Travelling Wives and Unprotected Women: Representing the Female Traveller in Tom Taylor's mid-Victorian Comedies (1860)

Victoria Puchal Terol (mariavictoria.puchal@campusviu.es)[1]
Universidad Internacional de Valencia

Abstract: Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Britain would boast of an economic and social prosperity, improving both national and international transport and tourism. However, certain social issues such as the *Woman Question*, or the altercations in the colonies raised questions about the Empire's stability. In London, galleries, museums, and theatrical stages, would reproduce images of the colonies to satisfy the people's appetite for the foreign. In these, mobile women were usually reduced to stereotypical characters. Thus, we can find a clear categorization of the female traveller: on the one hand, the faithful wife who accompanies her husband, and, on the other, the wild, undomesticated female (Ferrús 19). This article scrutinises women's position and representation as travellers during the Victorian period. With this purpose in mind, we analyse two comedies written by English playwright Tom Taylor (1817-1880) for London's stages: *The Overland Route* (Haymarket 23 February 1860) and *Up at the Hills* (St. James's Theatre 22 October 1860). The plays' setting (colonial India) offers us the opportunity to further discuss gender ideology and its relationship with travel during the mid-Victorian period.

Keywords: Victorian theatre, women, Tom Taylor, female representation, travel.

Esposas viajeras y mujeres desprotegidas: representación de la mujer viajera en las comedias de Tom Taylor a mediados del siglo XIX

Resumen: Durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIX, Inglaterra alardeaba de una prosperidad económica y

social, reflejada en la promoción de los medios de transporte y del turismo. Sin embargo, movimientos sociales como la *Woman Question* o los altercados en las colonias hacían cuestionar la estabilidad del Imperio. En Londres, numerosas representaciones teatrales y otras formas de entretenimiento visual reproducían unas colonias en las que la mujer, a menudo, se veía restringida a ciertos estereotipos de viajera. De esta manera, existe una categorización clara de la mujer viajera: por una parte, la esposa que acompaña a su marido y, por otra, la no domesticada o salvaje (Ferrús 19). En este artículo abordamos la situación y representación de la mujer Victoriana viajera en el teatro Londinense y analizamos dos comedias escritas por el dramaturgo inglés Tom Taylor (1817-1880): *The Overland Route* (Haymarket 23 Febrero 1860) y *Up at the Hills* (St. James's Theatre 22 Octubre 1860). Estas obras, ambientadas en la India colonial, nos permiten ahondar en cuestiones de género y su relación con el viaje durante la época victoriana.

Palabras clave: teatro victoriano, mujer, Tom Taylor, representación femenina, viaje.

1. Introduction

In 1851, on the occasion of the Great Exhibition at Hyde Park, over six million visited the city of London. The spectacular Crystal Palace, built solely with the purpose of showcasing Britain's industrial advances, was transformed into a sort of altar in which the visitor could revel on the Imperial mission without leaving the comfort of his or her own country. Among the most popular stands, the Indian section stood out for its perceived exoticism, and it is no wonder why: in there, one could find a real stuffed elephant mounted by a magnificent howdah (or carriage), sent as a gift by Indian rulers to Queen Victoria, as well as other objects from the colony compiled by the British East India Company. As these suggest, behind a façade of instruction and public service, a feeling of nationalism and exaltation of the British Empire lingered. After the tumultuous 1840s which were mainly

remembered by Ireland's Great Famine and the ensuing migration crisis, the 1850s set off to bring prosperity to the country and to re-signify the meaning of the Empire.

Almost a decade later, a second Exhibition in 1862 further established London (and Britain) as a global force. This time, the event would boast of its international nature, emphasizing its intention to promote "friendly relations among all nations of the earth" (*London Evening Standard* 6). Less remembered than its predecessor, the International Exhibition of 1862 attracted a greater number of people than the first, including more foreign visitors and organized groups from factories, institutions, and schools, and even certain female groups patronized by benefactors such as the girls from the London Orphan Asylum and the wives and children of groups of working-class men from Chatham (Hobhouse 135).

In a way, the Crystal Palace, the International of 1862, and the displayed objects became symbols of what William L. Burn named the "mid-Victorian equipoise", a period of apparent prosperity and peace in England during the 1850s and 1860s. According to Burn, both events contributed to hierarchical acceptance and peace amongst social classes, creating an illusion of companionship and national identity. Jeffrey Auerbach mentions how such enormous exhibitions were transformed into spaces for identity formation and affirmation of British nationalism and imperialism (228-231). However, contrary to what the "age of equipoise" might suggest, the mid-Victorian period was, in fact, a time for both social and political action (Hewitt). In this sense, it is worth to question the real purpose of both exhibitions, which had been celebrated shortly after England's victory overseas in the First Opium War (1839-1842) and the Second Opium War (1856-1860). The timing might have been coincidental, but the result was nonetheless relevant; the exhibitions had acted as loudspeakers of the benefits of the Empire, a justification for the colonial missions abroad, and ultimately, as an example of a growingly mobile society.

Within this context of change, several socio-political movements started to rise, amongst which it is worth noting the groups of middle-class women who made the idea of female emancipation go from a whisper to a shout. Taking after Mary Wollstonecraft and her contemporaries from before the turn of the century, considered as the

first wave of feminism (Shands 2), female-led groups such as the Langham Place circle or the Kensington Society gathered and fostered a sense of female community, developed campaigns for women's rights, and organized lectures around London to raise awareness about the old-fashioned passive role of women. Some of the leaders of the movement were Harriet Taylor Mill (wife of John Stuart Mill), Barbara Bodichon, and Emily Davies. They fought against the discrimination of women, going as far as the House of Commons with their pleas for female rights, and published propagandistic essays in favour of female emancipation on the national newspapers. However, a side of society still clung to the traditional "domestic ideology" that had previously relegated women to the home (Hall 28), thus expressing concern over what the media called the *Woman Question*. The *Illustrated Times* described the *Woman Question* as an untimely attempt to discuss the position of women in British society, insisting that "no one, except one or two female enthusiasts who have found no followers, says that women are qualified by Nature to fill all such positions as hitherto have been reserved exclusively for men" (102). Besides condemning women's ability to be consistent in their education, the newspaper went on to classify them as *the weaker* men. Some years later, the *Globe* would still insist on the intellectual inferiority of women and would remark women's supremacy over their own realm: the home (2).

