Including verifiable information and empirical data was one way for travel writers to reduce the risk of being accused of fabricating their journeys (it also helped promote the writer as a 'serious' traveller rather than a frivolous 'tourist'). Having a strong and authoritative narrator was another way of influencing whether or not a particular text was to be trusted. A narrator who was feeble or indecisive would hardly be able to convince their readers that they had been capable of leaving the security and protection of their home in Britain. Therefore, both male and female travel writers adopted the technique of using an 'Action Hero Narrator' in order to help convince the reading public of the veracity of their accounts

It is generally accepted among academics that it was usual for male writers during the nineteenth century, irrespective of literary genre, to adopt an authoritative narrative style in their written texts. For instance Sara Mills has claimed that: "The adventure hero is the perfect colonial subject, or at least the perfect colonial *male* subject. The narrator must keep 'face' and a 'stiff upper lip'."[166] Pressures of race and class meant that British middle-class male travel writers in particular could not be seen as weak. As representatives of the British Empire overseas they had a responsibility to be brave, resourceful and fully in control at all times, and their narrative style had to address these expectations. It is also commonly accepted that such literary conventions were especially problematic for women writers. On the one hand they too were representatives of the British Empire, and as such were similarly expected be confident and capable, but these same literary conventions also demanded that women writers be modest, less assertive and adopt a narrative style

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[166] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 77.

more suited to their gender; as Mills has reasoned: "the truth-status of the text often depends upon the strength of the narrator figure - which in turn poses problems of credibility because strong women narrator figures conflict with the cultural norms for women."[167] This chapter will address these assumptions, and investigate to what extent they are correct, by examining the approach of both genders to using a strong narrative voice in their travel texts. An analysis of the use of the 'Action Hero Narrator' will, therefore, play a crucial role in helping to evaluate how each gender coped with these apparently conflicting discursive demands, and assess whether this was an area where men and women operated in separate spheres.

2.1 The 'Action Hero Narrator' in Male Travel Literature

According to current research middle-class nineteenth-century male travel writers had no difficulty in using a strong narrative voice in their literature as they were not subject to the constraints that feminine discourse imposed on their female colleagues. One might have anticipated this usage to be especially evident in texts written about places that were under British control, whether that control was wholesale colonization or varying degrees of influence as a result of economic or political relationships. Texts written about trips to Africa tended to position their authors as daring heroic adventurers. They presented themselves as brave men valiantly facing the numerous perils of the 'Dark' continent in a noble endeavor to discover new territories and map vast uncharted landscapes, and all the effort and risk this entailed was usually attributed to a desire to further the knowledge of the human race and improve mankind. It was important that expeditions to Africa should be seen as having an altruistic mission. The British public should not have any suspicion that they were profit-making opportunities, even if some were deliberately designed to amass wealth and power or even if others did, rather fortuitously, result in establishing a variety of profitable political and commercial associations. This was not, however, to be the public's perception of them. As Laurence Kitzan found

[167] Ibid., p. 112.

during his investigation into the image of Empire in nineteenth-century literature, on the surface at least they should have a more philanthropic aim; furthering scientific knowledge, such as the discovery of new flora or fauna; improving topographical information, such as finding the sources of rivers; a moral goal, such as ending slavery; a religious mission, such as bringing Christianity to the heathen peoples; anything but a covetous search for wealth.[168]

We saw in Chapter One how on the whole expeditions to Africa were supported by government departments, scientific societies, or religious organizations, and each had their own particular motive for supporting these endeavours. Accounts of most journeys to Africa claim to have disinterested and noble intentions for exploring, as David Livingstone specified in his Introduction to the narrative of his expedition to the Zambesi:

> The main object of the Zambesi Expedition, as our instructions from Her Majesty's Government explicitly stated, was to extend the knowledge already attained of the geography and mineral and agricultural resources of Eastern and Central Africa—to improve our acquaintance with the inhabitants, and to endeavour to engage them to apply themselves to industrial pursuits and to the cultivation of their lands, with a view to the production of raw material to be exported to England in return for British manufactures; and it was hoped, that, by encouraging the natives to occupy themselves in the development of the resources of the country, a considerable advance might be made towards the extinction of the slave-trade, as they would not be long in discovering that the former would eventually be a more certain source of profit than the latter.[169]

Livingstone's comments indicate that profit could be made but it was not to be the expedition's primary purpose. That should be to "extend the knowledge", "improve our acquaintance with the inhabitants", teach the natives to apply themselves and, most important of all, encourage the "extinction of the slave-trade": all unquestionably extremely honorable objectives.

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[168] Laurence Kitzan, *Victorian Writers and the Image of Empire.*
[169] David Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition*, p. 9.

The leaders of expeditions sponsored by public organizations were, understandably, under pressure to behave in a certain way; after all they were representing their country's interests overseas. But, even when self-financing, these men were still representatives of a, if not the, dominant world power and colonial discourse dictated that their behaviour did nothing to tarnish Britain's premier status on the world stage. In order to maintain this eminent position, male writers who travelled to Africa typically adopted a very strong narrative voice in their texts; as Mills has argued: "An important element in the character of most travel narrators is their ability to handle difficult situations and not lose face."[170] A good example of this is Henry Morton Stanley. *In Darkest Africa,* published in 1890, describes his experience during the ill-fated rescue of Emin, Governor of Equatoria. Although, technically, it was a successful operation, the cost was high and during its three-year duration he and his team faced enormous hardship and deprivation. They trekked through some of the most difficult terrain in the region, they were regularly attacked by local tribesmen, and they lost hundreds of men to disease and starvation. And yet, regardless of all these troubles, Stanley explained that it was crucial that the British members of the expedition demonstrated that they could cope, whatever the circumstances, and set the right sort of example to the locals:

> Our officers had borne these privations with the spirit ascribed by Caesar to Anthony, and as well as though they were to the manner born. They fed on the flat wood beans of the forest, on the acid and wild fruit and strange fungus, with the smiling content of Sybarites at feast. Yet one of them paid £1,000 for this poor privilege, and came near being thought too dainty for rough African life. They had been a living example to our dark followers, many of whom had probably been encouraged to strive for existence by the bright, hopeful looks our officers wore under our many unhappy afflictions.[171]

Stanley implies that without the white men's brave leadership the black men would be unable to continue with the journey. Stanley's racist beliefs are clear; even an

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[170] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 142.
[171] Henry Morton Stanley, *In Darkest Africa,* vol. 1 (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington Ltd., 1890), p. 249.

effeminate white man who initially is "thought too dainty for rough African life" is shown to be more courageous than any black member of the expedition (this man was Mounteney Jephson, of whom Stanley admitted: "There is a great deal in Mounteney Jephson, though he was supposed to be effeminate."[172]).

As well as showing that Stanley was extremely proud of his men's resilience, *In Darkest Africa* is also a testament to Stanley's own personal courage. In it he shows how he triumphed over those who questioned his suitability as project leader: "It had probably been believed by the mass of the people that I was rather too old to supervise the march, as in former times; but on the march to Vombo, on the 7th, everyone was undeceived" (he was forty six at the time).[173] He also established that he was in more peril than the rest of his group: "In addition to all these mischiefs a vast crop of lying is germinated in these darksome shades [...] showing a measureless cunning, and an insatiable love of horror. My own murder appears to be a favourite theme."[174] The implication here is that not only was Stanley experienced enough to realise the dangerous nature of his assignment, and outwit the locals by uncovering the plots against him, but he was also resolute enough to continue with the mission in spite of the danger to his own life.

It was not only large-scale expeditions like Stanley's which encountered such extreme difficulties. Richard Burton's mission to find the source of the Nile (1856-9) was much smaller in scale than Stanley's endeavour but it shared many of its problems. Burton, too, faced extreme climatic and geographical difficulties: "At that season, when the moisture of the rainy monsoon was like a poison distilled by the frequent bursts of fiery sunshine, it was a valley of death for the unacclimatised travellers."[175] Burton used hyperbolic language such as "poison", "fiery" and "valley of death" to draw attention to the dangerous conditions he faced, and to set out his credentials as an acclimatised traveller. He reveals, like many male explorers to Africa, that it was disease and illness that were the biggest challenges to the success

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[172] Ibid., p. 73.
[173] Ibid., p. 84.
[174] Ibid., p. 483.
[175] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa,* vol. 1, p. 64.

of his mission. Most travellers to Africa describe in vivid detail the horrors of sickness, including Burton who observed that:

> The 'Mkunguru' begins with coldness in the toes and finger-tips; a frigid shiver seems to creep to the legs, followed by pains in the shoulders, severe frontal headache, hot eyes, and a prostration and irritability of mind and body. This preliminary lasts for one to three hours, when nausea ushers in the hot stage: the head burns, the action of the heart becomes violent, thirst rages, and a painful weight presses upon the eyeballs: it is often accompanied by a violent cough and irritation. Strange visions, as in delirium, appear to the patient, and the excitement of the brain is proved by unusual loquacity. When the fit passes off with copious perspiration the head is often affected, the ears buzz, and the limbs are weak. If the patient attempts to rise suddenly, he feels a dizziness, produced apparently by a gush of bile along the liver duct: want of appetite, sleeplessness and despondency, and a low fever, evidenced by hot pulses, throbbing temples, and feet painfully swollen, with eruptions of various kinds, and ulcerated mouth, usher in the cure.[176]

Although large numbers of men died on expeditions to Africa as a result of disease, and despite the constant fear that any sickness would be terminal, the travellers almost always managed to overcome their particular illness.[177] Burton commented on how: "At Dut'humi we were detained nearly a week; the malaria had brought on attacks of marsh fever, which in my case lasted about 20 days; the paroxysms were mild compared with the Indian or the Sindhian type."[178] During this undertaking Burton demonstrated not only that he could conquer a severe infection but he also revealed that this was not the first time in his career he had had to overcome problems like these, and that in the past they had actually been much worse. In his travel accounts, therefore, he established his ability to deal with any threat to his health, in a variety of different environments.

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[176] Ibid., p. 105.
[177] There were, of course, many travel narratives published posthumously, e.g. Hugh Clapperton died during his second expedition into the interior of Africa and his journal was published by his colleague Richard Lander (Hugh Clapperton, *Journal*).
[178] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa,* vol. 1, p. 84.

Burton was accompanied on this particular trip by John Speke. In his account of the operation Speke also graphically described the symptoms of one of his bouts of sickness:

> I turned into bed, but could not get up again; for the cough that had struck me for a month then became so violent, heightened by fever succeeding the cold fit, that before the next morning I was so reduced I could not stand [...] The symptoms, altogether, were rather alarming, for the heart felt inflamed and ready to burst, pricking and twingeing with every breath, which was exceedingly aggravated by constant coughing, when streams of phlegm and bile were ejected. The left arm felt half-paralysed, the left nostril was choked with mucus, and on the centre of the left shoulder blade I felt a pain as if some one was branding me with a hot iron. All this was constant; and, in addition, I repeatedly felt severe pains – rather paroxysms of fearful twinges – in the spleen, liver, and lungs; whilst during my sleep I had all sorts of absurd dreams.[179]

Many male travel writers appear to have relished detailing the particularly gruesome symptoms of some of the more unusual and exotic illnesses, and delighted in describing extremes of pain and discomfort. It appears that the worse the suffering the more heroic the recovery and, therefore, the greater the strength of character of the individual. Facing problems like these was not a sign of weakness; on the contrary it was a measure of how well one could cope with obstacles. Each explorer had to be seen to endure more pain and suffering than his predecessors, and there is a feeling that there was an air of competition among male travellers to see whose expedition had to face the most difficulties.

The rivalry between Burton and Speke is evident in the way each portrayed their associate's response to being sick. Both tried to out-do the other and there is a strong sense of one-upmanship in their relationship. Speke indicates that he was more resilient than Burton by commenting that: "All the members of the expedition, excepting myself, were suffering from the effects of wilderness life."[180] Whereas Burton waspishly remarks: "My companion suffered even more severely, he had a

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[179] John Hanning Speke, *Journal*, pp. 123-4.
[180] Ibid., p. 85.

fainting-fit which strongly resembled a sun-stroke, and which seemed permanently to affect his brain."[181] Each man stressed his own resilience to pain and incapacity whilst emphasising his colleague's weaknesses and inability to cope, and the highly competitive nature of their relationship forced both men, once they had returned home, to portray himself as the dominant leader and the strongest member of the team in their travel narrative.

Although Burton and Speke's relationship was particularly combative, in many respects every African explorer was in competition, as each subsequent expedition had to undergo more suffering or achieve more difficult goals than its predecessor. Furthermore all travellers were under pressure to a certain extent to make their journey unique: their account had to be different to any previous publication and overcoming a series of hostile environments and debilitating diseases was an effective way of achieving this objective.

Darkest Africa was not the only region where the health of the traveller was shown to be under threat, and many travellers to other parts of the world also relished describing the risk of contracting potentially life-threatening infections. The Middle East was also an area where travellers faced being exposed to terrible illnesses. Alexander Kinglake, for example, encountered cholera when he travelled to Cairo in 1835. Despite acknowledging that he was in a hazardous position he also manages to demonstrate that he could overcome his fears and, thus, avoid appearing weak to his readers:

> There is some semblance of bravado in my manner of talking about the Plague. I have been more careful to describe the terrors of other people than my own. The truth is, that during the whole period of my stay at Cairo I remained thoroughly impressed with a sense of my danger. I may also say that I lived under perpetual apprehension, for even in my sleep, as I fancy, there remained with me some faint notion of the peril with which I was encompassed. But fear does not necessarily damp the spirits; on the contrary, it will often operate as an excitement giving rise to unusual animation; and thus it affected me.[182]

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[181] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa,* vol. 1, p. 84.
[182] Alexander William Kinglake, *Eothen* , p. 210.

Kinglake's use of the word "Plague" in his account has connotations with the 'Black Death', with all its associated horror, and makes him sound even more heroic, as does his determination to interpret his feelings of fear as a positive attribute.

It was important that the author adopted a strong narrative voice in his text so as to advertise his capacity for dealing with a vast range of stressful situations. Isabel Burton, in the Preface to her husband's account of his pilgrimage to Al Medinha and Meccah, described in great detail how important and challenging it was for a traveller to prepare thoroughly for an expedition, and how her husband had:

> studied every separate thing until he was master of it, even apprenticing himself to a blacksmith to learn how to make horse-shoes and to shoe his own horses. It meant living with his life in his hand, amongst strangers and wildest companions, adopting their unfamiliar manners, living for nine months in the hottest and most unhealthy climate, upon repulsive food; it meant complete and absolute isolation from everything that makes life tolerable, for all civilisation, from all his natural habits; the brain at high tension, but the mind never wavering from the *role* he had adopted; but he liked it, he was happy in it, he felt at home in it, and in this Book he tells you how he did it, and what he saw.[183]

It is fascinating that she proposed the idea that the traveller was playing a "role"; that travel somehow involved adopting a persona, a mask that one could hide behind to disguise who one truly was. This is literally true in Burton's case as he was travelling in disguise during this mission because: "there are Holy Shrines of the Moslem world in the far-away Desert, where no white man, European, or Christian, could enter (save as a Moslem), or even approach, without certain death."[184] Yet, however dangerous the mission or challenging the problem, Burton's careful preparation indicates how determined he was to visit the holy sites: "for the purpose of removing that opprobrium to modern adventure, the huge white blot which in our

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[183] Richard Francis Burton, *The Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al Medinha & Meccah,* vol. 1 (London: Tylston and Edwards, 1893), Preface.
[184] Ibid., Preface.

maps still denotes the Eastern and the Central regions of Arabia."[185] Again this shows how important it was for expeditions to appear to have a non-commercial objective. It also reveals that if the mission was not going to be challenging then there would be no point doing it, as an easy assignment would not convey any strength of character.

It was particularly important that travellers to the colonies maintained a strong narrative voice in their travel accounts, so as not to undermine the supposedly superior reputation of the British Empire. Edward John Eyre's account of his assignment to find a practical trade route through Central Australia in 1840, written before his infamous posting to Jamaica, is typical of this sort of travel literature. Steadfast and determined Eyre faced enormous difficulties during his mission. Although his life was at risk from blistering temperatures and a scarcity of food and water, Eyre did not want to disappoint the colonists and the Australian Government who had engaged him for this task: "my own firm determination [is] never to return unsuccessful, but either to accomplish the object I had in view, or perish in the attempt."[186] He was so single-minded that he claimed not even the prospect of dying was going to prevent him fulfilling his obligations to his employers although, as we shall see, this proved not to be the case.

It was not only relatively remote and unknown places or British colonies where travellers showed themselves facing dangerous situations with courage and bravery. Sent to Spain by the Bible Society in the 1830s on a mission to promote the Scriptures, George Borrow was under constant threat of being punished for his Protestant beliefs. However, he remained unwavering throughout his narrative, and never doubted that his objective was a noble one and worth the risk to his life and freedom:

> I was told that a warrant had been issued for my apprehension. The prospect of incarceration, however, did not fill me with much dismay; an adventurous life and inveterate habits of wandering having long familiarized me to

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[185] Ibid., p. 1.
[186] Edward John Eyre, *Journals*, vol. 1, p. 300.

> situations of every kind, so much so as to feel myself quite as comfortable in a prison as in the gilded chambers of palaces.[187]

Although he was on a religious quest, Borrow did not describe his mission in religious terms. He made his life in Spain sound very adventurous and daring, and he deliberately courted danger by publicly promoting the Protestant Bible regardless of the consequences to his own safety, defiantly challenging the authority of the Roman Catholic Church.

The battle between explorers to be hailed as the best in their field could also explain why male travellers commonly went into such gruesome detail in their narratives. It also helped distinguish them from 'tourists' whose pleasure trips were deliberately designed to avoid the most dangerous situations. The more difficult and deadly the mission, the more fearless and resilient the explorer was seen to be, and each subsequent expedition had to face worse conditions than the one preceding it for it to be viewed as a success. The Prussian naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt wryly observed in the early nineteenth century that: "In a land where few travel, people enjoy exaggerating the dangers arising from the climate, animals and wild men."[188] It was important, therefore, that explorers were seen to face an assortment of perilous situations on their travels. Laura Franey's research into violence in travel writing has revealed an increasing appetite among the British public for ghastly, shocking stories and she concluded that:

> The circulation of these horrific stories may at least be partially explained as a manifestation of the increasingly sensationalistic bent of the English and American press over the final two decades of the nineteenth century [...] The sensationalistic approach was also evident in the bone-chilling details offered in many newspapers about the mutilation-slayings of prostitutes carried out by "Jack the Ripper" in London's East End in 1888.
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> Overall, it appears, that as both general literacy and the number of daily and weekly newspapers around Britain increased, the public discourse about events like murders, rapes, and other forms of violence became more prevalent.[189]

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[187] George Borrow, *The Bible in Spain*, p. 539.
[188] Alexander von Humboldt, *Jaguars & Electric Eels* (London, Penguin Books Ltd., 2007), Introduction.
[189] Laura Franey, *Victorian Travel Writing and Imperial Violence*, pp. 59-60.

There was an expectation that a serious explorer must be prepared to suffer, and suffer badly. There is also a strong sense of the Protestant work ethic about this attitude; that it was only through extreme hardship and struggle that true success could be achieved.

There are countless examples of male travel texts, similar to the ones we have discussed above, which depict their creators as individuals who were one hundred per cent determined to achieve their goals in spite of all the hazards they had to face on their various missions. Irrespective of location or time it would appear that it was important for them to be seen to triumph over all difficulties that arose along their journey or, if they could not overcome them, at least face them with courage and fortitude. Even apparent failure could be portrayed as a success if the traveller was seen to have done his best in the circumstances. For example, although their mission failed, Richard Lander's account of the trials he had to endure following the death of his associate Hugh Clapperton in 1827 illustrates that in even in the face of his own problems, and his intense grief at the loss of his close friend, he was determined not to give up, and he remained a brave and quick-witted man notwithstanding the enormous obstacles he had to face on his journey home. On one particular occasion, when he was under suspicion of being an English government spy, the local Chief insisted that he underwent a traditional and usually fatal test to see if the accusations were valid:

> All the chief men at length assembled at the fetish hut, and having come to a resolution that I was to drink a fetish, sent for me to appear before them. On my way five or six hundred people gathered round me, and I could proceed with difficulty. A great number of them were armed with hatchets, bows and arrows, and spears; and waited outside the hut till I came out. On entering one of the men presenting me with a bowl, in which was about a quart of liquid much resembling water, commanded me to drink it, saying, 'If you come to do bad, it will kill you; but if not it cannot hurt you.' There being no resource, I immediately, and without hesitation, swallowed the contents of the bowl, and walked hastily out of the hut, through the armed men, to my own lodgings, took powerful medicine and plenty of warm water, which instantly ejected the whole from my stomach, and I felt no ill effects from the

fetish. It had a bitter and disagreeable taste, and I was told almost always proved fatal.

When the king and chief men found, after five days, that the fetish had not hurt me, they became extremely kind, and sent me presents of provisions, &c. daily, and frequently said I was protected by God, and that it was out of the power of man to do me an injury.[190]

Lander's description of his success in outwitting the local tribesmen seems very clichéd because foiling assassination plots was a familiar scene in both travel texts and adventure stories set in Africa. Like many travellers he showed how Western intellect could triumph over African superstition but, nevertheless, it does indicate that even under extreme circumstances he continued to be a very ingenious man, and it is difficult to completely dismiss his resourcefulness and courage.

Edward Eyre, too, failed in his objective to find a practical trade route through Central Australia. Following "two most disastrous attempts to head the Great Australian Bight",[191] where his companions had perished, he had been close to death on several occasions, and his hopes had "been dashed to the ground, after the toils, anxieties, and privations of eight months",[192] he finally admitted defeat and returned home. Despite his previous claims that he would rather die than fail to complete his mission, Eyre recognised that it was: "all in vain; we made so little headway, and were so completely exhausting the little strength we had left, that I felt compelled to desist."[193] However, because of the severity of the conditions he faced, and the intense pain and suffering he had to endure, his story is not presented as a failure but as an account of an exceptionally plucky explorer who simply tried his best in brutal circumstances. Mungo Park sums up this heroic but flawed approach: "With this conviction on my mind, I hope my readers will acknowledge that I did right in going no farther. I had made every effort to execute my mission, in its fullest extent, which prudence could justify."[194] As long as the traveller demonstrated that he had done all he could he was not considered a failure, he was just an unlucky

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[190] Hugh Clapperton, *Journal*, p. 325.
[191] Edward John Eyre, *Journals,* vol. 1, p. 302.
[192] Ibid., p. 314.
[193] Ibid., p. 330.
[194] Mungo Park, *Travels*, p. 162.

individual who had had the misfortune to come across insurmountable difficulties on his journey.

2.2 The 'Action Hero Narrator' in Female Travel Literature

There are unquestionably many nineteenth-century travel texts written by male writers which have a strong and authoritative narrative voice, and because this conforms to colonial discourse theory and gender discourse theory it is understandable that this has been interpreted as meaning that male travel writers monopolized this technique. However, examination of texts written by female travel writers will show that it was not only male travel writers who used a strong narrative voice in their travel texts, and that many of them were also comfortable using a strong and authoritative narrator in their travel literature.

We discussed previously how improvements in technology and the expansion of the British Empire had led to an increasing number of women travelling overseas, and there was a corresponding increase in the number of travel texts they produced recording their adventures around the globe. These women wanted to be thought of as serious travellers and not casual 'tourists', and like male travellers they were also ambassadors for the British Empire, therefore it was a matter of national pride that they similarly demonstrated to their readers that they were fully in control and capable of dealing with any situation. On the other hand, female travel writers were also supposed to be modest, unassuming and feminine in their literary output because, as Mills has argued: "The stronger the narrator figure is in a woman's text, it would seem, the more likely it is for the work to be considered 'false' or exaggerated, since it does not fit in with discursive models."[195] However, although adopting an authoritative narrative style would appear to destabilize the rules of feminine discourse and, possibly, lead to the veracity of the account being questioned, it was evidently very important to female writers that they appeared competent and decisive in their travel texts.

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[195] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 149.

When it came to coping with illness and disease most female travellers were as determined as their male counterparts to present themselves as tough and resilient characters. Although they did not, on the whole, face the same extreme and unusual diseases as some of the male travellers, they tended to endure pain and suffering in a steadfast manner and continue with their journey if it was at all possible. Of course not all the maladies endured by male travellers on their trips were as horrific and life-threatening as those so vividly expressed by Livingstone and Stanley, some men described suffering from more mundane illnesses such as chills, exhaustion and sun-stroke. For example, Richard Burton, on his pilgrimage to Al Medinha and Meccah, grumbled:

> That was a sad night. My eighty-four mile ride had made every bone ache; I had lost epidermis, and the sun had seared every portion of skin exposed to it. So, lamenting my degeneracy and the ill effects of four years' domicile in Europe, and equally disquieted in mind about the fate of my goods and chattels, I fell into an uncomfortable sleep.[196]

So male travel writers also experienced more everyday complaints, and did not think them any less important or they would not have referred to them in their travel texts.

Neither the time nor the location appears to have heavily influenced the strength of the narrative voice in women's travel literature and the way they coped with illnesses on their travels. Writing early in the nineteenth century Lady Hester Stanhope's comments express most female travel writers' attitude towards the threat of sickness: "I, for one, have little apprehension of the plague; all in this world rests with Providence, and over-caution ever exposes more to danger than remaining quiet."[197] When she did become ill she did not let her difficulties overwhelm her: "the cold made me so ill that for more than two months I never walked upstairs, and I mounted my horse to go into the desert in this state."[198] Even near the end of her

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[196] Richard Francis Burton, *The Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al Medinha & Meccah,* vol. 1, p. 159.
[197] Hester Lucy Stanhope, *The Life and Letters of Lady Hester Stanhope,* ed., The Duchess of Cleveland (London: John Murray, 1914), p. 140.
[198] Ibid., p. 162.

life, when she was terribly ill and virtually alone, she remained unwavering: "I will not afflict you by drawing a picture of my situation, or of the wretched scare-crow grief and sickness have reduced me to, but I must tell you that I am nearly blind, and this is probably the last letter I shall be able to write to you."[199] Attitudes towards coping with sickness had not changed significantly towards the end of the nineteenth century. Whilst travelling through Persia in 1893 Isabella Bird showed the same determination as Stanhope as she too did not allow herself to be defeated by illness: "I was so tired and in so much pain that I was obliged to lie down on the roadside for a considerable time before I could proceed, and got a chill, and was so wretched that I had to be tied on my horse."[200] The approach of these women to being unwell is typical of many female travel writers. Their accounts frequently show that in spite of pain and sickness they were going to continue on their journey even if they had "to be tied" onto their horses.

Where female travel texts do differ markedly from male travel texts is that it seems to have been particularly important to female writers to show that if they did become debilitated by illness or injury they were seen to recover as quickly as possible. Honoria Lawrence recorded in the account of her visit to India her experiences of being so ill that she was close to death. She did not relate all her symptoms, unlike many male writers, but she was able to demonstrate the gravity of her illness, her determination to recover and continue on her journey, and her commitment to maintain contact with relatives at home: "I did not think last month that I should ever be able to write to you again, but God has again reprieved me from the very brink of the grave. At present I believe all alarming symptoms are over, but I have intense pain from rheumatic fever, which has left me only the use of my left arm."[201] Lucy Atkinson also admitted to having problems during her journey across the Tartar Steppes: "I had been so many hours on my horse, and had passed over such frightfully difficult roads, that when we stopped, I was actually obliged to be led, for I could not stand, my limbs were so benumbed." But this admission of weakness was quickly followed by a characteristically reassuring statement: "After

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[199] Ibid., p. 244.
[200] Isabella Bird, *Journeys in Persia & Kurdistan II* (London: Virago 1989), p. 369.
[201] Honoria Lawrence, *The Journals of Honoria Lawrence*, p. 216.

lying on the bench in the cottage for a few seconds, I recovered."[202] This rapid recovery is particularly remarkable as she was eight months pregnant at the time.

It is not surprising to find that women writers were able to describe dealing with illness or fatigue in their travel accounts; after all they had to cope with these issues whilst at home, as did men of course. It also conforms to the principles of feminine discourse theory, in that as women were physically weaker they would inevitably find the process of travel quite arduous. There was also a strong belief that their lives were in the hands of Providence and many of their texts were couched in religious terms. However, there were circumstances that they were unlikely to experience at home, and where women writers in particular might be expected to have exhibited more vulnerability. There are a number of female travellers, for example, who discuss themes more associated with masculine activities, such as being in physical danger, and in these particular texts they show just how resilient and resourceful they could be. As Dea Birkett has argued: "The more imminent death, the more alive the women felt, for the proximity of death enhanced the immediacy of life", so, rather than being overwhelmed by the prospect of serious injury or even death, many women felt invigorated and excited, and expressed these heightened emotions quite comfortably in their travel accounts.[203] A good example of this sort of female travel writer is Lady Hester Stanhope who, in 1827, found herself under threat from Emir Beshyr:

> A short time since, the Emir thought proper to publish in the villages that all my servants were instantly to return to their homes, upon pain of losing their property or lives. I gave them all their option. Most of them have remained firm, being aware that this order is the most unjust, as well as the most ridiculous, that ever was issued. Since that, he has threatened to seize and murder them here, which he shall not do without taking my life too. Besides this, he has given orders in all the villages that men, women and children shall be cut in a thousand pieces who render me the smallest service. My servants, of course, as you must imagine, cannot go out, and the peasants of the villages cannot approach the house. Therefore, I am of no very pleasant situation, being deprived of the necessary supplies in food, and, what is

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[202] Lucy Atkinson, *Recollections of the Tartar Steppes & Their Inhabitants* (London: Frank Cass, 1972), p. 76.
[203] Dea Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers* (Oxford: Blackwell Ltd., 1989), p. 69.

> worse, of water, for all the water here is brought upon mules' backs up a great steep.[204]

Stanhope's perseverance throughout this ordeal exhibited real courage. She not only showed that she was prepared to defend herself from attack but she also demonstrated that she was prepared to fight to the death, if necessary, to protect those around her: "he shall not do without taking my life too." Guarding the lives of other people is a stereotypically masculine characteristic and not what one would expect to see from a lady, and yet Stanhope defiantly faced up to his intimidation and refused to capitulate.

There is obviously a class aspect to Stanhope's heroic behaviour. She was a member of the aristocracy, with a very strong sense of duty, and was acutely aware of her responsibility towards those under her care. This obligation to her class to stand firm and protect those in her charge was obviously more important to her than appearing feminine. With typical tenacity, even though she was in an extremely perilous position, she consistently underplayed her difficulties: "Therefore, I am of no very pleasant situation" is an astounding understatement considering the circumstances. Irrespective of the danger, Stanhope was conscious that she had to live up to the family name and maintain the reputation of her ancestors: "I should not be a thoroughbred Pitt if fear were known to me, or if I should bow to a monster."[205] She was also fully aware of the impact that her defiance was having on the outside world and on her enemy who: "repents having given me an opportunity of showing what I am. I am thus become more popular than ever, having shown an example of firmness and courage no one could calculate upon."[206] Like many travel writers, male and female, she exploited the situation to illustrate that one should not give in to threats and bullying. She was British and "a thoroughbred Pitt" and, whatever the odds, she must, and did, stand firm. Shirley Foster's observation that: "In extreme circumstances, the women travellers not only reveal extraordinary innermost

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[204] Hester Lucy Stanhope, *The Life and Letters of Lady Hester Stanhope*, p. 249.
[205] Ibid., p. 249.
[206] Ibid., p. 252.

resources but they also recreate themselves in new heroic moulds"[207] perfectly describes Stanhope's situation. Stanhope certainly faced "extreme circumstances", and exhibited "extraordinary innermost resources" and, whilst doing so, she managed to recreate herself in "new heroic moulds" in spite of the constraints of feminine discourse which issues of class appear to outweigh.

Female travel texts show a remarkable similarity in their dogged approach to adversity throughout the whole of the nineteenth century, and this consistency does not appear to have been particularly effected by the location of the traveller. In the account of her visit to Mexico in the 1830s Madam Calderon de la Barca adopted a very strong narrative voice when faced with "extreme circumstances". Even in the midst of a revolution Calderon managed to maintain a confident demeanour and, despite the surrounding destruction and the appalling loss of life, she remained calm and organized facilities at the embassy for: "whole families who come for protection":[208] like Stanhope demonstrating a very strong sense of duty towards those in a less fortunate position. Political instability meant that Mexico was a particularly dangerous place in which to travel during this period since any group without a military escort was vulnerable to attack. Calderon carefully explained the potential dangers to her readers: "We have been strongly advised not to attempt this journey, and the stories of robbers and robberies, related by credible persons, are not encouraging. Robbers, bad roads, horrible heat, poisonous animals; many are the difficulties prognosticated to us."[209] However, she refused to let these very real hazards deter her from exploring her new land, and she continued to make excursions to the surrounding towns and villages throughout the whole of her stay in Mexico. Her text is full of instances which illustrate her strength of character and refusal to give in to threats, with no indication that she felt the revelation of such traits to the outside world would damage her femininity.

Florence Nightingale also faced being physically attacked during her trip to Egypt in the 1840s. Unlike many other female travellers, however, her heroism was

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[207] Shirley Foster, *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth Century Women Travellers and their Writings* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 160.
[208] Madame Calderon De La Barca, *Life in Mexico*, p. 231.
[209] Ibid., p. 298.

more passive than active as she did not take up arms to defend herself but she was concerned about the welfare of others: "It is not that one minds being spat at (which I have been) for a religion which one loves, but one is so afraid of the gentlemen of one's party noticing any insult, as an Englishman's complaint would bring a bastinado upon the poor wretch, which has so often ended in death."[210] She portrayed herself as a modern-day martyr, emphasized by her use of religious terminology, and her expression of anxiety for those around her continues the theme within feminine discourse of philanthropy and altruism and caring for others rather than oneself.

Women travel writers generally showed a remarkable determination not to exhibit any fear in their texts, and an especially strong resolve not to give in to intimidation. Lucy Atkinson demonstrated in the account of her journey across Russia in the 1860s that, even though she had been warned of trouble, she was not going to be daunted by the potential dangers of travelling. On her journey across the Tartar Steppes she was thoroughly prepared for the worst: "Mr. Tate presented me with a rifle. I had already a pair of pistols [...] it is advisable for me to be at least able to defend myself in case of an attack being made on our precious persons or effects whilst travelling amongst the wild tribes we shall meet on our journey us."[211] Although she prayed that: "I shall not be called upon to use any of my weapons of defence"[212] unfortunately their party was assaulted on the road by a band of robbers. However, Atkinson's comments reveal just how determined she was not to submit to these brigands:

> There was no mistaking their intentions, so we jumped up. I always at night placed everything where I could lay my hands upon it at a moment's notice. Placing my husband's pistols and gun into his hands, he started, bidding me lie down and keep quiet, but such was not my nature [...] and out I went, with my single pistol in my hand; the other had been stolen.[213]

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[210] Florence Nightingale, *Letters from Egypt*, p. 39.
[211] Lucy Atkinson, *Recollections of the Tartar Steppes*, p. 21.
[212] Ibid., p. 21.
[213] Ibid., p. 183.

Atkinson not only exhibited courage and resourcefulness in her actions but she also disobeyed her husband's express wishes, thereby not only defying the thieves but also challenging the authority of her spouse; this is not exactly the deferential feminine approach we have been led to expect from nineteenth-century women, particularly married women.

At roughly the same time as Atkinson was battling her way across the Steppes Lucie Duff Gordon was encountering her own problems with the Egyptian authorities, and the manner in which she faced these difficulties is further proof that female travellers could show impressive courage under difficult conditions. Chapter One discussed how, in her publication *Letters from Egypt*, she wrote passionately about what she saw as a corrupt and oppressive regime. Publicizing the failings of the Egyptian government to nations on whom it wanted to make a positive impression was not without personal risk, and Gordon's criticisms of the regime did not go unnoticed. Spies were employed to watch her movements and she was aware that her mail was being intercepted: "I hope you will get this, as old fat Hassan will take it to the office in Cairo himself – for the post is very insecure indeed. I have written very often, if you don't get my letters I suppose they interest the court of Pharaoh."[214] However, she showed her resolution not to be scared by their tactics, and observed the impact her independent stance had on the people around her: "now the people are really enthusiastic because I refused the offer of some cawasses as a guard."[215] She rarely expressed any anxiety for herself, but she was concerned for the safety of her friends and neighbours: "I was rather frightened – for them I mean."[216] In common with many female travel writers, such as Stanhope and Calderon, Gordon voiced great concern for the people around her when she thought their lives were under threat as a consequence of her behaviour.

When editing her letters both Gordon's husband and her mother, wisely perhaps, removed some of her strongest criticisms of the Egyptian regime to ensure her safety but nevertheless the picture that emerges is one of a woman deeply affected by witnessing the oppression of those around her: "I cannot describe to you

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[214] Lucie Duff Gordon, *Letters from Egypt*, pp. 273-4.
[215] Ibid., p. 239.
[216] Ibid., p. 262.

the misery here now, indeed it is wearisome even to think of: every day some new tax. Now every beast; camel, cow, sheep, donkey, horse, is made to pay. The fellaheen can no longer eat bread, they are living on barley meal, and I see all my acquaintances growing seedy and ragged and anxious."[217] Like Stanhope, Gordon was mindful of the effect her attitude was having on the outside world, and just as keen to ensure that as many people as possible got to hear of the regime's abuses in spite of the threat to her own safety.

These texts by Stanhope, Barca, Nightingale, Atkinson, and Gordon cover a large period of the nineteenth century and a vast range of different locations, and yet they are remarkably similar in the way that they portray their authors as strong and determined characters. The lack of any notable difference in attitude towards difficult obstacles in female travel literature from different times and from different locations, however, is most evident in the travel accounts of Isabella Bird. Produced during the last three decades of the nineteenth century her accounts show how she found herself facing a variety of hazardous situations with the same unwavering approach as Stanhope half a century earlier. One of her expeditions was to China where she had to face the dangers of the mighty Yangtze:

> many of the deterrent perils which are arrayed before the eyes of travellers about to begin a journey are greatly exaggerated, and often vanish altogether. Not so the perils of the Yangtze. They fully warrant the worst descriptions which have been given of them. The risks are many and serious, and cannot be provided against by any forethought.[218]

She did not, however, allow knowledge of the potential dangers to prevent her from continuing with her voyage. It was not only natural obstacles that Bird had to conquer on this trip as later she had to endure attacks from local villagers where her: "chair was struck repeatedly with sticks; mud and unsavory missiles were thrown with excellent aim; a well-dressed man, bolder or more cowardly than the rest, hit me a smart whack across my chest, which left a weal; others from behind hit me

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[217] Ibid., p. 335.
[218] Isabella Bird, *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond*, p. 110.

across the shoulders; the howling was infernal; it was an angry Chinese mob." However, her response to these threats reveals how it was possible to move between discourses: "There was nothing for it but to sit up stolidly, and not appear hurt, frightened, or annoyed, though I was all three."[219] She could admit to her readers that she felt "hurt" and "frightened", and display some of the frailties associated with feminine discourse, so long as she maintained an outward show of stoicism before her native attackers, and kept up the 'stiff upper lip' of colonial discourse. Appearances must be kept up in front of the locals, but her fears could be shared with her readers.

