Long's Peak:

Isabella Bird's Initiation Journey

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Abstract

Contrary to what can be expected from a Victorian lady of the 19th century, which is mostly taking care of her offspring and loving spouse, the traveller and writer Isabella Bird was determined to deviate herself from conventional standards, and enjoy a life branded by transgression. Everything suggests that she sought, above all, pleasure. The aim of this dissertation is precisely to bring closer an account *au féminin* about the American West, as well as to shed some light on a particular kind of travel literature, that is, the initiation journey. To this end, I selected the collection of letters by Isabella Bird addressed to her sister Henrietta, later compiled in *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* (1879). I then searched for instances where Bird's allegoric narrative agrees with the mythic structure of an initiation journey. The results obtained certainly show that despite her initial intention of embarking on a long journey on health grounds as prescribed by her doctors, it eventually turned out to be a goal of a more transcendental nature. Should there be a place where, after almost forty-two years of domestic confinement, a Victorian lady felt free to solo travel, ride astride, adopt any attire, and to even indulge herself in an intimate experience out of the padlock, that would be the New World. Not surprisingly, Bird headed for the Rocky Mountains. On the basis of these findings, I suggest that, taking advantage of remoteness, Bird employed landscape descriptions as metaphors of her sexual encounter(s), which allowed her to gently write about a taboo subject, i.e., her alleged first intimate relationship. All things considered, it is not so much about whether Bird actually enjoyed her first intercourse, as it is about the fact that she dared to put it down on paper.

Key Words: Isabella Bird, American West, initiation journey, sex, transgression

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1. Introduction

O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.
(American National Anthem)

The writer and traveller AnneMarie Schwarzenbach reveals, in *Todos los Caminos están abiertos* (2017), that our life is similar to a journey. Baudelaire for his part proclaims on his *Voyage* that "the only true travellers were those who left / for leaving's sake" (168). Further, the traveller and writer Mary Russell, quoting Mary Kingsley[1] in the title of her work *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt* (1986), advocates for one's own enjoyment as the best reason of all to depart. Still, according to the American expert in travel literature Dennis Porter, the pursuit of enjoyment stemmed from an original tendency introduced by Romantics where "pleasure (…) overwhelm[ed] the demand for instruction" (125). Female travellers do not seem, though, to have closely fitted into the aforesaid statement. Dorothy Middleton, expert on 19th century travel, argues instead that traveller ladies, despite being highly qualified and uncompromised, were not allowed to indulge themselves in such futility as amusement were not for their "note-books of statistics and pages-of-drawings" (5). This is precisely when 19th century female travel writers such as Isabella Bird come to the forefront.

The issue of unconventionality and transgression of Victorian codes in Isabella Bird's life as well as in her writing is but one of many that must be dealt with. In the course of her life, one might have occasionally been distracted by her troublesome ailments and the pursuit of physical appeasement as a hollow interpretation for her travelling. However, the underlying reason to embark on her solo adventures remains one of the most open-to-debate issues. The very existence of a myriad of explanations for the same phenomenon became the rationale for this TFG. This disparity of opinions did raise questions about what it is that experts assume, and made me delve into this subject, not only as a student of English Linguistics and Literature, but also as a human being concerned by gender questions. Accordingly, I suggest that an immediate problem is that of dealing with Bird's allegoric narrative in the shape of written correspondence, format which conceals her most profound interest in travelling all along the globe.

[1] Kingsley 270. She boasts of her "good thick skirt" against masculine's garments as a means of protection from bruises and spikes.

To this end, the goal of this paper is to bring closer this account *au féminin* about the American West, as well as to shed some light on a particular kind of travel literature i.e., the initiation journey. The present study will focus solely on the letters by Isabella Bird to her sister Henrietta while in the Rocky Mountains, later compiled in *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* (1879). In doing so, I will neglect those unedited letters studied and published more recently by the author of *Letters to Henrietta* (2002), Kay Chubbuck. Nor the truthfulness neither the accuracy of her testimony will be at the heart of the debate throughout my dissertation. I will hence confine myself to the analysis of what she lets us know about her own encounter. In particular, I intend to examine 1) some formal features of her narrative, 2) the description she presents of Otherness and 3) the structure of her narrative as well as the allegorical employment of the American scenery. To this aim, I have made use of the *bona fide* analysis of travel writing presented in *El Sentido del Viaje* (2013), by the contemporary writer and traveller Patricia Almarcegui. I have also employed the study of an archetypical journey by the leading expert in travel literature Friedrich Wolfzettel, the investigation of mythology by the American researcher Joseph Campbell, and the investigation by the educator and therapist Maureen Murdock. Therefore, the practical ambition of this paper is to uncover how Bird employs landscape descriptions as metaphors of her sexual encounter(s). This is precisely what allows her to gently write about a taboo subject, i.e., her alleged first intimate relationship. In any case, it is not so much about whether Isabella Bird actually enjoyed her first intercourse, as it is about the fact that she dared to put it down on paper.

The present study is thus organized as follows: I devote the first section to present the unconventional life of Isabella Bird along with the innumerable misfortunes Bird and her predecessors were subjected to as female travellers. I then move on to display Bird's account about the American West through the study of her written correspondence. Afterwards, I introduce the initiation journey as the rationale of my study, along with the examination of its deep structure, and rich symbolism. I conclude with Bird's sexual quest transgressing Victorian proprieties as well as innovating 19th century fiction, and a proposal for further research.

2. Isabella Bird

Txapela buruan eta ibili munduan (Basque proverb)
Take your beret and get ready for adventure[2]

The aim of this section is twofold, as not only do I intend to help readers with a better understanding of Isabella Bird, narrator and protagonist of this spiritual journey, but I also propose a rough portrait of the myriad of misfortunes and difficulties Bird herself, along with her predecessors, have been subjected to as female travellers.

2.1 An Unconventional Life

While it is true that according to the major experts[3] on Isabella Bird's life little is known about the "real" Isabella (Chubbuck 3), the fact remains that every author takes their time to ignore or embellish those aspects of their existence they like least. Similarly, they tend to emphasize those they feel proud of. Moreover, it is not unusual that a writer's work undergoes censorship[4] either from the author themselves, or from their family after their decease, or even from successive writers. In Bird's case, "it was Isabella who organized her letters before she died, cutting out[5] sections from some, destroying others entirely". Not to mention that Isabella's first biographer "was hand-picked; she was given explicit instruction about what to write" (Chubbuck 2).

All things considered, I will follow the academics' *dicta* and will begin by presenting what is known for certain about her life. Isabella Bird was born in North Yorkshire, in 1831. In accordance with Isabella Bird's first biography by Anne M. Stoddart, Bird's father as well as a number of family members entertained ties with the Church. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Isabella and her younger sister Henrietta (Hennie as she was often called) were home schooled and highly educated in the outmost strict application of the Protestant tenets. As of that moment, there has been

[2] My translation

[3] See Chubbuck, Barr, Stoddart, Checkland, and www.rtve.es/mujeresviajeras.

[4] See Almarcegui, *Una viajera*, 39. After Annemarie Schwarzenbach's demise, a great number of her works was burnt. See also Miller. According to her, Gaskell invented a more "edible" biography of the romantic writer Charlotte Brontë.

[5] See Tomalin 281. The great part of Jane Austen's letters was burnt and several of the remaining ones had portions cut out. See also La Faye. Out of a possible number of 3000 letters written by Jane Austen, only 160 left after family interference.

plenty of room for speculation concerning (i) Bird's enigmatic illness, (ii) her alleged devotional relationship with Henrietta, as well as (iii) her apparent disaffection with male companions, which have led academics to a number of conjectures about the real cause of her unconventional adulthood.