Indeed, as the feminist movements of the mid-Victorian period suggest, there was a growing concern over women's mobility outside the home. With the steady advances of a new wave of intrepid women, the *strong-minded women*, the *fast girls*, and *girls of the period*, defining femininity became an arduous task. Away from home, women had to endure public scrutiny and face moral judgement. Their ventures in a growingly mobile city, in public transport, or in public spaces, became opportunities to rethink what it meant to be a woman. Soon, the city offered feminised spaces that recreated the safety and welcoming nature of the domestic real (shops, tea saloons, all-female clubs…). These, as Lynne Walker suggests, encouraged women outside and materialized the gender differences of the mid-Victorian period (77). In Section 2, I comment on how female mobility outside the country found justification in the ongoing civilising mission of the Empire. We need to question the motives that encouraged the travelling habits of

mid-Victorian women and what such physical mobility implied for them. Which are the strategies adopted by women when travelling alone? Why are the experiences of female explorers erased from the literature or dismissed as "observing" discourses? As I shall contend in the following section, the country's own interest in travel and the improvements in public transport made possible the journey of British women to the colonies both as travelling wives and unprotected females. However, as we shall see, myriad, lesser-known female figures were on the move during the period.

In Section 3 I analyse two comedies by acclaimed playwright Tom Taylor, written for the London stages: *The Overland Route* (1860), first performed in the Haymarket theatre, and *Up at the Hills* (1860) for the Lyceum. I believe that by scrutinising the popular drama of the Victorian period, we will be closer to understanding the Victorians' own way of seeing the world. As both Tracy C. Davis and Jacky Bratton suggest, the success of Victorian popular theatre was inherently linked to its ability to connect with the audience's real experiences outside the theatrical venue. Saving the genre's conventions, the Victorian stage offers interesting representations of Victorian femininity. In my study of Tom Taylor's plays, I focus on the performance of mobile women, offering stereotyped female characters that remind of the period's problematic female mobility outside the country. As I shall contend, the duality of *travelling wife* or *unprotected female* goes on to remind us of unspoken rules of female behaviour. In the end, by exploring these characters and the well-known symbolism in their manners, we will be able to understand the position of women during the mid-Victorian period.

2. Female Mobility in the Mid-Victorian Period

In her study of Australian women's mobility from the colony to the metropolis, Angela Woollacott explains how "women's physical mobility, around the city and around the world, was tightly linked to modernity's other forms of gender instability, such as that occasioned by women's political and career claims" (61). Thus, the scrutiny of the Victorians' physical mobility can prove to be an advantageous perspective through which we can explore and understand the

importance of social hierarchies, gender roles, and the process of identity formation, especially in women. In light of what John M. MacKenzie has described as the "Empire of travel" (19), there is a need to establish the Victorians' space-time relationship and their strategies to negotiate with the "expansion of cultural geography" (Byerly 289). As Alison Byerly contends, the popularisation of travel as leisure contributed to the Victorians' altered perception of the world that surrounded them (289). As consequence, Stephen Kern affirms that, after the mid-century, Britain experienced a "reorientation of thinking about space and time" due to the destabilising advancing technology and its effect in the daily lives of the Victorians (1). Such reorientation implies the incorporation of physical spaces not only in mid-Victorian literature, as Byerly suggests, but also in contemporary everyday practices. Thus, we ought to scrutinise the Victorians' interaction with physical spaces, in the metropolis and beyond, to further comprehend material renegotiations of gender roles and class systems.

The development of both London's metropolitan transport and of Britain's railway network between 1840 and 1860 made possible an expansion of its users' demographics, now comprising the working- and middle-classes as well as the higher classes (Strong 25-26). Within this context, the pleasures of travelling and its cultural benefits could be experienced by a broader range of people. Peter Bailey attributes the popularization of leisure activities to the social structuring and the improvement of the living conditions of the middle class (*Popular*). Travelling became a national pastime for the middle-upper classes, with the interest being both on foreign trips and on domestic journeys. Furthermore, by the 1870s, the development of third-class rail travel increased the national lower-class tourist numbers, which evidences the structural social changes of the mid-Victorian era (Bailey, *Leisure* 81).

After the mid-century, the opportunities for female physical travel exemplify the changing gender roles and the attempts to work through the separation of spheres. Along with the female quest to recognise the multiple definitions of *woman*, the social riposte to female physical mobility evidenced the gender barriers that were yet to overcome. Outside the city, the female traveller was also scrutinised

and classified according to her position. If women were supposed to be still or immobile in the metropolis, when they travelled, their particular "observant" nature made them the perfect complement to the male leaders of the nation:

> [Travellers] constitute two great classes: those who discover, and those who observe —that is, those who penetrate into regions hitherto untrodden by civilized men, and add new lands to the maps of the geographer; and those who simply follow in the track of their bolder or more fortunate predecessors, gathering up fuller, and, it maybe, more accurate information. To the latter class… belong our female travellers. (Adams 215)

William H. D. Adams' differentiation between active male explorers and "observant" female travellers follows up the gender conventions existent in the nation. As his description attests, the perfect role for women is that of companion. Adams' message is clear: women "simply follow in the track" of the bold, male conquerors. However, we cannot forget the strategies adopted by female travellers, which are especially noticeable in their writings. As Shirley Foster and Sara Mills contend, "for women to adopt the role of the adventure hero by describing the dangers that they have overcome is to undermine their own claims to femininity" (258). Thus, by positioning themselves as passive, observant companions, women reaffirmed their socially accepted feminine status and complied with the female ideal.

