



Lady Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt: Identity as Performance in a Victorian Album

PATRICIA SHEPPARD

*The album constitutes an intermediate space between public and private spheres, and between the female subject's body and the body of others, for the figuring of feminine imaginings and desires which cannot otherwise be articulated, or even acknowledged.*¹

The popular leisure activity of assembling personal albums first originated within British aristocratic circles during the early part of the nineteenth century. Well-appointed, leather-bound volumes, albums took pride of place in the Victorian drawing room where friends and family would gather to share stories and engage in conversations – activities that often included an album's creator showing her book to visitors. Frequently serving as a basis for discussion, personal albums have long been sites wherein memories are recorded, oftentimes encoded. Lady Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt (1809–1886), a British military wife and a member of the landed gentry, compiled one such album. She used it as a repository for watercolours, letters, poems and various other ephemera for almost forty years (1837–1875). The first eighteen of these were spent accompanying her military husband on postings throughout the British Empire, including four years in Canada. On the strength of this connection, the album was acquired by Dr. Lawrence M. Lande for his extensive collection of Canadiana, and subsequently donated to the Public Archives of Canada (now Library and Archives Canada), where it forms part of the Lande Collection, a major repository of national historical memory.²

At first glance, the album's contents appear to have no chronological order. Where dates have been included they are not sequential, suggesting to the casual observer that the album may be nothing more than a random collection of memorabilia. More than half of the album's pages contain transcriptions of pre-authored texts, and it is striking that not a single sentence is expressed in Bucknall-Estcourt's own voice. In this sense, the album serves as an example of a practice that was known as *commonplacing*: one in which men and women transcribed selected passages from their

Detail, Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt, *Winter Scene with Men Warming Themselves at a Fire*, 1838, watercolour on paper, Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt Album, Library and Archives Canada, e010964536. (Photo: author)

readings as a resource for thinking, writing, and talking. In a similar vein, Bucknall-Estcourt, although an amateur artist herself, personally created only nine of the fifty-four sketches and watercolours included in the album.

Despite the apparent lack of overt personal content, however, literary historian Kate Chedzoy has analyzed women's practice of commonplacing as a form of "life-writing": "a process through which notebook compilations construct the self not primarily as originator of an individual story, but as something formed in conversation, listening, reading and exchange" – a subject that is both produced and yet also productive, notably through its acts of gathering, selecting, and organizing.³ In this article, I will propose that Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt's album worked in a similar way. Indeed, careful reading of the album reveals the presence of a coherent, vital, and very personal narrative. What is intriguing is that the album's creator managed to accomplish this as much through her absence as through her presence. Seeking to understand this aspect of absence, I contend that a variety of coding techniques permitted Bucknall-Estcourt to signify important events in her life. Some elements of the album, oblique and quite heavily coded, incorporate references to deeply personal events in a way that enabled the album's creator to maintain control over her privacy. These associations, in all likelihood, were ones that she would have shared with only a select few relatives and intimate acquaintances. Other techniques, by contrast, allowed Bucknall-Estcourt to incorporate more public elements of her life in an accessible fashion that would have been readily understood by those of her era. By decoding Bucknall-Estcourt's album, this essay will explore how one aristocratic Victorian woman used the material and visual culture at her disposal performatively, to express and conceal herself in a manner consonant with the time in which she lived. The public and private aspects of the album are carried through into its major themes: a celebration of the imperial project and of her husband's career.

Military Wife

Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt's role as a military wife and supporter of Empire came naturally, if not without opposition, to a woman of her time, education, and standing. Born in Cornwall in 1809, she was the daughter of Caroline Lytton and Reginald Pole Carew. Both parents were of the upper echelons of British society and Caroline's mother could trace her ancestry in a direct line back to King Edward III.⁴ She recognized the importance of ensuring a proper education for her daughters and was actively engaged in the process of its realization. Two watercolour paintings (Figs. 1–2), still in the family's possession, depict the sitting room at Antony House where Caroline and her sisters were taught. From these images it is apparent that the girls' education



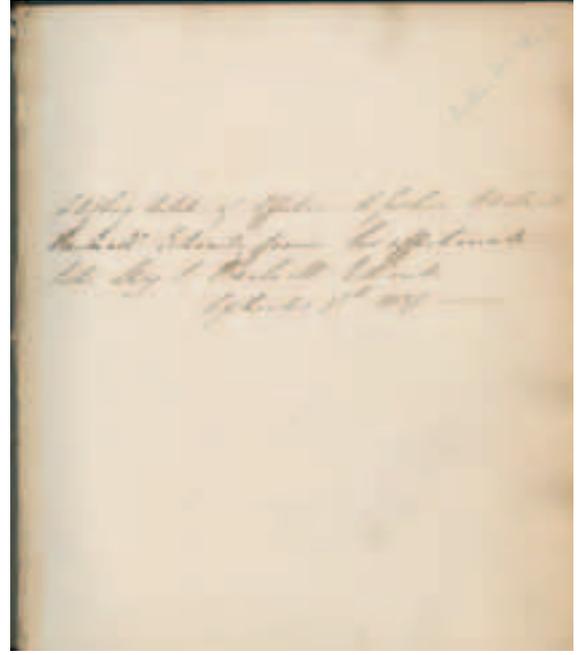
included training in the arts and was firmly grounded in the political and religious ideologies of the time: an elaborate tapestry is prominently displayed upon the walls, accompanied by a Union Jack and two paintings of the Holy Family. Busts of learned men, books, writing materials, as well as paints and brushes, are scattered upon the desks and a harp is on display in a corner of the room. Young ladies, one of whom is presumably Caroline, work diligently at their desks engaging with the objects that surround them. Bucknall-Estcourt's letters to George Perkins Marsh, written in later life, confirm her proficiency in four languages – English, Italian, French, and German – and, like the album itself, they evince the benefits that she reaped from the resources available to her.

Bucknall-Estcourt's father also played an important role in her upbringing and raised her from a very early age to value the imperial project. Reginald Pole Carew retired from his seat in Parliament at the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1816 when Caroline was only seven, choosing instead to immerse himself in family and local political affairs. In his youth, Pole Carew had served for some years as a British diplomat and, during the course of his thirty-year career as a parliamentarian, he had held ministerial office and enjoyed close ties with the British Admiralty.⁵ Pole Carew's experience and reputation were such that his advice and opinions were frequently sought even after his retirement and he often entertained British naval officers and other dignitaries at Antony House.⁶ His daughters thus grew up in an environment wherein the imperial concerns of Great Britain were an integral part of everyday life.

Caroline Pole Carew first met and fell in love with her future husband, James Bucknall-Estcourt,⁷ in 1828 when he was stationed at Devonport, a locale close to her family home, where he was often an invited guest of her father. Upon learning of his daughter's devotion to Bucknall-Estcourt and the couple's desire to wed, her father immediately opposed the match, expressing concern over financial matters as well as the quality of life that the wife of a military officer could expect.⁸ It would be almost ten years before the death of her father allowed Caroline to follow her heart into matrimony, and the couple finally married in August 1837, a year that also saw the coronation of

1 (overleaf, above) | Artist unknown, *View of Drawing Room at Antony House, Cornwall*, ca. 1830, watercolour on paper, Cornwall Records Office, CP/130/1-5. (Photo: Sharkfin Media Ltd., 2013)

2 (overleaf, below) | Artist unknown, *View of Drawing Room at Antony House, Cornwall*, ca. 1830, watercolour on paper, Cornwall Records Office, CP/130/1-5. (Photo: Sharkfin Media Ltd., 2013)



3 | Cover of Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt's Album, Library and Archives Canada, e011073016. (Photo: author)

4 | Dedication Page, Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt's Album, Library and Archives Canada, e011073017. (Photo: author)

Victoria as Queen of England. Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt's album (Fig. 3) was presented to her as a wedding gift by her sister-in-law, Lucy (Fig. 4).

