

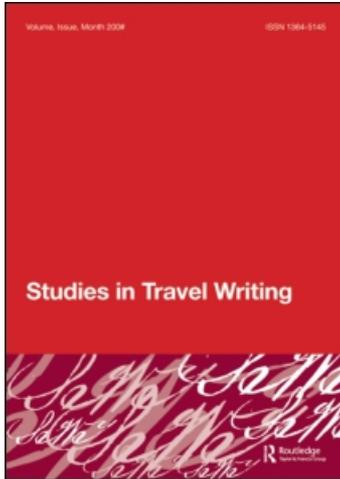
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The results of locomotion: Bayard Taylor and the travel lecture in the mid-nineteenth-century United States

Tom F. Wright*

During the mid-nineteenth century, appearances by returning travellers were a ubiquitous feature of the American popular lecture circuit. Attending such talks was one of the few means by which the majority of citizens acquired an insight into distant cultures. These ‘travel lectures’ became an idiom of an emerging mass entertainment culture, one of the period’s more under-appreciated and idiosyncratic cultural practices. Drawing upon a range of archival materials, this essay explores the scope of the phenomenon during the period 1840–70, and argues that these oratorical events represented interpretive performances or ‘dramas of appraisal’ through which performers brought reformist themes to the platform. Focusing on the career of the poet, writer and diplomat Bayard Taylor – the archetypal ‘travel lecturer’ of the period – it reveals the ways in which he used the form to advance a moral vision of mid-century American cosmopolitanism.

Keywords: travel; lecture; oratory; oratorical culture; performance; cosmopolitanism; nineteenth century; United States; Bayard Taylor

In a chapter of *Little Women* (1868) entitled ‘Literary Lessons’, Louisa May Alcott’s heroine Jo is disturbed from her writing and ‘prevailed upon to escort Miss Crocker to a lecture’ at the Concord Lyceum:

It was a people’s course – the lecture on the Pyramids, – and Jo rather wondered at the choice of such a subject for such an audience, but took it for granted that some great social evil would be remedied, or some great want supplied by unfolding the glories of the Pharaohs, to an audience whose thoughts were busy with the price of coal and flour, and whose lives were spent in trying to solve harder riddles than that of the Sphinx.

Unmoved at the speaker ‘prosing away about Belzoni, Cheops, scarabets and hieroglyphics’, Jo proceeds instead contentedly to compose stories in her head before ‘the lecture ended, and the audience awoke’.¹ The incident gently satirised an American scene immediately familiar to much of Alcott’s domestic audience. On winter evenings during the mid-nineteenth century, hundreds of communities throughout the nation gathered in meeting halls and lyceums to consume edifying addresses by visiting orators. The period represented the peak of the American popular lecture system, offering eclectic ‘people’s courses’ of talks in towns such as Alcott’s Concord, Massachusetts. Alongside lectures on temperance and ethical conduct, the appearances of returning travellers delivering eyewitness accounts of exotic locations were a ubiquitous feature of the circuit.

Speaking at the Brooklyn Athenaeum in February 1860, New England abolitionist and orator Wendell Phillips delivered just such an address, a lecture entitled ‘Street Life

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in Europe'. *The Brooklyn Eagle* reported that, introducing the topic to his audience he remarked that:

the system of public lecturing might be considered from one point of view as a great labor-saving machine. One man travels through books and brings back to you the result of his journeying; another travels over the globe and brings back the result of his locomotion.²

Such presentations of the 'results of locomotion' became an established idiom of an emerging mass entertainment culture, one of the more under-appreciated and idiosyncratic cultural practices of the period. Attending such talks was one of the scarce means by which many Americans acquired an insight into distant geographies and cultures. These presentations – which I term 'travel lectures' – covered a diverse array of oratorical performances, but often involved a single figure recounting and interpreting esoteric personal experiences. It was a form attempted by figures as various as Anna Dickinson, Herman Melville and Mark Twain, and the specialism of a handful of principal performers such as Bayard Taylor, the archetypal 'travel lecturer' of the period.

Beginning to think about the travel lecture through its appearance in *Little Women* allows us to glimpse its uncertain contemporary status. Alcott's ironic portrayal suggests that audiences routinely assumed the utility of lyceum discourses, uncritically presuming that they would meet 'some' broad national appetites and address 'some' imprecise reform agendas. Moreover, she posits that this reflex assumption blinded lecture-goers to the tangential irrelevance of addresses such as travel accounts. They were thus axiomatically middlebrow cultural productions, of putative cultural capital but lacking in import, occupying an ambiguous cultural status. Partly as a result, like Alcott's heroine Jo, modern scholarship seems to have taken the popular travel lecture, 'for granted', as an innocuous sideshow to more contentious, pungent oratory.

Surprisingly for an aspect of culture so important to so many, there has been a relative lack of recent engagement with nineteenth-century public lecturing in the United States, aside from the work of Donald Scott, Angela Ray and David Chapin.³ This is in part an inevitable consequence of the ephemeral nature of lecture culture. Nonetheless, the materials for its study – broadsides, newspaper reports, advertisements and manuscripts – are far from scant, and combine to provide glimpses of the transnational appetites and curiosities of the mid-century republic. In what follows, I draw upon a range of such materials to offer an outline sketch of the broad phenomenon of the travel lecture during the years 1840–70, the period of its greatest popularity and a fleeting moment before visual technologies diluted its essentially literary character.⁴

Reconsidering the diverse cultural work performed by these lectures, I adopt Alcott's phraseology to recover the ways in which they both supplied various 'great wants' of mid-century culture and assailed some of the republic's 'great social evils'. I trace this interplay through the richly suggestive figure of Taylor, whose attempts to advance a moral vision of exemplary cosmopolitanism reveals the ambivalence and limits of the travel lecture form.

The lyceum and popular lecture system

What became known as the 'lyceum movement' originated from a pioneering institution for community education established in Millbury, Massachusetts in 1826, aiming to provide workers with a secular, non-partisan centre for civic life.⁵ Catalysed by the self-improvement ethos of the Jacksonian era, a loosely connected network of between 4000 and 5000 similar lyceums had developed nationally by 1840.⁶ Their initial participatory

character gradually evolved into a commercial circuit based upon the hosting of lectures in seasons that ran from October to April, and by 1855 the *Boston Evening Transcript* observed that ‘every town or village of any sort of enterprise or pretensions has its annual course of popular lectures, while the cities support several courses’.⁷ In smaller communities, performances took place in town halls; in the major cities, venues and lecture-sponsoring organisations proliferated, and stages such as Boston’s Tremont Temple and Philadelphia’s Musical Fund Hall became hallowed platforms. Though Northern authors maintained that the system ‘never existed in the South and could not be tolerated there’, a Southern circuit had been in existence since the 1830s and venues such as the Richmond and Charleston Lyceums became important lecturing centres.⁸

According to Scott, ‘by fairly conservative estimate, attendance at public lectures probably reached close to half a million people each week during the lecture season’.⁹ An average lecture price of 50c prescribed a certain income, and lecture-going was traditionally associated with female and young male members of the emerging middle classes, a self-consciously refined arena for communal edification. Furthermore, as one observer saw it, the lyceum had a markedly nativist emphasis, with ‘foreign immigrants’ tending ‘to avoid it – or to taste of it, as they do of any other national dish, with courtesy but not with relish’.¹⁰ In practice, the movement represented an institutional attempt to foster the ethos and values of Northeastern civic nationalism.¹¹

In addition to being trailed in advance, noteworthy lectures were recorded in prominently placed newspaper reports, which ranged from brief précis to verbatim transcriptions. These evocative reports were often interpretative, providing a commentary on attendance and audience reaction, and were an essential part of the ‘text’ of any lecture, generating a potentially revealing discursive interplay between journalist and performer. Such reports raise inevitable authorial problems, with some rendered in direct reported speech, others in a shifting hybrid of transcription and editorial exegesis. Crucially, this reporting practice meant that the audience for any given lecture was threefold: a primary audience in the venue, perhaps a few thousand at most; a second audience of thousands more readers who consumed lectures in papers such as the *New York Tribune* with national readership; and a potential third group who read subsequent appropriated reprints of these lecture reports in local papers across the nation.¹²

