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The Artist's Loving Hand: The Travel Letters of Emily Eden, Isabella Bird, and MotherCatherine McAuley Written to Their Sisters in 19th Century Britain and Ireland

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Holly Elizabeth Ratcliff entitled "The Artist's Loving Hand: The Travel Letters of Emily Eden, Isabella Bird, and Mother Catherine McAuley Written to Their Sisters in 19th Century Britain and Ireland." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Mary Papke, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Don Richard Cox, Nancy M. Goslee

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Nancy M. Goslee

Accept for the Council:

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Vice Provost and Dean of
Graduate Studies

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THE ARTIST'S LOVING HAND: THE TRAVEL LETTERS OF EMILY
EDEN, ISABELLA BIRD, AND MOTHER CATHERINE McAULEY
WRITTEN TO THEIR SISTERS IN 19TH CENTURY BRITAIN AND
IRELAND

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Holly Elizabeth Ratcliff
August 2002

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loving parents, Mr. James R. and Mrs. Linda H. Ratcliff, who have always given me the strength and courage to pursue my heart's desires; I would not be the person I am today without their support and devotion. I also dedicate my work to the rest of my family who have been encouraging me in all my endeavors throughout my entire life. Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my sister, Melissa Ratcliff, who is my best friend, my inspiration, and my greatest advocate in everything I do, everything I dream, and everywhere I go, forever and ever.

*For there is no friend like a sister
In calm or stormy weather;
To cheer one on the tedious way,
To fetch one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,
To strengthen whilst one stands.*

--"Goblin Market," Christina G. Rossetti

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to observe the qualities of and techniques enlisted by British and Irish women travel writers corresponding with their sisters who remained at home. Some of the most vivid and telling works regarding the travels of extraordinary women are contained in the letters that they wrote to their families. These letters often involved brief factual commentaries; detailed descriptions of friends, other family members, or strangers encountered on a journey; advice and encouragement for life continuing on as normal back at home; and pictures or paintings that could serve as postcards to capture visions of people and places as seen by the traveler.

The travel letters of Emily Eden, Isabella Bird, and Mother Catherine McAuley are personal correspondences, and these letters provide insight into the nature of the writers, the lands in which they were visiting and traveling, life as they lived it in the nineteenth century, and the various relationships they fostered with their families, sisters, and individuals around them. Each female traveler I study is an artist in her own right, either through artistic skill at painting, or through her talent for verbal description and documentation, or else through the way she lived her life and encouraged her fellow sisters or other travelers. These women excelled at turning their lives and the lives of others into something different, special, and inspirational, and their letters reveal these exceptional gifts.

PREFACE

There are many nineteenth-century female travel writers worthy of consideration for a research project. The three writers I chose were Irish or British women traveling from their homes to other areas of their country or distant and strange lands. The most definitive connection between my three travelers are their travel letters written to sisters who did not undertake the journeys alongside their siblings. This method of private correspondence to a particular audience allows for a very personal and emotional analysis of the travelers' writing in order to reveal their artistic nature as reporter, adventurer, and "seeing eye" for their sisters remaining behind.

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I. INTRODUCTION

British women writers have been travelling and documenting their experiences for hundreds of years. These writers often kept journals during their travels, taking detailed notes of sights and fantastic surroundings, or they would write letters back home to their friends and family revealing their personal thoughts, expressions, and world views. The published works of particular British women travelers were popular and are still popular throughout the world today as records of adventurous women who depicted fabulous visions of foreign locales and encounters with unique and amazing strangers. Such popular works of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century women travelers include the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, Frances Trollope, Mabel Sharman Crawford, Amelia Edwards, and Mrs. F.D. Bridges. These various writers' publications represent a mixture of personal narratives, descriptive narratives, and collections of private correspondence. In my analysis of travel writing, I will examine the personal travel correspondences of three fascinating and very individual nineteenth-century women who traveled from their homes in Britain and wrote detailed letters to their sisters who remained behind. Emily Eden traveled from England to India from 1836-1842, and she wrote frequently to her sister, Mary, in letters filled with vivid stories, pictures, and descriptions of life in Calcutta and Simla. Isabella Bird traveled to many places around the globe, including America in 1854 and again in 1873. Her letters written home to her sister, Henrietta, were dramatic, exciting, and colorful so that her sister might envision America, the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, and the life there that Isabella Bird led. Mother

Catherine McAuley was a Catholic nun who founded the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland in 1831. In caring for the poor and disabled citizens of Ireland, Mother McAuley traveled among her various foundations writing many letters to her religious “sisters” living in Dublin and in convents throughout Ireland and England. Her letters were descriptive yet full of humor, love, and hope so that she might connect with her “sisters,” though she was physically unable to be with them during their various missions.

Emily Eden, Isabella Bird, and Catherine McAuley all bared their hearts and their souls to beloved sisters in letters that detailed how the writers lived and what they encountered in their distant journeys. Besides providing visual insights into the lives of these three women, their letters also reveal the inner strength, beauty, and talent that each of the women possessed. Letters addressed to travelers’ sisters who remained at home are particularly intriguing ways of witnessing the more private expressions of various women travelers. These letters are not just records of past journeys, but they are also works of art created skillfully and lovingly by the hands of intelligent, eloquent women. The delightful artistry found in the writings of Eden, Bird, and McAuley reflects these writers’ various relationships and their ability to reveal these multi-layered relationships within their letters. These women are allowed to pursue productive, meaningful lives, escaping the typical confines of home and domestic responsibilities that kept most nineteenth-century women from exploring the world. The written expressions of these writers allowed them to share amazing

and personal travel experiences with other women who could then see a new and different world through their traveling sister's eyes.

Serving as the “seer” for a distant sister occasionally caused these travel writers to turn to a typically romantic aesthetic by resorting to the “picturesque” as a method of capturing and relating description. Another method of description utilized by one or more of these writers is a vividly overdramatic relation of action and events, mixed with fabulous depictions of scenery and landscapes, giving the reading sisters an almost heroic vision of their traveling siblings. Both of these literary approaches are effective in eliciting imaginative responses from a reader. The dangers involved in a travel writer's engaging in these methods of descriptive writing include possible criticism of the writer as an unfeeling, unattached “camera” that relegates subjects to one-dimensional captives. Another criticism that could potentially be raised relates to the fanciful and mythical associations found when a writer talks too much of her own valor, bravery, and courage during her exciting travels abroad. Although these writers' letters and descriptions embody several of these literary techniques, it is apparent through the selections I examine that there is a comfortable familiarity with the people and places described that develops in these women's letters. Their eventual move from passive observers to active participants in their travels and experiences allows these writers to mediate any notions that they are objectifying or over dramatizing actions and events. My writers' use of particular aesthetics in their narration gives them the chance to create an order from the strangeness and the chaos that surrounds them in their journeys.

A certain detached disinterestedness does exist, at times, in the artistic vision of many travel writers; however, most travelers more often than not do make a conscious and decided move towards a more personal and thoughtful consideration of their subjects as their travels and writings progress. Many travel writers, including Emily Eden, Isabella Bird, and Mother Catherine McAuley, fall somewhere between the image of a distant traveler and a more personal and emotional approach to appreciating and depicting people and places. Another form of distancing that is naturally maintained by travelers relates not only to what they are seeing and discussing but also to whom they are writing and speaking. In most travel narratives and letters, a central placement in the descriptive process allows the author to become the “seer,” the artist, the visionary, so that he or she might more truthfully and effectively relay those representations home to an even more distant viewer – the waiting sister. My three women travelers achieve this role of traveling interpreter beautifully, honestly, and successfully.

The writers I chose to examine were all writing letters to their sisters to document their thoughts, ideas, and experiences. However, not all women travelers in the nineteenth century were writing emotional letters to their sisters waiting at home. Other British women, such as Frances Trollope and Mabel Sharman Crawford, were also traveling and writing, yet their works took the form of travel narratives derived, occasionally, from letters, but mostly from journals and personal notes. As publishable material, travel accounts most often took the form of personal narratives, as opposed to private letters, because the writers

would have been considered to be more reputable and authoritative if they took the view of curious tourists or objective narrators. In fact, up until the twentieth century, many critics overlooked the travel letters of women simply because these letters were often viewed as lesser imitations of similar, more popular works by men (Goldsmith xii). In order to place Emily Eden, Isabella Bird, and Mother Catherine McAuley within a specific genre of letter writing and private discourse, I will briefly outline the writings of other British women travelers. To appreciate certain travelers and their letters, it is important to understand the broader history of late eighteenth/early nineteenth-century British women's travel writing and the different styles and approaches used in recounting travel experiences.

In 1827, Frances, or Fanny, Trollope moved with her two daughters and her son, Henry, from England to America. During their two years in the States, Frances Trollope kept precise and detailed notes of what she experienced in her journeys through Louisiana, Tennessee, and Ohio. Originally intending to help her dear friend Fanny Wright set up a utopian society in Tennessee, Trollope decided not to reside in Memphis, and she eventually settled in Cincinnati. Once at home in Ohio, she began to write novels and short fiction to support her son, who was pursuing an education in Indiana. The difficulties faced by an English mother and her children far from their native home provide a backdrop for some very interesting and sincere observations and revelations. In 1832, Trollope's work *Domestic Manners of the Americans* was published shortly after her return to England.

Frances Trollope's travel narrative begins with an optimistic statement regarding her departure from England and the prosperity she hopes to gain in America: "On first touching the soil of a new land, of a new continent, of a new world, it is impossible not to feel considerable excitement and deep interest in almost every object that meets us" (12). Every object was, indeed, of great interest to Frances Trollope. Her incredible attention to description and detail is one of the defining qualities of her narrative. For instance, when she enters a cabin on a steamboat bound from New Orleans to Memphis, she finds it imperative to describe all that she sees, both outside of the room and within:

The innumerable steam boats, which are the stage coaches and fly wagons of this land of lakes and rivers, are totally unlike any I had seen in Europe, and greatly superior to them. The fabrics which I think they most resemble in appearance, are the floating baths (les bains Vigier) at Paris....The room to which the double line of windows belongs, is a very handsome apartment; before each window a neat little cot is arranged in such a manner as to give its drapery the air of a window curtain. (17)

This rather trivial and simple description of Trollope's surroundings is indicative of the overall feel and purpose of her entire work. The positive response from her many contemporary, European readers, in 1832, possibly owed precisely to her ability to provide such fine detail and to associate those details with familiar places and objects. This colorful and picturesque approach to relating experience is very similar to the style of Emily Eden. Eden, like Trollope, chose to describe sights and occurrences as realistically as possible in order to capture a visual snapshot of her experience and send that home to her reader. Both Eden and

Trollope resorted to aesthetic observations. The “floating baths” of Paris, described in the previous selection from *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, were Trollope’s way of likening her observations to matters that her British and European readers already possessed a reference for and could envision. Although mostly practical, visual explanations, Fanny Trollope’s comments seem at one moment light but at the next moment trenchant and critical:

I hardly know any annoyance so deeply repugnant to English feelings, as the incessant, remorseless spitting of Americans. I feel that I owe my readers an apology for the repeated use of this, and several other odious words; but I cannot avoid them, without suffering the fidelity of description to escape me. (18)

Frances Trollope’s goal was to enlighten at whatever cost. And, her contemporary audience was primarily an English public that was already, on the whole, predisposed to believe the Americans to be crude and unpolished. Although she felt, experienced, and witnessed activities that tested her strength as a woman and a visitor to a foreign land, she remained true to her endeavor to report reality, combined with her own unique personal perspective.

Throughout this factual and descriptive travel narrative, Fanny Trollope speaks to her readers in the manner of a very witty yet practical travel guide. She entertains, humors, and educates her readers with mostly informational accounts and only a little bit of the woman, Fanny Trollope, thrown in at certain places. Because she is writing as a professional writer, and not as a personal correspondent, her comments are sometimes distant and limited by an impersonal frame of mind rather than allowing her private emotions to enter into the

discourse, as it might have if she had been directly addressing a close and personal relation. Her distancing does not necessarily subordinate the objects depicted but, rather, it reflects the tone and purpose of Trollope's attempts to remain an objective narrator. Throughout even the toughest moments, however, Frances Trollope creates a travel narrative that is both individual and representative of the variety of travel and experience that many other women were encountering and documenting at the same time. Her work was an intriguing and inspirational resource for many travelers and travel writers in the nineteenth century.

One such inspired subsequent traveler was Mabel Sharman Crawford. Traveling in the nineteenth century from England to Algiers, Crawford produced a travel narrative that is factual and informative – much like the narrative of Frances Trollope; however, Crawford's observations are considerably more emotional and poetic. As her travel narrative begins, she states:

To what head my migratory propensity should be referred, I do not feel it necessary to declare. Perhaps, to readers of a speculative turn of mind, these pages may afford the means of arriving at a due solution of the question, as to why in the autumn of 1859 I took the swallows as my guide, and followed them to Africa. In general acceptance, a winter in Africa signifies a voyage up the Nile, and an interview with the Sphinxes.... (2-3)

One sees here that Mabel Crawford has more of a romantic's heart and she relays that same sentimental vision through her writing to her readers. In fact, Crawford's narrative reads so like that of earlier fictitious narratives that she seems more of a Charlotte Brontë successor (in the spirit of *Villette*) than a

follower of the more traditional, factual travel narratives written and published earlier in the nineteenth century. As readers of Crawford's descriptions, we can envision her as a character within a fictional novel. The appeal of Crawford's narrative lies precisely in the romanticized style in which she chose to write. For example, at one point late in the narrative, Mabel Crawford is describing a gala she has attended in the company of many of Algiers' most fashionable and influential citizens. The Moorish hostess of Crawford and her friends conducts a tour of her home, showing her guests into her husband's lavishly decorated apartment:

We had not been more than a few minutes in the room when, with an exclamation that indicated alarm, the elder sister bent forward her head in an attitude of eager listening; then, starting up almost immediately to her feet, she said a few words in Arabic to her sister, and rushed precipitately from the room. The young wife also showed symptoms of discomposure, and she asked us in a nervous tone to come and see her room. Before, however, we had passed through the central court, off which the apartments opened, the sound of approaching footsteps caught my attention, and, looking round, I saw a very handsomely-dressed young Moor coming up the stairs. 'It is my husband,' said our hostess, in answer to my look of enquiry, and, turning again alternately red and white, she leaned against a pillar close by in a state of very evident nervousness. (52)

In reading this passage, we tend to become involved in the situation as we might in the action of a novel. Why did the sister rush off? Why is the young wife so upset at the sudden appearance of her husband? What sorts of improprieties have been committed? Moving quickly on to the next passage, Crawford reveals that

the young wife was at fault for receiving her guests in her husband's room without his being present. Mabel Crawford's flair for the dramatic thus allows simple events to read like exciting and fashionable fiction.

The many customs and details of Moorish life in Algiers and Mabel Crawford's experiences there are dramatically relayed in such a way that her entire journey reads like a Victorian novel, which greatly appealed to her Victorian audience. The particular difference between Crawford's travel narrative and other narratives written in the nineteenth century is her superb use of fact and detail to weave a story that is both descriptive of her visit and indicative of Crawford's romantic interpretation of the world as she viewed it. The very same can be said of Isabella Bird and her captivating and fantastic descriptions of life in Colorado. Bird's experiences read like a beautiful and heroic narrative created for pure entertainment. The fascinating reality of her trip and experiences is almost a minor element when compared to the dramatic narrative portions of her letters describing her daring and eventful life in the mountains.

The two different approaches to writing demonstrated by Trollope and Crawford lead a reader of travel narratives to ponder a possible distinction between what these writers were seeing and revealing to a general reader and what these writers were seeing and actually feeling as travelers. If these women were not speaking to a public audience, then, would not their writings have revealed more of their true selves, as they might have if written to a private acquaintance or close family member? Nancy Walker addresses this issue when she argues that "the woman-as-traveler has a different eye and a different 'I'. In

whatever century she inhabits, ...she is stepping out: out of the house, out of the frame, away from home where she belongs” (146). The “eye” of the female traveler allows her to consider what she sees and experiences as fact, while the “I,” or the self, is more complicated. Additionally, the “eye” in women’s travel writings depicts fantastic sights and realities, while the “I” can remain intact and protected, revealing only what the writer truly wishes to share.

One of the earliest, most influential pathfinders for women’s travel and travel letter writing was Mary Wollstonecraft through her work *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*. This volume of letters, written during her travels conducted in 1795 and addressed back home to England, became a source of interest and inspiration for women all over the world. Although Wollstonecraft was a remarkable woman, as is evident in her political and social endeavors, her travel writings were not simply brushed aside as interesting yet insignificant anecdotes. Wollstonecraft’s style blends the best of both travel narratives and travel fiction because her “eye” and her “I” are one and the same. This same premise of the combined “eye” / “I” relates also to the writings of Mother McAuley in that her work, her vision, her experiences, and her self remain one and the same. McAuley, as with Wollstonecraft, apparently never encountered the need to censor or dilute her expressions, thus they were free to write as they thought and felt at every moment.

In her letters to Gilbert Imlay, Mary Wollstonecraft reveals a woman in search of knowledge and understanding. Her travels took her to unusual and interesting places, giving her the opportunity to view a world outside of her

familiar England. At the same time, her epistolary approach allowed her to voice her opinions truthfully and honestly because the letters were private and her audience was an individual who was familiar and close to her heart. In fact, Wollstonecraft even said that if she attempted to organize and edit her thoughts and construct them purposefully, her letters “became stiff and affected” (5). Therefore, she endeavored to “let [her] remarks and reflections flow unrestrained” (5). Certainly, the “eye” will blend more naturally with the “I” when a writer is aware of the discreet context of her writing. For instance, while traveling in Tonsberg, Norway, Wollstonecraft visited a gothic church, complete with open catacombs, and she wrote as follows:

A desire of preserving the body seems to have prevailed in most countries of the world, futile as it is to term it a preservation, when the noblest parts are immediately sacrificed merely to save the muscles, skin and bone from rottenness. When I was shewn these human petrifications, I shrunk back with disgust and horror. “Ashes to ashes!” thought I—“Dust to dust!”—If this be not dissolution, it is something worse than natural decay. It is treason against humanity, thus to lift up the awful veil which would fain hide its weakness. The grandeur of the active principle is never more strongly felt than at such a sight; for nothing is so ugly as the human form when deprived of life, and thus dried into stone, merely to preserve the most disgusting image of death. (71)

This description begins very typically, full of thought and detail, as do the descriptions of Francis Trollope, Mabel Crawford, and many other travel writers. However, Wollstonecraft’s self – her “I” – enters into the passage in a way that is not seen in the travel narratives of the two previous women travelers examined in

this introduction. Wollstonecraft does not resort to a picturesque distancing or a dramatic interpretation of events, as other writers do, because she approaches recounting what she sees as an extension of her own insight and understanding. Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas and opinions become more evident as she continues to view the tombs, and her description takes a decided turn from the historical to the more emotional and philosophical:

The contemplation of noble ruins produces a melancholy that exalts the mind.—We take a retrospect of the exertions of man, the fate of empires and their rulers; and marking the grand destruction of ages, it seems the necessary change of time leading to improvement.—Our very soul expands, and we forget our littleness; how painfully brought to our recollection by such vain attempts to snatch from decay what is destined so soon to perish. Life, what art thou? Where goes this breath? this *I*, so much alive? In what element will it mix, giving or receiving fresh energy?—What will break the enchantment of animation?—For worlds, I would not see a form I loved—embalmed in my heart—thus sacrilegiously handled!—Pugh! my stomach turns.—Is this all the distinction of the rich in the grave?—They had better quietly allow the scythe of equality to mow them down with the common mass, than struggle to become a monument of the instability of human greatness.

