WESTERN WOMEN'S TRAVEL WRITING ABOUT THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

Claudia Knapman
James Cook University of North Queensland

Although there has been a revival of interest in nineteenth-century women's travel writing, this is a neglected area of Pacific scholarship. Though the work of Western women travelers who wrote about the Pacific Islands has been drawn upon by some researchers, this literature has not received attention as a genre, as a body of source material, or as the focus of academic research questions. This article, while neither a detailed analysis of particular writers and their works nor an attempt to delineate the field, uses three categorizations--the realist, the protofeminist, and the orientalist--derived from analyses of women's travel writing elsewhere as a means of raising some of the major issues relating to such texts. The article argues that, while employing categories based on binary oppositions enables us to ask interesting questions and unmasks the complexity of these works and their authors, reductionist interpretations of this kind fail to provide adequate theoretical frameworks for understanding. Particular attention is drawn to the ambiguities and contradictions of the intersecting gender and "race" positions revealed through women's travel writing. It is suggested that this area is rich, largely untouched, and deserves further exploration.

IN RECENT YEARS there has been a marked revival of interest in nineteenth-century travelers and travel writing. It has been suggested that this late-twentieth-century revival represents a "bitter nostalgia for lost idioms of discovery and domination" (Pratt 1992:224) and a "choice of lifestyle that is a challenge to our own" (Russell 1986: 13). The "rediscovery" in the 1980s and 1990s of the books of women travel writers has been seen as part of a larger reclaiming of the Victorian period for women's history (Mills 1991:27), their contradictory lives being depicted as "more than simple portraits of feminist

Pacific Studies, Vol. 20, No. 2--June 1997

heroines" (Birkett 1989: preface). Travel writing has also become an important component of the renewed academic interest in imperialism, particularly "colonial discourse" and its contemporary impact in a "postcolonial" world in institutional forms, cultural understandings, and social interaction (Saïd 1979; Kabbani 1986; Breckenridge and van de Veer 1993). Current interest in travel writing also derives from the postmodem use of travel as a metaphor for a mode of thinking that questions the maps that position ourselves and others, and that is open to the retelling, revisioning, re-siting, and re-citing of historical and cultural knowledge, that is, the intellectual journey from the center into the periphery (Chambers 1994; Robertson et al. 1994). The interest in travel writing and tourism in the late twentieth century provides incentives--cultural and economic--for analyzing the significance and meanings of various forms of travel writing. Thus, many scholars are claiming that it is important to examine the travel writing of earlier times and different spaces, and they are approaching their analyses from a variety of disciplines and perspectives.

Some of the "rediscovered" women travel writers wrote about the Pacific, as did a variety of other women who for many different reasons traveled in one or more Pacific Islands countries during the colonial period. They include women as diverse as Sarah Maria Smythe (1864), the wife of a British' government official in precolonial Fiji in 1860; the model Victorian lady travelers Isabella Bird (1875) and Constance Gordon Cumming (1881, 1882, 1883) in the 1870s; temperance worker Lucy Broad (n.d.) at the turn of the century; Osa Johnson (1944), wife of the American photographer Martin Johnson, in the Solomons in the 1910s; and the enthusiastic British naturalist Evelyn Cheesman (1927, 1933, 1938, 1949, 1957, 1960) during the 1920s and 1930s.

Little attention has been paid by Pacific Islands researchers to this source material. This article attempts to bring into an academic focus books written about the Pacific by nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century English-speaking women travelers. In exploring these writings, it draws on the wider, growing literature on women travel writers. Jane Robinson has written a bibliographic guide to women travelers, which is the main sourcebook for those wishing to pursue what she regards as "an important, but little documented body of literature" (1991:vii). She lists nineteen women writers under the heading "Pacific Islands." This list is by no means exhaustive, but it compares well with her entries for other areas, reaffirming in a general context that women's travel writing about the Pacific is a recognizable body of literature.

Sara Mills (1991) points out that most scholars and nonacademic writers have looked for some thematic unity or other means of structuring the texts

or the authors they have examined. In order to find a coherent, organizing theme, Mills argues, women's travel writing has been selectively analyzed and variously categorized as realist literature, protofeminist literature, or as one kind of orientalist colonial discourse. These interpretations provide an entry point for thinking about Western women's travel writing about the Pacific Islands. Although it would be possible to devote an entire article to each category, my emphasis is on using them to open up discussion about this writing within Pacific studies. I will give some consideration to the first two interpretations--the realist and the protofeminist--before concentrating on the third.

The Realist Reading

Women's travel writing has been found to differ from men's in a number of ways, including the ways in which it is interpreted and evaluated. Because women's travel writing was not sponsored by governments or commercial organizations--in the Pacific, Beatrice Grimshaw (1907a, 1907b, 1910, 1912, 1930) is an exception who did write some commissioned pieces--it appeared to be personal autobiography. Therefore, it has been seen as particularly open to a realist reading. That is, texts are seen to reflect reality, and experience and authorial position are not problematized. The authors themselves frequently stated that, because of their own lack of scholarly training, they could claim no more than to be telling what they saw as it really was. Some of the better-known women's travel writing on the Pacific supports this interpretation. The much-published Isabella Bird, traveling for her health, claimed that her letters to a relation were "printed as they were written" (1875:vii-viii). Anna Brassey's extremely popular ***A Voyage in the "Sunbeam," Our Home on the Ocean for Eleven Months,*** which appeared in at least nineteen English editions and was translated into French, German, Italian, Swedish, and Hungarian, followed a day-by-day diary style. Her husband noted in the preface that she had a "painstaking desire not only to see everything thoroughly, but to record her impressions faithfully and accurately." She herself apologized for her inability to describe what she saw adequately (Brassey 1878:vii, 270; Marshall 1921:261-262). Margaret Stevenson's letters to her sister were edited and arranged by Marie Balfour, who claimed that "the South Seas . . . 'journal-letters' . . . are of course given in entirety" (1903:3), emphasizing that the text was not abridged, but a full and original account of Stevenson's direct observations and experiences. Caroline Edgeworth David noted in her preface that 'this does not claim to be a literary production, but merely an accurate, though unscientific account of the 1897 Funafuti coral-boring expedition" and insisted that her commen-

tary was based on her own observations, reinforcing this statement with frequent use of "I have seen" and "I never saw" (1899:153).

