

“THEY’VE ALL COME TO LOOK FOR AMERICA”

Constructing Self and Nation in Women’s Travel Narratives 1870-1890

---

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

---

by

Sarah Elizabeth McLennan


2004

APPROVAL SHEET


This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

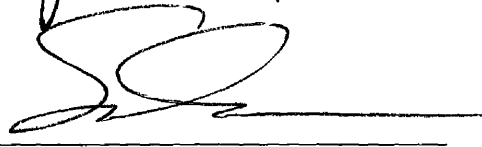
Master of Arts

  
Sarah Elizabeth McLennan

Approved by the Committee, August 2004

  
Leisa D. Meyer, Chair

  
James N. McCord

  
Scott R. Nelson

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| Acknowledgements  | iv   |
| Abstract  | v    |
| Introduction  | 2    |
| Chapter I: Defining Self and Nation in the American West              | 12   |
| Chapter II: Both Ends of the Tourist Spectrum: Yosemite and Chinatown | 21   |
| Natural Wilderness in Yosemite  | 21   |
| San Francisco's "Chinatown by Night" Tours                            | 35   |
| Conclusion  | 57   |
| Bibliography  | 60   |
| Vita  | 64   |

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Leisa Meyer, Scott Nelson, and Jim McCord for all their comments, suggestions, and support.

## ABSTRACT

Using travel accounts written by five women, Isabella Bird, Susie Clark, Iza Duffus Hardy, Miriam Leslie, and Alexandra Gripenberg, this thesis examines how each woman used tourism to navigate the physical, social, and cultural landscape of America at the end of the nineteenth-century, constructing ideas of both self and nation as they traveled across the country. The accounts are drawn from the *Travels in the West and Southwest* periodical series, and focus on those who took a “grand tour” of the United States between 1870 and 1890. Women traveled through multiple discourses on their journeys - scripts defined by the tourist industry, nationalist sentiment, and conventions related to class, gender and race that advised them where to go, what to see, and how to quantify it. These authors also pursued their own perceptions and agendas. In an era before women gained the vote and an official political voice, travel presented a means for engaging with issues of import, and adding their opinion to the public discourse.

For transcontinental tourists during this period seeking to understand and form an identity for America, viewing both extremes of what the country had to offer was key. The second section of this thesis examines two archetypal tourist sites: The Yosemite Valley, and San Francisco’s Chinatown. Yosemite Valley was promoted as a timeless natural wonder that could rival the draw and beauty of the cathedrals and mountains of Europe, while San Francisco’s Chinatown showcased the mix of classes, cultures, and rapid growth that characterized urban America. Together, these two sites represented both ends of the tourist spectrum -- the pastoral, awe-inspiring and regenerative, and the sensationalized urban slum.

Studying travel and tourist accounts ties together cultural, social, gender, class, race, and intellectual concerns, just as travel itself helped the authors in this study unite the disparate people, places, ideas, and values they encountered. Culture acts as a key site where ideas of citizenship, nationality, and identity are engaged with, produced, and worked out. Travel accounts reveal much about how people saw, and wanted to envision their world, its past, and their place within it.

**“THEY’VE ALL COME TO LOOK FOR AMERICA:” CONSTRUCTING SELF AND  
NATION IN WOMEN’S TRAVEL NARRATIVES 1870-1890**

## INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, the popular perception of the lives of white upper-class women at the end of the nineteenth century is often one dominated by the image of domesticity, with women confined by corsets and convention to the realm of the home. Depictions in literature and film, from Henry James' Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*, to the female narrator in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, driven mad by a "rest-cure" that confines her to her room, or Edith Wharton's truncated heroine Lily in *The House of Mirth*, unable to live the life she wants because she is not a man, largely support this idea. Around the same time however, another genre of writing, the travel narrative, provided a glimpse of a very different segment of the female experience. Authors like Miriam Florence Leslie, who ended her account of a trip to California in 1877 with the exuberant invocation "Go West, my friends, Go West! Within the Golden Gate lies all that you desire. Go West!" promoted the figure of the independent, mobile woman in their writings.<sup>1</sup> While capturing the enthusiasm and excitement of a newly completed journey, Leslie's statement also offers her (primarily female) readers the promise of finding something, "all that you desire," through the medium of the journey which they could not encounter at home. Inspiring through examples of women traversing the country, visiting wild natural areas, and touring large cosmopolitan cities, these narratives encouraged their readers to set out from the familiarity of their homes for places unknown.

---

<sup>1</sup> Miriam Florence Leslie [Mrs. Frank Leslie], *California: A Pleasure Trip from Gotham to the Golden Gate (April, May, June 1877)* (New York: G.W. Carleton & Co., 1877). Facsimile, with a introduction by Madeleine B. Stern, (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1972), 286.

Using travel accounts written by five women, Isabella Bird, Susie Clark, Iza Duffus Hardy, Miriam Leslie, and Alexandra Gripenberg, this thesis examines how each woman used tourism to navigate the physical, social, and cultural landscape of America at the end of the nineteenth-century, constructing ideas of both self and nation as they traveled across the country. The accounts are drawn from the *Travels in the New South* and *Travels in the West and Southwest* periodical series, and were all published. Specifically, my focus is on travel accounts from women who took a “grand tour” of the United States in the period from 1870-1890. Beginning on the East coast, often in Boston or New York, the route then proceeded West by train to San Francisco, visiting key points of tourist interest along the way. The authors of these accounts were white, wealthy, and well-educated upper-class women. They had the means to support themselves on extended trips that lasted for weeks, or even months. All five of these women traveled widely and wrote other books. In short, they were exceptional women. However, they were also part of a growing group of women including proponents for the vote, missionary, and reform movements, who actively participated in the formation of the country’s future.

Born in England in 1831, Isabella Lucy Bird had already completed previous visits to the United States, Canada, and the Mediterranean when she embarked upon a tour of the Rocky Mountains in the autumn of 1873. She shunned organized tours to prominent tourist destinations, setting out alone on horseback to explore the area around Estes Park, Colorado. *A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains* gave an account of her travels in the area she termed “no region for tourists and women” in the form of letters written to her sister.<sup>2</sup> First published in book form in 1879, the work enjoyed huge

---

<sup>2</sup> Isabella Lucy Bird, *A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains*, 3d ed. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1879-80; Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 9. Citations are to the University of Oklahoma edition.

popularity, and was in its eighth edition by 1912.<sup>3</sup> Always traveling alone, Bird remained single until the age of fifty, when she married her sister's former physician Dr. John Bishop. Following his death after only five years of marriage, Bird continued to travel until her death at age seventy-three, visiting China, Korea, Japan, India, and Tibet and working to set up medical missions in these areas. In 1892, she became the first woman ever elected to the Royal Geographical Society of England.<sup>4</sup>

Miriam Leslie, who recounted her 1877 trip from New York to San Francisco in *California: A Pleasure Trip from Gotham to the Golden Gate*, traveled in a very different manner than Isabella Bird. Miriam, along with her husband, publisher Frank Leslie, a party of ten reporters and artists, and her terrier Follette, set off on a luxury rail excursion across the West, partially funded by the Central and Union Pacific railroads.<sup>5</sup> Accounts of their visits to the main attractions of the West were published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* in an effort to popularize transcontinental tourism and show that it could be accomplished in comfort and style. Prior to wedding Frank Leslie at age thirty-eight, Miriam had been married and divorced twice, worked as an actress, and traveled widely in Europe, the United States, and South America with her second husband, archaeologist Ephraim Squier. Following Frank Leslie's death, she took over management of his publishing empire, briefly married Oscar Wilde's brother William, became active in the woman's suffrage movement, and returned to California twice before her death in 1914.<sup>6</sup>

Iza Duffus Hardy traveled to America in 1880 with her mother, Lady Duffus Hardy, for a vacation following the death of her father, Sir Thomas Hardy. *Between Two Oceans or Sketches of American Travel*, which detailed their travels and meetings with

---

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Boorstin, introduction to *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, by Isabella Bird (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), xvii.

<sup>4</sup> Boorstin introduction to *A Lady's Life*, xvi.

<sup>5</sup> Stern introduction to *California*, xi-xii.

<sup>6</sup> Stern introduction to *California*, xxii-xxiii.

many prominent authors and figures of the period, was published in 1884. Following their tour of America, Iza and her mother moved into a home just outside of London.<sup>7</sup> Hardy, whose mother was also an author, began writing at the age of fifteen, and published several fiction novels, as well as another travel account about Florida.<sup>8</sup>

Alexandra Gripenberg initially traveled to America in 1888 to attend the International Women's Congress in Washington D.C. as a delegate from Finland. A leader in Finland's women's suffrage and temperance movements, she published numerous articles on these topics, as well as a collection of essays, a novel, and travel accounts of Germany, Hungary, and England.<sup>9</sup> *A Half Year in the New World* offered an account of the Women's Congress, as well as sketches from her travels across America and meetings with famous figures such as Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Joaquin Miller in the following six months.<sup>10</sup>

The final travel account, *The Round Trip from the Hub to the Golden Gate*, written by Susie Champney Clark in 1890, chronicled her Western tour on one of the luxury packaged excursions arranged by the Raymond and Whitcomb Company.<sup>11</sup> Traveling with her husband and two other friends from Boston, Clark gave high praise to the convenience and quality of the Raymond tour, an ad for which appeared at the end of her book. A known spiritualist, Clark reported for various newspapers, traveled as a lecturer on "occult, metaphysical, psychic or spiritual themes," practiced "spiritual healing," and served for several years as vice-president of the Massachusetts State

---

<sup>7</sup> Helen C. Black, *Notable Women Authors of the Day* (1893; repr., Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), 198-209.

<sup>8</sup> British Biographical Archive, card 515. s.v. "Hardy, Iza Duffus."

<sup>9</sup> Alexandra Gripenberg, *A Half Year in the New World: Miscellaneous Sketches of Travel in the United States* (1888; repr., trans. and ed. Ernest J. Moyne, Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1954), v.

<sup>10</sup> Moyne introduction to *Half Year*, xiii-xv.

<sup>11</sup> Susie Champney Clark, *The Round Trip from the Hub to the Golden Gate* (Boston: Lee & Shepard/ New York: Charles T. Dillingham, 1890).

Association of Spiritualists.<sup>12</sup> Besides *The Round Trip*, she also wrote several books on topics including spiritualism, theosophy, and the actor John McCullough.

Despite diverse backgrounds and reasons for initiating travel, all these authors were united by two factors: a common belief that in order to truly know America, to “ever realize the tremendous extent of this country, or its wonderful resources” one had to travel its length “from shore to shore,” and the desire to see and experience America for themselves.<sup>13</sup> Susie Clark admonished her readers that they “can never view their own surroundings correctly until the same are seen through the perspective of distance,” a sentiment echoed by Miriam Leslie, who assured potential travelers that a cross-country journey “will convince you that you did not know your world as well as you thought you did.”<sup>14</sup>

For white women in the upper classes of American and European society, travel offered a socially acceptable chance to leave the boundaries of their homes, expanding their spheres both physically, and intellectually. The women conceptualized their journey as a voyage of discovery that opened up new venues to them and allowed them to sample all or most of what America had to offer. As Susie Clark advised her readers:

Brains do not lie fallow while traveling. Plentiful opportunities occur for storing the mind with valuable information, every hour suggesting new thought, broadening the range of mental vision, which is all the clearer because not absorbed in petty cares. . . human as well as vegetable growth is often encouraged by the process of transplanting.<sup>15</sup>

As tourists, the women had access to places otherwise off limits, such as remote western towns, mountains and canyons, brothels and opium dens, and experienced “the heterogeneous mingling together of . . . all classes and nations” which, according to

---

<sup>12</sup> John William Leonard, ed. *Woman's Who's Who of America: A Biographical Dictionary of Contemporary Women of the United States and Canada 1914-1915* (New York: The American Commonwealth Company, 1915; repr., Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1976).

<sup>13</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 144.

<sup>14</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 192; Leslie, *California*, 110.

<sup>15</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 145 & 6.

Englishwoman Iza Duffus Hardy, made traveling in America “the most Republican thing in the whole great Republic.”<sup>16</sup>

In *See America First*, one of the first comprehensive studies of the origins of modern American tourism and its role in forming national identity, historian Marguerite Shaffer argues that in late nineteenth-century America, tourism functioned as part of “the larger process of incorporation that reorganized space, redefined nature, and reconfigured human relations.”<sup>17</sup> The last decades of the nineteenth century were a time of social, cultural, and economic upheaval, when many long-held notions of order and stability began changing and breaking up.<sup>18</sup> To these female tourists, the country appeared to be at a crossroads. Life was rapidly changing. New infrastructure and railroads made the West accessible in a few days train travel, and forms of communication like the telegraph sped up the travel of news. Distance was redefined, shrinking with the advent of these new technologies. The realization that America’s land and resources were not inexhaustible was finally sinking in, and the wilderness preservation and national park movements were in their early stages.<sup>19</sup>

Struck with a sense, emphasized by Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1890 thesis on the closing of the frontier, that one phase of American development was coming to an end, people began searching for new symbols or definitions that could represent a changing America. Behind these female traveler’s exhortations that “each pair of eyes must see, each heart must open to receive, each memory must reproduce for itself the marvels [of

---

<sup>16</sup> Iza Duffus Hardy, *Between Two Oceans: or, Sketches of American Travel* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1884), 149.

<sup>17</sup> Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 286.

<sup>18</sup> Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), xviii. Orvell attributes this dislocation to the onset of modernity in America, following the Industrial Revolution, and proposes the concepts of “imitation” and “authenticity” as the two large cultural categories Americans have used to adapt themselves to these changes.

<sup>19</sup> Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*. Rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 143-144.

