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Representations of the Canadian West in late 19th-century English women's travel narratives¹.

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The Canadian West has never been the subject of extensive historiographical research in comparison with the research literature on the American West. Clearly, for several decades until the 1970s, when Canadian scholars began to reconsider the Canadian West, there had been a general consensus that the West - whose temporal and spatial delineations remained imprecise -, corresponded to the so-called Far West of the American nation, and to the myth of the "frontier" with all the nationalist and imperialist connotations that American historian Frederick Jackson Turner had assigned to it in 1893. More generally speaking, the West was represented as a man's world - where the white man had conquered land over the natives to expand the national territory. From this narrative of the West historians had virtually excluded women².

The significance of the West in the development of Canada appears as less important symbolically than in the US as, for many decades, the West and the Northwest did not occupy the minds of Canadian settlers or colonial governments. But the area, imaginary or geographical did not remain empty of white men. From 1679 to 1868, the Hudson's Bay Company, a private fur trade company, had the monopoly of trade over the whole continent: first from the western frontier of the Eastern colonies to the Rocky mountains – the Northwest territories –, then, from 1849, to the Pacific Ocean. The HBC officers planted forts along the waterways and reigned supreme over the "Indian country" as the land beyond the Eastern settlements had become known. In the course of the second half of the 19th century, the Canadian West gradually gained some mythical dimension in British imagination. In England, metropolitan readers imagined a vast wilderness peopled by natives and a few adventurous white men. But English-Canadian settlers did not feel the need to conquer or settle it before the 1870s.

Signs of Canadian interest in the West were only first visible when the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia were created, respectively in 1849 and 1858, on the Pacific Northwest coastline. In 1849, following the Treaty of Oregon which had settled the border between the British territories and the American West along the 49th parallel, the Hudson's Bay Company had seen its trade monopoly extended to the West of the Rocky mountains. From then on the Hudson's Bay Company controlled all the territories ranging from the limits of Canada West to the lower mainland of British Columbia.

Almost a decade later, in 1857, two expeditions, one Canadian, one British, set off to the West to consider its potential in terms of settlement and agriculture. Enquirers concluded to its value for agriculture and expansion, but only after the building of a railway line. Another decade later, after the creation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867, the West was eventually considered for transcontinental expansion. The Hudson's Bay Company eventually sold part of its territories to the Canadian government in 1868. The transcolonial railway which had begun to be built in New Brunswick could then find a transcontinental extension westward.

¹ Published in Michèle Kaltembach ed., *Canada from Sea to Sea*, Collection de l'AFEC, Toulouse, Presse Universitaire du Mirail, 2005

² See Mary Ann Irvin and James F. Brookes, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches in the history of women in the American West", in *Women and Gender in the American West*, Irvin and Brooks eds, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 2004, p. 10-12.

Another decade would go by before the works began. In 1868, the first road was built from Fort Garry to Lake of the Woods³, all the way to Red River, in Métis territory. This triggered a native revolt led by Louis Riel, which slowed down the progress of the Canadian settlement plans westward. Manitoba was eventually created in 1870 after Louis Riel and his métis followers had been controlled by the army. In 1871, British Columbia entered the Confederation after having closely negotiated several deals with the federal government, including the extension of the railway to Vancouver. With the entry of the most western colonies in the Dominion, its frontiers could now be extended "from sea to sea" and the huge empty territorial gap between Manitoba and British Columbia had now to be annexed and mapped. The federal government could now consider as its national mission the completion of the transcontinental line. The Canadian Pacific Railway, better known as the CPR, eventually reached Manitoba in 1881 and the first passengers landed in Vancouver, British Columbia, in 1887.

More generally, we could say that it was not before the 1880s, that Canadian politicians began to consider the West, as part of the Canadian national project. Once they slowly came to that stage, the West, as in the US, began to achieve a mythical dimension in Canada. It was presented as "The Last Best West", an agrarian paradise for farmers and ranchers, for disappointed Americans, young Canadians or new immigrants, in short a man's world. This myth served to support late 19th century expansionist projects, as Catherine Cavanaugh explains in her analysis of the representation of the West in Canadian political and literary discourses:

In constructing and reconstructing the West – from wilderness wasteland to economic hinterland to agrarian paradise – expansionism discourse perpetuated the myth of the West as a "manly" space, assigning to it a moral and political force that underwrote elite Anglo-Canadian men's hegemony in the territories⁴.

Before the 1880s, English and Canadian visitors could not gain access to the West. With the completion of the CPR which could take them to Winnipeg first and, from May 1887, all the way to Vancouver, the West was beginning to lose its seclusion and mystery. However, crossing Canada on the CPR remained a luxury means of transportation and the first transcontinental tourists were very wealthy. The first train travellers were to be found among the most exclusive tourists, upper-class British visitors, who had begun to explore the Empire seeking untraditional routes. In the 1880s, numerous upper-class English travellers were whisked through the Eastern parts of Canada, which had already been much written about in the previous decades and which presented no further interest for this elite, to the real West. Books such as *On the Cars and Off*⁵, or *From Halifax to Vancouver* represented the sort of travel literature, written by well-off English visitors, which was circulating in England in the 1880s and over the following decades. Wealthy English visitors could "do Canada" in a few weeks, then a few days in the 1910s, crossing the British dominion from its Canadian Eastern provinces to the West, in a manner we could describe as most imperial.

The West had not yet achieved the mythical status that Canadian officials would invest it with in the late 1880s. However the West - or the "Far-West" as English visitors often described

³ See J. M Bumsted, *A History of the Canadian Peoples*, Toronto, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p; 194-195.

⁴ Catherine A. Cavanaugh, "No Place for a Woman", *Engendering Western Canadian Settlement*", in *Women and Gender in the American West*, *op.cit.*, p. 184.

⁵ Douglas Sladen, *On the Cars and Off*, London, Ward, Lock and Bowden, 1895 and Lady Pullen-Burry, *From Halifax to Vancouver*, London, Mills and Boon Limited, 1912.

the Canadian West, mixing up geography and literary representations⁶ -, seemed to have gained some mythical value outside Canada, at the centre of the Empire, in England. Interestingly, at the end of the 19th century, we see develop two mythical representations of the West, not necessarily at poles apart but nevertheless culturally different. The first one was produced in the metropole by upper-class female visitors and the second, the man's world myth, was called up by Canadians themselves.

Indeed, in the course of this paper, we will see that, as early as the 1880s, the West was imbued with some mythical values by English upper-class female visitors who projected some fantasy onto its wilderness. They constructed the West as some freedom land for New Women. This mythical construction of the Canadian west was subsequently published in the form of travel narratives upon their return to London. Simultaneously, in fact a decade later, Canadian political and literary discourses were also forging a representation of the west as a preserve for male settlers. They invested the West with rich transformative and regenerative powers for the new generation of true Canadian men. In fact, each representation of the West was gendered-specific. But I contend that English women's representation of the Canadian West preceded by a decade the Canadian representation of the West as the last man's world - the spatial embodiment of masculine national values, where they could recover "their native manhood".

Along the same line, Catherine Cavanaugh notes that the first literary representation of the West for Canadian readers was written and published in Toronto, in the late 1890s by the author Ralf Connor, whose best-selling adventure novels, *Black Rock* (1896) and *Sky Pilot* (1899), embodied these Western values, thus forging the myth of the Western wilderness as "the last best thing" for the new generations of true Canadian men. His cultural and imaginary construction of the West as mysterious and masculine was creating the identity of that region. In 1899, in *The Sky Pilot*, Connor described the transformative power of the Western wilderness as follows:

Freed from the restraints of custom and surrounding, even the most 'high bred young lads' [...] soon shed all that was superficial in their make-up, and stood forth in the naked simplicity of *their native manhood*: the West discovered and revealed the man in them.⁷

We will show in the course of this paper that these words only echoed earlier remarks developed by "high bred" English female travellers about their "native womanhood".

I will therefore contend in this article that English women's representations anticipated the national myth-making about the Canadian West. A decade before the first literary representations circulated in Canada, they too had developed a similar gendered imaginary response to this rugged part of the British Empire, behind the Rocky Mountains, investing it with spiritual uplifting powers for women. In the Canadian west, upper-class English women could be freed from the oppressive gentility of British upper-class upbringing. As Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose posited at the beginning of their major work on women and space: "Gendered spaces should be understood less as geography imposed by patriarchal structures, and more as a social process of symbolic encoding and decoding that produces 'a series of

⁶ One of the popular books in England in the 1870s, particularly among women was Isabella Bird's *A Lady's Life in the Rockies* (London, John Murray, 1873), a typical Victorian traveller's account of the American Far-West through which Ms Bird travelled on horse-back in the most proper lady-like fashion, in full dress, on a side-saddle.

