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TRAINS THROUGH THE PLAINS

THE GREAT PLAINS LANDSCAPE OF VICTORIAN WOMEN TRAVELERS

KAREN M. MORIN

Arriving in San Francisco by the Overland Route impresses us as a coming back to the world again after a lapse into the wilderness. For, in leaving the wonderful Phoenix City of Chicago for the West, it seemed that we left the world behind; in Omaha, our next stage, we felt as if we had got to the outside fringe of civilisation and cultivation, and wondered vaguely what could be beyond? into what wild exile were we about to plunge?

—Iza Duffus Hardy, *Between Two Oceans*¹

The young British novelist Iza Hardy, during her travels to America in 1881-83, anticipated the American West as *terra incognitae*, a place completely beyond civilization. Like many other British tourists to America in the late nineteenth century, Hardy traveled extensively throughout the East Coast and South,

and took a transcontinental journey to the Pacific Coast by train (Fig. 1). Out of her American travels Hardy produced *Between Two Oceans: Or, Sketches of American Travel* (1884) and a book about Florida. Hardy's coverage of the western portion of her American journey followed the transect the railroad did, with chapters of her book titled accordingly.² And like many other books in the genre, her travelogue includes extensive coverage of scenic attractions such the Rocky Mountains and western cities such as Denver, Salt Lake City, and Sacramento, but very little discussion of the central prairies and plains between Chicago and Denver. The minor attention Hardy did pay to the central grasslands reflects disappointment and boredom with the scenery. She wrote of the oppression she experienced during her "four long days and nights of speeding across the seemingly limitless desolation

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of the prairies" (136-37) on her way west, during which time she apparently never left the train.

In this paper I examine how a group of fourteen well-to-do British women travel writers like Iza Hardy responded to the central prairies and plains between Chicago and Denver during their tours of the American West in the late nineteenth century. These women were among the many wealthier British subjects who took "grand tours" of North America by train just after the first transcontinental railway line from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast was completed in 1869. During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, travelers of all types, including tourists and travel writers, were for the first time provided with a relatively fast, comfortable means of transportation coast to coast. Traveling at the rate of twenty miles per hour and stopping at 250 stations along the way, the portion of the trip from Chicago to San Francisco (where most were headed), if direct, would have taken six days.³ Many of the British women rode in the Pullman cars of the Union Pacific railroad, sleeping cars designed specifically for long distance travel. As most of the women traveled by train straight through the region, they had little direct engagement with the land they were describing. However, a small number of them spent more time on the prairies and experienced the environment more intimately. Lady Rose Pender, for instance, traveled to the American West with her husband to inspect the family's investments in the cattle industry. Pender camped out in Wyoming and Nebraska and framed her narrative around the "search for a roundup."⁴ Another traveler, Maria Theresa Longworth, the Viscountess of Avonmore, during her twenty-thousand mile tour of North America in 1872-73, reported that she stopped at nearly every town, settlement, and fort in the West (including Fort Laramie) during her seven-week stay there.⁵

These women expressed a wide range of motivations for travel. Many wrote of traveling west simply for pleasure's sake or to view the region's scenic attractions. Lady Mary

Duffus Hardy, Iza's mother, a novelist popular with American audiences, took a trip similar to her daughter's in 1880-81. Lady Hardy reported that she was drawn "by the magnet of the Golden Gate. . . . That is our Mecca—the shrine whereon we are prepared to lay our heart's devotion."⁶ Twenty-three-year-old Mrs. Howard Vincent, on a world tour with her husband in 1884-85, wrote that she too hurried across the continent, "fearful lest time should fail us at last for the Yosemite Valley." The Baroness Lady Howard of Glossop reported "having a little time to spare" for a pleasure trip throughout North America with her brother in the autumn of 1894. Rose Kingsley, of the prominent English clerical and literary family (and cousin to the more famous world traveler Mary Kingsley), described crossing the Atlantic as a Church of England representative to an 1871 convention in Baltimore. She later traveled west to visit her brother who was living in Colorado Springs. Other women wrote of expressly intending to collect material for books. Emily Faithful, a leading English suffragist, writer, philanthropist, and businesswoman, wrote *Three Visits to America* (1884), which first appeared as a compilation of articles published in English and American magazines and newspapers. Her stated purpose for travel was "to write about the changed position of women in the nineteenth century . . . how America is trying to solve the problem."⁷

While these and other women travelers expressed rather diverse goals for their Atlantic crossings, their books nevertheless closely follow the late-nineteenth-century travelogue genre and are in fact quite similar not only in structure and format but to some extent in content as well.⁸ And while attention paid to the central prairies and plains sometimes occupies only several pages of a 200- or 300-page book, these travel writers responded to that landscape in a wide range of ways. Some responded emotionally, whether bored by the uninterrupted horizon or enraptured by the wide open spaces. Others expressed admiration for certain aspects of the landscape, such

as the glorious color and light displays in sunrises and sunsets, or they found fascination in monotony or barrenness—both views consistent with nineteenth-century romantic conventions for the beautiful and the sublime. Other travelers responded more empirically to the landscape, writing about buffalo and prairie dogs and the natural history of the area. Still others focused more of their attention on what the grasslands held for the future economic development of the region, particularly in farming and ranching. Often the same individual responded in multiple ways to the landscape.

My purpose in examining these seldom-explored travel accounts is to locate some of the social and cultural influences that may have combined to shape the women's varying responses to the rural grasslands. Train transportation itself deserves attention, in that responses to the landscape rested to some degree on the type of engagement with the land—whether firsthand and intimate or detached, from the train. Romantic literary conventions of the time seem to especially combine in the narratives as well, producing particular aesthetic responses to the landscape. And the women's social positioning, as professional- or upper-class women who had to some degree "escaped" the confines of Victorian domesticity through travel, also seems relevant to the ways in which the vast, often uninterrupted horizons of the prairies and plains were portrayed.

While my main focus is on the outdoor, rural landscapes of the central grasslands, I begin my discussion with the interior "landscapes" of the trains themselves, to which the women's attention was frequently drawn on their journeys westward.⁹ For my main purposes, though, I focus on the outdoor and rural prairies in western Iowa and Missouri and the plains of Kansas, Nebraska, and eastern Colorado and Wyoming—to form a homogeneous "grassland" zone, what the women themselves almost exclusively referred to as prairie. These central grasslands were primarily defined for these writers as the geographic

transect that the railroad followed between Chicago and Denver (though not incidentally, the writers oftentimes failed to note *exactly* which prairie landscape they were describing along that transect). The prairies and plains experienced different periods of settlement. A prairie is generally characterized by tall grasses intermixed with forested and hilly zones, with richer soil and more plentiful rainfall, while the plains tend to be more level, treeless, semi-arid, with short grasses. However, these differences went largely unnoticed by the travelers. The rural landscape on both sides of the Missouri River in the late nineteenth century appeared largely as an uncultivated and unaltered grassland: vast, unbounded, lacking in scale and open to the sky. These are the kinds of features the travel writer noticed.

TRAINS, PLAINS, AND TOURISM

Historian Robert Athearn argues that during the late nineteenth century, after transportation and accommodations became available, "no place on the earth's surface seemed to offer more all around attractions to the British than the American West." They came to invest their money in mining enterprises in the mountains or in agricultural or ranching ventures on the high plains; they came for the "bracing climate which attracted both the healthy and the ailing"; they came for hunting or fishing expeditions; and some came simply out of curiosity.¹⁰ Large numbers of Britishers who had settled in the Rockies provided focal points for some travelers' journeys (Rose Kingsley's, for instance). Whether the Rockies were a destination or an important stop on a longer journey en route to the Pacific, they must have served as a looming backdrop for women traversing the prairies and plains and modified their impressions of them accordingly. McFarling asserts that travelers whose destinations were points west looked upon the plains as a barrier to get across as quickly as possible.¹¹ In fact while she was traveling between Omaha and Cheyenne and

yearning for San Francisco, Lady Hardy found little worthwhile in the prairie landscape:

[We] look out upon the vast prairie-lands, which roll before and around us like a gray-green, motionless sea. The prospect is wild and dreary . . . The scene grows monotonous; nay, wearisome. Nothing but the grey-green prairie-land and bright blue sky; the novelty of it has worn off. (93)

Her return trip from California was more wearisome still:

We rest one more night in Denver, and start early next morning for St. Louis, via Kansas City. We soon feel as though we have left all the beauty and brightness of the world behind; for anything more dreary than the road thither cannot well be imagined. The whole day long, from morning till night, we look out upon the dull, uninteresting prairie land; the icy peaks, snow-clad mountains, and verdant valley have all disappeared, as though the magic plains had collapsed with all their wonders. (278)

In these passages Hardy portrayed the central grasslands as a time-consuming, displeasurable obstacle en route to other destinations. Her response to the same landscape on her return from California also suggests how important the stage of journey may be in landscape perception, in that the return journey is inevitably more monotonous.