America]. . .go yourself and bring it away” lay a validation of the worth and importance of individual observation and participation in the reconfiguration of America taking place.<sup>20</sup> Through their travels and their books, these women positioned themselves as participants in the “shifting social and cultural relations of the emerging urban-industrial nation-state,” asserting their vision into the process.<sup>21</sup>

In her study of the history of travel conventions, Judith Adler labeled the travel in which these women participated as a type of “performed art” because it was “undertaken and executed with a primary concern for the meanings discovered, created and communicated as persons move through geographical space in stylistically specified ways.”<sup>22</sup> According to Adler’s theory, taking on the role of a “tourist” removed both the traveler and her travel experiences from the context of “home life, its work routines, social relations and hierarchies,” allowing her to not “merely reflect views of reality but create and confirm them.”<sup>23</sup> Through the medium of the journey, women found the freedom to play with identity and ideology, refashioning themselves, and trying on a variety of roles as they moved among locations. Tourism functioned as a way for these women to investigate things that were of interest to them, engage with issues of social and political import, and compose their own vision of America and their place in relation to it.

However, no matter how freeing travel may have seemed, it did not exist in a vacuum “unmediated by social or cultural authority.”<sup>24</sup> The art of travel, like any other type of art, was “guided and publicly evaluated” by a set of parameters based on factors

---

<sup>20</sup> Leslie, *California*, 240 & 234.

<sup>21</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Judith Adler, “Travel as Performed Art,” *American Journal of Sociology* 94, no. 6 (1989): 1368. Adler also identifies the women’s representation of their trip as a “search for a vantage point from which to grasp and understand life ‘as it really is’” as one of the master narratives used to find meanings in travel performance.

<sup>23</sup> Adler, “Performed Art,” 1382-1383.

<sup>24</sup> Adler, “Performed Art,” 1383.

such as class, nationality, ethnicity, age, education, religion, gender, and profession.<sup>25</sup> Early twentieth-century promotional photographs and guidebooks for the United States depicted the ideal tourist group promoters would like to attract as “well-dressed and elaborately outfitted sightseers. . .white upper- and middle class [people] who could afford to travel. . .and spend a week or more vacationing.”<sup>26</sup> In order to undertake a “grand tour” of the United States, one had to possess the leisure time and expendable income required for a journey that took at least weeks, and usually months, to complete. Simply getting across the country itself was expensive. Fare for a round-trip transcontinental ticket in the 1870s and 1880s, not including a sleeping berth, cost at least three hundred dollars.<sup>27</sup> Then there were the added costs of hotels, meals, and excursions to various tourist attractions.

The travels performed by the five women studied here were geared to their particular class and culture, as well as to how they envisioned themselves. The mode by which they traveled, their manners, their dress, and the sites they visited all marked them as members of a cultured, elite tourist class. Miriam Leslie’s lavish two-month excursion with her party of twelve cost \$15,000, not including all railroad service, which they received for free.<sup>28</sup> An 1892 Raymond Vacation Excursion to California, similar to that taken by Susie Clark in 1890 reportedly cost \$10,000.<sup>29</sup> While happy to interact to a certain extent with the varied groups of people encountered along the way, all five women continually repositioned themselves and reaffirmed their social status in relation to those surrounding them. For example, in her narrative, Susie Clark noted the luxuries

---

<sup>25</sup> Adler, “Performed Art,” 1368 & 1380.

<sup>26</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 104.

<sup>27</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 17. Information on monetary value for this period has been difficult to find. However, a study of working class budgets in New York City from 1903-1909 indicate that the typical working class family earned an average of eight hundred dollars a year. (From Robert Coit Chapin’s *The Standard of Living Among Workingmen’s Families in New York City* (New York, 1909). Cited in Kathy Peiss’s *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 12.

<sup>28</sup> Stern introduction to *California*, xii.

<sup>29</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 25.

of the Raymond car in contrast to those of the other train cars; Miriam Leslie commented negatively upon day-trippers in Yosemite; and Isabella Bird critiqued the household manners and housekeeping techniques of Colorado settlers in their cabins.

By the 1870s, extended travels by elite white women were becoming a more common and acceptable pursuit.<sup>30</sup> Women set off across the globe, visiting locations in Europe, Africa, and Asia, as well as America, using “travel as a vehicle for symbolically challenging and evading gender restrictions.”<sup>31</sup> The female travelers read for this project appeared to enjoy flaunting convention whenever they could, pushing the boundaries of safety and propriety. They scheduled nighttime excursions into the slums of San Francisco, asked opium smokers for descriptions of the process, and quizzed prostitutes and madams about life in the brothels. Miriam Leslie and her female companions insisted on going into town at railroad stops whenever the porter told them it might not be suitable for “ladies.” Isabella Bird delighted in countering people’s expectations of what a British lady would want to do or see, writing “In traveling there is nothing like dissecting people’s statements, which are usually colored by their estimate of the powers or likings of the person spoken to. . .and then pertinaciously but quietly carrying out one’s own plans.”<sup>32</sup>

Even with its veneer of acceptability, female travel pushed at the boundaries of social mores. The very act of travel itself was an assertion of independence. Exhibiting a desire, or at least a willingness to step outside the domain of the home and family and enter the vast world outside, female travelers suggested that there was something wrong with society’s rules, and that women wanted and were able to do more than was prescribed for them. Accounts written by female travelers exhibited a clear awareness that they walked a thin line between the acceptable and unacceptable. Expressions of

---

<sup>30</sup> Jane Robinson, *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travelers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1-2.

<sup>31</sup> Adler, “Travel as Performed Art,” 1380.

<sup>32</sup> Bird, *A Lady’s Life*, 73-74.

exhilaration and freedom on one page were tempered by a concern over dress or propriety on the next. The female tourist had to navigate through multiple social, cultural, and personal “scripts” during her travel performance, each of which helped her negotiate the constraints on what she should or should not do.

In *Making Gender*, anthropologist Sherry Ortner provided a perspective on how all these scripts functioned in relation to one another and the individual’s desires, with her interpretation of practice theory. At the core of her conceptualization lies the idea that “human action is made by ‘structure,’ and at the same time always makes and potentially unmakes it.”<sup>33</sup>

. . .social life is culturally organized and constructed. . .consisting of webs of relationship and interaction between multiple, shiftingly interrelated subject positions, none of which can be extracted as autonomous “agents;” and yet at the same time there is “agency,” that is, actors play with skill, intention, wit, knowledge and intelligence.<sup>34</sup>

Neither “agents” nor social structures can operate separately; they both function in relation to each other. However, female travelers were able to help build and modify the multiple structures within which they functioned. As Ortner argues,

. . .whatever the hegemonic order of gender relations may be-- whether “egalitarian,” or “male-dominant,” or something else-- it never exhausts what is going on. There are always sites, and sometimes large sites, of alternative practices and perspectives available, [that] may become the bases of resistance and transformation.<sup>35</sup>

In essence, these women’s acts of tourism and many of the chosen sites they visited facilitated the opportunity to encounter and navigate these structures of social and cultural formation.

---

<sup>33</sup> Sherry B. Ortner, *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Ortner, *Making Gender*, 12.

<sup>35</sup> Ortner, *Making Gender*, 18.

CHAPTER I:  
DEFINING SELF AND NATION IN THE AMERICAN WEST

Among tourists embarking on the American Grand Tour, the West was a key destination. As Miriam Leslie's invocation to "Go West" suggested, one could not really say they had "done" or seen America without visiting the cities, mountains, and new national parks found across the great plains. According to Judith Adler's study of travel, "the possibilities and limitations of even the least self-conscious travels are to a great extent determined by the state of the travel art itself: its norms, technologies, institutional arrangements, and mythologies."<sup>1</sup> The popular image of the American West during this period was dominated by the mythology of the "Wild" West as portrayed in dime novels, folk tales, and Wild West shows.<sup>2</sup> Filled with rugged, self-reliant settlers, daring cowboys and wild or noble Indians, this mythical West constituted a different world; a place of half-formed culture existing on the edge of society. Late nineteenth-century tourists headed out west armed with this vision drawn from guidebooks, other travel accounts, and literary works by Mark Twain, Bret Harte, the "Poet of the Sierras" Joaquin Miller, and Helen Hunt Jackson planted in their minds.<sup>3</sup> For female tourists, travel in the West, with its mythology of vast landscapes and freedom from the restraints of culture and civilization offered an exciting alternative to the domestic routine and formal etiquette often advocated in prescriptive literature for women from the period.

The idea of using the transcontinental journey to "discover" and define America was not unique to the five travel accounts examined in this study. In his 1865 travel

---

<sup>1</sup> Adler, "Travel as Performed Art," 1371.

<sup>2</sup> John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 156.

<sup>3</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 12-18. Also, all five women's accounts mention their use of guidebooks and reference the literary works and authors mentioned above.

narrative *Across the Continent*, Samuel Bowles presented transcontinental journeys like his as a perfect opportunity to “see the expanding Republic in the making . . . [and] celebrate the wonders of the national landscape, the diversity of people, and the abounding resources” of America.<sup>4</sup> A well-established tourist industry had existed in America since the 1850s, but it was primarily regional in scope.<sup>5</sup> With the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, linking the East and West coasts of the country, the American West suddenly became accessible. A trip that originally took months now could be accomplished in a matter of days from the relative comfort of a train. With the advent of travel agents and package tours in the 1870s and 1880s, setting up extended, long-distance travels became easier. The British touring firm Thomas Cook (known for its Grand Tours of Europe) organized its first package excursion to California in 1876, in conjunction with America’s centennial celebration. By the 1880s, its success inspired an American competitor, the Raymond and Whitcomb Company, to establish its own repertoire of luxury transcontinental tours linked by Western resort hotels.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, a movement in America to find and designate symbols of national identity and pride latched on to the newly discovered natural wonders in Yosemite and Yellowstone.<sup>7</sup> Eager to promote these newest American icons that could rival the great sights of Europe, entrepreneurs joined with railroads, local towns, hotels, and artists to compile guidebooks, promotional paintings, and exhibitions in an effort to attract visitors. A canon of “distinctive points of interest” in the West developed, which included sites like “the boundless Plains; the snow-capped Mountains; the majestic Columbia; our Mediterranean of the Northwest, Puget’s Sound; the magic City, San Francisco; the wonderful Geysers; the Mammoth Trees; and the peerless Yosemite.”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> Sears, *Sacred Places*, 3-11.

<sup>8</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 9.

Western cities such as San Francisco also earned fame as exciting cosmopolitan outposts existing, as Iza Hardy termed it “on the edge of the civilization we so dearly prize.”<sup>9</sup>

Another important concept in the context of these women’s travels and goal of defining America was the idea of the American West as a basis of national identity. The Manifest Destiny-inspired view of the American West as an area of vast, free land open for expansion “became central to the political concept of nation-ness that emerged during the Gilded Age. . . become[ing] the basis for a new national consciousness.”<sup>10</sup> This idea, articulated in Turner’s 1890 thesis presented the West as “embodying the process of becoming American- of moving into the wilderness, abandoning European traditions, developing new behaviors and institutions that defined the American character.” As historian Marguerite Shaffer noted, “The West as celebrated in literature, art, political rhetoric, and pulp fiction had come to represent the ‘true’ America.”<sup>11</sup> There, all elements of modern American culture mixed and existed at once, but remained unformed, and malleable. The West contained both extremes, as tourist Alexandra Gripenberg said of California, “There the primitive forest and the most modern developments intermingle.”<sup>12</sup> Most importantly, however, the West held potential, and the room for innovation and change.

Finding its own middle ground in this mix of wilderness and civilization, the tourist industry developed “wild” western areas into attractions that could provide safe adventure for visitors and constructed its own romanticized version of the American West. This new West, with its mixture of fantasy and reality, seemed custom designed to suit the needs of the nineteenth-century tourist. Historian John Sears argued that:

The American West that emerged in the latter third of the nineteenth century was a place of wonders and curiosities in which fact and fiction, history and theater, actual and staged events were blurred together. It was a tourist’s

---

<sup>9</sup> Hardy, *Between Two Oceans*, 144.

<sup>10</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 16-17.

<sup>11</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 174.

West, performing and reenacting itself for the entertainment of Easterners and Europeans.<sup>13</sup>

National parks peppered with luxury hotels, restaurants, and carriage trails showcased preserved pockets of wilderness. Urban guides offered curious tourists a personalized look at the slums and criminal haunts of cities like San Francisco, and then returned them to their hotels uptown. A new way of seeing the West emerged. Scenery was viewed from cozy Pullman cars whizzing across the plains; landscapes seen in dioramas, snippets, and stops on a round trip journey. Selling a unique blend of the wild and the tame, attractions such as these allowed travelers to get a taste of the pioneer experience without danger to life and limb, to participate in the Wild West show without actually having to live it.<sup>14</sup>

For much of American history, the West was a place that primarily men traveled in and to. Most of the stock figures of Western mythology- miners, ranchers, cowboys, railroad workers, mountain men, fur traders - were men alone. Even the landscape of the West itself was imbued with gendered meaning. Climbing mountains, riding back-country trails, camping and hunting all were viewed as primarily male activities, and the values of the “strenuous life” they represented related to a “manly” image. In her examination of promotional materials for the national parks, Shaffer found that “the juxtaposition between civilization and wilderness rested on gendered distinctions between the urban tenderfoot and the rugged mountain guide.”<sup>15</sup> Modern city living was portrayed as having “feminized” the men, but after a few days of living rough near nature in the park they were purged of “soft-feet,” “perfumes,” “fancy clothing” and other “overly civilized affectations.”<sup>16</sup>

In *Sacred Places*, his book on American tourist attractions in the nineteenth

---

<sup>13</sup> Sears, *Sacred Places*, 157.