How can these claims to accurate description--to realism--be understood in a contemporary reading? Travel writing is a particular literary genre. It is not an outpouring of observations and experiences by unreflective, passive, and neutral observers. Travel writing accounts have in common "a particular reworking of the journey experience" in which diaries, jottings, and other sources "have been transformed into a new kind of text" (Millum 1994:132, 55).[1] Many of the letters that form nineteenth-century travel books were scrupulously written, edited, rewritten, and rearranged with a view to publication despite claims to be direct factual accounts of journeys and countries by a narrator (Mills 1991:69, 85-86; Millum 1994). Anna Forbes admitted that her account of the Eastern Archipelago of the Dutch East Indies (and including the tip of Papua) was pieced together from letters written home, which had given her the opportunity to remove the exaggerations of the moment and for "mature consideration of, and authentic information on, many points" (1887:viii). Her husband Henry Forbes's (1885) work included a few extracts from her journal when she was ill, and these are more detailed and interesting than the corresponding parts of her published version., Travel writing, whether authored by men or by women, cannot be' read in the late twentieth century as if it consists of unmediated descriptions of "real" events and places. The accounts by writers on the Pacific are no more "realist" in this sense than the works of travel writers about other places. Thus, in engaging with these texts, it is important to be aware of the sociocultural positioning of the authors and of ourselves as readers.

Women's use of letter or diary styles and their emphasis on being inexpert but honest observers formed part of the literary conventions governing women's travel writing. These literary prescriptions, relating to femininity, combined with women's particular interests and opportunities to construct women's texts as amateurish, unscientific, lacking literary merit, concerned with the domestic and private, and lacking authorial power (Mills 1991:12, 40, 69, 82; Pratt 1992:160; Okely 1992:12). All commentators on women's travel writing referred to in this article agree that women's writing did emphasize personal relations and domestic life, a focus that was derived from their actual social and narrative positions. Their works provide data such as extensive details regarding the proceedings and recipes used in a Funafuti cookhouse or bathing in the ***vai fafine*** (women's pool) (David 1899: chap. 16) and perspectives that are not available in male-authored works. These details support the claim that they were "realist," because they dealt with the details of "real" life. In their writing women authors often undervalued such observations and, thus, the significance of their own accounts. Katherine

Routledge (Mrs. Scoresby Routledge), who was a trained historian, apologized for the details of daily life--"the trivialities of this work"--in her account of the Easter Island Expedition of 1913-1915 (1920:vii). And Anna Forbes pointed out that she and her husband "shared for the most part the same experiences; but we looked upon them from an entirely different standpoint." Her account was "simpler," without "the admixture of scientific matter" (1887:vii). Even the Forbeses' titles reflected different, gendered claims. Hers indicated the text was about a wife's experiences (1887); his, that it was a (masterful and scientific) account of a naturalist's wanderings, travel, and exploration (1885). Other women stressed that they had written their books only because they were encouraged by others. American Mary Davis Wallis attributed her published account of her experiences in Fiji in the 1840s, when her husband was collecting bêche-de-mer, to the persuasions of her missionary friends and others (1967: preface); and Bird explained that she had been encouraged to publish by Hawaiian friends because she was less a stranger than other visitors (1875:vii-viii).

This "everyday life" focus and the constraints on being authoritative meant that women commented less frequently than male authors on political or economic questions and were perhaps less interested in politics (Middleton 1965:4). Although inattention to politics was considered appropriate for the genre, political and economic issues were not ignored by all women travel writers. A detailed study of South American travel writers led Mary Louise Pratt to conclude that women were often analytical and interpretive in their political commentary (1992:155-159), a point that could be made for certain commentators on the South Pacific as well. Isabella Bird, for example, commented extensively on Hawai'i's rulers and the prospect of American annexation (1875).[2] Nevertheless, if publication was desired, women's travel writing generally conformed to topics and stylistic conventions suitable for ladies (which is not to say that their writing was nonpolitical). Brassey, whose husband was a politician and who was herself a philanthropist and society leader in Britain, underplayed her own capabilities and deliberately refrained from making too many assertive or judgmental comments for a lady author about sensitive Hawaiian politics (Marshall 1921-1922). Her narrative about Hawai'i is warm and effusive, concentrating on sightseeing activities, her own domestic life and arrangements, and social engagements with members of the Hawaiian royal family (Brassey 1878). The masculinist heroic discourses of exploration, discovery, and colonialism were unavailable to women: theirs were not the experiences of exploration, economic expansion, or colonial government (Middleton 1965:4; Stevenson 1982:160; Mills 1991:5-6; Pratt 1992:213). And, as has been pointed out in relation to Africa, there was considerable opposition to women's traveling,

which was seen as an intrusion into a masculine domain that was essentially and textually "a man's country" (Adler 1992:l).

