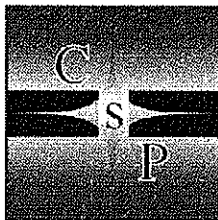


The Traveling and Writing Self

Edited by

Marguerite Helmers & Tilar Mazzeo



CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING

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This book first published 2007 by

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

15 Angerton Gardens, Newcastle, NE5 2JA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogic record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN 1-84718-106-6

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CHAPTER SIX

MAINTAINING A WIDE MARGIN: THE BOAT AS HOUSE IN BEATRICE GRIMSHAW'S TRAVEL WRITING

CLARE MCCOTTER

This paper focuses on Beatrice Grimshaw's second travelogue, *In the Strange South Seas* (1907). Demonstrating a degree of ambivalence, flexibility and openness *vis-à-vis* class and race, this text differs noticeably from her other travel writing and also from much of her fiction. It must be said from the outset, however, that this volume is concerned with the eastern Pacific. It is therefore possible that Grimshaw's engagement with race simply reflects colonial stereotypes which tended to favor Polynesians at the expense of their Oceanic neighbors. Alternatively, Susan Gardner suggests that the marked ambiguity of the book may result from the nature of Grimshaw's commission (107-8).¹ While these factors are of undoubted significance to any consideration of narrative voice in *In the Strange South Seas*, I would like to postulate a third variable: the influence of the Pacific itself and the mode of travel which Grimshaw enjoyed during those months that she toured the islands.² Describing a world of seascapes and boat journeys, *In the Strange South Seas* is the most nautical of Grimshaw's travel books and the one in which Grimshaw the traveler appears to be most content. And perhaps she was, for, if travel is an exploration of both the infinite and the finite, the unfenced and the fenced, then the months that Grimshaw spent on the little trading schooner the *Duchess* offered an almost perfect synthesis of the two. This colonial tourist could experience the vastness of the Pacific from the bounded space of the boat.

On a physical level, the boat is a bounded space, one which this paper, drawing on the work of Roland Barthes and Gaston Bachelard, argues is, in the first instance, a home. Enclosed and surrounded by the amniotic sea, the boat in many ways replicates the first home—the mother/womb/tomb. It incorporates, as we shall see, the semiotic and the symbolic, life and death, as indeed does the uterus itself. For the maternal is not a pre-symbolic site; our history, individual

and collective, is *embodied*. Influencing and being influenced by the journey, it travels with us. Home is always present in the away. What it means in the elsewhere will vary greatly. No two homes, regardless of whether the mother/first home or the first house, will be inhabited in the same way. The home is a site of contradictions: supposedly a private sphere, it is inescapably informed by the public. A putative site of rest and recuperation, for some it is a place of subversion, counter-culture, political action, the only place from which they can plan and dream. Despite strenuous efforts to reinforce lines of demarcation, borders and margins, the public is always ineluctably present in the private. This work examines the late nineteenth-century preoccupation with margins and the boundaries. It posits this concern as a futile attempt to cast off the abject, that which can never be cast off. The *out* is always already *in*. It is argued in this paper that Cloona House, the first house that Grimshaw inhabited, the marker of her family's status and its demise, a place of security and its absence, a source of rootedness and disconnection, of stasis and movement, influenced how she inhabited the small trading schooner, the home in motion, from which she viewed the blue infinitude of the Pacific.

The tropic sea was many things to Grimshaw, but perhaps more than anything else it signalled color, color ranging from changeless blue to luminous plains of beautiful opalescence. In *In the Strange South Seas* Grimshaw states:

Emerald and jade and sapphire—yes, one expects these, in the hues of tropic seas. But when it comes to whole tracts of glancing heliotrope and hyacinth, shot with unnameable shades of melted turquoise and silver, and all a-quiver with pulsations of flashing greens, for which there is no name in any language under the pallid northern or burning southern sun—then, the thing becomes indescribable, and one can only say: “There is something in that little corner of earth beyond the touch of words [.]” (2)

In using the word “indescribable,” Grimshaw indicates that part of the range of colors that make up the Pacific lie beyond language; they lie “beyond the touch of words” (137). Representation of this ocean can only ever be partial. Grimshaw's Pacific is a “magical sea” (138). Playful and chimerical, it undermines ocular authority: “The raised appearance of the lagoon is one of the strangest things I have yet seen, though it is merely an optical delusion, created by contrast in colour” (127). During a reefing party, Grimshaw, to the amusement of her friends, also discovers that the “pink-violet” coral which she manages to detach and bring to the surface is “liver-coloured” (100) once out of the water. But this ludic quality resides only on the surface or in the shallows; the deep harbors myriad dangers.