⁷ Ralf Connor, *The Sky Pilot*, Toronto, 1899, p. 189. (my italics)

homologies between the spatial, symbolic and social orders.⁸ What then are these symbolic encoding and decoding that English, upper-class women produced in their travel-writings in the West?

For social historians, travel-writings offer valuable resources for understanding social relations, personal impressions as well as national prejudice, as women's travel writing range from the personal to the communal. Besides, Sara Mills has shown that travel-writing is one important channel for the production of knowledge that is clearly differentiated by gender. By resorting to the concept of "representation", I want to emphasize the fact that the women travellers whose personal narratives I study here, were writing for an English audience, whose knowledge of the colonial or imperial world, i.e. of the margins of Britain, were limited to armchair travel literature. It meant that these women wrote their narratives with, in mind, the opportunity of being published and to attract readers who wished to be transported to far-away places, to lands of romance and adventure.

Clearly, students of travel literature must be aware that in order to be published, women travellers had to set themselves up as leading a particularly interesting life and as staging themselves in specific unusual position⁹. In short they had to "narrate" their life in order to attract readers. This was part of the constraints of metropolitan publishing. Therefore, the West - the backcloth to the personal adventures of these English ladies - had to answer their readers' expectations of romance and exoticism. Many of these women were more particularly writing for a female audience, as travel narratives of the Empire, at the end of the 19th century, had greatly passed into the hands of prominent female geographers or anthropologists while male travellers preferred to write first about new sport fields or about exploration in darkest Africa. Hence, if one considers the series of books found in the British Library, under the heading Canadian West, published in the 1880s-1890s, when the West was opened up to tourists, two categories stand out. On the one hand, a small number of male travellers reviewed the potential of British Columbia, the real West, in terms of sport or financial investment¹⁰. On the other hand, one finds in the catalogue, a large series of travels written by women, essentially from the upper-class, who broke away with the tradition of the middle-class Victorian travelling spinster. These ladies were not necessarily travelling unaccompanied or unchaperoned as most of them were married and travelling in company with their husbands who hardly seemed to be bothered to write a narrative of their trip. At the end of the 19th-century, travel narratives about Canada, East or West, seemed to have become a woman's occupation. Subsequently, the travel narratives analysed here are based on representations of the Canadian West from a gendered, upper-class, Anglo-centric perspective.

I – The West beyond the West, the last frontier for upper-class English visitors.

The geographical term "West" in the course of the mapping and naming of Canada was quite the conundrum. Isobel Gunn, whose legend was brought to the fore during our conference, was said to have lived "out West" in 1806 where she had worked for the Hudson's Bay

⁸ Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose eds, *Writing Women and Space, Colonial and Post-Colonial Geographies*, New York, London, The Guildford Press, 1994, p. 3.

⁹ Sara Mills, "Knowledge, Gender and Empire", in Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose eds, *Writing Women and Space, Colonial and Post-Colonial Geographies*, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

¹⁰ E. Hepole Hall, *Lands of Plenty, British North America for Health, Sport and Profit, A Book for all Travellers and Settlers*, London, Allen and Co., 1879; Clive Phillipps-Wolley, *A Sportsman's Eden*, London, Richard Bentley, 1888 and Byron R. Johnson, *Very Far West Indeed: A Few Rough Experiences on the North-West Pacific Coast*, London, Sampson Low, Marston, Low and Searle, 1872.

Company. At the time, Eastern settlers also referred to the West as the "Indian country", vaguely situating it west and north-west of the civilized and settled white colonies. After the Act of Union of 1849, long-colonized Upper Canada had even borne the name "Canadian West", for two decades, at least until the creation of the Dominion, in 1867. The federation government annexed the Northwest Territory (including British Columbia) by purchasing it from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1868. Manitoba was carved out of these territories in 1870. Waves of new emigrants were then directed to this new "western province", over the following decade. Thus, the Canadian government had opened up "the West" once the "Indian Country" had been pacified and controlled after the signing of the controversial numbered treaties with the Métis and other native tribes. Gradually, the Canadian West was gradually pushed beyond the limits of Manitoba. When British Columbia entered the Canadian Confederation in 1871, the coastal region gained the reputation of being "the West beyond the West". Eventually new provinces would fill up the "emptiness" of the "Prairies" in 1882, with districts (Assiniboia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Athabasca) being opened to welcome the continuous flow of immigrants, including American settlers, seeking some ranching land which was promoted by the Canadian government as "The Last Best West".

However "Out West" remained a popular expression in Canadian and English travelling literature as the spatial delineations were quite imprecise and confusing for the public abroad and at home. This explained the geographical vagueness found in the very first truly Canadian travel account, undertaken by a Canadian female traveller, Jane Porter, "dedicated to the ladies of Canada". She had entitled it *A Six Weeks' Tour in Western Canada*. Published in Montreal in 1865, Ms Porter provided an account of her six-week tour in Western Canada, in fact in Ontario, where she visited some south-eastern communities near the American border. In England, the first book on Western Canada written by a woman, for a female reading public, was published by the firm of Richard Bentley in 1880. Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon, Catherine Parr Traill's favourite niece, was the author of *A Trip to Manitoba*¹¹. She chose to publish it with her other famous aunt's publisher. (Indeed Susanna Moodie had been one of Bentley's successful contributors in the 1850s.) Fitzgibbon wrote about her western adventure, during which, herself and a female friend took the train and the boat in 1876 and left Ontario for two years, to settle in Manitoba. In her introduction, she tries to dispel the geographical mist in which her English readers must have been when they read the word Manitoba on the cover:

Readers who ask "Where is Manitoba?" may be answered that Manitoba is a province in the great north-west territory of the Canadian Dominion lying within the same parallels of latitude as London or Paris... While the province of Manitoba formed part of the Hudson Bay Company's territory, its resources were undeveloped but in 1869, it was transferred to the Dominion government... The original population consisted chiefly of Indian and French half-breeds.¹²

In the following years, English upper-class travellers, landing in Canada for a vacation, looked further than the emigrant-swarmed Manitoba and the American tourist sites of Banff and Jasper seeking their own glamorous West. These lady adventurers went beyond the mountains, beyond "the great divide", another popular expression to refer to the Rockies, where "there is a whole empire between the Rockies and the Coast, which is British Columbia"¹³, as Mrs Glynn Ward stated in *The Glamour of BC* in 1922.

¹¹ I do not have the space here to develop any remark on this important book. Fitzgibbon contributed to the Canadian national narrative with it. See my analysis of it in the forthcoming volume *From the Margins of Empire, Representations of Canada in 19th-century Women's Texts*.

¹² Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon, *A Trip to Manitoba*, London, R. Bentley, 1880, prefatory note, p. vi

¹³ Mrs H. Glynn-Ward, *The Glamour of BC*, Toronto, Doubleday, Doran and Gundy Ltd, 1922.

I see a major difference between the early travelogues on Canada published in England between the 1850s and 1880s (with *An Englishwoman in America*, by Isabella Lucy Bird, in 1858 or *First Impressions of the New World* by Isabella Strange Potter, 1859 or Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon, *A Trip to Manitoba*, 1880) and the travel accounts about British Columbia which I chose to study here. The latter series is essentially composed of narratives written and published by women from the upper-class. As for the earliest narratives, they were written by female travellers from the (upper) middle-class who had remained within the confines of Canada West (Ontario) or in the case of Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon, by a second-generation Canadian female writer whose representation of the North West territories (Manitoba) broke away from English representations.