Unlike their experiences hiking and taking stagecoach excursions into the Rocky Mountains and other well-advertised tourist destinations such as Yosemite and Yellowstone parks, these travelers had very little direct and intimate engagement with the central prairies and plains. Thus most of their observations of the area were "detached" and primarily visual, made in the context of the relative comfort (or discomfort) of the railroad car. Emily Faithful, for instance, mentioned that she "left Chicago on Saturday morning, and traveled for two nights and a day without leaving the

cars, chiefly over barren prairies extending for hundreds of miles" (127). From the inside of a swiftly moving train car, Faithful described the landscape as "barren prairies," even though she must have passed some agricultural country. Statements such as hers and Lady Hardy's necessitate an analysis of how the type of engagement with the land influenced particular responses to it.

Spending a good deal of time on trains, the women often wrote and reflected on their journeys within the confines of the closed, intimate, interior spaces of train compartments, spaces perhaps in many ways akin to the interior spaces of "home." Many scholars have noted that the experience of this interior space can affect travelers' writings about the exterior landscapes passing by. Mark Twain asserted that "nothing helps scenery like ham and eggs."¹² Shirley Foster argues that the enjoyment of a journey rested both on how well the traveler liked her or his traveling companions, and on the traveler's health.¹³ Martha Allen and Julie Jeffrey suggest that the means of transportation determined to a large extent how people responded to western American landscapes.¹⁴ By train, travelers were ensured of a relatively comfortable, if not carefree, experience (at least in comparison to a journey across the same terrain in a covered wagon). Train travel also provided a distinctly visual experience of a landscape in which the visitor could enjoy an ever-changing view, again in comparison to one in which fears about the outcome of immigration might detract from a settler's enjoyment of the same landscape.

Certainly the relative speed of train travel distinguished travelers' responses to passing landscapes as well, and perhaps even drew attention away from the exterior landscapes passing by. Wolfgang Schivelbusch discusses how nineteenth-century rail travel refigured time, space, and geographical imagination. Among other points, Schivelbusch asserts that the speed of railroad travel annihilated the familiar time-space continuum of other forms of transport such as coach travel, such that the experience of an area's geography was

reduced to destinations or stopping places. "The railroad knows only points of departure and destination." The outcome, to Schivelbusch, was an erasure of the space traversed between, and a destruction of the relationship between the traveler and traveled space.¹⁵ From a covered wagon, the "grain" of the country could be seen, while from a fast-moving train such microscale details might become aggregated into larger and perhaps more repetitious scenes. And at an aggregated grand scale, one exterior view of the vast horizons of places like the North American Great Plains may have seemed like any other, in which case the traveler's attention could easily turn to the immediate surroundings of the train compartments.

Lady Hardy commented that the "blinding sunlight" of the prairies caused her to withdraw from the scene and "glance round upon the cheerful prospect within" (94). She reported that fellow passengers were occupied with a variety of activities, including "indulging in reminiscences," playing or watching whist or poker, sitting idly, or making lace (Fig. 7). Hardy mentioned that she had a pleasant chat with a pretty girl, and with her "exchange[d] small confidences" (94-95). In a similar vein Iza Hardy wrote of the "cozy little social circle" within the trains that helped alleviate her boredom:

Beyond Omaha come four long days and nights of speeding across the seemingly limitless desolation of the prairies—the barren uplands of the Rocky Mountains—the wide waste of the sage-brush and alkali desert. Four days; they seem an age! not that to us, in our pleasant little social circle in a cosy palace car, they are comfortless or dreary. (136-37)

Train travel presents some interesting questions about the construction of gender in women travelers' texts. Postcolonial literary theorists such as Sara Mills have noted that a particularly feminine quality appears in the travel writings of Victorian women who were

otherwise undertaking "masculine" activities in the public sphere such as traveling and publishing books. Mills argues that women's writing often focused on appropriately feminine topics, such as domestic affairs, duty to family or community, the protagonist's own thoughts and feelings, interpersonal relationships, and proper, English upper-class manners.¹⁶ And in fact the quality of railroad accommodations, hotels, and food figured largely in the writings of travelers through the American prairies and plains, a response that is consistent with a feminine voice that derives its authority through association with interior domestic spaces. These travelers wrote at length about the extent to which the railroad accommodations fit their expectations and needs. Some were complementary. Lady Hardy enthused over the food on her train:

It was an *embarras de richesses*. There were so many good things that we held a consultation as to what would form the most desirable meal. We decided on mulligatawny soup, broiled oysters, lamb cutlets, and peas. . . . Towards six o'clock every table was spread with dainty linen, and the dinner was exquisitely served according to the previous orders of each traveller. The simplest dish, as well as the most elaborate, was cooked to perfection, and everybody fell to with a will. (80-82)

But complaints about the deficiencies of train travel were more common. Complaints about the lack of privacy on the trains, inadequate toilet facilities, stuffiness, and unpalatable food and the manner in which it was served were common subjects of discourse. These tropes may be understood as expressions of both genteel class superiority and British chauvinism. The well-traveled E. Catherine Bates, who spent a year crossing North America in the late 1880s, disagreed with her contemporaries that the Pullman was "the nearest approach to paradise possible on earth."¹⁷ Horrified at the way food was served, she wrote that one has to "degrade [one]self to

the level of a pig by eating every course of a meal off one platter" (2:6). The poet Emily (Davis) Pfeiffer, who published a travelogue about the Mediterranean region and America in 1885, complained that in America "[t]he fact that you are in a democratic country is pressed upon you from every side; no exclusiveness is here possible."¹⁸ And Theresa Longworth similarly objected to the lack of privacy on trains, protesting that

There are no special cars for ladies, and if your opposite neighbor is a gentleman in the day, in all probability you will have him on your shelf at night, and it will be well for you if he does not either snore or have nightmare [sic]. Although you have blankets, sheets, and pillows, you have to go to bed in your boots—at least, ladies have, and indeed they cannot undress at all, because they cannot shroud themselves behind the curtains without placing themselves in a recumbent position. Besides, what could be done with their clothing? . . . As this was my experience of Silver Palatial Sleeping, I preferred to be a peasant and roll myself up in my blanket, thus dispensing with the ceremony of going to bed with my coffee-pot. (2:5-6)

Many of the travelers resented going to bed earlier than preferred and complained of the heat and closeness of the train cars. Mrs. E. H. Carbutt alleged that the sleeping arrangements were "very much like being in one's coffin,"¹⁹ and Lady Howard of Glossop declared, "How one longs for an English first-class compartment, or even second or third! . . . no words can describe the discomfort and suffocating *desagreements* of the 'sleepers'!" (8). Marianne North, the celebrated world traveler and painter who crossed North America twice in her career (in 1875 and 1881), reported that

The accommodation of those much-vaunted carriages [trains] was still open to improvement. The ventilation at night was most ill provided for. I slept on a shelf un-

der Marie (Mrs. S's Swiss maid). If I opened the scrap of window next to my face, I was blown away and smothered with dust; if I shut it, I was stifled.²⁰

Emily Faithful described her frustration at the conductor closing windows so as to "'not warm the prairies as we pass' . . . which betrays your nationality and ignorance of the ways and manners of natives" (45-46). Yet, "for a few extra dollars" Faithful learned to enjoy the space of drawing room cars, and commented that "the long journeys across the plains and to the South would be impossible without the rest it affords and at last I learned to slumber peacefully . . . and almost to prefer night to day journeys" (47).

While Athearn points out that men also wrote of western train and hotel accommodations, "[l]ady travelers were somewhat more critical than the men" of them.²¹ If this is the case, one could argue that what could be called the "discourse of complaint" was not equally available to men and women travel writers. In addition to their focus on domestic scenes and personal feelings and relationships, Mills argues that further components of Victorian women's travel writing were expressions of weakness, passivity, the need for help, as well as complaints about how emotionally difficult travel had become. All of these were, Mills persuasively argues, the outcome of Victorian women's inability to participate fully as adventurers in a foreign land simply because they were women.²² Moreover, British women's complaints about accommodations also may be understood as a means of solidifying their gendered class positions, as a sort of "princess and the pea" narrative device. Women travelers' positions as members of Britain's higher social strata were strengthened by expressions of ladylike behaviors and mores. From this perspective, narratives about the grasslands that were turned inward, toward the social settings of train compartments themselves, provided travelers opportunities to disclose proper English manners reserved for the genteel classes (counterdistinguished from

American practices not up to those standards), as well as the delicacy and refinement reserved for "ladies." Thus these narrative devices served to consolidate both their superior class position and superior nationality, even if at other points in their texts the women were critical of dominant constructions of Victorian femininity at home.