The scientific community was no more ready to accept women's travel texts as academic, although its members were ready to accept the products of women's travels in the form of ethnographic and botanical collections. The women themselves knew this. Brassey, for example, carefully understated her botanizing activities in her text, as if they were amateur undertakings rather than scientific exercises (1878). Nevertheless, she was made a fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute in recognition of the excellence of her collection of ethnological specimens, which she contributed to that association. By the 1890s however, the number of interested and knowledgeable women could not be managed by a few honorary fellowships. Such women challenged the very core of male hegemony in the field of scientific travel. Isabella Bird addressed the British Association in 1891, 1892, and 1898 and was asked to give the prestigious Anniversary Address to the Scottish Geographical Society after being made a fellow in 1891 (Lucas 1917: 166-168). She drew such a large audience at the London branch in 1892 that the Royal Geographical Society, "seriously alarmed by the success of its rival," felt compelled to admit the members of all other British geographical societies (Middleton 1965:11). This meant women members, and the council formalized the situation by approving the election of "well-qualified" women, Bird being one of fifteen approved ***(Proceedings,*** November 1892, cited in Middleton 1965:11). This decision was reversed at a special general meeting, and no new women were admitted after 1893 until 1913. Constance Gordon Cumming was made a life fellow in 1914. This small foothold of acceptance was accompanied by reviews of women's work that were negative and diminishing, their sex rather than their achievements being emphasized (Birkett 1989:214-216).

There was, then, institutional and cultural resistance to women's fame and competence as travel writers. Travel writing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was inescapably gendered in both style and content. If one of the ways this gendering was reflected was women's attempts to portray their writings as everyday observations and straightforward descriptions, minimizing their claims to expertise and authority, another can be found in their insistent expressions of femininity. For their work to be accepted, it was important that they did not challenge the travel-writing "territory" of men, discuss topics considered unsuitable for their sex, or convey the impression of being "unwomanly." The juxtaposition of their affirmations of Victorian femininity with their actions serves to underscore their unconventionality. Contemporaries frequently labeled their behavior as "eccentric," but it did, in fact, challenge many gender assumptions and practices.

The Protofeminist Reading

It is the ways in which women travelers did not conform to dominant feminine roles and expectations that have provided the evidence for interpretations of their writing as protofeminist. Can such characteristics as their refusal to remain "at home" in the private domain, their independence, and their love of adventure be read as corroboration of emergent feminist sentiment? Some writers have depicted women travelers as models of independence; as intelligent, resourceful, strong, struggling against the social conventions of the Victorian period; and, later, in terms of the end of the century's "New Woman" (Frank 1986:71, 90; Mills 1991:3-5). In her pioneering work on seven British Victorian lady travelers, Dorothy Middleton claimed "that the strongest impetus [to travel] was the growing desire of the nineteenth-century woman for independence and opportunity, a desire which crystallized in the great movements for women's emancipation and the fight for women's suffrage" (1965:7). However, she pointed out that some were more conscious of these influences than others and that all held a "high ideal of womanhood" and sought to maintain the image of "a lady" (1965:9). As they did not fit prevailing feminine models of domesticity very well, they often made strenuous attempts to deny improper or challenging behavior, reaffirming the feminine and conventional aspects of their persons and activities (Birkett 1989:199; Mills 1991:121). Closer examination shows that many did not approve of the physical freedoms claimed by the "New Woman" and actively opposed this categorization as well as opposing or being disinterested in women's rights and suffrage (Stevenson 1982:3; Birkett 1989:197-199). Women travelers cannot be made to cohere into a pro- or antisuffrage framework (Keays 1989:5-6; Adler 1992:3), just as they differed in terms of background, interests, character, purpose, or reputation. Precisely because they were nonconformist, they cannot be grouped neatly into narrow categories.

Women travel writers did not conform to conventional feminine behavior in a wide variety of ways, and women travelers in the Pacific Islands are not exceptions to this generalization. At the height of Victorianism, the 1880s Margaret Stevenson, a Scottish matron of nearly sixty years and mother of Robert Louis, found that within a very short time in the Marquesas, she had abandoned stiff or fitted bodices, boots, woolen garments, and other European clothing and "dressed like the natives, in two garments, one being a sort of long chemise with a flounce round the edge, and an upper garment something like a child's pinafore, made with a yoke, but fastening in front. As we have to wade to and from the boat in landing and coming back, we discard stockings, and on the sands we usually go barefoot entirely" (1903: 70-71, 86). Clothing was central not only to feminine propriety, but to the

"correct" representation of the civilized white man (or woman) abroad. On the question of feminine dress alone, this matron had violated conventions of both gender and "race" identity. In 1899, besides participating in many other activities unusual for a Western woman, Caroline Edgeworth David tried surfing Funafuti style, an exercise in which she was swept into the wave, scratched and bruised, to the "uproarious merriment" of her female Funafutian friends (1899:170-171). This behavior would have been considered quite inappropriate for a married woman at home in Sydney, where strict regulations covered male and female seabathing well into the twentieth century. Evelyn Cheesman's nonconformity was much more courageous. As a volunteer entomologist for the British Museum, she obtained a small grant to go on a solo collecting expedition to the New Hebrides in 1928. Such an expedition, even if well resourced, was considered inadvisable and unseemly for a woman alone. With "apprehensions generated by those terrible stories of brutal murders" in missionary and naval literature, and against advice, Cheesman set off, undertaking difficult and dangerous expeditions in the company of indigenous guides in the New Hebrides, Solomons, and Papua over a period of many years (1933; 1957: 158). Later she reflected that "it is not so much courage that is called for but endurance. I should place independence first and then endurance, neither of which are virtues but acquired habits"--habits that she recognized were regarded as "unsociable" and "haughty" in a woman (Cheesman 1957:239).

To interpret women travelers' lives and writings in terms of a pre- or protofeminist model is reductionist and homogenizing. It oversimplifies the complexity of their individual, cultural, and structural locations. In not being conventionally feminine, such women challenged the gender roles and relations of their home societies and the dominant Western representations of foreign places and foreign people. Their position as white women was inextricably related to the gender and racial constructions of metropolitan society and the sexist and racist character of colonialism, and they were ambivalent on both counts. The focus on personal encounters and daily life meant that they emphasized interaction at an individual level, rather than between representatives of "races." Yet, simultaneously, they were present only by virtue of being part of the imperialist "race." As women, they were supposedly in need of male protection, and yet they traveled alone safely in "uncivilized" lands, in some instances by adopting European male status. Such contradictions are captured nicely in a comment recorded by Cheesman. While she did not adopt male status, she wore breeches (her "hunting suit," that is, for hunting insects [1957:141]), and she benefited, from her European status on trails that were tabu for women. Her guides noted astutely: " 'You, Missus, all the same as woman but different' " (1957:159).

