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Responses to imperialism of four women writers at the Cape Eastern frontier in the nineteenth century

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Part of the reason for Prichard's sense of dislocation and impermanency within the African landscape is the lack of what Raymond Williams calls a 'knowable community' of fellow British colonists. Williams defines this as 'a whole community, wholly knowable' in which all members of the community know each other and are known in an essentially transparent manner (Williams, 165).

The prototype of such a community is the English village which was still, despite the disruptions caused by urbanisation, the basic unit of communal life in England in the nineteenth century. The essence of the knowable community is that the individual has a complete familiarity with the environment and with the other people who dwell within that environment. Prichard is conscious of the fact that no such community of English people exists in the Transkei, and attributes the precarious nature of British power in the region to this lack:

> When would something happen to show the Kafirs we really were big people? How can they form the smallest estimate of England's greatness from the scattered handfuls of white people divided from each other by distance, and connected by no ties of affection, whom they contemptuously permitted to dwell among them? (FFT 150).

The existence of a strong, integrated community is not only a comfort to its members, but also impresses the outside world with a sense of its greatness. The British in the Transkei are acutely vulnerable to attack, and Prichard expresses her amazement that they have been allowed to exist for so long in their dispersed condition: 'I am exceedingly grateful to them [the Kaffirs] for not despatching us long ago, for that they could have massacred us with the greatest ease is a fact which no one acquainted with the country will dispute' (FFT 150).

Despite her feelings of vulnerability, Prichard finds much to admire in the Transkei landscape. She presents herself to the

reader as having a highly-developed aesthetic sensitivity which delights in natural beauty. Natural scenes, she writes, 'have an unspeakable attraction for me' (FFT 31). During such times as she does not feel threatened by her surroundings, the landscape of the Eastern Frontier acquires an idyllic and otherworldly appearance in her descriptions:

> I was quite charmed with the scenery. Most delightful hills, just high enough to be enjoyable; glorious trees, rich vegetation, with bright sunshine and a clear sky to throw a golden glamour over the whole, formed a fairy-like picture which remains in my mind after the details have passed away; and the silver shimmer of the river still shines in my recollection as a sunny souvenir of that brilliant winter afternoon (FFT 31).

This description obviously belongs to Prichard's 'poetic' mode of representation. The words 'charmed', 'glamour' and 'fairy-like' invest the scene with a magical quality. The size and proportions of all natural objects are perfect - the hills being 'just high enough to be enjoyable.'

In the process of observing and appreciating, Prichard is also engaged in a subtle form of appropriation. The landscape is transformed by her contemplation into a 'picture' and a 'souvenir'. She frames the scene and detaches it from its context in an act of possession. Her recollection of the vista reduces it to the manageable proportions of a small keepsake which a tourist may purchase as a reminder of a place of beauty.

Elsewhere in the text, the scenery of the Eastern Frontier is described as 'a most gorgeously-illuminated picture' (FFT 34), and 'a perfect panorama of lovely pictures' (FFT 35). These descriptions reinforce the notion that the landscape may effectively be possessed by the observer. This proprietorial attitude is Prichard's equivalent of the masculinist discourse of conquest and possession of male explorer writers. The sexual

metaphor invariably employed by these writers is not accessible to Prichard as a woman, but her mode of description is no less appropriatory and possessive.

By describing the scene as a panorama, Prichard suggests that nature is deliberately displaying itself for the observer's edification. This image may be attributed to the influence of the picturesque, which required that a landscape should reveal new and different features of itself as the observer's position within it changed. The picturesque tradition also demanded that an artist or novelist, in depicting a natural scene, should include only those aspects that were most pleasing.[4] It derived its name from the premise that the natural world should be made to appear like a work of art.[5] When Prichard engages in her self-consciously 'poetic' mode of representation, she observes the conventions of the picturesque: focusing only on the most pleasing parts of the landscape and emphasising the pictorial qualities of each natural scene.

It is significant that the scene she admires the most during her stay on the frontier is not a natural landscape at all, but a cultivated garden. For all her professions of loving nature, a scene that has been artificially created is most pleasing to her. This garden is encountered in King William's Town and is described in a chapter entitled 'Adieu to Civilization!':

> The whole thing was quite a picture! Opposite to the verandah was a pretty, miniature lake, from the centre of

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4 The influential picturesque artist and travel writer, William Gilpin, made this point in 1786:

> He who works from imagination - that is, he who culls from nature the most beautiful parts of her productions - a distance here; and there a foreground - combines them artificially; and removing everything offensive, admits only such parts, as are congruous, and beautiful, will in all probability, make a much better landscape, than he who takes all as it comes (quoted in Ross, 8; emphasis in original).

5 Ross explains this application of the picturesque tradition to novel writing:

> The use and popularity of the picturesque owed much to the fact that, for the artist or novelist, it provided a way of showing landscapes and their contents to viewers or readers in a fashion that seemed to them organized and sensibly pictorial. It was by and large how they considered the world should look when seen within picture frames or within the covers of a novel: representative and recognizably pleasant (Ross, xiii).

> which rose a tiny fountain, whose sparkling spray scattered silvery dewdrops upon the tall papyrus plants around, and then descended in graceful cadence upon the lilies which lay lovingly upon the water beneath.
>
> Doves came to drink at this fountain, undisturbed by the presence of my fair-haired little boy; who chased the pretty butterflies fluttering about him, his white puggaree streaming in the breeze.
>
> Beyond the little lake, one looked along vague vistas of trees laden with tropical fruit, brilliant foliage, and gorgeous flowers; all arranged so gracefully that a sort of enchantment seemed to pervade the whole (FFT 62-63).