Marriage brought tremendous changes in the life of Bucknall-Estcourt. At the relatively late age of twenty-eight, she left her family home in Cornwall and began to navigate both the comparatively private realm of a marriage and the more public sphere that attended her position as the wife of a military officer. Just four months after their wedding, in December 1837, her husband was recalled to active duty and ordered to Canada, where he would rejoin his regiment, the Forty-third Monmouthshire Light Infantry, to help quell the uprisings that then threatened Great Britain's control over its largest and most important North American colony.

Canada: First Military Posting

Material relating to Bucknall-Estcourt's decision to follow her husband to Canada and the couple's first Canadian posting, makes up roughly two thirds of the album. Between 1837 and 1842 the British government dispatched unprecedented numbers of troops to both Upper and Lower Canada in

response to rebellions seeking greater independence from British authority and rule. This proved a pivotal juncture in Bucknall-Estcourt's life, as she later described in a letter to a friend:

I had much to be thankful for in this parting, being so different from the last. I had now a right to follow him whenever he could see an opportunity for me doing so . . . The kind captain of *The Hercules* offered to accommodate the Commissioned Officer's wife if he had one in the cabins his own wife had been occupying till the vessel was ordered to sea, where our English Captains are not allowed to take their wives.

Significantly, the account reveals that the decision about whether Caroline would accompany her husband on his overseas posting was made, in great part, by Caroline herself in the face of his own vacillation on the matter:

[James] could scarcely believe that even his wife could wish to go so far to be with him, and though he did know and believe this in his heart he could not make up his mind that it was best for her that he should allow it. He wrote two letters a day with different decisions and at last referred the matter to her and his father to decide for him.⁹

In this way, Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt began her married life by following her heart and assuming a greater degree of autonomy than was often experienced by Victorian women within marriage.

The manner in which Bucknall-Estcourt chose to memorialize this life-changing event in her album is not easily decipherable, for it appears in the guise of an apparently unrelated excerpt from a poem by Samuel Rogers eulogizing the death of Lord Byron in the Greek War of Independence. Closer consideration, however, reveals an unexpected connection between Byron's life and Bucknall-Estcourt's own marriage and subsequent implication in Great Britain's foreign affairs.

George Gordon Byron fought and died on behalf of Greece in its war of independence against Turkish colonial rule. The rebellion had accorded well with Britain's interest in reducing Turkish geopolitical strength, and when government officials approached Lord Byron to enlist his private assistance on behalf of a campaign in which Britain must not be seen to be officially involved, he responded by organizing his own military force, and setting forth in a privately chartered ship, the *Hercules*.¹⁰ Fourteen years later it was this very same ship that transported Bucknall-Estcourt to her first imperial posting as wife of a British military officer. Thus, on both voyages the ship was destined for locales where the interests of imperial Great Britain were

closely involved in the outcomes of political rebellion, an irony that was clearly not lost on Bucknall-Estcourt and one that telegraphs the extent of her knowledge of British politics and history. Yet visitors' ability to read and accurately interpret the album's contents would depend greatly on the extent of their intimacy with its creator. What could on the surface be taken as a simple expression of patriotic enthusiasm for a British hero could also, to a more informed eye, allude to Bucknall-Estcourt's passion and to her determination to shape her own life in the face of the indecision of those around her – attributes that, while highly characteristic of a Byronic Romanticism, conformed less easily to Victorian notions of femininity.

The Bucknall-Estcourts sailed on 28 February 1838 and endured a “rough winter passage of four weeks.”¹¹ The range of emotions Caroline likely experienced is reflected in the excerpts she chose to transcribe. In contrast with her own recent demonstration of autonomy, these passages examine how little control we as individuals have over our own lives, and two humorous texts explore how disastrous events can overtake us as a result of minor occurrences. *Dirge on the Memory of Miss Ellen Gee of Kew* is a poem that satirically examines how Miss Gee died after being stung in the eye by a bee, while *The Gatherer* is an amusing parody that had been widely circulated in the media of the era. Based on the Privy Council investigation of the great London Parliament fire of 1834, *The Gatherer* makes fun of the tortuously long and boring report that was produced, but also highlights the senselessness and irony of the devastation that occurred when chimney flues overheated in the effort of burning massive numbers of wooden tally sticks – the by-then-obsolete memory devices for keeping track of numbers.¹²

Two additional passages convey a more serious tone. The first, *On an Altar Tomb*, is a poem that speaks not only of the bravery of warriors who die in battle, but also of the costs accruing to the women who loved them and endure the consequences of their loss. Its author, Felicia Dorothea Browne Hemans (1793–1835), was a well-known Irish poet who tried to give voice to women's trials and tribulations.¹³ The second, *Epitaph on Captain Conway Shipley*¹⁴ by Reginald Heber pays homage to the death of Shipley in a British naval battle aboard the frigate *La Nymphe* in 1808 at just twenty-six years of age. Both texts resonate with the risks that Bucknall-Estcourt herself ran in choosing to accompany her husband on his posting to Canada in the midst of a political rebellion. The selections attest to her lively sense of the dangers of a military career and the violence that accompanies political rebellions, and should be seen in context with the tragic fate of the *Hercules's* previous illustrious passenger. Simultaneously, the texts invoke a higher religious power and relinquish control of fate to God. Most obviously, in her choice of verses, Bucknall-Estcourt draws attention to her deep religiosity, while establishing herself in the role of military wife, emphasizing the consequences

that her husband's career might have on her own well-being and the sacrifices that Britons – men and women alike – were called upon to make in the service of England's imperial project.

To Niagara

If Bucknall-Estcourt was circumspect to the point of being cryptic in how she alluded to the personal choices and emotions that surrounded her accompaniment of her husband on his military posting, upon her arrival in Canada she began wearing her imperialist heart on her sleeve. It is noteworthy that although her message becomes more transparent as she enters the very public realm of Empire, Bucknall-Estcourt herself, for the most part, remains hidden, choosing instead to use images and transcriptions authored by others.