Adams' description of the female traveller echoes the mid-century's debates about female education and the national necessity to have good-educated, well-trained wives and mothers, and places women back at the tailgate of the gender and social hierarchy (Levine). For some critics, female travel was inextricably linked to emigration, and it was a question of morality and social improvement: in 1862, The *Illustrated Times* praised the emigration of "educated young women" as an exercise of "women's legitimate moralising and civilising influence on society" and insisted in their essential role in the colonies as "wives and mothers" (102). This "redundancy of middle-class single women" (Dreher 3) had emerged after the 1851

British census revealed a “statistical surplus of women”; this data, in combination with the unmarriageable, unemployable situation of many women, provoked the public questioning of the established gender roles. While the debate of the *Woman Question* commented on the employment prospects for women from all classes, the surplus of women instigated the necessity of re-evaluation of gender divisions.

In response to such *problem*, feminists of the era patronized female emigration as best “remedy” for idleness, and as effective means to “make women happy” (Dreher 5). The feminist perception of emigration differs from the *Illustrated Times*’ defence of female emigration as quest for doing “women’s work” outside England —marriage and childbearing— (102); in turn, feminist groups leaded by the Langham Place and Maria Rye’s *Female Middle-Class Emigration Society* emphasized emigration’s main goal of “independence” and not matrimony (S.C. 1-10). As Marie Ruiz contends, both the *Female Middle Class Emigration Society* (1861-1886) and the *Women’s Emigration Society* (1880-1884) can be seen as pioneering models of emigration societies in England (29). However, the controversy over the lack of eligible British females in the colonies propitiated the conservative critics’ insistences on women’s *natural* work to be done abroad: establishing and caring after a family.

Thus, several women travelled to the colonies in search of a husband. Perhaps as an overstatement, Anne De Courcy describes how “in England, a land where women outnumbered marriageable men, a girl without beauty, money or grand relations had little hope (of making a good match); in India, she was showered with immediate proposals” (9). Despite such an exaggerated statement, women were in fact travelling to the colonies in hopes of profitable matrimony. Traditionally, these groups of women were named “fishing fleets” due to their purpose of “catching” a rich Company civilian or military officer. The custom of sending women to colonial settlements highlights the commodity-like nature of women at the time; like *trading goods*, cargoes of eligible women were shipped to India to achieve the Imperial enterprise of the British nation. In this sense, female physical mobility outside the country reinforced established gender roles and reminded of the traditional security fostered by marriages and family. Many feminists of the period opposed female

emigration due to the unescapable female confinement in the household. This was because the jobs that were usually offered to female emigrants, generally limited to governess or housemaid. For some feminists, staying in the country would exert pressure on the employment regulations for women and would open up new, desired paths for female enterprise. A. James Hammerton explains how feminists believed that female emigration was "an unjust safety valve to siphon off pressure for progressive reform" (57).

The period's debate on women's emigration propitiated an oversimplistic categorisation of the female traveller. Beatriz Ferrús explains how female travellers usually fell into two categories: "wild women" and "faithful wives accompanying their husbands" (19). Such categories attempt to put order to an unruly situation when, in fact, women were travelling much more than before. Despite the critics' predilection for the stereotypical nineteenth-century lady travellers—the ones who "shocked their contemporaries by venturing into previously 'unexplored' territory, or who travelled unchaperoned, or who put [themselves] in dangerous and potentially life-threatening situations" (Foster and Mills 2), a plurality of women travelled abroad, whether for pleasure or for professional reasons. To name just a few, besides the "eccentric woman traveller", we can find other female figures such as missionaries, settlers, governesses, tourists, and emigrants. In short, as this list suggests, to oversimply Victorian female travellers would be a mistake.

Even though at present we perceive female travellers as proto-feminists who anticipated the fin-de-siècle's suffragist movements (De la Torre 250), the Victorian period restricted their mobility through constraining travelling rules and strategies to manipulate their self-presentation. For instance, there is a rise in the publication of travel etiquette books addressed to women, like Florence Hartley's *The Ladies' Book of Etiquette, and Manual of Politeness* (1860) or the latter *Hints to Lady Travellers at Home and Abroad* (Campbell-Davidson). These conduct books remarked the importance of feminine behaviour during the journey and reminded female travellers of valid unwritten laws of decorum and domesticity. Moreover, according to Lady Eastlake, the "peculiar domestic nature of an Englishwoman's life" had prepared her to be an excellent traveller, equipping her with

"the four cardinal virtues of travelling: activity, punctuality, courage and independence" (98).

One of the applicable rules for women on a journey was to always carry with them properties that would "replicate the domestic sphere", such as hot water bottles and sewing kits (Foster and Mills 8-9). Famous travellers and travel writers insisted on maintaining "proper" feminine English clothes during their journeys, like Mary Kingsley, who used to wear full skirts in her African explorations. Indeed, as the period's etiquette book recommend, sticking to the English codes of femininity and wearing gender-appropriate clothes became a sort of protection against male molestation and offensive behaviour. Above all, conduct books remind their female readers about their exposure during their journeys, and insist on preserving female dignity through "perfect propriety" and courteous behaviour with others. For instance, Hartley devotes a chapter of her etiquette handbook to explain the proper behaviour of a lady in her travels, remarking her inherent unprotectedness when she travels, and addressing her in an infantilized tone (35-39). In turn, Campbell-Davidson insists on women's vulnerability and reminds them to "keep still and be ready for action" in the case of danger (12). As she contends, "if there is no man, the woman will have to act for herself, but even then she will find it the best plan to keep still till the decisive moment arrives" (12). In the end, these etiquette books leave the female reader with a lingering sense of caution and warn about all the possible threats a woman might encounter while away from home.

