

Girlhood in Transition: Girls' Shipboard Diaries on Journeys to New Zealand, 1879-1881

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In her 1869 advice book *Girlhood*, Marianne Farningham writes: "Youth should be a happy time. . . . But it should be an earnest time, because so much depends upon it. Your whole future, the entire success or failure of your womanhood . . . hinge very much upon what you are, and what you will do now" (4-5). Farningham describes girlhood as a decisive period of liminality; distinct from both childhood and adulthood, it determines everything that will follow it, indeed the "entire success or failure" of the girl's womanhood. Shipboard diaries written by emigrants on their way to New Zealand narrate a similar period of liminality. The experience of being on a ship for about three months was different both from the lives the emigrants left behind and from their future lives in the colony. However, the shipboard experience also replicated features of the social structure on land, and it constituted the beginning of a new life in New Zealand. This essay explores how the liminality of girlhood and the liminality of the emigrant voyage are intertwined.

In the British settler colonies, the ideal girl was envisioned as brave, resourceful, and capable of engaging in hard work, an image that was linked to the loosening of class and gender constraints. This notion of colonial girlhood developed and enhanced traditional British expectations of women as responsible for the domestic sphere and as upholders of morality. The colonial ideal was negotiated within the British Empire in the latter part of the nineteenth century and reflected back on the metropole. Could the voyage be seen not only as a period of transition in spatial and temporal terms but also as mirroring or enabling this transformation in the concept of girlhood? In order to explore this question, this essay focuses on aspects of girlhood appearing in three diaries written by emigrant girls on their way to New Zealand: bravery and a sense of adventure; work and robust health; the civilising mission and identification with a domestic and maternal role; and social life on board. Whereas two of the diarists emphasise the "usefulness" of colonial girls showing bravery, ingenuity, and hardiness, the third diarist focuses on a more traditional concept of girls as pure and virtuous. The voyage offered new social opportunities, but life on board was also structured by the passengers' socioeconomic backgrounds. At the same time, it foreshadowed life in a colonial society which prided itself on more liberal class divisions. The texts' adherence to and departures from the genre conventions of shipboard diaries emphasise the liminality of the journey, mirroring the transformative potential of new notions of girlhood.

While the three diaries chosen here cannot be representative of a large and diverse settler community, they do represent different socioeconomic backgrounds as well as the places of origin of a significant proportion of British immigrants to New Zealand. The three girls made the voyage during the immigration boom of the 1870s and early 1880s, when Julius Vogel's assisted immigration schemes attracted large numbers of new arrivals to New Zealand. The voyage was a lengthy, expensive, uncomfortable and dangerous affair. Passengers still travelled on sailing ships, which were slower and less comfortable than steamers and took approximately three months to reach their destination – about three times longer than it took to travel from Europe to North America (Hastings 3). Many of the shipboard diaries written by these immigrants are available in New Zealand archives, illustrating the significance of these texts for the settler community. It seems that many writers kept a diary only during the voyage, not before or after, and that shipboard diaries were likely to be deposited at the archives by subsequent generations. Shipboard diaries were, and still are, considered

important texts: their production was encouraged and they were seen as worthy of being preserved for future readers. As David Hastings points out, the voyage was a defining event in the history of many Pākehā families, comparable to some extent to the mythological significance of the journeys that brought the first Māori to New Zealand (8).

Agnes MacGregor and Agnes Christie were from Scotland and Minnie Williams came from Ireland. Agnes MacGregor emigrated from Edinburgh to Dunedin with her parents and her eight brothers and sisters in 1881, when she was fourteen years old. Her father was a religious minister. While it is not clear whether they travelled first or second class, Agnes describes her berth as comfortable and makes few complaints about shipboard life in her diary. Agnes Christie also emigrated from Edinburgh to Dunedin with her mother and siblings in 1879. Travelling second class, she did not enjoy the unclean and cramped conditions on board. Minnie Williams was from a less wealthy background; she travelled in steerage from Ballymena to Auckland in 1881. Minnie travelled with her parents, one brother, and three sisters; another brother was already in New Zealand, and one remained in Ireland. Like Agnes Christie, Minnie was probably in her late teens.

