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## Caroline Kirkland's *A New Home: Who'll Follow?* as the Pioneer Realist Representation of the Social Groups and Domesticity on the Frontier

Travel writing cannot be read as a simple account of a journey, a country and a narrator, but must be seen in the light of discourses circulating at the time.

Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference* 69

'The West' – How much does that expression mean to include? I have never been able to discover its limits.

Caroline Kirkland, *A New Home: Who'll Follow?* 11

Caroline Kirkland deserves the name of pioneer on several grounds. Firstly, she moved West with her husband and four children to Michigan, a sparsely populated mid-western frontier in 1835. Caroline Kirkland's husband was attracted to Michigan by the prospects of the great land boom and he planned to buy land to found settlement on the Michigan frontier. In order to gain money for land speculation, Caroline Kirkland's husband accepted the position of a principal of the Detroit Female Seminary. However, the reality on the Michigan frontier differed from that promised by settlement promoters. Even though the emigration to Michigan grew and in 1837 former Michigan territory was granted the status of a state, the land fever brought about more disillusionments than profits for William Kirkland. Land agents, whom he had hired to lay out his settlement, deceived him, and disappointed with the harsh western reality he returned to New York City with his family in 1843 poorer than he had been before the frontier experiment.

Secondly, Caroline Kirkland is acknowledged as a pioneer realist in ante-bellum American literature (Osborne 1972: 55). Kirkland's satire on the romantic visions of the West and her down-to-earth, humorous portrayal of frontier settlements were hailed as an innovative realistic depiction of the western life. Edgar

Allan Poe saw her early writing about the West as admirable because of its “truth and novelty” and “a fidelity and vigor that prove[d] her pictures to be taken from the very life [...] ‘scenes’ that could have occurred only *as* and *where* she described them.” Moreover, Poe praised Caroline Kirkland for her representation of the domestic sphere of the frontier: “to Mrs. Kirkland alone we were indebted for our acquaintance with the *home* and home-life of the backwoodsman” (qtd in Fussell 1965: 144). Similar enthusiasm for Kirkland’s new approach to the frontier is visible in the reception of her first western narrative *A New Home: Who’ll Follow?* (1839) by the American and English press as “guide to those who [...] [were] labouring to create an American literature” and “one of the most spirited and original works which has yet been produced in this country” because Kirkland “has no paradise to offer him ‘who’ll follow’ [...] The real enjoyments of forest life are set forth in their true colors; but the real inconveniences and annoyances, and sacrifices, which belong to it, are not extenuated.” (qtd in Osborne 1972: 53–54). Reviewers appreciated her faithful representation of frontier reality, her satiric descriptions of local manners, characterization devoid of “romantic coloring” and her accurate recording of every day speech.

Henry Nash Smith also begins his discussion of the evolution of the realistic depiction of the western countryside with Caroline Kirkland’s western narratives and regards Joseph Kirkland and Hamlin Garland as continuators of this tradition (Smith 1975: 224–227). Smith explains popularity which Caroline Kirkland’s western stories enjoyed by underscoring her gift of keen observation and vivid narration. As he points out, Caroline Kirkland’s writing about the West from the perspective of a genteel settler is also important as “a valuable repository of upper-class Eastern attitudes toward the raw West” (Smith, 225). These beliefs are expressed in Kirkland’s comments on the western lifestyle, the frontier customs, and in the way she addresses her refined urban friends/readers in her narrative. Her realistic humorous description of numerous western circumstances when class divisions are neglected prepares her sophisticated readers for disappointments they are bound to experience in the West. Kirkland’s appeal to the reader of her own social standing is evident in her first person narration and frequent use of literary allusions, quotations and occasional foreign phrases. However, despite Kirkland’s experiments with the fictional representation of the innovative themes, such as social reality of the frontier, Smith concludes, she did not discover “an adequate form for the Western materials” (Smith, 227).

Finally, as Kolodny points out the enthusiastic reviews and readers’ interest after the publication of Kirkland’s first western narrative *A New Home: Who’ll Follow?* should be explained not so much by Kirkland’s innovative realistic depiction of the West but by the fact that Kirkland’s western narrative “made the west available for literary treatment by women” (Kolodny 1984: 157). Kirkland’s achievement consisted in opening the western territory for women writers because, as Kolodny argues, until Kirkland’s success, even women who lived on the fron-

tier were so overwhelmed with the male writers' portrayal of the West that they shrank from the frontier as a subject matter of their writing. Thus, Kolodny claims that the popularity of Kirkland's western narratives encouraged Margaret Fuller to write *Summer on the Lakes* (1844) a few years later "to stand beside Charles Fenno Hoffman's *A Winter in the West* (1835)" (Fuller 1835: 157). However, Fuller's treatment of the West is different from that of Kirkland's. Fuller's narrative may have continued Kirkland's interest in the western subject matter, but Fuller adopted a pastoral perspective on the frontier nature and its inhabitants. Fuller was not so interested in painting an accurate picture of the West and she largely relied on the romantic vision of the frontier as a pastoral paradise. Kolodny claims that other non-realist followers of Kirkland's literary exploration of the West included Eliza Farnham, whom Kirkland befriended and encouraged to publish her *Life in Prairie Land* (1846), which countered Washington Irving's portrayal of the mid-western frontier in *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835). Therefore Kolodny maintains that it was not Kirkland's pioneering realist mode of presentation of her western material that was taken over by women writers, but the realm of the frontier as a site for the literary visions that was continued in the frontier domestic novels by writers such as Alice Cary or Caroline Soule.

