

Nation, Empire and Gender: Two Genteel English Women Writing about Australia and Hungary in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

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Abstract: This article deals with two travel narratives written in the mid-nineteenth century by genteel English women and explores issues of nation, empire and gender. These travel accounts record journeys to two different areas of the globe, namely Hungary and New South Wales, and a close reading of these texts reveals a great deal of similarity in terms of their subject matter and writing strategies. The authors were unusual young women who transgressed gender demarcations by bringing out their own publications, intruding into the public domain of men. I will argue that these travel writings, irrespective of their travel destinations, reflected a common cultural and social background that stemmed from English genteel ideals.

Keywords: colonialism; female travel writing; gender and empire; gentility; travel writing on Hungary; travel writing on New South Wales

Louisa Anne Meredith, a future Antipodean settler, and Julia Pardoe, a seasoned traveller, were filled with curiosity when they set out on a great journey in 1839 to different corners of the globe. They were intrepid English gentlewomen who recorded their experiences and observations on the pages of their travel narratives. Whereas Meredith left her home country to recreate her former English lifestyle in a far-away colony of the British Empire, Pardoe, on the other hand, travelled to a little-known country of the Continent, outside the British Empire. Although thousands of miles apart, these two ladies used the genre of travel writing to step beyond the boundaries of the genteel world and established themselves as acute observers of foreign lands, manners and customs. Writing of two little-known parts of the globe, namely New South Wales and Hungary, Meredith and Pardoe constructed remarkably authoritative discourses. *The City of the Magyar, or, Hungary and her Institutions in 1839-40* by Miss Julia Pardoe (1840) bears a striking resemblance to Mrs Charles Meredith's *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales, during a Residence in that Colony from 1839 to 1844* ([1844] 1973) in terms of the discursive strategies employed in recording their travel experiences. Even though the contrast between the description of a settler society far from Europe and a small kingdom in the heart of Europe might seem somewhat forced, it is based on the underlying assumption, put forward by Katarina Gephardt, that "travel accounts of Eastern Europe present the experience as that of discovery and exploration

in a way that resembles travel accounts of the non-European world” (2005 293). Whatever the geographical disparity between their objects, both narratives, for example, demonstrate a sense of adventure in terms of destination, as neither was a common subject for writing by women.

The focus of this article is the investigation of these two women writers’ ways of seeing their respective travel destination within the context of genteel English social values. This article will accordingly explore how Louisa Anne Meredith and Julia Pardoe negotiated issues of nation, empire and gender. The approach is informed by gender and genre theories in general (Mills 1994; Borm 2004; Chirico 2008) and has also benefited from the large amount of recent scholarship on nineteenth-century women’s travel writing (Bassnett 2002; Thompson 2011 180-94; Youngs 2013 131-137). Indeed, a substantial amount of critical literature deals with both Louisa Anne Meredith (Johnston 1995; Dunscombe 1998; Bonyhady 2000; Grimshaw and Standish 2007) and Julia Pardoe (Bidwell 1857 135-136; Johnson 1862 50- 58; Kadar 1990; Gorman 1996; Fest 2000 412-414). Yet whereas much has been written about Pardoe’s visit to Constantinople and her portrayal of the Ottoman Empire in the 1830s (Davis 1986 35-6, 67-68; Schiffer 1999 393-394; Marino 2013), there is a surprising lack of critical literature regarding her journey to Hungary. Scholarship on English lady travellers to Australia is abundant (Standish 2008; Domotor 2009, 2013), but the same does not hold true for English (lady) travellers to Eastern Europe in general (Gephardt 2005) or Hungary in particular (Czigany 1976 89-104; Kádár 1990; Fest 2000).

The analysis of women’s travel writing usually focuses either on a particular lady traveller or the lady travellers of a specific region. This article, however, offers a comparative approach. Scholars have contrasted the travel accounts of genteel women in various corners of the British Empire (Jones 1985; Johnston 1994) but not much critical attention has been paid to the comparison of English lady travellers within and outside the British Empire.

