

“Lords of the World”:  
Writing Gender and Imperialism  
on Northern Space in C.C. Vyvyan’s  
*Arctic Adventure*

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A feeling persisted that I never should discover what I sought for unless I could travel in the wild, unpeopled parts of the world ...  
(Vyvyan, *Roots and Stars* 131)

Women, too, have spirits which crave the adventure of the unknown and the silence of the northern wilderness. (Hoyle 117)

The adventurer is in flight from women. (Zweig 61)

THE EPIGRAPHS that introduce this paper juxtapose a number of ideas about travel and travel writing: the traveller seeks to ‘discover’ something in far-away or foreign places; these destinations are often scripted as ‘wild,’ ‘unpeopled,’ and ‘unknown’; women as well as men have the urge for travel and adventure; and, paradoxically, the persona of the traveller or adventurer has historically been masculine. This last point is the starting place for my reading of C.C. Vyvyan’s *Arctic Adventure* (1961), a travel narrative of a journey through what is now northern Canada and Alaska from Edmonton to Vancouver by steamer, canoe, and train taken in 1926 by C.C. Vyvyan, born Clara Coltman Rogers (1885-1976), and her friend Gwendolyn Dorrien-Smith.<sup>1</sup> The ‘adventure’ portion of the trip involved the two English women and two Loucheux (now Gwich’in) guides named Lazarus Sittichinli and Jim Koe canoeing up the Rat River bridging the Yukon Territory and Alaska, and then the two women alone canoeing the 115 miles downriver from LaPierre House to Old Crow. Although *Arctic Adventure* has received little critical attention,<sup>2</sup> it is significant for being arguably the first travel narrative written about the Canadian Arctic by a white professional writer (MacLaren, “Land” 2); and Vyvyan and Dorrien-Smith are notable for

being among the first recreational arctic travellers, so that Vyvyan's travel book marks a transition from centuries of arctic discovery and exploration narratives. *Arctic Adventure*, however, is also important for the ways in which Vyvyan manipulates her travelling and writing personae in a genre that has historically been masculine, and for the ways in which she both resists and reproduces the imperial baggage that accompanies travel writing. Vyvyan's representations of the northern space that she often calls "unpeopled" or "uncharted" are implicated in these negotiations.

I will therefore look at *Arctic Adventure* in terms of the intersections of gender and imperialism.<sup>3</sup> I will be starting from the premise that, although women have always travelled and often written about their travels, the activity of travelling and the genre of travel literature have historically been coded as masculine. This has meant that the conventions of travel writing have supported a reading of the adventurer or traveller as male. Travel writing has also often been accompanied by imperial interests. Earlier exploration ventures in what is now the Canadian Arctic were inspired by mercantile and imperial institutions,<sup>4</sup> and the interests of these institutions often inflect the resulting exploration narratives. In the same way, although Vyvyan travelled independent of any particular institution, her journey was largely facilitated by the institutions, transportation, and communications put in place by the gradual settlement and administration of the Canadian landscape. Her narrative also includes reflections on the legal and religious administration of the north and relations between Native, Inuit, and non-Native northerners.

Although Vyvyan has inherited a genre that has historically interpellated the narrator and traveller as male and (to a greater or lesser degree) imperialist, she appears to be adjusting her personae to both fit and work against these confines. Vyvyan negotiates her way through the gendering of the genre of the travel narrative and the activity of going on an adventure.<sup>5</sup> She frequently mentions that the two women encountered people who admired them for being brave and adventurous enough to journey up the Rat River and make part of the journey alone. But neither woman wants to be treated differently from men. Because of the gender roles available to them at the time (although these are always flexible), I will argue that Vyvyan characterizes herself and Gwen in ways that at times appear deliberately masculine, and that are often accompanied by a derision of conventionally 'feminine' qualities. However, because of the frequent mention of the women's gender, Vyvyan's strategy can have the effect of expanding the boundaries of 'masculinity' and 'femininity,' and expanding the possibilities for the persona of the wilderness traveller.

At the same time, issues of imperialism arise in the text in different ways, often in conjunction with the gendering of the women's travel personae. Vyvyan makes direct statements that suggest both criticism and support of imperialism in the Canadian north, and the personae she adopts during her journey often imply gendered positions within imperialism. Critics such as Chaudhuri and Strobel, Lawrence, Kröller, Mills, and Frank have argued that Victorian and early twentieth-century women travellers occupy complex subject positions in their narratives in relation to the lands and people they encountered on their travels, demonstrating both complicity with and resistance to colonialism. *Arctic Adventure* reveals, at times, this same movement between complicity and resistance.

For this reason, I will maintain a focus on particular intersections of gender and imperialism. Some feminist critics concentrate mainly on the personal freedoms gained by Victorian women travellers, and celebrate the formation of these women's unified identities. As Sara Mills notes, however, studies that only represent women travellers as "individuals struggling against the social conventions of the Victorian period" elide the link between these women's writings and "larger discursive structures," including the colonial context of much of their writing (3). Gwyneth Hoyle, for instance, in an article on early women's travels in Canada, constructs an idea of the Canadian North as a "primordial" and "unspoiled" "wilderness frontier beyond the limits of civilization" (117), a characterization that suggests that the North is untouched by human presence. She appeals to the image of the explorer and suggests that women travellers also "struggle[d] against the forces of nature to reach their destinations" (118) and hence discovered "elements of self-testing and self-discovery" (139).