To begin with, at the age of eighteen Bird was submitted to surgery due to an unbearable pain in her back which would never abandon her unless she was outdoors and far away from home[6]. With this in mind, Chubbuck speculates with the possibility that Bird's mysterious ailments derive from carbunculosis (a skin infection). In contrast to Chubbuck's view, Stoddart and the social historian Olive Checkland appear more inclined to think that Bird's physical complaint might also be of a more psychosomatic nature as a result of a failed relationship. As a matter of fact, the former refers to "some sorrow (…) was sapping her nervous strength already impaired by the operation" (28). The latter also alludes to the fact that being Bird "recovering from an unhappy love affair, was advised by her doctor to take a sea-voyage" (3).

The truth is that according to Pat Barr, the author of Isabella Bird's travel biography, despite the delicacy of her condition, "Isabella passionately adored horses" and used to ride at the prairie along with her father "in the ladylike side-saddle fashion" (280-284). Little does Bird know, instead, how valuable her early riding skills would result in the near future. By the same token, Melanie Bundick Bruce maintains in her master dissertation that "the role that Birdie [her horse] plays in Bird's recovery and in her exploration of the Rocky Mountain landscape is pivotal" (50). Further, Bird performs the "rebellious act" (Bruce 27) of adopting the distinct but less painful riding fashion of faraway cultures. In favour of the above, Barr adds that "she straddled her first horse and discovered that she could gallop comfortably at last – at one with the steed, instead of perched inflexibly on its side" (284-290).

All things considered, one cannot help but wonder whether the notion of remoteness in untamed American lands did not provide Bird with the perfect antidote to appease the source of her agony. This would partly explain why she embraced such wild manners against strict Victorian precepts. For this reason, let me insist on the contrast between Bird's pleasing image above, and Checkland's following comment about Bird

[6] Barr 1250, Checkland 36.

riding in England: she "had always ridden side-saddle, her body awkwardly twisted with both legs on one side of the horse making it difficult for her to keep her balance over difficult terrain and exacerbating her spinal condition" (39).

The second matter of debate refers to the alleged idyllic relationship with her beloved sister Henrietta. Barr for her part informs us that "Henrietta's role was the traditionally female one of waiting and watching (…) Hennie had to be the stay-at-home to whom all happy wanderers return, trailing their bright tales behind them" (673). Chubbuck, by contrast, wonders whether a well-prepared woman who decided to move to the isle of Mull for the love of nature after their parents' demise would be content with the role of mere recipient of her sister's correspondence[7]. To say nothing of the impressively attractive journeys all along the globe narrated in Isabella's epistles to her. Judging by Isabella's alluring description of those faraway lands, it thus cannot come as a surprise Henrietta's proposal to move with her sister. Yet, Isabella "had found that danger and adventure were for her a necessary ingredient for good health. It was no part of the plan to have her sister share the magic" (Checkland 44). Chubbuck similarly concludes that Henrietta was mercilessly relegated to the back-burner in every adventure Isabella decided to embark on.

While all the aforesaid interpretations might be accurate, it is nonetheless true that after Henrietta's decease, Isabella came to terms with her sister's last will and accepted a marriage proposal from Henrietta's doctor, Mr Bishop. Contrary to what one might think in view of her wedding day portrait[8], Isabella felt "fervent adoration" (Middleton 39) for her husband, and she became entirely dependent upon him. Chubbuck equally adds that Mr. Bishop came to fill the gap left by Henrietta. Their happiness though did not last long. According to the author of *Frontiers of Feminity* (2008) Karen M. Morin, their marriage lasted just five years due to Bishop's decease. The dramatic brevity of their union, drives us then to the last but not least matter for concern in Bird's life i.e., her relationship with men.

Notwithstanding her apparent aversion for any emotional involvement (Barr 580-582), Chubbuck presents us with up to seven gentlemen Isabella could have been

[7] See section 3.1.

[8] See Middleton 51. She offers an illustration of Bird's tenue "prostrated with grief".

related to, which induces Chubbuck to wonder about the real motivation to plan Isabella's first solo adventure abroad. As a matter of fact, no better destination could have been chosen for marriage[9] than Colorado, where figures, according to Chubbuck, showed that the imbalance between available unmarried women and men was more than remarkable. Checkland for her part maintains the notion that Bird just "resolved to emulate her father" (4). The truth is that, while in India, Reverend Bird lost her former wife and son which leads Checkland to believe that Mr Bird treated her daughter Isabella as a "surrogate for a longed for son" (3). As a result, Isabella enjoyed opportunities mostly restricted to male descendants, that is, "freedom of non-domestic role" (Checkland 11).

As for the rest of Bird's jaunts, little do we know about the adduced reasons; delicate medical condition, desire to escape, or imperialistic ambitions. All we have is that "roaming, as she had just discovered, was her vocation, the talent and passion for the rest of her life when so much else would fall away. And roamers[10], as she knew in her bones, were doomed to leave even the fairest anchorage" (Barr 795). As a consequence of her frenzied passion for roaming, Bird published nine travel books. Unlike Rose Kingsley or Lady Theodora Guest, Bird mostly travelled alone challenging Victorian codes, and wrote on Japan, Middle East, Tibet, and China. It is not for nothing Morin's statement: "she is certainly among the best known and most studied of Victorian women travellers to North America, with two popular books on the subject: *An English Woman in America* (1856), and *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*" (*Frontiers* 1)[11].

2.2 The Female Traveller's Risks

Following the example set by Bird, the contemporary traveler and writer Patricia Almarcegui also dares to travel alone. In *Escuchar Irán* (2016), she complains that women cannot even now enjoy freely and above all, safely, public space[12]. According to

[9] See Tomalin 17-21. It was not unusual for English women to head for colonies in search of husbands.

[10] See Maillart, Schwarzenbach, Wortley Montagu, Morató (*Cautiva*) for examples of roamers.

[11] See section 3 and 4.

[12] See Almarcegui, *Una viajera*, 124. She is scared at night when streets are empty and silent either in the West or in the East for, unlike men, women will be always frightened of physical or sexual violence.

her, women's short trips were reduced for centuries to sacred sites and their surroundings. Less prosperous females also visited the panning site and the vegetable garden often designated "dangerous" since women were thought to succumb more easily outdoors to unexpected male acquaintance and gathering. Moreover, Morató, journalist and member of the Royal Geographic Society of London, adds that unless provided with safe-conduct passes, Christian pilgrims could not freely move within the limits of the Roman Empire. Highly illustrative of this dramatic situation results the ancient German proverb that reads as follows: "go a pilgrim, return a whore" (*Viajeras* 37). Morató concludes that to keep her dignity, a traveler woman had to be either a queen or a pilgrim.

Under those circumstances, Bird's account abounds in anecdotes and incidents where either her physical integrity or dignity are at risk. Her first nasty surprise takes place when Bird encounters a bear. It is, in her own words, "grotesque and humiliating" (Letter I)[13]. However, bears are not the only inhabitants whose company Bird enjoys during her heroic passage. She is additionally confronted to scary noises, and unknown, perilous creatures: "there are unaccountable noises, (wolves), rummagings under the floor, queer cries, and stealthy sounds of I know not what" (Letter IV). In this sense, despite her deep interest in proving the opposite, the notion of insecurity and peril for a solo female is everywhere: "a lady was sure of respect" or "the ugliest among them all won't touch you" (Letter I). In fact, Bird's numerous comments confirm this perception, on the streets as well as in the woods: "a rough mountain town", "nightly pistol affrays in bar-rooms" (Letter I), "a bad breed of ruffians" (Letter II). Further, at dark, risk doubles, and Bird is fully conscious of it, otherwise what for does she emphasize 'eeriness'?:

> I realized that night had come with its EERINESS[14], and putting my great horse into a gallop I clung on to him till I pulled him up in Truckee, which was at the height of its evening revelries—fires blazing out of doors, bar-rooms and saloons crammed, lights glaring, gaming tables thronged, fiddle and banjo in frightful discord, and the air ringing with ribaldry and profanity. (Letter II)

[13] Bird, *A Lady's Life*. Quotations of Bird's letters throughout the present study have been taken from www.gutenberg.org.

[14] Arbitrary use of capital letters has been observed.