Under water among the coral reefs! It sounds romantic, but it was not pleasant. Five feet beneath the surface, the light was as clear as day, and one could see all about one, far too much, for the things that were visible were disquieting. (201)

Although a strong swimmer, Grimshaw expresses intense discomfort and fear of swimming below the surface.³ While always conscious of sharks, her fear of the deep is largely restricted to underwater activity. In *In the Strange South Seas*, while discussing a bathing trip undertaken with some island girls from Niue, Grimshaw describes an unpleasant underwater experience; she encounters what she afterwards thinks may have been a “big devil fish” (202). The incident leaves her very shaken, but, rather than swimming for the shore, she simply decides to keep her head above sea level: “And on the surface I stayed, for the rest of the swim” (201). For Grimshaw the ocean is most threatening when one is submerged in it; she appears to believe that she is in less danger if she can see the sky. During her stay on Tonga, for example, she spends many hours swimming alone at night, surrendering herself to the rhythms of the ocean, with her gaze focused on the surface swell and the stars above:

the dark shining water bearing one to and fro with the swell from the reef, the land growing further and further away [...] Willingly indeed one would have passed the whole night out there, swimming, and floating in a warm dark sea of stars—stars above stars below—if nature had not given out after an hour or two, and demanded a return to the solid earth. (266)

Grimshaw delights in the fusion of air and sea. Relaxed on the surface of the water where she can see the sky, her fear of what lurks beneath, while not extinguished, is certainly diminished.

Grimshaw’s fear of the deep, her fear of sharks, her fear of being consumed are all very real fears; it is therefore all the more remarkable that she decided to confront this terror in the manner that she did: donning a cumbersome deep sea suit and diving solo to a depth of thirty feet in the notorious Torres straits. She describes this incident in her third travelogue, *The New New Guinea* (1910):

You look ahead through the darkling water for the swoop and rush and horrible scythe-shaped tail of the monster that you fear, but there is no sign of it [...] Still—you have been down some minutes now, and honour is amply satisfied. It would be very pleasant to see the light of day again[.] (219)

Contemplating the nature of her fear prior to the dive, Grimshaw claims:

The sober truth, I think, is that a woman always is afraid of doing dangerous things. Generally she lies about it, partly through conceit, and largely because she is curious and does not mind being horribly afraid if you will give her what she

wants. But the truth is as I have said. The cold courage of the male—the Nelson courage that “never saw fear”—is not in any woman who ever was born. (216-7)

In an extremely ambiguous statement about gender, the detached and passionless mental state that Grimshaw attributes to Nelson seems much closer to psychopathy than bravery. Courage cannot exist without fear, but, by highlighting the latter, Grimshaw is simultaneously italicizing the former. There is no doubt that her courage/fear is acute; prior to descent, anxiety is palpable, fear not only of the dimension that she is entering, but also of departure from the one that she is in. Commenting on the dive, Gaston Bachelard states:

we come to a point where we recognise in this space-substance, a one-dimensional space. One substance, one dimension. And we are so remote from the earth and life on earth, that this dimension of water bears the mark of limitlessness. (205)

Grimshaw does not experience this space-substance as liberating, something Bachelard's use of the signifier “limitlessness” tends to suggest; once on the sea bed she soon begins to long for the “light of day” and is eternally grateful for “the sweetness of that first rush of warm tropic air” (219). The one dimension of this absolute element unnerves Grimshaw. For her a sense of limitlessness is most fully realized when occupying the liminal position of partial submersion, body moving in both air and water, a position which replicates that occupied by the boat.

In his ruminations on the boat, Roland Barthes, while recognizing that it “may well be a symbol for departure” goes on to add that it is:

at a deeper level, the emblem of closure. An inclination for ships always means the joy of perfectly enclosing oneself, and having at hand the greatest possible number of objects, and having at one's disposal an absolutely finite space. To like ships is first and foremost to like a house, a superlative one[.] (66)

Decisively bounded the boat is house, the ultimate one, the one that not only encloses but also creates, on a physical level, the widest possible sterile zone between its inhabitants and potential sources of contagion. While it could be argued that islands perform the same function, from a human perspective they may not only be uninhabited but also uninhabitable. Boats imply a human presence, a place of habitation; they suggest a space that is emphatically bounded. Anne McClintock argues that during the Victorian period a desire for boundaries and definite lines of demarcation became an increasingly important aspect of middle-class society:

A characteristic feature of the Victorian middle class was its peculiarly intense preoccupation with rigid boundaries. In imperial fiction and commodity kitsch, boundary objects and liminal scenes recur ritualistically. As colonials traveled back and forth across the thresholds of their known world, crisis and boundary confusion were warded off and contained by fetishes, absolution rituals and liminal scenes. Soap and cleaning rituals became central to the demarcation of body boundaries and the policing of social hierarchies. (33)

The latter was of crucial importance not only within a colonial context but also in the metropolitan center. As urbanization accelerated in the nineteenth century, the classes were living in closer proximity to each other, something which could explain the increased focus on borders and boundaries. While McClintock recognizes that “[c]leaning and boundary rituals are integral to most cultures,” she goes on to add that what characterized Victorian cleaning rituals was not only their prevalence but also “their peculiarly intense relation to money” (33). With the commercial manufacture of soap emerging as an important industry in the nineteenth century, cleaning rituals became commoditized and objectified in the sense that certain boundary markers, such as doors, doorknockers, doorsteps, were, at times, the focus of acute attention (McClintock 208). Describing house work as a “semiotics of boundary maintenance,” McClintock in her discussion of the middle-class Victorian home states:

Servants spent much of their time cleaning boundary objects—doorknobs, windowsills, steps, pathways, flagstones, curtains and banisters, not because these objects were especially dirty, but because scrubbing and polishing them ritually maintained the boundaries between private and public and gave these objects exhibition value as class markers. (170)

The constant polishing of doorknobs and the scrubbing of steps was an attempt to maintain the integrity of the increasingly insular and—with the demise of cottage industries and the development of the factory system—de-industrialized home by creating a margin around it from which the abject was supposedly excluded. Describing the abject, Julia Kristeva states that “it is something rejected from which one does not part” (*Powers* 4). Producing unease or even nausea, the abject is that which we conceptualize as dirt and contagion, that which must be cast off but which from which distance can never be maintained. Kristeva writes that “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order” (4). “Above all ambiguity” (9), the abject—in its most obvious manifestation “*corporeal waste*, menstrual blood and excrement, or everything that is assimilated to them, from nail-parings to decay”—is that which threatens boundaries, threatens the dichotomy between inside and outside (70). The cleaning of street flags and the scrubbing

of doorsteps in the nineteenth century was an attempt to maintain a margin or buffer zone between the *in* and the *out*.

Surrounded by its sea-moat, no other habitation more decisively suggests a space of demarcation than the boat. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the vessel that was increasingly being constructed as a locus of insular, islanded, frequently luxurious domesticity was the yacht.⁴ Prior to the Prince of Wales's acquisition of the *Britannia* in 1893, the best-known English yacht was probably Thomas Brassey's *Sunbeam*, and one of the most discussed journeys was the 37,000 mile world cruise which the Brasseys, their family, and extensive crew undertook in 1876-7 and which Annie Brassey documented in *A Voyage In The Sunbeam* (1879). The *Sunbeam* was the family's home on the ocean wave, and like all domestic sites it incorporated the public. Much of the Brasseys' journey took place within a colonial context; it was the spread of European imperialism that made their trip possible. This fusion of public and private is reflected in the interior of the *Sunbeam*: it is a home that houses an imperial museum. Annie Brassey shops, trades, and barter incessantly. The vessel contains innumerable and disparate collections—birds, animals, botanical specimens, shells, handicrafts, and clothes. The *Sunbeam's* appetite for the products of the colonized world is voracious and insatiable. Indeed it could well be its ability to house collections, thus facilitating colonial trade (or plunder), that led to the popularity of long-distance cruising during the age of high imperialism. It was not enough to have an empire; empire had to be displayed. On board the yacht the Other could be viewed from a safe distance, left behind on the shore, kept away from one's home. Empire could be rendered visible; it could be translated into a spectacle. Domesticity, colonial trade, and the museumization of other cultures are fused within the space of the yacht, a space invariably gendered feminine. As McClintock observes "Sailors bound wooden female figures to their ships" prows and baptized their ships—as exemplary threshold objects—with their female names" (24). By using female names to suggest a site of bounded domesticity sailors were attempting to establish the boat's *insideness*, attempting to cement a clear line of demarcation between the known and the unknown, the inside and the out.

However, boundary markers do not stop here. On the boat itself there are degrees of *insideness*. Possibly the most obvious nautical boundary marker is the deck. Open to the elements, the deck covers the more private, uterine-like space that lies beneath enclosed within a world of fluidity. A very definite threshold position, the deck is the boat's doorstep, and on all "good" vessels it was as well scrubbed as the step of any middle-class Victorian home. Discipline on the *Duchess*, the trading schooner on which Grimshaw traveled across huge swathes of the Pacific, was, however, more relaxed than that found on board most English yachts of the period. She states "There is no "let-her-slide" spirit

in the whole world to compare with that which blossoms spontaneously on the sun-white decks of a Pacific schooner (*In the Strange South Seas* 119-20). Grimshaw describes the *Duchess* as "my home" (119), which it was for those four months that she spent on board. Grimshaw was clearly attracted by boats: after her arrival in Papua she had three double canoes strapped together and a home constructed upon them. Grimshaw had been the guest of Papua's colonial Governor J. H. P. Murray at Government House. She had also stayed at "the 'Top Pub', one of Port Moresby's two" (Laracy 160), but she left these addresses, preferring instead her canoes moored in the sea, of which she writes, "I loved that house until it became the meeting place for crocodiles who lived in the surrounding shallows and bellowed like bulls at night" ("How I Found Adventure" 3).