Without disparaging the clear accomplishments of these women, in terms of physical and mental endurance as well as a refusal to be deterred by social conventions, it is important to note that the freedoms achieved by women such as Vyvyan were supported by certain social privileges. In many ways, at the same time that the traveller can be curious about and descriptive of what she sees around her, recreational travel writing is about self-discovery and the consolidation of an individual subject. *Arctic Adventure*, then, can be discussed in terms of imperialism in the sense that Vyvyan's self-assertion and self-discovery are particularly made possible by a confrontation or communion with, and inscription of self on, a so-called 'empty' space of wilderness,<sup>6</sup> and she is able to achieve this freedom and self-development because her path has been cleared, literally and

metaphorically, by colonial institutions such as the Hudson's Bay Company, by Protestant and Catholic missionaries, by the North-West Mounted Police, by the railroad and steamers, by non-Native northern settlement, and by the assistance of Native guides.<sup>7</sup>

## I

Although I want to retain a focus on the particularly arctic nature of Vyvyan's travel and her manipulations of the conventions of arctic travel narratives, I believe that she can also productively be studied in light of current academic work being done in the field of women's travel writing in general. Many critics of travel writing note the gendering of travel and exploration. Karen Lawrence, in her study of the roles of women in travels and as travellers, pinpoints the absence of women from the conventional journey plot. She notes that female figures in adventure tales often symbolize the home and the safe domesticity that the male hero leaves behind; but women, particularly 'native' women, can also represent the foreign territory to which the adventurer travels. Lawrence argues that a woman "traditionally provides the point of departure and sometimes the goal for the male journey" (1). Similarly, Paul Zweig offers three models for a female presence in adventure tales: "as domestic binder [that is, as the woman who tries to bind the man to the home], as demonic adversary, and as shaper of the adventurous character itself" (80). Zweig suggests that "the adventurer's essential triumph is masculine. His gift is to bind the binder, to outwit and defeat the mysterious identities of woman. The woman he defeats expresses the bewitching domesticity of the house, the space of the community — which is immobile, predictable, fenced off" (69). Yet Zweig also locates a stereotypically feminine presence in the male adventurer's passive ability to let the world shape him, and in the often feminized figure of the hero's adversary. I should note that these critics are not suggesting that mobility and passivity are essential qualities of men and women, simply that the literary and social history of travel and travel writing have scripted masculine and feminine roles.

This gendering of travel takes on further implications when the travel is a prelude to colonization or settlement. Heather Murray, in an essay examining the place of wilderness and women in English-Canadian writing, looks at the "nature/culture dichotomy which casts woman as either nature (land) or culture (society) but invariably constitutes her as other, as a part of either force against which the lone hero must set himself" (77). She writes, "the frontier is by definition the place which is far

enough away to leave women behind" (77). When women travel to the frontier, it ceases to be a wilderness or frontier. R.G. Moyles and Doug Owsram note this perception in looking at the place of British women in Victorian emigration to Canada. They examine the contemporary rhetoric that suggested British women had an "Imperial mission" to civilize the wildness of Canada. Moyles and Owsram call this the "concept of the Englishwoman as an invincible global civilizing agent" (193). In a different geographical context, but with relevance to the Canadian situation, Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow argue that the presence of women travellers in Africa was a sign that the continent had been civilized — "the land was considered sufficiently tame for lady tourists" (qtd. in Lawrence 103). Hence there is a double relationship between women and civilization in the context of travel: the land and people must be made civilized to accommodate incoming women, but the women who arrive are seen to be civilizing forces. This is not meant to imply a slippage between the roles of women as travellers and settlers in Canada, for C.C. Vyvyan is clearly a traveller. But it is important to note that in the discourse of British travel and emigration to Canada, women had the role not of explorers and adventurers, but of settlers and civilizers.

In the context of arctic travel and exploration literature in particular, we can identify a gendering of male and female roles in travel. The 'heroic male adventurer' seems to be the persona of some early explorers in the Canadian Arctic. Captain Thomas James, for instance, includes in his 1633 exploration narrative a poem that gives shape to this persona of the hero. He romanticizes the deaths of his crewmen:

Their lives they spent, to the last drop of blood,  
 Seeking Gods glory, and their Countries good,  
 And as a valiant Souldier rather dyes,  
 Then yeelds his courage to his Enemies:  
 And stops their way, with his hew'd flesh, when death  
 Hath quite depriv'd him of his strength and breath:  
 So have they spent themselves; and here they lye,  
 A famous marke of our *Discovery*. (88)

While this poem has many valances, including an appeal to patriotism, a sense of religious mission, and a construction of the North as a destructive enemy, the quotation is also notable for its invocation of the arctic explorer as male hero. Here, as elsewhere in his narrative, James invokes the North as a theatre for spiritual and physical testing. Chauncey Loomis argues that, until the disappearance of the Franklin expedition, the Arc-

tic "was an environment within which a cosmic romance could be acted out: man facing the great cold forces of Nature and surviving if not prevailing over them" (110). This conception sets up a paradigm of the arctic explorer in masculine combat with the North.<sup>8</sup>

Women, on the other hand, have different roles: Native women appear in exploration narratives as representatives of Native people or, sometimes, as metonymic of the land itself, as in, for example, the Chipewyan story of the first woman to find copper at Coppermine, a myth that appears in the exploration narratives of Hearne and Franklin (1819-1822), and in Don Gutteridge's *Coppermine*. The Chipewyan woman in the story represents the copper that was said to have once been plentiful at Coppermine; in the myth, the rape of this woman by her own people stands in for the stripping of copper from the land. The rhetorical use of a Native female figure to represent the conquered land is common in exploration narratives, and suggests that the reference to this mythic woman in Hearne's and Franklin's narratives (and in Gutteridge's poetic exploration of an exploration narrative) may also imply Europeans' penetration of the Arctic.

