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NEGOTIATING IDENTITY: CULTURALLY SITUATED EPIDEICTIC  
IN THE VICTORIAN TRAVEL NARRATIVES  
OF ISABELLA BIRD

By

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

# NEGOTIATING IDENTITY: CULTURALLY SITUATED EPIDEICTIC IN THE VICTORIAN TRAVEL NARRATIVES OF ISABELLA BIRD

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Epideictic rhetoric, one of the classical modes of persuasion described by Aristotle, has faced some criticism concerning its value in the realm of rhetoric. Though attitudes have been shifting over the last several decades, there is still a tendency to undervalue epideictic, falling back on the Aristotelian system of ceremonial oratory. However, its “praise and blame” style of persuasion employs the type of rhetor / audience identification described by Kenneth Burke. Epideictic rhetoric is a major component of virtually any communication, as the speaker or writer seeks to create a bond with that audience so as to persuade them of something. This is evident in Victorian women’s travel narratives; not necessarily noted for rhetoricality, they are nonetheless powerfully rhetorical in their prose as they foster emotionally- based identifications. Through their employment of epideictic description, travel narratives are not merely showpieces, but rather catalysts for social consciousness and change. As we move from the civic discourse-based Aristotelian classification of epideictic to encompass literary works like the travel narrative, the multifaceted value of epideictic is undeniable.

Keywords: rhetoric, epideictic, Aristotle, Kenneth Burke, persuasion, emotion, identification, travel narrative, Isabella Bird

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Negotiating Identity:  
Culturally Situated Epideictic in the Victorian Travel  
Narratives of Isabella Bird

As human beings, we are inundated by words and symbols that instill in us a sense of community, and a common identity founded upon common values and beliefs. However, our unifications are illusive; in truth, every society is a patchwork of splintered groups joined by race, gender, economic status, or a number of other variances. It is these smaller units that are successful in uniting members by illustrating the otherness of anyone beyond the bounds of the group. Epideictic rhetoric, sometimes called “praise and blame” rhetoric, is characterized by just such a reliance on the powerful connection with audience to foster a sense of community values and ideals. When viewed through the lens of Kenneth Burke’s work on identification, it is evident that the epideictic experience is reliant upon the identification between orator and audience and allows for the strengthening of community ideals. Thus, a major component of any communication, and notably in epideictic, is the creation of an emotional connection with one’s audience in an attempt to augment similarities and differences.

This analysis of both the key connection between emotion and epideictic, as well as the validity of epideictic, is being presented amidst some controversy on this form of rhetoric, which is often portrayed as “mere rhetoric,” or discursive ornamentation. In his *Rhetoric*, Renato Barilli makes clear this opinion of epideictic as he compares it to forensic and deliberative appeals. “[Epideictic] is less functional than the previous [rhetorical appeals]. It is almost superfluous and will flourish primarily with the Sophists”(3). According to Michael Carter, “Epideictic has long been a source of

consternation, even embarrassment, among rhetoricians” (304). He goes on to state that epideictic has “little if any consequence outside of the realm of the discourse itself” (306). E.M. Cope asserted “Epideictic is inferior to [forensic and deliberative rhetoric] in extent, importance, and interest. It is the... demonstrative, showy, ostentatious, declamatory”(121). He views epideictic as simply a performance. I would argue, however, that epideictic rhetoric has been overlooked as the key rhetorical player that it is.

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle sets forth three modes of persuasion: deliberative, or political; forensic, or legal; and epideictic, or the ceremonial. Lawrence Rosenfield notes the common reaction to these three modes:

Contemporary scholars betray a certain unease with epideictic as a category. Many list it dutifully as one of the ancient forms of public address, but then pass on quickly to deliberative and forensic oratory, leaving the impression that epideictic is an afterthought meant to cover those orations that are unable to fit neatly into one of the two major classifications. (131)

Traditionally, epideictic has been relegated to its classical role in the arena of ceremonial oratory and demonstration. However, the “praise and blame” of epideictic oratory plays the pivotal role of inspiring the realization and reinforcement of values. In writing any text, authors seek to establish a connection with their audience that will encourage the fostering of common ideas and beliefs. An interesting example of this idea is found in the rhetoricality of personal writing, and travel writing in particular. Though it may appear that travel narratives are modes of self-expression— as Hoyt H. Hudson said,

“poetry is for the sake of expression... rhetoric is for the sake of impression”(154)— I would argue that among the most rhetorically powerful examples in literature are the travel narratives written by Victorian-era women. These narratives marked the beginning of shifting gender roles and shifting ideas about those roles. Additionally. They’re notable for the British attitude of the parent country intrigued by the antics of their “child” America. Therefore, the question I will seek to answer is this: How does a literary work noted for its groundbreaking feminist and cultural undertones, but not necessarily for its rhetoricality, have the power to foster identifications and shift identities if there is not some measure of the rhetorical in virtually all communication, and an unrecognized power in epideictic?

