

Mapping New Paths in the Field of Travel Writing Studies

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Abstract:

The editors of the *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*, Alasdair Pettinger and Tim Youngs, are leading experts in the field of travel writing. Their newest volume brings together contributions that examine key themes in travel writing, scrutinize novel and established approaches to the genre, and map new paths in the field of travel writing studies. Each individual contribution is persuasively argued and demonstrates its arguments and findings with examples of representative primary texts. The diversity of the travel narratives analyzed in the volume exemplifies the heterogeneity and richness of the genre. This makes for a compelling read for those who are new to the field as well as for those who are acquainted with the study of travel writing.

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Over the last three decades, the study of travel writing has developed into an established field of academic research. Travel-themed literature as well as scholarly publications on travel writing have flourished, with new introductions, handbooks, and collections being published on a yearly basis. Among the leading scholars in the field are Alasdair Pettinger and Tim Youngs, the editors of the *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*. They state that it is their aim to examine established and emerging patterns of research in travel writing studies, assess the deployment of theoretical concepts, approaches and terminologies, and outline promising new avenues for research in the field (p. 4). To pave the way for the chapters that follow, Pettinger and Youngs's introduction to the volume provides a brief and concise overview of the development of the discipline and the manifold directions it has traveled so far.

The twenty-five chapters that comprise the *Companion* are thematically clustered and divided into five parts, "Framing Travel," "Modes of Writing," "Sensuous Geographies," "Interactions," and "Paratexts." Each article considers a particular motif, an organizing principle, or a literary form that is illustrated with the example of representative primary texts (p. 4). The diverse body of travel narratives that is examined in the volume spans different historical periods and geographic terrain, ranging from tenth- and eleventh-century Japanese travel diaries to twenty-first-century accounts of migrant travel. The selection of travel texts thus demonstrates the heterogeneity and richness of the genre as well as the manifold ways of reading it.

The first part, "Framing Travel," scrutinizes various forms of travel and the traveler's purpose and motivation for venturing on a journey. Examples are the scientific traveler whose primary purpose is the acquisition of new knowledge; the footstep traveler whose aim is to retrace itineraries of earlier sojourners; and the journeys of migrants, for whom travel is an escape from persecution or poverty.

The contributions in next part of the volume, “Modes of Writing,” investigate how literary forms, such as travel letters, diaries, journals and lectures, determine and shape the way travel is narrated. John Culbert’s chapter “Narrative” draws attention to the fact that travel narratives, even if they purport to relate an objective account of events, are stories that are always carefully constructed with the help of literary devices. Culbert therefore rightly emphasizes that readers of travel writing should pay “critical attention to narrative’s role in propagation of seductive myths and moving fictions” (p. 163).

The part “Interactions” centers on various forms of encounters and interactions that are presented in travel writing. The chapters examine, for example, hospitality, the exchange of material objects, linguistic diversity in interlingual encounters as well as human-animal relations. The three chapters of the part “Paratexts” shift the attention from the travel texts to the materials that accompany them, such as maps, and takes into account the processes of production of travel writing.

The part entitled “Sensuous Geographies” has the most clearly defined focus and may well be the most captivating one of this volume. It scrutinizes the five human senses and their role in travel writing. The functions of senses have received scarce attention by scholars of travel writing – with one important exception. Seeing, the editors point out, has traditionally been privileged over other senses in the analysis of travel narratives. For example, scholars have concentrated on the manifestation of the “imperial eye” (Mary Louise Pratt: *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London/New York: Routledge, 1992) and expressions of the “tourist gaze” (see John Urry: *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. London: Sage, 1990) in travel-themed literature. This focus has provided important insights into the dynamics of power in narratives of travel, but the attention devoted to vision has led to a neglect of the other senses (p. 8). The five chapters that make up this part concentrate on each one of the senses separately, so as to avoid an imbalance and hierarchization. Whereas the first contribution takes up again the topic of vision, the subsequent chapter by Tim Youngs explores the role of hearing in different twentieth- and twenty-first-century travel texts. He demonstrates that sound is more than a mere descriptive detail in the narratives. Hearing, he contends, can be considered as the most objective sense, but its role in travel writing is highly symbolic (pp. 208, 218). Sounds “reinforce our sense of the identity and character of the protagonist-narrator, of the traveller’s relationship with the

surroundings and with other people” (p. 218). Sarah Jackson’s chapter “Touching” considers the tactile experience in two accounts of travel to Antarctica. Her analysis highlights the significance of tactility and texture in an inhospitable region and explores the haptic aesthetic of the travelogues. In her chapter on taste, Heidi Oberholtzer Lee provides an analysis of two early American texts, one by naturalist William Bartram, the other by the explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. She illustrates how travel narratives employ the category of taste for both delight and as weapon “to justify the unbridled domination of environment and other people” (p. 245). Clare Brant’s chapter completes the part by exploring the sensation of smell in travel writing and presenting insights into the field of olfactory studies. As a whole, the chapters of this part offer intriguing perspectives on the human senses in travel narratives and propose new approaches to studying travel texts that foreground such sensuous geographies. Further, they challenge the privilege of vision in travel writing studies.

Each individual contribution is well written and persuasively argued. The broad range of travel texts examined in the articles make for a fascinating and compelling read. It is this diversity of texts and approaches, however, that contributes to the feeling that the volume would have profited from a more narrowly defined conceptual frame. Nevertheless, it is a useful *Companion* both for those who are new to the field and for those who are acquainted with the study of travel writing. It certainly meets its goals to identify and assess emerging approaches, explore key themes and concepts, and chart new roads for scholarly research.

Experten zeigen neue Wege in der Reiseliteraturforschung auf

German Abstract:

Die Herausgeber des *The Routledge Research Companion to Travel Writing*, Alasdair Pettinger und Tim Youngs, zählen zu den führenden Experten auf dem Forschungsgebiet der Reiseliteratur, das sie maßgeblich mitgestaltet haben. In der vorliegenden Publikation versammeln sie Beiträge, die Schlüsselthemen der Reiseliteratur beleuchten, sowohl neue als auch etablierte Herangehensweisen an den Forschungsgegenstand erörtern, und neue Forschungspfade aufzeigen. Die einzelnen Beiträge sind stringent und klar argumentiert und liefern exemplarische Analysen von Primärtexten. Die Vielfalt der untersuchten Reiseliteratur spiegelt die Heterogenität der Gattung wider und macht das Handbuch zu einer abwechslungsreichen Lektüre, sowohl für Einsteiger als auch für diejenigen, die mit dem Forschungsbereich gut vertraut sind.