It is especially interesting to analyse the recollections and writings of Victorian female travellers in colonial contexts, as they show us the gendered power relationships that were at work during the period, both inside and outside the metropolis. While it is true that "not all women travel in the same way nor do they write in the same way" (Foster and Mills 4), we can still find some similarities in their public self-representation. One of them is self-effacement. As Indira Ghose suggests,

> by constructing themselves as busy collecting picturesque scenes or curious flowers…, looking on while men managed the dirty business of politics,

> women travellers epitomize the stance of British women in empire—as located outside of historical and material conditions. (*Women* 9)

As we have previously mentioned, female travellers (especially female travel writers) benefited from that perceived difference between sexes; thus, they usually wrote with a "humbler" voice than their male contemporaries, frequently employing a self-deprecatory tone. For instance, to avoid the scorn of the critics and in an attempt to counteract their public image of eccentric explorers, women like Anna Forbes felt the obligation to remind their readers of their femininity: "I am only a small and very feminine woman, and no masculine female with top-boots and a fowling-piece" (281). With this remark, the authoress is straying away from the "eccentric female explorer" stereotype that permeates Victorian female travel writing, and, as recommended by the travel etiquette books of the period, she is using her "femininity" as a vantage point (Wagner 175).

We have previously seen how the newspapers commended Englishwomen for their decisive colonial role, encouraging women to travel to the colonies to fulfil their roles as wives and mothers. Due to the improvements in transport and the bountiful marriage market in India, many women travelled from Britain to India after the mid-century. While early Victorian female travellers like Anne Elwood or Emily Eden had boasted of their pioneering role in visiting the Indian colonies and wrote with curiosity and amazement, the violent events of the mid-century provoked a shift in the travellers' perceptions. As Ghose contends, the Indian Mutiny of May 10th, 1857, revived the interest in the colonies (*Memsahibs* 6-7). After the uprising of the Indian soldiers against British officers and their families, numerous women wrote about their stories of survival amongst the chaos. Due to the gruesome nature of the Mutiny, women's safety in the colonies was questioned. As we will see in Section 3, these survival narratives were also adapted on stage back in London, where the audiences were eager to get news from the colonies.

Women's life in the colonies was thoroughly commented by the newspapers; for instance, *The Saturday Review* described the hardships of living in Anglo-Indian society:

> […] a lady in India is commonly deprived of those home duties and occupations which brighten and give a perpetual charm to the domestic hearth in England. The care and education of her own children are denied to the mother in a country where she most needs such employment. If not prepared to part with them at an early age, she must run the risk of losing them altogether; and what has she to supply their place and lighten the oppressive leisure which their absence has created? The Englishwoman at home may escape from the dullness and solitude of her own drawing-room by out door exercise and amusements at any hour of the day throughout the year; but the killing sun or merciless hot breeze generally keeps her less fortunate sister in the East a close prisoner to the house, from sunrise to sunset, all the year round. (*The Saturday Review* 10)

As we shall see, the lifestyle of the British women in India was much commented and parodied on the popular stage. In the following pages, I identify these previously mentioned strategies adopted by women in their travels and how these are represented on the Victorian stage. As Section 3 attests, the travelling lady complied to Hartley's etiquette rules (35-39) and sought the protection of other ladies (sorority) or that of elderly gentlemen, which is listed as one of the strategies to avoid unwanted male attentions.

3. Tom Taylor's Comedies

Tom Taylor was famous among the Victorians because of his intelligent, fast-paced dialogues and his unique way of portraying Victorian society. Even though Winton Tolles describes Taylor's work as representative of the theatre of the mid-century (254-5), there are still many understudied texts of his that could further contribute to our way of understanding the Victorians' tastes and perspectives. The only collection of plays that was published during Taylor's own lifetime was that of *Historical Dramas* (1877), a volume that highlights his interest in female figures and which features an array of texts inspired by remarkable historical ladies such as Joan of Arc, Anne

Boleyn, and Mary Tudor. As Martin Banham contends, Taylor was heavily influenced by melodrama, domestic drama, and verse drama, and was usually inclined to remark the "serious role of drama and the theatre" during the mid-century (4). Undeniably, Taylor's wit and satire not only found a place on the pages of *Punch*, the satirical newspaper in which he worked as an editor and contributor, but also on his play scripts.

The first play we shall analyse is *The Overland Route*, first performed at London's Haymarket under the patronage of John B. Buckstone's management.[2] Such was the play's success, that Buckstone maintained it in the theatre's repertoire until the Bancrofts took over. Still, in 1882, the Bancrofts revived Taylor's *The Overland Route* after a personal P&O cruise trip to Constantinople, perpetuating the play's take on the Indian Mutiny and highlighting the interest in the intrigues of Britons abroad. Due to the capture of the real Nana Sahib, leader of the Indian mutineers, the interest for the Mutiny rose up again in London in 1860.[3] In Taylor's *The Overland Route*, the extensive character list of military officers, colonial commissioners, adventurers, and servants, served the purpose of dramatizing the social intrigues and personal recollections of their real-life counterparts' stay in India. It was such the success of Taylor's play that the Simla Amateur Dramatic Club revived the story in 1882 at the Gaiety Theatre in Simla, India (Banham 12). The stories of the three main female leads, Mrs. Sebright, Mrs. Lovibond, and Miss Colepepper, mainly revolve around their romantic involvement with the men aboard the steamer with the purpose of survival in a foreign setting. First, we meet Mrs. Jenny Sebright, a lady who is passing as a widow for her own protection:

> MRS. SEB: You know, a prudent married woman, without her husband, has no chance aboard these horrid P.O. boats. But a widow's always sure of attentions. (Taylor, *Overland* 17)

Her relative anonymity on board of the steamer, allows Mrs. Sebright to use men to her own convenience. Taking advantage of her attractiveness as a widow, she encourages Mr. Colepepper

(Commissioner of Badgerypore District) and Sir Solomon's attentions. However, when Dexter, a doctor-adventurer, reveals her true identity as a married woman, Mrs. Sebright lives in fear of public humiliation. Her character reminds of women's inclination to travel during the mid-century. In real life, widows were usually in need of chaperones and published advertisements on the newspapers soliciting female travelling companions. For instance, the *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* featured a widow's classified advertisement soliciting employment as "lady housekeeper, travelling companion, or any other position of trust" (4). Other unmarried women solicited engagement as travelling companions in exchange of "a comfortable home" (*Illustrated London News* 85). Pauline Nestor argues that women's growing participation as travelling companions meant their incursion outside the domestic and "freed" them from conventional "feminine" behaviour (39). Nevertheless, those who were adamant to women's unrestricted mobility claimed that it was not enough to be chaperoned by another woman, as women were vulnerable to theft and physical assault when travelling without the protection of male individuals.

In Taylor's *The Overland Route*, Mrs. Sebright experiments a change of behaviour and humour after the steamer's shipwreck. The stage directions at the beginning of Act III announce Mrs. Sebright with a "*gay and cheerful*" appearance, wearing "*a coquettish made-up costume and handkerchief tied over her head*" (Taylor, *Overland*). As the scene moves on, we learn that Mrs. Sebright has "developed such a talent for nursing" since their wreckage and has been tending over other female passengers all night. In spite of her transformation, Mr. Colepepper praises her efforts to remain "ornamental" or, in other words, to remain feminine (Taylor, *Overland* 17). However, Mrs. Sebright's physical transformation takes a secondary role after the wreckage: her *true nature* as a nurturing woman redeems her of her coquettish past aboard the ship. For her, the journey positively influences her character, making her rediscover her true value as a tender, feminine caregiver. In short, Mrs. Sebright's mobility allows her to learn a moral lesson, which she thinks taught by Dexter, the play's hero. Throughout the story, Taylor describes him as an adventurer, a doctor, a newspaper editor, and a volunteer during the mutinies in India. Dexter's eventful journey is hinted at during the

play, as the audience catches glimpses of Dexter's recollections of his encounters with the Indian natives. Overall, his role as a mediator and mentor positions him at the top of the moral hierarchy, a sort of patriarch. In consonance with the times, Mrs. Sebright yields to Dexter's teachings and thanks him for her own achievements: "how shall I ever thank you enough for teaching me how much pleasanter it is to wait than to be waited upon" (Taylor, *Overland* 39). Accordingly, Mrs. Sebright thanks Dexter for his mentorship and for showing her the selfish ways of a domesticated woman.

The second female lead in *The Overland Route* is Mrs. Lovibond, a woman who has been abandoned by her husband. The journey aboard the steamer is also a transformative experience for her, who after reuniting with her neglecting husband, learns to forget her jealous ways. Mr. Lovibond is now a successful merchant and has amassed a fortune in Singapore; his new situation leads him to reclaim his wife back, as long as she keeps her meek nature. She is put at fault for her abandonment when Mr. Lovibond blames her of excessive harshness in the past. In turn, she pleads to "expiate" her previous behaviour "by being all meekness and indulgence" (Taylor, *Overland* 16). Her tender nature after their reunion stuns Mr. Lovibond:

> MRS. LOV: I'll do anything you bid me, dear. Good bye, 'till you see me again.
> *Exit* R. *tent*
> LOVIBOND: Now I call that a woman; and since she's so changed —she's an angel —better than an angel! She hasn't any wings to fly away with; and she *has* something to sit down upon! (Taylor, *Overland* 44)

Lovibond's reference to his wife's lack of wings reminds us of a wife's duty to stay by her husband, no matter what. As a changed wife, Mrs. Lovibond is now bound to her husband. After being away from the home and enduring hardships, she is now a changed woman who has learnt her physical place (by her husband) and her metaphorical place (attending his wishes). In the end both Mrs. Sebright and Mrs. Lovibond decide to define themselves as travelling wives rather than as freed women, especially after a frightening situation. They find

comfort in the protection of men and change their own untraditional behaviour to feel secure.

The *London Evening Standard* commended the play's purpose of amusing the crowds "by producing a picture of a certain phase of society, drawn with considerable regard to truth, and much humour and breadth" (6). *The Overland Route* was a complete success. It was praised by the audience on its opening night and repeated the nights thereafter. It was perhaps Taylor's own inspiration in the real wreckage of a Peninsular and Oriental steamer at the Red Sea what thrilled the audience. However, as the *London Evening Standard* suggested, not all of Taylor's characters would obtain the audience's sympathy: only Miss Colepepper, the third female lead, would gain the audience's favour. Miss Colepepper, the valiant daughter of the Commissioner of Badgerypore District, survived a housebreaking by the Indian mutineers thanks to the aid of Dexter. Throughout the play, her main purpose is to make her father know about Dexter's help, and her indebtedness to him leads to a romantic interest on both parts. Notwithstanding, Miss Colepepper is presented as a woman who prefers to avoid social obligations (she escapes the steamer's saloon to read a book and gaze at the skylight in Act II). In conversation with Dexter after the wreckage, Miss Colepepper highlights female endurance:

> DEXTER: […] Ah! Miss Colepepper, this is life — stripped to the buff. In our artificial world, men are so buckramed, and padded, and corksoled by aids and appliances, that they neither shew nor use their muscles. After all, we may have a few curs among us; but, on the whole, Englishmen peel well; don't they?
> MISS COLE: And Englishwomen?
> DEXTER: What —*you* fishing for a compliment? (Taylor, *Overland* 40)

Indeed, the play's female characters show great examples of female endurance after their physical journey, all three overcoming a disastrous halt in their lives (the wreckage). However, despite the

play's colonial background, the social intrigues binding the characters with one another overshadow the identity reconfiguration of British women abroad. Additionally, their discomfort in the public spaces of the play further contributes to their perceived of out-of-placedness in such a foreign setting. Away from home, the women from Taylor's play have to struggle with their own position to survive, ultimately having to return to more the traditional definition of femininity.

After the success of *The Overland Route*, Taylor created another comedy set in India: *Up at the Hills.*[4] It was first performed at the St. James's Theatre, London, on October 22nd, 1860. As a venue typically managed by women, the St. James's Theatre was "in the heart of fashionable London" and thus attracted a particularly polite, middle-class audience (Bratton 8, 158). Indeed, under the management of the Wigan matrimony from 1860 to 1863, the St. James's prospered with a comic repertoire, patronizing burlesques, dramas of French inspiration, farces, and spectacular extravaganzas. In *Up at the Hills*, Taylor sought to bring a glimpse of Anglo-Indian society to the metropolis, discussing topics such as British women's social morality while at the Station, the soldiers' dubious entertainments, and the reversal of roles in matrimony.

While it is unclear the actual geographical placement of the play, the stage directions in Scene I indicate that the scene is set "at a hill station in India", with the sight of "Himalayah rhododendrons", and a view of "the vast ridges and profound valleys of the Himalayahs" (Taylor, *Hills* 3). Taylor's lack of attention to detail in placing the setting was addressed by *The Saturday Review*, which reminds us of the nation's attraction to the foreign:

> People who stay at home must of course borrow their ideas of things abroad from the reports of travellers, who proverbially tell strange tales… Even at the present day, when an unprecedented interest in Indian affairs has been excited by the thrilling horrors of the still recent mutinies, the mass of educated people have no very clear idea whether the Hills are in Bengal or Madras. (10)

Furthermore, the newspaper echoes public concerns over the verisimilitude of the events depicted in *Up at the Hills*, remarking its lack of veracity and warning about a different kind of Anglo-Indian lifestyle in the colony. However, Taylor's depiction of society got the attention of a large audience, especially due to its resemblance to his previous hit, *The Overland Route*. Perhaps it was the main female narratives what made the critics condemn the play; indeed, despite what the colonial setting might suggest, the play strays from stereotypical masculine plots of physical adventures and conquest and focuses on the social and psychological intricacies of two women instead. Thus, in *Up at the Hills*, we find two female leads: Mrs. Isabella Colonel McCann (played by Leonora Wigan, the manager) and Mrs. Clara Eversleigh (played by Ruth Herbert, an actress of infamous beauty).

In *Up at the Hills*, Taylor tells the story of a young widow, Mrs. Eversleigh, who had exchanged flirtatious letters with Major Stonihurst before her widowhood. Stonihurst, a despicable man who takes advantage of everything and everyone, threatens her to discover their *criminal conversation* if she does not agree to marry him. However, his plan is ruined after the wife of the Station's Colonel, Mrs. McCann arrives to Mrs. Eversleigh's bungalow and asserts her omnipresent influence, tricking a young ayah (or Indian maid) named Monee to steal the accusatory letters from his bungalow, and leaving him with no proof of Mrs. Eversleigh's carelessness.

Following the *dangerous flirtation* of the widow Mrs. Eversleigh with Major Stonihurst, the audience learns about her dependability on him, and about his aggressive advances to marry her before her year of mourning runs out. Away from the respectability and security of her own home in the motherland, Mrs. Eversleigh is introduced as an unprotected, clueless widow abandoned at her mercy in India. Indeed, as Tamara S. Wagner suggests, "a traveling wife was protected by the presence of her husband against the most powerful of terrorizing influences, namely the solitude, which magnifies perils and weakens resistance" (176). Stonihurst takes advantage of Mrs. Eversleigh's unprotectedness and makes her believe she would be lost without him:

STONI: […] those fellows would eat you up alive, unprotected female as you are, if you were left to fight them single-handed. But you will be out of your mourning soon. (Taylor, *Hills* 6)

As the story progresses, we understand Mrs. Eversleigh's indebtedness to Stonihurst, who has been helping her with receipts, accounts, and even clothing matters. Her unprotectedness at the Hills is manifested through a series of physical indispositions: she is discovered reclining languidly in a lounging chair, surrounded by her Indian servants (3), and only shows "*great animation*" at the appearance of Stonihurst (6). Her physical revival when she is around her male suitor emphasizes her dependency on him, as well as her physical uneasiness at such a setting without her late husband or children to take care of. Thus, we see an isolated woman who has lost her bond with the colony after her husband's decease. In a way, life at the Station has gone from promising (the prospect of colonization and prosperity) to threatening (her lack of familial protection or employment). Additionally, perhaps Mrs. Eversleigh's commented beauty also positions her at the centre of the plot as token to protect. Throughout the play, her moral respectability and her physical integrity are at test; however, in both cases she is saved by a woman, Mrs. Colonel McCann:

MRS. EVER: And I have to thank you for this.
MRS. MCC: Yes; without affectation I may say you *have* —nobody but me.
MRS. EVER: I could not have slept with that sword suspended over my head.
MRS. MCC: A sword of your own forging too —they are always the sharpest; and now, good night.
MRS. EVER: Good night.
MRS. MCC: *(taking up her hair)* I don't wonder the flies are caught in this golden web! Poor Tunstall! Is he to be the next eaten, you insatiable little spider? (Taylor, *Hills* 56)

Mrs. Colonel McCann's remark on Mrs. Eversleigh's beauty as an "entangling" spider web for men partly puts the blame on her.