Women travelers were in a marginal position: both advantaged and disadvantaged by the combination of their "race" and sex. In Dea Birkett's words, women travelers were "exploited by and exploitative of the prejudices of their time" (1989: preface). Sara Mills claims they were caught between the conflicting demands of the discourse of femininity and that of imperialism; the former demanded passivity and a concern with relationships, and the latter demanded action and fearless behavior (1991:21). She finds that this conflict accounts for the "strange mixture of the stereotypically colonial in content, style and trope, presenting the colonised as naturally a part of the British Empire, whilst at the same time being unable to adopt a straightforwardly colonial voice" (Mills 1991:4).

The Orientalist Reading

What, then, did women travelers convey about the Pacific Islands and Pacific Islanders? Was their contribution to the colonial discourse of representation "orientalist"? Although travel writers never held a common view about colonialism, and both critical and uncritical comments in relation to colonialism can be found in male writing, Millum asserts that ultimately travel writers do represent the establishment (1994). Rana Kabbani argues that despite their diversity, and despite there being notable instances of women's travel writing, all travelogues served to bring the Empire home and contributed to a codified and static knowledge of "the other" that served the colonial vision and hierarchies of power (1986:7).

Following Saïd, whose work on orientalism did not address the discursive forms of writing available to women, we can ask whether such a " 'consolidated vision' " or cultural grasp of "the other" in overseas lands emerged in women's travel writing (1993:90). Were women, as Kabbani suggests, "token travellers only" (1986:139)? Most commentators on women's travel writing argue that because the relationship to colonialism was more problematic for women than for men, the images and options women offered their readers were much more ambiguous and complex. In short, it is argued that their representation of "the other" reflects the contradictions and ambiguities of their position as observers who are displaced from the dominant standpoint of colonialism.[3]

Visitors to Hawai'i

Let us draw on Bird's and Cummings experiences in Hawai'i in order briefly to explore the orientalist question.[4] Isabella Bird (later Mrs. Bishop) was born in Yorkshire in 1831. In 1854 she began her travels, recommended for

her health following a spinal operation. Over the next half-century she visited America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Sandwich Islands (Hawai'i), Japan, Korea, China, the Malay Peninsula, Cairo, the Sinai Peninsula, and Morocco. She was the subject of a number of biographies and author of more than a dozen books. The ***Geographical Journal's*** obituary in 1904 claimed a place for her "among the most accomplished travellers of her time" (Lucas 1917:168).

In ***The Hawaiian Archipelago*** (1875) Bird recounted her experiences as a traveler in Hawai'i from January to August 1873. Bird was an inquisitive and adventurous traveler and undertook a variety of trips around the Hawaiian Islands that challenged her physically, as well as emotionally and intellectually. Bird liked to be well informed and well prepared, reading extensively about the places she visited. The letters that make up the text of her book show that her ease grew as she understood more about customs and character, became more proficient at horse riding, reduced her dependence on the comforts of a European lifestyle, and established her ability to undertake long and strenuous expeditions, especially to the volcanoes. Unsurprisingly, many of her views and assumptions reflected those common in English scientific, religious, and popular thought. But like many women travelers, she found her experiences provided comparisons that allowed her the leverage to critique aspects of her own society. There is, then, a tension between her ideas about "native" people's need for civilization and Christianity, her negative evaluations of much of mission policy and American residents' colonialist politics, and her feelings of enjoyment and security in the company of Hawaiians. Bird did not have a closed mind to what she saw, and she did not construct an image of Hawaiians as objects of colonial endeavor. Bird's observations were reflexive, as the examples below illustrate.

Bird found that life in the islands agreed with European settlers, especially foreign women, whom she had never seen so healthy, bright, and gracious, and whose dress was devoid of "the monstrosities, and deformities of ultra-fashionable bad taste." She asked herself, 'Where were the hard angular, careworn, sallow, passionate faces of men and women, such as form the majority of every crowd at home, as well as in America and Australia?" and concluded that "people must have found rest from some of its [life's] burdensome conventionalities" (Bird 1875:22). Bird implied that if island living had advantages in terms of dress conventions, stress, and health over life in metropolitan settings, it was not an inferior life to that of "civilized" societies.

Bird was most emphatic that "natives" are not "savages" (1875:4). She admired Hawaiians' appearance--"a handsome people" (p. 274)--and ease in natural settings, and found the chiefly class to be educated "ladies" and "gentlemen." She thought the women inclined to obesity, but qualified her

statement with the observation that ample drapery "partly conceals this defect, which is here regarded as a beauty" (p. 20). Her own prejudice was relativized by her cultural awareness. Bird saw advantages and disadvantages in the Hawaiians' construction of femininity. She praised the free way in which Hawaiian women rode, "flying along astride, barefooted . . . a graceful and exciting spectacle" (p. 31). She noticed that she was never offered any help to climb walls, for example, and attributed this to the fact that native women never needed help, being as strong, fearless, and active as the men (p. 238). However, these positive attributes she countered with the comment that "Hawaiian women have no notions of virtue as we understand it," affirming Victorian gender assumptions about the responsibility of women as guardians of morality, for, she asserted, "if there is to be any future for this race it must come through a higher morality" that will raise the women in their occupations and amusements (p. 255).

To Bird, Queen Emma, Kaleleonalani, conveyed "an unconscious dignity with ladylike simplicity" (1875:263). At a garden party at Kaleleonalani's house, Bird observed that beside the splendor and stateliness of the Hawaiian chiefs, "the forty officers of the English and American war-ships, though all in full-dress uniform, looked decidedly insignificant; and I doubt not that the natives, who were assembled outside the garden railings in crowds were not behind me in making invidious comparisons" (p. 265).