Conversely, European women are often noticeably absent from the North. A poem entitled "A Thought of Home" from *The North Georgia Gazette and Winter Chronicle*, published on board William Parry's 1819-20 expedition, illustrates British women's role in the male adventure. The poem invokes a Penelope figure waiting at home for the adventuring men.<sup>9</sup> She represents the safety and warmth that the men in the Arctic are missing: "When sorrows intrude on our peace, / When wrung by anxiety's wound, / Her endearments procure us release. / How sweet is her tenderness found!" (Sabine 34). The definition of womanhood also helps to define the men's role in the arctic, for "Man is gifted with firmness of mind, / In dangers and triumphs to share, / But each beauty and softness combined, / Distinguish the lovely and fair" (34). And women are also associated with the home country itself, as they are "the pride of our Isle" (34) and walk in "Britain's fair footsteps" (34). In these narratives, however, women are not explorers.

## II

An analysis of gender roles in adventure and exploration literatures is relevant for reading *Arctic Adventure* because Vyvyan sets up a travelling persona for the two women that often invokes the idea of masculine heroism. Vyvyan also demonstrates an explicit preference for adventure and

travel as opposed to domesticity, which brings to mind Lawrence's and Zweig's comments about the adventurer escaping the domestic world of women. In this formulation, the assumption is that the male adventurer is escaping the stranglehold of women and domesticity when he travels. But when a woman travels, perhaps what she is escaping is also the stranglehold of domesticity, and the gender expectations that deter women from becoming adventurers. Travel has historically offered some women a measure of freedom from gender constraints.<sup>10</sup> Stanley, in "Travelers' tales," looks at Canadian women's travel and settlement narratives. She argues that "for women the physical act of travel often meant a stepping away from the conventions of female deportment. The unattainable thing, freedom, became momentarily possible" (60). Similarly, Leo Hamalian, in a study of women travellers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, argues that "travel promised a segment of life, a span of time, over which a woman had maximum control" (xi).

These ideas have particular relevance when read in the context of Vyvyan's autobiography, *Roots and Stars: Reflections on the Past*, written in 1962 when Vyvyan was seventy-seven years old. She organizes the autobiography around the development of her travelling and writing identities, and in many ways the book seems to be Vyvyan's construction of herself as a born traveller from an early age.<sup>11</sup> In the first chapter she writes that as a child she loved taking walks in "wild place[s] where anything might happen" (9). She contrasts herself with her sister, who "will always accept what each day and hour may bring"; but Vyvyan as a child "is given to moods of brooding and to hiding her secret thoughts and imaginings" (9). She writes,

Such longings for escape, such impulses to lead a life that would be new and wild and strange, were only the gropings of a childish mind towards freedom. I had no idea as yet of what I was looking for, only a dim notion that certain things, such as the solitude of that deserted minng country, ... the darkness of those untrodden fir woods were all connected with this search for something precious that was far away outside my life of routine. I had as yet no inkling nor foreboding that all through life I would be searching for physical and spiritual freedom and that already my intimacy with certain wild forms and places was quietly linking itself with the search. (11)

Vyvyan lives vicariously through the male-authored travel and adventure books she reads, including Robert Louis Stevenson's *Travels With a Donkey* and *An Inland Voyage*, as well as books like Thoreau's *Walden* which

celebrate the power of wilderness. These books instill in Vyvyan a love of adventure, isolated places, and nature.

In her autobiography Vyvyan makes a few references to the effects of her gender on her ambitions to travel, although she explicitly states that she is not a Suffragette (98). She describes how, upon her sister's marriage, she was forced by her parents to return home to take her sister's place; this happened while Vyvyan was in England working for the Charity Organization Society and studying social work. Vyvyan writes, "I was only one of many thousand victims in our day when it was considered almost criminal for a girl to follow any career except marriage" (109). She tells of how she read travel books and "dreamed of visiting the wild places of the earth," but was hampered by her meagre allowance and the fact that her family would never permit her to travel as a woman alone (124). But Vyvyan does go on to travel and to write books about her journeys. It is ironic that at the end of the first volume of her autobiography, when she marries Sir Courtenay Vyvyan, an older man, she settles down and stops travelling because it is her husband who is sedentary and bound to their house (176-77).

This contrast between domesticity and adventure is one of the ways in which Vyvyan constructs travellers' personae for herself and Gwen. Vyvyan recounts that at Fort Smith she and Gwen disliked talking to the women: "After being artificially animated for five minutes on the subjects of babies and cooking, Gwen and I would nearly expire. There would be a heavy silence while we watched the door and longed for the appearance of the men who would enliven us with tales of action and information on natural history" (*Arctic* 36). This comment suggests that the two women travellers have more in common with northern men than women, for they share 'masculine' rather than 'feminine' interests.<sup>12</sup> While they are driving around Edmonton, Vyvyan looks at the small, comfortable-looking houses and thinks, "how much energy had been expended on cleanliness and comfort? All the energy they had? Was there any left for spiritual adventures?" (24). Vyvyan would prefer to give up the comforts of domesticity in exchange for the freedom and expansion of adventure. Vyvyan and Gwen also seem to delight in the freedom they have from social conventions about personal appearance and grooming. During the portion of the canoe trip with Lazarus and Jim, the women did not bathe, and Vyvyan describes herself and Gwen in this way: "We were a muddy, unwashed, unbrushed beveled couple, wet to the knees from contact with dripping undergrowth, and we laughed at each others' appearance" (94). Their eventual symbolic return to civilization and the domesticity repre-



sented by Mrs. Burke's house in Fort Yukon continues to be phrased in brash terms, for Vyvyan writes, "We shuffled out of our breeches and into our skirts" (151).