All three diarists' journeys conform to general patterns; Dunedin as the "Edinburgh of the south" attracted many Scottish emigrants, and as Terry Hearn notes, County Antrim in Ulster was the "single most important county source" (72) for New Zealand's Irish immigrants from 1880 to 1915. The girls' diaries offer valuable insights into the varying experiences of girl emigrants from different places of origin and family backgrounds. However, as Charlotte Macdonald and Frances Porter emphasise in the introduction to their collection of women's letters from nineteenth-century New Zealand, no text can give us immediacy; there is always an element of representation and narration interposed between the actual events and the text's version of them (10-11). While the girls' diaries reflect their different backgrounds, the texts also contain similarities both in their experiences and in their forms of narration. These similarities illustrate that the ideal of colonial girlhood affected girls across different classes and ethnicities.

Bravery and toughness were seen as useful qualities for girl emigrants. They were linked to a traditional association of women with a domestic role, which could, however, be put to more adventurous uses in colonial life. As Tamara Wagner notes, domestic skills made women increasingly useful in colonial contexts, and this usefulness gave them a greater sphere of influence than traditional Victorian notions, epitomised in Coventry Patmore's *Angel in the House*, suggested. In the colonial context, Wagner suggests, "homemaking could be an adventure that broke through limiting ideas of confining separate spheres" (11). Terry Doughty describes how Bessie Marchant's empire adventure stories for girls illustrate this connection between homemaking and adventure; a typical heroine in Marchant's stories is adept at creating a domestic environment in the colony, but "her true worth is recognized only after she has been tested by and triumphed in settlement life through heroic acts" (194).

Bravery and a sense of adventure were certainly useful during the voyage to New Zealand. The usual route of emigrant ships across the Atlantic and round the Cape of Good Hope meant that for most of the voyage the ship would be out of sight of land (Hassam 8). There were sometimes spectacular sights to observe, as Agnes Christie notes: "After tea we went on the forecastle to see the sunset it was perfectly glorious a great heavy bank of clouds and then brilliant crimson and gold below and across that were heavy showers of rain like great slanting pillars" (5 Sep. 1879). For Minnie Williams such impressive experiences appear to be enhanced by an exciting element of danger. Her descriptions of squalls and storms show a fearlessness reminiscent of a Marchant heroine, demonstrating that for Minnie the voyage

constituted a training ground for the challenge of settling in the colony. On 12 August 1881 she writes: "Very rough, the sea grand. Enjoyed it very much," even though the subsequent sentence "Had to go below and spend the evening reading and talking" indicates that being on deck was dangerous. Ten days later the ship nearly collides with another vessel in a squall. Blasé about the danger, Minnie writes: "The deck was like the side of a steep hill, fine fun tumbling about" (22 July), and on 29 July: "Sea very high, one mass of white foam, it looks grand." Even though on 26 August a second-class passenger and Minnie are "nearly drowned" by a wave, this does not make her fear the sea. Three days later she notes: "After tea a walk, go below and listen to the waves thundering over our heads. Don't know what it is to feel afraid" (29 Aug.), and then: "Stayed on deck all day, very slippery; great fun trying to escape getting a wetting" (1 Sep.). That the rough sea can be life threatening becomes evident in Minnie's description of a terrifying storm: the steerage is flooded with water, the passengers' belongings are flying about and everyone holds on to whatever they can grasp. The next day the ship's officers pronounce it a narrow escape. Minnie writes that she "will never forget it" but only records the frightened reactions of other people, not her own: "Mama and Goody were very nervous, one poor lady was speechless with terror" (5 Sep.). The storm only results in tiredness, nothing worse: "Did not get up till 9 as we were all very tired after the gale, do not want another, one was quite enough" (7 Sep.). Minnie's iron nerves in the face of inclement weather appear impressive indeed when one remembers that storms were a significant danger on the voyage to New Zealand, added to by "a series of rocky islands strung out between the fortieth and fiftieth parallels in the Southern Ocean across the route that most ships took" (Hastings 63), which could cause collisions.

