



## **The diary of Susan Shelby Magoffin: From the fantasy of the west to daily experience?**

*Dorothee Koch*

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Essay from the year 2007 in the subject American Studies - Literature, grade: A-, Bread Loaf School of English, Middlebury College (Bread Loaf School of English), course: 19th Century American literature and the West, 2 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: The essay describes the hard life Susan Shelby Magoffin had to face when accompanying her new husband down the Santa Fe trail in 1846. The journey changes her. The high spirited young wife soon notices that neither her marriage nor her travels are the way she expected them to be. The paper reveals how Magoffin's diary mirrors the transformation of her personality. When Susan Shelby Magoffin left 'civilization' in June 1846, she was animated to accompany her newly-wed husband to Santa Fe and even further South. Yet, her journey and her marriage are not what she expected them to be. Her diary gives an insight into the great expectations she first had and leaves the reader with the impression of a hopelessly sick, sad or even depressed woman by the end of her diary. Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico shows a female who is trying to get used to the New World. She is one of many English-speaking women who "from the early decades of the seventeenth century onward, [...] struggled to find some alternate set of images through which to make their own unique accommodation to the strange and sometimes forbidding landscape" (Kolodny 3). Whether or not she managed her new life will be depicted in this paper. Are there any discrepancies between her early entries and the ones that are recorded later? Beginning her diary with the words: "My journal tells a story tonight different from what it has ever done before" (Magoffin1), shows how energetic she is by the idea to record her travels in her diary. She is an educated young woman and has already read about travelling West, since she at one time feels like The Oregon Pioneers (Magoffin 23) or compares her journey with the ones Greg has recorded. Further, her first diary entry shows that she sees herself as if she were in a theatre play. "The curtain raises now with a new scene. [...] Act 2nd, literally and truly. From the city of New York to the Plains of Mexico, is a stride that I myself can scarcely realize" (Magoffin1).

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