Des idées et des femmes
Collection dirigée par Guyonne Leduc

Des idées et des femmes, collection pluridisciplinaire dépourvue de tout esprit partisan, gynophile ou gynophobe, a pour objet de présenter des études situées à la croisée de la littérature, de l'histoire des idées et des mentalités, aux époques moderne et contemporaine.
Les thématiques y auront trait aux femmes en général ou à des figures précises de femmes, avec prise en compte de leur globalité (de leur sensibilité comme de leur intellect).
Le monde occidental constituera, dans un premier temps, le champ géographique concerné, ce qui n'exclut pas une ouverture ultérieure potentielle aux mondes oriental et extrême-oriental.

Dernières parutions

Robert ELBAZ et Françoise SAQUER-SABIN (dir.), *Les espaces intimes féminins dans la littérature maghrébine d'expression française*, 2014.
Florence BINARD et Guyonne LEDUC (dir.), *Genre(s) et transparence*, 2014.
Guyonne LEDUC (dir.), *Comment faire des études-genres avec de la littérature*, 2014.
Stéphanie GOURDON, *L'écriture expérimentale de Mary Wollstonecraft : normes et formes*, 2014.
Andrée LEROUSSEAU (dir.), *Des femmes traductrices entre altérité et affirmation de soi*, 2013.
Christian AUER, *Luttes et résistances des femmes écossaises 1838-1915*, 2013.
Guyonne LEDUC et Michèle VIGNAUX (dir.), *Avant l'Europe, l'espace européen. Le rôle des femmes*, 2013.
Evelyne ENDERLEIN et Lidiya MIHOVA (dir.), *Ecrire ailleurs au féminin dans le monde slave au XX^e siècle*, 2013.
Guyonne LEDUC (dir.), *Les rôles transfrontaliers joués par les femmes dans la construction de l'Europe*, 2012.
Marie-Laure MASSEI-CHAMAYOU, *La représentation de l'argent dans les romans de Jane Austen*, 2012.
Sous la direction de Françoise BARRET-DUCROCQ, Florence BINARD, Guyonne LEDUC, *Comment l'égalité vient aux femmes, Politique, droits et syndicalisme en Grande-Bretagne, aux États-Unis et en France*, 2012.
Eglantine JAMET-MOREAU, *Le curé est une femme. L'ordination des femmes à la prêtrise dans l'Eglise d'Angleterre*, 2012.
Claire BAZIN et Guyonne LEDUC (dir.), *Littérature anglo-saxonne au féminin. (Re)naissance(s) et horizons. XVIII^e-XX^e siècles*, 2012.
Fabienne MOINE, *Poésie et identité féminines en Angleterre : le genre en jeu (1830-1900)*, 2010.
Guyonne LEDUC, *Réécritures anglaises au XVIIIe siècle de l'*Egalité des deux sexes *de François Poulain de la Barre. Du politique au polémique*, 2010.
Jean-Paul BARRIERE et Philippe GUIGNET (dir.), *Les femmes au travail dans les villes en France et en Belgique du XVIIIe au XXe siècle*, 2009.
Guyonne LEDUC (dir.), *Réalité et représentations des amazones*, 2008.

Sous la direction
d'Isabelle Baudino

LES VOYAGEUSES BRITANNIQUES AU XVIII^e SIÈCLE

L'ÉTAPE LYONNAISE DANS L'ITINÉRAIRE DU GRAND TOUR

L'Harmattan

invalids abroad. While it deprives the fictional diarist of her life, her invalidism and subsequent death do enable the publication of her travel account : the death of the author's body results in the birth of her published text. For, as the narrator repeatedly claims, she would have kept her journal private had she lived. Although travel for an invalid may be a sad pleasure at times, the experience can result in published travel texts that are eagerly received and thrive for centuries to come.

"REMEMBERING THE MULES : EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH WOMEN TRAVELLERS IN THE ALPS"

Patrick VINCENT

Université de Neuchâtel

> I met a family of children and old women
> half-way up the Wengen Alp (by the Jungfrau)
> upon mules, some of them too old and others
> too young to be the least aware of what they saw.
> Lord Byron to Thomas Moore, 27 March 1817[1]

> But what is this desire [to be dissolved and to enjoy
> the spirit free of attachments] ? For my part I cannot
> understand so much as the meaning of the words, for
> every pleasure I know comes from an intimate union
> between my body and my very human mind, which fast
> receives, confirms, revives, and can summon up again
> what my body has experienced.
> Hilaire Belloc, *The Path to Rome* (1902)[2]

A favorite subject of nineteenth-century painters and composers, Lord Byron's dramatic *mise-en-scène* of Manfred on the Jungfrau has become iconic of the Romantic sublime and of modern man, yearning to be free of nature, of history, and of his own body. The mountain's fortuitous name highlights the gendered dynamics of this metaphysical struggle between subject and object, in which female-troped nature aids the male subject to transcend his senses. Had Byron's contemporaries known all the details of the ascent that inspired this scene ; however, one may wonder if it would have had the same hold on the cultural imagination. In his own journal of the tour, the more practical-minded John Cam Hobhouse tells us that their sublime contemplation at the summit of the Lauberhorn "was infringed upon

[1] George Gordon Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols. (London : John Murray, Harvard UP, 1976) 6 : 188.

[2] Hillaire Belloc, *The Path to Rome* (New York : Longman, Green, 1902) 118.

by the apparition of two or 3 females on horseback"[3]. The image of Lord Byron sharing a summit with "females on horseback" is both incongruous and refreshing. It challenges the Romantic *cliché* of the solitary walker while raising the question of how these three women themselves perceived the Alps. Is it true, as Byron claims in his letter to Moore quoted above, that they were unable "to be least aware of what they saw" ?