The most startling case of Vyvyan dissociating the two women from domesticity occurs in her description of Gwen baking the Puftaloonas. Vyvyan renders Gwen as if she were a blacksmith rather than a cook:

Her method was simple and forceful. She would take the ingredients in the palm of a very horny hand that had been hardened by rowing sea-boats since infancy, she would then weld them as if they were pieces of metal and she herself a blacksmith. Sooner or later, by hard pommelling the mixture became homogeneous, and when satisfied that it was solid as a cricket ball, she would cast it into the frying pan with a determined gesture. (121)

Vyvyan seems at times to be using a strategy of displacement to transfer onto Gwen most of the markers of masculinity in the text: while she makes what seem deliberate gestures to construct the two women as travellers in the masculine tradition of wilderness travel, she makes the character of Gwen bear more of the responsibility for representing the gruff male heroic traveller. Gwen is "lion-hearted" (102) and "an old sea-dog" (107). Her fists are "strong enough to open any port-hole which was screwed down" (18-19) and "she learned to row a boat before she learned to walk" (69). Gwen "could always enjoy and hold her liquor" (116), and she sometimes communicates by grunting (52). The characterization of Gwen as an "old sea-dog" especially aligns her with the 'old-timers' and the men of the north.

Vyvyan also accentuates the individualism and heroism of the traveller figure by contrasting it with the image of the tourist. She sets up a dichotomy between *real* travellers like herself and Gwen, and tourists or city-types who just view the north from the safety of a steamer or train window. Although her portraits are usually not explicitly gendered, they emphasize a distinction between what might be called 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities (or, additionally, rural and urban stereotypes). For instance, when Vyvyan talks to Captain Cameron in Aklavik, he says, "'The North country is tough and cruel, you can't deny it. 'Tis no bed-o-roses, balmy, cradle life up here ... The Rat river ain't no asphalt pavement laid for patent leathers but there it is, 'tis a trail same as any other and you'll get over all right'" (77). The reference to "patent leathers" and asphalt suggests that city people are soft and not tough enough to handle arctic travel. Vyvyan also later talks of tourists who view the north

from a comfortable seat on the deck of the steamer (138), and comments, when she and Gwen are on the steamer, that "an onlooker's life is no life at all" (161). Although the descriptions of tourists are not explicitly feminized, they are certainly contrasted with the toughness and aggressiveness of adventurers. For instance, at the beginning of the trip Vyvyan envisions the journey as a heroic battle with nature: "we realised, for the first time, the difficulty of our undertaking and the forces of nature that would be arrayed against us. We wondered if we should have strength to overcome those forces and fulfil the expectations of our new friends" (21). And when the two women are in Edmonton organizing their trip, Vyvyan notes that "now we began to feel like pioneers about to set foot on an unknown road ... we had come to an end of spoon-fed travel and had to begin making our own decisions" (23).

The reference to a pioneering spirit invokes a hierarchy of travel that assumes the superiority of unprecedented, individualized, and challenging travel experiences. Paul Fussell, in a study of British travel in the interwar years, makes a distinction between exploration, travel, and tourism according to the originality of the journey: "All three make journeys, but the explorer seeks the undiscovered, the traveller that which has been discovered by the mind working in history, the tourist that which has been discovered by entrepreneurship and prepared for him by the arts of mass publicity ... If the explorer moves toward the risks of the formless and the unknown, the tourist moves toward the security of pure cliché" (39). Vyvyan appeals to the ideas of both the precedent-setting nature of her venture and the untouched quality of the land she travels through. She half-seriously voices the wilderness traveller's desire to be the 'first': "Throughout that twenty-five miles we felt like the Ancient Mariner; surely 'we were the first that ever burst' into that silent water. Surely our puffing engine was the first mechanical sound that had ever broken the age-long silence of the river" (92). Vyvyan's comment that "our map of the Rat river seemed rather blank" further suggests that the women are charting the river. But Vyvyan also emphasizes that the trip is unique because of her gender. She notes that only one white woman had previously made the journey up the Rat River, Professor Laura Frazeur of Chicago (13). Although Vyvyan claims that both she and Gwen are embarrassed by the public attention drawn by their endeavour, the narrative emphasizes such moments as the phone call from a curious reporter before the women leave Edmonton (23), the remarks from the inhabitants of Old Crow that "'those two women they came down the river paddling their canoe like a couple of squaws'" (142), and the curious stares of the

tourists on the Yukon steamer (160).<sup>13</sup> This is one way in which Vyvyan can work within the conventions of the so-called 'male' travel narrative and still acknowledge her female gender, for she appeals to the idea that the women are setting a precedent (this is the traveller's claim that s/he is charting new territory), and that they are able to set this precedent *because* they are women.