These institutional arrangements gave birth to the short-lived profession of the ‘public lecturer’ and the dominance of the national marketplace by a small number of eminent names largely drawn from the metropolitan elites of Boston and New York who toured the country lucratively each winter.¹³ Hailed by *Putnam’s Magazine* in 1857 as ‘the intellectual leaders of intelligent progress in the country’, these celebrity lecturers included such renowned cultural figures as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Brooklyn preacher Henry Ward Beecher, and temperance speaker John B. Gough.¹⁴

Travel lectures

One condition of the circuit was that speakers brought to the platform some form of practical first-hand knowledge, and in this way, physicians, military veterans and cultural arbiters of all kinds found enthusiastic audiences. So too did the broader group of individuals returning from distant excursions. In the mid-century republic, travellers were by definition people of consequence, and accounts of their experience were seen to promise both entertainment and information. For the purposes of this discussion, the ‘travel lecture’ is defined as an oral rendition of first-hand experience, imparting esoteric

knowledge about distant places or peoples, most often delivered by Americans returning from international excursions. It represented a discursive space where several other modes of expression and inquiry – natural history, popular anthropology, comparative politics, autobiography, landscape description – overlapped in the lecture hall. Approaches and registers ranged from the urbane to the demotic, from scientific analysis to touristic reminiscence. As Scott maintains, ‘the travel lecture was less a travelogue than a kind of comparative ethnography’ an oratorical performance that fused description and comparison to communicate the realities of unfamiliar geographic and social conditions, with the cardinal aim of allowing audiences to ‘travel’ vicariously.¹⁵

No season would have been complete without at least one lecture topic occasioned by a period of travel, and these performances became a hallmark of courses from the humblest lyceum to prestigious courses such as Boston’s Lowell Institute series.¹⁶ A high-water mark of the vogue for these lectures can be seen in the records of the Salem, Massachusetts Lyceum course of 1853–4 (Figure 1).¹⁷ In this season, which featured some of the circuit’s leading names, five out of 18 lectures were on subjects that newspaper accounts confirm as reports of international or domestic travel: ‘France’, ‘Cuba and the Cubans’, ‘Europe’, ‘The Arabs’ and ‘The Valley of the Mississippi’.¹⁸ As this course suggests, the repertoire of locations covered in these lectures was eclectic, a range that provides an index to the fashions of the period and antebellum society’s thirst for knowledge about the world beyond the republic. Perennially popular subjects were locations such as the Holy Land, Western Europe, and the developing American West; most attractive of all were the even more exotic locations of Africa, the Far East and the Arctic.

The range of travel orators was also diverse, the personalities of individual performers frequently being as important an attraction as their chosen theme. *The Atlantic Monthly* observed in 1865 that ‘narratives of personal travel ... have been quite popular, and indeed, have been the specialties of more than one of the most popular of American lecturers, whose names will be suggested at once by this statement’.¹⁹ First, there were those such as Taylor or the Arctic explorers Elisha Kent Kane and Isaac Hayes, whose fame largely rested on voyages; second, there were more substantial public figures such as

Mendelssohn Quintette Club – Concert
 George Sumner – France
 Ralph Waldo Emerson – American Character
 George B. Cheever – Reading and Mental Cultivation
 W.H. Hurlbut – Cuba and the Cubans
 William R. Alger – Peter the Great
 John P. Hale – Last Gladiatorial Exhibition at Rome
 Octavius B. Frothingham, Salem – Europe
 Thomas Starr King – Property
 George W. Curtis – Young America
 Henry Ward Beecher – Ministrations of the Beautiful
 Theodore Parker – The Function of the Beautiful
 Bayard Taylor – The Arabs
 Henry W. Bellows – New England Festivals
 Anson Burlingame – The Valley of the Mississippi
 D.A. Wasson – Independence of Character
 Prof. Guyot – Distribution of the Races
 Wendell Phillips – The Lost Arts

In *The Massachusetts Lyceum During the American Renaissance*, ed. Kenneth W. Cameron

Figure 1. Salem Lyceum Course 1853–4.

Phillips or Emerson, who sporadically reflected upon their travels on the platform.²⁰ Reports also testify to travel accounts delivered by some curious or unexpected figures. During the early 1860s, audiences throughout the country were treated to Rev. W.H. Milburn, former chaplain to the US Congress, speaking on 'What a Blind Man Saw in Paris' and 'What a Blind Man Saw in London'.²¹ In 1872, Civil War General William T. Sherman regaled Cincinnati with an unlikely account of 'his travels among the Greek islands'.²² Perhaps most peculiar, in 1859 *The Lowell Daily Citizen* tells us of 'a fellow named McKinney':

who escaped jail at Dayton, Ohio, went to New Madison, Indiana, and gave a course of lectures on his travels in the Holy Land. He did the thing so well that he was invited to repeat his lectures in the college there, but before he had finished an officer came along in pursuit, and he was obliged to make a precipitate retreat.²³

As Carl Bode observed, 'the traveler who brought back his tales could generally count on prompt engagements', in part due to lecture committees' approval of travel reports as reliably uncontroversial.²⁴ Public lecturing operated within a carefully regulated discursive space, and as Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr was later to remark, there was 'an implied contract to keep clear of doubtful matters'.²⁵ Alongside biography or conduct, 'travel' presentations were viewed as an ideal way of achieving this whilst simultaneously meeting the lyceum's original function of 'diffusing' useful information.²⁶ These lectures could aid an appreciation of novel agricultural processes; could foster an understanding of other nations and peoples; and could underwrite democratic decisions with an awareness of competing traditions and social formulations. As Henry David Thoreau remarked of the self-censorship of the lyceum, 'the little medicine [audiences] get is disguised with sugar': these lectures offered the 'sugar' of pleasurable evocation, alongside 'medicinal' acts of cultural translation.²⁷

To be sure, the ostensible emphasis of these events was frequently on entertainment, most clearly in such presentations as the 'thrilling' Arctic narratives of Kane and Hayes.²⁸ Lectures could consist of mere international small talk, as in a series of lectures on 'England and the English' delivered by Rev. C. Pinkney in Baltimore in 1844, which dealt mostly in physical descriptions of Queen Victoria and Albert.²⁹ They could also offer vehicles for light satirical commentary, as in playwright Dion Boucicault's 1854 'Sketches of European Society', which humorously lampooned the foibles of the French and British nobility.³⁰ They could even occasionally resemble theatrical performance, as with Gough's series of flamboyant lectures on London during the 1860s, the highlight of which was a series of well-received impersonations of cockney street characters and Parliamentary figures.³¹

Other categories of lecturer offered more substantively educational experiences to audiences. Some such as French-American naturalist Paul du Chaillu used reports as the basis for popular scientific instruction, and the popularity of his accounts of Africa was the subject of a *Harper's Weekly* article in 1869 (Figure 2).³² As depicted in *Little Women*, others offered historical and archaeological descriptions, frequently accompanied with visual aids, as in an 1840 New York lecture on 'Modern Jerusalem' 'illustrated with 40 splendid Illuminated Paintings, from drawings taken on the spot' (Figure 3).³³ Subjects and locations were often topical, supplying news and fresh information, with a number of lecturers providing first-hand accounts of the European revolutions of 1848, the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the Paris Exposition of 1869.³⁴ Particularly urgent were those addresses by Civil War participants which provided Northern audiences with eyewitness accounts of the progress of the Union forces in the South.³⁵

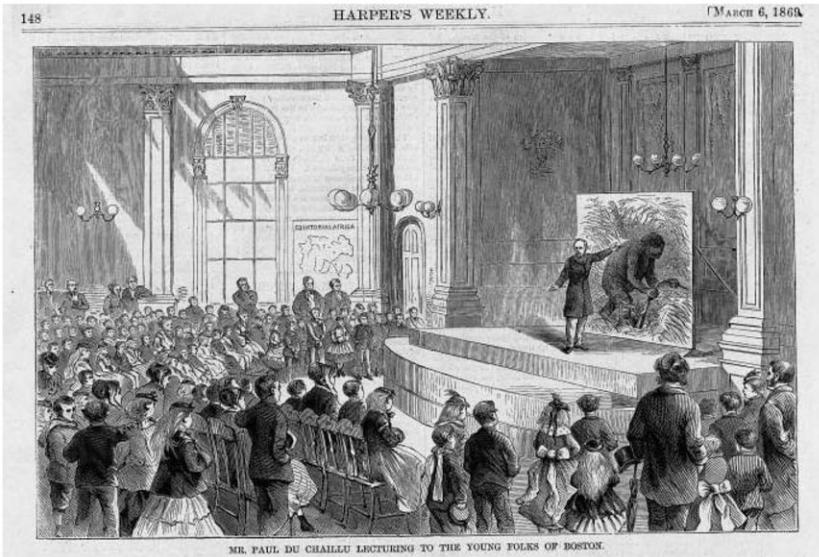


Figure 2. 'Mr. Paul Du Chaillu Lecturing to the Young People of Boston', *Harper's Weekly*, 6 March 1869.