The fact of landscape appreciation being culturally gendered and the metaphysical sublime barred to women at the beginning of the nineteenth century is nothing new. Luckily, the caricatural distinction between men climbing peaks in search of an "agreeable kind of horror" and women opting for domestic safety and sociability, does not exhaust the subject. These reductive categorizations do not do justice to the increasing number of female-authored texts on travel in the Alps after 1750, to the range of their responses to mountains, or to the sublime as a potentially liberating experience for women as it was for men. Elizabeth Bohls has convincingly shown eighteenth-century women's ambivalent relation to the masculine sphere of landscape aesthetics. Travel writing was one means for them to participate, and the members of the Bluestocking circle in particular were enthusiastic about the sublime, leading Bohls to ask whether their interest arose in response to the latter category's ideology of individualism[4]. Aesthetics, as we know, emerged alongside the rise of the modern subject as a means to articulate affective experiences. Thomas Weiskel, in what remains one of the most influential studies on the Romantic sublime, links its metaphysics to the Freudian Oedipal complex[5]. By engaging with the sublime, and notably asking the question "what moves me ?"[6], women travellers could position themselves in regard to modernity's individualistic, and clearly masculinized subjectivity.

Some of them, as I will show below, adhered to this new subjectivity more or less sincerely, whereas others developed what Bohls has labelled "strategies of obliqueness"[7] as a means of critique or to propose alternative identities more open to sociability and to intersubjectivity. This is what feminist critics in the 1990s liked to call the "female sublime", a term also used more recently by Silvia Bordoni in the context of early-nineteenth-

[3] John Cam Hobhouse, "Alpine Journal", in John Clubbe and Ernest Giddey, eds, *Byron et la Suisse : Deux études* (Geneva : Droz, 1982) 50.

[4] See Elizabeth Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818* (Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 1995) 2, 15.

[5] See Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime : Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins UP, 1976).

[6] Andrew Ashfield, and Peter de Bolla, eds, *The Sublime : A Reader in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 1996) 1-2. See also *Cultures of the Sublime : Selected Readings, 1750-1830*, ed. Cian Duffy and Peter Howell (Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[7] Bohls 5.

century women travellers in the Alps[8]. In this essay, I discuss nine responses to mountains, selected from a corpus of fourteen female-authored texts written between 1718 and 1796 [see table 1]. My study ends at the dawn of the nineteenth century, after which Napoleon's ambitious road projects sensibly eased travel across the Alps, tourism opened up to the middle classes with their stricter division of spheres, and the rhetoric of the sublime fast became debased from sheer overuse[9]. I focus on British travellers, who were among the first to describe their crossing of the Alps and whose empiricist philosophical tradition gave them a headstart in theorizing aesthetics applicable to mountains. But we should not forget, as Claude Reichler has shown, that the "discovery of the Alps" was a pan-European cultural phenomenon[10]. Several of these women in fact draw their information from non-English sources, notably from the travel guides of Abbé Richard and Lalande, as well as from the novels of Marmontel and Rousseau. All of them belong to what Amanda Vickery has called the "genteel" classes[11]. Their itineraries follow those recommended in the guidebooks and are representative of the most frequent forms of Alpine travel before 1800. As I shall suggest, writing for publication or for private purposes does not seem to have modified the way these women apprehended the landscape. The scarcity of women's travelogues published before 1800 gives representative weight to my sample of texts, but its representativity should be taken with a degree of skepticism if we consider the far greater number of women who travelled to Italy *via* the Alps whose history went unrecorded[12]. As an example, one may cite Nancy Parsons, better known as

[8] See Silvia Bordoni, "Experiencing the Alps : Women and the language of the Sublime", *La Questione Romantica* 15-16 (Autumn 2003-Spring 2004) : 69-80. See also Patricia Yaeger, "Towards a Female Sublime", in *Gender and Theory : Dialogues on Feminist Criticism*, ed. Linda Kauffman (Oxford : Blackwell, 1989) 191-212.

[9] See Ann Colley, *Victorians in the Mountains : Sinking the Sublime* (Farnham : Ashgate, 2010) 5, 100-41. Chapter three focuses on Victorian women in the Alps. For a general history of women's climbing, see also Rebecca Brown and Arlene Blum, *Women on High : Pioneers of Mountaineering* (Boston : Appalachian Mountain Club Books, 2002) ; on women climbers in the Alps, see Cécile Ottogalli-Mazzacavallo, *Les Femmes alpinistes au Club alpin français (1874-1919) : Un Genre de compromis* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2004).

[10] See Claude Reichler, *La Découverte des Alpes et la Question du paysage* (Geneva : Georg, 2003) 14.

[11] Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter : Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven : Yale UP, 1998) 2.

[12] See Jeremy Black, *The British Abroad : The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (Stroud : Sutton, 1992) 32. Étienne Bourdon's new history of early modern travel in the Alps states that its sample of travellers is "above all a masculine world, of adult men". *Le Voyage et la Découverte des Alpes : Histoire de la construction d'un savoir (1492-1793)* (Paris : PUPS, 2011) 23. John Ingamells, on the other hand, names of dozens of women who followed fathers, husbands and lovers onto the Continent yet whose stories went unrecord. See *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800*, ed. John Ingamells (New Haven : Yale UP, 1997).

Lady Maynard, one of the century's most notorious mistresses who was twenty years older than her husband : according to the Earl of Morley, she "had made herself perfectly mistress of all the passes of the Alps"[13], yet we have no journal or letters written in her own hand.

In an article on French noblemen and scientists in the Alps in the same period, Gilles Bertrand writes that we have much to learn on the "laboratory of mountain writing" by examining the "signs [traces] that at first hand appear more discrete and negligeable"[14]. One of these signs, I will argue, is the much-maligned mule, often present in early illustrations of travellers in the Alps, yet occluded in most male-authored texts and in cultural histories. Informed by the turn to the body in theory and more directly by autopathography, or the reading of identity through embodied experience[15], my essay looks at ways in which these women are made aware of their own embodied condition during their crossing of the Alps, and how this awareness, rather than being perceived as a burden, can sometimes lead to a sense of enthusiastic excitement and of unity with the world that may be also qualified as sublime. Women writers' greater attention to the material conditions of travel gives us insight into the sublime as an embodied phenomenon, as the result of "an intimate union between my body and my very human mind", as Hilaire Belloc would phrase it during his own mountain crossing a hundred years later[16]. By no means exclusive to women, these embodied instances of the sublime can be triggered by intersubjective feelings and from stimuli other than sight. They correspond more closely to Burke's physiological explanations of the sublime than to Kant's disembodied aesthetics, with its fixation on what is ungraspable through the senses. Furthermore, they converge suggestively with recent findings in experimental psychology and in cognitive philosophy[17].