There are but few exceptions to this pattern. The first one occurs when Bucknall-Estcourt chose to commemorate the beginning of her first residential posting in Canada, on the Niagara frontier, through the rare addition to her album of a watercolour that she painted herself. *Our Cottage Near the Falls of Niagara* (Fig. 5) depicts the house in which the couple lived on Lundy's Lane – a house that was significant in that it was the first independent home James and Caroline had established together.¹⁵ It has been executed in a style approaching the topographical: the location is identified directly on the painting – “*Our cottage near the Falls of Niagara: Lived there from August 20, 1838 – August 30, 1839*” – and the dry and functional style of the treatment is brought into still sharper focus by comparison with the rich and lush landscape of the area found in a watercolour she painted for inclusion in her husband's album, *Autumnal Tints – Road Behind Lundy's Lane, Falls of Niagara* (Fig. 6). Given the importance of the topographical tradition to Britain's imperial project, Bucknall-Estcourt's choice of pictorial style seems an appropriate one for her portrayal of the artist's first home in one of Great Britain's colonies and it fits well with an image of herself as an imperialist. The depiction of the couple's Niagara home is embedded

5 | Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt, *Our Cottage Near the Falls of Niagara*, 1838, watercolour over pencil on paper, Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt Album, Library and Archives Canada, e011073015. (Photo: author)

6 | Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt, *Autumnal Tints – Road Behind Lundy's Lane, Falls of Niagara*, 1838, watercolour over pencil on wove paper, 14.0 × 20.0 cm, James Bucknall Bucknall-Estcourt Album, Library and Archives Canada, C-093924. (Photo: author)



within the transcription of a religious passage asking God to protect those who travel and face battle, and to care for young children and women who labour. If Bucknall-Estcourt's accentuation of the domestic realm is obviously in keeping with the private sphere conventionally accorded to women in the nineteenth century, it is equally clear that with this drawing she was simultaneously inserting herself into the very public realm of Empire and her husband's military career.

Analysis of women's travel writing undertaken by Sara Mills and others, has amply explored the contradictory ideological pressures experienced by women whose implication in the colonial project cast them in active and very public roles as representatives of Empire, even while such roles were frequently denied them as women.¹⁶ This tension was often enabling, and Bucknall-Estcourt's full participation in the imperial adventure is apparent in another sequence in the album. Here she transcribed two excerpts that were published in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book 1836*:¹⁷ *Horse Shoe Fall Niagara*, a passage describing the Falls; and *The Indian Girl*, a poem about an Indian girl who lost her life when her canoe went over the falls. These excerpts are immediately followed by a watercolour, *The Crescent Fall at Niagara from near the Clifton* (Fig. 7), painted by a senior military officer, Sir William John Codrington.

One of the most dramatic features of the Canadian landscape, Niagara Falls, lent itself particularly well to the pictorial conventions of the sublime that were so prevalent amongst British artists. As Marilyn J. McKay writes, British "landscape artists in Canada were using beautiful, sublime, and picturesque drawings and watercolours to 'make' Canada English for themselves and for their English audiences."¹⁸ In Codrington's painting, two individuals, possibly an adult accompanied by a child, are dressed in Western attire. Their presence attests to the accessibility of the site and, by extension, also to the ease with which British colonizers had access to North America. The figures are standing at the shore. Despite their proximity to the falls, they seem protected by the greenery that surrounds them and frames the painting. The sun shines brightly. Including this image in the album allowed family and friends to visualize a notable feature of an important British imperial colony, depicted in a style recognizable as their own. However, when viewed in conjunction with the narrative of the poems, it would also have allowed Bucknall-Estcourt to suggest that the colonizing British knew how to deal with the threatening landscape safely, unlike the indigenous peoples who were portrayed, however counterfactually, as being in need of protection. Codrington's watercolour also provided confirmation that political harmony had been restored, the rebellions successfully quelled, and Britain's imperial rule in North America once again secured.



7 | Sir William J. Codrington, *The Crescent Fall at Niagara from near the Clifton*, n.d., watercolour over pencil on paper, Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt Album, Library and Archives Canada, e011061967. (Photo: author)

Bucknall-Estcourt's inclusion of Codrington's image of Niagara Falls also casts some light on the social functions of her album and the company in which it would have circulated. The painting is one of a number that were executed by or copied from the British military artists that Bucknall-Estcourt met through her husband. In addition to Codrington, these included Richard George Augustus Levinge, Godfrey Charles Mundy and William Robert Herries. Both Herries and Levinge are known to have been part of an informal group of amateur artists – the so-called group of 1838 – that formed during the Bucknall-Estcourts' first posting to Canada. Consisting primarily of British military men, and their wives and/or daughters, the group first came to associate with one another in the Quebec City area, but later relocated to Niagara as British troops were displaced. Although no positive archival proof of such a group has been located, surviving works suggest the frequent exchange and copying of one another's watercolour sketches and the strong likelihood of joint sketching excursions.¹⁹ Bucknall-Estcourt has not hitherto been numbered amongst the group's members,²⁰ but her album confirms direct contact with at least one of its adherents – Captain Mundy – who wrote a brief humorous passage illustrated with an ink sketch



directly on one of its pages. It is clear through her album that Bucknall-Estcourt participated in the broader patterns of exchange and sociability that characterized imperial culture in British North America, and this too explains some of its quality of authorial absence: the images of Niagara Falls that Bucknall-Estcourt might have painted (Figs. 8 and 9)²¹ she did not keep for her own album, but gave to her husband for inclusion in his.

The March of the Forty-third

As an upper class British military wife, Bucknall-Estcourt's concern for the imperial interests of Great Britain paralleled her concern for the advancement of her husband's military career. Nowhere is this conjunction of public and private interests more apparent than in her decision to include a 3,500-word first person account – by one Private Townsend of Captain Wright's Company – of an overland trek undertaken by the Forty-third Light Infantry from New Brunswick to Quebec during the dead of winter in December of 1837, before the Bucknall-Estcourts had arrived in Canada.

In November 1837, 300 British soldiers had marched into the Richelieu Valley expecting to make quick work of an armed rebellion led by Louis-Joseph Papineau, whose demands for greater local accountability by elected officials had been resolutely rebuffed by the British. When British forces were dealt an unforeseen defeat by the *patriotes* at St. Denis, military authorities reacted by declaring martial law and calling for reinforcements. Several regiments hitherto stationed in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, including the Forty-third Light Infantry, were urgently ordered to march to Quebec during the bleakest and harshest part of the Canadian winter.

The textual narrative told by Private Townsend and illustrated by accompanying images provides a robust and comprehensive understanding of what the soldiers of the Forty-third Regiment endured that winter. The narrative of the march is prefaced by an ink drawing entitled *1st Division of the*

8 (*facing page, above*) | Attributed to Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt, *The Great Horseshoe Fall from the Pavilion Hotel, Niagara*, 1838, watercolour over pencil with scraping out on paper, James Bucknall Bucknall-Estcourt Album, Library and Archives Canada, C-093919. (Photo: author)

9 (*facing page, below*) | Attributed to Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt, *The Horseshoe Fall from Goat Island, Niagara*, 1838, watercolour over pencil on paper with scraping out and gum arabic on paper, James Bucknall Bucknall-Estcourt Album, Library and Archives Canada, C-093917. (Photo: author)



10 | Godfrey Charles Mundy, *1st Division of the 43rd Crossing the River St. John, New Brunswick, on the Ice*, 1837, brown ink, Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt Album, Library and Archives Canada, e011073013. (Photo: author)

43rd Crossing the River St. John, New Brunswick, on the ice (Fig. 10) by Godfrey Charles Mundy of the Forty-third. Mundy’s ink drawing acquaints the viewer with the vastness of the frozen landscape. In the foreground, a rough sled pulled by two horses carries soldiers bundled up against the cold as it begins traversing the frozen river. Jagged floes of ice ram up against the river’s edge and provide obstacles to the sled as it follows a caravan of similar sleds ahead of it. The frozen river occupies most of the picture plane. This, combined with the way the distant shore of the river blurs with the horizon, allows Mundy to convey the magnitude of the task with which his regiment was charged, and the image provides the viewer with a powerful entry point for envisioning a journey subsequently described as “one of the most remarkable movements on record.”²² Watercolours and ink drawings by Caroline

Bucknall-Estcourt and William Robert Herries are interspersed throughout to illustrate Townsend's narrative.