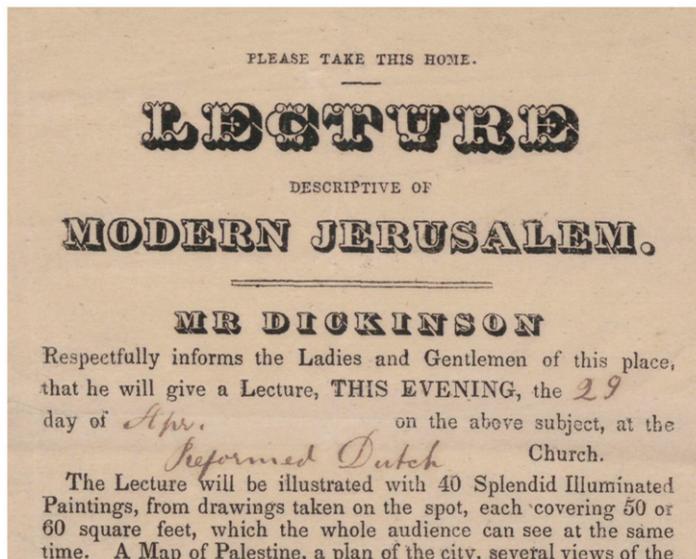


Figure 3. Mr. Dickinson, 'Lecture Descriptive of Modern Jerusalem', New York, 1840. Reproduced with permission of American Antiquarian Society.

A popular sub-genre of presentation supplied another 'great want' of Eastern audiences in the form of explanations and interpretations of westward expansion. Frequently performed by missionaries, clerics or settlers, these lectures often had the more or less explicit aim of spurring internal emigration, offering inspiration and guidance for Easterners hoping to emulate pioneer success. They could be anthropological, as

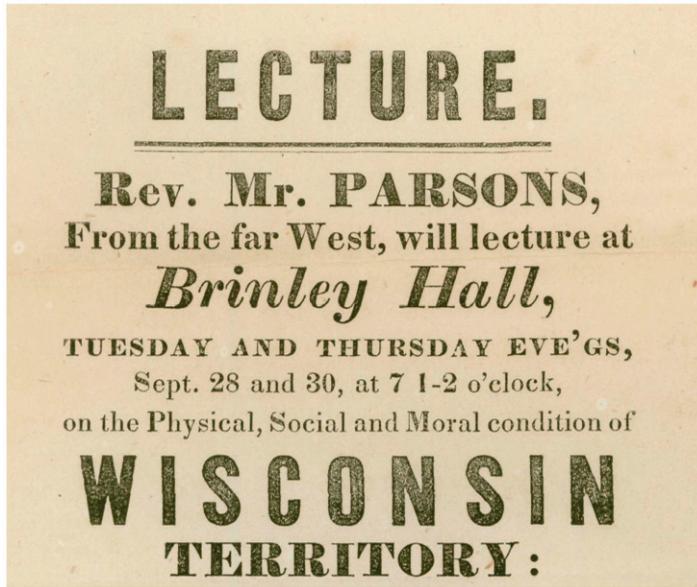


Figure 4. Rev. Parsons, 'The Physical, Social and Moral Condition of Wisconsin Territory', Worcester, MA, 1841. Reproduced with permission of American Antiquarian Society.

in Rev. Parsons's 1841 report on 'The Physical, Social and Moral Condition of Wisconsin Territory' in Worcester, Massachusetts (Figure 4).³⁶ Other examples were straightforwardly autobiographical, such as Rev. Peter Cartwright's lectures on 'Pioneer Life in the West' at the Episcopal Church in Manhattan in 1860.³⁷ This brand of lecture represented part of the dominant imperialist discourse surrounding Manifest Destiny, but Eastern audiences were also occasionally treated to oppositional visions of Western developments, as in the talks of Native American Chief Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh (aka 'George Copway'), who lectured widely during the 1840s and 1850s describing the landscapes of Wisconsin and the threatened practices of the Ojibway tribe.³⁸

As this survey demonstrates, the performances of travellers supplied a range of the 'great wants' of nineteenth-century culture: providing excitement, escapism, adventure, instances of heroism, patriotic reassurance and guidance. Travel lectures also sometimes aimed to remedy 'great evils' of antebellum society, and a number of performers used the form as an oblique but effective medium for bringing reformist themes to the platform. Many used accounts of experience abroad to rebuke American society, as was the case with *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley's admonitory account of the Great Exhibition entitled 'The Crystal Palace and Its Lessons', which lamented the state of American industry and advocated reform of free trade.³⁹ Similarly, Phillips's 'Street Life in Europe' drew on experience of Old World racial attitudes to condemn the relative intolerance exhibited in the cities of the US.⁴⁰ Others used a comparative frame as a warning, as with educationalist Horace Mann's lecture on 'Great Britain' which drew on descriptions of the English labouring classes to argue for the necessity of republican educational institutions.⁴¹ During the late 1860s, women's rights reformer Anna E. Dickinson toured an eyewitness report of Utah entitled 'Whited Sepulchres', a piece that began as a descriptive travel narrative, before evolving into an outspoken critique of gender relations under Mormonism.⁴²

The most incendiary of such lectures were those by orators who used reports of both international and domestic travel as vehicles for abolitionist sentiment. This was true of both international and domestic topics. Speaking before the Boston Mercantile Library Association in 1847, the well-travelled Senator Charles Sumner offered an account of ‘White Slavery in the Barbary States’, marvelling at how ‘the evil I am about to describe...banished at last from Europe, should have entrenched itself in both hemispheres between the same parallels of latitude’.⁴³ In a lecture featured in the Salem course of 1853–4, Free Soil Party spokesman Anson Burlingame spoke on the seemingly innocuous topic of ‘The Valley of the Mississippi’, but the *Cambridge Chronicle* reported that he ‘elected this subject . . . for the purpose of fixing a few transient memorials of that wonderful valley’, before documenting the lecture’s escalation to a crescendo of anti-slavery rhetoric: ‘In the name of humanity, I protest: let the declaration go forth from Old Fanueil Hall, let it rise from every section of the republic . . . by every shining mountain, *Nebraska Shall Be Free!*’⁴⁴

In providing this broad platform for cross-cultural reflection, the eyewitness travel report offered a significant degree of freedom to orators, a potential discursive range far beyond any notional remit. Performers could exploit an innocuous set of broad conventions of the travel report – evocative first-hand description, curious information, comparative cultural interpretation – to pronounce on almost any subject. Rhetorically, they were acts of inductive reasoning, treating empirical experience of distant practices to argue for local reform. As with the wider genre of nineteenth-century travel writing, these lectures centred on potent messages about ‘nationhood’ and ‘otherness’, articulated with varying degrees of conscious obliqueness. However, the oral form transformed the purchase of this wider literary mode; in this still largely pre-visual mode, language was called upon to usher expectant audiences into distant lands. Moreover, oral renditions of travel material allowed for the evolving emotional or dramatic movement of the travel account to be experienced communally. Travel talks were therefore above all performances of interpretation, or dramas of appraisal.

