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0 Introduction

In the anglophone world, at least since the nineteenth century, travel writing has counted among the most prolific genres. The vast sections in bookstores devoted to travel, the international success of British travel writers such as Graham Greene, Bruce Chatwin, Jan Morris, and more recently Robert Macfarlane, and the popularity of travel as a topic for TV documentaries suggest its ongoing attraction for ever-wider audiences. Despite the popularity and commercial success of the travel book, travel writing studies is thought to have appeared fairly late as an academic research area. In recent years it has developed from a relatively niche field of study to what has now become a vibrant and prolific research field within the humanities. The google *ngram viewer*, for example, shows a nearly linear, 45 degrees line upward for the term ‘travel writing’ from about 1980 onwards. Since then, Literary Studies has increasingly embraced the importance of travel writing, challenging its previously marginal status insofar as it has accompanied a general critical reflection of the English canon.

In doing so, the historical specificities, narrative diversity and complex formal aspects of travel writing have continued to present scholars with classificatory challenges. Many have commented on how difficult a generic demarcation turns out to be. Tim Youngs, for instance, discusses an impressive array of approaches towards defining the genre in his *Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* (see 2013, 1). Travel writing is a mercurial category, involving, and sometimes combining, elements of autobiography, memoir, diary, letters, journalistic reportage, fiction, poetry, satire, or travel guide. The contributions in this volume serve to illustrate this generic fluidity: Ralf Haekel’s chapter on Lord Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (↗ 18) and Ralf Hertel’s chapter on W. H. Auden’s *Journey to a War* (↗ 26) invite us to consider how far poetry can be subsumed under the heading travel writing, and Laurence Williams observes how Defoe deploys similar aesthetic and narrative strategies in his Home Tour account and *Robinson Crusoe* (↗ 9). Susan Pickford shows how the boundaries between the private letter and the guidebook reportage are elided in Mariana Starke’s *Letters from Italy* (↗ 16), and how Starke moves from the subjective tone of a correspondent to the authoritative voice of a travel guide. Susanne Schmid draws similar attention to the blurred line between documentation and fiction in V. S. Naipaul’s travel writing (↗ 27). And lastly, contemporary writers such as Robert Macfarlane (↗ 31), often classified under the rubric of *New Nature Writing*, invite us to rethink the concept of travel altogether.

In order to do credit to the hybrid essence of the genre, this handbook has opted for a generous and inclusive definition of travel writing. By including texts which transgress (and at the same time highlight) the boundaries between fact and

fiction, prose and poetry, the subjective travelogue and the descriptive guidebook, it goes beyond Jan Borm's much quoted definition of travel writing as

any narrative characterized by a non-fiction dominant that relates (almost always) in the first person a journey or journeys that the reader supposes to have taken place in reality while assuming or presupposing that author, narrator and principal character are but one and the same. (Borm 2004, 17)

Even if one were to delimit travel writing to the criteria adumbrated by Borm, one would still be confronted with perennial questions about the truthfulness and authenticity of the travel experience on the one hand and its later literary representation on the other. One of the distinctive markers of travel writing is, after all, its procedural nature: a collection of notes written on the spot is transformed into a more coherent and complete narrative back home, revised, even self-censored, and then turned into a publishable text by editors. Barbara Korte has observed how this process tends to involve a move from fact to fiction: "The actual experience of a journey is reconstructed, and therefore fictionalized, in the moment of being told" (2000, 11). To regard travel writing as a carefully crafted literary enterprise is to recognise it as an inherently citational genre (↗ 6 Intertextual Travel Writing), rich in literary allusions and references. Such self-conscious forms of literariness serve not only to counter an all too easy focus on autobiographical factuality, but also underline the genre's reliance on fictional and non-fictional traditions.

Seen from a historical perspective, the diversity of the genre in terms of its discourses (↗ 2), purposes and practices (↗ 5) is even more obvious. In the course of its development the genre's topics and concerns have also been on the move. What Carl Thompson described as a marker for travel writing in the interwar period, namely that it could be used to engage with worldly affairs and politics, act as cultural commentary, relate a series of adventures or explore subjectivity, memory and the unconscious (see Thompson 2011, 58), is certainly not exclusive to this particular period. Notwithstanding travel writing's hybrid generic features, literary scholars have always tended to focus on the relative autonomy of a genre with its own formal aspects such as language, tropes, and narrative structures. In an attempt to do so they have drawn, for instance, on narratological approaches to space, such as Juri Lotman's exploration of the semantics of space in literary texts (1990) or Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope as the interplay between time and space (1981). In particular, they have explored the aesthetic representation of subjectivity in relation to factual reportage in order to come to terms with the most central concern of any travel writing: the mediation between the I and the Other, or, as Casey Blanton has framed it, the Self and the World (see 2002).