The previous example exhibits Bird's strong disapproval of the Western nightlife which is poles apart from her own moral code as well as Victorian one's. So much so that Bird is urged to take a shotgun in the event of a risk: "on my telling him that I traveled[15] unarmed, he could hardly believe it, and adjured me to get a revolver at once" (Letter VII). As a matter of fact, from then on, Bird would never abandon her pistol: "I never told you that I once gave an unwary promise that I would not travel alone in Colorado unarmed" (Letter XI). Frequent shootings do not come as a surprise either: "Nearly all the shooting affrays arise from the most trivial causes in saloons and bar-rooms" (Letter XII). Nevertheless, in the hope that this situation meliorates, some kind of 'justice' has been implemented in particular places warning ruffians as well as criminal against breaking the law:

> At Alma and Fairplay vigilance committees have been lately formed, and when men act outrageously and make themselves generally obnoxious they receive a letter with a drawing of a tree, a man hanging from it, and a coffin below, on which is written "Forewarned." They "git" in a few hours. (Letter XII)

The abovementioned warning serves only, in professor Karen M. Morin's opinion, to emphasize the ubiquitous presence of imperialism, which means that the mother country rules even over the most distant of its territories. Male closeness constitutes another major source of danger for a solo female. Yet, to appease the fears about impropriety, Bird portrays all the men in the waggon she was travelling with soundly slept. Her dignity hence will not be called into question: "the twenty-four inmates of the car were all invisible, asleep behind rich curtains. It was a true Temple of Morpheus. Profound sleep was the object to which everything was dedicated" (Letter III). Regarding her ambiguous position about propriety and undertaking particular transgressive activities, Morin maintains that Bird swings between the Victorian severe code of conduct and the heroic adventure tale, where she plays the leading role "without relinquishing her feminity" (*Narrating* 212). Coupled with the portrayal of impending sexual threat, Indians' incursions cannot be ignored either, their raids actually threaten the very essence of the Western economy: the rancho. Accordingly, it is not a coincidence that confrontation between Indians and settlers resonates with Bird's story:

[15] American English spelling has been observed throughout Bird's letters.

> The Indians have taken to the "war path," and are burning ranches and killing cattle. There is a regular "scare" among the settlers, and wagon loads of fugitives are arriving in Colorado Springs. The Indians say, "The white man has killed the buffalo and left them to rot on the plains. We will be revenged". (Letter VIII)

The aforesaid clash between settlers and American natives constitutes another example of the actual presence of the British empire in the West, if only the last breath for the latter. Let alone the adverse climatic conditions which deter Bird from accomplishing one of the most elementary activities as writing: "snow-bound for three days! I could not write yesterday, it was so awful" (Letter IX). So much so that Bird cannot even cope with the glacial weather: "had gone to sleep with six blankets on, and a heavy sheet over my face (…) [but] the sheet was frozen to my lips (…) my bed was thickly covered with fine snow (…) The bucket of water was solid ice" (Letter IX).

Having been presented the most compelling evidence of the West itself as a perilous setting for any tourist and in some particular cases, even deadly risky for female travellers, let me present some interpretations which I align myself with. To begin with, Morin suggests that Bird deliberately depicts herself involved in perilous missions to make her achievement "more heroic" and prove her "personal credit" (*Frontiers* 78). Emphasis on the danger, however, must be measured as female tourism might be affected by her frightening narrative. That is why, seeking to soften her account, Bird introduces some nuances as the following one: "truly terrible as it was to me, to a member of the Alpine Club it would not be a feat worth performing" (Letter VII). At the same time, professor Sara Mills, researcher on gender and feminism, argues that many female discourses present women travelling unchaperoned and "without coming to harm" so as to "reinforce the notion of imperialism" (22). Henceforth, given this 'haven of safety', there is no room for sexual[16] matters, subject which would be, according to Mills, "improper for a woman even to allude to" (22). Having been added the aforesaid interpretations, let us move on then to the study of Bird's 'going West' to comprehend how important role 'place' plays in her travel narrative.

[16] See section 4.2.

3. The Travel Narrative: Going West

"This is no region for tourists and women, only for a few elk and bear hunters at times"
Isabella Bird *(A Lady's life in the Rocky Mountains; Letter V)*

While much of this section focuses on Bird's account about the American West through the study of her writing correspondence, I am strictly concerned with the letters as published in *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*. I will hence neglect those unedited letters studied and published more recently by Chubbuck. In doing so, I will avert lengthy debates[17] about the truthfulness or accuracy of Bird's testimony. I will, first of all, (i) offer a number of formal features of her written correspondence. Later, I will (ii) furnish my analysis with a quick definition of Otherness by Almarcegui so that Bird's Discourse is better understood in both format and content. I will eventually (iii) study the essential role played by 'place' in Bird's discourse because it is precisely this distant scenario which allows her to find her own space, as well as a certain degree of empowerment.

3.1 Letter Writing: Features and Devices

By the mid-18th and the beginning of the 19th century, travel accounts used to take the form of a letter[18] according to the Professor Leonardo Romero, to such an extent that epistolary writing was regarded as an essential feature in travel writing. Its popularity, in line with Romero's statement, was the result of a new liberal trend in the 18th according to which one thought mostly of themselves giving rise to "oneself literature" (Romero 481). In addition, the traveling experience underwent a slight change opening to sectors of society whose interests and ventures had been until then very distant from this personal, rewarding and pleasing activity.

As any kind of letter, the travel letter presents, according to Romero, a dialogue between the sender and the recipient. In the particular case of the travel letter, however, the missive is usually void of dialogue and results in an extensive monologue. This is precisely Isabella Bird's style. *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* (1879)[19], "a

[17] See section 5, 'further research'.

[18] See Wortley Montagu, Wollstonecraft and Wollstonecraft Shelley.

[19] See Morin, *Frontiers*, 2. It was originally written as letters to her sister, then appeared serially in the English weekly *Leisure Hour* in 1878. It was not until 1879, six years after accomplishing her heroic deed, that *A Lady in the Rocky Mountains* was published.

roaring success" (Checkland 54), compiles the correspondence between Isabella and her sister Henrietta throughout the former's long journey. In this way, Bird allows us to know the exact date of each event along with the precise place where her narration materializes, yet no feedback from Henrietta is acknowledged.

As for its content, Bird conceives her letters as fictionalized narration, statement which will be proved in the next lines. Suffice to say that Bird unilaterally determines to select some stages of her long journey while others are neglected: "I pass hastily over the early part of the journey" (Letter I). The previous utterance graphically illustrates that Bird manufactures her own account. As a matter of fact, she knows what comes next, *ergo* Bird prefers to tiptoe around the first part of her journey to go later into details[20]. Let aside the fact that she repeatedly makes use of the past tense: "when the snow darkness began to deepen towards evening, the track became quite illegible, and when I found myself at this romantically situated cabin, I was thankful to find that they could give me shelter" (Letter IX). Its use clearly shows that the time of action and the time of writing do not coincide, which enables Bird to use her time to the greatest advantage, and present events in the most favourable way for her[21]. In addition, Bird sets herself up as the narrator of her own pilgrimage, which adds the autobiographical perspective. Therefore, it may be concluded that her account is indeed a fictionalized exposition: "It is difficult to make this anything of a letter. I have been riding for a whole week, seeing wonders and greatly enjoying the singular adventurousness and novelty of my tour" (Letter X). So much so that Morin argues that "Bird wrote much of her text as a heroic adventure tale" (*Narrating* 211). By the same token, the Professor Christine DeVine claims that "Bird's travel narrative has been shaped to resemble a quest romance".

Notwithstanding the number of abovementioned arguments, Bird seems highly concerned about accuracy within her discourse: "the letters are a faithful picture of the country and state of society as it then was" (Letter I). Bird is in fact aware of the risk she takes in the event her travel book is labelled as wonder narrative or just untrue testimony. With this in mind, it could be stated that she intentionally makes an effective

[20] See section 4.1.