Throughout her life Grimshaw would spend time on boats, traveling on luxury liners, on a missionary launch in Papua, and of course as Murray's guest on Papua's government launch *Merrie England*. The latter was an orderly boat with a beautiful interior, and yet the voice that emerges from the *Duchess* seems happier, more relaxed, less in need of the seemingly well-organized world of colonial plantations. This is not to suggest that order did not exist on the *Duchess*. There is still a wide margin between sea and land, and the door to Grimshaw's cabin is a decisive boundary marker. Nevertheless the order that Grimshaw experiences on the *Duchess* is different from that to which she is accustomed; it is a scuffed, sometimes threadbare type of order that facilitates a degree of interracial and, in particular, interclass intimacy. Describing breakfast on the schooner for herself and the white members of the crew, Grimshaw states:

Clawing like a parrot, the passenger reaches the cabin, and finds the bare-armed, barefooted mates and the captain engaged on the inevitable "tin" and biscuits. There is no tea this morning, because the cockroaches have managed to get in and flavour the brew[.] (*In the Strange South Seas* 220)

Grimshaw seems to spend a good deal of time interacting with these men in a way that does not suggest concern about class distinctions: "Lying on the poop, like seals on sand, the little knot of passengers, captain, and mate, 'yarned' for hour after hour—strange, wild tales of frontier life in new lands" (156-7). The image of the seals suggests a group of people who are totally relaxed in each other's company, while also indicating close physical proximity.

Abandoning steam for sail, it is during this lengthy voyage around the Pacific on the little schooner that Grimshaw appears to be at the mercy of the elements more than at any other time in her travels. The Pacific demands flexibility. Unlike a tract of forest put under the planter's axe, it cannot be controlled. This is a seascape that is in motion and one that can clearly talk

back. When the captain of the trading schooner on which Grimshaw is traveling attempts to explore and chart Beveridge Reef, heavy squalls upend his boat, almost resulting in loss of life. Concluding her description of the incident Grimshaw states, "And so we left the reef in the growing dusk, and no man has to this day disturbed the virgin surface of its stormy little lagoon with profanely invading oar" (*In the Strange South Seas* 177). This is a victory to the ocean, and Grimshaw is uncomplaining. Entirely dependent on the wind, timetables for this trip have to be extremely elastic. The hard-riding equestrienne of *From Fiji to the Cannibal Islands* (1907), who harried her guides, pressing them on to reach the appointed destination each evening, is gone. A more relaxed narrator emerges *In the Strange South Seas*. Although the mindscape that she projects is not free from barriers, it certainly appears less trammelled, less encumbered, less rigid than in her other travelogues. Grimshaw's second travelogue, *In the Strange South Seas*, exhibits a degree of openness, a widening of horizons that is not as evident in her other non-fiction. Those seascapes which surrounded her for months on end during the voyages described in this volume may have quietly eroded a few barriers, perhaps none more important than those between the races.

In the following quotation from *In the Strange South Seas* Grimshaw represents indigenous sailors in predictably stereotypical terms:

Native crews are the rule in the South Seas, and native crews make work for everyone including themselves. Absolutely fearless is the Kanaka, active as a monkey aloft, good natured and jolly to the last degree, but perfectly unreliable in any matter requiring an ounce of thought or a pennyworth of discretion[.] (217-8)

But Grimshaw also moves beyond this stance. Presented in the above *en masse*, later in the text the crew are individualized: "Tapitua, who is a great dandy, puts two gold earrings in one ear, and fastens a wreath of cock's feathers about his hat. Koddii (christened George) gets into a thick blue woollen jersey [...] Ta puts on three different singlets—a pink, a blue, and a yellow" (222). And so it goes on until all are named and their attire described. While it could be argued that Grimshaw is merely poking fun at the men's fashion sense, I do not think that this is the case. She concludes this passage by saying "Truly we are a gay party, by the time every one is ready to land" (222). The viewing *I* is translated into a *we*; Grimshaw is not disembarking as an individual but as part of a group, a collective including black and white. Although fleeting, a moment of *communitas* has been achieved within the liminal space of the *Duchess*.

Grimshaw's colonial encounters in *In the Strange South Seas* embody a much greater degree of openness and acceptance. As she shares accommodation with islanders, as she goes on swimming and fishing trips with them, some of these relationships start to exhibit a degree of intimacy. One of numerous

examples takes place on the island of Atiu, where Grimshaw and the local women spend some time in a hairdressing session. Commenting on this activity Grimshaw states:

We had a good deal of feminine talk among ourselves, before the men came out again: the fact that I did not know anything of the language, save perhaps half a dozen words, was no bar to a certain amount of thought-interchange. How was it done? Signs, for the most part: scraps, guesses, hints, stray native words made to do double and treble duty. Could I have talked to the husbands and brothers of the women in the same way? No, certainly not. (152)

Temporary, makeshift and partial, this radiantly evanescent system of signification, lying beyond the space of stale phallogocentric speech, is a body language. It is, according to Grimshaw, a type of communication which men can not appreciate: "Women, who have talked the 'sign language' to each other, many and many a time, over the innocent thick heads of their unsuspecting better-halves, friends or brothers, will never doubt it" (152). Grimshaw goes on to add "We are not as clever as men—let the equality brigade shriek if they like, 'it's as true as turnips is, as true as taxes'—but neither are we as stupid" (152). This is another markedly ambiguous statement about gender. Grimshaw asserts that women are not as intelligent as men immediately after referring to the male center of learning as "innocent" and "thick." It is a remark that must be read within its literary context, sitting as it does amid a body of travel writing in which a female author offers endless advice to men on subjects such as imperial politics, agriculture, horticulture, economics, defence, travel, emigration, and architecture.