The ideology of gentility and travel writing by genteel women

Similar social backgrounds but different marital statuses and travel incentives characterized the lives of Miss Julia Pardoe (1806-62) and Mrs Charles Meredith (1812-95). While Louisa Meredith left England soon after her wedding in 1839 to start a new life in the colonies (Shillinglaw 1996 260), Julia Pardoe was a single woman travelling on the Continent escorted by her mother (Fest 2000 412). By the time these personal narratives were published, both women had already entered the world of letters. Louisa Anne Meredith had published literary critiques and poetry (Shillinglaw 1996 260) whereas Julia Pardoe’s reputation as a travel writer had already been established with her accounts of Portugal and the Ottoman Empire (Johnson 1862 53-4). As prolific writers, both women left an admirable legacy of their extraordinary lives in the form of personal recollections and fictional works. Their writing career earned them a respected place in British society and demonstrated what learned women could achieve in the mid-nineteenth century. Louisa Meredith “holds an important position in the colonial literature of Australia” (Shillinglaw 1996 259) and Julia Pardoe’s three-volume account of Hungary is usually credited with being “one of the founders of the nineteenth-century British image of Hungary” (Kádár 1990 227). In their own ways, therefore, these two authors contributed significantly to the formation of contemporary images of colonial Australia and Hungary.

A genteel upbringing moulded the minds of these young women, giving them sets of values that they could never shake off. As genteel women, their world revolved round the private sphere of their family and female friends. Idleness was British gentlewomen's chief characteristic. They led a secluded life and were discouraged from taking an active interest in worldly matters, which were regarded as strictly men's business (Altick 1974 50). Well-bred gentlewomen were thus largely deprived of an access to the public sphere. Those women who ventured outside the private sphere risked losing their respectability. The experience of travel was thus a breach of the concept of separate spheres. Writing for publication was another infraction of this notion. Books exposed their authors' thoughts and identity to the public and therefore tended to put women's gentility in jeopardy (Poovey 1984 36). Despite these severe restrictions on such women's sphere of action there were a handful of respectable ladies who laid themselves open to possible exclusion from genteel society by undertaking a long journey overseas and bringing out their own publications. Julia Pardoe and Louisa Anne Meredith were two such fearless women.

By definition, travel narratives were intended to furnish the home audience with essential information concerning distant countries and peoples. In other words, they were a testimony to their authors' having had experience of the Other. In relating this experience, however, travel accounts naturally expressed their writers' thoughts and views. Such writings therefore investigate the dichotomy between *me* and the *others*. As Tim Youngs claims, travel writing "throws light on how we define ourselves and on how we identify others" (2013 1). This article will be concerned with the portrayal of the differing Australian and Hungarian otherness along with the ways in which the portrayals affirmed the respectability of the English woman travel writer.

Both travel texts recount first impressions of and initial reactions to the respective travel destination. Whereas Julia Pardoe's sojourn in Hungary lasted only a few months and her reminiscences were published soon after leaving Hungary in 1840, Louisa Meredith went on to become a settler in Tasmania. Her recollections were published in 1844, five years after her landing in New South Wales, and unsurprisingly show the benefit of hindsight. Her narrative can be defined as the publication of a woman settler, while Pardoe's account went into print as the work of a woman traveller. Sara Mills distinguishes between women settlers and women travellers by arguing that settlers were under a lot more social pressure to "assert a strong cultural identity" as members of the settler community than travellers who "were not seen as necessarily part of these communities and could behave in a slightly eccentric way" (1994 38). This article will later highlight Meredith's strong attachment to England and will discuss some of the supposedly unladylike features of Pardoe's narrative.

Prefatory disclaimers were regularly employed to account for the limited claims of such books and to undervalue the suggestion that women's undertaking of travel was risky. Pardoe stated in the Preface to *The City of the Magyar* that "I cannot, as a woman, presume to suppose that any weight can possibly be attached to my particular sentiments on such a subject" (1840, 1 vi). Meredith extended the disclaimer by admitting that "I cannot for a moment flatter myself with the idea of conveying information to those skilled in scientific detail" ([1844] 1973, vii). She claimed to focus on the events of the private domain of women, adding that she "believed that a few simple sketches ... would be a welcome addition to the present small fund of information on common every-day topics relating to these antipodean climes" ([1844]

1973, vii).