Moreover, Mrs. Eversleigh' flirtatious letters to Stonihurst while she was still married are used as the backbone for female motivation. The menace of making public a *criminal conversation* and the fear of losing her reputation leads the female protagonist to participate in dubious practices.

The second female lead, Isabella McCann, is described as the leader of the Station, despite just being the wife of the Colonel. The soldiers rely on her for everything and affirm that the regiment would be a chaotic place were it not for her work. Greenway, a military officer, describes her position in the Station:

> GREENWAY: […] all the fellows in Our's swear by Mrs. Colonel Mac —she's as good as a mother to us, lectures us and lends us money, and helps us out of scrapes with old McCann. (*Hills* 10)

As a "mother", as Greenway says, Mrs. McCann has the obligation —but also the inclination— to care for the members of her Station. As such, she is aware of every gossip lingering about, and can exert her authority even at a house that is not her own. At Mrs. Everleigh's bungalow, Mrs. McCann practically behaves as if it were her own, letting herself in when the hostess is absent and bringing along her two nieces, Kate and Margaret. Her position as leader of the community is a direct consequence of her profitable marriage; in other words, she is able to command everyone around her due to her being the wife of the colonel. In other scenario, her position would have been completely different. It is her status as a (travelling) wife what allows her to move along the Station and the Hills at wish, and to quarrel with Stonihurst for Mrs. Eversleigh's reputation. Mrs. McCann's manipulations of the Indian ayah, Monee, and her close relationship with her husband's officers, allow her to outwit Stonihurst and save her friend.

In the end, her social manipulations prove successful both for her friend and for her own benefit, as she manages to find acceptable suitors for her just-arrived, *redundant* nieces (Dreher 3). In *Up at the Hills,* Kate and Margaret remain unaware of the "moral atmosphere"

and the lingo of the colonial settlement but are never unprotected. This is due to their bond with their aunt, Mrs. McCann. However, the girls' journey to the colony has a sole purpose: that of finding matrimony. Their situation reminds us of the previously mentioned *fishing fleets*. Both Kate and Margaret quickly grow accustomed to the rules of the colonies and fully take on their roles as leaders of the household, thus requiring the assistance of the ayahs and reaffirming their perceived superiority in the colony. Margaret is convinced of their "civilising" duty as travelling English ladies in the colonies (Taylor, *Hills* 34).

As these characters suggest, the representation of a wife's domestic and educational duty while in a colony is repeated throughout the plays of the 1860s. As Taylor's plays show, on stage, the colonial wife is usually *shipped* to her waiting husband-to-be. The prospect of replicating the Western ideal of domesticity and establishing prosperous families serves as protection for the women who are displaced to a foreign land. Agency and independency are represented as dangerous behaviour when away from home; in the end, the unprotected female on stage will have to struggle to return to the traditional role of womanhood if she wants to survive.

4. Conclusion

We have previously warned of the perils of oversimplifying the Victorian female traveller. As we have said before, the plurality of Victorian women who were travelling both inside and outside the British metropolis embodied the changing ideals of femininity, and at the same time, evidenced a shift from traditional to transgressive womanhood. The popularisation of conduct and etiquette books for lady travellers demonstrates the growing concerns about British women's femininity and mobility. As this paper attests, these concerns were unavoidably expressed by the literature and the printed press.

We have analysed two of Tom Taylor's comedies, *The Overland Route* and *Up at the Hills*, and shown how the popular representation of the mid-Victorian female traveller further perpetuated the simplistic, patriarchal differentiation between "unprotected" and

"protected" women. While it is true that it would be difficult to provide a single definition of the Victorian female traveller, the characters that we have considered in the previous pages show us the period's tendency to differentiate between "travelling wives" and "unprotected females". Thus, Mrs. Sebright, Mrs. Lovibond and Miss Colepepper in *The Overland Route*, and Mrs. Eversleigh and Mrs. Colonel McCann in *Up at the Hills* are all constructed and defined according to their relationship with men. Altogether, it is their relationship (or lack thereof) with men what makes them vulnerable to external dangers. Still, as we have previously said, these women can find some respite thanks to their friendship and sorority. In the end, these female characters continue to manifest both the unspoken and the written rules of femininity of the Victorian period.

Notes

[1] The research for this article has been funded by the projects FFI2017-86417-P and GIUV 2017-354.

[2] All the following quotes from *The Overland Route* have been taken from the original manuscript of the play, which is stored at the British Library in London, with reference Add. MS 52990 A.

[3] The interest in the Mutiny lasted for the first half of the decade of the 1860s. One of the dramatic adaptations we can find is *Nana Sahib; or, A story of Agmer* (27 October 1863). The play was written by F. Fenton and W. R. Osman and it was first performed at the Victoria Theatre, London. The original manuscript of the play can be found in the British Library, with reference Add. MS 53026 M.

[4] All the following quotes from *Up at the Hills* have been taken from the original manuscript of the play, which is stored at the British Library in London, with reference Add. MS 52996 H.