Fires were another threat. The most harrowing story was that of the wreck of the *Cospatrick* in 1874: after the ship was destroyed in a nightmarish fire, the few survivors resorted to cannibalism until their lifeboat was rescued. Hastings emphasises that "[t]hanks to a number of well-publicised maritime disasters, the migrants had a clear idea of the dangers they faced" (65). Indeed many diarists recorded their fear when they experienced storms, for instance Charlotte Couchman, who emigrated in steerage from England to New Zealand in 1879, frequently used her diary to complain both about the food on board and about her daughter-in-law's rude behaviour. On 21 October she writes: "The storm still rages fearfully. Oh God, protect us from the dangers of the sea! . . . The sea still rages. Sometimes I think we shall never live to send this diary to you, but we shall all go down together if we go down." Nevertheless, for Minnie even the immediate experience of a storm does not appear to lessen the pleasure of the voyage. When the ship is nearing land, she writes: "Most of the passengers very glad. Emma [her sister] and I say we can never settle to a humdrum life on shore again, we have enjoyed the voyage so much" (21). The excitement of real danger seems to be an important element of what makes shipboard life less "humdrum" than life on shore; rough seas provide "fine fun." For Minnie, the voyage allows her to exercise the bravery and enjoy the adventure associated with life in the colonies. While she does not get the opportunity to engage in the heroic acts of Marchant heroines, she identifies with a similar ideal of adventurous colonial girlhood.

Another aspect of colonial femininity was the ability and inclination to work hard, notwithstanding the class degradation this would have signified in Britain. In New Zealand, as in other colonies, the scarcity of domestic servants meant that middle-class women had to engage in more domestic labour than in Britain. Raewyn Dalziel argues that this work could be empowering since

life within the bounds of home and family and respectability was not as frustrating for women in New Zealand as it had become for women of Great Britain. . . . The colonial environment . . . gave, within the context of an accepted role, a sense of purpose, a feeling of usefulness and a greater degree of independence than the women migrants had experienced before. (59)

In order to achieve this greater independence and usefulness, however, it was necessary to be robust and healthy – and this was true not only for women, but for girls too. Kristine Moruzi points out that girls' periodicals promoting emigration focused both on "the freedoms and possibilities of settler living" and "the importance of hard work, proper training and good health" ("Freedom" 178). A sickly middle- or upper-class woman who let her servants do all the work could not be a role model for the ideal colonial woman who was, as Dalziel argues, "most frequently described as . . . a true 'helpmeet'" (59). Agnes Christie emphatically draws a line between herself and such women, representing feminine displays of fainting and "hysterics" as ridiculous and implying that they are nothing more than a scheme to attract male protectors. On 11 September 1879 she narrates disdainfully that "Miss Robson had taken hysterics and was very ill there is a great fuss made about her." When Miss Robson faints a few days later, Agnes seems convinced that she is only putting on a show, like Miss Blundell: "Miss B tried hard to faint today but didn't manage it. But Miss Robson did just before prayers" (13 Sep.). Miss Blundell's behaviour does seem to attract male admirers, but Agnes has nothing but contempt for them: "J.C. continues to make a fool of himself with Miss B" (13 Sep.). Agnes implies that Miss Blundell continues to feign illness when "Mrs B. told us she was too ill to see any one the Dr said. however she found herself able to see Mr Roberts" (27 Nov.). When Agnes is ill herself, she dislikes people making a "great fuss" about her, presumably not wanting them to think that she herself is putting on a show of fake illness: "I have been much bothered with my head & sickness & am tired of enquiries after me" (4 Oct). Like Minnie's bravery of wind and weather, Agnes' light-heartedness about sickness is surprising when one considers that sickness was "by far the greatest peril of the voyage out" (Hastings 196). There was always a danger of disease on board since insufficient medical knowledge made it hard to detect the symptoms of infections during the medical examinations upon embarkation, and epidemics could spread quickly on board ship. However, far from being worried about infection when someone is "too ill to see any one," Agnes takes the opportunity in her diary to distance herself from such displays of feminine weakness.

Minnie Williams' text makes a wider argument about health. Her enjoyment of the voyage and her boredom with a "humdrum life on shore" are remarkable since Minnie also notes repeatedly that the food rations are insufficient. Steerage passengers were allocated specific quantities of food that they picked up once a week and cooked for themselves. Minnie's family frequently run out of food towards the end of the week, despite petitioning the captain for more generous rations. However, Minnie remains cheerful until the end of the journey and declares that "[w]e are all in great spirits" (10) and "not a bit tired of the voyage" (20 Aug. 1881). On 21 September she records: "Spent the morning on the forecastle, such fresh air, no smoky chimneys." Rather than merely emphasising the need for colonists to be hardy and healthy, this statement is connected to an image of the New Zealand climate itself as healthy – an image which gave rise, for instance, to the commonly held perception that the New Zealand climate could cure tuberculosis. It was not uncommon for shipboard diarists, such as Quaker evangelist Ann Fletcher Jackson in 1878, to note that a passenger on board was going to New Zealand in the hope of being cured of this illness.

