

Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs, eds. 2004: *Perspectives on Travel Writing*. Aldershot: Ashgate. VIII + 200 pp.

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Focusing on a broad range of geographical areas as well as on a wide array of travellers from the early modern period to the postcolonial age, the essays collected in this book, published as volume 19 in the Studies in European Cultural Transition series, cogently exemplify the diverse paths that scholarship on the literature of travel has trodden in recent years. The wealth of publications as well as the scheduled academic events regularly devoted to this field evidence that the critical study of travel writing is not only holding its ground within the vast domain of literary studies but also expanding it with more sophisticated forays into other disciplines. Specialized journals like *Studies in Travel Writing* and *Journeys*, book series such as *Travel Writing Across the Disciplines*, published by Peter Lang, and well-established conferences like the biannual meeting of the International Society for Travel Writing (ISTW) are but a few examples that attest to the strength and diversity of a field where much of the best criticism continues to be concerned with texts written in English. This is particularly true of the present collection of essays, which far from being merely descriptive, provides finely crafted theoretical treatments of British, Scottish, Caribbean, and Indian travel texts by some of the most active experts in this field.

The editors acknowledge early on in the Introduction that, in accordance with the series in which the book has been issued, one of the goals of this volume is to scrutinize the rhetorical strategies whereby European travel writing has ‘othered’ foreign cultures and in turn has been transformed by its own ‘othering’ processes. However, their scope clearly goes beyond that, as the diverse approaches employed by the contributors raise other issues and questions that may challenge long-held assumptions about this genre. What constitutes travel writing? Which are the most suitable tools to dissect it? What kind of interaction between disciplines does its criticism foster? Indeed, these questions have no easy answer, but the heterogeneity that travel literature and its critical practice so conspicuously display certainly indicates, as the editors suggest, that this is a complex field of study in a constant state of transition. It is no coincidence, then, that the book commences with an essay where Jan Borm faces the always problematic task of redrawing the boundaries of the subject matter. In ‘Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing, and Terminology’, he relies on a group of mainly French critical theorists—Philippe Lejeune, Gérard Genette, Jean-Didier Urbain—to tackle the terminological quandaries that the genre has faced over the past twenty years, and concludes that in spite of its generic looseness it still serves as “a useful heading under which to consider and to compare the multiple crossings from one form of writing into another and, given the case, from one genre into another” (26). For Borm, travel writing, whether it is an autobiography, a novel passing for a non-fictional travel account, or vice versa, should be conceived of by its author (and viewed by its readers) as a literary artifact, but he seems to forget that the genre also encompasses para-texts like leaflets, guidebooks, and blogs that, though not strictly literary, should be included

in any discussion of the genre if only on account of their liability to be parodied or appropriated by more elaborated travel texts.

The essays that follow prove the validity of most of Borm's claims by deftly exploring how travel narratives, thanks to their chameleonic nature, use the possibilities of combining genre, aesthetics, and ideology to inscribe difference. To begin with, Helga Quadflieg's essay ('As Mannerly and Civill as any of Europe: Early Modern Travel Writing and the Exploration of the English Self') focuses on some of the Renaissance narratives anthologized in Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* and Samuel Purchas's *Hakluytus Posthumus* to demonstrate that the early discoverers inscribed images of the Other in their texts to strengthen their national identity and to reaffirm their own Protestant values. In contrast to these prejudiced early modern texts, Betty Hagglund in 'Not Absolutely a Native, nor Entirely a Stranger: The Journeys of Anne Grant' concentrates on the less biased travel books that this Glasgow-born woman wrote during the Romantic period, when the appeal of the Home Tour was beginning to supersede that of the Grand Tour. Hagglund compares *Memoirs of an American Lady* (1808), based on Grant's reminiscences of the colonial upstate New York where she spent her childhood, with her *Letters from the Mountains* (1806), an account of the parish of Laggan, in the Scottish Highlands, where she later resided with her husband, and argues that the celebration of otherness and multiculturalism in this writer's travel books arose from her early experiences of the American wilderness and her even longer daily contact with the Gaelic-speaking population of northern Scotland.