From a Cultural Studies point of view, the increasing importance of travel writing in the humanities corresponded with what might be regarded as a postmodern focus on space as an epistemological category. This was explored among others by the French poststructuralist theorists Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre and Michel

de Certeau, culminating in Edward Soja's announcement that the so-called spatial turn had arrived in the mid-1990s. As a practice concerned with the signification of places, with the experience of otherness, with displacement, exile, border-crossing and contact zones, travel writing provided critical theory with useful terms to analyse human relations from a spatial angle. This approach sometimes resulted, as Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst have remarked (see 2015, 2), in an overuse and generalisation of travel metaphors in critical theory which had become too far removed from the actual genre. When, for example, de Certeau explored the structural analogies between walking and language in his essay "Spatial Stories" and concluded that "Every story is a travel story – a spatial practice" (1988, 115), it might be argued that he produced a paradigm more helpful for narratology than for the analysis of travel or travel writing.

Cultural Studies in particular has turned to travel writing as a genre which negotiates key issues of culture: identity, exchange, knowledge transfer, mobility, hegemony, the confrontation between the I and the Other, and much more. As a genre which by its nature reaches across borders, travel writing is always necessarily involved in processes of cultural translation, in consequence of which it mediates knowledge about the strange and unfamiliar. Recent compendia such as companions, introductions, anthologies and handbooks (with which the present volume dovetails) have acknowledged the overall cultural importance of travel. When Raymond Williams published his seminal *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* in 1976, it did not include one single term relating to travel or mobility. Thirty years later, a new and revised edition (Bennett, Grossberg and Morris 2005) included 'mobility' and 'tourism' as new terms, marking their amplified relevance for culture and society. In 2019, Forsdick, Kinsley and Walchester published *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies: A Critical Glossary*, indicating both the importance of travel practices as well as travel writing as a fundamental cultural phenomenon. Similarly, introductions to travel writing have proliferated in the twenty-first century: Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan's *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (2000), Peter Hulme's and Tim Youngs' *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2002), Casey Blanton's *Travel Writing: The Self and the World* (2002), Carl Thompson's *Travel Writing* (2011), Tim Youngs' *Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* (2013), Paul Smethurst and Julia Kuehn's *New Directions in Travel Writing Studies* (2015), Carl Thompson's *Routledge Companion to Travel Writing* (2015), Robert Clarke's *Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Travel Writing* (2017) and Alasdair Pettinger's and Tim Youngs' *Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing* (2020) all testify to the significance of travel writing as key resource for cultural analysis.

A fact that most of these introductions seem to take for granted (and therefore rarely mention) is that travel writing is not a genre which evolved equally in a European or even world literary context but was predominantly shaped by the British. A nation of seafarers, traders, explorers and colonialists which became the dominant power in the nineteenth century, the British have formed a corpus of

travel writing over centuries that is beyond compare. It is, of course, not exclusive and it has not evolved without intertextual relations with other travel writing cultures or writers. One thinks here of the Jesuit tradition, or iconic European figures such as Marco Polo, Amerigo Vespucci or Alexander von Humboldt. And yet over the past half millennium, no other nation has contributed to the genre of travel writing a comparable number of texts while addressing the whole globe with such a diversity of themes, styles and purposes. The novel may rightly be called a Western genre, merging in its development many influences such as, for instance, the Spanish tradition of the Picaresque, the Anglo-American tradition of protestant individualism, the German Bildungsroman, Russian realism, French naturalism and South American magical realism, but in this process of development no single national tradition set the tone for the whole. With regard to travel writing, the British – with some notable exceptions – have held hegemonic power in the field and, to use a phrase coined by Mary Louise Pratt, “produced the world” for a European readership (2012, 5).

In the wake of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), which drew on many travelogues in order to support its argument of the Western hegemonic construction of the Orient, Postcolonial Studies has turned to travel writing as a model within which colonialist and imperialist ideologies can be traced and deconstructed. More recently, scholars have contested such a reductive view of cross-cultural encounters as “simple relations of domination and subordination” (Clark 1999, 3) and explored postcolonial travel writing as forms of “writing back” or of producing cultural knowledge outside the frame of Western knowledge production (Youngs 2013, 116). In her chapter on Samuel Johnson’s *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, Sarah Fekadu-Uthoff discusses Wendy Belcher’s theoretical paradigm of discursive possession (see 2012) which introduces a model to theorise the agency of the other as a form of transcultural intertextuality. These recent nuanced approaches contest former ‘postcolonial’ notions of the overwhelming colonialist and imperialist quality of most of British travel writing. However, a focus on transculturality and transnational connections does not mean that travel writing is free from all ideological constraint. Rarely are travelogues written by distant observers – more often, as the examples of Raleigh (↗ 8), Cook (↗ 14), Bird (↗ 21), Kingsley (↗ 22) and others in this volume show, they are embedded in issues of colonial control as well as the critique of conquest (see Clark 1999, 5). What is more, the reception of travel writing is also determined by ideological frameworks. One can see how throughout history travel writing – like any other literary texts – is reassessed and reinterpreted. Johannes Görbert and Katharina Nambula show with the examples of James Cook (↗ 14) and Mary Kingsley (↗ 22) how authors can be glorified or demonised in accordance with changing dominant political values, geopolitical contexts and interests.