Given that gentlewomen's sphere of interest was by and large determined by social expectation, it is not surprising to see that their accounts tended to emphasize the private nature of their writings. Such apologies and confessions were essential to preserve the genteel position of the woman author in British society. The chapters that followed, however, often bore no relation to the introductory disclaimers. The opportunity of overseas travel widened the horizons of respectable women and provided subject matters through which these ladies could modestly exhibit their undoubted intellectual capabilities. Both Louisa Meredith and Julia Pardoe stepped beyond the limitations of the genteel world to write accounts in which their own experiences and opinions superseded some of those they were expected to hold and to uphold in their function as Englishwomen of a certain social position.

National characteristics and indigeneity

Without reading these two accounts, it may seem at first sight to be an arduous task identifying any similarities between mid-nineteenth century Hungary and New South Wales. A close reading of these narratives, however, brings to light an abundance of common themes and images that stem from the similar social background of lady writers and inform the genre of travel writing by women at this time. One of these was the inevitable issue of national character, through which discourses tended to be mediated in the depiction of local inhabitants.

Interestingly, when formulating their views on the peculiarities of national identity, both writers centered their analyses around the theme of vanity, arguing that it was the greatest shortcoming of the inhabitants of these two countries. In Sydney, Meredith claimed that "shallow petty pride, or rather vanity, which causes so many heart-burnings and such eager rivalry among those who can often but ill afford its cost, is the mainspring of their follies" ([1844] 1973 52). To her way of thinking, nevertheless, this defect at least had the potential to change the colony for the better. She went on to write that "pride, of a right kind, *might* be the best agent a new country could possess; but it must be a generous, not selfish pride" ([1844] 1973 52). Hungarians on the other side of the globe were depicted in a strikingly similar manner by Pardoe. She also noted that "the besetting sin of the Magyar is vanity" (Pardoe 1840, 2 287). Like Meredith, Julia Pardoe also asserted the truth value of this observation when writing "this is a startling assertion, but one which can be easily borne out" (1840, 2 288). These observations suggest a rather motherly concern for the moral development of a young country. It is as if these women viewed their respective travel destination through the eyes of a mother and treated the fledgling countries as if they were their children. What young people needed were care and instruction and Louisa Meredith and Julia Pardoe were ready to provide this emotional support. They were after all genteel women brought up to believe in the centrality of the private sphere. Their interest in the public world showed undeniable elements derived from the private world. In this light, Sara Mills claims that "women writers often adopted a maternal role in relation to indigenous women" (1994 41), and the above excerpts suggest that a similar motherly attitude was embraced also in respect to other white communities.

The presence of unjustified vanity, however, engrossed the attention of both writers considerably. Convict heritage and Turkish occupation were assumed to be drawbacks to moral development. Louisa Meredith remarked that "the existence of such feeling in

a colony, where all, with very rare exceptions, have sprung from needy emigrants or transported criminals, is too absurd to require a comment” ([1844] 1973 52). In other words, she exclaimed that Australians had no basis to be vain seeing as they were mostly descended from convicts. Miss Pardoe hinted at the great devastation Hungary had experienced under the “rule of the Infidel” (1840, 2: 287), namely, under the sway of the Ottoman Empire. It was only after that period that Hungary had “been slowly asserting itself, but still under disadvantages which have greatly tended to retard its progress” (1840, 2: 287). Based on these examples, it can be argued that the depiction of colonial New South Wales and mid-nineteenth century Hungary was undertaken in much the same style in terms of this particular national characteristic, using excuses for past wrongdoings and misfortunes.

Sketches of Indigenous peoples also regularly formed part of travel narratives and in many cases ethnography was regarded as an essential component of the genre of travel writing (Rubies 2002 242). Such descriptive accounts were intended to inform the home audience about the peculiar customs and lifestyle of the natives. This “ethnographic impulse” (Rubies 2002 242), however, revealed more about the viewpoint of the author than the specific culture of the local community in question.

Recognizing the complexity of the ethnic composition of the Hungarian Kingdom, Pardoe used the metaphor “Babel” to refer to the “land of the Magyar” (1840, 2 256). Notwithstanding the nature of multi-ethnic Hungary, this article will go on to focus solely on the representation of the “Hungarian gypsies” (sic) (Pardoe 1840, 1 167) as compared to the Aboriginal Australians. The analysis of the Slavonic and German population of the Hungarian Kingdom and the depiction of convicts within New South Wales society will not be entered into for reasons of space.