<sup>14</sup> Sears, *Sacred Places*, 179.

<sup>15</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 86-88.

<sup>16</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 87-88.

century, John Sears suggested that tourism was never identified as a gendered activity. Unlike Annette Kolodny, who found a great disparity between male and female fantasies about the American frontier in the mid-nineteenth century, he discovered no “obvious differences” in how men and women responded to American tourist attractions in the course of his research.<sup>17</sup> While tourist sites may not have been identified specifically as male or female spaces, and men and women visited the same sites, often together, gender awareness was implicit in all five women’s accounts, underlying their descriptions of motivations, actions, and sites visited. Raised in a culture dominated by ideals of feminine domesticity, the upper and middle class women who undertook extended American travels in this period were very aware of their gender and the status that went along with it.

A good example of this gendered awareness, and the special circumstances involved in women’s travel appeared in the area of female travel clothing. When looking at illustrations in nineteenth-century travel narratives, guidebooks, and popular magazines, one factor about the female tourists pictured particularly stood out. Whether in the streets of San Francisco or the wilds of Yosemite park, they all appeared dressed in formal costumes more fitting for an afternoon tea, than a trek in the mountains. Women wearing wide-brimmed hats and long skirts with bustles wandered among the Mariposa redwood groves, rode sidesaddle down steep mountain trails, and guided horses around fallen trees.

Textual sources from the late nineteenth century, written both for and by women travelers, depicted a similar view of “appropriate” clothing for female travelers. While men on long journeys or camping trips tended to adopt fashions that were most suited to their locale and activity, these sources universally recommended formal attire for women over more functional or comfortable dress options. Many a seasoned female traveler

---

<sup>17</sup> Sears, *Sacred Places*, 8.

decried the donning of pants under any circumstances.<sup>18</sup> The only exception made came in the form of a bloomer costume, like that worn by Isabella Bird while hiking in the Rocky Mountains. Consisting of a “half-fitting jacket, a skirt reaching to the ankles, and full Turkish trousers gathered into frills falling over the boots,” Bird defended this attire as “a thoroughly serviceable and feminine costume for mountaineering and other rough traveling.”<sup>19</sup> Before riding into Colorado Springs at the end of one of her treks, however, Bird stopped to “put on a long skirt, and [ride] sidewise, though the settlement scarcely looked like a place where any deference to prejudices was necessary.”<sup>20</sup> Even in the most remote outposts of “civilization,” propriety was a constant concern for female travelers. Adventurers like Bird, while willing to give up any number of comforts in the course of their travels, relentlessly clung to the formal costume of their homes.

While this obsession with appropriate dress may seem quaint or even absurd from a modern perspective, it played a critical role in facilitating women’s travel at the time. Bird’s reference to giving “deference to prejudice” hinted at why formal costume was so important. The very act of traveling for a woman in this period was an assertion of independence that challenged accepted social norms. Dressing like a “lady” made it easier for society to deal with female mobility. As Brigitta Ingemanson described in her essay on the paradox of Victorian women’s travel costume, the confining clothing Victorian travelers wore provided “a facade of propriety behind which the women were free to pursue the ulterior purpose of their travels: active participation in life.”<sup>21</sup> Cloaked in the persona of a proper lady traveler, a woman could move about with the least amount

---

<sup>18</sup> Bonnie Frederick and Susan McLeod, eds. *Women and the Journey: The Female Travel Experience* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1993), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Bird, *A Lady’s Life*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Bird, *A Lady’s Life*, 152 & 248. Interestingly, the opposite standard seems to have applied to men. Used to meeting European gentlemen in the Rocky mountains wearing “rough hunter’s or miner’s dress,” Isabella Bird was amused by a male traveler she encountered in a small mountain town “dressed in the extreme of English dandyism [right down to his] perfectly-fitting lemon-colored kid gloves.” She describes his “inappropriate” costume as an emblem of “the innate vulgarity of a rich *parvenu*.”

<sup>21</sup> Frederick and McLeod, *Women and the Journey*, 6.

of resistance. While she may have been participating in “unladylike” activities, at least she looked the part.

Proper clothing also was an integral part of the traveling lady identity itself. In its chapter on female travel, *The Woman's Book*, an etiquette book from 1894, recommended “a very plain tailor skirt and coat of some neutral-tinted serge or tweed with a silk bodice” that emphasized both practicality and femininity as the ideal travel gown for “lady” tourists.<sup>22</sup> An emblem of her special status, it helped distinguish the lady traveler from the settlers, immigrants, and townswomen among whom she traveled. Her dress identified the woman as an outsider in these areas; above and apart from what was going on in them. In an era when social etiquette prescribed that a lady be protected by men and sheltered from the rougher elements of life, dress that emphasized class and gender also helped dictate the treatment she would receive. Looking feminine, yet modest while traveling was said to inspire good behavior and chivalric impulses in men. The 1894 edition of *The Woman's Book* advised its female readers that “a garment of modest purity is as magic a defense today as when Una wore it, and the sight of a good woman who needs their aid wakens in even bad men some part of the spirit of a Bayard.”<sup>23</sup> Many female travel accounts from this period also mentioned the care and concern shown by men towards lady travelers. Based on her experience traveling with only one other female companion, Iza Duffus Hardy determined that “to get the best out of American travel, one must be an unescorted female.”<sup>24</sup> Bad behavior, when

---

<sup>22</sup> *The Woman's Book, Dealing Practically with the Modern Conditions of Home-Life, Self-Support, Education, Opportunities, and Every-day Problems*. 2 Vols. (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1894), 374.

<sup>23</sup> *Woman's Book*, 383. Una is a character from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* that represented “truth.” Bayard most likely refers to the Seigneur de Bayard, Pierre Terrail, a French military hero from the fifteenth century. Also known as “Chevalier Bayard,” he was said to be the last embodiment of the ideals of chivalry. (from [www.Bartleby.com](http://www.Bartleby.com))

<sup>24</sup> Hardy, *Between Two Oceans*, 207. Martha Allen's survey of travel writings by both men and women in *Traveling West: 19th Century Women on the Overland Routes*. (El Paso, TX: Texas Western Press, 1987) supports this contention. She found that overall, women wrote of a better impression of Western men than their fellow male travelers. Allen attributes this difference to preferential treatment.

encountered, was remarked upon as being the exception, rather than the rule. Isabella Bird, who traveled alone, noted this phenomenon often in *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*: "I mention these little incidents to indicate the habit of respectful courtesy to women which prevails in that region. . . Womanly dignity and manly respect for women are the salt of society in this wild West."<sup>25</sup>

Formal, feminine travel dress also played one final important and subversive role. Lady travelers were very aware and proud of the fact that they were traveling as women, able to take on these activities from their gendered position. Their goal was to take advantage of the extended opportunities that travel provided within the context of their femininity, not displace one entirely for the other. The travel costume helped accomplish this by accentuating the feminine and upholding standards of propriety. The figure of the well-dressed lady traveler declared to the world that she could accomplish these activities as a woman, and traverse the same landscapes as the male traveler, all while wearing a dress. This elite group of female travelers used conventions, like proper formal dress and social etiquette to both protect themselves, and to navigate multiple constructed "scripts" defining gender, class, and racial boundaries that existed at the time.

For tourists during this period seeking to understand and form an identity for America, viewing both extremes of what the country had to offer was key. By the late nineteenth-century, the intellectual movement (most famously articulated by Henry David Thoreau) that posited the ideal balance for modern life and society as coming from a blend of savage and civilized elements had gained prominence in American thought.<sup>26</sup> In line with this philosophy, transcontinental travelers took in sights ranging from urban metropolises like New York City and San Francisco, to wilderness areas like the Rocky Mountains and the Yosemite Valley. The next section of this thesis will examine two archetypal tourist sites: The Yosemite Valley, and San Francisco's Chinatown.

---

<sup>25</sup> Bird, *A Lady's Life*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> Nash, *Wilderness*, 93.

Occupying opposite ends of the tourist spectrum, these sites both formed essential components of the tourist's itinerary and mission. Yosemite Valley, designated a state park in 1864, and a national park in 1890, was promoted as a timeless natural wonder that could rival the draw and beauty of the cathedrals and mountains of Europe. San Francisco's Chinatown existed in a cosmopolitan setting and showcased the mix of classes, cultures, and rapid growth that characterized urban America. Nativism and immigration, especially Asian immigration to the West coast, were critical issues of debate during this period that also drew curious Anglo observers to areas such as Chinatown. Together, these two sites represented both ends of the tourist spectrum -- the pastoral, awe-inspiring and regenerative, and the sensationalized urban slum.

## CHAPTER II:

## BOTH ENDS OF THE TOURIST SPECTRUM: YOSEMITE AND CHINATOWN

*“Such is California. There the primitive forest and the most modern developments intermingle.”*

-Alexandra Gripenberg

**Natural Wilderness in Yosemite**

Like many nineteenth century tourists, lady travelers saw the natural world as a prime attraction. According to Susie Clark, “To spend a season in California and not visit the valley of the Yosemite is to witness the play of Hamlet, with the omission of its title-role.”<sup>1</sup> As America became more and more developed over the course of the nineteenth-century, areas of preserved “wilderness,” like Yosemite gained significance and status. Accounts of the journey to Yosemite focused on the anticipation of its scenery and views, and characterized the landscape on the way as largely unremarkable. As is evidenced in Susie Clark’s description of the route, it was something to be passed through in expectation of the experience of the valley itself:

Gradually we rise, winding round sloping hillsides, from whose vantage ground we look down into verdant fields and charming valleys. Unfamiliar wild flowers line the roadside with many old favorites including several varieties of lupin, blue and pink and white, the vermilion painted cup, and vivid mountain pink, large bushes of the wild white lilac.<sup>2</sup>

In this depiction, the outside was largely empty of significance. It was benign, “charming,” “unfamiliar,” but not inspiring or breathtaking by any means. The difficulty and discomfort of travel through parts of this area inspired even less favorable comments.

---

<sup>1</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 119.

<sup>2</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 123.

Travelers could only reach the reward of Yosemite and the best views within the park via a jolting, dusty carriage ride. Miriam Leslie and Alexandra Gripenberg both complained about the dust, heat, and jarring nature of the journey to the park. Susie Clark summed up the feelings of many travelers when she quipped: “We recall the remark of a dear lady who declared that she was never so near her Maker as when in the Valley. We certainly never expect to be so near Purgatory again as when on our journey thither.”<sup>3</sup>

In all the accounts examined, upon first sight of the Yosemite Valley the description, characterization, and meaning of the landscape changed dramatically. Susie Clark’s narrative contained a particularly vivid contrast between her description of the “purgatory” on the way to the park, and that of her first glimpse of the landscapes in the Yosemite Valley:

Suddenly, as if the planet had dropped from beneath our feet, the trees disappeared on our right, the sky rolled itself backward like a scroll to give space to a vast army of peaks and domes and mountains of granite, a double row, the verdant gorge between, and we realized with a gasp that was almost pain, that we were looking upon the marvellous Valley. We stood on Inspiration Point. Majestic, solemn, awe-some in the massive sweep of its gigantic contours, in the wonderful stillness, the immovable calm that broods above it, as if here it was that God rested “on the seventh day from all that He had created and made, the heavens and all the host of them.”<sup>4</sup>

The tone of the description, the imagery, allusions, and energy in it increased dramatically. Swept along in the imagery, the reader can literally envision the skyline sweeping back to reveal the peaks and gorges of the valley. No longer simply charming, unfamiliar, or uncomfortable, the scenery in the park became “majestic,” “solemn,” “gigantic,” and “immovable.” Caught up in viewing the scene, Clark described how that only after her guide began “kindly dissect[ing] the grand spectacle for us” was she able to come down to “ordinary levels of thought and feeling” and notice the individual features of the park.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 125.

<sup>4</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 128-129.

<sup>5</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 129.

Miriam Leslie was equally impressed by the view, declaring “We looked, drew breath, and gave vent with such powers as God had given us to the wonder, delight, admiration, and awe which all persons, I believe, experience in first beholding this marvel of nature.”<sup>6</sup> Even Alexandra Gripenberg, who complained of her guide’s “drawling, monotonous guide’s voice, which repeated the same exaggerations three hundred and sixty-five times a year” about the wonders of the Yosemite on the way to the valley, revised her opinion.<sup>7</sup> Tired from the long journey, and armed with tales from guidebooks and the driver, her first view still inspired awe:

Yosemite Valley, the object of every Californian’s pride, opened before us, shining in the sunlight, answering our look with a smile of victory. . .we were not prepared for this bit of earthly paradise, which surpassed all of our expectations.<sup>8</sup>

Won over by the vistas she saw in the valley, Gripenberg admitted that the view was worth the journey; its “charming reality made amends for our sufferings.”<sup>9</sup>

In wilderness parks like Yosemite, travelers found an environment completely different from what they knew. The change in the description in the accounts, as well as the added significance these women authors put into their descriptions of the Yosemite Valley indicated its exceptional status. Not just any landscape could inspire the feelings of shock and awe these authors described. As historian John Sears argued, beginning about in the mid-nineteenth century, Americans designated certain sites “sacred places” that helped define the national culture, and mark out America’s exceptionalism.<sup>10</sup> Europe may have had its cathedrals, art, and culture, but America had its natural wonders. Imbued with meaning and significance, these sites promised an escape from the restraints and anxieties of daily life, and offered “spiritual renewal through contact with a transcendent reality. . .where they [visitors] would experience God more closely” much

---

<sup>6</sup> Leslie, *California*, 234.

<sup>7</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 168.

<sup>8</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 168.

<sup>9</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 168.