[13] John Parker, 1st Earl of Morley, "Memoirs of the Earl of Morley", British Library Add. Ms. 48244, ff. 226-52.

[14] Gilles Bertrand, "Construire un discours sur la montagne : Nobles et savants vers les Alpes occidentales au tournant des Lumières (v. 1760-v. 1820)", *Compar(a)ison* (2003) : 93-130. My translation.

[15] See, for example, Sonja Boon's recent corporeal biography of Germaine Necker, *The Life of Madame Necker : Sin. Redemption and the Parisian Salon* (London : Pickering and Chatto, 2011).

[16] Belloc 118.

[17] For a recent psychological study of sublime-like states, see Michelle Shiota and Dacher Keltner, "The nature of awe : Elicitors, appraisals and effects on self-concept", *Cognition and Emotion* 21.5 (2007) : 944-63. The essay defines awe as a feeling of belonging to something greater than oneself, but insists romantically on limiting awe to a solitary experience and to visual phenomena. Closer to these women's experiences is cognitivist philosopher Mark Johnson's aesthetic theory, in *The Meaning of the Body : Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago : U of Chicago P, 2007), which acknowledges the importance of the body and its movements in the operation of imagination and understanding. Johnson proposes a more "modest" liberty than that of the transcendental subject, which he labels "embodied

Four Women Travellers and the Natural Sublime

Thomas Martyn's list of five available routes from Lyon to Italy is perfectly straightforward, as is the title of his book, *The Gentleman's Guide in his Tour through Italy*, which excludes women outright[18]. According to Jeremy Black, the choice faced by travellers in Lyon between the Alps and the Mediterranean was nothing simple, the conditions either way being awful[19]. Apart from the Col de Tende, where a road was built in 1782, carriage travel across the Alps' passes was impossible before the nineteenth century. The most popular route was from Lyon to Turin across the Mont Cenis, which, according to Martyn's guide, took fifty-six hours, including an hour and half to ascend the pass, and two hours for the steep descent, the famed "*ramasse*" to Novalese. Even though stoicism and courage ranked high in the list of eighteenth-century feminine virtues[20], the route must have appeared formidable to women conditioned to live a sedentary, domestic existence. Yet women travellers anticipated their crossing of the Alps with as much eagerness as their male counterparts. They travelled in large groups, undermining the Romantic topos of mountain travel as a solitary endeavour, and were usually carried by chaise or on a mule, allowing them to experience the *locus horribilis* in relative safety, the main prerequisite of the sublime according to Burke. Martyn writes that from six to ten men accompanied each traveller ; they were paid fifty sols a day, the same cost as renting a mule[21]. Despite the marked improvements to the infrastructure and the sharp increase in travellers, the reinforcement of domestic ideology paradoxically seems to have rendered travel in the Alps more formidable to women in the early nineteenth century. George Robert Chinnery, on tour with the ex-Foreign Minister George Canning, reports as late as 1819 that his party had to forego an excursion to Chamonix because one of the ladies feared the effort of travelling several hours on a mule without the possibility of riding in a post-chaise[22].

Disregarding both physical and cultural obstacles, eighteenth-century women described the conditions of travel in the Alps in a particularly picturesque manner. They responded to the growing demand for original observations and reflexions as a means of authentifying their narratives and of distinguishing them from an ever-increasing number of similar

spirituality". It rejects the vertical movement of the spirit and recognizes human finitude as part of a vaster human and non-human process.

[18] Thomas Martyn, *The Gentleman's Guide in his Tour through Italy* (London, 1787) 1-2.

[19] Black 32.

[20] Vickery 8.

[21] Martyn 9.

[22] George Chinnery, "The Chinnery Journals", British Library, Add. Mss. 64093-64095, f. 72.

travelogues[23]. In addition to aesthetic and scientific observations on the mountains themselves, these fourteen writers also carefully comment on their meals, vividly criticize the conditions encountered in the inns, and provide informed anecdotes on the manners of the locals, in particular of women. The apparent randomness of their remarks often belies the fact that they are informed by the same Whiggish ideology invigorated by the age's passion for Rousseau. While in Swiss Alps, these writers almost invariably praise what they have been prepared to see as a form of political sublime : the mountains' heroic nature, the locals' virtuous manners, and the country's free institutions perfectly mirror one another, forming what Claude Reichler has called an "absolute landscape"[24]. When they pass from Switzerland to France or Savoy, however, the conventional analogy between liberty and the Alps falls through, forcing them to search for the sublime solely in nature.

The first British woman to leave a written account of her experience of the natural sublime in the Alps is the *grande dame* of women travellers, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Better known for having revealed to the world the interior of a harem, Montagu crossed the Mont Cenis from the Italian side in September 1718, or twenty-one years before Gray and Walpole's epic six-day winter traverse, when the latter's King Charles spaniel was devoured by a wolf, and twenty-three years before Windham and Pococke's outlandish expedition to the Mer de Glace that usually marks the beginning of British mountaineering. Montagu describes how their post-chaises were dismantled and loaded onto mules, while the travellers were themselves placed in "little seats of twisted osier, fixed upon poles, upon men's shoulders". Her account of the landscape demonstrates that she can perfectly deploy the new discourse of the sublime made popular by John Dennis, Addison and Shaftesbury, but that she chooses not to be moved by such a scene :

> The prodigious prospect of mountains covered with eternal snow, of clouds hanging far below our feet, and of vast cascades tumbling down the rocks with a confused roaring, would have been entertaining to me, if I had suffer'd less from the extreme cold that reigns here[25].

