



# Gender Stereotypes in Some Romantic Travelogues (and How to Use Them)

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# Gender Stereotypes in Some Romantic Travelogues (and How to Use Them)

Anne ROUHETTE

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- 1 This essay will concentrate on travel narratives written primarily in the first person plural, presented as having been mostly or entirely penned by a woman travelling with her husband during the Romantic period, when collaborative works began to be published. In such works, readers might expect to find a distinction between masculine and feminine voices and personae based upon clearly differentiated gender roles, which does not mean that I will assume an essentialist viewpoint according to which those voices or personae depend on biology. A very recent essay by Nicole Pellegrin has shown how difficult and even frustrating such an approach can be: her interrogation about a masculine and a feminine way of writing travel literature – “Y a-t-il un *il* ou un *elle* de l'écriture de voyage?” (Pellegrin 121) – based upon a study of the Cradocks' separate accounts of their journey to Lyon yielded unexpected and interesting, but inconclusive, results, leaving the question open as to whether the highlighted variations stemmed from differences in sensibility or from the modes of writing chosen by each spouse<sup>1</sup>.
- 2 The perspective adopted here derives largely from that taken up by Sara Mills in her influential *Discourses of Difference* (1991), where she analyses various works and comes to the following conclusion:
 

what the narrators write about the people amongst whom they travelled and their attitude to those people is surprisingly similar and seems to differ from the writings of male travel writers in the stress they lay on personal involvements and relationships with people of the other culture and in the less authoritarian stance they take *vis-à-vis* narrative voice. (Mills 21)
- 3 However, Mills does not automatically attribute such similarities and differences to gender and, building her theoretical framework on Foucault's “notion of discourse, [...] concern with the surface of discourse and [...] critique of claims to scientificity” (8), prefers to speak of ideological constructions responsible for certain discursive practices:

[women's texts] are produced and received within a context which shares similarities with the discursive construction and reception of male texts, whilst at the same time, because of the discursive frameworks which exert pressure on female writers, there may be negotiations in women's texts which result in differences which seem to be due to gender. (Mills 6)

- 4 While acknowledging that some texts written by women are easily recognizable as such, Kristi Siegel follows Mills and finds it hard to defend the viewpoint of critics who "have posited that women's travel writing demonstrates unique characteristics" such as a greater concern with people than with place, a mistrust of the rhetoric of mastery and conquest, a greater emphasis on the body or on an inward focus. She adds that "[t]hough gender inevitably affects genre, it is nearly impossible to construct a set of commonalities that would cut across lines of race and class" (Siegel 5)<sup>2</sup>. I will not try here to differentiate between an essentially "masculine" or a "feminine" mode of travel writing, insofar as expectations of femininity and of feminine writing have been so internalized by Romantic women writers that it is virtually impossible to distinguish between a naturally, quintessentially feminine type of writing, whatever that may be, and a conscious or unconscious conformity to the prevailing conception of what true female "nature" should be. After a general presentation of a gendered approach to travel writing, this essay will consider several collaborative works published between 1795 and 1817, the year when the most famous of those works, the Shelleys' *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (hereafter referred to as *History*), came out, in the light of stereotypical gendered expectations, in order to analyse how these stereotypes are consciously exploited, played upon and partially subverted. If a gendered perspective on travel writing is not specifically new, approaching it through these collaborative travelogues may afford a stimulating take on the question.

## 1. Travel writing, a gendered genre

- 5 "By a Gentleman on his Travels": such is the pseudonymic formula concealing Lady Barbara Montagu and Sarah Scott for the publication of *A Description of Millenium Hall, and the Country Adjacent* in 1762. In what to the best of my knowledge represents the only example of a woman (or rather, two women) using a variation on the "By a Gentleman" signature, the work happens to be a – fictitious – travelogue, which is hardly surprising. Up to a recent date, travel writing, both fictional and non-fictional, was indeed closely associated with the masculine, which a brief overview of the gendered nouns used as signatures, a practice very common during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and still widely used at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, makes perfectly clear. If one takes into account all the travel narratives<sup>3</sup> published until 1817, only four are signed with the gendered formula "By a Lady" and its variants such as "By a Lady of..." and "By a Young Lady": *A Journey to the Highlands of Scotland, With Occasional Remarks on Dr. Johnson's Tour*, By a Lady (i.e. Mary Ann Hanway, 1776); *A Sentimental Tour of Newcastle*, By a Young Lady (i.e. Jane Harvey, 1794); *A Sketch of Modern France. In a Series of Letters to a Lady of Fashion. Written in the Years 1796 and 1797, During a Tour through France*. By a Lady (i.e. Louise Beaumont<sup>4</sup>, 1798); and *The Lowestoft Guide: Containing a Descriptive Account of Lowestoft and its Environs*. By a Lady (1812). By contrast, 39<sup>5</sup> travel narratives are signed by "a Gentleman" or one of its derivatives ("a Gentleman of...", "a Young Gentleman", etc.), which represents almost ten times the amount of "ladies", if not quite the "host of anonymous 'Gentlemen'" evoked by