In order to answer this question, I will seek to establish the inherent value of the epideictic experience as illustrated in Victorian women’s travel narratives, a project that will look to an indirectly, non-traditionally rhetorical text—that is, a text not generally noted to be persuasive, but rather descriptive—in an attempt to discover how it fosters an understanding of rhetoric. With my focus on British author Isabella Bird’s narrative *An Englishwoman in America*, I will demonstrate that Bird’s employment of epideictic description illustrates gender and cultural “otherness” in rhetorically effective ways that are explained by Burke’s concept of identification. It is important to note here that I use the terms “otherness” and “the other” not in Burkean terms, but rather as a designation describing anyone beyond the bounds of the group—those from whom one is divided.

To build a foundation for this argument, I will look to Carolyn Miller’s article on genre studies in order to explain how genres do rhetorical work. This will demonstrate the potential rhetoricality of the seemingly non-rhetorical text I have chosen to analyze. I

will not focus on genre in general, however, nor is the purpose to analyze Bird's work in particular. The intent of such a specialized focus—Victorian era British women's travel narratives, obviously a very narrow segment of the broader genre of travel writing—is to avoid slipping into a general discussion of genre. Rather, I will use both genre studies and my analysis of Bird's narrative to demonstrate the rhetorical work that travel writing does regarding attitudes toward gender, thus proving the applicability of epideictic as previously discussed.

I hope show how Bird's work, and works like it, expand the canon of epideictic. The purpose of rhetorically analyzing this particular work is to demonstrate the power that this often overlooked genre had in fostering gender identifications among British citizens. A key aspect of my research will deal with the genre of travel writing itself in order to demonstrate the rhetorical function of Victorian travel writing specifically. Rather than performing an in-depth study of specific individual reader reactions, I will make connections between the ostensible goals of certain rhetorical moves, and connect them to general social outcomes and movements. My interest, then, is not in Bird's text in particular, but in the genre of female-authored travel narratives as they functioned rhetorically in nineteenth century British culture.

By reading Bird with the intent to recognize the rhetoricality of her narrative, we will find a clear connection between her groundbreaking gender bending and the resultant social movements that began. A close reading reveals the dual task Bird faced in attempting to distance herself from gender constraints while simultaneously avoiding the alienation of her audience, who adhered to those constraints. By connecting her polarized role to epideictic and identification, gender challenges of the age are demonstrated in



ways not previously discussed. This indicates that not only is the genre of travel writing a powerful rhetorical player, but more importantly that epideictic has the power to do much more than function as a “show-piece.”

In order to answer my initial research question dealing with the rhetorical potential of virtually all texts, as well as the power of epideictic, I will shift my discussion of genre to that of epideictic, with the intent of answering several smaller questions in order to reach some consensus as to its rhetorical value. How do changes in the treatment of epideictic rhetoric by modern scholars indicate evolving opinions on its function? How can the identifications created between rhetor and audience strengthen epideictic’s success? And finally, what can be gained by performing an analysis of the type of *non-traditionally rhetorical* text previously discussed, through the Burkean lens? After answering these questions, I will determine the modern applicability of the epideictic experience and its connection to Burkean identification by expounding on the function of the artifact itself. My goal is ultimately to extend recent scholarship on the rhetorical nature of indirectly rhetorical texts—in this case, non-fiction literature— thus suggesting the presence of rhetoric—and epideictic rhetoric specifically— in virtually all written communication.

#### The Rhetoricity of the Non-Rhetorical

The study of the travel narrative has traditionally dealt with the impact of travelers’ introspection and the results of trans-cultural interactions on the self and personal identity. Barbara Korte discusses this aspect of Victorian travel, citing purposes that range from self-improvement, to simple curiosity and wanderlust. “Among other things, [travel] helped to polish the traveller’s cosmopolitan manners and to shape his

aesthetic taste” (42). More importantly, however, “A person who travels subjects the structures of his personality, his mind and his emotions to a new process of experience, which may, in extreme cases, destabilize the traveller’s previous world-view” (45). Much of the literature on this subject appears in social psychology and anthropology literature, and focuses on the transaction between the self and the world. However, less has been written about how the effects of that interaction are brought about. In Burkean terms, scholars of travel narrative have neglected the effect of the identifications that travelers encounter. This is actually a neglect of the rhetorical functions of travel narratives. I propose to develop a discussion of these functions here, and will begin with the genre itself.

According to Carolyn Miller, “Genre study is valuable not because it might permit the creation of some kind of taxonomy, but because it emphasizes some social and historical aspects of rhetoric that other perspectives do not” (151). Bear in mind that this article is not meant to be a taxonomy of the genre, but rather an analysis of its function. By looking for those emphasized social and historical aspects of Isabella Bird’s writing, I will demonstrate how this type of discourse functions. That is, how it “reflects the rhetorical experience of the people who create[d] and interpret[ed] this discourse” (Miller 152). Travel writing in the Victorian era had specific traditions that were challenged in women’s contributions to the genre. For one, the perceived purpose of travel was challenged. “Men... had to give good reasons for their journeys, and the usefulness of male travel was not uncontested” (Korte 111). When women began documenting their travel experiences, there was more freedom for inclusion of the aesthetic rather than the simply useful. The type of change demonstrated in the travel narrative is to be expected

of any genre of writing. Miller states that “Genres change, evolve, and decay...and depend upon the complexity and diversity of the society” (163). This constant evolution is indicative of the connection between genre and culture: there is a *function* beyond the form of travel writing. The evolution of genre comes about in sync with the evolution of culture: as societies and cultural norms evolve, so, too, do the elements of genres.