Whilst travelling in Persia, Bird was in almost constant fear of being robbed by local gangs: "I did not hear till the evening that the topic of the talk was our robbery, with possible murder [...] After the Gorab affair, I loaded my revolver, and now sleep with it under my pillow, carry it in my holster, and never have it out of my reach."[220] Each hazard she encountered was faced with courage and a determination not to submit to being intimidated. The language she employed in her narratives to describe these dangers is unemotional and detached and mirrors her resolution not to give in to any threats: "Meanwhile a number of Zalakis, armed, two with guns and the rest loaded with sticks, crowded round me, using menacing gestures and calling me a *Kafir*, on which I took my revolver out of the holster, and very slowly examined the chambers, though I knew well that all were loaded. This had an excellent effect."[221] Bird demonstrated in her writing that by remaining calm, outwardly at least, almost any problem could be overcome, regardless of one's gender.

We have seen by studying texts from a number of female travel writers, such as Stanhope, Barca, Nightingale, Atkinson, Gordon and Bird, how neither the time nor the location appears to have had much impact on the way that female travel writers faced extremely difficult situations, and how there is an abundance of examples to confirm Foster's conclusions that when in "extreme circumstances" women were able to "reveal extraordinary innermost resources". The traditional

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[219] Ibid., pp. 215-6.
[220] Isabella Bird, *Journeys in Persia & Kurdistan II*, pp. 16-20.
[221] Ibid., p. 64.

view of women as being weak and defenseless creatures unable to behave as courageously as men does not appear to be supported in the primary source material. Mary Martha Sherwood's account of her sea voyage to India in 1805 may help to explain why there is this discrepancy between how women were expected to behave and how they actually behaved in practice. Describing an incident when their ship came under attack from a French gun ship she wrote:

> The hold was a dismal place, and there was no light but what came from above [...] We were then considerably under water-mark, in darkness, and quite certain that if anything happened to the ship nothing could save us, for they had taken away the ladders, probably to keep us in our places. Our husbands and all our late companions were above, and we heard the roar of the guns, but had no means of learning what was going on. We were warned not to approach the opening lest a ball might roll in upon us, and there we were for some hours, not in the least knowing what was going on. There was, however, no fainting, screaming, or folly amongst us; it is not on occasions of real trial that women in general behave weakly.[222]

Sherwood argues here that when in genuine danger women did not resort to feminine wiles but exhibited true, even if passive, courage. Her comments reveal that so-called feminine weaknesses, such as "fainting" and "screaming", were not a natural consequence of one's gender but a series of strategies women had leaned to employ when the circumstances demanded. Isabel Burton explained how exhibiting weaknesses traditionally associated with female behaviour would be extremely unproductive on an expedition:

> I appeal to you, reader, whether one would not be a bore to a travelling and scientific husband if, when one wanted to lend a hand to carry out some project, one's tender sensibilities overcame one, and one fell into shrieking convulsions [...] A traveller's wife must cultivate certain capabilities – ride well, walk, swim, shoot, and learn to defend herself if attacked, so as not to be entirely dependent upon the husband.[223]

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[222] Mary Martha Sherwood, *The Life and Times of Mrs Sherwood (1775-1851) From the Diaries of Captain & Mrs Sherwood* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., Ltd., 1910), p. 239.
[223] Isabel Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine, and the Holy Land*, vol. 1 (London: Henry King & Co, 1875), p. 232.

Burton appears to imply here that these "tender sensibilities" arose from conscious decisions taken by the women themselves in order to support their particular personal objectives. These comments by Burton and Sherwood seem to suggest that the frail and delicate female, who swooned at the first sight of danger, was a role that could be adopted by women when required. However, the demands of travel, including the pressures of class and race as well as gender, were such that they rarely assumed that sort of position on their travels.

There is a plethora of primary source material to prove that female travel writers were able to cope with a variety of complex and demanding situations in a confident and robust manner, and that there is little evidence of so-called 'feminine' attributes of weakness and vulnerability. On the contrary, many female travel writers deliberately subvert these expectations. Mary Kingsley's account of her trip to West Africa, for example, contains several challenges to the idea of what might be considered as constituting appropriate feminine behaviour during the nineteenth century. Kingsley and many other single women travelling abroad overturned traditional gender roles by adopting a leadership role, although this was facilitated by the fact that she was in charge of people of a lower status: "While the men were getting their food I mounted guard over our little possessions, and when they turned up to make things tidy in my hut, I walked off down the shore by a path."[224] Here it was the males who performed the domestic activities while she took on the role of their protector. In *Travels in West Africa* she also demonstrated that it was possible to be authoritative without needing to carry guns: "As for flourishing about a revolver and threatening to fire, I hold it utter idiocy. I have never tried it, however, so I speak from prejudice which arises from the feeling that there is something cowardly in it."[225] This indicates that she had enough confidence in her own ability to lead an expedition by force of character rather than having to resort to threats of physical violence.

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[224] Mary Kingsley, *Travels*, p. 62.
[225] Ibid., p. 144.

We have seen that many female travellers demonstrated as much, if not more, courage and determination as men in their travel literature. They not only showed that they were brave and resourceful, but they also exhibited good leadership skills and a strong sense of duty and responsibility for their companions. We identified in Chapter One how recent studies into domestic social history had shown that women during the nineteenth century were not completely restricted to the home but that they were able to become involved in a range of public activities, and we saw how this behaviour was also reflected in much of the travel literature produced by female writers during the period. [226] Recent investigations by Indira Ghose and Laura Franey, among others, have also determined that women adopted a more active part in the colonial endeavour than had been previously thought, and, rather than playing a supporting role, they were in fact significant contributors to British imperialism.[227] Like male travellers women were also representatives of the British Empire and were expected to behave with confidence and resoluteness. Whatever happened Britain's reputation on the world's stage should not be tarnished. One would anticipate, therefore, that female travel writers would not only be assertive and adopt a strong narrative voice in their travel texts but that such behaviour was expected of them. They had a duty to set a good example to the rest of the world.

Dea Birkett has written how: "becoming someone different is, for me, at the heart of foreign travel" as it enabled her to forget that she was: "someone's mother, daughter and sister". At home people could, by the way she spoke or the way she dressed, deduce a considerable amount about her, but:

> abroad, all these signs and their attendant responsibilities count for nothing; only a very anglophile Spaniard will learn much about me from my accent. And the further away I travel, the less all these signs indicate. By the time I reach Bhutan, I could claim to be living on a sink estate, or a country estate (neither of which is true), and I doubt anyone would challenge me.[228]

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[226] Jon Stobart and Alastair Owens, eds., *Urban Fortunes*, Catherine Hall. *White, Male and Middle Class*, Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women*, Penelope Lane, Neil Raven and K.D.M. Snell, eds., *Women, Work and Wages*, Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists*, Margot Finn, *After Chartism*.

[227] Indira Ghose, *Women Travellers in Colonial India: The Power of the Female Gaze* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Laura Franey, *Victorian Travel Writing and Imperial Violence*.

[228] *The Guardian* 5th July 2004.

The ability to escape from one's background and try something new must have been very appealing to many women. It gave them the self-assurance to write more authoritatively in their travel literature, and the public appetite for travel literature written by confident women proves that their literary style was, on the whole, regarded as suitable, even from a woman.

2.3 Justifications for an 'Action Hero Narrator' in Female Travel Literature

The examples examined above show that the 'Action Hero Narrator' played as important a role in female travel literature as in male travel literature, a conclusion that would have been impossible to come to without examining texts by both genders. We have also discovered that it was used by male and female travel writers in similar ways in order to give their work an authoritative and self-assured tone. However, many academics have chosen either to ignore this evidence or dismiss it as inconsequential. Many scholars agree with Sara Mills's contention that:

> Because of the way that discourses of femininity circulated within the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women travel writers were unable to adopt the imperialist voice with the ease with which male writers did. The writing which they produced tended to be more tentative than male writing, less able to assert the 'truths' of British rule without qualification.[229]

This has, she argues, resulted in women writers having a:

> problematic status, caught between the conflicting demands of the discourse of femininity and that of imperialism. The discourses of colonialism demand action and intrepid, fearless behaviour from the narrator, and yet the

[229] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 3.

> discourses of femininity demand passivity from the narrator and a concern with relationships.[230]

Mills does not deny that some women writers utilized a strong narrative voice in their travel texts, but she has concluded that: "it is often modified by disclaimers and by humorous interventions."[231]

Mills's conclusion is endorsed by Cheryl McEwan in *Gender, Geography and Empire* where she similarly argues that: "women travellers modified their texts by disclaimers and interjections of humour [...] rather than adopting the position of the adventure hero."[232] Scholars such as Mills and McEwan, among others, have asserted that women writers who expressed themselves in a light-hearted way undermined the authority of the narrator in their texts, and we discussed in Chapter One how women have often been accused of devaluing the gravity of their literature by using humour. The example that is usually given to support this particular argument is Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa*. Kingsley's account does contain several amusing stories of her time in West Africa, including encounters with wild animals such as gorillas, snakes and a crocodile who: "chose to get his front paws over the stern of my canoe, and endeavoured to renew our acquaintance. I had to retire to the bows, to keep the balance right, and fetch him a clip on the snout with a paddle", after all it was only a: "pushing young creature who had not learnt manners."[233] Kingsley related this story as if the crocodile was merely a frisky youth getting fresh at a dance rather than a wild beast that, potentially, could tear her limb from limb, and there is no doubt that she did use humour to reduce the seriousness of their confrontation; all of which would appear to support Mills and McEwan's argument.

Kingsley is not the only woman who took a less serious approach in her travel literature. Emily Eden also used humour throughout the account of her trip

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[230] Ibid., pp. 21-2.
[231] Ibid., p. 78.
[232] Cheryl McEwan, *Gender, Geography and Empire: Victorian Women Travellers in West Africa* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2000), p. 19.
[233] Mary Kingsley, *Travels*, p. 25.

across India in the 1830s, and this technique enabled her to effortlessly express both pride and humility at the same time: "I had no idea that I could have walked a mile and a half without dropping down dead. That is something learnt."[234] Her sister, Fanny, also used characteristically wry humour when faced with a potentially frightening situation: "We found an enormous skeleton of a snake – Ariffe said a boa constrictor, and that it was thirty feet long. I trust that none of its relations are alive, because we shall hardly have room for them in our tents."[235] Because some female travel writers used humour in this way, academics such as Mills, Alison Blunt and Karen Lawrence, among others, have claimed that they softened the impact that relating highly dangerous events might have on their more sensitive readers, and undermined their self-portrayal as strong, fearless action heroes.[236] Women who described events that contained too much danger and excitement or where they were too knowledgeable and heroic could expose themselves to accusations of being too masculine. This has led some scholars to claim, therefore, that the application of humour enabled women travel writers to reconcile the conflicts between feminine and colonial discourses as they could show themselves to be both courageous and vulnerable at the same time.

There were, however, circumstances where some women writers used humour in a way which actually emphasised their gender rather than trying to deflect any criticism for being too masculine. On one famous occasion Mary Kingsley explained that she only managed to survive serious injury from falling into an animal pit due to her adherence to correct female attire: "It is at these times you realise the blessings of a good thick skirt. Had I paid heed to the advice of many people in England [...] and adopted masculine garments, I should have been spiked to the bone, and done for."[237] Kingsley was not the only woman travel writer to attribute her survival to the rules of etiquette governing appropriate codes of dress. Isabella Bird was also saved from serious injury descending a mountain because as she fell

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[234] Emily Eden, *Up the Country*, p. 83.
[235] Fanny Eden, *Tigers, Durbars and Kings*, p. 44.
[236] Karen Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition* (USA: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 135.
[237] Mary Kingsley, *Travels*, p. 113.

she was fortunately: "hung by my frock, which caught on a rock."[238] Therefore, not all female travel writers employed a strong narrative voice in their travel literature in order to disguise their gender or pretend to be masculine.

Not every female writer, however, took such a positive attitude towards British standards of feminine attire. Whilst riding across hills in the interior India in the 1830s Fanny Parkes Parlby wrote of how she almost met with disaster because of her initial choice of dress: "I met with an accident, a fall; coming down a rock, my long silk gown, having caught on a projecting part of it, I was thrown headlong down; therefore I made a dress more suitable for such expeditions, a black Pahari dress, somewhat resembling Turkish attire."[239] This near tragedy, she explained, convinced her that her safety was more important than any silly notions of impropriety. Isabel Burton also took a very pragmatic approach to the clothes that she chose to wear during her trip to the Middle East:

> I am very much amused, and very much pleased, to learn that all along the road I have been generally mistaken for a boy. I had no idea of my disguise, but as soon as I found it out I encouraged the idea, and shall do so in future whenever we are off the usual beaten tracks. After all, wild people in wild places would feel but little respect or consideration for a Christian woman with a bare face, whatever they may put on of outward show. It is all very well in localities where they daily see European women, but otherwise, according to their notions, we ought to be covered up and stowed far away from the men, with the baggage and beasts.[240]

Burton recognised that in certain circumstances it was better to be thought of as a boy rather than a Western female, although, equally, there were other times when dressing as a woman was more beneficial. She demonstrates that she was capable of determining the most appropriate course of action for herself, rather than simply adhering to the expectations of British society.

Women often acknowledged that their gender meant they were in fact less likely to be physically harmed than male travellers, as few men would dare to be

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[238] Isabella Bird, *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* (London: Virago Press, 1996), p. 19.
[239] Fanny Parkes Parlby, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*, p. 374.
[240] Isabel Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria*, vol. 1, pp. 223-4.

violent to a lady.[241] Isabella Bird spoke for the majority of female travellers when she observed that: "the law of universal respect to women is still in full force."[242] Bird firmly believed that if one remained calm and behaved in a lady-like manner, one would ultimately come out unharmed, and she explained the importance of having this approach in the account of her trip across the Rockies, her first written work, in 1878:

> A story was current of a man having ridden through Truckee two evenings before with a chopped-up human body in a sack behind the saddle, and hosts of stories of ruffianism are located there, rightly or wrongly. This man said, "There's a bad breed of ruffians, but the ugliest among them won't touch you. There's nothing Western folk admire so much as pluck in a woman."[243]

Lilias Campbell Davidson agreed with Bird that as long as women behaved like ladies they would be safe: "no man, however, audacious, will, at all events if he be sober, venture to treat with undue familiarity or rudeness a woman, however young, who distinctly shows him by her dignity of manner and conduct that any such liberty will be an insult."[244] Despite the suggestion that women were personally responsible for any harm they came to on their travels (a belief still prevalent today), there is also the overriding impression that there were considerable benefits to being a woman, and that female travellers were very conscious of the advantages their gender gave them and that they were not reluctant to use them if necessary. This falls in with our earlier discussion of Sherwood and Burton's admission that certain 'feminine' characteristics could be adopted when required.

It was not only women who saw being female as being a positive attribute in travel rather than a handicap; the travel writer Richard Galton considered that:

> there are few greater popular errors than the idea that we have mainly derived from chivalrous times, that woman is a weakly creature [...] It is the nature

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[241] There is an argument that as women they were not considered a threat and so did not warrant any particularly aggressive or defensive action from those with whom they came into contact.
[242] Isabella Bird, *A Lady's Life*, p. 115.
[243] Ibid., p. 19.
[244] Lilias Campbell Davidson, *Hints to Lady Travellers* (London, 1889), p. 63.

> of women to be fond of carrying weights; you may see them on omnibuses and carriages, always preferring to hold their baskets or their babies on their knees, to setting them down on the seats by their sides.[245]

He went on to advise that "when in Africa, it is wise to take the wives [...] along on an expedition," as they were, he remarked rather ungallantly, "as good as a man and certainly better than a horse or a bullock."[246] Richard Hearne agreed that: "Women were made for labour; one of them can carry or haul as much as two men can do."[247] And Thomas Skinner proclaimed that there were good practical reasons for his decision to use female porters on his expedition across India: "Although they were well-loaded, we did not consider it a reproach to our gallantry; for stouter and more masculine damsels were never yet seen."[248]

This admiration, however, was generally reserved for native women. There are few references to European women being complimented for their physical strength. Indeed most texts, by male and female writers, doubted if European women would manage to survive the physically demanding challenges of travel as well as they did. The majority of travellers saw themselves as a different, more resilient, species to the rest of the population and there are numerous references, particularly in female travel texts, which contrast the stamina of the traveller with the feebleness of those around them. Following a day's riding in the desert Isabel Burton was concerned about her guest's health: "I dare say you feel quite tired. We will go home, and you shall go to your room", but she was to "go round to the stables and see that the horses are all right" as she did not require as much rest.[249]

There are many occasions when women are shown to have been emotionally and intellectually superior to their male colleagues. For example, when writing about their party's traumatic kidnapping by Syrian Beduins, Gray Hill gave his wife all the credit for managing to arrange with their captors for the provision of shelter, food

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[245] Cited in Mary Russell, *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt: Women Travellers & Their World* (London: Collins, 1988), p. 195.
[246] Ibid., p. 195.
[247] Ibid., p. 196.
[248] Thomas Skinner, *Excursions in India,* vol. 2, p. 211.
[249] Isabel Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria,* vol. 1, p. 92.

and fuel, whereas his blustering approach had only served to antagonize their kidnappers: "My arguments, appeals, indignation, have been to no avail, but a woman's wit and spirit do better."[250] Hill conceded that there were moments when a less aggressive response was more effective, and he praised his wife for successfully taking control of the situation and negotiating with their captors for better conditions. Madam Calderon de la Barca's remarks highlight the more pragmatic approach to danger held by many women: "We certainly made up our minds to an attack this time, and got ready our rings and watches, not to hide, but to give, for we womenkind were clearly of the opinion, that in case of an attack, it was much better to attempt no defence, our party having only two guns amongst them."[251] Calderon indicates that aggression was not always the wisest course of action and, like Mrs. Gray Hill, recognised that sometimes a more conciliatory approach might prove to be more beneficial.

Both sexes appear to have appreciated the advantages that a female presence could bring to an expedition and acknowledged the diversity of skills they contributed, whether they were part of the labour force, or needed for more diplomatic tasks such as negotiation, or simply because they were a calming and conciliatory influence. Rather than view women travellers as being at a disadvantage because of their gender, the attitude of the male and female writers themselves indicates that in particular circumstances many saw women as equal, and occasionally superior, to men. Femininity and humour were, therefore, not always seen as negative attributes but as valuable tools for the job.

It would be easier to accept that self-mockery and humour were used in women's travel texts to compromise the use of a strong narrative voice solely as a result of the pressures of feminine discourse if these literary techniques were used exclusively by female writers. However, many male travellers also wrote in a light-hearted and amusing way, and yet these same scholars have not argued that this undermined their masculinity. Chloe Chard, for example, praises Mungo Park when he used humour in his travel account in order to reduce the seriousness of his capture

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[250] Gray Hill, *With the Beduins: A Narrative of Journeys and Adventures in Unfrequented Parts of Syria* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1891, p. 224.
[251] Madame Calderon De La Barca, *Life in Mexico*, p. 341.

by Arab slave traders, arguing he "thought it best to treat the matter jocularly."[252] Chard interprets Park's use of humour as an act of pragmatism and not as a sign of weakness or tentativeness.

Chard is not alone in this. Academics have continued to assert that women used humour in their travel narratives in order to reduce tension and deflect criticism for being too masculine, and generally ignored male travel writers' use of humour, despite its regular use in many male travel accounts. There are texts covering the whole of the nineteenth century and a range of different countries, including the colonies, that show the male traveller as looking foolish and where humour is regularly used to expose the ridiculousness of the narrator. Henry Nelson Coleridge, for instance, openly admitted to appearing silly in his slap-stick description of his attempts to mount a mule during his tour around the Caribbean in the 1820s:

> Three men laid hold of me by main force; my left leg was mounted on a mule, my right stretched across a horse, and the bridle of a pony thrust into my hand. I swore as became me, but, unfortunately for my influence in the world, I have such an ungovernable tendency to laughter upon the most solemn occasions, that all I could do or say excited neither remorse or terror in these fellows. I succeeded at length in righting myself and sheered off the horse [...] I was so convulsed with laughter at the unspeakable absurdity of the scene, that I consider it a very great mercy that I neither killed myself nor any body else.[253]

Although Coleridge asserted that laughter would not help his position in the public sphere, claiming it was unfortunate "for my influence in the world", he plainly did not mind admitting to the public that he had "an ungovernable tendency to laughter upon the most solemn occasions". He was not ashamed or embarrassed of looking ridiculous, nor was he unwilling to broadcast his inadequacies to the reading public. He obviously did not feel such revelations would seriously endanger his masculinity, challenge his authority, or lessen either his or his country's reputation in the outside world.

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[252] Chloe Chard, "Women who transmute into tourist attractions: spectator and spectacle on the Grand Tour", in *Romantic Geographies,* ed., Amanda Gilroy, p. 117.
[253] Henry Nelson Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, pp. 22-3.

Two decades later Charles Dickens was also perfectly frank in describing how preposterous he looked whilst suffering from the effects of sea-sickness during a very choppy voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in 1842: "in the midst of these terrors, I was placed in a situation so exquisitely ridiculous, that even then I had as strong a sense of its absurdity as I have now, and could no more help laughing than I can at any other comical incident, happening under circumstances the most favourable to its enjoyment."[254] Dickens does not give the impression that he thought such honesty would have damaged his personal image with the public or reflected badly on his country's reputation overseas. Visiting America twenty years later Anthony Trollope's account of his visit to North America shows that attitudes towards humour had changed very little as his text also contains repeated references to his incompetence, such as one occasion in Missouri:

> Sydney Smith declared that an Englishman only wasted his time in training himself for gymnastic aptitudes, seeing that for a shilling he could always hire a porter. Had Sydney Smith ever been at Rolla he would have written differently. I could tell at great length how I fell on my face in the icy snow, how my friend stuck in the frozen mud when he essayed to jump the stream, and how our guide walked on easily in advance, encouraging us with his voice from a distance. Why is it that a stout Englishman bordering on fifty finds himself in such a predicament as that? No Frenchman, no Italian, no German, would so place himself, unless under the stress of insurmountable circumstances. No American would do so under any circumstances. As I slipped about on the ice and groaned with that terrible fardle on my back, burdened with a dozen shirts, and a suit of dress clothes, and three pairs of boots, and four or five thick volumes, and a set of maps, and a box of cigars, and a washing-tub, I confessed to myself that I was a fool. What was I doing in such a gallery as that?[255]

Not only does Trollope show himself as pathetic but his incompetence is presented as being a typically English characteristic. Colonial discourse should have ensured that Trollope presented himself as a capable and authoritative figure in relation to other nations, particularly Britain's competitors on the world stage, and

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[254] Charles Dickens, *American Notes*, p. 67.
[255] Anthony Trollope, *North America*, p. 395.

yet not only did he fail to do so, he also published his failures to the outside world. He evidently did not feel humiliated by his revelations or worry that such disclosures would reflect badly on Britain's status as a world power.

Similarly, William Makepeace Thackeray, in the account of his adventures in Cairo in 1865, also demonstrated a willingness to expose his inadequacies in a comical way:

> Not one of our party had a single weapon more dreadful than an umbrella; and a couple of Arabs, wickedly inclined, might have brought us all to a halt, and rifled every carpet-bag and pocket belonging to us. Nor can I say that we journeyed without certain qualms of fear. When swarthy fellows, with girdles full of pistols and yataghans, passed us without unslinging their long guns; when scowling camel-riders, with awful long bending lances, decorated with tufts of rags, or savage plumes of scarlet feathers, went by without molestation, I think we were rather glad that they did not stop and parley: for after all, a British lion with an umbrella is no match for an Arab with his infernal long gun. What too would have become of our women? So we tried to think that it was entirely out of anxiety for them that we were inclined to push on.[256]

Thackeray inverts the notions of chivalry by confessing that rather than protecting the women of his party he used them as an excuse to behave in a cowardly way.[257] His behaviour was neither heroic nor admirable, although it does make for a very amusing anecdote.

The pressure of colonial discourse for British gentlemen to behave in an authoritative and confident manner does not seem to have deterred these and many other male travel writers from allowing themselves to appear ridiculous in public. And it was not only amateur travellers who exposed their deficiencies in a light-hearted manner, as some professional male explorers also utilized this technique in their travel literature. Richard Burton, in the account of his pilgrimage to Al Medinha and Meccah in 1855, often reduced the tension arising from the dangerous nature of his enterprise through the use of humour, and he was always able to laugh

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[256] William Makepeace Thackeray, *A Legend of the Rhine*, p. 194.

[257] This contrasts with Florence Nightingale's comment that she tried to prevent her gentlemen friends from defending her in case people got injured.

at his own shortcomings: "Thus it was, gentle reader, that I lost my reputation of being a "serious person" at Cairo. And all I have to show for it is the personal experience of an Albanian drinking-bout."[258] Even experienced and respected travellers do not appear to have feared that portraying themselves in their texts as foolish would in any way damage their status, either as men or as Englishmen. Whether the texts were written at the beginning or the end of the nineteenth century, or if written about the West Indies, the United States of America, or the Middle East, or whether the narrator was an amateur or professional traveller, appears to have made very little difference to the way humour was employed in male travel accounts.

As well as asserting that female travel writers used humour to undermine the impact of using a strong narrative voice in their texts, some scholars have also accused them of mitigating its influence by being modest and unassuming. Mary Russell has stated that: "many women travellers adopted a self-effacing prose, unnecessarily belittling their aims and denigrating their achievements" in order to avoid criticism for being unfeminine.[259] A view supported by Cheryl McEwan who has contended that because of nineteenth-century literary conventions: "travel narratives by women were often prefaced with disclaimers denying scientific, academic or literary merit"[260] Dea Birkett has also concluded from her research that: "The first action of many when thrust, initially unwillingly, on to the public platform was to deny any claims to achievement [...] Their first books begin not with claims to credit and acclaim, but with self-abnegation."[261] And Sara Mills has similarly argued that: "Women are clearly not given the same discursive possibilities to assert as male writers and many are singularly modest in their assertions" and that: "women's texts are not supposed to be 'scientific' and authoritative, but rather, supposed to be amateurish. This problematic positioning of these texts often leads to the writing being prefaced with a disclaimer which denies any scientific, academic,

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[258] Richard Francis Burton, *The Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al Medinha & Meccah*, vol. 1, p. 140.
[259] Mary Russell, *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt*, p. 213.
[260] Cheryl McEwan, *Gender, Geography and Empire*, p. 87.
[261] Dea Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad*, p. 202.

literary or other merit; this occurs very frequently with women's travel writing in the nineteenth century."[262]

There are many examples contained in women's travel literature that would seem to support these arguments. Often women travellers prefaced their accounts with claims that their literary efforts were inadequate, full of errors, or that they would not have been published at all if it were not for the insistence of friends and family. Fanny Eden, for example, mocked herself for attempting to document her trip to India:

> I am going to try, my dear, if for once in my life, I can keep a journal, and if I can, instead of sending you a doubled up letter I shall send you this book, with an account of our Rajmahal expedition. Such a disturbing event for you, but then you know you can give it to your children for a lesson book on the principle of always making children read for instruction, what everybody else finds too dull to undertake.[263]

Both the Eden sisters admitted to being uninformed. Fanny claimed that: "I am as ignorant as a beast about Indian historical recollections"[264] and Emily confessed: "I have not an idea how I ought to spell those words."[265] Florence Nightingale was also open about her scholarly and intellectual inadequacies, declaring that she did not have the ability to satisfactorily convey her experiences of her trip to Egypt:

> I am afraid that you must find my triads and my temples tiresome, dear people; one comfort is they are all coming to an end, and you will not be troubled with them long [...] you do not know how difficult it is to write anything about such a subject, it is like trying to get a genie into a bottle; and when I have succeeded in getting him in, I could sit down and cry to see what I have made of him. It is not because I have failed that I cry, but because I have profaned Thebes [...] How little idea I had of her – how little I have given you.[266]

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[262] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 83.
[263] Fanny Eden, *Tigers, Durbars and Kings*, p. 8.
[264] Ibid., p. 96.
[265] Emily Eden, *Up the Country*, p. 22.
[266] Florence Nightingale, *Letters from Egypt*, p. 152.

Similarly, Mary Shelley wrote of her work that: "Nothing can be more unpresuming than this little volume" as it contained an account of: "scenes which are now so familiar to our countrymen, that few facts relating to them can be expected to have escaped the many more experienced and exact observers, who have sent their journals to the press" and regretted that her "materials were not more copious and complete."[267] Not only did Shelley want to defuse any criticism for possible flaws or lack of information in her account, but her avoidance of the feminine or personal pronoun also has the effect of distancing her from the consequences of any potential negative judgments.

It is also quite common in women's travel literature for the author to offer excuses for having dared to publish in the first place. Lucy Atkinson claimed that she only wrote an account of her travels because: "friends have so often importuned me to give them some account of what happened to me in countries where an English lady had never been seen before."[268] Fanny Parkes Parlby's dedication reveals that she also held other people responsible for the publication of her work:

> To my beloved mother, at whose request it was written, this narrative is dedicated: and if any of the friends, whose kind partiality has induced them to urge its publication, should think I have dwelt too much on myself, on my own thoughts, feelings, and adventures, let them remember that this journal was written for the affectionate eye of Her to whom nothing could be so gratifying as the slightest incident connected with her beloved and absent child.[269]

Because female travel writers frequently blamed their friends and families for encouraging them to publish their adventures it is difficult to determine whether this modesty was genuine or purely a literary device; whatever the case its use was not confined to the travel literature genre. Arthur Helps, in the Preface to Queen

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[267] Jeanne Moskal, ed., *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley, Volume 8, Travel Writing; Index* (London: William Pickering, 1996), p. 13.
[268] Lucy Atkinson, *Recollections of the Tartar Steppes*, p. vi.
[269] Fanny Parkes Parlby, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*, dedication.

Victoria's journals of her life in Scotland, demonstrated that even the most important woman in the country also exhibited this characteristic:

> During one of the Editor's official visits to Balmoral, her Majesty very kindly allowed him to see several extracts from her journal, relating to excursions in the Highlands of Scotland. He was much interested by them; and expressed the interest which he felt. It then occurred to her Majesty that these extracts, referring as they did, to some of the happiest hours of her life, might be made into a book, to be printed privately, for presentation to members of the Royal Family and her Majesty's intimate friends; especially to those who had accompanied and attended her in these tours.
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> It was then suggested to her Majesty by some persons, among them a near and dear relative of the Queen, and afterwards by the Editor, that this work, if made known to others, would be very interesting to them as well as to the Royal Family and to her Majesty's intimate friends. The Queen, however, said, that she had no skill whatever in authorship, that these were, for the most part, mere homely accounts of excursions near home; and that she felt extremely reluctant to publish anything written by herself.[270]

Helps goes on to state that it was only as a result of outside pressure, an assurance that "it would be very gratifying to her subjects", and a fitting testimony to the memory of "the loving companionship of the Prince Consort" that "her Majesty eventually consented to its publication." The Queen's private gesture therefore satisfies the public's wishes, but any criticism can be neutralized by the "homely" nature of the publication.

The large number of female writers, writing throughout the whole of the period and who expressed modesty and made excuses for lack of quality in their travel texts, would appear to confirm the conclusions drawn by Mills, Birkett, McEwan and Russell. However, once again, examination of male travel texts shows that these techniques were not exclusive to women's travel literature, and therefore cannot wholly be explained by feminine discourse. Men, too, frequently used these same devices in their travel accounts. Richard Burton did not mind making excuses for any mistakes that occurred in his text: "In conclusion, I would solicit forbearance

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[270] Victoria, Queen of Great Britain & Ireland, *Leaves from the journal of our life in the Highlands* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1877), Preface. Thanks to Dr. D. Wynne for bringing this quotation to my attention.

in all that concerns certain errors of omission and commission scattered through these pages."[271], nor did Gray Hill:

> The things which we have seen and the little adventures which have befallen us have proved so interesting to ourselves, that we have thought that they might also interest the public. Whether they will do so depends much upon the manner of relating them, and unfortunately I am inexperienced in authorship [...] I am keenly alive to the shortcomings of my narrative.[272]

The Preface to George Borrow's journey across Spain also shows a willingness to admit to having faults: "With respect to my poor labours, I wish here to observe that I accomplished but very little, and that I lay claim to no brilliant successes and triumphs [...] In conclusion, I beg leave to state that I am fully aware of the various faults and inaccuracies of the present work."[273] Edward Eyre held his friends responsible for the publication of his text claiming that: "the reasons which have led to this work being published at all, the author would observe that he has been led to engage in it rather from a sense of duty, and at the insistence of many of his friends, than from any wish of his own."[274] And Alexander Kinglake not only admitted that his narrative contained errors and omissions, but he also acknowledged the difficulty of the writing process itself, and claimed that if it had not been for the insistence of a close friend he would not have persevered with his endeavour:

> I had intended to write some account of my Eastern Travels. I had, indeed, begun the task, and had failed; I had begun it a second time, and failing again, had abandoned my attempt with a sensation of utter distaste [...] Well – your request for a sketch of my tour suggested to me the idea of complying with your wish by a revival of my twice abandoned attempt.[275]

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[271] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa,* vol. 1, p. xvi.
[272] Gray Hill, *With the Beduins*, p. 9.
[273] George Borrow, *The Bible in Spain*, Preface.
[274] Edward John Eyre, *Journals,* vol. 1, Preface.
[275] Alexander William Kinglake, *Eothen*, pp. 1-2.

By blaming the publication of their accounts on relatives and friends these travellers show a compliance with the demands of duty and friendship rather than the pursuit of self-aggrandizement and, therefore, reduce any possible criticism for being egotistical.

This particular literary device, of making excuses, apologizing to the reader, and holding one's friends responsible for publication, was plainly not exclusive to one gender and cannot therefore be completely attributed to the influence of feminine discourse. Neither was this device unique to the period or to the genre as it had been used at least from the beginning of the eighteenth century, if not earlier, in fictional travel literature. Arguably one of the most famous fictional travel books of any period, *Gulliver's Travels*, has its eponymous hero making excuses for the publication of his adventures by blaming pressure from his friends: "I do in the next place complain of my own great want of judgment, in being prevailed upon by the intreaties and false reasonings of you and some others, very much against my own opinion, to suffer my travels to be published."[276]

Nineteenth-century works of fiction continued with this tradition; for example Rider Haggard had his narrator, Allan Quartermain, blame his associates for the publication of their adventures: "I wonder why I am going to write this book: it is not in my line. I am not a literary man [...] Let me try to set down my reasons, just to see if I have any. First reason: Because Sir Henry Curtis and Captain John Good asked me."[277] It is difficult to accept some academics' claims that this particular narrative approach critically undermines the authority of a text, especially as its use was so commonplace that it was being satirized as early as the 1720s. Consequently, it would have been recognised and accepted by nineteenth-century readers of travel accounts simply as a literary device and not as any serious admission of inadequacy. Furthermore, as it had proved to be so successful in the past, it is only natural that nineteenth-century travel writers, of both sexes, should continue to employ it in their literature.

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[276] Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, p. 4.
[277] Henry Rider Haggard. *King Solomon's Mines* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994), pp. 1-2.

There are clearly many parallels in the way that male and female writers utilized a strong narrative voice in their travel literature, and also a similarity in the techniques used to moderate any effects which might have arisen from the use of such a narrative style. Yet, these tactics of using humour, apologizing for errors or faults in literary technique, or expressing modesty, genuine or otherwise, whilst ostensibly compromising the effect of the 'Action Hero Narrator', did not strongly challenge its authority. Their use did not make the authors appear especially weak; on the contrary they worked to their advantage by helping to reduce the likelihood of them being accused of appearing too egotistical in their narratives. They showed that the travellers were not infallible but were normal human beings prone to making mistakes. This resulted in the travellers establishing a rapport with their readers rather than alienating them by appearing too confident and self-assured. They also, customarily, occurred at the beginning of the text rather than in the main body so they did not significantly impinge on the focus of the story: the travel itself. The result of this is that the authority of colonial discourse was not significantly destabilized by either male or female travel writers.

2.4 Weakness and Frailty in Female Travel Literature

It has been claimed by scholars such as Sara Mills that "The discourses of femininity allow the hero figure to admit to making mistakes."[278] Mills has proposed that women had the luxury of being able to combine the strong narrative voice of colonial discourse with the freedom of confessing failure allowed by feminine discourse; a facility that was not available to male writers. However, detailed examination of texts produced by both sexes reveals that this is not exactly true.

Women's travel literature does contain examples where the narrator confesses to being afraid, to making mistakes and to having errors of judgment, all of which tends to support Mills's hypothesis. Yet, even with the so-called freedoms of feminine discourse, admitting to being physically weak was a problematic area for

[278] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 170.

female travel writers, because if they were not up to the physical demands of travelling then they exposed themselves to being disparaged for daring to travel in the first place. We have seen how women such as Lady Hester Stanhope, Isabella Bird, and Lucy Atkinson quickly qualified their admissions of succumbing to exhaustion or illness by explaining how rapidly they managed to recover. Others, such as Emily Eden, underplayed the severity of their physical sufferings with comments such as: "I had a great mind to tell him that I felt very ill, which was quite true, but as the water at Delhi is invariably a rank poison that would be nothing new."[279] Women writers, therefore, employed a variety of techniques in order to moderate any criticism they might incur for admitting to being physically weak in their travel literature.