In addition to being healthy, women were also appreciated in the colonies for their imagined civilising potential. Judith Rowbotham describes how, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, a stereotype of women as “Household Fairies” was replaced by the “Home Goddess,” a “more robust version of the domestic ideal” (266). As Doughty explains, a “key selling point of the British domestic goddess was her utility to empire: with her ability not only to manage her home competently but to expand these domestic skills to manage her wider community, the domestic goddess exercised a civilising effect” (193). In New Zealand, as in other settler colonies, women were expected to bring a beneficial moral influence to a society characterised by particularly low church attendance, alcoholism, and a surplus of men, many of them itinerant labourers. Women’s civilising potential was often linked to religion; nineteenth-century Australian migration reformer Caroline Chisholm described women as “God’s Police,” which implies that women are messengers of God on Earth and can redeem men from their sins (qtd in Summers 347). The link between Christianity and women’s civilising mission connects the Home Goddess to the more conservative stereotype of the Angel in the House, which, as Nina Auerbach has famously argued in *Woman and the Demon* (1982), associates women with the spiritual world and invests them with divine powers. Thus, even as notions of femininity were developing and expanding, they were connected to a more traditional concept centred on the domestic and maternal. Moruzi observes that while “feminine agency was clearly developing” in the late nineteenth century, as opportunities for female education, employment, and legal independence increased, Christian ideals of feminine purity and virtue continued to be emphasised in girls’ periodicals, even as the need for toughness and bravery in the colonial context was also stressed (*Constructing* 205).

Christian thinking clearly emerges in Agnes MacGregor’s diary, likely connected to her father’s office as a religious minister. Whereas Agnes Christie complains that “it was horrid to have to go to prayers” (7 Sep. 1879), Agnes MacGregor teaches Sunday school on board. She also takes sickness very seriously – not surprisingly, since her brother Jame [sic] dies of an illness during the voyage. When she is seasick, Agnes writes that she “was also praying almost all day both that we might be made well, & that we might be made thankful for it” (16 July 1881). While on board, a whooping cough epidemic breaks out, and Agnes and her sister Charlotte are not allowed to attend concerts and religious services. Rather than enjoying the excitement of the voyage, Agnes misses her home: “I am sure I ought to be contented just now, and I do feel so, only I like to think how happy I used to be at Uncle Morris’s, and of the comforts of home” (26 July). Recalling the sad scene of saying goodbye to friends and relatives, she writes: “I could not keep back the tears that rose to my eyes for a good while after, nor can I as I write” (26 July). Agnes and her sister Nellie also identify with a maternal role when a baby is born on the ship: “I have seen the baby, and had it in my arms. Nellie and I both saw the mother and child” (31 Aug.). Rather than using her diary to prove her bravery and toughness, Agnes Christie places emphasis on living a religious life. Her attitude is no doubt inflected by her family background as well as by the reality that she probably did not have a say in the family’s decision to emigrate, and that her religious faith provided solace in the face of homesickness and her brother’s illness. However, it can also be seen as a different approach to colonial life, one which places more emphasis on the civilising aspect of imperial femininity.

While women were imagined as bringing civilisation and social order to the colonies, the voyage also offered them new social opportunities. The excitement that both Agnes Christie and Minnie Williams felt was certainly related to the social life on board. This is visible in Agnes Christie’s diary entry after her arrival in New Zealand: “almost all our friends are gone & we miss them very much indeed I hope we will see them again. . . . If ever I go home I

hope the voyage will be as nice & jolly as this one has been I'm afraid it can't" (30 Dec. 1879; emphasis in the original). Social life on the ship – making friends – was structured according to regulations that the officials and passengers brought with them from life on land. Hastings argues that the structuring of space on board emigrant ships can be described as a microcosm of Victorian society: "A migrant ship was like a social map of nineteenth-century Britain, dividing space according to class, marital status and gender. . . . It was a kind of maritime *Upstairs, Downstairs*, although class on a ship was defined by money rather than social status" (29). In addition to the official spatial regulations on board, the migrants' religion and place of origin constituted "unofficial borders, marked and patrolled by the migrants themselves" (Hastings 96). For girl emigrants it was important to find their place on this transitional social map, which emerged from the society they left behind but also foreshadowed their future life in the colony. Agnes Christie's diary in particular provides many examples of her negotiation of her social status on board. While she acknowledges the need to obey social rules and regulations (often reluctantly), she also explores the new and exciting social opportunities offered by the voyage. Gossip takes up a large part of her diary in entries such as:

Miss Annie Landells has completely hooked Mr Wilkie it is most amusing to watch her efforts

Miss B has succeeded equally well with the tall nice looking apprentice White, which must afford her satisfaction. (3 Sep.)