[21] See Bruce 7. See also Chubbuck's work. She reveals that the letters presented in *A Lady's Life* are not the original ones but the ones she arranged back at home.

use of *mise-en-scène* in the American West through plausible and first-hand information: boarding in a family of settlers, doing manual labour in a rancho and riding astride like any other settle. After all, imbued with the spirit of the untamed West, everything appears to be the most genuine and credible.

After having been detailed the main features of Bird's letter writing, let us move on to examine how she faces Otherness throughout her discourse, and the advantage she takes of selecting such a distant setting. I suggest there that her choice of place is far from innocent.

3.2 Geographical Displacement: Facing Otherness

In the present section, I will furnish my analysis with a quick definition of Otherness as expressed by Almarcegui so that Bird's discourse is better understood in both format and content. I will subsequently revel Bird's technique to describe Otherness, which will steadily but surely lead to the central core of this chapter; going West and the prominent role of place.

Encountering Otherness constitutes for Almarcegui the essence of travelling as stated in *El Sentido del Viaje*. Needless to say, Bird's 'going West' will allow her to get in contact with Others. Further, while the female travellers have been considered objects rather than active and independent subjects throughout history, women will eventually recognize themselves as subjects following Almarcegui's thought in *Inscribir los Movimientos del Corazón en la Faz de la Tierra* (2005). That is precisely because female is defined by the way she will perceive herself within Otherness. Therefore, as a result of females' outdoor adventures, there will be plenty of room for them, so much so that unknown places will become accessible and familiar for male as well as for female travellers.

Given these points, Almarcegui defines Otherness in the framework of Travel Literature as what the traveller finds bizarre. However, Otherness not only radiates fear, desire, attraction, contrast, remoteness, but resemblance, closeness and recognition as well. The question, though, seems to unravel how the observer copes with Otherness. Additionally, being confronted with the task of describing Otherness, Almarcegui presents a number of devices to accomplish such a task, and 'reversal' appears to be the

one which illustrates Bird's methodology. Generally speaking, Bird raises Otherness to her level to interchange her own peculiarities with those appertaining to Otherness. In the next example, Bird establishes weather as a simple comparator: "In our sunless, misty climate you do not know the influence which persistent fine weather exercises on the spirits. I have been ten months in almost perpetual sunshine, and now a single cloudy day makes me feel quite depressed" (Letter XI). In the previous utterance, the total "appropriation" of Western weather from Bird's part leads her to complain about her home land's climate. Eventually, in order to seize Otherness, Bird will portrait those elements shared by both (Otherness and Empire) such as domesticity as well as leisure activities. The analysis of those issues will be precisely at the heart of the next section.

3.3 The Role of Place

Bird depicts in her writing a myriad of activities she is not allowed to following the strict Victorian protocol of conduct. As a result, tension arises between what she longs for doing and what is appropriate from her feminine bourgeois point of view. Therefore, she portrays herself as a subject and/or object of the scene. While sometimes Bird dresses *à l'americaine* to adapt herself to the new climatic conditions, once in a while, she presents herself as an exotic element of the *décor* staying at the edge of the Western influences[22]. All things considered, I will devote the following section to highlight the important role played by the American West to comprehend Bird's transgressive narrative and her subsequent initiation journey. It is precisely this remote scenario which enables her to find her own space as well as a certain degree of empowerment far away from homeland 'corsets'.

3.3.1 Domesticity: Seeking Private Space

According to professor Mary Louise Pratt, while we hardly find references to domestic settings in male discourse, female's "territorial claim [is] to private space, a personal, room[23]-sized empire" (159-160). As a matter of fact, while men's objective is to "collect and possess everything else", Pratt points out that "women travellers seek first and foremost to collect themselves" (159-160). For Morin too, those female

[22] See Goin 254. He defines the American West as "a land of contradictions".

[23] See Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*.

travellers try hard to recreate the same ambience in the mountains of Colorado as in their home land, which enables them to feel comfortable. Not surprisingly, Bird devotes a number of lines within her account to domesticity. Concerning accommodation, Bird displays an illustrative description of the challenging situation she has to deal with while abroad: "there was no table, no bed, no basin, no towel, no glass, no window, no fastening on the door. The roof was in holes, the logs were unchinked[24], and one end of the cabin was partially removed!" (Letter IV). Fortunately, a fortnight later she is proud of announcing that she enjoys "a clean hay bed with six blankets, and there are neither bugs nor fleas" (Letter VI). In relation to her daily domestic routines while in the Rockies, Bird supplies us with detailed information about her slight clumsiness. Bird makes it clear that although unusual for her in England, she is perfectly capable of coping with a number of house chores. Put differently, Bird is creating her own 'room':

> "At sunrise Mrs. Chalmers comes in (…) and makes a fire, because she thinks me too stupid to do it (…) and by seven I am dressed, have folded the blankets, and swept the floor (…) After breakfast I draw more water, and wash one or two garments daily, taking care that there are no witnesses of my inexperience. (Letter IV)

While it is true that Bird feels here her skills underestimated in comparison to those exhibited by American housewives, it is equally true that it turns out that she is a pretty capable an adroit labourer: "I had washed my one change of raiment, and though I never iron my clothes, I like to bleach them till they are as white as snow" (Letter XV). Further, Bird ends up by offering her own knowledge about home life to female settlers: "this has resulted in my having a knitting class, with the woman, her married daughter, and a woman from the camp, as pupils. Then I have gained ground with the man by being able to catch and saddle a horse" (Letter V). In a matter of weeks, in addition, Bird improves her technique to the point that a foreigner mistakenly thinks that she is actually a genuine domestic worker. Therefore, it is at this very point that Bird has taken full possession of her own space:

> After baking the bread and thoroughly cleaning the churn and pails, I began upon the tins and pans, the cleaning of which had fallen into arrears, and was hard at work, very greasy and grimy, when a man came in to know where to ford the river

[24] The spelling of the original text has been observed.

> with his ox team, and as I was showing him he looked pityingly at me, saying, "Be you the new hired girl? (Letter VI)

Still, once again, contradiction emerges between what an American housewife is expected to do: "all women work in this region, so there is no fuss about my working" (Letter XV), and what a prosperous bourgeois lady in England should properly do: "mending, knitting, writing to you" (Letter IV). Regarding house chores, Morin reminds us that back in England, men's prosperity was judged by the amount of leisure time their wives enjoyed throughout the day; the more successful the former, the idler the latter. Yet, according to Morin, "western displacement appears to offer the women a sense of prideful self-sufficiency (…) embracing the domestic tasks, and becoming empowered by them. They are, for perhaps, the first time in their lives, taking care of themselves" (*Frontiers 63*-64).

Concerning 'what to wear', Bird willingly embraces, unlike most of the European travellers, the American ladies' apparel[25]. Seeking hence to introduce her particular feminine touch, Bird adds a footnote expanding on a little to the particularities of her unconventional outfit[26]: "a half-fitting jacket, a skirt reaching to the ankles, and full Turkish trousers gathered into frills falling over the boots,—a thoroughly serviceable and feminine costume for mountaineering and other rough traveling" (Letter I). Once imbued with the most genuine American flavour, Bird's eagerness for liberty is at this stage fuelled by the straightforward suggestion for doing as she wishes. Birth presents then her innovative riding fashion: "ride your own fashion; here, at Truckee, if anywhere in the world, people can do as they like" (Letter I). On top of that, no astonishment at all about her riding astride[27]. As a matter of fact, Bird lets us know, no boundary is being transgressed so doing, since not even one of the eyewitnesses say a word or show their surprise before her behaviour:

> In no time a large grey horse was "rigged out" in a handsome silver-bossed Mexican saddle, with ornamental leather tassels hanging from the stirrup guards, and a housing of black bear's-skin. I strapped my silk skirt on the saddle, deposited my cloak in the corn-bin, and was safely on the horse's back before his owner had

[25] See Birkett 152. She offers a graphic illustration of feminine garments.

[26] See Chubbuck 180-18. It is presented a graphic testimony of Bird's Bloomer suit in Colorado. See also Hayers 89-95, and Power O'Donoghue Part II, Chap. IV.