It is perhaps acceptable up to a point that women travellers could write about being physically weak - after all they were members of the supposedly 'weaker' sex. Nevertheless they were generally keen to show that they could regain their health and their energy very quickly and they rarely dwelt upon being debilitated for any length of time. They were, however, often willing to discuss their limitations in areas where they might have been expected to be more resilient. For example, although Fanny Eden, drained by the Indian climate, readily confessed to being physically weak: "Ten miles knocks me up, and if I am out in the sun after two o'clock I come home with my head splitting, and hardly a woman ventures out",[280] she also admitted to having intellectual limitations as well: "our faculties are really wearing very fast. I thought I was growing cleverer but I am not."[281] Mary Kingsley also acknowledged her intellectual inadequacies of understanding West African culture: "I beg you to understand that I make no pretension to a thorough knowledge of Fetish ideas; I am only on the threshold."[282] Similarly, Isabella Bird disclosed her lack of preparation for her trip to Persia: "I now find myself in the midst of a state of things of which I was completely ignorant, and for which I was utterly unprepared."[283] Lots of female

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[279] Emily Eden, *Up the Country*, p. 347.
[280] Fanny Eden, *Tigers, Durbars and Kings*, p. 19.
[281] Ibid., p. 141.
[282] Mary Kingsley, *Travels*, p. 161.
[283] Isabella Bird, *Journeys in Persia & Kurdistan II*, p.272.

travellers, it appears, were prepared to risk censure and admit to having intellectual difficulties in their texts.

Anna Leonowens regularly referred to making mistakes and feeling helpless in the account of her experiences at the Siamese court. She even conceded that her initial decision to go to Siam was a mistake: "Fears and misgivings crowded and stunned me. My tears fell thick and fast, and, weary and despairing, I closed my eyes, and tried to shut out heaven and earth; but the reflection would return to mock and goad me, that by my own act, and against the advice of my friends, I had placed myself in this position."[284] Her text also revealed that although she was British she was still answerable to the people of other nationalities: "His Majesty required my presence; and his Majesty's commands were absolute and instant. 'Find and fetch!' No delay was to be thought of, no question answered, no explanation afforded, no excuse entertained. So with resignation I followed my guides."[285] Showing oneself as subservient to other races tends to destabilize other colonialist statements in the text and weakens the influence of colonial discourse. However, as a woman, Leonowens would also have been expected to defer to masculine authority, so discussing incidents such as these was less problematic for female writers than one would assume it would be for male writers.

Confessing to having difficulties with foreign people of a higher social position could be reconciled with the tropes of imperial domination; after all travellers would have had to submit to the authority of people of superior status, regardless of gender, at home in Britain. However, women writers often disclosed that they had disciplinary problems with their servants. This is a significant admission, as being a representative of arguably the world's leading economic power meant that they should have been able to control not only people of an 'inferior' race but also people of an 'inferior' class, and yet women often commented on being unable to supervise their household staff. Fanny Parkes Parlby's remarks of her experiences in India are typical of the complaints made about servants: "The idleness of the natives is excessive; for instance, my ayha will dress me, after which she will

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[284] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 10.
[285] Ibid., p. 199.

go to her house, eat her dinner, and then returning, will sleep in one corner of my room on the floor for the whole day. The bearers also do nothing but eat and sleep, when they are not pulling the pankhas."[286]

Several women travel writers observed that they found it almost impossible to stop their staff from stealing from them. Again, Parlby's remarks are typical of their comments: "Since our arrival we have been annoyed with constant robbery in the house."[287] These disclosures subvert the authority of the narrator as they portray the British women as being regularly outwitted and deceived by people of an inferior status; although it does provide the opportunity for the author to emphasise the dishonest nature and violent tendencies of the natives. Some women even went so far as to admit to being unable to control members of their own family. Honoria Lawrence, for example, found her son Alic's behaviour in India uncontrollable: "I had no patience [...] whipped him again, and tied him to the bed post."[288] Therefore, irrespective of race, class, or age, many women writers were willing to own up to the public that they were not always in control, and certainly not always in a position of authority.

2.5 Weakness and Frailty in Male Travel Literature

These examples are just a selection of the myriad of women travellers I have found who freely admit to having weaknesses across a whole range of areas in their travel accounts. The arguments put forward by Sara Mills, Dea Birkett, and Mary Russell that feminine discourse gave women writers the freedom to admit to having weaknesses would, therefore, appear to be justified. However, examination of the texts written by male travel writers shows that they too were equally frank in discussing their mistakes and shortcomings, and the threat of such admissions to the status of colonial discourse does not appear to have deterred many of them from

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[286] Fanny Parkes Parlby, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*, p. 35.
[287] Ibid., p. 41.
[288] Honoria Lawrence, *The Journals of Honoria Lawrence*, p. 117.

revealing their frailty and vulnerability in their travel texts. This, though, seems to have been overlooked by travel literature scholars.

It is perhaps surprising that male travellers who wrote about their trips to Africa were prepared to admit to having any significant weaknesses in their texts. These men were among the toughest explorers of the century and were masters of self-promotion. Yet the majority of male travellers who wrote about their African adventures chose not to overlook their mistakes, nor did they fail to mention when it was their own ignorance and inexperience that got them into trouble in the first place. If these men were able to show a vulnerable side to their character in their travel accounts then current notions about colonial and feminine discourses need to be revised.

Bearing in mind Britain's reputation as a military power in the nineteenth century one might have expected there to have been very little travel literature published which depicted its citizens as being overwhelmed by foreign forces, and yet this is far from the case. Regardless of the location or the period of travel many male travellers appear to have been quite comfortable discussing their disasters. Sir Francis Galton, in the account of his trip to South Africa in 1853, admitted:

> I felt nervous at being amongst such numbers of armed ill-looking scoundrels as these Damaras are; their features are usually placid, but the least excitement brings out all the lines of a savage passion. They always crowded round us and hemmed us in, and then tried to hustle us away from our bags and baggage. They have an impudent way of handling and laying hold of everything they covet, and of begging in an authoritative tone, laughing among themselves all the time. It is very difficult to keep them off; the least show of temper would be very hazardous among such a set of people.[289]

Similarly, when Richard Lander found his party at the mercy of local tribal leader Chief Bello, he begged his group leader Hugh Clapperton to "accede to the demands of the sultan, however unjust and tyrannic soever they might be" as "two debilitated white men stood no chance in holding out against the united force of so many

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[289] Sir Francis Galton, *The Narrative of an Explorer in Tropical South Africa* (London: Johnson Reprint Company Ltd., 1971), p. 98.

Fellatas, who only waited the command of their sovereign to assassinate them."[290] Yielding authority to an 'inferior' race, and publicizing this helplessness to the world, is not a demonstration of a rigid adherence to the rules of colonial discourse, and yet many African travellers openly admit to finding themselves at a disadvantage. However, it does heighten the dangerous nature of the situation and emphasise the severe obstacles which needed to be overcome along their journey.

Although often outnumbered by the local opposition on their missions, travellers usually possessed superior weaponry. They were also members of a nation with a global reputation to maintain so they should have portrayed themselves as victorious in their narratives, and yet this is not the case. David Livingstone, an explorer who usually employed a very authoritative narrative voice, observed that better arms did not necessarily ensure victory: "we felt it was most humiliating for armed men to have been so thoroughly fleeced by a few black rascals."[291] Even when not in physical danger some male travellers conceded to feeling intimidated by the mere presence of the natives, as Sir Francis Galton confessed: "I felt ill at ease in Ovampo land, because I was no longer my own master. Everybody was perfectly civil, but I could not go as I liked, nor where I liked; in fact I felt as a savage would feel in England."[292] There is a strong sense of alienation here, as Galton finds himself in the position of the 'Other', and there is also awareness that a person's status and authority was influenced, not only by where one was born, but also by where one was currently located. Male travel writers' willingness to disclose to the public that they were often caught in situations where they were at a disadvantage proves that it was not imperative for them to maintain a strong narrative voice throughout the whole of their texts, despite the pressure of colonial discourse.

As well as being overwhelmed by physical force, male travel accounts often reveal how they were beset by other types of troubles. For example, although a professional and vastly experienced traveller, Henry Morton Stanley wrote at length about the psychological pressures of exploration: "A silence as of death was round about me; it was midnight; I was weakened by illness, prostrated with fatigue and

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[290] Hugh Clapperton, *Journal*, p. 270.
[291] David Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition*, p. 380.
[292] Sir Francis Galton, *The Narrative of an Explorer*, p. 209.

worn with anxiety for my white and black companions, whose fate was a mystery."[293] He did not try to hide his worries and concerns, nor did he appear to have any difficulty in expressing the extreme emotions he experienced during his ordeals:

> A few more days of this disheartening work, attending on the sick, looking at the agonies of men dying from lockjaw, listening to their muffled screams, observing general distress and desperation, from hunger, and the sad anxiety caused by the unacceptable absence of their brothers and comrades, with the loss of some 300 men impending over me must have exercised a malign influence over myself. I am conscious of the insidious advance of despair towards me.[294]

Colonial discourse theory proposes that male writers, especially those from the British middle classes, should have adopted a more courageous and robust demeanour whilst describing their experiences. However, this does not appear to have been what occurred in practice. In this particular text what is noticeable is that Stanley was not reluctant to describe his deepest feelings. He even went so far as to own up to what was, and arguably still is, perceived as being that most feminine of weaknesses, crying, as on hearing of the drowning of his close friend Frank Pocock, he confessed to breaking down completely:

> As I look on his empty tent and dejected servants, and recall to my mind his many inestimable qualities, his extraordinary gentleness, his patient temper, his industry, his cheerfulness and tender love of me, the pleasantness of his society, and his general usefulness, I feel myself utterly unable to express my feelings or describe the vastness of my loss. And in looking at the faces of my people, I am certain that their untutored hearts are big with sorrow and sympathise with mine. Every instance of his faithful services to me that I can recall, only intensifies my grief. The long, long companionship in peril thus abruptly severed, his piety, and cheerful trust in a generous Providence suffuses my heart with pity that he departed this life so abruptly and unrewarded for his life *[illegible]*....[295]

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[293] Henry Morton Stanley, *In Darkest Africa*, vol. 1, p. 2.
[294] Ibid., p. 183.
[295] Ibid., p. 192.

The editors state in the footnote that this illegibility was a result of: "Stanley's deep distress; parts of it are almost impossible to read; the syntax is incoherent and many of the words are mutilated." Not only did Stanley disclose how emotional he was but the editors also drew attention to it in a footnote. No one appears to have thought that such an admission made Stanley any less masculine, or that he was an embarrassment to his country.

The sadness and passion Stanley expressed in this passage is not an exceptional occurrence as *In Darkest Africa* includes several instances where he wrote in great detail about being very emotional. Later, when faced with the imminent failure of his mission, Stanley again displayed feelings of vulnerability and impotence:

> There were six dead bodies lying unburied, and the smitten living with their festers lounged in front of us by the dozen. Others worn to thin skin and staring bone from dysentery and fell anemia, and ulcers as large as saucers, crawled about and hollowly sounded their dismal welcome – a welcome to this charnel yard! Weak, wearied, and jaded in body and mind, I scarcely know how I endured the first few hours, the ceaseless story of calamity vexed my ears, a deadly stench of disease hung in the air, and the most repellent of sights moved and surged before my dazed eyes. I heard of murder and death, of sickness and sorrow, anguish and grief, and wherever I looked the hollow eyes of dying men met my own with such trusting, pleading regard, such far-away yearning looks, that it seemed to me if but one sob was uttered my heart would break. I sat stupefied under a suffocating sense of despondency.[296]

The raw honesty of this passage is very moving and, rather than have the effect of making Stanley appear pathetic and weak, it elicits the sympathy of the reader for his expedition's plight, and a recognition of the huge pressure he was under as the group leader.

Many other African travellers were also adept at involving the public in their difficulties and gaining their compassion. Richard Burton, another veteran traveller,

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[296] Ibid., p. 439.

also regularly shared his feelings and emotions with his readers in the account of his journey around the lake regions of Central Africa, where he disclosed that he was having doubts about his ability to continue:

> Thus several beasts were lost, and the grounding of the Expedition appeared imminent and permanent. The result was a sensation of wretchedness, hard to describe; every morning dawned upon me with a fresh load of cares and troubles, and every evening reminded me as it closed in, that another and a miserable morrow was to dawn.[297]

Burton's travelling partner, John Speke, also wrote openly about his inadequacies: "in my weakness of body and mind I actually cried like a child over the whole affair. I would rather have died than have failed in my journey, and yet failure seemed at this juncture inevitable."[298] This candour is especially remarkable when you consider that Speke and Burton had an extremely acrimonious relationship (both claimed to have discovered the source of the river Nile and publicly denounced the other's efforts), and yet the highly competitive nature of African travel did not prevent them from revealing a softer, more vulnerable side to their characters in their travel texts. Even that most unemotional of travellers, David Livingstone, occasionally abandoned his customary authoritative narrative style to reveal a softer side to his personality. Relating the story of his reunion with the Makolol tribe Livingstone emotionally admitted: 'It is not often I have shed a tear, but they came in spite of me."[299]

The examples discussed above show that in nineteenth-century travel literature confessing to breaking down and crying was certainly not exclusive to female writers. Indeed, there are relatively few travel accounts written by women where the narrator was this open about her feelings. In contrast there are many male travel accounts in which the writer describes how emotional and moved he was by his experiences. Of course, it is likely that in order to avoid accusations of hysteria

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[297] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa,* vol. 1, p. 86.
[298] John Hanning Speke, *Journal*, p. 127.
[299] David Livingstone, *Zambezi Expedition of David Livingstone 1858-63*, vol. 1 (London: Oppenheimer Series, Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1956), p. 42.

and being 'too' feminine, i.e. weak and helpless, the majority of female travellers steered clear of discussing their deepest emotions. They usually did not wish to portray themselves as emotional creatures. Men, on the other hand, tended not to mind revealing their innermost feelings. They did not fear accusations of being feminine nor did they appear to suspect that such revelations would endanger their masculinity. It is apparent that neither the requirements of colonial discourse nor the extremely competitive nature of exploration prevented many male travellers from admitting to being weak in their literature.

We have seen from the examples discussed above that as far as African travel texts are concerned the period of travel appears to have had little effect on male travel writers' willingness to expose their feelings in their travel literature. However, the location of the journey does not seem to have had much influence on whether the writer was prepared to admit to being emotional as travel writers to regions other than Africa also confessed to breaking down and crying in their accounts. Unlike Stanley, Burton and Speke, Bishop Heber's tears were not brought on by despair or physical hardship but by the beauty of the Indian landscape:

> I never saw such prospects before, and had formed no adequate idea of such. My attention was completely strained, and my eyes filled with tears, every thing around was so wild and magnificent that man appeared as if nothing, and I felt myself as if climbing the steps of the altar of God's great temple.[300]

Amanda Gilroy has suggested that the "tradition of emotional reaction to landscape has connotations of feminization."[301] Male writers, she has argued, were more likely to portray the landscape as something to be penetrated, conquered and controlled, and there has been a long association in literature of linking sexual imagery with men's physical dominance of the landscape. Heber, however, does not give the impression that he was ashamed by expressing his heartfelt response to the Indian countryside, or that by doing so he would be undermining his masculinity or exposing himself to accusations of being effeminate. He was simply writing in the

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[300] Reginald Heber, *Bishop Heber in Northern India*, p. 216.
[301] Amanda Gilroy, *Romantic Geographies*, p. 23.

established tradition of the Picturesque, and his readers would not have found anything extraordinary about him having such an emotional reaction to the landscape.

Other male travellers found themselves moved by the hospitality of the people with whom they came into contact on their journeys. Octavious Stone, for example, was extremely upset about saying goodbye to the friends he had made among the natives of New Guinea: "My eyes half filled with tears as both men and women clustered round me, and held out their hands in true English style to be shaken."[302] So it was not only physical loss or pain that resulted in tears. The men's accounts reveal that they could be moved by a whole range of phenomena usually associated with feminine sensibilities, and admitting to having these feelings in such a public way certainly does not give the impression that they were at all embarrassed by expressing their emotions so candidly.

The evidence shows that male travel literature contains many examples where the author portrays himself as being both physically and emotionally fragile. However, there are also other areas where male travel writers appear to have been quite open about revealing their limitations. We saw earlier that sometimes women travellers wrote about the problems they had establishing good working relationships with local peoples, and a significant number of male authors also discussed having similar difficulties in their travel texts. Rather than being in control and having their orders followed without question, men frequently depicted themselves as having limited influence over the other races they came into contact with on their journeys. Many African explorers, for example, repeatedly described the difficulties they encountered with some local chiefs. John Speke had to yield to the demands of the belligerent Chief Makaka: "I never felt so degraded as when I complied, and gave orders to my men to fire a volley as he approached my tent; but I ate the dirt with good grace, and met the young chief as if nothing had happened."[303] Similarly, Hugh Clapperton wrote how he held little influence over the local chief:

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[302] Octavious Stone, *A Few Months in New Guinea* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1880), p. 227.
[303] John Hanning Speke, *Journal*, p. 111.

> I rode up to the head man's house, who was just coming out of his door to take his ride; a jolly looking tall Fellata, about thirty years of age. After we had exchanged compliments, he took me to a very good house to lodge in, and promised to send me everything I wanted, which was food for man and beast. I got corn sent me in abundance, but nothing else; all his other promises proved to be nothing but empty words.[304]

Both Speke and Clapperton soon learned that neither their nationality nor their social class nor their gender gave them much authority or status when dealing with some of the local chiefs.

Because the pressures of colonial discourse would have been particularly demanding on travellers acting as official representatives of their country professional explorers might have been expected to have portrayed themselves as having some influence over local tribesmen in their narratives. However, as we have seen, their texts contain many examples where they are shown as powerless and completely at the mercy of their hosts. Amateur travellers also found themselves in similar positions. For instance, Gray Hill had to surrender to the demands of Sheik Khalil whilst travelling through Syria:

> This was the first we that we had heard of Sheik Khalil, and we knew nothing of the politics of Kerak [...] What could we do? He and his men were all armed to the teeth and carried Remington rifles. It was useless to think of resisting such a force. After a very long attempt to better the terms we found that there was nothing for it but to yield.[305]

Although travelling for pleasure Hill was still a representative of the British Empire and yet he evidently did not feel it was necessary to portray himself as being in complete command.

Many travellers experienced difficulties when dealing with other nationalities as in practice they found that being British, rather than being an advantage in their associations with other races, was actually a handicap. Travellers to Africa, in

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[304] Hugh Clapperton, *Journal*, p. 163.
[305] Gray Hill, *With the Beduins*, pp. 198-9.

particular, including Livingstone, Stanley and Galton, discovered that Arab and Portuguese traders, concerned that the British would usurp their long-standing trading associations, had warned the locals against trading with the British. Richard Lander described how:

> Three of the Portuguese slave-merchants residing at Badagry, went to the king one day, and told him and his principal men that I was a spy sent by the English government, and if suffered to leave, would soon return with an army and conquer their country. This the credulous people believed, and I was treated with coldness and distrust by the king and his subjects, who seldom came to see me.[306]

Lander blamed his mistreatment on the credulity of the natives rather than any maliciousness on the part of the Portuguese. He could empathise with the misgivings of the Arab and Portuguese traders but he despised the naivety and superstition of the local people. Hugh Clapperton also suffered during his expedition because of Britain's reputation as an imperial power:

> The Sheik of Bornou had written to him, advising him to put me to death; as if the English should meet with too great encouragement, they would come into Soudan, one after another, until they got strong enough to seize on the country, and dispossess him, as they had done with regard to India, which they had wrested from the hands of the Mohometans.[307]

This reflects how Britain's success as a world power was viewed, not always favourably, by other nations. It also illustrates the potential dangers explorers were exposed to as a result of their nationality and how being British did not always entitle them to special treatment. Many British travellers, though, appear to have expected some display of favoritism, but they were often very quickly disabused of this belief.

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[306] Hugh Clapperton, *Journal*, p. 325.
[307] Ibid., p. 197.

As well as confronting obstacles arising from their dealings with high-status locals, male writers also found their authority being undermined by natives of a lower class and, in common with several women writers, they also did not hold back from sharing these bitter experiences with their readers. The most common complaint amongst travellers was that they were unable to stop members of their staff stealing from them. Sir Francis Galton informed his readers that: "a great deal of pilfering had been going on. In the constant loading and unloading of my many things, it was impossible but that several occasions should occur for the servants to steal them, and some had certainly done so. However, I said nothing."[308] While John Speke admitted that: "I knew all my men were robbing me daily."[309] And Mungo Park reported how the disobedience of his servants put the whole group at risk: "The people here are all thieves: they attempted to steal several of our loads, and we detected one carrying away the bundle in which was all our medicines."[310] These examples are just a selection of many accounts which depict the traveller as being taken advantage of by his staff. The number of incidents of deception they reported demonstrates that it was not compulsory for male travellers to always present themselves as in control or especially authoritative with their subordinates, even with the constraints of colonial discourse, and even when they were travelling in countries which they considered 'inferior' to Britain.

However, there are a few texts where male writers reveal that they deliberately tolerated some level of disobedience because it suited their long-term objectives. Sir Francis Galton allowed some of the Hottentots in his party to disobey him: "only one or two were impudent, and, as I did not know how much thrashing they would stand, I let them alone."[311] Similarly, J. L. Porter found with his expedition in Damascus that: "The best policy is to yield to them with a good grace, and under ordinary circumstances, they will be satisfied with a liberal *bakhshish*."[312] Even experienced travellers, such as Richard Burton during his pilgrimage to Al Medinha and Meccah, admitted that his servant had:

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[308] Sir Francis Galton, *The Narrative of an Explorer*, p. 36.
[309] John Hanning Speke, *Journal*, p. 71.
[310] Mungo Park, *Travels*, p. 321.
[311] Sir Francis Galton, *The Narrative of an Explorer*, p. 25.
[312] J. L. Porter, *Five Years in Damascus*, p. 55.

all the defects of his nation; a brave at Cairo, he was an arrant coward at Al-Medinah; the Badawin despised him heartily for his effeminacy in making his camel kneel to dismount, and he could not keep his hands from picking and stealing. But the choice had its advantages: his swarthy skin and chubby features made the Arabs always call him an Abyssinian slave, which, as it favoured my disguise, I did not care to contradict.[313]

It appears that, now and then, male travel writers took a very pragmatic approach to discipline, and did not feel that their authority was under any serious threat or their reputations damaged as a result of taking a less authoritative stance.

Occasionally some of the men's texts also disclose that it was not only local people who were a problem to them on their travels. In the account of his Zambezi expedition David Livingstone divulged that he had severe issues of indiscipline with some of the European members of his team. The published text contains copies of his exchange of letters with geologist Richard Thornton, artist Thomas Baines, Captain Norman Bedingfeld of the Royal Navy, and even his own brother Charles. These letters indicate that their relationship with Livingstone was at times confrontational, with accusations of theft, desertion and idleness, and resulted in the dismissal and resignation of several members of the expedition.[314] Henry Morton Stanley had similar problems with the Europeans on his mission to rescue the Governor of Equatoria, which led to an extremely bitter and vitriolic exchange of views in the press upon their return to England.[315]

These texts broadcast to the world that expedition leaders were not always in control and nor were they able to completely trust all the members of their teams, regardless of nationality. This has the effect of focusing the readers' attention on the narrator as he was unable to rely on anyone else and he single-handedly had the unenviable task of making difficult but potentially life-saving decisions. However,

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[313] Richard Francis Burton, *The Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al Medinha & Meccah,* vol. 1, p. 64.

[314] David Livingstone, *Zambezi Expedition*, vol. 1.

[315] Tim Youngs, *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues, 1850 – 1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) is a useful source of information on this expedition and also on Burton and Speke's competitive relationship.

often the travellers destabilize this hero-figure image by revealing that many of them found this huge responsibility very difficult to bear. This again is contrary to the conclusions proposed by current research. Scholars, such as Dea Birkett, have contended that colonial discourse theory demands that British male explorers should be in control at all times and that they "revelled in their control over people".[316] This may be true but there are also numerous examples to be found in the source material where the men undoubtedly show that they were deeply troubled by doubts about their own abilities and leadership skills. Even highly experienced travellers such as Henry Morton Stanley admitted: "I find it terrible trouble to take charge of so many people so totally innocent of anything approaching manliness or sense on water. It is one protracted torture, chest aches with violent shouting and upbraiding them for their foolish cowardice, voice becomes hoarse with giving orders which in a few seconds are entirely forgotten."[317] Edward Eyre summed up the feelings of many expedition leaders in the account of his trip across Australia: "The hopes, fears, and anxieties of the leader of an exploring party, must be felt to be understood."[318] The travel narratives of Stanley, Eyre and numerous others illustrate that it must not have been critical to demonstrate that one was in complete control of one's team throughout the whole of the expedition and, occasionally, it appears it was acceptable to admit that one was helpless and found leadership an onerous task.

As well as being very open about being weak and admitting to failure, much of the travel literature produced by male writers also acknowledged that some of their problems and difficulties were caused because they were unprepared for the particular pressures and strains their journeys put them under. Sir Francis Galton was especially direct in owning up to his inexperience:

> The fact is, we were in wretched travelling condition. An indolent life of high feeding and perfect rest on board ship, is a bad preparation for a journey like ours [...] I think that it was the most foolish thing that I was guilty of during the whole journey, to leave the poor animals to shift for themselves, two

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[316] Dea Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad*, p. 127.
[317] Henry Morton Stanley, *The Exploration Diaries of H. M. Stanley* (London:William Kimber,1961), p. 146.
[318] Edward John Eyre, *Journals,* vol. 1, p. 24.

> miles from us, and without the slightest protection; but I was new to the country.[319]

Similarly, John Speke recognized that: "We had come into the country drawn there by a combination of pride and avarice, and now we were leaving it in hot haste under the guidance of an escort of officers."[320] Several male travel writers, in common with their female counterparts, also commented on the uselessness of some of their research prior to travelling. Galton disclosed: "I was grieved, too, to find that very many of my articles of exchange were ill-chosen and worthless"[321] and Stanley confessed:

> Guided by what I had remembered Speke had written of Mtesa's character I had furnished myself with some toys and cheap showy articles, but after an interview with him, I blushed at the insult I came near to doing him and to condone for my simplicity I almost impoverished myself to do him honour.[322]

It might have been acceptable for amateur travellers to admit to embarking on a journey without adequate research but not professional explorers such as these, and what is striking is the number of these men who were willing to acknowledge the poor quality of their preparation in their travel literature. However, this does expose the inadequacies of previous travel texts, as Stanley's comments on Speke show, and acts as extra validation for their decision to publish another travel account. Female travel writers were equally critical of the poor quality of some of the earlier travel texts. For example, Mary Kingsley recognized that much of the material she had researched for her trip was deficient: "One by one I took my ideas derived from books and thoughts based on imperfect knowledge and weighed them against the real life around me, and found them either worthless or wanting."[323]

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[319] Sir Francis Galton, *The Narrative of an Explorer*, pp. 44-5.
[320] John Hanning Speke, *Journal*, p. 160.
[321] Sir Francis Galton, *The Narrative of an Explorer*, p. 75.
[322] Henry Morton Stanley, *The Exploration Diaries of H. M. Stanley*, p. 71.
[323] Mary Kingsley, *Travels*, p. 164. Cited in Chapter One.

It would seem, from the abundance of evidence, that male writers did not feel at all awkward or uncomfortable when discussing their weaknesses with the reading public, whatever the circumstances and irrespective of whether that weakness was physical, emotional or psychological. They even found it possible to admit to failure in that most masculine of activities, hunting. Following a failed tiger hunt Thomas Skinner was prepared to divulge that: "After beating every other likely place for some hours, we returned to our couch at night-fall tolerably tired and disappointed."[324] Richard Burton disclosed that: "perhaps, a few words concerning the prospects of sportsmen in this part of Africa, may save future travellers from the mistake into which I fell. I expected great things, and returned without realising a single hope."[325] And Hugh Clapperton admitted:

> I went out to hunt on the flats on foot, with a Fellata to drive in the game, my servants being all knocked up, and too tired to accompany me. After getting on the ground, I lay down amongst the long grass, and sent out for the Fellata, who twice drove the game close to where I was lying, but on both occasions I was sound asleep, being overcome with fatigue, and I got up and returned home.[326]

From the plentiful examples discussed above it is apparent that male travel writers were not unwilling to confess to failure, even in overtly masculine activities, nor did many seem to have felt that such public honesty would have emasculated them in any way.

This attitude was not confined to true-life travel accounts as fictional travel literature also contains many instances where the main characters were equally open about their feelings and admitted to making mistakes. For example, Rider Haggard's hero, Quatermain (1885), unashamedly confessed: "As those who read this history will probably long ago have gathered, I am, to be honest, a bit of a coward, and certainly in no way given to fighting."[327] Neither was he reluctant to describe his

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[324] Thomas Skinner, *Excursions in India,* vol. 1, p. 117.
[325] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*, vol. 1, p. 268.
[326] Hugh Clapperton, *Journal*, p. 246.
[327] Henry Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, p. 206.

deepest emotions: "I am bound to say that, for my part, I gave way in despair. Laying my head against Sir Henry's broad shoulder I burst into tears; and I think that I heard Good gulping away on the other side, and swearing hoarsely at himself for doing so."[328] Haggard was not alone in depicting the heroes of his novels as exhibiting 'feminine' characteristics, as several other fictional travel writers adopted the same technique. Robert Louis Stevenson's young hero Jim Hawkins (1883) declared that he: "jumped in my skin for terror"[329] and on leaving his mother behind confessed to having his "first attack of tears";[330] although in this situation his youth was a reasonable excuse for behaving in such a timid way. The same cannot be said for Joseph Conrad's hero Marlow (1898), who revealed that he "couldn't have felt more of lonely desolation"[331] and disclosed that he was "completely unnerved by a sheer blank fright, pure abstract terror, unconnected with any distinct shape of physical danger."[332] Representing one's hero as delicate and fragile was not unique to nineteenth-century fiction as adventure stories written during the previous century also exhibited these characteristics. Daniel Defoe's hero Robinson Crusoe (1719) was so startled by the firing of his ship's distress signal that he "fell down in a swoon"[333] and he was so miserable about the circumstances of his shipwreck that he admitted the experience "forced tears from my eyes again."[334]

There was clearly an established literary tradition for having flawed action heroes in tales of daring and adventure which does not appear to have been particularly influenced by Britain's changing political and economic status on the world's stage. The classic adventure stories by Haggard, Stevenson, and Conrad, among many others, were published towards the end of the nineteenth century when Britain was struggling to maintain its colonies and come to terms with its fading status as the most powerful country in the world. However, losing economic and political authority to rivals such as America and Russia appears to have made little

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[328] Ibid., p. 267.
[329] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 19.
[330] Ibid., p. 39.
[331] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1995), p. 79.
[332] Ibid., p. 104.
[333] Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 12.
[334] Ibid., p. 40.

difference to the willingness of writers to have their leading characters admit to being weak and helpless, and even overtly imperial writers, such as John Buchan and George Henty, were still able to include characters that exhibited emotions and made mistakes in their tales.

Conclusion

It is easy to accept that a work of nineteenth-century fiction might contain characters that were more willing to confess to having feelings, weaknesses and emotions than a true-life account. After all, one might have expected real people, particularly from the British middle classes, to have adopted a more courageous and robust demeanour whilst travelling overseas than their fictional counterparts. However, this does not appear to be the case. Whether the account was from a work of fiction or non-fiction, from a male or female perspective, from the beginning or the end of the nineteenth century, from an independent nation or a colony, appears to have made little difference to the readiness of the narrator to portray him or herself as distressed and powerless.

Roy Bridges may have concluded from his investigation into exploration and travel outside Europe between 1720 and 1914 that the challenge from emerging nations towards the end of the nineteenth century had made travel literature: "more strident in asserting Europe's technological and racial superiority over non-Europeans and full of fears about 'falling behind' rival powers", but we have seen that there is also considerable evidence to show that many accounts depicted their narrators as weak and failing.[335] Neither genre seemingly believed it was necessary to maintain an authoritative position throughout the whole of the text, despite the requirements of colonial or feminine discourse, or despite Britain's changing global status. They were working within well-established literary conventions, where it was acceptable to have a narrator who was outwitted, made mistakes, lacked confidence, and suffered emotional and psychological breakdowns. The consistently high

[335] Roy Bridges, "Exploration and travel outside Europe (1720-1914)", eds., Peter Hulme & Tim Youngs, *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 66.

demand for these stories, both fiction and non-fiction, indicate that it was an extremely popular approach with their readers.

CHAPTER THREE

"The first question of mankind to the wanderer – 'what are the women like?'"[336]

Introduction

The first part of this investigation examined characteristics of travel literature that have been traditionally associated with male travel writing and the public sphere; specifically the inclusion of 'technical' information and the adoption of a strong narrative voice. It has revealed that the evidence does not wholly support the conventional assertion that these features were the preserve of male travel writers and, because of the pressures of feminine discourse, were closed to female travel writers. It has also shown that at least in regard to some aspects of travel literature there is little evidence to support the notion of separate spheres. The second part of this investigation will explore an area which has been customarily associated with female travel writing and the domestic sphere, namely relationships, in order to discover what this can tell us about the nature of separate spheres in nineteenth-century travel literature.

It has been argued that while men have been linked to the public world and outside spaces women, by implication, have been confined to the private world and inside spaces. Their realm has been limited to the family unit and to events in the domestic environment. Shirley Foster claims in her study into nineteenth-century women's travel texts that women writers discussed: "topics not generally explored in any depth in male travel writing. These include appearance, costume and manners of women" and that this enabled female travel writers to establish "a new female-oriented genre."[337] Similarly, Mary Louise Pratt has asserted that: "domestic settings

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[336] Richard Francis Burton, *The Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al Medinha & Meccah*, vol. 2, p. 85.
[337] Shirley Foster, *Across New Worlds*, p. 24.

have a much more prominent presence in the women's travel accounts than in the men's (where one is hard pressed indeed to find even an interior description of a house)."[338] The discussion in Chapter One revealed that these views were supported by Sidonie Smith who also concluded that the female travel writer was restricted in her choice of subject matter: "Her attention could most properly be trained upon social arrangements, domestic relations, and the activities and lives of women [...] Reporting on manners and customs, women travellers exercised their eye for fine and practical detail, a mental habit identified as proper to femininity."[339] There appears, therefore, to be a general expectation among academics that female travellers would write about, indeed were better suited to write about, private, domestic issues and that male travel writers would concentrate on more public, worldly affairs.

Ideally, in order to determine whether this expectation is justified, every area associated with the domestic sphere should be investigated. However, restrictions of space will not allow such a wide-ranging analysis at this time and, for that reason, the next two chapters focus on particular aspects of relationships; an area which has traditionally been regarded as a 'female' concern. Before addressing the issue of relationships, however, it should be noted that my research does not wholly support the claims that men were not interested in a wide range of domestic issues and I cannot agree with Pratt's assertion that in male travel literature "one is hard pressed indeed to find even an interior description of a house." Many, if not most, of the travel texts I have studied written by male travellers include substantial information about a vast range of subjects typically associated with female areas of expertise such as food, hygiene and household furnishing.

It is not my intention to discuss these particular issues in any great depth, as time will not allow, but I feel that it is necessary to quickly justify my conclusion. Food was regularly discussed in male travel literature throughout the whole of the nineteenth century. In the account of his African adventures, Mungo Park meticulously recorded how the locals prepared their food. He not only described how

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[338] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 159.
[339] Sidonie Smith, *Moving Lives*, pp. 18-9.

they processed the corn: "they bruise the seed until it parts with the outer covering, or husk, which is then separated from the clean corn by exposing it to the wind [...] The corn thus freed from the husk is returned to the mortar, and beaten into meal [...] a sort of pudding, which they call *kouskous*" but he also provided recipes: "It is made by first moistening the flour with water, and then stirring and shaking it about in a large calabash or gourd, till it adheres together in small granules, resembling sago."[340] Many male travel writers were also extremely concerned with matters of hygiene. Thomas Skinner was appalled at the disgusting living conditions he discovered on his journey across India. He observed in one village that: "In dirtiness the men are only surpassed by the women" and that "The ground about their villages is literally teeming with vermin; and their abodes present too filthy an exterior to tempt me to pass the threshold. The children not quite so dirty as their elders, merely because they are not so old; but give great promise of rivalling them, for they grow in dirt as they advance in years."[341] Male travel writers also regularly described their living arrangements and how their accommodation was furnished. Edward Granville Browne's 1893 travel narrative contains pages of detailed descriptions of the various types of accommodation he encountered during his stay in Persia, including this particular overnight stop:

> On dismounting, we are conducted to a room littered up, rather than furnished, with several beds, a number of cane-bottomed chairs, and a table or two. The windows are furnished with tawdry curtains; the walls are bedecked with tinselled mirrors and gaudy pictures; while on the washing stand a single ragged tooth-brush is ostentatiously displayed by the side of a clothes-brush, which would seem to be intended to serve as a hair-brush as well.[342]

These three extracts from Park, Skinner and Browne are typical of the observations recorded in many male travel accounts written during the nineteenth century concerning issues traditionally thought of as 'female'. They cover the whole

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[340] Mungo Park, *Travels*, pp. 7-8.
[341] Thomas Skinner, *Excursions in India*, vol. 1, pp. 321-2.
[342] Edward Granville Browne, *A Year Among the Persians* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 87.

of the nineteenth century and a range of different countries, and are not rare occurrences as Pratt and others would have us believe. There are numerous travel texts written by male writers which contain not just a passing reference to domestic issues, but accounts that go into elaborate detail and at great length about these so-called 'feminine' themes. Topics such as hygiene, accommodation, food preparation and consumption, and appearance and clothing were also conventionally used during the nineteenth century as a means of assessing social status and judging moral codes. Therefore it is only to be expected that both male and female travel writers would be eager to include such matters in their travel texts. This weight of evidence manifestly demonstrates a keen interest in such subjects rather than simply a token gesture: as Isabel Burton observed during her journey through the Middle East: "The British reading public, nay, all the world, likes personal detail" and, from the amount of material available, it is obvious that she was not the only travel writer to draw such conclusions.[343] Both men and women were keen to discuss these issues in their travel literature, and Burton's comment confirms that an interest in "personal detail" was shared by both sexes.[344]

Having established that male travel writers tackled a wide assortment of topics traditionally thought of as domestic in their texts, and were not prohibited from dealing with them as many academics have claimed, I would now like to address the core issue of these next two chapters, namely the way relationships were discussed in nineteenth-century travel literature. Sara Mills has asserted that:

> The discourses of femininity, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, set out for middle-class women a range of roles, largely situated within the private sphere. 'Feminine' women concerned themselves with their families and maintaining relations, but also tended to the spiritual and moral well-being of the family group. These discourses had a clear effect on the way that women's travel writing was constructed.[345]

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[343] Isabel Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria,* vol. 1, Preface.
[344] Chapter One also discusses how travel literature appealed to a mixed audience.
[345] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 94.