Though often fragmentary in their record of audience response, newspaper reports occasionally provide a sense of this galvanising public atmosphere. As Lawrence Levine has remarked of the performance culture of the period, ‘the very ethos of the times encouraged active audience participation’, a reality amply illustrated in reports of two lectures on British themes in 1850s’ New York.⁴⁵ An account of Emerson’s lecture on ‘England’ in 1850 recorded that ‘the loudest and most animated cheering occurred at the mention of the name of Oliver Cromwell – proof positive that he was before an audience who sprung from the people of whom Oliver was one’.⁴⁶ Three years later, a report on Mann’s ‘Great Britain’ detailed the dramatic silencing of a heckler:

a gentleman from the gallery said he would like to say a word on the other side of the question. He was from the manufacturing districts, and could say that the statements were exaggerated; that – The gentleman’s voice was overpowered by a storm of sibilation.⁴⁷

Both cases testify to the readiness with which certain audiences endorsed or appropriated the symbolism of orators’ cross-cultural representations. Moreover, the experience of reading these reports reminds us that the importance of these events only partly lay in their initial oral expression. The implications of these dramas of appraisal were transformed through their reproduction in the print media, and reporters and editors participated in the encoding and dissemination of performances.

Promotional materials were also central to this process, and advertising for these events reveals a range of motivations for attendance. Some lectures were marketed as purely

informational, others as more aspirational, as with Gough's talks on London, which were specifically recommended to Philadelphia audience members 'who design visiting the English metropolis'.⁴⁸ Most others were advertised simply in terms of narrative value or descriptive appeal. Performers deficient in these prized qualities were not highly regarded, the most prominent example being Melville, whose short-lived platform career speaking on 'The South Seas', and 'Statues in Rome' during the mid-1850s suffered from his apparent failure to provide such stimulation.⁴⁹

These performances existed as part of what David Chapin has termed 'a culture of curiosity, built on knowledge of the world presented as both amusement and useful education'.⁵⁰ The purveyors of such knowledge occupied a unique place in mid-century culture, their lecturing activities providing 'the possibility of forging careers' in Lewis Perry's terms 'as intellectual middlemen'.⁵¹ The act of travel rendered performers crucially distinct from most of their audience, and the 'result' of locomotion could be gauged by how separate and distinct these performers had become. Due to their accomplishments, travel lecturers represented exemplars, but were also obliged by lyceum conventions to interpret privileged experiences in a demotic way, to be simultaneously exceptional and representative.

Bayard Taylor: performing cosmopolitanism

Of no performer of the period was this more true than Bayard Taylor, the travel writer, poet and diplomat whose lectures dominated the platform of the 1850s. An 1873 *Harper's Weekly* illustration entitled 'The Lyceum Committeeman's Dream' (Figure 5) depicted him striding purposefully in Russian attire amidst a cohort of fellow celebrity orators,



Figure 5. 'The Lyceum Committeeman's Dream – Popular Lecturers in Character', *Harper's Weekly*, 15 November 1873. Bayard Taylor top centre.

including Susan B. Anthony, Wilkie Collins and Mark Twain. One historian of the lyceum has termed him among ‘the most admired and talked-about men in antebellum America’, and his 1879 *Harper’s Weekly* obituary recalled that:

for a long time in his earlier life, his lectures of travel were more charming and attractive to the public than any other lyceum oratory; special trains were run, and no hall was large enough for the crowds that wished to hear him.⁵²

Born into moderate means in Pennsylvania in 1825, Taylor rose to prominence as a result of serialised newspaper dispatches of his youthful adventures as an impoverished but resourceful traveller in Europe during the early 1840s. When these experiences were subsequently published as *Views Afoot: Europe Seen with a Knapsack and Staff* (1846), a generation of middle-class Americans were offered an innovatory guide to enjoying the Old World ‘on the cheap’. Possessed of acquisitive linguistic gifts and considerable personal charm, he found himself a natural traveller, and his combined voyages were on a vaster scale than any author or lyceum performer, covering more ground than perhaps any other American of his age.

At the height of Gold Fever in 1849 Taylor travelled West to California and Mexico, excursions which resulted in *El Dorado: Adventures in the Path of Empire* (1850). In 1851 he travelled to the Levant and sailed down the Nile; in 1852 he pressed on to India and China before achieving his greatest coup the following year, accompanying US Commodore Perry on the successful 1853 commercial ‘opening’ of Japan.⁵³ The output from these and other voyages was prolific – including *A Journey to Central Africa* (1854); *The Lands of the Saracen* (1854); *A Visit to India, China and Japan* (1855); and *Northern Travel* (1857) – and Taylor became a literary sensation, widely hailed as a patriotic hero.

Upon his return from Japan in 1854, he observed to his publisher that ‘curiosity is alive to see “The Great American Traveller”’. It provokes me and humiliates me, but I suppose it is natural, and I must submit to it.⁵⁴ Taylor duly embarked upon the lecture circuit, satisfying the curiosity of audiences across the nation who ‘longed to look upon this friend who had been with them such a pleasant companion in so many strange lands’.⁵⁵ He proved an immediate success, and though he soon grew to resent the time-consuming pressures of lecturing, he could not resist its rewards and repeatedly undertook full winter tours.⁵⁶ Taylor’s account books state that between 1850 and 1865 he delivered almost 800 lectures, netting him an average salary of \$3363 versus the \$2058 he received from publishing.⁵⁷

His repertoire consisted of a nucleus of five main lectures on exotic locations – ‘The Arabs’ (toured from 1853), ‘Japan and Loo Choo’ (1853); ‘India’ (1854), ‘Life in the North’ (1858) and ‘Moscow’ (1858) – alongside which Taylor frequently delivered a more abstract piece entitled ‘The Philosophy of Travel’ (1856).⁵⁸ In later years his attention turned to presentations on German literature and, to mixed success, ambitious socio-political addresses on such grand themes as ‘The American People’ (1861) and ‘American Life’ (1866). This latter group have been the only pieces to have received critical attention, but it is on the first group of popular eyewitness reports that his considerable contemporary fame rested.⁵⁹

Taylor periodically appeared in the costume of the region about which he was speaking, adopting Oriental robes while performing ‘The Arabs’ or an oversized Cossack cap for touring ‘Moscow’ (see Figures 6 and 7).⁶⁰ This theatrical element of his ‘act’ was central to his appeal. However, unlike fellow performers who became increasingly reliant upon visual aids, ‘magic lanterns’ and illustrations, reports suggest that Taylor’s art was a primarily oral, literary phenomenon. For the modern reader, some of this literary appeal



Figure 6. 'Bayard Taylor', *Putnam's Monthly*, Vol. 4.4, August 1854.

is elusive. In his published works, he is often a repetitive and wearisome guide, his admirably complete immersions in local culture frequently marred by a stylistic tendency for superlatives and extraneous statistics. The lecture scripts are necessarily comparatively condensed, and the more effective for it. Mature pieces such as 'Moscow' are relatively tightly focused, finely wrought collage-like compositions that weave exotic cultural allusion to figures from Western and Eastern traditions, anecdotes, precise geographic detail and rhapsodic imagery.

In Alcott's terms, Taylor's performances met several great wants of antebellum culture: his accounts afforded vicariously pleasurable escapist experiences, and his appraisals met the 'great want' of international classification. An account of an 1854 performance of 'Japan and Loo Choo' in Cambridge, Massachusetts, centred on just such an act of classification, beginning with a comparison between the Chinese and the inhabitants of Japan, with the lecturer concluding the latter to be 'immensely superior in capability and in promise . . . The Chinese however, are a stupid, almost witless race, fitted to their stagnant condition'. Such troubling moments represented influential codifications of races in hierarchical relation to putative American progress.

