

Frances Power Cobbe's Stranger-Guest Rhetorics in "Life in Donegal"

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Weary men, what reap ye?—Golden corn for the stranger.
What sow ye?—Human corses that wait for the avenger.
Fainting forms, hunger-stricken, what see you in the offing?
Stately ships to bear our food away, amid the stranger's scoffing.
From "The Famine Year," by "Esperanza," Lady Jane Wilde, 1864

The sophists' rejection of transcendent truths and eternal values, their ability to move a popular audience with a range of rhetorical techniques, their interest in social exigencies: all formed a dark "shadow" of timeless Platonic idealism and the frozen perfection of Aristotelian logic. There is much about the well-known lore of their historical existence which contributes to the impression of "otherness." They were all aliens, stranger-guests to Athens, who impressed its citizens with their expertise as diplomats, teachers, and performers. But they could be victims of fickle public opinion.

From *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured*, by Susan Jarratt

In the Oct. 20, 1866 issue of the London-based periodical *Once a Week*, Frances Power Cobbe published "Life in Donegal," which recounts a year Cobbe spent in the then isolated region still known for its natural wildness, an essay that drew upon her life in Ireland to support her belief that the country was not fit to govern itself. Cobbe was an activist writer who was positioned at the intersection of several ongoing conversations about gender, race, and class in the periodical press during the mid-to-late nineteenth-century. She was born in Dublin on December 4, 1822,

near her family's estate, and died on April 4, 1904 in Hengwrt, Wales, in a house on the family estate of her "special woman friend" Mary Lloyd (qtd. in Mitchell 351). During her lifetime, she had been the pampered only daughter of an Anglo-Irish landowner, the household manager of her family's estate, the self-described "exile" from her father's home after a bout of religious apostasy, and the young woman who voyaged out from her home as an independent traveler of the world. As a writer, she was the young, anonymous author of an ambitious theological work, *Intuitive Morals*, which most reviewers assumed was written by a clergyman (Mitchell 79). She was a journalist and essayist in London's busy print culture, writing on topics that ranged from women's suffrage to the American abolitionist movement. Throughout her professional life and well into her retirement, Cobbe actively campaigned for women's equal treatment under the law, most notably in her journalism in support of the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 and the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878. The only cause that competed with women's emancipation for the bulk of the animal-loving Cobbe's energies was anti-vivisectionism.

Late in the year 1848, 26-year-old Cobbe left what she considered the relative civilization of her father's estate outside of Dublin (relative to London, the center of British imperial culture) for a year's stay at her brother's estate just outside of the town of Donegal. Cobbe's year-long sojourn was productive to her self-fashioning as a rhetor, as it informed her later writing on Ireland, evidenced most directly in "Life in Donegal." This rhetorical moment—encompassing Cobbe's lived experience of Ireland and her written construction of that experience—provides important evidence of Cobbe's perception of herself as a woman writer and thinker, which played an important role in her rhetorical strategies. In this article, I am specifically interested in how Cobbe constructed an identity based on her experiences as an Irish woman of high status without clearly identifying herself as such within the text: this evasive self-construction was her strategy for making her appeals about Ireland's place within the British empire persuasive to her mostly English audience.

Cobbe died over 100 years ago and is largely unfamiliar to American audiences, so where should we position her within the wide landscape of women's rhetorics? In a keynote address of the 2011 Feminisms and Rhetorics conference, Eileen E. Schell called for scholars not only to reclaim and refigure past women rhetors but also to reposition the field(s)

of women's rhetorics in relation to the rest of the world, to practice methodologies that considered women's rhetorics geopolitically and not just nationally. Schell argued that our focus on American women—and in some cases, Western European women—has caused us to ignore the transnational networks of women's texts and oral communication. Schell's call was revisited and expanded during the 2013 Feminisms and Rhetorics conference, Gesa Kirsch and Jacqueline Jones Royster invited scholars to engage with women's rhetorics on a global scale by broadening our perspectives to include women communicating in multiple transnational contexts. Cobbe's journalism on Ireland is a productive means of widening our scope of research while raising questions about how power complicates women's rhetorical agency within global and transnational networks.

In this article, I focus on a woman who was Western European and privileged, yet her complicated national identity as an Anglo-Irish woman forces us to interrogate established categorizations of race, nationality, and status. Cobbe lived a hyphenated identity. She was of upper-class English stock but lived in Ireland the first half of her life, where her patrician father was a devout evangelical Anglican, but the women who did the daily work involved in caring for his children were mostly Catholic Irish; her status would have enabled a life where she did little or no visible labor, yet her paid journalism appeared in periodicals across Great Britain and America; she did not marry a man and bear children, thus fulfilling her role as "big house daughter"¹ by replicating the gentry class, but lived in a partnership that she termed a "marriage" with a Welsh gentry woman. This partnership bore many markers of upper-class respectability. Most importantly for this article, Cobbe performed variations of this hyphenated identity within the periodical press.