By definition, both the Indigenous Australians and the Hungarian Gypsies were classified as distinct from mainstream society. Louisa Meredith referred to the first Australians as “natives” ([1844] 1973 90) and “Aborigines” ([1844] 1973 91). She did not need to stress the fact that the Aborigines formed a different race because it was so obvious. It is noteworthy to point out that Julia Pardoe gave a more descriptive and outspoken account of the “Zigeuner” (1840, 1 167) by claiming that they constituted “a race as utterly distinct from the other inhabitants of the country as though they were not children of the same soil” (1840, 1 167). As far as their physical appearance, in particular their complexion, went, Pardoe argued that the Hungarian Gypsies greatly resembled “black” people: “the Zigeuner of Hungary are a much darker race, being little removed from black” (1840, 1 167). The term “black” was also applied to the Australian Aborigines in Meredith’s narrative ([1844] 1973 93). It can be inferred from these passages that both Pardoe and Meredith saw the Hungarian Gypsies and the Australian Aborigines in much the same light as regards their racial attributes.

With respect to their way of life, both Julia Pardoe and Louisa Meredith emphasized these communities’ nomadic lifestyle and their laziness at work. Neither of them could comprehend why they refused to settle down and live in proper houses. Meredith remarked:

I have often wondered that constant intercourse with Europeans, and experience of the comfort afforded by a permanent and substantial shelter from the inclemency of the seasons in the variable climate of New South

Wales, has not induced the natives to make some rude attempt at building themselves huts ([1844] 1973 103).

Pardoe noted that the Hungarian Gypsies “wander over the face of the land, voluntary outcasts” (1840, 1 167). Both writers appeared to be unable to understand how one could lead a normal life without a permanent dwelling. Jenni Calder argues that “the home and the structure of life within it was at the center of the middle-class view of life” in Victorian England (1977 32). The absence of a home-like building displeased respectable English women for whom the house represented an essential element of their identity.

Another peculiar feature of the Hungarian Gypsies and the Australian Aborigines was their idleness. Meredith remarked that “to make them industrious is utterly hopeless” ([1844] 1973 104). Pardoe explained that “they are extremely idle, passing whole weeks stretched in listless inaction, under the trees, without an effort at occupation, until fairly driven by hunger to exert themselves” (1840, 1 168). Genteel women’s view of the Aborigines and the Gypsies as indolent should be seen in the context of Protestant European discourse on idleness. Idleness was not only a great sin but was also a “betrayal of one’s humanity” (Coetzee 1988 21). Poverty was equated with sloth and work was declared to have an ethical value (Coetzee 1988 21). In this historical context it becomes clear why respectable British women were sometimes offended by the sight of idle people who did not seem to make the best use of their time. Gentlewomen’s own idleness, however, was ironically not a matter of shame. Ann McMahon notes that “idleness was a form of evil among the poor, [but] it was a badge of class in the lady” (1979 11).

Taking such genteel ideals as the norm, Julia Pardoe and Louisa Meredith gave an ethnographic account of the Hungarian Gypsies and the Australian Aborigines in much the same style. Since these writers shared a common way of looking at non-European peoples, they focused only on certain aspects of their culture. The work ethic and housing were thus two issues that were fundamental to the judgment and classification of other peoples. Rather than appreciating their otherness, both of these women pointed out those features of Aboriginal and Gypsy culture that differed considerably from their own social ideals. With regards to their comments on mainstream society, moral strength was deemed essential to proper national feelings.

What these observations about colonial New South Wales and mid-nineteenth century Hungary reveal, is that these countries did not fully come up to the high expectations of the two English lady travellers. While in their prefaces they both set out to apprise their readers of distant peoples and countries, what they actually produced was a hierarchical reading of the locals’ way of life in terms of their own class norms.

Empire

Both Meredith and Pardoe published their narratives with a largely female audience in mind at an age when interest in the outside world, especially in the outcome of the imperialist agenda, was constantly on the rise. Whereas men were entrusted with the job of discovering, exploring and conquering new areas, as well as dispossessing Indigenous people, women were expected to raise children and look after the household. Seen in this light, the process of empire-building could be regarded as “gendered work” (Hall 2007 47). In an indirect way, however, some middle-class women did step into the

public domain and did make a contribution to imperial discourses, and hence to the imperial project. In this section I wish to probe the extent to which Meredith and Pardoe's travel accounts extended imperialist discourse.