[27] Hayes 1-7 'Beginning to Ride' *au feminine*.

> time to devise any way of mounting me. Neither he nor any of the loafers who had assembled showed the slightest sign of astonishment, but all were as respectful as possible. (Letter I)

The truth is that the ease and speed with which she willingly acquires her new attire and cavalier riding fashion may raise doubts about Bird's behaviour. This is why she keeps introducing amendments to her writing, and Bird concludes with: "once on horseback my embarrassment disappeared, and I rode through Truckee" (Letter I). All things considered, Morin holds that Bird presents readers with an ambiguous position regarding her dress and mode of riding, for "Western America served as a useful location for such an ambivalent gendered subjectivity" (*Frontiers* 59). Therefore, the important role played by geography serves Bird "to do the most improper things with perfect propriety" (*Frontiers* 59).

As a partial conclusion, trying to fit her own code in the new setting, Bird finds hard to stick to coherent and logic behaviour, but above all, she dares to act in a way she would not dare to back at home. The culprit of her unusual performance remains the 'place'.

3.3.2 Long's Peak Ascent: Female Empowerment

According to Morin, the traditional Victorian adventure tale presents the exploits of a male hero whose major deeds are related to the conquest of land, search of gold or the colonial administration (*Frontiers*). As for women, by contrast, while a few of them travel to the West as writers or tourists, women are mostly expected to build their own family household irrespective of the selected location. They are mainly wives or female relatives whose partners are involved in colonialist ventures oversees (Morin, *Frontiers*). In this sense, unlike male adventurers who show off about their achievements and feats, women travellers like Bird "demonstrate, not triumph or domination over place but a particular kind of triumph over self and emotive attachment to place" (Morin, *Frontiers* 52).

Therefore, letting aside those roles of mother and wife, Bird depicts herself as a heroine whose strength and courage runs parallel to the most heroic of the male adventurer's. As an indication of her heroine status she turns to be, for instance, more capable of orienting herself than the English settler Chalmers, "vainly I pointed out to

him that we were going north-east when we should have gone south-west" (Letter V). Let us remember that she is a well accomplished horsewoman. It is therefore plausible in her case to be more skilful than her male counterpart. There are in addition markers of heroic achievements in her performance (Morin, *Frontiers* 73), "at least the Peak was won" (Letter V). Still, Bird takes into account at any one time her own femininity. An illustrative indication of its relevance is admitting how demanding her goal is, let alone her persistent use of self-deprecation. Eventually, she ends up by admitting that anyone could emulate her: "let no practical mountaineer be allured by my description into the ascent of Long's Peak. Truly terrible as it was to me, to a member of the Alpine Club it would not be a feat worth performing" (Letter VII).

Seeking to interpret the aforesaid contradiction between a remarkable display of femininity and some glorious physical deeds, the professor Precious McKenzie-Stearns reveals that "at times in the texts, the writer supports Victorian stereotypes and at other times, the travel writer is renegotiating competing positions" (10). In line with McKenzie-Stearns' view, Mills claims that elements such as self-deprecation stress the notion of female accounts as "counter-hegemonic voices within colonial discourses" (22). As a consequence, Bird's texts may result "unstable, contradictory and transgressive" (9). More, for the authors of a work furnished with such an illustrative title as *The Madwoman in the Attic*[28], contradiction is just the consequence of female writers trying to 'fit in' to a male dominated literature. Unsurprisingly, female writer "seems to be anomalous, indefinable alienated, a freakish outsider" (48). Nonetheless, Bird-like women are "well-qualified" (Middleton 3-16), resourceful and capable of almost anything, which brings about certain notion of transgression. It also challenges the traditional thought about housewives as vulnerable and helpless. Further, McKenzie-Stearns claims that female travellers "challenged the Victorian status quo by writing of the dangerous pleasures they experienced while travelling" (iii).

In the same fashion, it proves particularly remarkable the way Bird and her travel companions achieved a certain mental control over their bodies. As a matter of fact, while women used to resort to "sickness, anorexia[29], neurasthenia, or even waring

[28] See Charlotte Brotë, *Jane Eyre*.

[29] See Gilbert and Gubar 53-64. It is offered an extended explanation of anorexia and agoraphobia in female writers.

corsets" (Morin, *Frontiers* 78), Bird exercised horse riding and climbing suffering from physical exhaustion throughout her ascent. Let us remember that bedevilled by mysterious ailments, Bird undertook her journey to Colorado searching for the conquest of her own weakness. Accordingly, Morin concludes that even if Bird was not a feminist, her narrative reveals "personal empowerment through rugged physical exercise and the overcoming of fear" (*Frontiers* 80). By the same token, McKenzie-Stearns states that mountainous West paved the way for performing traditionally male social activities, which led women to "re-evaluate their definitions of womanhood and freedom" (9). She adds that while not being active supporters of the feminist movement, courageous women travel writers like Bird inspired the New Woman's movement. According to her, it is not so much about the writers' attitude *per se*, as it is about the interpretation their readers made of their texts, since they were taken "as proof of female equality" (qtd. in McKenzie-Stearns 8).

Much of this chapter has focused on the influence of the new setting to comprehend Bird's singular performance. In addition, I suggest that empowered by performing household chores, and enlivened by strenuous physical activity Bird takes the decision not to play by patriarchal rules anymore. After her unprecedented decision, no roadmap is registered for guiding her, what would explain, according to Maureen Murdock, a life full of excitement and terror. Therefore, the way is now paved for Bird's account of her amazing journey. Let us get ready for unconventionality and transgression to the highest extent.

4. The Travel Narrative: The Initiation Journey

Heureux qui, comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage (Joachim Du Bellay)
Happy the [one] who finds sweet journey's end[30]

In line with DeVine's claim that Bird makes use of a "phallus-rich metaphorical landscape and an allegorical hero", I additionally suggest that her ascent to Long's Peak embodies the highest point of an initiation journey in the quest for her first sexual experience. It is no accident hence that Bird, unmarried at the age of 42, starts one of her first solo travel after her progenitors' demise, and selects the American West as outstanding setting for her first intercourse. In the present section, therefore, I intend to verify whether Bird's account constitutes an archetypical journey by analysing its deep structure: (i) departure of the heroine, (ii) the road of trials, (iv) heaven on earth, (v) supernatural help, and (vi) transformation of the heroine[31]. Later, I will examine some instances where metaphoric devices have been made used of to convey some taboo messages. I will conclude that Bird employs landscape descriptions as metaphors of her whether real or fictionalized sexual encounter(s).

Let us remember that the official aim of Bird's odyssey is to reach the summit of Long's Peak to ameliorate her health, that is, the socially acceptable aim for a woman travelling alone: "I might, I thought, get over canyons and all other difficulties into Estes Park, which has become the goal of my journey and hopes" (Letter IV). However, there is an unofficial one related to the hidden and transgressing goal of her passage or personal pilgrimage. In this sense, Wolfzettel states that Bird's hidden objective may be even unconscious. It may additionally faintly change over her sojourn. According to Wolfzettel, the point is hence to establish the agreement between the official purpose of a journey; expedition, commercial or pilgrimage among others, and the abovementioned deep structure of its narrative. Regarding the purpose of travelling, Porter defends the notion that, at the turn of the 19th century, "pleasure (…) overwhelm[ed] instruction" (125). For her part, Middleton states that, unlike male travellers, women went on taking extensive notes of statistics and drawings as if "they feared it was wrong to travel for pleasure" (5). It cannot come as a surprise then the fact of having Bird maintaining that she travels for health in an attempt to protect her reputation at home as if she could not

[30] Arranged translation from www.poetryintranslation.