The conflation of the physical space of Ireland and figurative space of the periodical becomes the rhetorical space from which Cobbe makes her arguments. Her action not only replicates larger imperialist actions that maintains English control over Ireland, but also maintained a metaphorical place for women for women to stand and speak on behalf of their own interests. Travel writing, by its very nature, examines how a subject moves through a specific space and how that subject presents

¹See Margot Backus's *The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality and Child Sacrifice in the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order*.

her experiences in written form, suggesting that it is the navigation, the movement, through rhetorical spaces that creates rhetorical identity, as identity in discourse is not created until the author responds to the pressures of the rhetorical space.

This article focuses on the concept of rhetorical space and its intersection with place, the geographical *and* imagined Ireland, given that Ireland is a place that exists and a place created in discourse. Travel writing allows us to look even more closely at the concept of how rhetorical space impacts the self-fashioning of a woman rhetor. Both pieces feature many of the conventions of travel-writing, a hybridic genre that often could just as easily be classified as autobiography while embracing all manner of scholarly inquiry, including the social sciences, history, and art (Kinsley 73). Travel writing is "nonfictional," though novels that fictionalized an author's travel experiences are often included as examples of the genre (Kinsley 10). The travelogue appeared mostly in guidebook, narrative, or epistolary formats, but its hybridic nature allowed a movement between the three types (Kinsley 38-39). Like many British travelogues, Cobbe's "Life in Donegal" also took special interest in social science, art, and history. It also illustrates the hybridity and flexibility of the travel-writing genre, as it was published in periodical format.

Cobbe's travel did not mark her as absolutely exceptional among Victorian upper-and-middle class women. After all, evidence of British women's travel writing began appearing in the eighteenth century, when Lady Mary Wortley Montagu circulated her *Letters* detailing her experiences in Constantinople where she traveled with her husband, ambassador to Turkey, well over a century before Cobbe began her writing career (Bassnett 229). However, as Susan Bassnett points out, "In an age when relatively few people travelled at all, the idea of a woman traveller was something of a novelty" (229). Some women writers chose to capitalize on this novelty when it came to fashioning their narrative selves, while others did not (Bassnett 229). Cobbe seemed to find it more rhetorically effective to *not* emphasize her uniqueness as a female traveler. Instead, she emphasized her experiences of Ireland without specifically referencing her gender.

Cobbe used her experiences of Ireland as a means of making imperialist arguments, arguments that would need to be delivered in a

vessel her audience would find credible, informative, and entertaining. Dana Anderson's book, *Identity's Strategy*, describes how rhetors construct selves in language that are persuasive in different contexts. Through Anderson, Kenneth Burke's theories about persuasion and identity become a clear and coherent means of examining how rhetors construct selves within language that are designed to persuade, which Anderson describes as "the rhetorical strategy of *identity*, the influencing of others through the articulation of our sense of *who we are*" (4, emphasis in original). To Anderson, identity is always contextual, and is not merely biographical, but a rhetorical construction:

One way of viewing identity rhetorically ... is to view it as a kind of persuasive strategy, as a means of moving audiences toward certain beliefs or actions. ... Identity matters less as something that one "is" and more as something that one *does* in language; or, more exactly, identity matters as something that one does to an audience through the expression of who or what one is. (4, emphasis in original)

The question that continues to guide my study is how did Cobbe fashion a self that could speak with authority about Ireland without rooting herself too firmly in the relatively powerless position of being an Irish woman? One answer to that question lies in her self-construction as a "stranger-guest," a strategy that relied upon a certain unfixity in positionality that enabled Cobbe to move freely between spheres, English and Irish, public and domestic, male and female.

Travel writing intersects in productive ways with Susan Jarratt's feminist reconceptualization of sophistic rhetoric, providing a new means of imagining women rhetors navigating the physical and conceptual spaces of the nineteenth century, which enables us to see how Cobbe fits, and expands, our definition of a Victorian woman rhetor. I pay special attention to "distancing strategies," which Sara Mills defines as women speaking about "unfeminine" topics by de-emphasizing themselves as the source of the information; one example of a distancing strategy would be the quotation of letters to relay controversial information (82). Cobbe's distancing strategy was the use of the genre conventions of travel writing, which she used to build a rational, objective identity, one that would create an ethos of credibility on the subject of Ireland. In order to distance

herself from the irrationality and sentimentality attributed to Irish and women's rhetorical performances, Cobbe adapted a style of travel writing that allowed her to move through the discursive space of *Once a Week* by constructing herself as a neutral, impartial "stranger-guest."

The periodical functioned as a third space between the material and the conceptual, and travel writing's place in the periodical culture illustrates how women navigated this terrain. It is also a midpoint between the privacy of the domestic sphere and the exposure of the public sphere, where women could enter into societal debates without transgressing cultural taboos about women speaking publicly to mixed audiences. A periodical is a site where the literal meets the metaphorical: it's a material collection of multiple genres of writing and a figurative meeting place for writers with multiple points of view. Imagining Cobbe as a "stranger-guest," a term in classical rhetoric re-envisioned in modern rhetoric by Jarratt, will help us envision how Cobbe used the conventions of travel writing as a means of navigating both geographical and metaphorical spaces.