The passage not only displays her rank's requisite sang-froid (she claims to be more worried of "falling sick" than of "breaking her neck"), but also the fact that it is impossible to separate the experience of the mind from the body, challenging the concept of aesthetic disinterestedness *avant la lettre*.

Another traveller who refuses to be seduced by discourse of the sublime is Anna Miller, who crossed the Mont Cenis with her husband in 1770.

[23] Charles Batten, *Pleasurable Instruction : Form and Convention in Eighteenth-Century Travel Literature* (Berkeley : U of California P, 1978) 62-70.

[24] Reichler 120.

[25] Montagu 3 : 97-98.

While the latter prefers walking than to be transported by "creatures of his own species", Lady Miller relishes being carried, giving her the leisure to ask porters questions and to compare what she sees with what she reads in the guidebooks, notably in Lalande[26]. This enables her in turn to provide an erudite natural history of the region. Unlike many of her male counterparts, she shows sympathy and even respect toward the locals she encounters, including the Père Nicolas, the hospice chaplain. Her curiosity is such that the steep downward route, which makes her feel like a "witch upon a broomstick"[27], leaves her unperturbed : "I never once felt myself sufficiently frightened to lay hold of the arms of my chair, my attention was so engaged with the singularity and the variety of the prospect below"[28]. Her attention is drawn to a waterfall's "prodigious cascades", but without the experience of fear her thoughts remain attached to the sensual detail of the objects that surround her, including the "exceedingly damp and cold" clouds and the "plainly incrusted" rocks[29]. It is only on the Sardinian side of the pass that a mule train travelling from Lyon with a load of gold and silver terrifies her when it forces her chaise toward the precipice. Once more Miller shows her capacity for sympathy when she praises her porters, but equally when she humorously pays her respect to the wayward mule, feminized here, that had threatened her life : "But my chairmen were so alert as to lift the chair clear over a low breast-work, so as to leave room for my *annoyance* to continue her way"[30].

While Montagu and Miller remain skeptical of the sublime, other travellers adopt its vocabulary, at the same time exposing it as culturally constructed and as difficultly reconcilable with the condition of women. Margaret Spencer, a regular visitor on the Continent and the mother of the Duchess of Devonshire, first crossed the Mont Cenis on her way to Italy in September 1763. In her manuscript journal she gives little practical information, preferring to use the language of aesthetics to flaunt her sensibility :

> The whole way today was gloriously fine in the horrible stile [...] The height of the mountains the tops of which appeared sometimes in a most astonishing manner beyond the clouds, the depth of the valley, the dashing of the water and the darkness that is given to the whole by some immense woods of pine hanging on the sides of the mountains, altogether was amazingly fine and I

[26] [Lady Anna Riggs Miller], *Letters from Italy, Describing the Manners, Customs, Antiquities, Paintings, &c. of that Country, in the Years 1770 and 1771, to a Friend Residing in France. By an Englishwoman*, 3 vols (Dublin : Watson et al., 1776) 1: 51.

[27] [Miller] 1 : 56.

[28] [Miller] 1 : 56.

[29] [Miller] 1 : 56-57.

[30] [Miller] 1 : 58.

> cannot help thinking that one scene alone which we saw today was worth the trouble of the whole journey[31].

One finds in the above passage all of the sublime's principal triggers as theorized six years beforehand by Edmund Burke and as still found almost word for word fifty years later in Wordsworth's lines on the Simplon : immensity, depth, obscurity, infinity, power, sound, and the juxtaposition of contrary elements. The author jotted this down in her journal for a small circle of friends ; nevertheless, the idiomatic expression "I cannot help thinking" betrays the highly mediated nature of her remarks. As was still expected of travel writers[32], she is in fact unthinkingly resorting to stock sentiments and associations rather than to her own subjective experience. Hester Lynch Piozzi, who enjoyed a healthy appetite at the top of Mont Cenis in 1784, makes this artifice even more apparent in her published account :

> Surely the immediate sensation conveyed to the mind by the sight of such tremendous appearances must be in every traveller the same, a sensation of fullness never experienced before, a satisfaction that there is something great to be seen on earth–some object capable of contenting even fancy [...] the portion of terror excited either by real or fancied dangers on the way, is just sufficient to mingle with the pleasure, and make one feel the full effect of sublimity[33].

The impersonal voice, the abstraction of sensations and the universalizing of her experience as belonging to all travellers, male and female, nicely mimicks the mental process of the sublime, in which reason is meant to master feeling. Hester Lynch Piozzi is here again respecting the genre's requirement of objectivity, while appropriating aesthetics' masculine authority. The passage tests this discourse's claim to universality, however, by placing a woman in the role of observer. Her strategy backfired, attracting the ire of critics for whom the aesthetic subject could only be male[34].

Mary Berry's journals and letters describing her many tours on the Continent were never under the same public scrutiny as Hester Piozzi's travelogue ; according to Brian Dolan, travel enabled her to escape the physical and intellectual claustrophia that she experienced at home[35]. Mary Berry crossed the Mont Cenis with her sister at least three times. During the first passage in 1783, she claims not to have felt any fear, and describes a

[31] Lady Margaret Spencer, Althorp Papers, "Journal of Lady Spencer", British Library Add. Ms. 75744, f. 16.
[32] Batten 13-18.
[33] Piozzi 31.
[34] Katherine Turner, *British Travel Writers in Europe 1750-1800* (Aldershot : Ashgate, 2001) 174-80
[35] See Brian Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour* (London : Harper Collins, 2001) 4.

chance meeting at the pass with the artist John Robert Cozens, whose sublime Alpine landscapes would profoundly influence Turner : "An unexpected meeting in such a place, even with a person in whom one is little interested or acquainted, is very pleasant"[36]. The Berry sisters were among the first British women to tour the glaciers of Chamonix, three years before the first ascent of Mont Blanc, and they returned in 1784. The curiosity of the inhabitants in Bonneville says a lot about the novelty of women's travel in the region :

> The appearance of a postchaise and two ladies in strange dresses drew all the people to their doors, a train of children after us walking the street, and a crowd of all ages around the carriage, who kept their eyes fixed on us and examined us with a stare as of much admiration as if we had been the inhabitants of another planet[37].