During his platform career Taylor's style developed from this early reductive emphasis on racial hierarchy towards meeting the 'great want' of aesthetic stimulation through vivid geographic sketches that served as dramatic highlights. It was this latter quality that was



Figure 7. Bayard Taylor *Carte de Visite*, c. 1860 (Berg Collection, New York Public Library).

clearly most admired by audiences. ‘Japan and Loo Choo’ was praised in New York in 1854 for its ‘extremely graphic...descriptions of the island scenes’ that generated ‘the strongest expressions of pleasure from the audience’; an 1855 Ohio report recorded that ‘his listeners can see clearly in their minds eye the things of which speaks’.⁶¹ Having attended ‘Moscow’ in 1858, *The Philadelphia Press* deemed him ‘a true, faithful word-painter of scenes that come within the range of his perceptive intellect – Taylor’s powers are certainly extraordinary’.⁶²

One such dioramic set-piece occurs towards the beginning of ‘Moscow’, a recollection of Taylor’s first sight of the capital, worth quoting at length for its cumulative effects:

Your eyes, accustomed to the cool green of the woods and swamps, are at first dazzled with the light. The sun is reflected from hundreds of gilded domes, whose long array fills up one third of the horizon, the nearest ones flashing in your face, and the farthest sparkling like stars in the distance. I have heard people attempt to compliment Nature by saying of a celebrated view: ‘How like a scene in a theatre!’ Yet one’s first impressions of Moscow might be expressed in almost these words. Its sudden burst of splendour – its confusion of gold and prismatic

colors – does not belong to the sober landscape which surrounds it or the pale Northern sky which looks down upon it. It is an immense dramatic show, gotten up for a temporary effect, and you can scarcely believe that it may not be taken to pieces and removed as soon as its purpose has been achieved. Whence comes this wilderness of grass-green roofs, of pink, blue and yellow houses, out of which rise by hundreds spire and towers, stranger and more fantastic than ever were builded [*sic*] in the dream of an insane architect? Whence these gilded and silvered domes, which blind your eyes with reflected suns, and seem to dance and totter in their own splendour, as you move? It can be no city of trade and government, of pleasure and scandal, of crime and religion, which you look upon. It was built while the lamp was yet in Aladdin's hands.⁶³

Rather than capturing a static image, the varied rhythms and constructions of the passage strive to dramatise a process of observation and appraisal. Taylor emulates the assault of Moscow on the senses, a spectacle represented as celestial, feral, enchanted, yet delicately insubstantial. Russian otherness is figured against the propriety of the 'sober' landscape, offsetting the city's 'confusion' and the strange daring of its architecture. To experience Taylor reciting such a passage and rehearsing its rhetorical questions was to participate in his succession of metaphysical uncertainties, to share in the essentially passive theatricality of travel. The passage's invocation of such theatrical aspects alludes to an interplay of visual and literary arts in the contemporary performance culture of spatial representation, and offers a commentary on the pictorial character of his own prose, a 'dramatic show gotten up for temporary effect'. In the absence of magic lanterns or illuminated paintings, mimetic literary executions such as Taylor's provided audiences with their most vivid encounters with distant scenes.

Even in such passages as this, Taylor's account retains a curiously informational character in its specification of 'one third of the horizon', and a diffidence of tone in the tentative gesture of 'it might be expressed'. Just as central to the effect of such scenes was Taylor's pronominal flexibility. His scripts often let the third-person 'traveller' drive his narrative ('this tale will naturally recur to the mind of the traveller, who approaches Moscow'), achieving a sense of objective distance from his own travels.⁶⁴ As with other performers, he also frames his experience with reference to plural 'we' and 'us' of American identity ('If any of us had asked his neighbour, three years ago . . .'; 'In Finland, we find a different class . . .').⁶⁵ Significantly, however, Taylor largely avoids the first-person singular, characteristically employing the second-person to establish a voice simultaneously intimate and authoritative. In the above passage, the action of viewing Moscow thus takes place specifically *for* its listeners ('your eyes', 'your face', 'you can scarcely believe'). By modulating the addressee of his lectures in this way, Taylor presented his exploits as merely one in a succession of potential voyages, intimating the essentially representative typicality of his exploits, and the plausibility of audience repetition of such feats.

This stylistic self-effacement contributed to Taylor's self-conscious attainment of fellowship with his audiences. His lectures resisted mystifying himself or his achievements, aiding the process of what Ray has termed 'the symbolic creation of Taylor as the public's own observer, simultaneously a celebrity and a compatriot'.⁶⁶ In 1855 the *Wisconsin Patriot* thought 'his manner [is] not that of the orator, but that of the companion – conversational'; in 1860 the *Springfield News* maintained that 'everybody likes Bayard Taylor because he is a man of the people and puts on no airs'.⁶⁷ The early image of Taylor as the resourceful, indigent everyman of *Views Afoot* appears to have remained with popular audiences, and central to this appeal was his position as part of but crucially apart from the antebellum literary establishment.

Among these elite contemporaries, he enjoyed a markedly less positive reputation. Fellow poet and editor Park Benjamin coined the notorious, widely circulated witticism that Taylor had ‘travelled more and seen less than any man living’.⁶⁸ Melville, perhaps harbouring a degree of resentment at his rival’s lyceum success, is believed by some to have used Taylor as the basis for ‘The Cosmopolitan’, the worldly but naive dilettante in *The Confidence Man* (1856).⁶⁹ A contemporary coolly remarked of his lecturing that ‘reports of his latest trip are always well-received by the large class who (as Goethe says in his analysis of playgoers) do not care to think, but only to see that something is going on’.⁷⁰ Modern critical opinion of his lecturing has generally concurred, considering him at best as a minor heir to the Genteel Tradition of such derided figures as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, at worst as a mere shill of colonialism, a disseminator of the racial prejudices of his day.⁷¹ David Mead concluded of his platform career that ‘his appeal was conscious and calculated; he had no share in the ideal of spreading culture’.⁷²

Taylor’s colonial vision clearly represents the most challenging aspect of his work for modern readers. His books were filled with repeated claims of the nature that ‘every important triumph which man has achieved since his creation belongs to the Caucasian race. Our mental and moral superiority is self-evident.’⁷³ In his lectures, a prominent aspect of this vision lay in the repeated theme of the celebration of the ‘mobility’ of nations. In ‘the course of History’ he observed in ‘The Philosophy of Travel’, ‘we shall find that a country is progressive, in proportion as its people travel. None of the great nations of the ancient world ever grew up to power on its original soil’.⁷⁴ This process of international mobility was characteristically expressed in a troublingly violent register, typified by the frequent rhetorical suggestion that the traveller ‘should rather seek to *penetrate* the national character of each country he visits’.⁷⁵ Taylor was evasive about the processes and implications of imperialism, remarking of his role in the ‘opening up’ of Japan to US trade that:

I leave it to others to discuss the question whether Japan has not a perfect right to exclude herself from intercourse with the world . . . destiny does not pause to consider these questions. There are certain things which happen, whether they seem to be right or not.⁷⁶

This celebration of destiny is twinned in the dramatic closing tableaux of ‘Japan and Loo Choo’ with a vivid expression of militarist patriotism:

We carried with us, as a token of our nationality, a small boat’s ensign, and on arriving at the gate of the capital, one of the sailors fastened it to a light staff which he stuck into the barrel of his musket, and thus we carried the flag in triumph through the centre of the town.⁷⁷

However troubling they may seem, emphasis on these seemingly oblivious imperial aspects alone risks missing the broader personal and party-political agenda at work in Taylor’s lecturing. Correspondence from his earliest days of touring registers his realisation of the potential of his new role, expressing pleasure in the ‘great satisfaction’ of ‘magnetizing so many persons at once’.⁷⁸ It also indicates that at least for a time, he consciously sought to articulate serious lessons through what he described as his ‘lecturing crusade’ across the nation.⁷⁹ Reports repeatedly record this resolute aspect to his performances, noting Taylor’s characteristic transition from graphic description to abstract cross-cultural analysis. In 1855, the *Wisconsin Patriot* reported having ‘listened with great pleasure to this most philosophical of travellers, and most travelled of philosophers’.⁸⁰ In 1858, the *Philadelphia Press* praised ‘the lecturer’s happy manner of tinging his vivid and life-like descriptions with the sober colors of sound philosophical content’.⁸¹