This quotation illustrates Bird's self-awareness, which grew from a sense of her own ridiculousness when out of her own environment. Wearing her "coarse Australian hat . . . [with a borrowed] riding costume" and "great rusty New Zealand boots," and riding on a Mexican saddle (to which she had not at that stage become accustomed), she saw herself as "grotesque" compared to her picturesque guide from Hilo to the volcano (Bird 1875:69-70). And later: "I was conscious that we foreign women with our stout staffs and grotesque dress looked like caricatures, and the natives, who have a sense of the ludicrous, did not conceal that they thought us so" (p. 80). She frequently commented on the negative ways in which Hawaiians must perceive Europeans. On an expedition to Waimanu Valley, she collected ferns, noting that the "natives think it quite idiotic in us to attach any value to withered leaves" (p. 232). And she asserted that a Hawaiian woman who interested her greatly, and whom she considered extremely shrewd and intelligent and a skilled mimic of Europeans, "evidently thinks us a sour, morose, worrying, forlorn race" (p. 227), a view that appeared to have been her own.

Although her enjoyment of Hawaiian company grew, Bird found the sunny side of native life countered by "dark moral shadows" (1875:103), marked by such problems as population decline and leprosy. Here, Bird conformed to stereotypical generalizations, her own upbringing in a highly reli-

gious family probably contributing to the ease with which she slipped into an analysis that was challenged by her own observations elsewhere. Prior to the success of European, civilizing influences, she asserted, the Hawaiians were “a vicious, sensual, shameless, herd” (p. 103). She was impressed by how far they had come along the paths of civilization in forty years: “Poor people! It would be unfair to judge of them as we may legitimately be judged of, who inherit the influences of ten centuries of Christianity. They have only just emerged from a bloody and sensual heathenism, and to the instincts and vitality of these dark Polynesian races, the restraining influences of the Gospel are far more severe than to our cold, unimpulsive northem natures” (p. 183). So there was sympathy for Hawaiians and a barb for the Europeans.

The Hawaiians’ sense of ceremony impressed her greatly, but she was inclined to interpret it in terms of “a wonderful leap” to “correct and tasteful civilization” (Bird 1875265). At one “ ‘poetical’ spectacle” she was reminded by “ancient and hideous females, who looked like heathen priestesses, [and] chanted a monotonous and heathenists-sounding chant. . . that this attractive crowd was but one generation removed from slaughter-loving gods and human sacrifices” (p. 207). On one of her expeditions, a “frightful old woman, looking like a relic of the old heathen days” and females with “low sensual faces, like some low order of animal” (pp. 141-142), prompted Birds most negative comments in an evolutionary racialist framework. And she disparaged her young friend Deborah for being childlike (p. 134). Although she broke many of the gender prescriptions of her own society, it is the way Hawaiian women did not conform to her ideas about appropriate female behavior that she connected most often to the character of the Hawaiian “race.” By contrast, she did not link Hawaiian men’s cruelty to horses, which offended her greatly, or the appearance or demeanor of males to their barbarous ancestry (pp. 133-134, 311).

By the end of her stay, Isabella Bird had undertaken numerous trips in the company of Europeans with Hawaiian guides, alone with Hawaiian guides or friends, and on her own. She had waded waist deep in rivers and ridden across in dangerous floods, ridden hundreds of miles astride and even barefoot, and camped in all manner of housing, including low grass shelters, with all classes of people. She decided that “society” is more demanding than the rough open-air life (Bird 1875:266), and that the more she saw of Hawaiians, “the more impressed I am”: “I thoroughly like living among them, taking meals with them on their mats, and eating ‘two fingered ***poi*** as if I had been used to it all my life. Their mirthfulness and kindliness are most winning” (p. 429). Before leaving, she concluded that the “life here is truer, simpler, kinder, and happier than ours . . . the natives, in spite of their

faults, are a most friendly and pleasant people to live among . . . and a white woman is sure of unvarying respect and kindness" (pp. 440-441). She had clarified her ideas on politics and was particularly critical of Americans, "destitute of traditions of loyalty or reverence for aught on earth" (p. 201), and of their designs for annexation (p. 279). Her notions of "race" and civilization included the earnest wish that Hawai'i should remain the inheritance of the Hawaiians (p. 473).

Constance Gordon Cumming, who was born in Scotland in 1837, was an even more prolific writer than Isabella Bird, producing two volumes on many of the subjects of her wide-ranging travels, including Hawai'i, although she spent less than two months there in 1879. She is better known in Pacific scholarship for her writing on Fiji, where she lived in the household of Governor Sir Arthur Gordon. Cumming was such a prolific gatherer of information that some readers have considered her books almost unreadable, they are so densely packed with information (Middleton 1965:5). Volume 1 of ***Fire Fountains: The Kingdom of Hawaii, Its Volcanoes, and the History of Its Missions*** (1883) consists of a series of letters recording her activities and impressions, while volume 2 is primarily her version of history, missions, morals, and general knowledge put together from other accounts, her contact with missionaries, and personal observations. It is volume 1, therefore, that is of most relevance as travel writing. The bulk of the work concerns her expeditions to the volcanoes but is liberally interspersed with comments on white and Hawaiian society. She filled out the narrative with outlines of history and customs, mainly from secondary sources.