In search of the sublime in the Alps, the Berry sisters are themselves transformed by the locals into sublime objects, a role reversal familiar to early travellers and to ethnologists[38]. Arrived in Chamonix, Mary Berry shows her complete mastery of Burke's empirical epistemology, while difficultly containing that "extatic wonder not unallied to madness"[39] that Percy Bysshe Shelley would also experience in the same spot thirty-three years later :

> The scenes presented to the eye are the most sublime that the imagination can form. They fill the mind with great ideas, and leave it impressed with a degree of admiration, which attempts not to express itself by words. I experienced this so forcibly that when I arrived at Chamouni, after being for nearly six hours surrounded by these new and astonishing views of nature, I sat down perfectly absorbed in a confusion of ideas, every one of which seemed too great for my mind, and could neither speak myself nor hear others on the subject[40].

Like Shelley, Mary Berry is left breathless : she needs to sit, and becomes temporarily deaf-mute. For the Romantic poets such a blockage would give rise to imaginative epiphanies exalting the mind at the expense of the senses, but it leaves Berry simply confused. The passage's fine phenomenological detail once again highlights the relation of the mind to the body. Instead of

[36] Berry 1 : 36.
[37] Berry 1 : 29.
[38] See Chloe Chard, "Women who Transmute into Tourist Attractions : Spectator and Spectacle on the Grand Tour", in *Romantic Geographies : Discourses of Travel 1775-1844*, ed. Amanda Gilroy (Manchester : Manchester UP, 2000) 109-26.
[39] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick Jones, 2 vols (Oxford : Clarendon, 1964) 1 : 497.
[40] Berry 1 : 30

providing her with a feeling of imaginative or spiritual transcendence, this sense of the ungraspable reminds the author of her embodied condition : the ideas are "too great for my mind". I prefer to read this as a sign of the author's discomfort with transcendental states rather than as an example of feminine modesty. The precisely rendered description of her ascent the next day to the Montanvert on a mule, interrupted by the fog, reinforces our sense that she is closely attentive to embodied experience, and resistant to epiphanies of the mind. Interestingly, the special bond between Montagu, who was an experienced rider[41], and her mount enables her to transform her experience of fear into one of enthusiastic wellbeing, even of at-homeness in the world :

> The road the mules picked out upon the almost perpendicular side of the mountain, over and between immense masses of rock, loose stones, and roots of trees, astonished me ; but as I had before heard of their sagacity and steadiness when left to themselves, I did not experience the least degree of fear even in those places where a slip would have been fatal, but putting the bridle upon the mule's back, took care only not to slip off his tail, which the steepness of the ascent often rendered possible[42].

Remembering the Mules

The mule, a domesticated animal obtained by crossing a male donkey with a female horse, little inclined to reproduce, does not enjoy pride of place in Western culture, and despite being stronger, more intelligent and agile than the horse, is rarely considered a noble creature nor the purveyor of sublime experiences. William Faulkner famously quipped that a mule will serve his master patiently for a whole decade in order to have the privilege of kicking him just once[43]. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston calls African-American woman "de mule uh de world", an analogy that reminds us of the last paragraph of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, in which woman's condition is compared to that of asses and horses[44]. Not all narratives gendered the mule female, however. On his way up the Col de Balme in 1825, William Hazlitt was urged by his guides to "take hold of the *queue of Monsieur the Mulet*, a mode of travelling partaking as little of the sublime as possible"[45]. In fact, in its many cameo appearances in Alpine literature, the mule usually personifies not stubbornness or female

[41] Gillian Newsum, *Women and Horses* (London : The Sportsman's P, 1988) 18.
[42] Berry 1 : 31.
[43] William Faulkner, *Flags in the Dust* (New York : Random House, 1973) 268.
[44] Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York : Perennial Library, 1990) 14 ; Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792, ed. Carole Poston (New York : Norton, 1987) 194.
[45] William Hazlitt, *Notes of a Journey through France and Italy* (London : Hunt and Clarke, 1826) 392.

victimhood, but instead prudence and trustworthiness : before being replaced by the steam piston, it was an indispensable component of travel in the Alps. John Moore, in his 1779 account of his tour through the Alps, combines all the above significations in a typically mysognist joke : "I laid the bridle on the neck of my mule and allowed him to take his own way without presuming to controul him in the smallest degree. This is doubtless the best method and what I recommend to all my friends in their journey through life when they have mules for their companions"[46].

It is on the back of a mule that Ann Flaxman, together with her husband, the neoclassical artist John Flaxman, and two other English families, including the physician Benjamin Bates, his wife, and their teenage daughter Lydia, ascended to the flat plain atop Mont Cenis in October 1787. Their destination was Rome, where they were to spend seven happy years. In her diary, Ann Flaxman expresses her enthusiasm at first catching sight of the Alps from their boat on the Saône, a few kilometers upstream from Lyon. But her aesthetic experience is interrupted by something much more immediate, and in her mind more important :

> Unfortunately I lost much of the Prospect owing to a poor maim'd dog which belong'd to a master unworthy of such fidelity [...] His head lay in my lap and his eyes were spontaneously lifted up to my face expressing the most lively gratitude for my love nor would he quit me[47].