Once again, Prichard invests the scene with a magical quality, conveyed by the word 'enchantment'. It is also described as 'quite a picture,' showing Prichard's inclination to admire a scene that mimics the symmetry and composition of a work of art.

The intervention of human agency is very apparent in the garden. Prichard praises the 'miniature lake' and the 'tiny fountain', indicating her admiration for things constructed on a small scale. The cosy little lake and fountain would not be incongruous in an English setting where space is at a premium, but they are out of place in the Eastern Cape of the nineteenth century, which abounded in vast tracts of unpopulated land. Similarly, papyrus plants and lilies are not indigenous to the environment; nor are the 'trees laden with tropical fruit.' Prichard's delight in these plants originates in a standard of 'foreign' beauty which admired exoticism, but was not attracted by the monochromatic scrub of the Eastern Cape.[5]

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[5] Prichard accompanied her husband to the West Indies prior to their sojourn on the Eastern Frontier. She has nothing but praise for the beauty of the tropics and, from time to time, compares the Eastern Cape unfavourably with that part of the world:

> I recalled the lovely harbours of the West Indies, the gorgeous tints, splendid scenery, and luxuriant vegetation of the tropics - is it absolutely necessary that man should spend so much money and toil upon ugly places, while at a fraction of the expense and fatigue he could convert the loveliest spots on earth into paradises almost fit for fairies to live in?
>
> Will no one say a kind word for the tropics? (FFT 14-15).

And elsewhere:

> My longing for a Crusoe life had been gratified, and though South African scenery had been a little disappointing, lovely Jamaica had not; and I felt grateful that

The garden is laid out with a precise attention to detail and symmetry. The fountain has been placed exactly in the centre of the lake, and the unknown landscaper has ensured that the spray from the fountain should land on the papyrus trees and descend onto the lilies in 'graceful cadence'. The eye of the viewer, at first attracted by the centrepiece of the lake, moves beyond this to the brilliant foliage which has been 'arranged so gracefully.' Nature has been tamed, ordered and compelled to assume pleasing postures.

This garden may indeed be described as an oasis. It is a haven of lush greenery in the middle of the semi-desert of the Karoo. Unlike a real oasis, however, it is not natural to its environment. It is also an 'oasis' in a metaphoric sense, in that it represents one of the last days of peace and security Prichard was to experience for over a year:

> Perhaps this charm was not lessened by the knowledge that on the morrow we were to bid adieu to civilisation, and commence our march towards the wilderness; and I felt as the explorer feels, when he bids farewell to home! (FFT 63).

Prichard explicitly contrasts the garden with the hostile wilderness which lies beyond it. Constructed according to English standards of prettiness, it is a sort of 'mini-England' in the middle of the hostile African landscape.

It is evident that the retrospective action of memory has mystified Prichard's recollection of this scene. Her awareness of the horrors that followed her stay in King William's Town, invests the little garden with the qualities of a refuge and therefore with extraordinary beauty.

As Prichard and her family cross the border between British

I had been privileged to behold her tropical beauty. But now, all I had to look forward to was a monotonous existence in desolate Transkei (FFT 78).

Kaffraria and the Kaffir-occupied territories, the landscape becomes increasingly less pleasing to her eye. She is filled with a sense of foreboding and can no longer perceive beauty in her surroundings:

> We now traversed a very lonely piece of prairie, and I did begin to realize that we were in Kreli's country; in the very heart of Gcalekaland.
>
> Occasionally we would pass Kafir kraals, and the lean, starved-looking dogs would rush out and bark at us; but I do not remember meeting a human creature for several hours, during which we did not even see a herd of cattle or a flock of sheep (FFT 107-108).

The glorious trees, rich vegetation and golden glamour which adorned the landscape of the Cape Colony in Prichard's mind, have disappeared in favour of 'a very lonely piece of prairie.' The 'poetic' mode of narration has clearly been replaced by the 'prosaic'.

There are no people to be seen in this environment, but it is threatening nonetheless. Such signs of human habitation as the 'Kafir kraals' and 'lean, starved-looking dogs' have a sinister appearance, created by Prichard's awareness that she is in the land of the enemy. She is struck by the absence of those signs of cultivation which indicate European occupation of a landscape - 'a herd of cattle or a flock of sheep'.

This connection between the land and its inhabitants is established earlier in the text when Prichard catches her first glimpse of a Kaffir village: '[T]he mud huts and dusky people, in their brown blankets, are most difficult to discern in a general survey, as they harmonize wonderfully with the hue of the undulating grass-land, and even a practised eye may easily fail to perceive them' (FFT 38). This description effectively constructs the Kaffirs as animated parts of the landscape.

Once Prichard has reached the Idutywa reserve that is to be her home, her spirits have dropped to such an extent that the landscape has become irredeemably ugly to her: 'the whole aspect of the place was most forlorn and miserable' (FFT 116). She contemplates her future in the Transkei with intense dismay, and cannot conceive how she will survive in such a bleak environment. Her 'prosaic' mode has never been employed with such overwhelming pessimism:

> No words can describe how my heart sank within me at the prospect of mouldering away my existence in this frightful solitude!
>
> A dreary vista of years unmarked by any change, and of days passed in one monotonous round of never-ending duty, rose before me, while at a glance I seemed to recall the happy years spent in my father's home; the ever-varying society gathered at almost every meal about his generous table; the gay and loving family circle, full of youth and animation; the beautiful mother, with her aristocratic air and charming manner, and the father, whose wit and spirits never flagged; all these rose before me. Why had I been given this love of music, this passion for everything refined and beautiful, only to be tortured by a living death in this dreary desert, where I could never look on the face of any who had loved me in childhood, or hear so much as the song of a bird? (FFT 117-118).