Vyvyan also sets herself apart as a traveller/adventurer by referring to the isolation of the land through which she travels. However, in the same way that the valorization of her travelling accomplishment elides the fact that the journey would be commonplace for a local Native woman, her occasional inscriptions of the North as wild or uninhabited serve symbolically to clear the land of its existing people.<sup>14</sup> In *Roots and Stars*, Vyvyan comments, "a feeling persisted that I never should discover what I sought for unless I could travel in the wild, unpeopled parts of the world" (131). In one sense, such comments express her desire for a spiritual expansion that can be achieved in "wild tracts of country where nature was still free from man's intrusion" (*Roots* 58). This kind of sentiment inflects some of Vyvyan's remarks about the vastness of the North, such as her rumination, while on Great Slave Lake, that "we are lost in a world of clear water and clear sky which have a strange impalpable look ... I have come home; back to that long-lost home which, without plan or conscious purpose, I have been always seeking" (*Arctic* 41). But at other times, her heralding of the greatness or emptiness of the North suggests that she is an explorer newly discovering the land.

These are the moments when Vyvyan invokes the figure of the male adventurer who stands in the centre of the landscape and surveys the land with an all-encompassing gaze. When she and Gwen are travelling across Great Slave Lake by steamer, Vyvyan reflects:

It is hard to realise the vast extent of this forested country where nature is prodigal of leagues, prodigal of trees and water and far horizons. The mere sense of spaciousness in such a country can take complete possession of a man, transmitting all his energy into that most haunting and insistent of desires, 'horizon fever.' Yet it can also bring him satisfaction and peace, for here, free from man-made barriers, he can embrace north, south, east and west in a glance and he feels as if he had gained in stature. (42)

Vyvyan is not illustrating an explorer's possessiveness that would lead to technological penetration of the "prodigal" landscape, for she abhors "man-made barriers" and the "intrusion" of the steamer into the coun-

try (42). Yet the quotation suggests that although the man is possessed by the land, he also can assert at least visual control over the landscape. The same image of the lone man surveying from on high an unpeopled land occurs as the women leave Alaska by steamer, when Vyvyan comments that, on the turbulent river "We felt as Noah must have felt on the top of Mount Ararat, when he looked about him and saw on every side unpopulated country" (164-45). In an even clearer example of control, she characterizes herself and Gwen as conqueror-explorers when the four canoeists reach the Divide between Alaska and Canada. She notes that the words "The Divide" and "the Height of Land" make her think of "continental vastness" and "provoke thoughts of adventure and gold-seeking, of the Rocky Mountains and incredible feats of pioneers" (118). Upon the group's "triumphant arrival on the height of land" after a challenging day, Vyvyan claims that "mentally we were lords of the world, were conquerors, we were unconquerable" (123). She constructs the women as conquerors, at the summit of land, in a way that asserts their control over the land.<sup>15</sup>

### III

Although the image of the independent hero is an important part of the text, it is by no means a consistent persona in *Arctic Adventure*, for a few paragraphs after Vyvyan calls the women "conquerors" she notes that they are "weak as straws" when it comes to lifting heavy packs (124). There are also moments when Vyvyan relinquishes control and travels passively, in particular when the two women are aboard the steamer on the Athabasca River and she writes, "Whither are we drifting? Into the north land? Into infinity? Who knows? Who cares?" (31). Throughout the text Vyvyan moves between the positions of indomitable traveller and self-deprecating greenhorn; she marks her inexperience when she comments, "we were not much use in ... emergencies" (95). In this vacillation her narrative resembles Hearne's *Journey to the Northern Ocean*, for, although Hearne does not deliberately admit to his weaknesses, they appear in the fissures of his narrative. Bruce Greenfield notes the tensions in Hearne's narrative between Hearne's role as a 'discoverer' and representative of the Hudson's Bay Company, and his actual experiences of being led north by his Chipewyan guides: "the plot of his story, rather than one of conquest or discovery, involves dependence, apprenticeship, and adoption, voluntarily or not, of a new system of values" (40). Vyvyan does not represent an imperial institution, but she can authorize her travel narrative by oc-

asionally appealing to the image of the traveller-explorer. Like Hearne, though, Vyvyan and Gwen are dependent on their Native guides (in this case, Gwich'in) to lead them through the wilderness, and they most often maintain an attitude of curiosity rather than superiority.

In this movement between the roles of heroic explorer and curious observer both Vyvyan and Hearne exemplify T.D. MacLulich's categorization of emplotment in Canadian exploration narratives. MacLulich argues that exploration narratives can be organized into three main categories: quests, odysseys, and ordeals. Quests display "a swiftly-moving, straight-line narrative, focused on limited issues. The explorer himself appears as a determined and forceful hero, a conqueror" (74). An ordeal narrates "a story of disaster or near-disaster" (74). In an odyssey, the details of the journey are more important than the explorer's goal, and the traveller "desire[s] to obtain an overall view of the unknown regions he is traversing" (75). The odyssean mode is more adaptive, according to MacLulich, because the explorer "gives extensive descriptions of the lands and the peoples he encounters, and may describe his own gradually growing understanding of a non-European way of life" (75). These distinctions can be useful tools for reading exploration and travel literature, and for noting an historical transition from 'quest' to 'odyssey' in travel writing as travel became less hazardous and as scientific (or recreational) motives replaced economic incentives for travel. However, MacLulich tends to underestimate the ability of explorers to write narratives that combine these modes, for he claims that "explorers are ... relatively unsophisticated storytellers, who tend to emplot their stories in a simple manner" (76). Aside from his rather innocent assumption that all explorers single-handedly write their own exploration narratives,<sup>16</sup> MacLulich overlooks the complexities of voice that can characterize exploration narratives. Vyvyan's text moves between quest and odyssey, with an occasional passage emphasizing the 'ordeal' of the trip. Although she does occasionally represent herself as a conquering male adventurer, Vyvyan spends more time observing the land and people around her and constructing character portraits of the people she encounters.