One of these illustrations, a watercolour by Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt, *Winter Scene with Men Warming Themselves at a Fire* (Fig. 11) is, in fact, a copy of another watercolour, *Troops Leaving Forest Encampment at Dawn* (Fig. 12), by William Robert Herries, who had participated in the march. The scene depicted by Herries and copied by Bucknall-Estcourt is one of a military encampment beside a lake (possibly Lake Temiscouata). Soldiers partly sheltered by a lean-to constructed of tree branches are seen warming themselves around a fire in the left foreground. Light spills from barracks that surround the lake and soldiers prepare sleds on the frozen ice. Tall evergreens envelope the scene and merge in the distance with the horizon. The golden light of the sky is reflected on the snow-covered roofs as well as upon the frozen lake recalling the effects of early dawn, as described by Townsend in his narrative: "The sun too was just rising, and guilding with his beams the tops of the tallest pines that grew on its bank leaving the rest of the scene in the holy and calm twilight which always precedes the rising of the sun on a clear morning in this part of the world."²³

A keen sense of observation and an adept use of colour allow this early dawn light and the magnificence of nature to be captured exquisitely. Herries and Bucknall-Estcourt direct our attention to the beauty and the danger inherent within the Canadian winter, creating a landscape that is simultaneously sublime and picturesque. The smallness of the foreground figures in relation to the vastness of the natural world that surrounds them creates a tension that is not out of keeping with the uncertainty surrounding England's control over their resource-rich Canadian colony. At the same time, the recognition of the beauty of the Canadian scenery reinforces the value of Britain's territorial acquisitions.

A contemporaneous sense of the significance attached to the winter march of the Forty-third Light Infantry is afforded by Richard Levinge, one of the contributors to Bucknall-Estcourt's album, and himself a participant in the affair. In his regimental history, published in 1868, Levinge comments that: "The moral influence of this march was immense. It convinced the world that there is no season at which Britain cannot reinforce her colonies, while she possesses soldiers whose dauntless spirits never quailed before a foe, or recoiled from any trial or exertion."²⁴ His response comes into sharper focus still when placed within the broader historical context of the times. Imperialists in Great Britain had not yet forgotten the American Revolution,²⁵ and Great Britain was determined that such history should not repeat itself in relation to Canada and the natural resources it provided. The result was a disproportionate and perhaps overly vigorous military response to the Canadian rebellions.



A question remains, however, as to why Bucknall-Estcourt devoted fourteen pages of her album to a trek in which neither she nor her husband had personally participated. Here the public role of Victorian albums might well be recalled: their circulation in drawing rooms and amongst visitors, where they oiled the wheels of social discourse in a society that was highly conscious of position and propriety, and within which women might subtly facilitate their husbands careers. Perhaps Bucknall-Estcourt was playing at politics – trying in some way to publicly associate her husband with the march. Such an association might well have cast him in a positive light to those who would view her album after his return to England. Certainly it would have made his first Canadian posting far more impressive from a military careerist point of view; in fact, by the time James had joined the regiment in Montreal, in June of 1838, the rebellion in Lower Canada had been suppressed, and the rumblings that subsequently sent the regiment to Upper Canada never resulted in open confrontation. James’s time in Niagara was, for the most part, spent in doing road survey work.

More likely, however, as a newly-minted military wife travelling on her first overseas posting with her husband, Bucknall-Estcourt was not trying to falsify history as much as to document her own encounter with it. The sequence in which the events are portrayed in the album support such an interpretation. We have seen that her first depiction of this posting to Canada is a watercolour of their home at Niagara, and is immediately followed by a watercolour depicting the Horseshoe Falls. It is only after this that the fourteen pages relating to the march appear. Such a dramatic reversal of chronology occurs nowhere else in the first part of the album and suggests that Bucknall-Estcourt only became aware of the narrative and the existing images of the march at some point after her arrival at Niagara. Thus, their inclusion in her album is faithful to the chronology of events that she herself experienced. While the narrative and images of the march may well have served indirectly to reflect glory onto James, they also functioned as a paean to British imperial might and an expression of Bucknall-Estcourt’s own vested interest and pride in the power of the British military to protect British imperial interests.

11 (*facing page, above*) | Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt, *Winter Scene with Men Warming Themselves at a Fire*, 1838, watercolour on paper, Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt Album, Library and Archives Canada, e010964536. (Photo: author)

12 (*facing page, below*) | Robert William Herries, *Troops Leaving Forest Encampment at Dawn*, 1837, watercolour on paper, Royal Ontario Museum, rom2006_7500_1. (Photo: author)

Unravelling Fortunes

The Bucknall-Estcourts returned to England at the beginning of 1840 and were then posted to Ireland for three years. Though Caroline would ultimately continue to work on the album for many years, nothing in it references this period, perhaps because it was a peaceful time with little to link it to the more adventurous undertakings of their Canadian days. In Ireland the couple rented a home, bought a small carriage for outings and sketching expeditions, and enjoyed a satisfying social life.²⁶

More puzzling, however is the absence of any reference in the album to the couple's next colonial posting when, from 1843 to 1846, they returned to Canada so that James might take up a post as British Boundary Commissioner, responsible for working with the Americans to survey and permanently demarcate the Canada-U.S. boundary. Differing interpretations of the border between Upper and Lower Canada and the United States – originally defined by the 1783 Treaty of Paris and executed by the Jay Treaty of 1794 – had become a source of dispute and a cause of increasing conflict between nations.²⁷ The Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842 resolved this conflict and redefined the Canada-U.S. border, and in January of the following year James Bucknall-Estcourt accepted the challenge of surveying the new boundary between the source of the St. Croix River in New Brunswick and the intersection of Hall's Stream with the Forty-fifth Parallel in Quebec's Eastern Townships.²⁸ James's position was an important assignment, likely secured through family connections.²⁹ The couple spent the grueling first year of this second Canadian posting near Grand Falls on the St. John River in a tiny settlement consisting of two inns, a barracks and a cottage. Caroline lived in the cottage while her husband spent considerable time working in the wild. In February of 1844 they moved to Quebec City where they would remain until February of 1845, when fieldwork was complete. The final task of writing reports was carried out in the comfort of the British Embassy in Washington, after which the couple returned to England in the summer of 1846.³⁰

This was exactly the sort of imperialist project that earlier pages of Bucknall-Estcourt's album had so enthusiastically celebrated. Yet nothing related to it appears within the album – and this despite the fact that Caroline's winter in the wild became something of a legend in England, such that when the couple was presented to the Queen in 1854, Victoria identified Caroline as that "intrepid lady who had endured the Canadian wilderness."³¹ A number of reasons could explain such an omission: its compiler may have temporarily lost interest in the album, or it might have been left behind in England along with other possessions. What Bucknall-Estcourt could not have known is how fortuitous the exclusion would become to her later project of

defending her husband's reputation against charges of incompetence, for the first of these charges would only surface during the second Canadian posting, when – despite successfully bringing the project to conclusion – James permitted it to go considerably over budget and beyond the time allotted to it. According to her husband's biographer, Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt believed that James's career had been irreparably damaged by negative reviews of his performance as boundary commissioner.³² When around the time of his death she returned to her album, it was to find a project unmarred by any inconvenient record of this professional setback.