VIEWS FROM THE TRAINS: MONOTONOUS AND "EMPTY"

When the women's attention turned outward, onto the grand-scale vast horizons of the central American grasslands, one exterior view often appeared as any other. Many of the travelers who described the prairies and plains from within their train compartments found the terrain hopelessly dreary, desolate, visually tedious, and psychologically overwhelming. Many pointed to the absence of variety in nature, of streams, rocks, trees, as well as to the absence of human features. Negative terms such as "dull," "monotonous," "dreary," "desolate," and "barren" were common. The aristocratic Lady Theodora Guest, sister of the Duke of Westminster, who took a short trip to America in the spring of 1894 with her husband, another male companion, and her maid, wrote of the plains just east (and within sight of) the Rocky Mountains: "[W]hen we woke thus early it was to gaze on a most bare, hopeless, flat, treeless prairie, stretching as far as the eye could reach, in shades of yellow, grey and dull brown."²³ Mrs. Howard Vincent described the prairies as "the blankness of desolation" (1:72). Catherine Bates saw "not a building, not a hill to break the terrible monotony" (2:17). Emily Faithful referred to the grasslands as "barren prairies" (127), and Rose Kingsley as a place of "utter desolation and monotony" (40). Theresa Longworth's impression was that the plains were as "monotonous as the Arabian desert" (2:15). Rose Pender, who greatly admired the Nebraska Sandhills region (to her mind, "the most charming spot in the world"), found the surrounding plains "flat [and] uninteresting" (72, 69).

Mrs. Vincent "look[ed] for some sign of life, some tree or green plant" (1:72). Her suggestion that nature should be "green" is a significant one. The seeming uniformity of plant life and the absence of the trees and shrubs found in eastern woodlands, the season of the year in which most journeys took place—late summer or autumn when much of the vegetation may have seemed brown and unattractive—and the fact that riding in a train was not conducive to picking out individual flowers or plants, all suggested to the traveler that nature itself was absent from the surroundings. Vincent elaborated on her point by referring to nature as "stingy":

I was longing for my first sight of that vast deserted plain, "the blankness of desolation." The scene was growing wilder and wilder; dreary, uninhabited expanses were succeeded by wooden shanties, clustering round a small store with a few cultivated fields and low-lying marshes; . . . The sunflower, a smaller kind than ours, flourished luxuriously in large patches; but that was the only evidence of nature, usually so prolific, here so grim and stingy (1:72).

Martha Allen, in her study of 143 book-length accounts of travel in the nineteenth-century West, asserts that women (travelers as well as immigrants on the overland routes) "showed a surprising lack of interest in flora and fauna" of the region and that "to a certain extent this apparent oversight is a reflection of the nineteenth-century understanding of the plains rather than a lack of curiosity or keen eyesight."²⁴ But it is not surprising that travelers detached from the landscape, moving swiftly through it by train, were unable to distinguish species of grass or herbs. Asserting monotonous uniformity of the region, particularly its plant life, can be directly related to mode of transportation and degree of direct engagement with the land. Most of these travelers were located not *in* the landscape but apart from it; their separateness from it must be considered in contrast to their claims to

"know" the region without actually having stepped foot in it.

Even writers who noticed the difference between uncultivated grass and cultivated fields (typically east of the Missouri River) found the agricultural land monotonous and lacking in variation. Traveling across Illinois and Iowa, Emily Pfeiffer, for instance, complained that,

Fine cattle there are grazing the hedgeless, and generally treeless, fields, and prosperous-looking farmsteads on the earlier part of the way; fields, too, of many broad acres laid down with Indian corn. To the husbandman all this has an interest of its own, but to the ordinary traveller it soon becomes monotonous. (116)

Lady Guest similarly remarked that

The fenceless railroad continued through a fenceless prairie. The great Indian corn-fields look very dreary, as they are only wide stretches of grey brown soil with the rotten stalks of last year's growth sticking up forlornly at various angles, for the new corn will not be planted here till June. (57)

THE AESTHETIC RELIEF OF WILDFLOWERS

While much of the prairie landscape appeared repetitious and even empty to British women travelers, one of the few distinguishable features they often noted about the region were the (sometimes) plentiful prairie flowers and sagebrush, another component of a "properly" feminized discourse about a place. Women travelers' attention to flowers in these texts appears to be consistent with other women settlers who wrote about their experiences on the early American frontier, as noted by Annette Kolodny. Kolodny argues that women went about planting gardens and flowers to claim the frontier and as a way to produce a kind of sanctuary for domesticity.²⁵ The women placed great significance on flowers during their journeys, described them at

length (often providing the botanical names for the different species), and collected them at train stations along the western routes. Mrs. Carbutt, who otherwise found little to appreciate about the northern prairies, found the wild sunflowers one of the only redeeming qualities of the landscape. She also praised the sagebrush for its aesthetic appeal and pungent smell. Of the northern plains she reported that,

[a]t first the country was very uninteresting; then we got to the prairies, which were not covered with grass, but with sage-brush, a pale, silvery, olive-coloured plant with a delicious smell. I have some now sewn in muslin. (38)

Season of travel, of course, greatly influenced how the traveler experienced a flowered landscape. A typical cross-country tour began with an Atlantic steamship crossing in summer and arrival in the West by railroad in early autumn. By that time, the region's plentiful wildflowers had dried and turned brown and, to many observers, unattractive. Some women, especially those on longer or multiple trips to America, though, traveled through the interior country in the winter (e.g., Longworth) or in spring (e.g., Pender) and thus encountered an altogether different landscape. Rose Pender described the springtime Platte River valley as flourishing with

Plenty of cotton trees, and a river was winding its way through the valley. Such lovely prairie flowers, and all as green as only the early spring can produce. We halted by the river and made tea, and I rambled some distance along its banks, enjoying the delicious air after the rain, and gathering a lovely bouquet of quite unknown (to me) wild flowers. (94)

Although sometimes diminishing their bouquets to the rank of "common weeds," the women collected wildflowers at rural train depots and decorated their train and

hotel rooms with them. Rose Kingsley wrote that

At Ellice [Kansas] we stopped for dinner . . . I took advantage of the train waiting to get a little walk on the prairie, coming back into the cars with a handful of common weeds which were all new to me. Most of them were in seed, as the season for flowers, alas! was over; and some of my fellow-travellers were not a little puzzled at any one taking an interest in such rubbish. (40)

Marianne North likewise commented that

All that long prairie country was fine; there were hundreds of miles of sunflowers over it, and continual dust . . . [w]e also stopped long enough at the other stations to pick a few flowers; and the train always started again slowly, so that any stragglers could catch it up. (1:200-201)

After crossing the Rocky Mountains eastward, North wrote of coming down "on the vast and uninteresting plains, . . . *Lupins*, *vetches*, and *oenotheras* were the only flowers I saw on that great green plain" (2:203). North's text almost could be said to be *about* flowers and other vegetation, given her lifetime goal of producing oil paintings of plants and flowers on every plant-bearing continent.²⁶ Lady Guest, too, collected flowers throughout her American journey and dried them using her own press (61).

NATURAL HISTORY OF THE GRASSLANDS: PRAIRIE DOGS AND BUFFALO

Prairie dogs and especially buffalo figured prominently in the travel narratives of many women traversing the central and northern grasslands. With little else of the apparently empty landscape to draw their attention, women travelers textually "completed" the prairie scenery through discussion of notably western forms of wildlife. As Anne Farrar-Hyde contends, by the 1870s European as well as

American tourists expected to see not only evidence of the West as "uniquely American" but also dramatic feats of engineering and exotic animals and people.²⁷ The job of the travel writer, then, was to textualize those features of the place most unique and different from the home country, such as strange animals.