Victorian women’s travel narratives continue to be popular with audiences, with a new edition of Bird’s book published as recently as 2007. However, despite continued popularity, when researching an antiquated genre like British Victorian women’s travel writing—a genre defined in large part by the bygone era in which it was written—the challenge comes in attempting to assign rhetorical motives to an author who cannot answer back. According to Miller, however, “If genre represents action, it must involve situation and motive, because human action, whether symbolic or otherwise, is interpretable only against a context of situation and through the attributing of motives” (152). As part of a genre that prompted social action and cultural change, there was a motive behind Bird’s words. While certain rhetorical motives must be assigned to the author, much can be assumed by simply assessing Bird’s situation: namely, the societal constraints placed upon her as a woman. The very fact that she went abroad alone, as a woman, would have been unacceptable in the Victorian era. This restrictive attitude demonstrates a challenge evident in the genre of women’s travel narratives as a whole and provides a solid starting point for understanding Bird’s rhetorical motives.

Why, then, is it important to analyze a genre that will never be replicated? In the case of the Victorian woman’s travel narrative, there is a larger issue at hand, which is the evolution of social reality discussed by Campbell and Jamieson: “The critic who

classifies a rhetorical artifact as generically akin to a class of similar artifacts has identified an undercurrent of history rather than comprehended an act isolated in time” (153). The key to genre study is that, in researching a single artifact representative of the whole, there comes a greater understanding of not only that work but of the influences and impacts on entire cultures and periods of history. The Victorian era was a major turning point in the fight for women’s rights, and a genre that fostered that pioneering female spirit is an important element in viewing the social evolution. And while the Victorian aspect of my study may be extinct, women’s writing and travel narratives continue to be powerful players in the world of literature. An understanding of the function of this specialized genre can be transferred to foster greater understanding of the rhetoricality of more modern works of this kind.

Genre studies and that rhetorical art of persuasion are intrinsically linked. Miller notes that “Studying the typical uses of rhetoric, and the forms that it takes in those uses, tells us less about the art of individual rhetors or the excellence of particular texts than it does about the character of a culture or an historical period” (158). By analyzing Isabella Bird’s narrative not as an individual work, but rather as part of the genre of travel writing as a whole, the true impact of that genre will become more readily evident. Not only will this demonstrate the importance of the seemingly non-rhetorical Victorian travel narrative in bringing about social reform, but it will also offer a broader perspective on the way epideictic rhetoric brings about change and shapes history.

#### The Advancement of Epideictic in the Realm of Rhetoric

Sometimes called praise and blame rhetoric, epideictic is perhaps better defined by scholars Waldo W. Braden and Harold Mixen, who call epideictic “a celebration of

communal values and traditional beliefs” (Sullivan 115). According to Dale Sullivan, in epideictic rhetoric the orator relies on the “amplification or heightening”(117) of one’s presentation. This incites in the audience a like response of amplified or heightened emotions toward what is being said. An epideictic situation is described by Sullivan.

A successful epideictic encounter is one in which the rhetor, as a mature member of the culture, creates an aesthetic vision of orthodox values, an example of virtue intended to create feelings of emulation, leading to imitation. As such, epideictic...invites them to participate in a celebration of the tradition, creating a sense of communion. (118)

Therefore, the epideictic situation allows the rhetor to create a sense of community and shared values within their audience. Through the implication that they, too, are part of that community, they create consubstantiality with that audience. Most importantly, epideictic plays a “legitimate role in institutional, social, political, cultural, or even personal *change*” (Sheard 768). In the case of Isabella Bird’s works, she is attempting to maintain the traditions of British culture, while at once minimizing the traditions of gender restrictions placed on women by that culture. To accomplish this, Bird slightly alters the traditional style of epideictic—that is, praise and blame—and employs praise and *critique* of America and American culture to create consubstantiality with her audience, and to establish her own identity.

In situations of “worship, protest, celebration, and education” (Sheard 765) reasoning alone is not enough to influence an audience. Logical appeals must be supplemented with an emotional connection between speaker and audience, and “must...address our common humanity”(765). Therefore, the epideictic situation allows

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Through the implication that they, too, are part of that community, they create

consubstantiality with that audience. Such a connection is vital as

The epideictic rhetor is attempting to bring people fully into the same tradition of which he or she is a representative, and because the listeners are considered at least initiate members of that tradition, the rhetor treats them as though they are already within the pale and attempts to increase the intensity of their adherence to those values held in common. (Sullivan 126)

Classically, epideictic was viewed as an art to be used in celebration and ceremony.

Epideictic was seen as a performance and audiences were seen as merely spectators.

However, epideictic is a valuable tool in varied situations.

