

TRAVELLING NARRATIVES: MODERNITY AND THE GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGINARY

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Introduction:

The inquisitive man always wishes to read every page of the great book – the world itself. This is the reason why the term ‘Travel’ has attained such a wide popularity. Who doesn’t like to visit different countries of the world and have a direct glimpse of the various civilizations, the remarkable features of Nature, the relics of history, the various life styles and so on? A travelogue records those events, sights and personal feelings which a traveller experiences as they visit one place after another. The format of these travelogues can be at its simplest a diary with events listed day by day but more usually they are combined into a more coherent narrative much more like a story. The style of individual travelogues varies as much as the reasons for travelling do. They can be just a simple description of what was seen, an investigation into the reason behind these new sights or into the authors’ own beliefs and motivation for travel. One example of this kind of writing is Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey Through France & Italy*.

Some of the most important travelogues, and many of those that are considered as literature, are ones that recount exploration or conquests. These offer new, strange and sometimes sensationalized accounts of completely alien cultures and civilizations which often become the standard texts about a region for many years afterwards or else bring the region to the notice of a new generation of travellers.

Travel literature is travel writing of literary value. It records the experiences of an author visiting a place for the pleasure of travel. An individual work is sometimes called a Travelogue or itinerary. Travel literature may be cross-cultural or transnational in focus. It may also involve travel to different regions within the same country. Literary travelogues generally exhibit a coherent narrative beyond the logging of dates and events. Travelling is man’s most instructive school. It is by travelling that he is able to know his fellow men; it is by living with other people, by studying their customs, their religion, their government, that he has a standard of comparison by which he can judge the customs, religion, and government of his country. Travel is not just a search for the exotic and the erotic. Rather, it is an instructive activity that benefits the general public by raising awareness of the public’s own religion, government and moral and cultural values.

The travelogues of *Ibn Jubayr* (1145 -1214) and *Ibn Batuta* (1304 – 1377) are examples of early travel literature. They recorded their travels across the known world in detail. The travel genre was fairly common genre in Medieval Arabic Literature. In 1589, Richard Hakluyt published *Voyages*, a foundational text of the travel literature genre. Aristocrats and clergy with money and leisure time travelled across Europe to learn about the art and architecture of its past.

Travel literature also became also became popular during the Song Dynasty of Medieval China. The genre was called ‘travel record literature’ and was often written in narrative, prose, essay and diary style. In the eighteenth century, travel literature was commonly known as the book of travels, which mainly consisted of maritime diaries and almost every famous writer wrote in this form. The Americans, Paul Theroux, Bill Bryson and William Least Heat – Moon, Welsh author Jan Morris and Englishmen Eric Newby – are widely acclaimed as travel writers although Morris is a historian and Theroux a novelist. Travel literature often intersects with essay writings. Rebecca West’s work on Yugoslavia, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is similar to V.S. Naipaul’s *India: A Wounded Civilization*, where a trip becomes the occasion for extended observations on a nation and people. Lawrence Durrel’s *Bitter Lemons*, Deborah Tall’s *The Island of the White Cow* and Peter Mayle’s *A Year in Provence* are good examples where a writer settles into a locality for an extended period, absorbing a sense of place while continuing to observe with a travel writer’s sensibility.

A travelogue is usually a single person’s account of a trip or journey. In fact, the early travelogue would have been hand written on either paper or in blank books to chronicle the adventures of the traveller. Such writing is highly individualized, and is an experience of a journey seen through the eyes of the traveller. The travelogue is no merely nonfiction. Fictional travelogues make up a large proportion of travel literature. Although it is desirable in few contexts to differentiate fictional from nonfictional works, such distinctions have proved notoriously difficult to make in practice, as in the famous works of Marco Polo or Mandeville. Many fictional works of travel literature are based on factual journeys – Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Homer’s *Odyssey*. On the other hand, many famous written works are travelogues of fictional places. Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is essentially a record of a journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, and Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* is another early fictional travelogue. The recent example of a real life journey transformed into a work of fiction in the novel *The White Mary* by Kira Salak which is largely based on her own experiences in the countries of Papua New Guinea and the Congo.

Conclusion:

The systematic study of travel literature emerged as a legitimate field of scholarly inquiry in the mid-1990s, with its own conferences, organizations, monographs, anthologies and encyclopaedias. Among the most important are: *Abroad* (1980) by Paul Fussell, an exploration of British interwar travel writing as escapism; Marianna Torgornick's presentation of foreign cultures in *Gone Primitive: Modern Intellectuals, Savage Minds* (1990) Sara Mill's *Discourses of Differences: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing*, an inquiry into the intersection of gender and colonialism during the nineteenth century; *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* by Mary Louise Pratt, an influential study of Victorian travel writings declaration of a colonial mind-set and *Belated Travelers* an analysis of colonial anxiety by Ali Behdad. The study of travel writing developed most extensively in the late 1990, encouraged by the currency of Foucauldian criticism and Edward Said's postcolonial landmark study *Orientalism*. They expressed the growing interdisciplinary preoccupation with cultural diversity, globalization and migration.

References:

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