(71-72)

The true feelings of Wollstonecraft are revealed in this passage in a passionate and engaging manner. The freedom that Mary Wollstonecraft was afforded through relaying her message in a personal letter allowed her to comment on what she was thinking and feeling at the same time she was seeing and experiencing. These actions were not veiled or filtered for an anonymous audience; she was writing from the heart to an individual whom she loved deeply. As readers of

Wollstonecraft's letters, we feel as though a window has been opened onto a world that is unknown and unexplored. As readers of her letters, we are also allowed access to the fascinating and inquisitive mind of Wollstonecraft herself and her travel descriptions become an added bonus along the way. The historical and natural world revealed by Mary Wollstonecraft is certainly improved by her experience with that world and through her intense emotions and observations. It is arguable that the passionate nature of her travel writing was merely a result of the talented and incredible individual she was; however, the depth of revelation in her writings can also be attributed at least in part to the private purpose of her commentaries: her correspondence with a dear, much beloved acquaintance.

Throughout the history of nineteenth-century travel writing, letters written from the road to family members left at home are incredibly revealing and provide entrance into a world of thoughts and emotions that may not be as accessible in more publicly and generally addressed mediums. In letters to sisters, there is also the opportunity for a woman to relate to another woman in ways that need not be filtered, as they may if a woman were writing to a man in the nineteenth century. Wollstonecraft was a fiery exception to this argument, but she was an unusual woman in many public and private respects.

Recent works examining the travel letters of nineteenth-century women are varied but few. There are wonderfully thick and informative encyclopedias and anthologies of women travelers; however, their specific works – especially private letters – are often briefly glossed in order to preserve space and reading time. There are complete and edited volumes of the letters written by my

travelers, which served greatly to assist my research and to educate other readers. There exist also several detailed biographies of Emily Eden, Isabella Bird, and Mother Catherine McAuley, yet these biographies are historical and fact-based, in nature, and the true art of these women's relationships with their sisters and their particular correspondences are not totally and completely defined. Overall, there are very few scholarly works available at this time that discuss primarily the travel letters of specific women travelers, particularly nineteenth-century British travelers, and the letters those travelers wrote home to their sisters.

The correspondence between women, in turn, is a wonderful and relatively under appreciated method of self-expression and self-realization. The bond between sisters opens up opportunities for a woman to share her impressions with a kindred spirit, someone who knows her perhaps even better than she knows herself. Because travel was rather restricted in the early nineteenth century, it was not unusual for a sister to remain behind while other family members traveled the globe. A traveling sister writing back to a homebound sister could give a new perspective on the outside world to a loved one not able to experience life outside of her home or homeland. Private letters allowed the writer to escape the conformity of proper and conventional conversation, revealing a critical, humorous, political, and intellectual voice that might not have otherwise been realized. In Mary Morris' brief introduction to her work *Maiden Voyages*, she alludes to a theory held by John Gardner in which he stated that "there are only two plots in all of literature. You go on a journey or a stranger comes to town" (xv). My examination of travel letters written to waiting sisters takes both of

these plots into consideration. My travelers were the women who undertook the journeys, and these travelers' sisters were the women waiting for a "stranger" to come to town in the form of new sights and new people introduced to them through the images found in their sisters' letters.

Travel writers' roles as artists transcend the mere relation of the title of a port-of-call, the name of a hotel in which an individual resides, or the simple description of the interior of a train car or ship's cabin. The writers I examine had a skill in articulation that allowed their thoughts to move from their eyes to paper and then to their distant readers in such a way that an experience was shared. As writers, they were bestowing upon their readers a glimpse into their travels, their souls, their views, and their own private worlds of change and enlightenment. An image was created, a work of art was born, and someone, somewhere, was seeing through new eyes and becoming a more complete and fulfilled reader. Emily Eden, Isabella Bird, and Mother Catherine McAuley, through their letters, were opening windows of vision and understanding for their sisters, while at the same time opening doors of opportunity for future women travelers and writers. Whether writing practical descriptions, the romantic and picturesque, or very personal letters and expressions, these three travelers complete their accounts truthfully and vividly, with little evidence that they are engaging in a discourse that renders them too distant, too attached, or inconsiderate of the subjects they describe. The material contained in the letters of these three writers is bold, witty, detailed, sincere, intriguing, revealing, and enduring. Their letters have stood the test of time and have been carefully and adoringly preserved and published so that

these writers' art, for they certainly are gifted artists in many respects, might be appreciated by scores of subsequent travelers and readers.

II. A RELUCTANT TRAVELER: EMILY EDEN IN INDIA

Vivacious, intelligent, and witty, Emily Eden was the perfect picture of a well-raised, well-educated English girl. At the age of eighteen, she and her younger sister, Fanny, set up house in London for their unmarried older brother, George, Lord Auckland. While traveling between the family estate, Eden Farm, and the various homes of her brothers and sisters, Miss Eden was always writing journals and letters either to George or Fanny about what she saw, whom she saw, and all that she encountered. An accomplished writer, painter, and a gifted debater on subjects such as society, government, and politics, Emily Eden expressed very bold and opinionated sentiments in all her letters to her friends and family.

Although content to remain unmarried and to serve as constant attendant to Lord Auckland, Miss Eden also maintained many strong relationships with the men she encountered in London political circles. Always the warm, friendly, and clever hostess, Miss Eden was often found arguing by the fireside with scores of prominent gentlemen and other members of the English aristocracy. It was a known fact that after his wife Caroline Lamb's early death, Prime Minister Lord Melbourne fell in love with Miss Eden and proposed marriage (Dunbar 6). Ever the loving sister to Lord Auckland and the independent, free-willed spirit, Emily Eden declined this prestigious offer and remained instead a loyal companion to her older brother.

In her many letters, written both home and abroad, to her favorite older sister, Mary Drummond (or "Mary D."), Miss Eden was witty and open, sharing detail after detail of her thoughts, impressions, and emotions experienced during

her travels. Emily Eden could be frank and sincere in her letters to her friends and sisters, Mary in particular, because her correspondence was kept safe and confidential, like small pieces of her heart travelling the distance home to be held dear by those whom she loved and missed immensely. Emily Eden's letter-writing style was uniquely her own. In an early letter, typical of her enthusiastic style, Emily wrote to Eleanor Grosvenor, following a hectic day back at Eden Farm: "My Dearest Sister, I am going to write you a long letter, and I shall be like a ginger-beer bottle now, if once the cork is drawn" (*Letters* 41). Eden's enthusiasm for life and her affection for her sisters is clearly displayed in many of her letters, written while traveling both at home and abroad. Before embarking on a six-year stay in India, Emily Eden wrote to Mary from the Admiralty in London:

My very dear Mary, Your note was a sad blow to me; but perhaps it is best that we should so have parted, and I am very thankful that we should have had this week together. I am thankful for many things—that we love each other so entirely; that you have a husband who has been so invariably kind to all of us, and whom I can love in return; and then, that your girls seem to me like real friends, and almost like my own children. All these are great goods and absence cannot touch them. God bless you, my darling Sister. Your ever affectionate
E. Eden. (*Letters* 254)

This letter epitomizes the loving relationship that existed between the sisters and the trust that Emily Eden assumed in their private, family correspondence.

Through her letters, in addition to her heartfelt proclamations and colorful reports home, Miss Eden engaged with her sister in discussions of popular fiction,

numerous pictorial accounts of her many travels, her frustration with her inability to change the face of poverty and deprivation she encountered in Indian society, and, occasionally, admissions of boredom regarding her role as a reluctant and homesick traveler. These letters to her sister show a special sisterly bond and a vulnerable image of Emily Eden that perhaps would not have been obtained otherwise. Her use of paintings and sketches, the literary “picturesque,” popular literary references, and the pathetic are all methods used by Miss Eden to blend her thoughts and experiences in such ways that would be most appreciated by her sister. The trust and affection shared between Emily and Mary can be best illustrated in the words of Toni McNaron regarding the bond between sisters:

A sister can be seen as someone who is both ourselves and very much not ourselves—a special kind of double....[This] dynamic...results from something essential within the sister-bond, unexamined and unnamed. The desire to be one, juxtaposed against the necessity to be two, lies at the heart of this mystery. (7)

It is clear that Emily Eden was very smart, observant, and articulate. Analyzing what is represented in her letters is a way to seek details about parts of a life long past, but those words and details alone cannot tell the whole truth and cannot reveal an entire person in all of her wisdom. Her relationship with her sisters, as seen through her letters, is what truly shows us the woman, Emily Eden.

The private correspondence undertaken by Eden and her family can be described as “familiar letters,” a term which Amy Smith identifies as “refer[ring] specifically to authentic letters written for a private audience, generally a friend or friends of the writer” (80). Miss Eden’s letters were not published until long after

they were written; therefore, any notion that she was attempting to influence or impress a public audience can be discounted. Even when she was still home writing in England, Miss Eden's letters to friends and family often exposed her true feelings in respect to her life, politics, and her experiences in the social circles of the English aristocracy and popular Whig society. Conversely, her younger sister Fanny's letters were not particularly opinion-laden, argumentative, or passionate. Fanny wrote as often and as enthusiastically as did her sister; however, according to biographer Janet Dunbar, Fanny's letters focused more on "dancing, and bonnets, and gowns, and the latest babies in the family" (5). Despite their differences in topic preferences, both sisters shared a love of travel, family, and letter writing. Emily and Fanny Eden also shared an ability for sketching, an art form which served to supplement their many epistles, providing their recipients with a visual token of the Eden sisters' many travels and experiences. The fascinating correspondences of these two siblings show, then, their similar personal and artistic talents, while also exemplifying the unique capability each possessed to be able to document, express, and relay their daily lives through astonishingly vivid prose and skilled, carefully crafted drawings.

Between the years of 1829 and 1834, Eden's older brother George, Lord Auckland, held the positions of Commissioner of Greenwich Hospital, President of the Board of Trade, First Lord of the Admiralty, and, finally, in 1835, Governor-General of India. Thirty-eight-year-old Eden was pleased by her brother's success, yet she was devastated to learn that as Governor-General he would be traveling to India to serve in his new office. After much deliberation,

Emily decided to accompany George, and they were joined by their younger sister, Fanny, and their nephew, the Hon. William Godolphin Osborne. On October 3rd of 1835, the Edens set sail for India accompanied by a legion of personal servants, Godolphin's six English greyhounds, Emily's spaniel "Chance," a chef, a cook, Dr. Drummond (a relation by marriage), and a troop of British soldiers bound for Calcutta.

The voyage south was extraordinarily difficult for Emily, and she remained seasick for days after departing Portsmouth. Janet Dunbar states that when the ship docked in Madeira for a brief layover, Emily Eden disembarked on the island "certain that she would never be brought aboard again except by a guard of marines" (16). Fanny Eden was more fortunate in dealing with her short bout of seasickness, and she spent her time on the ship in search of ways to keep herself occupied during the long monotonous experience that was a sea voyage. She took to writing letters to their eldest sister, Eleanor Grosvenor, with her letters being brief summaries of the journal entries she wrote everyday to capture all aspects of her sea-going experience. As Emily Eden slowly regained her health, she also began to write letter-journals back home to her older sisters and to close friends Theresa Lister and Lady Pamela Campbell. Eden had been writing letters to these two friends for years, and the three young women had many of the same views regarding life, love, and friendship. Dunbar discusses the correspondence of these close friends by revealing that Emily, with Theresa and Pamela, shared "the same kind of humour, a sense of the ridiculous, the same zest in the everyday happenings of life. When they gossiped in their letters it was

without malice; their wit was sharp, but, it was never dipped in acid” (4). Since Miss Eden was engaging in a private correspondence with these women, her opinions did not reflect an anxiety about receiving any unfair criticism or random exposure to unwelcome eyes. For a reader in the twenty-first century, Eden’s sincerity and confidence allows a greater appreciation for the writer as a human being, who shared circumstances with her acquaintances that only she could have illustrated.

In March, 1836, the Edens’ five-month voyage to India ended upon their arrival in Calcutta. Their long, tedious journey southeast concluded, both Emily and Fanny Eden already had packets and packets of letters completed ready to be sent back home on the first steamer to leave port. Upon entering the mouth of the river at Calcutta, the sisters were delighted to find ships already docked bearing parcels and stacks of letters for them from home that had been patiently awaiting their arrival. On March 4th, the Edens and their companions finally disembarked in the harbor at Calcutta.

Once settled in Calcutta at their official residence, Government House, Lord Auckland began to adjust to his role as Governor-General. Serving both the Whig party and the East India Company was a challenge in the ever-changing atmosphere of compromise and difficulty that he experienced for the next six years. As Governor-General, George had been sent to India under a cloud of political unrest both at home and abroad. The Whig government, headed by Lord Melbourne, had just supplanted a Tory regime, led by Sir Robert Peel. Upon taking charge in Calcutta, George found himself responsible for the vast merchant

empire of the East India Company and the political affairs of the Indian government, as well as having to play the military role of defender of the colony against the fear of invasion, most particularly from Russia.

Emily and Fanny Eden's first year in India involved setting up house for their brother and their large entourage of companions at Government House as well as at Barrackpore [sic], their country house eighteen miles from town. Barrackpore provided the family with the most pleasure because of its country setting, which allowed them to stroll, garden, hunt, and play with their many animals in a way that was very reminiscent of their life back in England. There were also new acquaintances to be made, parties to plan, formal dinners to oversee, and military balls to attend. The first year in India was a trial for the two sisters, but they were happier in one another's company, and in the company of their beloved George, than if they had all been forced to separate.

In February of 1837, Fanny was set to accompany William Osborne to the hills of Rajmahal [sic] for a brief tiger-shooting expedition. She looked forward to this trip with both intense excitement and deep trepidation. In writing home to Mary Drummond, she exclaimed, "My dear, here is such a plan, such a sublime plan burst upon me! It will eventually conduct me either to the bottom of a tiger's throat or the top of a rhinoceros' horn..." (Dunbar 58). Although she was excited by the prospect of adventure and desired a change of scenery, Fanny was nervous about leaving Emily behind in Calcutta, and so they promised to write each other every day. On February 13th, 1837, Fanny Eden and the hunting party set out from Barrackpore on their journey to Rajmahal.

While her sister was away, Emily Eden continued to write to Mary and to complete paintings that would fill her many sketchbooks. Miss Eden's skill in painting and her ability to complement her written images with colorful visions was a craft that she undertook very seriously. She was not simply concerned with recording numerous written details regarding her travels, but she endeavored, as well, to create memorable snapshots of her life in India that she could either send home to her family or keep with her as a type of artistic souvenir. In this sense, Emily Eden was a thoughtful and gifted artist, using her brush and paper as well as her more familiar medium of letter writing. Some of Miss Eden's more striking paintings and sketches were undertaken in the instances where she was shockingly affected by the outlandish or extreme nature of her subjects' physical dress or accoutrements. One such instance involves the minor royalty of India's society and the luxurious saddlery of their horses. The persons Miss Eden describes are "thousands of Runjeet's followers all dressed in yellow or red satin, with quantities of their led horses *trapped* in gold and silver tissues, and all of them sparkling with jewels" (*Up the Country* 205). Eden goes on to say, "I really never saw so dazzling a sight" (205), and she sketched one of the horsemen as a painting to accompany a letter home (see fig. 1).

According to Marian Fowler, the fact that women travelers in India recorded their experiences and perceptions through painting or sketches establishes a form of distancing from the strangeness of their colonial existence. These observations through artistic, visual means allowed the travelers, as indicated by Fowler, to "view India as picturesque [in order] to retreat yet again to

the conventional, for all British gentlewomen, in India and elsewhere, had been viewing nature that way for a hundred years” (45). Whether Emily Eden engaged in this sort of “retreat” in order the better to observe her foreign surroundings through a traditional, “conventional” means is debatable. Relaying her experiences through a “picturesque” medium did allow her to translate her thoughts and ideas into a framework that would be familiar to her sister and other family members back in England.

The picturesque, in Emily Eden’s case, was not a way to oversimplify or normalize an otherness that she could not explain; rather, this visual approach gave her audience the materials with which they could see into the Edens’ lives and experiences so far from home. As Angela Jones suggests, regarding the picturesque in travel letters, a certain distance from the subject depicted allows a writer to understand and better represent the true likeness of who or what they are viewing (499). In the analysis of Elizabeth Bohls, she takes the idea of visual distance a step further revealing that a composition incorporating a technique of the picturesque would represent the very Kantian notion of “aesthetic disinterestedness,” as well as Sir Joshua Reynolds’ theory of subject form and painting (67). To Bohls, Kant’s use of disinterestedness in aesthetics refers to the idea that “to regard an object aesthetically, one cannot desire to eat it, embrace it, own it, or otherwise draw worldly benefit from it” (68). This premise holds true to the artistic vision of Emily Eden in her early writings and sketches; however, she makes an unconscious and decided move towards a more personal and attached consideration of her subjects.



Fig. 1. Bejeweled Indian horse and rider painted by Emily Eden. Jagmohan Mahajan, *The Grand Indian Tour: Travels and Sketches of Emily Eden* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996) 106.

Regarding painting, Bohls interprets Reynolds' philosophy of the repulsiveness of detail by stating that "good form in painting subordinates objects and figures to ideas; each figure is formed through a process of comparing and abstracting from actual things" (78-79). Eden's use of the picturesque in both her letters and her paintings falls somewhere in between these two aesthetic lines of theory. She begins as a disinterested tourist, but she concludes her journey as a changed woman, instrumental in the lives of her fellow English travelers as well as in the welfare of the poor and unfortunate Indians that she encountered in her travels. Originally, her paintings may have subordinated and categorized her subjects, to some degree, by relegating them to simple, one-dimensional drawings on sheets of paper. By the end of her tour, Emily Eden's sketches held more life-like qualities, and she visually captured the essence of the individuals she depicted in order to represent their real forms and true identities. Instead of limiting or containing her subjects as objects for examination, Miss Eden brought them to life by committing them to paper in the forms of her letters and pictures and then sent them home to be reincarnated through the voracious eyes and sensibilities of her older sister. In November of 1837, for example, Eden shared an experience that involved her and George and two prominent Hindu women on the docks at Ghazeepore [sic]:

There were two women on the landing-place with a petition. They were Hindu *ladies*, and were carried down in covered palanquins, and very much enveloped in veils. They flung themselves on the ground, and laid hold of G[eorge], and screamed and sobbed in a horrid way, but without showing their faces, and absolutely wanted a pardon for the

husband of one of them, who, with his followers, is said to have murdered about half a village full of Mussulmans, and these women say he did not do it, but that the Nazir of that village was his enemy, and did the murders, and then laid it on their party. These little traits are to give you an insight into the manners and customs of the East, and to open and improve your mind, &c. (*Up the Country* 19)

In this passage, Miss Eden describes the women in order to provide a true representation of the customs and ways of a foreign people; however, she includes certain details not to label or categorize the individuals she encounters but to make them real in the eyes of her sister so that she might “give [her] an insight into the manners and customs of the East” (19). Though her choice of wording at times seems patronizing, Eden’s early letters reveal the blunt and unpolished technique of letter writing that she eventually developed into a more personal narrative as her travels progressed. She moved from more distant and trivial discussions of her experiences to decidedly more emotional and pathetic observations of the country she grew to love and appreciate as her time in Northern India progressed. What Emily Eden attempted to accomplish in her earliest letters was to provide an informed and intelligent reproduction of the people she met so that her sister might take that information and make her own conclusions of the Edens’ experiences.

The distance from her subjects, in both her writing and her drawing, put Emily Eden into the role of a reporter who was able to process and pass on information to her waiting reader. Rather than distancing herself from the action to protect her sensibilities, Eden was in fact attempting to serve as an amateur

artist and impartial observer in order to provide her sister with a picture for which Emily served only as the frame, not the creative artist. Emily Eden knew her sister well enough to realize that details were necessary to relay her thoughts back home and that very little improvisation or commentary was needed. Early on in her letters, Eden seeks to describe what she sees as if through the lens of a camera – verbally conducting that image home to Mary – and this method of reproduction serves to capture Emily’s immediate experience instead of storing up something or someone for future reference:

We have had a beautiful subject for drawing the last two days. A troop of irregular horse [guards] joined us at Futtehghur. The officer, a Russaldar—a sort of sergeant, I believe—wears a most picturesque dress, and has an air of Timour the Tartar, with a touch of Alexander the Great—and he comes and sits for his picture with great patience. All these irregular troops are like parts of a melodrama. They go about curvetting and spearing, and dress themselves fancifully, and they are most courteous-mannered natives. (*Up the Country* 71)

In this passage, the subjects of Emily’s sketches enjoy her scrutiny and they revel in the intense attention paid them; they are certainly not shrinking from a probing, European gaze (see fig. 2). Emily Eden knew that years after her excursions, she would read back over her letters and find there the same pictures that could then be conjured in her own memory. Because her sister Mary was not able to produce her own memories of a trip to India, Eden wanted to provide her with a view into that life as best she could.