Cumming made frequent direct comparisons with places and customs she knew were familiar to her readers in order to convey her impressions. Thus, 'Waikiki is to Honolulu as Brighton is to London" (Cumming 1883, 1:25); ***"poi,*** which is still the approved diet of the country. . . is to Hawaii as porridge is to Scotland" (1:35); the deification of idols of stone she found common to most lands, even the Scottish Hebrides last century (1:40); "the profession of minstrel ranked as high here as in Wales" (1:108); and human sacrifice was compared with the law of Moses (2:21). These comparisons were not an attempt to appropriate scenery and culture to metropolitan ideals. Cumming did not try to domesticate Hawai'i or the Hawaiians; nor did she specifically link such comparisons of cultural practices to evolutionary schemes of progress. Undoubtedly, she was a strong advocate of the "civilizing" process: "In the presence of such a civilised community as the Hawaiians of to-day, and of ladies whose fashionably made silks and satins are supplied by expensive American milliners, it is scarcely credible that only sixty years ago a sail in the offing was the signal for all these nut-brown maids and matrons, from the highest chiefess to her lowliest vassal, to swim

out to sea to welcome the newcomers" (2:81). Still, she acknowledged that cannibalism had almost ceased prior to the arrival of whites (2:77). And in her comparisons there were many observations and judgments that were critical of "civilization." On one level, Cumming adhered to common viewpoints with respect to the civilizing effects of white contact and conversion; but on another, she conveyed misgivings and criticisms. So, it is "horrible to relate, I saw 'advanced' girls wearing ***leis*** of artificial flowers! Such is progress!" (1:22); the "early navigators gave small equivalent for the hospitality lavished on them" (2:31); and "with all possible reverence for the great work so nobly accomplished by the early missionaries, it is certainly a matter much to be regretted that, in the wholesale sweeping away of idolatry, so many subjects deeply interesting to the ethnologist and the antiquarian should have been hopelessly swamped, and everything bearing on the old system treated as being either so puerile as to be beneath contempt, or so evil as to be best forgotten with all speed" (1:55). She suggested that "the British Isles retain far more traces of the old paganism than do the isles of Hawaii" (1:55-56). Cumming's use of comparisons, then, can be seen as a way of asserting the common humanity of all within a common geographical environment, and the cultural comparisons seem designed to relativize European customs as well as convey "foreign" subjects in ways that were meaningful to her readers.

Assiduous as they were in conforming to the appropriate literary conventions and emphasizing that they were "ladies," both Bird and Cumming provided subtle but persistent subthemes that were a critique of Western lifestyles. Their sense of achievement was not only about independently managing physical challenges. There is a strong thread of reflexivity in their writing, of self-learning that they wanted to convey to their readers. Women travelers often presented different "knowledge," leading to a relativized view of women's status, gender relations at home and abroad, and colonialism (see also Melman 1989). The "knowledge" they conveyed was formed through different experiences and different relationships with their hosts, relationships and experiences that altered the lives and self-perceptions of many women travelers.[5] The self-consciousness in much of their travel writing can be seen as one area in which the construction of the "colonized subject" was at least partly collaborative at the level of daily life and personal relations. Thus, we need to avoid considering cultural representation as only the work of the Western observer. The notion that European culture emanates out perpetuates an imperial tendency. Recognition of reflexivity and the incorporation of Pacific Islanders' self-representations in Western writing is an important antidote to ideas perpetuating metropolitan power and lack of agency of the colonized.

Crossing the Boundaries of "Race" and Gender

Women travel writers did not always construct difference between "us" and "them." As Birds and Cumming's works show, they often used similarities, not differences, to illustrate what they wanted to convey. Nor were the differences they did construct necessarily favorable to the Western "us."

Frequently, women travelers considered aspects of Pacific cultures superior to their own, and they sometimes sought to identify themselves with Pacific Islanders. Caroline David used humor to good effect to reduce the distance between "us" and "them" (1899). She found that "the Ellice Islanders hadn't the faintest desire to kill and eat us; on the contrary, they were quite as civilized as most white folks, and merely wanted to earn our dollars easily and eat our 'kaikai' freely" (p. 2). Throughout her "Unscientific Account of a Scientific Expedition," she undermined the knowledge and skills of the civilized "theoretical experts" (p. 3). She joked about the intransigence of the Funafutians who did exactly as they liked and refused to take the necessary precautions to cure ringworm, but simultaneously she poked fun at missionaries: "For the, first time I wished myself a missionary; they will obey a missionary," and "Oh for a medicine man for my obstinate, good, lazy, lovable Funafutians!" David's wit and judgments were dispensed equally between Westerners and Pacific Islanders. The following comment is typical of her style: "I never heard any Salvation Army drum that equalled a Funafuti mat-banging in ear-splitting misery" (pp. 56, 57, 61).

Even those who were wary about addressing the absolute distinction between "us" and "them" occasionally made comparisons to show that native practices were not "primitive." Brassey explained to her readers that the eating of live shrimps by Hawaiians "looks a very nasty thing to do, but, after all, it is not much worse than our eating oysters alive" (1878:287). And, although cautious about politics and claims to be authoritative, even she could provide a negative commentary that underscored the weaknesses of "civilization." She supported colonial endeavors, but not the French--"poor colonizers"--and she supported the Christian mission, but not the missionary squabbling between Protestants and Roman Catholics in Tahiti (Stuart-Wortley 1882:10, 16).

Bird's and Cummings critiques are sober indeed, compared to the warmth and enthusiasm for Marquesan and Paumotuan lifestyles and people shown by Margaret Stevenson. Their critiques are abstract and distant from the practical concern for the neglected health of the Funafutians demonstrated by Caroline David and moderate in the extreme compared to the scathing rebuttal of European constructions of savagery reiterated time and again by Evelyn Cheesman in Melanesia: "The natives had always been justified in

retaliation. . . . [The guides and carriers] helped me rapidly to change my whole conception of the natives' attitude towards all white people" (1957: 158). Cheesman discovered that on Malekula "a ***tambu*** had been set upon me!--which signified that my person was sacred and I must hot be interfered with, and that anyone accompanying me was ***tambu*** also." This discovery lessened her anxiety considerably, not for her own safety but for that of her guides: "The chief anxiety always concerns the boys" (Cheesman 1933: 16). Cheesman was no romanticist, but she learned from the people and knew that she had to respect and work within the parameters of local cultures.