The consistent message of Taylor’s later lectures ultimately appears less one of imperial destiny than a Whiggish enactment of exemplary stances of appraisal. In ‘The Philosophy

of Travel', he announced the broad aim of 'presenting some of the nobler aims of travel...rescuing the practice from the imputation of being merely the result of an unsettled state of mind, or an unstable character'.⁸² These nobler aims were most clearly expressed in a passage of direct guidance:

I know of no better advice to give to one who wishes to obtain that broad and living experience of the world which travel only can supply, than follow the example of St. Paul and become all things unto all men. You can establish no magnetic communication with another race, without conforming in some degree to their manners and habits of life. Unless you do this, you carry your own country with you wherever you go, and you behold new forms of life merely from the outside, without feeling the vital pulse which throbs beneath. The only true way of judging of a man's actions is to place ourselves in his situation, and take our bearings from that point; and the only way to understand a people thoroughly is to become one of them, for a time.⁸³

All of his lectures were at least in part hymns to these benefits of breadth of experience, which for Taylor amounted to the cultivation of an attitude of cultural openness and cosmopolitanism.

Taylor believed that he was witnessing the close of an age of authentic cultural cosmopolitanism, an ethos and way of life whose passing he mourned. Throughout his multiple careers as traveller, diplomat and man of letters, he worked up a distinct vision of this lost cosmopolitan ideal, one reliant on versatility, adaptation and resistance to the wilder claims of nationalism. It was an ethos central to his cultural agenda, at the heart of such projects such as his *Cyclopaedia of Modern Travel* (1856), but was one he sought to convey most energetically on the lecture platform.⁸⁴ Taylor was one among several Whig voices who used the lyceum to urge for a reining in of boosterist passions, and the tendency of the United States to overvalue itself. One of the most popular performances of the period, Wendell Phillips's 'The Lost Arts' (included on the 1853–4 Salem course discussed earlier) was a comparable attack on self-indulgent nationalist boosterism, advocating a greater respect for the achievements of past global civilisations.⁸⁵ Such sentiments became a major theme of Taylor's lectures, disseminated by plentiful lecture reports. In 1854 'The Arabs' reminded audiences in Georgia that 'those who have only associated with their own race have but a little knowledge of human character'; 'Man and Climate' opened in Brooklyn in 1860 'with some general remarks setting forth the desirableness of acquiring a knowledge of the different branches of the human family'.⁸⁶ While unfailingly affirmative about American life, these lectures drew upon Taylor's foreign experience to advocate a more sophisticated, cosmopolitan form of patriotism.

This cosmopolitanism was reiterated through the aesthetic values of Taylor's lectures. Their stylistic layering and multicultural allusiveness supplied for audiences a stance of elegant discrimination, and the frequently unassuming nature of his observations communicated a position of confident discernment. It was also part of the casualness of his tone, a disavowal of the high seriousness of his peers on the platform, favouring meandering over linear narrative. In 'Japan and Loo Choo', for example, he said:

I propose, therefore, to give you my impressions of the Japanese, with such illustrations as may suggest themselves, rather than a connected narrative of my experience, much of which has already been made public.⁸⁷

If a cosmopolitan stance can be defined as partly that of boredom, then Taylor's lecturing frequently exemplified this blasé attitude.⁸⁸ 'In walking through palaces you lose your sense of the value of jewels', he remarked in 'Moscow', 'you look upon them at last with as much indifference as upon pine wood and pottery'.⁸⁹ These values were imparted through his urbane platform persona. In 1854, the *Newark Advocate* thought his style 'dignified,

simple and unaffected'; in 1858, the *Cambridge Chronicle* considered his 'easy conversational style' to have 'afforded a pleasant contrast to the spread eagle and pompous lectures so much in vogue'.⁹⁰ Taylor's cosmopolitanism was almost a matter of physical bearing, his insouciance and costumes offering audiences the spectacle of the cosmopolite.

Taylor has long been associated with Genteel literary culture, a milieu whose association has dogged his reputation, but whose own members are currently attracting revived interest for their comparably cosmopolitan emphases.⁹¹ While he certainly enjoys many affinities with this tradition and with the Whig culture of Greeley's *Tribune*, the intimate accessibility of his everyman persona also embodied a type of non-elite cosmopolitanism. As a lyceum celebrity, he personified the obtainable goal of travel, its potential for social mobility and personal growth, offering audiences a form of 'performed cosmopolitanism'. It was in one sense cosmopolitanism as commodity whereby, for the price of admission, lyceum-goers could vicariously obtain 'that broad and living experience of the world'.⁹² Attending his performances, Taylor's admirers gained exposure to an aspirational way of life: literary, itinerant, and amicable, an apparent representative of broadminded republican manhood.

As the 1860s began, Taylor's lyceum career faced a growing problem. Correspondence reveals his recognition of the absurdities of the occupation, not least the fact that conditions for the traveller on the provincial platform circuit were often as oppressive and treacherous as those in the regions about which he spoke. Eager to focus on more literary endeavours, he was increasingly unwilling to accumulate the experiences necessary for fresh travel lectures, turning to socio-political themed talks that were perhaps not best suited to his talents. Partly due to this shift in subject matter and his continued association with the abolitionist *New York Tribune*, Taylor became embroiled in the unavoidable clamour towards sectional conflict, and suffered a high-profile cancellation of his speaking engagements before the Young Men's Christian Association in Richmond in 1860.⁹³ As Civil War broke out, Taylor continued to lecture to Northern audiences, perhaps now more than ever meeting the 'great wants' of escapism through his exotic accounts. Nonetheless, an 1863 Washington, DC, performance of 'Moscow' led to a memorable exchange with one such audience member who retained a belief in Taylor's potential to remedy the most urgent of 'great social evils'.

Having attended the lecture at Willard's Hall on 23 December, Abraham Lincoln wrote to Taylor, with whom he had a passing personal acquaintance, requesting the commission of a lecture on the realities of Russian serfdom, as an instructive parallel to Confederate slavery:

My Dear Sir. I think a good lecture or two on 'Serfs, Serfdom, and Emancipation in Russia' would be both interesting and valuable. Could not you get up such a thing? Yours truly A. LINCOLN.⁹⁴

Though evidently deeply flattered, Taylor, due to time constraints, was forced to reply to his President in the negative:

I am very much gratified by the manifestation of your personal interest in the subject, and hope that I may be able to contribute, though so indirectly, to the growth of truer and more enlightened views among the people.⁹⁵

This exchange testifies to a mutual belief in the reformist potential of the lecture circuit, and to Lincoln's keen sense of the 'value' of popular amusements in shaping national opinion. Perhaps disclosing lingering doubts regarding his own abilities, it reveals Taylor's awareness of the significant, 'indirect' cultural agency of his lecturing activities. It articulates his determination to exploit his ambiguous position as the 'Great American

Traveller' as a platform from which to stage resistance to what he regarded as misguided national sentiments, aspiring not only to captivate audiences, but to convert them. As Larzer Ziff has observed, 'he believed he had acquired a comparative base from which to point out to his countrymen America's shortcomings'.⁹⁶

The waning of Taylor's lecturing career during the late 1860s, however, suggests the limits to this form of cultural authority. Upon his turn towards political commentary, audience responses grew increasingly lukewarm, and reports speak to a popular reluctance towards his more explicit comparative analyses. A report of 'Ourselves and Our Relations' from Quincy, New York, in December 1865 concluded that whilst 'Mr. Taylor is a scholar, and has the appearance and bearing of a gentleman, as one might expect from so extensive a traveller... he is not a great thinker', observing that he merely took 'skilful advantage of his pursuit and position to propagate... purely partisan ideas'.⁹⁷ Sections of the public were seemingly unwilling to entirely accept the premise of the insightful traveller as oppositional voice. As George Landow has observed regarding the rhetorical authority of nineteenth-century non-fiction, 'the audience is willing to pay attention to someone extraordinary and set apart from the majority of men, but any claim that one possesses special insight threatens to drive them away'.⁹⁸

By 1870, one New York reporter recommended that 'Bayard Taylor can stand down. His audiences on his last lecture tour have been slim. He is *ausgespielt* [finished]'.⁹⁹ Despite this retreat, not long before his death in 1878 Taylor pointed to an apparently enduring legacy of his lecturing tours, noting that 'hardly a week passes, but I receive letters from young men' influenced by his example:

to achieve the education of travel; and believing as I do that the more broad and cosmopolitan in his views a man becomes through his knowledge of other lands, the purer and more intelligent shall be his patriotic sentiment – the more easily he shall lift himself out of the narrow sphere of local interests and prejudices – I rejoice that I have been able to assist in giving this direction to the mind of the American youth.¹⁰⁰

This direction came in the form of a continual entreaty for an appreciation of global culture and a challenge to parochialism and the wilder excesses of nationalism. These sentiments of curiosity and nuance were offered as the 'results' of his locomotion: results whose moral and civic benefits his writings insistently dignified, and which the dramas of appraisal of his underappreciated lyceum performances helped bring to the remotest communities in the nation.