Investigations undertaken by Mills, Foster, Smith and Pratt have contended that, for once, female travel writers had discovered an area of research that they could claim as their own and from which male travel writers were excluded (it is strangely ironic that we should consider male writers as being 'restricted' to public concerns when by its very nature the term 'public' does not lend itself to being interpreted as restricted). However, by examining the texts themselves and seeing how relationships were addressed in nineteenth-century travel narratives written by both genders perhaps different conclusions can be drawn.

There are undoubtedly many different types of relationships; for example there are family associations between parent and child, brother and sister, husband and wife; there are platonic friendships between single sex and mixed sex individuals; there is sexual attraction between men and women, men and men, and women and women. However, so as to be able to best ascertain whether the concept of separate spheres applies to nineteenth-century travel literature I have decided to concentrate on two main areas and divide my investigation into two discrete chapters. Therefore in this chapter the focus of my research will be on the sexual attraction between men and women, and in the following chapter I will be examining the dynamics of family relationships. In both cases I will be trying to determine whether these issues were handled in similar ways by both male and female travel writers or if, as has been asserted, these were areas where women had established Foster's "new female-oriented genre."

3.1 Background to the Portrayal of Sex in Travel Literature

There has always been a close connection between travel and sexual activity, which is somewhat ironic as today's mass tourist industry can be seen to originate in the tours organized by Thomas Cook in the 1840s: Cook was a leading member of a temperance organization and he began his business through hiring trains to transport his group to national meetings. Sex tourism, even in the relatively innocent form of 18-30 holidays, is often portrayed as a modern phenomenon, yet activities such as

these have been going on for hundreds of years. [346] Captain Cook's report of his initial encounter in the 1760s with the natives of Tahiti contains several references to the sexual promiscuity of the islanders; he made special note of how "the women were so very liberal with their favours."[347] Certain places on the Grand Tour had a reputation for raucous pursuits. Venice, in particular, was renowned for centuries as a centre for sexual pleasure. Francesco Da Mosto's research has uncovered that: "Sixteenth century tourists in the city could consult a directory of ladies of the night and discover their names, their protectors, their place of residence and reception, and how much a gentleman would have to pay for their services." He has observed that by the eighteenth century an estimated quarter of the population suffered from a sexually transmitted disease and: "Once the vice of sodomy began to spread in the city in the eighteenth century, the Republic actively encouraged prostitutes to flaunt themselves in doorways and windows, with lanterns lighting their wares in the evening. To entice the men away from 'unnatural sins' they would lounge bare-breasted on their balconies."[348]

Literature generally reflects the culture and beliefs of the society in which it is produced, and the eighteenth century's attitude towards sexual matters can be seen in the theatrical productions of the period. The popularity of productions such as Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777) and Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), with their spirited and amusing outlook towards sex and romance, indicate a very relaxed and non-repressed stance. This more direct approach to sexual issues was also reflected in earlier travel literature as eighteenth-century writers, of both genders, seem to have been fairly comfortable when

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[346] Michael Palin, *Himalaya* (London: Orion Publishing Group, 2004), p.184. On his visit to Yunna in Southern China, near the border with Tibet, Palin encountered a tribe where it was the women who took the lead in sexual matters: "The tourist authorities, as anxious to bring people to these ethnic areas as they once were to keep them away, have made much of the matriarchal tradition of the Mosuo. A billboard on the way here showed inviting girls in local costume above the slogan 'Lucpu Lake Women's Kingdom. God Living There.' They meant 'Good Living' but for the men who troop out to the lake in search of liberated ladies it comes to the same thing. The irony is that there aren't enough Mosuo women willing to live up to this hype and they have had to import Han Chinese sex workers masquerading as Mosuo to satisfy the demand.".

[347] James Cook, *The Voyages of Captain James Cook Round the World; Selected from his Journals* (London: The Cresset Press, 1949), p. 19.

[348] Francesco Da Mosto, *Venice: The dramatic history of the world's most beautiful city* (London: BBC Books, 2004), p. 98.

discussing sexual liaisons. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, for example, in her *Selected Letters* openly described the sexual intrigues of the courts of Europe in the early eighteenth century. She observed in Viennese society that:

> Here are neither coquettes nor prudes. No woman dares appear coquette enough to encourage two lovers at a time, and I have not seen any such prudes as to pretend fidelity to their husbands, who are certainly the best natured set of people in the world, and they look upon their wives' gallants as favourably as men do upon their deputies that take the troublesome part of their business off of their hands, though they have not the less to do, for they are generally deputies in another place themselves. In one word, 'tis the established custom for every lady to have two husbands, one that bears the name, and another that performs the duties.[349]

She appears to have felt little embarrassment in revealing the infidelities of European women, as it was clearly perfectly acceptable behaviour in their society. It was her refusal to engage in similar sexual pursuits that was portrayed as abnormal: "having no intrigue at all is so far a disgrace that I'll assure you a lady who is very much my friend here told me but yesterday how much I was obliged to her for justifying my conduct."[350] However, it was easy for her to adopt this approach precisely because she did not engage in these sexual high jinks herself. It was not her behaviour that was on public display but that of the society hostesses of Europe.[351]

Similarly, Captain John Stedman, in his *Expedition to Surinam* published in the late eighteenth century, was also very honest when discussing his relationship with a fifteen year old local slave girl called Joanna. He openly admitted that a local woman: "gravely presented me her daughter to become what she was pleased to term my wife."[352] He described Joanna as his "mate" and "an agreeable partner",[353] but he was obviously very conscious of the manner in which he wrote about her as he also felt it necessary to justify his concern for her wellbeing: "It will no doubt appear

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[349] Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Selected Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (London: Longman, 1970), p. 84.
[350] Ibid., p. 85.
[351] Later she did engage in a passionate affair with Francesco Algarotti, a bisexual Italian man the same age as her son, to whom she wrote many impassioned letters which were published posthumously.
[352] Captain John Stedman, *Expedition to Surinam* (London: The Folio Society, 1963), p. 12.
[353] Ibid., pp. 127-9.

surprising to many of my readers to find me mention this female slave so often, and with so much respect; but I cannot speak with indifference of an object so deserving of attention."[354] He did not feel that he had to defend his sexual relationship with the girl, but he did feel ashamed of the way slaves were treated with such little respect by the Europeans, and found the contrasting attitude of his fellow countrymen morally unacceptable:

> I found myself up-braded by my mess-mates for taking care of my own offspring: 'Do as we do, Stedman,' said they, 'and never fear. If our children are slaves, they are provided for; and if they die, what care we, should they be d-n'd in the bargain? Therefore keep your sighs in your own belly, and your money in your pocket, my boy, that's all.' I repeat this in their own language, to show how much my feelings must have been hurt and disgusted with similar consolation.[355]

Stedman complained not only about the uncharitable nature of his countrymen towards the island's slave population but also about the low moral standards they displayed among themselves. He was particularly critical about the flirtatiousness and lack of moral character of the colonists' wives, who were constantly propositioning the servicemen and who, compared to his Joanna, appear to have behaved in a very debauched way:

> At this time Colonel Fourgeoud and myself were daily visitors of the ladies, in whose company no man could behave better, while I could often not avoid disgust; indeed so languid were many in their looks, and so unrestrained were some in their conversation, that one even asked me, *sans ceremonie,* to supply the place.[356]

This passage is remarkable as it destabilizes both feminine and orientalist discourses. In it Stedman describes women as being the sexual predators rather than the traditional view that women were the victims of male sexual aggression and, because

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[354] Ibid., p. 118.
[355] Ibid., p. 136.
[356] Ibid., p. 200.

these women were European, he also challenges the conventional image of the libidinous nature of black women contrasted with the chaste character of white women. His black woman was modest and behaved in a very respectable manner, unlike the European women he encountered who are shown to be sexually promiscuous and unfaithful to their husbands. The passage also demonstrates that writers during the eighteenth century felt at ease when discussing these sorts of subjects in their literature even if they portrayed Europeans in a bad light.

This more open and forthright attitude to sexual encounters, regardless of whether they were between Europeans or not, does not appear to have lasted very far into the travel literature of the nineteenth century. This is not, however, because there was a decline in interest in sexual issues during this period; on the contrary, for a century with a reputation in today's society for sexual prudity and repression there was almost an obsession with sexual themes. As Michel Foucault has observed, all relationships are based on the question of power, and the suppression of a particular activity inevitably creates a counter-reaction to it. Foucault wrote that by the nineteenth century: "Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered. It was in the nature of public potential; it called for management procedures; it had to be taken charge of by analytical discourses."[357] Consequently, as the century progressed and more and more bodies became concerned with investigating and controlling sexual matters, more interest and debate in the subject was generated. Tamsin Spargo agrees that "evidence from the 19th century pointed not to a prohibition on speaking about sexuality but to a remarkable proliferation of discourses about sexuality."[358] During the nineteenth century studies were undertaken, laws were introduced, and sermons were preached, and all this activity contributed towards generating a vigorous debate concerning sexual issues. The heated public reaction to the introduction of The Contagious Diseases Act, originating in the 1860s, and the controversy it generated is an indication of the high level of interest in sex during the nineteenth century. Therefore, rather than the

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[357] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 24.
[358] Tamsin Spargo, *Foucault and Queer Theory*, pp. 11-2.

nineteenth century being a period of sexual repression, there was actually a great curiosity about, and eager consumption of, sexual matters.

However, although there was considerable interest from a number of different areas in sexual issues during the nineteenth century, the travel literature written during this period had a tendency to be rather circumspect in addressing matters of a sexual nature, even though some travel writers openly admitted that sexual attraction was of great interest to their readers; as Richard Burton explained: "After this long description, the reader will perceive with pleasure that we are approaching an interesting theme, the first question of mankind to the wanderer – 'What are the women like?'"[359] Where evidence of sexual behaviour can be discovered in the travel texts there is a significant difference in the attitude towards it depending on the time, the place, and, most importantly, the gender of the writer. It is only by examining a range of texts that an accurate assessment can be made of whether the discussion of sexual relationships in nineteenth-century travel literature could be said to belong to Foster's "new female-oriented genre", and what the implications are, if any, on our understanding of the notion of separate spheres.

3.2 The Portrayal of Sexual Relationships in Female Travel Literature

People who went to Africa in the nineteenth century tended to be serious travellers, and the majority of them were on official business of one sort or another. They were missionaries or civil servants, businessmen or troops, depending on the country being visited and the period concerned. Although led by individuals, expeditions to the interior were predominantly financed and organized by large private institutions, such as the Royal Geographical Society or the London Missionary Society, usually in association with various Government departments. And the majority of these travellers were men, with some notable exceptions such as May French-Sheldon and Mary Kingsley. Therefore, much of the travel literature written about journeys across

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[359] Richard Francis Burton, *The Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al Medinha & Meccah*, vol. 2, p. 85.

Africa was produced by male writers. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century increasing numbers of single females travelled to the continent as the spread of British colonization opened up new career opportunities for women and began to have a serious impact upon their lives at home.

During her investigation into the role of women in the British Empire Joanna Trollope discovered that between 1815-89 more than twelve million men emigrated to the colonies and that this had resulted in an enormous shortage of men at home. The *Plymouth Times* in January 1848 reported that there were "40 single ladies for every single man in Weston-super-Mare", a pattern that was repeated across the country, and by "the middle of the century over 35% of women between twenty and forty-four were single."[360] Grant Allen wrote in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1889 that many of the available men were: "in the army, in the navy, in the Indian Civil Service [...] or a diamond-digger at Kimberly, or a merchant at Melbourne: in short, he is anywhere, and everywhere, except where he ought to be, making love to the pretty girls of England."[361]

The life of a middle-class female who was not financially independent or supported by a wealthy family was very difficult as there were limited opportunities open for her to support herself without putting her reputation at risk.[362] Marriage was one of the few prospects available and if there were fewer eligible men then the chances of finding a good match were considerably reduced. Therefore it was perhaps inevitable that more women were prepared to travel to search out better opportunities, even if that meant travelling to some fairly inhospitable places. In Britain becoming a governess appears to have been undertaken as a last resort as it is difficult to find anyone with anything positive to say about this particular profession. The work was poorly paid, of low status, and there was little chance of advancement. In the 1850s there were over 25,000 governesses in Britain. The best of these earned around £100 per annum but the majority earned significantly less, between £30 and £40 per annum and this was at a time when a daughter was expected to cost her

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[360] Joanna Trollope, *Britannia's Daughters: Women of the British Empire* (London: Pimlico, 1983), p. 23.
[361] Cited in John Tosh's *A Man's Place*, p. 176.
[362] See Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (London: Virago Press, 1994) for a discussion of the types of roles open to middle-class females.

father around £100 per annum to keep.[363] In the colonies, though, the situation was far different. An educated female might be considered with some suspicion in Britain but they were highly regarded and very much appreciated in other nations. There was a huge demand for governesses in the colonies, particularly in Canada, Australia and Africa, and a variety of organisations were developed in order to supply women to meet this need. For example, Miss Maria Rye, who also ran a successful law-copying firm, established the Female Middle Class Emigration Society. Founded in 1862, it survived for twenty three years and settled hundreds of women.[364]

Dea Birkett's research on opportunities for women in West Africa provides some very useful data on the Colonial Nursing Association (CNA), established in 1896 to provide suitable medical care to meet the needs of the growing British Empire in West Africa.[365] Both Birkett's and Trollope's investigations show that the development of organizations designed to support colonial endeavours in Africa resulted in a massive increase in the number of women travelling to the region (a pattern which was repeated in other areas). Technological improvements to land and sea transportation made travel both quicker and cheaper, and it was also becoming more socially acceptable for women to travel unaccompanied by a male escort. As Sidonie Smith concluded during her investigation of women's travel literature, the new technological developments had feminized travel and trains, in particular, had "delivered to middle-class women a convenient, acceptable means of escape from domesticity."[366] Therefore, with rising numbers of women travelling overseas, many of them intentionally travelling so that they could meet the opposite sex, one might anticipate finding a gradual increase in the production of female travel accounts which recorded how these romantic objectives fared. Yet this is not the case. Not only is there not a significant increase in the number of travel texts produced by these women but there is record of few, if any, romantic entanglements either with British men or with local native men.

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[363] Joanna Trollope, *Britannia's Daughters*, p. 62.
[364] Ibid., p. 64.
[365] Dea Birkett, 'The 'White Woman's Burden' in the 'White Man's Grave': The Introduction of British Nurses in Colonial West Africa', in *Western Women and Imperialism*, eds., Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel.
[366] Sidonie Smith. *Moving Lives*, p. 126.

This cannot be because such relationships did not occur, as Birkett's research has uncovered how "In the first five years of CNA appointments, one-third of the nurses stationed in West Africa were recalled or 'retired'" and that "One nurse, giving evidence in London in a case that led to dismissal, pinpointed the cause of this embarrassing statistic: 'ignorance on the part of most nurses who go out, and who think they may do things there which they would not dream of doing here.'" Evidently there could be a variety of reasons why these women were "recalled" other than as a result of sexual indiscretions but Birkett concluded:

> the image of a land free from the restrictions of their home society led many to believe that they could enjoy a social and personal freedom they did not enjoy as single women in Britain. But instead they found a closely controlled and ordered European society which sought a non-professional, separate place for them within it. Yet even within the rigid regulations facing them on arrival in West Africa, they found ways of rebelling. Their exploitation of chances for sexual freedom was an indication of women taking control of an area of their lives usually denied to them. The cost of such action, however, would be scandal, reprimand, and dismissal.[367]

For many, therefore, romance was an important part of why they travelled and yet, because of the damaging consequences such behaviour might have on their futures, they chose to leave very little evidence of it in their texts. Sara Mills agrees that "it would have been considered improper for a woman writer even to allude to sexual matters" as the pressures of feminine discourse would have strongly discouraged them from addressing topics that might have endangered their reputations.[368]

This general reluctance of women writers to discuss sexual matters in their literature was recognised during the nineteenth century. Research conducted by Ellen Moers into female literary traditions shows that it applied not only to travel literature but also to other literary genres: "That English fiction was weak in the area of passion was a complaint almost as characteristic of the Victorian age as that French fiction was indecently full of lust." She goes on to assert:

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[367] Ibid., p. 186.
[368] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 22.

> In no area of literature have women writers been subjected to such earnest, constant, and contradictory advice as in the literature of love. Women are the passionate sex, they are always told, and therefore love is their natural subject; but they must not write about it. If they avoid love, that proves they are mere women, inferior to men, next to whom women are always told they are cold, narrow, childish. If they dwell on love they are doing what is expected of the worst of women, who are said to be stupid, sentimental, hysterical creatures incapable of thinking of anything else.[369]

Moers makes it clear that women writers were placed in an impossible situation as they risked criticism whatever they did. However, the travel literature genre did provide women writers with an opportunity to circumvent this problem as it enabled them to discuss sexual issues in reference to other races. By describing the sexual activities of the indigenous populations they encountered on their travels they could maintain a somewhat detached approach to the subject of sex without fear of damaging their own reputations too severely as their curiosity could be disguised as anthropological interest. Of course they might still be criticized but they could answer that criticism by claiming that their interest in sexual matters was necessary in order for them to be able to provide a thorough and accurate account of local life, and not because they had any particularly prurient interest or because they were "sentimental, hysterical creatures". Orientalist discourse, rather than acting as a constraining influence on their literature, actually gave them some freedom to address subjects which might otherwise have been considered inappropriate. Adopting an orientalist approach, therefore, gave them the liberty to talk about the sexual practices of other races relatively freely because such analysis could be viewed as scientific study. The semblance of science in a text also lent an air of what Nigel Leask calls "authorial veracity", as it could be used to endorse "*qualitative* judgements about people and places which were subject to no such definitive testimony."[370] And, as we saw in Chapter One, including scientific material in a

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[369] Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: Allen, 1977), pp. 142-3.
[370] Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing, 1770-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 73.

travel text also enabled travellers to add a weight and substance to their information, and help distinguish them from simple 'tourists'.

Clearly race had an impact on the approach of female writers towards sexual matters in their travel narratives but the social status of the locals also had an influence on their literature. Like people of a different race, who were nearly always viewed as inferior, the sexual conduct of people of a lower social standing could also be viewed in a pseudo-scientific way: reminiscent of observing animal behaviour. The nineteenth century saw an outbreak of studies into the way the lower classes operated: Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) is arguably the most famous but a number of societies and organizations were established in order to analyze and improve conditions for the poor: Methodist minister William Booth founded the Salvation Army (1865), George and Richard Cadbury developed the town of Bournville (1879) and William Hesketh (Lord Leverhulme) built Port Sunlight (1888). This perceived superiority over other classes, which almost certainly would have been shared by their readers, provided some protection for women writers against being criticized for addressing sexual issues in their travel texts. This also corresponds with the Foucauldian idea that sex in the nineteenth century was "a thing one administered" and which needed to be "taken charge of by analytical discourses." By writing about the sex lives of foreigners or the lower classes in their travel literature female travel writers could become part of this administration process and, therefore, distance themselves from their gender with all its associated restrictions concerning appropriate feminine behaviour.

Writing about the sex lives of the people on the continent of Europe did not readily fit into the category of anthropological research as racial superiority was not as easy to claim over European countries as it was in other parts of the world.[371] However, there was an established tradition in travel literature arising out of the Grand Tour, and written by both sexes, of discussing sexual intrigues and passionate encounters. The objective of journeys around Europe was generally either to improve one's health or, more often than not, to meet new acquaintances, broaden

[371] The exception to this, however, was Roman Catholic countries, where British Protestants generally considered themselves to be superior.

one's education, develop relationships, discover the outside world, and escape domestic responsibilities and regulations. When these travellers wrote to friends and family back home in Britain it was inevitable that their correspondence would contain gossip about the latest romantic liaisons. Publication of these letters without editing out any of their own scandalous behaviour would have been unthinkable, so perhaps it is unsurprising that so few women discussed their own sexual encounters in their travel literature. However, following in the footsteps of earlier writers, such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, many women were happy to address other people's sexual intrigues in their texts, particularly if they were being judgmental about their conduct.

Women writers found it relatively easy to discuss the sex lives of their peers on the continent in their travel narratives, but in doing so they exposed their literature to being disparaged for being inconsequential and trivial, and certainly of not having any substance or authority. This was acceptable if that was their intention, but female travellers on the whole wanted their writing to be taken seriously, and incorporating too much tittle-tattle and scandal would undermine this objective. However, curiosity about the methods of courtship of the lower classes gave many women writers the opportunity to take a more serious and less gossipy approach to their subject. We have already discussed how it was possible for women writers to adopt a more detached and gender-neutral stance when they were observing people whom they viewed as having an inferior status. The large number of women writers who commented on the love lives of the peasantry and the working classes they encountered on their travels, is evidence that many believed that under these circumstances it was possible to discuss sexual matters without attracting too much criticism. It also enabled them to give their literature more authority and gravitas than simply gossiping about the sexual dalliances of their peers would allow. Mary Shelley's account of her journey across Europe is a good example of this. Although her own life was rather scandalous, in her travel literature she adopted a fairly conventional approach to her subject matter. Perhaps she was intentionally trying to appease her audience and assuage any criticism of her private life impinging on her travel literature. Like many female travel writers she did not comment either on her

own or her companions' love lives but she did take a keen interest in comparing the sexual behaviour of the working-class girls of Italy, France and Britain, observing in Italy how:

> Each evening, too, at dusk, the girls from the silk mill close by, pass our inn on their way from work to their own village; they sing as they go, and look happy: some of them are very beautiful. They are all well conducted, I am told, keeping sharp watch on one another. The unmarried in Italy are usually of good conduct, while marriage is the prelude to a fearful liberty.[372]

Although they acted in a reputable way whilst single, Shelley claimed that once married Italian women relaxed their moral standards and became somewhat wayward in their behaviour. She contrasted this with what she came upon in France where: "Nothing can equal the care with which the French youth are guarded from contact with the world; girls in our boarding-schools are less shut up."[373]

However wayward the Italian married women's activities may have appeared to be, Shelley was not too critical of their conduct. She acknowledged that standards by which 'correct' behaviour were judged differed across Europe, and it would be unfair to condemn them just because they did not conform to British values. To illustrate this liberal attitude she observed how the Italians thought the behaviour of some British women equally scandalous: "It is not etiquette for a lady to enter a *caffe*, and they are shocked at the English women, who do not perceive the difference between eating their ice, or sipping their coffee, in the open Piazza, and entering the shop itself."[374] Shelley was not the only woman, or the only travel writer, to observe that local people were often offended by the activities of British women in their countries. Fanny Parkes Parlby, for example, discovered on her trip to India, published in 1850, that some of her actions upset her hosts:

> The conduct that shocked them was our dining with men not our relations, and that too with uncovered faces. A lady's going out on horseback is

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[372] Jeanne Moskal, ed., *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, p. 114.
[373] Ibid., p. 150.
[374] Ibid., p. 284.

> monstrous. They could not comprehend my galloping about on that great English horse, just where I pleased, with one or two gentlemen and the coachman as my attendants.[375]

Another region, apart from Europe, where female travel writers felt reasonably unperturbed about commenting upon the sexual customs of the local population was America. This is curious because one might have expected that the close association between Britain and its former colony would have meant that female visitors would have been embarrassed at raising such topics for discussion. However, this seems not to have been the case and, from the candid observations many visitors made, it appears that they could write relatively openly about sexual matters in this area in their travel narratives without too much risk to their reputations. Many women who visited America did so because they were curious about the differences between the lives of American women and their own lives at home, so perhaps it is understandable that their travel accounts should refer to these issues so regularly. In her travel text, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon relates a conversation she had with a woman she met whilst travelling on a coach that clearly illustrates the contrasting attitudes American girls had towards sex:

> Miss Juliet was a specimen of a Southern lady [...] She had been brought up in the Great Convent at Washington where fashionable Southerners go for education [...] I never heard of a worse system of education in my life, and, according to her account, the girls were as bad as the system – intriguing, lying creatures. – Miss Juliet told stories of the way in which lovers were got into the convent in disguise, and this before three young men in the coach who very much admired her conversation. She was a horrid animal. She told me her mother was married at thirteen and her sister at fifteen and says it is the custom in the Slave States.[376]

Bodichon unquestionably found Miss Juliet's frankness shocking, particularly as she hardly knew her, and the schoolgirls' behaviour thoroughly immoral. Her reference

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[375] Fanny Parkes Parlby, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*, p. 301.
[376] Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, *An American Diary*, p. 56.

to Miss Juliet being "a horrid animal" links promiscuous sexual activity with bestiality, a common theme in travel literature. She also complained that she thought it was an inappropriate conversation to have in front of male company, in spite of their obvious enjoyment, and yet she seemingly considered it perfectly respectable to repeat it in the public arena for a mixed-sex audience. But as she was being extremely censorious, unlike Miss Juliet who was advocating deceit and intrigue, she clearly did not feel that her actions were at all hypocritical.

Another aspect of American life in which Bodichon was especially interested was mixed-race relationships, and in her travel writing she was particularly judgmental about the locals' attitude towards these affairs: "A Mr. Robinson here is much blamed for living openly with a black wife, walking in the streets with her on his arm. He is very rich and the white ladies are scandalized – he ought to have a white wife as well, they think."[377] The "as well" is very telling as Bodichon's comments reveal how the relationship was not objected to on moral grounds but purely because of race. The white American females did not mind him having a sexual relationship with a black woman as long as it was behind closed doors but, for public activities, he should have an 'official' white wife so that he could maintain 'correct' appearances (it would be fascinating to know whether their attitude would have been different if he was not so "very rich"). Bodichon was also particularly frank about American men's attitude towards women of mixed-race:

> the mulatto race here beats the white in health, strength and beauty, and all the men admire the women with some African blood in them more than they do the whites. And I do not wonder, the whites here are wretched looking objects, yellow and pale, the quadroons magnificent women, the mulattoes very often beautifully formed and faces of a sort of Memnon cast, very pleasing, the children of mixed unions quite exquisite little creatures, the white children little miseries.[378]

The contrast between the whites and the mulattos is striking, and Bodichon leaves her readers in no doubt as to her opinion. She is not judgmental or censorious but

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[377] Ibid., p. 70.
[378] Ibid., p. 83.

adopts a practical and pragmatic attitude towards these relationships. The mulatto women are healthier, and physically more robust than their white rivals, therefore it is natural that white men would prefer to form associations with them, especially as the product of these mixed-race relationships would be "exquisite little creatures" rather than "little miseries".

Mixed-race relationships were of great concern to many female travel writers, particularly when they resulted in offspring, and there is a significant amount of comment regarding the plight of these children in nineteenth-century travel literature. Mrs. Ernest Hart believed that the morals of the Burmese people were considerably higher than those of her fellow countrymen, noting that in Burma: "illegitimate children are rare, except as the Eurasian offspring of Christian fathers, whose example is bitterly deplored."[379] She was sympathetic to the children's plight and acknowledged the unfortunate position they had been born into: "Eurasians there are, of course, in Burma, as elsewhere in the East; an unhappy race, suspended as it were midway between heaven and hell, and whose proper place is not to be found on earth."[380] Her text also indicates that mixed-race relationships were seen as a considerable problem for the British administration: "When Sir A. Mackensie was Chief Commissioner, he denounced publicly, with no uncertain voice, the irregular relations openly established between English soldiers and Burmese women."[381]

It was not particularly the official reaction to the situation which concerned Hart but the way these relationships were dealt with by her countrywomen. She was highly indignant towards their attitude: "On this subject English ladies have much in their own hands. At present an Englishman who honourably marries a Burmese woman, or an Englishwoman who marries a Burman, are tabooed in society; while irregular relations are winked at, if not countenanced." She wanted them to take firmer action: "If English ladies would, on the contrary, ostracise the men who outrage morality and openly dishonour their country and religion, and give support

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[379] Mrs. Ernest Hart, *Picturesque Burma,* p. 142.
[380] Ibid., p. 256.
[381] Ibid., p. 256.

to those who act honourably" only then, she believed, would the situation improve and there be fewer illegitimate offspring.[382]

Hart's observations in Burma were similar to those made by Bodichon during her trip to America; as long as inter-racial relationships were conducted in secret they were considered unimportant, at least by some of the resident British women. The act of marriage, however, was a public activity and this made the sexual relations of the couple of public concern. It would have been difficult for some British women to accept that a non-white female was their social equal, and marriage to a British man would have given them this status (at least in theory). Hart obviously believed that it was these British women who were behaving in an immoral way, not the married mixed-race couples who were simply trying to maintain loving relationships, and she was very critical of their conduct in her travel account. Hart's text also confirms that it was women who were perceived as being the moral compass for society as it was they who decided what behaviour was or was not acceptable. This supports the notion advocated by Sara Mills, referred to earlier in this chapter, that it was women who "tended to the spiritual and moral well-being of the family group."[383]

Hart's text also implies that it appeared to be universally accepted that British men were unable to control their sexual appetites whilst away from home, and it was understood that they would need to seek sexual gratification in any way they could. Female travel writers tended to tolerate the men's sexual activities, even if that involved relationships with native women, but they blamed the local British women for allowing them to act in such a way. Mary Martha Sherwood is one of the few writers whose travel text is openly critical of the men for their loose moral conduct. She held them completely accountable for their sexual urges, and pitied their illegitimate mixed-race offspring:

> These, and many such as these, are the daughters of Europeans, of Englishmen and English gentlemen - of men who have known what it is to have had a tender, well educated Christian mother, and honourable and

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[382] Ibid., pp. 256-7.
[383] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 94.

> amiable sisters. How can such men, by any sophistry, reconcile it to themselves so utterly to forget the first principles of morality, and then neglect the good of their own offspring, as they, alas! too often and often do? But this is a subject I dare not enter upon.[384]

Sherwood was very sympathetic towards the men's illegitimate offspring but extremely angry and disappointed by their lack of moral fibre. Notwithstanding her claims that "this is a subject I dare not enter upon" she did approach the issue several times in her travel account and she was one of the few women who took practical action to try and remedy the situation; she set up a school for the unfortunate children and avoided associating with the men unless it was to give them religious and moral instruction which she hoped would lead to an improvement in their conduct.

Bodichon and Hart's experiences of the attitudes towards mixed-race relationships in America and Burma are echoed in many travel texts issued by female writers from other countries, including Lucie Duff Gordon's *Letters from Egypt.* Describing her stay in Egypt during the 1860s Gordon's narrative reveals how she came across similar discrimination against mixed-race couples. She also discovered that, although these relationships were tolerated by the Egyptians, yet again the attitude of some of her countrywomen was very bigoted. She cited the example of Lady Ellenborough who, because she was married to an Arab sheik, was treated appallingly by British women living in Damascus: "The Arabs think it is inhuman of the English ladies to avoid her."[385] With this sort of prejudice towards mixed-race relationships it is understandable that Gordon, or any other female travel writer, would not want to speak freely about her own romantic affairs in her travel literature.

The children of mixed-race relationships were usually portrayed in a sympathetic manner by most female travel writers, although there are reports when social encounters between white women and mixed-race offspring did cause

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[384] Mrs. Mary Martha Sherwood, *The Life of Mrs .Sherwood, (chiefly autobiographical) with Extracts from Mr. Sherwood's journal during his imprisonment in France and residence in India,* ed. Sophia Kelly (London: Darton, 1875), p. 428.
[385] Lucie Duff Gordon, *Letters from Egypt*, p. 135.

considerable embarrassment. For example, Laetitia Hargrave wrote in 1840 of how Catherine MacTavish, newly arrived in Canada as a postal bride for a colonist with the Hudson Bay Company, was introduced by her husband to his thirteen year old mixed-blood daughter:

> MacTavish rose and took her up to his wife who got stupid but shook hands with the Miss who was very pretty and mighty impudent [...] Mrs MacTavish got white and red and at last rose and left the room, all the party looking very uncomfortable except her husband and the girl. Mrs Simpson followed and found her in a violent fit of crying. She said she knew the child was to have been at home that night but thought she would have been spared such a public introduction.[386]

However, when it came to discussing the wives in these relationships the feelings of the women writers were more ambiguous. During a trip to India Mary Martha Sherwood was introduced to a Dr G. who had married a native woman and had had seven children with her, so she was able to witness the situation first-hand. Like many women travellers Sherwood was indignant about the way the wives of mixed-marriages were treated:

> Of the multitudes of half-native ladies with whom I afterwards became acquainted, I never heard of the existence of the mother. I never knew of one, besides the mother of Dr G-'s children, to whom the same respect was paid as to this woman. On the contrary, I have heard of shocking instances of the neglect of these poor creatures, who, whilst their daughters are revelling in all Oriental luxury, are often left in the most abject situations. It was greatly to the credit of this family that they paid every respect to their mother.[387]

The conditions were even worse for the lower class native women and, even though it portrayed the British in a bad light, Sherwood did not attempt to disguise the appalling oppression these poor women had to face:

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[386] Cited in Joanna Trollope, *Britannia's Daughters*, p. 53.
[387] Mrs. Mary Martha Sherwood, *The Life and Times of Mrs. Sherwood (1775-1851)*, pp. 311-2.

> the white men in barracks are allowed to take each of them a black woman as a temporary wife whilst they are in India. These women, for the most part, live in huts near the barracks, and act as servants to the men; and the only idea these poor creatures have of morality and honour is, that whilst thus engaged to one man they are to be faithful to him, and faithful many are, perhaps following him for years, bearing him many children, and may be standing with those children on the sands of the river to see the last of him and of the vessel which bears him away. I have had scenes of this kind described to me by such of these poor creatures as have themselves gone through them, and I cannot recall the recollection of them without tears. The lower orphan-school provides refuges for many of these poor children; but the mothers have no refuge, nor can I understand how one can be provided. She has lost caste by her union with the white man, and has no resource but, if she can, to form such another temporary union with another white man.[388]

Yet, even with the numerous accounts by women travellers which expressed support and compassion for these women, when they were confronted with them they found themselves under pressure to conform to their society's standards of morality and act in the same way for which they criticized their own countrywomen. Emily Eden summed up their dilemma:

> There was a lady yesterday in perfect ecstasies with the music. I believe she was the wife of an indigo planter in the neighbourhood, and I was rather longing to go and speak to her, as she had probably not met a countrywoman for many months; but then, you know, she might not have been his wife, or anybody's wife, or he might not be an indigo planter. In short, my dear Mrs. D., you know what a world it is – impossible to be too careful, &c.[389]

Eden's comments are typical of many female travellers and shows that they were confused about how to react when faced with these poor women, although, as we shall see later with Fanny Parkes Parlby, some women were able to take a more relaxed attitude. The situation was much easier for them to cope with if these relationships were kept behind closed doors, as Eden explained: "We dined with Colonel J. yesterday. He lives, I believe, quite in the native style, with a few black

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[388] Mrs. Mary Martha Sherwood, *The Life of Mrs .Sherwood, (chiefly autobiographical)*, pp. 485-6.
[389] Emily Eden, *Up the Country*, p. 71.

Mrs. J.'s gracing his domestic circle when we are not here."[390] So, as long as they were not confronted with these couples in a social setting, the women were relatively content with their existence and happy to maintain an association with the gentlemen. Most acknowledged that the situation was wrong but they felt helpless to challenge it in case they damaged their own reputations. They were, however, prepared to expose these issues in their texts and draw attention to the difficulties in their published works.

The texts indicate that female travel writers were able to talk to some extent about sexual matters when they involved those perceived to be of a 'lower' status, regardless of whether that reduced status was as a result of class or race. However, there was one area of the world to which they travelled during the nineteenth century where many women were keen to discuss the sexual goings-on of people who, as far as race and class were concerned, were generally their social equals, and that place was India. Women's accounts of travel in this region frequently raised the topic of sexual frustration, not only in relation to men but also women. As discussed previously the growth of British commercial and military interests overseas had resulted in a shortage of available men at home, as a consequence scores of women travelled to areas such as India in order to find a husband, and numerous women's travel texts commented on boat-loads of hopeful, single, and sometimes desperate, women arriving at the quaysides.

Mary Martha Sherwood's account of her passage to India is important for the purpose of this study, as it is a valuable piece of evidence to prove that some women were fascinated by the sex lives of those that they met on their travels.[391] The popular image of Victorian Britain would have us believe that 'decent' women were not interested in sex; it was only lower and working-class women, with their loose morals and lack of decency, who indulged their sexual appetites.[392] However, Sherwood's account reveals that some of the women she travelled with to India, and

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[390] Ibid., p. 373.

[391] It is also ironic that Sherwood's text should reveal so much about sex when she was such a religious person.

[392] Private correspondence indicates that when apart 'respectable' middle-class wives were just as likely to miss the physical side of their marriage as their husbands. Letters also reveal single women confessing to having sexual desires – see John Tosh's *A Man's Place*.

these included women from the middle classes, could not control their baser instincts even on the journey out: "There was, I doubt not, much folly and much flirting on deck after I was gone down, which my presence might not perhaps have hindered, though it might have slightly checked it."[393]

Sherwood was always careful to protect her own reputation and reassure her readers that, despite the cramped and improper accommodation onboard ship, her behaviour was always exemplary: "the horrors of it, it was only separated by a canvas partition from the place in which the soldiers sat and, I believe, slept and dressed, so that it was absolutely necessary for me, in all weathers, to go down to this shocking place before any of the men were turned down for the night."[394] Irrespective of the difficult living conditions onboard ship, she stressed throughout her narrative that, providing the women conducted themselves in the correct manner, none of the men would have dared to behave in an inappropriate way:

> I should say from my own experience that an officer's wife will always be well treated if she behaves discreetly, there being a sort of point of honour amongst the gentlemen of the Army to show every polite and respectful attention to the wife of a brother officer. These gentlemen on board the *Devonshire* fully understood that it was not in my power to avoid associating much with them; they were fully aware that, when on shore, I had never put myself forward to be noticed by them.[395]

Again it is noticeable that it was the females of the group that were expected to determine the standards of morality and proper behaviour, not the males who apparently merely took the lead from the women. In a lecture to an audience in Liverpool in 1856 Reverend F. West proposed that: "Our social and moral character is chiefly of woman's formation, and in woman's keeping",[396] and it was a common theme in much of nineteenth-century conduct literature to place the burden of being

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[393] Mrs. Mary Martha Sherwood, *The Life and Times of Mrs. Sherwood (1775-1851)*, p. 234.
[394] Ibid., p. 228.
[395] Ibid., p. 232.
[396] Cited in Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair's *Public Lives*, p. 74.

responsible for maintaining society's high moral standards on women.[397] This notion, that if a woman behaved herself no man would ever dare force his attentions upon her, has echoes with what we discussed in Chapter Two; that women were safe to travel as long as they maintained a feminine and lady-like demeanour. It is curious that a gender which was supposed to have little authority in the outside world was also being portrayed as having complete control over her own destiny and strongly influencing people and events around her.