Kirkland's position as a pioneer realist in the American literary history was reaffirmed in the 1970s, but evaluations of her first western narrative differ (Osborne, 41–54). While Henry Nash Smith finds Caroline Kirkland's plot structures unsuitable for the western subject matter, Brigitte Georgi-Findlay considers *A New Home: Who'll Follow?* "a rather complex text" because Kirkland's realistic representation of the frontier exhibits anxiety concerning the disparity between the requirements of the travel writing genre and the woman's point of view on the experience of settling down in the West (Georgi-Findlay 1996: 29). Georgi-Findlay's interpretation of Kirkland's travel narrative seems to illustrate the discursive constraints on women's text described by Sara Mills with respect to travel accounts of the nineteenth century British women. In *Discourses of Difference* Mills contends that narrative strategies employed by women writers, when compared with the generic features characteristic of travel writing, situate their texts in a special position because: "the clash of feminine and colonial discourses constructs texts which are at one and the same time presenting a self which transgresses and conforms both to patriarchal and imperial discourses" (Mills 1991:106). Such perspective makes it possible to integrate an analysis of gender with the context of colonial situation as two important factors influencing the production of women's travel narrative. Since the western travel account was constructed as a predominantly masculine genre, the narrative positions adopted by women travelers can shed light on the negotiations of gender roles and assertion of women's presence and power in the aspect of the public discourse connected with traveling and settling on the frontier.

The first western narrative of Caroline Kirkland bears the modest subtitle *Glimpses of Western Life* and next to the subtitle, the author (concealed under the

pseudonym of Mary Clavers) draws reader's attention to its authorial expertise on the subject as "an actual settler". Yet despite the professed first-hand knowledge of the frontier, the narrator of *A New Home: Who'll Follow?* begins her story of her arrival and settlement in the West with an exemplary disclaimer denying independent authorship, which is typical of women's travel writing (Georgi-Findlay 1996: 23):

Our friends in the "settlements" have expressed so much interest in such of our letters to them, as happened to convey any account of the peculiar features of western life, and have asked so many questions, touching particulars which we had not thought worthy of mention, that [...] I have determined to give them to the world, in a form not very different from that in which they were recorded for our private delectation; nothing doubting, that a veracious history of actual occurrences, an unvarnished transcript of real characters, and an impartial record of everyday forms of speech (taken down in many cases from the lips of the speaker) will be pronounced 'graphic,' by at least a fair proportion of the journalists of the day.

(NH, 8)

She frames her narrative as an answer to the demand expressed by her friends for the factual description of the life in the West and as a text which is, in her view, completely devoid of individual craftsmanship or any literary value. Such ritual self-depreciation, which recurs in many women-authored travel accounts, ensures a peripheral positioning of the female narrator and the story in the public discourse. The initial presentation of the text as "a meandering recital of common-place occurrences – mere gossip about common-day people, little enhanced in value by any fancy or ingenuity of the writer; in short, a very ordinary pen-drawing" (NH, 8) defines the narrator's thorough compliance with the requirements of the woman's proper sphere. This attitude of submissive self-denial was not restricted only to women's travel account but was pervasive in the ante-bellum American women writers despite their rising popularity and the commercial successes they enjoyed. Yet, in the context of travel writing it acquires a special significance since women who venture West, outside the established society, become authoritative sources of first-hand knowledge about the new territory (Georgi-Findlay 1996: 29). Thus, these women travelers/writers stepped in what was largely considered in geographical and literary sense the men's domain. These women writers of travel accounts assumed the pose of feminine self-depreciation as if to make up for their "unfeminine" interest in the "masculine" genre and subject. These contradictory pressures towards the newly conceived gender role and the typical humble self-presentation of women writers resulted in polyphonic narratives.

The nineteenth century ideology of domesticity was a powerful instrument of socialization of young American women. The echoes of the ideology of "true womanhood" reverberated from 1820s until 1860s when they were challenged by the concept of "the New Woman" (Welter 1976: 20). The cult of domesticity regulated many aspects of middle class women's lifestyle. On the basis of gender distinction, it defined woman's role as restricted to the "private sphere" of the home.