The concerns for her husband's reputation that unsettled Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt came dramatically to the fore at the end of his military career and continued well after his death. Upon the couple's return to England, James entered the House of Commons. In 1848 he was elected as Conservative MP for Devizes, his family borough,³³ a position he held for six years, until he was once again called to active duty as war with Russia loomed. The fortunes of war seemed at first to shine favourably on James, and in early 1854 he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier-General and appointed Adjutant-General to the British expeditionary force in the Crimea.³⁴ Ultimately, however, the gross incompetence of British military leadership during the conflict would cast a pall over the reputation of many of its senior officers.

As she had at the outbreak of rebellion in Canada, Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt chose to be close to her husband, spending the winter of 1854–1855 on board the ship that brought her and her sister-in-law Maryanne to the Black Sea.³⁵ She visited her husband in camp in the Crimea when he was taken ill and was present at his side when he died of cholera on 24 June 1855.³⁶ Bucknall-Estcourt was emotionally devastated by her husband's death – a desolation intensified by the fact that she also felt tremendous guilt at not having demanded that he spend more time resting during the days leading up to his demise. As she wrote to her friend Mrs. Marsh on 29 September, she had been torn between concern for her husband's health and anxiety for his reputation. Certainly, she did not want him to appear unfit for the tasks with which he had been entrusted, for she was fully aware that criticism had been directed against senior officers blaming their incompetence for the inhumane conditions their men were forced to endure.³⁷ Public scrutiny of her husband's character and moral integrity continued posthumously, as his fitness to have occupied a leadership role in the Crimea was called into question.

Given these circumstances, it is striking to consider the way that Bucknall-Estcourt commemorated her husband's death in her album. The event is recorded on a single page bearing two images relating to the Crimean War and an immediately following page containing an extract from Manzoni's poem *Ode to Bonaparte*. As with the poem about Byron, the rationale for

this second inclusion is not immediately apparent, but Bucknall-Estcourt was, in fact, choosing to record the end of her husband's life by recounting an event that memorably marked the beginning of her own development as an imperialist.

On a July morning in 1815, when she was six years old, the British ship *Bellerophon* was moored in Torbay, a locale not far from her home, and it soon became widely known that the *Bellerophon* was carrying Napoleon Bonaparte as prisoner following his defeat at Waterloo. The ship remained moored in Torbay for roughly three weeks prior to Bonaparte's ultimate conveyance to exile and imprisonment on the island of St. Helena. The event drew thousands of spectators to the region to witness Bonaparte's prison ship as well as the defeated Emperor's daily walks on deck, his defeated figure embodying the tremendous imperial strength of the British Crown. It is easy to imagine that the pageantry and excitement surrounding this event might have had a powerful impact upon the young Caroline, and so it is fascinating to see that the page in her album upon which she includes imagery of the Crimea, where her husband died, is immediately followed by another with Manzoni's *Ode*. Without explicitly saying so, Bucknall-Estcourt has linked the death of her husband during a British imperial war with the imperial and martial glory of both Napoleon himself and the empire that defeated him, thus dramatizing both the significance of her husband's career and the profundity of the loss she had experienced. She could not have chosen a grander figure or a more grandiose imperial history with which to link her husband and commemorate his own imperial stature and career.

Life as a Widow: 1855–1886

After the death of her husband, Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt made living arrangements in company with her unmarried sister-in-law Maryanne Bucknall-Estcourt at Tetbury in Gloucestershire. Much of her subsequent social life was spent with her extended family of both Bucknall-Estcourts and Pole Carews. She continued to attend the social season in London every year. Nevertheless, her grieving process was arduous and long. Only in June of 1872, a full seventeen years after James's death, did she write in a letter to her friend Mrs. Marsh "that resignation has come at last."³⁸ During this time, two pillars seemed to support her actions and assuage her pain: a deep religious faith, and a concern to set public opinion to rights on the matter of her husband's reputation, which she considered to have been unjustly besmirched.

The portion of the album compiled after the death of her husband represents roughly its final third. Unlike its earlier parts, wherein images are juxtaposed closely to literary passages and serve primarily as illustrations, the

transcribed passages and images now appear to bear little or no relation one to another. Where dates have been inscribed they only confuse the reader, for they vary widely in range and there is no obvious chronological order. Some dates apparently refer to when a given passage was actually being worked on while others relate to times during Bucknall-Estcourt's life as a married woman; still others predate her marriage. At this juncture, the album begins to take on the characteristics of a scrapbook by incorporating more of such keepsakes as letters, postcards and newspaper clippings.³⁹

Victorian culture in relation to the experience of death and the grieving process provides insight into the narrative constructed in this last portion of the album, and by extension into the identity created through it. Romanticism and Evangelicalism alike were important aspects of this process. Both movements encouraged a full and free expression of the emotions that come with the loss of a loved one, and widows were encouraged to talk and write freely of their loss and sorrow.⁴⁰ That Evangelicalism positioned the marriage-bond as a divine institution favoured by God only further emphasized the calamitous aspect of its dissolution through death.⁴¹ In the album, morbid excerpts dealing with grief and loss appear. For example, Bucknall-Estcourt transcribed an excerpt from the poem *Des Mädchens Klage* by Friedrich Schiller, first in German, and then in an English translation:

The oak forest moaned, the heavens look'd grim,
The maiden walk'd forth by the angry stream,
It rush'd on its way with right, with might
And she sang, as she gaz'd on the stormy night
With a dim and tearful eye:
"My heart is dead – the world's a void –
Each wish extinct – each hope enjoy'd
My God! Take back the poor child's breath,
Life's joys are spent – Oh! Give me death!
I have lov'd – Oh! Let me die!"

While contemporary readers of the album might be concerned for the author's safety and the state of her mental health, Victorian readers would, in all likelihood, not have responded similarly. Indeed, what distinguishes Victorian mourning from contemporary grieving processes is its public, performative nature – the intricate conventions of dress that were associated with mourning being only the most visible example.