My reading of more than forty books by women travel writers who visited the Pacific Islands shows that most used their marginal positions to ponder their own understanding of other peoples and cultures, of themselves, and of their home societies. However, some women writers were unreflective, lacked knowledge, were predisposed to prejudge and stereotype, were unlikely to be changed by their experiences, and stressed sensationalist items such as head-hunting.[6] Charlotte Cameron's anecdotes and comments about New Guinean cannibals and prisoners--"Never have I seen such degraded, criminal, distorted faces" (1923:71-72)--and the transformations effected by Christianity to "gentle, docile, and law-abiding people" (p. 86) place her work in this category. The naive and ill-informed Osa Johnson in the Solomons provides the strongest example of this kind (1944). So while it is possible to find many cases demonstrating aspects of women's travel writing that undercut white superiority and Western gender relations, the stereotypic writers--like Johnson, who reveled in tales of cannibalism and savagery --cannot be ignored.

Women's travel writing about the Pacific Islands and other recent research suggest that there is no coherent, uniform statement about "the other" in women's travel writing. Nor was such writing simply a footnote to a homogenizing, orientalist discourse (Melman 1989; Mills 1991:51-55). But, if this diversity can be seen as a positive interpretation of women's writing, it has been argued as well that the different versions of "the other" and "themselves" presented in women's travel writing, while less confident and more complex than the male versions, actually made visible what was formerly "uncolonized space." In other words, they opened up areas of life that had previously been screened from Western (imperialist) observers, enlarging the boundaries of the orientalist vision. From this perspective the various critiques--implicit and explicit--in this literature are seen as insufficiently strong (or perhaps lacking the mastery) to challenge the pervasiveness of the dominant colonial discourse (Nair 1990:42-43). These are issues that surely require further investigation and suggest that it is important to attend to the various discourses in Western women's travel writing about the Pacific and to the authors' individual voyages of self-discovery.

Realists? Protofeminists? Orientalists? Answering such questions leads to the danger of falling back on the old binary divisions: they were or were not realist, feminist, or orientalist. But the search for answers also reveals the complexity and richness of this barely examined source material. As Robinson found, when organizing her bibliographic sourcebook, women travel writers were "a nonconformist race" (1991:viii). She claims that one of the few things these women had in common was their originality, an originality that took them not just to foreign lands, "but across the boundaries of convention and traditional feminine restraints" (p. ix). We can see by looking even briefly at their impressions and accounts that this originality included conflicts, ambiguities, and contradictions, and that the boundaries they crossed were the intersecting boundaries of "race" and gender.

I have used three types of categorization to try to emphasize and elucidate some of the tensions apparent in their writing. These women did not provide a realist mirror of Pacific Islands society--since all reporting is mediated by authorial position and all accounts are selective--yet they claimed, in line with the genre of women's travel writing, to be reporting directly. And while they were not conventionally feminine, most stressed their femininity and few were suffragettes or identified themselves as feminists. Most owed their presence and safety in the islands to Western countries' colonialist endeavors and their "race," but many expressed dissatisfaction and some expressed anger at the results of Western impacts and the hubris of Western claims to superiority. As a group, these writers did not present a unified voice. Their individual output, expressed in a language and style that was diffident and often self-deprecating, was unlikely to have been strong enough to disrupt the dominant colonial and gender discourses. But challenge them they did on paper and in their own lives. Theirs was another of colonialism's cultures and a subversion of it (Thomas 1994). Margaret Stevenson found it "a strange, irresponsible, half-savage life" and wondered "if we shall be able to return to civilised habits again" (1903:86). One thing is certain: she was never the same again.

NOTES

I. The definition of travel writing is itself open to debate. I have rejected the inclusive approach, which incorporates any writing by those who lived in places other than their homelands, and have concentrated on published works that are concerned with and written as accounts of journeys and experiences in places where the authors did not intend to establish a home.

2. Isabella Bird was forced by her publisher to exclude some material from *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither* (Mills 1991:116).

3. Clearly, the time and place mattered, and, thus, the working out of this standpoint in women's travel writing differs. In southern Africa, for instance, women travelers often strove to identify with the most powerful group, white males, and even referred to themselves at times as Englishmen, taking advantage of their white skins to extend their boundaries of independence (Adler 1992:11; Frank 1986:70-72).

4. This article is a longer version of a paper delivered at the "History, Culture, and Power in the Pacific" conference organized by the Pacific History Association and the University of Hawai'i Center for Pacific Islands Studies in July 1996. The focus on visitors to Hawai'i in this section was especially appropriate to the conference location in Hilo. As well, Bird and Cumming are well known and acknowledged archetypical "lady travelers" on a world scale.

5. These points also emerge in Pratt 1991:27, 90; and Stevenson 1982:12.

6. This list of characteristics is taken from Millum's analysis of travel writing in Borneo, an analysis that ignores the gendered nature of travel writing and is based on masculine characteristics. Nevertheless, it provides a relevant interpretation of women travel writers like Osa Johnson, who was one of Millum's sources for Borneo (Millum 1994:80-81).

REFERENCES

Adler, Michelle
1992 "In a Man's Country": British Women Travellers in Nineteenth-Century South Africa. Transcript, seminar series on Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London.

Bird, Isabella Lucy [Mrs. Bishop]
1875 *The Hawaiian Archipelago: Six Months, among the Palm Groves, Coral Reefs and Volcanoes of the Sandwich Islands.* London: John Murray.
1883 *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither* London: John Murray.

Birkett, Dea
1989 *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Boyd, Mary Stuart
1900 *Our Stolen Summer: The Record of a Roundabout Tour.* Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons.