Equally focused on perceptions of Celtic difference are the essays by Glenn Hooper and Jean-Yves Le Disez, which are partial re-elaborations of previous work already known to the public (Hooper 2001, 2005; Le Disez 2002). In 'The Saxon in Ireland: John Hervey Ashworth on the Emigrant Trail', Hooper explores nineteenth-century British travel writing on Ireland by focusing on a book—*The Saxon in Ireland* (1851)—which extolled the wonders and promises of an island still under the consequences of the potato famine. While many British travelers deplored the state of their neighboring island, Hooper explains, Ashworth deployed several tropes typical of colonialist literature that publicized it as a potentially advantageous destination much closer to home for the English settler than those in Africa, Australia or New Zealand. Similarly, in 'Animals as Figures of Otherness in Victorian Narratives of Travel in Brittany, 1840–95', Le Disez studies the attraction that travellers like Thomas A. Trollope and Matilda Betham-Edwards, among many others, felt towards another marginal yet very close destination. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Le Disez contends, Victorian travelers generally misrepresented French Brittany by way of animal imagery, and a close study of these narratives evidences the gradual domestication of a puzzling, somewhat exotic region across the Channel that for many remained halfway between the security of home and the wildness of abroad.

Grounded in the connections between travel writing, otherness, and identity, the next two essays take the reader further afield across the Atlantic. Peter Hulme's 'The Silent Language of the Face: The Perception of Indigenous Difference in Travel Writing about the Caribbean' sagaciously examines how the representation of the Caribs has evolved over the past century, starting with some of the official reports published immediately after the U.S. invasion of 1898 (for instance, the widely circulated *Our Islands and their People as Seen with Camera and Pencil*), continuing with such

narratives of the 1940s as Patrick Leigh Fermor's *The Traveller's Tree*, and ending with recent texts by Caribbean authors from Cuba and Dominica. Hulme, who has been studying the British representation of the native Caribbean peoples for more than two decades (Hulme 1986, 2000; Hulme and Whitehead 1992), claims that even though the earlier travel accounts represent the native peoples as a silent race nearly condemned to extinction, there has been lately a process of recovery on their part to speak up with their own voice. A similar process is analyzed in Erdmute Wenzel White's essay 'Night Train to Belo Horizonte: South American Travels', which argues that revisionist readings of the early European travel accounts on Brazil compelled some Brazilian intellectuals and artists of the 1920s and 1930s like José Oswald de Sousa Andrade or Heitor Villalobos to travel across their country in search of its rich multicultural heritage. Their chief goal was to redefine their national identity, and in order to do so they collected native songs, reinterpreted Indian myths, and launched avant-garde movements such as Antropofagia that helped them to stand up against the old Eurocentric burden. Less focused on collective discourses than White's essay, the emphasis on how travel texts construct and blend personal identities also becomes central to Loredana Polezzi's article 'Between Gender and Genre: The Travels of Estella Canziani', an interesting case study of how a traveler can shift between selves and cultures, between autobiography and travel writing. The British-born daughter of a forward-looking American mother and a culturally committed Italian father, Canziani excelled both as a writer and painter and continuously sought the overlapping of multiple identities in her travel books. Ironically, as Polezzi observes, both facets stand apart today, for she is remembered in Italy as a British writer, whereas in Britain she is exhibited in museums as a painter of picturesque Italian scenes.

The last three essays in this volume strike a more contemporary key by focusing on postcolonial travel literature and theory. In 'Varieties of Nostalgia in Contemporary Travel Writing', Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan continue exploring one of the issues they had already touched upon in their path-breaking study *Travelers with Typewriters* (1998). Drawing on Susan Stewart's theorization of different modes of 'longing' as well as on Renato Rosaldo's conceptualization of 'imperialist nostalgia', though inexplicably ignoring John Frow's relevant theses on the 'semiotics of nostalgia' (Frow 1991), these scholars trace the presence of colonialist, spiritual and environmental yearnings in postwar texts that transmute a bygone "desire for domination and conquest into 'benign' mythologies of loss or remembered pleasure" (141). While the first part of their essay is concerned with the writings of such well-known travelers as Eric Newby, Redmond O'Hanlon, Bruce Chatwin and Wilfred Thesiger, who are dubbed as "the 100-years-too-late" school of travel writing (142) on account of their belated—albeit sometimes ironic—imperial reminiscences, in the second part readers will find Huggan and Holland engaging into a profitable discussion of texts by Laurens Van der Post and Marlo Morgan where the invocation of the loss of primitive communities taps a sort of modern-day mysticism that ultimately disguises the damaging role played by western civilization in colonial contexts.