Although it does sound somewhat predatory to have hundreds of single women arriving at the quayside with the sole objective of acquiring a husband, the waiting men were not unaware of their aims or unreceptive to their advances. The lives of many men, at least those who did not already have a 'wife' of any complexion, were lonely and isolated, and many were eager to obtain some sort of female company. Emily Eden observed how: "There were several gentlemen at Kurnaul avowedly on the look-out for a wife"[398] and she recognised that the harsh demands of their careers made them particularly receptive to female company:

> I never saw anything so happy as the aides-de-camp were at Kurnal; flirting with at least six young ladies at once [...] I dare say after four months of marching, during which time they have scarcely seen a lady, that it must be great fun to come back to the dancing and flirtation, which is, as we all know, very considerable amusement at their age.[399]

Her sister Fanny's travel narrative describes in more detail the difficult conditions some of these men had to bear:

> some are quite alone, no other European within reach – and in a climate where for some months they can hardly get out of the house, and why they do not go melancholy mad I cannot conceive. Some do come back to Calcutta in a frightfully nervous state of health, some take to the life but then they grow

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[397] Pam Morris, ed., *Conduct Literature for Women 1770-1830*, vol. 1 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005), Introduction.
[398] Emily Eden, *Up the Country*, p. 340.
[399] Ibid., p. 271.

> dreamy and stupid [...] The Indigo planters are worse off still – some really forget how to speak English.[400]

Working under such difficult conditions no wonder so many men were keen to enjoy female company whenever possible, and the lack of available marriage partners at home ensured a steady stream of willing females. However, if it had not been for the organizational skills of the women stationed in India it would have been difficult for supply and demand to have come together. Without these women arranging parties and get-togethers the rules of etiquette and appropriate social behaviour would have prohibited much fraternization between the sexes.

The social life of the British in India was extremely important for morale and ensuring the sanity of isolated workers. It was also crucial that the men should be distracted away from the charms of the local females and prevented, if at all possible, from forming any 'undesirable' liaisons. The party season was the highlight of the year and almost all travellers to India, not only women, animatedly described the activities that went on. Fanny Parkes Parlby's enthusiasm is typical of many Indian travel texts: "The races are beginning, the theatre in high force, fancy-dress balls and dinner-parties on the tapis, water-parties to the botanical gardens, and I know not what."[401] However, although social interaction was important, the main objective for these gatherings was never very far from the thoughts of women travellers as Parlby revealed: "Allahabad is now one of the gayest, and is, as it always has been, one of the prettiest stations in India. We have dinner-parties more than enough; balls occasionally; a book society; some five or six billiard tables; a pack of dogs, some amongst them hounds, and (how could I have forgotten!) fourteen spinsters!"[402] The purpose of these events was to ensure that no female, or male for that matter, remained single at the end of the social season. Fanny Eden was very satisfied that her group was particularly efficient in this regard: "The ball was a

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[400] Fanny Eden, *Tigers, Durbars and Kings*, p. 61.
[401] Fanny Parkes Parlby, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*, p. 51.
[402] Ibid., p. 173.

most successful ball last night for oh, my dear, Beadon has proposed and we are so proud of having married our only young lady."[403]

Fanny Parkes Parlby, however, expressed some concerns about the pressures the single people were under: "We have weddings and rumours of weddings. The precipitate manner in which young people woo and wed is almost ridiculous; the whole affair, in many cases, taking less than a month. Many young gentlemen become papas before they have *lawfully* passed their years of infancy." Women writers often remarked on the haste with which engagements were made, although most agreed that the resulting marriages appeared to be quite successful as Parlby went on to explain: "Marrying and giving in marriage is, in this country, sharp, short, and decisive; and where our habits are necessarily so domestic, it is wonderful how happily the people live together afterwards."[404] However, Emily Eden's account does caution that perhaps it might have been wiser not to act so rashly, to think carefully before entering into a life-long commitment, and to take more time to consider one's options:

> Met Mrs. – and a newly-married couple, the husband being an object of much commiseration. Not but what he is very happy, probably, but he married the very first young lady that came up to the hills this season; she was 'uncommon ordinary' then, and nothing can look worse, somehow, than she does now. I dare say she is full of merit, but I merely wish to observe, for the benefit of your sons who may come out to India, that when they have been two or three years in a solitary station they should not propose to the very *first* girl they see. However, I dare say the –s are very happy, as I said before.[405]

It is interesting to note that Eden felt it necessary to warn the parents of the young men rather than the young men themselves, again indicating that men were not thought capable of acting wisely when it came to women.

Although most women's travel narratives appear to have been in favour of these social gatherings there were a few women who had some misgivings about

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[403] Fanny Eden. *Tigers, Durbars and Kings*, p. 72.
[404] Fanny Parkes Parlby, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*, p. 51.
[405] Emily Eden, *Up the Country*, p. 176.

their apparent lack of decency. Mary Martha Sherwood, characteristically, did not feel at ease at these events and expressed her reservations openly in her travel text: "In Indian parties I always thought that the preponderance of gentlemen made society uncomfortable; one gentleman among many ladies is less overpowering than one lady among many gentlemen."[406] Yet, in spite of not totally approving, Sherwood felt that even she was occasionally obliged to attend one of these functions. However, she stressed that she only did so because of the needs of others and not for her own pleasure: "But I found to my dismay that there is a rule in India that it is judged improper for single ladies to dance unless the ball is opened by a married one, and I found myself assailed on all sides by white jackets, and all the crescent-bearing sisters, to set them at liberty to amuse themselves in their own way, by going down one dance."[407] Sherwood was an exceptionally moral and highly religious woman, and consequently in her travel account she was especially concerned to ensure that her reputation was always above reproach. On the whole, though, most women travellers enjoyed describing the sexual intrigues arising from these social activities in their travel texts, particularly as their own reputations were not the ones being gossiped about and, as the objective of these events was to acquire a spouse, a little flirtatious conduct could be tolerated. It was a question of the end justifying the means.

There was, however, one particular social event in India where the moral status of the gathering was much more dubious, and this was an exhibition of dancing by nautch girls. Similar to the geishas of Japan, in that their lives conformed to a set of intricate rules and rituals, nautch dancers were girls from a range of social backgrounds whose lives from a very young age were dedicated to a particular temple. Their dancing attracted visitors whose donations and patronage greatly added to the wealth of the temple and ensured a high standard of living for the most successful girls. Although, according to their own particular principles, their lives were governed by a strict code of behaviour, they could not escape being associated with prostitution, especially as some brothels adopted nautch dancing as a front for their businesses. Consequently, many Western visitors to India found it difficult to

[406] Mrs. Mary Martha Sherwood, *The Life and Times of Mrs. Sherwood (1775-1851)*, p. 284.
[407] Ibid., pp. 312-3.

accept the different moral code adopted by the temple dancers, and various missionaries and social improvers campaigned to have these activities banned.[408] Mary Martha Sherwood's comments are typical of those women writers who were strongly critical of the nautch's alleged impropriety:

> The influence of these nautch-girls over the other sex, even over men who have been brought up in England, and who have known, admired, and respected their own country-women, is not to be accounted for. It is not only obtained in a very peculiar way, but often kept up even when beauty is passed. It steals upon those who come within its charmed circle in a way not unlike that of an intoxicating drug, being the more dangerous to young Europeans because they seldom fear it.[409]

Her orientalist tendencies are obvious as her comment "even over men who have been brought up in England" reveals that she believed Englishmen were of a superior moral character to any other nationality and should, therefore, have been able to withstand the charms of these sirens.[410]

Yet despite, or because of, the dissolute reputation of nautch dancing, many women travellers were fascinated rather than appalled by the idea of attending one of these displays, and their narratives show a completely different outlook towards the tradition. Mrs. Alan Gardner's observation sums up their alternative viewpoint:

> I must say I came to the nautch with some hesitation, and a vague idea there was a spice of impropriety about it. Never have I been so undeceived! The Nonconformist Conscience might have witnessed it undisturbed; and it is no exaggeration to say that a London ballet, after the strictest supervision by the County Council, is a wild orgy in comparison with the scene of staid respectability we witnessed tonight. The nautch-girls were swathed in long

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[408] Mary Carpenter, Annette Akroyd Beveridge, Margaret Noble (Sister Margaret) and Gillespie Cousins all battled to improve conditions for Indian women and discourage what they considered immoral activities.
[409] Mrs. Mary Martha Sherwood, *The Life and Times of Mrs. Sherwood (1775-1851)*, pp. 405-6.
[410] She draws on her personal experience to write a fictional account of a disastrous affair between a young Englishman and a temple dancer - *The History of George Desmond founded on facts which occurred in the East Indies, and now published as a useful caution to young men going out to that country* (Wellington, Salop: F. H. Houlston, 1821).

> robes which barely showed the tops of their feet, and even our London purists would have found it impossible to lengthen their skirts.[411]

Many women discovered that in practice these displays were far from being the racy and indecent exhibitions they anticipated. On the contrary, as Isabel Burton's text indicates, the girls appeared to be more respectable than performers in England: "You see in point of dress they are far more decent than our own ballet girls, and that even the Lord Chamberlain could not object to them."[412] However, rather than being relieved to discover this, many women's accounts expressed disappointment, and there is a general tone of dissatisfaction at the lack of eroticism on display. They also grumbled that many of the dancers, rather than being great beauties, were notably ugly, and this seemed to be a far greater offence than being immoral. Fanny Eden, however, was fortunate enough to be entertained by a very attractive dancer who helped alleviate her boredom:

> George was put down in the middle of the sofa, Emily and I evidently as his two wives, being also allowed a seat on it on each side, and then the nautch began, and the whole scene looked like the Arabian Nights put into life. One of the two principal nautch girls was so very pretty and graceful, though nothing could be less interesting than the dance, I never grew tired of looking at her.[413]

It is striking that so many women complained about the lack of sensuality and felt let down by the dancers' ordinariness (this has echoes of Emily Eden's earlier disappointment in the young gentlemen marrying plain ladies). The restrictions of their social lives in Britain would have meant that travel was a means for them to witness alternative life-styles impossible to encounter under any other circumstances. It is only to be expected, therefore, that they would have been excited at the prospect of being able to experience such an extraordinary event without endangering their precious reputations. It is also understandable that they would be

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[411] Mrs. Alan Gardner, *Rifle and Spear with the Rajpoots*, pp. 274-5.
[412] Isabel Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria,* vol. 1, p. 128.
[413] Fanny Eden, *Tigers, Durbars and Kings*, p. 81.

particularly disappointed if these activities failed to come up to their high expectations.

Many female travel writers also made similar complaints about the women of the harems of the Middle East and India who, rather than being the voluptuous and charismatic temptresses conjured up by the *Thousand and One Nights* and Byron's harem tales, were found to be "simply hideous and repulsive".[414] Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's glowing report of finding many of the women "as exactly proportioned as ever any goddess was drawn by the pencil of Guido or Titian", her observation that she had never in her life seen "so many fine heads of hair", and her conclusion that: "it must be owned that every beauty is more common here than with us. 'Tis surprising to see a young woman that is not very handsome", was not shared by many later female travellers.[415] Fanny Parkes Parlby complained when her idealistic expectations failed to be met: "I had heard so much of Mulka's wonderful beauty, that I felt disappointed."[416] Isabel Burton was even more critical of what she witnessed: "You are quite right, it is not *all* prepossessing – far from it. Those old women squatting on the floor, with about five hairs, dyed a bright orange colour, are really disagreeable. They have harsh voices, and they make an irritating noise." And Burton wryly concluded: "How thankful they ought to be for the veiling institution."[417]

Billie Melman's detailed investigation into British women's attitudes towards the sexual nature of the harems of the Middle East shows how the lack of sensuality and sexual activity in the harems left many women travellers with a feeling of regret and disappointment.[418] This excellent study provides an in-depth account of the changing attitudes of British women across two centuries. Melman has argued that the most important change in approach towards the harem in women's travel literature was the: "desexualisation of the Augustan notion of liberty and the

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[414] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess*, p. 18.
[415] Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Selected Letters*, pp. 91-6.
[416] Fanny Parkes Parlby, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*, p. 256.
[417] Isabel Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria,* vol. 1, p. 146.
[418] Billie Melman, *Women's Orients – English Women & The Middle East 1718-1918* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1995).

domestication of the Orient."[419] Nineteenth-century female travel writers increasingly saw the harem as an enlargement of the Victorian home rather than as places of sexual intrigue and immodest behaviour. Harems were gregarious places where the women not only resided with their children, their relations and their servants but they also entertained and conducted business in them. Admittedly, these women were part of a patriarchal system but they had adapted that system for their own benefit.

Reina Lewis, in *Gendering Orientalism – Race, Femininity and Representation,* agrees with Melman's conclusions, and shows how the domestication of the harem was represented in works of art produced by female painters. Focusing on pieces by Henriette Browne, Lewis describes how Browne reproduced: "the *haremlik* (the segregated quarters of women and children) as an 'image of the middle-class home'" and by doing so: "the exotic erotic fantasy harem of Ingres and Gérôme becomes a knowable domestic location."[420] This domestication of the harem in art and literature should have dispelled the popular images of the Orient in Western mythology although, to her surprise, Lewis found: "the persistence and longevity of hegemonic Orientalist tropes, even though it seems they were regularly disproved by readily available women's accounts."[421] It appears that despite the popularity of women's travel accounts, which de-mystified the operation of the harem, many people, including women, preferred to continue to believe in a magical world of intrigue and sensuality, even though the reality was far more prosaic.[422]

It is evident that the travel literature genre gave women writers some protection against being criticized for being immodest and vulgar if they addressed sexual matters in their travel narratives. It enabled them to discuss these issues providing they were in reference to people of a lower status, and to many Britons this meant people not only of a lower class but also those of a different nationality. However, this freedom did not extend to confessing to any of their own sexual

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[419] Ibid., p. 99.
[420] Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism – Race, Femininity and Representation* (London, Routledge: 1996), pp. 127-34.
[421] Ibid., p. 129.
[422] Chapter Four discusses the position of women and children in harems in more detail.

activities and it is rare to discover any travel text written in the nineteenth century by a woman in which the author admitted to having an association of a sexual nature.

Occasionally, however, some travel accounts do provide an intriguing glimpse into the private life of the female traveller and reveal that at least some women were prepared to acknowledge that there was the possibility of having a sexual relationship, even if it never actually came to anything. On her trip to the Rocky Mountains in 1873 Isabella Bird developed an association with Jim Nugent, a wild and infamous Indian scout, with a reputation for excessive drinking and violent mood swings; hardly a suitable companion for a middle-class, forty-one year old spinster suffering from poor health. It would appear that it was quite a complex relationship, with Bird admitting how her: "soul dissolved in pity for his dark, lost, self-ruined life."[423] Yet, in spite of vehemently condemning his lifestyle, she was still attracted to him and prepared, to a limited extent, to write about their relationship in her travel literature.

More of Bird's feelings are revealed in her unpublished letters to her sister, where her language is much less restrained. In one she wrote that Nugent had: "discovered that he was attached to me and it was killing him [...] I was terrified. It made me shake all over and even cry. He is a man any woman might love, but no sane woman would marry."[424] However, from her published account, she does not give such an emotional picture of their relationship, and most of her comments about him are framed in the language of religion. Even when she is describing an intimate moment at a dance (which she hastily reassures her readers was "most respectable" because the majority were "married people" and there was "no drinking at all"), where Nugent is reciting his poetry to her, Bird dispels the sexual charge of their encounter by urging upon him: "the necessity of a reformation in his life, beginning with the giving up of whisky". She also appeals for God to show him mercy and forgiveness: "as I looked at him, I felt a pity such as I never before felt for a human being. My thought at the moment was, Will not our Father in heaven, 'who spared us not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all,' be far more pitiful?"[425] Whilst

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[423] Isabella Bird, *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, p. 243.
[424] Ibid., p. xvi.
[425] Ibid., pp. 293-4.

seeming to be liberal by discussing her relationship with Nugent, she was also able to mitigate any accusations of improper conduct such revelations might attract by her regular references to religion and her affirmation that their relationship had no serious future.

In one respect Bird could be said to have breached spheres in her narrative. As this investigation has maintained, female writers were extremely reluctant to discuss their own sexual relationships in their travel literature and, as shall become clear shortly, male writers were generally much more relaxed when talking about their relationships. Therefore Bird's inclusion of her relationship with Nugent in her travel text has more in common with male travel narratives than female travel narratives. However, Bird did not really breach feminine discourse as she was careful to ensure that her text presented her association with this wild man as 'decent' and 'proper' at all times. Even at the close of the account there is no tearful goodbye, nor is there much emotion in her language when she relates what became of him after she left. Her only reference is in a footnote:

> Some months later "Mountain Jim" fell by Evans's hand, shot from Evans's doorstep while riding past his cabin. The story of the previous weeks is dark, sad, and evil. Of the five differing versions which have been written to me of the act itself and its immediate causes, it is best to give none.[426]

To a modern readership this rather passionless footnote is hardly a fitting final comment to write about the death of a man who had made one: "shake all over and even cry". Yet it shows that, although it is difficult to find evidence of romantic relationships in the source material, some women did have relationships on their travels. These relationships were probably rarely consummated but they were certainly very emotional and highly charged. However, because of the risks to their reputations, most women felt unable to reveal too much, if anything, about them in their published accounts.

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[426] Ibid., p. 287.

There is, however, one text written by a woman in which the author was prepared to provide a more honest account of her relationships with the opposite sex than has been seen in any other female travel narrative from the nineteenth century. From the age of sixteen in 1878 until her death in 1939 Margaret Fountaine kept a detailed diary of her travels around the world in which she provided a relatively frank description of her relationships with men, regardless of how successful they were or how scandalous her behaviour. The early chapters contain references to several juvenile infatuations, ranging from a succession of imaginary love affairs to a detailed account of her very passionate relationship with Septimus Hewson, an Irish chorister at Norwich Cathedral. Her attempts to form a lasting relationship with Hewson show a complete disregard of conventional nineteenth-century feminine behaviour, and this seems to typify most of her relationships with the opposite sex.[427]

Fountaine's literary style in *Love Among the Butterflies* is somewhat crude and often melodramatic, but it nevertheless demonstrates considerably more openness about sexual relations between the sexes than most texts of the period, and it does give a particular insight into the dreams and hopes of one individual. Her twenty-eight year relationship with Khalil Neimy, whom she initially hired as a guide to escort her around Damascus, is of particular interest.[428] This romance was also not conventional. Neimy was not only foreign (he was a Syrian dragoman), and a much younger man, but he was also married. However, she did not omit these facts from her narrative or attempt to disguise them with humour. Although she used a very florid style and had a tendency to get carried away with the romance of their encounters, she did describe her deepest feelings and openly acknowledged her passion for him:

> When Khalil came in next morning and folded me in his arms – while I feebly expostulated because I was still only in my night-gown and dressing-

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[427] She wrote begging letters to him, arranged secret assignations (to which he never came), sent money to pay off his debts, made excuses for his alcoholism, and even followed him to Ireland where he had fled to escape his debtors. Margaret Fountaine, *Love Among the Butterflies*.

[428] Although, technically, this relationship took place during the first three decades of the twentieth century, she continued to employ the same narrative style she had used in the descriptions of her previous affairs. She met Neimy in 1901 and they spent almost twenty-eight years together until his death in 1929.

gown – my whole heart went out to him. He carried me in his arms across the room, and laid me on my bed, and when he lay over me the weight of his body was sweet to me now, because I loved him. We went very near the brink, but I knew that if I gave him all he asked, all I now longed to give him, I might find myself in a condition which would compel me to implore him to marry me; for my power was infinite only so long as I withheld from him what he most desired.[429]

Despite this overdramatic description she was not so infatuated that she did not recognise their social differences: "I sank lower than I had ever sank before; the very audacity of the man overcame my sense of all that was right and proper."[430] She also appreciated that her behaviour, if exposed, would be shocking to her peers:

> It has been said that all women are born actresses, which is, I think, quite true. And as I sat talking to Miss Stockwell I was again a high-minded, honourable Englishwoman; the thought that on the previous day I had almost sunk to the level of being the mistress of my dragoman could not live in the pure atmosphere of the British Syrian School House.[431]

Yet, irrespective of the social, racial, marital, and age differences, she continued to have a sexual relationship with this man for almost twenty-eight years. However, she did attempt to justify some of her disregard for social conventions by explaining that as his marriage was not a loving relationship based on mutual affection, it should not be a reason to terminate their affair:

> After this, any latent self-reproach I might have felt entirely vanished, for I had not usurped his wife's place in his affections. I had not deprived her of her husband's love, for he had never loved her, and what is more neither had she apparently ever loved him. We might be happy, Khalil and I together, and do no injury to anyone. Now I knew the whole story, I could feel no more scruples with regard to our present relationship, for was he not my husband in all but name? and did we not every day swear eternal fidelity to

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[429] Margaret Fountaine, *Love Among the Butterflies*, pp. 137-138.
[430] Ibid., p. 122.
[431] Ibid., p. 122.

each other? The world would not recognise our ties, so the world must never know.[432]

And the world did not know until 1978. Following her death in 1939, under the terms of her will, her diaries were sent in a sealed box to Norwich Museum with instructions it was not to be opened until one hundred years after they commenced. She knew her revelations would scandalize her peers, and so she refused to have her material published whilst there was the slightest chance of any of her acquaintances still being alive. However, the fact that she left her diaries to a public institution is a clear indication that she wanted their contents to be read by the public one day, and from the contrived and rather sensational way in which they were written she undoubtedly intended them to have an audience.[433]

Although Fountaine's text was not published during her life-time, it is still an important source of evidence that British women were able to form relationships with foreign men in the course of their travels. Unfortunately the pressures of feminine discourse prevented most women from discussing them in the public forum of a travel text. It is easy to appreciate why women avoided discussing their own sexual behaviour in their travel accounts. In her account of life in the Rocky Mountains Isabella Bird summed up the stress women were under to maintain high moral standards: "the influence of woman is second only in its benefits to the influence of religion, and where the last unhappily does not exist the first continually exerts its restraining power."[434] Women who travelled unaccompanied by a male escort exposed themselves to being criticized as unfeminine and also risked being considered immoral. It is not difficult, therefore, to understand why they tried to reassure their readers about their strength of moral character. As Sarah Ellis warned her female readers in her 1842 conduct book, when it came to matters of love and sex: "There are few subjects which present greater difficulties [...] to female

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[432] Ibid., p. 155.
[433] She also copied her daily journals into ledger-like manuscript volumes every April and it was these 'edited' versions that she left to the museum.
[434] Isabella Bird, *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, p. 286.

writers."[435] And Fountaine's refusal to publish her account for a century is perhaps an indication of just how long she believed it would take for British society to be willing to accept a more direct approach to sexual issues from its female writers.

3.3 The Portrayal of Sexual Relationships in Male Travel Literature

Examination of the source material has shown that female travel writers were generally hesitant about discussing sexual matters in their travel accounts unless they felt themselves to be in a position of superiority, whether that perceived advantage was as a result of class, race or simply because they were a married woman among single females. The influence of feminine discourse pressurized them into conforming to society's expectations that they should write in a ladylike manner and, therefore, refrain from addressing 'inappropriate' subjects in their literary material. But, without the pressures of feminine discourse, did the texts written by male travel writers address sexual issues any differently?

There is a strong similarity between the female texts discussed above and many of the travel texts written by male writers in that the authors were prepared to comment on the sexual behaviour of the local people they encountered on their journeys. William Hazlitt discovered on his tour of Europe in the 1820s that certain sexual customs of the upper classes had not changed very much from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's time, observing how: "*Cicisbeism* is still kept up in Italy." Although Hazlitt claimed to have "nothing to say in favour of that anomaly in vice and virtue" it is difficult to accept his disapproval as genuine, particularly as all parties seemed to be perfectly content with the arrangement, and he concluded it "often lasts for life".[436]

It was not only European travel texts where male authors were prepared to comment on sexual matters, as the country being visited appears to have made little

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[435] Sarah Ellis, *The Daughters of England,* p. 313.
[436] William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey Through Italy and France* (USA: Chelsea House Publishers, 1983), p. 250. (Cicisbeism is an authorized relationship between a married woman and her lover).

difference to whether or not these issues were discussed. Accounts written about visits to places as diverse as Africa, North America and the Middle East all referred to sexual issues. Mungo Park's account of his travels into the interior of Africa contains considerable detail on how the local tribes attempted to attract the opposite sex:

> I found a great crowd surrounding a party who were dancing by the light of some large fires, to the music of four drums, which beat with great exactness and uniformity. The dances, however, consisted more in wanton gestures than in muscular exertion or graceful attitudes. The ladies vied with each other in displaying the most voluptuous movements imaginable.[437]

Although not finding the dancing to his own taste, Park did admit that it was a very popular mating ritual with the Mandingos. And, whilst on a visit to North America, Rudyard Kipling discovered that in Vermont the winter custom of making maple syrup was a fantastic opportunity for the sexes to fraternize:

> Afterwards (this is the time of the 'sugaring-off parties') you pour the boiled syrup into tins full of fresh snow, where it hardens, and you pretend to help and become very sticky and make love, boys and girls together. Even the introduction of patent sugar evaporators has not spoiled the love-making."[438]

He was not at all disapproving of their enjoyment; on the contrary he sounds rather envious. Similarly, Richard Burton was not shocked but highly amused by the sexual frivolities he observed, even at serious religious events, during his pilgrimage to Al Medinha and Meccah: "Yet, even on this solemn occasion, there is, they say, not a little flirtation and love-making; parties of policemen are posted, with orders to interrupt all such irregularities, with a long cane; but their vigilance is notoriously not up to the task."[439]

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[437] Mungo Park, *Travels*, p. 49.
[438] Rudyard Kipling, *Letters of Travel (1892-1913)* (London, Macmillan & Co, Ltd., 1920), p. 10.
[439] Richard Francis Burton, *The Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al Medinha & Meccah*, vol. 1, p. 116.

There was little criticism of sexual promiscuity in male travel literature, irrespective of the location or the period. Most accounts treated these activities with good humour and the authors appear to have enjoyed writing about them. Lovell James Procter's attitude is typical of most male travellers. When describing the sleeping arrangements of the natives from his own group on an expedition across central Africa in the 1860s he observed: "The men & women of course have their separate huts, but they mutually appeared to mistake the locality on very many occasions – almost every night."[440] Procter's light-hearted and gently satirical tone, although representative, is somewhat startling: as the leader of a missionary expedition one might have expected him to have taken a slightly more disapproving position in his published travel account but he, like Burton, also appears to have relished discussing sexual matters in his narrative and there is little evidence of any embarrassment in his text.

Both male and female travel writers discussed the sexual practices of local people in their texts although, generally, male writers took a less censorious position than female writers. Female writers were much more judgmental in their approach to these activities and did not use humour to any great extent; nor did they usually give the impression that they enjoyed observing the locals' sexual pursuits or that they condoned what they witnessed. This approach is understandable given that women were supposed to be the arbiters of all things moral and would have felt under enormous pressure to convey an image of respectability and high moral character. However, both genders seem to have taken a similar approach to sex in texts written about journeys to India. For example, like numerous women travellers, many men expressed very strong views regarding mixed-race relationships in their travel narratives and also recognized the important role of British social customs.

Most travel accounts relating to experiences of life in India commented on how, as a result of the remoteness of Indian life, the men living there were particularly vulnerable to falling prey to temptations of the flesh. We have already discussed evidence which shows that some female travellers to the region had a great

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[440] Lovell James Procter, *The Central African Journal of Lovell J. Procter* (Boston: African Studies Center, Boston University, 1971), p. 118.

appreciation of how difficult the men's lives could be, and many male travellers also shared this empathy. Thomas Skinner's remarks are typical of many Indian travel narratives written by men in the nineteenth century. In the account of his trip in the 1830s he witnessed the promiscuous nature of the men stationed there:

> The lower classes of Hindoos have, I am grieved to say, little encouragement to believe, from the example of their equals among our countrymen. The self-indulgence that the heat of the climate in some degree may excuse sinks, among the lower order of Europeans, into coarsest immorality. Although the discipline of the troops is as high as possible, there are few services more irksome to the feelings of a British officer, and none less appreciated, than a tour of duty in the East Indies. It is not a light occupation to hold constantly the bridle on licentiousness and crime.[441]

Skinner's remarks are in reference to the "lower classes" and, yet again, men are portrayed as having uncontrollable sex-drives; even with their army training which should have offered them some resistance they were still unable to restrain their sexual impulses. Skinner's account also reveals that, like the majority of British travel writers, he believed the natives looked to the British as examples of correct behaviour, and their lack of moral fibre he felt reflected badly on them all.

However, although Skinner criticized some of the men for their rather dubious romantic entanglements, he was less critical of those who formed lasting relationships with local women and he reluctantly accepted mixed-race marriages: "Half-caste women are frequently chosen by the British soldiers for their wives, and I believe they make extremely good ones." His approval of mixed-race marriages was, he explained, because: "In habits and morals, I am sorry to say, they are far before our own countrywomen of the same class in the East." Skinner, like John Stedman seen above, compared the behaviour of European women with that of the local girls and he also concluded that European "marriages are not half so commendable, for the half-caste women generally behave with greater propriety."[442] It was a recurring theme in travel literature that the morals of Europeans, particularly

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[441] Thomas Skinner, *Excursions in India,* vol. 1, pp. 135-6.
[442] Ibid., pp. 215-6.

those of European females, tended to be quite lax compared to those of other nations. Margaret MacMillan, whilst researching the women of the Raj, discovered how Lord Curzon was very reluctant to give permission for his troops to visit Britain in order to attend the official functions which had been arranged to commemorate Queen Victoria's jubilee as:

> the 'woman' aspect of the question is rather a difficulty, since strange as it may seem English women of the housemaid class, and even higher, do offer themselves to these Indian soldiers, attracted by their uniform, enamoured of their physique, and with a sort of idea that the warrior is also an oriental prince.[443]

Skinner's guarded support of mixed-race relationships, however, only applied to the lower classes. Where officers were concerned he was much less in favour, but he did recognise that they took place. He attempted to justify the officers' behaviour by claiming that it was as a consequence of the extreme conditions and severe hardships of their lives on the sub-continent, and not because of any particular libidinous inclination, that they were compelled into forming associations with local women. Skinner explained that in Meerut, which was one of the largest stations in the region, there was only one single British woman and therefore the officers had little option but to interact with local females:

> The desolate situations young men are often reduced to, placed by themselves in remote districts, with no family within many miles, and no prospect of returning to England till at least declined into the vale of years, are almost enough to make them forget that they have a 'home beyond the sea,' deeply as that circumstance is generally inscribed upon the heart.[444]

Unlike the men of the lower classes, who Skinner depicted as behaving with the "coarsest immorality" and being full of "licentiousness and crime", the higher

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[443] Margaret MacMillan, *Women of the Raj* (German Democratic Republic: Thames & Hudson, 1988), p, 106.
[444] Thomas Skinner, *Excursions in India*, vol. 2, p. 220.

classes were shown to associate with local women only as a last resort and when they had "no prospect of returning to England".

Most male travel writers accepted that it was inevitable, if regrettable, that British men overseas would strike up relationships with local women. However, although it was tolerable for the lower classes to engage in these associations it was extremely regrettable if the higher classes developed any "unfortunate connexions".[445] Bishop Reginald Heber's lengthy assessment of the situation is particularly revealing:

> I was talking today with Dr Smith on the remarkably diminutive stature of the women all over India, - a circumstance extending, with very few exceptions, to the female children of Europeans by native mothers; and observed that one could hardly suppose such little creatures to be the mothers or daughters of so tall men as many of the sepoys are. He answered, that the women whom we saw in the streets and fields, and those with whom only, under ordinary circumstances, Europeans could form connexions, were of the lowest caste, whose growth was stinted from an early age by poverty and hard labour, and whose husbands and brothers were also, as I might observe, of a very mean stature. That the sepoys, and respectable natives in general, kept their women out of our way as much as possible; but that he, as a medical man, had frequently had women of the better sort brought to him for advice, whose personal advantages corresponded with those of their husbands, and who were of stature equal to the common run of European females.[446]

As a consequence of the strict rules governing fraternization between the sexes in India, European men could usually only form relationships with women "of the lowest caste" as, irrespective of their social rank, it was almost impossible for them to come into contact with Indian women from reputable families. Therefore it was inevitable, many believed, that any offspring resulting from relationships with the lower orders would be physically underdeveloped or unhealthy. This was one reason why officers were not encouraged to have mixed-race relationships, as their supposedly superior bloodlines would be polluted by associations with these lower

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[445] Ibid., p. 220.
[446] Reginald Heber, *Bishop Heber in Northern India*, p. 284.

caste foreign women. Heber's remarks reveal the developing interest and fascination in the subject of eugenics during the nineteenth century, and reflect the common assumption that the lower classes were physiologically, physically and socially 'inferior' to their 'betters'.[447] Another interesting point exposed by this extract is that "the sepoys, and respectable natives in general, kept their women out of our way as much as possible". This comment reveals the presence of a sort of Occidentalism rather than Orientalism, as it shows Indians assuming that they were superior to the British rather than the other way around: they did not want their women being contaminated by contact with British men.

The days when inter-racial relationships were encouraged, by both nationalities, belonged, primarily, to the previous century. William Dalrymple's well-researched and evocative history of the relationship between Britain and India during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century reveals how the nature of this association changed over time. Beginning his investigation at the start of the East India Company's involvement in the region Dalrymple found that "the success of the East India Company in its formative years depended as much on contacts across lines of race and religion as it did on any commercial acumen" and that this had led it to encourage its senior employees to form intimate relationships with the daughters of Indian noblemen.[448] However, as time passed and:

> as British power steadily increased, and that of the Mughals gradually declined, the incentives to cross cultures for financial betterment steadily diminished [...] and with it the attitudes of the British in India were beginning to change too. With their new confidence and growing power, the British cities of the coast were becoming more and more un-Indian.[449]

Although the changes occurred at different rates across the country eventually:

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[447] This contrasts with Bodichon's view discussed earlier that mulatto women were physically superior to American white women.
[448] William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India* (London: Harper Collins, 2002), p. 17.
[449] Ibid., pp. 27-8. The East India Company was not alone in this. Similar commercial organizations also launched their enterprises by promoting relationships with local women, e.g. The Hudson Bay Company. However, once commercial ties were entrenched these personal ties were usually discouraged.

All over India, as the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth, attitudes were changing among the British. Men who showed too great an enthusiasm for Hinduism, for Indian practices or even for their Indian wives and Anglo-Indian children, were finding that the climate was growing distinctly chilly.[450]

As the atmosphere changed from one of cooperation and mutual advancement to one of evangelical fervor and imperial zeal, and as increasing numbers of single British females arrived in India looking for a husband, the time when British men could indulge in inter-racial relationships and Indian cultural traditions was over. As George Otto Trevelyan wistfully observed in his account of life in India in the 1860s:

> The days of corruption have long passed away. The hands of a civil servant are as pure and white as his summer trousers. Men have learned to resist the temptations to indolence and dissipation. They drive dog-carts instead of being driven in coaches, and very much prefer a gallop across the country to snoozing about in a palanquin. They walk up partridges, and ride down hogs, and no longer relax their minds with hazard and cock-fighting. Honest dancing has driven out the vicarious nautch, an amusement the moral tendency of which might be called into question. A quiet pipe in the verandah after dinner has succeeded to the eternal omnipresent hookah, and habitual indulgence in brandy-pawnee is no longer allowed to be respectable.[451]

By the middle of the nineteenth century mixed-race relationships in India, at least among the higher classes, seldom occurred. However, writing earlier in the century and on a different continent Henry Nelson Coleridge uncovered a different attitude towards mixed-race relationships during his tour of the West Indies in the 1820s: "there is no colony, with perhaps the exception of Grenada, where free-colored people are treated with so much justice as in St. Kitt's. There are instances here of respectable white and colored persons intermarrying, which is a conquest

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[450] Ibid., p. 49.

[451] George Otto Trevelyan, *The Competition Wallah* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1864), p. 242.

over the last and most natural of all prejudices."[452] Evidently, attitudes towards mixed-race relationships were not always negative and changed according to time and place.

Coleridge's narrative is also important because, along with Mary Martha Sherwood's, it is one of the few texts to criticize British men for their promiscuous behaviour whilst overseas. Not only did Coleridge censure the men for their callous actions but, like Bodichon and Hart, he also condemned British women as traitors to their sex for encouraging the men's attentions even when they were aware of the heartless manner in which they had treated other women in the past:

> Every one knows that the commissioned officers of His Majesty's army stand a far better chance with the fair sex than any other class of His Majesty's subjects...But though the garrison loves, the garrison does not marry [...] I dislike the man, swordsman or not, who deliberately trifles with the affections of a woman. I would rather shake hands with a highwayman than with a gentleman who has sacrificed to his own vanity the life-long happiness of an inexperienced girl. I fear this sort of conduct has never yet been sufficiently reprobated, and females too often betray the cause of their sex by accepting with pride the homage of a man, who has become notorious for the conquest and desertion of their sisters.[453]

Coleridge's comments are unusual, as generally travel accounts written by men did not concern themselves with the plight of the abandoned women or any resulting offspring. They were predominantly interested in how mixed-race relationships reflected badly on the men's characters, for the lower classes, and weakened the bloodline, for the higher classes. Therefore Coleridge's text is a valuable source for showing that some men, at least, were aware of the devastating impact their sex's actions could have on an "inexperienced girl".

We have discussed how most Indian travel narratives written by female writers contained detailed descriptions about the social life of the British community, and stressed the importance for British men and British women to have the opportunity to come together and develop relationships, particularly as it interfered

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[452] Henry Nelson Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, p. 218.
[453] Ibid., pp. 286-7.

with the men forming relationships with local women. Male travel accounts also frequently showed a great interest in these social occasions, and their texts are remarkably similar to those of the women. Thomas Skinner's narrative is a good illustration that men were also aware of the importance of these social events in obtaining 'appropriate' female company:

> It is now the month of October, and the cold season has commenced, which is generally the period of gaiety and amusement. We have dinners, plays, balls, and a large society, (about two hundred perhaps) with, however, an overwhelmingly majority of men. The early complaint of our settlers in India may still be reasonably urged in the upper-provinces – that there are no means of becoming husbands: in Meerut, which, as I have said, is the largest station, there is but one unmarried lady [...] I fancy there are at least one hundred and fifty single men.[454]

As we saw earlier Skinner used this shortage of British women as an excuse for the officers to enter into mixed-race relationships. Fortunately, the days when there was a limited supply of British female company were soon over, and by 1848 William Buyers was able to observe: "The passage round the Cape of Good Hope, so formidable to our ancestors, is now made every year by some hundreds of young ladies, fresh from boarding-schools, with as little apprehension as a London lady thinks it becoming to exhibit on a trip to Ramsgate."[455] This illustrates the impact that advances in sea travel and the changing attitudes towards single women travellers had on the social scene in India during the nineteenth century.