One of its most important roles is realized in the political arena. Epideictic experience is a natural element of a democracy, as it draws upon the freedom of the individual to either embrace or dispute the messages conveyed. Epideictic is a multifaceted tool, designed to teach, to sway, to provoke thought and to strengthen community values. In his article on epideictic, Lawrence Rosenfield describes the situation in which epideictic experience is fostered, citing reliance on “openness of mind, felt reverence for reality, enthusiasm for life, [and] the ability to congeal significant experiences in memorable language” as necessary elements in this type of oratory (149). Rosenfield goes on to contextualize the place of epideictic in the democratic setting, saying that

When all these factors come together in a rhetorical act, the resultant celebration reaches toward the core of all political life. At that moment the community at large is privileged to share those insights through which man is encouraged to make his home in the world. (150)

This illustrates the idea that, although epideictic rhetoric is rarely used in an effort to sway audiences to a *new* way of thinking, it does allow audiences to realize their thoughts and beliefs. That is, it creates an awareness in audiences of their reactions to ideas and opinions, and indicates where they fit into the overall community way of thinking.

“Epideictic audiences are given a view of reality with which they already agree. The rhetorical effect of such discourse is limited and self contained, for it can elicit little more than nodding heads, applause, or, occasionally, a standing ovation” (Sheard 776). Thus, the overall goal of epideictic is to create shared interest with the audience and to allow the rhetor create a persona with which that audience may identify. The contemporary scope of this branch of rhetoric has expanded to include any prose that seeks to instill common values and beliefs, including travel narratives like Isabella Bird’s. Whereas Bird was a Victorian era author, her use of epideictic is timeless in its applicability to modern prose.

Both classically and in more modern works, emotion and epideictic have been treated as subsidiaries in the hierarchy of importance in rhetorical theory. According to Sheard, “Prejudices against epideictic discourses as mere ‘show-pieces’ meant solely to reflect upon the speaker and his oratorical talent have persisted since the time of the First Sophists” (767). This area of rhetoric has historically been relegated to the pedagogical

and liturgical, as there has been some suspicion of anything beyond the rhetoric of the courts:

So suspect was the use of poetic in the realm of public discourse that we find Isocrates defending the figurative quality of his own rhetoric... aware of the extent to which the success of public discourse depends upon both the intellectual and emotional engagement of its audience. (Sheard 767)

There have always been critics of epideictic questioning its legitimacy as a form of effective rhetorical persuasion. Michael Carter alludes to this fact in a 1992 article, stating “Epideictic has long been a source of consternation, even embarrassment, among rhetoricians...and has [been] a catchall term for all the rhetoric that did not fit into the categories of law and politics”(304). Carter’s observation of the dismissal of epideictic continues: “This lack of extrinsic value has long been recognized as a distinguishing characteristic of epideictic rhetoric, one that brings a blush to the faces of many rhetoricians”(306). E.M. Cope rejects epideictic outright, dismissing it as “demonstrative, showy, ostentatious, declamatory...[with] no practical purposes in view (121-122). What these scholars ignore, however, is the value of epideictic as a tool in creating identification with one’s audience. Although a utopian view of these rhetoricians likely casts audiences as logical beings swayed by facts, the truth is this: the emotion underlying all rhetorical situations, and present in virtually all audiences, allows for the success of the epideictic experience.

At the root of all rhetorical interaction we must consider the emotional appeal, an appeal that can often be best created upon the foundation of a connection with one’s audience. In rhetorical situations, our response to a rhetor, as the audience, is determined



as we both react to the speaker and find some personal connection to the speaker's stance. It is through a framework grounded in an understanding of audience expectations—that is, an awareness of what will most effectively sway a particular audience—that rhetorical appeals are rendered either effective or ineffective. According to James Kastely, “For an argument to work rhetorically, it must engage an audience in such a way that they are moved to act, and to do this, it must speak to their ethical and emotional investment in a particular situation”(224). Therefore, one of the most basic goals of rhetoric is to arouse in an audience emotion, whether it be to sway them to agree with a certain opinion or arouse them to take action. Rhetoric, whether it be in the form of a speech or a dialectical argument, cannot be impersonal. For this reason, a rhetorician must create some form of identification with his or her audience so as to most effectively persuade them.

Modern rhetoric has also evolved in its treatment of epideictic rhetoric. Identified by Aristotle as one of the three main types of discourse, epideictic has sometimes been mistakenly viewed as more a form of entertainment than a legitimate and powerful rhetorical tool:

We have come to regard epideictic discourse as more spiritual and private than civic and social and to see its audience's role as passive rather than active. But this image of epideictic that comes down to us through criticism of sophistic texts oversimplifies its motives and underestimates its significance. It does not, for instance, help us explain such rhetoric's legitimate role in institutional, social, political, cultural, or even personal *change*. (Sheard 768)

Over the last several decades, opinions have shifted and this area of rhetoric has ultimately been accepted as rhetorically valuable. The contemporary problem with epideictic, then, is the habit of some to fall back on the Aristotelian system of classification, created at a time in history that offered only civic discourse. Rhetoric was limited to talk. Currently, communication options are limitless, as are the audiences reached by rhetoric in its varied forms. Therefore, when the potential influence on audience by epideictic is recognized—this through the rhetorical power of the emotional appeal as an element in epideictic—it is evident that this genre of oratory should be viewed as a vital method of persuasion.