British Columbia a country "fit for [upper class] women"

In the late 19th century, upper-class female visitors were the only ones who could afford to travel first-class on the CPR, from East to West. They had the impression of being embarked on an exclusive geographical journey of knowledge and experience which bore some resemblance to the European "Grand Tour" of yore. In the 1880s however, the European "Grand Tour" was no longer the exclusivity of English upper-classes, as Europe was now the destination of the affluent middle-classes and vulgar American plutocrats. Undertaking an "imperial grand tour" of the British colonies had become therefore one alternative. The "Grand Tour" of the 18th century had served one specific purpose: to teach young upper-class men about the other European courts where they befriended other aristocrats. It ultimately gave the grandee traveller the sense of belonging to an aristocratic and privileged community who ruled over Europe. The trip contributed to asserting his social position and privileges once back at home. Though the learning experience was supposed to be brought about by "confrontation", the result of the tour was a sort of reassurance of one's social and political position. It seems that this late 19th-century "imperial Grand Tour" for young upper-class travellers also served to create a sort of reassurance. In Canada, they were travelling in an expensive English-made train, travelling across British colonies and finding some exclusive summer retreat away from the vulgar crowds, in the West beyond the West, where they could be together. They had to share this small preserved wilderness with rich Americans who crowded the CPR hotels at Banff and Jasper for the summer season. But these wealthy tourists never left the civilized resorts and refused to encounter the Canadian wilderness which offered no interest to them.

According to Lady Pullen-Burry in *From Halifax to Vancouver*, "Banff is a centre for canoeing, climbing, golfing, fishing and shooting [...] They come to breathe the purest air in the world, to enjoy the sublime scenery of the everlastingly snow-capped mountains, possibly to seek recuperative benefit from the far-famed sulphur baths". She also establishes the reputation of British Columbia's mountains as a preserved domain for the wealthy upper-classes from Britain, when in 1912, she pointed to the fact that : "Living at these altitudes (in the Rockies) is not and never can be cheap when you take into consideration the necessary cost of transportation, but one can imagine nothing more delightful, or recuperating that a sojourn here amid the grandeur of nature."¹⁴ However she insisted that vulgar American tourists, - mostly "parvenus" she said - should not be left alone enjoying this scenery, as Banff and Jasper were part of the Dominion and should be reserved, of right, to British upper-class tourists. Even CPR hotels had been first designed to please true British tastes, as in Glacier

¹⁴ Lady Pullen-Burry, *From Halifax to Vancouver*, Mills and Boon Limited, 1912, p. 301.

House, one of the luxury resort hotels which she described as exquisite: "Throughout, that note of cultured luxury in tasteful furnishing, to British eyes so familiar, so restful, is nowhere more worthy of notice than in this palatial hostelry."¹⁵

In 1890 when the Duchess of St Maur published her account of the six-month vacation she spent with her husband in the interior of British Columbia, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot during a Journey in Search of Sport in the Far West*¹⁶, the province was not very well known to the British public, beside Vancouver Island and the Cariboo, the Gold Rush scene. But, many readers among upper-class sportsmen had been impressed by the long chapter devoted to British Columbia by E. Hepole Hall, (FSS), *Lands of Plenty, British North America for Health, Sport and Profit, A Book for all Travellers and Settlers*¹⁷, published in 1879. Expressing a discordant opinion among the numerous brochures published about BC mainland which described the new province as a middle-class paradise, the author was not convinced that BC was really meant for respectable settlers. Indeed, he concluded that one would have to invest a lot of money before reaping any benefit, especially if like himself, the respectable settlers did not wish to set down to work the land. His book was definitely intended for upper-class travellers as Hall devoted several enthusiastic paragraphs to the fact that BC was the place for a perfect vacation for fishing, hunting and riding, for the British elite. What British Columbia had to offer English grandees was the Englishness about it which should boost the morale of England's natural social rulers or at least reassure them about their top-stratum position in the British Empire. For once, travelling to Canada would not give them the impression of "roughing it in the bush" in settlers' communities¹⁸. The "bush" in the West had to offer some new great aesthetic perspectives which upper-class visitors sought. Emily Katherine Bates, another upper-class traveller, described Victoria and the mainland in 1887 as an extension of the homeland, in the Empire. Her imperial comment on the West beyond the West goes as follows: "We feel ourselves quite upon British ground and something in the looks and ways of the people reminded one constantly of Canada, only that British Columbia is much more beautiful."¹⁹ In short, the overall impression that was given in these travel narratives was that BC could easily become the last "natural" frontier for English upper-class men and women: they felt at home, they could hunt and do sports, in the reclusion of beautiful surroundings.

In Britain, the Scottish Highlands had offered that great potential to upper-class families in the course of the 19th century. Following the Royal couple, grandees had been used to go hunting in the Scottish Highlands. There they had built or bought luxury mansions, away from the hordes of British bourgeois tourists who were then heading to Europe, taking over France, Italy and the Swiss Alps, or visiting the once picturesque countryside of the British Lake District. In the late decades of the 19th century, upper-class sportsmen were now being chased, away from the Highlands, by new hordes of professional men, the "nouveaux riches", and

¹⁵ Lady Pullen-Burry, *From Halifax to Vancouver, op.cit.*, p. 301.

¹⁶ Somerset, Susan, Margaret McKinnon, St.Maur, Duchess, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot during a Journey in Search of Sport in the Far West*, London, John Murray, 1890.

¹⁷ E. Hepole Hall, *Lands of Plenty, British North America for Health, Sport and Profit, A Book for all Travellers and Settlers*, London, Allen and Co., 1879.

¹⁸ I'm referring here to Susanna Moodie's popular book *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852), about which upper-class female travellers often made joke. They felt Moodie was describing Canada as a petty world of would-be bourgeois, passing for social leaders in colonial communities.

¹⁹ Emily Katherine Bates, *A Year in the Great Republic*, London, Ward and Downey, 1887, p. 150.

some American plutocrats who were buying mansions and country houses off aristocrats²⁰. They too wished to hunt like the English grandes and to taste aristocratic life. Cannadine notes that: "Fox-hunting had become middle-class, and shooting was vulgar and competitive." The Highlands which had so far been the most secluded and remote "frontier" in the British Isles, where the elite could flee urbanized Britain, and upper-class men flex their muscles with the "monarch of the Glen", had now to be replaced by new retreats. Not only did the upper-classes seek to leave Europe and Britain, taken over by cheap tourists travelling on Cook Tours with John Murray tourist guides in hand, but they also deserted the long-civilized or Anglicized colonies of the Empire, and turned to wild untamed countries, where big games could be found, away from the tourist destinations easily reached by cheaper transatlantic travels. Big game hunting also meant hiring local native guides who could take you to untrodden, exotic and exclusive hunting games²¹.

Dark Africa, India, Australia and the Canadian West attracted these wealthy one-time adventurers, who could then recapture the thrill of imperial explorers and masters, as well as the luxury of space which only money could buy. In the same way as the Scottish Highlands had been invested with romance and chivalric atmosphere at the beginning of the 19th century, in the late 19th century, upper-class visitors still sought romance and chivalry away from the tumult of the bourgeois industrial world which Britain had become. Cannadine described this pleasure-seeking life as quite masculine, as these aristocrats could again flex muscles in the West for instance, as their forebears had done in the celtic fringe: "At home, they killed small birds; abroad they killed large animals. As a test of courage, chivalry, endurance, and manhood, the allure of big-game hunting was irresistible for many a would-be macho magnifico.²²" The Rockies were then invested with that "romance", and upper-class visitors answered "the allure of far-off places²³", by travelling to the still pristine and unconquered western parts of Canada. "Men may come and go", stated Emily Katherine Bates, "stages may run, hotels may be built, but the mountain themselves stand fast for ever, as grand and majestic in their beauty as when no human eye had rested upon them."²⁴

The Canadian Eastern provinces had already been taken over by middle-class travellers, as the numerous travel accounts written by women in the 1860s showed. In the eyes of these later upper-class visitors, Eastern Canada, and the Maritimes, had been desecrated by tourism. The Niagara Falls for instance were described by Lady St Maur in the same way as she would describe the evils of urbanization in Britain: "The hideous mills and glaring hotels, the tawdry shops, the noisy cab-drivers who implore to be hired, and lastly the people who offer to be guides when you want none of them – all these things harshly jar upon my mind at times when I would fain go silently on my way..." In fact, in late-century travel accounts about Canada, readers hardly found descriptions of or information for settlers about Ontario or Quebec. These new travel narratives only seemed to focus on the needs of an exclusive category of upper-class readers who were offered tips on how to travel in luxury and style,

²⁰ David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, London, Picador, 1990, p.361, p. 366, "Like deerstalking in Scotland, which was transformed and plutocratized at exactly the same time, the craze for shooting served only to undermine the country life and community still further."