Brassey, Anna [Mrs.]
1878 *A Voyage in the "Sunbeam," Our Home on the Ocean for Eleven Months.* London: Longmans, Green and Co.

Breckenridge, Carol, and Peter van de Veer, eds.
1993 *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Broad, Lucy
n.d. *A Woman's Wanderings the World Over.* London: Headley Bros.

Cameron, Charlotte
[1923] *Two Years in Southern Seas.* London: Unwin.

Chambers, Iaian
1994 *Migrancy, Culture, Identity.* London and New York: Routledge.

Cheesman, Evelyn
1927 *Islands near the Sun: Off the Beaten Track in the Far, Fair Society Islands.* London: H. F. and G. Whitherby.
1933 *Backwaters of the Savage South Seas.* London: Jarrolds.
1938 *Land of the Red Bird.* London: H. Joseph.
1949 *Six-Legged Snakes in New Guinea: A Collecting Expedition on Two Unexplored Islands.* London: Harrap.
1957 *Things Worth While.* London: Hutchinson.
1960 *Time Well Spent.* London: Hutchinson.

Cumming, Constance Gordon
1881 *At Home in Fiji.* 2 vols. Edinburgh: Blackwood.
1882 *A Lady's Cruise in a French Man-of-War:* 2 vols. Edinburgh: Blackwood.
1883 *Fire Fountains: The Kingdom of Hawaii, Its Volcanoes, and the History of Its Missions.* 2 vols. Edinburgh: Blackwood.

David, Mrs. Edgeworth [Caroline]
1899 *Funafuti, or Three Months on a Coral Island: An Unscientific Account of a Scientific Expedition.* London: John Murray.

Forbes, Anna
1887 *Insulinde Experiences of a Naturalist's Wife in the Eastern Archipelago.* Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons.

Forbes, Henry
1885 *A Naturalist's Wanderings in the Eastern Archipelago, a Narrative of Travel and Exploration from 1878 to 1883.* 2 vols. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington.

Frank, Katherine
1986 Voyages Out: Nineteenth-Century Women Travelers in Africa. In *Gender, Ideology, and Action: Historical Perspectives on Women's Public Lives,* ed. J. Sharistanian, 67-93. Contributions in Women's Studies, no. 67. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

Grimshaw, [Ethel] Beatrice
1907a *From Fiji to the Cannibal Islands.* London: Eveleigh Nash.
1907b *In the Strange South Seas.* London: Hutchinson.
1910 *The New New Guinea.* London: Hutchinson.

1912 *Adventures in Papua with the Catholic Mission.* Melbourne: Australian Catholic Mission Society.
1930 *Isles of Adventure.* London: Herbert Jenkins.

Johnson, Osa [Mrs. Martin]
1944 *Bride in the Solomons.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Kabbani, Rana
1986 *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule.* London: Macmillan.

Keays, Julia
1989 *With Passport and Parasol.* London: BBC Books.

Lucas, Charles Prestwood
1917 Bishop, Mrs Isabella Lucy. In *The Dictionary of National Biography Supplement 1901-11,* ed. Sidney Lee, 166-168. London: Oxford University Press.

Marshall, Edward Henry
1921- Brassey, Anna (Baroness). In *The Dictionary of National Biography Supplement*
1922 *1901,* ed. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, 261-262. London: Oxford University Press.

Melman, Billie
1989 Desexualizing the Orient: The Harem in English Travel Writing by Women, 1763-1914. *Mediterranean Historical Review* 4 (2): 301-339.

Middleton, Dorothy
1965 *Victorian Lady Travellers.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Mills, Sara
1991 *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism.* London and New York: Routledge.

Millum, Trevor
1994 *Tramps and Their Excuses: A Study of the Writing of Travellers in Borneo in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.* Bibliography and Literature Series, no. 12. Hull: Centre for South-East Asian Studies, University of Hull

Nair, Janaki
1990 Uncovering the Zenana: Visions of Indian Womanhood in Englishwomen's Writings. *Journal of Women's History* 2 (1): 8-34.

Okely, Judith
1992 Anthropology and Autobiography: Participatory Experience and Embodied Knowledge. In *Anthropology and Autobiography,* ed. Judith Okely and Helen Callaway, 1-28. London and New York: Routledge.

Pratt, Mary Louise
1992 *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation.* London: Routledge.

Robertson, George, Melinda Mash, Lisa Tickner, Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, and Tim Putnam, eds.
1994 *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement.* London and New York: Routledge.

Robinson, Jane
1991 *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travellers.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Routledge, Katherine M. [Mrs. Scoresby]
1920 *The Mystery of Easter Island: The Story of an Expedition.* London: Sifton Praed and Co.

Russell, M.
1986 *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt: Women Travellers and Their World.* London: Collins.

Saïd, Edward
1979 *Orientalism.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
1993 *Culture and Imperialism.* London: Chatto and Windus.

Smythe, Mrs. Sarah Maria
1864 *Ten Months in the Fiji Islands.* With an introduction and appendix by Col. W. J. Smythe. Oxford: John Henry and James Parker.

Stevenson, Catherine Barnes
1982 *Victorian Women Travel Writers in Africa.* Boston: Twayne Publishers.

Stevenson, Margaret Isabella
1903 *From Saranac to the Marquesas and Beyond: Being Letters Written by Mrs. M. I. Stevenson during 1887-8, to Her Sister, Jane Whyte Balfour* Edited and arranged by Marie Clothilde Balfour. London: Methuen.

Stuart-Wortley, Colonel H.
1882 *Tahiti: A Series of Photographs Taken by Colonel Stuart-Wortley with Letter-press by Lady Brassey.* London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington.

Thomas, Nicholas
1994 *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Wallis, Mary Davis [Cook]
1967 *Life in Feejee, or, Five Years among the Cannibals.* Ridgewood, N. J.: Gregg; first published Boston: William Heath, 1851.