#### Identification and Epideictic

Kenneth Burke uses the term “identification” as a way in which one “may identify himself with such bodies or movements, largely through sympathetic attitudes of his own” (268). Burke postulates that in allowing for use of this identification in determining the rhetorical situation, one is able to move beyond the focus of “persuasion” evident in classical rhetoric, allowing for considerations that fall beyond that narrow and “systematic” scope (268). This vision of emotional identification illustrates its function part of the larger whole that constitutes rhetoric. Gerard Hauser expounds on the idea of identification further, stating “Identification does not refer to *identification of* such as my identification of the picture before me...It refers to *identification with* whereby we find that our ways are the same” (213). This feeling of sameness, when created by a rhetor, has the power to allow them to create an emotional bond with their audience, and thus to sway that audience more readily.

Burke further develops this idea of identification with the statement that “one’s notion of his personal identity may involve identification not just with mankind or the world in general, but by some kind of congregation that also implies some related norms of differentiation or segregation” (268). Implicit in any ‘identification with’ someone or something, is the ‘division from’ something else. In coming closer to one, you move farther from another. This fact will be discussed later in the article as a phenomenon very apparent in Bird’s work.

A connection can be created through identification with an audience’s cultural, religious, and political values, to name a few. In assessing an audience, a rhetor must delve into these innate and varying norms. Giambattista Vico stated that “in the art of oratory the relationship between speaker and listeners is of the essence. It is in tune with the opinions of the audience that we have to arrange our speech” (869). In rhetorical oratory, the relationship between the rhetor and his or her audience is of utmost importance. Rhetors must be constantly arranging and rearranging their arguments to be in tune with the ideals and expectations of the audience. In their efforts to cater to audience expectations, rhetors are truly engaged in a balancing act. They are attempting to create identification with their audience, an identification which comes through the creation of a reality based on an understanding of the values and opinions of that audience. If they are not in tune with their audience, or fail to correctly assess them, they run the risk of alienating rather than convincing their listeners. Identification can either perpetuate conflict or understanding, depending on the appropriateness of that identification. If a rhetor succeeds in compelling an audience to connect with them on a non-logical level, through the foundation of emotion upon which identification is

founded, then that audience can be more easily convinced than if the rhetor relied on logic alone.

Rather than trying to connect with one's audience at a logical level, it is essential to create that emotional identification that will make an audience more likely to alter their "deepest convictions," with the security of knowing that the rhetor identifies with their inherent values.

Our deepest convictions are not simply or primarily products of logical thought. Rather, they arise out of our having lived particular lives and are inescapably tied to those lives...they do not feel as if they were deliberately adopted...The fact that these values are not easily altered by a reasoned discourse suggests the depth at which the emotions operate and argues that they are rooted in sources anterior to reason. (Kastely 223)

Kastely's statement illustrates one of the fundamental differences between classical and modern rhetoric. Whereas classical rhetoric focused on the deliberative, conscious practice of creating a persuasive argument, modern rhetoric allows not only for deliberate persuasion, but also for non-deliberative, unconscious acts, including the use of and response to emotions in rhetorical discourse. Therefore, in order to most effectively sway an audience,

In a responsible and effective rhetoric, the argument has to be not only sound but also responsive to the reality with which the audience must deal and be reflective of its values. When rhetors compose their speeches, they need to focus on character and emotion because these influence the

determination of the judgment to be internalized by the audience. (Kastely 225)

The key to this statement is the term “reality.” According to Kastely, perceived reality is based on how an audience feels about reality (225). It is through identification that a reality is constructed through the words of the rhetor, and the reality of an idea or event can be changed according to the rhetoric used.

As human beings, we’re divided by our separate bodies and are seeking unity without the ability to experience other’s thoughts and feelings. Isolated in our individual bodies, emotional connections bring about identification with those around us who share our ideas and ideals. From this transfer of ideas through words rhetoric accomplishes its goal, which is to bring an audience to a certain way of thinking. John Dewey states that, through the sharing of signs and symbols, “There is generated what, metaphorically, may be termed a general will and social consciousness: desire and choice on the part of the individuals in behalf of activities that, by means of symbols, are communicable and shared by all concerned” (153). Although we are limited to the use of signs and symbols to communicate and persuade, an understanding of the power of identification with one’s audience will create greater unity of thought and action in both the rhetorical and national arenas.

We may ask, what is the benefit of analyzing a non-traditional text through a Burkean lens? Volumes have been written about epideictic rhetoric as it relates to various prose and poetry, ranging from Jeffrey Walker’s *Poetics in Rhetoric and Antiquity* to David Elder’s “Chris Rock: Epideictic Rhetor.” This area of rhetoric has been applied to a myriad of texts. Little, however, has been written of the connection between

epideictic's goal of cementing public values and norms, and the accomplishment of this goal through travel writing's depiction of otherness. Thus it becomes expedient that some research be conducted into how the narratives of a Victorian woman, specifically Isabella Bird, have informed the shared opinions of a nation.

Additionally, it is important to recognize the lasting attitudes that have evolved from those early observations of cultural otherness. By recognizing the impact of Bird's travel narratives, it is possible to better understand the rhetoric underlying her writing, both the function of her words as persuasion, and resultant action of her readers, which indicates both her persuasive success and the formation of cultural norms. The travel narrative presents readers with the unique opportunity of vicariously experiencing other cultures. Audiences see "otherness" through the eyes of the author; therefore, their resultant opinions are a response to the identifications created through words rather than their own experiences. Travel writers hold an impressive amount of power, able to shape nations based solely on their own, individual perceptions.