²¹ Cannadine, *op.cit.*, p. 371, "So widespread was this fashion for aristocratic-adventuring and published reminiscence that in two successive volumes of the periodical *Nineteenth-Century*, for 1892 and 1893, it was possible to read the Duke of St Albans on 'Jamaica Rsurgen', Lady Galloway on 'Globe-Trotting in New Zealand', the Countess of Jersey on life in New Caledonia, Lady Grey Egerton on 'Alaska and its Glaciers', and the Earl of Meath on 'A Britisher's Impressions of America and Australasia.'"

²² Cannadine, *op.cit.*, p. 374.

²³ Cannadine, *op.cit.*, p. 370.

²⁴ Emily Katherine Bates, *A Year in the Great Republic*, p. 262.

and preserve their social privacy from vulgar tourists or Canadians. In her book written "during a journey in search of sport in the far west", the Duchess of St Maur was impressed by the seclusion of the mountains and the primeval state of the place preserved from civilization:

The following pages may [...] suggest to the reader all the wonder and pleasure I experienced among the strange and beautiful scenes they describe [...] the great primeval forests which the axe has not yet despoiled, and quaint, peaceful Indian villages, where sunsets seemed to linger [...] transfiguring all the bare and primitive surroundings with soft, deep shadows and a poetry quite their own.²⁵

In spite of the stark and rugged surroundings, she felt quite at home just as she felt at home in the Highlands to which she compares the interior of BC in her very first page: "All along the canon of the Fraser river reminded me of the scenery in the Highlands of Scotland on a large scale."²⁶ It is clear therefore that the choice of BC as an untrodden wilderness was a way for this upper-class couple, the St Maurs, to flee the masses and to look for a resort in which they could enjoy the freedom they seemed to have lost at home, surrounded as they might be by middle-class professionals mimicking their lifestyle. "We undertook our journey in search of health, sport and pleasure"²⁷, stated the Duchess in her introduction. Seeking some freedom, away from social rules, could only be fulfilled after having shed behind all the odious traces of the other world, that of urban evils with its urban poor or third-class emigrants. Once again this was a luxury lifestyle which only money could afford: "To Algernon these pleasures were not new for he had trodden many of these 'happy hunting grounds' before; still he was keen to go again and no one understands nor appreciates more than he the freedom of life in the Far West."²⁸

The "imperial tour" to the West beyond the West.

Lord and Lady St Maur, like many others after them, crossed Canada on the CPR, in their luxury coach which she recommended every "proper" visitor to the West should hire, if they wished to preserve their status and feel almost as comfortable as at home. Travelling first-class clearly set them apart from the lowly crowds of emigrants who were pent-up in the third-class coaches: "The CPR Co [...] have made their "Cars" as near perfection as possible; nothing approaching their luxury and comfort is to be found on the American Continent", states Lady St Maur. She continues: "The most comfortable way when travelling is to engage "the State Room", which accommodates two persons; there being only one of these on each car." Travelling on the CPR seems to provide these British upper-class visitors with a proper observatory of colonial life, as they could observe at great length, like anthropologists, the poor struggling emigrants. They were safely secluded behind their "State Room" windows - like British dignitaries. Appreciating the panopticon effect of the CPR, Lady St Maur mentions the results of her observations on colonial life, from a distance: "We realise for the first time the enormous difficulties the settler has to overcome in making a farm-steading out of chaos"²⁹ The train also created some cinematic effect as first-class visitors only quickly crossed the Eastern colonies and Manitoba looking at their Empire, from a master's stand point, but rarely alighting from the train to mix with the emigrants. The cinematic effect meant that the scenes they observed went by very quickly, as if they were merely entertaining

²⁵ Somerset, Susan Margaret McKinnon, St Maur, Duchess of, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot during a Journey in Search of Sport in the Far West*, London, John Murray, 1876, introduction, p. vii.

²⁶ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, op.cit., p. 72.

²⁷ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, op.cit., p. viii.

²⁸ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, op.cit., p. 2.

²⁹ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, op.cit., p. 23.

scenes designed for the sake of their pleasure-seeking. In 1912, Lady Pullen-Burry, who presented herself as a trained anthropologist, also mentioned her first-hand accounts of settlers' life in Canada to her readers as she added bravely, but briefly: "I had an opportunity to visit the steerage passengers..."³⁰

But the grandees' sympathy for the fate of the emigrants was always short lived. The Duke and the Duchess of St Maur were "glad to be on [their] way to the Rocky Mountains", discussing now the "odious tipping system" used in the West. In fact, the British visitors were all experimenting the American manners of the Canadian valets and maids on the CPR, asking for tips in exchange for service. This was a great contrast compared to England where British upper-class visitors were so clearly accustomed to being served out of respect for their social rank. Confronted to this "American custom", "tipping", the upper-class visitors came across what Lady Pullen-Burry described as the "odious democratic principles" which attested to the underdeveloped state of civilization in the New World. There, the British social hierarchy was challenged by the lower-classes who ruled and imposed their "Republican" rights and demands. However, Lady Seton, another experimented traveller, warned her fellow upper-class female adventurers that travelling West in the Rocky Mountains should not change anything to the British social hierarchy, as aristocratic visitors should resist any form of Americanization in manners. In the West, the British upper-class still ruled and should not accept to be challenged by the native guides, be they Canadian or Indian: "Dear woman who goes hunting with her husband [...] Make sure your horse wrangler knows how to cook and expects to do it [...] He is used to it, and anyway, he is paid for it. He is earning his living, you are taking a vacation." As for Lady Pullen-Burry, whose main interest was the observation of the economic prospect of the Western parts of Canada and not sports, she also insisted that this part of the continent belonged to the British Empire and as such should be under the control of British visitors whose imperial privilege should thus be acknowledged: "Banff, the paradise for loungers and loafers is becoming the great tourist, health and pleasure resort on the American continent. But this beautiful town is the property of the Dominion."³¹

Fascination and Anticipation of the Unknown.

Between 1872 and 1878, Lady Dufferin, a true royalty, kept a regular diary of her imperial tour of Canada when, as a Royal visitor, she travelled across the Dominion, with her husband, who was governor-general of Canada at the time. Her anticipation upon reaching British Columbia was high. She represented it to herself as a great adventure land, still quite mysterious, and more particularly a place where you could still sightsee wild natives. More than any other part of the Dominion, British Columbia seemed to have preserved some mystery, having hardly been written on. Like the Highlands, in the first part of the century, considered by grandees as wild and open for deeds of adventure, British Columbia took up this "last frontier" function in British imagination, at the end of the imperial century. Lady Dufferin imagined the "wild part of British Columbia" and recalled "what endless thoughts were mine!... What hopes for the future and through all what anticipation of seeing great and unknown lands!"

When one takes into consideration Lady Dufferin's whole account of her tour of Canada, one can see that her aesthetic discourse varied according to the places she visited. When in Ontario, or even in Manitoba, her description of her surroundings were very brief, resorting to the conventions of the picturesque with a clear lack of enthusiasm. The "framed" landscapes

³⁰ Lady Pullen-Burry, *From Halifax to Vancouver*, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

³¹ Lady Pullen-Burry, *From Halifax to Vancouver*, *op.cit.*, p. 300.

of Ontario seemed to be almost mundane or ordinary-looking to the British Royal eye. However, on the West coast, outside of the capital city Victoria which she found very conventionally British and almost dull for that reason, Nature and its landscapes were not tamed yet and not "man-made". On her way to Queen Charlotte's Island, leaving Victoria, she felt almost anxious as she anticipated the wild scenery, describing Vancouver Island from the boat, as the "splendid passage" from Victoria, which "I suppose is the wildest place I shall ever be at." However, the discovery of the mainland and the interior, during an excursion which the BC lieutenant-governor has prepared for her and her husband, overwhelmed her even more. She was taken on a luxury camping trip to the Selkirks, prepared for the Royal couple, where she seemed to come to life again. There her diary entries clearly reflect the vibrant emotions she experienced in the wilderness:

As we approached our camp we saw a most beautiful mountain view, down the sides of the precipitous hills, there were streaks of light green, the rest being very dark firs, light clouds of mist floating about, and the river, far below, flowing rapidly along [...] It is impossible to do justice to the day³²!

The encounter of some untamed "children of the wilderness", - a pre-arranged welcome ceremony organised by the lieutenant-governor - , caused some "excitement" in her. Only hoping to sightsee some of them, Lady Dufferin now feels the thrills of adventure life when she gets to be amidst the savages, thinking herself the first white woman to experience such an amazing scene.