Works Cited

Adams, William H. D. *Celebrated Women Travellers of the Nineteenth Century*. Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1882.

Auerbach, Jeffrey A. *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display*. Yale UP, 1999.

Bailey, Peter. *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*. 1998. Cambridge UP, 2003.

—-. *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885*. 1978. Routledge, 2014.

Banham, Martin, editor. *Plays by Tom Taylor*. Cambridge UP, 1985.

Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette. 27 July 1869: 4.

Blunt, Alison. *Travel, Gender, and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa*. The Guildford Press, 1994.

Bratton, Jacky. *The Making of the West End Stage: Marriage, Management and the Mapping of Gender in London, 1830-1870*. Cambridge UP, 2011.

Burn, William L. *The Age of Equipoise. A study of the Mid-Victorian Generation*. Allen and Unwin, 1964.

Byerly, Alison. "Technologies of Travel and the Victorian Novel". *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel*, edited by Lisa Rodensky, Oxford UP, 2013, pp. 289-312.

Campbell-Davidson, Lillias. *Hints to Lady Travellers at Home and Abroad*. Iliffe and Son, 1889.

Davis, Tracy C., editor. *The Broadview Anthology of Nineteenth-century British Performance*. Broadview Press, 2012.

De Courcy, Anne. *The fishing fleet: husband-hunting in the Raj*. Hachette, 2012.

De la Torre Laviana, María. "Susan Hale: Una viajera en el camino hacia la emancipación". *Odisea*, vol. 11, 2010, pp. 249-257.

Dreher, Nan H. "Redundancy and Emigration: The 'Woman Question' in Mid-Victorian Britain." *Victorian Periodicals Review*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1993, pp. 3-7.

Hall, Catherine. "The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology." *Fit Work for Women*, edited by Sandra Burman, St. Martin's P, 1979, pp. 15-32.

Hammerton, A. J. "Feminism and Female Emigration, 1861-1886." *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, edited by Martha Vicinus, 1977. Routledge, 2013, pp. 52-71.

Hewitt, Martin. *An Age of Equipoise? Reassessing mid-Victorian Britain*. 2000. Routledge, 2017.

The Era. 15 November 1863.

Eastlake, Lady Elizabeth Rigby. "Lady Travellers." *Quarterly Review*, June 1845, pp. 98-137.

Fenton, F. and W. R. Osman. *Nana Sahib; or, A story of Agmer*. Victoria

Theatre, 27 October 1863. British Library Add. MS 53026 M.
Ferrús, Beatriz. *Mujer y Literatura de Viajes en el Siglo XIX: entre España y las Américas*. Publicaciones de la Universitat de València, 2011.
Forbes, Anna. *Unbeaten Tracks in Islands of the Far East: Experiences of a Naturalist's Wife in the 1880s*. Oxford UP, 1987.
Foster, Shirley and Sara Mills. *An Anthology of Women's Travel Writing*. Manchester UP, 2002.
Ghose, Indira. *Memsahibs Abroad: Writings by Women Travellers in Nineteenth Century India*. Oxford UP, 1998.
—-. *Women Travellers in Colonial India*. Oxford UP, 1998.
Globe. 13 April 1868, p. 2.
Hartley, Florence. *The Ladies' Book of Etiquette, and Manual of Politeness*. Lee, Shepard and Dillingham, 1860.
Hobhouse, Hermione. *The Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibition*. 2002. Continuum, 2004.
Illustrated London News. 12 January 1861.
—-. 27 July 1861, 85.
Illustrated Times. "Woman's work in the world." 14 June 1862, p. 102.
Kern, Stephen. *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1910*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983.
Levine, Philippa. *Victorian feminism 1850-1900*. Hutchinson Education, 1987.
London Evening Standard. 27 Februrary 1860, p. 6.
—-. 29 April 1862, p. 6.
MacKenzie, John M. "Empires of Travel: British Guide Books and Cultural Imperialism in the 19th and 20th Centuries." *Histories of Tourism: Representation, Identity and Conflict*, edited by J.K. Walton. Channel View Publications, 2005, pp. 19-38.
Mills, Sara. *Discourses of Difference: An analysis of women's travel writing and colonialism*. Routledge, 1991.
Nestor, Pauline. "Female Friendships in Mid-Victorian England: New Patterns and Possibilities." *Literature & History*, vol. 17 no. 1, 2008, pp. 36-47.
Ruiz, Marie. *British Female Emigration Societies and the New World, 1860-1914*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
The Saturday Review. 6 July 1861, p. 10.
S.C. "Emigration for Educated Women." *The English Woman's Journal*, 1 March 1861, pp. 1-9.
Shands, Kerstin W. *Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist*

Discourse. Greenwood P, 1999.

Strong, Michele M. *Education, Travel and the "Civilisation" of the Victorian Working Classes*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Taylor, Tom. *The Overland Route*. Comedy in three acts. Haymarket, 17 February 1860. British Library Add. MS 52990 A.

—-. *Up at the hills*. Comedy in two acts. St. James's Theatre, 22 October 1860. British Library Add. MS 52996 H.

Tolles, Winton. *Tom Taylor and the Victorian Drama*. Columbia UP, 1940.

Wagner, Tamara S. "Travel Writing." *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women's Writing*, edited by Linda H. Peterson. Cambridge UP, 2015, pp.175-188.

Walker, Lynne. "Vistas of Pleasure: Women Consumers of Urban Space in the West End of London 1850-1900." *Women in the Victorian Art World*, edited by Clarissa Campbell Orr. Manchester UP, 1995, pp. 70-87.

Woollacott, Angela. *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity*. Oxford UP, 2001.

Recibido / Received: 15-3-2021 *Aceptado / Accepted: 15-7-2021*