It was through the recounting of personal experiences that lady writers made their voice heard. By narrating the expansion of the British Empire in the pages of their travel books, genteel women affirmed and naturalized "the imperial presence" (Standish 2008: 21). Their accounts of domestic bliss, their descriptions of household management and family matters transformed the grand imperial project into intriguing and sometimes heroic stories of personal achievement. Anything that went beyond this level, particularly information about the local flora and fauna or the indigenous people, added picturesque flavor to the narrative and sometimes contributed to the growth of Western knowledge. As Sara Mills put it, "travel writing within the imperial context clearly produces knowledge about the colonized country" (1994 34), and Pardoe and Meredith's work clearly takes its place within this context.

One basic difference in the writing of empire registers in the spatial approach of these two writers. On arriving at their respective travel destination, both Meredith and Pardoe found themselves in a geographically different world. Meredith's travel narrative records colonial Sydney and New South Wales in 1840 and was intended to provide information for would-be settlers "at Home". As Louisa Meredith put it in the Preface, "very many persons at 'Home' are deeply interested in these distant Colonies, as being the residence of dear friends and relatives" ([1844] 1973 vii). This preface explicitly placed Meredith in the context of settler-colonial discourse and her account was added to the growing list of travel memoirs on the young colony of New South Wales. Firmly believing in the superiority of England, she did not question the validity of the colonial project. Describing the amusement of "country gentlemen near Sydney", she noted that "dinners and balls of course form part of the arrangements for the races and hunts, and everything is conducted in as English a manner as can be attained by a young country imitating an old one" (Meredith [1844] 1973 49). Judith Johnston has pointed out that "the sense of a British superiority remained an integral part of Louisa Meredith's consciousness and behaviour throughout her life" (Johnston 1994 53). It is no surprise that Meredith naturally employed the tone of the metropolitan colonizer.

Pardoe's outlook on empire, on the other hand, presents a less straightforward case. Since Hungary was never held by the British Empire, her account cannot by definition be explained in terms of the imperial-colonial binarism. Being a British subject, however, Julia Pardoe exemplified many of the characteristic British values Victorian travellers brought with themselves on their journeys to British colonies. As a case in point, the summer residence of the bishop of Waitzen provided an opportunity for Miss Pardoe to contrast Hungary with the imperial center. She noted that it was "by far the most English-looking plaisance I have seen in the country, and one might really fancy it a villa on the Thames" (1840, 2 61-2). What caught her attention was the actual setting of that palace. She pointed out that "it stands in the midst of a richly-wooded valley, backed by lofty hills, with the river flowing before it, and its wide park-like grounds stretching on all sides to a considerable distance" (Pardoe 1840, 2 61). This sketch of landscape with undulating ground and flowing water echoes the kind of scenery that was associated with genteel living in England. Being a well-bred gentlewoman, Julia Pardoe's eyes were trained to spot park-like environments, areas demarcating the social class in a position to occupy land for leisure and not simply for labour, and as an

outcome of her genteel upbringing she grew fond of such areas. This is yet another reference that articulates the social standing of the author. At the same time it demonstrates the extent to which Pardoe remained attuned to the signs of her class and national ideals even though she was visiting a territory outside the British Empire.

In his study on Victorian travellers in the Balkans, Andrew Hammond suggests that there is a remarkable similarity between the attitudes of those British travellers who visited the Balkans and those who journeyed to colonial outposts (2006 89). His article engages with the analysis of personal attainment within the framework of Britain's ethnocentric view of the world. "Imagined colonialism" (Hammond 2006 89) is the term he introduces to describe the personal ambition of those Victorian travellers who ventured outside the British Empire in the strong belief that it was their "natural right to explore, order, interpret, deprecate, control, challenge, and judge" (2006 89). In this respect Julia Pardoe's account could be classified as an example of the process of imagined colonialism in Andrew Hammond's terms. Seen in this light, just like Louisa Anne Meredith, Julia Pardoe was also impelled to gaze at her European travel destination through imperial eyes.