Flirtations provide particular excitement:

at least something very interesting has happened. . . . [A]n engagement [has] taken place in our cabin between Mr Graves & Mrs Hodge. . . . We have been observing them some days and whenever we want to speak of them we say "Watch & Pray" someone heard him pop the question. (29 Sep.)

Agnes' recording of gossip shows the social excitement of the voyage for girl emigrants; the voyage provided opportunities to meet new people, often outside the writer's usual social circle, and to interact with boys or men outside the family, leading to flirtations and rumours. Moreover, at the level of the text, recording gossip confirms the author's place in the social community, demonstrating her familiarity with all the goings-on of shipboard life. Agnes writes that a "very exciting event has happened within the last few days. Amy Graham is engaged to Mr Ellis! of of all people [sic]. How she can be such a goose no one can guess, for he is horrid and she can't possibly know anything about him" (12 Nov.). Agnes shows an awareness that the journey was a liminal space in which social conventions could be compromised, since Amy Graham runs a risk if she marries a man without knowing much about his background and unable to make enquiries as she could on land.

With its focus on gossip and scandal, Agnes' diary differs from many shipboard diaries, which tend to narrate a more conventional version of the voyage. As Lydia Wevers points out, nineteenth-century travel writing followed the conventions established by other travel writing and by guidebooks such as the tellingly-named *What to Observe* (1841) by Colonel Julian Jackson of the Royal Society (Wevers 3). As a model for shipboard diaries, Andrew Hassam cites W. H. G. Kingston's *Emigrant Voyager's Manual* (1850), which even includes a specimen entry where the shipboard diarist only needed to fill in the gaps (Hassam 36-37). The conventions are oriented around the itinerary of the ship, with which writers were likely to be familiar from accounts they had read or heard. Nearly all shipboard diarists record

details about the weather, food and meals, fellow passengers, maritime rituals like Neptune's visit on the occasion of crossing the equator, saloon entertainments for the cabin passengers, duties like sewing and cleaning for those in steerage, and religious services. Depending on the ship's route, accounts of stopovers and sightseeing along the way might be included, and possibly also incidents like storms, fires, illnesses or accidents, births and deaths. Most diaries were intended for an audience of family and friends "at home" and often gave practical advice and information. In 1886, Anne Timpson, very dissatisfied with food and accommodation, writes: "Do not advise anyone to come out on this line" (26 May) and "Never advise anyone to come out in any ship when there is no Doctor" (1 June).

Agnes' emotional gossiping diverges from this generic pattern. When she narrates that she "went on the forecandle with F.O. I thought Ara was coming too. . . . Then James was discovered to be there too, which was rather awkward as I had refused to go with him before" (5 Sep.), this indicates how she negotiated her use of shipboard space. It is important not only with whom she associates but also where. This again reflects the highly regulated social structure on board. The most significant disparity was between cabin class and steerage: both first- and second-class passengers had to do less work and enjoyed more comfortable cabin fittings, and more space and ventilation than the crowded conditions in steerage would allow (Hastings 73-84). Only cabin class passengers were able to freely move around the ship. Steerage passengers used the main deck, with the exception of single women, who were only allowed on the poop deck at specific times (Hastings 32). Single women had the least freedom of movement and were subjected to the most stringent rules, making them "by far the most regulated group on any ship" (Macdonald 74). That the passengers' use of the space on board is connected to their reputation and social status becomes evident when Agnes' mother is anxious that Agnes' interpretation of spatial demarcations might jeopardise her respectability:

Mamma has been giving us a fearful rowing for staying on deck after prayers and going in the forecandle and says we will be talked about & that the Blundells & Landells are not respected etc. etc. It is very hard to expect us to go to bed soon in this heat, when all the married ladies except herself stay later than us & the Graham girls go about all alone while we always have Andrew etc. to look after us . . . (12 Sep.)