Epilogue

In the years following the Civil War, the lecture circuit increasingly professionalised, culminating in the dominance of lecture agencies such as the Redpath Lyceum Bureau.¹⁰¹ The catalogues of these agencies attest to the continued popularity of travel themes, which persisted in the successful career of explorer George Kennan into the late 1890s, by which time the lecture system evolved into the Chautauqua movement.¹⁰² By this time, advances in visual technology had decisively ended the era of the free-standing, oral travel narrative. In effect, these lectures had always been embedded in a wider performance culture of spatial geographic representation alongside magic lanterns, raised maps and panoramas.¹⁰³ Since the 1840s, lectures had occasionally been accompanied by illustrations and paintings (as in Figure 3), but by the post-war period even those lecturers who had earlier dealt in unadorned accounts now often presented stereopticon views, with oral testimony as a prominent but secondary attraction.¹⁰⁴ As the century drew to a close, heirs to Taylor

such as John L. Stoddard and Burton Homes achieved national fame as purveyors of the kinds of cinematic travelogues which film historian Jeffrey Ruoff has recently termed 'virtual voyages'.¹⁰⁵

Meanwhile, a more conceptual challenge had been launched against the authority of these eyewitness reports. From the late 1850s humorists such as Stephen Massett and Artemus Ward began to tour the lecture circuit offering comic talks billed as straightforward eyewitness travel accounts. In 1863, Ward spoke in Ohio on 'Sixty Minutes in Africa', which the *Cincinnati Inquirer* recorded as a series of disjointed witticisms that closed with the declaration 'I have not told you much about Africa. You did not suppose I would, and so, as the prestidigitators say, there is no deception about that.'¹⁰⁶ Its Cincinnati audience recognised the satire: 'The speaker administered some telling blows at the prevailing folly of putting on airs and funnily took off the ignorance concerning the West which prevails in New England.'¹⁰⁷ Upon the transfer of the lecture to the East Coast, there was more irritation at Ward's 'deception', and the *Brooklyn Eagle* concluded that the lecture had been a mere 'joke on the audience... he spoke of almost everything but Africa, which was merely alluded to incidentally'.¹⁰⁸

The most prominent parody of this type was a lecture billed as 'A Lecture on the Sandwich Islands', the performance that helped introduce obscure journalist Mark Twain to national consciousness. First performed in San Francisco in 1868, it consisted of an obtuse account of his impressions of Hawaii gained as a correspondent for Californian newspapers, burlesquing the typically lofty informational tone of travel accounts:

These islands are situated 2,100 miles southwest from San Francisco, California, out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Why they were put away out there, so far away from any place and in such an out-of-the-way locality, is a thing which no one can explain.¹⁰⁹

In a similar vein, advertisements for the lecture's San Francisco performances (Figure 8) took aim at the mock-grandeur of certain lyceum presentations, announcing 'A SPLENDID ORCHESTRA/is in town, but has not been invited/A DEN OF FEROCIOUS WILD BEASTS/Will be on exhibition in the next block/MAGNIFICENT FIREWORKS/Were in contemplation for his occasion, but the idea has been abandoned.'¹¹⁰ By the time Twain reached the East, the act was being billed as a 'humorous lecture'.¹¹¹ Despite this, in Jamestown, New York an audience member wrote to express outrage at 'the irrelevancy and senselessness of nearly all his lecture... I went there expecting to hear something thrilling and original about those interesting islands, and this trash was all he had to offer.'¹¹² The town's newspaper felt it necessary to clarify that the lecturer had used his 'ostensible theme for the sole purpose of hanging jokes to it'.¹¹³

'The Sandwich Islands' was in part a repudiation of Pacific missionaries and the genre of the 'missionary lecture'. It also represented a broader challenge to the conventions and assumptions of the 'travel lecture', invoking a set of regional and class antagonisms. As portrayed in this essay, typical performers were overwhelmingly elite Northeastern males, often doubtless pompous in their appraisals of international experience for the 'benefit' of mid-Western audiences. In a sense Twain and Ward merely offered a more extreme version of the oblique way in which purveyors of travel lectures talked 'around' and 'against' the advertised themes of their talks. Their burlesques mocked the high-minded sobriety of the lyceum, debunking the prestige surrounding the activities of orators such as Taylor and exposing travel lecturing as merely another confidence trick. They concurred with the spirit of Alcott's contemporaneous depiction in *Little Women* of such

MAGUIRE'S ACADEMY OF MUSIC
THE SANDWICH ISLANDS,
MARK TWAIN,
 (Honolulu Correspondent of the Sacramento Union.)
WILL DELIVER A
Lecture on the Sandwich Islands,
AT THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC,
On Tuesday Evening, October 2, 1866.

In which passing mention will be made of Harris, Bishop Staley, the American Missionaries, etc., and the absurd Customs and Characteristics of the Natives fully discussed and described. The great VOLCANO OF KILAUEA will also receive proper attention.

A S P L E N D I D O R C H E S T R A
 Is in town, but has not been engaged.

Also, A DEN of FEROCIOUS WILD BEASTS
 Will be on exhibition in the next block.

M A G N I F I C E N T F I R E W O R K S
 Were in contemplation for this occasion, but the idea has been abandoned.

A GRAND TORCHLIGHT PROCESSION
 May be expected; in fact, the public are privileged to expect whatever they please.

Dress Circle One Dollar
 Family Circle Fifty Cents
 Box Office open on MONDAY, Oct-ber 1st, at 9 o'clock A. M. Seats secured without extra charge.
 Doors open at 7 o'clock. The troupe to begin at 8 o'clock.

Figure 8. 'The Sandwich Islands', *San Francisco Bulletin*, 1 October 1866. Reproduced with permission of American Antiquarian Society.

lectures as lofty and ephemeral, an idiom of condescending cultural appraisals directed at social inferiors.

Conclusions

The dramas of appraisals offered by these travel lectures remains a largely unexplored area. Anglophone culture offers plentiful contemporary analogues to this American

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phenomenon, from Anglican missionary talks and Royal Geographical Society presentations to the lectures of Victorian comic orators such as Albert Smith.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, British parallels apparently offer little of comparable scope to the example of the United States. Entertainments involving global comparison were particularly attuned to the curiosities and anxieties of a nation with a rapidly expanding land empire, its history so characterised by mobility. Moreover, it was a culture in which oratory enjoyed a prominent national role, and in which the civic virtue of knowledge diffusion had acquired republican distinction.¹¹⁵ Given this civic impetus, the enthusiasm of travel lecturers might be seen as an heir to the reportorial duties of returning travellers' re-aggregation rituals in classical republicanism.¹¹⁶ Moreover, as Judith Adler and others have argued, all processes of travel represent modes of 'performance'; the phenomenon discussed in this essay proposes a suggestive way in which cultural aspects of this performance might be said to occur upon travellers' return.¹¹⁷

Despite the legitimate critiques of Twain and Alcott, it is clear that these performances represent a dynamic and still largely underexplored field of cultural activity. More than simply part of nineteenth-century spectacle culture, popular renditions of travel experiences should be recognised as influential 'rational amusements', operating at the intersection of mass culture and moral discourse. It was an oratorical phenomenon that offered a fleeting literary mode through which performances could foster inventive and powerful comparative views of American identity. As I have demonstrated, these dramas of appraisal provided a space for communal thinking about place, national selfhood, and the ethics of interpretation; they met both the 'great wants' of a mass society, and attempted to engage with its 'great social evils'. It was a space whose creative and reformist potential was exploited by public figures such as Taylor as a unique vehicle for popular moral critique.