Grimshaw's engagement with gender is complex and contradictory. She dismisses contemporary feminists as the "equality brigade," while leading a life that eschewed many of the norms governing what was considered appropriate female behavior at that time. Grimshaw constructed a life in the South Seas that provided her with a considerable degree of freedom, a life surrounded by what she, quoting Thoreau, referred to as "a broad margin" (qtd. in "Where the Road Calls" 21). As a new arrival in Oceania, recently released from the routine of nine to five, Grimshaw's first experience of this less rigorously fenced existence would have been her time on board the *Duchess*. Those restrictions that she experienced elsewhere, particularly in that much earlier home, were lessened to a considerable extent. Reminiscing in the *Blue Book* on her home in Belfast Grimshaw reflects:

I was taught to ride and play games. I was taught to behave. To write notes for Mamma. To do the flowers. To be polite but not too polite, to Young Gentlemen. To accept flowers, sweets and books from them, but no more. To rise swiftly with

the rest of the six daughters and sons when Papa came into the breakfast-room, to kiss him ceremoniously, and rush to wait upon him. He liked it, and we liked it.
(1)

While Grimshaw ends on a positive note, there seems to be much here with which she was less than enamored: 19 College Gardens was a home in which she did not stay any longer than was necessary:

But I was the Revolting Daughter—as they called them then. I bought a bicycle, with difficulty. I rode it unchaperoned, mile and miles beyond the limits possible to the soberly trotting horses. The world opened up before me. And as soon as my twenty-first birthday dawned, I went away from home, to see what the world might give to daughters who revolted. (1)

Grimshaw would undoubtedly have appreciated George Sand's *cri de coeur* "What is more beautiful than a road" (qtd. in Bachelard 11). As a young equestrienne at Cloona House and later as an enthusiastic cyclist, she craved movement, and it was a persistent driving force throughout her long life. College Gardens and all the subsequent homes that she either owned or rented, even the "Dream Houses" described in *Isles Of Adventure* (1930), were places to be left. Yet, in a letter written to an Australian friend Margaret Windeyer in 1912, Grimshaw states:

I was very glad to hear that you are well and that your home affairs are happy. You don't know how different life looks when the home breaks up and you warm yourself henceforth by other folk's fires. Of course yours never may; there may always be some of your people left in the old place. I hope there will be. (qtd. in Laracy 155)

Susan Gardner has pointed out that, when Grimshaw died in St Vincent's Hospital at Bathurst, one of very few personal effects was a photograph of Cloona House. She had carried this image of her family's country home around with her all her life. Gardner suggests that Cloona became "the most stable and obsessive of her symbols" because of "its connotations of inheritance, entitlement, birthright" ("A'vert to Australianism" 44). While this is a good point, when pondering the significance of this photograph we must also take into consideration the possibility of a desire that is much more fundamental. In his deliberations on the importance of the first shelter Bachelard argues:

In short, the house we were born in has engraved within us the hierarchy of the various functions of inhabiting. We are the diagram of the functions of inhabiting that particular house, and all the other houses are but variations on a fundamental theme. (15)

What did the first house, which is an "oneiric house, a house of dream-memory," engrave within the young Grimshaw, what hierarchy of inhabiting did it leave (Bachelard 15)? These speculations indicate two possible preoccupations: rootedness and movement. The Grimshaws had occupied the area around Cloona since the late eighteenth century. It was where the family had developed their textile industries, where they had established themselves, and where they were buried. It was also the place Grimshaw had to leave at the age of seven. Cloona's roots, its foundations, its cellars, its dead lying close at hand, could not and did not prevent dispossession. Mobility, as we know, is something Grimshaw sought; it became a way of life for her. Yet, in the letter to Windeyer, written some years after the loss of her parents and also College Gardens, she seems to be experiencing an excess of rootlessness, a mobility that wants a chthonic dimension, even one resting in the shallowest of soils. Perhaps this is what the photograph of Cloona offered Grimshaw—the glimpse of a fragile radicle lying in the Antrim earth. At some level this may have been what life on the *Duchess* provided. During her time on board, Grimshaw experienced a sense of community, a sense of being at home, possibly even a fragile sense of rootedness. For, although foundations are lacking, the *Duchess* does have a cellar: the hold, lying below the surface in a space of chthonic density. Surrounded by the amniotic sea, it is from this uterine enclosure that the boat's roots emanate. One is inclined to think that Grimshaw, an inveterate traveler, would have approved of the anchor as root system. While an indispensable part of the boat, the anchor can be lowered or raised at will; it is a portable root, and, even when it is lowered, standing still means still moving. Caught in the rhythms and pulsations of the sea, an anchored boat is never static. The anchor is a root that is manageable and controllable not controlling; but the subtlety and the freedom that it affords does not lessen the problems that may well ensue if it is lost.