Whereas Agnes' mother places Agnes and her sisters in a different social category from the married ladies and enforces that distinction, Agnes is eager to explore the opportunity to socialise with other passengers. However, she is also anxious to stress that she is respectable after all, unlike her sister, who is even worse than the Blundells and Landells: "Ara is getting just too wild & am awfully angry at her tonight she has been behaving much worse than Miss Blundell or Miss Landells either, the way she behaved most disgracefully at prayers" (13 Sep.). Eventually Agnes' mother puts an end to her daughters' evening excursions to the forecandle: "We don't go on the F.C. as much in the evenings for Mamma doesn't think it proper she says" (4 Oct.). Shipboard space offers the girls exciting social opportunities, but they still have to obey social conventions and submit to their mother's authority.

Hastings points out that "[s]econd-class passengers were often the most aggressive group when it came to preserving the boundaries of the social map" (109); they had to delineate their superiority to steerage passengers while simultaneously being excluded from first-class privilege, for example eating at the captain's table. Both Agnes' negotiation of her social position and her mother's worries about respectability fit in with this observation. Agnes also draws lines around her own class. In her first entry she writes: "Now for the people," before

launching into a long and very critical description of the second-class passengers, proving that she has met and interacted with all of them. Then she notes: “and that is all our cabin we don’t know many of the 1st class people” (1 Sep.). That the first-class passengers are separate becomes even more evident in this entry: “It is ridiculous to hear the way these saloon people talk Mr Cornocots [?] saying he envies us & the nice things we cook & the work we have to do etc” (27 Sep). Moreover, Agnes draws a line between steerage (and crew) and cabin class in this entry from 17 November: “Last night there was a great row, the head steward & a steerage passenger they got drunk & burned open lights. Mr Salmon interfered & some others. & the steerager threatened to shoot them with a revolver.” The anonymous “steerager” who endangers everyone’s life by risking a fire is differentiated from the explicitly named Mr Salmon, one of the second-class passengers known to Agnes, who interferes in what could have become a highly dangerous situation.

Not surprisingly, Agnes refuses to send her diary “home” upon arrival in New Zealand: “Mamma wants us to send our diaries home I will keep mine to myself” (30 Dec.; emphasis in the original). Rather than providing guidance to an audience of potential future emigrants, her diary privately documents her social positioning in preparation for her new, colonial life. Moreover, Agnes’ refusal to send the diary home shows an awareness that her way of recording shipboard life diverges from the generic pattern and that her attitude might meet with disapproval – an indication that her text engages with a version of shipboard or colonial girlhood that was in conflict with more established, metropolitan notions.

Minnie Williams also places emphasis on the social interactions between the passengers. However, rather than recording “unflattering” talk she describes the relations between the passengers as harmonious: “We are all like one family on board. The officers say they never knew such a nice lot of passengers” (10 July 1881); “We have made friends with nearly everyone on board” (17 July). As opposed to Agnes Christie, Minnie’s way of drawing social boundaries is inclusive rather than exclusive: class boundaries are blurred and all passengers become “friends” or even “family.” One reason for this inclusiveness is probably the fact that the welfare of Minnie’s family relied on getting on well with everyone, rather than delineating their position to preserve social status. Minnie’s family benefited from good relations with both the second-class passengers and the crew since food gifts from those groups mitigated the insufficient rations: “some of the young men in the 2nd cabin were determined that we should not starve . . . The officers and passengers would do anything for the merry Irish girls” (14 Aug.). But Minnie’s representation of a shipboard community where friendship and helpfulness transcend the boundaries imposed by class and wealth also foreshadows a colonial society which frequently reiterated the need for inter-class cooperation. James Belich states that “classlessness in colonial New Zealand was a retrospective myth, not a contemporary one,” but also notes that there was “frequent reference to the need for these classes to work together in harmony” (23). Moreover, as noted above, class markers were redefined in settler colonies. Again the ship emerges as a transitional space in which these new realities – or myths – can be explored. In different ways, both Agnes Christie and Minnie Williams thus negotiate their social position and status on board ship, which is coloured by their socioeconomic background but also prefigures how they will find their place in society when the liminal situation of the journey is over. Whereas Minnie’s diary foreshadows a settler society which prides itself on being less hierarchical than Britain, Agnes’ diary might constitute an attempt to preserve class privilege under the threat of a colonial blurring of distinctions.