Fanny Eden was a devoted letter-writer and sketch artist as well. She kept her promise to write Emily everyday and to keep a detailed journal of sights and

activities while she traveled with various hunting parties. During her early trip to Rajmahal, her letters were brief, descriptive journal entries, peppered with charcoal and watercolor sketches of mosques, elephants, tigers, tents, and the Bengal jungle. Upon her arrival back at Barrackpore, after a tiger hunt in 1837, Fanny remarked as follows in her last journal entry:

In this country to have been away for near two months without one trouble or fright of any kind, is a blessing to be thankful for. Certainly this expedition has quite answered to me in point of pleasure. Then I am rather proud of having seen a tiger killed, because, except for Mrs. Cockerell, there is not another woman in India who has, I believe.... I am persuaded that if the beasts we have left were a little tamer, and the [English friends] we are going to were a little wilder, the improvement would be remarkable. (Dunbar 81)

This humorous statement upon Fanny Eden's return back to civilization speaks clearly of her disdain for monotony and her desire for excitement. While she was extremely happy to return to the company of her sister, she looked forward to more adventures in this strange and beautiful land. Fanny would get her wish as her brother had a trip to Simla planned for October of that same year. It was on this grand yet cumbersome journey northward that Emily Eden wrote the letters that she later published in her work *Up the Country*. This journal, in the form of letters to Mary, is detailed, opinionated, particular, and revealing, and it serves as a fine example of Eden's method of creating order out of the chaos. Although Eden was closer to her sister Fanny, Mary was the eager, supportive figure who provided Emily with an avenue for uncensored, honest dialogue. Because Miss

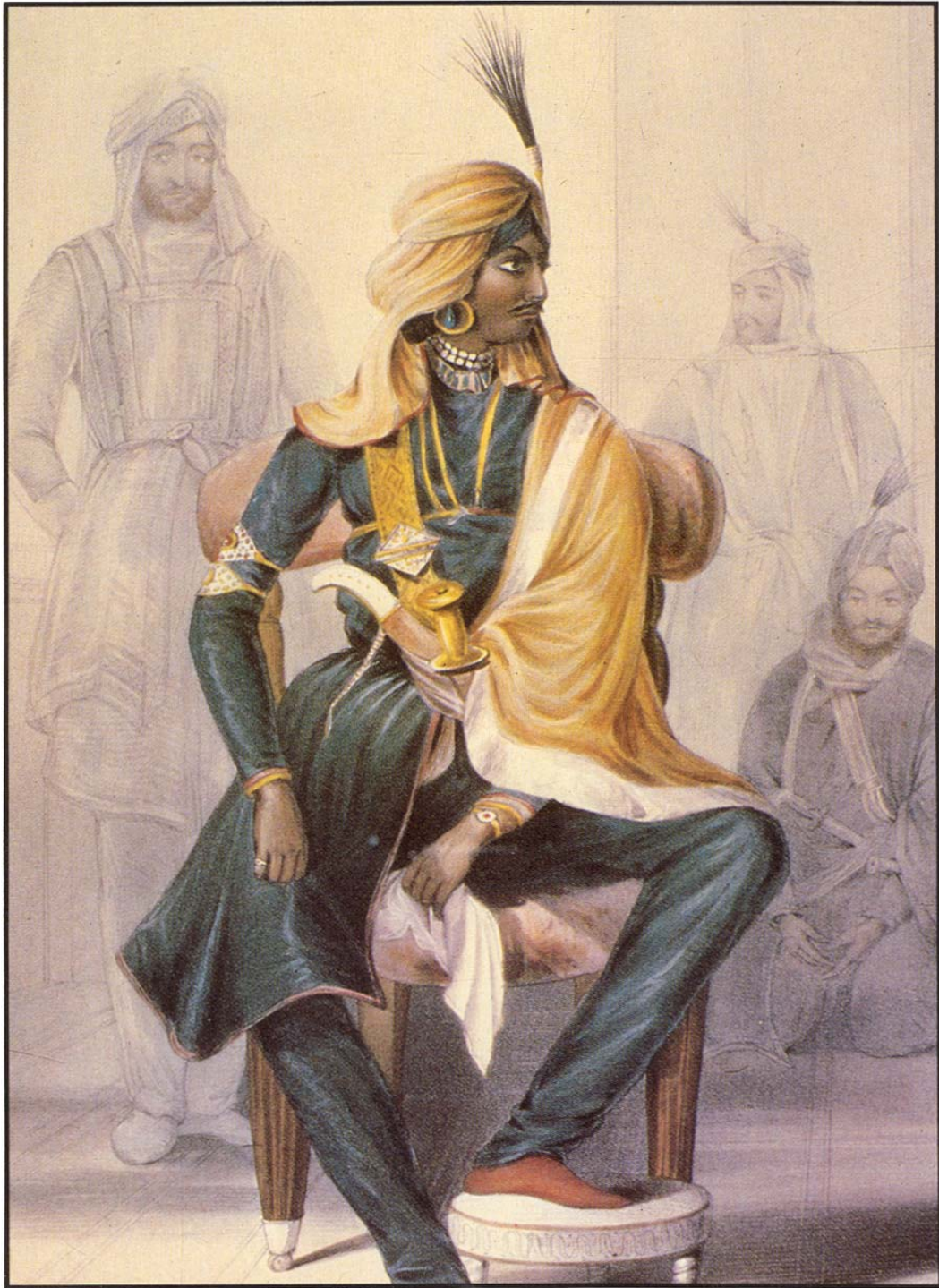


Fig. 2. Indian aristocrat posing for Emily Eden. Jagmohan Mahajan, *The Grand Indian Tour: Travels and Sketches of Emily Eden* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996) 107.

Eden's letters were not published until long after they were composed, the notion that they were compromised in some way through the anticipation of publication can be safely dismissed. Emily Eden's letters always poured forth from her heart in a fountain of uninhibited remarks. She knew exactly to whom she was addressing her sentiments, and she did not alter or mask her opinions to appeal to a mass, general audience.

After a very tiring and exciting arrival in the Indian city of Benares, Miss Eden wrote Mary an extremely detailed letter, at the close of which she exclaims, "God bless you, dearest! When I am tired, or *tented*, or hot, or cold, and generally when I am in India, I have at least the comfort of always sitting down to tell you all about it" (*Up the Country* 23). These letters to "Mary D." provided Eden a means of communicating her anger, happiness, fear and frustration to a loving and receptive ear. She meant no harm to any creature, although her words were often tainted with fatigue, sorrow, and disappointment. Such a time of homesickness and frustration is evident in a letter written in January 1838, from a British military camp in Bareilly [sic]:

The thing that chiefly interests me is to hear the details of the horrible solitude in which the poor young civilians live. There is a Mr. G. here, whom R. recommended to us, who is quite mad with delight at being with the camp for a week. We knew him very well in Calcutta. He says the horror of being three months without seeing an European, or hearing an English word, nobody can tell. Captain N. has led that sort of life in the jungles too, and says that, towards the end of the rainy season, when the health generally gives way, the lowness of spirits that comes on is quite dreadful; that every young man fancies he is going to die, and then he

thinks that nobody will bury him if he does, as there is no other European at hand. Never send a son to India! my dear M., that is the moral.

(Up the Country 77)

This passage clearly exhibits a sad, contemplative side that Emily Eden attempts to keep from view in almost all of her other letters. These comments also reveal an English fear of the strangeness of the land and its inhabitants, and it shows Eden's obvious compassion for the English soldiers who might go for months without seeing another Englishman, or any other European for that matter. This extreme sense of an Anglo centric community and the importance of English camaraderie in the face of such an alien environment weighed heavily on Emily Eden's heart. Eden was fortunate to be traveling with a great number of her fellow English citizens as well as her brother and sister, and the idea of an individual separated from his or her friends and countrymen was a prospect that Emily Eden would rather not have had to face. Because she was confiding in her beloved sister, she let her true anxieties and apprehensions spill forth at times that revealed an honesty that was frightened, yet reasonable and sincere.

In many of her letters from India, Miss Eden did not hide the fact that she was a privileged member of a colonial nation living amongst a strange and mystifying "other" society of people. The European identity of the Edens posed a threat, at times, to the natives of the land in which they traveled, in turn, making them intruders and, so, vulnerable to attack. However, Emily Eden rarely expressed in her letters the consciousness that she was possibly manipulating the identities of a race of people whom she found to be alien:

They said we should be murdered amongst other things; but in my life I never saw such a civil, submissive set of people. Our people and the police of the place walked on first, desiring the crowd to sit down, which they all did instantly, crouching together and making a lane all through the fair. They are civil creatures, and I am very fond of the natives. (*Up the Country* 18)

Miss Eden often, in her letters, portrayed a woman who was intrigued by everything foreign yet was suspended in a spirit of detached observance rather than active interference. Her comments and actions were those of an omniscient eye that saw many things yet did not often attempt to participate in the encounter. In relation to the familiar theory of Orientalism set out by Edward Said, Indira Ghose states, “the position of the spy is, of course, the ultimate reification of the disembodied gaze paradigm: it offers visual pleasure and power without involvement” (20). Although it is not quite accurate to label Emily Eden as a “spy,” Ghose’s discussion of the “disembodied gaze paradigm” can be applied to travel letters generated by Eden. Her written alterations of any part of Indian society were mostly unintentional. Eden’s internalization of the intrusive and often destructive British colonial system was based upon her faith in her brother, George, to pursue what their government felt to be a correct approach to foreign policy, and Miss Eden was partially just along for the ride.

Indira Ghose asserts that, although relatively protected and hidden, British women were indeed instrumental in the colonial process; “by colluding in the myth of women’s non-involvement in colonialism, we are denying precisely those women agency who rightly earn our admiration by actively shaping their own

lives by travelling!” (9). While this argument has merit, it is also not entirely true in the case of Emily Eden. Emily never desired to visit India, and she was not a comfortable traveler. However, her wish to accompany her brother in his political duties outweighed any reservations she had about leaving her home in London. Simply because Emily was a member of the Governor-General’s entourage did not mean that she was always in favor of treating the native inhabitants of India as abject subjects. Emily Eden was fascinated, amused, shocked, and horrified by some of the traditional Indian ways, and, although strange to her English identity, she would not have desired any appropriation on the part of the Indian citizens. The foreign nature of the Indians may have been uncomfortable for Eden now and again, but she was also quick to find fault with her fellow Britons and attempted to remain outside of military and government affairs. For instance, at one point in the city of Futtygunge [sic], Miss Eden sees a fellow Englishwoman, and she talks of how much she desired to go and speak with her:

There was a lady yesterday in perfect ecstasies with the music. I believe she was the wife of an indigo planter in the neighborhood, and I was rather longing to go and speak to her, as she probably had 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.

(Up the Country 71)

This selection shows Emily’s questioning attitude towards British citizens in India, not simply reserving her mistrust for those “natives” that she found to be quite unmannered and frightening. The reservations she extended to English

citizens represented the ideas of status and propriety with which she examined even her own countrymen. If an individual did not embody the sort of class and decorum that Eden was familiar with, then she was immediately skeptical of the nature of that person, be they European or Indian. Miss Eden was smart and savvy when it came to politics and society, but she was also in a strange country, and it was all she could do to forge ahead and maintain her enthusiasm in order to strengthen the spirits of her sister and brother. She certainly would comment to Mary of the unfair circumstances she encountered, but she was often reluctant to assume that she should play a hand in altering the lives of the many people she met early in her travels.

At first, Eden trivialized the inhabitants of India as oddities or interesting exhibits to be watched, observed, and described for the amusement and interest of her family back in England. Eden preferred the role of a reactive tourist who was obviously disinclined to admit she had a vital role in British colonialization. In one particular inane and trivial instance, Miss Eden wrote to her sister of one of her and George's journeys:

That little ditch the Gugga is quite pompous with twenty feet of water, and it has been dry for three years, and was nearly so on Monday, so we are just a day too late. We moved eight miles nearer to it merely for the love of moving, and are now at Noodeean—evidently a corruption of Noodleland, or the land to which we noodles should come. I want to leave the last camp standing, and to march backwards and forwards between the two; it would be just as good as any other Indian tour.

(Up the Country 250)

This letter is indeed silly and nonsensical, but it does reflect the air of unimportance and tedium that Eden often attributed to her and her family's travels in India. At times, it seems that Miss Eden had forgotten entirely their reason for being there. Emily Eden did not openly subscribe in these letters to the theory of the British being the great white saviors of the fiendish, backward Indians. She may have had strong feelings regarding imperialism and her possible role in that institution; however, this correspondence with her sister contains no such resounding convictions. In fact, Indira Ghose argues "what is missing in Eden's work is a sense of the White Man's Burden.... [Eden] displays no sense of a civilizing mission to bring light unto the darkness" (80-81). Although Eden eventually did begin actively to engage in the betterment of the Indian society she so briefly inhabited, she had no misconceptions regarding her role as primarily a dutiful, political tourist and observer, and not a missionary or savior. Emily Eden did not consider her presence in India a delightful or relaxing vacation, herself a pillar of change and reformation, or her society a standard for cultural healing. Indeed, moments of sadness and weakness often pour forth from various letters into Miss Eden's sister's sympathetic ear; such a moment follows:

Another of the civilians here is Mr. B.O., son of the Mr. O. you know. He was probably the good-looking stepson whose picture Mrs. O. used to carry about with her, because he was such a 'beautiful creature.' He is now a bald-headed, grey, toothless man, and perfectly ignorant on all points but that of tiger-hunting. There is not a day that I do not think of those dear lines of Crabbe's—

But when returned the youth? The youth no more
Returned exulting to his native shore;
But in his stead there came a worn-out man.

They were always good lines, and always had a tendency to bring tears into my eyes; but now, when I look at either the youth or the worn-out men, and think what India does for them all, I really could not venture to say those lines out loud. Please to remember that I shall return a worn-out woman.
(*Up the Country* 83)

The spirit that Emily Eden expresses in this melancholy selection is that of a reluctant traveler who does not claim the role of a professional historian or a commentator on the subject of political action. In fact, in one letter, she told her friend Theresa Lister to continue writing of England, the Lister family and their children—not meaningless gossip—because, as she wrote, “I find the letters in which my friends tell me about themselves and their children are much pleasanter than mere gossip. They really interest me—there is the difference between biography and history” (*Letters* 298). This is precisely how Emily Eden approached her letter writing and her extensive descriptions of the people she knew and encountered in her travels. Her writings were indeed “familiar letters,” not annals of political theory or meticulous historical facts. Eden’s letters were simply the daily writings from one weary, worn, and homesick sister to another sister waiting for her family’s eventual return to safety.

The most apparent quality of Miss Eden’s letters to Mary is that she portrays the figures in her letters through very visual descriptions rather than through sound or smell. Sara Mills identifies several constraints exhibited in women’s writings on other nations, and one of the more disturbing approaches she discusses involves “portraying the other nation in terms of abhorrent smells and filthiness” (90). This approach to description is not the case in the writings of

Emily Eden. Her senses were more receptive to the immediacy of sight and vision; therefore, her letters are heavy with vivid, visual impressions. Exhibiting this visual focus, Eden's writing falls into a genre of travel literature that can be described in Mary Louise Pratt's term as the narrative of the "anti-conquest." In examining Pratt's analysis further, we find that in ethnographic writing, description serves the author as a means to assign an identity to a foreign people without limiting or labeling that race of people, therefore "fix[ing] its members in a timeless present.... Like the system of nature, it makes an order where, for the outsider, there exists chaos" (64). Whether Emily Eden was aware of this effect in her own writings or not, the fact remains that through her visual definitions, she was allowing for an order to emerge from her occasional confusion over and frustration with living in a strange and fascinating country. Similarly, Eden was able to gain some control over her surroundings and come to her own understanding of these through her use of writing and the many artistic sketches that she completed during her travels, as we see in the following example:

We arrived at Benares at ten, *lay to* all through the heat of the day, whilst the servants unloaded the flat, and then steamed up within view of the city, as far as the rajah's country-house, Ramnuggur, and then dropped down again, thereby seeing the whole of the city. The glare was horrible, but the buildings were worth all the blindness that ensued. Such minarets and mosques, rising one above the other to an immense height; and the stone is such a beautiful colour. The ghauts [landing places] covered with natives, and great white colossal figures of Vishnu lying on the steps of each ghaut. Benares is one of their most sacred places, and they seem to spare no expense in their temples. We mean to keep our steamer here, to go out sketching in it. But it would

take a whole week to draw one temple perfectly; the
ghaut where we landed was as pretty a sight as any.
(*Up the Country* 21-22)

Creating images that filtered through her own consciousness and passing those images on to her sister in England allowed Miss Eden to document her thoughts, experiences, and impressions in a way that was personal and unique. At the same time, this method of documentation allowed her to serve as a non-threatening seeing-eye, without changing or altering the landscape that she desired to commit to memory. An excellent example of a character description by Emily is seen in the following passage in which she portrays the Maharajah Ranjit Singh in Ferozepore [sic]:

He is exactly like an old mouse, with grey whiskers and one eye.... Runjeet had no jewels on whatever, nothing but the commonest red silk dress. He had two stockings on at first, which was considered an unusual circumstance; but he very soon contrived to slip one off, that he might sit with one foot in his hand, comfortably.