Katherine Turner (3). Besides, “Gentlemen” had published accounts from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century whereas the first travel narrative signed by a “Lady” dates from 1776.

- 6 This, however, does not mean that women did not write about their travels. As Sara Mills notes, citing Margery Kempe’s relation of her pilgrimages in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, women have produced travelogues since the 14<sup>th</sup> century (27). Mills goes on to refute Charles Batten’s claim that “even the occasional woman travelled” in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Mills 31), but although she is on solid ground when dealing with the period specifically examined in her book (roughly speaking, from 1860 to 1920), she remains vague when it comes to the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In fact, figures corroborate Batten’s statement regarding most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: according to Benjamin Colbert, “[b]efore 1780, only ten books of travel by women had been published in Britain and Ireland” (Colbert 2016). Yet a marked evolution can be observed at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in a context where women writers took an increasingly large share of the literary market: 63 travelogues published between 1780 and 1817 by British or American women are thus listed in the *Database of Women’s Travel Writing 1780-1840*<sup>6</sup>. Some are anonymous, others were signed by their author, who sometimes wrote several (Helen Maria Williams, Maria Graham). Although this certainly points to more than mere “occasional” women travellers and travel writers, these findings need to be put in perspective with the thousands of travel narratives which appeared during the 18<sup>th</sup> century taken as a whole<sup>7</sup> and lead us to conclude with Elizabeth A. Bohls that “[w]omen travellers wrote, though they did not publish their travels as often as did men; women certainly wrote far fewer travel books than novels” (xv).
- 7 In spite of highly successful travel books like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1718-1720, pub. 1763), Helen Maria Williams’s *Letters Written in France in the Summer 1790* (1791), or Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796), travel writing remained gendered masculine in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. This is largely due to the fact that the exploration and conquest of space were associated with men and antithetical to the idea of the private sphere to which women were increasingly relegated as the 18<sup>th</sup> century wore on and as conduct-book writers like James Fordyce stressed the domestic circle as woman’s natural environment. There “lurked a whole body of thought and writing which was establishing with increasing fervour that the proper position of women (and British women in particular) was at home” (Turner 135). As a result, female travellers were affected by a suspicion of sexual impropriety which also concerned their very status as writers, since authorship was associated with authority, considered as exclusively masculine; they published their works in the context of a widespread disapproval of women exposing themselves in print and hence in the public space. This explains why Wortley Montagu’s famous *Turkish Embassy Letters* was published posthumously. Many women chose not to make their travel narratives public, doubtless because of “the residually masculine associations of the genre” (Turner 135).
- 8 Those who did had to negotiate with the pressures of a society which imposed a certain number of expectations upon them, as regards both womanhood and authorship. In order to avoid the possible opprobrium which, among other things, would prevent their books from selling, women travel writers often imitated female novelists and tried to placate readers with an apologetic paratext, emphasising their conformity to these expectations both explicitly and implicitly. When Sarah Belzoni appended her account to her husband Giovanni’s *Narrative of the Operations and Recent Discoveries [...] in Egypt and Nubia* (1820), the

title given to her part, not mentioned on the book's title-page, was "Mrs. Belzoni's Trifling Account of the Women of Egypt, Nubia, and Syria". Not only does she present herself in relationship to her husband, as a wife ("Mrs.") dealing with feminine matters ("Women"), in the same manner as her narrative depends on his in the general economy of the volume, but she also depreciates her claim to authority thanks to the derogatory adjective "trifling", commonly found<sup>8</sup> in the titles of women's narratives or in their prefaces. Benjamin Colbert's summary of Sarah Belzoni's account shows the extent to which such a gendered façade may be misleading:

Sarah's "Trifling Account of the Women of Egypt, Nubia, and Syria" comprises a good deal of her own ethnological travels in Egypt, and includes an account of her solo voyage to the Holy Land from around March to November 1818, when she visited Jerusalem, Jordan, and Nazareth, often dressed in men's clothing and at times passing for a man. Though Giovanni mentions her when she is of his travelling party, and she him, the two accounts are less a joint enterprise than a joint platform from which both assert their independence and single-minded determination, with Sarah's account being one of the few travel narratives besides Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) to detail a journey in which a woman travelled alone. (Colbert 2016)

- 9 A woman travelling alone dressed as a man, with "independence and single-minded determination", is certainly not what one would expect from a "trifling account"; it is not impossible that the title of Sarah Belzoni's narrative and its place in the volume partake of a strategy based on gendered codes and aiming at deflecting criticism<sup>9</sup>. More generally, women's prefaces often stress the utter lack of pretention of their narratives, usually written (allegedly) without a view to publication and refusing to own an authorship which might smack of authority. Mary Ann Hanway, who, sounding like many first-time novelists, presents herself as a "young" and "inexperienced" writer, thus pleads her "timidity" and the "errors of a female and unpractised pen" in the dedication of her *Journey to the Highlands of Scotland* (1776) to the Earl of Seaforth, before insisting in her preface that "[t]he following letters are selected from a correspondence begun, continued and completed, upon motives of amusement, invitation and tenderness" (i-v).
- 10 In some travelogues, this display of female modesty and unworthiness may be accompanied by a hint that to some extent at least, her travels were more or less forced upon a reluctant woman who would have much preferred to stay at home. Thus, although she does not scruple to criticize such an iconic patriarchal figure as Samuel Johnson in her *Journey* (or perhaps precisely for that reason), Hanway constructs an author persona in her preface which conforms to the stereotypical conception of femininity by insisting on her attachment to her home and family, her "dear, and domestic circle":

we may transport our persons [...] to the remotest regions of the earth [...] but the mind still remains untravelled, and clings fondly to that dear, and domestic circle whom we have left over our own firesides, and whose prayers and wishes are forever on the wing to keep pace with our migrations. (Hanway vi)
- 11 Such statements contribute to conveying what would be called today an essentialist picture by suggesting that a woman's natural place is in her home, because she is a woman. In her essay on "Lady Travellers" (*Quarterly Review*, 1845), Lady Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake develops this idea when she describes two types of writing associated with men and with women – although she writes in the Victorian era, Eastlake articulates conceptions which informed the perception of travel writing in the previous decades. She alludes to the "peculiar powers inherent in ladies' eyes", which, in opposition to the too

frequent “sweeping generalities” to be found in a man’s writing, allow a woman to write letters

overflowing with those close and lively details which show not only that observing eyes have been at work, but one pair of bright eyes in particular [...] Or who does not know the difference between [women’s and men’s] books – especially their books of travels – the gentleman’s either dull and matter-of-fact, or off-hand and superficial, with a heavy disquisition where we look for a light touch, or a foolish pun where we expect a reverential sentiment, either requiring too much trouble of the reader, or showing too much carelessness in the writer – and the lady’s – all ease, animation, vivacity, with the tact to dwell upon what you most want to know, and the sense to pass over what she does not know herself; neither suggesting authorly effort, nor requiring any conscious attention, yet leaving many a clear picture traced on the memory, and many a solid truth impressed on the mind?

- 12 Eastlake here differentiates between two types of writing on the basis of the writer’s sex, foregrounding the distinctions usually drawn between masculine and feminine travel writing. According to Eastlake and more generally to the gendered perceptions of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and beyond, a woman will concentrate on details, on a series of observations seen from up close (“close and lively details”), where a man will resort to generalisations and present an overview of historical, social and philosophical matters, accompanied by reflections and seen from a distance. The objectivity supposedly inherent in masculine writing (Man as the universal author) is matched by the subjectivity of the female writer, who remains an individual – “one pair of bright eyes in particular”, as Eastlake puts it, while underlining here and at several other points in her essay her ideal lady travel writer’s lack of authority/ authorship (“neither suggesting authorly effort”). A system of binary oppositions is thus set up, opposing detail and generalisation, observation and reflection, immediacy and distance, subjectivity and objectivity<sup>10</sup>. A combination of the two types of writing represents, for Eastlake, a perfect form of travel narrative:

But, in truth, every country with any pretensions to civilization has a twofold aspect, addressed to two different modes of perception, and seldom visible simultaneously to both. Every country has a home life as well as a public life, and the first quite necessary to interpret the last. Every country therefore, to be fairly understood, requires reporters from both sexes.