The liminality of the voyage is visible not only in the content but also in the structure of shipboard diaries, which usually adhere to stringent genre conventions. It was common to keep a diary on the voyage, as M T Binks, travelling to New Zealand in 1887, notes in her introductory sentence: “Well, I suppose it is what everyone does the first long voyage they take, so I must follow the general example, and write a sort of diary” (3 Sep. 1887). Most diarists write every day or at least record the date and the lack of any noteworthy event. The progression of the voyage is visible in the narrative since most diarists record information such as the ship’s position, speed, and progress since the last entry. As Hassam points out, the nautical entry was the basic entry in the emigrant diary: “when all else failed, the emigrants recorded the wind and the weather” (99). The beginning and ending of the voyage and that of the narrative usually coincide. This parallel structure of journey and narrative implies a notion of time as linear and of the diary as chronologically capturing the progress of the ship towards its destination. Hassam argues that journey-stories as “exemplary chronological narratives” gave form to a “sense of time as progress,” which “matched nineteenth-century beliefs in natural, social, and economic evolution, a belief that movement forward through time and space produced a cumulative, positive effect” (51).

This ideology of linear and teleological time is not only a nineteenth-century way of thinking but also one that, as Benedict Anderson has argued, is inherent in the concept of the nation (24-26). European imperialism is based on similar conceptions of space and time. Richard Dyer suggests that in the racial ideology of whiteness, imperialism “could be conveyed in terms of the excitement of advance, of forward movement through time, and of the conquest and control of space” (31). However, this ideology is undermined by the transitional nature of the journey; while the diaries construct the journey as a chronological progression of events, their narrative structure also represents it as a period of liminality which questions the possibility of such logical progression. The generic insistence on a journey as having a beginning and an end clearly separates the voyage from everything that comes before or after; rather than providing connection and continuity, the voyage is transitional and liminal. Furthermore, there is a tension between connection and distance. The shipboard voyage is part of a network of shipping routes that link the various parts of the British Empire. Yet travelling along these routes can also make clear to the diarist how far away from one another these places really are, as Margaret Fidler writes in 1877: “I think I did not know before that there was so much water in the world, as we have gone over these last 7 days” (23 Feb.). The danger of shipwreck and disaster discussed above further accentuates the tenuousness of the connection established by the voyage.

In the girls’ diaries discussed here, an adherence to or departure from the genre conventions marks and explores this liminality and ambiguity. Agnes Christie’s diary frequently departs from the genre conventions of reflecting the progress of the voyage in the text. While Agnes notes latitude, longitude, and the miles covered in the previous 24 hours quite diligently for a while or at least gives a rough indication of the ship’s position (“we are off the coast of Portugal today somewhere” (2 Sep. 1879); “we are off cape Finisterre somewhere” (31 Aug.)), she loses interest as soon as shipboard life becomes repetitive: “I am getting awfully tired of this life now” (6 Sep.); “Nothing worth much notice” (7 Oct.). Rather than reducing her text to what Hassam describes as the basic nautical entry, Agnes frequently just leaves a blank for latitude and longitude. Whereas most other diarists regularly put down precise details on what happened and when, Agnes loses motivation to do this and notes carelessly: “I really can’t remember all that has happened this longtime” (30 Oct.), after interrupting her entries for nearly three weeks; or “[s]omewhere about the end of October we saw a lot of whales” (12 Nov.). Along with her focus on gossip, which leads her to accord less

importance to the events usually recorded in shipboard diaries, Agnes' text places more emphasis on the exceptional nature of the journey, which makes it a space of transition and excitement.

Agnes MacGregor's diary accords more space to the standard aspects of shipboard life, including wildlife, the weather, and religious services. However, she too fails to write regularly. Sometimes this is for pressing reasons, such as illness, but not always: "I have been too unwell to write for several days, and even tonight I am not at all myself yet" (23 July 1881); "It is more than a month since I have written in my diary, but now I mean to resume it, and write every day. For about three weeks I have been really unable to write on account of the hooping-cough [sic], but it is just laziness that has kept me from writing the rest of the time" (12 Oct.). Whereas after a few weeks Agnes starts noting the daily progress of the ship ("The distance today is a hundred and ninety-five miles," 9 Sep.), she also acknowledges that the felt length of time does not always correspond to objective measures: "It seems to me as if we had been months in the Tropics, but we have only been less than a fortnight" (20 Aug.). Incidents such as the number of other ships sighted are represented as more reliable markers of time than the seemingly objective number of miles covered: "It seems we must be getting pretty fast: – we are passing vessels like anything" (26 July). Agnes' diary thus reveals the relationship between the actual voyage and its textual representation as less self-evident and more arbitrary than the genre conventions of shipboard diaries imply. This illustrates an underlying sense that a text might not be able to actually mirror the progress of the journey – that the liminality of the journey is difficult to frame in a narrative. Moreover, the psychological confusion of not being able to tell how long the ship has been in the Tropics undermines an ideology of progress and continuity which implies that the itinerary of the ship should be immediately observable and evident to the rational mind. Similar to Agnes Christie's incapability of remembering what happened when, or where they are exactly, Agnes MacGregor's confusion about the ship's objective position illustrates that, contrary to the logical progression implied by the genre conventions, the ship's progress is incomprehensible to the passengers. Hassam aptly compares the experience of travelling on a sailing ship to modern air travel: "looking out of a ship, like looking out of a plane, was to look merely into an emptiness. . . . The sea gives a sense of space . . . but no sense of place" (92-93). Instead the ship becomes a liminal space in which nothing ever seems to change or progress.