<sup>10</sup> Sears, *Sacred Places*, 5-6.

like that sought by medieval pilgrims.<sup>11</sup>

In the hierarchy of American sacred scenery, Yosemite held one of the top slots. Yosemite's uniqueness, embodied in its landscape, and popularized by descriptions in guidebooks and paintings like that of Albert Bierstadt, that made it an ideal site for transcendence. As Sears pointed out, "Yosemite matched the beauty of the great monuments of European architecture yet possessed the freshness and wildness of unspoiled American nature. . .it was as if both a slice of paradise and a natural cathedral had been found hidden among the mountains."<sup>12</sup> Descriptions in travel accounts pick up on all of these elements. These female travelers characterized entering Yosemite as journeying into another world. According to Miriam Leslie, upon reaching the bottom of the valley:

it seemed as if we had left the surface of the earth, and entered a mere crevice of its granite foundations, a fissure in the great chaos of everlasting rocks; and the towering peaks and overhanging crags seem marching down upon one, and pressing and crowding one in, until it seems almost a struggle to breathe.<sup>13</sup>

Framed on all sides by mountains, the park stood as a place apart from the reality of normal life in the minds of its visitors. Susie Clark claimed "heaven itself is not so far away as we are from every mundane interest or association," while Miriam Leslie deemed the valley "a world above the level of the world we know and habitually lie in, another strata of the earth's surface" and a "seventh heaven of romance and delight."<sup>14</sup>

The environment, however, took some getting used to before it could be fully appreciated and enjoyed. Clark found "the first mental impression and one not lifted until the second day, is that of overwhelming sadness. The burden of isolation oppresses us," and wished that the "magnificent proportions could be toned down just a little nearer our

---

<sup>11</sup> Sears, *Sacred Places*, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Sears, *Sacred Places*, 122.

<sup>13</sup> Leslie, *California*, 234-235.

<sup>14</sup> Leslie, *California*, 110-111 & 237; Clark, *Round Trip*, 131.

comprehension.”<sup>15</sup> In fact, these authors often declared that viewing the wonders of the valley inspired “unutterable” and “untranslatable” feelings. Facts, as Miriam Leslie argued, failed to provide any sense of the experience of being in the park:

What use, for instance, to say that the Bridal Veil Cataract is six hundred and thirty feet in height? Does that fact give an idea of its undulating, gauzy, and every-varying folds of most impalpable vapor and mist, now condensing into water, now etherealized into clouds? . . . To catalog the sights and wonders of the Yosemite Valley would be at once a thankless and unsatisfactory task; each pair of eyes must see, each heart must open to receive, each memory must reproduce for itself.<sup>16</sup>

Lists, measurements, and other descriptive terms commonly employed in guidebooks were all deemed inadequate to capture the ambience of the park. Susie Clark also declared the experience “untranslatable in any human speech” and deemed it “sacrilege [to attempt] to describe this master-piece of the Creator.”<sup>17</sup>

Despite these claims, the female travelers did their best to try and convey a sense of the scenery around them, partly in an effort to persuade future travelers to follow in their footsteps and see Yosemite for themselves. In lieu of facts or measurements, they couched their descriptions of the landscape in terms drawn from the realms of romantic poetry, myth, legend, and art. The influence of concerns with color, light, composition, and contrast were pronounced in descriptions like Gripenberg’s account of the view from Glacier Point: “And what a lavish display of colors and lights in those clear, light-brown mountain streams, silvery-foamed waterfalls, dark-green pine woods, gently green fruit trees.”<sup>18</sup> Leslie described El Capitan similarly:

It seemed to us that the variety and wondrous beauty of coloring is even more marvellous than the form, height, or grandeur of the scene. From El Capitan’s creamy, ivory whiteness the rocks deepen through every shade of pearl, smoke, and gray tints to great black patches here and there frescoed upon the silvery gray granite, and the masses of dusky oaks and dense green pines that cling to the face

---

<sup>15</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 131.

<sup>16</sup> Leslie, *California*, 240-241.

<sup>17</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 128-129.

<sup>18</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 173.

of the range.<sup>19</sup>

The scenery, composed of cliffs, valleys, and waterfalls, also lent itself perfectly to the poetic rhetoric of romantic imagery. Its influence can clearly be seen in descriptions like Susie Clark's account of Bridal Veil Falls:

The white ribbon let down several hundred feet from one of these heights is we learn Bridal Veil Fall, only to be enjoyed from a nearer view where its misty drapery floats airily and gracefully as the wayward zephyrs frolic with its gossamer meshes, and especially when the afternoon sun-beams, flooding it with their prismatic dyes, make of it a vision of loveliness too fair for earth.<sup>20</sup>

Such description would easily be at home in a work by Byron or Wordsworth. As historian of tourism Marguerite Shaffer pointed out, this similarity was exactly the point. In the late nineteenth-century, she argued, "references to pastoral imagery, natural design, along with color, mood, and form allowed tourists to equate viewing nature with viewing art, implying the education and refined sensibility one needed to fully appreciate natural scenes."<sup>21</sup> Nash also noted that the enjoyment of wilderness was viewed as a function of gentility, associated with refinement and good breeding.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, these female travelers' descriptions did indicate education and a familiarity with key compositions and art movements of the period. This cultural literacy helped separate them and their experiences from the mass of other tourists, and gave added weight and authority to their observations.

The terms and methods used in the above descriptions were characteristic of the rhetoric of the picturesque and the sublime. All in all, they evidenced the changing conception of nature and "wilderness" in America during the nineteenth-century. In his book *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash chronicled how the combined influence of Romantic, Transcendental, Nationalist, and Deist thought helped refashion

---

<sup>19</sup> Leslie, *California*, 235.

<sup>20</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 129.

<sup>21</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 279.

<sup>22</sup> Nash, *Wilderness*, 60.

wilderness from a place of peril into a place to refresh and fortify oneself from the modern world, and be closer to God.<sup>23</sup> Key to signifying and expressing this new feeling about wilderness were the concepts of sublimity, which argued that “vast, chaotic scenery could also please” even as it inspired fear and awe, and the related idea of the picturesque, pioneeringly defined by William Gilpin as the aesthetically “pleasing quality of nature’s roughness, irregularity, and intricacy.”<sup>24</sup> Gripenberg and her sister travelers, for example, described how the landscape of Yosemite, with its grandeur and promise of possibilities inspired feelings of exhilaration, freedom, and joy:

The rays of the morning sun danced in the valley; around us rose, like the towers of Gothic cathedrals, the slender, ethereal, graceful mountains . . . at every step new views opened up before us, new, lovely beauty, and our hearts filled with thankful admiration in the light, vibrating morning air.<sup>25</sup>

Clark also characterized the “wilderness” of Yosemite, as the “Mecca of every traveler, the shrine at which all devotees of Nature will reverently bow,” arguing that “amid such sublimity of environment” travelers were able to “renew [and] strengthen the soul for all sterner duties” in the world outside.<sup>26</sup> Rather than simply offering an escape from the realities of the modern world outside, Yosemite functioned as a respite, a place where travelers could be lifted above mundane concerns by the sublime environment, and head back out into the world refreshed and fortified by their experience. As Nash noted, by the mid-nineteenth century, wilderness like that found in Yosemite “was recognized as a cultural and moral resource” associated with virtues like “innocence, purity, cleanliness, morality,” and faith that modern society was supposedly lacking.<sup>27</sup>

The natural environment in Yosemite was portrayed as not only good for the body, but for the soul as well. Comparisons to cathedrals and churches, like Leslie’s

---

<sup>23</sup> Nash, *Wilderness*, 145 & 157.

<sup>24</sup> Nash, *Wilderness*, 45-46.

<sup>25</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 172.

<sup>26</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 140 & 143.

<sup>27</sup> Nash, *Wilderness*, 67 & 157.

description of the walls surrounding Mirror Lake as “carved as richly as any cathedral, Gothic or Norman,” implied connections between the scenery and the sacred.<sup>28</sup> In fact, explicit references to religion and God figure prominently in all five of the women’s accounts. Watching a sunrise in the mountains, Isabella Bird quoted the Biblical phrase “surely, the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands!” and felt she “must worship.”<sup>29</sup> Viewing “Nature, rioting in her grandest mood, exclaim[ing] with voices of grandeur, solitude, sublimity, beauty, and infinity” constantly raised Bird’s “thoughts reverently upwards to her [nature] Creator and ours.”<sup>30</sup> Susie Clark related the “deep emotion” she felt at being able to “read so clearly in terrestrial language the mighty impress of the Almighty Hand, the tracing of the Infinite Sculptor” in the Valley.<sup>31</sup> It offered an ideal place for contemplation and worship.

As Clark’s quote alluded to, many people viewed the “wild” nature like that supposedly existed in Yosemite as shaped directly by God. According to Nash, many suspected such environments were closer to God, since they contained few accretions from man and civilization.<sup>32</sup> The “wilder” the environment, the more pure, moral, and godly it was. Nationalists soon decided that in wildness, America’s natural landscapes could not be matched. This “nationalism of nature” dictated that American wilderness offered not only the best in terms of sublime and picturesque views, but in religious communion as well.<sup>33</sup>

While these female travelers engaged with and repeated the tropes of nationalism, romanticism, and the picturesque in their accounts, these descriptions held a meaning and a purpose beyond rhetoric and promotion. Aestheticizing the environment removed it from the world and time, setting it off on its own. All of the descriptions helped construct

---

<sup>28</sup> Leslie, *California*, 240.

<sup>29</sup> Bird, *A Lady’s Life*, 92.

<sup>30</sup> Bird, *A Lady’s Life*, 94 & 106.

<sup>31</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 130.

<sup>32</sup> Nash, *Wilderness*, 69.

<sup>33</sup> Nash, *Wilderness*, 71.

Yosemite as a place apart, “where ordinary laws did not apply” and normal standards of behavior were suspended.<sup>34</sup> According to sociologist Judith Adler, the “promise of time travel” where the tourist can experience “surviving remnants of an earlier, or even ‘timeless,’ way of life” by visiting certain sites has long been a master narrative of tourism.<sup>35</sup> Alexandra Gripenberg became caught up in the lure of this promise during her visit, describing how the Yosemite Valley allowed a privileged contact with traditions and legends from another time:

This remote valley with its wild, wooded mountain ravines was for a long time the favorite haunt of bears and Indians. The name of every lake, river, and mountain peak was originally given to them by Indians; and at every step here we meet with old traditions and legends, but they are vanishing distressfully fast in the modern business routine which now completely governs the place.<sup>36</sup>

Gripenberg's description of the valley, given after her first glimpse of it illuminated the many factors that attracted her to the site. The remote location of the valley preserved a sense of the seemingly untouched, unspoiled nature from the time when it was only a “haunt” of Indians and bears. Removed from the modern world both physical and temporally, Yosemite became a place where Gripenberg and her companions would not just hear about “old traditions and legends,” but actually meet them at every step along the way. A remnant of California's mythic wilderness was somehow preserved and contained within the park:

Yosemite has its own beauty. Lonely, melancholy, and fantastic like a sigh out of the Indians' barren wilderness, in the midst of civilization's hustling daily life. All that California still has of its wild forests' poetry can be found concentrated in Yosemite. In the midst of modern tourists in checkered clothes, over the soft rugs of the inns and their French foods, between the telephone and the telegraph a breath of air still blows from the time when the redskins with shining eyes and bated breath silently crept along the shore of a river in tracking their foe. . .<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Sears, *Sacred Places*, 136.

<sup>35</sup> Adler, “Travel as Performed Art,” 1375.

<sup>36</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 170.

<sup>37</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 173.

This later passage by Gripenberg romanticized Yosemite as something at once eternal, and out of the past. Even among all the modern incursions of the tourist industry, Yosemite retained a timeless quality that set it apart from the outside world.

Being in a “world apart” in Yosemite functioned for female travelers on several different levels. The women tourists used the space of nature in Yosemite, and its status as a place where the “normal” rules of society are suspended to actively challenge contemporary constructions of femininity through physical movement. While travelers portrayed the environment in Yosemite as a haven, it remained, as Leslie declared, “no paradise of creature comforts.”<sup>38</sup> The descriptions of activity in each account used language and references that emphasized not only the difficulty and physical challenge of the activities the women undertook, but also the significance of them being achieved by women. While mountain climbing, for example, Alexandra Gripenberg envisioned herself and two companions as “three Amazons with knockabout hats on and staffs in hand”<sup>39</sup> Just as the mythological Amazons participated in conventional male activities like war in Ancient Greece, Alexandra and her compatriots tackled the nineteenth century primarily male pursuit of mountain climbing, ascending “about one thousand five hundred feet upward” on a trail “so narrow that sometimes we had to walk along a crevice in the rock,” and “barely dared to talk, so that the tongue would not list toward the side of the chasm and deprive us of our balance.”<sup>40</sup>

Susie Clark put a twist on the feminine “damsel in distress” image by describing the women in her group during an ascent of Cheyenne Canyon as “three determined damsels of the persistent, resolute type [who] set forth in the face of a threatened shower to climb the rugged path.”<sup>41</sup> Far from being helpless, these damsels “leave the faint-

---

<sup>38</sup> Leslie, *California*, 241.

<sup>39</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 169. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Amazons are a race of formidable, female warriors from Greek myth. The term can also refer to a very strong, tall, or masculine woman.

<sup>40</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 171-172.