It ascribed a set of feminine characteristics as distinctive traits of a "true woman." Barbara Welter describes these social norms of propriety for a nineteenth century woman in almost religious terms in her study *Dimity Convictions* (1976) because they were presented as sanctioned by God himself: "The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbours and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife – woman" (Welter 1976: 21). Almost religious reverence for home and domesticity was expected even of women who were educated and were writing for publication. Hence women's domestic experience was believed to constitute a perfect subject for a literary woman, as conduct books, religious writing and women's magazines made it clear that „if women invoked the muse, it was the geni of the household lamp" (Welter 1976: 34). Such concern with domestic affairs prevented "unnatural" competition between women and men in the public sphere. If women decided to publish, they were not expected to publicly express their awareness of skill, ambition or financial success as the possible motifs of their literary production. Adoption of literary pseudonyms, as in the case of Caroline Kirkland, protected from „unfeminine" fame following publication. However, the nineteenth century ideal of a perfect woman with her influence limited to domestic sphere was also a subject to changes effected by such social phenomena as, among others, westward expansion:

The movements for social reform, westward migration, missionary activity, utopian communities, industrialism, the Civil War – all called forth responses from woman which differed from those she was trained to believe were hers by nature and divine decree. The very perfection of True Womanhood, moreover, carried within itself the seeds of its own destruction. For if woman was so very little less than the angels, she should surely take a more active part in running the world, especially since men were making such a hash of things. Real women often felt they did not live up to the ideal of True Womanhood: some of them blamed themselves, some challenged the standard, some tried to keep the virtues and enlarge the scope of womanhood.

(Welter 1976: 40)

Apart from diverting women's attention from the public matters, these requirements of women's selfless dedication to home, devotion to moral instruction and the general cultivation of exclusively "feminine" virtues also brought about integration of women's community, especially that of white middle class American women. Although women writers often professed to be adherents of the code of "true womanhood," they strove to find covert ways to express sentiments and opinions which were considered improper in the feminine work by that code. Thus, it is interesting to examine the strategies of evoking the resistance to the nineteenth century women's cultural roles in the narratives in which the private and the public spheres intersect.

Even though the narrator of *A New Home: Who'll Follow?* professes to be concerned with ordinary daily events and common neighbours, she frequently uses

satire to contrast the preoccupations of a “true woman” with the men’s perspective on the frontier. In this way Kirkland uses the subversive power of exemplary femininity to mock the pretensions of proper “masculine” activities in the West. The initial self-abnegation is made conspicuous by the references to extraordinary subject matter in male-authored accounts: “Tis true there are but meagre materials for anything which might be called a story. I have never seen a cougar – nor been bitten by a rattlesnake.” In contrast, the narrator of *A New Home: Who’ll Follow?* initially disclaims the authority of an adventurous figure and she admits her interest in more mundane descriptions in her statements such as “I intend to be ‘decidedly low’” (NH, 7–8). Although she assumes the role of a “modest chronicler” in the beginning, the way in which she describes her husband’s grand plans connected with western migration betrays through verbal irony her critical attitude towards the venture: “my husband purchased two hundred acres of wild land on the banks of this to-be-celebrated stream, and drew with a piece of chalk on the bar-room table at Danforth’s the plan of a village” (NH, 9). Similar irony is discernible in her references to men’s writing about the West which she read before her expedition to Michigan:

When I first “penetrated the interior” (to use an indigenous phrase) all I knew of the wilds was from Hoffman’s tour or Capitan Hall’s ‘graphic’ delineations: I had some floating idea of ‘driving a barouche-and-four anywhere through the oak openings’ – and seeing ‘the murdered Banquos of the forest’ haunting the scenes of their departed strength and beauty. But I confess, these pictures, touched by the glowing pencil of fancy, gave me but incorrect notions of a real journey through Michigan.

(NH, 12)

In this passage she assumes the role of a male explorer or adventurer to relate her and her husband’s down-to-earth confrontation with “a Michigan mud-hole” and to expose unrealistic depiction of the West as a traveler’s paradise (NH, 11). As Hoffman’s and Hall’s narratives are full of imaginative descriptions concerning the beauty of natural scenery in the West, Kirkland expresses disappointment with her preconceptions of both western travel and life based on the romantic accounts about the West. In contrast to the male romantic travelers, the narrator of *A New Home: Who’ll Follow?* perceives Michigan not as a pastoral retreat but as a mundane bog.

Similarly, she finds the situation when their elegant vehicle proved unsuitable for Michigan marshes also an occasion for a humorous comment on impractical eastern women’s fashionable dress code that required paper-sole shoes even for traveling in the woods. Except for meeting one stranger, who appears not to pose a threat but to help them out of the mud, their journey is quite uneventful. Lack of adventures makes their travel tiresome and boring with the exception of one night “in a wretched inn,” which was memorable because of the horror the drunken owner of the inn inspired in his family. As a result of her experience with the drunk inn-keeper and his family, Mary Clavers replaces her bookish notions of Michigan



as emigrant's paradise with the vision of degradation and impoverishment in the West which, in a way, prefigures the story of Mrs. Clavers and her husband: "So much for turning our fields of golden grain into 'fire water' – a branch of business in which Michigan is fast improving" (NH, 14).