We had not left our starting-point for long when, with shouts and drums and neighing of horses, we were surrounded by a cavalcade of Indians. The next half hour was one of the *greatest excitement*. I never saw anything so delightful as the sight of these men, women, children, waving their flags.³³

Lady St Maur's account of her camping and hunting trip in British Columbia, - beyond the natural frontier that the mountains represented between the civilized world and the "Indian country" -, also counts numerous vibrant descriptions of her wild surroundings. Like Lady Dufferin, the Duchess also anticipated the "mental exhilaration" of "fresh scenes" in British Columbia. The word "excitement" comes up very frequently under her pen. This was an inappropriate word for upper-class women in a published text, as it had some sexual connotation. She too was overwhelmed by her feelings, also presenting herself as the first white woman: "After many months spent in wandering, when the excitement of changing scenes and varied incidents has ended [...] the following pages may suggest to the reader all the wonder and pleasure I experienced among the strange and often beautiful scenes they describe."³⁴ The white women's anticipation was apparently heightened by the various myths and stories they seemed to have heard on their way to British Columbia. Many of these stories had been told by former Hudson's Bay Company officers, in personal narratives published in London in the 1860s.

On many occasions, Lady St Maur admits being submerged by the emotions triggered in her by the wonderful beauty of the scenes. To better appreciate these moments of physical communion with the Canadian wilderness, she sought seclusion and solitude, fearless of nature and of losing herself among what she describes as the rugged Nature. In solitude, experiencing the "deep spiritual significance" of the wilderness, as Lady Seton described the experience, she also felt overwhelmed by the vibrant primary colours encountered in this raw

³² Lady Dufferin, *My Canadian Journal, 1872-1878*, London, 1891, p. 215-216.

³³ Lady Dufferin, *My Canadian Journal, 1872-1878*, *op.cit.*, p. 218

³⁴ Somerset, Susan, Margaret McKinnon, St.Maur, Duchess, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.*, introduction, p. vii.

natural environment: yellow, green, "fiery red" and blue, and their combination: dark green, rich purple, vermilion red. Such are the unusual colours that come under the pen of women visitors. Emily Katherine Bates for instance called up the richness of "golden green", "dark blue", "crimson", "charcoal black"³⁵. The Eastern provinces and their "tamed" landscape had not been worth describing for many of them - or at least these vistas had been transferred to the page with the aesthetics of the picturesque, in washed out water colours. But the untamed landscapes of the Rockies required new colours, quite foreign to the British eye, and quite foreign to women's aesthetic language indeed. Lady St Maur admits being short for words when she tried to recapture the impressions she felt that the world around her was "alive", she was "struck by the beauty of the scene, a shingle beach, a running stream, wooded forests [...]" and you could almost hear her whisper when she described: "the richly-coloured mosses and lichens which hung in great festoons in every side, were to me new and strange, and the flash of some humming birds and bright butterflies, as they flitted by, disturbed by our presence, gave animation to the scene."

The reality of the Western landscape seems to disturb the smooth façade of European picturesque, and one could add, of European colonialism which had used picturesque - as a rhetorical strategy of appropriation - to frame or tame Canadian native landscapes for English readers in previous travel books. In her memoirs, Emily Carr clearly expressed the inappropriateness of European traditional colour codes and technique to "seize" and transcribe the reality of her British Columbian forests and totem poles. Boldly, she abandoned Impressionism which she had been taught to admire and copy, to adopt more postimpressionist manners and even the overtly sexual style and colours of Fauvism. As we know it, her daring act was not well-received in Canada where late-Victorian or Edwardian women could not pretend to another pictorial talent than the reproduction of quaint impressionist views in watercolours. However, as Emily Carr expressed it at the end of *Growing Pains*, British Columbia primeval forests and native ways and colours had dictated to her to free herself from all the European Victorian conventions. Instead she had let herself become overwhelmed by the Canadian West Coast, by her "beloved country", and sought bold colours which could render the primal energies which she felt when she was painting in the solitude of the forest, or in a native village:

I stopped grieving about the isolation of the West. I believe now I was glad we were cut off. What I had learned in other countries now began to filter back to me transposed through British Columbia seeing. Ways suitable to express other countries, countries tamed for generations, could not expect to fit big new Canada³⁶.

British women travellers all seemed to have undergone this freeing experience when in contact with the Canadian western wilderness which appeared to grow on them and to cause some emotional and physical stir. In the same sexual overtones, British explorers and adventurers were said to consider conquered land as feminine, since they used phallic symbols to render their encounter with the land which they "penetrated" or "mastered". Here, women's rendering of their emotional encounter with the Canadian Western forests was also transcribed in sexual terms, though in a more subdued way. But judging from the reading of numerous travel accounts on BC, all English women considered the land as masculine, "the rugged vast wilderness"³⁷, with "the sharp and rugged edges of the cliffs, half hidden by mist"

³⁵ Emily Katherine Bates, *A Year in the Great Republic*, *op.cit.*, p. 152.

³⁶ Emily Carr, *Growing Pains*, Toronto, Irwin Publishing, 1946, p. 239, see F. Le Jeune, "Emily Carr et la quête d'une identité individuelle", in *Identités individuelles, identités collectives*, Gabrielle Chamarat ed., Presse Universitaire de Caen, 1998, pp.161-172.

³⁷ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

which "looked striking and impressive."³⁸ The land looked overpowering, as it did not immediately reveal itself to the explorer, as it blocked entrance to the deep forest: "fallen timber obstructed our way and had to be climbed over every yard". Besides, even if the female traveller sought to control it, she could never master it as the land clearly resisted control or appropriation. This reflection could lead scholars to investigate the sexual perception Victorian men had of the West which they never tried to conquer, but which they used to flex muscles against and to assert their virility.

Women never felt insecure in the woods, though they hardly found some familiar scenes, animals, or bearings. To the contrary, Lady St Maur relished the depiction of series of wild scenes that served to impress her female readers at home, "deserted lakes and buffalo wallows become more frequent, and are favourite resorts of water-fowl of all kinds. Swans, cranes, geese, pelicans and ducks of many varieties all frequent them and snip, plover, curlew and prairie chicken are also to be met with in this part of the country, while now and again the wandering coyote may be seen skulking on his lonely way."³⁹ These were scenes she captured before passing beyond the "great divide". Soon, she replaced these animals in her narrative, by wolves, bears and native Indians as the hunting party approached the hunting grounds in the interior. Lady St Maur was in fact enhancing her female fragility in the Western landscape which was described by her as overly masculine. She seemed to turn herself into a sexual object at the mercy of danger, while seeking the excitement it procured.

In Lady Dufferin's and the Duchess of St Maur's narratives, the encounter with Native people in their "wild" environment, - those uncivilized Indians whom late 18th century Hudson's Bay Company explorers had written home about -, represented key-moments. Beyond the Rocky Mountains, authentic and genuine Indians were to be found. They had nothing in common with the half-civilized unpicturesque natives encountered at CPR stations: "Until after Winnipeg is reached, most of the Indians are dressed in the same way as the white people, which costume does not at all suit the noble red man."⁴⁰

In 1836, Catherine Parr Traill in *The Backwoods of Canada* - like Anna Brownell Jameson in 1838 - had admired these natives for their great ability to adopt white civilized manners, - thus paying homage to the work of missionaries. In the 1890s, the red man, a *rare avis* in the Eastern provinces, was hailed for his wild features. He was still leaving "in great primeval forests which the axe has not yet despoiled". While cleared land and the soon-to-come disappearance of the native race were looked forward to by English-Canadian settlers in the new western districts, upper-class imperialists seemed to consider colonization and assimilation as unnecessary. In Canada, where some genuine red men were left, they provided English women visitors with excitement and novelty. They were part of the romantic wild scenes of Canada they had read about in exploration books and juvenilia. To assimilate them would deprive the upper-class adventurer-cum-tourist from these exclusive and rare scenes: "quaint and peaceful Indian villages, where sunsets seemed to linger...transfiguring all the bare and primitive surroundings with soft, deep shadows and a poetry quite their own", expressed Lady St Maur also stating that "to me the mental exhilaration of fresh scenes and fresh faces was a continual delight."⁴¹

³⁸ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.*, p. 26.

³⁹ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.*p.31

⁴⁰ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.*p. 26.