- 13 The rest of this essay will be devoted to an analysis of travelogues written more or less in partnership between “reporters from both sexes” during the Romantic period, insisting particularly on the best-known of these works, the Shelleys’ *History*.

## 2. Radcliffe’s *Journey* and Beaumont’s *Sketch*

- 14 When Ann Radcliffe published the two volumes of *A Journey Made in the Summer of 1794* (1795), she was already a highly successful novelist who hardly needed to apologise for bringing herself forward into print. However, while she opens the preface she added to her book with an assertion of authorship (“The Author begs leave...”), she also explains, “perhaps using a modesty trope” (Moody), that the observations recorded in the book were made conjointly by herself and her husband, whose name she would have liked to add to her own on the title-page. More specifically, “[w]here the political and oeconomic conditions of countries are touched upon”, she states, “the remarks are less her own than elsewhere” (v-vi). As Benjamin Colbert notes, “[a]scribing political and economic investigations to her husband [...] circumscribes her authorial role in gendered terms”



(Colbert 2016), seeming thereby to respect the traditional distinction between masculine and feminine discourses. However, the text that follows does not exploit this gendered distinction. Far from contrasting the subjectivity of a female individual with the objectivity of a generalising male gaze, or combining the two perspectives to produce a supposedly complete picture of the countries visited, à la Eastlake, Radcliffe's *Journey*, written exclusively in the first person plural<sup>11</sup>, consistently displays a striking impersonality. Relatively few emotions are demonstrated or mentioned, and none of those which are belong to the supposedly emotional woman traveller alone; they are all shared with her husband. Very early on in the travelogue, Radcliffe thus foregrounds her objectivity by presenting an impersonal description as "better" than a personal judgment in the first sentence of the excerpt below, which is characteristic of the work in general. She provides many details, scrupulously assessing the degree of accuracy of her statements ("appears", "perhaps" on the hand, "of course", "enough to permit" on the other):

It is better, however, to describe than to praise. The mound, which appears to be throughout of the same height, as to the sea, is sometimes more and sometimes less raised above the fields; for, where the natural level of the land assists in resistance to the water, the Hollanders have, of course, availed themselves of it, to exert the less of their art and their labour. It is, perhaps, for the most part, thirty feet above the adjoining land. The width at top is enough to permit the passage of two carriages, and there is a sort of imperfect road along it. In its descent, the breadth increases so much, that it is not very difficult to walk down either side. We could not measure it, and may therefore be excused for relating how its size may be guessed. (Radcliffe 8-9)

- 15 Rather than what *she* felt, Radcliffe relates what *they* saw, describing landscapes, buildings, objects and people as precisely as she can, with historical details, dates, measurements, etc. This distance enables her to align herself with her husband's dissenting sympathies, more specifically with his "democratic" and "republican" viewpoints (Norton 108); she can voice political opinions, speaking in praise of liberty, as when they admire the independence and freedom of Frankfurt (I, 398-399) or commemorate the Glorious Revolution (II, 210), at a time (1795) when many in Britain might object to such a position. Radcliffe's feminine persona in her preface arguably sets up a complex strategy which manipulates gender stereotypes for double protection: just as her presumably womanly modesty is shielded behind her husband's alleged expertise, his responsibility in its turn is played down by his wife's avowed authorship. Because the work is presented as having been written by a woman, and that woman a very successful novelist, the political and ideological aspects of the travelogue may have been missed by reviewers, who indeed did not comment on them. The preface of the Shelleys' *History*, as we will see below, fulfils a very similar function.
- 16 Much more personal and traditionally feminine than Radcliffe's *Journey* is Louise Beaumont's relation of her travels through France in *A Sketch of Modern France* (1798). The narrator also journeys with her husband, whom she calls "B.", but the reader is presented with a man and a woman travelling together instead of an homogeneous and somewhat impersonal couple; the narrator's "I" and "B."s "he" are almost as frequent as the collective "we". Stephen Bending and Stephen Bygrave, the modern editors of this travelogue, remark on the gendered manner of the work's writing, which "is all to do with observation and not to do with participation, [while] its judgements tend to arise from accumulated details rather than generality" (Beaumont vii). The work is also



accompanied by a preface, written by its editor, Christopher Lake Moody, a friend of Beaumont's and a dissenting clergyman into whose hands the letters "have been placed". Described by Moody as "a mere Journal, written on 'the spur of the occasion,' without any regard to style and arrangement", those letters "abound more in plain undecorated narrative than in deep and pointed reflection" and "required some abridgment and correction to fit them for Publication" (Beaumont v-vi). Moody's condescending remarks foreground his role as male editor authorising the work of "a Lady" and herald Beaumont's own self-deprecating tone in such sentences as "I write *en courant*, without any particular arrangement, attentive only to veracity and to your real information" (Beaumont 43). This is particularly perceptible in her last letter:

As I was obliged to use dispatch, and forced to write with what may be called a *flying pen*, I could not in general stay to make much comment [...]. I have desired B., *pour faire la bonne bouche*, to assist me with some general remarks and observations, arranged under distinct heads; so that you will now have subjoined to my hasty and undigested narrative, the impression which our late view of France, and interview with the French, have made on *his* mind. (Beaumont 499-500).

- 17 Beaumont follows Radcliffe's example of delegating serious matters to her husband but clearly distinguishes between *her* narrative and *his* (the italics above are hers) by adopting a strategy which Lady Morgan will imitate in *France* (1817) and *Italy* (1821): the female narrator disappears at the end of her travelogue and leaves the reader with her husband's general remarks on the situation in France regarding "Politics" or "the state of morality". The structure of the book seems to be built on a hierarchy of the sexes<sup>12</sup>, leading from the female chaotic and amateurish account, written in the traditionally feminine form of letters (or rather journal-letters), to the clear and distinct headings of a masculine "cherry on the cake", to take up the gustative metaphor sustained in this short extract ("*pour faire la bonne bouche*", "undigested").
- 18 The picture which the female narrator draws of herself and her husband also corresponds to gendered stereotypes: for instance, she laments her "poor nerves" (Beaumont 134) or depicts "B." as a cool-blooded hero when he manages to discourse on the fortifications of Montreuil, prevent his wife from having a nervous fit and save an emigrant's life, almost at the same time (Beaumont 54-63). But it might be argued that the metaphor in the excerpt quoted above, with its humorous connotations, also incites the reader to take her statement with a pinch of salt; after all, Beaumont's husband complies with his wife's desire to "assist" her as the extract shifts from the passive ("was obliged") to the active ("have desired") voice, in a slight departure from usual gendered norms according to which women are the object but not the subject of desire. Furthermore, as in Radcliffe's *Journey*, the husband and wife share political opinions which find their way into Beaumont's narrative, written from "a position of radical sympathy and rational dissent" (Beaumont x) which was not perceived when this work "By a Lady" was reviewed. *The Critical Review* thus states: "The narrative sometimes exhibits an agreeable vivacity; and many parts of the volume will amuse the reader: but the information is not very important; nor do we highly approve of the lady's choice of an editor [...]" (August 1798, 397). This passage, taken from the conclusion to the article, stresses the usual characteristics of a lady's travelogue and of acceptable women's writing in general (its entertaining liveliness and amateur status) and dissociates Beaumont from her editor Christopher Moody, a well-known dissenter, whose anticlerical and relatively pro-revolutionary sentiments she nevertheless echoes in her narrative. Were Radcliffe's and Beaumont's reviewers blinded by the gendered façades of their travelogues, and if so, was

this the effect of a conscious strategy? These questions are raised even more acutely by a study of Mary and Percy Shelley's *History*.