The conflicts arising from cultural encounters are also significant in the essay entitled 'Mediaeval Travel in Postcolonial Times: Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*', where Padmini Mongia brings her own perspectives on travel writing from the standpoint of a scholar in postcolonial theory (see Mongia 1996). This critic employs

Ghosh's singular book—a novel published in 1993 that in fact reads like a narrative of Ghosh's sojourn in contemporary Egypt blended with the history of a medieval Jewish traveler to India he himself was researching—not only to discuss an Indian writer's view of Islam but also to probe the limits of travel writing in the postcolonial era. Mongia methodologically defends a porous type of text, call it a novel, call it a travel book, which openly and self-consciously blends genres, anecdotes, historical layers and cultural traditions in order to provide a non-western representation of otherness. However, in placing so much emphasis on the postcolonial side of this book she fails to underline its most postmodern traits, particularly Ghosh's collage of fictional and non-fictional materials resulting in a narrative where the traveler-cum-narrator must share protagonism with an apparently minor historical character called Bomma.

Finally, calling for further perspectives on travel writing, Tim Youngs closes the book with a state-of-the-art discussion of some relevant issues that this genre and its critics systematically fail to address. Youngs, an expert in African travel writing (Youngs 1994, 1997) now better known for having recently co-edited the valuable *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Hulme and Youngs 2002), captivates the reader with a suggestive title—'Where Are We Going? Cross-border Approaches to Travel Writing'—that evokes concepts like transition and cross-disciplinarity which this volume had sought to (re)define from its inception. However, instead of exploring the permeability and cross-fertilization of travel writing alongside other genres, which is the task that Jan Borm carries out earlier, Youngs here examines the limits as well as the intersection of the discipline with other fields of research in the humanities and social sciences. He particularly focuses on the fecund ties that over the past two decades have been established between travel writing, on the one hand, and discourse analysis, anthropology and postcolonial studies, on the other. This mutual exchange of ideas and methods, he contends, is nowhere more visible than in the widespread presence of travel metaphors and terminology that we all take for granted in academic circles. Migration, border-crossing, nomadic literatures or travelling cultures, Youngs observes, are just a few of the many images of fluidity that have crossed over from one discipline into another and that we use today in many different contexts; however, he alerts that, paradoxically, behind their polysemic value we may encounter bleak political and economic realities that travel writing and its critics either ignore or approach in a rather muted manner. According to Young, "[t]ravel writing should not be blamed for this" (180), but its criticism should perhaps aim for a less metaphorical and more pragmatic consideration of those issues—linguistic, political, economic, technological—that really matter, or else it may run the risk, as the title of his essay seems to imply, of losing its bearings.

In conclusion, the essays featured in this volume provide perspectives for reading travel literature that, in spite of their diverse subject matters, cohere into a critical methodology which pays attention to otherness and representation through issues of gender, race, nation, and genre. The volume's contribution to the field, in consequence, lies in its stimulating display of the many ways of reading travel texts. For all the strengths of the editors' careful selection, however, the reader is left with the sensation that matters of class are hardly tackled in a book that emphasizes so much the representation of the Other, and also that the choice of mostly English texts does not totally correspond to the presumed European scope of a volume where French or

German travel writers, for example, are almost absent. This is partly one of the reasons why the book, lacking the specificity it would have gained under a narrower chronological, geographical, or authorial framework, bears such an umbrella title as *Perspectives on Travel Writing* capable of containing it all. Thus, even though its contents and conclusions may be relevant for anyone in the area of humanities, this book is aimed primarily at scholars working in the field of travel studies. Those hoping for practical overviews of canonical travel writing and theory will not find them here, and should do well to complement their reading with other fairly recent publications in the field like Susan Roberson's careful compilation of theoretical texts, *Defining Travel* (2001), or the comprehensive *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Hulme and Youngs 2002). These reservations expressed, this collection of essays marks another commendable instance of the solid work being carried out lately in the field of travel writing. Apart from the editors and contributors, the publishers deserve equal praise for the careful editing of this hardback which, with its nine illustrations and very useful index, serves as a fine instance of their ongoing commitment to producing excellent books in the field of travel writing.

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