<sup>41</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 178.

hearted ones behind and press on” up the mountain, even when returning parties tell them the ascent is “near impossible.”<sup>42</sup> Miriam Leslie also bragged that rather than “sit[ting] placidly upon the piazza” in Yosemite like some members of her party, she “found energy to set off on horseback. . .to ascend Glacier Point and obtain one of the wildest and most impressive views of the whole valley.”<sup>43</sup> The language she used emphasized the active nature of her adventure as well as the physically demanding terrain of the territory she intended to cross. The trail was “steep and zigzag,” full of “frightful” curves, and ended with a ledge requiring “moral courage” to creep out on in order to see the “Mecca of their morning’s pilgrimage,” the sought-after view.<sup>44</sup>

Class divisions and hierarchies, just like gender restrictions, also seemed more fluid inside the borders of Yosemite. The travel narratives portrayed society in the park as a small utopia where people interacted on an equal plain. On first sight, Gripenberg noted the community and attitude of the Yosemite tourists: “everywhere could be seen wandering groups, either on horseback or on foot. All were suntanned, gay, and covered in real California dust, which cannot be described in words; it can only be felt in the nose, on the tongue, and on the body.”<sup>45</sup> Gripenberg’s own interaction with people while in the valley only reinforced this initial impression. Hiking the trails of the park, she and her companions encountered “smiling women riding on pretty little donkeys,” were “greeted courteously by a hunter wearing leggings and carrying a long rifle,” and met “two long-legged, young Mexican gentlemen with happiness in their eyes” who abandoned their own horses and packs to their guide to help Gripenberg’s party descend the trail.<sup>46</sup> Based on these experiences, Gripenberg concluded that:

In Yosemite all the tourists believed themselves to be of the same family, and people who happen to meet each other talk openly and frankly, give and receive

---

<sup>42</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 179.

<sup>43</sup> Leslie, *California*, 237.

<sup>44</sup> Leslie, *California*, 238.

<sup>45</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 169.

<sup>46</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 170-172.

advice about horses, guides, hotels and itineraries, and also narrate their adventures and tell stories.<sup>47</sup>

All travelers in the park united under their shared status as “tourists” and guests in an environment far from and different than that back home. They bonded together in common pursuit and enjoyment of nature and the park.

Gripenberg’s impressions of a conflict-free, unified populace in the park were not unique. In her research on national parks, Marguerite Shaffer found that publicists often promoted wilderness areas like Yosemite and Glacier National Park as offering an atmosphere “freed from commerce and free of class conflict.”<sup>48</sup> The point of wilderness vacations was to escape the disorder and restrictions of modern life, and achieve transcendence through contact with “authentic,” “untouched” nature. According to folklorist Regina Bendix, the nineteenth-century American conception of the “authentic” involved being “freer of class and historical constraints.”<sup>49</sup> Tourists expected to find camaraderie and community in the wilderness that was missing from modern life, and the tourism industry did its best to deliver. Shaffer discovered regulations from Glacier National Park instructing employees to remain inconspicuous, and segregating different classes of people within the park.<sup>50</sup> Measures like these achieved an illusion of class unity and harmony, but only by masking the divisions that did exist. Even within Yosemite, as noted above, Gripenberg and her sister travelers distinguished themselves in terms of social status, wealth, and education from other tourists. While the liminal environments of areas like Yosemite did offer more space (physically and socially) for exploration and self-definition, they were not hierarchy-free zones. Tourist may have been able to transcend the divisions and conventions that characterized their daily lives for a while, but they could not (nor did they seem to really want to) escape them

---

<sup>47</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 171-172.

<sup>48</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 67.

<sup>49</sup> Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 71.

<sup>50</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 67.

completely.

As much as travelers may have viewed Yosemite as a world apart, the site was not completely divorced from reality. Leslie described how it seemed “so impertinent for chattering, staring, lunch-eating humanity to intrude” upon the “eternal silence and seclusion” of the park.<sup>51</sup> Gripenberg also commented on the tourist developments she saw in 1888, “even now hotels were overcrowded and everywhere could be seen wandering groups.”<sup>52</sup> The women filled their accounts with references to the hotels, couriers, restaurants and other tourist amenities that dotted the Yosemite Valley. Discussions of mundane concerns, like lunch, often interrupted enthusiastic descriptions of the sublime scenery. Miriam Leslie, for example, ended one soliloquy on the view of the mountains with “to gaze, to wipe the parting tear- and to lunch! Poor human nature, to whom crackers, sardines, and Pomery Sec. are still a necessity” even in the face of awe-inspiring nature.<sup>53</sup>

Even when lamenting the intrusions and business aspects brought into Yosemite by the tourist industry, these female travelers still acknowledged the important role these amenities played in facilitating their experience and enjoyment. As Gripenberg said, “the sky was cloudless and so were our gay tourist hearts. The only cloud of worry in our hearts was fear over the fate of our lunch. . . And food, as we know, is an important stake in a tourist’s life.”<sup>54</sup> The reason tourists were able to play, enjoy, and lose themselves in contemplation of the environment was because they did not have to worry about survival. Not surprisingly, Roderick Nash found that the first groups to embrace the romantic, sublime conception of wilderness were “vacationers and urban sophisticates-” those who did not have to “explore, trap, farm and otherwise conquer the wilderness.”<sup>55</sup> With food,

---

<sup>51</sup> Leslie, *California*, 239.

<sup>52</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 169.

<sup>53</sup> Leslie, *California*, 242.

<sup>54</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 172.

<sup>55</sup> Nash, *Wilderness*, 63.

shelter, water and other basic necessities supplied, it was easy to enjoy nature. All of the accounts paid homage to this fact.

For these nineteenth-century travelers, Yosemite represented an island of wilderness, removed from the concerns and conventions of modern life. Though they recognized the modern modifications and other elements that infringed upon the ideal of “pure” nature in the park, it was this ideal that inspired them and brought them to Yosemite. While these female travelers lamented the intrusion of the modern world into this environment, they sought it out in other portions of their travels. In the tours of Chinatown described in the next section, tourists traveled to the center of America’s urban environment with the same enthusiasm they displayed for Yosemite and its timeless natural wonders.

### San Francisco's "Chinatown by Night" Tours

"A description of San Francisco which does not include Chinamen, China Town, and the Chinese question in some degree," declared Miriam Leslie in her travel account of the 1877 tour she took of the United States, "would indeed be Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark's character."<sup>56</sup> True to Leslie's word, during the last three decades of the nineteenth-century, San Francisco's Chinatown became a must-see destination for tourists from both America and abroad. As bizarre a historical picture that several well-dressed tourists wandering the depths of Chinatown in the middle of the night may present, during the nineteenth century, such practices were not uncommon. Middle and upper-class citizens of London made a practice of visiting poverty-stricken areas or "slumming" beginning in about 1860.<sup>57</sup> Prisons and asylums became popular tourist attractions in the United States; showcasing new advances in reform that helped cope with social problems.<sup>58</sup> Urban areas also attracted numerous visitors who were fascinated by their rapid growth, the mix of classes and cultures, and the major social and physical changes that expanding urban areas wrought.<sup>59</sup> Nativism and immigration, especially the debate over Chinese immigration to America known at the time as the "Chinese Question," were critical issues during this period that also drew curious observers to areas such as Chinatown. By 1884, when Englishwoman Iza Duffus Hardy embarked on her own travels to San Francisco "a Pilgrimage by night, under police escort, through the back slums and opium-dens of the Chinese quarter in San Francisco" while not "a tempting prospect . . . [for] an enjoyable evening" was "understood [as] the duty of every tourist in San Francisco, of whatever age, sex, or condition."<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Leslie, *California*, 144.

<sup>57</sup> For more information on slumming see Ellen Ross's essay "Slum Journeys: Ladies and London Poverty 1860-1940," in *The Archaeology of Urban Landscapes: Explorations in Slumland*, eds. Alan Mayne and Tim Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>58</sup> Sears, *Sacred Places*, 87.

<sup>59</sup> Sears, *Sacred Places*, 88.

<sup>60</sup> Hardy, *Between Two Oceans*, 153.

Indeed, all the female travelers this thesis examined, save one, viewed an inspection of the “Chinese quarter” as an essential component of their United States tour. Susie Clark, who declined to actually visit Chinatown, still could not leave a description of it out of her account. She felt compelled to write a lengthy explanation to her readers justifying her refusal to investigate the quarter first hand:

Chinatown- that ulcer gnawing at the city’s heart . . . We have passed through its most civilized and cleanliest corner. . . but of the opium dens . . . of the theaters whose performances sometimes last twelve hours, and of other abodes of filth and vermin, the profoundest ignorance would seem the greatest bliss. If one has a retentive memory let him be careful what pictures he hangs among her (sic) cherished treasures, selecting only those whose permanent companionship will be a pleasure. As well eat tainted meat as contact from motives of curiosity alone, impure malarial mental atmospheres.<sup>61</sup>

While warning against the dangers of Chinatown, Clark’s caution also accurately summarized both the sites most commonly visited on the tour, as well as the language of disease, filth, contamination, and vermin often employed by travelers to describe them. The very elements that so repulsed Clark thrilled and attracted many others to the Chinatown tour. Alexandra Gripenberg, for example, echoed Clark’s language but felt that “it is at night that Chinatown is most worth seeing” precisely because that was when “the Chinese crawl out of their corners and. . . become active just as do some vermin and insects.”<sup>62</sup> Miriam Leslie’s party, likewise agreed that “the mild and superficial view of China Town to be obtained at noonday by no means satisfied” and organized a “formal expedition” into the heart of the area later that night to “make its intimate acquaintance.”<sup>63</sup>

An organized guiding industry facilitated these women’s desire to journey into Chinatown. Parties met their guide (usually a former detective or member of the police force) at night on the outskirts of Chinatown and then headed down Dupont Street into

---

<sup>61</sup> Clark, *Round Trip*, 75.

<sup>62</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 143.

<sup>63</sup> Leslie, *California*, 146.

the center of the district. The guides ran the entire enterprise in the spirit of a carnival attraction, or sideshow, augmenting their description of sites with tales of vice, crime, and melodramatic comments like “from that place we’ve carried out twenty-three murdered men . . . all shot or stabbed in the back!”<sup>64</sup> Along the way, the groups visited a tour circuit of prime sites: the “Joss House” or temple with its incense and statues, the Chinese theater where plays “frequently last for six or seven hours,” the opium dens where an obliging smoker explained the whole process, the “Murderers’ Alley” said to be a haunt of the “Highbinders,”<sup>65</sup> and then through a housing complex to the infamous brothels. Finally, the excursion concluded with dinner at a “purely Chinese Restaurant” serving “true national cuisine.”<sup>66</sup>

In his investigation of depictions of San Francisco’s Chinatown, art historian Anthony Lee described how early photographers transferred the same “survey” gaze they used to depict Western landscapes to their photographs of Chinatown. This gaze aestheticized Chinatown, “transforming the quarter into an object of analysis,” meant to be observed and interpreted from the outside.<sup>67</sup> Divorced from the social and economic realities within the neighborhood, these photographers experienced Chinatown as “a ‘place’ of the imagination,” removing it and its inhabitants from the living, modern world and relegating them to a place frozen in time.<sup>68</sup> These representations had more to do with the values, opinions, and lives of those making them, than the people they were supposedly about.

Tourists visiting San Francisco in the late nineteenth-century conceptualized

---

<sup>64</sup> Hardy, *Between Two Oceans*, 160.

<sup>65</sup> Anthony Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 122 & 141. According to historian Anthony Lee, “Highbinder” was a reference to the most violent members of the tongs- the “often violent associations of single men who orchestrated much of the Chinese quarter’s illegal gambling and opium smuggling.” Highbinders were said to bind their queues up on their heads to “thwart pursuers trying to snare them.”

<sup>66</sup> Leslie, *California*, 155 & 170.

<sup>67</sup> Anthony Lee, *Picturing Chinatown*, 41.

<sup>68</sup> Anthony Lee, *Picturing Chinatown*, 19.

Chinatown in much the same way. For Alexandra Gripenberg, the boundary of Sacramento Street on the outskirts of the quarter marked “where China begins.”<sup>69</sup> She envisioned Chinatown as literally a world away from the rest of the city. Miriam Leslie’s description of leaving Chinatown as stepping from “the Celestial and flowery kingdom back to our American Republic, from an Oriental dream into a very wide-awake reality” emphasized the fantasy aspect of the site, and she admitted being “willing to pay something . . . for the pleasure of fancying ourselves in Nankin or Peking.”<sup>70</sup> Familiar with the Chinese population in London, Iza Duffus Hardy and her companion still felt that “the insight into the mode of life which we were to have” during the night tour “had all the bloom of novelty upon it.”<sup>71</sup>

In their accounts, these women portrayed entering Chinatown as crossing into a different world. Hardy and her companions “felt as if we had left the bright, busy city of San Francisco a world away. The ground was slimy beneath our feet; the strip of sky was so far above our heads that we seemed out of sight of the stars. We groped at last to a door, whose worm-eaten planks seemed crumbling to decay.”<sup>72</sup> Leslie similarly described passing from “the familiar to the unknown” as their party entered Chinatown and encountered “silent-footed, sad-eyed passengers” she described as “more like the shades encountered by Dante at the entrance of the Inferno than living and busy mortals.”<sup>73</sup> Other tourists echoed the association of Chinatown with hell, alluded to in Leslie’s reference to Dante. Hardy declared, “It was Tophet! We felt we had been carried down into some lower world. The memory of those scenes comes back like an evil dream.”<sup>74</sup> Alexandra Gripenberg added references to sorcery, disease, and decay in

---

<sup>69</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 143.

<sup>70</sup> Leslie, *California*, 172 & 144.

<sup>71</sup> Hardy, *Between Two Oceans*, 156.

<sup>72</sup> Hardy, *Between Two Oceans*, 158.

<sup>73</sup> Leslie, *California*, 147.