As Mrs. Clavers distances herself from the men's stories of western romance and adventure, she often presents a satiric counter-picture where frontier emerges not as a forest seclusion or the site of the uncanny, but as ordinary low-lying marshy land which often proves a trap for an urban dweller greenhorn. Also the characters encountered in the frontier settlement turn out to be unpleasant evidence that fraud, deceit and incompetence flourish in the West. For example, Mr. Mazard, a talkative land agent, employed by Mr. Clavers to lay out their village made advantage of the newcomer's gullibility and disappeared suddenly leaving the Clavers in debt. In order to demystify the western land boom, the narrator presents her husband's and his friends' land acquisition plans in a convention of an adventure narrative. When the Clavers return to Detroit, and the narrator's husband accepts an offer to join the party of men who "were going to make a tour with a view to the purchase of one or two cities," Mrs. Clavers ironically lists their sophisticated abundant equipment: "Ponies, knapsacks, brandy-bottles, pocket-compasses, blankets, lucifers, great India rubber boots, coats of the same, and caps with immense umbrella capes to them: these are but a beginning of the outfit necessary for such an expedition" (NH, 45). The narrator casts herself in a truly 'feminine' role of a caretaker who understands her husband's boyish excitement: "My only parting charge to my quota of the expedition was to keep out of water and to take care of his spectacles. I should have cautioned him against buying a city, but that he was never very ambitious, and already owned a Montacute" (NH, 45). The narrator's comments referring to the story of the male expedition shows the project of founding a city on the frontier in terms of not very well-thought-out masculine group behaviour. Thus, despite the initial promise to be a "modest chronicler," the narrator assumes the attitude of a candid commentator and, at times, even an explicit critic of the expansive nature of western land speculation (Georgi-Findlay 1996: 27).

Set against the framework of the adventure narrative the gentlemen's 'exploits' seem particularly unheroic when they return. As Mrs. Clavers reports: "Tired and dirty, cross and hungry were they all. No word of adventures, no boasting of achievements, not even a breath of the talismanic word 'land,' more interesting to the speculator of 1835–6 than it ever was to the ship-wrecked mariner" (NH, 46). All their bold plans of camping out as often as possible, hunting wild animals and buying the land collapsed due to damp and foggy weather, lost trail, yearning for a proper shelter in a log cabin and the general lack of knowledge and skills of city-bred gentlemen. The only 'adventure' they can report is the noise made by the drunk Indians, which disturbed them during a second night spent in the log cabin of a French trader and his reticent Indian wife. Moreover, their ambi-

tious venture of land purchase proved disastrous as it turned out that they invested in the “strips of land which were at that moment a foot under water” (NH, 54). Finally, the gentlemen’s plans of land speculation are mocked by the narrator, who perceives them as broad but utterly ill-conceived: “The obliged party chanced to meet the agent for New-New-York about a year after and inquired the fortunes of the future emporium – the number of inhabitants, & c. ‘There’s nobody there,’ said he ‘but those we hire to come’” (NH, 55).

While both men’s literary visions of the West and real men’s attitudes and behaviour on the frontier are presented as exaggerated and misleading, there are numerous passages in *A New Home: Who’ll Follow?* which deal with misconceptions about frontier women’s life. One of the illusions concerns the possibility of a smooth continuation of the feminine urban lifestyle in the West. In the stories about women neighbours in Montacute Mrs. Clavers underlines great physical endurance required of women settlers. Kirkland’s western narrative makes it clear that women settlers should be prepared for hard physical labour before they can gather the fruits of their success as the example of Mrs. Danford shows: “We had most awful hard times at first. Many’s the day I’ve worked from sunrise till dark in the field gathering brush heaps and burning stumps. But that’s all over now; and we’ve got four times as much land as we ever have owned in New York State” (NH, 38). When the narrator recounts a hard-earned success of Mrs. Danford at whose tiny hotel the Clavers stay after their arrival she demythologizes another notion connected with frontier settlements. Even though the size of Danford’s land increased, the narrator underscores the fact interesting especially to women readers, who were expected to manage a household on the frontier; it does not guarantee improvement in one’s living conditions as: “Comforts do not seem to abound in proportion to landed increase, but often on the contrary, are really diminished for the sake of it” (NH, 38).

The narrator emphasizes that not only frontier men have to cope with difficult situations in the western settlement, but women too must have resources to overcome the frontier afflictions. Even though the narrator modestly assures that she cannot boast of killing a rattlesnake, she notes that Mrs. Danford can boast of killing two rattlesnakes and is still not afraid of long walks through the woods. Several passages of *A New Home: Who’ll Follow?* display situations in which frontier women also take on the role of fearless adventuresses even though at first they are presented as naive genteel ladies. For example, initially Mrs. Clavers is ironic about her lack of practical skills indispensable to living on the frontier, manifest in her bringing a lot of superfluous things to the western settlement in Montacute. Later on, she narrates her own daring enterprise. During the absence of her husband she decides to leave uncomfortable Ketchums’ house in order to move in the Clavers’ new log house in the woods. Nevertheless, Mrs. Clavers’ audacious decision to establish her new home in the forest on her own, without her husband’s assistance, brings about a lot of unexpected challenges. First of all,