The Idutywa environment is displeasing to Prichard because it is separated from other English communities. It represents a monotonous existence, unrelieved by the pleasures of society. She contrasts it with a very different setting that she remembers from her childhood. The centre of this childhood environment was the dinner-table around which a large family and a succession of guests gathered. The epithet 'generous' suggests that the inhabitants of this environment never lacked for material comforts.

In contrast, the Idutywa Reserve is described as a 'dreary desert' in which Prichard is compelled to endure 'frightful solitude'. It represents an enforced severance from her past: 'I could never look on the face of any who had loved me in childhood'. This is compounded by the painful effect that an absence of beauty has on one whose aesthetic sensitivity ('passion for everything refined and beautiful') is particularly acute.

Prichard's dismay at the prospect of life in Idutywa causes her to exaggerate the desolation of the landscape, to the extent that she believes she will never 'hear so much as the song of a bird'. The paradisal idyll that she describes earlier in the text has been transformed into a bleak wasteland, stripped of human and animal life.

One of the primary reasons for Prichard's antipathy towards the Transkei environment is its remoteness from the seat of colonial power. This is the governing factor that determines her attitude to the landscape: the Cape Colony (which is under imperial control) is a golden Eden for which she feels a strong proprietorial affection; the Transkei resists domestication and appropriation, and therefore functions in her writing as a symbol of bleakness. Her attitudes to the Eastern Cape landscape are inextricably linked to the success of imperial interests on the frontier.

5.3 Landscape in Jasper Lyle: A Tale of Kafirland

Harriet Ward wavers to an even greater extent than Prichard between two extreme views of the African landscape. On one hand, she presents Kaffirland as a glorious paradise and compares it with the legends of a lost Golden Age; on the other, she warns her reader of the terrible perils that are concealed behind this appearance of serene beauty, and shows that the landscape may transform itself in an instant from a lush eden into a desert.

The landscape is constructed as fundamentally treacherous. Only the initiated observer is undeceived by its treachery. The uninitiated observer is betrayed by the land and forced to pay the price of ignorance.

Ward presents herself as the initiated observer. She is accustomed to the beauties, the dangers and the inhabitants of the landscape. Throughout the text, she adopts the instructive tone of the storyteller, guiding the reader through the perils of Kaffirland. The opening passage of the novel describes the landscape at its most pleasing but contains a sinister warning:

> Kafirland!
>
> People are beginning now-a-days to know where Kafirland is!
>
> Verily they have paid dearly for their knowledge!
>
> It is a beautiful land, with its open savannahs, its wooded glens, its heathy mountains, its green and undulating parks - nature's plantations! Pleasant to the eye is the sight of the colonists' sheltered farms, surrounded by waving cornfields, and backed by noble mountains, ascending in the distance, one above another, assuming every hue it is possible to imagine, and finally blending their purple heights with clouds all radiant with gold, or shaping themselves into canopies of sombre colouring, and veiling the glories of heaven from the upturned gaze of man (JL 1).

The 'people' referred to in the second line of the passage are obviously the English. By 1850, when Jasper Lyle was published, seven frontier wars had served to bring the Cape Colony to the attention of even the most parochial Englishman or Englishwoman. The English colonists, rather than the Dutch, had 'paid dearly' for their incursions into the Eastern Cape. The land had proved unsuitable for arable farming, causing financial ruin for many, and many English lives had been lost in the wars. Nevertheless, as Ward points out, the English retained their hold on the land

despite adversity. Their continued occupation of the landscape is indicated by 'the colonists' sheltered farms, surrounded by waving cornfields'.

Ward's assertion that this sight is 'pleasant to the eye' indicates the extent to which her aesthetic judgments are governed by the recognition of the familiar. She expresses pleasure at encountering signs of English-type cultivation in Africa. This response is also prompted by the sense of social, political and economic security that the sight of English-owned farmland imparted to the English colonist. Throughout the novel, Ward's preference for a cultivated landscape over a wild landscape is evident.[7]

Even the uncultivated land that Ward describes in the opening passage of the novel has a certain order and symmetry about it. She expresses her delight at the way in which 'nature's plantations' have arranged the landscape in a conventionally tasteful manner. Elsewhere in the novel, she refers to 'Nature's tasteful hand' (JL 302) which moulds the land.

The twentieth-century reader is forced to consider whether the hand that has constructed this landscape is actually the author's, rather than that of nature. The 'open savannahs', 'wooded glens', 'heathy mountains', and 'green and undulating parks' certainly conform with mid-nineteenth century English standards of natural beauty, but are almost unrecognisable to anyone familiar with the Eastern Cape wilderness. In descriptions such as these, Ward demonstrates her adherence to the picturesque tradition by not only selecting the most pleasing parts of the landscape, but also improving upon nature by adding elements which it has omitted to supply. Like Prichard, Ward approves of those parts of the landscape that have been

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7 Ward reserves her most lyrical praise for scenes of pastoral and agricultural activity, such as the following descriptions of settler-owned landscapes: 'It was a busy, happy, thriving place; the sunlight fell on richly-cultivated lands and herds of fine cattle, the vineyard was filled with workers' (JL 278). And elsewhere: 'Behind this green space rose a range of purple heights; nearer to it, and sheltering the village from the north, was a chain of low hills, and the sides of these were dotted with thousands of beautiful cattle' (JL 91).

successfully converted to imperial use. She effectively aids and abets the imperialist process by constructing a section of the landscape as a form of mini-England. The African landscape is thereby appropriated in the text and transformed to conform with the imperial ideal.