(*Up the Country* 198-199)

Eden's description of the old Maharajah is similar to something that Charles Dickens might have conjured in one of his earlier works (see fig. 3). In fact, Miss Eden and Mary Drummond exchanged comments frequently regarding contemporary literature, and Dickens was one of their favorites. For instance, reflecting her fondness for her dog and other domestic animals, the "characters" in many of Emily Eden's letters have a comforting, animal-like familiarity. The Englishness of Dickens' style kept appearing in Eden's journal and letters time and time again, and she declared, "I had laughed twenty times at that book [*The*

Pickwick Papers]. Then there is always a quotation to be had from Pickwick for everything that occurs anywhere” (*Up the Country* 64). Because both Emily Eden and Mary Drummond were fond of Dickens, expressing strange happenings and customs from India in terms reminiscent of his work allowed Eden to connect with her sister humorously, traversing the many miles spiritually, making the strange seem familiar. One specific instance involves a “Mr. Q” and Emily’s dog, Chance:

That Mr. Q., of—, who has been living with us for a month, and who admires Chance, as a clever demon, but is afraid of him, always says, if Chance goes near him at dessert: —‘Bring some cake directly! good old Chance! good little dog! the cake is coming,’ so like Pickwick and his ‘good old horse.’ (*Up the Country* 63-64)

Eden’s characterizations are not meant to be harmful or in bad taste; they are created as a sort of funny little joke that she can share with Mary. Emily Eden’s sense of humor is reflected throughout her journals written in India, and that witty approach to everyday life was what kept her spirits high in times when she desperately wished to go home. Similar literary references used for the benefit of her and her sister’s shared appreciation for reading novels can be seen in passages such as the following:

[The King of Oude’s] postilions were dressed much like our own, and drove very tolerably; but the road was so awfully bad, we were shaken about the carriage most uncomfortably and covered with dust. I felt so like Madame Duval in *Evelina*, after the captain had shaken her and rolled her in the ditch.
(*Up the Country* 57-58)

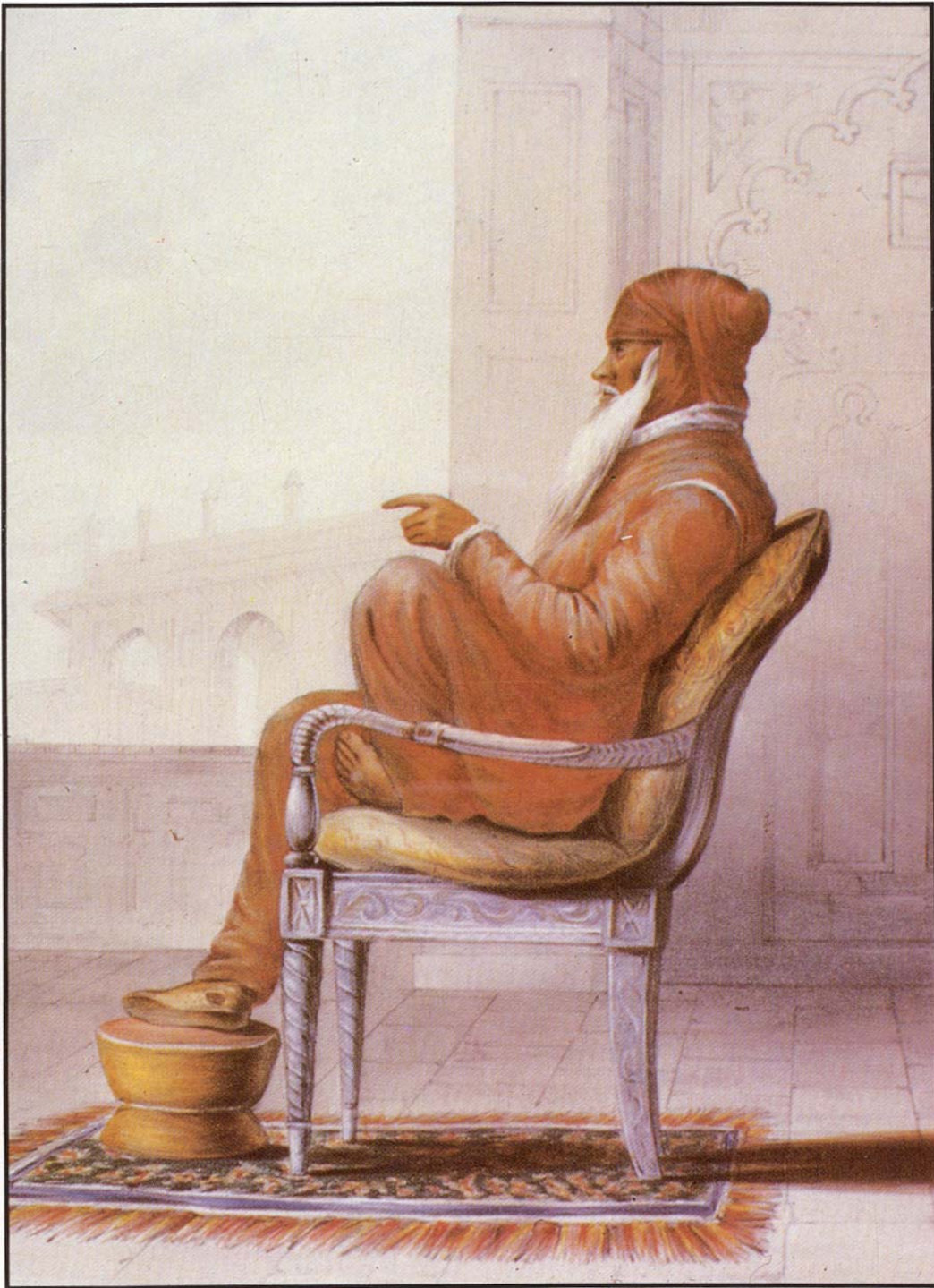


Fig. 3. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, as painted by Emily Eden. Jagmohan Mahajan, *The Grand Indian Tour: Travels and Sketches of Emily Eden* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996) 105.

This selection, for anyone who has read *Evelina*, immediately conjures a particular image to mind, just as it would have for Mary Drummond reading the letter from her sister. This dropping in of references is clever of Miss Eden and would have been adored by her sister reading through her correspondences at her leisure in England. These shared “jokes” served to further their affection for one another and to bring a bit of Emily Eden’s personality with her in her letters to be treasured by Mary from afar.

To return to the notion of the picturesque, Marian Fowler expands further upon her idea that Emily Eden engaged in this visual technique in order to distance herself from her surroundings. Fowler further claims that Eden also uses her humor in much the same way as she does the picturesque because “if [Emily] could ridicule and belittle, turning India’s natives and its British residents alike into figures of fun, it would all remain unreal – just some hilarious stage farce, or Punch-and-Judy show” (46-47). True, Emily had a great gift for wit and nothing was above her criticism or playful ribbing, but her humor was often used merely as an extension of her own unique personality and not as a means to dehumanize or “belittle” other individuals. For example, she constantly makes jabs at her brother George for hating his tents and the discomfort that he experiences during their travels from camp to camp:

G[eorge] positively declared against any more dust or any more drives, so we stuck to the tents in the afternoon. He cannot endure his tent, or camp life altogether, and it certainly is very much opposed to all his habits of business and regularity.

(Up the Country 25)

Although the Edens traveled in the height of luxury for that time, Emily Eden repeatedly comments on George's cross disposition regarding their arrangements and the inconveniences of life on the move. Miss Eden and her family often traveled on elephants, in *jonpons* (rather like a European sedan-chair), *tonjons*, or *palanquins* (both are portable chairs borne about by a pole and four pole-bearers).

Emily's own ill-humor, at times, did not escape her scrutiny either:

Only five more days [before reaching Simla]. I get such fits of bore with being doddled about for three hours before breakfast in a sedan-chair, that I have a sort of mad wish to tell the bearers to turn back and go home, quite home, all the way to England. I wonder if I were to call 'coach' as loud as I could, if it would do any good. (*Up the Country* 121)

Though they were not travelling in carriages or by railroad, they were far from being forced to traverse the hot country by horseback or on foot. George's irritability is noted again in another passage that takes place in one of the many elaborate encampments:

G[eorge] and I went on an elephant through rather a pretty little village in the evening, and he was less bored than usual, but I never saw him hate anything so much as he does this camp life. I have long named my tent 'Misery Hall.' F[anny] said it was very odd, as everybody observed her tent was like a fairy palace. 'Mine is not exactly that,' G[eorge] said; 'indeed I call it Foully Palace, it is so very squalid-looking.' He was sitting in my tent in the evening, and when the purdahs are all down, all the outlets to the tents are so alike that he could not find which *crevice* led to his abode; and he said at last, 'Well! It is a hard case; they talk of the luxury in which the Governor-General travels, but I cannot even find a covered passage from Misery Hall to Foully Palace.' (*Up the Country* 37)

Indeed, the Governor-General complained quite often of his discomfort and made clear how he wished to find himself back home in Calcutta at the Government House. Time and time again Eden depicted her brother's tantrums over his dust-covered clothing or his lumpy bed. Emily Eden loved her brother extraordinarily, but even he fell victim to her sly, humorous remarks concerning his complaints and the inadequacies of life on the march. These casual commentaries are almost shades of an inner monologue escaping through her letters, as seen in the following scenario:

We had a dreadful sermon at church yesterday from a strange Clergyman.... He quoted quantities of poetry, and when he thought any of it particularly pretty, he said it twice over with the most ludicrous actions possible.... All round the church people's shoulders were shaking and their faces hid, and there was one moment when I was nearly going out, for fear of giving a scream.... I came home in one of those fits of laughing and crying which we used to have about 'Pleasant but not correct,' or such like childish jokes, which always ended by giving you a palpitation. (*Up the Country* 135-136)

Far apart, Eden and her sister could, then, still share in moments of private laughter through the grand descriptions that Emily included in her letters.

Although many critics accuse Emily Eden of callous and uncaring treatment of the Indians in her letters, Indira Ghose states that "what Eden's text sets up for mockery most of all is her own persona: that of a letter-writing, perspiring, bonnet-wearing, homesick traveller" (84). Not only were the "natives," the Indian customs, other British citizens, and Eden's family and companions susceptible to her humorous gaze, but, apparently, so was Emily herself. In one

description of her and George's obligations to attend balls and parties at night and then survey the naval officers on the English ships all the next day, Eden wrote to Mary:

We did not get home last night till half-past one, and were up at seven to go on board, and we had to go smirking and smiling through all that regiment again, with all the other gentlemen to go to the boat with us; but we may have a rest to-day. It certainly is a hard-working life, is not it? I never get 'my natural rest,' as Dandie Dinmont says, in the steamer for noise, and on the shore for work.

(Up the Country 21)

The "work" that Eden refers to here was hardly manual labor, and she did enjoy her official duties, no matter how begrudgingly she spoke of them. At the same time, Emily Eden also recognized the frivolity involved with her superficial responsibilities she undertook as the companion to the English Governor-General.

Further on into their travels to the city of Simla, Emily Eden did express thoughts of disdain and abhorrence for certain aspects of Indian society. During their stay near Allahabad [sic], Emily was invited to visit a girl's school:

The children looked very poor; and luckily half the ceiling of the school fell down while I was there, owing to the successful labours of the white ants, which gave the ladies an opportunity of observing that their funds were in a very bad state. All these sights are very expensive, and I never know exactly what is expected from us. I gave 15*l.* for all three of us, but it is a very odd system of the *good* people here, that they never acknowledge any donation. It is supposed to be a gift from Providence; so, whether it is satisfactory to them, or not, remains a mystery. *(Up the Country 42)*

This was one of the first instances on their trip to Simla in which Eden expressed unhappiness or scorn for the treatment of the “natives.” Until this point in her letters, everything described has been personal accounts of balls, dinners, or official state visits. But at this moment, Miss Eden began to realize that she, as an Englishwoman in a position of power, could sit back and observe certain situations or attempt to change the injustices she witnessed. As she states in this passage, she was not sure what was expected of her, and she hoped that her monetary donation would suffice. This is not the first time that Emily Eden would realize that her presence in India required her to fulfill a role that was more than that of a casual reporter of sights and sounds. She was an Englishwoman treading on the foreign soil of a country where people lived and behaved quite differently from anything she was accustomed to before, and there were some things that she was reluctant, unable, or unwilling to accept.

Early in their travels north from Calcutta, Emily Eden and Lord Auckland came face-to-face in the town of Cawnpore [sic] with the horrors of the starving, impoverished natives of India, and Eden noted to her sister the tragedies that she was forced to come to terms with:

You cannot conceive the horrible sights we see, particularly children; perfect skeletons in many cases, their bones through their skin, without a rag of clothing, and utterly unlike human creatures. Our camp luckily does more good than harm. We get all our supplies from Oude, and we can give away more than any other travellers. We began yesterday giving food away in the evening...and I went with Major J. to see them, but I could not stay. We can do no more than give what we do, and the sight is much too shocking. The women look as if

they had been buried, their *skulls* look so dreadful.
(*Up the Country* 65)

Whereas before, in portions of her letters, Emily Eden had been blithe, jovial, if not sarcastic, she now found herself stricken with sorrow not for herself but for the individuals whom her brother and her fellow countrymen were there to govern. For once, her equanimity failed her, and she was forced to look away. At a time when she was so overwhelmed by emotion for the poor natives, she found it hard to separate herself from the misery that she witnessed:

I am sure there is no sort of violent atrocity I should not commit for food, with a starving baby. I should not stop to think about the rights or wrongs of the case. (*Up the Country* 65)

The Governor-General and his troops were not sent to India as missionaries but as emissaries of the British government. They could not overlook the suffering of the people they encountered during their official marches. The humanity of Emily Eden and her mindfulness of human conditions enter into her letters, just as do the funny and playful experiences that she describes. An aversion to the “other,” the strange “natives,” does not appear anywhere in the passages wherein she views famine and death. She did not pity the starving Indians and then climb up into her palanquin and flee. She stopped, looked around, and then began to do what she could to end the anguish she faced. In this sense, Emily Eden’s purpose in India had matured into a mission of personal action, quite different from the passive stance she took earlier in both her behavior and observations. She was a human being after all, and her letters document the quiet change that overtook her as she became evermore involved in life as it moved around her, rather than just

stopping to describe it on paper. While still in Cawnpore, Emily and George visited their stable and were witnesses to a terrible discovery:

G[eorge] and I walked down to the stables this morning before breakfast, and found such a miserable little baby, something like an old monkey, but with glazed, stupid eyes, under the care of another little wretch of six years old. I am sure you would have sobbed to see the way in which the little atom flew at a cup of milk, and the way in which the little brother fed it.... Dr. D. says it cannot live, it is so diseased with starvation, but I mean to try what can be done for it.

(Up the Country 65-66)

The several descriptions in this passage, such as “old monkey,” “stupid eyes,” and “little atom” are unusual terms when illustrating a starving child. However, Emily Eden is not criticizing or ridiculing the baby; she is, instead, disgusted at the sight of such pitiful human conditions, and she is, perhaps, angry at the fact that there is not much she can do to change such matters. Regardless of her word-usage, the impression gained through these images is one of sadness and helplessness: a tiny being, left to fend for itself with only the help of another “little wretch.” And no matter how Miss Eden described the child, she did attempt to care for it:

My baby is alive, the mother follows the camp, and I have it four times a day at the back of my tent, and feed it. It is rather touching to see the interest the servants take in it, though there are worse objects about, or else I have got used to this little creature.

(Up the Country 66)

Again, the words “object” and “little creature” lend a feeling of uncertainty regarding Eden’s sincerity towards the sickly child. But, not being a mother

herself and not desiring children of her own, Miss Eden was most likely unused to such tangible needs as those of a baby, and it was also difficult for her to express her frustration verbally. In fact, this description does little to reveal Emily Eden's true emotions – whether they be truly caring or pitifully condescending – because in a very early letter, back in England, Emily wrote of her own, beloved Mary's children in less than complimentary terms:

The work of education goes on from morning to night. Six small Intellects continually on the march, and Mary, of course, is hatching a seventh child. I own I am glad I am not married, it is such a tiresome fatiguing life; and though as a visitor I delight in the children, yet I would not be so worn and worried as their mother is on any consideration.
(*Letters* 127-28)

In this case, Eden is expressing an unwillingness to foster care and support for *any* children, regardless of race or nationality. She is uncomfortable considering her role as a mother, and it is clearly not her wish to become one. This uneasiness is perhaps at work in her less than complimentary picture of the Indian children, despite our knowledge that she did in fact aid the diseased baby from the stable.

Through instances like the famine, Emily Eden is revealed to be more than just a bored traveler, an innocent bystander, or a hard-hearted colonialist. She was an interested observer, keeping her distance in times of great excitement and beauty, while stepping in when she encountered moments of tragedy. All of this is in the journal, in her letters, but what she was thinking and feeling between writing down the words that represented her experiences can only be speculated upon. The many instances in which Emily Eden opened her heart to her sister

totally and completely serve as reference points in her life and experience during her stay in a peculiar and extraordinary country; and those moments serve to expose a truly amazing bond between two very special sisters. In one of her final letters to Mary before returning to Calcutta in February of 1840, Eden set her emotions free in talking about the two-year trek that she had recently endured and the weary future that lay ahead:

I have a right to feel vapid and tired and willing to lie down and rest; for during the last four years my life has been essentially an artificial life; and, moreover, from my bad health it is physically fatiguing, and I feel I am flagging much more than I ever expected to do. I should like to see you and to be at home again.... I am quite sure that you and I feel unusually detached from the future, from having enjoyed our young days so eagerly. They were very happy lives; and very often, when I am too tired to do anything else, I can think over particular days, with nothing but high spirits to recommend them, that are still quite refreshing.

(Up the Country 337-38)

Realizing the relationship that is at work in these letters between Eden and Mary Drummond is crucial to appreciating what was being said, shared, and disclosed. Understanding the context for her observations and the audience for her commentary is the key to understanding Emily Eden. Her “familiar letters,” written originally for only her sisters and dear friends, do serve a lasting purpose to educate contemporary readers and scholars to the nature of nineteenth-century travel and travel letters. Emily Eden’s letters were released for publication in 1866, and she entrusted her dear nephew William Godolphin Osborne with that duty. In the note that accompanied all of her collective correspondences from

India, she told William that she wished they would be published because “she to whom they are addressed, they of whom they were written, have all passed away, and you and I are now almost the only survivors of the large party that in 1838 left Government House for the Upper Provinces” (*Up the Country* dedication). Time had passed and Miss Eden was willing to let her letters be made public so that the India that she knew and experienced could be recreated by future generations in all of its vivid beauty and horror. The historical importance of Miss Eden’s writings did not enter the picture until long after they were composed, yet she hoped that her letters would serve as a reminder of how that country had been when she was its visitor. She wrote further in her note to Mr. Osborne, “these details, therefore, of a journey that was picturesque in its motley processions, in its splendid crowds, and in its ‘barbaric gold and pearl,’ may be thought amusing. So many changes have since taken place...” (*Up the Country* dedication). The beauty of India, as seen through Emily Eden’s pen and paintbrush, still survives as a personal memorial to the strange land that, for six long years, captured the heart and mind of a reluctant yet successful and intriguing female traveler.

III. ISABELLA LUCY BIRD IN AMERICA

Growing up in her father's parish of Cheshire, England, was an extraordinary experience for Isabella Bird. Born in 1831 and educated by loving parents, she and her younger sister, Henrietta, spent many hours outdoors, exploring the countryside. The two sisters were inseparable, and, according to biographer Evelyn Kaye, they "were often isolated from other children in the communities their father served. They learned to depend on one another as playmates and friends" (43). In addition, Isabella, on horseback, often accompanied her father while he made his daily visits to his parishioners, and, as Dorothy Middleton indicates in her research on Bird, "this was typical of the upbringing of the Bird girls, for there were no concession[s] to childishness in that household...[;]the children learnt from the beginning to ride a big horse, to read the whole Bible, to comprehend the full truth of every subject" (21). This early introduction to inquiry and a thirst for knowledge affected Isabella through the remainder of her life. She was very much her father's daughter: both possessed a quick mind and both were troubled by constant bouts of nervous disorder, backaches, and frequent insomnia.

Later in their lives, Henrietta Bird decided to live a tranquil and secluded life in Tobermory, Scotland. Isabella, though loathe to part with her invalid sister, suffered her own health problems that prohibited her taking up residence on the wet, windy moors of the Scottish coast. Before Henrietta's death in 1880, Isabella Bird would travel to Australia, Malaysia, Hawaii, the Rocky Mountains, Canada, Japan, Hong Kong, and Egypt, writing amazingly descriptive letters to Henrietta

every step of the way. As in the case of Emily Eden and the letters she wrote to her sister, the idea of the split halves separated by geography, yet reconstituted through correspondence until they could be physically rejoined, can be applied to Isabella Bird and her beloved sister.

Although the Eden/Bird sisters' situations were similar, there were distinct differences in speech, sensibility, purpose, and intent exhibited in the letters from Isabella Bird on her trips abroad. Miss Bird's travel letters and travel accounts moved through different stages as she grew and matured. From her early travels as a young woman to her final travels as an accomplished and well-respected elderly lady, Isabella Bird developed a writing style and type of correspondence that was all her own. That is, while she did write often and earnestly to her younger sister for much of her life, Isabella Bird's letters were removed and efficient and not extraordinarily personal or tender. Evelyn Kaye describes well the relationship between the two sisters in the following analysis:

Henrietta's role, though she did not realize it then, was to stay at home so that Isabella could write to her. She provided the solid anchorage Isabella needed, the link with all that had been left behind, the image of family and fireside which Isabella believed she could not live without. Isabella could travel freely, knowing that someone was waiting for her at home, reading her long letters, caring about her, telling their friends what she was doing and where she was going. Henrietta's role was to be Isabella's audience. (64)

This relationship may seem to be rather selfish on the part of Isabella Bird; however, both women seemed to be perfectly comfortable in their roles. Henrietta provided the mirror in which Isabella might view herself and her

accomplishments so that Isabella might know that she was living her life to its full potential. For Henrietta, Isabella provided the window through which she might view a vast and extraordinary world from which she would otherwise be forever excluded. Their complicated relationship was, then, mutually beneficial.