[31] The nomenclature used to name the stages of Bird's initiation journey is my own mixture of the proposals by Wolfzettel, Campbell and Murdock.

travel just for (sexual) fun. Accordingly, Bird tries hard throughout her narrative to present her departure as a therapeutic journey referring to (i) the Western mild climate (Letter IV), (ii) its mineral water resources (Letter IV), and (iii) mountain climbing so as to enjoy outdoor activities: “at Denver, people who come from the East to try the "camp cure" now so fashionable, get their outfit of wagon, driver, horses, tent, bedding, and stove, and start for the mountains” (Letter IX). As has been noted, the notion of travelling for the improvement of one’s health may result a convincing pretext for a female traveller. Similarly, it may help to silence nasty rumours and sexual speculations about what for Bird travels unchaperoned. Those nasty rumours and speculations reminds me of Almarcegui letting us know in *Escuchar Irán* (2016) that she has been advised to wear a wedding ring in her nowadays solo travels. I thus wonder whether Middleton’s aforesaid statement about women travellers not being allowed to indulge themselves in pleasure were not for their note-books of statistics and pages-of-drawings is still valid.

4.1 Mythical Structure

Let us begin first of all by verifying whether Bird’s narrative meets the stages of the archetypical journey. To this end, I will make use of the works by Wolfzettel, Campbell and Murdock.

4.1.1 Departure of the Heroine: Bird Going West

Bird’s journey starts in letter I, as soon as she leaves aside her Victorian apparel in the city of Truckee willingly adopting comfortable clothes for horse riding. As can be seen, Bird displays a high level of adaptation to a new scenario in her role of heroine:

> Putting a minimum of indispensables into a bag, and slipping on my Hawaiian riding dress over a silk skirt, and a dust cloak over all, I stealthily crossed the plaza to the livery stable, the largest building in Truckee, where twelve fine horses were stabled in stalls on each side of a broad drive. (Letter I)

Given the special circumstances of her travelling alone, Bird introduces many male individuals, and speaks great things about them in order to avoid criticism. In this way, Bird gives the impression that she is taking no (sexual) risk in travelling alone according to Victorian conventions: “I mention these little incidents to indicate the habit

of respectful courtesy that prevails in that region" (Letter II). Yet, no sooner does she get to her new location than she receives news about the 'sacred mountain', the mountain that will guarantee the realisation of her dream: "there is a most romantic place called Estes Park, at a height of 7,500 feet, which can be reached by going down to the plains and then striking up the St. Vrain Canyon" (Letter V).

Meantime, Bird enjoys the landscape, and acknowledges its beneficial impact on her body as well as on her soul: "the scenery up here is glorious, combining sublimity with beauty, and in the elastic air fatigue has dropped off from me" (Letter V). Additionally, her remarkable physical improvement runs parallel to her mental wellness, "this scenery satisfies my soul. Now, the Rocky Mountains realize—nay, exceed—the dream of my childhood. It is magnificent, and the air is life giving" (Letter V). Fine weather also appears to be by her side, whose benefits are immediately provided: "yesterday was perfect. The sun was brilliant and the air cool and bracing. I felt better (…) I went to bed cheerful and hopeful as to the climate and its effect on my health" (Letter VI). Generally speaking, this collection of comments only confirms Bird's superficial interest, that is, travelling for health as prescribed by her doctors.

Still, however hard Bird tries, things get out of hand: "my first experiences of Colorado travel have been rather severe" (Letter III). Let aside the fact that Bird fails in her first attempt to reach the summit: "my horse fell first, rolling over twice, and breaking off a part of the saddle, in his second roll knocking me over a shelf of three feet of descent (…) I was cut and bruised, scratched and torn" (Letter V). Fortunately, no broken bones are reported, according to the information provided in letter VI. Bird, nonetheless, does not yield and all of a sudden, her landlord supplies her with good news: "you're in luck this time; two young men have just come in and are going up to-morrow morning" (Letter VI). On top of that, they will be accompanied by the best possible guide of the Rockies, the worldwide known hunter and trapper, Mountain Jim: "[he] came in, and said he would go up as guide" (Letter VII).

With regard to the 'departure' stage, it is a significant fact how easily all the parts are fitted together, which reinforces the notion of Bird's letters as previously and deliberately arranged.

4.1.2 The Road of Trials: Bird's Thorny Path

According to Wolfzettel, following the initiation journey's logic, Bird must endure a number of tribulations and hardship in order to achieve paradise. Her initiation pilgrimage reaches its crest precisely with her ascent to Long's Peak. Similarly, initiation rites may be regarded as the accomplishment of a personal dream: "the Rocky Mountains realize—nay, exceed—the dream of my childhood" (Letter V). However, Bird admits that she is so frightened that she is about to quit, to abandon her goal: "it was a time of extreme terror. I was roped to "Jim," but it was of no use; my feet were paralyzed and slipped on the bare rock (…) I wanted to return to the "Notch"" (Letter VII).

Further, at a certain point of the ascent, Bird seems highly concerned about the impact of her incompetence on her mountain mates, but Jim sticks to their plans. Therefore, until now, Jim appears to be her most passionate supporter: "one of the young men said almost plainly that a woman was a dangerous encumbrance, but the trapper replied shortly that if it were not to take a lady up he would not go up at all" (Letter VII). However, Bird's agony does not cease, as though death may occur at any time: "my fatigue, giddiness, and pain from bruised ankles, and arms half pulled out of their sockets". Still, two more hours of misery until the peak "of trembling, slipping, straining, of smooth ice appearing when it was least expected, and of weak entreaties to be left behind while the others went on" (Letter VII). Yet, after all adversity and torment not easily endured even by the best trained mountaineer, Bird feels deeply embarrassed. It is too big a challenge for her. She also knows that without Jim, she will never reach the summit: "I am only humiliated by my success, for "Jim" dragged me up, like a bale of goods, by sheer force of muscle" (Letter VII). Together with embarrassment, Bird downplays her performance by suggesting that she almost ends by crawling: "SCALING, not climbing, is the correct term for this last ascent. It took one hour to accomplish 500 feet, pausing for breath every minute or two" (Letter VII). As a result, instead of pride for her deed, Bird feels she has failed Jim, her closest companion: "I knew that he must be grievously disappointed, both in my courage and strength" (Letter VII). At the same time, Bird is also well aware of the fact that her ordeal borders on human strength to the point of even frightening an animal: "Jim's dog does not dare to go on walking ""Ring" refused to traverse the Ledge, and remained at

the "Lift" howling piteously" (Letter VII). Very illustrative of Bird's exploit results the information presented by Bruce about the fact that very few climbers attempt Long's Peak ascent outside summer time.

As for 'the road of trials', its narrative is useful to emphasize the relevance of the subsequent stage i.e., Bird's 'heaven of earth'. The more pitiful and endless the list of misfortunes, the more rewarding Bird's pilgrimage will turn out to be.

4.1.3 Heaven on Earth: Bird's Paradise

After so much suffering, the climax is eventually reached: "at last the Peak was won" (Letter VII), and Bird insists that she owns the paradise, she literally means it: "Estes Park is mine. It is surveyed, "no man's land," and mine by right of love, appropriation, and appreciation" (Letter VIII). Truth be told, Bird's achievement not only resounds in the Rockies, but throughout the Continent as well: "on one of the mightiest of the vertebrae of the backbone of the North American continent" (Letter VII). Additionally, given the magnificent landscape she finds herself surrounded by, Bird remains awed, astounded: "the unspeakable awfulness and fascination of the scenes" (Letter VII). She admits that no landscape outperforms Long's Peak in beauty, not even her venerated homeland: "Estes Park combines the beauties of all. Dismiss all thoughts of the Midland Counties" (Letter VII). Further, Bird confesses that she is overwhelmed, she does not expect so much as she has apparently achieved: "at a height of 7,500 feet, where the hoar frost crisps the grass every night of the year, I have found far more than I ever dared to hope for" (Letter VI). More, in the light of her profound religious sentiment, Bird can now understand why natives adored particular geographic features as enchanting as Long's Peak: "here under its shadow one learns how naturally nature worship, and the propitiation of the forces of nature, arose in minds which had no better light" (Letter VII). Yet, not content with this tremendous physical deed, Bird already anticipates her greatest reward by conferring human features to the captivating mountain:

> It is one of the noblest of mountains, but in one's imagination it grows to be much more than a mountain. It becomes invested with a personality. In its caverns and abysses, one comes to fancy that it generates and chains the strong winds, to let them loose in its fury. The thunder becomes its voice, and the lightnings do it homage. (Letter VII)

At this stage of the initiation journey, I suggest that Bird's official purpose of her journey, and her concealed objective have just converged. Let us remember that the ascent of the most seductive mountain constitutes the former, while entertaining her first intimate relationship the latter. Put differently, both occur almost simultaneously in letter VII.