In other parts of the novel, Ward does not spare her reader the harsh and displeasing appearance that the landscape can assume:

> But from these [beautiful] scenes the traveller may suddenly find himself translated to the most sterile moors, stretching out in apparently illimitable space, or bounded by bald rocks, which offer no "shadow from the heat," no "refuge from the storm." In these tracts, the earth, resembling lava, is bare of all but stones, except where some bright-flowering bulb has struggled with its destiny, only to waste its beauty on the desert. There is nothing to be seen living in these inhospitable regions (JL 1).

The words 'sterile' and 'bald' suggest that nature has withdrawn its bounty from this wasteland and rendered it completely barren. This image is strengthened by Ward's suggestion that the landscape resembles the aftermath of a volcanic eruption. It is a hellish land which has been abandoned by its deity and blasted by fire. The blighted wilderness described here contrasts sharply with Ward's earlier evocation of a lush Arcadia. This is the face of the African landscape that resists imperial domination. It's infertility represents its refusal to succumb to Settler attempts at cultivation.

Ward's Kaffirland is the site of both a heaven and a hell on earth, and her natural world is both well-disposed and hostile to the colonist. According to her, even an environment which is wholly pleasing to the observer, showing no apparent signs of inhospitableness, cannot really be trusted. In the Kaffirland of Jasper Lyle, appearances are almost always deceptive. A scene of peace and tranquillity usually masks some form of impending

disaster, and danger lies concealed behind beauty:

> To have seen the settlement of Annerley, in the early part of March, 18—, you would have thought, had you known nothing of the terrible elements gathering silently around, that Mercy and Peace had met together, that Righteousness and Truth had kissed each other:
>
> "In the deep mountain, in the sunset's hush,"
>
> the children's voices chimed together in the busy school; mothers and sisters plied their needles in the shady, trellised passage; the cattle herds grew careless, and dozed away the dreamy day; the ladies of the family party suffered themselves to hope that the dove with the olive branch was winging her way from the mountain haunts of the unhappy heathen (JL 183-184).

This passage is one of Ward's most explicit dramatisations of the gap between appearance and reality. Two contending environments are set up in contrast to each other. The first is the settlement of Annerley, situated in a fertile valley and inhabited by English colonists; the second is 'the mountain haunts of the unhappy heathen,' inhabited by the Kaffirs. The two environments are separated by distance, causing the inhabitants of Annerley to believe their position to be unassailable. They are lulled into thinking that the anticipated war with the Kaffirs will not occur after all. The uninitiated observer, who knows nothing of 'the terrible elements gathering silently around', is similarly misled. But the two environments are about to merge, greatly to the detriment of the Annerley idyll.

The phrase 'terrible elements' refers to the Kaffir warriors. This metaphor has the effect of likening the Kaffir army to an impending storm which is about to shatter the peace of the Colonists. It is as though the Kaffirs are a natural part of the

hostile African landscape, like the devastating thunderstorms that periodically ravage the district.

The inhabitants of Annerley have much to distract them from the contemplation of war. The children are engrossed in their school, and the women in their needlework. A 'shady, trellised passage' provides protection from the heat of the day, and deludes them into believing that they are similarly protected from the hostilities of the Kaffirs. Even the cattle are described as growing 'careless', and falling into a doze.

The women of the settlement allow themselves to hope that the mountain fastness of the Kaffirs will shortly send forth a dove of peace rather than a flurry of assegais. Even the men, who are assumed in the novel to have a more precise knowledge of political affairs than the women, 'began to think the chiefs had held council and determined on prolonging the truce' (JL 184). These optimistic predictions are proved false when the Kaffirs attack the settlement within a few days. The deceptive nature of the African environment has been demonstrated.

Unfavourable appearances, on the other hand, are never misleading. The Kaffirland landscape of Jasper Lyle is frequently presented in an unambiguously sinister light. It is shown to be hostile to the European and obstructive to European interests:

> Evening fell, heavy and gloomy; the atmosphere was loaded with an unpleasant vapour. As night drew on, the exhalations floated above the earth in thin white mist, and as this increased, the travellers could scarcely see a foot in advance. The road, or rather track, was grass-grown, the wheels sunk into the sward, and moved noiselessly along; there was no echo of the horses' feet upon the turf, and as if the stillness of nature had effect upon the party, not a word was uttered (JL 123).

The party referred to here is a military cavalcade which is returning from a hunting expedition. It has just received the news that war has been declared, along with information that the rivers are rising in flood. It is imperative for the soldiers to reach Annerley as soon as possible, because their position is hopelessly vulnerable - but the landscape seems to rise up to prevent them from doing so. Like a malevolent entity, the land exhales unhealthy vapours to impede their progress. These become increasingly dense until the soldiers 'could scarcely see a foot in advance'. Their progress is slowed so that 'haste was out of the question' (JL 123). The sinister mist seems also to deaden all natural sound, rendering the cavalcade susceptible to a surprise attack. The soldiers of the party are so strongly affected by the fearful silence that they dare not break it with their usual conversation.