misguided by the romantic “elegant sketches of western life,” she does not realize what effort it requires to carry out her plan and she foresees “real satisfaction in removal to this hut in the wilderness” (NH, 72). She does not anticipate her difficulties with drunk workers or finding a domestic help in the woods. Neither does she expect the inadequate size of her new cabin, the lack of chimney and the fact that it would be impossible to put half of the ‘necessary’ furniture into it. Yet despite her unrealistic expectations, Mrs. Clavers overcomes the trials of setting up a home in the log cabin in the forest. Eventually, the first supper is prepared in the primitive conditions and is served on the floor to be followed by unbearable heat emanating from the oven, forcing Mrs. Clavers to sleep with the doors open. An astonishing night storm follows and Mrs. Clavers and her children wake up on the wet floor on their first night in the woods. However, all the initial tribulations do not overpower Mrs. Clavers but they reveal her unexpected stamina in the face of frontier adversities.

As a result the narrator, who swiftly adjusts to the new circumstances, voices the realization that her standards of domestic arrangement must be simplified in the frontier settlement: “my ideas of comfort were by this time narrowed to a well-swept room with a bed in one corner, and cooking apparatus in another – and this in some fourteen days from the city!” (NH, 76). Her sense of domestic propriety changes radically as she decides to use her once cherished tall cup-board made of oak, which is too large to fit into the log cabin, not as a sophisticated piece of interior design but as a functional corn-crib. The disillusionment with the romanticized representation of primitive life in the western narratives haunts her for a long time as she minutely examines down-to-earth details of frontier lifestyle:

The circumstance of living all summer, in the same apartment with a cooking fire, I had never happened to see alluded to in any of the elegant sketches of western life which had fallen under my notice. [...] The sleeping apparatus for the children and the sociable Angeline, were in the loft; but my own bed, with its cunning fence of curtains; my bureau with its ‘Alps on Alps’ of boxes and books; my entire cooking array; my centre-table, which bore, sad change! the remains of to-day’s dinner, and the preparations for to-morrow, all covered mysteriously under a large cloth, the only refuge for the mice: these and thousand other things, which a summer’s day would not suffice me to enumerate, cumbered this one single apartment; and to crown the whole was the inextinguishable fire, which I had entirely forgotten when magnanimously preferred living in a log-house, to remaining in Detroit till the house could be erected.

(NH, 83)

This careful listing of all the inconveniences of the temporary household in the woods illustrates the clash of the narrator’s refined conceptions of domestic arrangements with the crude reality of a solitary forest settler removed from helpful neighbours. The lack of space and privacy, and the strenuous cooking conditions are significant details of establishing a home in the woods. This realistic description of the forest household also anticipates the problems encountered by another couple of cultivated western emigrants, Anna Rivers and her husband, who are

initially as genteel and “fond of novels and poetry” (NH, 109) as Mrs. Clavers used to be before she went through her ‘survival test’ period in the woods: “I had, besides the works to which I have alluded, dwelt with such delight on Chateaubriand’s *Atala*, where no such vulgar inconvenience is once hinted at; and my floating visions of a home in the woods were full of important omissions, and always in a Floridian clime, where fruits serve for viviers” (NH, 83).

According to the narrator, the life on the frontier offers some gratification because demanding conditions require equal involvement of both women and men in outdoor and domestic chores and these circumstances apparently bring about obliteration of gendered labour patterns. In chapter XIX, Mrs. Clavers proudly asserts that the lack of division of labour in the frontier settlement is not restricted to one gender only, and thus both women and men must be prepared to perform a wide range of tasks. Apart from the typical nineteenth century masculine roles, men on the frontier, as Mrs. Clavers claims, must presumably be prepared to perform “feminine” tasks: “And every man, whatever his circumstances or resources, must be qualified to play groom, teamster, or boot-black, as the case may be; besides ‘tending the baby’ at odd times, and cutting wood to cook his dinner with” (NH, 123). Yet these professions of dissolution of prescribed strict gender roles and duties sound unconvincing in the narrative devoted to recurring descriptions of search for women as domestic help, Mrs. Clavers’ ladylike admiration for flowers and gardening or the numerous accounts of Mr. Clavers and Mr. Rivers being away on business. The reproduction of the gender roles, if not division of labour in the frontier settlement, is evident in the narrator’s complaint “Oh! for one of those feminine men, who can make a good gruel, and wash the children faces” (NH, 95). Chapter XXXVI contains a poignant summary of genteel women’s lot in the Michigan frontier: “Women are grumblers in Michigan, and they have some apology. Many of them have made sacrifices for which they were not at all prepared, and which detract largely from their every day stores of comfort. The conviction of good accruing on a large scale does not prevent the wearing sense of minor deprivations” (NH, 247). Such comments on deterioration of the standards of living and excessive strain on women, who were not trained in many skills indispensable on the frontier, reappear in numerous women-authored western narratives.