Writing home to Henrietta also gave Isabella Bird a familiar audience for her many views and their expressions. She enjoyed being a lone traveler in worlds far from her native country because she was afforded the opportunity to be the eyes and ears for her house-bound sister. Miss Bird was assertive and determined to succeed in her ventures, and she exhibited an unusual ability for tough endurance, calculated skill, and an unwavering sense of what constituted objective description. She was not attached emotionally to those individuals she encountered in her early travels, and she was not on any mission to serve or protect the inhabitants of the lands she visited. Instead, Isabella Bird approached her travels as an artist would a canvas, with bold curiosity, acquired skill, and an endless potential for encountering beauty and adventure. Like Emily Eden, Isabella Bird recounted her adventures for her sister through fabulous descriptions and colorful visions. Both travelers had a flair for adopting a picturesque manner of defining their experiences and surroundings. By engaging in the pictorial, both Eden and Bird could attain mastery over their own thoughts and visions while also remaining true to their subjects' actual natures. As their travels wore on, both writers became comfortable with their style of description, their individual roles in their journey, and the ultimate challenges of life in foreign lands. Their picturesque descriptions allowed them to understand their place in the scheme of

action as well as gain a better understanding of what they saw and perceived. In these cases, the picturesque is not a technique that limits the writer or usurps the identity of the subject, but, instead, it is a technique that allows the viewer, or letter writer, to maintain control in a world that is strange and often chaotic.

Isabella Bird's maturity as a seer and a traveler was achieved through years of learning, seeking, and understanding the world outside of her own existence. Bird began traveling early, and her life on the move was a series of confidence-building adventures that significantly changed her outlook on life and her place in the world. Lila Marz Harper raises the important issue of Isabella Bird's "anxiety about conventional respectability and how she came to seek personal independence through travel..." (145-46). Although Bird was seeking independence from her home and family she did maintain an active and revealing correspondence with Henrietta. Isabella Bird wrote her sister detailed and precise letters often during her travels, but any sisterly affection or overabundance of emotion was rarely ever shared. In fact, Isabella Bird continued to write her travel narratives in letter format even after her sister's death because it was, as Harper further indicates, the method she was "most comfortable with, seeing it, as did Wollstonecraft, as the [format] most likely to encourage a sympathetic identification of the reader with the traveler" (140). At certain times, Isabella Bird did respond emotionally to her sister in her letters, but more often than not, she treated her faraway sibling as a devoted reader simply waiting to be educated and enlightened.

The early American travel letters of Isabella Bird reveal a spoiled girl determined to make her mark upon the world and to take detailed notes of what she saw and experienced. Her letters speak of people and places as if she were recounting them for a science project and not the appreciation of a doting sister or close friends and family. Isabella Bird's reluctance to dwell upon the sentimental permitted her letters to be clear representations of one person's definition of life in North America. Only rarely did she wander into romantic relations of a scene or occurrence, and in those unusual moments of soulful reflection, her sentiments are expressed as outlets for her thoughts and feelings and not simply as a means to over romanticize her experiences.

Why did Isabella Bird write to Henrietta so diligently if it were only to relay factual description devoid of overt feeling or sentiment? Isabella's letters to Henrietta were quite different from the heartfelt correspondences shared between Emily Eden and Mary Drummond. No longing for home or despair over separation exists in the letters of Isabella Bird. She wrote with an eagle's eye for the particular, and she did not let impractical sensibility enter into her discourse. Emily Eden's flair for the "picturesque" is an artistic approach to description that Isabella Bird did not emulate in her writing. In her early travel narratives, Miss Bird did not revel in the idyllic views of sights and experiences but, rather, in a formal if candid overview of exactly what she saw, precisely what occurred, and what her well-considered interpretations were of specific incidents and certain circumstances. This would change, somewhat, in later travels because Isabella Bird would gradually change as she continued to grow and mature as a traveler

and as an educated woman. In contrast to several women travelers of the nineteenth century, who traveled for specific social and political reasons, or only for pleasure, Isabella Bird made a lifelong career out of her travels. She thus created a new identity for traveling women, and she forged a path for courageous female explorers into uninhabited and rarely visited, remote parts of the globe.

In 1854, Isabella Bird, an intelligent, wide-eyed, twenty-three-year-old Englishwoman, journeyed to America to visit family friends and relatives. Her trips through Nova Scotia, Canada, Maine down to Kentucky, and back up through Ohio and Iowa were documented in what now seem immature impressions as seen by a critical, sheltered daughter of a rural English clergyman. Isabella Bird had been educated and encouraged to think and travel from a very early age, and her letters and experiences on that first trip to North America reflect the maturation of a thoughtful yet naïve girl into a strong-willed, independent young lady. Many of her comments in the letters and journals that comprise *An Englishwoman in America* reveal Miss Bird's self-assured nature, her quick wit, and occasionally acidic tongue. Because she had considered or perhaps even planned in advance to publish her letters and journals upon her return, many names of real people were dropped, abbreviated, or changed to protect her and their reputations. Bird states, in her own prefatory remarks, "The notes from which this volume is taken were written in the lands of which it treats: they have been amplified and corrected in the genial atmosphere of an English home" (*An Englishwoman* 5). Although this may explain some of the coarse and unflattering tones she uses in many instances, the fact remains that she

endeavored to portray truthfully and realistically her thoughts and “impressions” as they were experienced during her travels (*An Englishwoman* 2). She was frank and undaunted when it came to her personal reactions to situations, and she did not shy away from relaying her true impressions. This brash honesty may have been a contributing factor to the popularity of the book in England, the more upper-crust inhabitants of which enjoyed smirking about the rough Americans whenever they were afforded the opportunity. Miss Bird was also incredibly well-read, and her dismissive remarks were a product of similar points of view expressed at the time by rather famous English figures such as Frances “Fanny” Trollope and Charles Dickens. Both of these public figures had traveled in America in the early nineteenth century, and neither of them spared the rugged Americans any amount of glaring derision in parts of their own travel narratives from abroad.

Interestingly, the young Isabella Bird, given the chance to escape her family and the countryside of England, was considered by many to be “a true snob” (Clark xiii). One particular instance that exemplified her “snobbish” nature occurred when she made a coach stop at a boardinghouse in a place called “The Bend” in New Brunswick:

A tidy, bustling landlady, very American in her phraseology, but kind in her way, took me under her especial protection, as forty men were staying in the house, and there was an astonishing paucity of the softer sex; indeed, in all my subsequent travels I met with an undue and rather disagreeable preponderance of the “lords of the creation.” Not being inclined to sit in the “parlour” with a very motley company, I accompanied the hostess into

the kitchen, and sat by the fire upon a chopping-
block, the most luxurious seat in the apartment.
(*An Englishwoman* 69-70)

Indeed, she was often sharp and proudly judgmental in her descriptions, yet in comparison to the private journal from which she partly derived *An Englishwoman in America*, the final text of her travel accounts was watered down, revised, and quietly compromised by her and her publisher (Clark xi). The journal and letters that were the basis for her published work more clearly reveal Isabella's haughty nature during her first trip to America, as Andrew Clark notes:

The journal reveals her as a much more decided character than does the book, and on the whole, a somewhat less attractive one. She liberally sprinkled both book and journal with tedious quotations from often rather banal poetry, of which she appears to have committed an inordinate amount to memory.... She seemed remarkably quick to drop old acquaintances or hostesses for new ones who offered more entertainment or prestige. She had a good deal of vanity about her own mental powers and exulted over her triumphs...in an almost indecent way. (xiii)

While the journal may bring to light a more realistic and forthright side of Isabella Bird, the alterations and revisions that make up the final version of the book allow for a format that appeals to a more widespread audience (her original audience being just her sister, family, and friends). Furthermore, the editing resulted in the work enduring enough to maintain its popularity through time.

Of course, not all of Isabella Bird's observations are critical, calculating, or ill-humored. Because she was traveling alone, her constant companions were her pen, paper, and the far-away relatives and acquaintances to whom she was

writing. *An Englishwoman in America* may well represent the stark notions of a demanding and commanding young woman, but this work also considers the many glorious sights and scenes that Bird happened upon in her incredible travels throughout the States. Although often comparing new visions and new cities with those found back home in England (mostly for the benefit of her correspondents in order to give them a common frame of reference), Isabella Bird was frequently overcome by the sheer beauty of the gleaming new homes and buildings going up in the booming metropolises of an ever-expanding country. For instance, in one particular selection she notes:

It was a glorious morning. The rosy light streamed over hills covered with gigantic trees, and park-like glades watered by the fair Ohio. There were bowers of myrtle, and vineyards ready for the vintage, and the rich aromatic scent wafted from groves of blossoming magnolias told me that we were in a different clime, and had reached the sunny south. And before us, placed within a perfect amphitheatre of swelling hills, reposed a huge city, whose countless spires reflected the beams of the morning sun—the creation of yesterday—Cincinnati, the “*Queen City of the West*.” (*An Englishwoman* 114)

The complimentary description found in this passage exposes a fresh and nonabrasive attitude that does not criticize the newness of America or comment negatively on American shortcomings in politics and society, as do many of Miss Bird’s other selections from her letters. This foray into the pictorial allowed Isabella Bird to respond to what she viewed in a purely visual way that did not delve into the constant dissection that she normally undertook in her analyses, especially those criticisms involving crude boarding establishments and the rough

Irish and Scottish immigrants she encountered on her travels. In the same fashion, she expressed such surprise at parts of this unfamiliar country which resembled her own beloved England, and she shared observations of those similarities in very rare moments of thoughtful emotion, as is seen in the following selection:

There were smiling fields with verdant hedgerows between them...and meadows like parks, dotted over with trees, and woods filled with sumach and scarlet maple, and rapid streams hurrying over white pebbles, and villages of green-jalousied houses, with churches and spires, for here all places of worship have spires; and the mellow light of a declining sun streamed over this varied scene of happiness, prosperity, and comfort; and for a moment I thought—O traitorous thought!—that the New England was fairer than the Old.

(An Englishwoman 96)

This brief and unusual venture into the slightly sentimental provided Miss Bird's sister and friends with a verbal postcard through which they were allowed to see what Isabella Bird was observing in her travels. Rarely did Miss Bird take the time to make such emotional images come to life, but when they do appear in her letters, her sense of audience seems more alive, and her tendency to write flat and one-sided descriptions and explanations appears less obvious.

Perhaps because of her limited experience abroad at the time of this earliest journey, Isabella Bird dissected every aspect of her travels so that her sister back in Scotland might examine and interpret those same sights and activities when she read her many letters. Isabella Bird's confident and enthusiastic observations traversed the waters to Britain, carrying with them a

spirit of exploration, new discoveries, bold commentaries, unrestrained descriptions, and an air of mastery over the strange and uncouth characters of American society. Indeed, Miss Bird's attitude of conquering a vast world of foreign customs and manners is clearly displayed in the many passages in which she exerted her intelligence and dominance upon the Americans she casually met. For instance, her quick tongue and free will are exhibited in a random conversation she had with a woman on a train:

Another lady, who got into the cars at some distance from Cincinnati, could not understand the value which [the English] set upon ruins. "We should chew them up," she said, "make roads or bridges of them, unless Barnum transported them to his museum: we should never keep them on our own hook as you do." "You value them yourselves," I answered; "any one would be '*lynched*' who removed a stone of Ticonderoga." It was an unfortunate speech, for she archly replied, "Our only ruins are British fortifications, and we go to see them because they remind us that we whipped the nation which whips all the world."

(An Englishwoman 134-35)

Miss Bird's use of the word "lynched" did indeed contribute to the "unfortunate" nature of this casual exchange. A woman from England constantly asserting her superiority in knowledge and position over the Americans she met became a wearisome occurrence, and her observations often engendered ill feelings in the people with whom she visited and conversed. Her immaturity as a woman abroad contributed to this behavior. Her freedom to do and say as she pleased while at home was perhaps beginning to get the better of her when it came to interacting with people of a different nation and class. While Isabella Bird was not extremely

wealthy and she was not a born aristocrat, she often spoke and behaved in a way that declared an English snobbery that outraged her interlocutors.

Because Miss Bird was sheltered and protected as a child, she was not ready to compromise her independence or recognize the improprieties she committed in an unfamiliar society. Not surprisingly, then, the statements and commentaries contained in her letters to Henrietta are often naïve and narrow-sighted. For instance, proud of her English heritage and educated background, Isabella Bird maintained an air of aloofness when traveling by ship or train because she was mingling with the “lower classes,” which she never did when traveling in England.

While attempting to comment on these American “lower classes” in her letters, she often slighted other Britons in a tone and style that was seemingly unconscious and perfectly natural. She was first and foremost an Englishwoman, not a Scot, and her scorn was reserved for anyone who was not of her educated class and heritage. When considering the mixed company that she kept upon arriving in Chicago, Miss Bird wrote the following to Henrietta from her small and crude hotel: “Though I certainly felt rather out of my element in this place, I was not at all sorry for the opportunity, thus accidentally given me, of seeing something of American society in its lowest grade” (*An Englishwoman* 149). The inn of which Miss Bird speaks was hardly a hovel but, rather, a boarding house for immigrants and working-class Chicagoans. She declines to give the name of the place to her sister, “though it will never be effaced from my memory” (*An Englishwoman* 147). In the dining room of this hotel, Isabella Bird observed her

fellow diners and commented that “As far as I could judge, [I was] the only representative of England. There were Scots, for Scots are always to be found where there is any hope of honest gain—” (*An Englishwoman* 150). Her derision, then, extended to those individuals who were not, in her own eyes, similar to herself. The only acceptable individuals she appreciated were the friends she visited who were upper class Americans and fellow educated, English citizens. In fact, Bird stated in her introductory pages to *An Englishwoman in America* that during her travels, there were quite a few qualities of American life that she found to be commendable and satisfactory. However, she also found it necessary to state that “there is much which is very reprehensible [and] it is not to be wondered at in a country which for years has been made a ‘cave of Adullam’—a refuge for those who have ‘left their country for their country’s good’—a receptacle for the barbarous, the degraded, and the vicious of all other nations” (*An Englishwoman* 3). Still further showing her disdain for the lower class foreigners who crowded the shores of America, Bird noted that “It must never be forgotten that the noble, the learned, and the wealthy have shrunk from the United States; her broad lands have been peopled to a great extent by those whose stalwart arms have been their only possession” (*An Englishwoman* 3). She claimed, often, to be enchanted by and intrigued with the common people she encountered, but she always remained detached and ultimately indifferent, as if she feared dirtying her hands or ears by interacting with these unknown persons.

Writing to her sister in this manner or about issues such as class or national differences allowed Isabella Bird to speak in a very presumptuous,

arrogant tone. She never felt that she was at fault for any altercations or bad encounters that occurred on her travels; instead, she spoke as if she were constantly inconvenienced by the alien culture with which she interacted everyday. Her commentaries on class and culture are an integral part of her writing style and narrative tone. Isabella's formal yet inquisitive approach to documenting her excursions was a unique blend of cultural anthropology and natural history written from the point of view of the superior observer. Mary Louise Pratt defines natural history as a science that "maps out not the thin track of a route taken, nor the lines where land and water meet, but the internal 'contents' of those land and water masses whose spread made up the surface of the planet" (30). In this sense, Isabella Bird was combining historical and cultural definitions with a description of the "contents" of a land, the very people and places that comprise a nation.

Perhaps what is most troublesome regarding Isabella Bird's rather formal and judgmental approach to her letter writing is that the translation of experience through the format of natural history is, as Mary Louise Pratt argues, primarily an "urban, lettered, male authority over the whole of the planet" (38). Miss Bird had yet to create an identity and voice of her own at the time of her earliest travels. Much of her early writing style is brusque and offhand due to her youthful arrogance and self-assured demeanor. Andrew Clark attributes this abrupt manner to her naïveté and the fact that "she did have a mental acuity substantially greater than most of the women, and many of the men, she met..." (xiii). Clark goes on to explain that "the sharpness of her usually unfavorable judgements [sic], if a

little jarring to read at times, gives us a superb limning of dozens of characters which would have added greatly to the book's interest" (xiii-xiv). Although Clark's statement goes a little way towards pardoning Bird's often critical tones, it still can be said that Isabella Bird had intended to see America and experience American culture, yet her comments to Henrietta that reveal a short temper mostly indicate a lack of tolerance for ways and manners which differed from their own familiar background and way of life.

For example, in her detailed accounts of her daily activities, Isabella spoke often of her thoughts and values and how she was usually required to concede some point to an unenlightened American. However, she did not speak of Henrietta ever, nor did she ask after any acquaintances back in England. Her musings were very self-centered, and she wrote to her sister as if she were writing to another facet of her own being, a fractured half of a whole that was part of one identity and not two separate, intellectual individuals.

As was the case with Emily Eden and Mary Drummond, Toni McNaron's concept of the sister as "someone who is both ourselves and very much not ourselves—a special kind of double" (7) applies to the case of Isabella and Henrietta Bird but in a rather different and more one-sided manifestation. Being raised and educated by the same parents allowed Isabella Bird no true advantages over her younger sister. Both women experienced the same things, learned the same lessons, and endured the same privileges and hardships, one no more nor less than the other. Not until she traveled to America in her early twenties did Isabella Bird express a particular individuality or a freedom from her family, her

sister, and her former life. Adventures thus removed from her familiar home allowed Isabella Bird to exert her intelligence and entitled status in an arena distant from the people and places with whom she was accustomed. Her letters to Henrietta are not emotional or sentimental, but, rather, they are certain, assertive, and discriminating, for Isabella Bird could so judge others when she was speaking only to herself. And that is precisely how her letters read—as if she were writing for her own benefit and not for the benefit of her reader, Henrietta.

At times, of course, Isabella Bird would allow parts of her soul to shine through in her letters, particularly in moments when she was allowed to experience a freedom that was not appreciated by all women or all travelers. An example of Isabella Bird's thrill of adventure is seen in a passage of *An Englishwoman in America* wherein she recounts the chance to horseback ride with a wealthy Canadian friend of her family:

But, the horse!...He was a very fine animal—a magnificent coal-black charger sixteen hands high, with a most determined will of his own, not broken for the saddle....My horse's paces were, a tremendous trot, breaking sometimes into a furious gallop, in both which he acted in a perfectly independent manner, any attempts of mine to control him with my whole strength and weight being alike useless. We came to the top of a precipice overlooking the river, where his gyrations were so fearful that I turned him into the bush. It appeared to me a ride of imminent dangers and hair-breadth escapes. (*An Englishwoman* 210)

The exhilaration that Isabella Bird was afforded in this wild Canadian ride gave her a sense of freedom and power that travelers riding in the safety of a carriage did not experience. Women riding wildly through the rough Canadian

countryside were daring and rare, most women choosing the safety of a trap or carriage, and Isabella Bird enjoyed the liberation from typical Victorian conventions that her free-spirited riding occasioned. This particular instance also foreshadowed much of Isabella Bird's later life when she would travel by horseback thousands of miles in various countries and across several continents. Her love of riding and the freedom that she experienced when it was just she and the horse would affect much of her subsequent travels and help create an identity for Miss Bird that would mark her as a bold and accomplished female explorer.

In 1858, only a month after Isabella Bird returned to England from her first journey to America, her father died, leaving her family shocked and devastated. Isabella published *An Englishwoman in America*, based on her letters and travel journals, in order to gain a living for her family after her father had passed. At the age of twenty-nine, Isabella Bird looked back upon her early travels and realized how much her journeys had matured her in ways she could not have experienced at home in England. Isabella understood how fortunate she had been in her freedom to travel on her own, so far from her home, but, as Evelyn Kaye reveals, she “vowed at her father's death that she would repress her selfish inclination to travel and instead dedicate herself to helping others” (41). In one particular instance, Miss Bird used the connections she had gained in her North American travels to write letters of introduction and reference for the tenant farmers of wealthy Scottish land-owners who evicted those farm workers after cutting back on the planting of crops. Isabella's eagerness to help tenant farmers find land in Canada aided many unemployed Scots in finding a new home and a

new life across the Atlantic. Miss Bird looked past her former rash and immature experiences and forged ahead in a philanthropic manner that would be evident for the rest of her life. Her decision to remain unmarried for a while and to devote her life to caring for others was a distinct change from the earlier impression rendered by a carefree and willful young girl gallivanting across America just several years earlier.