Transcriptions of religious passages relinquishing control to God now also appear in Bucknall-Estcourt's album. Especially iconic in this regard is her inclusion of an image of the painting of Rosamund Croker by Sir



13 | Sir Thomas Lawrence, *Portrait of Miss Croker*, 1827, print after the portrait, Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt Album, Library and Archives Canada, e011073014. (Photo: author)

Thomas Lawrence (Fig. 13). The painting had been shown in the Academy Exhibition of 1827 and an officer of the Forty-third Regiment had given her a lithographic reproduction of it. Although all who saw the painting remarked on Miss Croker's ravishing beauty, Bucknall-Estcourt quite likely identified with something quite different, for Miss Croker had chosen to live a pious life dedicated to religious and philanthropic work, believing that it was for this purpose that God had chosen to bless her with good looks and excellent health.⁴² Bucknall-Estcourt's total immersion in her religious beliefs may have helped her to endure the sacrifices she had made in her efforts to further the imperial interests of Great Britain. She seemed also to take comfort in her belief in the hereafter, as is reflected in the following passage from "The Stream of Time" which she transcribed into the album:

Methought I saw a stream
The dark bed choked with many ruin'd things,

And all along its' Banks, were cities high,
And villages, and crests of lofty trees,
But the Stream pass'd them, then I look'd again,
And all was gone, but mid decaying piles
Of homes and towns, and villages, and dwellings fair,
Vast heaps of smouldering ashes met my eye
These were the relics of the mortal frame,
Once full of beauty, and of life, and health,
But there was something which the stream of time
Could never reach – the deathless human soul
It winged its' way thro' boundless realms of space
Mid which the mortal eye may never pierce
Where nought but pure immortal rivers flow,
And Time shrinks back from bright eternity.

Protestantism also reinforced the female role of dutiful wife and guardian of the family⁴³ and during the two years immediately following her husband's death, Caroline was intensely involved in a process aimed at ensuring that he would be well remembered. She followed media coverage of the Crimean War very closely and paid careful attention to the accusations leveled at senior military officers.⁴⁴ Upon her husband's death, she played an instrumental role in having a number of eulogies to him published in England, Canada, and the United States, all written by men.⁴⁵ I contend that she also used her album to ensure James's favourable remembrance in history. Recording the dark and morbid passages in her album afforded her an instrument for the public performance of grieving. However, by also including images of her husband's successes it would have been possible to recount stories of James's military triumphs, thus overlooking the failures of his second Canadian posting and downplaying his role in the demise of British soldiers in the Crimea.⁴⁶

Life-writing

The album does not come to a natural nor definitive end. It simply appears to trickle to a close with a series of almost random images relating to Lady Caroline's life. She added to the album as late as 1875, when she was sixty-six years old. This item appears on the third to last page and consists of a brief note written to her brother-in-law Edward Bucknall-Estcourt by her long-term and dear American friend, George Perkins Marsh, in which he passed along an interesting insight regarding Shakespeare's Hamlet: "Knowing the excessive literariness of your family [I pass along the following.] Hamlet . . . was probably a journeyman who in his early youth had been poisoned by the

Roman Catholics probably by order of King Henry VIII of England!!!” The note likely was included in memoriam of her brother-in-law’s death. I am only able to infer why Bucknall-Estcourt might have selected such a keepsake for inclusion from what she wrote to Mrs. Marsh:

[He] had an excellent library and was very well read . . . We have lost in him a living example . . . [of a man with a] brilliancy of wit and memory which was more like your husband’s than that of anybody else I know, which made him the most delightful companion and the most improving you can imagine.⁴⁷

Bucknall-Estcourt clearly considered both of these men, with whom she had close relationships, to be figures of great intellect, who had provided her with guidance and stimulation as she pursued her own intellectual development, a pursuit that offered her considerable pleasure during this late phase of her life.⁴⁸

As preoccupied with her husband as she remained, however, it is noteworthy that towards the very end of the album she also begins – and for the first time – to incorporate a number of references to her own missionary work, carried out, like James’s endeavours, in aid of Empire. The first reference consists of Ojibwe translations of the Lord’s Prayer, the Collect for Grace, and the Blessing that had been given to her in 1839 by the Governor of Upper Canada, Sir George Arthur. The second is a publication of the “Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts,” dating from 1849. Lady Caroline was the artist responsible for the image on the first page, *Travelling Scene in Canada* (Fig. 14).⁴⁹ As minor as these traces seem, particularly when considered within the context of the album in its entirety, they remain evidence of and testament to the work that she herself was involved with during her two Canadian postings.⁵⁰ Certainly, she developed close ties with a number of the missionaries working in North America and expressed concern for their safety during the American Civil War.⁵¹

These examples stand in marked contrast with the rest of the album – where Bucknall-Estcourt’s own participation in the imperial project is celebrated obliquely, and never in her own voice. Although her imperial message was transparent and easily read through the imagery and transcripts she chose to include, the album to this point was characterized by an almost total erasure of herself in the telling of the story; her use of Codrington’s painting of Niagara Falls rather than her own is but an exemplary instance of her strategy on the whole. Why, then, did Bucknall-Estcourt finally choose to memorialize her own contributions in aid of Empire? One possible explanation might be found in the evolving feminist movement in England during the second half of the nineteenth century, as London feminists



14 | Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt, *Travelling Scene in Canada*, 1849, wood engraving on wove paper, published in *The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts*, Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt Album, Library and Archives Canada, e01107301. (Photo: author)

broadened the definition of domesticity to include women's work.⁵² The time Bucknall-Estcourt spent as a widow living with her sister-in-law saw the two women working together to organize educational lectures for women of their parish. Although Caroline busied herself with the religious components of the program, her sister-in-law Maryanne organized lectures promoting the rights of women.⁵³ It was an issue widely in the air, for John Stuart Mill had published *The Subjection of Women* in 1861, advocating for women's rights to self-determination, access to education and social justice. Perhaps such a process of beginning to think about women in a different light allowed Bucknall-Estcourt finally to grant herself permission to memorialize her own work in furthering the interests of imperial Great Britain.

Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt worked on her album for almost forty years as she recorded the important events of her life. Using the visual and material culture available to her, she engaged in a complicated process wherein the event being recorded and the extent to which she identified herself as

recorder of the event came to be situated along a continuum of concealment and revelation. Over time she traced a trajectory from disguising both her message and her own role as messenger to revealing clearly both what she wished to say and that she herself was saying it. As a newly married woman who attained her goal of following her husband on his first military posting to Canada, Bucknall-Estcourt concealed both the achievement and her own role as recorder of what was achieved by using a poem embodying a heavily encoded message. Her belief in and support of the imperial interests of Great Britain were recorded enthusiastically and transparently, but without directly revealing these as her own thoughts; the images and narratives she used were created by others. Finally, as a widow, both her narrative and her own role as recorder of that narrative were allowed to become readily visible to the world: a grieving widow intent on ensuring her husband's legacy while also ultimately acknowledging the importance of her own missionary work in Canada.

NOTES

I am grateful to Dr. Kristina Huneault for her encouragement, guidance, and critique of this essay.

- 1 Samantha MATTHEWS, "Albums, Belongings, and Embodying the Feminine," in *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, ed. Katharina Boehm (Hampshire, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 107–08.
- 2 Journal of Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt, MIKAN no. 3931084, Library and Archives Canada (LAC). Lande also donated printed material to McGill University.
- 3 Kate CHEDGZOY, *Women's Writing in the British Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 36.
- 4 Cornwall Records Office (CRO), Carew Pole Family Papers – as per the family tree, in the Archives at Truro in Cornwall, CG/FX 11a and b.
- 5 Ed JAGGARD, "Introduction" to *An Exceptional Man: Reginald Pole Carew of Antony* (London: Filmer, 2011).
- 6 *Ibid.*, 110–11.
- 7 David LARGE, "General Sir James Bucknall Bucknall-Estcourt," *Transactions from the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 100 (1982): 5. James's grandfather married the daughter of a viscount in 1774 and in 1823, to comply with a will in their favour from her mother's Hertfordshire family, the Estcourts took the additional surname Bucknall. James had already been given the name Bucknall as his second Christian name and thus his full name became James Bucknall Bucknall-Estcourt.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 7–8.
- 9 Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt to George Perkins Marsh, 21 Apr. 1856, George Perkins Marsh Collection (GPMC), University of Vermont Bailey/Howe Library Special Collections, Carton (C) 2, Folder (F) 40.