One obvious category highlighting the ideological embeddedness of travel writing is gender. Many feminist scholars have taken the mythological configuration of travelling Ulysses and stay-at-home Penelope as a starting point to explore the

different conditions shaping a female tradition of travel writing. Sara Mills (1991) has coined the term “discourses of difference” to describe the relation of women travellers to colonialism and their position within conflicting discourses: femininity, feminism, and patriarchal imperialism. In this volume, Elizabeth Bohls discusses gender as the most distinctive category in travel writing but also includes race as a category for a more nuanced analysis of colonial travel writing (↗ 3). For the larger part of history women had had neither the financial means nor any institutional support to travel, and they suffered from the social and moral constrictions that forbade them to travel independently. And yet, as this volume amply shows, women travellers have had a considerable influence on the canon of British travel writing.

Through the medium of translation into and from English, the corpus of British travel writing has continually expanded and found itself situated within a global web of travel writing. Its global impact was enhanced through its dissemination and reception in other languages (see, for instance, Anna Jameson’s reception in Germany, ↗ 19). Likewise, its discourses were shaped, as Susan Pickford and Sarah Fekadu-Uthoff show in this volume, by other European travel texts translated into English (↗ 4 Travel Writing and Translation, ↗ 10 Samuel Johnson).

A further aspect that has recently gained prominence in travel writing studies is the interdependence of travel and technology. Writers have always foregrounded the modalities (and hardships) of their travels by referring to their means of conveyance – the uncomfortable saddle or carriage, the unruly horse, or long and tiring foot journeys. Freya Stark explored the desert in the 1930s in a motorcar, bemoaning, as Dúnlaith Bird argues (↗ 25), the loss of the romance of camelback travel. New technologies have always generated new forms of travelling and travel writing. However, new technologies have, on the other hand, also often conjured up in travel writers a nostalgia for more antiquated forms of travelling – on foot, on a donkey or a bicycle, in order to resist the power of speed and its dangers of loss of perception. Walking through the Lake District or the Scottish Highlands was for William and Dorothy Wordsworth not just a consequence of their reduced financial circumstances but also a critique of industrial forms of travel. As our own age has witnessed the emergence of new forms of travelling – such as journeys to witness events, or Gap Year journeys – so older, established forms of travelling are dying out. The bankruptcy of the Thomas Cook group in September 2019, the company that did more than any other to shape what had come to be regarded from the late nineteenth century until recently as affordable organised tourism, might be seen as an effect of new technologies that have engendered the shift from booking through old-fashioned agencies to online bookings. At the same time, we have witnessed a shift from the old analogue written and printed travel book to TV documentaries (↗ 30), travel blogs or vlogs.

As I write these very words, the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic is bringing global mobility to a standstill. In the midst of a lockdown, one thinks of Xavier de Maistre who, imprisoned for duelling for 42 days in 1790, composed the ultimate parody of

travelogues – *A Journey Round My Room*. At this moment we too are thrown back on our resources as armchair travellers. Used to the amenities of modern media and global leisure industries, we find ourselves suddenly limited to the vicarious pleasures of reading about travel in books and magazines, watching TV travel documentaries, and remembering our own past journeys. The COVID-19 virus reminds us that viruses travel and spread as fast and widely as humans themselves, inviting many to reflect, sometimes for the first time, on the fact that the freedom to travel is a privilege and cannot be taken for granted.

In conclusion, this handbook attempts to consider British travel writing both from Literary and Cultural Studies points of view. Part I offers an expansive overview of the history of British travel writing and the various motives and practices that have informed it over the centuries. The systematic questions addressed in these first seven chapters stake out the important analytical categories relevant to travel writing studies described in this introduction.

The close reading chapters are intended to steer a middle course between introducing readers to some of the most iconic British travel writers and their works, while also providing the opportunity to explore writers who have not yet garnered the critical attention that we feel they deserve. Some famous travel writers appear in this volume not through the most renowned texts with which their names are often associated, but sometimes with lesser known and lesser discussed works. Admittedly, the selection that follows cannot pretend to be comprehensive. Given the limitations of a single volume, difficult editorial choices had to be made and many well-known and already much-discussed travel writers and texts could not be included here. Readers already find ample information about them elsewhere.

I would like to thank the general editors of the de Gruyter Handbook Series, Martin Middeke, Gabriele Rippl, and Hubert Zapf for commissioning this volume and for their ongoing support. Viktoria Helms and Jasmina Sovšić have been invaluable in their scrupulous attention to the manuscript, in particular the index and bibliographies, and Julia Heinemann has been the most observant and meticulous copy-editor one could wish for: I owe them my sincere thanks.

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