This stranger-guest persona, a term I unpack in greater detail in the next section, authorized Cobbe to speak with conviction on the issue of Ireland, while masking her identity as an Irish woman, enabling her to speak about the other though she often functioned as a societal other herself. After I define the term "stranger-guest," I offer a brief discussion of the theories surrounding women's travel writing. I then describe Cobbe's year-long stay in Donegal and its impact on her self-fashioning as a writer, before concluding with an exploration of how her construction of herself as a stranger-guest to Ireland enabled her to navigate the rhetorical space of *Once a Week*.

Jarratt's Feminist Reclamation of Sophistic Rhetoric and its Implications for Women's Rhetorical Performances in Journalism

Though the term "sophist" is often used rather loosely today, the original sophists are generally known as traveling teachers who taught rhetoric for a fee during the fifth century B.C.E. They were "educational innovators responsive to social and political changes that made the ability to speak effectively a valuable commodity" (Rountree 681). Sophistic rhetoricians "believed that logical arguments could be constructed

on either side" (Rountree 682); thus, they were often viewed as being opportunistic, uninterested in "Truth" in exchange for multiple "truths." However, the sophists have been reclaimed for modern rhetoric and are most often used today for their philosophy of context-based truth: "They evinced a special interest in human perceptions as the only source of knowledge in all fields, including nature, and emphasized the significance of language in constructing that knowledge" (Jarratt xviii).

The unfixed nature of sophistic rhetoric is what makes it an apt means of theorizing women's speech and writing, as it disperses rhetorical authority over groups of people and across multiple spaces. Such flexibility would allow someone like Cobbe, privileged in many ways and marginal in others, the authority to speak persuasively in a space like the periodical press. However, there were two sides to the sophistic coin: strategies of sophistic rhetoric worked in positive and negative ways for cultural "others," whose writing and speech acts either predicted or emulated practices of sophistic rhetoric. In addition, Jarratt makes important connections between the sophists and women rhetors, describing how ideas about their otherness often cut both ways in terms of their reception by their audiences. In the epigraph for this article, Jarratt describes how the sophists represented the otherness of being born away from a cultural center. Stranger-guest has many implications in terms of the otherness Cobbe would have experienced as an Anglo-Irish woman writer.

The concept of "stranger" would have meant something very different to someone living in Ireland during the nineteenth century. "Stranger" was a term that the Irish used to describe English and Anglo-Irish people living in Ireland. Examples of this usage in the nationalist literature are plentiful. In the poem that is the epigraph for this article, Lady Jane Wilde, under the pseudonym Speranza in nationalist newspaper *The Nation*, castigates the "stranger" as the recipient of the "golden corn" harvested from Ireland that should have gone to the starving people who cultivated it. In Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats's nationalist play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, the titular character, an old woman personifying Ireland, is asked what has "set her to wandering" (7). She answers, "Too many strangers in the house" (7). The term "guest" connotes someone who is welcome under certain conditions, but not permanently. Cobbe is a stranger-guest on different levels: she is a stranger-guest in Ireland due

to her English heritage, a stranger-guest in England due to her Irish background, and a stranger-guest in the masculinist discursive space of imperialism, represented by the family literary journals for which she wrote. Cobbe was an interloper in the country of her birth *and* an interloper in the masculinist world of journalism.

But how can we compare wandering, male teachers of rhetoric active during the sixth century B.C.E. to women writing and speaking about two thousand years later? The implications of the stranger-guest position for women's discourse have to do with the term's connections to hierarchical gendered and racial systems. According to Jarratt, the sophists were feminized and, thus, denigrated: "The character projected onto the feminine as 'other' shares with Plato's sophists qualities of irrationality (or non-rationality), magical or hypnotic power, subjectivity, emotional sensitivity; all these are devalued in favor of their 'masculine' or philosophic opposites—rationality, objectivity, detachment and so on" (65). According to Jarratt, the feminization of sophistic rhetoric is bound up in the concept of nationalism: those born away from Athens were cast as the irrational, submissive "other." Irish communication styles were similarly devalued, depicted as overly emotional, illogical, and subjective. Cobbe's adoption of an objective, detached persona throughout her writings helps her distance herself from charges of irrationality and subjectivism, characteristics that would have marked her writing as female and Irish, guaranteeing a more difficult reception.

While Jarratt posited that the denigration of sophistic rhetorics resulted in its feminization (and recursively the feminization resulted in its denigration), my use of the term stranger-guest will emphasize how it allowed women the power of movement through hostile or contested spaces. Cobbe's stranger-guest persona illustrates the flexibility of the strategy of first-person constitution: Cobbe could enter into discursive spaces where women had only just begun to set foot and, thus, shape larger cultural conversations that impacted people across the globe. If Cobbe had elected to emphasize her Irishness and/or her femininity, she risked not being taken seriously by her audience. The strategy of first-person constitution enabled women to use what could be held against them—their very otherness—as a means of making effective arguments. Cobbe fashioned herself as a stranger-guest in order to more effectively navigate the rhetorical space of the periodical, taking advantage of the