Marianne North declared that a prairie dog "city" interested her more than Chicago did (1:200). Many descriptions of prairie dogs combined observational detail with analysis of the animals' social characteristics. Mrs. Vincent, for instance, informed her readers that

[t]hese curious little animals are of a grayish-brown colour, always fat, with the long body and bushy tail of a dog, and the head of a ferret. . . . the rattlesnake and the burrowing owl are supposed always to share the home. (1:73)

F. D. Bridges, traveling with her husband through the American West in the summer of 1880 as part of a world tour, reported that somewhere between Colorado and Omaha she passed through "'Prairie Dog City,' where for miles the plain [was] covered with the mounds thrown up by these little animals—something like squirrels—who share their domiciles with small owls and rattlesnakes."²⁸ Lady Hardy expounded at length on the prairie dog, thankful that they at least broke the monotony of a day's journey. She reported that

Presently we come upon the prairie dogs' wild domain, and see scores of these funny little animals scampering along till they reach each his particular hole, where he sits on his hind legs a moment, glancing curiously round and listening, then, turning a somersault, disappears, head first, down his burrow. They are plump little creatures, like guinea pigs, only much larger, and something the colour of the prairie-grass; they are sociable little animals. (93-94)

Rose Kingsley filled two pages describing a prairie dog scene west of Salina, Kansas, and included in her book a detailed pencil sketch of them (Figs. 8 & 9). She declared that

I could not take my eyes off the country, so strange and new it seemed; and suddenly my attention was attracted by a small brown post, about a foot high, planted in a sandy ring, with a little round pit in the centre. I looked again, thinking it a strange place for a post, and there was another, and a dozen more. All at once one of the posts threw itself flat down and disappeared into the pit, displaying four short legs and a twinkling tail; and I saw it was a prairie dog (*Arctomys Ludovicianus*). We were going through a dog-town, and there they sat by scores on their hind legs praying at the train. (36)

Not only did prairie dogs anthropomorphically "pray," but they "are the quaintest little animals; and make charming pets, as they are very easily tamed" (36), Kingsley concluded. While this view toward domesticating prairie dogs seems congruent with a feminine desire to contain wild animals within the limits of domesticity, the narratives adopted more moral and ethical dimensions when the subject turned to buffalo.

Buffalo provided a much-needed diversion to the largely uninterrupted prairie landscape, and many of the women who wrote of them expressed concern with how fast they were dying out.²⁹ Sometime after departing west from Columbus, Nebraska, Theresa Longworth assessed their situation:

These plains, which extend for about five hundred miles, are the great buffalo runs. These sagacious animals, having true consideration for their health, keep their winter and summer quarters. They come to the prairie in summer, and retire into Arkansas in winter. They, as well as the Indians, object to their projects being interfered with by the railroad, and sometimes when the

train crosses their path they attack it *en masse*. . . the buffaloes literally cover the plain, and can be shot from the platform and windows—a sort of cockney sport, but one which the American hunter seems to delight in. Sometimes the plains are blackened over with these animals, and shooting at them is like firing into a mountain. (2:18-19)

Here, Longworth ironically provides buffalo with anthropomorphic intelligence and dignity, in contrast to the "cockney" (dull, stupid, low-class) American sportsmen who shot them. As Longworth continued describing ignorant American buffalo-hunting, she added that Americans "can never understand the English idea that danger enhances the pleasure of the sport" and so preferred instead to shoot buffalo from a position of safety, that is, from a position of weakness (2:20-21). Rose Kingsley wrote of the "sport" of killing buffalo from the trains in still less forgiving terms. She was both attracted and repelled by buffalo, maintaining that "they are most hideous animals, with heavy heads and shaggy shoulders quite out of proportion with their small hind-quarters," but said that seeing thousands of them in a vast herd "quite fulfilled" her expectations as to number (39, 42). However, she was also appalled at random shootings of buffalo. In coming out onto the "buffalo plains" of Kansas for the first time, she wrote that

Now began great excitement in our car, which was the last on the train; and some of us went out on the back platform to watch for the appearance of the buffalo. . . . A most cruel and foolish fashion prevails on these trains, of shooting the poor animals from the cars as they go along, for the mere pleasure of killing. . . . But suddenly I caught sight of two about a mile to the north. Then the excitement among the passengers redoubled; in half-hour we heard the crack of a pistol from the front of the train. . . . About 4:30 we came across the buffaloes again . . . in one place we saw 200 or more

a mile away, and in another the plain was literally alive with a vast herd, three or four miles off, which I was told must have numbered some thousands. (38-39, 42)

Like Theresa Longworth, Kingsley located herself in opposition to the random massacre of buffalo by thoughtless (male) railroad passengers, adopting a voice of compassion. Both Longworth's and Kingsley's feminine sympathy, along with their English upper-class ideal of hunting, is clearly evident in these passages. Altogether ignoring the possibility of subsistence hunting as a form of survival, these women focused their attention on the rough and uncouth American manner of hunting, implicitly comparing it to their "refined" lady- or gentlemanlike ideal. (Never mind that buffalo were potentially far more dangerous than rabbits and foxes on an English hunt.)³⁰ These writers thus asserted their ethnocentric pride in proper hunting techniques, and in that sense they did not seem to object to the killing of buffalo per se, as much as they did to the manner in which it was done.

LITERARY AND ROMANTIC HORIZONS

It is important to recognize the potentially vast range of commercial and literary influences on landscape interpretation in Victorian travel writing. Tourist guidebooks on America, such as Croft's *Trans-Continental Tourist Guide* (Fig. 10), were one such commercial influence.³¹ Widely available to British travelers, they provided practical and useful information about the transcontinental journey. The main source of tourist information about western America, however, was provided by the major railroad companies. Advertisements praising the virtues and qualities of scenery and recommending preferred travel routes and points of interest were found in British newspapers and journals beginning in the 1840s and 1850s. Such promotional material was also available through the railroad land offices and private land companies (some with offices in Britain), as well as on

board the trains. These probably had less than the desired effects for the railroad companies, however, as travelers frequently expressed contempt for how unsatisfactorily their western experience measured up to that promised. Emily Pfeiffer, for example, complained that

It is amusing to contrast the inflated descriptions which are issued to travellers gratis, with the reality of what we have seen on this first eight hundred miles of our way from Chicago. A less interesting tract of country, from the point of view of the picturesque, than that which the line traverses through the States of Illinois and Iowa, it has never happened to me to behold. (116)

Not surprisingly residents and nonresidents of an area embody distinctly different types of landscape observers. A tourist or traveler, disengaged from qualities of land such as economic productivity, "enjoy" a landscape and therefore might respond mainly to its aesthetic qualities.³² Unlike a settler on the central plains who may be more drawn to the agricultural rather than aesthetic significance of rain, for instance, a tourist or travel writer might respond to it in a more literary way. Thus, a study of literary genre, particularly the influence of the romantic movement on Victorian travel writing, helps illuminate tropes and rhetoric of language that found their way into descriptions of the central American grasslands in the late nineteenth century.

Romanticism, originating as an artistic and intellectual movement in the late eighteenth century, stressed the importance of emotions and sentiment, imagination, self-improvement, and anticlassical artistry.³³ Romantic writers were concerned with the impact of scenery on their senses; they observed and recorded their subjective reactions to beautiful and sublime landscapes in a way contrary to the transparent, uninvolved "scientific" observer. Romanticism stressed the individual, and in terms of landscape, how a landscape made one *feel*. Thus while feminist scholars of Victorian women's travel literature have

treated personal and introspective expressions of feeling as somehow feminine and related to women's domestic orientation, evidence also suggests that these expressions correspond to romantic literary conventions.³⁴

But the grasslands lacked all the features normally valued by Victorians in a landscape: they lacked the sublimity of the mountain or desert and were not picturesque like England and New England. As Robert Thacker points out, the grasslands were (and are) "unlike any landscape conventionally thought pleasing. Rather than the variety and contrast of the picturesque, or the majesty of the sublime, the prairie seemed to embody a view vast and endless."³⁵ Anne Farrar-Hyde argues that the "raw natural power" of American landscapes was potentially alienating to European observers in search of the beautiful or sublime in more familiar picturesque scenes. She explains that, primarily due to the influential eighteenth century treatise of Edmund Burke, romanticism popularized another aesthetic category to exist alongside the picturesque. This category "seemed perfectly designed for the American wilderness"—an object or scene could be described as sublime if it produced fear, awe, or excitement, or if it evoked great size, power, or solitude. According to Farrar-Hyde, "[w]ild, barren, harsh, jagged, and strange landscapes suddenly had aesthetic value."³⁶

Likening the prairies and plains to the sea or ocean was a common literary device in the travelers' texts. As Martha Allen suggests, the sea metaphor was the only other physical form in the travelers' experiences with which they could draw a "logical analogy."³⁷ The sea was the only familiar topography that was as vast, trackless, and treeless as the open prairies. Rose Kingsley likened the plains to "long stretches of brown, rolling away wave upon wave, like some great ocean turned into land in the midst of a heavy ground swell after a storm" (35). Lady Howard of Glossop wrote that "everywhere [was] a sea of green" and that "half of the passengers felt sea-sick" from the rocking motion of the train (28). Theresa Longworth

wrote of her experience as one of "rolling through these boundless plains of swaying grass, that now seemed to move in ripples, now in great undulating waves of the ocean"; she went so far as to describe smelling a "salt-water breeze" (2:18). Longworth drew the analogy out in an image of a winter scene as well:

It was a bright morning in December, sufficient snow having fallen to make the country look beautiful. The long prairie grass waving for miles around was topped with snow, like crested foam on the ocean (2:10-11).