It seems to me, however, that Pardoe's background as a seasoned traveller occasionally empowered her to go beyond the colonizer's viewpoint. In an attempt to give minute descriptions of the places she visited, Miss Pardoe often drew on her memories of travel elsewhere. In her introductory chapter on Pesth, for instance, her familiarity with European cities becomes evident (Pesth at that time was a cultural and commercial hub of the Hungarian Kingdom within the Habsburg Empire; the cities of Pesth, Buda and Obuda were united in 1873 under the name of Budapest). "Pesth is decidedly one of the most cheerful-looking cities in Europe" she noted, and added that "many of the streets are as handsome as any in Vienna, and most of them considerably wider" (Pardoe 1840, 2 175). Naturally, travel writers drew comparisons with places they believed readers would be more familiar with, but in this reference she also displayed herself as someone who was not afraid to admit her beloved home's shortcomings. She admitted that "for with all my prejudice in favour of my own country, I cannot conceal from myself that the public carriages in London are disgraceful in every point of view" (Pardoe 1840, 2 316-317). Her criticism of London coach-stands was even harsher: "Nothing so revolting as a London coach-stand is to be seen at Pesth. ... [They are] always provided with good and well-conditioned horses, and smart drivers; and presentable anywhere. In this respect we are decidedly a century behind the Hungarians" (Pardoe 1840, 2 317). Such examples bear witness to Pardoe's ability to step outside the triumphalist rhetoric surrounding British imperial achievements and the superiority of the metropolis from which they were managed.

On the whole, I would suggest that rather than emphasizing the superiority of empire, Julia Pardoe tended to negotiate a largely descriptive account of her experiences. Travel did broaden her mind and she was thus capable of appreciating otherness without constantly longing for images of home. In fact, her travel in Hungary gave her so much delight that she developed a passionate concern for and a marked level of personal engagement with the country. She openly declared her love and respect for the people of Hungary on a number of occasions. Even dry facts, such as statistical information concerning the Hungarian mining districts, provided her with the opportunity to express her enthusiasm for Hungary.

The statistical information which follows, relative to the Hungarian mining districts, I have derived from the most authentic sources; ... I trust that it may not be considered tedious; for I confess that I have learnt to feel so sincere a sympathy with Hungary, such a respect for the phoenix-like spirit which dwells within her, and which is rapidly renewing a strong and stalwart existence from the ashes of the past, that I cannot look upon these palpable sources of prosperity and power without the deepest and most absorbing interest (Pardoe 1840, 1 156).

Julia Pardoe's feelings for her travel destination are unabashedly exhibited in the above quote. At the same time, however, the accentuation of the emotionality and sentimental aspect of her interest may have served as an affirmation of her gentility. Sometimes the personal connection to a particular topic, especially if it was considered an unladylike one, was reinforced to lessen the associations with the masculine world of business and industry of such sections of the text. The topic of mining was seen as an unfeminine one in the nineteenth century and a female writer on such a matter was therefore easily disregarded. To make the section acceptable to genteel readers, she accordingly emphasized her emotional involvement in the topic. Carl Thompson asserts that

There has also been a strong tendency historically for women travellers to ... adopt modes of travel and travel writing, in which a personal, subjective response is prioritised over a more intellectual and ostensibly "objective" attitude. ... By this means, the female travel writer can claim for herself a sort of "subjective" authority; at issue in her text, it seems, is not so much the accuracy or otherwise of her observations about the external world, but rather the strength and appropriateness of her own feelings (2011 184-5).

Statistical information concerning the Hungarian mining districts is thus made to appear more like Julia Pardoe's special interest in people than a factual analysis of a field that was imagined to bore her female readers.

In a way Julia Pardoe and Louisa Anne Meredith were operating as female ambassadors of their country, never forgetting their social status in the foreign place. Meredith, in the voice of a hypothetical future settler, represented the imperial centre which had conquered the east coast of Australia at the end of the eighteenth century. Her account therefore chronicled and reflected on the project of empire-building. Pardoe's visit, in sharp contrast, was most probably fuelled by personal curiosity. She, too, was an imperial subject and as such identified with many of the priorities of the imperialist agenda, but her personal history as a seasoned traveller gave her a much wider perspective. Occasionally, she was able to distance herself from the empire the better to appreciate her travel destination.