foreignness associated with the racial or gendered other by offering a perspective that depended on displacement and dislocation. As a stranger-guest, Cobbe leaves her identity as an Irish woman *out* of the equation, instead constructing herself as an English, masculine subject. While she negated her femininity and her Irishness, the stranger-guest persona does allow her to enact the role of interlocutor between English and Irish culture and to assert herself as an authoritative voice in a polyvocal rhetorical space. This construction of Irishness was wholly dependent on her construction of herself as a stranger-guest to Ireland, which left her identity persuasively open to her readers' interpretations, investments, and expectations. While Cobbe's endorsement of imperialism remained unchanged regardless of context, her use of language to fashion a persuasive self in discourse is sophistic. Like the sophists, she emphasized the construction of truth through language. Her strategy of making different choices in the fashioning of her Anglo-Irish persona in response to changing contexts also reflected the flexibility and variability of sophistic rhetorics. Jarratt's concept of the "stranger-guest" complicates an easy categorization of Cobbe's writing on travel, because it does not allow us to comfortably place her within any one tradition, suggesting as it does that cultural others are always set apart from the dominant rhetorical paradigm. Yet Cobbe was not alienated from the dominant culture, enjoying a place of privilege even when she stepped out of bounds.

In order to navigate the treacherous terrain of the periodical press, Cobbe would need to use her status in specific ways. Cobbe emulated the conventions of travel-writing in order to speak authoritatively on Ireland but from a strategic distance. Cobbe's goal was never to persuade her audience to visit the country of her birth. Rather, her purpose was to narratively construct Ireland and then claim Ireland not only as part of the Empire, but as rhetorical platform. Cobbe's use of the travel writing genre to advance her own class interests at the expense of the Irish underclasses shows the problematic malleability of the periodical as a rhetorical space for women. While it offered women a metaphorical podium to address large audiences of willing listeners and often did serve as a mouthpiece for social change, it also gave rhetors the ideal apparatus for maintaining their privilege: a ready-made audience that had many of the same investments as the writer. Travel-writing was a readily

acceptable and available means to deliver arguments about England and her colonial holdings. In the case of Cobbe's imperialist rhetorics in *Once a Week*, her stranger-guest persona endowed Cobbe with the power of navigation over the metaphorical spaces of the periodical press.

In a sense, *all* women writing during the nineteenth century were navigating newly chartered spaces. Travel writing makes the figurative literal and the literal figurative, tracking how women navigated these conceptual and physical arenas. Examining travel writing as rhetoric shows what Cobbe did with the rhetorical spaces available to her and how she expressed her material body moving through material spaces in discourse. Cobbe's travel writing not only helped legitimate women's movement through physical spaces, but through the world of journalism. Her travel writing on Ireland, no matter how problematic a portrayal, shows a woman on the move, in terms of geography and writing, displaying the potential of the third-space for women rhetors. Access to physical spaces would allow women access to rhetorical spaces, and vice versa. The act of travel allowed women the authority to speak about subjects unrelated to hearth and home, while women's presence in the rhetorical space of travel writing made their exploration of the world outside the domestic sphere seem a lot more commonsensical.

Cobbe's Excursion to Donegal and its Translation into "Life in Donegal"

When considering Cobbe's positionality, we need to understand how her ideological location intersected with her geographical location. If Ireland as a whole was often described as the wild opposite of stately England, western Ireland was seen as even wilder and more removed from English culture. Donegal is even now part of the *Gaeltacht*, "the appellation employed to describe certain geographical areas containing a diverse group of communities which are predominantly Irish-speaking. These communities are mainly in the west of Ireland" (Watson 256). In the 1990s, there were 80,000 people living in the *Gaeltacht*, and 60,000 were Irish speakers (Watson 256). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Donegal was even more widely Irish-speaking. For Cobbe's English audience, it would have signaled a particularly foreign experience, though logistically it was not far away. As Mitchell noted, "It seemed a long way from civilization. By 1848 news reached Dublin by telegraph

and twice-daily London mails. Donegal still had no rail service" (71). Because the western end of Ireland was further away both geographically and culturally, Cobbe could more easily establish herself as an expert on the subject, as most of her audience had not likely seen Donegal for themselves.

According to her autobiography, Cobbe was banished to the wilds of Donegal from Newbridge by her strictly evangelical father after revealing that she no longer was a believing Christian (her atheism did not last long). However, this may be another important example of Cobbe's ability to fashion a persuasive self in discourse, as Mitchell points out that there is no evidence of a rift between Cobbe and her father in his diary, where he agonized over one son's decision not to enter the clergy and his other son's brief interest in an alternative sect of Christianity (Mitchell 71). This implies that Cobbe's dissension barely registered with her father (or did not register at all) and that Cobbe's putative banishment stemmed from something else entirely. While Mitchell makes the very reasonable assumption that Cobbe was actually sent to Donegal to tend to her seriously depressed brother, Cobbe's writing never suggested that her exile was an extension of her role as domestic caretaker of Newbridge instead of punishment for her religious apostasy.