Consistent with later nineteenth-century romantic conventions for the beautiful and the sublime, all the travelers turned at some point to what they considered the aesthetically pleasing aspects of the western grasslands. They noted the special qualities in the colors, light, and shadows of the sun, particularly in sunsets and sunrises, in violent thunderstorms and other inclement weather, in extraordinary starlit nights, and in the sheer vastness of the wide open spaces. Those who experienced violent thunderstorms—from within the safety of a railroad car, that is—found value in inclement weather, considering it grand, awesome, and sublime. Mrs. Howard Vincent, for instance, referred to a hailstorm as a "grand sight" and longed to see a prairie fire, even though "such good fortune rarely happens to any traveller." She reported that

In the evening we had a grand sight, when a storm swept with terrific force over the prairie. A dense blackness enveloped the previously lurid sky, against which the forked lightning played in jagged edges, and the thunder pealed overhead, mingling with the rattling of the hailstones. The engine ploughed along,—we were swallowed up in darkness and gloom, till the sky lightened and gradually broke, and from a confused mass of purple clouds the rays of the setting sun converged into a pale gold mist on the distant hills (1:73).

Stormy skies engaged many of the travelers. On her approach to Omaha, Nebraska, Lady Hardy observed that

The skies were heavy with huge, black clouds, whose growing thunders went reverberating like a cannonade among the surrounding hills. The wind howled like a shrieking demon, and came creeping in at every crevice, till we shivered in its icy grasp. Dreary without and dreary within! (83)

And Rose Pender, who traveled in the springtime by stagecoach from prairie ranch house to ranch house in Wyoming, described at length the many thunderstorms she and her party witnessed. After crossing the Cheyenne River she remarked that

The heat was dense, if I may use the word, till at last we heard the welcome growl of thunder, and in a few minutes we were in the midst of a furious storm, which cooled the air, laid the dust, and quite refreshed both man and beast. (94)

Pender found one storm to be "lovely and wonderful" and another "truly grand" (88, 69). Locating herself in the prairie (i.e., out of the train), her descriptions of storms reflected her intimate, firsthand encounters with them. On one occasion she exclaimed,

Oh, what a storm it was! The lightning played about the harness, and seemed at times to fall in forked vividness close to us; the thunder crashed and roared, and down came a deluge of rain. It was so dark we could only just distinguish the herds of cattle tearing past, and a troop of frightened deer that came nearly over us. It was truly grand. (69)

Pleasing aspects of sunrises and sunsets also figured prominently in the texts. The poet Emily Pfeiffer, in what could perhaps be considered the most "literary" of the travelogues

discussed here, declared that a Missouri sunset

had indeed been surpassingly lovely . . . with its indescribable clearness, it stood as of heaven opened, and its delicate variation of tints; and no less exquisite was the starlit night. . . . The sunrise the following morning was a glorious succession of changes, dark, upright-standing clouds, like battalions of fighting men, catching the red illumination on their fronts as they moved forward over the crystal clearness to melt into the roseate blaze. (117)

On her return eastward Pfeiffer's attention was again drawn to the skies:

The stars are wonderful; pools of light in the crystalline blue of the heavens. The sunrise on the dun-coloured prairie this third morning of our return journey is impressive, bands of gold breaking through bars of tawny cloud forming a fine broad harmony. (259)

Other, less belletristic writers commented on sunsets and sunrises as well. Lady Theodora Guest reported that near Bismarck "[t]here was a lovely sunset, with an orange and pink sky, which threw up in great relief the intensely blue and perfectly level horizon, broken only by abrupt edges which gave the land the aspect of a series of terraces" (176).

Thus travel writers adopted a range of rhetorical strategies to justify describing a landscape that otherwise held little interest, and this was most especially accomplished by producing a romantic version of the prairies as "fascinating" in all their monotony. Most of the writers who portrayed prairie scenery as boring also found romantic fascination in it. Mrs. Vincent described "the majesty of loneliness. . . . Monotonous as they are, there is the greatest fascination about the prairies" (1:73). She continued, "[t]hose beautiful rolling plains—millions of acres, covered with the short, yellow buffalo grass—extend to the

horizon in undulating lines, a wide, uninhabited, lifeless, uplifted solitude" (1:72-73). Likewise, Theodora Guest contended that "[i]t was a fascinating landscape, in all its monotony" (59). Lady Howard of Glossop described the region as "boundless plains of rolling grass—a sea of waving golden verdure, wild, solitary, and beautiful" (28).

The narrative tradition of romanticism undoubtedly provided British women travelers a language to describe the unfamiliar, grand-scale landscape of the North American grasslands. One might speculate that these romantic modalities enabled these writers to further articulate their class associations. From a sociological viewpoint, it could be argued that these writers employed certain romantic conventions in order to associate themselves with the British intellectual and literary elite. In this way romantic writing itself took on class significance; it was a marker of an intellectual upper class or an upwardly-aspiring (and perhaps pretentious) middle class. Furthermore, it might plausibly be argued that romanticism gave these writers a language to express their changing gender definitions, specifically a language to express the transformative effect of their interactions with nature on their personal growth as women. Given romanticism's stress on emotional responses and human perfectibility, some of the writers may have invoked a romantic style to signify the extent to which the "natural" environment of the prairie freed them from the constraints of their domestic lives in cities (even if contact with nature also produced an ennobling effect on men). While romanticism stressed the "cult of the individual," this individualism stood in marked contrast to the feminine discourse of family ties and self-effacement. Many of these women did not travel until middle age, when their familial duties were complete, and thus their prior exposure to nature (outside of England's well-articulated landscape aesthetic focused on picturesque heaths, and so forth) may have been quite limited. In this sense direct exposure to the rugged, wild, outdoor landscapes of the

prairies may have become the arena within which they expressed personal transformation, a vehicle by which they expressed pride and self-satisfaction and other "feminist" feelings previously suppressed.

Lady Rose Pender's text provides a case in point. Pender, in describing prairie storms, stressed the many markers of romantic language to which Farrar-Hyde refers.³⁸ Pender's courage stood out in the face of a terrifying storm (69, above), as do her explicit references to the awe-inspiring and grand-scale qualities of the scene. The individual that emerges, then, is a more liberated figure taking pride in withstanding dangerous natural hazards. Travelers such as Pender who experienced direct engagement with the land, noticed details about it that were difficult, if not impossible, to recognize from the train. Whereas most travelers described the region as uniformly "flat," "monotonous," and "dull," Pender noticed variation across the terrain:

I must try and give some idea of the Neobrara [sic] Ranche and the country round it. Not a bit flat, much resembling Scotch lowland scenery, a broad green valley, through which a bright little trout stream wound its way, and along its banks we put up ducks, herons, and other water fowl. The hills rose in high undulations for ever and ever,—a country where one would get lost easily in an hour when once out of sight of the ranche and its enclosures. (72)

Thus where and how the traveler experienced the land made all the difference in how she represented it in the travel text. Not only did Pender notice variation in the physical landscape as she camped out in Wyoming and Nebraska, but her text provides a good example of the romantic mode in its fullest expression as she pondered the wide open spaces she actually stood in. Pender wrote of a sense of exhilaration, freedom from constraint, and well-being she experienced in what she considered her unrestricted life in the Niobrara country of north-western Nebraska: "I hunted

for wild flowers, helped Bury to milk the cows, and washed all the clothes . . . in short, led the simplest and wildest lives, in the purest and most delicious air I ever breathed" (74). While visiting cattle ranches in Nebraska, she further contended that

Never in my life had I enjoyed anything half so much as our wild rough life . . . The delicious pure air, the scenery, the strange sights and experiences, the sense of utter freedom and independence, and above all, the immunity from any ailment whatever—a feeling of such well-being that to rise in the morning was a delight and to live and breathe a positive luxury—made our few weeks' drive over the prairies a happy time for me to look back upon for all my life. (123)

While domestic tasks such as washing clothes explicitly fall within the discursive limits of femininity, Pender also participated in more "masculine" activities, such as a cattle round-up (see below), and portrayed herself as strengthened by them. She quoted a ranchman who asserted that "if all English women were as strong as I was they must be a fine race, as I seemed to be a real 'Rustler'. This, I believe, is a term of approval" (117). In all of these excerpts, Pender expressed something demonstrably new and different—and empowering—about her experiences, and employed romantic language to articulate this newfound sense of self on the prairies.