However, Sir William Sleeman pointed out that although the female situation had improved in Meerut this had brought other unforeseen problems. To his amazement he discovered that the women were "Up every night and all night at balls and suppers" and had "literally been fagging themselves to death with gaiety, at this the gayest and most delightful of all Indian stations" and, as a consequence of all this

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[454] Thomas Skinner, *Excursions in India,* vol. 2, pp. 219-20.
[455] William Buyers. *Recollections of Northern India; with Observations* (London: John Snow, 1848), p. 13.

exertion, they were "looking wretchedly ill".[456] Sleeman's description of the physical effort involved in these 'pleasurable' occasions was echoed by George Otto Trevelyan in his vivid portrayal of life in India in the 1860s:

> You probably never waltzed in full evening dress round the inner chamber of a Turkish bath, and therefore can have no conception of the peculiar charms of the dance in this climate. Terpsichore is a muse who loves shade, and zephyrs, and running streams; but not shade in which the thermometer stands at 93°, where the zephyrs are artificial, and the only running streams those on the faces of her votaries. The waste of tissue during a galloppe, with a partner in high training just landed from England, is truly frightful. The natives understand things better. They let the ladies do their dancing for them, and content themselves with looking on. I sometimes think that Orientals agree to consider women as chattels, in order to avoid the trouble of paying attentions to the sex. It cannot be denied, however, that this is very hard upon the women. Making love is no joke out here; though, in one sense, Indian lovers may all be said to be ardent. It is all very well in a humid northern atmosphere to talk of the torch of Cupid, and the flames which dart from the eyes of your mistress, and the genial glow of mutual affection; but on the tropic of Cancer these images acquire a horrible significance. Talk of dying for your sweetheart! [457]

Trevelyan's detailed description gives a very clear image of an aspect of British social life in India during the nineteenth century, and his narrative also highlights an important issue concerning the way that couples were brought together at these social events:

> A serious drawback to the enjoyment of an English ball is the impossibility of getting at any accurate information concerning your partners or your rivals [...] You apply to your hostess, who, inasmuch as she has brought together nearly five hundred pairs in the course of one evening, naturally wonders what young lady you can possibly refer to, but thinks she may be a distant relation who Mrs- asked leave to bring. [458]

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[456] Sir William Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 580.
[457] George Otto Trevelyan, *The Competition Wallah*, pp. 227-8.
[458] Ibid., pp. 231-3.

His concerns are similar to Emily Eden's discussed earlier, as she was also anxious about the rashness of some of the engagements she witnessed when little was known about character and background of the people involved.

The passion observed in the women at these gatherings by Sleeman, Trevelyan and other male travel writers mirrors the comments made by many female travellers who also portrayed these public engagements as being enthusiastically received by the British community. There can be little doubt that for both sexes these events were extremely important social occasions, especially as for many their lives and future happiness depended upon their forming lasting relationships. They were so central to British life in India that, regardless of gender, most writers chose to discuss them in their travel texts and both sexes elected to write about them in remarkably similar ways.

There was little opportunity for fraternization between British travellers and Indian women but one section of the female community to which male and female travellers to India had equal access was nautch dancers. In common with a number of female travel writers some men also expressed a slight apprehension at the prospect of attending one of these shows. Bishop Heber, for example, was concerned that the exhibition might be inappropriate for a gentleman in his position. However Heber, and numerous other travellers, found that the dancing was not as improper as he had anticipated:

> After we had been here a few minutes a set of dancing-girls entered the room followed by two musicians. I felt a little uneasy at this apparition, but Dr Smith, to whom I mentioned my apprehensions, assured me that nothing approaching indecency was to be looked for in the dances or songs which a well-bred Hindoo exhibited for his visitors. I sat still, therefore, while these poor little girls, for they none of them seemed more than fourteen, went through the same monotonous evolutions which I had heard my wife describe, in which there is certainly very little grace or interest, and no perceptible approach to indecency.[459]

[459] Reginald Heber, *Bishop Heber in Northern India*, p. 241.

It is noteworthy that Heber's wife had attended a dance before him, and that she had reassured him it would have "no perceptible approach to indecency." One might have assumed that Heber would have investigated the morality, or lack of it, prior to his wife going rather than the other way around, especially as he obviously suspected that there was something slightly dubious about the practice, but he allowed his wife to determine whether it was proper for him to attend.

Few travel accounts, by either men or women, were complimentary about the nautch dancing, other than observing that on the whole they were very proper and completely decent displays. Most remarked that the performances lacked any sexual associations; the girls were fully clothed not half-naked, the movements clumsy not sensuous, the music jarring not moving, and, worst of all, some of the girls even dared to be ugly. However, rather than this being a positive outcome most narratives expressed disappointment and regret. The general consensus, by both sexes, was that nautch dances were extremely boring events, lacked any hint of sensuality and should be avoided by future travellers.

Previously we saw that female writers felt more able to talk about sexual issues in their travel narratives if they could disguise their curiosity by claiming a sort of scientific interest in the subject. Occasionally male travel writers also used this technique to obtain a more intimate and detailed understanding of the local women with whom they came into contact on their travels. Unlike Mungo Park who, as will become clear later, found the fattening-up practice of Arab females extremely repulsive,[460] John Hanning Speke was fascinated by the custom and relished the opportunity of talking about it in his text:

> She was another of those wonders of obesity, unable to stand excepting on all fours. I was desirous to obtain a good view of her, and actually to measure her, and induced her to give me facilities for doing so, by offering in return to show her a bit of my naked legs and arms. The bait took as I wished it, and after getting her to sidle and wriggle into the middle of the hut, I did as I promised, and then took her dimensions as noted below.[461]

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[460] Arab females were fed a high-fat diet from childhood as larger women were highly-prized and admired for their beauty in Arab society.
[461] John Hanning Speke, *Journal*, p. 189.

Rather than being disgusted by this practice, Speke was pleasantly struck with the woman's "extraordinary dimensions" which gave her a "pleasing beauty", even though "She could not rise; and so large were her arms that, between the joints, the flesh hung down like large, loose-stuffed puddings."[462] Speke's procedure for obtaining data was not particularly systematic or empirical. Clearly it was not very scientific to flirt with one's subject in order to gather information, and his approach was not disinterested or his language impartial. However, his method was effective as it did enable him to discover intimate details of at least one female on his journey.

Sir Francis Galton during his trip across South Africa also used science as justification for taking a keen interest in a Hottentot female who caught his eye:

> I profess to be a scientific man, and was exceedingly anxious to obtain accurate measurements of her shape; but there was a difficulty in doing this. I did not know a word of Hottentot, and could never therefore have explained to the lady what the object of my foot-rule could be; and I really dared not ask my worthy missionary host to interpret for me. I therefore felt in a dilemma as I gazed at her form, that gift of bounteous nature to this favoured race, which no mantua-maker, with all her crinoline and stuffing, can do otherwise than humbly imitate. The object of my admiration stood under a tree, and was turning herself about to all points of the compass, as ladies who wish to be admired usually do.[463]

The fact that Galton was unwilling to request help from his interpreter indicates that he was conscious that his attention would have seemed improper to a bystander, especially a missionary. However, he was not so embarrassed by his fascination that he omitted the incident from his travel narrative, as he could justify it by claiming that he was "a scientific man"; presumably this reasoning would have failed to impress the "worthy missionary". Yet the language he used was not that of scientific detachment but of a much more personal, self-consciously literary, character, describing the woman as having a "bounteous nature", coming from a "favoured race", and being the "object of my admiration". These are not scientific terms, and

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[462] Ibid., p. 172.
[463] Sir Francis Galton, *The Narrative of an Explorer*, p. 88.

both Speke and Galton were not truly scientists, but neither appeared to be particularly concerned that their accounts lacked scientific rigour. Their alleged interest in anthropology and ethnography barely mask their acts of voyeurism and their fascination with the female form.

The evidence examined earlier in this chapter showed that although female travel writers were prepared to discuss other people's sexual behaviour they were reluctant to admit to having their own relationships with members of the opposite sex in their travel literature, even though there was a high probability that such relationships did take place. Having to maintain a reputation for being virtuous and respectable made it almost impossible for them to discuss their own relationships or to acknowledge the possibility that they might find the opposite sex sexually attractive. They could admire the male form in a disinterested, pseudo-scientific or artistic way, but they could not easily admit to being aroused or excited by it without putting their fragile reputations at risk. Male travel writers did not have this responsibility to the same extent. They did have racial and class pressures to deal with but, on the whole, men were not expected to behave to the same high moral standard as women and, therefore, they were able to be more forthright about sexual matters in their travel accounts.

Not only were male writers able to discuss the sexual activities of local people in their travel literature but they also had the freedom to comment on their own aspirations and hopes for romance. Unlike the majority of female travel writers, male travel writers were often happy to discuss their feelings about the opposite sex and seemed to relish the opportunity of describing how they flirted with some of the local women. John Hanning Speke good-humoredly discussed his interaction with some local tribeswomen he met on his journey: "Here the men and women of the place came crowding to see me, the fair sex playfully offering themselves for wives, and wishing to know who I admired most."[464] However, Speke was also very aware that engaging in a little flirtation would enable him more easily to obtain food and supplies along his journey; not a very romantic approach but perhaps a life-saving one.

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[464] John Hanning Speke, *Journal*, p. 105.

Speke tended to have a very pragmatic approach in his associations with local women; earlier we saw how he was prepared to offer glimpses of his "naked legs and arms" in exchange for a closer inspection of a Wahuma female so he could complete his 'scientific research'. His account contains no expression of true romantic feelings for these women, so he could never be accused of abandoning what most of his British readers would have considered as a position of superiority resulting from his status as an English gentleman. He flirted with them when he needed to achieve a particular objective. He even admitted to offering the prospect of sex as a bribe in order to get his men to work harder: "Indeed, to prevent my men ever thinking of matrimony on the march, as well as to incite them on through the journey, I promised, as soon as we reached Egypt, to give them all wives and gardens at Zanzibar, provided they did not contract marriages on the road."[465] This comment could also be interpreted as evidence of orientalist thinking as he was implying that his men could be easily manipulated by appeals to their baser instincts, whereas he was resilient enough to complete the journey without such incentives.

Generally, though, most male travellers were not quite this cynical when it came to discussing their flirtatious behaviour, and many were open and good-natured when talking about their involvement with the opposite sex. Their attitude towards sex does not appear to have changed very much during the period or to have been especially influenced by the country being visited. Henry Nelson Coleridge clearly enjoyed interacting with the local Creole females:

> Every Creole female loves dancing as she loves herself [...] there is more artlessness, more passion than is usual with us in England; the soft dark eyes of a Creole girl seem to speak such devotion and earnestness of spirit that you cannot choose but make your partner your sweetheart of an hour; there is an attachment between you which is delightful, and you cannot resign it without regret.[466]

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[465] Ibid., p. 96.
[466] Henry Nelson Coleridge, *Six Months in the West Indies*, p. 251.

Coleridge had a fantastic time flirting with the local females on his tour of the West Indies, and throughout his account he conveyed an unabashed interest in the opposite sex which he was very willing to share with the world at large.

There are also several male travel texts where the authors admitted to having more than a flirtatious relationship with local women. These men talked openly about engaging in serious, if not permanent, relationships with members of the opposite sex during their travels. George Borrow, for example, wrote in great detail about forming a strong bond with a Spanish lady:

> a woman of about thirty-five years of age, rather good-looking, and with a physiognomy every lineament of which bespoke intelligence of no common order. Her eyes were keen and penetrating, though occasionally clouded with a somewhat melancholy expression. There was a particular calmness and quiet in her general demeanour, beneath which, however, slumbered a firmness of spirit and energy of action which were instantly displayed whenever necessary. A Spaniard, and, of course, a Catholic, she was possessed of a spirit of toleration and liberality which would have done honour to individuals much her superior in station. In this woman, during the remainder of my sojourn in Spain, I found a firm and constant friend, and occasionally a most discreet adviser.[467]

What is extraordinary about this relationship is that Borrow was not only prepared to discuss having an intimate, if not sexual, association with a local woman but he was also full of admiration for a Roman Catholic. Most British travel literature of the period was severely critical of Roman Catholicism and its followers. Borrow was also on a mission to convert the Spanish Catholics to English Protestantism, so it is astonishing that he would talk openly about forming a close relationship with a single Catholic woman whilst on a religious quest.

Notwithstanding the abundance of evidence of flirtations and romantic entanglements in male travel literature, not every local female was likely to be thought of in positive sexual terms. Male accounts regularly described encounters with the opposite sex where there was little, or no, chance of romance, ostensibly

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[467] George Borrow, *The Bible in Spain*, pp. 256-7.

because of a lack of physical attraction. Mungo Park, unquestionably, did not find the women he met on his tour of Africa particularly appealing:

> The Moors have singular ideas of feminine perfection. The gracefulness of figure and motion, and a countenance enlivened by expression, are by no means essential points in their standard; with them, corpulence and beauty appear to be terms nearly synonymous. A woman, of even moderate pretensions, must be one who cannot walk without a slave under each arm to support her, and a perfect beauty is a load for a camel. In consequence of this prevalent taste for unwieldiness of bulk, the Moorish ladies take great pains to acquire it early in life; and for this purpose, many of the young girls are compelled by their mothers to devour a great quantity of kouskous, and drink a large bowl of camel's milk every morning [...] This singular practice, instead of producing indigestion and disease, soon covers the young lady with that degree of plumpness which, in the eye of a Moor, is perfection itself.[468]

Evidently Park did not find the results of this fattening-up tradition very arousing and, unlike Speke and Galton, did not express any scientific interest in the women. Similarly Speke thought the odour of the women of the Wahuma tribe less than attractive: "They smear themselves with rancid butter instead of macassar, and are, in consequence, very offensive to all but the negro, who seems, rather than otherwise, to enjoy a good sharp nose tickler."[469]

This lack of chemistry, however, worked both ways and several male travellers commented on their own apparent lack of sex appeal with the local females. In India Thomas Skinner: "overheard many remarks regarding our complexion that were not perfectly flattering."[470] And Richard Burton was extremely amused to find during his Central African journey in the 1850s that, as far as the local women were concerned, his body was far from alluring:

> About noon we entered the fine grain-fields that gird the settlements of Muhogwe, one of the most dreaded in dreaded Uzaramo. In our case, however, the only peril was the levee *en masse* of the fair sex in the villages,

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[468] Mungo Park, *Travels*, p. 116.
[469] John Hanning Speke, *Journal,* p.107.
[470] Thomas Skinner, *Excursions in India*, vol. 1, p. 248.

to stare, laugh, and wonder at the white men. 'What should you think of these whites as husbands?' asked Muinyi Wazira of the crowd. 'With such things on their legs? – Sivyo! – not by any means!' – was the unanimous reply, accompanied with peals of merriment.[471]

Numerous male travel writers unreservedly admitted that they could appear repulsive to foreign ladies, and acknowledged that the British idea of beauty was not necessarily universal. Alexander William Kinglake, during his journey around the Middle East in 1835, was not flattered to discover that, although he found the women of Gaza very attractive, they were intrigued rather than sexually attracted by his physical appearance:

> The women in groups were diverting themselves and their children with swings. They were so handsome that they could not keep up their yashmaks; I believe they had never before looked upon a man in the European dress, and when they now saw me in that strange phenomenon, and saw, too, how they could please this creature by showing him a glimpse of beauty, they seemed to think it more pleasant to do this, than to go on playing with the swings. It was always, however, with a sort of zoological expression of countenance that they looked on the horrible monster from Europe; and whenever one of them gave me to see for one sweet instant the blushing of her unveiled face, it was with the same kind of air as that with which a young timid girl will edge her way up to an elephant, and tremblingly give him a nut from the tips of her rosy fingers.[472]

This strongly sensuous paragraph is a strange reversal of most travel accounts as the narrator is portraying himself as a zoo animal, rather than the more usual orientalist view that it was the foreigners who were the exhibits. Travel narratives regularly depicted the author as being examined by the locals and exciting their curiosity, but Kinglake takes it a stage further. Rather than using animal terminology to represent everyone or, as was more common, solely the locals, on this occasion he refers only to himself in this way: the girls remain human. However, this does not undermine Kinglake's authority. On the contrary he continues to be in control. It is he who

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[471] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa,* vol. 1, p. 63.
[472] Alexander William Kinglake, *Eothen*, p. 275.

determines what happens next. The wild animal reference provides a hint of danger to the encounter as any sudden movement on his part would scare the girls away, thereby emphasising the sense of power he has over them.

The potential for male travellers to form a relationship with local women was not only undermined by physical incompatibilities. Some men thought the personalities of the opposite sex they met very unattractive. Anthony Trollope, for instance, complained that American women: "were generally hard, dry, and melancholy. I am speaking of course of aged females,- from five and twenty perhaps to thirty, who had long since given up the amusements and levities of life."[473] Obviously Trollope preferred his women to be more jovial, less severe and, it appears, very young. Others, such as Hugh Clapperton during his trip across the Bight of Benin, found the moral laxity of the Wawa women very off-putting:

> The virtue of chastity I do not believe to exist in Wawa. Even the widow Zuma lets out her female slaves for hire, like the rest of the people of the town. Neither is sobriety held as a virtue. I never was in a place in my life where drunkenness was so general. Governor, priest, and layman, and even some of the ladies, drink to excess. I was pestered for three or four days by the governor's daughter, who used to come several times in a day, painted and bedizened in the highest style of Wawa fashion, but always half tipsy; I could only get rid of her by telling her that I prayed and looked at the stars all night, never drank anything stronger than *roa-in-zafir*, which they call my tea, - literally hot water: she always departed in a flood of tears.[474]

The majority of male travel writers, however, tended not to be too critical of the different levels of morality exhibited by the locals, and promiscuous activity was usually treated with humour. Occasionally humour was even used to express the romantic expectations of the travellers themselves. William Makepeace Thackeray moaned in 1844 that although the men of Lisbon were: "well-dressed, manly, and handsome: so much cannot, I am sorry to say, be said for the ladies, of whom, with every anxiety to do so, our party could not perceive a single good-looking specimen

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[473] Anthony Trollope, *North America*, p. 143.
[474] Hugh Clapperton, *Journal*, p. 93.

all day."[475] Thackeray was not alone in his disappointment. Several male travel writers confessed to the public that, for a variety of reasons, they had been unsuccessful with the opposite sex. Alexander William Kinglake was gracious enough to praise the Bedouin women for their high moral standards, but disappointed not to find the beauties of the romantic tales he had read prior to his journey: "They may have been good women enough, so far as relates to the exercise of the minor virtues, but they had so grossly neglected the prime duty of looking pretty in this transitory life that I could not at all forgive them."[476] Alfred Dolman was equally direct about the lack of sexual chemistry between himself and the women of the Korranna and Tottie tribes whom he unflatteringly described as being: "not the most prepossessing in the world, and the ancient odours that appertained to them, spread around a delightful fragrance."[477] Both male and female travellers were, it seems, frustrated that the people they met on their travels were not as attractive as they had hoped, and openly expressed their disappointment in their travel literature.

The more generous travel writers sometimes conceded that beauty was a cultural concept, and that ideas of physical perfection varied from country to country. It was not fair, therefore, to criticize women of other nations just because they did not conform to British ideas of beauty. For example, Sir Rutherford Alcock observed that in order to fully appreciate the women of Japan: "One must be brought up from infancy to the manner, to be able to look upon their large mouths full of black teeth, and the lips thickly daubed with a brick-red colour, - and not turn away with a strong feeling of repulsion."[478] On the whole male travel writers tended to accept that customs differed around the world; after all one of the main reasons for travelling was to investigate new cultures, and men by and large accepted that ideals of beauty and standards of behaviour changed according to the particular country.[479] Alcock tried to explain the necessity for tolerance during his observations on the

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[475] William Makepeace Thackeray, *A Legend of the Rhine*, p. 94.
[476] Alexander William Kinglake, *Eothen*, pp. 218-9.
[477] Alfred Dolman, *In the Footsteps of Livingstone* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head Ltd., 1924), p. 153.
[478] Sir Rutherford Alcock, *The Capital of the Tycoon*, vol. 1, p. 80.
[479] As we saw earlier, Mary Shelley was also tolerant about differing standards of behaviour.

bathing customs of Japan. He noted that as far as the Japanese people were concerned mixed-bathing was a perfectly acceptable tradition: "I cannot help feeling there is some danger of doing great injustice to the womanhood of Japan, if we judge them by *our* rules of decency and modesty." On what grounds, Alcock asked, could the British object to this custom when "Fathers, brothers, and husbands all sanction it."[480]

Similarly, Rev. J.L.L. Thomas, also on a visit to Japan, contrasted how: "A European lady in evening dress makes a willing display of her neck and her arms", whereas her: "Japanese sister is careful to conceal the upper part of her body, but express with pride her well-formed little feet."[481] Sir William Sleeman's text also draws attention to the different standards of morality he observed on his trip to India in the 1840s:

> On our way we met a party of women and girls coming to the fair. Their legs were uncovered half-way up the thigh; but, as we passed, they all carefully covered up their faces. 'Good God!' exclaimed one of the ladies, 'how can these people be so very indecent?' *They* thought it, no doubt, equally extraordinary that she should have her face uncovered, while she so carefully concealed her legs; for they were really all modest peasantry, going from the village to bathe in the holy stream.[482]

Male travel writers frequently argued that racial prejudices should be put aside and foreign people should not be judged according to British values, and they often stressed that it was important for their readers to understand that different was not necessarily bad, and British was not necessarily best.

Travel accounts written by both male and female writers reveal that many of them were aware that because native customs differed from their own it was inevitable that once in a while their own behaviour would be considered improper. Previously we discussed how Indian women were upset by Fanny Parkes Parlby's conduct, and male writers too observed how actions that they took for granted were

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[480] Sir Rutherford Alcock, *The Capital of the Tycoon*, vol. 1, p. 253.
[481] Rev. J.L.L. Thomas, *Journeys Among the Gentle Japs*, p. 99.
[482] Sir William Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections,* p. 18.

sometimes deemed impolite by the locals. Mungo Park, for example, found that the Moors were shocked and highly offended by one of his customs:

> The Moors, accustomed to a loose and easy dress, could not reconcile themselves to the appearance of my *nankeen breeches*, which they said were not only inelegant, but, on account of their tightness, very indecent: and as this was a visit to ladies, Ali ordered my boy to bring out the loose cloak which I had always worn since my arrival at Benowm, and told me to wrap it close around me.[483]

Although it is common to find references to British behaviour being considered offensive (either intentionally or accidentally), Park's comment is unusual as generally references to 'improper' dress were made about female clothing, particularly if they adopted male attire; it is unusual for male standards of dress to be considered indecent.

Most male travel narratives acknowledged that different cultures had different standards of morality, but as William Hazlitt explained: "The rule for travelling abroad is to take our common sense with us, and leave our prejudices behind. The object of travelling is to see and learn."[484] There are few accounts written by male travellers which did not agree to a certain extent with Hazlitt's philosophy, and take a more relaxed approach to alternative life-styles. Occasionally, however, some men did admit to feeling slightly uncomfortable when they found themselves faced with people who had a different sense of morality. Whilst on a journey across France Robert Louis Stevenson was forced, because of the shortage of hotel rooms, to share his accommodation with another couple:

> The sleeping-room was furnished with two beds. I had one; and I will own I was a little abashed to find a young man and his wife and child in the act of mounting into the other. This was my first experience of that sort; and, if I am always to feel equally silly and extraneous, I pray to God it to be my last as well. I kept my eyes to myself, and know nothing of the woman except

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[483] Mungo Park, *Travels*, p. 101.
[484] William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey*, p. 89.

> that she had beautiful arms, and seemed no whit embarrassed by my appearance.[485]

Stevenson seems not to have been too perturbed by this encounter, as he was gently mocking his own British sensibilities rather than criticizing others for any lack of shame. Few male travel narratives were genuinely censorious, and any which were critical tended to be slightly tongue-in-cheek.

In spite of the numbers of texts which comment on the incompatibility between male travellers and local females, there are also many accounts which describe the men as having relationships with members of the opposite sex. However, rather than confessing to being carried away by the lure of the exotic many men tried to use logic to justify these associations. Several male travellers to Africa reported being given 'wives' by local chieftains in the course of their journeys and, because they did not want to offend their hosts, the travellers explained how they were coerced into accepting these offers. Sir Francis Galton's account of his explorations in South Africa shows how common a situation it was:

> It is really a great drawback to African explorings that a traveller cannot become on friendly terms with a chief without being requested and teased to receive a spare wife or a daughter in marriage, and umbrage taken if he does not consent. It is, I know, very ungallant to betray tender secrets, and I would not do so on any account, if the charming Chipanga was ever likely to read this book; but I cannot help hinting at the subject, as it not only illustrates a phase of African life, but also indicates a direction in which any adventurous fortune-hunter may successfully push his addresses.[486]

Galton accepts, he claims, the "charming Chipanga" under duress, but he is well aware that any prospective "adventurous fortune-hunter" might take advantage of this particular custom in order to help further them in their career.

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[485] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Travels with a Donkey, An Inland Voyage, The Silverado Squatters* (London: Everyman, 1996), p. 128.
[486] Sir Francis Galton, *The Narrative of an Explorer*, p. 220.

Hugh Clapperton was also presented with a female companion during his expedition into the interior of Africa:

> Yarro asked me if I would take his daughter for a wife; I said "Yes," after a great many thanks for my present. The old woman went out, and I followed with the king's head man, Abubecker. I went to the house of the daughter, which consists of several coozies separate from those of the father, and I was shown into a very clean one: a mat was spread: I sat down; and the lady coming in and kneeling down, I asked her if she would live in my house, or I should come and live with her: she said whatever way I wished: very well, I said, I would come and live with her as she had the best house.[487]

Like Galton, Clapperton does not appear to have been embarrassed by this relationship or to have felt that exposing it would be particularly shocking for his readers. Nor was this the only sexual association he wrote about in his account: "In the course of the day the prince offered me a young female slave, named Aboudah, for a wife! I accepted of her with gratitude, as I knew she would be serviceable to me on my journey".[488] Clapperton did not clarify exactly what he meant by "serviceable", leaving that up to his readers' imagination. He also did not say whether he still had his first 'wife', although as he had not mentioned her leaving one can only assume that she remained a part of his retinue. Clapperton, therefore, was possibly confessing to having his own small harem. Admitting to having a polygamous lifestyle was not common in male travel literature, but it is a good illustration of how some male travellers, at least, had more direct approach to sexual issues.

On occasion a few men were even prepared to acknowledge when these arranged relationships had problems. John Hanning Speke was very honest about his failure to endear himself to his new 'bride':

> he [the Chief] asked Bombay if it were true the woman he gave me ran away; and when Bombay told him, he said, 'Oh, he should have chained her for two

[487] Hugh Clapperton, *Journal*, p. 70.
[488] Ibid., p. 304.

> or three days, until she became accustomed to her residence; for women often take fright and run away in that way, believing strangers to be cannibals.'[489]

Speke does not appear to feel embarrassed at being presented with a female companion, or ashamed to confess that she ran away from him. Perhaps he was secretly pleased that he no longer had to be responsible for her, as he did not really approve of women on expeditions and actively discouraged his men from forming relationships until they completed their mission. Whatever the reason, his revelation is a good illustration of the more relaxed attitude to sexual matters held by many male travel writers in the nineteenth century, and a demonstration that it was relatively easy for men to address such topics, and even to discuss their own sexual adventures, successful or otherwise, in their travel narratives. The range of evidence we have investigated also demonstrates that neither the time nor the location appears to have had any significant impact on the men's approach as the way they addressed sexual issues in their travel literature remained noticeably consistent.

Conclusion

Unlike female travel writers, who were often rather circumspect when they addressed matters of a sexual nature, male travel writers were able to be much more open and direct when discussing sexual issues in their narratives. It does appear, therefore, that in this case the concept of separate spheres does apply, gender does have a significant impact on travel literature, and there is evidence to support Foster's idea that women travel writers had created a "female-oriented genre". It is, however, a complete reversal of the accepted reasoning behind the ideology of separate spheres as, although there are distinct differences in the way male and female travellers wrote about sexual issues in their travel literature, it is not women who wrote about these 'private' issues but men. Foster's premise has only been proven by women writers repressing their views on sexual matters, not by discussing

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[489] John Hanning Speke, *Journal*, p. 273.

them openly. It would be equally valid to argue that male travel writers had created a 'male-oriented genre', as, when it came to writing about sexual experiences, many were willing to include some information about them in their travel accounts.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Creation of a "new female-oriented genre"[490]

Introduction

The previous chapter began this two-part investigation into characteristics of travel literature that have been traditionally associated with female travel writing and the domestic sphere, specifically relationships. In Chapter Three the focus was on aspects of sexual attraction between men and women and we concluded that, although it was possible to identify distinct differences in the approach taken by male and female writers in their travel literature, we saw that these 'private' issues were discussed more readily by male writers than by female writers. In this chapter the focus will now turn towards examining family relationships, and look at how male and female writers dealt with these issues in their travel narratives. This will complete our investigation into topics usually associated with the domestic sphere, and should help us ascertain whether the ideology of separate spheres is relevant to the study of nineteenth-century travel literature.

When it came to discussing family relationships, particularly children and the role and status of wives and mothers, one would assume that feminine discourse would now have worked in women travel writers' favour and ensured that this was one area that they could monopolize; an area from which male travel writers were primarily excluded. Many academics have claimed that women writers had a specific agenda in their travel literature, including Shirley Foster who has asserted that:

> It is nevertheless possible to recognise a distinctive and overtly feminine voice in the women's texts, ways of seeing and recreating foreign experience which are clearly gender-related. First, there is the treatment of topics not generally explored in any depth in male travel writing. These include appearance, costume and manners of women; details of domestic life such as

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[490] Shirley Foster, *Across New Worlds*, p. 24.

> household management and culinary habits; behaviour towards children; marriage customs and female status; the importance of 'space' in the physical environment. All these often suggest a covert means of challenging the male norm and of establishing a new female-oriented genre.[491]

According to scholars of nineteenth century travel literature the home and family were supposed to be the prerogative of women. Therefore in the travel literature produced by female writers during the nineteenth century it should be possible to find ample evidence for Foster's "new female-oriented genre." A close examination of the texts, however, will show that this assumption is not correct, and that the picture is far more complex than has been previously argued.

4.1 Family Life in Female Travel Literature

Chapter Three discussed how, during the nineteenth century, there was an expanding awareness regarding matters of sexual attraction. Similarly, there was also a corresponding growth in interest in family issues. The nineteenth century, with the rise of the middle classes, the growth of evangelicalism, and the mounting interest in matters of health and eugenics, saw an increase in awareness of and investigation into the mechanisms of the family unit for a much broader range of social classes. The middle classes in particular became increasingly concerned with the operation of family life and the creation of the perfect family unit. Concepts, such as Coventry Patmore's 'Angel in the House' with its representation of women as ideal wives and mothers, became an important part of middle-class consciousness and were held up as role models to which middle-class women in particular were supposed to aspire.[492]

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[491] Ibid., p. 24.

[492] This image of the caring, selfless and faultless female was also represented in the fiction of the period through such characters as Milly Barton in George Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life* (London: Penguin Classics, 1973).

Academics such as Sidonie Smith, Sara Mills, and Shirley Foster, have concluded that throughout the nineteenth century female travel writers felt particularly comfortable when discussing the family relationships they observed in the course of their journeys. Smith has argued that women travellers were attentive: "to the social space of domesticity, the space to which bourgeois women were assigned."[493] Mills has also determined that: "It is not surprising therefore that women, because of socialisation, should consider relationships and interest in other people important, as these traits defined them as 'feminine' women."[494] Both of which supports the argument we saw earlier from Shirley Foster that women had, at last, found an area they could claim as their own, a "female-oriented genre." In the course of my research, however, whilst I have observed that often women travel writers were keen to describe a variety of domestic matters such as clothing, physical appearance and, to some extent, the local customs of the indigenous peoples, I have also found that there is not that much in-depth information regarding family relationships. This discovery came as a surprise given that we have been repeatedly told women were supposed to have if not a unique insight into the subject then at least a special empathy.

One possible explanation for this relative lack of data is that few female travel writers had their own traditional family set-up at home. Women who were single and free from responsibilities at home tended to make relatively few detailed observations of the family life of the indigenous populations they came into contact with in their travel accounts. It is predominantly women who travelled overseas with their own families who made any significant observations about family life, and even then they were generally more concerned with the experiences of their own family rather than with how local families operated in alternative societies. When their narratives did discuss family issues it was usually to comment about the way that foreign climes, cultures and traditions affected their own children, and not how they might have influenced the lives of the children born and raised there. Therefore these

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[493] Sidonie Smith, *Moving Lives*, p. 18.
[494] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 96.

accounts have a tendency to provide comparatively little information on how family relationships worked in different cultures.

Not all women's travel accounts, however, neglected family issues, and there were some women who provided important information on family life in their narratives. As a widow, with two children of her own, it is reasonable to assume that Anna Leonowens would be interested in family life, and her text does provide very detailed descriptions of the daily routines of the royal family at the Siamese court in the 1860s:

> On his Majesty's left were ranged, first, his children in the order of rank; then the princesses, his sisters; and, lastly, his concubines, his maids of honor and their slaves [...] Here he chatted with his favorites among the wives and concubines, and caressed his children, taking them in his arms, embracing them, plying them with puzzling or funny questions, and making droll faces at the babies: the more agreeable the mother, the dearer the child. The love of children was the constant and hearty virtue of this forlorn despot.[495]

In spite of this rather idyllic picture she obviously did not approve of the harem system or what she saw as the oppressive way the royal children were raised:

> A very stern thing is life to the children of royalty in Siam. To watch and be silent, when it has most need of confidence and freedom,- a horrible necessity for a child! The very babe in the cradle is taught mysterious and terrible things by the mother that bore it, - infantile experiences of distrust and terror, out of which a few come up noble, the many infamous. Here are baby heroes and heroines who do great deeds before our happier Western children have begun to think.[496]

However, although her narrative is very detailed, it only provides information about the royal family. Her lack of contact with families outside the environs of the palace resulted in all other classes of Siamese society being ignored and her account, therefore, does not give any sort of representative picture of family life in Siam.

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[495] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess*, pp. 95-8.
[496] Ibid., p. 155.

Isabella Bird was more successful in witnessing the family life of ordinary people during a journey she undertook in 1893. Whilst travelling across Persia and Kurdistan she observed that: "The women know nothing, and, except among the sons of the leading Khans, there is no instruction given to the children"[497] and she carefully recorded some of their daily routines:

> Certainly the women are very industrious, rising at daylight to churn, working all day, weaving in the intervals, and late at night boiling the butter in their big caldrons. They make their own clothes and those of their husbands and children, except the felt coats, sewing with needles like skewers and very coarse loosely-twisted cotton thread [...] When it is remembered that, in addition to all the "household" avocations which I have enumerated, they pitch and strike tents, do much of the loading and unloading of baggage, and attend faithfully to their own offspring and to that of their flocks and herds, it will be realised that the life of a Bakhtiari wife is sufficiently laborious.[498]

These women's lives were extremely arduous and a complete contrast to that of most of Bird's female readers, the majority of whom would have come from the more affluent sections of British society. British working-class women would have been able to identify more closely with the Bakhtiari women, and their lives of constant toil and hard work, but Bird did not exploit her observations to make any specific political points about the nature of class struggle. Her narrative was predominantly neutral and more concerned with recording what she actually witnessed than in passing any particular social or political comment.

Because Bird lived with local people and sought out local accommodation whenever she could, rather than stay with European officials as was more common, she was able to engage with ordinary families and manage to witness some of their native customs first hand. Similarly, Fanny Parkes Parlby was also able to profit from local contacts whilst travelling through India. One association in particular enabled her to visit the household of a mixed race couple:

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[497] Isabella Bird, *Journeys in Persia & Kurdistan II*, p 103.
[498] Ibid., p 112.

> Mr. James Gardner married Nuwab Mulka Humance Begam, the niece of the emperor Akbar Shah, and daughter of Mina Suliman Sheko (the brother of the present emperor), who lives at Agra. I was taken to the zenana gates, when three very fine children, the two sons and a daughter of Mr. James Gardner, and the princess, in their gay native dresses of silk and satin, embroidered in gold and silver, ran out to see the new arrival. They were elegant little creatures, and gave promise of being remarkably handsome. I was surprised to see the little girl at liberty, but was informed that girls are not shut up until they are about six years old, until which time they are allowed to run about, play with the boys, and enjoy their freedom.[499]

Parlby built up a strong friendship with this family and her account provides a valuable insight into the rules and customs associated with mixed-race relationships in Indian society at the time: "Being tired with writing, I will go down and talk to Colonel Gardner; should no men be in the room, he will converse respecting the zenana, but the moment a man enters, it is a forbidden subject."[500] She was also able to explain how some of their traditions differed to those in a British home: "we walked across the court to the entrance of the zenana; there we took off our shoes and left them, it being a point of etiquette not to appear in shoes in the presence of a superior; so much so, that Mr. Gardner himself was never guilty of the indecorum of wearing shoes or slippers in the presence of his wife."[501] Little observations such as these reveal some of the peculiarities of day-to-day life for an Indian family and, because Colonel Gardner was an Englishman, Parlby had a unique opportunity to experience people and places that might otherwise have been off limits to a foreigner.

Parlby's account is also of interest because she accepts and regularly compliments the Gardners on their relationship. Unlike Emily Eden, who we saw above was unsure of how to behave in the company of these foreign wives, there is no sense that Parlby felt embarrassed or uncomfortable with the couple's mixed-race marriage, and she appears to have enjoyed spending time with the whole family. As long as there was a feeling of mutual respect and fondness race did not matter. This

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[499] Fanny Parkes Parlby, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*, p. 256.
[500] Ibid., p. 136.
[501] Ibid., p. 256.

attitude is especially interesting because of the period Parlby was writing. One might have expected a work published in 1850s to take a more censorious and disapproving approach towards such relationships, as we saw in Chapter Three how the time when the authorities encouraged or even permitted such alliances belonged to an earlier age, but Parlby consistently speaks very positively about their marriage and their children in her travel text with no trace of awkwardness.