The discourse of sympathy, more appropriate to a woman, displaces that of aesthetics. Despite the dog, which she decided to keep, gendered conventions, and a sprained arm, Flaxman nevertheless does manage to aesthetize the landscape as they make their way up into the mountains, in particular as mediated through her reading of Marmontel's *Bergère des Alpes*, so that it is a feminized, pastoral scene in line with the category of the Beautiful that she describes[48]. When narrating the actual traverse of the pass, however, her tone changes radically as does her handwriting, which becomes more unruly, hinting at her excitement. Flaxman and Lidy Bates, sitting precariously sideways on their mules with their feet on a planchette as was the norm for women equestrians, and in all likelihood hampered by petticoats and skirts[49], cannot refrain from laughing despite being "fearful of

[46] John Moore, *A View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland, and Germany*, 2 vols. (London : Strahan and Cadell, 1779) 1 : 192.
[47] Ann Flaxman, "An Uninteresting Detail of a Journey to Rome", British Library Add. Ms. 39787, ff. 30-1. Marie E. McAllister has since published a fully annotated electronic edition of this text. See Ann Flaxman, "An Uninteresting Detail of a Journey to Rome", *A Romantic Circles Edition*, ed. Marie E. McAllister, August 2014 : http://www.rc.umd.edu /editions/flaxman/editions.2014.flaxman.html
[48] See Flaxman ff. 36-37.
[49] See Newsum 18, 28.

every pebble"[50]. Then, as Flaxman writes in a lyrical outburst, "our fear was soon transmuted into Mirth at the idea of what our English Friends would say to see us in Such a Plight ; we rode triumphant o'er rising ragged Ground in a zigzag round till we nearly gain'd the Summit {being an hour & a quarter} the Town of Lanebourg diminish'd in our Sight as we ourselves exalted"[51].

The style of the sentence betrays its author's acute consciousness of the situation's impropriety but also her jubilation at having escaped the rules of decorum. As Chloe Chard reminds us, crossing the Alps could be extremely destabilizing, and narratives of such journeys often allegorized the human will to freedom and self-fulfilment[52]. The marginalia and many corrections on the manuscript page suggest that she wishes to seize her, or rather the two women's epiphany as precisely as possible. What they experience, as in the Romantic sublime, is the sense of *hypsos* and of dizzying infinitude, captured in the "Ground/round" rhyme. But that sensation is never translated into the apperception of something beyond the senses. Rather, their feeling of triumph emanates from their newfound disinhibition, from their transcendence of social and political norms inscribed in the body. As Iris Marion Young explains in "Throwing Like a Girl", her influential essay inspired by the phenomenology of Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, women in patriarchal societies experience their body as a "a fragile encumbrance, rather than the media for the enactment of our aims"[53]. For a short while at least, Flaxman and Bates can rid themselves of that debilitating feeling of fragility and ride, as it were, like men. If she omits to describe in detail the scene at the top of the pass, I would argue, it is because it is the ride itself rather than the surrounding landscape that triggers their sublime experience.

On the way down, the two women are carried in a single chaise :

> We were stuffed into it as you would squeeze two long Parcels into a little box for a long journey [...] I verily believe if they topped us over the mountain they would have found us in the same seat so difficult was it for us to be mov'd [...] It cost us a deal of Mirth, & them a Deal of labour [...]– we might well have been Compar'd to some of Shakespear's similes as two Cherries growing on the same stalk having but one heart &c –[54]

[50] See Flaxman f. 38.

[51] See Flaxman ff. 38-39.

[52] Chard, *Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour : Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography, 1600-1830* (Manchester : Manchester UP, 1999) 186.

[53] Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience : 'Throwing Like a Girl' and Other Essays* (Oxford : Oxford UP, 2005) 39.

[54] See Flaxman f. 39.

Paradoxically, their shared experience of discomfort makes them keenly aware of the natural landscape's rich sensorial stimuli :

> We were Surrounded by snow top't Mountains, amus'd by the falling of numerous Cascades whose prismatic effects against the sun's Rays were truly beautiful – the wind blew briskly round the side of the Rocks & concentrated on our poor heads, & which would certainly have mov'd us from our Seats had such indeed been practicable.[55]

These female travellers' predicament reminds us of the remark in the *Vindication* that to stay beautiful, women will voluntarily cramp their limbs and faculties "worse than Chinese bands"[56]. Their mirth arises, however, from the fact that their Alpine voyage frees them from the sendentary life criticized by Wollstonecraft. In a chapter suggestively titled "How pain can be a cause of delight", Edmund Burke explains that physical effort stimulates the body in the same manner that terror affects the imagination and the mind : "To have them in proper order, they must be shaken and worked to a proper degree"[57]. In the above passage, Ann Flaxman and her young friend are indeed shaken hard : all the conditions of their trip, including the novelty of the experience, the strong intersubjective relation with another woman but also perhaps with the mules, and the physical stimulation, contribute to an intensity of affect, which, in line with the rhetoric of the sublime, Flaxman finds difficult to describe. "Of our feelings I shall only say that we remembered the mules for some days after", she wittily but also cryptically comments the morning after in Novalese[58].

In the rest of this essay I would like to look at three more texts in which a strong experience of embodiment prepares the subject for different variations on the sublime, including the spiritual, the "masculine", and the comic. Elizabeth Webster's melancholy account of her crossing of the Great St. Bernard in 1793 reminds us that mules are not always the muses we saw in the above examples. They nevertheless symbolize the material conditions that consciously or unconsciously influence the minds of travellers, but which are so often left out of male travel accounts and of critics' explanations of aesthetic experience. Before leaving her husband for Lord Holland, Webster lived three years on the Continent, a separation that only confirmed the disastrous state of her marriage. Her return trip to Sir Godfrey was filled with foreboding, amplified by the sight of troops called up to fight the First War of Coalition and massed on each side of the Alps. Lady

[55] See Flaxman f. 39.

[56] Wollstonecraft 55.

[57] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1756, ed. James T. Boulton (New York : Columbia UP, 1958) 134-36.

[58] Flaxman, ff. 38-39.

Elizabeth is famously transported backwards across the pass in order to be able to bid adieu to Italy. What is less often cited is the passage in her journal in which she describes the first part of her ascent :

> At six in the evening we set off for St. Remy. My journey there was not pleasant as to my monture, for my own saddle was broken, and I was, after shifting from pack saddles, etc obliged to be chucked upon a sack of wheat on a *bête-de-somme*. The muleteer considered me as a bale of goods entrusted to his care to convey without damage, and so far thought of me, but not the least to my ease or comfort. As much as I could see of the scenery by daylight very beautiful[59].