Incorporating subterranean depth, an unconsciousness, the liminal space of the boat, with its hold submerged in the deep, also flings an arm toward the stars. This home has both a cellar and an attic. For Grimshaw the aspirational mast is an imaginative staircase which like Bachelard's house "conquer[ing] its share of the sky [...] has the entire sky for its terrace" (53). It is this interstitial perspective, likened to "swinging between heaven and earth" (*In the Strange South Seas* 173), that Grimshaw enjoys up in the cross trees and ratlines. This is an aerial vantage point from which space is distorted: "her little white deck lying below me like a tea-tray covered with walking dolls, her masts at times leaning to leeward until my airy seat was swung far out across the water" (172). Hoisted up in a "boatswain's chair," Annie Brassey, approximately a quarter of a century earlier, likewise relished the view from the masthead: "I was so happy up aloft that I did not care to descend; and it was almost as interesting to

obverse what a strange and disproportioned appearance everything and everybody on board the yacht presented from my novel position" (202-3). Both women experience a distortion of space, their base, their terra firma mid-ocean is shrunk to almost unrecognizably small proportions. This is not, however, an anxiety provoking experience. Secure in the knowledge of their umbilical connection to the boat, they seem to find this impression of distance appealing. Indeed, as the masts swing leeward, Grimshaw appears to be moving even further away from the boat, further away from the people who are in it.

There is a sense of liberating isolation here, something which Grimshaw, at various junctures in *In the Strange South Seas*, associates with the ocean:

All these houses look the one way—across the wide, empty grassy street, between the stems of the leaning palms, to the sunset and the still blue sea. It is a lonely sea, this great empty plain lying below the little town. (184)

Grimshaw is on Niué, and she is happy: "Still I loved Niué, and love it yet" (186), sentiments inspired chiefly by the island's isolation:

It was so very far away, to begin with. In other islands, with regular steamers, people concerned themselves to some degree about the doings of the outer world, and used to wonder how things were getting on, beyond the still blue bar of sea [...] But in Niué, the isolation was complete. (186)

Creating a "long, long trail—long in distance and in time," this "blue bar of sea" offers protection from the outside world (157). But as Grimshaw becomes aware after visiting the "Leper Island" (238) at Penrhyn, it is also a barrier that imprisons. Moved by what she sees as the extreme isolation and melancholia of the place, she writes "Nothing stirs, nothing cries; the earth is silent, the sea empty; and a barrier of thousands of long sea miles [...] between us and the world where people live" (242). It is hardly surprising that the sea around such a desolate and depressing place should be viewed as a barrier. Grimshaw expresses similar sentiments when visiting the extremely isolated Malden Island. Malden was a heavily industrialized site where colonial entrepreneurs made vast sums of money from the island's guano reserves. Grimshaw describes Malden as being surrounded by a "prison bar of blue relentless ocean" (225) and "the empty imprisoning sea" (225). Incorporating the solidity of the prison bar and the rhythms of the tidal streams, Grimshaw's ocean is a mixture of fixity and fluidity, stasis and flux. However, more often than not, it is the latter. Grimshaw only infrequently conceptualizes the sea as a barrier, something which tends to happen when she is viewing it from the perspective of an island dweller and not from that of a passenger on the schooner. Although at one stage in her journey she opines, "For nine days we ploughed across the same monotonous plain of

lonely sea, growing a little duller every day" (216), this lament is far from typical of her travel writing. Unlike Samuel Johnson, who described the boat as a prison "with the chance of being drowned" (qtd. in Boswell 348), the sight of the schooner and the sight of the ocean when viewed from it are, for Grimshaw, in the main, sources of promise. This sensibility may of course be informed by Grimshaw's knowledge that her time on board is limited, and it may also be heightened by the sense of impermanence and, indeed, loss that she associates not only with the *Duchess* but also with South Sea trading vessels in general.

In chapter two of *In the Strange South Seas*, when commenting on the small schooners engaged in the pearling trade around the Paumotus, Grimshaw states:

I never coveted anything more than I coveted those dainty little vessels. Built in San Francisco, where people know how to build schooners, they were finished like yachts [...] One, a thirty-ton vessel, with the neatest little saloon in the world, fitted with shelves for trading; and a captain's cabin like a miniature liner stateroom, and a toy-like galley [...] was so completely a craft after my own heart that I longed to run away with her, or take her off in my trunk to play with—she seemed quite small enough, though her "beat" covered many thousand miles of sea. (47)

Grimshaw is attracted to the boat because of its size and power. Compact to the last degree, it is a miniature, one which effortlessly consumes sea miles but which, nevertheless, ends up being consumed: "Her bones are bleaching on a coral reef among the perilous pearl atolls, this two years past, and her captain [...] of his bones are coral made" (47). Grimshaw casually remarks that "The pitcher that goes to the well, and the schooner that goes to the pearl islands, are apt to meet with the same fate, in time" (47). The schooner's excellent provenance is not enough to keep it afloat. What chance, then, does the *Duchess* have with her suspect background? Discussing the boat that was her home for four months, Grimshaw tells us that photographing from aloft was only possible when the schooner was steady and "[t]hat was seldom [...] for the *Duchess* had been built in New Zealand, where the good schooners do not come from, and had no more hold of the water than a floating egg" (172). The *Duchess* is not reliable; like all boats (and like Cloona that remained for Grimshaw only as a fragment), it is characterized by impermanence. Grimshaw goes on to add:

More than one sailing vessel turned out by the same builders had vanished off the face of the ocean, in ways not explained, by reason of the absence of survivors, but dimly guessed at all the same; and I cannot allow that the pirate captain had any just cause of annoyance – even allowing for a master's pride in his ship—when I recommended to him to have the schooner's name painted legibly on her keel before he should leave Auckland on his next northward journey, just "in case." (172)

Grimshaw's dire forecast appears to have been accurate; many years later, reminiscing in an article in the *Blue Book*, she writes:

In those days I roamed the South Seas in a schooner long since sunk among the corals—the *Countess of Ranfurly*, captained by a little white daredevil who afterward became famous in another quarter of the world as an Antarctic explorer. Any passenger he took had to work passage as well as pay; I learned to go aloft, to “hand, reef and steer,” and to use the sixteen-foot oar in the whaleboat. (2)

Grimshaw may simply have made a mistake with regards to the boat's name, but it is more likely that she had changed it, as was her wont, in the travelogue. For there can be little doubt that the above description, complete with reference to learning to steer the vessel (*In the Strange South Seas* 171), managing a sixteen-foot oar (172), and the daredevil captain (174-177), is of Grimshaw's time aboard *Duchess*. Grimshaw was convinced that the schooner would eventually be lost at sea; her forebodings seem to have been correct.

The *Duchess* was a bounded space that was destined to disappear, like the first bounded space that she knew, that anyone knows. As O.V. de Milosz puts it: “I say Mother. And my thoughts are of you, oh, House. / House of the lovely dark summers of my childhood” (qtd. in Bachelard 45). The *schooner* was imbued with the impermanence of the mother/womb/tomb, and of Cloona, the first house; it was a disappearing fragment that could go under at any time. Permeated with the rhythms, pulsations, music, and murmurings of the sea, *Duchess*, like all boats, embodied a strong semiotic dimension. Kristeva associates the semiotic with the “archaic, instinctual, and maternal territory”; and in particular the *chora* (*Desire* 136). Meaning “receptacle” the *chora* is an “economy of primary drives” that is “anterior to any space” (Roudiez 6) as “no space has yet been delineated” (Kristeva, *Desire* 284). As a result “facilitations are localized at a point that absorbs them, and they return like a boomerang to the invoking body, without, however, signifying it as separate” (Kristeva *Desire* 284). And what, if not a reduction in separation (between the subject and the boat), a shrinkage of space to shell-like proportions, is Grimshaw describing when she writes of the schooner that she “coveted more than anything else” (*In the Strange South Seas* 46) and which she presents in miniature? Commenting on miniatures Bachelard states “[t]he cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it” (150). The habitation of one, and only of one, Grimshaw wants to mark as her own, to possess completely, this boat/home. Like the Barthian boat, Grimshaw's ideal schooner will provide her with “an absolutely finite space”; with its toy-like galley everything is, as Barthes suggests, “at hand” (66); all “facilitations are localized” (Kristeva, *Desire* 284).

Of course separation can only be reduced. The boat can never be anterior to space, nor, indeed, would Grimshaw want it to be. It is possibly true to say that the ultimate assault on our awareness of space is the dive; submersion leads to what Bachelard, as we have seen, refers to as “[o]ne substance, one dimension” (205). For Grimshaw, this complete contact with another substance is not desirable. Grimshaw’s sea is both a source of promise and dread, the latter provoked by total immersion. She is not at home in the world of fluvial dusk and shadows; it is the mingling of sea and sky, water and air, a place of brilliant surface color that she desires. As one would expect, the color most often associated with this surface is blue: “the sea is so vividly blue, as we push off in the boat, that I wonder my fingers do not come out sapphire-coloured when I dip them in” (*In the Strange South Seas* 126), “melted turquoise” (137), “shimmering pale blue” (156), “peacock-blue in colour” (199), “blue relentless ocean” (225). Commenting on the development of color perception in young children Kristeva states that “[t]he earliest appear to be those with short wavelengths, and therefore the color blue” (*Desire* 225). Blue is thus connected with the body of the archaic mother and with an absence of any fixed sense of identity. But it is not this alone. For now is a time in the newborn’s life when the “I” is in “the process of becoming” (*Desire* 225).⁵ Movement away from the maternal body is beginning, and it is a disconnection crucial to survival. The archaic mother is a site both of life and death, a nurturing body that can devour.