#### Introduction to Isabella Bird and Nineteenth-Century Women's Travel

Isabella Bird, born in 1831 in Boroughbridge, Yorkshire, was of a delicate constitution from an early age, and was the type of socially acceptable invalid eschewed by feminist pioneers like Mary Wollstonecraft. Although Bird's adventures began as a means of regaining her health, she ultimately undertook the dual roles of adventurer and invalid. As she documented her life of world travel in that dichotomous position, Bird's experiences illustrated vividly the stifling of feminine potential by the expectations of Victorian society:

The invalid at Home and the Sampson Abroad do not form a very usual combination, yet in the case of the famous traveler these two ran tandem for many years... [W]hen she took the stage as pioneer and traveler, she laughed at fatigue, she was indifferent to the terrors of danger... But, stepping from the boards into the wings of life, she immediately became the invalid, the timorous, delicate, gentle-voiced woman... (Anderson 81)

It is clear that when traveling, Bird was able to free herself from the societal expectations placed on women at the time. Upon returning to England, however, despite her savvy and experience, she was again relegated—whether consciously or not—to her appropriate role. Even Bird’s affected “invalidism,” however, demonstrates another example of her attempt to extricate herself from the constraints of her gendered place in society.

The literary world in Victorian England, which focused heavily on the morally and socially appropriate, would likely have been a hostile environment for a woman like Isabella Bird to function as a writer. She was by no means the first female traveler, preceded by women “who traveled on the Continent in the late eighteenth century... who wrote about their experiences” (Korte 113). Ann Radcliffe, Mary Wollstonecraft, Hester Thrale Piozzi—all were pioneers in female travelogues. However, each of these women stayed close to home. With the exception of a few, like explorer and scientist Mary Kingsley, Isabella Bird was among the earliest to leave the bounds of the Continent. Women in this age were not encouraged to gain an intellectual education, let alone the time of world-knowledge that Bird gained in her travels. Why, then, were Bird’s travels a valuable contribution to British society? Two words: Imperial expansion. With literary heroines swooning in parlors and making witty conversation, Bird’s placement of herself

as the heroine of her own adventures went against the feminine role so carefully prescribed. Good girls in Victorian England didn't wander—unless they were orphans. And yet Bird, the middle-class daughter of a Church of England priest, did just that: she wandered from America to Asia to India, excursions she documented in several books published anonymously.

In particular, Bird's *The Englishwoman in America* provides an interesting rhetorical lens through which to view both cultural and gendered otherness. According to Monica Anderson, the role that Victorian women travelers played in the history of British Imperialism is often muted: "In numerous accounts of nineteenth-century travel, women are frequently dismissed as merely complicit in the spread of imperialism or praiseworthy for negotiating a place for themselves within colonial society" (14). When recognized for their rhetorical significance, however, it is evident that the works of travel writers like Bird were much more influential than they were credited for.

Bird's writings are diametrically charged; that is, she seeks to create consubstantiality with her British audience, but also attempts to distance herself from the gender biases of that audience which were inherent during the Victorian era. Thus, her writings seek to augment the feeling of the cultural superiority and the idea of the foreign "other" in order to foster identification with her own country, while also striving to diminish her own sense of otherness in a male-dominant society. This duality of purpose places Bird between two worlds: "On the one hand, the native wilderness for her, as for other women travelers, is seen as a place of both personal and sexual freedoms. On the other hand, it is also a space complicit with imperial programs, processes and positions" (Anderson 102).



From Bird's own words in the 'Prefatory Note' of her book *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* it is clear that her travel narratives were well-received by her fellow countrymen. "[The letters] appeared last year in the *Leisure Hour* at the request of its editor, and were so favourably received that I venture to present them to the public in a separate form" (Korte 115). But what impact did her writings truly have on the ideas and attitudes of her counterparts? To answer that question, it is important to first understand *why* people were so interested in experiencing vicariously the things she shared in her books. Lila Marz Harper asserts that the style of writing evident in works like Bird's—that is, a simple prose—allows for more flexibility in the author's writing style, increasing the accessibility of the work to a broader spectrum of the population. "By describing the world beyond Britain, and emphasizing their ability to observe, women travel writers were able to write from a position of authority, a narrative stance which was very difficult to obtain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (16). Bird's audience, then, had the opportunity to experience "otherness" from the security of home, and to form opinions on identity based on the observations of another. The first-hand experience of women travelers, specifically, maintained authority among both a male and female audience because they as traveler had that first-hand authority.