- 10 Dora Neill RAYMOND, *The Political Career of Lord Byron* (1924; reprint, New York: Russell & Russell, 1972), 191–208.
- 11 Bucknall-Estcourt to Marsh, 21 Apr. 1856, GPMC, C2/F40.
- 12 “The Gatherer,” *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction* 24 (1834): 431–32.
- 13 Michael T. WILLIAMSON, “Impure Affections: Felicia Hemans’s Elegiac Poetry and Contaminated Grief,” in *Felicia Hemans – Reimagining Poetry in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Nanora Sweet and Julia Melnyk (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 19–35.
- 14 Reginald HERBER, *The Poetical Works of Reginald Herber* (London: John Murray, 1870), 324.
- 15 Bucknall-Estcourt to Marsh, 21 Apr. 1856, GPMC, C2/F40.
- 16 Sara MILLS, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women’s Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991); CHEDGZOY, *Women’s Writing*; S. FOSTER, *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth Century Women Travellers and Their Writings* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990); and Janet WOLFF, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Los Angeles: UCLA Berkeley Press, 1990).
- 17 *Fisher’s Drawing Room Scrap Book* was one of a number of published pre-made albums that targeted the rising middle classes who desired not only the visible indicators of wealth, but also tangible indicators of knowledge. See Patrizia DI BELLO, *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 42–44.
- 18 Marilyn J. MCKAY, *Picturing the Land: Narrating Territories in Canadian Landscape Art, 1500–1950* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011), 48–49.
- 19 Kamille T.H. PARKINSON, “Philip John Bainbrigge and The Group of 1838 Imperial Landscapes and the Colonial Art Scene” (PhD thesis, Queen’s University, 2005), 124.
- 20 *Ibid.*, Appendix A.
- 21 I have attributed both of these watercolours to Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt, despite the Public Archive of Canada’s database designation that *James Bucknall Bucknall-Estcourt painted The Great Horseshoe Fall from the Pavilion Hotel and The Horseshoe Fall from Goat Island*. This album has been disassembled with the watercolours individually mounted on separate paper along with cutouts of writing from the album pages where they were originally mounted. Both of the cutouts included with these watercolours clearly identify CBE (Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt) as the artist. Wherever James Bucknall Bucknall-Estcourt is the artist, he is clearly identified by the initials JBBE.
- 22 Sir R.G.A. LEVINGE, *Historical Records of The Forty-Third Regiment, Monmouthshire Light Infantry* (London: W. Clowes & Sons, 1868), 237.
- 23 Extract from Townsend, Private of Capt. Wright’s Company, “Account of the march of the 43rd from New Brunswick to Quebec and Sorel in the depth of winter, Dec. 1837,” n.p., Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt’s album, LAC.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 37–38.
- 25 Gerald HALLOWELL, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2004), 530–31.
- 26 LARGE, “General Sir James Bucknall Bucknall-Estcourt,” 13; Diary of James Bucknall Bucknall-Estcourt, 22 Mar. 1854, D 1571/F485, Gloucestershire County Records Office (GRO).
- 27 HALLOWELL, *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History*, 46.

- 28 LARGE, "General Sir James Bucknall Bucknall-Estcourt," 13; Henry Unwin Addington to James Bucknall-Estcourt, 9 Dec. 1842, D 1571/F470, GRO.
- 29 LARGE, "General Sir James Bucknall Bucknall-Estcourt," 13.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 14–15.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 13.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 35 Bucknall-Estcourt to Marsh, 2 June 1855, C2/F29–39, GPMC.
- 36 LARGE, "General Sir James Bucknall Bucknall-Estcourt," 17.
- 37 Bucknall-Estcourt to Mrs. Marsh, 29 Sept. 1855, C2/F29–39, GPMC.
- 38 Bucknall-Estcourt to Mrs. Marsh, 24 June 1872, C6/F1–13, GPMC.
- 39 Personal albums were created in blank pre-bound books that served as repositories for handwritten transcriptions as well as sketches, watercolours, and ephemera. Around mid-century, catalyzed by increased literacy and widely available printed texts and images, scrapbooks emerged as a distinct type of album, consisting primarily of cutouts of printed material.
- 40 Patricia JALLAND, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 42 "The Beautiful Miss Croker," *Nelson Evening Mail* (New Zealand), 6 Oct. 1905.
- 43 JALLAND, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 234.
- 44 Bucknall-Estcourt to Marsh, 23 May 1857, C3/F10–19, GPMC.
- 45 Bucknall-Estcourt to Marsh, 23 Nov. 1855, C2/F29–30; 21 Apr. 1856, C2/F40; and 17 Aug. 1856, C2/F40, GPMC.
- 46 LARGE, "General Sir James Bucknall Bucknall-Estcourt," 18. Large concluded that although "James was too kind and courteous and too forgiving to be ideal as the officer chiefly responsible for the discipline of the army . . . it was not a breakdown in discipline which was at the root of the Crimean disasters." Furthermore, "while having no influence in planning or directing operations, he had doubted the wisdom of the whole Crimean expedition and foreseen trouble ahead while the army was still at Varna."
- 47 Bucknall-Estcourt to Mrs. Marsh, 5 Jan. 1876, C6/F52–65, GPMC.
- 48 The level of sophistication she achieved in her intellectual pursuits is well illustrated in the album by an extract from Thomas CARLYLE's *Sartor Resartus*, a book that had propelled Carlyle to the status of a leading literary figure of Great Britain during the nineteenth century.
- 49 MIKAN no. 3931341, LAC.
- 50 This is based on dates recorded in the album. Bucknall-Estcourt obtained the Ojibwe translations during her first posting and created the lithographs during her second posting.
- 51 Bucknall-Estcourt to Mrs. Marsh, 20 July 1863, C4/F36–47, GPMC.
- 52 Leonore DAVIDOFF and Catherine HALL, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London: Hutchison, 1987), xxii.
- 53 Bucknall-Estcourt to Mrs. Marsh, 11 Oct. 1866, C5/F1–13, GPMC.

Lady Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt : l'identité et la représentation dans un album de l'époque victorienne

PATRICIA SHEPPARD

Au cours du XIX^e siècle, les femmes s'adonnaient à l'activité de loisir populaire de compiler un album d'objets d'une importance personnelle tirés du monde environnant – extraits de littérature, art amateur et diverses babioles – pour les transformer en des constructions complexes multicouches d'identité qui dépassaient la simple accumulation. Volumes reliés en cuir fin, les albums occupaient une place d'honneur dans les salons de l'ère victorienne où amis et famille se réunissaient pour raconter des histoires ou discuter, et où la créatrice de l'album montrait son œuvre aux visiteurs. Sujet de conversation fréquent, les albums personnels ont longtemps servi à enregistrer et même à encoder les souvenirs.