Transported like merchandise, Webster takes the full measure of her condition as female object, barred from the aesthetic sphere. Yet this strong bodily experience opens the way on the Swiss side of the pass to an impression of insignificance and of proximity to the rest of the universe : "The sublimity of the scenery among these mountains inspires one with a notion of the grandeur of our world, but this thought is still dissipated on a starlight night, for then we behold what a speck we are in the creation–a twinkling orb like them"[60].

Webster's spiritual apprehension of the infinitude of creation is close to Helen Maria Williams's in her "Hymn to the Alps", written during her ascent to the glaciers of the San Bernardino region in 1794 : "Where midst some vast expanse, the mind / Which swelling virtue fires, / Forgets that earth it leaves behind, / And to its heaven aspires"[61]. Williams's religious transcendence anticipates such exemplary Romantic epiphanies as William Wordsworth's in "Tintern Abbey", in which the speaker is "laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul"[62]. Unlike the other examples we have seen, her experience reinforces the duality between mind and body to the disadvantage of the latter. Again like Wordsworth, whose apostrophe to the imagination at the Simplon Pass requires his losing the mule train and himself[63], Williams also has to leave her mule attached to a rock and to separate herself from her guides and companions in order to fully appreciate the landscape's grandeur : "While my fellow travellers amused themselves by wandering over that world of ice, a difficult and dangerous enterprize, I sat down on the border of the Glacier, to enjoy the new and magnificent

[59] Lady Holland, *The Journal of Elizabeth, Lady Holland (1791-1811)*, ed. Earl of Ilchester, 2 vols. (London : Longmans, Green, 1908) 1 : 65.

[60] Holland 1 : 68.

[61] Helen Maria Williams, *A Tour in Switzerland ; or A View of the Present State of Governments and Manners of Those Cantons* (London : Robinson, 1798) 2 : 17.

[62] William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, 2 vols. (London : Longman, 1802) 1 : 193.

[63] Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, Meyer Howard Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York : Norton, 1979) 1805, ll. 494-524.

vision around me"[64]. With Williams, one may say, women travellers finally obtained a glacier of their own, but the disembodied sublime resulting from it, with its strong sense of individual subjectivity, can be interpreted as a loss as much as a gain.

Eliza, the penname of Esther Milnes Day, reacts against the gendered conventions of landscape aesthetics in her delightful satirical poem, "A Tour to the Glaciers of Savoy" (1796), an early instance of what Ann Colley has called "sinking the sublime"[65]. We do not know if this woman of modest origins, a resident of Berkshire married to an author of children's books, ever went on the Grand Tour or saw the Alps. Nevertheless, her description of the horrific travelling conditions is keenly realistic, just as her comic undermining of the already conventional language of the sublime rivals that of Rodolphe Töpffer and Mark Twain. The poem first describes their arrival in Chamonix, all piled up in a *char à bancs* that shakes them up, enabling the speaker to discover the magnificient surroundings : "When you get to the Vale of Chamony,/All your twitches and jerks are repaid/[...] This vale of all vales, at the last,/Was beyond every thing most romantic"[66]. Eliza dramatizes a blockage that is not epistemological but rather cultural. Confronted with aesthetic discourse's regimented gender roles, she gives up trying to describe the sublime scene : "I wished for a genius of fire, / I wished for a thousand of quills [...] / For though I was no genius born, / From such wishes I am not exempt ; / Your pen would the subject adorn : / You might soar,--but I must not attempt"[67]. At the Montanvert, the speaker does finally find the right words, but is more concerned with her safety than the glacier's sublimity : "Yet though 'twas enchantingly fine, / *Très superbe, magnifique*, the rude murmur, / Still the part I thought nearest divine, / Was when my feet touched *terra firma*"[68]. It is only when she ascends the Col de Balme on a mule that a strong emotion transpires in the text :

> 'Tis out of my power to rhyme
> The figure we cut upon mules [...]
>
> *En cavalier* one after t'other,
> We mounted the Col de Baum's ridge,
> Whilst to keep up the rear rode my brother ;
> Like so many ducks o'er a bridge.

[64] Williams 8.

[65] See Ann C. Colley, *Victorians in the Mountains : Sinking the Sublime* (Aldershot : Ashgate, 2010)

[66] Eliza [Esther Milnes Day], "A Tour to the Glaciers of Savoy", in *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets : An Anthology*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford : Oxford UP, 1990) 315.

[67] Eliza 497.

[68] Eliza 498.

And then we went sideling away,
In good truth I was struck with such awe, Sir,
Like a stuck pig, I star'd with dismay,
With my eyes near as large as a saucer ![69]

The awe that the speaker experiences makes her scream like a slaughtered pig, a *bathos* effect that once again undermines the sublime, yet at the same time gives her emotions greater credibility. The object of her awe, one may guess, is not the mountain landscape, but rather her mount : "For the mules they would go as they chose, Sir, / Rightly judging, they knew the way best ; / And though dreading to fall on my nose, / Sir, I found 'twas in vain to contest"[70].