This is not the first time this military cavalcade has been afflicted by the spiteful hostility of the landscape. At the beginning of the novel, their journey is arrested 'by one of those appalling storms which, in the loveliest spots of Southern Africa, disenchant the mind, impressed with the beauty of the wooded tracts, or the grandeur of even the solitary wastes' (JL 2). The storm overtakes the cavalcade when they are 'in the centre of an unsightly plain' (JL 2) and beyond the reach of any shelter. They are forced to seek cover behind a heap of stones:

> The giant of the storm advanced as with a trumpet-blast from that part of the horizon whence the lightning had telegraphed his approach. He came with a rushing sound resembling the passage of an invisible but powerful host, the desert shook with the terror of his presence, the clouds came slowly floating on, growing darker and darker, till their hue was of a leaden aspect, and in a few moments, as with a roar of many waters, the rains poured down their torrents, the winds whistled an unearthly chorus to the plashing of the floods, the great stones rocked and moaned, the thunder pealed, now muttering in ill-subdued

> wrath, and now clattering overhead in ungovernable fury, then passing by to burst its bolts on some far mountain top, or on fair pasture lands, where cattle stood huddled together in terror and dismay (JL 2-3).

It is evident that Ward conceives of the storm as an ill-disposed agency which deliberately terrorises the colonists. This agency is inextricably linked to the landscape itself and is transformed, in her description, into an evil and capricious spirit that possesses the country.

This awe-inspiring being heralds 'his' presence with a trumpet-blast of lightning, thunder and wind. The land quakes with fear at these evidences of his 'wrath' and 'ungovernable fury'. Ward's personification of the storm may be compared with the legends of Adamastor[8] that have pervaded literature about the Cape since the sixteenth century. By the nineteenth century, these had crystallised into a myth whereby the vengeful god Adamastor was perceived as the spirit of Africa which attempted bitterly to resist the imperial mission (Smith 1988, 16).

According to Ward, this fearsome African spirit maliciously desires to wreck any European ships attempting to enter one of the bays of the Cape peninsula. Ward herself was involved in a shipwreck when the Abercrombie Robinson ran aground in Algoa Bay, and she includes a fictionalised description of a shipwreck in Jasper Lyle. The same storm that terrorised the military cavalcade causes the wreck of the convict ship Trafalgar:

> [A] solitary ship neared the south-eastern coast of the great continent of Africa. The hurricane blew there with

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[8] Adamastor was the creation of the Portuguese poet, Luis Vaz de Camoens, in his 1572 epic The Lusiads. Smith explains Camoens' conception of Adamastor:

> He is indeed at the centre of the southern African sequence of the Lusiads - mighty but miserable; the most memorable of the poem's several avatars of the irrational and pagan African Bacchus; exiled from the pantheon of European gods and jilted by one of its divine white daughters, Thetis; inspired perhaps by the biblical Nem and Dante's titanic giants guarding the exit from Hell to the southern terrestrial paradise; helpless to stop Da Gama but potent enough to invoke on him and all his European successors a terrible curse; the first victim of Portuguese conquest and a resentful representative of African nemesis ever after (Smith 1988, 12-13).

> frenzied violence; the fiends of the storm were howling aloft among the shrouds, the canvass cracked and rattled till it split into ribbons, and was whirled away to the winds; the rudder had been torn from its place, the masts groaned and shrieked, the waters frothed up in fountains of spray, and at intervals the heavy surges swept the decks like clouds, enveloping the vessel, and bearing it down with a force it could ill resist (JL 37).

Once again, there is the sense that some malevolent Adamastor-like agency is responsible for this tempest. The violence of the hurricane is described as 'frenzied' and the storm has been created by howling 'fiends'. The hapless ship is ripped to shreds by a host of spiteful demons which lurk along the coast of Africa, waiting to pounce on unsuspecting mariners. The irresistible 'force' which bears down on the vessel is a direct descendant of the being that cursed Da Gama in Camoens' poem.

The Kaffirland of Jasper Lyle can never provide a real home for the European. The only place in which the English truly belong, according to Ward, is England. This is demonstrated at the end of the novel when the heroine, Eleanor Daveney, and her family have moved to England. They are very conscious of the contrast between their present situation and the terrors they encountered in Kaffirland:

> Who thought that instead of an embowered porch, rudely built and thatched with rushes, they now met beneath the stately colonnade of a noble mansion!
>
> Oh! those precious meetings, when the sea has long divided us (JL 429).

It is with relief that Ward's characters forsake the environment of Kaffirland for that of England. There is no sense of nostalgia for the crude African home they have left behind. They willingly exchange this uncomfortable dwelling for the grace of an English mansion.

Ward takes the opportunity here to reiterate her preference for cultivated land over wilderness:

> The cultivated lands of England! the fields crowded with reapers! the heavily-laden wains - women and youths and children singing along the roads, as if rejoicing in the plentiful harvest; the noble woods, stretching afar, and glowing in the mellow light of autumn! - all contributed to bring repose to Eleanor's soul. She lived a new life - she seemed to begin a new career in a new world. Here she was indeed at peace - no fearful storms, no savage war-cry, no dread of an enemy stalking in and making desolate the hearth. The space between her and the past seemed suddenly widened (JL 429).

The attraction of England lies in the fact that there is scarcely a square foot of it which has not been appropriated for human use. In describing the English countryside, Ward draws on a pastoral tradition[9] which celebrates the fertility and fruitfulness of the land, as represented by a harvest. The fields are crowded with reapers and the wains are loaded with hay. Everywhere, the country people celebrate 'the plentiful harvest.'

Throughout Jasper Lyle, Ward expresses admiration for signs of European-style cultivation on the Eastern Frontier; but her ideal of universal cultivation can only be realised in England. The novel's celebration of the 'georgic' mode of pastoral representation[10] reaches its apotheosis in the above description

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9 Michael Squires defines the modern application of the concept 'pastoral' to literature in the following way:

> The term pastoral, used loosely, can function as nothing more than a synonym for peaceful rural life; it can indicate all forms of idealized country life; it can signify only the conventions of traditional pastoral; it can suggest any literature about shepherds; or it can apply to literature revealing a single dominant feature of pastoral, as it has most frequently in recent critical usage (Squires, 10).