Gender

Having considered the national, imperial and colonial factors of these travel narratives, I shall now turn to the issue of gender. Given the well-defined boundaries of female gentility, there were certain limitations on what a respectable lady was allowed to do. In addition to genteel accomplishments, the pursuit of natural history, especially botany, was one area in the scientific sphere which was highly encouraged. Jennifer Bennett suggests that "something intrinsically female seemed to be present in plants, and thus their study, unlike that of, say, rocks or stars, was socially acceptable, even encouraged,

for women” (1991 103-105). There are numerous examples of this love for flowers in both narratives. Julia Pardoe expressed her admiration of wildflowers she came across with near the ruin of Trenschin in the following way:

And what flowers they were which had struggled into life upon that rugged rock! the deep blue larkspur, the wild anemone, clusters of mignonette, and a thousand other delicate blossoms, all as bright and as beautiful as though they had been sown in a genial soil, and tended by lady-fingers (Pardoe 1840, 1 98-99).

Her remark on the genteel occupation of flower gardening is yet another reference to her social background. Prefatory disclaimers, as argued earlier, apologized for the production of the book, an activity beyond the domestic locations in which middle-class women were expected to operate, but many features of the narrative were carefully placed there to affirm the writer’s gentility, and a skill in natural history was one of them.

Notes and Sketches of New South Wales presents a different level of fascination for plants. Whereas its preface anticipated “simple sketches from nature” (Meredith [1844] 1973 vii), Louisa Meredith’s narrative testified to her considerable expertise in Australian flora and fauna. Although she was not a scientist in the strict sense of the word, she was an “acute and discerning observer of nature who studied the landscape of the country, wrote about it, published, and made accurate and ornamental studies of Australian flowers” (Moyal 1986 99). By producing a travel narrative, Meredith stepped beyond the boundaries of the genteel world. Ironically, though, this violation of female gentility enabled her to develop an even greater passion for the socially acceptable study of natural history.

Botanical and zoological passages, indeed, make up the greater part of Meredith’s writing. In sharp contrast, social issues and factual information are more central to Julia Pardoe. It is not surprising, since travellers to the botanically similar spaces of Europe were more likely to focus on society, politics and history. European flora and fauna no longer seemed as exotic as those in countries with which Europeans were less familiar. Continental Europe, with its diverse cultures and peoples, tended to draw the culturally- and politically-sensitive kind of traveller. Pardoe’s narrative reflects this type of attitude towards her travel destination. As mentioned earlier, she did notice nature’s beauties, but that was just one of many areas she expressed her interest in. She had an insatiable appetite for almost everything. Her scope of interest ranged from castle ruins to great figures of the Reform Age in Hungary. In compiling her travel account she gathered information from the most reliable sources and in some cases, she modestly boasted of her own first-hand experiences. While in the National Museum, for instance, it was the “collection of ancient weapons” (Pardoe 1840, 2 213) that captured her attention. On another occasion, after calling on the Archduchess at the Palatinate Palace in Buda, she paid a visit to a prison. While Chapter VI describes the prison of Pesth (Pardoe 1840, 2 78-89), Chapter VII is devoted entirely to a country prison (Pardoe 1840, 2 97-110). By far the most unladylike section of the narrative, however, is a lengthy depiction of a mine in Schemnitz. Her curiosity took her deep down the mine to an area where she even witnessed a blast (Pardoe 1840, 1 194). It is worth noting that her passage on a working mine preceded recollections of the Californian and Australian Gold Rushes by ten years. So even before mining became a fashionable and accepted topic of female

British travel writers, Pardoe was already a sharp observer of this issue. Given the fact that *The City of the Magyar* was not her first travel publication, as indicated on the title page of her book, Julia Pardoe might have learnt to disregard many genteel restrictions imposed on her by English society. In writing about mining, for example, she was evidently experimenting with the supposedly authoritative tone of male writing interspersed here and there with some comments that affirmed her gentility. In a way she might even have thought of herself as an “honorary man” (Mills 1994 38).