Minnie's diary is more conventional in its marking of time, with a typical opening ("Left Ballymena 20 minutes past time. Arrived at Larne, crossed to Stranrear", 23 June 1881) and regular daily entries, even when there is nothing to narrate: "Nothing particular happened" (24 July). Minnie frequently describes the location of the ship, especially towards the end of the journey ("south of Adelaide", 12 Sep.; "near Canterbury", 17 Sep.). However, her diary acknowledges the exceptional nature of the journey in different ways. As noted above, Minnie repeatedly stresses how much she enjoys the voyage even though there are numerous dangers and not enough food. On 20 August she writes: "We have rounded the Cape today and expect in less than a month to be in Auckland. We are not a bit tired of the voyage," and on 26 September: "Don't know whether to be glad or sorry that the voyage is over. We have enjoyed it so much." While Minnie describes Auckland as beautiful, this only seems to apply when it is seen from board ship: "The scenery is beautiful. We could spend a month here nicely, will feel sorry to land" (27 Sep.). When they do land, Minnie and her sisters wish themselves back on the ship: "Kate, Emma and I are disgusted with the place, would give anything to be back again. . . . Can see no beauty in anything So ends our long and happy voyage" (30 Sep.). The juxtaposition in the text of being "disgusted with the place,"

where there is “no beauty in anything,” with a “happy voyage,” stresses the liminality of the voyage and its difference from life on land. This is undoubtedly also connected to the change in everyday life; settling the family in the colony would have meant harder work for the girls than they had to do during the voyage. The liminality of the voyage is also emphasised when the pilot comes on board to steer the ship into port. Whereas during the voyage excitement and a love of adventure prevailed, this exceptional situation is now over and Minnie feels that she is truly starting her new life: “We feel now that we are indeed separated from all the loved ones at home” (28 Sep.). While the genre conventions are designed to convey progress and continuity, their framing of the voyage as a journey-story simultaneously marks it as liminal. These diaries’ partial departure from the genre conventions stresses this liminality further. Agnes Christie’s and Agnes MacGregor’s irregular entries question the ability of their diaries to textually frame the psychologically confusing experience of the journey. Whereas liminality could mean excitement, as it did for Agnes Christie and Minnie Williams, a sense of being lost in space rather than progressing continuously also meant that the shipboard experience resulted in repetitiveness or boredom, seemingly bearing no relation to the world on land.

In their diaries Agnes Christie, Agnes MacGregor and Minnie Williams engage with different aspects of changing notions of girlhood, which can be explored during the transitional period of the voyage. Agnes Christie’s and Minnie Williams’ texts in particular stress qualities such as bravery, a sense of adventure, and good health, which were part of a “useful” imperial femininity. Agnes MacGregor’s diary illustrates that a more traditional notion of girlhood, connected to religious virtue and a maternal role, endured and was incorporated within the colonial feminine ideal. The diaries’ negotiations of social status and relations demonstrate that even though the voyage constituted an exceptional situation, there were aspects of continuity connected to the girls’ family and socioeconomic backgrounds, and to the realities of colonial life. As the genre conventions of shipboard diaries and the three girls’ negotiations of them illustrate, the voyage was an exceptional period of liminality. However, it also constituted the beginning of a new life in the colonies, and thus a decisive period of liminality; similar to Marianne Farningham’s description of girlhood, the future “hinges” on this new beginning. In addition to reflecting changing aspects of girlhood, the voyage in itself thus also harbours transformative potential. As these three diarists embarked on a journey around the world, their diaries engaged with a girlhood that was in transition both geographically and ideologically.

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