4.1.4 Supernatural Help: Mountain Jim

In accordance with the narrative pattern of every tale, the heroine always counts on supernatural help to achieve her goal. Let us surmise that Mountain Jim plays this role of 'supernatural help'. To begin with, his remote location offers hints upon his mysterious and even magical condition: ""Mountain Jim's" cabin is in the entrance gulch, four miles off, and there is not another cabin for eighteen miles toward the Plains. The park is unsurveyed[32] (…) almost altogether unexplored" (Letter VIII). Alongside his remoteness and secrecy, while Bird talks about Jim's performance concerning Indian Frontier warfare, she suggests that Jim could be more a spirit than a physical person: "he is a man for whom there is now no room, for the time for blows and blood in this part of Colorado is past" (Letter VII). With the intention of underlying his arcane nature, Bird suggests that Jim could be even gifted in magic powers since he always succeeds at finding water when she is thirsty, and surrounded by ice: "at last, in a deep hole, he succeeded in breaking the ice, and by putting one's arm far down one could scoop up a little water in one's hand" (Letter VII). Furthermore, Jim is always there, ready to help her, depicting him as her guardian angel: ""Jim" always said that there was no danger, that there was only a short bad bit ahead, and that I should go up even if he carried me! (Letter VII). More, irrespective of the difficulty, Jim does never abandon her: "nolens volens, dragged me along with a patience and skill, and withal a determination that I should ascend the Peak, which never failed" (Letter VII).

As for Jim's physical aspect, it has to be particularly poignant and striking: "one eye was entirely gone, and the loss made one side of the face repulsive, while the other might have been modeled in marble. "Desperado" was written in large letters all over him" (Letter VI). Bird confesses that she even had second thoughts about "having sought his acquaintance" in view of her grotesque aspect. However, Bird confers him

[32] The spelling of the original text has been observed.

chivalrous manners, refined accent, and easy and elegant language. He is also capable of making her letting aside her scary moments: “a conversation which lasted for more than three hours, in spite of the manifold checks of fording streams, single file, abrupt ascents and descents, and other incidents of mountain travel” (Letter VII).

Coupled with his physical strength and deep commitment, Bird is captivated by Jim’s ability to talk about matters ranging from murderous deeds to poetry: “he was very agreeable as a man of culture as well as a child of nature” (Letter VII). In fact, Bird has learnt to more than willingly accept Jim’s two natures, like the two radically distinct sides of her face (the repulsive and the one modelled in marble). On the one hand, he embodies the tantalising challenge of the sin: “the fame of many daring exploits is sullied by crimes which are not easily forgiven here” (Letter XV). On the other hand, Jim responds in a gallantry manner when treated as such: “then he read us a very able paper on Spiritualism which he was writing” (Letter XV).

Contrary to Campbell’s archetype, in Bird’s initiation journey, the ‘supernatural’ performs, not one, but two roles at the same time. First of all, Jim helps Bird to accomplish her official aim of reaching the summit of Long’s Peak. Additionally, he plays his part as Bird’s partner in the quest for her first intercourse.

4.1.5 Transformation of the Heroine: Lessons Drawn

After the successful conclusion of Bird’s passage, it is the time for the assessment of whether expectations have been fulfilled, and measure the impact of those spiritual as well as physical experiences on our heroine. Should have some major changes to be highlighted, I would underline the enormous strength and high confidence Bird has acquired over her pilgrimage. With this intention, according to Almarcegui in *Escuchar Irán*, beginning a journey, abandoning one’s own milieu brings about underplaying the small, the tiny and insignificant. In short, seeing things differently. In this sense, Bird herself admits her own improvement: “surely one advantage of traveling is that, while it removes much prejudice against foreigners and their customs, it intensifies tenfold one's appreciation of the good at home” (Letter XVI). Another key point in Bird’s positive progress is that she wins in strength as well as in self-confidence according to her biographer Pat Barr: “for Isabella it was a test of courage and endurance; it was her way of proving to Jim that she was the bravest, toughest, and most extraordinary English

lady ever to have come his way" (1047). Further, in letter VII, Bird confesses that she is no longer afraid: "I was no longer giddy, and faced the precipice of 3,500 feet without a shiver". More, in letter IX she acknowledges that "there was nothing to be afraid of; and though I can't exactly say that I enjoyed the ride, yet there was the pleasant feeling of gaining health every hour".

I will add as a second achievement regarding Bird's personal success, the little importance she attributes to materialistic properties in comparison to her previous attitude e.g. servants, domestic menagerie, housing as well as wearing apparel. Therefore, Birds has also learnt the limited value of material goods; she can perfectly manage with half of the things she made use of at home: "I REALLY need nothing more than this log cabin offers. But elsewhere one must have a house and servants, and burdens and worries" (Letter IX). As for Letter X, her confession cannot be neglected either since Bird admits that all she needs is her horse and a few things fit in a small package: "there are no real difficulties. It is a splendid life for health and enjoyment. All my luggage being in a pack, and my conveyance being a horse, we can go anywhere where we can get food and shelter".

Thirdly, I will emphasize her ability to accomplish male as well as female chores. On the one hand, Bird is in charge of household tasks although she has never got previously involved in any of them. It thus emerges that housekeeping is domestic workers' duty in England: "to-day has been one of manual labor (…) I cleaned the living room and the kitchen, swept a path through the rubbish in the passage room, washed up, made and baked a batch of rolls and four pounds of sweet biscuits" (Letter XIV). On the other hand, in consonance with the information provided in Letter VIII, Bird is finally regarded as one of them, as equal, as valuable as a rancho man. In this sense, Bruce maintains that Bird "cannot resist being unconventional" (24). In Bruce's opinion, Bird is less concerned about her feminine reputation than by the thrilling experience of performing traditionally male roles. Consequently, she willingly accepts the invitation to drive wild cattle. Once again, Bird enjoys her freedom; she seeks the happiness she cannot relish at home. After all, who can resist savouring the pleasure of meeting and succeeding any challenge:

> "I wish you'd lend a hand, there's not enough of us; I'll give you a good horse; one day won't make much difference." So we've been driving cattle all day, riding about

> twenty miles, and fording the Big Thompson about as many times. Evans flatters me by saying that I am "as much use as another man"; more than one of our party, I hope, who always avoided the "ugly" cows. (Letter VIII)

This last stage illustrates a notion of the Far West as more progressive and ready to adopt new tendencies regarding women's enjoyment than the Continent. I thus suggest that this may be the reason for Bird to select the New World as the setting of her particular initiation journey.

4.2 Metaphorical Language

4.2.1 The Landscape

In the present section, I intend to delve deeper into Bird's narrative to bring to light the hidden objective of her adventure. Needless to say, Bird is not allowed to make explicit comments on sexuality. As a consequence, she makes use of the landscape and religion to transmit the central message of her discourse. It is not a matter of coincidence that the same letter where Bird narrates her epic odyssey of climbing Long's Peak, "phallus-rich metaphorical landscape" (DeVine) is often employed. Allow me then to stress 'the Mountain' as the most prominent geographic feature in Bird's discourse. In essence, the climbing of Bird's mountain constitutes a very suggestive description of her first intimate relationship: "it is one of the noblest of mountains, but in one's imagination it grows to be much more than a mountain" (Letter VII). The previous sentence might mark the exact moment where the mountain acquires human features, and no doubt, its presence and size have left an indelible impression in Bird's mind: "Gray's Peak and Pike's Peak have their partisans, but after seeing them all under favourable aspects, Long's Peak stands in my memory as it does in that vast congeries of mountains, alone in imperial grandeur" (Letter V). In the same fashion, Bird depicts from her bed, the shadow projected by 'the Mountain' on the lake, in the following glowing and suggestive terms, "it lies there absolutely still, a purplish lead color. Then suddenly into its mirror flash inverted peaks, at first a bright orange, then changing into red (...) the glory steals downwards, and a red flush warms the clear atmosphere of the park" (Letter VIII).