Meredith and Pardoe highlighted diverse issues in their narratives. In some cases their choice of topics or depth of knowledge in certain areas may have been unladylike for the time, but what made their narratives successful after all was their ambition to inform the world, and their mostly female audience, of the unfamiliar, and this necessarily extended into areas not normally associated with middle-class women. Mary Louise Pratt points out that travel writers often desired not just to narrate but to classify the world that opened up before them. They were fuelled with curiosity to describe, define and order everything that came along their way. By doing so they contributed to local discourses about issues of social organisation, political arrangements, land use and moral priorities. As Mary Louise Pratt indicates, travel books “gave European reading publics a sense of ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized” (2008 3). Pratt introduces the term “planetary consciousness” to refer to the “European project” that aimed at systematizing nature (2008 35). Louisa Meredith’s account is an excellent case in point because her chapters on natural history reveal a female colonist’s ambition to get to know the newly-colonized space and depict it in European terms. Julia Pardoe’s narrative, on the other hand, focuses less on natural history and more on political history. Nonetheless, I would argue that the systematization of knowledge is also a driving force behind Pardoe’s account, and in this sense this text also bears signs of what Pratt defines as “planetary consciousness” (2008 35).

It is legitimate to ask, though, what could have motivated these respectable women, who showed such a high degree of intellectual accomplishment, to contribute to the accumulation of Western knowledge in this way? Firstly, the desire to be different from others and to stand out might have provided an impulse. As Carl Thompson has noted, “many Victorian travel writers sought to signal a sensibility, and an intellectual and emotional cultivation, superior to that of other tourists” (2011 55). Secondly, an educational and political agenda might have been another driving force. In a way such women might be classed as early feminists who sought to acquaint their fellow women about the peculiarities of the world, and to show that women could move out of their domestic space. This view of lady travel writers, however, has been contested by the argument that “most female travellers and travel writers historically have sought to negotiate the gender norms of their day, rather than confront them head on” (Thompson 2011 181). Thirdly, a growing sense of adventure could also have been responsible for the proliferation of travel writing by women. Whatever the early exploration of unknown territories of the world was for navigators, explorers, conquistadors, fortune-seekers and pioneer settlers, the same thrill of adventure for women was provided by the unladylike intrusion into the public world of men.

Mary Louise Pratt, however, offers a more radical explanation. Focusing on the significance of travel narratives with chapters on natural history, she claims that “the discourse of travel that natural history produces, and is produced by, turns on a great

longing: for a way of taking possession without subjugation and violence” (Pratt 2008 56). Meredith’s systematic account of the peculiarities of Australian flora and fauna might be interpreted as her metaphorical conquest and colonization of one particular corner of the Australian island continent. As a woman, in the absence of a gun, she had only a pen and a piece of paper to conquer the world—and so she did. Following this line of argument, I would suggest that Pardoe’s investigation of the political and social history of Hungary could be seen in a similar light. She, too, desired to get to know and symbolically conquer another country through intellectual means. Whereas Louisa Meredith relied on the power of science to achieve her goal, Julia Pardoe turned to politics and history to reflect more insightfully on her travel destination.

This section has scrutinized these two travel narratives through the lens of gender and has argued that despite the genteel restrictions on their sphere of action, both Meredith and Pardoe trespassed on the domain of men by publishing travel accounts that had a wider view of the world than that which was expected of genteel women. Meredith and Pardoe were unique women who espoused a broad range of interests and by doing so appeared to operate in a continuum with respect to their aspirations to those of men. As we have seen, multiple techniques were applied to disguise the risky violation of genteel norms. Given that participation in public discourse was deemed suitable only for male expression, lady travellers felt it necessary to redefine themselves on the pages of their travel books if they wanted a place in the public sphere, as well.

Conclusion

In conclusion, these non-fictional accounts reflect two genteel British women’s interest in the outside world. The opportunity of travel gave them a framework within which they could express their thoughts and observations on the pages of their personal recollections. The genre of Victorian travel writing, together with genteel ideals of female respectability, determined the structure as well as the style of the travel narrative. Meredith and Pardoe violated certain socially acceptable norms in order to create personal versions of their understanding of colonial Australia and mid-nineteenth century Hungary. Drawing on their genteel English background, they saw the world, not only through gentlewomen’s eyes, but, to a certain extent, also through imperial eyes. However exceptional Louisa Meredith and Julia Pardoe were in their own right, they were, after all, the social and cultural products of their age. Their textual representations of New South Wales and Hungary record not only by-gone days, but also reflect mid-nineteenth century ideas of nation, empire and gender.

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