Another notable oversight in the fictional accounts about the West, except uncomfortable and unsophisticated lifestyle, is connected with extreme loneliness likely to be experienced by a frontier woman in the settlement where a long distance separates one cabin from another. Yet, both the wife of Mr. Clavers, who is busy with his project of founding a town, and the wife of Mr. Rivers, who becomes the president of a bank even though he displays aversion to work, are dependent on their husbands’ ability (or its lack) to prosper on the frontier. While their husbands are busy with real or pretended business outside the home, both women separated by long distances are frequently confined to the household and suffer from painful loneliness which is evoked by descriptions of women’s “long,

solitary, wordless day” in the forest cottage (NH, 245). Moreover, the sense of isolation in the frontier woods, which genteel women deserted by their husbands experience, is enhanced by their awareness of social classes and their feeling of superiority towards rough peasant neighbours. Mrs. Clavers’ expectations of being revered as the first lady of the settlement are in conflict with the idea of democratization cherished by local women. Her notions of female and domestic propriety are regarded as extravagant or openly scorned by poor frontier women. The experienced frontierswomen look down on intricate norms connected with table manners or dress code and they take pride in their simple habits and their autonomy, which they sometimes manifest by ‘unfeminine’ smoking or spitting. Mrs. Clavers realizes that because of her refined customs she is perceived as a curiosity in the frontier community: “one who sits *all day* in a carpeted parlor, teaches her own children instead of sending them to the district school, hates ‘the breath of garlic-eaters,’ and – oh fell climax! – knows nothing at all of soap-making” (NH, 91). This sardonic comment illustrates the discrepancy between the narrator’s elaborate ideology of domestic reformism and the contemptuous attitude of inhabitants of the rough frontier towards female seemingly regal power in an affluent home. Nevertheless, the lack of appreciation for Mrs. Clavers high standards of household duties does not discourage her from the plan of instituting the cult of domesticity on the frontier. As if in retaliation for belittling of her status as a ‘priestess’ of the home and family, Mrs. Clavers notes inconsistency between the professed values of the frontierswomen and the social practice observable in the common habit of borrowing from neighbours while keeping up pretensions of frontier self-reliance (Leverentz 1989: 155).

Mrs. Clavers believes that her “silent influence of example” can bring about improvement, in what she perceives as, vulgar and degrading frontier customs (NH, 90). The narrator’s attempts to judge the frontier women settlers by eastern standards of domesticity and ladyhood expose her desire to impose middle class control on them, visible in the first part of the narrative. Such attitude is evident in chapter XXVIII describing the gradual decline of the Newlands. The chapter opens with a general statement concerning the mysterious deterioration of “one class of settlers” who “seem to work hard, to dress wretchedly, and live in the most uncomfortable style in all respects, apparently denying themselves and their families everything beyond the absolute necessities of life” and yet grow poorer (NH, 181). The narrator describes their piteous living conditions in minute detail: “They had been living through the summer in a shanty, built against a sloping bank, with a fire-place dug in the hill-side, and a hole pierced through the turf by way of chimney” (NH, 182). In this context, the Newlands’ story does not comply with the myth of easy profit and improvement of settler’s lot on the frontier. The derisive comment concerning the temporary arrangement of the Newlands reveals an air of superiority of Mrs. Clavers, who feels entitled to evaluate the Newlands’ lifestyle as their employer and benefactor: “In this den of some twelve feet square,

the whole family had burrowed since April; but in October, a log-house of ordinary size was roofed in, and though it had neither door nor windows, nor chimney, nor hearth, they removed, and felt much elated with the change" (NH, 182). Mrs. Clavers describes her unannounced visit to the Newlands' new home and her astonishment to see them preparing for a house-warming party. She scornfully notes their extravagant outfit and the fact that they celebrate even though their father is seriously ill. The chapter ends with the ultimate decline of the family following the death of Mr. Newlands, when the eldest daughter dies in mysterious circumstances as if "to elude the 'slow unmoving finger' of public scorn" (NH, 186). The news that the "vicious and degraded" Newlands decided to move out is greeted with relief and is combined with appreciation for the westward expansion which facilitated the removal of the disreputable family: "Texas and the Canada war have done much for us in this way; and the wide west is rapidly drafting off those whom we shall regret as little as the Newlands" (NH, 187). The story of the Newlands also reveals powerlessness Mrs. Clavers experiences in the face of the ungovernable frontier emigrants who neither respect her genteel education nor share her great zeal for the institution of refined manners.

Gradually, Mrs. Claver's change of attitude towards her uncultured neighbours becomes evident in the instruction she gives to a young genteel newcomer about the social reality on the frontier. She teaches city-bred Mrs. Rivers not to disapprove of her rural neighbours because due to scarce population she may soon be in need of their assistance: "What can be more absurd than a feeling of proud distinction, where a spark of fire, a sudden illness, or a day's contre-temps, may throw you entirely upon the kindness of your humblest neighbour?" (NH, 111). The motivation behind this attitude is rooted in a quite pragmatic assessment of the indispensable social network on the frontier: "If I treat Mrs. Timson with neglect to-day can I with any face borrow her broom to-morrow? And what would become of me, if in revenge for my declining her invitation to tea this afternoon, she could decline to do my washing on Monday?" (NH, 111). Eventually, Mrs. Clavers learns the lesson that her proud superiority does not pay off in the frontier circumstances and she cannot preserve her traditional class status intact. As a result, she exposes more equally the vices and virtues of both poor frontier women and genteel ladies who begin to arrive in Michigan woodlands.