Under those circumstances, little effort does the imagination require to establish a certain link between ‘the Mountain’ and ‘Jim’. To begin with, Jim’s description constitutes the most prominent account regarding length and degree of detail in Bird’s careful narrative. Everything seems to fit in nicely; Jim is about the same age as Bird: “He is a man about forty-five, and must have been strikingly handsome” (Letter VI). To say nothing of the fact that Bird employs the adjective ‘handsome’ up to three times, “strikingly handsome (…) a handsome aquiline nose (…) and a very handsome mouth”. Equally important is the fact that Jim plays the role of Bird’s personal bodyguard which literally means protecting and enjoying more than once their mutual physical contact: “"Jim" dragged me up”, “I was roped to "Jim,"”, “I stood on his shoulders” (Letter VII). As a further illustration of Jim’s own intentions, Jim ordered his own dog to closely follow Bird: "Ring, go to that lady, and don't leave her again to-night" (Letter VII).

Let aside the scene where Bird alongside Jim rest pleasantly under the light of the stars. Meanwhile, “the students were asleep (…) "Ring" lay on one side of me with his fine head on my arm, and his master sat smoking, with the fire lighting up the handsome side of his face” (Letter VII). By contrast, Bird continues scrupulously addressing ‘Jim’, ‘Mr. Nugent’, as if he were just an acquaintance. She thus sticks to complying with the Victorian proprieties even in this wild setting. One more instance is mentioned in relation to sexuality; *à propos* the sentence describing Jim’s behaviour when interacting with Bird: “his manner was certainly bolder and freer than that of gentlemen generally” (Letter VII). This last explanation enables to model a clear image of highly sexual connotation[33] in our mind. DeVine concludes that “the sense of isolation, the physical closeness suggested by the dog with his head on her arm, and the fact the master sits smoking, is all too obviously post coital”.

4.2.2 Religion

As for religion, Wolfzettel states that Romantics share with Symbolists their obsession for the blue sky, meaning spirituality, in search of the paradise. It seems as if they sought escaping from the bourgeois society, that is, a kind of self-redemption. Unsurprisingly, given her deep religious convictions, Bird’s letters remarkably abound in references of this kind. The most compelling evidence that Bird seeks her own

[33] Chubbuck 178.

paradise, as a metaphor of her first intercourse, is the employment of ‘blue’ and ‘sky’ together up to thirteen times. Let us compile some of them. Letter II: “into a dark rich blue”, letter V: “the mountains breaking into pinnacles of bold grey rock as they pierce the blue of the sky”. Letter VI: “The sky was cloudless, and a deep brilliant blue”, Letter VIII: “the blue sky on the top of a colossal rock”, Letter X: “There was not a cloud on the bright blue sky the whole day,” Letter XI: “that sky of infuriated blue” Letter XV: “Today the sky has resumed its delicious blue,” Letter XVII: “the pure blue of the sky”.

Still, perhaps the most connected reference with religion seems the parallelism Bird establishes between Jim and Jesus. There, she suggests that just as God sent Jesus to save us, God also sent Mountain Jim not only to save her in the ascent to Long’s Peak, but to enable her first sexual relation too. In this way, Bird highlights the abovementioned notion about Jim as supernatural help, divinity natured, angel guard and sexual couple:

> Nature, rioting in her grandest mood, exclaimed with voices of grandeur, solitude, sublimity, beauty, and infinity, "Lord, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" Never-to-be-forgotten glories they were, burnt in upon my memory by six succeeding hours of terror. (Letter VII)

It is therefore with good reason that McKenzie-Stearns claims that “travel literature and empire provided the impetus necessary for a Victorian sexual revolution” (40). Further, she even places 19th century women travel writers as previous step, albeit unconscious, to the beginning of the New Woman’s movement.

As shown above, Isabella Bird’s narrative does constitute an example of initiation journey according to Wolfzettel’s, Campbel’s and Murdock’s archetypes. Letter writing and the imaginative use of landscape and religion only contribute, though, to disguise Bird’s most desirable dream. As for the ‘place’, I suggest that the very notion of this epic passage could not have been conceived anywhere but in the American West, the land where dreams come true.

5. Conclusions and Further Research

Inveniam viam aut faciam (Séneca)
I will find the path, or I will make it myself[34]

The intentional focus of this paper was to bring closer, and thoroughly analyse the letters Isabella Bird addressed to her sister Henrietta while in the Rocky Mountains. Coupled with the aforesaid, I also intended to shed some light on a particular kind of travel literature i.e., the initiation journey. In the course of this research, I have made the acquaintance of Isabella Bird and become familiar with her adventures and misfortunes. I have learnt that this Victorian lady, bedevilled by some arcane sickness, led an unconventional life after being prescribed to embark on an extended journey. Subsequently, I have discovered the description she presents of the Other, that is, the American West. There, I have realized how relevant the role performed by 'place' is, which has given me all the more reason to believe that her reputation was not as important for her as the notion of enjoying freedom and excitement. Judging by her unusual manners in accordance with the Victorian code, I have also found that Bird's behaviour may be branded as rebellious, since she challenged social taboos in relation to female leisure activities; riding astride, adopting 'American Lady's Mountain Dress', performing manual labour in a rancho and sharing a house with male companionship. Still, it is remarkable that she felt highly concerned about others' assumptions and reactions before her attitude; she was anxious about the credibility of her own narrative, feared about her new mode of riding, frightened by her uneasiness in male company, ashamed of her physical deed and embarrassed by the sensation of rapture or ravishment before the glorious scenery. The ultimate consequence of the aforesaid has been an unstable, contradictory and transgressive text concealed amid metaphorical devices and rich symbolism stemmed from landscape as well as religion.

In view of the above, and after having examined its deep structure, I suggest that *A Lady's Life in The Rocky Mountains* constitutes an allegory of an initiation journey in the quest for an intimate relationship, being the ascent to Long's Peak the embodiment of her first intercourse. It is thus no accident that Bird, unmarried at the age of 42, starts one of her first solo travel after her progenitors' decease, and selects the American West as outstanding setting for her first intercourse. I eventually claim that Bird employs

[34] My translation.

landscape descriptions as metaphors of her sexual encounter(s) which allows her to gently write about a taboo subject, i.e., her alleged first intimate relationship. As I have briefly discussed before, it is not so much about whether Isabella Bird actually enjoyed her first intercourse with Jim, as it is about the fact that she dared to put it down on paper. In this way, Bird transgresses Victorian proprieties as well as innovates 19th century fiction. Further, she is claimed, along with the 19th century women travel writers, to have laid, albeit unconsciously, the foundations of the New Woman's movement.

Yet, due to space and time constraints, there is not enough information to resolve whether Bird actually enjoyed her first intimate experience with her one-eyed desperado companion, known as "Mountain Jim". I am as well in the dark about whether it is humanly possible to get to know it. Additionally, I wonder whether Isabella Bird constitutes a unique example, or in case there is more, whether they travel to the American West too. I also speculate with the language being used in the same way as in *A Lady's Life*. Thereby it remains a subject for future research. Meanwhile let us rejoice in Bird's delight:

"The scenery is the most glorious I have ever seen, and is above us, around us, at the very door" (Letter VI).

"Truly, that air is the elixir of life" (Letter I).

"This scenery satisfies my soul. Now, the Rocky Mountains realize—nay, exceed—the dream of my childhood. It is magnificent, and the air is life giving" (Letter V).

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