It would be simplistic, however, to suggest that gestures of adaptation and observation in *Arctic Adventure* necessarily herald a "growing understanding of a non-European way of life" (MacLulich 75). Vyvyan does remain open to the northern way of life represented by the trappers, old-timers, and other non-Native northerners: near the end of the trip, noting an "unshaven Bishop," she remarks, "after a while we began to realise that none of them were really strange, it was we ourselves who were

the strangers" (146). She also engages in self-critique, calling attention to the "nasty, superior English fashion" in which she pities northerners for not noticing their wildflowers (150). And there are ways in which Vyvyan is a critic of colonialism. While many of her observations of Native people suggest the wistfulness of primitivism — she describes the "ancient fires" in a Chipewyan chief's eyes (36), a Métis man's "life of struggle with elemental forces" (31), and the "cave-man mentality" inspired in her while she watches an Inuit man perform a seal-dance (60) — Vyvyan uses these characterizations to lament paternalistically the damage done to Native cultures through contact with whites. She notes Mr. Warner's judgement about the "greed and fawning ways [of Native people] and the influence of the white man that had destroyed their ancient dignity" (26). Lazarus is, for her, the ideal man of the north, for he "knew how to live off the country" (145). Yet this ability has been destroyed in Jim Koe's generation, for he was brought up in a mission school and "knew little of wild-life" (130).

Despite these implicit criticisms of colonialism, Vyvyan does not otherwise seem to adjust in relation to the Native people she meets, for she appears to approve of the separation of Native and non-Native northerners and the legal, judicial, and religious administration of the North and Native people. That Vyvyan does adapt to the old-timers in the north and wants to meet with these men *as* men is indicated in her conversation with the prosecutor in Aklavik about her meeting Captain Cameron:

"He is a rough old sea-dog, but I have warned him that you are ladies and that he must curb his tongue accordingly."

"Ladies?" I said, in a tone of resentment, "how could you have said such a thing? Of course it will cramp his style." (73)

Many of the statements that are racist or supportive of colonialist attitudes arise out of the accounts of her conversations with northern people. This appears to be a strategy of displacement, resembling the strategy used when Vyvyan attributes to Gwen, more than to herself, qualities of the man of the north. For instance, Vyvyan is explicitly an onlooker at an Inuit murder trial in Aklavik and takes notes of the proceedings. In this distanced manner she records stereotypical representations of Inuit, including the Defence's statement that "when the Eskimo stops smiling he is dangerous" (58). She notes Sergeant Anderton's comment that Inuit evidence is useless at trials "since their minds are like the mind of a twelve-year-old child" (71). Later, in a conversation with Captain Cameron, who

draws a line across his cabin to separate white visitors from Native visitors, Vyvyan notes Cameron's comment on mixed marriages: "'Tis a degradation of manhood'" (75). In these cases, the remarks are attributed to the person with whom Vyvyan is talking.

But there are also instances of Vyvyan's directly taking a stand on issues of Native and non-Native contact and religious/legal administration of Native people or Inuit. She introduces the topic of mixed marriages as "that perennial problem of the North ... a practice deplored by the average white man," and describes one mixed couple as consisting of "a fine upstanding Englishman" and "a shapeless squaw" (46). Vyvyan greatly admires the North-West Mounted Police and calls them a "magnificent type of manhood" who "guard, among ice-floes and the Eskimos, the white man's justice and the white man's creed" (66). In a similar manner, she describes the Burkes at the English Mission "standing like beacon-lights in the lonely northland, keeping alive and shining the spirit of true Christianity" (158). Her comments on the need for the administration of Native people and Inuit can be looked at in light of the opposition in the text between 'civilization' and adventure. As I have suggested earlier, Vyvyan constructs adventurous personae for herself and Gwen in an explicit and implicit rejection of domesticity and the civilizing role of women in the context of travel. However, when she discusses relations between Native and non-Native northerners, Vyvyan becomes an advocate of 'civilization.'

This tendency can partly be explained by the women's status as privileged white women. Although when Vyvyan discusses mixed marriages with the old-timers it is scripted as a 'man-to-man' talk, she remains, as a white woman, the absent term in the mixed relationships.<sup>17</sup> The women's gender and race also become factors during their canoe trip with Lazarus Sittichinli and Jim Koe. Mr. Warner's caution hovers over the entire trip: he tells the women that Indian guides "would not take orders from anyone" and must be treated "on a friendly and equal footing," for another woman traveller had insulted her guides so that they refused to continue up the Rat River with her (24). This implied vulnerability of white women to Native men accentuates her later statement that "for the next ten days or so we should be completely *at the mercy* of the two Indians. The success of our enterprise depended on their fidelity rather than on our own efforts and powers of endurance" (89; emphasis added).<sup>18</sup> Although Vyvyan only refers to the men's willingness to continue up the Rat, her comment suggests a more threatening vulnerability. She continues with this emphasis on the women's uneasy position when she notes

that she and Gwen had moods of "perfect confidence in Lazarus and Jimmy," but also "moods when, not understanding a word they said to each other, we found ourselves in the deadly grip of suspicion. But we were completely in their power and there was nothing we could do to escape" (100). The women hide their brandy from the two men, for, "remembering that we were two lone women with a couple of hundred pounds in our pouches, completely at the mercy of our guides, we thought it wiser not to let them know that we had any brandy with us" (113). Such comments override the image of masculine endeavour that Vyvyan creates elsewhere in the narrative, for these passages rely for their effect on a recognition of the women's gender and race and an assumption of the threat posed to them by two Native men. The characterization of the two women as "cringing" (97) so as to avoid insulting their guides helps explain the position of dependency that mars the women's personae of heroic, conquering explorers. In this sense, the characterization of the women avoids the implications of imperialism that are associated with the explorer role. However, as shown above, the construction of more 'feminine' travelling identities also depends on racially-marked assumptions, and implicitly invokes the need for the 'civilizing' of a 'wild' land and people.