<sup>74</sup> Hardy, *Between Two Oceans*, 159. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Tophet refers to a place of punishment for the wicked, or hell.

her depiction of Chinatown as a “mystic and cabalistic” place and “a cancerous sore in American progress”<sup>75</sup> Leslie also described “abodes of filth and vermin” as being characteristic of the area.<sup>76</sup> Even the residents of Chinatown themselves were not portrayed as human. Both men and women were consistently referred to as “strange creatures,” or “celestials” that “cultivate a squalid and odorous mode of existence.”<sup>77</sup> Gripenberg’s lengthy description of what she termed the “typical Chinese man” also lacked all the markers of her conception of civilized humanity:

He can sew by machine for sixteen hours, sleep without bedding on a table or on the floor, subsist on tea and dried fish heads, be almost without any clothes, experience difficulties without complaining and do any kind of work to which he is assigned. . .he can live in a dirty tent on a red-hot sand dune in the midst of stinking heaps of rubbish and garbage.<sup>78</sup>

In all of these descriptions, Chinatown’s environs and inhabitants were posed as the antithesis of civilization as defined by the white, Anglo, capitalist society the women were part of. In his study on American nationalism and ideals of citizenship, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad*, Matthew Frye Jacobson argued that such comparisons with “foreign” cultures both at home and abroad were key to defining notions of American citizenship and civilization in the period between 1876 and 1917. Jacobson found that mid-nineteenth century descriptions of urban immigrant districts in the “middle-class or patrician presses” from Jacob Riis to *Harpers Weekly* often characterized the areas as “a peculiar hybrid of Stanley’s Africa and Dante’s Hell” populated by “narrative figures of darkness and moral descent.”<sup>79</sup> The rhetoric of darkness, filth, moral depravity, disease, swarms and vermin that the women travelers used tapped into a larger trend in nationalist thought that constructed the

---

<sup>75</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 145.

<sup>76</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 151; Clark, *Round Trip*, 74; Leslie, *California*, 148.

<sup>77</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 144; Leslie, *California*, 147.

<sup>78</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 144.

<sup>79</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 123.

“barbarian foreigner” as the foil for the ideal civilized American. Using “a language of blended exoticism and savagery” to describe “foreign populations in the American city” these descriptions set up their “own hierarchic or evolutionary scale.”<sup>80</sup>

Chinatown held an especially low place on this scale. As Jacobson argued, the idea of American citizenship, racialized since the 1790 naturalization act granted it only to “free white persons,” came to be defined as the antithesis of everything “barbarian,” including nationality, language, and color.<sup>81</sup> The residents of Chinatown had all three of these factors working against them. In the eyes of travelers and other Anglo observers, they were not “merely exotic,” but “fully savage or heathen” as well.<sup>82</sup> America’s Chinese population was singled out by many as particularly “wretched” and “depraved,” a perception reinforced by legislation like the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that suspended immigration of Chinese laborers to America, and marked the first time in the history of the United States that “a specific group of people was excluded on the basis of race and class.”<sup>83</sup> While the dehumanizing rhetoric used by the female travelers in their accounts was not specifically racialized, and applied to other immigrant populations as well, the discriminatory anti-Chinese climate of this period marked Chinatown out as an exceptional site.

Not everything about Chinatown was seen as repulsive, however. The quarter also held many “exotic” and desirable elements that appealed to tourists, embodying a sort of “barbaric gorgeousness.”<sup>84</sup> Gripenberg marveled at the opulent furnishings in a restaurant where “on the walls of every room hung expensive tapestries embroidered in gold and silver; [and] gilded screens decorated with beautiful carvings,” as well as the

---

<sup>80</sup> Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 125.

<sup>81</sup> Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 191.

<sup>82</sup> Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 126.

<sup>83</sup> Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 23.

<sup>84</sup> Anthony Lee, *Picturing Chinatown*, 61.

“shops of goldsmiths and china merchants, where gold, silver, bronze, amber, and sandalwood products and expensive china tempted us to try to bargain.”<sup>85</sup> In the popular mythology of the period, areas associated with “oriental” culture, like Chinatown, offered opportunities for pleasure, indulgence, sensuality and vice not available in the outside world of Anglo society, an idea explored by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*. Said described the idea of the “Orient” as “almost a European invention. . . a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” that stood in contrast to Europe and the “West” (the Occident) as a perpetual “Other.”<sup>86</sup> Conceptualized as unchanging, mysterious, and always inferior, the Orient acted as “a sort of surrogate and even underground self” for Western people, whose culture harbored elements that could “defeat the materialism and mechanism of Occidental culture” and revitalize it.<sup>87</sup>

Evidence of this Orientalist conception appeared in the accounts. Hardy and her companion, for example, felt free to be “true daughters of Eve” when told of the strength of Chinese wine during their visit, and “immediately had a tiny glass filled therewith.”<sup>88</sup> Leslie’s description of a room, supposedly in a Chinese brothel, combined all of these elements:

[a woman] with her hair elaborately coiled, puffed and ornamented with bright gold pins, making tea at a little table set out with queer cups and saucers which excited our ceramic covetousness; the room was very small and very neat, with a bed in one corner enclosed with white curtains tied with scarves at the corners, and upon the bed a little tray holding two vases of lilacs and other common flowers, besides a lamp, pipe, and opium box; curled up beside this festive preparation lay a man.<sup>89</sup>

This description characterized the environment in the room as both foreign and familiar, dangerous but appealing. The woman is coifed and ornamented, the table is set with a

---

<sup>85</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 147.

<sup>86</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 1.

<sup>87</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 3 & 115.

<sup>88</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 168.

<sup>89</sup> Leslie, *California*, 164.

“queer” but desirable china tea set, and the bed, curtained with scarves and set with the accouterments of opium smoking, functions as a site of both sexual and narcotic indulgence. Yet, it is all arranged in an appealing, domestic setting, so much so that Leslie and her companions mistake the couple for man and wife, and flee the room when the pair’s amused denial reveal the party’s “absurd mistake.”<sup>90</sup>

Not conforming to American or European notions of civilization in either its beauty or repugnance, the Chinatown female travelers viewed became a “barbaric” land ensconced in the midst of San Francisco, or as Gripenberg put it, the “Asiatic part of the American mosaic.”<sup>91</sup> As Gripenberg’s metaphor of a mosaic suggested, in this vision Chinatown could remain distinctive, yet still be part of the American landscape. The fact that it seemed unique or “exotic” to travelers and other members of the population did not exclude it from membership, even if some nationalists would have preferred it that way. Chinatown was only one tile among many, but the mosaic of turn-of-the-century America could not be complete without it.

According to Said, Orientalism was the West’s way of dealing with the Orient—“dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it. . .the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage-and even produce-the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively.”<sup>92</sup> The descriptions of vermin, insects, and disease in travel accounts coupled the language of scientific observation with a discourse of thrill and sensationalism to dehumanize the Chinese, and fix them outside of the world of civilized people. In this way, rendered as an “other,” they could be safely categorized, examined, and commodified. Once sites were “transformed into scenery and spectacle” in this way, the tourist was “empowered by the all-encompassing tourist gaze. . .to possess the tourist

---

<sup>90</sup> Leslie, *California*, 164-165.

<sup>91</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 143.

<sup>92</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

landscape [and] weave a totalizing narrative.”<sup>93</sup> Miriam Leslie’s comment that “we haunted the Chinese quarter, greedily gathering up every item or novelty, every intimation of the hidden life of this strange people” typified this attitude.<sup>94</sup> For her, the experience functioned as a type of consumption. By “gathering up” descriptions of people and places as well as material souvenirs, she and her fellow tourists constructed a vision of Chinatown they felt gave them both understanding, and a sense of ownership of the place. Just by going through the tour, Chinatown became something of theirs, an element of their experience and life.

While Chinatown functioned for many as a place of the imagination, it was not a wholly unique or personal vision. As travel historian Marguerite Shaffer argues, tourists set their “quest for authentic experience and a larger sense of individual meaning and identity within a scripted landscape shaped and defined by cultural texts and commercial aims.”<sup>95</sup> There is a striking similarity among the three accounts used in this discussion, even though the women come from three different countries and travel over a span of ten years. According to Anthony Lee’s analysis of Anglo conceptions of the Chinese in San Francisco, *Picturing Chinatown*, the images and portrayals of Chinatown and the Chinese found in the female travel accounts described above replicated popular stereotypes that had existed since the mid-1850s.<sup>96</sup> In *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*, Robert G. Lee broke down the stereotypes from this period into four archetypal images—the “pollutant,” an alien presence and threat to Anglo settlement in the West, the “coolie” (cheap Chinese laborer) that threatened American free labor, the “deviant” that was “a figure of forbidden desire,” and the “yellow peril. . . a threat to nation, race, and family.”<sup>97</sup> Various popular culture sources, from guidebooks and accounts in Eastern newspapers, to

---

<sup>93</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 302.

<sup>94</sup> Leslie, *California*, 213.

<sup>95</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 302.

<sup>96</sup> Anthony Lee, *Picturing Chinatown*, 19.

<sup>97</sup> Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 8-10.

minstrel shows, poems, songs, and short stories disseminated these views and stereotypes across America and overseas.

One especially key text from the period, which also provides an excellent example of the influential role popular culture plays in shaping identities and perceptions, was Western author Bret Harte's poem "Plain Language from Truthful James."<sup>98</sup> Originally written in 1870 as a satire of anti-Chinese sentiment in the West, especially among Irish laborers, Harte's poem told the story of two miners who ended up being out-cheated at cards by their Chinese opponent Ah- Sin. Influenced by the largely xenophobic, anti-immigration climate of the 1870s, the public took Harte's poem literally. According to literary historian Gary Scharnhorst, lines from the poem, especially "That for ways that are dark/And for tricks that are vain, /The heathen Chinee is peculiar" and "With the smile that was childlike and bland" became oft-quoted euphemisms for the Chinese and the "'yellow peril' they seemed to represent."<sup>99</sup> The poem exploded into popularity across the country and beyond. Reprinted and pirated editions (often titled "The Heathen Chinee") sold thousands of copies throughout the last three decades of the nineteenth-century, inspired parodies, novels, illustrations, songs, plays and pamphlets, and were even cited on the floor of the United States' Congress during immigration debates in 1871.<sup>100</sup>

All the female travel accounts examined for this thesis exhibited the influence of Bret Harte's poem on their perceptions of the Chinese. Miriam Leslie actually titled her first chapter on Chinatown "The Ways that are Dark," and concluded:

No happier hit was ever made than Bret Harte's poem of the "Heathen Chinee," but nobody can appreciate the phrase 'child-like and bland' until he has looked into one of these smooth olive-colored, serene and utterly expressionless faces, and wondered, in vain bewilderment, what emotions, what passions of one's self

---

<sup>98</sup> Bret Harte, "Plain Language from Truthful James," in *The Luck of the Roaring Camp and Other Writings*, ed. Gary Scharnhorst (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

<sup>99</sup> Gary Scharnhorst, "'Ways That Are Dark: Appropriations of Bret Harte's 'Plain Language from Truthful James,'" *Nineteenth Century Literature* 51, no. 3 (1996): 379.

<sup>100</sup> Scharnhorst, "'Ways That Are Dark,'" 381-386.

lay beneath it.<sup>101</sup>

This “inscrutableness” was also noted and attributed to Harte by Hardy, who informed readers “if you look at a Chinaman, his face beams with the ‘simple and child-like’ smile immortalised by Bret Harte. Sometimes we wonder what lies behind that smile.”<sup>102</sup> Even Alexandra Gripenberg, who hailed from Finland, knew of “Bret Harte’s California with its prospectors and Chinese.”<sup>103</sup> Whether Finn, Briton, or American, all three women engaged with similar dialogues about Chinese identity, citizenship, and immigration in America. Created and communicated through popular stories, songs, and stereotypes, this common discourse unified tourists across national, spatial, and temporal lines. It provided the white, upper-class traveler with background information, shaping their identifications, assumptions, and approach to the experience of San Francisco’s Chinatown.

Interestingly, one usually common element in this dialogue was missing from these three women’s accounts. According to Robert Lee’s study of Asian-Americans in popular culture, in the nineteenth-century “Chinatowns were widely believed to be centers of urban vice such as prostitution and opium smoking” and were connected to “fears of white slavery, the coercion of [white] women into prostitution.”<sup>104</sup> In this vision, white women were susceptible to the “pernicious” influence of both the Chinese themselves, and the supposed exotic, sensual, and indulgent aspects of “oriental” culture because they could be easily persuaded and duped.<sup>105</sup> As Catherine Cocks pointed out in her book on urban tourism, *Doing the Town*, “walking in an American city in the mid-nineteenth century was [seen as] an act fraught with moral and political peril,” especially

---

<sup>101</sup> Leslie, *California*, 147.

<sup>102</sup> Hardy, *Between Two Oceans*, 154.

<sup>103</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 124.

<sup>104</sup> Robert Lee, *Orientalism*, 125.

<sup>105</sup> For more on such stories, see also Gary Scharnhorst “‘Ways That Are Dark.’”

for a woman.<sup>106</sup> This general threat associated with any urban area was only compounded by the “vices” described above that were uniquely associated with Chinatowns.

While repetition of other common stereotypes from the period abounded, references to the threat of white female slavery or corruption did not appear among these accounts. A pervasive concern among the wider culture of the period was not a concern of these female travelers, or at least not one they chose to express in their writing. The only women the travelers express concern for were the Chinese women and girls they viewed as victims (or potential victims) of enslavement and concubinage. The other targets of Chinatown corruption were men- the white men who indulged in the vice of smoking opium, or worse, patronized and otherwise supported the prostitution and exploitation of Chinese women. In *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939*, Peggy Pascoe argued that the white, middle and upper-class Protestant women who ran rescue missions conceptualized Chinese women in Chinatown in terms of three primary images: the girl with bound feet, the guarded merchant’s wife, and the Chinese slave girl/prostitute.<sup>107</sup> These images exemplified female powerlessness in terms of “domestic confinement, sexual exploitation, and the treatment of women as property,” and reflected the mission workers’ critique of patriarchy, as well as their assumption of Anglo-Saxon superiority.<sup>108</sup> This viewed aligned with that of the female travelers, and while exaggerated, did have a basis in fact.