Despite the restrictive cultural code of genteel ladyhood, which renders upper-class women especially vulnerable to misunderstanding and estrangement in the new frontier settlement, the narrator finds consolation in sight-seeing trips to "the ancient woods": "The time, midsummer, and the wilderness literally 'blossoming as the rose.' In a tour of three miles we saw three lakes, each a lonely gem set deep in masses of emerald green, which shut it in completely from all but its own bright beauty" (NH, 124). Moreover, Mrs. Clavers learns to overcome her domestic and social isolation by forming bonds of friendship with women

newcomers who share the same status. They organize their independent expeditions on horse-back to survey the nearby countryside. For example, the narrator recounts her trip to Tinkerville with her new cultivated neighbour Anna Rivers. They enjoy the situations in which they can transgress the bonds of 'true' femininity by using "masculine" equipment such as „men's saddles of course, for the settlement boasts no other yet," and they can test their courage and physical endurance in other-than-domestic circumstances (NH, 144). Mrs. Clavers admires the variety of landscapes they are passing through, and she is equally pleased with garden-like forest and the spacious clearing: "woods cool and moist as the grotto of Undine, and carpeted every where with strawberry vines and thousand of flowers; [...] strips of open land where you could look through the straight-stemmed and scattered groves for miles on each side" (NH, 144). Her appreciation of the stretches of open land is quite notable as many of women settlers exhibited aversion to treeless countryside (Kolodny 1984: 96). The narrator describes the trip in a jocular tone reporting that "a marsh or two were to be passed" (NH, 144). A similar light attitude is discernible in the narrator's account of the unexpected encounter with an Indian, which evoked terror in her companion:

It was only an Indian, and when I stopped and tried to inquire whether we were in the right track, he could not be made to understand but gave the usual assenting grunt and passed on. When I turned to speak to my companion she was so ashy pale that I feared she must fall from her horse. "What is the matter, my dearest madam!" said I, going as near her as I could coax old Governor. "The Indian! the Indian!" was all she could utter. I was terribly puzzled. It had never occurred to me that the Indians would naturally be objects of terror to a young lady who had scarcely ever seen one; and I knew we should probably meet dozens of them in the course of our short ride. (NH, 145)

In the above passage, the narrator assumes the pose of an experienced frontier settler, who is accustomed to the sight of Indians, and mocks her friend's fear of the innocent passer-by. The narrator presents the Indians as a part of the frontier economic system and hence a common sight. Mrs. Clavers' story includes an Indian woman who is a wife of the French trapper, other Indians who are involved in the fur and wild fruit trade and the comment that the Indians can also be met on the roads in considerable numbers during a short trip. Even though Mrs. Clavers is far from looking at Indians from the perspective of a stereotypical captivity heroine threatened by savages as her companion is, she too displays the fears in connection with Indian presence, though in a much more domesticated convention. The narrator does not expect that every Indian will be eager to fiercely assault and abduct her, but the way in which she frames her contacts with Indian fruit gatherers seems to point to fear of violence. As she describes the wild Michigan whortleberries that the Indians barter with her for flour, she compares the size of the fruit to that of "a rifle bullet," bringing the echoes of bloodshed in the context of the everyday exchange between Indians and the white woman (NH, 138). Although

the fruit picked by Indians are tasty and they are available in great quantities, Mrs. Clavers advises the settlers to cultivate their own gardens and in this way to become independent from Indian supply.

The narrator does not portray Indians as a serious threat to the emerging frontier settlement, but she normalizes their presence as the objects of daily interactions and newcomer's curiosity, as exotic people appreciated for their mute assistance and occasionally considered a minor nuisance. The Native Americans are relocated to the background of her narrative focused primarily on the establishment of a middle-class home in the West. Brigitte Georgi-Findlay suggests that Kirkland's description of the West highlights the class differences between the poor and affluent white settlers in an effort to present "a contact zone where the history of racial conflict has already been suppressed or sublimated" (Georgi-Findlay 1996: 30). According to Georgi-Findlay, in this context the early poor settlers are treated almost as a substitute for Indians: "Native Americans were replaced in Kirkland's text by new natives who invite scenarios of control and who are seen to exhibit the same traits stereotypically assigned to Native Americans: the first white settlers, uneducated and often from rural backgrounds, live in dirt and shun labor" (Georgi-Findlay 1996: 55). Even though Kirkland refrains from explicit comments on the conflicts between the Indian people and white settlers she does acknowledge the daily coexistence of the Native Americans with the white inhabitants of the frontier. Unlike Kirkland, most men-authored accounts of the nineteenth century West refrain from presentation of Indians as local residents of the frontier settlements and cast them in the role of migratory belligerent "savages" or depict them as groups of degenerate individuals living on the outskirts of the "civilized" communities.