*Arctic Adventure* is a complex narrative and deserves increased critical attention, not only for the unique specificities and eccentricities of the text, but also for the ways in which it can illuminate the implications of gender and imperialism in travel literature. Vyvyan shows an awareness of the gendered conventions of travel and exploration literature, generic expectations that assume not only a male traveller and author, but also a constellation of 'masculine' images of adventure, challenge, and control. At times Vyvyan inhabits this persona of the conquering hero; at other times, she acknowledges the difference of her gender and the freedoms as well as restrictions that she experiences as a woman traveller. Her treatment of gender raises the question of the role played in her narrative by the arctic wilderness: considering the element of self-discovery permitted by the contact between a traveller and a sparsely populated landscape, do wilderness and arctic travels permit more freedom for women than metropolitan travel? Does *Arctic Adventure* posit the assumption that gender expectations are lessened in the north, and that anyone, whether male or female, who travels in the North is worthy of admiration? An affirmative answer would suggest that Vyvyan's text has expanded the generic boundaries for the possibilities of the persona of the wilderness traveller. Yet these issues of gender remain linked to imperialism, for the self-ac-



tualization and freedom from gender constraints that are facilitated by arctic travel are made possible by the imaginative and territorial annexation of the space of the North. Vyvyan also maintains control or authority during her travels by means of her race and class, and these privileges enable her to achieve her goal. Seeing her narrative in the “larger discursive structures” (Mills 3) of colonial penetration of the North makes clear how Vyvyan’s ability to imagine the North as an empty wilderness space on which to inscribe her unhampered self depends upon an institutional and technological network that prepares her way. The relations between gender and imperialism offer one way of reading *Arctic Adventure* that focuses on how Vyvyan’s writing participates in an already constituted system of meaning and form. This reading puts her recreational travel narrative in the context of a history of arctic exploration literature, and suggests that her narrative can represent the continued ‘use’ of Canada’s North, in this case for spiritual fulfilment, character development, and as a space on which to write the self, rather than primarily for purposes of economic gain and technological expansion.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of clarity (and to avoid awkwardness) I will consistently refer to Rogers/Vyvyan by her married name of Vyvyan, even though she conducted her trip as C.C. Rogers and published articles about this trip under the name Rogers. I arrived at this decision because the two texts of Vyvyan’s to which I will refer were both published under the name Vyvyan, and because I largely discuss *Arctic Adventure* in terms of Vyvyan’s authorial strategies rather than Rogers’s lived experience.

<sup>2</sup> I have found only two published instances of critical treatment of *Arctic Adventure*: Gwyneth Hoyle summarizes the text and provides some critical commentary in “Women of Determination,” and Judith Niemi and Barbara Wieser offer an excerpt from *Arctic Adventure* prefaced by a brief contextual description in *Rivers Running Free*. C.C. Vyvyan is noticeably absent from such valuable studies as Marni L. Stanley’s “Travelers’ tales,” and Jane Robinson’s ambitious annotated bibliography, *Wayward Women*, both of which engage with many of Vyvyan’s contemporaries and predecessors in Canadian wilderness travel. Future critical work on Vyvyan should be enabled by the forthcoming publication of I.S. MacLaren and Lisa N. LaFramboise’s critical edition of *Arctic Adventure*, entitled *The Ladies, the Gwich’in, and the Rat: Travels on the Athabasca, Mackenzie, Rat, Porcupine, and Yukon Rivers in 1926*. This text includes a Foreword by Pamela Morse; an Introduction by MacLaren and LaFramboise describing the background of the route, the women travellers, and the guides, and commenting on the text as an example of travel literature; the text, including photographs and Dorrien-Smith’s watercolours; and Vyvyan’s field notes. I am grateful to MacLaren and LaFramboise for their assistance with editing and research for this paper.

<sup>3</sup> The term “imperial,” as I use it in this essay, gestures both to the historical in-

stitution of imperialism in Canada and the infrastructure set up by imperial struggles for land and resources, and also to the legacy of imperialism that remains after its political dismantling — assumptions and values (for example, distinctions between 'civilized' and 'savage,' or assertions of ownership and control) that mark both the exploration texts that were contemporary to imperial penetration of Canada, and texts like Vyvyan's that were written much later.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Captain Thomas James's 1631-1632 voyage of discovery was commissioned by the merchants of Bristol; Samuel Hearne's journey from Prince of Wales's Fort to Coppermine (1769-1772) was an enterprise of the Hudson's Bay Company; and Sir John Franklin's two arctic expeditions (1819-1822 and 1845-?) were conducted under the auspices of the British Admiralty. On this topic, see I.S. MacLaren, "Commentary" (275).