#### British Consubstantiality

Although it may be common to create identification with one's audience by belittling or dismissing the "other," Bird's method of creating consubstantiality with her British audience is not found in any overtly critical observations about American culture. Rather, she alludes almost immediately to the inherent prejudices held by herself and her fellow countrymen. "We know that they are famous for smoking, spitting, 'gouging,' and

bowie-knives—for monster hotels, steamboat explosions, railway collisions, and repudiated debts... These prejudices gradually melted away” (7). This passage illustrates the true epideictic power of Bird’s narrative, as she shifts the placement of her praise and critique. She notes the preconceptions of her English counterparts, praising Americans for making her aware of her prejudices. The unification with her audience, then, comes about not through critique of the “other,” but through Bird’s constant differentiation between the British and Americans, both their habits and mentality. These observations show her need to specify points of “otherness” rather than criticizing them: “An Englishman bears with patience any ridicule which foreigners cast upon him...but the Americans are nationally sensitive, and cannot endure that good-humoured raillery which jests at their weaknesses and foibles” (7).

Bird’s word choice in her narrative illustrates one of her most powerful tools in identifying with her audience. She regularly uses descriptive titles to differentiate between Americans and British. Terms like “foreigner” and the derogatory “Yankee,” often used derisively or in jest, demonstrate her attempt to present Americans as the “other.” In the same manner, she uses Americans’ own view of themselves, as she perceives them, to further draw a dividing line between the two countries. “I already began to appreciate the hearty enthusiasm with which Americans always speak of their country, designated as it is by us by the names ‘National vanity,’ and ‘Boastfulness’” (12). Two descriptive terms that were in direct opposition to what was considered appropriate in Britain, Bird’s use of “vain” and “boastful” as terms accepted nationally by the British appears almost as an inside joke shared with her readers. She aligns herself with her own country in their derision of the American attitude. However, lest she appear

overly critical in her attempt to identify with her audience, she notes at several points Americans' recognition of their inferiority to the British, from manners to style to education. Her assertion that "They say themselves that they are not so highly educated as the ladies of England" (187) demonstrates her ability to glean praise for the British without using overt criticism to gain it.

#### Beyond the Bounds of Gender

Isabella Bird faced the dual challenge of being both a woman, and a woman alone, in her travels. While her position as the lone British traveler would have set her apart, she was also generally the lone female traveler as well. This provides her observations a unique authority based on the fact that there were no men to dispute her insights. However, it also brought up the sensitive issue of what was appropriate for women in that era. "Realistically, for women traveling alone, travel has always been and still is difficult, and to present oneself as essentially being alone invites questions about the traveler's morals" (Harper 17). Bird essentially walked a tightrope with her writing, attempting to make a place for herself in a world that valued masculinity above all, while avoiding the social minefield of what was considered inappropriate for a lady. How, then, did Bird avoid offending her audience with the escapades that fill her books? "We sang, and rowed, and fished, and laughed, and made others laugh, and were perfectly happy, never knowing and scarcely caring where we should obtain shelter for the night" (32). In order to avoid the numerous pitfalls open before a woman traveler, Bird constructed a unique narrative style in which she utilizes a certain amount of emphasis in describing the roughness of her location, augmenting the distance from England and English manners. She notes the strange manners, the "twang" of the language, and the undeveloped (though

developing) cities and towns throughout her narrative. By employing this type of description, she makes clear the drastic differences between America and England, and the impossibility of maintaining propriety at all times. This effectively provides her with a buffer from the expected social norms and protects her reputation as a lady.

In certain social situations in her book, Bird capitalizes on her interactions with British expatriates living in America as she notes their rough manners and emphasizes her own proper sensibilities. She describes one situation:

I had the misfortune of having for my companion in my state-room an Englishwoman who had resided for some years at New York, and who combined in herself the disagreeable qualities of both nations. She was in a frequent state of intoxication, and kept gin, brandy, and beer in her berth. Whether sober or not, she was equally voluble; and as her language was not only inelegant, but replete with coarseness and profanity, the annoyance was almost insupportable. (Bird 11)

Her observations in this passage demonstrate Bird's attempt at differentiating herself from the crude manners and social inappropriateness that may have been expected of a woman traveling alone. By juxtaposing herself next to another Englishwoman, she emphasizes the fact that she still holds to the conventions her audience would approve of.

Although Bird must maintain social conventions, she also faced the reality of the fact that she was often alone with groups of men, traveling over rough terrain, and therefore was required to prove herself stronger than the type of woman described in the manners handbooks. Sarah Ellis states: "No power of intellect, or display of learning, can compensate to men, for the want of nicety or neatness in the women with whom they

associate in domestic life” (129). Bird, however, had to be much more than proper to survive her travels, and her strength is demonstrated in her exaggerated exclusion of certain elements of her trip. Of her six-week bout of cholera, she says only “I remained six weeks in this island, being detained by the cholera, which was ravaging Canada and the States” (28). There is no description of trial or discomfort; rather, she moves on with her narrative immediately. In one instance, Bird demonstrates the type of gender nullification that occurs at several points throughout her journey.