PIONEERS OF PROGRESS: THE FUTURE FARMING AND RANCHING FRONTIER

While a few travelers who experienced the environment firsthand portrayed the central grasslands in their liberating potential, most traveled straight through by train, and, as I have already pointed out, represented the region primarily as empty, devoid of interesting characteristics that the mountains in particular held. The Great Plains especially were described in relation to the mountains

as an obstacle to be crossed as quickly as possible (Lady Hardy 93, above). And whereas the mountains represented presence, the plains represented absence. Rose Kingsley wrote that "[t]o the east one sees nothing but brown barren plain, away and away. But on the west the view is superb. The prairie rolls up in great brown waves to the foot-hills of the Rocky Mountains" (44). In relational terms, the mountains were invested of meaning in the texts, and the plains divested.³⁹ The implications of this predominant discursive position is one that merits further attention.

Various representations of the plains were formed out of negative terms, terms that indicated the landscape lacked attributes found in other places (and despite the romantic, sublime fascination some found in them). That is, the region was constructed as treeless (lacking in trees and shrubs), flat (lacking in topographical variation), and monotonous and dull (lacking in interesting vegetation, geology, human features, picturesqueness). Some claims were exaggerated to stress a point, such as Kingsley's assertion that the plains ran east from the mountains to Kansas "without a single tree, for 400 miles" (60). Thus these writers primarily constructed the plains as essentially underdeveloped, as unfinished in comparison to other landscapes, and ultimately as lacking meaning. Since familiar trees and shrubs of other landscapes were absent, travelers saw not only uniformity, emptiness, and monotony, but nature itself absent from the surroundings as well (Mrs. Vincent 1:72-73, above). This type of discourse implies that the region is in need of some sort of completion, either aesthetically or through human development in the form of civilization, industrialization, or especially agriculture.

Aesthetically the landscape might be completed by imagining a different landscape altogether in its place. Rose Kingsley, traveling through the Kansas prairies, deployed a landscape "mirage" into her text to complete an otherwise unsatisfactory view:

Then away we went again over endless plains, through blinding sun and dust: when, to my amazement, I saw here and there, to the south, beautiful lakes and rivers, with trees along their banks reflected in the clear water. I had been assured that there was hardly any water, and not a single tree all across these plains; however, here they were most certainly, and I called my friends to look too. But as we approached one of the lakes it gradually faded away into the air, and we found it was nothing but a mirage. (40)

To Mrs. Vincent, the only way to aesthetically complete the landscape was to look past it:

How we strained our aching eyes over that burnt, parched plain, in search of the vestige of a shadow, or any green thing to give relief! At last we did see something, a mirage it almost seemed, for the first moment, of dark blue mountains, with dazzling crowns of snow. They were the glorious range of the "the Rockies" bounding the horizon, and Denver lay at their feet (1:76).

Mary Louise Pratt, in her *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), argues that constructions of landscapes as essentially lacking in meaning was characteristic of imperialist travel writing of the eighteenth century, wherein places such as South America were "reinvented" by explorers (such as Alexander von Humboldt) as needing European completion.⁴⁰ Pratt argues that the writer in this type of discourse is "oblivious to the limitations on [her] own perceptual capacities" to see the landscape out of scarcity, rather than density, of meaning.⁴¹ That is, if meaning is lacking in the landscape, it is the landscape's "fault," not the viewer's inability to see and interpret it. Geographer Derek Gregory makes a similar point in his work on the travel writings of Florence Nightingale in nineteenth century

Egypt. Gregory argues that Nightingale, unable to adequately describe the Egyptian landscape, turned her frustration into a focus on the inadequacy of her object; Egypt for her becomes hell itself, an inversion of the "ordered and Christian world of Europe."⁴² Pratt's and Gregory's analyses are instructive for analyzing women travelers' primarily negative assessment of the Great Plains. If a landscape is primarily represented in terms of deficiencies, in terms of aesthetic disappointments, the writer implicitly suggests that the hand of social or material intervention is required to bring it to fruition.

Several British women travel writers turned their attention to the future capitalistic development of the region, and especially the potential for productive farming and ranching, as a means of textually completing the plains landscape for their home audiences. Discourses surrounding the nineteenth-century development of the plains region, as well as the American West more generally, have been well documented. An enormous body of scholarship exists on the aesthetic as well as political-economic meaning of the transformation of the West from the points of view of American settlers as well as the more influential industrialists, scientists, railroad developers, and media correspondents. Key works have focused on the mixed and paradoxical images of the West, particularly of the central prairies and plains as both "garden" and "desert" throughout the century.⁴³ From a textual perspective, these rhetorical strategies invoked the transformative powers of settlers and farming techniques that in effect completed an otherwise incomplete and immature western land. As such, these strategies can be considered part of an (American) imperialist version of the world, especially if the removal of the region's indigenous populations as part of this transformation is considered. Ultimately, the "success of settlement depended on the ability to master the land, transforming the virgin territories into something else—a farm, a village, a road, a canal, a railway, a mine, a factory, a city, and finally, an urban nation."⁴⁴

Athearn maintains that much of the attention of the "enterprising" Britisher in the later Victorian years was focused on the numerous investment opportunities in western mining, cattle ranching, and agriculture.⁴⁵ Such economic interests produced particular kinds of discourse about the proper development of the region in the travelogues of writers personally invested. Again, Rose Pender's travelogue provides a good example of the way in which personal investment interests produced a kind of "business" discourse concerned with capitalist improvement of the land. The climax of Pender's narrative is her participation in a spring cattle roundup in which she participated:

In plain English, a Round-up is a search or hunt in the spring for all the cattle in the locality. Several owners join together. An outfit, which consists of waggons [sic] drawn by mules, a large herd of horses, and as many men from each owner as is necessary, is assembled, under the command of a headman or foreman. The country is systematically scoured for miles, sometimes for hundreds of miles. All the cattle collected are driven to some settled locality, when the calves are branded, and beeves destined for market are driven off, a rough estimate of profit or loss is made out, and when this part of the business is finished the Round-up terminates, and the men depart to their ranches. (3)

Within the context of the roundup, Pender's attention occasionally turned to the relative development of the cattle industry and availability or quality of pastureland for grazing. Somewhere in the vicinity of Fort Laramie Pender reported that "[we] drove for a long way . . . till we reached the enclosure of Players' Ranche, our destination for the night. 50,000 acres are enclosed with a ring fence, and as this was a new purchase of our manager's, we were anxious to inspect a part of it" (69). On approach of her own ranch she observed that

[s]uch rich pasture land it all was, and near the stream was the hay land. Mr. R— calculated that they would make some hundreds of tons that season. It simply requires cutting, the sun dries it thoroughly in two days, and then it is stacked as it stands. (72)

Significantly, though, such a business discourse was overlaid by Pender's romantic and feminist discourse on experiencing "the most charming spot in the world" for the first time. The thrill of camping out during the roundup itself, her "first actual experience of roughing it," foregrounded her narrative (70-72, 123, above). Here Pender captured the scene as one of romantic sublimity, a "lovely and picturesque sight . . . which quite atoned for the discomforts and fatigues we had undergone" (80). Still another narratorial voice appeared in the text when Pender arrived by buggy to observe the roundup of twenty thousand cattle. At this point Pender's attention became focused on her fear of the animals and disgust over their treatment:

The incessant bellowing sounded formidable, and the appearance of the cattle was not reassuring, for though not large their huge wide-spread horns and wild eyes made me rather glad to be in the buggy. Really they were much too frightened to be savage. . . . We drew up to watch them cutting out some cattle from the herd. It certainly was very cleverly done . . . [one] poor steer, terrified, tore off at a gallop, pursued by the men. . . . I could not help thinking that were the whole thing done more quietly and gently much time might be saved, as the cowboys so terrify the wretched beasts that they become like mad things. (77-78)

Like Longworth's and Kingsley's references to the crude American "sport" of buffalo-hunting, in this passage Pender contrasted her genteel, upper-class sensibilities against uncouth American modes of cattle rustling. Her feminine imagining of quiet and gentle treatment

of the animals recalls the English upper-class discourse of the lady. Pender went on to clarify that "I did not like the cowboys; they impressed me as brutal and cowardly, besides being utterly devoid of manners or good feeling"—in other words, not a single one of them offered to help her stake up her tent (78-79). Thus a complex array of capitalist business interests, a sense of feminist liberation in "roughing it" outdoors, upper-class admonitions toward proper cattle-raising techniques, romantic expressions of picturesque scenery, as well as a feminine arrogance toward the cowboys' poor treatment of the cattle and, by extension, Pender herself, all combine in her narrative.