### 3. The Shelleys' *History*

- 19 *History* opens with a preface which firmly locates the work within the tradition of female travel writing, in which it is also anchored first by the female-gendered modes in which the book is written, i.e. letters and journal, and secondly by the female-authored travel narratives mentioned in the course of the work: Wollstonecraft's *Letters from Norway* and Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*. This preface determines a gendered reading of the work both explicitly and implicitly. Explicitly, because the author is presented as a woman, travelling "with her husband and sister" (Shelley iv). The husband, "S.", is identified as the author of two letters (out of the four comprised in the second section, "Letters from Geneva") and of the poem "Mont Blanc" which closes the travelogue, leaving the rest of the volume to the female traveller, "M.", and notably its first and longest section, the eponymous "History of a Six Weeks' Tour". The book is also implicitly gendered feminine because of several traits associated with feminine writing, in particular a certain lack of pretention in the very first sentence of the preface: "Nothing can be more unassuming than this little volume", reminiscent for instance of Mrs. Belzoni's "trifling account". This is followed by such phrases as "the account of desultory visits", "they have done little else than arrange the few materials which an imperfect journal, and two or three letters [...] afforded", "their little History" (Shelley iii-iv), etc., which fall in with the general ascription of the work to a female author.
- 20 However, this preface largely relates a fiction because Percy was not Mary's "husband" during the two journeys related in the travelogue (he was still married to Harriet), because Claire Clairmont, the "sister", was not a blood relation of Mary's, and because it was not written by the putative female author but by Percy Shelley. Some details in the travelogue may alert the reader to the fact that the scenario exposed in the preface and the gendered perception of authorship it determines need to be questioned. The gendered "strength-weakness binary" (Colbert 2016) perceptible in *A Sketch of Modern France* and in many other accounts of a travelling couple is quickly reversed in the first part as "M.", who first suffers greatly from the heat and slows the party down because of her various ailments, soon has to relinquish her seat on the trio's donkey to "S.", who has sprained his ankle and is unable to walk. Later, "S." comes close to playing the damsel in distress when a storm threatens to sink the little boat on which he and his aristocratic friend are crossing Lake Geneva, the unnamed Byron preparing himself for the rescue: "I know that my companion would have attempted to save me" (Shelley 122). This gendering is made clearer a few pages afterwards as Shelley implicitly compares himself and Byron to Rousseau's Julie and Saint-Preux respectively: "I forgot to remark, what indeed my companion remarked to me, that our danger from the storm took place precisely in the spot where Julie and her lover were nearly overset, and where St. Preux was tempted to plunge with her into the lake" (Shelley 133). "S."s sensibility is also more frequently alluded to than "M."s, notably in the third Letter, where he is struck by the appearance of a young boy and starts imagining that boy's character and future life in an openly subjective manner, emphasising the role played by his "imagination" (Shelley 111).

21 The three contemporary reviews of *History* do not question the fiction set up in the preface, on which they at least partly base their opinion. In a manner of which Lady Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake doubtless would have approved, those reviews, especially that in *Blackwood's*, present *History* as the work of a “lady”, perfectly innocuous and completely deprived of anything which could even remotely resemble an ideological position. *The Eclectic Review* of May 1818 compares it favourably to another travelogue, *A Walk through Switzerland in September 1816*, by Thomas Hookham (who was also the publisher of *History*), which this usually rather liberal journal blames, among other things, for its enthusiastic endorsement of Rousseau’s political ideas. Conversely, *History* is praised for its refreshing lack of pretention, its plainness and its judicious references to Rousseau, namely to *The New Heloise* (1761), which belonged to the works deemed acceptable at the time by the British press. The *Monthly Review*, which reviewed *A Walk* just before *History* in its January 1819 issue, also exempts the Shelleys from the reproaches heaped on Hookham, which echo those already found in *The Eclectic*<sup>13</sup>.

22 The same elements are also implicit in the approbation which the very conservative journal *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* paradoxically (?) lavishes on *History* in April 1818. The book is described as “the simplest and most unambitious journal imaginable of a Continental Tour”, in which the reader will find “little information” and “no reflection”, as the critic notes approvingly before adding:

The writer of this little volume is a Lady, and writes like one – with ease, gracefulness, and vivacity. Above all, there is something truly delightful in the colour of her stockings: they are of the purest white, and much more becoming than the brightest blue. She prattles away very prettily in the true English idiom, and has evidently learned her language from living lips, rather than dead dictionaries. Though a travelling lady, and therefore entitled to understand all tongues, she very modestly confines herself to the English; and we are not the less disposed to believe, that she understands the language of other countries, from observing that she writes well that of her own. Now and then a French phrase drops sweetly from her fair mouth, but the fear of bad grammar is before her eyes, and she has never ventured on a whole sentence. (412)

23 The reviewer congratulates the writer on what he perceives to be the modesty, humility, and utter lack of intellectual and authorly pretensions of a true English wife, who has nothing in common with the Blue Stockings targeted here. Stylistically speaking, his definition of true ladylike writing, characterised by “ease, gracefulness and vivacity”, announces Eastlake’s emphasis on “ease, animation, vivacity”, the general idea being that the volume will be entertaining and is not to be taken seriously. Taken seriously it obviously was *not*, since an even cursory reading of the work suffices to detect the narrators’ deep aversion to the monarchy, and this even in the first part, where “M.”’s feminine character is most perceptible: she thus glorifies Wilhelm Tell as a figure of a hero resisting tyranny and the Swiss as a people deeply attached to their freedom. Studying, in particular, the references to Tacitus and Rousseau and the figure of Napoleon, Michael Rossington has analysed the way in which *History* “functions as a commentary on the resumption of monarchical rule on the continent”:

the volume recalls Europe’s pasts in such a way that the continent becomes a palimpsest, a constantly overwritten surface beneath which lie episodic memories that republicans must recover so as to sustain precedents for an alternative to the Restoration. The records of classical, feudal and eighteenth-century struggles between liberty and tyranny, and, relatedly, between imperial, invading armies and

those resisting them, are inscribed insistently in [History] in the form of ruins, monuments and vistas. (322)