Although Parlby's account concentrated on only two families, the observations she made regarding their lifestyles and rituals applied to many Indian families of a similar social status. Other classes, particularly those of a lower social status, were barely mentioned and so we have little idea if their practices differed in any way. However, at least Parlby's text does give us some information about Indian family life. Honoria Lawrence's Indian travel account on the other hand, written at roughly the same time, offers a comprehensive report not of local family life but of her own family's daily routine whilst living in an Indian hill station during the 1850s. In it she describes in great detail their schedule, starting at four o'clock when "The children are called and before five they are washed, dressed, tea-ed, and out of doors" where they ride or "play in our own grounds." Meanwhile the adults' routine is generally to "read and write" and "potter about the house". After relating the family's activities at various times of the day she concludes her account with a description of their evening rituals "Four o'clock dinner. Then play until nearly six – go out again as in the morning – home soon after seven, tea and bed. And the seniors do not sit up much later."[502] Her family's daily routine was determined primarily by the climate which forced them to rise at dawn, eat lightly, doze much of the day, and retire to bed early.

Lawrence's account, although providing a fascinating insight into the lifestyle of British families in India in the 1850s, is not very informative about local family life. In common with many narratives written by women who travelled with their family it is predominately her children who elicited any detailed comment; local children and their family life are barely mentioned. Early in her trip she did remark that: "The children when very young go about absolutely naked with long

[502] Honoria Lawrence, *The Journals of Honoria Lawrence*, pp. 229-30.

hair, their ankles and wrists adorned with silver, tin or coloured glass. Up to ten or twelve, they wear only a waist-cloth and a piece of cotton round their shoulders."[503] And later, when she was more accustomed to Indian life, she noticed: "The women here row stoutly and the children are quite amphibious. It is strange to see the swarms of little things, dark and shining like tadpoles in the shallow water near the banks."[504] However, her account is hardly an in-depth description of Indian family life; but it is an important record of what life was like for a British family living in India at the time and is therefore a valuable historical source. Also, the way she compared the local children to creatures rather than seeing them as human beings, although typical of much of the travel literature written by women about India during the nineteenth century, displays an overtly orientalist attitude and does not give any indication of the presence of a particularly sympathetic feminine attitude towards children.

This lack of any profound interest in local children and their families was shared by numerous female travel writers, contrary to what many academics have proposed, and does not seem to have been influenced in any noticeable way either by the location being visited or the period of travel. Even when journeying across countries about which comparatively little was known there is a marked absence of data on family life. For example, although Mrs. Ernest Hart's account of her visit to Burma in 1897 contains considerable detail on domestic issues such as the food, clothing and accommodation she observed during her trip, it only has general comments about local family life: "The women are free, children are adored, and marriage is respected."[505] She did mention that: "When a girl reaches, however, the age of twelve or thirteen, she passes from childhood to young womanhood [...] and is marked by a ceremony [...] that of the boring of the ears" and that: "In the same way as boring of the ears marks the age of puberty in a girl, so tattooing the legs is the sign in a boy that he is growing into manhood."[506] However, like Lawrence, Leonowen and many other female travel writers, Hart's narrative does not show us

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[503] Ibid., pp. 90-1.
[504] Ibid., p. 209.
[505] Mrs. Ernest Hart, *Picturesque Burma*, p. 25.
[506] Ibid., pp. 144-5.

how life was for an average local family or how the members of the family unit related to each other. It is not as though the travel literature market was flooded with accounts of family life in Burma, which might help explain Hart's lack of comment, as there were few texts which discussed the region in circulation at the time. She apparently did not feel that her gender compelled her to include much information on family life in her account, and clearly she was not particularly interested in the subject.

One area of the world where native children usually warranted some comment was the United States of America. American children, when they were mentioned by British travel writers, were usually portrayed in an unfavourable light, and comments were often made about their perceived overconfidence and rude behaviour. Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon's account of her experience during a boat trip on the Alabama River sums up the British attitude:

> I went into the cabin and looked round and saw a small boy five years old lying on the sofa, his legs stretched out over the cushions – when there were old people without seats. Yesterday at the *table d'hote* at Mobile there were two little children *alone*, one not more than two, the other four. The littlest (for the other was little) could not reach the plate with her chin, yet she ordered without hesitation three different meats and tea with all the aplomb of a woman. The negress waitress asked the children what they would have just as if they were grown up![507]

American children demonstrated none of the deferential characteristics expected from British children, and often travel writers found their apparent arrogant attitude and lack of respect extremely discourteous and offensive. Bodichon's revulsion at the children's confident attitude is typical of much of the travel literature written about journeys to America, and reflects the general view that they were not as well-bred as their British contemporaries. Irrespective of the country being visited, when children of other nationalities were discussed they were by and large compared

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[507] Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, *An American Diary*, p. 112.

unfavourably to British children, who were usually represented as polite, well-behaved and respectful.[508]

Although location does not appear to have significantly influenced how female travel writers wrote about local family life, because of the quantity of literature written about life in India there are a huge number of accounts which discuss family living on the sub-continent. However, analysis of these sources shows that they focused mostly on British family life. They do not often provide any extensive insight into Indian society, and they were also usually written by women who travelled with their own families. There was one aspect of family life in India, however, which was of interest to both married and single women travellers. Many women writers who travelled to India, regardless of whether or not they had their own children, commented on the severe depression felt by British mothers when they had to be separated from their children. Once British children reached a certain age, usually five or six, they could no longer remain with their parents and they would be sent to Britain in order to receive a 'proper' education. Daughters often stayed with their parents slightly longer than sons as their education was not considered as important to their future careers, but it was customary, at some point, for both sexes to be sent to Britain.

When the separation occurred it was a very painful and emotionally draining experience, and many women's travel texts referred to the trauma it caused.[509] Fanny Eden's account of one family's experience illustrates how difficult it was for one mother to be separated from her children: "Mr and Mrs Rishel dined with us. The poor woman is just arrived, half broken hearted at leaving four children at home under the care of strangers. She was to have left the fifth but when the ship was at the point of sailing she could not part with it and smuggled it aboard."[510] When the issue of separation was discussed in women's travel literature, the narrator generally positioned herself as being sympathetic towards the mother, regardless of whether

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[508] There were exceptions to this. See Honoria Lawrence's problems of discipline with her son Alic in Chapter Two.

[509] Whilst separating children from their families was part of life in India it was not exclusive to that country. For example when Anna Leonowens accepted a teaching post in Siam she left her daughter behind in England with relatives but took her son with her.

[510] Fanny Eden, *Tigers, Durbars and Kings*, p. 13.

they were referring to their own personal experience or whether they were relating the experience of another family, but they barely mentioned the effect that the custom had on other family members. The loss of a child on fathers, siblings and other family members was rarely mentioned. This deficiency in women's travel narratives not only reveals a narrowness in their approach towards the family unit, but it also shows an absence of any extraordinary female sensitivity.

The idea that women should have been able to exhibit a greater tendency towards sympathy and compassion than men was a common notion in nineteenth-century Britain. Catherine Hall's research gives an interesting insight into this issue. During her analysis on the Royal Commission investigation into the actions of Governor Edward John Eyre following a riot on the island of Jamaica in 1865, she found that the supporters of Eyre's response to the uprising ("439 blacks and 'coloureds' were killed, 600 men and women were flogged and over 1,000 huts and houses were burnt. A member of the Jamaican House of Assembly, George William Gordon, was hanged."[511]) were criticized for not considering his reaction extreme, as they felt it was: "disgusting to find English men, and especially English women, applauding the hero of such deeds as these."[512] Hall argues that "The reason, of course, for finding it particularly horrifying that Englishwomen should be supporting Eyre was that it challenged the ideal of woman as more sensitive and more open to morality than men."[513] Eyre's female supporters would, no doubt, have argued that their sympathies lay with the safe keeping of the 13,000 whites who lived on the island and who were heavily outnumbered by the 350,000 blacks. However, regardless of the rights and wrongs of this terrible incident, it does illustrate that there was a lack of consensus among British women, and it also shows that there was a clear expectation that women would naturally be more sympathetic than men.

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[511] Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, p. 255.
[512] This statement was published in the *Annual Report* of the Edinburgh Ladies' Emancipation Society. Cited in Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, p. 281.
[513] Ibid., p. 281.

4.2 Family Life in Male Travel Literature

Female travel writers did provide some information concerning children and the family, but it was neither comprehensive nor conveyed with any noticeable warmth or emotional engagement, nor does there appear to be much evidence to confirm Mills, Foster, Smith and Pratt's assertion that throughout the nineteenth century female travel writers were particularly suited to discuss family relationships. Furthermore there is little evidence to show that as a result of their gender female writers had any special connection with these issues. This deduction is reinforced when travel texts written by male writers are examined. Rather than ignore these subjects many male travel accounts contain considerable information about the role of children and the family.

In common with many female travel texts the amount of detail male travel writers included about family life in their texts was not significantly influenced by the location or the period of travel. It is also noticeable that few male writers appeared to have been particularly conscious of their gender or felt that it restricted their choice of subject matter or literary style in any fundamental way. For example, in the account of his trip to Africa in 1805 Mungo Park paid great attention to how the local tribes raised their children:

> The Negro women suckle their children until they are able to walk of themselves. Three years nursing is not uncommon; and during this period the husband devotes his whole attention to his other wives. To this practice it is owing, I presume, that the family of each wife is seldom very numerous. Few women have more than five or six children. As soon as the infant as able to walk, it is permitted to run about with great freedom. The mother is not over solicitous to preserve it from slight falls and other trifling accidents. A little practice soon enables the child to take care of itself, and experience acts the part of a nurse. As they advance in life, the girls are taught to spin cotton, and to beat corn, and are instructed in other domestic duties; and the boys are employed in the labours of the field. Both sexes, whether Bushreens or Kafirs, on attaining the age of puberty, are circumcised.[514]

[514] Mungo Park, *Travels*, p. 203.

Park was not unusual in the amount of detail he provided in his travel account. Hugh Clapperton also carefully documented the daily routine of family life he witnessed during his journey into the interior of Africa in 1822, and managed to give his readers a wonderful insight into native life:

> At daylight the whole household arise: the women begin to clean the house, the men to wash from head to foot; the women and children are then washed in water, in which the leaf of a bush has been boiled called Bambarina: when this is done, breakfast of cocoa is served out, everyone having their separate dish, the women and children eating together. After breakfast the women and children rub themselves over with the pounded red wood and a little grease, which lightens the darkness of the black skin. A score or patch of the red powder is put on some place where it will show to the best advantage. The eyes are blackened with khol. The mistress and the better looking females stain their teeth and the inside of the lips of a yellow colour with gora, the flower of the tobacco plant, and the bark of a root: the outer part of the lips, hair, and eye-brows, are stained with shunni, or prepared indigo. Then the women who attend the market prepare their wares for sale, and when ready go. The elderly women prepare, clean, and spin cotton at home and cook the victuals; the younger females are generally sent round the town selling the small rice balls, fried beans, &c. and bringing a supply of water for the day. The master of the house generally takes a walk to the market, or sits in the shade at the door of his house, hearing the news, or speaking of the price of natron or other goods.[515]

In one discussion with a local chief Clapperton happily debated their different approaches towards family relationships. When he was asked why British men only had one wife Clapperton remarked that having only one wife was acceptable because British women had no trouble breeding and that: "it was no uncommon thing for one woman to have sixteen or seventeen children."[516] Although this remark was made in a humorous tone, there was obviously also an element of truth in it, as large families were not rare occurrences in Britain during the nineteenth century.

Clapperton and Park's detailed accounts of family routines were not uncommon in travel literature produced by men, as it was usual for male travellers to Africa to comment on the child-rearing traditions of the local tribes in their texts. Sir

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[515] Hugh Clapperton, *Journal*, p. 140.
[516] Ibid., p. 31.

Francis Galton was also keen to explain to his readers some of the customs associated with the Damaras tribe he encountered in 1853:

> A new-born child is washed – the only time he is ever washed in his life – then dried and greased, and the ceremony is over. Some time during boyhood the lads are circumcised, but at no particular age. Marriage takes place at what appears to be the ages of 15 or 16, but as the Damaras keep no count of years it is scarcely possible to be certain of their ages.[517]

Galton took great interest in the traditions associated with children during his trip to South Africa. He carefully recorded the rituals associated with both boys and girls, and noted the importance of such traditions to the well-being of the tribe.

Similarly Richard Burton observed that in the Wanyamwezi tribe: "Children are suckled till the end of the second year. Their only education is in the use of the bow and arrow; after the fourth summer the boy begins to learn archery with diminutive weapons, which are gradually increased in strength. Names are given without ceremony."[518] Burton also recognised the practical importance of the family unit to the survival of the tribe: "A strong inducement to marriage amongst the Africans, as with the poor in Europe, is the prospective benefit to be derived from an adult family; a large progeny enriches them."[519] Here he indicates that large families were a class issue and nothing to do with race as they were equally important to the survival of the British lower classes. He also draws his readers' attention to differences in child-rearing around the world:

> Women retain the power of suckling their children to a late age, even when they appear withered granddames. Until the child can walk without danger, it is carried by the mother, not on the hip, as in Asia, but on the bare back for warmth, a sheet or skin being passed over it and fastened at the parent's breast.[520]

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[517] Sir Francis Galton, *The Narrative of an Explorer*, p. 190.
[518] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*, vol. 2, p. 23.
[519] Ibid., p. 332.
[520] Ibid., p. 117.

As well as informing the reader about the differences between the customs of the Wanyamwezi women and women from other parts of the globe this statement also proves, if proof was needed, that Burton was a highly experienced world traveller and keenly interested in the intricacies of family life.

Burton's travel accounts usually contained substantial amounts of information regarding the customs and traditions of the various cultures with which he came into contact on his journeys. Burton was interested in people and that fascination comes across in his travel literature. However, there are travel accounts written by men who are not generally thought of as being interested in family life which also provide very useful data on the family. David Livingstone is a good example of this. In the account of his expedition to the Zambesi he discussed how marriages were arranged and children organized in the Makolol tribe:

> Wives are not bought and sold among the Makolol, though the marriage looks like a bargain. The husband, in proportion to his wealth, hands over to the father-in-law a certain number of cows, not as purchase-money for the bride, but to purchase the right to retain in his own family the children she may have; otherwise the children would belong to the family of the wife's father. A man may have perfect control over his wife without this payment, but not of the children; for, as the parents make a sacrifice of a portion of the family circle in parting with their daughter, the husband must sacrifice some of his property, to heal, as it were, that breach. It is not absolute separation, for, when a wife dies, the husband gives an ox again, to cause entire severance, or make her family 'give her up.'[521]

Livingstone is not known for being a particularly demonstrative or sensitive character and yet even his travel texts show a curiosity about local family traditions. Admittedly his descriptions lack the passion and emotional engagement of some male narratives, and he was rather interested in the financial and practical implications of relationships, but he did at least attempt to record the lives of ordinary people.[522]

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[521] David Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition*, p. 285.

[522] Unlike many female writers who travelled with their family Livingstone ignored his own family and concentrated on local family life. Not all female travellers, however, included information on their own

One area relating to children that was almost exclusive to male travellers to Africa was the effect the arrival of twins had on a village. With the exception of Mary Kingsley, who was one of the few female travel writers who wrote about this issue, it was predominately male travel writers who concerned themselves with how these unfortunate children were regarded by their families and by their local communities.[523] The birth of twins was often viewed as an extremely bad omen, and it was the custom that both babies, and sometimes the mother, were put to death in order to put an end to the bad luck which their arrival was believed to bring to those around them. John Speke, during his journey to find the source of the Nile, was both horrified and fascinated by the local superstitions he encountered associated with the birth of twins:

> a Myoro woman, who bore twins that died, now keeps two small pots in her house, as effigies of the children, into which she milks herself every evening, and will continue to do so five months, fulfilling the time appointed by nature for suckling children, lest the spirits of the dead should persecute her [...] Should any one attempt to conceal twins, the whole family would be murdered by the chief.[524]

Richard Burton was equally keen to give an account of what he discovered during one of his trips to Africa: "Twins are not common amongst the Kafir race, and one of the two is invariably put to death; the universal custom amongst these tribes is for the mother to wrap a gourd or calabash, in skins, to place it to sleep with, and to feed it like, the survivor."[525] As well as being quite gruesome and shocking events there is, of course, an element of racial superiority in these stories: the natives are to be seen as inferior because they adhere to such violent and bloodthirsty superstitions.

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family circumstances in their travel texts. Maria Graham, for example, barely mentions her husband in her text on India.

[523] Kingsley's treatment of this custom shows one of the inherent conflicts contained within feminine discourse: on the one hand it placed the subject of childcare under the province of women writers but on the other it restricted women writers from discussing violent or bloodthirsty subjects. Kingsley did not allow the pressures of feminine discourse to prevent her from discussing some of the tribes' more gruesome customs and she related in great detail the horrific punishment suffered by one particular family. See Mary Kingsley, *Travels*, p. 188.

[524] John Hanning Speke, *Journal*, pp. 425-6.

[525] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*, vol. 2, p. 23.

They should be pitied because their poor intellect prevents them from behaving in a more enlightened way but with the help of a society who has a more progressive approach, such as Britain, these ancient superstitions could be vanquished.

From these examples it is evident that male travel writers did not view the treatment of children as a field which they could not address, and that they, as men, were not permitted to discuss. However, as the murder of twins was rather a gruesome practice, it is hardly startling that they would be attracted to it and want to write about it in their travel narratives, particularly as there was a demand for shocking and brutal stories.[526] It would also have confirmed the belief held by many Britons that Africans were a barbarous and uncivilized people burdened by superstition.

Male travel writers were not only attracted by horrific and shocking aspects of family life and we have seen considerable evidence that men were very willing to discuss a wide range of family matters in their narratives. The detail about family life that men such as Park, Clapperton, Galton, Burton and Livingstone provided in their travel accounts demonstrates not only a strong interest in the subject but also an eagerness to share their discoveries with their readers. It also shows that a high level of curiosity about family life continued throughout the period as their accounts span a number of decades in the nineteenth century. However, this interest was not confined to travellers to Africa, as the country being visited appears to have had little impact on whether or not the account contained information about children and family life. As mentioned previously, American children were usually portrayed in an unfavourable light in women's travel literature and this was also true in much male travel literature. Anthony Trollope was disappointed by what he observed during his visit:

> I must protest that American babies are an unhappy race. They eat and drink as they please; they are never punished; they are never banished, snubbed, and kept in the back ground as children are kept with us; and yet they are wretched and uncomfortable. My heart has bled for them as I have heard them squalling by the hour together in agonies of discontent and dyspepsia. Can it be, I wonder, that children are happier when they are made to obey

[526] See the discussion in Chapter Two and Laura Franey, *Victorian Travel Writing and Imperial Violence*.

> orders and are sent to bed at six o'clock, than when allowed to regulate their own conduct; that bread and milk is more favourable to laughter and soft childish ways than beef-steaks and pickles three times a day; that an occasional whipping, even, will conduce to rosy cheeks?[527]

Trollope's comments echo those made by other visitors to America such as Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. In these accounts American children generally compare unfavourably with British children who were better behaved, more respectful and, at least according to Trollope, more responsive to discipline and corporal punishment.

Whilst travelling across Portugal George Borrow grasped the opportunity to interact with a large number of local children: "I believe that I spoke to at least two hundred of the children of Portugal upon matters relating to their eternal welfare. I found that very few of those whom I addressed had received any species of literary education" and he was saddened to find: "none of them had seen the Bible, and not more that half a dozen had the slightest inkling of what the holy book consisted. I found that most of them were bigoted Papists and Miguelites at heart."[528] Many writers used their travel texts as a means to criticize other religions and, as Borrow was travelling on a mission to spread the Protestant religion across the Papist states of Europe, his narrative, therefore, had a particular bias. He was not a disinterested observer concerned with simply recording the lives of Portuguese children. Borrow believed that the Catholic Church intentionally left its supporters in ignorance as a means of social control, and he used his travel text to highlight what he saw as oppression and also to make the point that Britain was a superior economic power because its citizens followed a superior religion.

At the same time as Borrow but across the world Edward John Eyre's account of his journey across Central Australia in the 1840s also contains more than just a passing interest in children and family life, as in his narrative Eyre wrote in great detail about aborigine family life and child-bearing customs:

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[527] Anthony Trollope, *North America*, p. 142.
[528] George Borrow, *The Bible in Spain*, p. 36.

> The menses commence to flow among the native females at an earlier age than among Europeans, frequently beginning at about twelve; they are also subject to many irregularities in their periodical return, arising probably from the kind of life they lead and the nature of the diet upon which they live. I have known cases where this irregularity has extended to three months. Child-bearing does not commence often before the age of sixteen, nor have I ever noticed pregnant women under that age. In inquiries conducted by Mr. Moorhouse among the natives of Adelaide, that gentleman ascertained, that as many as nine children have occasionally been born to one woman; that the average number is about five; but that each mother only reared an average of two. At childbirth, the placenta, which is considered as sacred, is carefully put away from the reach of the dogs as soon as thrown off from the uterus, and the female is up and following her usual avocations a very few hours after her accouchement.[529]

The graphic details of the mechanisms of sexual reproduction contained in Eyre's account are very striking. It would have been considered improper for Eyre to discuss intimate details such as the "menses" if he was talking about British women, but he took it for granted that his nationality allowed him the authority to address issues of an intimate nature providing they were with reference to a supposedly inferior race.[530] Eyre's inclusion of such subject matter in his travel text is in stark contrast to female travel narratives, which rarely mention such private bodily functions, and it again highlights how a topic which might be considered 'female' was in practice being addressed by male writers and not female writers in their travel literature. Also the treatment of these issues in texts as varied as those by Trollope, Borrow, and Eyre, shows how the location being visited had little influence on the amount or the way that family life was being discussed in nineteenth-century travel literature.

Earlier we noted that there was a huge quantity of travel literature written about journeys across India, and that as far as female travel writers were concerned most of these accounts concentrated on British families and took little notice of native family life. However, Indian travel narratives written by male travel writers tended to contain more general observations concerning the customs and habits of

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[529] Edward John Eyre, *Journals*, p. 323.

[530] Chapter Three discusses how both male and female travellers used science as an excuse to approach topics in their narratives which may have been considered slightly risqué.

native families, and did not limit themselves to writing exclusively about their own nationality. Sir William Sleeman is a good example of this as he wrote at great length about family life on the sub-continent:

> There is no part of the world, I believe, where parents are so much reverenced by their sons as they are in India, in all classes of society. This is sufficiently evinced in the desire that parents feel to have sons. The duty of daughters is from the day of their marriage transferred entirely to their husbands and their husbands' parents, on whom alone devolves the duty of protecting and supporting them through the wedded and the widowed state. The links that united them to their parents are broken. All the reciprocity of rights and duties which have bound together the parent and child from infancy is considered to end with the consummation of her marriage.[531]

And he ensured that his text included meticulous descriptions of what parental responsibility meant for the locals:

> Marriage is a sacred duty among Hindoos, a duty which every parent must perform for his children, otherwise they owe him no reverence. A family with a daughter unmarried after the age of puberty is considered to labour under the displeasure of the gods; and no member of the other sex considers himself *respectable* after the age of puberty till he is married. It is the duty of his parent or elder brothers to have him suitably married; and, if they do not do so, he reproaches them with his *degraded condition.* The same feeling, in a degree, pervades all the Muhammadan community; and nothing appears so strange to them as the apparent indifference of old bachelors among us to their *sad condition.*[532]

Sleeman's reference to "old bachelors among us" and "sad condition" was unquestionably intended to be humorous, as he was travelling with his wife and son at the time, but this lapse into humour is a rare occurrence as on the whole he took great care to ensure that his account contained a thorough record of the locals' attitude towards family responsibilities. Both Sleeman and Livingstone barely acknowledged the presence of their own families in their travel accounts but they

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[531] Sir William Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections*, p. 254.
[532] Ibid., p. 38.

were very interested in documenting native family life. This contrasts with many of the narratives written by women travellers who tended to concentrate their attention on their own families' customs and routines, and paid much less attention to the lives of the native families.

Previously we discussed how many travel texts written by women in India referred to the trauma caused by the custom of sending children back to England to be educated, and how the majority of these accounts focused on the suffering felt by the mother. However, George Otto Trevelyan's serialization of his life in India for *Macmillan's Magazine* in the 1860s describes the impact of this event from a male perspective:

> The drawbacks of Indian life begin to be severely felt when it becomes necessary to send the first-born home. From that period until his final retirement there is little domestic comfort for the father of the family. After two or three years have gone by, and two or three children have gone home, your wife's spirits are no longer what they were. She is uneasy for days after a letter has come in with a Brighton post-mark. At last there arrives a sheet of paper scrawled over in a large round hand, and smeared with tears and dirty fingers, which puts her besides herself. You wake two or three times in the night always to find her crying at your side; and the next morning you write to the agent of the P. and O. to engage places for a lady and ayah. At the end of six months she writes to say that the doctor has insisted on Joey's going to Nice for the winter, and that she must stay to take him. Shortly after that you receive a communication from your mother-in-law, to the effect that you must give Anna another summer in England, under pain of the life-long displeasure of that estimable relative. And so it goes on, till, after the lapse of some three or four years, your wife joins you at the Presidency in a state of wild delight at meeting you, and intense misery at finding herself again in India. Within the next two hot seasons she has had three fevers. She tries the hills, but it will not do; and at last you make up your mind to the inevitable, and run down to Calcutta to take your seat at the Board of Revenue and dispatch her to England, with a tacit understanding that she is never to return. Then you settle down into confirmed bachelor habits.[533]

[533] George Otto Trevelyan, *The Competition Wallah*, pp. 151-2.

This very depressing account paints a dramatic picture of the distress that separation could inflict, and it provides a valuable male perspective on a very stressful event that affected the whole of the family, not just the mother.

From the many examples we have studied it is possible to conclude that male travel writers were able to break down barriers and converse and write about subjects that we are told should be the prerogative of women. Naturally there are instances where male travel writers demonstrated as much disinterest and lack of empathy in these 'women's' issues as female travel writers. However, there is also a significant amount of material available to show that not only did many men discuss family life but they appear to have been very willing to do so. They do not give the impression that they felt that their gender prohibited them in any significant way from discussing family issues in their travel literature, or that they felt uncomfortable when they did.

John Tosh, during his investigation into masculine identity during the Victorian period, discovered that British men were often involved in caring for their children in a nurturing way and were not, generally, the fierce disciplinarian authority figure that is their popular image today: "what the child-centred culture of Victorian England required was that parents should give careful attention to the domestic arrangements for their children's upbringing, and should give them their undivided attention during their daily periods of contact."[534] He concluded that: "the virtues of domesticity laid claim on both sexes [...] fatherhood became a telling touchstone of men's commitment to the home."[535] Therefore it should not be a surprise to discover that male travel writers were also interested in children and the role of the family on their journeys, and that single men as well as married men would write about these subjects in their travel accounts

4.3 Justifications for the Lack of Data on Family Life

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[534] John Tosh, *A Man's Place*, p. 43.
[535] Ibid., p. 79.

The relative shortage of women's travel literature from Africa goes some way to explain why there were so few accounts written by women that spoke about the effect the birth of twins had on a village. This excuse does not, however, explain the deficiency of information regarding local family life exposed in many women's texts written about other regions of the world. Some women writers realised that their texts were weak in this area but protested that it was not their fault. They claimed that it was not because they were not curious about local family life but because they found it very difficult to obtain much information about it from the locals. Honoria Lawrence was conscious that her text lacked detail concerning real Indian family life: "I feel the more strongly how absolutely ignorant we are of the minds, thought, motives, domestic habits of those around us."[536] And she tried to justify why:

> It would be difficult to describe all the minutiae which makes life here so different from home, particularly to females. The total confinement to the house during the day at first irked me greatly, accustomed as I was to freedom of motion. We have here no such thing as a delightful rambling walk, no visiting of the poor in their cottages, no going out alone unquestioned.[537]

Lawrence blamed this lack of freedom for her text's deficiencies, not that she was uninterested or remiss in her duties as a travel writer.

Fanny Eden similarly claimed that she was keen to learn about Indian family life: "The women were quite unlike any others we have seen, so coaxing in their manner to us. I am always curious to know what they do to amuse themselves" but, she complained, it was "impossible to find out."[538] Like Lawrence she felt that she had to defend her failure to discover the real India: "The instant we come in sight the women cover up their faces and scuttle away as fast as they can."[539] Her sister, Emily, had similar experiences. She also stressed that she was curious about the locals' lives: "I should like to see some of these high-caste ladies several times,

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[536] Honoria Lawrence, *The Journals of Honoria Lawrence*, p. 149.
[537] Ibid., p. 91.
[538] Fanny Eden, *Tigers, Durbars and Kings*, p. 198.
[539] Ibid., p. 11.

without all this nonsense of presents, &c., but so as to hear their story, and their way of life, and their thoughts"[540] but she too found it difficult to discover anything of any significance about their lives: "It has occurred to me that when we go home I shall not be able to show you what an Indian woman is like, and to be sure we have seen very few."[541] However, not all female travel writers failed in their attempts to discover what life was like for an Indian family. Fanny Parkes Parlby had her special friendship with Colonel Gardner to thank for her admission to certain proceedings usually prohibited to non-Indians, and she acknowledged that without his assistance she would have been unable to include information on particular family events in her account: "I might have lived fifty years in India and never have seen a native wedding. It is hardly possible for a European lady to be present at one."[542]

These excuses for a lack of data are perfectly reasonable as it was very hard for visitors to associate with Indian families in an informal setting. Indira Ghose's research confirms the problems faced by travellers to India: "What is striking about these accounts is that while they expend page after page on the picturesque landscape of India, encounters with Indians – other than servants – are rare."[543] Male travellers to India had even greater difficulties with access and they made similar justifications for their limitations. William Buyers, for example, admitted that: "The state of female society in India, is always a difficult subject for a European, either to speak, or write upon; as he can very rarely have any intimate acquaintance with native women of respectability" and he concluded: "He may indeed, know a great deal about the characters of the women of the lower orders, but it would not be fair to make them the standard."[544] This is a very revealing comment as it shows that although male and female travellers faced similar problems in observing real Indian family life, because of notions of propriety men could usually only gain first-hand experience of the lower classes whereas women tended to be confined to the upper

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[540] Emily Eden, *Up the Country*, p. 237. Each visit to a harem involved the exchange of gifts which, because they were acting in an official capacity, the Eden sisters were not allowed to keep. Much to their annoyance if they liked the presents they had to pay the market value to local British government officials.
[541] Ibid., p. 300.
[542] Fanny Parkes Parlby, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*, p. 300.
[543] Indira Ghose, *Memsahibs Abroad: Writings by Women Travellers in Nineteenth Century India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 3.
[544] William Buyers, *Recollections of Northern India*, p. 396.

classes. Therefore the notion of separate spheres, in this particular situation, is not purely based on gender but also includes issues of class and social status.

Although men, arguably, faced more restrictions and taboos regarding access to women and the family, there are obviously many texts written by men, visiting a range of different countries, in which they at least attempted to document family concerns. Richard Burton discussed some of the difficulties he met with in the account of his tour of the Middle East:

> I have described the establishment at some length as a specimen of how the middle-classes are lodged at Al-Madinah. The upper ranks affect Turkish and Egyptian luxuries in their homes, as I had the opportunity of seeing at Omar Effendi's house in the 'Barr;' and in these countries the abodes of the poor are everywhere similar [...] I never once set eyes upon the face of a woman, unless African slave girls be allowed that title. Even these at first attempted to draw their ragged veils over their sable charms, and would not answer the simplest question; by degrees they allowed me to see them, and they ventured their voices to reply to me; still they never threw off a certain appearance of shame.[545]

Yet, in spite of his problems, Burton still managed to observe the lives of a range of social classes and document their daily lives. Admittedly he was disguised as an Armenian, which allowed him entry into sites prohibited to westerners, but as a man he was still subject to the rules separating males and females and yet he was still able to address these issues in his texts.

4.4 'Women's' Issues in Female Travel Literature

Shirley Foster has proposed that: "understandably, in approaching the unfamiliar, the travellers paid particular attention to matters of inherent interest to their own sex",[546] and the number of female travellers who wrote about the treatment of women in their

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[545] Richard Francis Burton, *The Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al Medinha & Meccah,* vol. 2, p. 297.
[546] Shirley Foster, *Across New Worlds*, p. 142.

accounts would appear to justify her claims. Female travellers frequently commented on the role of the wife and her rights and position in different societies, and we also know that the image of the ideal close-knit family unit was an extremely important concept during the nineteenth century. However, perhaps rather strangely, female travel writers often focused their attention, not on describing if or how this perfection could be achieved, but on the procedures for divorce and separation. Divorce was a contentious issue in nineteenth-century Britain and generally many women, not just female travellers, were interested in amending the laws that tended to favour the husband in most cases of marital dispute.[547] There were some notorious divorce cases during the period, such as that of Lady Jane Digby in the 1830s which, as well as entertaining and shocking society, also highlighted the imbalance between men's and women's marital obligations, and which led many women, such as Christina Sinclair Bremner and Mary Frances Billington to campaign for equal rights.

Women had been interested in this issue long before the nineteenth century. Writing at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu enviously observed the rights available to Turkish women:

> Neither have they much to apprehend from the resentment of their husbands, those ladies that are rich having all their money in their own hands, which they take with 'em upon a divorce with an addition which he is obliged to give 'em. Upon the whole, I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the empire. The very Divan pays a respect to 'em, and the Grand Signior himself, when a pasha is executed, never violates the privileges of the harem (or women's apartment) which remains unsearched entire to the widow. They are queens of their slaves, which the husband has no permission so much as to look upon, except it be an old woman or two that his lady chooses. 'Tis true their law permits them four wives, but there is no instance of a man of quality that makes use of this liberty, or of a woman of rank that would suffer it. When a husband happens to be inconstant (as those things will happen) he keeps his mistress in a house apart and visits her as privately as he can, just as 'tis with you.[548]

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[547] It was not possible for a woman to divorce her husband until 1857 and even then she had to prove extenuating circumstances. Women were not entitled to control their own finances until the Married Women's Property Act passed in 1882. It was not until 1923, and the implementation of the Matrimonial Causes Act, that the double standard for filing for divorce was removed.
[548] Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Selected Letters*, p. 97.

She noticed that not only did Turkish couples have a more egalitarian process for separation but they also had a more efficacious system of reconciliation: Yet 'tis certainly true that when a man has divorced his wife in the most solemn manner, he can take her again upon no other terms than permitting another man to pass a night with her, and there are some examples of those who have submitted to this law rather than not have back their beloved."[549] The amount of coverage she gave to this matter in her literature shows how important it was to her and her acquaintances, and indicates a keen interest concerning the entitlements of wives in other parts of the world.

Interest in women's rights did not diminish over time. On the contrary it grew, as increasing numbers of women became concerned about their legal status. This growing interest was, unsurprisingly, reflected in the travel literature of the period. Throughout the whole of the nineteenth century many female writers used their travel narratives to expose the iniquities in the British legal system regarding wives' rights to their freedom, their children and their assets. Much of their literature was taken up with discussing the differences between the opportunities available to British women and the opportunities available to women of other nationalities, and they regularly remarked how poor women's rights were in Britain compared to those of many of their foreign sisters.

The British who ventured across the Atlantic following the American War of Independence tended to be particularly fascinated in analyzing how conditions had changed, for better or worse, in the former colony since splitting from British control. This fascination continued into the next century. Nineteenth-century travellers were generally interested in the civil liberties granted to American citizens, and women, in particular, were curious to identify how a nation with such close historical links to Britain could have such a different attitude to its female population. Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon's findings are typical of what many women uncovered during their visits to the ex-colony. She discovered that, unlike in

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[549] Ibid., p. 101.

Britain, divorce was quite common: "Mde. B. had had three husbands: first, dead, second was divorced and went to the Mormons, third was blown up in a steamboat. This is a characteristic of America. Every third woman I met seems to have been divorced."[550] Not only did American women have the legal right to their freedom but Bodichon reported that obtaining it was a simple process:

> I find Mrs. B. is divorced from her husband and is Miss Sophia Titney. In Kentucky divorce is easy – for adultery, for desertion, for slander, or even public ridicule or intoxication. I believe Mrs. B. obtained her divorce on the grounds that her husband had held her up to public ridicule by publishing certain private letters of hers against her wishes. There was a good deal of conversation about her as she was the most interesting woman on board and sang very sweetly. The gentlemen all said she would marry again and that no man would think the divorce any impediment.[551]

This last sentence is particularly significant as it reveals that not only could American women sue for divorce but also that there was no stigma or loss of reputation associated with them as a result. Their characters remained unblemished, and this contrasted markedly with the outcome of divorce for British women. One of the strongest criticisms of the British system was the hypocrisy which surrounded the divorce process: the estranged husbands usually continued to be received in society but the estranged wives were generally ostracized. For example, after receiving an annulment for her marriage to John Ruskin, Effie Ruskin was free to marry Sir John Everett Millais. However, the scandal resulted in her being barred from many social occasions and she was refused entry to any function where Queen Victoria was present. This injustice was seen as a disgrace by many British women, and the American system was often held up as an example of a much more just and benevolent arrangement.

It was perhaps bearable that American women could have greater freedom and superior legal rights to British women because of the close historical links between the two countries, but women who belonged to nations that were considered

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[550] Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, *An American Diary*, p. 86.
[551] Ibid., p. 66.

less developed than Britain and who also had superior rights proved to be more difficult for female travel writers to reconcile. Countries where polygamy was an established custom were especially problematic. There was almost universal condemnation of polygamous relationships by women writers in nineteenth-century travel literature. However, even the most vehement critics reluctantly admitted that often these ladies had access to certain rights to which they were prohibited. For example, Anna Leonowens found that for Siamese women the procedure for separation was extremely simple: "Instead of the more vexatious and scandalous forms of divorce, the party aggrieved may become a priest or a nun, and thus the matrimonial bond is at once dissolved; and with this advantage, that after two or three months of probation they may be reconciled and reunited, to live together in the world again."[552] A much more equitable system than would have been available to her in Britain, had she required it.