Isabella Bird remained in Scotland with her mother and sister for quite a few years, until her mother died suddenly in 1866. After the death of their parents, the Bird sisters were faced with an uncertain future, particularly since both of them were unmarried, and they settled upon an arrangement in which Isabella would write and support them and Henrietta would undertake the domestic responsibilities of keeping the house. Evelyn Kaye remarks of this relationship that “it was a uniquely comfortable marriage of two compatible personalities. Isabella was creative and assertive, an independent, capable, and intelligent young woman.... Hennie was a quiet retiring person, with little interest in company or social life” (42). Isabella Bird’s decision to remain in Scotland and provide support for her sister and the citizens in their small town was a change for the restless traveler, who was happiest when she was speeding through the mountains in a train or racing through the woods on the back of a magnificent horse. The cold, quiet life she led in Scotland did not agree with her adventurous spirit, and it also did not agree with her chronic back problems and severe headaches. Whether it was Isabella Bird’s struggle with her physical disorders or an internal desire to escape the sluggish lifestyle of the Scottish seaside, she

finally made the decision – at her sister’s and several doctors’ insistence – to leave her home and travel to a warmer clime to heal her suffering body. In July of 1872, Isabella Bird once again struck out for distant worlds and parts unknown.

After spending considerable amounts of time in Australia and New Zealand, Miss Bird boarded a steamer to return to that strange and fascinating country that had captured her attention twenty years earlier: America. That later trip, however, was not a free-wheeling jaunt through cities and states, her digesting detail after detail and collecting experiences for her journal like so many fireflies trapped in a glass jar. Bird’s second journey to America would take her to the west coast, through San Francisco and up into the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, where she had been told she would find a paradise of clean air and fantastic views to rehabilitate her suffering body. Humbled by sickness and the loss of her parents, and more mature and open-minded than during her previous trip, Isabella undertook her return to America in a more professional and refined manner. Her letters to Henrietta this time around reflected their more devoted relationship (after the loss of their parents), and Miss Bird was anxious to share her thoughts and feelings with her sister, who remained always in their small cottage at Tobermory until her death.

During her first journey to America, Isabella Bird was critical and harsh in many of her encounters and several of her relationships. The changed status of her familial relationships and her growth into a responsible and caring woman dictated her more tolerant frame of mind this time around, although she always

remained very independent, strong-willed, and determined. Lila Marz Harper remarks on Bird's maturity in the following statement:

Over her writing career, [Bird's] goals became more focused as the range of her travel became more ambitious. While she was able to expose her armchair readers to more of the trouble and dirt of travel and to present her narratives as essentially solitary endeavors even when others accompanied her, she also kept her emotional responses in check and presented a dignified and controlled persona.
(174)

In her later narrative, *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, again formed out of her travel letters and journals, Isabella Bird revealed more of the inspired woman that she truly was and the aspects of life that she found to be stimulating, moving, and beautiful. Unlike the persona evident in her first, more critical narrative written twenty years prior, in *A Lady's Life* Miss Bird was, as Ernest Bernard indicates in his introduction, "a competent observer but never the detached scientist, functioning rather as an interpreter—a personal guide, edifying the reader through an explication of landscape..." (16). Isabella Bird's second trip to America allowed her to see the country through more experienced, mature eyes. Although her letters and journals written on her first trip lacked sentimental digressions or over romanticized illusions, they still provided her with an outlet for her true thoughts to flow forth. In her letters written during her later journey, Bird is more self-possessed, and her compositions are premeditated and poised. Her maturity as a traveler certainly fostered a more mature level of writing and expression the second time around.

Early in her first letter to Henrietta, Isabella Bird described one of the hotels she stayed in while visiting a town called Greeley on her way to Estes Park, Colorado. A decided change from accounts of her maiden voyage to America is her apparent tolerance of rudimentary accommodations and her willingness to lend a hand when it was needed. Such an episode, as is found in the following selection from her letters, would never have occurred on her first trip through America:

My first experiences of Colorado travel have been rather severe. At Greeley I got a small upstairs room at first, but gave it up to a married couple with a child, and then had one downstairs no bigger than a cabin, with only a canvas partition. It was very hot, and every place was thick with black flies. The English landlady had just lost her "help," and was in a great fuss, so that I helped her to get supper ready.
(*A Lady's Life* 52)

The practical and rational tone of this selection is a far cry from the disdainful and haughty commentaries that litter *An Englishwoman in America*. As a young twenty-three year old, Isabella Bird would have refused to stay in a "small upstairs room" of a crude hotel, much less given it up "to a married couple with a child" (52).

Miss Bird's years at home in Scotland with her sister had prepared her and mellowed her in ways that would surprise even herself. In the year she spent traveling through the rugged Colorado Rockies, Isabella Bird was constantly undertaking adventures of which weaker, more timid women would never even have dreamed. Her wonder at the vast landscapes and unusual beauty of the peaks and valleys surrounding Denver kept Isabella Bird in a continued state of

joy and excitement. She never tired of the harsh winters, the tremendous cold, the deep, biting snowstorms, and the necessary foraging for supplies from settlement to settlement. Her true role as an explorer, and not just a traveler, had finally been understood. She lived a strong and courageous life in the mountains for such an “unhealthy” and small Englishwoman. Her letters to Henrietta are vivid, abundant, and enthusiastic. She wrote to her of every sight and experience, even though she felt that her sister would “grow tired of the details of [her] journal letters. To a person sitting quietly at home, Rocky Mountain traveling, like Rocky Mountain scenery, must seem very monotonous” (*A Lady’s Life* 198). Isabella’s concern with the “monotonous” details of her extraordinarily exciting life were only cursory worries because, to her, “the pure, dry mountain air [was] the elixir of life” (*A Lady’s Life* 198). Whether her sister found her adventures tiring or boring is unknown. One can only imagine that any word or morsel of news sent to the home-bound Henrietta was anxiously and excitedly consumed back in Scotland. In one particularly and unusually sentimental note to her sister, Isabella Bird wrote:

You will ask, “What is Estes Park?” This name, with the quiet Midland Countries’ sound, suggests, “park palings” well lichenized, a lodge with a curtsyng woman, fallow deer, and a Queen Anne mansion. Such as it is, Estes Park is mine. It is unsurveyed, “no man’s land,” and mine by right of love, appropriation, and appreciation; by the seizure of its peerless sunrises and sunsets, its glorious afterglow, its blazing noons, its hurricanes sharp and furious, its wild auroras, its glories of mountain and forest, of canyon, lake, and river, and the stereotyping them all in my memory.

(*A Lady’s Life* 120)

Miss Bird's emotions here overtake her pen, and she endeavors to recreate her love for the untamed country that has become her home and obsession. She began by comparing it to a British estate, which would provide Henrietta with a vague, familiar reference, and then she proceeded to enter into a description of the vast differences and the new sights and features that had captured her traveler's heart.

The year Isabella Bird spent in the Rockies would prove her to be a strong and skilled mountaineer and equestrienne. At one point in her letters, she exclaimed to Henrietta "how time has slipped by I do not know. This is a glorious region, and the air and life are intoxicating. I live mainly out of doors and on horseback" (*A Lady's Life* 120). After all of the time she spent in years of supporting the charity societies and hospital wards of Scotland, she was finally able to live life on her own terms and savor every drop of beauty and adventure of each moment of every day. No longer was she a critical and privileged traveler seeking to make her mark on American society. On her return trip to North America, she was older, more sophisticated, and better traveled. She did not desire to observe and critique life; she wanted to experience life and live each second to the fullest. On September 28 of her first year in the Rockies, Miss Bird wrote to her sister, heading her letter "Estes Park!!! September 28." Bird was so overcome with delight upon reaching her destination, she exclaimed to Henrietta:

I wish I could let those three notes of admiration go to you instead of a letter. They mean everything that is rapturous and delightful—grandeur, cheerfulness, health, enjoyment, novelty, freedom, etc., etc. I have just dropped into the very place I

have been seeking, but in everything it exceeds all my dreams. (*A Lady's Life* 90)

Any homesickness or displeasure at the absence of her sister was pushed aside by Isabella Bird, and she earnestly endeavored to convey her joy and excitement with the new places she encountered through her honest letters home to Scotland.

Miss Bird's life in Colorado was a far cry from the leisurely city-to-city vacations she undertook on her first trip to America. From dawn until midnight, Isabella Bird helped with housework, drove cattle, explored the hills and passes outside Denver from horseback, and succeeded in becoming one of the first women to scale Long's Peak above Estes Park. The tales with which she regaled her sister in her amazing letters were daring, risky, and breathtaking. Her reputation as an adventurer and mountaineer was not just a fabrication of her own pen brought about in order to entertain and inform her sister. In fact, Isabella Bird was very surprised herself to hear upon entering a town called "Green Lake" that no one was to be lent a horse for travel unless it was "the English lady traveling in the mountains, she can have a horse, but not any one else" (*A Lady's Life* 201). Her almost legendary existence was a shock to Isabella and a testimony to the truly ripened traveler that she had become over the years.

As a lone traveler in a treacherous wilderness, Isabella Bird made friends with the hunting and mining men that she bunked with in the camps and cabins of the deep Colorado valleys and gorges. Isolated from English society, female companionship, and her faithful sister, Isabella befriended a wily "desperado," known as "Mountain Jim," and she also formed a close, emotional bond with her

small, plucky bronco mare, “Birdie.” As a matter of keeping her travel accounts professional and discreet, Isabella Bird was famous for her grand attachments to her equine companions, while she downplayed the few intimate relationships she had with men she met on her travels. This apparent distancing is a product of her conscientious editing of her letters before she allowed them to be published, as well as a result of the true level of seclusion she sought in her various journeys. In *Solitary Travelers*, Lila Marz Harper states that over the course of all of her life’s travels, Isabella Bird’s affection was guarded, and “rather than people, [Bird’s] personal attention [was] reserved for her horses, of which she had a series, named Birdie, Gyalpo, Screw, and Boy. Each one was a vividly described distinct character whose presence helped differentiate each major stage of her travels” (169). Her friendships were limited to the very few people she encountered during her horseback trips through the mountains from park to park, and she was by far closest to her little horse, on whom she had ridden over 800 miles by the end of her stay. The interesting and personal qualities that she noted in her equine companion reveal a tender and endearing relationship that might have served as a transitory substitute for her far-off sister:

Birdie amuses every one with her funny ways. She always follows me closely, and to-day got quite into a house and pushed the parlor door open. She walks after me with her head laid on my shoulder licking my face and teasing me for sugar; and sometimes when any one else takes hold of her, she rears and kicks, and the vicious *bronco* soul comes into her eyes. Her face is cunning and pretty, and she makes a funny, blarneying noise when I go up to her. The men at all the stables make a fuss with her, and call her “Pet.” She gallops up and down hill, and never

stumbles even on the roughest ground, or requires even a touch with a whip. (*A Lady's Life* 170)

This affectionate personification of Birdie is a touching addition to Isabella Bird's letters. She always noted to her sister how Birdie was faring, and she talked of times when horse and rider were so exhausted from their treks that Isabella would walk for miles at a time to let her mare's small back rest. During one vicious snowstorm, Miss Bird revealed how she took the socks from her own feet and stretched them over Birdie's hooves so that she would not slip on the treacherous patches of ice they traversed.

Bird wrote to her sister daily, and she made clear she missed her and worried about her constantly, a noticeable change from her first trip to the States when she wrote mostly for her own pleasure and not as a means of comforting those anxiously waiting back home. Late in her stay in Estes Park, Miss Bird ironically commented on the folly of a youth who had abandoned his place at school to try his hand at mountaineering:

They asked no questions, and brought the lad in, a slangy, assured fellow of twenty, who, having fallen into delicate health at a theological college, had been sent up here by Evans to work for his board. The men were too courteous to ask him what he was doing up here, but I boldly asked him where he lived, and to our dismay he replied, "I've come to live here." We discussed the food question gravely, as it presented a real difficulty. We put him into a bed-closet opening from the kitchen, and decided to see what he was fit for before giving him work. We were very much amazed, in truth, at his coming here. He is evidently a shallow, arrogant youth.

(*A Lady's Life* 226)

The last sentence of this passage could well have applied to Isabella Bird at one time in her early travels; however, she endured a long, emotional, and mental road to get where she was, as well as overcoming intense social and physical barriers.

Towards the end of her stay in Colorado, Isabella Bird wrote to her sister of a particularly horrible experience she endured while riding in the snow. This painful recollection was not intended to scare Henrietta but, rather, to educate her to the hardships that Isabella overcame and her strength in the face of almost certain death. It was easier for Miss Bird to write to her sister of the dangers she met with when they were safely in the past. The following passage would have been almost impossible for a distant sister to endure if she had not already been assured that her sibling was none the worse for her frightening journey:

I knew that I was on the track. But reaching a wild place, I lost it, and still cantered on, trusting to the pony's sagacity. It failed for once, for she took me on a lake and we fell through the ice into the water, 100 yards from land, and had a hard fight back again. It grew worse. I had wrapped up my face, but the sharp, hard snow beat on my eyes—the only exposed part—bringing tears into them, which froze and closed up my eyelids at once. You cannot imagine what that was. I had to take off one glove to pick one eye open, for as to the other, the storm beat so savagely against it that I left it frozen, and drew over it the double piece of flannel which protected my face. I could hardly keep the other open by picking the ice from it constantly with my numb fingers, in doing which I got the back of my hand slightly frostbitten. It was truly awful at the time. (*A Lady's Life* 240)

This horrifying tale of ice-covered lakes, frozen eyelids, and frostbitten hands might have been a poor thing to share with a loving sister thousands of miles

away, but, as determined by Lila Marz Harper, this was actually a clever writing technique that Bird had adopted as her own “to emphasize daily hardship and discomfort to a greater degree than most women travel writers in order to establish the difference and authority of her observations” (Harper 171). While the need to establish her authority as a hardened traveler is present in many of Isabella Bird’s later works, this approach is perhaps not so prevalent in the letters written to Henrietta before her death. After her sister’s death, Miss Bird wrote in a more scientific and scholarly fashion because her audience was then to be her educated readers and not her younger sister. In her travels to Colorado, Isabella Bird’s intentions were primarily to inform and correspond with her sister, and altering those descriptions for public eyes would come much later.

In her accounts of more exotic and dangerous adventures, besides wanting to tell Henrietta everything she was experiencing, Isabella Bird was also slyly endeavoring to keep her sister from attempting to join her in the wilds of Colorado, as she had threatened to do at one point. Henrietta was evidently thrilled by the amazing descriptions she was privy to and a little jealous of the relationships with strange Colorado denizens that Isabella was forging. Henrietta had on several occasions spoken to her sister of striking out from home and meeting with her on her ventures, particularly on those travels while Isabella visited Hawaii and some of the tamer regions of the American west. Evelyn Kaye remarks in the following selection on Isabella’s rash invitations and Henrietta’s earnest imploring to be included:

Isabella was stunned. This would never do.... She never expected her sister to do anything except stay at home. How could Hennie fit into this paradise of carefree living? Even though Hennie might have enjoyed the experience, Isabella did not even consider the possibility. She could not allow the one stable factor in her life to change. (63-64)

Though this decision seems sad and unjust for Henrietta, it stands true to the relationship that the two sisters had initiated from the time they were small children. They may have shared an education, a common childhood, loving parents, and affections for one another, but Isabella was always the travelling eye and Henrietta was the faithful, strengthening force of support at home in a fixed life of steadfast stability. Isabella counted on Henrietta's constancy to keep a part of herself grounded as she rambled over the great, wide world. If the two halves were finally to come together, then what would balance the two separate and completely different personalities that each sister embodied? Each sister had her own role in this relationship, and until Henrietta's death, Isabella maintained her life as a wanderer, always looking towards Henrietta who gladly received her letters and in return provided Isabella with solid strength and comfort. After the loss of her sister, Isabella was devastated, and, as Evelyn Kaye recounts, she told a friend "She was my world, present or absent, seldom absent from my thoughts. Such a lovely angelic being, and now all is gone. I seem hardly to care what becomes of me, and yet I pray God to make me follow her helpful, loving footsteps" (qtd. in Kaye 148). It seems strange, here, that these two sisters' relationship should come full circle with Isabella endeavoring to follow in her sisters' graceful and "loving footsteps." After all, Isabella was always the

pathfinder and explorer, yet she recognized Henrietta's own travels, a silent journey of faith, love, and devotion in the absence of her globetrotting sister.

Isabella Bird continued to travel to remote, rarely visited corners of the world. She wrote extraordinary and prolific accounts of her journeys, which were published and provided Bird with an income that would allow her to live comfortably and travel as often as she liked. As she sought for more challenging paths to traverse, she struck up correspondences with Charles Darwin and Constance Gordon Cummings. She became wildly popular as a travel writer, and magazines such as *Leisure Hour*, *The Spectator*, and *The Athenaeum* were all anxious to publish anything she wrote during her adventures abroad. Because of her reputation as a skilled and capable traveler, Isabella was asked to speak to the Royal Geographical Society and read from her many letters and narratives written on one of her treks through Western China. In 1892, Isabella Bird became one of the first female members of the RGS, which caused a great scandal among some of the men who opposed the induction of women. Isabella Bird proved to be a pioneer for future women's travels and their acceptance into the discourse of educated and scientific explorers. Shortly before her death, Evelyn Kaye reports that Miss Bird told a close friend, "When I die, it may be that my memory will perish with me, but it also may be that others will care to know something about me" (qtd. in Kaye 241). Indeed, many women travelers, from the late nineteenth century to the present day, have been educated, enlightened, and inspired by the travels and expeditions of Isabella Lucy Bird.

IV. THE SPIRITUAL TRAVELER: MOTHER MCAULEY

It is not unusual for a traveler to be “called” to a journey through a longing for knowledge, freedom, or personal accomplishment. It is truly special when a traveler emerges who has a selfless mission to complete through tireless travels. Catherine McAuley was a noble, pious, and devoted woman who changed the face of religious and charitable operations across the world. On December 12, 1831, Mother Mary Catherine McAuley founded the Order of the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin, Ireland. Up until her death ten years later, Mother McAuley worked diligently to aid in establishing many more convents to help the poor in countries all over the world, not just in her native Ireland. During her travels, in the years that she oversaw her institute’s expansion, McAuley wrote many letters to her fellow Sisters of Mercy. Catherine McAuley’s affection for the women who joined her in her calling is apparent through her extensive correspondence. Her true skills existed in her care and attention to the well-being of others, and her roles as a force and inspiration in the development of humanitarian causes in nineteenth-century Ireland and Great Britain. Her writings reflect a woman engaged in a lifelong spiritual journey, and the impact she had upon her fellow nuns and the people she aided is evident in her letters. In addition, her letters are clear, open, and sincere, serving always as a touching tribute to a woman whose travels and devotion changed her own life and the world of religious service forever. Her travels were exclusively for the prospect of serving others and not for any personal recognition. In this sense, Mother McAuley, as a traveler, differed a great deal from many of her contemporary female travelers who were traveling

for public and political purposes or journeying to experience extraordinary adventures.

Catherine McAuley was also an artist engaging in beautiful works of love and spirituality, providing guidance and serving as the inspiration for other women to lead productive and spiritual lives of faithful devotion to their religious calling. After McAuley's death in 1841, her legacy of faith and devotion continued through the travels and missions of her beloved sisters. In 1843, one of her dearest sisters, Frances Warde, relocated to Pennsylvania and began establishing convents of the Sisters of Mercy throughout America. Mother McAuley's mission of Mercy spread quickly, and by the middle of the twentieth century, there were more than 800 convents in the United States alone (Healy 9). The expansion of the Sisters of Mercy to many countries throughout the world serves as a lasting testament to Catherine McAuley's influence on her sisters and their religious commitment.