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Notes

1. Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women, Good Wives* [1868] (London: Everyman, 1994), 293.
2. 'Street Life in Europe', *Brooklyn Eagle*, 22 February 1860.
3. Donald Scott, 'The Popular Lecture and the Creation of a Public in the mid-Nineteenth-Century United States', *The Journal of American History* 66, no. 4 (1980): 791–809; Scott, 'Print and the Public Lecture System 1840–1860', in *Printing and Society in Early America*, ed. William Joyce *et al.* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1983); and Scott, 'The Profession that Vanished: Public Lecturing in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America', in *Professions and Professional Ideologies in America*, ed. Gerald Grierson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983). Angela Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005); and Ray, 'What Hath She Wrought? Woman's Rights and the Nineteenth-Century Lyceum', *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9, no. 2 (2006): 183–213. David Chapin, *Exploring Other Worlds: Margaret Fox, Elisha Kent Kane, and the Antebellum Culture of Curiosity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004). Earlier valuable studies include Carl Bode, *The American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956) and David Mead,

- Yankee Eloquence in the Middle-West: The Ohio Lyceum 1850–1870* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951).
4. This essay draws upon (a) the newspaper holdings of the American Antiquarian Society; The Boston Athenaeum; Cambridge University Library; Harvard Widener Library, and Readex Historical Newspapers Online (Series 1–7); (b) the broadside holdings of the above and Boston Public Library, Massachusetts Historical Society and New York Historical Society; (c) the manuscript holdings of the above and Boston Public Library; Chester County Historical Society, PA; Cooper Union Library; and Harvard Houghton Library.
 5. Josiah Holbrook, *American Lyceum, or Society for the Improvement of Useful Knowledge* (Boston, MA: Perkins & Marvin, 1829).
 6. Bode, *American Lyceum*, 15.
 7. 'Popular Lectures', *Boston Evening Transcript*, 29 October 1855.
 8. Josiah Holland, 'The Popular Lecture', *Atlantic Monthly* 15, no. 89 (March 1865): 370. For accounts of the Southern lyceum, Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class 1800–1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina), 97; and Michael O'Brien, *All Clever Men Who Make Their Way: Critical Discourse in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992); Bode, *The American Lyceum*, 87.
 9. Scott, 'The Profession That Vanished', 12. Scott explains that 'the figure is based on an estimate that 2000 lectures, with an average attendance of 250 people, took place each week during the season. See Robert J. Greef, 'Public Lectures in New York: A Cultural Index of the Times' (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1941), 4–7.
 10. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 'The American Lecture-System', *Living Age* 97, no. 1244 (April 1868): 630.
 11. Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture*, 2. For the distinction of civic and ethnic nationalisms, I draw on the discussion in James McPherson, 'Was Blood Thicker Than Water? Ethnic and Civic Nationalism in the American Civil War', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 145 (1999): 102–08.
 12. See Meredith McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting 1834–1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).
 13. Holland, 'The Popular Lecture', 363; Scott, 'The Profession That Vanished', 10–12; and Lewis Perry, *Boats Against the Current: American Culture Between Revolution and Modernity 1820–1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 173–85.
 14. Anon., 'Lectures and Lecturers', *Putnam's* IX (March 1857): 318.
 15. Scott, 'The Popular Lecture and the Creation of a Public', 803. For this understanding, I draw on the discussion in James McPherson, 'Was Blood Thicker Than Water? Ethnic and Civic Nationalism in the American Civil War', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 145 (1999): 102–08.
 16. For example, 'Prof. H. D. Rogers, The Arctic Regions' and 'E.H. Davis, Mounds and Earthworks of the Mississippi Valley', on the 1853–4 course. A full course list is provided in Harriet Knight Smith, *History of the Lowell Institute* (Boston, MA: Lamson, Wolfe & Co., 1898).
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 18. For example, 'Athenaeum Lecture: Valley of the Mississippi', *Cambridge Chronicle*, 11 February 1854; 'Bayard Taylor on The Arabs', *Macon Georgia Telegraph*, 14 February 1854.
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 27. Henry David Thoreau, 16 November 1858, *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals* (New York: Courier Dover, 1961), 203.

28. For example, 'Dr. Hayes Lecture at Musical Fund Hall Last Evening', *Philadelphia Press*, 10 January 1862.
29. 'England and the English', *Baltimore Sun*, 26 April 1844.
30. 'Sketches of European Society', *Cambridge Chronicle*, 18 February 1854.
31. For example, 'John B. Gough at the Academy of Music Last Evening', *Philadelphia Press*, 19 February 1861; 'General City News – Lecture by John B. Gough', *New York Times*, 25 January 1867; 'John B. Gough at the Academy of Music – The Great Metropolis', *Brooklyn Eagle*, 4 April 1865.
32. 'Mr. Paul Du Chaillu Lecturing the Young People of Boston', *Harper's Weekly*, 6 March 1869.
33. 'The Great Lecture of the Season', *New York Tribune*, 9 February 1860.
34. For example, 'Benjamin Silliman on Paris', 1870, *Free Saturday Night Lectures Index*, Cooper Union Library; 'The Crystal Palace and Its Lessons – A Lecture by Horace Greeley', *New York Times*, 1 January 1852; 'Mr. Stansbury's Lecture on the World's Fair before the Maryland Institute', *Baltimore Sun*, 24 January 1852.
35. 'Campaign of the Army of the United States in Louisiana' invitation card, Boston Tremont Temple 1863, American Antiquarian Society.
36. 'Mr Dickinson – Modern Jerusalem' broadside, Dutch Reformed Church, New York, 1840, American Antiquarian Society.
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57. Private Account Book, Bayard Taylor Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University. See also Theresa Ellen Moran, 'Bayard Taylor and American Orientalism: 19th Century Representations of National Character and the Other' (PhD diss., Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, 2005), 45.
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 62. 'Bayard Taylor', *Philadelphia Press*, 6 November 1858.
 63. Taylor, 'Moscow' manuscript, 5–6.
 64. Taylor, 'Moscow', 2.
 65. Taylor, 'Japan and Loo Choo' manuscript, 1; 'Moscow', 15.
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 67. 'Bayard Taylor's Lecture', *Wisconsin Patriot*, 6 April 1855; *Springfield News*, 27 November 1860 quoted in Mead, *Yankee Eloquence*, 123.
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99. 'Miscellaneous Items', *Jamestown Journal*, 18 February 1870.
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101. See Crawford A. Peffer, *Outline History of the Redpath Lyceum Bureau* (MA diss., Harvard University, 1953); John R. McKivigan, *Forgotten Firebrand: James Redpath and the Making of Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008). Annual lists of lecturers and topics are contained in editions of *Lyceum Magazine* (1871–5), the American Antiquarian Society.
102. See discussion of Kennan's lecture career in 'The Forgotten George Kennan: From Cheerleader to Critic of Tsarist Russia', *World Policy Journal* 19, no. 4 (Winter 2002/03): 79–84.
103. See Edward Ziter, *The Orient on the Victorian Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
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105. Jeffrey Ruoff, ed., *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); see also Robert Dixon, 'What was Travel Writing? Frank Hurley and the Media Contexts of Early Twentieth-Century Australian Travel Writing', *Studies in Travel Writing* 11, no. 1 (2007): 59–81.
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115. Susan Gufstafson, *Eloquence Is Power: Oratory and Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 7–11.
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