All of Mitchell's suppositions speak to Cobbe's position as a woman in a patriarchal culture. Cobbe's father may not have even "heard," literally or figuratively, Cobbe's assertions about her own spiritual beliefs, though those beliefs were important enough to shape his daughter's identity as a reformist writer for the rest of her life. Cobbe's experience within her own home mirrors the problems of reception women writers faced outside the domestic sphere. If Cobbe's father heard her assertions and disregarded them, it suggests that Cobbe's expressions as a woman did not carry as much intellectual or spiritual weight as a man's. Cobbe's role as a stranger-guest in her own home would replicate itself in her roles in the public sphere, including the periodical press.

It is possible that she continually asserted that she was sent away due to her father's anger because Cobbe saw herself—and saw the benefit in fashioning herself—as equal to a man. Cobbe was remarkably self-possessed, and this attribute greatly informed how she constructed her authorial persona. Many women writing during the nineteenth century made different rhetorical decisions, opting to emphasize their roles as

domestic caretakers in order to build their ethos. While these women rhetors used their domestic experiences to harness rhetorical power, it is fair to say that this sort of power was undervalued in comparison to the political and social power of men (a trend that we can recognize in our own age). Cobbe surely recognized this and opted to construct herself as equal to her brothers in importance to her father and, more expansively, saw her rhetorical performances as being just as valuable as any man's.

The fact that she could not assume that her audience would feel the same way informed how she portrayed her writing self in each of her pieces. In *Once a Week*, Cobbe found it most expedient to use the conventions of travel writing, a genre popular with writers of both sexes. Of course, the ways that men and women employed the conventions of travel writing were often different and put to different purposes. However, at times, those purposes would converge. This was the case in Cobbe's imperialist rhetorics, which sought to keep in place the colonial system that benefited her and other members of her class. The complex interplay of status, genre, and gender in Cobbe's travel writing enabled a masculinist voice that facilitated a certain construction of Ireland forever open to the excursions, literal and imaginative, of the English.

Fashioning a Self Outside of the Confines of Newbridge: Cobbe's Use of Travel-writing as a Means of Entering a Wider World

Before Cobbe could open up Ireland to the imaginative excursions of her readers, she would need to take literal excursions of her own. Status was the very mechanism that allowed Cobbe to function as a travel writer. Cobbe's status enabled her to speak persuasively on the Irish Question, as it afforded her the privilege of dislocation and displacement from her native land *and* traditional expectations of gender—the ability to be on the move, free from financial concerns and domestic duties. While the boundaries between genres may be a bit nebulous, it is clear that Cobbe was no stranger to travel writing before her pieces in *Once a Week* and *Fraser's*. Upon the death of her father, she had left the safe confines of Newbridge for a year-long excursion to the Middle East and Italy. According to Sidonie Smith, an increasing number of women were embarking on voyages at the time Cobbe left her family estate for the wider world: "The expanding mobility of *certain women* in the middle to

late nineteenth century came as an effect of modernity—democratization, literacy, education, increasing wealth, urbanization and industrialization, and the colonial and imperial expansion that produced wealth and the investment in 'progress'" (xi, my emphasis). Due to her status, Cobbe was one of those "certain women," free from the "drudgery of daily survival and from ignorance" (Smith xi).

Cobbe's independent travels illustrate how enacting the role of stranger-guest could work in positive ways for the woman writer. While Cobbe's travel marked her as a woman independent of father and husband, it also marked her entry into a wider world, one where she could also be free of her privileged background if she chose: "She was especially happy to discover that people enjoyed her for herself, even without the social advantages of her position in Ireland" (Mitchell 87). One could imagine that Cobbe's travel gave her the sense that she could shape her identity to make herself appealing to the strangers she met on her journey. Was her navigation of the physical spaces of Italy and the Middle East, where she was never sure what people and events she would encounter, the origin of her ability to negotiate the conceptual spaces of the literary miscellanies that would help make her career? We can only imagine.

What *is* clear is that Cobbe's class helped propel her into the world outside the gates of Newbridge; within those new contexts—including the periodical press—she could also turn off, so to speak, her classed identity when it proved advantageous. We also know that Cobbe mined her experiences for her first publications in the periodical press. In 1862, "The Eternal City (in a temporary phase)," a piece about Rome, was published in *Fraser's*, while "Women in Italy in 1862" was published in *MacMillan's Magazine*. In 1863, *Fraser's* also published "A Day at the Dead Sea" and "A Day at Athens." Travel writing helped keep Cobbe employed as a professional writer from the beginning of her career to the end. Little wonder, then, that she relied on its conventions even when writing about her own homeland.

Tours of the "Celtic fringe" had become increasingly popular during the eighteenth century as regions on the outer edge of Britannia gained the infrastructure to support a tourism industry. What Kinsley described as the "home tour" of the Celtic regions by British citizens "assisted the articulation of national character, yet instead of promoting Britishness

as a coherent and united identity, it placed emphasis on the foreignness of much home tour experience and accentuated regional difference" (Kinsley 129). The first few decades of the nineteenth century brought waves of middle-class British tourists "eager to demonstrate its cultural and economic capital" in an expression of "a metropolitan desire to 'tame' the previously colonized, ever-expanding margins of the United Kingdom" (Kroeg 200). Travel writing "provided a space and a language for ongoing cultural negotiations between Great Britain and England" (Kroeg 200).