Beyond those with personal business interests, other British women positively portrayed large-scale, capitalist-improving development of the region. Emily Pfeiffer, refreshed from lunch and a good cup of tea (and having just derived much inspiration from "a most impressive sermon" reprinted in the *Denver Daily News*), closed her chapters on the American West thus reflecting:

In crossing this spur of the "Rockies" we have before us now . . . the whole of the grand range bounding the plain to the right of the line, and our spirits revive with the imposing spectacle. The prairie since first seen at sunrise has been covered with the short, sweet tussucks of the buffalo grass, and now in the middle distance the surface is for the first time dotted with trees. . . . The sun is shining; the world is in progress; the end is still hopeful if God is its Guide. (261)

Pfeiffer demonstrated here a romantic appreciation for unique and sublime scenery, as well as the Victorian belief in progress and improvement (here associated explicitly with the presence of trees). However, this type of discourse on progress exists alongside a discourse akin to Kolodny's "feminization" of development in some of the narratives.⁴⁵ That is, travelers often advocated large-scale development of land that was represented as "useless" (such as

the central grasslands), while at the same time advocated the preservation and protection of other resources, especially picturesque or aesthetically pleasing land (the mountains and forests), from invasive, large-scale, polluting forms of civilization such as the railroad. Emily Faithful, for instance, represented progress as something good so long as the place undergoing progress was not beautiful or picturesque or worth preserving in its "natural" state. She lamented the invasion of the railroad in the Colorado Rockies:

The giant of the nineteenth century—the ogre who, while he brings these lovely places within ordinary reach, spoils their picturesqueness and destroys their solitude—is gradually asserting his sway throughout this wild district . . . disturbing the serenity of the eagles, hawks, and coyotes. (145-46)

Similar displeasure was expressed by Mrs. Vincent, on her journey to Pike's Peak:

The picturesque ascent of ten miles on mules is soon to be no more, for a syndicate of four speculators are making a railway taking a circuitous route of thirty miles to the top, and already the dark line of earth and the rows of telegraph poles tell of its progress. (1:80)

These travelers' positions resonate well with the late-nineteenth-century preservationist and protectionist rhetoric of John Muir (and that stood in opposition to more conservation-minded, "wise-use" arguments about management of western resources articulated by Gifford Pinchot).⁴⁷ To the preservation-minded, the "monumental" aspect of sublime nature, such as that found in rugged mountains, held value in particular as a scenic resource; deserts, semi-arid valleys, and prairies held little interest as natural or scenic environments to be protected.

Faithful and Vincent, then, expressed a romantic nostalgia for the sublime aspects of mountainous landscapes which were to be

destroyed by the invasive forces of civilization. Yet, these and other writers also asserted that the railroad would positively impact the prairies and plains. Faithful, for instance, was pleased with the "peace and order" that the railroad brought to the 1880s prairie landscape in Kansas:

Peace and order now prevail; schoolhouses abound, and prosperity has been insured by the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad, which brought civilization into the heart of this rich country. This dry plains and the prairie grass have been transformed into fields of corn, and today Kansas stands to the front among the agricultural States. (258)

Faithful effused that "immigration to Kansas means prosperity . . . for those who are prepared to take proper advantage of the resources America affords cannot fail to command success" (258-59). While these excerpts focused on Faithful's belief in the transformative power of capitalism on physical land, her narrative continued by extolling the fruitful outcomes of capitalism on Kansas culture and society. She marveled at one of the "handsomest" libraries she saw while in America, in Topeka, Kansas, and noted that the audience to whom she lectured included many "cultivated" professors. Her representations added up to a much transformed—and advanced—version of Kansas compared to the previous one. She exclaimed that it "is difficult to believe that this is Kansas—till recently the home of the prairie-dog, rattlesnake, and buffalo!" (261). Other travelers' discourse on progress similarly centered on the benefits of capitalism and especially the ability of the railroad to transform the region. Emily Pfeiffer was interested in looking out upon the new "locations" that had sprung up along the railroad, "some probably counting their age but by months, upon the track of the great iron way. . . . All for some hundreds of miles was at present wild prairie, but the iron road had invaded it, and the pioneers of progress were not far off" (117, 120).

Seen out of scarcity rather than density of meaning, the central grasslands, lacking primarily in aesthetic appeal, held little value without the improving hand of capitalism.⁴⁸ The empty and monotonous landscape could only be redeemed through the imprint of civilization.

CONCLUSIONS

I have argued that one key influence upon late-nineteenth-century British women's travel writing about the American grasslands is mode of transport; travelers' responses to prairie landscapes depended to a large degree on how they experienced them in terms of type of transport and level of engagement with the land. Women riding trains straight through the region viewed an aggregated, grand-scale version of the grasslands in which one scene may have appeared like any other. Those writers often turned their attention inward, to the interior landscapes of the train themselves, spaces I have argued were well within the scope of domesticity considered appropriate for women to write about. A recurring theme in this essay has also been the dual gender and class construction of the proper English lady, and how this version of womanhood was affirmed and imposed on others, most especially within the confines of the trains. The travel narrative provided some women a forum within which to disclose proper ladylike behaviors and thus consolidate their positions as members of the ruling classes.

Turning their attention outward, these travelers were often bored with what appeared to be the uninterrupted horizons of the prairies and plains. Much of this paper has focused on the influence of romanticism on Victorian women's travel texts, specifically examining the complementarity and discontinuity between nineteenth century conventions for the beautiful and the sublime and the possibilities for deploying those qualities onto the landscapes of the American interior. I have closely examined the aesthetic appeal that the grasslands held (or failed to hold) for these

travelers, finding that most of them expressed aesthetic disappointment toward the landscape. They represented the grasslands as lacking in attributes found in other places (such as trees, vegetation, and picturesqueness). I have argued that they "textually completed" this landscape through discussions of wildlife, flowers, and notable features of the skies. In their capacities as travel writers the women searched for the unique, and discovered ample qualities of the region worth reporting. Positive responses to some aspects of the grassland landscape conform to the travel writer's ability (and need) to find value in strange and unfamiliar scenes. I have also argued that other positive interpretations of the prairies appeared in the text of Lady Rose Pender, a woman who experienced more intimate engagement with the land on her cattle roundup in Nebraska and Wyoming. Pender's domestic orientation combined with her sense of freedom and well-being in the open country complements but also contrasts with what she may have perceived as constraining social roles for women in Victorian England.

Some writers focused their texts on the future development of agriculture for the region. The rhetoric of large-scale, capital-improving progress for the grasslands existed in some of their narratives alongside that of a more protectionist perspective on other regions of the west. While travelers such as Emily Faithful and Mrs. Vincent advocated turning the "useless" land of the central plains into productive agriculture, they and other writers were ambivalent over the inevitable despoliation and destruction of aesthetically pleasing environments (such as the Rocky Mountains) that resulted from such development. The central interior of the continent was thus constructed as a place of profitable capitalist development: a place primarily envisioned for what it could become, rather than what it was.

NOTES

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1. Iza Duffus Hardy, *Between Two Oceans: Or, Sketches of American Travel* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1884), p. 136. Further citations to *Between Two Oceans* are given in parentheses in the text.

2. Travelers in this study, like Hardy, typically departed on the western portions of their journeys at Chicago and then followed a transect across the West though Kansas City, Omaha, the central grasslands, Denver, the Rocky Mountains, Salt Lake City, the Sierra Nevadas, and finally reaching the Pacific at San Francisco. The travelogues typically follow the transect the railroad followed, with chapters dated and titled chronologically and geographically east to west. A northerly or southerly leg was typically added to the travelers' journeys either going west or returning east. Lady Theodora Guest (1895), for instance, rode the Northern Pacific Railroad onto Vancouver Island and then crossed through Montana and Yellowstone Park and the northern Plains states before returning east.