10 The 'georgic' mode was, according to Squires, the most important development of the nineteenth century to the pastoral tradition:

> Whereas conventional pastoral had demanded that the pastoral world be free from toil and that leisure to sing and pipe be unbroken, the most significant change in the nineteenth-century transformation of the pastoral impulse in the

of the English countryside. The landscape of Kaffirland can do no more than approximate this ideal.

The 'noble woods' of the estate on which Eleanor is standing are very different to the dense bush of Kaffirland. They are ornamental in function and are the cherished result of years of cultivation. This vista of beauty is visible to Eleanor from the vantage-point of the 'noble mansion' - the seat of power of the landowner. The rural people upon whom she is looking do not have the same privileged perspective. They are a part of the landscape, rather than observers of that landscape. Eleanor has access to the privileged vantage-point because she is a member of the landowning class: the owner of this particular piece of land is her brother-in-law.

Gazing upon the rural scene 'bring[s] repose to Eleanor's soul'. The serenity of the landscape generates serenity within her. This perfect union between man and landscape is contrasted with the turbulence of Kaffirland where fearful storms, savage war-cries and stalking enemies continually disturb the peace and 'mak[e] desolate the hearth'. As Eleanor surrenders herself to the tranquillity of England and renounces her Kaffirland days, she is set free from the past and is permitted to begin 'a new life'. In concluding her novel with this eloquent contrast between the serene beauty of England and the turbulent danger of Africa, Ward seems similarly to be rejecting the Kaffirland landscape as a viable home for the European.

5.4 Landscape in The Cape As I Found It

By 1894, when Hicks arrived in South Africa, British control over the Cape Colony had been undisputed for many years, the last frontier war having ended in 1878. The locus of conflict in

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recognition, even glorification, of work. One writer has said that 'the bucolic, unlike the georgic, exalts the innocent leisure of the shepherd over the peasant's hard task'. After Wordsworth the pastoral form verges toward the georgic, the literary work which glorifies the toil of the agricultural sphere and which finds supreme expression in Vergil's Georgics (Squires, 48-49).

South Africa had shifted to the north of the Orange River. For the first time, the various inhabitants of the Cape Colony coexisted in a state of relative peace. This stabilisation of the frontier encouraged an English observer like Beatrice Hicks to form a more favourable attitude to the landscape than that of her countrywomen earlier in the century. Unlike Ward and Prichard, she views it with neither mistrust nor fear. She expresses considerable admiration for the Karoo terrain and compares it favourably with the English landscape.

Hicks's attitude may also be attributed to the marginalised position - socially, politically and economically - that she perceives herself to occupy in England. As one of the 'surplus' women of her country, she knows there is no place for her in the English environment. She demonstrates none of the affection and loyalty for the English countryside that are expressed by Ward and Prichard. She conceives of that countryside rather as a site of oppression of the individual.

Hicks shows no desire to see the Cape landscape altered to suit the georgic ideal. In accordance with Pratt's model of women's imperial writing, she rejects the 'civilising and beautifying' impulse of imperialism (Pratt 1992, 214) and adopts a discourse that 'rejects domination and parodies power' (Pratt 1992, 213). At several points in her narration, she explicitly satirises imperialist attempts to transform the Cape landscape and expresses the hope that they will never be successful.

When Hicks leaves England and moves to the Eastern Cape, her material circumstances improve considerably. She finds remunerative employment without difficulty and manages to live more comfortably than in England. She is consequently well-disposed to the Eastern Cape environment, believing it to offer her a greater degree of individual freedom than was available to her in her native country.

However, her initial impression of the African landscape is not

favourable. She has not yet established herself within it, and it impresses her with a sense of strangeness and alienation. She displays a lingering attachment to the familiar English countryside:

> Curiously enough, at first the veld strikes one with a feeling of desolateness, and then of monotony: it is only after one has lived there that one learns its fascination and its engrossing interest.
>
> Well, I sat up and drank my coffee. There was the veld, and I quite own that at first I was greatly disappointed. I had expected to see stretches of waving grass, beautifully green, like the marshes at home, but instead of that it was yellow, sear and sandy; but the rising sun made it look like gold (CFI 24).

Hicks's immediate response to the veld is conventional and even predictable. As Jean Marquard has shown in her article about depictions of the South African landscape, nineteenth-century colonial literature displays as a dominant theme the protagonist's estranged, alienated and displaced relationship with the landscape (Marquard, 293). In particular, such veld-landscapes as the Karoo are depicted as desolate and forsaken, and are described in terms of empty spaces, poor soil and unpeopled distances (Marquard, 295).

In the case of Hicks, however, familiarity with the landscape engenders affection, and the veld no longer appears monotonous in her eyes. She becomes initiated into an appreciation of 'its fascination and its engrossing interest'. She is disappointed at first because the veld does not resemble the picture she had formed in her imagination. This emerged from a European ideal of natural scenery which required that a landscape should be lush and green in order to be pleasing. Her expectations have been created by what is familiar to her, and she anticipates that the veld will look like the wide expanses of land she has seen 'at home'.

Even in her initial disappointment, however, Hicks is able to perceive beauty in the unfamiliar scene: 'the rising sun made it look like gold'. She has an inkling of the value that she will shortly discover in the veld.