In important ways, Cobbe continued the tradition of writing the home tour in her journalism on the Irish Question. Travel writing was yet another way for Cobbe to use her Irish heritage as a means of shaping a persuasive identity, as it relied on her class status as much as her personal experience of Ireland. As a member of the Ascendancy class, Cobbe shaped herself as a writer above the task of giving mere tourists the practical information they would need to visit Ireland. Instead, she used her expertise to craft a wider argument about culture, an argument that always ended with an intact Great Britain, with England at its political and cultural center.

Telling Tales of Travel in "Life in Donegal": Cobbe's Use of Travel-writing Conventions to Construct an Identity of Stranger-guest

Cobbe's experiences of Ireland were mediated through a rhetorical self that was designed to move through discursive and literal places, despite cultural codes that reified women's rightful place in the private or domestic sphere. The stranger-guest persona would prove to be a successful strategy when Cobbe used the conventions of travel writing as a means of persuasion about Ireland because it enabled her to use the power of her position while mitigating the factors that could make her powerless. Cobbe's rhetorical identity came into being at the intersections of the multiple spaces she inhabited. In this section, I bring together discussions of the physical space of Ireland, especially Donegal, and the more conceptual spaces of the periodical in question, in order to demonstrate the rhetorical space Cobbe navigated. The contents of *Once a Week* reveal that it was "an emphatically middle-class magazine that takes reading, history, and art seriously" (Hughes 46).

"Donegal" was the second piece that Cobbe published in the magazine that year; an essay detailing her travels to Egypt, "A Lady's Adventure in the Great Pyramid," had appeared in the April 14, 1866 issue. This reveals that the editors of *Once a Week* were interested in travel writing in general, and in particular, Cobbe's travel writing. "Donegal" was the only piece in the October 20 issue that featured Celticist² themes. Overall, the issue displayed an interest in Teutonic subjects, featuring titles such as "A German Jubilee," an essay commemorating the German victory over Napoleon at Leipzig, and the travel piece "A Day at Salzburg and Berchtesgaden." Cobbe's travel piece was written about a space much closer to her English readers, and to herself.

For Cobbe, the location of Donegal was bound up not only in her construction of herself as a writer, but as a commentator on the Irish Question. Writing on the home tour shared many of the same genre conventions as travel writing that detailed journeys to faraway lands: "British travellers touring their own island encounter difference just as travellers 'abroad' do, and that difference is commonly given expression through rhetorical gestures that imitate or echo the motifs of travel texts relating foreign journeys" (Kinsley 2).

Cobbe's introduction to "Life in Donegal" is an exercise in identity construction by the means of evasion. The constraints presented by *Once a Week* are the constraints posed by a larger imperialist system. In *Once a Week*, Cobbe portrays herself as an active participant in empire building by downplaying her position as a "big house daughter," thus undercutting the expectations of feminine behavior that go along with it. While the piece bears her byline, it does not come until the end. It is not obvious at the beginning of the piece whether the author is male or female, and Cobbe makes no allusions to her gender throughout the entire piece. In

² In "Celticism: Macpherson, Matthew Arnold and Ireland," George J. Watson described the duality of Celticism: "If Celticism had a patron saint, it would have to be the Roman god Janus, who faces both ways at once" (150). Watson posited Celticism as less systematic and coherent than Said's definition of Orientalism: "Celticism ... is an ideological construction, originating in the eighteenth century, an attempt to recreate or assert a cultural identity for the people of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales which will distinguish them from the majority inhabitants of the British Isles, the English" (148). Celticist discourse cast the Celt as the binary opposite of the Anglo-Saxon: where the Celt is feminine and irrational, the Anglo-Saxon (usually English) is rational and masculine.

the passage below, Cobbe places herself at the level of adventurous young men prepared to travel to the furthest reaches of the Empire:

If it should happen to any parent with a mind thus well-regulated, to possess a son troubled with a strong desire to emigrate to Upper Canada or New Zealand, we should recommend, as the best possible remedy, that the youth should be induced to make a short and easy trial of how he really likes solitude, by spending six months or so in the county of Donegal. If he pass through that ordeal, and return to London still talking of the delights of living out in the world, then let him go by all means to the Antipodes, or the society of those sweet creatures which brave S. Baker met about Gondokoro. He has certainly a "call" from St. Anthony. (436)

In fact, by constructing herself as an authority, Cobbe occupies a space *above* these young men: her identity here reads more like a middle-aged Victorian gentleman about to recount his past adventures to a younger audience than a middle-aged spinster, which is how many of her readers may have viewed her. Cobbe's performance of masculinity here deemphasized her role as a woman in shaping colonial culture.