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that Vyvyan's negotiations are mediated temporally by the 35 years that separate her journey (and her field notes) from the published book. Her construction of her travelling persona also takes shape through the six articles about her trip that Vyvyan wrote for such journals as *Canadian Geographical Journal* and *The Cornhill Magazine*. In "A Land Beyond Words," MacLaren studies the evolution of Vyvyan's narration of a particular incident from her trip, the different forms this narration takes in different publications (and publication stages), and the role of gender in Vyvyan's writing.

<sup>6</sup> The non-Native construction of the Arctic as 'empty' has a history that is at least partly attributable to the disappointment felt by early explorers searching for a North-West Passage to China — disappointment at not finding the passage, and disappointment at the perceived lack of usable resources (in European capitalist terms) in the North. This history is also marked by bifurcations in the experience of the Arctic as this 'emptiness' and as a 'place,' as home and as frontier. On this last point, see Berger.

<sup>7</sup> Considering Vyvyan's Romantic sensibility (for example, her desire to discover inarticulable truths in 'wild' places of nature), perhaps Paul Hamilton's remarks on Romantic creativity are cogent here. Hamilton suggests that "Romantic claims for self-sufficiency" invoke "images of a creative and originary self": "The self-production prized by Romantic poets and artists frequently images itself as a kind of imperialist annexation of an object of desire. Its gendering and exoticizing of such objects of Romantic quest remind us that Romanticism was situated at the start of a period of unparalleled imperialist expansion" (121).

<sup>8</sup> Although it does not engage specifically with either travel or the Arctic, R.G. Haliburton's essay "The Men of the North" was influential in creating an image of a male Canadian North. This essay proposes that the descendants of Northern European nations, comprising "a dominant race," are heirs to the new civilization of Canada by virtue of their hardiness, health, virtue, daring, and "spirit of liberty." At the end of this essay Haliburton makes a concluding salute to "the fair sex" towards whom the Man of the North is ever-chivalrous. Haliburton's essay inscribes the image of the Canadian North both racially and sexually. I thank I.S. MacLaren for bringing Haliburton's essay to my attention.

<sup>9</sup> Thanks to Lisa LaFramboise for suggesting this connection to the Penelope myth.

<sup>10</sup> Although not even travel would be able to offer complete freedom from gender expectations, as *Arctic Adventure* demonstrates. I also want to clarify that particular

women's ability to travel has been limited by economic and political situation as well as race and ethnicity. During the Victorian period the women that were travelling and writing travel books were upper- and middle-class white British women. The valorization of travel as liberating assumes a mobility that is dependent on power and choice; as bell hooks notes, "Travel is not a word that can be easily evoked to talk about the Middle Passage, the Trail of Tears, the landing of Chinese immigrants at Ellis Island, the forced relocation of Japanese-Americans, the plight of the homeless" (343).

<sup>11</sup> My reference to Vyvyan's autobiography should not imply that I take either *Roots and Stars* or *Arctic Adventure* to be straightforwardly factual accounts: in both cases, I am concerned with what Sara Mills calls the "fictionalizing possibilities" (200, n3) of these texts, and the ways in which Vyvyan constructs personae for herself in her work. At the same time, I also want to avoid the concentration on individual biography that marks some studies of women travellers (including Hoyle's and Niemi and Weiser's studies of Vyvyan) and focus on the larger discursive structures within which *Arctic Adventure* works.

<sup>12</sup> However, Vyvyan seems to give northern women more credit in the later parts of her narrative, after she and Gwen have reached Fort Yukon. Although she calls Mrs. Burke "the happy home-maker" and her friend "a pecking kind of woman from Los Angeles, in silk stockings" (151), she acknowledges the hospitality and warmth of Mrs. Burke and the quickness of mind of 'Mrs. Pecker.'

<sup>13</sup> Vyvyan's publisher, Peter Owen of London, capitalizes on the uniqueness of the women's journey, for the flyleaf of *Arctic Adventure* remarks that Vyvyan "has seldom travelled as a conventional tourist," and travelled a route "only once previously taken by a white woman."

<sup>14</sup> In a cogent instance of this phenomenon, Vyvyan describes the figure of the Métis 'Mate' who takes soundings from a canoe that precedes the S.S. Athabasca down the Athabasca River. She writes, "Sometimes a nation's story may be spell-bound in one gesture" (31). The story of nation is encapsulated in the image of "one frail canoe moving forward through uncharted waters" (31) (although the waters have certainly been travelled before). The image of the Mate calls up, for Vyvyan, "the story of those pioneers who matched their strength against the unmeasured, unrelenting spaces of the ice-bound North" (32). It seems ironic that a Métis man is used to represent the white pioneers, especially as the words "uncharted" and "unmeasured" imply that the vast northern "spaces" are symbolically empty or uninhabited until subjected to European modes of inscription including measurement or mapping.

<sup>15</sup> Hoyle's comments on Vyvyan's travel narratives are pertinent here: "Travel to remote places and writing about it were Clara Vyvyan's life. Her choice of routes emphasized a geographic totality, whether it was following a river from source to mouth, or completely exploring a region. Her northern trip, encompassing half a continent and crossing the continental divide by canoe, was typical of this large vision" ("Women" 133).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, MacLaren's work on the ambiguous authorship of Hearne's *Journey* in "Samuel Hearne's Accounts" and "Notes."

<sup>17</sup> See also Sylvia Van Kirk's work on the place of Native, Métis, and European women in early Canadian fur trade society.

<sup>18</sup> I use the generic term 'Native' in this case rather than referring to the Gwich'in nation to which the men belong in order to emphasize that the following excerpts from *Arctic Adventure* rely on stereotypes about Native people in general.

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