To appreciate Mother McAuley, one needs only to read her many letters. She did not write to dramatize her experiences or shock and impress her readers with wild and colorful stories. Her letters were personal conversations conducted between her and numerous Sisters of Mercy. Jane Martin defines conversation as "neither a fight nor a contest. Circular in form, cooperative in manner, and constructive in intent, it is an interchange of ideas by those who see themselves not as adversaries but as human beings come together to talk and listen and learn from one another" (10). Catherine McAuley's letters were conversations in a written, literary format because she could not physically be a hundred places to

minister personally to all of her sisters at one time. Through these letters, she shared her thoughts, feelings, advice, and sense of humor with so many women who embraced the same spiritual and nurturing lifestyle that she had striven to establish. In a particularly positive and encouraging note to a sister in Kingstown, Mother McAuley wrote:

We have done all that justice and prudence demand to avert this affliction [withdrawing of the sacrament at the convent in Kingstown]. If it must come, let us receive it as the Holy Will of God in our regard. It will mortify us and that will be salutary, please God. As to removing the Blessed Sacrament, God will direct you. Be a good soldier in the hour of trial. Do not be afflicted for your poor: their Heavenly Father will provide comfort for them, and you will have the same opportunity of fulfilling your obligations during your life. (*Correspondence* 71)

Nothing McAuley conveyed was banal, spiteful, or judgmental. She did not attempt simply to define persons or places but, rather, to relay encouragement, positive words, and basic information regarding activities, friends, and foundations to keep all in her web of sisterhood aware of the well-being and condition of the others. She was the lifeline that kept her sisters motivated and connected.

Mother McAuley's lifelong journey involving spiritual and humanitarian causes allowed her to make a difference in many lives and to create a special working force of extraordinary women. Mark Cocker proposes that traditional travelers and the ascetics of old have strange similarities in their quests afar. His analysis asserts that "very few other activities can serve as a richer metaphor to

articulate the essential pattern of an entire human life than the pilgrimage” (132).

His reasoning for comparing the human life to a pilgrimage is further explained by the following statement:

With its intrinsic sense of linear progress from a known past to an indefinite future, of a complete physical and emotional challenge, and then of a final resolution at the journey’s end, travel appears uniquely equipped to communicate what it means to orient oneself towards an ultimate spiritual goal.
(Cocker 132)

Mother McAuley, through her life’s calling, was undertaking both the physical journey and spiritual quest. From a privileged past, which fueled a heartfelt interest in helping the poor, to a future that revealed the beauty of her religious work, Catherine McAuley and her sisters embarked upon travels that would take them into reverent and emotional territories that the average traveler did not always strive to enter. To a sister who had traveled to work at a convent in Galway, McAuley wrote “I am delighted to find you are so happy. You never will be otherwise while the spirit of your religious vocation animates your actions” (*Correspondence* 167). Mother McAuley’s caring and stirring nature regarding her calling to help the poor of Ireland shines through in this letter to a sister who also felt compelled to serve the less fortunate during her travels through life.

Catherine McAuley wrote many letters to many sisters everyday. She wrote mostly from the home convent at Baggot Street to the sisters at other foundations scattered throughout England and Ireland. Catherine McAuley was not exclusively the wandering eye of distant experiences that captured life and

then relayed it back to a waiting sister. She provided wisdom and encouragement, much more than just visual descriptions designed to entertain her various sisters. Sister Mary Ignatia Neumann regards Catherine's letters as "her means of keeping in contact with [appointed superiors] when it was impossible for her to visit the foundations. These letters and her infrequent visits were the only threads binding them together; therefore, she wrote often and at great length..." (65). The majority of Catherine McAuley's travel letters contained images that were practical and efficient because she was providing her sisters with information and advice that would help them to help others. What constituted art in Mother McAuley's letters was her ability to inspire, while at the same time creating a positive and stable environment for progress. In a letter written during her travels to Limerick, Mother McAuley encouraged Sister Mary Teresa in the face of financial troubles that threatened one of their convents:

I charge you, my very dear child, not to be sorrowful, but rather to rejoice if we are to suffer this humiliating trial. God will not be angry; be assured of that. And is not that enough?...He will not be displeased with me, for He knows I would rather be cold and hungry than [that] the poor in Kingstown or elsewhere should be deprived of any consolation in our power to afford.

(Correspondence 71)

While other travel writers in the nineteenth century were observing and writing, Catherine McAuley was writing and working. Her visions became not just beautiful landscapes, as was the case with more aesthetically focused writers such as Emily Eden and Isabella Bird, but Mother McAuley was concerned with development and action that could be felt and experienced by individuals other

than just herself. Catherine McAuley did not seek to gain freedom or personal enjoyment from her travels; rather, she sought to educate and improve the less fortunate. Sister Mary Angela Bolster reveals that Mother McAuley's letters "show beyond [the] shadow of doubt that Catherine McAuley never lost the sense that she was the steward of God's mercy; they also show that she had three burning loves, namely, Our Divine Lord, Her Sisters and God's poor" (Bolster x). Furthermore, Sister Bolster feels that the true nature of Catherine McAuley and her discipline and sincerity are righteously shown through her letters. According to Bolster, for the world around Mother McAuley, "it is beyond question that [she] took a long, loving, contemplative look at the reality of life as she saw it in 19th century Dublin...and equally in her English foundations at Bermondsey and Birmingham" (Bolster x). This selfless desire to strengthen and illuminate others was the purpose of McAuley's physical travels and the key to her spiritual journey through life. She did not just see certain needs and then comment upon them in her many letters, but she made progress with her own two hands. Her words were not just knowledge for her sisters but comfort, reassurance, and motivation. Her many letters are extensions of her soul that she endeavored to share with the women in her close-knit order. Amid the discussion of practical matters and convent issues, McAuley was prone to lapse into a moment of philosophical or religious sermonizing in an almost unconscious diversion from the bland descriptions she was undertaking:

We are in the very midst of the Sandymount
Patronesses and feel it. Dr. Murphy is cast off.
He came here [Boosterstown] and to Kingstown....

We have a majority of bishops at all events! Do not let this nonsense be subject to any eye but your own. Pray fervently to God to take all bitterness from me. I can scarcely think of what has been done to me without resentment. May God forgive me and make me humble before He calls me into His presence. May He bless and protect you and make you the instrument of His glory, and may He prepare you to enter the new house [convent] with a heart entirely devoted to Him.

(Correspondence 63)

Like Mary Wollstonecraft, Mother McAuley blended her inner self with her written self in such a way that her contemporary readers – her sisters – could see parts of her dynamic personality at work in her written words. Readers today who might wish to gain a more intimate understanding of Catherine McAuley can certainly do so by examining her travel letters to her sisters.

Catherine Elizabeth McAuley was reportedly born in 1778 to James McGauley, of Dublin, Ireland, and Elinor Conway McGauley (Elinor would drop the “G” from her children’s surnames after their father’s death in 1783). Many of the details surrounding the McGauleys’ marriage, their children’s births, and their own deaths are not recorded in Irish historical documents; therefore, while much of Catherine McAuley’s life has been carefully researched, the facts are mostly assumed. It is known that Elinor McGauley inherited little wealth from James, but she did retain a large number of property holdings, which she subsequently sold as needed to support a relatively luxurious lifestyle she pursued for her self and her children. Catherine, her sister Mary, and their brother James were all well-educated, yet a religious devotion was not particularly encouraged during their childhood years. Instead, as revealed by Sister M. Ignatia Neumann, Mrs.

McGauley raised her children “according to the elegant standard of the time and [they were] trained in all the social graces of the eighteenth century” (4). After the death of Elinor McGauley, assumed to be sometime in 1798, Catherine McAuley went to live with her uncle, Dr. Owen Conway.

Since her mother died relatively poor and the few assets retained were awarded to her brother, Miss McAuley was grateful for the home that her uncle provided, although the Conways were not prosperous, and they suffered moments of great poverty. Not wanting to impose upon her relatives, Catherine McAuley took up residence with her brother and sister in the household of William Armstrong. The Armstrongs were distant relatives of the McAuleys, although it is not clear exactly what that relationship was. However, shortly after her move to the Armstrong home, Catherine made the acquaintance of the Callaghan family, neighbors of the Armstrongs. The Callaghans had just returned to Dublin from India, where Mr. William Callaghan had acquired a large fortune. After a short while, the refined, elderly Callaghan couple decided to move outside the city into a country estate home known as Coolock House. When the Callaghans took up residence at Coolock House in 1809, Catherine McAuley accompanied them in their move (Neumann 5-6).

At the time of her departure from Dublin with the Callaghans, Catherine McAuley was somewhere between the ages of twenty-eight and thirty. As an unofficially adopted daughter to the elegant Callaghan couple, Miss McAuley was given access to all the amenities afforded by their privileged life. She was allowed to pursue her charity causes without undertaking a profession. She used

the Callaghans' horses and carriages to travel all over the countryside aiding the poor, and through these charitable ministrations, she came into contact with Father Daniel Murray, who served as her priest and gave Catherine McAuley her first Catholic communion (Neumann 7). Having been raised without any specific religious background, Miss McAuley was new to the dogmas of the Catholic faith; however, she found a personal solace in Catholicism and this religion afforded her the chance to devote her life completely to the service of others.

Once she entered the Catholic faith, Catherine McAuley chose to pursue a life of chaste, religious devotion, and so she did not marry. Catherine's sister did marry (to Dr. James Macauley, no direct relation) and bore several children, the eldest of whom was Catherine McAuley's favorite niece, Mary Teresa. The years 1819-1822 brought joy to Catherine through her constant communication with her family's growing number of children; however, this time also brought grief through the deaths of the Callaghans and Catherine's dear friend and cousin Ann Conway Byrne. After Ann's death from tuberculosis, Catherine McAuley adopted several of the Byrne children and took them to live with her at Coolock House, which she inherited after the death of William Callaghan. Mr. Callaghan was extremely devoted to Catherine, and he bequeathed all of his wealth to her, knowing that she would use her resources to care for the many children she had adopted, helping the poor in Coolock parish, and seeing that the general well-being of her fellow countrymen was assured.

This newfound financial security was a blessing to Catherine McAuley and her "family"; however, she still believed that the spiritual well-being she

desired was as yet incomplete. Already in her early forties, Miss McAuley decided to sell Coolock House and the estate and move back to Dublin so that she might be able to live among those she endeavored to succor. In 1824, a house on Baggot Street, Dublin, was erected and designated the “House of Mercy.” Catherine McAuley and her brood of orphaned kin moved to the Baggot Street home and began a life there of social and religious devotion to one another and those less fortunate. As to Miss McAuley’s new mission, Sister Neumann writes, “ Nothing less than total involvement would satisfy her. To the poor she would go; she would seek them out; live near them; and although it would mean giving up many comforts, when it came to serving others, especially the poor, sick, and ignorant, no sacrifice was too much” (12). Catherine McAuley’s devotion to the poor, sick, and ignorant of Ireland was a personal mission for her, as well as a reaction to the horrible conditions that faced the Irish Catholics in the nineteenth century. The British penal laws kept the Catholics in Ireland from seeking productive professions or obtaining honorable, well-paying jobs. Kathleen Healy remarks that “these penal laws actually made poverty an Irish institution. No Catholic could achieve a higher position than that of serf to a Protestant master...[and they were not] allowed a decent remuneration for his or her labor” (10). The “potato famine” of 1830’s and 1840’s in Ireland further distressed the poor and ignorant Irish (Healy 11). In her desire to help the downtrodden and abandoned, Miss McAuley assisted servant girls, children, orphans, and the poor of any and all descriptions. The majority of Catherine McAuley’s life was spent caring for the friends and family that surrounded her in her own Irish parish.

Soon, she would expand her mission and travel to other corners of Ireland and Great Britain to establish homes of mercy and increase her family to include “sisters” from all walks of life.

By December of 1829, the “House of Mercy” had been blessed and appointed a site of official religious community. The women residing permanently at the Baggot Street home were Catherine McAuley and her female friends and wards, including her nieces Catherine Byrne (Sister Mary Josephine), Mary Teresa Macauley (Sister Mary Joseph Teresa), and their close friend Frances Warde (Sister Mary Frances Teresa). A close-knit community of women, the “sisters,” as they chose to call themselves even before their official ordination, worked together to fight poverty in the very heart of Dublin. Though not biologically sisters, these women did not observe the hereditary delineation that physically denied them sisterhood. Their form of sisterhood was based, instead, upon a common heritage of devotion, religious service, and community missions that bound them together in one purpose under one God. Denied biological sisterhood after her own sister Mary Macauley’s death in 1827, Catherine McAuley created a family for the seven original residents of the House of Mercy. Eventually, the House of Mercy became a convent, and the order of the Sisters of Mercy was established. All of Catherine McAuley’s endeavors reflected a deep love for her many “sisters,” and she never forsook her own seven sisters from Baggot Street, though she traveled constantly to other foundations and took on new, challenging responsibilities. As in the relationships and letters of Emily Eden and Isabella Bird, Catherine McAuley’s letters reveal the strong attachments

that existed between her and her Sisters of Mercy. McAuley was not living and working as one, single woman, but as a woman encouraged and inspired by the many people she aided and the sisters who followed and supported her in her numerous charitable missions. Throughout her travels from convent to convent, Catherine McAuley never spent a moment where she was not thinking of or writing to one of her many sisters.

Over the years, Catherine McAuley wrote many letters to maintain contact with all of her fellow nuns, and her letters almost always begin and end with various expressions of love for her many sisters. As Sister Regina Kelly depicts, wherever she was, whatever problems faced her, Mother McAuley was to write again and again “Remember me affectionately to all” (qtd. in Kelly). What was important in the relationships of Catherine McAuley and her sisters was the constant search they undertook to become better providers for those in need, which led Mother McAuley on a spiritual and physical journey of religious service. Whether or not they were physically traveling, or simply associating with other sisters who were traveling, all of the women were continually in search of better relations with one another, their communities, and their personal faith. In a letter written by Mother McAuley on a visit to the convent in Cork, she writes to Sister Mary de Pazzi Delany:

Your packet of notes and letters afforded me great comfort, and I am most grateful to you and all my dear Sisters for them; they were real recreation to me. Please God I will soon have the happiness of thanking each personally. The time, though long, is drawing to a close; it would have been useless for me to take such a long journey if I did not

remain until my poor Sister Mary Clare [Moore]
got fixed into her new office [as superior], and
I know you feel anxious about her and would not
wish me to leave her too soon.

(Correspondence 33)

In this letter, Mother McAuley admits that her travel is long and tiresome; however, her devotion to both Sister Mary de Pazzi (at home in Dublin) and to Sister Mary Clare Moore (the new superior in Cork) is more important to her than her own pleasure or homesickness. Her interest in the lives of her sisters and friends was a primary concern during her travels and in her letters. She did not speak grandly of her own sights, visions, or experiences. She was using her written voice as an extension of her self, her own personality. In a sense, her travel letters almost show us more of the woman Mother McAuley truly was rather than simply revealing everything she was seeing and experiencing.

As we have seen, many nineteenth-century travel writers—such as Emily Eden and Isabella Bird—corresponded with their sisters who provided an anchor at home for their wandering siblings. In writing to her own “sisters,” Catherine McAuley was the anchor that kept all of her fellow nuns grounded in faith, hope, and charitable devotion. She did not write to those women simply to share exciting descriptions of her daily travels or to bring to life images of distant people and lands or to provide insight into remote worlds and exotic traditions. The letters of Catherine McAuley spoke of perseverance, determination, and the possibility of a better world through the devotion and works of very special women. The purpose of Mother McAuley’s missions and journeys was to oversee the convents in the Sisters’ endeavors to improve the condition of the less

fortunate individuals they encountered throughout their lives. Several examples of Mother McAuley's sadness at the sight of suffering can be seen in her letters, such as this instance from a letter written in Kingstown, Ireland in which she wrote, "I expressed to Rev. Mr. Sheridan a particular desire to have a school for the poor girls whom we every day saw loitering about the roads in a most neglected state..." (*Letters* 86-87). She also remarked to Sister Mary Francis, while visiting the convent in Limerick, "The poor here are in the most miserable state. The whole surrounding neighborhood one scene of wretchedness and sorrow" (*Letters* 147). McAuley's letters must, inevitably, reflect the misfortune she observed during her work to help alleviate the suffering of the weak and poor. She did not fixate on the visual, as other travel writers did, because she was primarily concerned with unworldly qualities of aesthetics.

The vision of Catherine McAuley brought to light in her letters is a reflection, then, not just of what she saw around her physically but what she saw in her heart and in the heart of her loyal sisters. Of Catherine McAuley's letters, Sister Mary Hilda Miley notes their profound spiritual nature:

A perusal of Mother McAuley's letters gives the final touches to the lyrical quality of her soul. These letters are a replica of her beautiful spirit. They are redolent of deep spirituality, true mercy, unobtrusive holiness, and genuine Irish wit. (49)

Sister Miley's assertion that Mother McAuley was a "beautiful spirit" is an honest and complimentary assessment of McAuley's skill with words as well as her spiritual nature. She was an artist not concerned simply with the fascinations of foreign lifestyles and landscapes but, rather, with the sorrowful and unclean

experiences of poverty and sickness. The images that pervade McAuley's travel letters are those of tragedy, sorrow, joy, and success felt in the quotidian aspects of everyday life. Her art existed not in the seeing but the doing and her letters reflect her determination to see that her work and the work of her sisters never ceased or faltered. She did not have time to dwell upon the imaginative or fantastic aspects of life and her letters represent her dutiful and resolute desire to see that her work and her travels are purposeful and resolute.

The first foundation established after the Baggot Street house was at Kingstown on the coast of Ireland in 1835. A convent, hospital, and school were opened there and called "Dun Laoghaire." Mother McAuley left Dublin to oversee the purchase and institution of several new convents, including those in Tullamore, Carlow, and Cork. From the establishment in Cork, Mother McAuley wrote to Sister Mary De Pazzi Delany, who remained behind at the Baggot Street convent:

I would like to tell you all the little cheering things that God permits to fall in our way, though it does not do so well for reading out, as it might sound like boasting, but it has so happened that all our little ways are particularly liked here.... (*Letters* 97)

As the previous selection illustrates, Mother McAuley's style is unpretentious and does not contain an excess of zealous piety or religious jargon. McAuley's writing is a clear extension of her own warmhearted personality. Her letters impart a personal tone that would have been familiar to the reader, and the information she shared was prudent and heartfelt, as is also seen in the following letter:

Two watches were given to that bazaar for the children, but not for building. Mr. Nugent got twelve pounds each time for putting up the tent, though we had all the trouble of getting permission from Col. Burgoyne, and borrowing sail cloth. In all, Mr. Nugent got from us eighty-four pounds and ten, which Mr. Sheridan sent me for him.

(Letters 144)

This selection is factual and plain, very different from the dramatic correspondences of Emily Eden and Isabella Bird. However, the purpose of Catherine McAuley's letters was quite different from the more typical descriptions of adventurous travels of other British and Irish women.

Although she was not traveling to enjoy physical delights, Mother McAuley could not entirely ignore the sights around her. At times, the places she visited were important to describe to her sisters so that they could experience the progress and success of their spreading mission, even if only from afar. In her desire to recreate the visual reality of many of the occasions she describes, Mother McAuley engages in discussions of images, details, sights, and sounds to enlighten her distant readers to what she saw and experienced during her travels. Unlike Emily Eden and Isabella Bird, Mother McAuley's descriptions lack a certain emotional attachment to the visual and she does not become involved in overdramatic or picturesque depictions of her subjects. McAuley's letters and descriptions serve the purpose of educating her readers and creating a vision of the faith and community that existed from convent to convent. In this sense, her descriptions highlight the spirit of a scene or occasion and she does not just focus on the physical sights and objects she observed. In the following selection from a

letter written in Limerick, Mother McAuley did endeavor to describe the physical objects she saw:

We have found much more here than we expected.
A very nice old convent, enclosed by the walls of an
abbey: a beautiful ruin. There is a most simple
inviting tomb, just opposite the cell I occupy. A
holy abbess and a lay Sister are deposited there. A
very large weeping ash hanging over the Grace
[embellishment]: it looks delightful and excites
meditation of the most consoling kind. A very nice
chapel and choir, good garden and extensive school
rooms. (*Correspondence* 67)

The gracefulness and splendor relayed through this description were not dependent upon strictly tangible or material items, but they are qualities of a spiritual life that encourage piety and invite inner and religious reflection. Mother McAuley did not expound upon many glorious sights; neither did she ever find herself amongst vast and fantastic countries and landscapes. Her sisters read her letters for information, understanding, and encouragement. This differs slightly from the purpose of Eden and Bird's letters, who wished for their sisters to envision their unique travels and experiences as well as to find pleasure and enlightenment in the relation of sights and detail. The enlightenment that McAuley wished for her sisters was more spiritual and religious, providing them with the knowledge that their mission was growing and changing the lives of others for the better.