Beyond representation, the boundless fluidity of the semiotic is indubitably present in the symbolic as a disruptive destabilizing force. Perhaps the boat illustrates this better than any other space, for the sea’s semiotic qualities not only facilitate, but they also confuse, disorientate, and obstruct. If the symbolic/semiotic dialectic ceases because the latter gets the upper hand, as in the case of storms and tempests, the vessel will be consumed. A home in motion, the *Duchess* was a contrapuntal site. Suffused with semiotic qualities—rhythms and pulsations—the schooner is also a bounded patriarchy but one which has a woman, if only for a brief interlude, at its helm. It is a complex space, invoking as it does the womb/tomb/first house, while disrupting any erroneous notion of the pre-social. It is from this bounded space that Grimshaw views the vastness of the Pacific; perhaps it is only from such a clearly demarcated space that such vastness can be contemplated. Jules Supervielle argues that “Too much space smothers us much more than if there were not enough” (qtd. in Bachelard 221). On the *Duchess* Grimshaw’s private space is radically circumscribed:

The cabin had a floor exactly the size of my smallest flat box, which filled it so neatly that I had to stand on the lid all the time I was in my room. It had a bunk about as large as a tight fit in coffins[.] (*In The Strange South Seas* 120)

In his work on the death drive, Freud posits the animate and the inanimate as two distinct states, arguing:

If we take as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons—becomes inorganic once again—then we shall be compelled to say that “*the aim of all life is death*” and, looking backwards, that “*inanimate things existed before living ones.*” (Freud, *Beyond* 38)

This longing for an anterior state of absolute inanimation produces extreme anxiety within the organism; the death drive is a mix of desire for and fear of stasis:

What we are left with is the fact that the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion [...] Hence arises the paradoxical situation that the living organism struggles most energetically against events (dangers, in fact) which might help it to attain its life’s aim rapidly—by a kind of short-circuit (Freud, *Beyond* 39)

In her two travel brochures, *Three Wonderful Nations* and *The Islands of the Blest* (dates of publication uncertain), Grimshaw posits tourism as escape from a death-like existence. Travel in the South Sea Islands is a form of rebirth where the tourist who has been:

starved in adolescence on the diet of the work-a-day world’s common exigencies, and buried at last with a counting-house stool for headstone—comes to life again, for a little while under the splendours of a tropic moon. (*The Islands of the Blest* 4)

Beyond the tourist destination, a pale imitation of life is played out in the shadow of the symbolic headstone. In her discussion of death and the aesthetic, Elisabeth Bronfen has observed that “representations of death both articulate an anxiety about and a desire for death, they function like a symptom, which psychoanalytic discourse defines as a repression that fails” (x).

While indicative of anxiety about death, Grimshaw’s symptomatic headstone simultaneously attempts to negate it. She depicts death as an event taking place in the world of the Other, an urban world characterized by nullifying routine and batch living, a place that she has left. For the tourist, death can only be held at bay by repeated journeying away from the site of stasis. This provides a clear contrast with Grimshaw’s representation of death in *In the Strange South Seas*; here death is not occurring at the life of the Other. The coffin-bed is in Grimshaw’s cabin, and the desire for and dread of stasis is not simply tranquillized by the literal *bodying* forth of travel. Rather, the categories animate/inanimate are destabilized. Perhaps they always are, for the death drive may not simply bespeak the fusion of desire/fear but also the realization that, as

the biological is subsumed into geological immensity, absolute stasis cannot be guaranteed. The pristine before may always be out of reach. Within the space of the boat, the shell-like cabin and even the coffin-bed are permanently impregnated with motion. Grimshaw's sealed corner is a consuming space, one that enfolds her, holding her still in a sea of movement.

The boat is a space where the polarities stasis/movement, animate/inanimate are challenged. Other modes of transportation can be brought to a definite halt. Once positioned in the element for which it was designed, the boat is always in motion. Even when engines are deadened and the sails and anchors lowered, the boat is never entirely stationary. The *Duchess* provided Grimshaw with a finite space, a space of static movement, a space that was a point of departure and arrival, a home in *the away*, a home that was always in motion. Perhaps shards, maybe even an anchor, may remain on the floor of the vast Pacific, somewhere beyond a space of archaic blue, somewhere beyond representation.

Notes

¹ Grimshaw's first journeys in the Pacific were commissioned by the *Daily Graphic* [London]. The articles which were published in this paper, designed largely to appeal to potential tourists and settlers, later formed the basis of *In the Strange South Seas*. Although this was Grimshaw's second travelogue, it described her first journeys in the Pacific. Susan Gardner suggests that her second travelogue, *From Fiji to the Cannibal Islands* (1907), may have been partly sponsored by established and extremely hard-line settler groups within Fiji.

² Quoting Martin S. Day, Susan Gardner briefly mentions that there are differences between land and sea journeys, but she does not explore these in her doctoral dissertation (100).

³ I am referring here to the open sea. Grimshaw did dive in the pool in Port Moresby during her years in Papua (1907-1934). She described the Port Moresby pool in a letter to Margaret Windeyer as "railed and netted in" (Grimshaw "Autograph"); clearly she felt more confident in this environment than she did in the unfenced ocean.

⁴ From its introduction into England, yachting had been associated with colonial capital and the state. Presented to Charles II at the Restoration by the Dutch East India Company, the first yacht in English history was the *Mary*. It was not, however, until the nineteenth century, when England was at the zenith of its imperial power that, yachting truly caught the attention of a sporting elite whose capital was, in many cases, either directly or indirectly, inextricable from colonial adventures.

⁵ Kristeva's use of "archaic" corresponds with that of Freud. Freud states that the archaic harks back "to picture-language, to symbolic connections, to conditions, perhaps, which existed before our thought-language had developed" (Freud, "Lecture XIII" 199).

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