Another conventional response to the landscape on Hicks's part is her adherence to the popular European myth that the African continent is timeless and unchanging, existing in a condition of stasis:[11]

> I doubt if the country is, or ever will be, different to what I knew it. It is a large, wide tract of land, with few people there, and things change very, very slowly. Climate, race, and custom have made the place what it is, and it will not be altered in a day or so, however great the schemes for the future may be (CFI 1).

This standard perception is rendered unconventional by Hicks's obvious satisfaction with the fact that the landscape is resistant to change. It pleases her to believe that the Africa she experienced is the definitive Africa, and that it will continue to be 'a large, wide tract of land', largely devoid of people.

Hicks experiences none of the frustration at the intractability of the African landscape expressed by many colonial writers[12]. She appears to derive consolation from the thought that Africa will not easily be altered 'however great the schemes for the future may be'. This refers, of course, to the imperial programme for the Colony. Hicks is so detached from this

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11 This view was applied as much to the African continent itself as to its inhabitants. Eve Bertelsen has identified the 'dominant [colonial] image of Africa as a barbaric continent inhabited by wild animals and alien ancestors, trapped far back in time' (Bertelsen, 131; emphasis added).

Marquard has shown that Africa was conceived of as 'unyielding,' 'timeless,' 'unchanging' and possessed by 'a supreme indifference to human endeavour' (Marquard, 295 & 296). This view was intensified by the colonists' perpetual awareness of 'the great age of the land itself, in contrast to the relative youth of the human species' (Marquard, 296).

12 See Jean Marquard's article, 'The Farm: A concept in the writing of Olive Schreiner, Pauline Smith, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer and Bessie Head,' for a discussion of this tendency among white South African writers.

programme as to hope it will fail rather than destroy the uniqueness of the landscape.

Hicks does not perceive the land as something to be possessed at all costs, unlike the majority of white colonists at the Cape. Marquard has described this impulse in South African colonial literature:

> The white settler in Africa is intensely conscious not only of his historical situation, his relation to time, but also of his relation to space, the land itself, seen as something to be structured, conquered or possessed. It is from his sense of the land as something structured by him that he derives his own sense of belonging to it, of being in the right place historically. Conversely, estrangement, alienation, displacement, which are dominant themes in white South African fiction, reflect the protagonist's insecurity with regard to the land and to his right to own it (Marquard, 293).

Hicks's sense of identity does not derive from or depend upon an ability to control the African landscape. She is scornful of the attempts of others to tame it and appears to be immune to the sense of alienation that afflicted other colonists.

The African veld of <u>The Cape As I Found It</u> operates as a metaphor for individual freedom. Hicks continually contrasts the openness and wildness of the Eastern Cape terrain with the restricted orderliness of England:

> Instead of the (perhaps overrated) advantages of England, you can go for miles and miles, on and on, over ground which no spade has ever turned; you can breathe air uncontaminated by the breath of millions, such air as you have never felt in all your life before (<u>CFI</u> 3).

Here Hicks conceives of the landscape as a place where the

individual can exist without the confinements of urban life. Whereas Ward and Prichard draw comfort from any appearance of cultivation in the landscape, Hicks rejoices in the fact that 'no spade has ever turned' the earth of the veld. The very air of the Eastern Cape is delightful to her because she is not sharing it with millions of other people.

Such signs of cultivation as she does discern in the Karoo do not afford her any satisfaction: 'Here and there men have tried to steal enough from it to make their mealie lands, or even enough sometimes to build a town, but all that is merely a drop from the ocean - the veld laughs at them still' (CFI 23; emphasis added).

The image of human beings 'stealing' from the land to serve their own purposes is particularly telling. It suggests that Hicks does not believe in the automatic right of humans to exploit the environment that hosts them. The veld belongs to itself. Any attempt on the part of 'men' to appropriate it amounts, in her view, to thievery. She reconciles herself to these depredations with the thought that the veld is large enough not to miss the pieces that are taken from it. It 'laughs' at the people who try to tame it.

One of the reasons for Hicks's affection for the African veld is that she perceives it, perhaps unconsciously, as a site of freedom for women:

> The veld! One always hears of that in England, and wonders what it is, and we, with our tidy country and our fields, primly set out like an old maid's parlour, cannot imagine it. Just the land as God left it - wide-spreading; on and on it goes, like the sea, only bounded by the horizon in the distance (CFI 23).

The comparison drawn in this passage between the English landscape and 'an old maid's parlour' is significant. It indicates Hicks's desire to escape from the narrow orbit and

restricted lifestyle of the unmarried Englishwoman in the nineteenth century. Her orientation as a self-professed New Woman renders her awareness of this confined situation particularly acute. Even the fields of England, which are conventionally evocative of bucolic freedom and open spaces, appear to Hicks as nothing more than clutter in an over-cluttered country.

As Hicks embarks on her first train journey through the Karoo, she remarks: 'All this struck me as a delightful breath of unconventionality, and gave a beautiful feeling of freedom. I fell quite in love with the new country as I looked out the window' (CFI 27). It is evident that the landscape is not only aesthetically pleasing to her, but also representative of an unprecedented absence of societal vetoes and prohibitions. She conceives a strong sentimental affection for it, of a kind that is usually associated with an individual's attachment to his or her homeland.

Hicks is disappointed by the lack of a woman's rights movement at the Cape, and by the fact that 'there were so few "new" women among them' (CFI 189); but she subordinates these 'disadvantages' to the more real forms of freedom that people at the Cape enjoy:

> [I]f one goes three weeks' journey from England, and then for a day or so up-country, one cannot expect to be quite up-to-date. And, besides, who wants to be? There the people have a hot sun to warm them, plenty to eat, fresh air to breathe, wide open country around them, and a blue sky above them, wider and more open still: what need have they to bother their heads about what the folks in a little foggy island are thinking and doing? (CFI 126).