Because Mother McAuley was writing for practical, personal purposes, it does not mean that her letters lacked imagination or depth. On the contrary, her travel letters reveal a great deal about McAuley and her life among the sisters.

Although vivid accounts of action and experiences were not her primary concern, her ability to reproduce scenes and images in a simple and factual manner allowed her dear readers to envision the lives of their distant and traveling sisters. For instance, while traveling to London to oversee the establishment of the convent at Bermondsey, Mother McAuley wrote back to Sister Mary Elizabeth Moore, who remained in Ireland at St. Mary Convent, Limerick. In her letter, Catherine McAuley describes her journey through Liverpool and the sights in and around London in Bermondsey:

We sailed from Kingstown on Monday evening, the 18th of November at 6 o'clock, in the *Queen Victoria*, arrived in Liverpool at half past six next morning, were conducted to the Mersey Hotel where breakfast was ready—laughed and talked over the adventures of the night, particularly my travelling title, changed from your Kitty to friend Catherine, an improvement, you will say.... The Convent is built in the old heavy monastic style; it will not be finished for another year, nor dry in three years, but our unceasing engagements have contributed to preserve us from the bad effects of a damp house. Indeed we have been “Busy Bodys.”
(*Letters* 185)

Catherine McAuley’s wit and spirit are fondly relayed in this selection. She speaks of the humor they share among them at breakfast, which lends a personable and good-natured atmosphere to this letter. This particular letter from London imparts a human quality to the life of Mother McAuley and her sisters. Catherine McAuley continues in this same letter to discuss several ceremonies held at the new convent at Bermondsey, and she specifies individuals who were present, making statements such as “First the Lady Barbara Ayre, daughter of the

late and sister to the present Earl of Newburgh—about Sister Agnew’s age, has been a beauty, very dignified appearance, humble and pleasing—wore a full court dress worth 100 guineas besides valuable diamonds. Her train went below the last step when at the top” (*Letters* 186-87). Another description reads “Next [came] a Lancashire Lady, not young, very nice and amiable” (*Letters* 187). Many of these women described were to be the benefactresses to Bermondsey, and some were newly entered sisters at the convent. They were the daughters and sisters of the English aristocracy in most cases, very similar to the socialites among whom Catherine McAuley circulated and whom she befriended in her early life in the Irish upper class. In one humorous instance, Mother McAuley related how “her Majesty’s” hairdresser had been dispatched to the convent to “adjust a court headdress” (*Letters* 187). Catherine McAuley went to the cell of Lady Barbara Ayre, disguised her voice, and whispered to her that the hairdresser had arrived. Lady Barbara flippantly replied, not knowing it was Mother McAuley, “Take down that box of my feathers and diamonds” (*Letters* 187). She became most distressed when she did realize she had been speaking not to an attending sister or servant but to the Reverend Mother! These anecdotes might have amused the sisters to whom Mother McAuley wrote, revealing a sense of humor that may not be readily expected of the illustrious foundress. Letters containing these scenarios reveal a comforting humanity in Mother McAuley as a person, in addition to an appreciation for her tremendous status and piety.

The particular aesthetics of McAuley’s missions exhibited in her travel letters cannot be strictly defined. Emily Eden often engaged in the picturesque

through many of her travel letters, as did Isabella Bird, at times. But, what sort of aesthetic was Mother McAuley providing through her letters and experiences? The beauty that Catherine McAuley experienced and shared with her sisters came from within her heart and mind and was felt through her many charitable successes that followed her throughout Ireland and Great Britain. Her literary aesthetic, or the aesthetic quality that exists in her letters, was the result of her devout spirituality and love for the Sisters and not an attempt to enlist any descriptive technique. If experiences shared through visual means run the risk of creating pleasure or enlightenment for the reader at the expense of the integrity of the subjects (as the “picturesque” is often accused of doing), then Catherine McAuley’s readers could rest assured that no person or individual was compromised or appropriated through her eyes in her letters. In a very practical letter written during one of McAuley’s trips to London, she wrote of a ceremony performed there in the following excerpt:

On the 12th the fine church was crowded at an early hour. The High Mass commenced at eleven o’clock, after which the *O Gloriosa* was performed by the Choir and we then approached the Sanctuary: Sister Mary Teresa bearing a *very heavy Cross*, Sisters M. Cecilia, Agnew and Taylor, one by one, to make the most of a few. Rev. Mother Clare and her valuable assistant, with their six postulants, advanced to the Sanctuary. The altar is very high – two platforms – the Bishop was at the top [and] we had to ascend and descend in full view of thousands and many of the ancient English Nobility. (*Correspondence* 112)

In this selection, Mother McAuley certainly does not resort to any grand methods of description. In fact, her letter is so precise and informational that it is almost

trivial and boring to the average reader because she engages in an entirely objective relation of occurrences. This is very different from the picturesque and dramatic travel experiences we have viewed of Emily Eden and Isabella Bird.

Mother McAuley's inner eye was always seeking the spiritual beauty of every situation, and her vision of compassion and benevolence towards the suffering poor was the experience she chose to speak of in her many letters to her various beloved sisters in faith. During a visit to Limerick in 1838, Mother McAuley feared that the convent there might undergo turbulent times due to a lack of funding and support from the community. She remained hopeful and encouraging, and her faithful spirit is revealed in the passage in which she wrote:

We found dear Sister Mary Clare [Moore] and
community in excellent health and spirits....
There was danger of all breaking up, and my heart
felt sorrowful when I thought of the poor being
deprived of the comfort which God seemed to
intend for them. I made every effort and praised
be God, all came round. (*Correspondence* 67-68)

The rapidly growing community of sisters was a positive sign that Mother McAuley's work was producing recognizable benefits for the needy. She appeared happiest in her letters that indicated their growing numbers because she felt that there were never enough hands to help the needy. Her kind words in the previous letter show her primary concern was the "poor," and she openly discussed her fear that tragic or uncontrollable factors would prevent her sisters from comforting troubled individuals in Limerick.

In reference to Catherine McAuley's inner eye that constantly remained focused on her desire to change lives everywhere, Sister Mary Hilda Miley

remarks that “When one is capable of visioning beauty, he has the first requisite of an artist: inspiration. When he finds himself capable of conveying his vision into adequate expression, he has the second: creation. And when he uses as his medium man’s peculiar heritage—words: we hail him as a poet” (6-7). In light of this definition, Mother McAuley would indeed embody the life and vision of a true poet. Sister Miley goes on to further her claim for McAuley’s gift as an artist when she states the following:

The soul of Mother McAuley, then, may be truly said to be artistic, to be a beautiful poem, for she possessed the two essentials of a poetic artist: inspiration and creation. (7)

This selection reflects Sister Miley’s pious, perhaps biased, admiration for the illustrious Foundress. Despite her possible bias, several aspects of this analysis ring true. Mother McAuley’s pure vision of her faith and charity was what defined her as a pioneer in missions for the Irish and English poor. This vision and the beliefs she held regarding love and friendship among the sisters in her many foundations was predominantly what flowed forth in her travel letters. Catherine McAuley’s writing never showed her as a woman who went from place to place attempting to impose any pretentious doctrines on others. She never intended, through her writing, to paint an unfair or unrealistic picture of persons in her ministry or without. At times, though, Mother McAuley could reveal an ill-temper in her letters, as in the following selection she completed in a note written while she visited the convent at Birr:

The unfortunate Crotty [apostate priest] is indefatigable in his evil works. He is joined by Mr.

Carlile, who was one of the Commissioners of Education. They have the same church and preach the same doctrine that “nothing is to be feared but popery.” This speaks well for National Education. Had Mr. Carlile found it likely to injure the Catholic Church, he would not have abandoned it. We have not met any poor Crottyite yet, but expect to see them soon, for they are most unhappy, though still obstinate – the common punishment of rebellion in religion. (*Correspondence* 183)

In this selection, though critical and uncomplimentary, McAuley endeavored to relate the unappealing qualities of the “Crotty,” as she viewed them, in a truthful and factual manner. What she illustrated most often in her letters was a picture of herself and her visions regarding a better community and a better world, and she allowed her descriptions of people and places to be realistic and not overly disparaging or too sentimental.

There were often good times to be had in the lives of the sisters. The Sisters of Mercys’ amiable and supportive community life was echoed in the intimate and endearing tones of Mother McAuley’s travel letters. Describing a trip to the convent in Galway, Ireland, Mother McAuley wrote the following letter all in rhyme. Her role as a spiritual poet mirrors, here, her talent as a literary poet as well:

Stopped at Mount Carmel on our way
and passed a most delightful day:
 Sweet simple nuns.
Got lamb and salad for our dinner,
far too good for any sinner;
 At tea, hot buns.

Got use of a Superior’s Cell,
and slept all night extremely well
 on a soft pillow.

When lying down in my nice bed
I thought how very soon this head
must wear a willow.

Next morning we had Mass in choir,
and to my very heart's desire,
our own dear Father.
Then we had breakfast, nice and neat –
tea and coffee, eggs and meat:
which e'er we'd rather.

At eight o'clock we started fair:
One car, one horse, one chaise and pair.
The car went first.
Not long we travelled ere a wheel
mounted with ill-tempered steel
completely burst.

Our youthful driver, naught dismayed:
A real Irish, fearless blade,
said: "Sorra fear.
The forge is just below the river –
we'll get it mended, smart and *cliver* –
the place is near."

When to the expected forge he came
and no assistance could obtain,
aloud he said:
"Oh! Such a forge – no nails, no sledge:
Pat Lurgan wouldn't take the Pledge –
he drank his bed."

[...]

Next morning all our cares began:
Each proposing *her* own plan –
all different tastes.
What some approved, some deemed bad,
but all agreed that now we had
no time to waste.

The work is now progressing fast:
Not one waste hour we yet have passed;
and Sisters many.
We hear of Chrissie, Jane and Bess

all ready to put on the Dress.
we have got Nanny.

Brigid, Mágarét and Mary,
who were of this poor world quite weary
though free from care.
And now with all their minds and heart,
of all its joys give up their part,
the Cross to bear.

Farewell, loved Sisters, old and new.
With joy I shall return to you
and count you o'er.
And if the number full I find
united in one heart and mind,
I'll bless my store.
(*Correspondence* 129-32)

Such a lengthy, delightful piece of work was rare; however, Catherine McAuley's jocular sense of whimsy was a common occurrence in her letters and interactions with her sisters, despite her position as the esteemed Reverend Mother. As Sister M. Angela Bolster notes, "*There is evident a strong vein of spirituality in each of her letters to her Sisters*, even in those which were light-hearted to the extent of evoking gentle laughter in their recipients" (Bolster ix). Maintaining morale in the face of tragedy, sickness and disaster was a defining strength of the Sisters of Mercy, and Catherine McAuley considered laughter to be almost as beneficial in the healing process as prayer. Her humor in the face of wearying travels and numerous challenges is slightly similar to the courageous approach of Isabella Bird in her travel letters, though Bird's travels were much more self-gratifying and physical. Forging ahead and treating various hardships as the practical and unavoidable parts of life allowed both Bird and McAuley to stay strong despite their troubling encounters. This humorous side of a very pious and sincere

Catholic nun served as a means for Mother McAuley to lighten the burden she felt through her travels away from her home convent in Dublin.

As part of her devotion to her sisters and her mission, Mother McAuley was often called upon to travel for tragic and unfortunate reasons. An inevitability that Catherine McAuley and her sisters faced was the prevalence of sickness and death. McAuley's devoted character was most notably exposed in the letters in which she was forced to convey bad news and relate sad tidings, as in a letter written during her visit to Booterstown after the death of her friend Sister Mary Gertrude:

Our poor Sister Mary Gertrude is no longer an inhabitant of this passing world. She died on Ascension Day....Her countenance was sweetly composed in death. Her teeth perfectly white, and not the slightest swelling in the feet, which are strong signs of not being in an unhealthy state of body. She expressed a strong desire to die on Ascension Day. Sister Monica and I were watching her. We had read all the last prayers, three or four times, and after eleven o'clock on Wednesday night concluded she would live a day or two longer as no change appeared. The instant the clock struck 12 which was just at her door, she stretched out her arms, and as if it were an immediate call on her to go, she settled her head and before we could read the departing prayers, she was gone.

(Letters 163-64)

This selection reflects a very realistic depiction of Sister Gertrude's death, which Mother McAuley considered to be a time of blessed celebration and not a time of infinite sorrow. The manner in which she pictured Gertrude's death for her fellow sisters relates an air of sanctified peace and a positive movement from one world to the next. Many of Catherine McAuley's letters include descriptions of the

death of one sister or another. The tone in which she wrote, however, was not melancholic, mournful, or overly emotional but, rather, that of one who is hopeful that a full and glorious life will be rewarded in an afterlife that would reflect the good accomplished by a sister on earth. In the spiritual journey, Mother McAuley recognized the death of a sister as one part of their mission brought to an end, as another journey would begin in the next life. Death, to the sisters, was part of their travel through this world, and it was seen as a holy passing and a glorious completion rather than a sad termination or a sudden, dark ending.

At a time when she was ill and aging, Mother McAuley still cared for the sick and weak of her convent, and she wrote to Sister Mary Francis Warde of their hardships in Dublin:

Thus we go on, my Dear Sister Francis, flourishing in the very midst of the Cross, more than a common share of which has latterly fallen to my lot, thanks be to God. I humbly trust it is the Cross of Christ. I endeavor to make it, in some way like to His, by silence. (*Letters* 125)

This passage clearly illustrates Catherine McAuley's spiritual journey through life. Her earthly journeys from week to week and month to month were the tangible evidences of a greater mission that Mother McAuley had embarked upon. Unlike Emily Eden or Isabella Bird, Mother McAuley's purpose in her travels and her writings was not to view her subjects from afar but to get involved and change lives. She went into her various excursions with the intention of getting her hands dirty and callused with the work she endeavored to undertake. And, her letters reflect her desire to heal, encourage, and share her faith with her dear sisters. She

was not afraid to trust in a force stronger than her self, and her words express this pure vision of mercy. In regards to Catherine McAuley's strength and support in trying times, Sister Miley states "She exhibits...in her letters the test of true greatness of soul: victory over grief, conquest of sadness or melancholy, cheerfulness under all circumstances" (50). Catherine McAuley's true talent, as a traveler and as a Sister of Mercy, resided in her righteous soul; a soul that was seen time and again, through her travel letters, to embrace compassion, devotion, and strength.

The influence of Catherine McAuley and her superb mission extended long after her death and to many countries beyond the borders of Ireland. Sisters of Mercy traveled to distant lands to heal the sick and poverty-stricken to minister to their physical and emotional needs. The Sisters were also instrumental as nurses during several wars, and they rushed to aid wounded soldiers. Just two years after Mother McAuley's death, her sisters crossed the Atlantic and opened a foundation in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. From that one convent, other foundations emerged in Chicago, Philadelphia, Oklahoma City, Nashville, and Baltimore. A second major foundation was established in New York City, bringing much of Mother McAuley's Baggot Street family to serve on the shores of America. As Sister Mary Isidore Lennon notes, "Because Catherine McAuley responded to the sweet voice which whispered: 'Come Follow Me,' she left the world a rich endowment in the Institute she founded. Today on every [c]ontinent of the world there is tangible evidence of her influence on social welfare work..." (99).

Mother Catherine McAuley first put aside her early, privileged life to embark on a

physical and spiritual journey to help individuals in need. This quest to provide for the poor, destitute, ailing, and uneducated citizens of Britain and Ireland led Mother McAuley on a mission that would expand far beyond the boundaries of her native land and far beyond the limitations of her physical, mortal existence. Sister M. Ignatia Neumann asserts that overall Catherine McAuley's "letters are considered the best form of biography – hers indicate a character radiant with zeal, hope, and joy" (65). Mother McAuley's travel letters are truly special because they reveal the "I" of the writer much more than the seeing "eye." She does not define the people and places described in her letters through romantic images or emotional portraits for a reader's entertainment or distant interpretation. Instead, she engages in spiritual and friendly conversations with her sisters while she travels so that her devotion and her inspiration are constantly heeded and recognized. Many of her letters I have examined represent a mixture of Catherine McAuley the sister, Catherine McAuley the traveling nun, and Catherine McAuley the hard-working and influential foundress of the Sisters of Mercy. Her fascinating life was apparent in her travel letters, and she was comfortable revealing more about her self than being as presumptuous as to engage in describing her friends and acquaintances or strangers she met. The artistic quality of her writings sprang from the essence of Mother McAuley as the writer. And, like similar works of spiritual art, her craft will be continued through the many orders and foundations of Mercy established by her hand and by the willing hands of her sisters for years to come.

V. CONCLUSION

The women travelers I have examined in this thesis project were talented and fascinating women. Their lives were not led according to the traditional, domestic norms of nineteenth-century society. Emily Eden, Isabella Bird, and Mother Catherine McAuley all broke with the Victorian ideal of women leading quiet lives in the home. These three travelers pursued lives that were rich with ambition, compassion, vision, devotion, adventure, and interest in the world around them.

The key to gaining an understanding of these writers as special and influential women emerges through reading their private letters written during their travels around the world. Appreciating not only what they witnessed and experienced but also to whom they were speaking and how they were writing is crucial to realizing the personalities behind the pens and envisioning the minds at work in these individual travelers. Their letters to their sisters reveal sights, images, thoughts, impressions, attitudes, and beliefs that a woman in nineteenth-century Britain and Ireland might not have been so free to discuss with a male or more general audience. In my research, I show that the private letters between sisters allow readers today to become intimate with the feelings, experiences, and purposes of three different women travelers who led diverse lifestyles, yet they all had one thing in common: they were encouraged, supported, loved, and admired by faithful sisters who could not accompany them on their physical journeys through life.

The question always remains regarding “how can we say for sure who a particular woman was simply through our interpretation of their life exposed in their writings?” In personal writings and private letters, it is very hard to distinguish the writer from their words. What is being said, revealed, and described becomes a natural extension of the seer, as does the audience or original recipient of the letters. My reason for choosing to write about the women that I have examined in this thesis is precisely that although they were traveling away from their homes and familiar surroundings, they were corresponding intimately and regularly with someone – a woman – who was a part of their lives, their hearts, and their missions: a sister. I have not spent a large amount of time undertaking a gender or feminist examination of the title “sister”; however, I have attempted to illustrate the importance of the roles of sisters in the lives of my travelers as well as their roles as sisters to their distant siblings. Conversations and confidences, though written, are special when experienced between women who infinitely trust one another. The methods of narration are different for the three travelers I have researched, but the context of purpose, intimacy, and revelation surrounding their correspondences is a common thread that connects my writers as sisters in a larger sense of the term.

There are many, many published works that exist which discuss or portray the letters written by travelers during their journeys. For example, there are wonderful compilations of travelers’ biographies and several works of reference that list and detail different travelers and their journeys. Edited volumes of travel narratives dealing with men writing to men, women writing to men, men writing

to women, are all common occurrences throughout the history of documented travel writings. But, I felt, for my analysis, that it was important and revealing to explore the travel letters of British and Irish women traveling and writing not only to women who could not accompany them on their voyages but to women who were their sisters—sisters by birth, by blood, or by religious avowal. What I would truly believe to be the defining achievement of my interest and my research would be to have the opportunity to look at the other side of the correspondences I have examined and see what the waiting sisters were writing and thinking about Emily Eden, Isabella Bird, and Mother McAuley. This opportunity exists in one or two of these situations; however, the letters of the non-traveling sisters are not completely or readily accessible, nor do letters exist at all in some cases. Seeing and understanding both individuals' points of view in a correspondence may lead to a clearer and more comprehensive appreciation of both the travelers I have reviewed and their readers. I feel that future research can be enhanced, and my work in this thesis taken a step further, if the entire relationship could be revealed involving the very special women travelers I have investigated in this particular project.

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