Cobbe establishes herself as an adventurer to the outer limits of the British Empire, a difficult identity for women travelers to claim, as they were afforded less freedom of movement and behavior than men. To claim this identity, Cobbe distances herself from any information that would reveal her inferior status as an Irish woman. In order to construct an Ireland her audience would accept, Cobbe would need to set the parameters for discussion, undertaking this task in the most literal sense by becoming an educator for her English audience, offering her readers a quick geographical primer:

[Donegal] is a vast shire some forty miles long at the N.W. angle of that island of whose history and geography you know less than of those of Kamtschatka.³ Donegal is large, and Donegal is beautiful in a certain wild desolate style. There is a magnificent rock-bound coast to the north, and a bay like the Bristol Channel

swarming of fish to the south, and plenty of mountains and salmon rivers, and a few woods here and there; altogether a county which in England people would walk over and talk over perpetually. *But it is in Ireland, and at the outermost and most inaccessible rim of Ireland. So who cares for its beauty or wildness?* (436, emphasis mine)

Though Cobbe's piece is not illustrated, her descriptive language reflects the ethos of *Once a Week*, providing her readers with a vivid portrait of Donegal. Cobbe's physical descriptions were never simple; instead, they were overlaid with multiple meanings. In this one, there is a hiccup in Cobbe's careful construction of herself as an objective, English traveler to Irish lands. She expressed a sense of indignation at English ignorance of a land not that far away. The line "so who cares for its beauty and wildness?" suggested that the ignorance was a sort of willed ignorance: the curiosity of the English middle-class about foreign cultures did not extend, in Cobbe's view, to Ireland (though the sheer number of essays and articles about Ireland in many literary miscellanies refutes this point). Cobbe's labeling of her English audience as ignorant of Ireland's attributes is calculated to create the opportunity for Cobbe to act as educator. Her strategy of first-person constitution would construct Cobbe as a credible resource for her English readers, actually placing her above them in terms of authority and expertise on the subject of Ireland.

Cobbe enacts this expert authorial persona by organizing the English into different groups, suggesting that the class of Englishman implied what each was looking for in a holiday. This labeling, surely meant to be comical, has uncomfortable overtones. For example, Cobbe offers the correct pronunciation of Donegal for her "dear brother Cockneys" who "are sure to mispronounce it" (436). Rather than use ornamented, lyrical prose, Cobbe strives for an objective, scientific tone, but that does not mean she was not also striving for humor. She dryly observes the travelling patterns of her fellow Britons, carefully categorizing them according to their class: the Cockney, "an animal so naturally gregarious," longs for the "alpine solitude" of a Swiss chalet, while the Londoner—clearly distinct from his "brother Cockney"—"aspires" for "a lodge in some vast wilderness" (436). Cobbe's self-conscious adoption of a scientific persona creates moments of comedy: the Cockney does

³Kamtschatka is a peninsula located on the outermost northeast region of Russia, extending the length between Brussels to Reykjavik.

not leave "his wonted habitation" in a train, but a "shoal," in a "process corresponding partially to the hybernation of the mole, and partially to the passage of the herring" (436). Her stranger-guest persona enables Cobbe to persuasively categorize her fellow British subjects without revealing where she fits into such a broad hierarchical system. The working-class Cockney is described in much the same way as Cobbe often described the Irish: uneducated, ignorant, and highly animated. Cobbe's categorization of English tourists only anticipates much more serious categorizations that would come later in the piece, categorizations that would have greater implications for questions of empire.

It takes more than military and economic might to conquer a nation: language also plays an integral part. Cobbe expends more energy describing the land than she does the people, placing her within the masculinist tradition of the "manners and customs" style of travel writing. Mills argues that in "the physical act of describing the landscape the narrator is also mastering it" (78). Travel writers often describe landscapes "as if they were empty of people," symbolically emptying a colonial space of its native inhabitants to make room for colonial occupiers (Mills 75). Cobbe takes a similar tack in "Life in Donegal." Gone is the "big house daughter," who had a close, though hierarchical, relationship with her father's villagers, who could name them and ascribe them characteristics and life stories that emphasized their humanity even within a system that subjugated them.

Instead, Cobbe focuses her energies on narrating the landscape of Donegal in order to discursively package its wild landscape for a new audience. Her power in this context would hinge on her ability to construct a persona that was knowledgeable but not vested.

Few tourists ever hear of it. Beyond the immediate corner of the little county town nearest to the rest of the world, there is hardly a resident gentleman. Half of it is a vast district, thinly inhabited by the poorest of poor Irish-speaking cottiers; and, if the Ordnance Surveyors were not beyond suspicion, we should entertain private doubts whether the villages marked sparsely in the map were not

fancifully introduced, as in *Hudibras*⁴ days, when "Geographers on Africk's downs/Stuck elephants for want of towns." (436)

The above paragraph is typically Cobbian, with many layers of meaning and intertextual references, including the 20-year endeavor by English government to map the terrain of Ireland. In 1824, the British government began mapping "every nook and cranny of the country" which would "address inequalities in local taxation" (McWilliams 51). In one short passage, Cobbe renders Donegal as the western other to the civilized England and even the rest of Ireland, emphasizing their strange tongue and perhaps more importantly, the lack of an aristocratic presence in the region. In her biography, Mitchell sees Cobbe's musings in *Once a Week* as straightforwardly autobiographical. No "gentleman" means simply that there is no society and Cobbe was socially isolated. But what Mitchell read as Cobbe's boredom due to lack of society, I read as a signal to her English audience that the area had seen little English influence, with the lack of civilization that would suggest to her middle-class English reader. Of course, her brother was a "gentleman," but he is left out of Cobbe's piece, as is any information that would openly signal Cobbe's Anglo-Irish identity.