- 24 Rossington demonstrates persuasively that the Shelleys' republican sympathies appear in rather subtle ways throughout the travelogue. This is borne out by not-so-subtle interventions, as in the two following examples taken from the "Letters from Geneva" signed by "M." The supposedly demure, white-stockinged lady openly champions the cause of liberty in her first letter:

The manners of the French are interesting, although less attractive, at least to Englishmen, than before the last invasion of the Allies: the discontent and sullenness of their minds perpetually betrays itself. Nor is it wonderful that they should regard the subjects of a government which fills their country with hostile garrisons, and sustains a detested dynasty on the throne, with an acrimony and indignation of which that government alone is the proper object. This feeling is honourable to the French, and encouraging to all those of every nation in Europe who have a fellow feeling with the oppressed, and who cherish an unconquerable hope that the cause of liberty must at length prevail. (Shelley 86-87)

- 25 "M." also offers brief but unmistakable praise of Rousseau's political writings in her second Letter:

Here [at Plainplais] a small obelisk is erected to the glory of Rousseau, and here (such is the mutability of human life) the magistrates, the successors of those who exiled him from his native country, were shot by the populace during that revolution, which his writings mainly contributed to mature, and which, notwithstanding the temporary bloodshed and injustice with which it was polluted, has produced enduring benefits to mankind, which all the chicanery of statesmen, nor even the great conspiracy of kings, can entirely render vain. (Shelley 101-02)

- 26 What must be called the blindness of contemporary critics may be accounted for by various factors. For a casual reader, the fiction created in the Preface is corroborated by several elements, especially in the first part, which may be said to act as a screen for the rest of the volume: for instance, "M." travels through a heat-wave in France dressed in a modest habit made of "black silk" (16); she describes the local costumes with curiosity and practises a form of ethnocentrism, usually (but not always) praising English mores to the detriment of Continental ones, in a manner more discreet than Radcliffe's in *A Journey*, whose exacerbated jingoism displeased at least one reviewer (Norton 115)<sup>14</sup>. This enables her in the second part to take a swipe at her own country, responsible for the "indignation and acrimony" justifiably felt by the French in the first passage quoted above.

- 27 Furthermore, if Rousseau's theoretical – particularly political – writings, briefly evoked in the second Letter from Geneva, still gave off a whiff of scandal at the time, the Letter where Rousseau's influence is most deeply felt is the third one, signed by "S.", where the narrator looks for the traces of Julie and Saint-Preux. As mentioned before, *The New Heloise* found favour with even the most conservative critics; many Britons visited the Valais in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in real Rousseauian pilgrimages. The stress laid on the novel may have lured the reviewers away from the reference to Rousseau's political works, along with the fact that this reference occurs in a letter identified as feminine and thus associated with the trifling and amusing matters connoted by feminine writing. Reviewers did not perceive either the atheism of "Mont Blanc", which the Tory *Blackwood's* even compared indulgently to Coleridge's *Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni* (1802), although the earlier poem is fraught with religious fervour. Other anticlerical or even anti-religious passages might have aroused the critics' indignation, in

particular the reference to Tacitus' anti-Christian views in the third Letter from Geneva<sup>15</sup>, but the Shelleys' convictions here, as well as those concerning their attachment to republican values, are expressed indirectly although clearly, greatly helped by the anonymity of the publication and shielded behind the respectable façade of the impeccable lady traveller.

- 28 By playing on expectations of masculine and feminine discourses which the very genre of travel writing crystallises, as we have seen, Radcliffe's *Journey*, Beaumont's *Sketch* and the Shelleys' *History*, with different strategies, indirectly question ideological assumptions about the representations of masculinity and femininity prevalent in British society at the time. These collaborative travelogues manipulate gender stereotypes to express political views while deflecting potential criticism; contrary to what their conventional paratexts might suggest, they also offer a complex and blurred picture of male and female travellers – and of the way they engage with the act of travelling.