Besides the gentleman under whose escort I was to travel, there were twelve island gentlemen and two ladies, all supposed to be bound, like myself, for Boston. All separate individualities were, however, lost amid the confusion of bear-skin and waterproof coats and the impenetrable darkness which brooded both on wharf and steamer. (36)

As in this case separate *individualities* were lost, so too were separate genders. In bear-skin and darkness, all are the same. On the same token, at several points in her book, Bird is so closely identified with the men she travels with that it would be impossible to determine her gender from her description. She relates the following experience:

One day, with a party of youthful friends, I crossed the Hillsboro’ Creek, to visit the Indians. We had a large heavy boat, with cumbrous oars, very ill balanced, and a most inefficient crew, two of them being boys either very idle or very ignorant, and, as they kept tumbling backwards over the thwarts, one gentleman and I were left to do all the work. (30)

Bird’s obvious experience in what may be considered “man’s work” was a far cry from the domestic duties of her homeland. However, it was vital that she participate in such a

way in order to assure a measure of identification with her fellow travelers. It was this identification that allowed Bird the opportunity to experience America in such a way that would appeal to a universal audience.

### Redefining Roles

The true test of Isabella Bird's influence on Victorian society and the efficacy of her epideictic descriptions can be found in the change that her work inspired. Yes, it is impossible to make a direct correlation between Bird's book specifically and the social movements that followed closely behind. However, it is important to keep in mind that at the time of her publication "it is estimated that travel books came close second in popularity to the novel [and] many of the best sellers were travel books on North America" (Dodd 154). As part of the best selling genre of the female-authored travel narrative, Bird's work would undoubtedly influenced readers. More importantly, however, the genre itself had an impact on the identifications readers felt, both as related to culture and to gender. Cultural influence, while obviously a factor, is difficult to determine; however, the influence on gender roles can be easily ascertained.

Nowhere in her book does Isabella Bird take on the issue of gender roles or women's rights. Her writing, while not directly activist in nature, served as an indirect magnification of the disparity in Victorian women's roles. According to Monica Anderson

Late nineteenth-century women's travel literature necessarily adhered to a particular world-view in presenting women's viewpoint... In mapping out a particular performance space for themselves, late nineteenth-century women's travel and travel literature allows us to see something of the

changes in the way society thought about and treated women, and the way women thought about themselves. (234)

Bird's work, and those like it, served the purpose of stirring public consciousness rather than presenting an overt call to action. Whether directly or indirectly related, following the publication of *The Englishwoman in America* in 1856, advancements continued in the rights of women in England. From the right to divorce, to the ability to keep their earned income, milestones in the fight for equality continued until the ultimate battle was won in 1918 when women gained the right to vote. It would be foolhardy to assume that women's travel narratives were the catalyst in this change. However, equally cavalier would be the assumption that these works didn't play at least a marked role in the fight for equality, adding their voice to millions that combined over decades to ultimately bring about equality.

#### Conclusion

This article has brought together three seemingly unrelated theoretical frameworks—genre, epideictic rhetoric, and Burkean identification—with the intent of discovering the common thread. While I have by no means provided an in-depth analysis of each, I hope to have shown that when each is understood and employed in any work, the ability to influence an audience is increased. Isabella Bird's diametrically charged observations in *The Englishwoman in America* demonstrate the power of Burkean identification, as she successfully maneuvers between two opposing worlds: the world of the proper Englishwoman, and that of female adventurer. The rhetorical structure of her discourse as both praise and critique of America through her descriptions illustrates the rhetorical strength of the genre of women's travel writing. Amidst the seeming trivialities

of description and pretty writing, Bird's powerful observations had the strength to shape a nation's identity, and to inspire a generation of women to move beyond the bounds of their gender. This power is mirrored in that of epideictic rhetoric, which overcomes the dismissal of "discursive ornamentation" in its ability to inspire opinions and incite change.

Throughout this discussion of epideictic and its merits in the realm of rhetoric, I have attempted to not only inform on the nature of epideictic, but more importantly to discount the traditionally narrow view of this type of discourse. Whereas "the conventionally Aristotelian conception of epideictic as a discourse of 'praise and blame' casts it as closed rather than open, weak rather than strong discourse that it is, for the most part a dogmatic rhetoric of display serving primarily to allow speaker and audience to feel good about themselves" (Sheard 787), I have argued that epideictic discourse invites a unification and reinforcement of democratic values and ideals. If my initial hypothesis is true—that virtually all texts have the potential to be powerfully rhetorical through the merits of epideictic and Burkean identification—what, then, are the implications?

First, it is evident that common motivations have the power to bring about change. Bird's work is only one of many such narratives of the era, dedicated to demonstrating women's power beyond the parlor. As Burke states in *A Grammar of Motives*,

Each man's motivation is unique, since his situation is unique, which is particularly obvious when you recall that his situation also reflects the unique sequence of his past. However, for all this uniqueness of the



individual, there are motives and relationships generic to all mankind—  
and these are intrinsic to human agents as a class. (103-4)

These motives are evident in any genre: words and actions can be attributed in some ways to the form in which they are written, but always in the context of the overall rhetorical situation.

The most important conclusion that can be drawn from my research, however, is that epideictic rhetoric deserves far more respect than it has garnered over the years. There is an intrinsic link between epideictic and the emotional identifications it encourages. This link is the rhetorical key in fostering community ideals and bringing about change. Equally important is the fact that authors of all works, no matter the genre in which they're writing, have the often-unrealized power to shape actions and attitudes, nations and cultures. Through their use of epideictic and the identification that is irrevocably tied to it, these authors can take the societally splintered pieces of our selves and effectively create identities.

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