Ultimately, Kirkland's narrative ends with the transformed but viable "romance of rustic life" (NH, 151). In the story of Cora and Everal Hastings in the final chapters of *A New Home: Who'll Follow?*, Mrs. Clavers reports the phases of disillusionment which the genteel people, who are used to leisure, experience in their adaptation to the life in the woods. Their initial ups and downs in the confrontation of their fiction-based visions with real wilderness are followed by familial bliss in the natural surroundings even though the frontier lady has to relinquish her fantasies of "'sweet white dress,' with straw-coloured kid-gloves, and a dog tied to a pink ribbon" and replace them with a less elegant calico dress more appropriate in the rural frontier (NH, 256). Thus in conclusion, the feasibility of domestic middle-class idyll in the West is affirmed, and the frontier emerges as not merely wilderness but also a stratified social space, though the disparity between classes seems less distinct than in the urban centers of the East. By presenting the Midwest undergoing the process of domestication, Kirkland's narrative could indeed function as an "emigrant's guide" to the frontier for prospective middle class settlers.



Similarly to Poe, who appreciated domestic perspective adopted by Kirkland, and Smith who praised her focus on the social stratification, Georgi-Findlay maintains that Kirkland's first western narrative represented the social dimension of the frontier highlighting the issues connected with class and gender. The initial seven chapters following the description of the Clavers' arrival to the frontier settlement present Mrs. Clavers as a cultured newcomer, who is virtually shocked by some customs practiced by frontier women which cannot be reconciled with the etiquette of eastern ladyhood. Mrs. Clavers is outraged when she sees a local school mistress who smokes a pipe while looking for a side job as a domestic help. Similarly, Mrs. Clavers' simple neighbours who drink from the spout of the tea pot, wear bizarre clothes, or display persistent lack of concern for the interior decoration in the home and disregard the genteel rules of conduct disturb the narrator only in the first part of her narrative. The second part of *A New Home: Who'll Follow?* tells the story of gradual accommodation of the narrator with her high ideas of social propriety to the local customs of western community with the hope of reformation of the lower class neighbours (Kolodny 1984: 138). Mrs. Clavers' social interactions with the inhabitants of the West are initially narrated from a position of a critical outsider, but in the final chapters they exhibit her transformation to the insider, a person integrated into the frontier community. The narrative delineates this metamorphosis of Mrs. Clavers ascribing it to sustained personal contacts with her neighbours and special circumstances of frontier settlement:

Although many of these remarks and requisitions of our unpolished neighbours are unreasonable and absurd enough, yet some of them commend themselves to our better feelings in such a sort, that we find ourselves ashamed to refuse what seemed at first impertinent to ask; and after the barriers of pride and prejudice are once broken, we discover a certain satisfaction in this homely fellowship with our kind, which goes far towards repaying whatever sacrifices or concessions we may have been induced to make.

(NH, 310)

Eventually, the narrator is capable of growing understanding towards the unfavourable reactions of her neighbours concerning her standards of domestic comfort. She notes that the disapproval her neighbours show towards her few luxurious possessions are related to the "simplification of life" and the "republican spirit" widespread among the western settlers (NH, 308). However, Mrs. Clavers also comments ironically that this democratizing process seems to operate in one direction as "one cannot help observing that 'levelling upwards' is much more congenial to 'human nature', than levelling downwards" (NH, 310). The concluding remarks concern the rise to relative wealth and prosperity of rural Montacute settlement whose inhabitants can boast of, for instance, a school, a sewing circle and "as many as three cows; some few, carpets, shanty kitchens; and one or two, piano-fortes and silver tea-sets." Yet despite the favourable material circumstances in the settlement, the narrator distances herself from the idea of reproduc-

tion of the aristocratic elite: “But I am now a denizen of the wild woods – in my view, ‘no mean city’ to own as one’s home; and I feel no ambition to aid in formation of a Montacute aristocracy, for which an ample field is now open, and all the proper materials are at hand” (NH, 313).

Contrary to F.J. Turner’s thesis asserting the disappearance of classes on the frontier, Kirkland’s narrative shows that the emigrants from the East brought the concepts of social stratification with them (Kolodny 1984: 139). Kirkland’s description of the midwestern village gives the account of the evolution of the class lines but does not delude the readers that Montacute can be regarded as individualist’s or egalitarian’s paradise. Emphasis on frequent dependence on neighbours’ help and the popular custom of gossiping reveals the frontier as a socially controlled space. As Georgi-Findlay, contends Kirkland’s narrative depicts the rise of the new middle class in the midwestern settlement as the emigrants, such as the Clavers, and the earlier settlers who perform physical labour for them “do not interact on equal terms in a romance of reciprocity” (Georgi-Findlay 1996: 32). Thus Mrs. Clavers’ efforts to establish a proper middle class home in the developing frontier community clash with the desire of the poorer settlers to abolish social hierarchies. Yet, Mrs. Clavers dissociates herself also from the leisured gentility and strives to find a middle place on the frontier social ladder for herself and her family.

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## Abbreviation

NH – *A New Home: Who’ll Follow?*