In an early eighteenth-century essay attacking travel writing conventions and the egotism of its authors, Gordon and Trenchard ask the following : "Now, what the Devil is it to Mankind whether the Booby has pass'd the Alps upon a Mule, or upon a Beast that is still nearer a-kin to him ?"[71] As I hope to have shown, that difference can be capital. Critics too often overlook the modalities of travel, yet these belong to those discrete or negligeable "signs" that Gilles Bertrand rightly claims can help us gain better insight into the history of writing on the Alps[72]. The gendered conventions of aesthetics curtailed but did not completely inhibit women travellers's range of activities or writing practices. They still crossed the Alps and described their experiences in writing. Whether destined to be published or not, their texts all borrow, adapt and sometimes even modify the language of the picturesque and the sublime, in particular thanks to their greater attention to the body. Although our examples are too few and piecemeal to be able to theorize a distinct form of the sublime in relation to women's experience of the Alps, taken together they do enable us to deduce a few general points. Women travellers in the Alps were more ready than male travellers to challenge the sublime's dematerialized subjectivity, to expose the artifice of idealist discourse, to emphasize an embodied form of cognition, and to express their desire for a freedom not grounded in transcendental metaphysics but in a concrete social and political reality. Were we to

[69] Lonsdale does not anthologize this last section. The entire poem is available at the British Women's Romantic Poetry Project : http://digital.lib.ucdavis.edu/projects/bwrp/Works /DayEPoems.htm. It is worth comparing this with Mary Berry's account of her ascent by mule of the Col de Balme in 1784. See Berry, *Extracts* 1: 132-34.

[70] Lonsdale does not anthologize this last section. The entire poem is available at the British Women's Romantic Poetry Project : http://digital.lib.ucdavis.edu/projects/bwrp/Works /DayEPoems.htm. It is worth comparing this with Mary Berry's account of her ascent by mule of the Col de Balme in 1784. See Berry, *Extracts* 1 : 132-34.

[71] Thomas Gordon, and John Trenchard, *A Collection of All the Humorous Letters in the London Journal* (London, 1721) 41.

[72] Bertrand 93.

imagine what those three women riders felt on the Lauberhorn on 23 September 1816 (other than their possible interest for the handsome stranger wallowing at the summit), I could without too much risk suggest that it was an intense feeling of plenitude and of unity with all creatures, human and non-human, together with a renewed confidence in their own physical abilities. That women were not alone in experiencing this embodied form of sublime is evident when we go back to Byron's madcap journal entry for 19 September. The poet describes his ascent of the Dent de Jaman as a rollicking succession of mounting, dismounting, tumbling, and laughing, in which every one present, including the mules and horses, are knocked around and exhausted, but that leaves him in admiration of his surroundings. "I have lately repeopled my mind with Nature", he famously concludes, a line that says much about the sublime as a sociable experience shaped by material conditions that connects, rather than severing, mind and body[73].

[73] Byron 6 : 98-99.

APPENDIX 1

Author	Year of trip	Publication year, form	Itinerary
1. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu	1718	Published letters (1767)	Turin, Lyon
2. Lady Margaret Spenser	1763	Unpublished journal	French Jura to Morges, Geneva and on to Mont Cenis
3. Lady Margaret Spenser	1792	Unpublished diary	Swiss tour from Lausanne to Basle
4. Lady Mary Coke	1769	Published letters and journals (1889)	Side trip from Lyon to Geneva
5. Lady Anna Miller	1770	Published travelogue, in form of letters (1777)	Pontarlier, Geneva, Mont Cenis
6. Duchess of Northumberland	1772	Published diaries (1926)	Lyon, Geneva
7. Mary Berry	1783, 1790	Published letters and journals (1865)	Basle, Geneva, Chamonix, Geneva (3 passages over Mont Cenis)
8. Hester Piozzi	1784	Published travelogue, in form of letters	Lyon, Turin
9. Anne Flaxman	1787	Unpublished journal	Lyon, Turin
10. Elizabeth Webster, Lady Holland	1791, 1793	Published journal (1908)	Grand St. Bernard
11. Mariana Starke	1792	Published travelogue (1800)	Col de Tende, Mont Cenis
12. Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devosnhire	1793	Published poem (1799)	St. Gotthard
13. Helen Maria Williams	1794	Published travelogue and poem (1798)	St. Bernardino Pass
14. Eliza (Esther Milnes Day)	1796 ?	Published poem (1796)	Chamonix

Table 1 : List of Consulted Authors

BIBLIOGRAPHIE SÉLECTIVE

Sources primaires

Écrits de femmes

Allen, Michael, ed. *An English Lady in Paris. The Diary of Frances Anne Crewe, 1786.* St Leonards : Oxford-Stockley, 2006.

[**Anonyme**] *A Sketch of Modern France. In a Series of Letters to a Lady of Fashion. Written in the Years 1796 and 1797, during a Tour through France. By a Lady.* Ed. Christopher Lake Moody. London : Cadell and Davies, 1798.

Baillie, Marianne. *First Impressions on a Tour Upon the Continent in the Summer of 1818 through Parts of France, Italy, Switzerland, the Borders of Germany and a Part of French Flanders.* London : Murray, 1819.

Bending, Stephen, and Stephen **Bygrave**, eds. *Women's Travel Writings in Revolutionary France.* Part I. London : Pickering and Chatto, 2007.

—. *Women's Travel Writings in Revolutionary France.* Part II. London : Pickering and Chatto, 2008.

Berry, Mary. *Extracts of the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry from the year 1783 to 1852.* Ed. Lady Theresa Lewis. 3 vols. London : Longmans, 1865.

[—.] *England and France. A Comparative View of the Social Conditions in both Countries from the Restoration of Charles the Second to the Present Time.* 2 vols. London : Longman *et al.*, 1828.

Carey, Frances Jane. *Journal of a Tour in France in the Years 1816 and 1817.* London : Taylor and Hessey, 1823.

Carter, Anne. *Letters from a Lady to her Sister during a Tour to Paris in the Months of April and May 1814.* London : Longman, 1814.

Coke, Lady Mary. *The Letters and Journals of Lady Mary Coke.* Ed. James A. Home. 4 vols. Bath : Lonsdale and Bartholomew, 1970.

Colston, Marianne. *Journal of a Tour in France, Switzerland, and Italy, during the Years 1819, 20, and 21.* Illustrated by Fifty Lithographic Prints, From Original Drawings Taken in Italy, the Alps, and the Pyrenees. Paris : Galignani, 1822.

Cradock, [Anna Francesca]. *Journal de Madame Cradock. Voyage en France (1783-1786).* Trad. d'après le manuscrit original et inédit par Mme O. Delphin Balleyguier. Paris : Perrin, 1896.