In India Fanny Parkes Parlby noted that the procedure for divorce was also a very simple and fair process: "When a Muhammadan has sworn to separate himself from his wife, she retires to her own apartments, and does not behold her husband for four months; if they are not reconciled by the end of that time, all their ties are broken; the woman recovers her liberty, and receives, on quitting the house, the property settled on her by the contract of marriage."[553] She contrasted this to the situation faced by British women: "We spoke of the severity of the laws of England with respect to married women, how completely *by law* they are the slaves of their husbands, and how little hope there is of redress."[554] Parlby was appalled by the injustice of the British system where upon divorce a British woman had "little hope" of compensation whereas a Muhammadan woman received the "property settled on her by the contract of marriage", and she explained to her readers how she believed these iniquities began in the nursery:

> Where is the difference in intellect between a man and a woman brought up in a zenana? *There* they both receive the same education, and the result is similar. In Europe men have so greatly the advantage of women from

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[552] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess*, p. 194.
[553] Fanny Parkes Parlby, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*, pp. 302-3.
[554] Ibid., p. 311.

> receiving a superior education, and in being made to act for, and depend upon themselves from childhood, that of course the superiority is on the male side; the women are kept under and have not fair play.[555]

Parlby was envious that the girls of the harem received the same education as the boys even though their future careers differed completely; an opportunity which was denied to British girls who were "kept under". She argued that as a consequence of this lack of fairness at the start of their lives, it was inevitable that British females would continue to be discriminated against.

Florence Nightingale, although thoroughly disapproving of the harem system, discovered during her tour of the Middle East that Egyptian women had greater protection under Egyptian law than she did under British law:

> The law of inheritance here (if there were but anything to inherit) is fairer than you would expect. There is no primogenitor, and the female has half the share of the male. A man has only power over one third of his property, and that he may not leave to an heir, unless with the consent of all the others. An only daughter (if there is no son) may inherit half the whole property by the Koran, and the other half by common usage. The wife seems, wonderful to believe, to have entire command of her own property, and the husband inherits but a fourth, if she have children; and property, independently and over and above their dowry, if he have no children. With regard to children, the child of the slave-wife inherits equally with the child of the real wife! This sounds much better than one expected.[556] .

Nightingale's observations of the benefits that were available to women in polygamous societies are quite common in nineteenth-century female travel literature. However, unlike Parlby, Leonowens and many others Nightingale did not limit her encounters to one class of women, and she was particularly eager to examine how lower status harems operated: "my noble mind was bent not upon tombs, but upon harems, upon Mustafa's (our cook's) "womans". I do not care a doit about seeing Abbas Pasha's harem, one never gets further than the sweetmeats and

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[555] Ibid., p. 371.
[556] Florence Nightingale, *Letters from Egypt*, p. 52.

the fine clothes; but I do want to see the common harems."[557] Nightingale was determined to present as comprehensive a picture as possible, and her revelation that even women of the lower classes were entitled to financial and legal provision under Egyptian law would have been particularly shocking for her middle-class female readers. Not only could they see that they had fewer rights than 'foreign' women but they could also see that they had fewer rights than women of a lower social status - a double insult.

Nightingale was not the only female travel writer to investigate the effect of polygamy on the lower classes. In *Letters from Egypt* Lucie Duff Gordon described the situation of her servant's brother, who had two wives, recording how: "He and they, with his wife and sister-in-law, all live together, and one of the brother's wives has six children – three sleep with their own mother and three with their *other* mother – and all is quite harmonious."[558] Gordon was very critical of travel literature which portrayed harems as places of vice and depravity: "I have been reading Miss Martineau's book; the descriptions are excellent, but she evidently knew and cared nothing about the people [...] and her attack upon hareems [sic] outrageous; she implies that they are brothels."[559] She stressed that this was a far from accurate description and that Egyptian harems were extremely practical arrangements and rarely viewed in a sexual way: "Very often a man marries a second wife out of duty to provide for a brother's widow and children, or the like."[560] In order to emphasise the lack of sexuality she used the example of Hassan, a close acquaintance of hers:

> He told me he had married another wife since last year – I asked what for. It was the widow of his brother who had always lived with him in the same house, and who died leaving two boys. She is neither young nor handsome, but he considered it his duty to provide for her and the children, and not to let her marry a stranger. So you see polygamy is not always sensual indulgence.[561]

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[557] Ibid., pp. 165-6.
[558] Lucie Duff Gordon, *Letters from Egypt*, p.33.
[559] Ibid., pp.111-2.
[560] Ibid., p.112.
[561] Ibid., p.87.

Her multiple references to the non-sexual nature of polygamous relationships are an indication of how strongly she felt that existing prejudices should be removed, and how eager she was that her readers should be made aware of an alternative, less erotic, rationale behind the system.

Gordon was not alone in her views. Mary Kingsley also recognised that there were often practical reasons behind many polygamous relationships, showing that even at the end of the century women writers were still discussing this issue in their travel literature. Kingsley noticed during her visit to West Africa that being a bush trader was a highly dangerous occupation as the natives often felt a strong "temptation to kill the trader." To avoid an official investigation, which a suspicious death might give rise to, the locals were aware that they could "safely let him die of a disease", and cannily knew that the "most prevalent disease in the African bush comes out of the cooking pot". The trader, also aware of this, would "have a wife – one in each village" who would cook all his meals for him in order to avoid having his food being poisoned by some disgruntled native. Kingsley concluded that: "This system of judiciously conducted alliances, gives the black trader a security nothing else can."[562] She did not condemn these relationships as immoral, but saw them as an eminently sensible solution to a potentially lethal problem.

Billie Melman discovered during the course of her detailed study into the lives of women in the Middle East that, rather than harems being full of incessant sexual activity with wives permanently at the mercy of their spouses, in practice women had the right to deny sexual relations to their husbands. She found that the wives had devised: "the custom of putting a pair of slippers outside the door [...] to signify the women's wish for privacy."[563] Husbands were not permitted to enter the apartment of a wife who had placed her slippers at the entrance to her quarters and, therefore by custom, the women controlled when and if they engaged in sexual relations with their husbands. The authority to refuse one's spouse was technically not available to British wives and women travellers often remarked on the irony of this situation. Lucie Duff Gordon's observations are typical of many female travel

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[562] Mary Kingsley, *Travels*, pp. 136-7.
[563] Billie Melman, *Women's Orients*, p. 87.

writers. She describes how women in Egyptian society, rather than being repressed and powerless, were in fact in a much stronger position than the majority of British women: "Women can and do, without blame, sue their husbands-in-law for the full 'payment of the debt', and demand a divorce if they please in default."[564] Egyptian women were not only allowed to keep their own money and property after marriage but their husbands were not permitted to know of what their assets comprised. How different from Gordon's rights at home in Britain.

Egyptian women benefited not only in a material way when they separated from their husbands, they also had access to other advantages. In nineteenth-century Britain there was a stigma associated with any woman who divorced or separated from her husband. Any adulterous or immoral behaviour severely damaged a woman's reputation and once lost that reputation was almost impossible to restore. Similar behaviour by a man did not generally have such serious consequences as his reputation and therefore his position in society normally remained unaffected. Gordon's text illustrates how there was none of this double-standard surrounding Egyptian morality: "It is impossible to conceive how startling it is to a Christian to hear the rules of morality applied with perfect impartiality to both sexes [...] Any unchastity is wrong and *haram* (unlawful), but equally so in men and women."[565] Gordon unquestionably believed that Egyptian society was more civilized as a result of this more equitable approach and passionately argued for a fairer system to be established in Britain.

Although women who lived in polygamous societies were often shown to have privileges not available to women in Britain, not all travel accounts were unreservedly complimentary. Despite admitting that Egyptian women derived some benefits from the polygamous system, Florence Nightingale's observations are representative of the attitude female travel writers generally felt towards harems:

> No ideas that I had of polygamy come near the fact; and my wonder is now, not that Sarah and Rachel were so bad, but that they were not a great deal worse. Polygamy strikes at the root of everything in woman – she is not a

[564] Lucie Duff Gordon, *Letters from Egypt*, p.112.
[565] Lucie Duff Gordon, *Letters from Egypt*, p.136.

wife – she is not a mother; - and in these Oriental countries, what is a woman, if she is not that? In all other countries she has something else to fall back on. The Roman Catholic woman has a religion – the Protestant has an intellect; in the early Christian, in the old Egyptian time, women had a vocation, a profession, provided for them in their religion, independent of their wifedom; here, she is nothing but the servant of man.[566]

Consequently, aside from some advantages, most female travel writers fundamentally disapproved of the harem system and polygamous relationships. Few female travel writers, however, attempted to justify their disapproval by discussing any failures in the relationship between the husband and his wives. Quite the opposite, several women's travel narratives comment on how good this relationship was. The majority of women's travel texts tended to concentrate more on the friction the system generated between the wives themselves, and were frequently preoccupied with the internal jealousies and petty rivalries of the harem.

The continued references to the competitive nature of the relationships between the wives in female travel texts throughout the whole of the nineteenth century indicates that this fascination with the subject does not seem to have diminished over time, or changed significantly according to the county being visited as there is a marked similarity between the accounts. For example in Egypt in 1850 Florence Nightingale found that in her experience: "Their sole occupation in the harem is politics, and all politics are conducted by *their* intrigues."[567] While at the Siamese Court in the 1870s Anna Leonowens noted wryly that: "it was curious, even amusing, to observe the serene contempt with which the "interlopers" were received by the rival incumbents of the royal gynecium, - especially the Laotian women, who are of a finer type and much handsomer than their Siamese sisters."[568] And in Persia in the 1890s Isabella Bird observed that: "There was a complete rabble of women in the gallery, with crawling children and screaming babies – a forlorn, disorderly

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[566] Florence Nightingale, *Letters from Egypt*, p. 139.
[567] Ibid., p. 28.
[568] Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess*, p. 275.

household, in which the component parts made no secret of their hatred and jealousy of each other."[569]

Many female travellers elected to write about the internal politics of the harem system in their travel narratives, and focused on the effect this had on the standing of the wives. Fanny Parkes Parlby described the Indian zenana as: "a place of intrigue, and those who live within four walls cannot pursue a straight path: how can it be other-wise, where so may conflicting passions are called forth?"[570] She concluded that the rivalry between the wives resulted in a constant changing of the status of the women: "Sons are of inestimable value; the birth of a daughter is almost a calamity; but even the mother blest with a son is not likely to remain long without a rival in the heart of her husband, since ninety-nine out of a hundred take new wives; besides the concubines given by the mother before marriage!"[571] Several female travel writers noted that women in polygamous relationships only achieved some sort of authority once they had given birth.[572] Anna Leonowens recorded how in Siam:

> The husband and father have unlimited power, even of life and death, over the wife and children, but murders are extremely rare. Woman is the slave of man; but when she becomes a mother her position is changed, and she commands respect and reverence. As a mother with grown children she has often more influence than her husband. Hence maternity is the supreme good of the women of Siam; to be childless the greatest of all misfortunes.[573]

But, however difficult life was for childless women in Siam, Isabella Bird's account of her observations in Persia and Kurdistan show that conditions for some women were far worse:

> Yangaloo is a typical Armenian village [...] All the male members of a family bring their brides to live under the parental roof, and one "burrow"

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[569] Isabella Bird, *Journeys in Persia & Kurdistan II*, p. 109.
[570] Fanny Parkes Parlby, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim*, p. 265.
[571] Ibid., p. 302.
[572] They also often implied that it was no different for British women, many of whom also relied on childbearing as a means of improving their status.
[573] Anna Leonowens, *The Romance of the Harem*, p. 10.

may contain as many as three generations of married couples with their families. On becoming an inmate of her father-in-law's house, each Armenian bride, as in the country districts of Persia, has to learn the necessity of silence. Up to the day of the birth of the first child she is the family drudge, and may not speak to any one but her husband, and not to him in the presence of his parents. Maternity liberates her tongue; she may talk to her child, and then to the females of the household; but she may not speak freely till some years of this singular novitiate have passed by.[574]

This particularly cheerless account of the prospects for an Armenian wife is especially valuable as it illustrates that not all polygamous societies were the same, and women did not always benefit from legal protection or have greater advantages to women in Britain.

The numerous discussions concerning the role of wives and the position of women, particularly in polygamous societies, in women's travel literature during the nineteenth century would appear to confirm Foster's assertion that: "It is nevertheless possible to recognise a distinctive and overtly feminine voice in the women's texts."[575] The evidence does show that, as a rule, female travel writers were concerned with the status and treatment of women under alternative regimes, and that they were keen to compare their circumstances with their own. Many female travel writers were even prepared to acknowledge that women from places commonly considered inferior to Britain had opportunities which British women were denied, regardless of whether or not that undermined traditional orientalist discourse.

4.5 'Women's' Issues in Male Travel Literature

If we are to accept Mills, Pratt and Foster's claims that women travel writers were "challenging the male norm" and "establishing a new female-oriented genre" then there should be little value attached to information relating to the role of wives and

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[574] Isabella Bird, *Journeys in Persia & Kurdistan II*, pp. 367-8.
[575] Shirley Foster, *Across New Worlds*, p. 24.

the position of women in the travel literature produced by male writers. However, yet again, examination of the texts produced by male travel writers shows that this was not the case.

There are numerous examples of texts from male travel writers which discuss in some detail the role of wives and the position of women throughout the whole of the nineteenth century, and from a range of different countries, even from areas where one might have expected these 'women's' issues to have been of little importance. For instance although male travellers to Africa were, on the whole, professional explorers on official business, they still exhibited a keen interest in non-official subjects and a particular curiosity about the local female population in their narratives. In the account of his expedition to Africa David Livingstone went into great detail regarding the position of women in Zambesi society, and he took considerable care to document women's roles and the effect polygamy had on their status. Livingstone shared many women travel writers' disapproval of polygamy writing: "Polygamy, the sign of low civilization, and the source of many evils, is common" but, in spite of his strong religious views, he tempered his condemnation by explaining how the system was:

> oddly enough, approved of even by the women. On hearing that a man in England could marry but one wife, several ladies exclaimed that they would not like to live in such a country: they could not imagine how English ladies could relish our custom; for, in their way of thinking, every man of respectability should have a number of wives, as a proof of his wealth. [576]

Livingstone's readers would have found the information he supplied especially valuable because it provided an important insight into the structure and organization of harems in Africa. British readers had some knowledge about the operation of such systems in the Middle and Far East, thanks to the number of female travel writers who chose to document their experiences. Data on harems usually came from women as in these regions the majority of men were prohibited entry. However, Africa was one location where men did have some freedom to observe harems for

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[576] David Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition,* pp. 284-5.

themselves, and they were eager to take advantage of this rare opportunity to discuss what they witnessed in their travel accounts.

African harems operated in a different way from those of the Middle and Far East. Economics was an important factor in all polygamous societies but, whereas in the Middle and Far East the focus was on the expense of running a harem and the wealth that was needed to maintain them, in Africa they were seen as *income providing* units. Livingstone noted how: "No man is respected by his neighbour who has not several wives. The reason for this is, doubtless, because, having the produce of each wife's garden, he is wealthy in proportion to their number."[577] Livingstone's observations were echoed by other African explorers such as John Hanning Speke who also found on his travels that:

> Illicit intercourse being treated as petty larceny, a value is fixed according to the value of the woman – for it must be remembered all women are property. Indeed, marriages are considered a very profitable speculation, the girl's hand being in the father's gift, who marries her to any one who will pay her price. This arrangement, however, is not considered a simple matter of buying and selling, but delights in the high-sounding title of 'dowry.' Slaves, cows, goats, fowls, brass wire, or beads, are the usual things given for this species of dowry. The marriage-knot, however, is never irretrievably tied; for if the wife finds a defect in her husband, she can return to her father by refunding the dowry; whilst the husband, if he objects to his wife, can claim half-price on sending her home again, which is considered fair, because as a second-hand article her future value would be diminished by half. By this system, it must be observed, polygamy is a source of wealth.[578]

Ester Boserup has made a particular study of the role of women in economic development, and the results of her investigation indicate that women made a significant contribution to the sphere of productive work during the nineteenth century. She concluded that: "In Africa [...] polygamy is widespread, and nobody seems to doubt that its occurrence is closely related to economic conditions."[579] The economic importance of women in African society is stressed throughout

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[577] Ibid., p. 285.
[578] John Hanning Speke, *Journal*, p. 5.
[579] Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), p. 37.

Livingstone's text, and he comments in some detail on the women's contribution to the local economy:

> The women are accustomed to transact business for themselves. They accompany the men into camp, sell their own wares, and appear to be both fair traders, and modest sensible persons. Elsewhere they bring things for sale on their heads, and, kneeling at a respectful distance, wait till their husbands or fathers, who have gone forward, choose to return, and to take their goods, and barter for them. Perhaps in this particular, the women here occupy the golden mean between the Manganja hill-tribes and the Jaggas of the north, who live on the mountain summits near Kilimanjaro. It is said that at the latter place the women do all the trading, have regular markets, and will on no account allow a man to enter the market-place.[580]

On the whole male travel writers tended to take a more pragmatic attitude towards polygamy in their narratives than their female counterparts. While the majority of female writers saw the system of polygamy as sinful and immoral, male writers generally approached them from a more practical standpoint and often discussed the rational reasons that lay behind the system.[581] George Curzon's observations are characteristic of many male narratives. On one of his travels he found that the Amir of Afghanistan was:

> much interested in the marriage laws and customs of different countries. Monogamy, as practiced in England and Europe, he held to be a most pernicious system. Firstly, there being, as a rule, more women than men in European countries, monogamy meant that a large number of them remained unmarried, which was a cruel and unnatural fate. Secondly, if a man was only allowed by law to take one wife the country swarmed with 'children of God,' *i.e.* illegitimate offspring.[582]

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[580] David Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition*, p. 192.
[581] Lucie Duff Gordon and Mary Kingsley are among the few female travel writers who comment on the practical reasons for polygamy, but their approach is not common – see above.
[582] Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, *Tales of Travel* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), p. 82.

Curzon took great care to record the local people's justifications for supporting polygamous relationships and, in common with many male travellers, he did not judge their systems from a moral or religious standpoint of view.

The access to women and children enjoyed by male travellers to Africa is evident in the quality and quantity of information concerning them in their travel texts. However, men who travelled to other parts of the world were also able to observe women's lives on their journeys. Edward John Eyre discovered on one of his expeditions across central Australia that among the Australian aborigines:

> little real affection [...] exists between husbands and wives, and young men value a wife principally for her services as a slave [...] Women are often sadly ill-treated by their husbands or friends, in addition to the dreadful life of drudgery, and privation, and hardship they always have to undergo; they are frequently beaten about the head, with waddies, in the most dreadful manner, or speared in the limbs for the most trivial offences. No one takes the part of the weak or the injured, or ever attempts to interfere with the infliction of such severe punishments.[583]

Eyre's description of life for Australian aborigine females was bleak and in his account he was generally very sympathetic to their plight. However, he took no direct action to try and improve their situation or alleviate their suffering. He merely documented what he saw.

Investigation into the primary sources has shown that many male explorers were able to include substantial amounts of information on the role and status of women in their travel texts, particularly when they travelled to parts of the world where they were able to closely observe the local female population. However, even accounts written about areas to which European men had very limited access to the female population were still able to provide some details about women's lives, although in that situation the information usually came from third-parties. For example, in the account of his experiences in India in 1844 Sir William Sleeman not only described the social lives of British women but he also wrote about life for women in the harem. Far from portraying Indian women as weak and powerless and

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[583] Edward John Eyre, *Journals*, vol. 2, pp. 321-2.

completely under the control of their husbands, Sleeman maintained that in practice they had considerable influence in Indian society:

> In the exercise of dominion from behind the curtain (for it is those who live behind the curtain that seem most anxious to hold it), women select ministers who, to secure duration to their influence, become their paramours, or, at least, make the world believe that they are so, to serve their own selfish purposes. The sons are tyrannized over through youth by their mothers, who endeavour to subdue their spirit to the yoke, which they wish to bind heavy upon their necks for life; and they remain through manhood timid, ignorant, and altogether unfitted for the conduct of public affairs.[584]

Sleeman did not reveal how he got this information, although he did have a history of asking advice from his wife, but his comments are typical of many male narratives written about life in India.[585]

In male travel accounts harem women were not ordinarily seen as "pets and playthings", as they were in some female travel texts, as Sleeman's text demonstrates.[586] On the contrary, male travel writers often depicted them as being influential and manipulative rather than impotent and defenseless. In *White Mughals* William Dalrymple describes how James Kirkpatrick's detailed knowledge of the operation of the harems in Hyderbad made an important contribution to furthering British interests in the area as it meant that he could avoid:

> underestimating the power of the Nizam's women in the Hyderbad political process. In his very first report for Wellesley, James wrote not only about the Nizam and his advisers, but also devoted many pages to analysing the distribution of power within Nizam Ali Khan's harem [...] This knowledge enabled him successfully to predict the outcome of power struggles and succession disputes.[587]

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[584] Sir William Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections*, p. 255.
[585] When visiting the Taj mahal: "I asked my wife, when she had gone over it, what she thought of the building." Sir William Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections*, pp. 316-7.
[586] "Let me conduct the reader into one of the saloons of the palace, where we shall find this intellectual sensualist in the moral relaxation of his harem, with his latest pets and playthings about him." From Anna Leonowens, *The English Governess*, p. 43.
[587] William Dalrymple, *White Mughals*), pp. 125-6.

Many male travel writers appear to have had a fear of what they could not see and, because most Indian women were out of bounds to them, they were very distrustful of what these women might be up to behind the scenes. They were not usually able to have first-hand experience of these enclosures, unlike Kirkpatrick, and as a consequence the women were frequently regarded with suspicion in the men's travel texts.

However, without the benefit of either first or second-hand knowledge, writers of fiction took a different approach. Nancy Paxton's investigation into the idea of rape in the colonial imagination has led her to conclude that fiction written about India prior to the Mutiny, such as William Hockley Browne's *Tales of the Zenana* (1827) and Meadows Taylor's *Confessions of a Thug* (1839), wanted to "captialize on the popularity of Byron's harem tales" and therefore tended to romanticize life in the Indian harem.[588] Post-Mutiny fiction, on the other hand, influenced by the uprising and inspired by accounts of female warriors such as Rani of Jhansi, including J.E. Muddock's *The Star of Fortune: A Story of the Indian Mutiny* (1894), and Robert Armitage Sterndale's *The Afghan Knife* (1879), moved away from idealizing the harem and often portrayed the women as authoritative and controlling. This brought imaginative writing closer to true-life accounts, which had for some time acknowledged that despite their seclusion the women of the harem were more than capable of exerting power and influence, and demonstrates the impact of major political events, such as the armed rebellion in 1857 against British colonial authority, on literary representations of India.

We have discussed how in some regions male travellers had as much access to domestic areas as female travellers, but even in countries where strict rules of segregation operated many men still successfully managed to record family customs in their travel narratives. Married men, of course, had the advantage of having their wives along with them on their explorations. Gray Hill was fortunate to be accompanied by his wife on his visit to the Middle East, and her presence enabled

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[588] Nancy Paxton, W*riting under the Raj: Gender, Race, and Rape in the British Colonial Imagination, 1830-1947* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1999), p. 59.

him to discover more about the life of the female members of the Beduin tribes of Syria than he might have been able to do if he had travelled alone:

> Ali Diab is somewhat liberal in the matter of wives, marrying a new one every three or four months. He divorces old ones as frequently, and generously bestows them upon the less important members of his tribe. He has one chief old wife who looks after his harem and domestic affairs. But even she cannot keep absolute order in the female quarter of the great tent; for he complained to my wife that his wives were always quarrelling, and that it made his head ache. What did she advise him to do? She suggested that it might be best to reduce the establishment to one. But if he had only one, what would he do when she got old? She observed that with age would come wisdom, but the old reprobate did not think much of that.[589]

This was not the only time Hill recognised his wife's participation in his exploits. We saw in Chapter Two that she had assisted him on other occasions and, unlike some male travel writers, he publically acknowledged her contribution to the success of his explorations. This extract also confirms other writers' observations on the internal disagreements and "quarrelling" that went on between the wives but, whereas women's travel texts tended to focus on how upsetting this was for the wives, men's travel narratives unsurprisingly tended to centre on how troublesome this made life for the husbands.

Single men, although somewhat at a disadvantage, were often still able to include substantial amounts of information on the local female population. We are told that in this situation the information obtained came mostly from conversations with local men. Sir William Sleeman confessed that he occasionally had to rely "on the testimony of others" but he hastily reassured his readers that he believed their information "to be true" and that the reader "may rely upon as being so."[590] Therefore there is evidence to indicate that there were some local men who were happy to spend time discussing their family circumstances with other men and with men of other nationalities. It demonstrates that men were prepared to sit around and

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[589] Gray Hill, *With the Beduins*, pp. 44-5.
[590] Sir William Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections*, Introduction.

chat about 'women's' subjects with each other, and make a record of their conversations for public consumption.

Our investigation into female travel literature showed us that women travel writers were often concerned with the system of divorce and the legal rights available to married women. However, this interest was not exclusive to female travel writers: male travel writers also frequently chose to discuss these subjects in their travel texts. The detail and length which Edward Granville Browne goes into in the account of his travels through Persia demonstrates his keen interest, and his eagerness to document the local marriage customs and rules for separation:

> A Shi'ite may, according to his law, contract a temporary marriage with a woman of his own, or of the Jewish, Christian, or (though some may contest this) Magian faith, for a fixed period of time, which may vary from a fraction of a day to a year or several years. Properly speaking, it is the contract drawn up by the officiating *mulld* (in which both the period of duration of the marriage, and the amount of the dowry – though this last may be no more than a handful of barley – must be specified), which is called the *sigha*, but the term is commonly applied to the woman with whom such a marriage is contracted. This species of marriage (if it can be dignified with his name), though held in very proper detestation by Sunnite Muhammadans, is regarded by the Shi'ites as perfectly legal, and children resulting from it are held to be lawful offspring. Though prevalent to some extent throughout Persia, it flourishes with special vigour in Kirman, where, owing to the great poverty of the people, the small dowry bestowed on the *sigha* induces many parents to seek for their daughters such engagement. Bad as this institution is at best, the *mullas*, by one of those unrighteous legal quibbles of which they are so fond, have succeeded in making it yet more abominable. According to the law, a *sigha*, on completing the contract period, must, before going to another husband, wait for forty-five days or two months to ascertain whether or no she is with child by her former husband. This, however, only applies to cases where the marriage has been actually consummated. So, as many of these women are practically *sighas* by trade, and do not wish to be subjected to this period of probation, the *mullas* have devised the following means of evading the law. When the contracted period of marriage has come to an end, the man makes a fresh contract with the woman for another very short period; this second (purely nominal) marriage, being with the same man as the first, is legal without any intervening period of probation, and is not consummated; so that, on its expiration, the woman is free to marry another man as soon as she pleases.[591]

[591] Edward Granville Browne, *A Year Among the Persians*, p. 505.

Although not approving of these customs, particularly as apparently the women were being exploited as professional fiancées by their families, the quantity and quality of the data Browne included in his narrative shows an intense rather than a passing interest in the subject.

Browne was not alone in his curiosity as most male travel texts tended to show a high level of interest in these 'women's' issues. Many male travellers also accepted that in some regions women in polygamous relationships had advantages that wives in Britain were denied. Richard Burton, for example, acknowledged that, although life was difficult for the women of the Wanyamwezi tribe, they did have access to some freedoms:

> The wife is so far the property of the husband that he can claim damages from the adulterer; he may not, however, sell her, except when in difficulties. The marriage is celebrated with the usual carouse, and the bridegroom takes up his quarters in his wife's home, not under her father's roof. Polygamy is the rule with the wealthy. There is little community interest and apparently a lack of family affection in these tribes. The husband, when returning from the coast laden with cloth, will refuse a single shukkah to his wife, and the wife succeeding to an inheritance will abandon her husband to starvation. The man takes charge of the cattle, goats, sheep, and poultry; the woman has power over the grain and vegetables; and each must grow tobacco, having little hope of borrowing from the other. Widows left with houses, cattle, and fields, usually spend their substance in supporting lovers, who are expected occasionally to make presents in return.[592]

Sir Francis Galton found that there were some African tribes where women had even greater opportunities:

> Damara women have not much to complain of: they are valuable helpmates; and divorce themselves as often as they like. The consequence is that the marital rule depends not upon violence nor upon interest, but upon affection. A wife costs a Damara nothing for she "crows" her own pignuts, and she is of positive use, because she builds and plasters his hut, cooks his victuals,

[592] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa,* vol. 2, pp. 23-5.

> and carries his things when he moves from place to place. A Damara seldom beats his wife much; if he does, she decamps.[593]

Galton believed, however, like many male travel writers that there were disadvantages to giving women so much license and he concluded: "This deference of husband to wife was a great difficulty in the way of discipline; for I often wanted to punish the ladies of my party, and yet I could not make their husbands whip them for me, and of course I was far too gallant to have it done by any other hands." Anthony Trollope reported that American women also had considerable freedom and control over their lives. However, rather than this being a positive feature he indicated that too much liberty had its drawbacks:

> I confess that in the States I have sometimes been driven to think that chivalry has been carried too far;- that there is an attempt to make women think more of the rights of their womanhood than is needful. There are ladies' doors at hotels, ladies' drawing-rooms, ladies' sides on the ferry boats, ladies' windows at the post office for the delivery of letters;- which by-the-by, is an atrocious institution, as anybody may learn who will look at the advertisements called personal in some of the New York papers. Why should not young ladies have their letters sent to their houses, instead of getting them at a private window?[594]

Trollope demonstrates here a very traditional view of the role of women which he confirms by declaring: "The best right a woman has is the right to a husband, and that is the right to which I would recommend every young woman here and in the States to turn her best attention." Clearly Trollope thought American women had too much liberty, and that they would benefit from the discipline of having a husband.

It was not only American women who capitalized on their relative independence. Richard Burton discovered during his visit to Egypt in 1852 that as a result of changes in the law: "The palmy days of the Egyptian husband, when he might use the stick, the sword, or the sack with impunity, are, in civilised places at

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[593] Sir Francis Galton, *The Narrative of an Explorer*, pp. 196-7.
[594] Anthony Trollope, *North America*, p. 265.

least, now gone by. The wife has only to complain to the Kazi, or to the governor, and she is certain of redress." However, like Galton and Trollope, Burton also indicated that he suspected the women were abusing their freedom: "That is right in the abstract, but in practice it acts badly. The fair sex is so unruly in this country, that strong measures are necessary to coerce it, and in the arts of deceit men have here little or no chance against women."[595] Women did not appear to be able to win. Either they were pitied for being enslaved or they were criticized for taking advantage of their opportunities for freedom.[596]

Conclusion

It was a common theme in male travel literature that the quality of a society could be judged by the way it treated its women. Burton not only claimed that women were interesting ("the first question of mankind to the wanderer – 'What are the women like?'"[597]), but he also declared that a nation could be assessed by examining the status and role of its female population: "The social position of women – the unerring test of progress towards civilisation."[598] Men needed to write about women in their travel narratives not just because it was an attractive subject or because it was very profitable, as the texts would potentially appeal to both a male and female audience, but because it could be used as a barometer with which to measure progress and civilization. We should not be surprised, therefore, to find that their travel literature regularly included this sort of information and that men confidently addressed 'women's' issues in their narratives; as Sara Ellis observed in her conduct book of 1842: "It seems to be the peculiar taste of the present day to write, and to read, on the subject of woman."[599]

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[595] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa,* vol. 1, p. 175.
[596] It is interesting that while female travel writers saw the liberties enjoyed by some women in a positive way, male travel writers generally viewed them in a negative way.
[597] Richard Francis Burton, *The Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al Medinha & Meccah,* vol. 2, p. 85.
[598] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*, vol. 2, p. 334.
[599] Sarah Ellis, *The Daughters of England*, Preface.

Conclusion

The purpose of this enquiry has been to establish whether the ideology of separate spheres should continue to be used in the analysis of nineteenth-century travel literature, and whether there is any justification in assuming that male and female travel writers were restricted to addressing gender-specific themes in their travel narratives. Examination of the texts has revealed that, generally, male and female travel writers took a very similar approach in their travel accounts, and the popularity of travel literature during the nineteenth century is a good indication that the British public had an appetite for texts that incorporated a wide variety of material.

The market needed travel books that encompassed a broad range of subject matter, rather than all sentiment or all facts, and the publishing houses were understandably eager to respond to this need. Richard Burton was forced to amend his intended "exclusively 'light work'" in order to include the "addition of stronger meat",[600] while Edward Granville Browne's publishers "expressed a preference for the narrative form, which, they believed, would render the book more readable."[601] So controlling were the publishing houses, and their advice to prospective travel authors so formulaic, that their practices were parodied by the British writer Frederick Marryat. *Olla Podrida* (first published in 1840) has a whole chapter entitled "How to Write a Book of Travels" in which the two characters, Barnstaple and Ansard, debate the best way to produce a successful travel book, irrespective of whether the country in question had actually been visited, or even if the author had left the confines of their living room. Barnstaple's advice is that in "every chapter

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[600] Richard Francis Burton, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa,* vol. 1, Preface.
[601] Edward Granville Browne, *A Year Among the Persians*, p. 2.

you should have certain landmarks to guide you", and that these should include topics such as:

> Travelling - remarks on country passed through – anecdote – arrival at a town – churches – population – historical remarks – another anecdote – eating & drinking – natural curiosities – egotism – remarks on women (never mind the men) - another anecdote – reflections – an adventure – and go to bed.[602]

This not only signifies how prescribed the travel literature genre was, but also reiterates the importance of including "remarks on women" in a travel text; "never mind the men" (apparently men do not make for particularly interesting reading material). Clearly convention was more important than discourse to many nineteenth-century travel writers, and there is a paradigm in travel literature which has been overlooked or discounted by academics. Both genders were encouraged to discuss a diverse selection of topics and there is, on the whole, a strong sense of homogeneity between travel texts rather than within genders. There was an understanding between publisher and author of what was required, as Sara Mills observed: "Writers also have a fairly clear notion of what subject-matter is likely to be acceptable to the publishing world at a particular time", and it was a brave author who chose to adopt a novel literary style.[603]

The veracity of a text relied heavily upon having an easily identifiable literary style, it was, therefore, important for travel writers of both genders to approach their work in similar ways. However, the emphasis placed by many academics on the limitations of being a woman in nineteenth-century Britain has coloured their interpretation of women's travel literature, and blinded them to the variety of information contained in the texts. Women writers' discussions of 'technical' subjects have been ignored or dismissed, as have male writers' discussions of the family and the position of women, although for different reasons. There has been an expectation that women would write differently from men, not only by current scholars but also by nineteenth-century reviewers. Lady Elizabeth

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[602] Frederick Marryat, *Olla Podrida* (Boston: Dana Estes & Co., 1897), p. 294.
[603] Sara Mills, *Feminist Stylistics* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 32.

Eastlake's 1845 critique of "twelve recently published travel books by women" is particularly illuminating as in it she compared the detail of women travellers, trained to "count canvass stitches by the fireside", to the "sweeping generalities" of men.[604] Eastlake envisaged a partnership in travel writing, with each gender making its own different but equally important contribution. Nigel Leask observed of Eastlake's review: "Whilst men describe public life, British women (and the reviewer is nationally specific) excel at observing the private, female spaces in the lands they visit because of their innate domesticity". Leask concluded, however, that Eastlake was aware that her aspirations for a 'literary marriage' were "designed to sketch the beau ideal (rather than the actual state) of nineteenth-century woman's travel writing", and a "response to changing facts on the ground", as "the increasing absorption of travel writing into the literary sphere from the 1820s [...] rendered specialist scientific knowledge less necessary for travel writers in general, a fact which empowered many women authors."[605]

The expectation that men and women travelled in different ways remains prevalent. When Dea Birkett was requested by the male organizer of a talk she was invited to give to "trace a red line to demonstrate the routes I had travelled for the benefit of the audience", she found it difficult because: "I hadn't really travelled anywhere at all, not in that sense. I don't go on expeditions." She claims that "women have always travelled differently. We tend to hang out, chat, gossip" whereas with men travel is about "obstacle-conquering – mountains to be climbed, hostile terrain to be overcome."[606] However, this statement is difficult to reconcile with what nineteenth-century travellers actually described in their travel texts. Yes, there was certainly some amount of bravado, and a desire to be 'first' in much male travel literature, but there was also eagerness to address 'women's' issues as well. Similarly, although many women writers wrote about domestic matters, some also wanted to be recognized as the 'first'. Alexandra David-Neel was proud of being "the lone woman explorer who had had the nerve to come to [Lhasa] from afar, the

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[604] Cited in Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*, p. 203.
[605] Ibid., pp. 203-4.
[606] *The Guardian* 5th July 2004.

first of her sex."[607] And Hester Lucy Stanhope boasted "I believe I am the only person who can give an account of the manner in which a great Turk is received by his wives and women."[608] Perhaps women did not set out with the intention to conquer or to discover, but when they did achieve something they certainly wanted it to be acknowledged.[609]

There is a noticeable discrepancy between how male and female travellers during the nineteenth century were expected to write and what is found in the texts they actually produced. Not all travellers shared the same political, religious or ideological beliefs, and there are marked differences in many texts, but, as we have seen, the texts of both genders are remarkably similar. It is only in areas where the author's reputation was significantly at risk, and this applies primarily to female authors, where there is any notable difference between genders. However, even in these circumstances, women authors were able to take advantage of the freedoms inherent within the travel literature genre in order to circumvent many of the restrictions governing what was considered 'suitable' literary material for female writers. The genre of travel literature allowed travel writers to examine an eclectic selection of themes under the guise of scientific discovery, a freedom perhaps not available to other literary forms, and enabled men and women to address topics in their travel texts which, theoretically, their gender should have restricted.

The vast number of male writers who chose to explore 'women's' issues in their travel texts, the large number of female writers who chose to explore 'men's' issues in their travel texts, and the popularity of these texts with the reading public indicates that both sexes were interested a wide range of subjects. It is difficult, therefore, to justify the continued application of the ideology of separate spheres in travel literature, at least in regard to the areas we have investigated, as it appears that public and private issues were important to both genders, irrespective of what one's expectations might be.

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[607] Alexandra David-Neel, *My Journey to Lhasa* (London: Virago Press, 1983), p. 259.
[608] Hester Lucy Stanhope, *The Life and Letters*, p. 137.
[609] The publication of travel texts under a pseudonym or anonymously does not contradict this statement. Barnstable advises Ansard to publish incognito as it will: "impart an additional interest to your narrative. All the world will be guessing who you may be." In Frederick Marryat, *Olla Podrida*, p. 302.

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