⁴¹ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.*, introduction

This disposition was typical of late English visitors to the New World whose main interest in the tour was to be entertained, seeking "fresh interest" and declaring themselves disappointed or bored by scenery when it lacked exoticism. Central to the pleasure-seeking trip was the need to have one's expectations or clichés met by reality. Images of the romantic character of the disappearing Noble Savage-cum-Red Man was circulating in late 19th century Europe in travelling shows. There Buffalo Bills paraded among pacified Indian warriors. Mrs Emily Katherine Bates in her popular *A Year in the Great Republic* published in London in 1887 stated, on her way to BC, - before actually encountering any Native -, that according to her own readings: "Indians were born cruel and treacherous and remain so to the end of the chapter, and that extermination, not education, was the only possible treatment for them."⁴² However, she had to gaze at or sightsee one of these cruel savage, while visiting the West.

What seemed to particularly please the British eye was the fact that the natives of British Columbia were potentially still dangerous Red Men. From the 1860 onwards, Paul Kane's paintings which were popular in North America and Europe contributed to this representation of the Native man as half savage, half docile. Kane's depictions of fearful warriors, particularly the portrait "Kee-akee-ka-saa-ka-wow" (oil on canvas, c. 1848-1852), a close-up of the painted face of a Native chief in full war attire, with an "eagle nose" - sketched when the painter was summering among a native tribe near North Saskatchewan River, but painted in his Toronto art studio -, must have greatly influenced the imagination of British visitors before their westward trip. Kane strongly stressed the ugliness of the face of the native chiefs. Like him, women visitors also insisted on the "ugliness" of native traits. Here is Mrs St Maur's rendering of "Our Hawati Indians [...] three out of four were singularly ugly and flat faced, "Chuckumlilac" had the eagle nose typical of the Red Indian, his straight black hair was cut square on his neck."⁴³, after the fashion represented by Kane. Kane's great use of native colours overemphasized the blood-red colours used by natives in their war paints. The apparently calm taciturn noble savage depicted in the famous "Kee-akee-ka-saa-ka-wow" portrait by Kane, hardly seemed to counter his anger and fierce, thus resembling one of the Hawati Indians who guided the St Maurs through the forest. When addressed by the Duchess, one of them was described as quite near savagery: "He carried his Winchester rifle; as we paddled along I asked him which he preferred, his rifle or his squaw and judging from the way he hugged the weapon when the question was interpreted to him, the answer was clear."

Part of the "greatest excitement" felt by both Lady Dufferin, Lady St Maur and Lady Bates came from the contact with these hardly pacified natives whose undecipherable attitudes could soon turn against white men and particularly against the vulnerable white female visitors. Mrs St Maur often reminds her readers about this smouldering threat which she keeps in mind while observing her native guides who cook for her and sleep near them at night: "The Indians, more especially the Blackfeet and Bloods – are great warriors when they get on the war-path..."⁴⁴ Without over-exaggerating, it must have been quite clear to their female readers that the "great thrill" these white women experienced also came from the thought of what could happen if promiscuity awakened their animal senses of these native guides and if they began looking at them, single women as sexual objects.

⁴² Emily Katherine Bates, *One Year in the Great Republic*, *op.cit.*, p. 67.

⁴³ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.*p. 85.

⁴⁴ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.*p. 77.

II - The West and its cross-dressing ritual: sexual rite of passage for English female visitors

In her preface to *The West Beyond the West*⁴⁵, historian Jean Barman, writing in 1991, evoked her childhood dream about British Columbia, when she was growing up in Winnipeg. She recalled the powerful lasting myth of the West in Canadian lore, evoking here the mysterious world which it represented, in her youth, in the imagination of Canadians. The West was the kingdom of unconquered Nature and the sacred ground of first nations, the land only a few initiated adventurers had access to:

I dreamt of British Columbia. Totem poles and snow-capped mountains symbolized the west coast province. I fell in love sight unseen with this west beyond the west. [...] British Columbia continues to fascinate, in part because it so often presents an enigma. Reality and perception, the geographical entity and its social constructs, Vancouver as a cosmopolitan city amidst one of the world's last frontiers – they all intertwine with a mysterious, fascinating whole that is British Columbia.

In the course of the 19th-century, there had been a strong fascination for the stories of the West in Britain. In the imagination of English readers, who had perused Hudson's Bay Company narratives, a number of which had been published in the 1850s, the Canadian forests were synonymous with a man's world. In late-19th century, a number of female travellers crossed the Atlantic ocean, they traversed the Canadian provinces from East to West on the newly-built Canadian Pacific Railway to seek adventure and a peep at this man's world. Their journey of adventure and experience did not take them to the new Canadian west, but to the west beyond the west, beyond "the great divide" of the Rockies, where the interior of British Columbia was still an enigma: the world of Red Men and of English upper-class sportsmen. These lady travellers published their narratives of the West in England and furthered the myth by representing it as some inaccessible man's world where only a few white women were admitted, providing that they passed some rituals.

Women like Lady St Maur, Lady Seton, Lady Dufferin joined their husband on hunting trips in the British Columbia forests. Once there, not only did they experience the freedom that white men had when away in the mountains, on this "last frontier", but they all revealed the secrets of a world of male camaraderie. On these trips, they also experienced some promiscuity with the Red Men who accompanied the party as guides. None of these experiments left them unscathed as they returned to the civilized world transformed into "New Women". At the end of the 19th century, therefore the Canadian wilderness still exercised a great power of attraction over white English women who crossed the Atlantic and now the whole North American continent to undergo some ritualistic experiences which transformed them mentally and sexually.

I consider these women's erotic fascination for the West, which runs through their description of the Red Men and some male ranchers, as similar to the fascination that men had developed towards the Orient in mid-19th century. In the 1840s for instance, many English male travellers went after the legends of harem women, or veiled Arabian

⁴⁵ Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1991, preface, p. vii.

princesses they had fantasized about. Men often had to wait for white women to enter hammams or Zenana in order to read even more enticing accounts about oriental women. One of the first white woman travellers, since Lady Montagu, to be admitted beyond the closed door of Oriental homes, Fanny Parkes described scenes in the Zenana and advertised them in the title of her narrative. In the same way, these white women in the West were entering a man's world, revealing to their female readers the secret stories of male camaraderie and the experiences they underwent in the company of men. Late Victorian women were still maintained in sexual ignorance. According to Gail Hawkes, the backbone of Victorian sexuality was "the successful promotion of a version of women's sexuality, an ideal of purity and sexual innocence well fitted to the separation of spheres that underpinned the patriarchal power of the new ruling class."⁴⁶ This separation of the spheres maintained all the way to British Columbia, in Banff and Jasper luxury hotels, disappeared when they reached the forests, a few days' ride from the civilized world. This explains the feeling of freedom that these women enjoyed once they left behind their world of social conventions and finally shared the exciting experience of camping outdoors with men who were there to protect them (their husband) and to serve them (their Native guides, their cook and their horse wrangler). In this unusual position they were both courtesan and mistress, and could indulge some erotic fantasy, as they were transgressing the Victorian sexual and gender codes in this wild environment. While female sexual autonomy was still considered illicit in the public sphere⁴⁷, beyond the mountains, they could undress and don men's clothes, and act as men or as fragile objects for the time their holiday lasted.

Besides the natives' presence, the fact that they were the only white women among a hunting party of men, also procured them some new sensations. For the first time they were allowed to share and be part of the mysterious world of male camaraderie. For British female travellers in the West had come to Canada after having read about or heard of the stories of the Old West and of the "Indian County" as told by Hudson's Bay Company men. These men impersonated true chivalric heroes of the West. In England, the legendary story of Lady Simpson was well-known and a fresh fact in the mind of readers, since her husband had published his memoirs in the 1860s . In 1833, she had been the first woman to travel by canoe with Native guides from Montreal to Fort Rupert to live with her husband, HBC Governor George Simpson. Her legendary canoe trip to the Northwest - hardly two days away from Montreal -, represented for her "the boundary between the civilized and the savage worlds."⁴⁸ She was the first white woman to penetrate the wilderness, to enter the "Indian country" and to live in a HBC fort, a man's world. Germaine Warkentin notes that "her journals capture the mounting sense of danger as she travelled deeper into the territories, although she seemed uncertain as to whether the greater threat lay with Nature or with the 'wild and savage habits of the Aborigines.'⁴⁹"

This explains why Lady St Maur⁵⁰, or Lady Dufferin⁵¹, also described themselves as the "first white woman up the river"⁵², echoing and recapturing in a way Lady Simpson's

⁴⁶ Gail Hawkes, *A Sociology of Sex and Sexuality*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1996, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Gail Hawkes, *A Sociology of Sex and Sexuality*, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

⁴⁸ This extract from Lady Simpson's private journal is quoted by Germaine Warkentin ed., *Canadian Exploration Literature*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1993, p. 387. Her journal has never been published.