This attitude is very different from the conventional colon tendency to hanker after the metropolitan environment, and to persist in viewing the metropolis as the centre of the world. Hicks reduces England to 'a little foggy island' which is quite

irrelevant to the lives of people in Africa. The social trends that are being forged in England, including the New Woman movement, have little significance in a place where everyone has 'plenty to eat' and 'fresh air to breathe'. These opinions may be contrasted with the nostalgia and longing for the 'mother country' expressed by Ward and Prichard.

The prospect of returning to England fills Hicks with dismay:

> England would seem so cramped and crowded after this. The country, even, would look so prim and petty with its neat little fields and regular hedges. And the conventions of England, with the faultless, methodical housekeeping! Oh, I knew I should often long for that comfortable land, where there is no spring-cleaning (CFI 188).

The neatness and orderliness of England is inextricably associated in Hicks's mind with its 'conventions'. She is unable to contemplate the English landscape without dreading the tyranny of domestic routine it imposes: the 'faultless, methodical housekeeping' and the 'spring-cleaning' which inevitably fall to a woman's lot and which were anathema to the New Woman. Africa, in contrast, is 'a comfortable land' and a 'wild land' (CFI 23) where such things are not thought of.

In Africa, Hicks is free to be an individual without domestic responsibilities. Her earning power derives from her education and she is able to create a comfortable, independent life for herself on the strength of it. There is no need for her to marry and no advantage to be gained from altering her footloose lifestyle in any way.

Hicks's sense of alienation from the English environment and affection for the African environment may be attributed in part to her exclusion from the system of land ownership in England. Harriet Ward and Helen Prichard were both born into the landed upper-middle class of England and subsequently married men who

also belonged to that class; their continued access to the land was safeguarded by privilege. They derive a sense of security from evidences of English-style cultivation on the frontier, but have great difficulty in forming a positive attitude to an environment in which the colonial hold on the land is tenuous at best. The repeated challenges of the indigenes - cattle-raids, cross-border skirmishes, frontier wars etc - keep their insecurities alive.

Beatrice Hicks is fortunate enough to visit the Eastern Cape at a time of relative stability and peace. This undoubtedly assists her in establishing a benevolent attitude to the landscape. Excluded from the privileged circle of English landowners by her status as a single woman of straitened means, she appears to place no value on the ownership of land. On the contrary, she dislikes the domesticated appearance of the English countryside and compares it unfavourably with the wildness of Africa. She is also irked by the obligation England imposes on women to perform an endless round of domestic tasks. The African environment seems to her to impose no such obligation, and her unique perspective transforms the landscape into a powerful symbol of personal liberty. Above all, she has no desire to see the land altered in accordance with the imperial ideal of domination. Indeed, she expresses the hope that Africa will long resist attempts to tame it.

6 CONCLUSION

Women colonial writers are capable of adopting the discourses of imperialism and of espousing the imperialist cause. Despite the fact that colonialism was traditionally perceived as an exclusively masculine endeavour, women were able to act as 'agents' of empire and to reproduce imperialist sentiments. This is particularly evident in the representations of the male 'Other' by the four women writers selected for study in this dissertation. In the texts, the male 'Other' is portrayed with varying degrees of condescension and hostility. The authors demonstrate no inclination to establish a reciprocal relationship with the colonised races or to strive towards mutual understanding. Their discourse is uniformly alienating and objectifying of the male 'Other'.

In other respects, the four women writers demonstrate widely different levels of commitment to imperialism. This is particularly true of their attitudes to the colonial landscape. Whereas Prichard and Howarth endorse the imperialist attempt to domesticate the land, Hicks opposes it and expresses the hope that it will never be successful. These differences result from the individual perspectives of the writers and from the unique nature of their encounters with the Eastern Frontier. For example, Hicks's unusual attitude is largely a consequence of her exclusion, as a single woman of straitened means, from the English system of landownership. Differences in attitude between the four writers may also be accounted for by the fact that the political situation in the Eastern Cape altered considerably between the years 1846 and 1900. During their visits, the four writers encountered the Frontier in many different guises, some hostile and some benevolent. This inevitably affected their perceptions and depictions of the region.

Although the influence of gender may be discerned in the work of the four women, it is not the only, or even the primary, factor

behind the construction of the texts. Even the sympathetic attitude expressed in the texts toward the female 'Other' may be attributed to the unthreatening nature of that 'Other' rather than to any form of gender-based solidarity. While both Howarth and Ward, in their depictions of the female 'Other', make certain compromises with their commitment to imperialism, these are minor and do not amount to a challenge to the imperial status quo.

Women colonial writers cannot be assumed to have written from a feminist or proto-feminist perspective. Similarly, the experience of colonial travel was not necessarily liberating or consciousness-raising for women. The dissertation uses the example of Beatrice Hicks to show that contact with the imperial context could have a moderating rather than a radicalizing effect on feminist convictions. The feminism of the 1890s was strongly dependent for its existence on its metropolitan context and did not transplant easily to the pragmatic reality of colonial existence.

Recent feminist critical theory has attempted to absolve women writers from complicity in the imperial endeavour. This school of criticism has been allied to a feminist agenda that seeks to construct imperialism as a male phenomenon from which women were excluded and to which they were opposed. Such research is based on theoretical extrapolation and selective readings of certain texts. It ignores or passes over evidence that does not accord with its theoretical premises. This dissertation shows that there is considerable resistance in the six texts to an attempt to disassociate them from imperialism.