In her study of Chinese women in San Francisco, Judy Yung found that in the late nineteenth-century, Chinese women were “doubly bound by patriarchal control in Chinatown and racism outside” into a triad of life options: prostitute, mui tsai (domestic

---

<sup>106</sup> Catherine Cocks, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States 1850-1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>107</sup> Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 54.

<sup>108</sup> Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue*, 54.

slave girl), or wife.<sup>109</sup> Few Chinese women actually came to the United States. In 1850, there were 4,018 Chinese men in San Francisco, and only seven Chinese women, an immigration pattern that continued into the twentieth-century.<sup>110</sup> Women were included in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, excepting merchants' and diplomats' wives, and those who did emigrate rarely did it on their own. The vast majority who entered (legally or illegally) had been sold into prostitution or domestic slavery, or joined their husbands.<sup>111</sup> While this did not preclude all forms of agency or self-determination, and some exceptional Chinese women made their own way to and in the United States, most remained under the control of men, or other women.

Female travelers, however, were able to move through this dangerous space without fear, and emerge uncorrupted. Visiting brothels, opium dens, and theaters did not affect them, or their reputation. Besides the protection supplied by their class, race, and the tourist industry guides, it was their role as tourists, and the way sites were constructed through the "tourist gaze" that allowed the women to acceptably travel through these areas. Catherine Cocks' analysis of the rise of urban tourism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century described how this new type of tourism allowed for the "appreciation of cultural difference . . . in its proper place."<sup>112</sup> Thus travelers could safely view and interact with the Chinese, but only within the confines of Chinatown, and in the context of the Chinese constructed as the barbaric, uncivilized "other." Social distance and mobility gave tourists their privileged gaze:

insofar as the artist and writer thought of Chinatown as a place for intense experience, that belief was dependent on their privilege to stroll there and, a greater privilege still, to take a turn down Sacramento Street toward Kearney, leave the quarter altogether, and reminisce about life in the streets below. . .<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 7.

<sup>110</sup> Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 18.

<sup>111</sup> Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 24.

<sup>112</sup> Cocks, *Doing the Town*, 6.

<sup>113</sup> Anthony Lee, *Picturing Chinatown*, 78.

Here, difference in race, class, and civility with its population was magnified, but to the point that the women occupied a privileged place as mobile viewer and spectator, observing and making what they will of the environment they see. Their identity as “tourists” protected them, allowing the women to pass through even the “corrupt” areas of Chinatown with a guide, and not be criticized for it.

As part of their sensationalized tours, the guides often made comments to the “ladies” in the party on this point. Alexandra Gripenberg’s account, for example, detailed a speech given by their guide, detective Bethell, at the start of their tour:

‘Ladies,’ said Bethell and tapped his nose with his thick forefinger, ‘ladies, you may follow me without any fear. No harm will come to you. Whatever you may see- trust in me. Under my protection you will have nothing to worry about.’<sup>114</sup>

Following this comment, Gripenberg explained to her readers “not one of us was in the least afraid and no one had even mentioned anything about fear, but our guide seemed to feel in a better mood after this gloomy introduction.”<sup>115</sup> As indicated from Gripenberg’s quote, female travelers presented themselves as fairly fearless as they moved through Chinatown and sought to interact with the environment. In this context, fear and vice seemed more thrilling, than genuinely threatening. In Leslie’s opinion, even the characteristic smoking of opium was “a habit not so horrible after all as drunkenness of another nature; since the opium smoker injures only himself, and the man crazed by liquor is dangerous to his family and the community at large!”<sup>116</sup> Her comment, while emblematic of the viability of the temperance movement during this period, also summarily dismissed one of the main threats of Chinatown as inconsequential. Enough of the feel or remote possibility of danger in the infamous “urban slums” remained in the Chinatown tour to make it thrilling in a fun, but not truly terrifying way. Surrounded by the tour infrastructure and their social positions, female travelers were able to navigate

---

<sup>114</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 143.

<sup>115</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 143-144.

<sup>116</sup> Leslie, *California*, 159.

this “dangerous” environment and come out feeling triumphal, proud, and even entitled for having done it.

This is not to say the women felt completely self-assured in their voyeuristic touring of Chinatown. Their accounts abound with instances of miscommunication, discomfort, and cultural confusion. In the theater, for example, Miriam Leslie’s party, “the only Americans in the house” gave an acrobatic performance “a round of applause” only to find that they were the sole members of the audience to do so. Discomforted when “the silent Celestials [in the audience] turned and grinned at us in wonder and derision” they quickly “got up and went out.”<sup>117</sup> This passage perfectly expressed the mix of authenticity and unease present during the Chinatown night journey. Being the only Americans in the house made the experience more authentic for Leslie’s party, but at the same time caused discomfort and embarrassment for the party when their alienness in the environment became manifest. Faced with such a situation, they felt their only recourse was to get up and leave.

The women were also convinced that on some level, whatever face they may portray, the Chinese could not be trusted. They described sensing a malignant purpose among all the Chinese encountered. Passing “several Chinese men coming down from the temple . . . upon the narrow stairs” Miriam Leslie found it “very possible [they] felt disposed to fling us over the light hand-rail,” even though no actions or words to indicate this occurred.<sup>118</sup> She also suggested that “one might take to reading the old letters from India which told at first of the skill and faithfulness [of Indian servants] and then of the horrors of the Sepoy rebellion, and then came no more!” when considering the trustworthiness of the Chinese population.<sup>119</sup> In Hardy’s vision, men lying half senseless in an opium den appeared to coil like “wild animals in their lair,” and she was more than

---

<sup>117</sup> Leslie, *California*, 158.

<sup>118</sup> Leslie, *California*, 148.

<sup>119</sup> Leslie, *California*, 172.

ready to believe her guide when he observed that “almost every one of those [Chinese] fellows has one of these [weapons hidden] under his blouse.”<sup>120</sup>

Judging by the accounts, it seems the “bland face” so famously described by Bret Harte only lent credence to the women’s fears and stereotypes of the “duplicitous Chinese.” They seemed unable to understand expression on the faces of the Chinese people they encountered, and they ascribed to all Chinese an “inscrutability” which functioned as a mask meant to hide its wearer’s true emotions (and ill intentions) to the white visitor. Miriam Leslie reported about her encounter with an opium-smoker: “in that sneering look and laugh we seemed at last to get the true expression of feeling which forever haunts the writer as the real meaning underlying the bland, smiling or inane exterior, presented to us by these Celestials.”<sup>121</sup> Gripenberg commented rhetorically about one Chinese shopkeeper “You look innocent, but the devil skulks at your heels.”<sup>122</sup>

Much of this unease and suspicion was likely a reflection of the tourists’ own unease in the “foreign” environment; a result of the extreme alienation between the two groups, which was only augmented by the sensationalized night tours designed to show the “worst” of Chinatown, and reinforce these very stereotypes. As Anthony Lee noted, the social and cultural gulf between Chinatown and the white, upper-class tourists made tours “a diversion of a cultivated but often alienating sort” that personified “the discomfort of coming face-to-face with foreigners in the metropolis.”<sup>123</sup> Even with their guides, in Chinatown, tourists confronted a culture radically different from their own. Some tourists suggested that, contrary to their purported duty, their guides made the experience even more alienating. Iza Duffus Hardy, for example, noted how her “escort took pride in pioneering us through the worst places,” and offered little in the way of

---

<sup>120</sup> Hardy, *Between Two Oceans*, 157.

<sup>121</sup> Leslie, *California*, 161.

<sup>122</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 148.

<sup>123</sup> Anthony Lee, *Picturing Chinatown*, 67.

information or orientation.<sup>124</sup> Visitors on guided tours of Chinatown were alienated from the people and places they encountered. They could not blend in, or go anywhere or observe anything without attracting attention themselves. Unable to understand the language or really participate in the culture, tourists had to settle for simply observing. They remained “outsiders” even while in the midst of Chinatown itself.

As much as these sites functioned as sets and backdrops for the traveler’s tourist performance and were used to reflect back personal anxieties, concerns, and beliefs, the sites and their inhabitants added their own stamp to the travelers’ experiences. Chinatown was a living, functioning place, no matter how much tourists constructed it as realm of imagination. Tourist incursions did not go unnoticed, as Iza Duffus Hardy observed:

Nowhere else in the civilized world would our presence have caused so much curiosity and interest-*excitement* is totally incompatible with the Celestial calm. Outside every house as we came out, we would find a crowd of blouses and pigtails, filling up the whole street, waiting to get a look at us.<sup>125</sup>

The residents of Chinatown looked back, flipping the voyeurism around to gaze on their spectators. They were not just passive. At one point in her trip, Leslie found her party being followed into a shop by a group of curious Chinese people from the street. They watched the activities of the eight ladies and gentlemen in her party just as earnestly as they were trying to observe the Chinese. This reverse voyeurism greatly disturbed her:

Wherever we paused, a crowd of blue-bloused, olive-skinned pig-tailed figures gathered silently and closely about us. The crowd evidently discussed us freely. . . as we could not but suspect, in a jeering and uncomplimentary manner, although every face “beamed the child-like bland smile” and spoke only flattering words in English.<sup>126</sup>

Although the Chinese were only doing much the same as her party, Leslie felt it was a wrong, impolite, and even uncouth way to act. She became incensed at being stared at

---

<sup>124</sup> Hardy, *Between Two Oceans*, 159.

<sup>125</sup> Hardy, *Between Two Oceans*, 160.

<sup>126</sup> Leslie, *California*, 152-153.

and laughed at in her own country, especially by a group of people she viewed as “outsiders” and beneath her in social status.

While designed to provide tourists with the voyeuristic thrill of experiencing the perceived “exotic” and “foreign” ways of the residents of Chinatown, these tours also served an important function. Regardless of the discomfort, paranoia, or discontent the women felt, the “Chinatown by night” tour gave them the authority to comment on the Chinese situation as an *eyewitness*, and express their own opinion of the situation. Tourism functioned as a way for these women to investigate things that were of interest to them, engage with issues of social and political import, and compose their own vision of America and their place in relation to it. On their tours, they took in not only the sensationalized, thrill of “slumming,” but funneled their observations into examinations of critical questions of citizenship, assimilation, and lifestyle that surrounded the issue of the Chinese presence in America, as well as immigration in general.<sup>127</sup>

At the end of their accounts of Chinatown, after repeating numerous slurs and stereotypical views about the Chinese, all three of the women expressed outrage at the treatment of the Chinese and conditions of Chinatown in San Francisco. Alexandra Gripenberg, for example, ridiculed her guide when “without noticing his lack of logic, he reproachingly” admonished a Chinese prostitute to give up her profession and marry.<sup>128</sup> She then launched into a criticism of “Christian America” for viewing the “annual importation of thousands of children from China with the same calmness that general opinion in Europe tolerates two standards of morality and legalized vice.”<sup>129</sup> Rejecting the excuse that this trade ensured the safety of white women on the streets given to her by both the detective guide and the headmistress of a rescue mission, she deplored the idea that “the poor, coarse, ignorant woman [should be] sacrificed to protect her sisters who

---

<sup>127</sup> For more on the role of the “Chinese Question” in early San Francisco society, see Anthony Lee’s *Picturing Chinatown*.

<sup>128</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 150.

<sup>129</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 151.

are better off in life.”<sup>130</sup>

While Gripenberg expressed her indignation in moral terms, Miriam Leslie took on the “Chinese Question” in explicitly political terms. Arguing that “the free and noble principles of our government suffer insult and wrong [by] our own people who permit the ruffians infesting San Francisco to rob, insult and maltreat the Chinaman at every turn,” she concluded that while San Francisco’s Chinese may not be completely trustworthy or personable, they are here to stay:

Whether we like him or not, the Chinaman in California has become a fixed fact, and one not to be done away with except by giving the lie to our own Institutions, especially to that clause of the Constitution which declares all men to have a right to life and liberty ‘and the pursuit of happiness,’ and to those laws which welcome the emigrants of the world to our shores and offer them a share of that freedom. . . all that remains is, for us to make the best of it as it is, and treating John liberally as a man and a brother, cultivate such of his qualities as we esteem, deal with what we do not like. . . and wait for Time, the great assimilator, to soften the differences. . .<sup>131</sup>

While clearly not unbiased, Leslie called for recognition of the humanity of the Chinese population and their right to be in America, as well as equal application of the law to all immigrants. Also invoking the constitution, Iza Duffus Hardy argued a similar point:

The ‘Chinese Bill’ prohibiting the immigration of Chinese laborers into the United States. . . is unconstitutional. . . the Republic of Washington’s foundation, according to its original constitution, was free and open to all peaceable and law-abiding persons to enter and to leave.<sup>132</sup>

Both Leslie and Hardy addressed the issue of the Chinese in America in relation to the ideals and laws that were supposed to govern the nation. They advocated change through appeals to the government and politics, rather than through moral authority or reform societies. Their travels through Chinatown provided them with both the authority, and opportunity to address key issues of national and political concern, and their travel narratives gave them a public platform to express and circulate their opinions.

---

<sup>130</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 152.

<sup>131</sup> Leslie, *California*, 167 & 174.

<sup>132</sup> Hardy, *Between Two Oceans*, 187.