Lady Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt (1809–1886), femme d'un militaire britannique et membre de la noblesse avait constitué un tel album. Elle l'avait reçu en cadeau de mariage en août 1837 et l'avait utilisé pour y verser des pastels, lettres, poèmes et autres objets pendant près de quarante ans, jusqu'en 1875. Les dix-huit premières années de sa collection, elle accompagnait son mari affecté à des postes militaires dans tout l'Empire britannique. Elle a ainsi passé quatre ans au Canada au cours de deux mutations différentes, la première de 1838 à 1840, et la seconde de 1843 à 1846.

Au premier abord, le contenu de son album n'a pas l'air de suivre un ordre chronologique. Quand les dates sont précisées, elles ne sont pas séquentielles, laissant croire à l'observateur occasionnel que l'album ne serait qu'un ramassis de souvenirs classés au hasard. Notons aussi que pas une seule phrase transcrite dans l'album n'exprime la voix de Bucknall-Estcourt. Bien qu'elle soit artiste amateur, elle n'a personnellement créé que neuf des cinquante-quatre croquis et pastels contenus dans l'album. Or, une lecture attentive de l'album révèle la présence d'une narration cohérente, dynamique et très personnelle.

Chose intrigante, Lady Bucknall-Estcourt s'arrange pour remplir son album aussi bien pendant son absence que sa présence. À notre avis, elle utilisait toute une série de techniques de codage pour signaler les événements importants de sa vie. En effet, certains éléments de l'album, détournés et lourdement codés, comportaient des références à des événements profondément personnels d'une manière qui lui permettait de conserver le

contrôle de son intimité. Ces associations, selon toutes probabilités, étaient celles qu'elle n'aurait partagées qu'avec une poignée de membres de sa famille et amis intimes triés sur le volet. En revanche, d'autres techniques lui permettaient d'incorporer plus d'éléments publics de sa vie d'une façon accessible, facile à comprendre des personnes de son époque. En décodant l'album de Lady Bucknall-Estcourt, cette étude explore comment une aristocrate de l'époque victorienne utilise représentativement la culture matérielle et visuelle à sa disposition pour garder le secret ou s'exprimer en accord avec son époque. Les aspects publics et privés de l'album sont menés à bonne fin, dans ses thèmes principaux : l'éloge du projet impérial et de la carrière de son mari.

La documentation relative à la décision de Lady Bucknall-Estcourt de suivre son mari au Canada à peine six mois après leur mariage et la première mutation du couple au Canada constituent à peu près les deux tiers de l'album. Bien que les circonstances inhabituelles qui l'ont conduite à la décision d'accompagner son mari soient extrêmement encodées par les passages littéraires qu'elle a choisi d'intégrer dans l'album, une fois au Canada, elle commémore plus ouvertement sa première mutation résidentielle au service de l'Empire. Bucknall-Estcourt était une ardente impérialiste, caractéristique qui est reflétée dans sa décision de consacrer quatorze pages entières de son album à un récit de 3 500 mots raconté à la première personne – par un certain soldat Townsend de la compagnie du capitaine Wright – d'une marche exténuante entreprise par la Quarante-troisième unité d'infanterie légère, du Nouveau-Brunswick au Québec, pendant la période la plus rude et la plus glaciale de l'hiver canadien. Ce récit est important parce que l'événement précède l'arrivée de Bucknall-Estcourt au Canada et n'avait absolument aucun lien direct, ni avec le séjour du couple au Canada, ni avec la carrière militaire de son mari. La rapidité avec laquelle les militaires britanniques avaient répondu avec succès aux soulèvements au Canada malgré les conditions hivernales extrêmes témoignait de façon impressionnante de la puissance impériale britannique.

Les Bucknall-Estcourt retournèrent en Angleterre au début de 1840, furent mutés en Irlande pendant trois ans et revinrent au Canada en 1843. Nommé commissaire frontalier, son mari était chargé de travailler avec les Américains pour délimiter de façon permanente la frontière canado-américaine entre la source du fleuve Sainte-Croix, au Nouveau-Brunswick, et le croisement de la rivière Halls avec le quarante-cinquième parallèle dans les Cantons de l'Est du Québec. Le couple passa une première année éreintante près de Grand Falls au bord de la rivière Saint-Jean, dans un minuscule hameau comprenant deux auberges, une caserne et une petite maison. Caroline vivait dans la maison pendant que son mari travaillait beaucoup dans les régions sauvages. C'était exactement le genre de projet impérialiste que les premières pages

de l'album avaient glorifié avec enthousiasme. Or, rien lié à cette période ne figure dans l'album –, et cela, même si les hivers de Caroline dans les régions reculées étaient devenus une légende en Angleterre. De nombreux motifs pourraient expliquer cette omission : sa compilatrice se serait désintéressée provisoirement de l'album, ou elle l'aurait laissé en Angleterre. Bucknall-Estcourt n'aurait toutefois pas pu saisir tout le caractère fortuit que prendrait cette omission dans son projet ultérieur de défendre la réputation de son mari contre des accusations d'incompétence.

En 1854, James Bucknall-Estcourt a été promu au grade de brigadier général, puis nommé adjudant général pour la force d'expédition britannique en Crimée où il mourut du choléra le 24 juin 1855. Il faisait partie des officiers supérieurs de l'armée britannique accusés d'incompétence grave et blâmés pour les conditions inhumaines que leurs troupes étaient forcées de subir. Caroline, bien qu'accablée par la mort de son mari, a activement veillé à ce que sa mémoire soit respectée. Nous prétendons que son album lui a servi dans cette démarche. Entrecoupant les passages sombres et morbides liés au chagrin du deuil de l'époque victorienne, elle a inséré des images illustrant les succès militaires de son mari. En inscrivant des passages liés au deuil, son album lui offrait un instrument pour la représentation publique du chagrin. Or, en y versant aussi des images des succès de son mari, il aurait été possible de retracer les histoires de ses triomphes militaires, minimisant ainsi son rôle dans la débâcle des soldats en Crimée.

L'album ne se termine pas de façon naturelle ou définitive. D'après les dates consignées, Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt a alimenté son album jusqu'en 1875 ; elle avait alors soixante-six ans. Aussi préoccupée par son mari qu'elle l'était encore, il convient de noter que vers la toute fin de l'album elle a aussi commencé – et pour la toute première fois – à incorporer de nombreuses références à son propre travail de missionnaire en appui à l'Empire. La première référence consiste en des traductions en ojibwe de prières (*Lord's Prayer*, *Collect for Grace*, *The Blessing*) que lui a données en 1839 le Gouverneur du Haut-Canada, Sir George Arthur. Aussi mineures que soient ces traces, elles demeurent des preuves, et le testament, du travail missionnaire auquel elle a participé personnellement au cours de ses deux mutations au Canada.

Caroline Bucknall-Estcourt a monté son album pendant près de quarante ans, enregistrant les événements de sa vie. À l'aide de la culture visuelle et matérielle à sa disposition, elle s'est engagée dans un processus compliqué où l'événement consigné et son identification à l'auteure de l'enregistrement de cet événement s'inscrivent dans un continuum de secrets et de révélations. Au fil des ans, elle a tracé une trajectoire allant du déguisement de son message et de son rôle de messenger à la révélation claire et nette de ce qu'elle souhaitait dire et de ce qu'elle disait elle-même.