⁴⁹ Warkentin, *op.cit.*, p. 388.

⁵⁰ Somerset, Susan, Margaret McKinnon, St.Maur, Duchess, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot during a Journey in Search of Sport in the Far West*, London, John Murray, 1890.

adventure deed. Lady St Maur asked to visit the old Hudson's Bay forts on the way to the Rockies, reading, when she could, "the old HBC's journals and entry-books", and praising their role in their peaceful interaction with the Natives, oblivious of their imperial role in the West: "They were the pioneers of civilization in the Northwest. They were the first to open up an organized system of trade in this wild region, and always dealt honestly with the Indians, keeping good store, and by just dealing earned their respect."⁵³ Female travellers seemed to have anticipated greatly the encounter of rough men like the HBC heroes who lived in the solitude of their forts in the midst of the Indian country. BC interior clearly represented the world of male camaraderie, with its own codes, its ruggedness, its roughness, a world of adventure which had until then been the preserve of a few courageous men and treacherous Natives.

On a farm near Calgary, Lady St Maur was struck by the manly attitude of two former English men now transformed into cowboys. She only discovered after having a few words with them that they were in fact English. To her, they passed for real Canadian ranchers after a few years spent in the West: "Two ranchers came to luncheon to day – true types I should think, of "western men"...they look rough."⁵⁴ As for Lady Pullen-Burry's account of British Columbia, in 1912, the North West Mounted Police men deserved all her attention for the same reasons. For these women, the Rockies represented a forbidden world until then, a sort of male Zenana. For instance, the Duchess of St Maur described numerous situations when she was "the only woman" among men, suggesting that event "ponies and dogs 'out West' seem shy of women", as she "had to conceal any objectionable self behind some bushes" in order to let two mule teams go by, as the animals were afraid of her "unusual appearance". She clearly relished these moments when she felt like the female outsider, and the sexual intruder in this man's world. She recounts some occasions when she was left alone with the native guides. One time, she explained to her female readers that she had stayed at the camp for a few days when her husband had gone hunting with a friend. She was then left to the care of the native cook and native guide, who took her fishing. The two Native men taught her how to catch salmon for instance. She enjoyed the moment which she would never have experienced in Victorian England where a married woman could not have stayed alone with two men for many days. She was fascinated by the native men and the way they looked after her and cooked for her, in the same way as "memsahibs" felt troubled by the presence of their Indian servant boys in many narratives of the Orient.

In order to observe this Western world for her female readers, but also to adapt themselves to life in the wilderness, white women had to adopt some manly manners in order not to disappoint her husband and his party of guides and hunters, and not to shock animals and men by being too womanly. Lady Seton and Lady St Maur both transformed themselves physically into Western ranchers, donning the entire male outfit, and getting rid of the "good thick skirt" over petticoats so warmly recommended by Isabella Bird in her latest book on the American Far West, published in London in 1876. Crossing the border between civilization and wilderness enabled them to cross another sexual border by cross-dressing. Lady St Maur as well as Lady Seton, the

⁵¹ Lady Dufferin, *My Canadian Journal, 1872-1878*, London, 1891.

⁵² "I was the first lady who had been so far up the river" said Lady St Maur after a hunting trip in the Selkirks

⁵³ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.*p. 63.

⁵⁴ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.*p. 47

author of the *Woman Tenderfoot*⁵⁵, - a manual destined to upper-class or affluent young ladies who wished to follow their young husband to the West on hunting or camping trips - both enjoyed this cross-dressing. They quickly adopted: "The usual dress out here is a blue flannel shirt, with no collar, but a coloured handkerchief tied loosely around the neck, a buckskin skirt, a pair of leather "shaps" with fringes down the seams, worn over trousers, boots and broad brimmed felt hat with a leather band round it."⁵⁶ In fact, in one of the first pages of her book, the publisher added a sketch in which Lord and Lady St Maur are represented posing in their riding outfit. Mrs St Maur is wearing a blue flannel shirt, with a coloured handkerchief tied loosely around the neck, the buckskin skirt, leather "shaps" worn over bloomers, topped with the broad brimmed felt hat which covered her hair (in a bun). The narrator passed for one of the men, after having successfully undergone one of the rites of passage of this man's world.

The West had overcome her white English female ways, or she had succumbed to the masculine surroundings. Besides, cross-dressing was not the only transgression that women could commit in the wilderness. Passing for a "tenderfoot", a young cowboy, also meant adopting male manners. Hunting and riding in the West forced you to adopt the western style of riding, i.e. across the saddle, like men and native women. Indeed riding side-saddle, according to Lady Seton, made "twice as difficult for women to mount and dismount by herself". A further sign of independence and fearlessness would be to adopt a man's saddle which according to the expert rider Lady Seton, might be slightly strange and dangerous at first but "the accomplishment of a thing depends largely upon one's mental attitude." In short, only strong-minded and intelligent women could overcome their fears - and their sexual prejudice -, and prove their gusto to the rest of womanhood and to the men that accompany them. Lady Seton highly recommended that women adopted a man's saddle if the lady rider would not want to always experience "the weariness of being the weakest in the party."⁵⁷ Clearly, all womanly attitude had to be shed along with the female riding habit. Godiva was not riding naked but in a flannel shirt and leather "shaps" which was even more erotic than nakedness.

All this cross-dressing could only be possible in the seclusion of the mountains, in a man's world, as, Lady Seton deplored, the social conventions back East or in Europe did not admit that an upper-class lady rode astride though "the glory of it" was that "you can go galloping...with never a thought that the trot is more proper, and your course, untrammelled by fenced-in roads, is straight to the setting sun."⁵⁸ Victorian society would surely condemn this habit of riding astride as "vulgar", but British Columbia lay very far away indeed from social conventions from which women could at last break away and happily transgress for a few weeks. As for Lady St Maur she felt "all the exhilaration that freedom gives in these untrodden solitudes"⁵⁹, but when left alone, she kept her "riffle hitched to my saddle, and felt happier with it there", like any man would. Lady Seton suggests to her female readers that following their husband to the West should not be undertaken out of marital duty but quite the contrary "for (their) enjoyment". Only independent women, aware of their own potential and needs, would feel, Lady Seton said, particularly alive "out in the mountains, with the wild west wind

⁵⁵ Grace, Thompson Seton (Lady), *A Woman Tenderfoot*, London, Toronto, G.N Morang, 1900

⁵⁶ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.*p. 47

⁵⁷ Lady Seton, *A Woman Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.*, p. 56

⁵⁸ Grace, Thompson Seton (Lady), *A Woman Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

⁵⁹ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.* p. 48

for companion and the big blue sky for a roof, than sitting in a whitewashed bedroom of the summer hotel variety." To this, she adds that dressed in man's wear, riding a man's saddle gave her the occasion, at last, to experience her own self when she was "under the spell of the West", when "all these (civilization and its conventions) fade away...and in their place comes the joy of being at least a healthy, if not an intelligent animal." In the wilderness of British Columbia, in the rugged mountains and the primeval forests, upper-class women seemed to experience the excitement of being in touch with their inner selves, and of fulfilling their physical needs for freedom.