In sophistic rhetoric, there was a focus on the local over the universal. But for Cobbe, as stranger-guest in Donegal *and* in the English periodical, what is "local" is the audience represented by *Once a Week*; it is the shared values between the audience and Cobbe that become transposed upon the landscape of Ireland. But instead of remapping Ireland, she rewrites Ireland through the imperialist lens of a middle-class English miscellany. Her position as stranger-guest enables her to function as both a traveler to and a resident of Ireland, allowing her to claim authority through her experience with the land and people, without revealing or emphasizing parts of her identity that would mitigate that authority: her Irish heritage and her gender. By focusing on one part of the country, "Life in Donegal" offered a piece of Ireland for the consumption of her English audience.

⁴ This is surely a reference to *Hudibras*, a mock epic poem written by seventeenth-century poet Samuel Butler. The poem is a satirical indictment of Cromwellian politics. According to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Butler was widely read and imitated in Great Britain and continued to be published until the early twentieth century.

The strategy demanded and enabled a certain selectivity in what the rhetor revealed to the audience, which not only allowed the woman rhetor to speak within the contested third space of the periodical, but to fashion an identity that could persuasively answer the question for her Victorian audience: To whom does Ireland belong? For her readers in the twenty first century, what does Cobbe's answer to this question say about the intersection of hierarchy and rhetorical agency? At a time when so much was in flux—gender roles, racial conceptualizations, geographical boundaries—Cobbe's rhetorical mapping attempted to keep Ireland and its people frozen in time, perpetuating the classed system that allowed a woman such as Cobbe rhetorical agency in the first place.

It could be argued that Cobbe practices sophism in the worst sense of the word, as she attempted to persuade the English public of the essential rightness of continued colonial rule over Ireland without acknowledging her investments in the issue. Her ability to be "English" or "Saxon" dependent on context could be seen as an "attempt to persuade through deception." While Cobbe is often discussed as being an "exceptional" Victorian woman, she was very much of part of that age, and was subject to—and perpetuated—some of the worst prejudices of her class, race, and time. While we work to recover Cobbe's rhetorics for what they can teach us about the Victorian age, we should not forget her shortcomings and remind ourselves that even during the nineteenth century, she might have made different choices. The Lady Wilde poem "The Famine Year" that begins this article illustrates that upper-class Victorian women did write on behalf of the poorer classes of Irish from a nationalist perspective.

Conclusion: Negotiating Gendered and Geographical Spaces

In this article, I have shown how Cobbe used the conventions of travel writing to extend her imperialist argument. Cobbe's strategy of constructing herself as a stranger-guest to Ireland, like other strategies performed by women rhetors, has both positive and negative implications for women speaking and writing during the Victorian age. On the one hand, while Cobbe underplays her gender by equating herself with masculine adventurers, the fact remains that she was a woman asserting her right to travel freely through the empire, which lent her—and by extension, other women—the authority to speak credibly on issues of

empire. Cobbe's construction of herself as a travel writer is instructive to the myriad ways Victorian women used the strategy of first-person constitution in order to persuade, as it emphasized how in flux the concept of identity was for women writing and speaking about empire. Travel writing is where the materiality of the rhetorical situation—the journals, the contested physical space of Ireland—interconnects with conceptualizations of rhetorical space that are vital when discussing Victorian women rhetors.

The intersection of travel writing and rhetoric represents women on the move, physically, socially, and ideologically. Travel writing enabled women to, borrowing a phrase from H el ene Cixous, write themselves into being on an international scale. In the case of Cobbe's travel writing, we can view her writing on place as an argument that women had rights to traverse the globe and make meaning about what they saw and the people they encountered. Cobbe's travel writing on Ireland shows how complicated this global rhetorical stage could be for women, despite the greater freedoms afforded those "certain women" described by Sidonie Smith. On a larger scale, women were on the move through multiple contexts during the Victorian age. That Cobbe traversed through so many successfully enough to become a celebrity writer on both sides of the Atlantic signals to us that we should be very interested in just how she did it. *Where* Cobbe came from—geographically and ideologically—is an important question to consider as we begin to examine Cobbe's rhetorical journeys through the Victorian English-speaking world.

I hope including Cobbe will broaden the conversation, if only a bit, by widening our focus to include a woman who, like her American counterparts, had to answer questions about race and status. Those questions may have come with different historical and cultural baggage given different cultural and political contexts, but are still instructive to us as we strive to construct a more complete picture of women speaking and writing in the past, and as we work to expand our vision of women and speaking and writing transnationally today.

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