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## NOTES

1. "En croisant deux regards littéralement 'conjointes' posés sur une même ville, nous espérons en savoir plus long sur la dimension genrée du voyage au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Nous n'avons finalement

rencontré que deux pratiques d'écriture que tout oppose, même si, dans le cas du couple Cradock, elles furent sans doute étroitement liées, tout à la fois partagées et successives" (Pellegrin 135).

2. Among the authors and works Siegel mentions are Susan L. Blake, "A Woman's Trek: What Difference does Gender Make?" (*Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, ed. Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel [Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1992]: 19-34); Karen R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1994); Mary Morris, ed. and intr., *Maiden Voyages: Writings of Women Travelers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); and Jane Robinson, ed. and intr., *Unsuitable for Ladies: An Anthology of Women Travellers* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994).

3. It is well known that the loose appellation "travel narrative" covers an almost infinite variety of books. It will be used here to refer to all types of publication related to travel: accounts, guides, pedagogical or informative works dealing with a country or a region's geography, history, ethnography, etc.

4. The work was definitively attributed to Beaumont by Jan Wellington and Jean Brondel (see in particular Brondel 2007).

5. These figures are based on a study of the various pseudonymic formulae built around a gendered noun, carried out in the ESTC catalogue and completed by a search in the catalogues of the British Library and the Bodleian Library and in the EEBO and ECCO databases. It is a work in progress, starting with the earliest occurrences of these formulae, which for the purposes of the present article only takes into account the works published until 1817.

6. This database was compiled by Benjamin Colbert on the University of Wolverhampton website and is available at <http://www4.wlv.ac.uk/btw/>.

7. For voyages alone, the amount of works published during the 18<sup>th</sup> century is estimated at over 2,000 (Edwards 2). I would like to thank Sandhya Patel for bringing this to my attention.

8. Or another adjective with the same connotations, "little", "unpresuming", "small", "insignificant", etc.

9. To my knowledge, no record has been kept of who chose the formulation of this title or the arrangement of the volume. It may very well have been Belzoni himself, who says nothing of his wife or of her narrative in his preface.

10. Drawing on French feminist theory in her *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (1993), Gillian Rose identifies several characteristics identified as a masculine in geographical writing (i.e. a claim to objectivity, transparency, neutrality, exhaustiveness, characterlessness) which may very well apply to travel writing, in which geographical remarks often abound; these characteristics are of course opposed to the traditionally feminine emphasis on emotion, on the personal, on details.

11. No "I" in the preface either, as it is written in the third person singular.

12. In the same line of thought, Jeanne Moskal argues that the Shelleys' *History* is hierarchically structured to lead from feminine prose to masculine poetry (243), developing Donald Reiman's opinion that the work is "carefully constructed to culminate" in P. B. Shelley's "Mont Blanc" (41). This interpretation of the work's structure is however questionable (see Jonathan Wordsworth's introduction to *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, Colbert 1999, and Rouhette 2015).

13. A close analysis of these reviews can be found in Colbert 1999.

14. Patriotism, which is also a feature of Beaumont's *Sketch*, combines with gender to serve as a shield for the narrators' political opinions.

15. See Rossington 323-25.



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## ABSTRACTS

This article looks at Romantic travel literature from a gendered perspective. After general considerations on the masculine dimension of travel writing, I focus on three narratives presented as having been written by a woman, more or less in collaboration with her husband. My purpose here is not to look for a specifically masculine or feminine type of travel writing, but to analyse how the openly gendered dimension of the text impacts its reception, to the extent that it may be said to partake of a strategy aiming at conveying a sometimes radical discourse.

Cet article aborde la littérature de voyage de l'époque romantique à partir d'une perspective genrée. Après des réflexions générales sur l'association du genre viatique au masculin, il s'intéresse à trois récits présentés comme ayant été écrits par une femme, avec la collaboration plus ou moins étroite de son mari. Il s'agira non pas de tenter de discerner une spécificité masculine ou féminine du récit de voyage, mais d'analyser la manière dont la dimension ouvertement genrée du texte influe sur sa perception, au point peut-être de s'intégrer dans une stratégie visant à faire accepter un discours parfois radical.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** récit de voyage, perspective genrée, époque romantique, Ann Radcliffe, Louise Beaumont, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley, réception

**Keywords:** travel narrative, gendered approach, romantic era, Ann Radcliffe, Louise Beaumont, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley, reception

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