3. Robert G. Athearn, *Westward the Briton* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), p. 17.

4. Rose Pender, *A Lady's Experience in the Wild West in 1883* (1888; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978). Further citations to *A Lady's Experience* appear in parentheses in the text.

5. Maria Theresa (Yelverton) Longworth, *Teresina in America* (1875; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1974), 2:8. Further citations to *Teresina in America* appear in parentheses in the text.

6. Lady Duffus Hardy, *Through Cities and Prairie Lands: Sketches of an American Tour* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1882), p. 133. Further citations to *Through Cities and Prairie Lands* appear in parentheses in the text. R. L. Rapson, in his *Britons View America, Travel Commentary, 1860-1935* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971), p. 233, reports that Iza followed her mother to America, though a comparison of the two women's texts raises the possibility that they traveled together. Parts of their texts are nearly identical, such as their descriptions of San Francisco's Chinatown (see Hardy, 1882, pp. 137-89 and Hardy, 1884, pp. 138-87).

7. Mrs. Howard Vincent, *Forty Thousand Miles Over Land and Water: The Journal of a Tour through the British Empire and America* (London: Sampson

Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1885), 1:102; Lady Winefred Howard of Glossop, *Journal of a Tour in the United States, Canada, and Mexico* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1897), p. 1; Rose Kingsley, *South by West or Winter in the Rocky Mountains and Spring in Mexico* (London: W. Isbister & Co., 1874); Emily Faithful, *Three Visits to America* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1884), p. vi. Further citations to these works appear in parentheses in the text.

8. After Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 171, I distinguish the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century bourgeois era travelogue as an "autobiographical narrative." In this form, the writer herself is the narrative's protagonist; the texts combine events surrounding the protagonist with observational detail. The travelogues in this study are remarkably similar in form and itinerary. Most are introduced with elaborate frontispieces and characteristic lengthy and detailed tables of contents. They then proceed with descriptions of departures from British ports like Liverpool or from the author's entry into New York Harbor. They then continue chronologically and geographically (typically east to west) as the journey progresses. The subject matter of the narratives primarily reflects the route and destinations of railroad travel circa 1880 (see note 2 above). Though these books are similar in form, they do vary considerably in topics. Generally, all of the women wrote to some extent about American society and culture, scenic attractions, and hotel and train accommodations. But beyond that they concentrated more or less on an extensive range of American physical and cultural landscapes.

9. I use the term "landscape," then, to incorporate both natural features of the earth as well as features that denote relationships between people and their material world. In this sense "landscape" is used as a more restrictive term than either "environment" or "place" (after Janice Monk, "Approaches to the Study of Women and Landscape," *Environmental Review* 8 [1984]: 23-33.) There are other important features of the prairies and plains "landscape" that I have omitted from the present discussion because I have written of them elsewhere, above all the aestheticized Native Americans whom the women frequently encountered at train stations. See my "British Women Travellers and Constructions of Racial Difference across the 19th Century American West," forthcoming in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. Athearn, *Westward the Briton* (note 3 above), pp. 116-18.

11. L. McFarling, ed., *Exploring the Northern Plains, 1804-1876* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1955), p. vii.

12. Twain quoted by Anne Farrar-Hyde, *An American Vision: Far Western Landscape and National Culture, 1820-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), p. 115.

13. Shirley Foster, *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and Their Writings* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 76.

14. Martha M. Allen, *Traveling West: 19th Century Women on the Overland Routes* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1987), p. 14; Julie Roy Jeffrey, "There is Some Splendid Scenery: Women's Responses to the Great Plains Landscape," *Great Plains Quarterly* 8 (1988): 70.

15. My thanks to David Wishart for pointing this out. See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the 19th Century* (New York: Urizen Books, 1978), pp. 41-76. Quote is on p. 44. Subsequent citations appear in parentheses in text.

16. Sara Mills, "Discourses of Difference," *Cultural Studies* 4 (1990): 128-32; *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 94-106.

17. E. Catherine Bates, *A Year in the Great Republic* (London: Ward and Downey, 1887), 1:19. Subsequent citations to *A Year in the Great Republic* appear in parentheses in the text.

18. Emily Pfeiffer, *Flying Leaves from East and West* (London: Field and Tuer, 1885), p. 119. Subsequent citations appear in parentheses in text.

19. Mrs. E. H. Carbutt, *Five Months' Fine Weather in Canada, Western United States, and Mexico* (1889; reprint, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1979), p. 24. Subsequent citations to *Five Months' Fine Weather* appear in parentheses in the text.

20. Marianne North, *Recollections of a Happy Life: Being the Autobiography of Marianne North*, ed. Mrs. J. Addington Symonds (London: Macmillan, 1892), 1: 200-201. Subsequent citations to *Recollections of a Happy Life* appear in parentheses in the text.

21. Athearn, *Westward to Briton* (note 3 above), p. 18.

22. Mills, 1991, *Discourse of Difference* (note 16 above), p. 78. Nevertheless, both men's and women's emphasis on the difficulties of travel served as a means of "improving" their achievement, although this seems more relevant within the context of mountaineering or other explorations into remote districts than within such "domestic" train scenes.

23. Lady Theodora Guest, *A Round Trip in North America* (London: Edward Stanford, 1895), p. 58. Subsequent citations to *A Round Trip in North America* appear in parentheses in the text.

24. Allen, *Traveling West* (note 14 above), p. 14.

25. Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontier, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), pp. xii-xiii, 6-8.
26. Mary Russell, *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt* (London: Collins, 1986), p. 17.
27. Farrar-Hyde, *An American Vision* (note 12 above), p. 110. This concern for the novel and unique also falls in line with other aspects of romantic discourse discussed below.
28. F. D. Bridges, *Journal of a Lady's Travels Round the World* (London: John Murray, 1883), p. 410. Subsequent citations to *Journal of a Lady's Travels* appear in parentheses in the text.
29. Richard White, in his "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), pp. 216-20 reports that bison herds on the American plains probably peaked at about twenty-five million, with about six to seven million in the southern herds in the mid nineteenth century, and three million as late as the 1870s. However, by 1875 the southern herd "had largely ceased to exist," due primarily to the industrial-style hunting of professional hide hunters who moved into the area. White reports that the most skilled hunters took 2,500 to 3,000 buffalo in a single year in the 1870s, inefficiently wasting most of their kill. "The slaughter was so thorough and quick that not even the hunters could believe what they had done" (219). By 1883 the northern herds had vanished as well.
30. My thanks to Fran Kaye for clarifying these class- and nation-based distinctions.
31. Farrar-Hyde, *An American Vision* (note 12 above), pp. 120-21.
32. Vera Norwood and Janice Monk, eds., *The Desert is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 4.
33. L. Perry, *Intellectual Life in America: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 207-59.
34. Mills, "Discourses of Difference," 128-31 and *Discourse of Difference*, pp. 81-83 (note 16 above); Dea Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Travelers* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1998), pp. 191-200.
35. Robert Thacker, *The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), p. 2.
36. Farrar-Hyde, *An American Vision* (note 12 above), pp. 17-18.
37. Allen, *Traveling West* (note 14 above), p. 7.
38. Farrar-Hyde, *An American Vision* (note 12 above), pp. 17-18.
39. As previously discussed, however, travelers did occasionally note the differences between cultivated and uncultivated land, especially with respect to the dividing line between the prairies and plains at the Missouri River. Catherine Bates, for instance, asserted that "Iowa is much more green and fertile than Nebraska. There are plenty of trees there and good crops of wheat and Indian corn" (2:265). Similarly, F. D. Bridges stated that "[l]eaving Omaha . . . we travelled all the way into Chicago through a rich country—'the golden belt'—a garden of Indian corn, and every kind of fruit and vegetable, with pretty farms, and even hedgerows—a strange sight to our eyes" (410). Lady Hardy also pointed to the presence of agricultural land west of the Missouri. After passing through 800 miles of "interminable desert land," signs of cultivation began to appear to Hardy in Kansas—signs of cattle, homesteads, and cultivated lands that were "blessed and refreshing" to her eyes (280).
40. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* (note 8 above), pp. 137-41.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 217-19.
42. Derek Gregory, "Between the Book and the Lamp: Imaginative Geographies of Egypt, 1849-50," *Transactions: Institute of British Geographers* 20 (1995): 29-57.
43. See, for instance, Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West in Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950); Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); and Leo Marx, *Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).
44. Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 7.
45. Athearn, *Westward the Briton* (note 3 above), pp. 122-24.
46. Kolodny, *The Land Before Her* (note 25 above), pp. xii-8.
47. Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1993), pp. 26-29.
48. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* (note 8 above), pp. 217-19.