Lady Seton, in *A Woman Tenderfoot*, also insists on the fact that "out west", because upper-class women are freed from the conventions of their world, they can become "New Women". Clearly, upper-class women were not really part of the movement that initiated the "revolt of the daughters" either in England or in North America in the 1880s. New Women were to be found first among the middle-class daughters who tried to free themselves from the Victorian conventions and started riding bicycles, doing physical exercise or visiting friends without chaperons. Upper-class women were late joining this trend but many younger women of this caste seemed to have managed to experience some freedom in going riding and hunting with their husbands in the "wild wild west" as Lady St Maur imagined this part of the world. However only bright and energetic women could successfully survive in the wilderness of the Rocky Mountains at least beyond the great CPR hotels of Banff and Jasper, as Lady Seton suggested. What it took was stamina and the will to leave behind comfort and luxury, and the dullness of such a life in a "gilded cage", an expression also used by early 20th century suffragettes. Emily Katherine Bates⁶⁰ also warned women travelling on their own, beyond the domestic world of the luxury hotels, that they had to leave behind all mannerism pertaining to traditional women. In order to enter the wilderness, she declared, the female traveller must display the features of an "independent" woman, as "no porter is to be had", "it is necessary if possible to reduce one's hand baggage within such limits that it can be carried *independently*."⁶¹

However, it also happens that this newly acquired freedom, this exhilarating feeling of having entered a man's world, brings some of these women back to their own sexual status. This might also be part of the "excitement" they conveyed to their pages about the wilderness and its savages. White women were clearly disturbed by the "Red Men"'s immobile faces which often let the travellers wonder what sort of thought crossed their mind. The excitement came from the fact that the "savage" was never far from the "noble man". The narrators at times seem to represent these native men as a threat to their femininity. Sexual tension or eroticism which Victorian male travellers encountered in the Orient in mid-19th century, was now experienced by Victorian women travellers in the West.

White women in the West were not shy when it came to observe the natives they encountered on their trip. Red men were closely observed and described by them. Lady St Maur and Lady Dufferin gave details on the natives' height, muscular strength, or about their eyes. Looking at the natives for the purpose of giving an exact rendition of their looks and attire was part of the imperial white woman's privilege, a sort of imperial gaze. At home, women would not gaze at men, as this would be too sexually

⁶⁰ Emily Katherine Bates, *A Year in the Great Republic*, London, Ward and Downey, 1887.

⁶¹ Emily Katherine Bates, *A Year in the Great Republic*, *op.cit.*, p. 281 (italics in the original text).

charged and therefore improper. Once again, beyond the mountains, scrutinizing native men became possible. However, on two occasions, Lady St Maur felt gazed back at. She felt ill-at-ease and very troubled when, for instance, two Native men gazed at her like a sexual object. The first time it happened she seemed quite amused by the daring natives: "They had only come to look at us on the way down the trail, 'white squaws' being still a curiosity in the Kootenay Valley". However she felt threatened when some other day two Indian "warriors" stopped by the ranch of one of her husband's friends when she was alone with a maid, Adela:

We called the Indians as I wanted to buy some of their ornaments... The Indians spoke to each other all the time, I heard one of them say in Chinook "that there were a lot of Clotchmans (women) about". Adela whispered "Let them go, it's time they went away". I saw she was uneasy and I was not sorry when they rode off.⁶²

After they had gone, she began to experience fear and loneliness as the men were away. Such were the limits of her sexual fantasy. Finally, upon her husband's return, the fantasy life of passing for a man among other men came to an end when her husband's friend refused that she went with them to hunt bears, as he believed she would "diminish the chances of sport." She was then sent back, or dismissed, to Banff CPR hotel.

There, in order to escape the conventions of her narrow, "ridiculous" world, her mind would fly back to the experiences that seemed to have transformed her, "I close my eyes and think of all we have seen and done", "I thoroughly enjoyed the free life in the mountains."⁶³ The genteel female visitor to the "alien" and "manly" West was regenerated and transformed by her six-month vacation, as she considered her social world as uninteresting and far too limited for someone who had transgressed all the limits and conventions of her world. But, sexual division and gendered spheres seemed to triumph for the time being, waiting for her return to the West on her next vacation. However during this short-lived experience in the West, they had made theirs "flannel shirt and liberty", the so-called rallying cry of Western men, and they had found themselves empowered by their confrontation to the wilderness, and having experienced some erotic thrill too, a male privilege in a man's world. Writing home their experience, they reinforced the myth of the Canadian West as the "last frontier" for socially-constrained English women. This imaginary land for New Women, where borders could be traversed and transgressed, influenced female readers, all the way into the new generation of upper-class or upper-middle-class new women travellers. In 1924, for instance, a young upper-class lady, Mary Bosanquet wrote a best-seller which went through several editions both in London and in North America, and was translated in several languages. In *Canada Ride. Across Canada on Horseback*⁶⁴, Bosanquet, who had dreamed of leaving suffocating London for a place where women could be alone and experience freedom on their horse, enthusiastically recounted her riding account across British Columbia and its magical effects on her womanhood. It would be impossible to conclude that the imaginary West had been necessary to the recognition of new women's power and needs, in England, but at least for the female readers who dreamed of more freedom, intellectually and sexually, these narratives had been necessary playful disruptions.

⁶² Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.*, p. 192.

⁶³ Duchess of St Maur, *Impressions of a Tenderfoot*, *op.cit.*, p. 212.

⁶⁴ Also published under the title, *Saddle Bags for Suitcases*, in the numerous editions in England and North America. Originally published in London, by Hodder and Stoughton, 1924.

In this article, we have reviewed the different imaginary responses that English women developed when they experienced a prolonged exposition to the Canadian wilderness. Each woman's account revealed the magical or secret powers that the woods or the forests exercised on their female self. The first English women settlers could not resist the transformation of their English self into a more native self. Once they had passed the rituals of the native land, which consisted in abandoning their social prejudices and their English manners, they could then contribute to the elaboration of a cohesive society with its own native traits and identity. As for later transatlantic pilgrims, the upper-class white women in the Canadian West, they too sought the wilderness' powerful rites in order to experience a deep transformation of their constrained self. For a few weeks, as "women tenderfoot", i.e. "woman passing for cowboy", a form of sexual "in-betweenness", they could cross the borders of conventions and transgress gendered and sexual codes in the Canadian "last frontier" whose wilderness and rugged nature had forced them to don men's attire and adopt men's attitude. In both cases, Canada was constructed by English women, settlers or visitors, as a great textual site for the exploration of "otherness" which they conceived as the reversal projection of their constrained English female self.

The West that these women projected and constructed for their female readers resembled a mythical fantasy world for English women⁶⁵ where they could experience a life of adventure in a world of male camaraderie, where they too could put their endurance and their emotions to the test. The West was seen, at least for the time that their vacation lasted as a man's world that could be shared by fearless independent women. I find this representation of the West had a lasting impact on young English women, at least well into the first part of the 20th century. These personal narratives must have been read with alacrity and excitement by young upper-class women at home, dreaming of rides to freedom, physically and socially. This is perceptible in later representations of British Columbia found in the travel book by Lady Mary Bosanquet, *Canada Ride. Across Canada on Horseback*⁶⁶, for instance. In 1924, this young upper-class lady, who dreamed of leaving suffocating London for places where women could be alone with their horse and themselves, published her enthusiastic woman's experience of British Columbia, in London.

As for Canadian women, Catherine Cavanaugh underlines that if some of them saw the West as liberating them from conventional femininity, their assertions of equal status with the frontiersmen had the opposite effect, at least until the first two decades of the 20th century: "By denying the differences sex difference made, women were drawn further into dominant gender conventions." If they chose to transcend the boundaries of middle-class femininity, they found themselves denigrated by men, and if they "insisted upon their female specificity, they were barred from an autonomous political authority."⁶⁷ However, one of these Canadian women, a great social activist, Emily Murphy, a member of the Equal Franchise League with

⁶⁵ I developed the erotic and fantasy charge that women found in the promiscuity of men (Red Indians and cowboy guides) in my article, "Rites of Passage in Transatlantic Journeys", in Charlotte Stirling ed., *The Politics and Poetics of Passage in Canadian and Australian Culture and Fiction*, Bern, New York, Peter Lang, 2005 (forthcoming).

⁶⁶ Also published under the title, *Saddle Bags for Suitcases*, in the numerous editions in England and North America. Originally published in London, by Hodder and Stoughton, 1924.

⁶⁷ Catherine Cavanaugh, *op.cit.*, p. 208.

Nellie McClung, as well as the founder of the Federated Women's Institute for Rural Women, became the first woman magistrate in the British Empire, at Edmonton in 1916. Her name was better known by the early generation of 20th century young Canadian women after she published *Janey Canuck and the West*⁶⁸ which celebrated Western Canada and its openings for young women. A few decades after upper-class English visitors, Canadian New Women could also dream of the West and its renewed opportunities for young women. Janey Canuck, in "her flannel shirt" is one of the Canadian cultural symbol of the West today.

⁶⁸ Emily F. Murphy, *Janey Canuck and the West*, Toronto, Cassell, 1910.