While sympathetic to the Chinese plight, these three authors still remained embedded in racial, social, and class discourses of the period. A major part of belonging, being a proper immigrant, and gaining citizenship, in the view of these authors, involved consuming American goods, adopting American culture and foodways, and putting money back into the country's economy. And in this respect, they perceived the Chinese population as sorely lacking. Leslie lamented that the first thing the Chinese did in America was "reduce themselves generally to a condition of crowd, discomfort and clutter most repugnant to the American's habit of mind, but apparently the height of convenience to that of the Oriental."<sup>133</sup> Gripenberg was angered by what she saw as the residents of Chinatown's refusal to adopt and adapt to America:

Johnny will not give up the foods which he has been accustomed to eat, but imports them from China. He works for the whites and takes their money, but he will not trade with them and leave his money in this country. America is not dear to him; he does not care for it nor does he want it as his fatherland. It is only a gold mine to him, nothing more.<sup>134</sup>

Although politically disenfranchised and exploited, the Chinese, in Gripenberg's opinion, should still be involved in America, and at least make an effort to assimilate. She felt they owed something to the country they made their home, and part of their failure to integrate resulted from their own insular ways.

Class distinctions also still applied, even across racial boundaries. All of the accounts distinguished between what their authors' designated as the better, cleaner, upper-class areas in Chinatown, and the darker, dirtier alleys and slums where the lower-classes dwelt. Leslie described how in San Francisco's "fashionable Chinese shops" the air was:

more foreign than is possible in an Eastern city, the atmosphere redolent of a pungent, delicious odor of sandalwood and Oriental perfumes, and the smooth, brown, quiet salesmen. . .with shining pigtailed descending from beneath their silken skull caps, heads and faces smooth as a baby's. . .were altogether different

---

<sup>133</sup> Leslie, *California*, 154.

<sup>134</sup> Gripenberg, *Half Year*, 144.

form the Chinese laundry-men from whom we of the Atlantic Coast, take our ideas of the Flowery Kingdom.<sup>135</sup>

She then contrasted this inviting, opulent environment with what her party encountered when “we turned into steep and dingy Munro Street, and were in China Town itself. No more *bric-a-brac*, no more silken caps or fine clothes. . .here all the people cultivate a squalid and odorous mode of existence.”<sup>136</sup>

Hardy’s account even went one step further. Using her San Francisco connections, she arranged invitations to the homes of several upper-class Chinese merchants during the Chinese New Year celebration. Unlike the poorer areas of Chinatown, the merchants’ rooms were “large, airy, well-furnished. . .the first such apartment we had seen in China Town.”<sup>137</sup> She described their host, Sing Yang, as “a very fine specimen of a courteous and dignified gentleman, of a grave and intellectual cast of countenance; he spoke English almost perfectly, and his manner as host might have done credit in any nation.”<sup>138</sup> Among the upper-class, Hardy saw clean and neatly arranged homes, wives, material goods, connections to prominent members of the city and a type of society more familiar to her own wealthy, Anglo community. It was all civility, cleanliness, and good manners. For Hardy and the other female travelers, class made a difference, even among another race. Viewed by Anglo tourists as on their way towards acculturation and reaching the “white” standard of civilization, the wealthy elite of Chinatown were represented as the example lower classes should aspire to. Both class and race figured into this hierarchical model of society and American citizenship.

The description of Chinatown in these three female tourists’ travel accounts complicated both the nineteenth-century stereotypes and perceptions of San Francisco’s Chinatown, as well as those often associated with its elite tourists. While these women

---

<sup>135</sup> Leslie, *California*, 142-143.

<sup>136</sup> Leslie, *California*, 144-45.

<sup>137</sup> Hardy, *Between Two Oceans*, 170.

<sup>138</sup> Hardy, *Between Two Oceans*, 172.

remained firmly embedded in the racial and class hierarchies of their day, they still used their tourist experience to promote reform and change, even against the dominant views and advice of their tour guides and other prominent residents of San Francisco. They worked their own agenda in and through the produce voyeuristic thrill tours of Chinatown, using and getting more out of it than simply entertainment. Tourism played a key role in thinking about and engaging with social, political, and cultural issues by providing a site where issues of race, class, gender, nationality, and citizenship collided and were examined. In an era before women gained the vote and an official political voice, and when cities were still viewed as dangerous contexts for female mobility, the Chinatown “thrill tour” provided a means for female travelers to skirt both these boundaries and add their opinion to the public discourse.

## CONCLUSION

Whether manifested as concerned with finding a Chinese restaurant that served “true national *cuisine*,” and “Chinese tea prepared by Chinese hands” or waxing poetic over the untouched natural beauty of El Capitan or the Bridal Veil falls, there was definitely a sense in these accounts that environments like Chinatown and Yosemite held an essence, something vital and intense that the outside world had lost.<sup>1</sup> In some ways, this search for the authentic tourist experience can be understood as a response to conditions in the “modern” world which these women lived. In *No Place of Grace*, historian Jackson Lears identified a “broader transatlantic dissatisfaction with modern culture in all its dimensions: its ethic of self-control and autonomous achievement, its cult of science and technical rationality, its worship of material progress” that rendered modern life increasingly empty, alienating, over civilized and “unreal.”<sup>2</sup> Travel offered one way to “experience ‘real life’ in all its intensity” for those who “sought ‘authentic’ alternatives” to the banality of modern existence.<sup>3</sup>

Chinatown and Yosemite seemed to embody opposite poles in both tourist destinations and tourism categories, but female travelers of the time saw them as part of the same integrated journey. As Marguerite Shaffer argued, the primary goal of transcontinental tourism was to “reconcile the national mythology, which celebrated nature, democracy, and liberty, with the realities of an urban-industrial nation-state.”<sup>4</sup> Yosemite was only 180 miles away from San Francisco, a distance easily traveled by

---

<sup>1</sup> Leslie, *California*, 170-171.

<sup>2</sup> T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 5.

train.<sup>5</sup> As technological advances, like the railroad “shrunk the distance between nature and culture,” integrating the two became an essential project for tourism.<sup>6</sup> Nature and culture were both parts of America that, with the closing of the frontier, now had to coexist with each other. Examining the way female tourists described, and used both sites together reveals a unity of purpose and opportunity. Despite their differences, Chinatown and Yosemite worked congruently, serving similar functions in terms of self and national definition for the women who visited them.

In an era before women gained the vote and an official political voice, travel presented a means for women to engage with issues of import, and add their opinion to the public discourse. Through travel, they found both the authority, and opportunity to address key issues of national and political concern, and their travel narratives gave them a public platform to express their views. Women traveled with and through multiple discourses on their journeys - scripts defined by the tourist industry, nationalist sentiment, and conventions related to class, gender and race that advised them where to go, what to see, and how to visualize and quantify it. But through it all, these women also pursued their own perceptions and agendas. Their accounts and narratives are more than just fond recollections of an entertaining pleasure trip. As Miriam Leslie advised her readers in the “Preparatory” of *California, A Pleasure Trip from Gotham to the Golden Gate*, “remember that to competently judge a woman’s letter or a woman’s book, one must have learned to read between the lines and find there the pith and meaning of the whole.”<sup>7</sup>

Tourism is about making sense of self, place, history and nation. Ideas of citizenship, nationality, and identity are not determined by politics, legislation, or borders alone. Culture acts as a key site where such ideas are engaged with, produced, and

---

<sup>5</sup> Sears, *Sacred Places*, 122.

<sup>6</sup> Shaffer, *See America First*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> Leslie, *California*, 6.

worked out. By examining travel accounts, one learns much about how people not only saw, but wanted to envision their world, its past, and their place within it. As Cocks argues “the fostering of a distinctly American culture in the present required defining which people and events were truly American. . .popular writers participated in the process of reshaping the way that [people] imagined and moved through. . .the nation.”<sup>8</sup> Studying travel and tourist accounts provides a unifying method that ties together cultural, social, gender, class, race, and intellectual concerns, just as travel itself helped the authors in this study unite the disparate people, places, ideas, and values they encountered into one cohesive vision of America. Tourism offers space for making one’s own meaning.

Tourism in both the past and the present embodies the complexities and contradictions of the period it occurs in. Looking at the current bevy of tourists attractions in the form of reconstructed historic places, like Colonial Williamsburg, or Greenfield Village, historian John Sears determined that overall, modern “Americans love not the past itself but bright new reconstructions of the past created by technology.”<sup>9</sup> Even examining such attempts to commodify and reduce history only provides more insight. As always, current ideologies, policies, and beliefs put their stamp of meaning upon reconstructions and other tourist sites. Who we were helps form an idea of who we *are*. Tourism can be used to support agendas like policy and patriotism, but it also offers opportunities to extend understanding and reform agendas and ideologies. As we move further into the twenty-first century, what will our tour choices say about us and our society?

---

<sup>8</sup> Cocks, *Doing the Town*, 174-175.

<sup>9</sup> Sears, *Sacred Places*, 215.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary SourcesTravel Accounts

- Bird, Isabella Lucy. *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*. 3d ed. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1879-80.
- Clark, Susie Champney. *The Round Trip from the Hub to the Golden Gate*. Boston: Lee & Shepard/ New York: Charles T. Dillingham, 1890.
- Gripenberg, Alexandra. *A Half Year in the New World: Miscellaneous Sketches of Travel in the United States*. 1888. Reprint, translated and edited by Ernest J. Moyné, Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1954.
- Hardy, Iza Duffus. *Between Two Oceans: or, Sketches of American Travel*. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1884.
- Leslie, Miriam Florence [Mrs. Frank Leslie]. *California: A Pleasure Trip from Gotham to the Golden Gate (April, May, June 1877)*. New York: G.W. Carleton & Co., 1877. Facsimile, with an introduction by Madeleine B. Stern, Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1972.

Other

- Black, Helen C. *Notable Women Authors of the Day*. 1893. Reprint, Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972.
- Harte, Bret. *The Luck of the Roaring Camp and Other Writings*. Edited by Gary Scharnhorst. New York: Penguin Books, 2001.
- Leonard, John William, ed. *Woman's Who's Who of America: A Biographical Dictionary of Contemporary Women of the United States and Canada 1914-1915*. New York: The American Commonwealth Company, 1915. Reprint, Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1976.
- Mallon, Isabel A. "Seashore and Mountain Frocks." *The Ladies Home Journal*, August 1892, 21.
- Sanborn, Kate. *A Truthful Woman in Southern California*. New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1893.
- The Woman's Book, Dealing Practically with the Modern Conditions of Home-Life,*

*Self-Support, Education, Opportunities, and Every-day Problems.* 2 Vols. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1894.

Tingling, Marion, ed. *With Women's Eyes: Visitors to the New World 1775-1918.* Hamden, CN: Archon Books, 1993.

### Secondary Sources

Adler, Judith. "Origins of Sightseeing." *Annals of Tourism Research* 16, no. 1 (1989): 7-29.

---. "Travel as Performed Art." *American Journal of Sociology* 94, no. 6 (1989): 1366-1391.

Allen, Martha Mitten. *Traveling West: 19th Century Women on the Overland Routes.* El Paso, TX: Texas Western Press, 1987.

Armitage, Susan and Elizabeth Jameson, eds. *The Women's West.* Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.

Bendix, Regina. *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997.

Boorstin, Daniel J. Introduction to *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, by Isabella Lucy Bird. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960.

British Biographical Archive, card 515. s.v. "Hardy, Iza Duffus."

Cocks, Catherine. *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850-1915.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Downs, Robert B. *Images of America: Travelers from Abroad in the New World.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

Foster, Shirley and Sara Mills, eds. *An Anthology of Women's Travel Writing.* Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2002.

Frederick, Bonnie and Susan McLeod, eds. *Women and the Journey: The Female Travel Experience.* Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1993.

Horn, Marilyn. *The Second Skin: An Interdisciplinary Study of Clothing.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968.

Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign*

- Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000.
- Kerber, Linda K., Alice Kessler-Harris and Kathryn Kish Sklar, eds. *U.S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
- Kolodny, Annette. *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984.
- Lawrence, Karen. *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Lears, T. J. Jackson. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.
- Lee, Anthony W. *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Lee, Robert G. *Orientalists: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999.
- MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken Books, 1976.
- Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Mayne, Alan and Tim Murray. *The Archaeology of Urban Landscapes: Explorations in Slumland*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. Rev. ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973.
- Ortner, Sherry B. *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Orvell, Miles. *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989.
- Pascoe, Peggy. *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Reinhardt, Richard. *Out West on the Overland Train: Across-the-Continent Excursion with Leslie's Magazine in 1877 and the Overland Trip in 1967*. Palo Alto, CA: The American West Publishing Company, 1967.

- Robinson, Jane. *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travelers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Ross, Ellen. *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London 1870-1918*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.
- Scharnhorst, Gary. "'Ways That Are Dark:': Appropriations of Bret Harte's 'Plain Language from Truthful James.'" *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 51, no. 3 (1996): 377-399.
- Schmitt, Peter J. *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.
- Sears, John F. *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Shaffer, Marguerite S. *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001.
- Sklar, Kathryn Kish and Thomas Dublin, eds. *Women and Power in American History: Volume II from 1870*, 2d ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002.
- Smith, Henry Nash. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. New York: Vintage Books, 1950.
- Smith, Valene L., ed. *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*. 2d ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989.
- Stern, Madeleine B. *Purple Passage: The Life of Mrs. Frank Leslie*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953.
- Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.
- Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." *The Turner Thesis Concerning the Role of the Frontier in American History*. 3rd ed. Edited by George Rogers Taylor. Heath: Lexington, MA, 1972.
- Yung, Judy. *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

## VITA

*Sarah Elizabeth McLennan*

Sarah Elizabeth McLennan was born in Alpena, Michigan on November 8, 1978. She graduated from Alpena High School in June of 1997, and received a B.A. in History and a B.A. in English Literature from Michigan State University in December of 2001.

In August of 2002, the author entered the College of William and Mary as a candidate for the M.A. degree in history, and worked as a graduate assistant at the National Institute for American History and Democracy.