



A HISTORICAL AND ANALYTICAL SURVEY OF EUROPEAN TRAVEL WRITING WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BRITISH TRAVEL LITERATURE

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Abstract

The paper seeks to undertake a historical and analytical survey of European travel writing with a special focus on British travel literature from the early modern period to the end of the twentieth century. European travel writing has a history that dates back to the ancient times. Inaugurated by *The Odyssey*, the genre began to take shape during the fifteenth century and later came to be known as “voyages and travels.” Travel--symbolic and literal--has been the theme of many texts written down the ages. Travels have been undertaken for different purposes at different times like pilgrimage, exploration, expedition, trade, colonisation and also for pleasure. The genre has undergone significant changes in tone, style, and narrative modes with the passage of time. Richard Hakluyt’s collection of travel accounts published in 1589 ushered in the entry of the English into the field of sea explorations. Documentation underpinning authenticity and truthfulness was the norm during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Eighteenth century produced a wealth of travel-themed writings in British literature. Travel narratives--fictional, nonfictional and, philosophic--found expression in the hands of a number of talented writers during this period. Taking advantage of the locomotive ease facilitated by the technology, writers began to travel in order to write during the twentieth century. There was a shift from extreme objectivity to personalised descriptions of travels during this period. Though travel writing flourished in Britain in the years between the two World Wars, the genre lost its lustre and glory during the post-war years only to be reawakened in the 1970s by some gifted writers. The concepts of otherness, subjectivity and gendering continue to inform the genre even today. The relevance of the genre in the field of Postcolonial studies, Anthropology, History, and Geography has facilitated its entry in the academic circles. All kinds of travels like space travels, virtual travels, and those associated with the refugees and migrants will continue to expand the boundaries of the genre in the years to come.

Keywords: Travel, History, Pilgrimage, Exploration, Expansion, Colonisation, Fact, Fiction, Otherness, Subjectivity, Gendering.

Travel can be a journey one sets out from one’s doorstep to any destination, near or far, with or without a purpose. In simple terms, travel narratives are accounts of journeys undertaken by travellers. An attempt to take stock of the travel-themed texts down the centuries will turn futile, as it is an unending task. This is because the genre has produced innumerable texts crossing generic confines. According to Carl Thompson the term travel writing is “a very loose generic label, and has always embraced a bewilderingly diverse range of material” (11). A lot of critical energy has been expended on the genre lately. Despite the researches going on in this field uncertainties prevail regarding the borders of the genre. The shifting borders of the genre has rendered it generically indefinable and unstable. The genre has also assumed different narrative styles at different times. In the “Introduction” to their jointly edited book *Perspectives on Travel Writing* Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs write: “One of the most persistent observations regarding travel writing, then, is its absorption of differing narrative styles and genres, the manner in which it effortlessly shape-shifts and blends any number of imaginative encounters, and its potential for interaction with a broad range of historical periods, disciplines and perspectives” (3). Thus by blending genres, straddling between historical periods, drawing on other disciplines and depicting perspectives of real and imaginary encounters, travel writing has become a loose, variable and protean genre. Moreover the portrayal of inward and outward journeys, representations of psychological and physical peregrinations, utilisation of self-ironising modes, self-reflexivity and increasing subjectivity have positively revolutionised the genre in the current decades. Just as travel itself has changed in modes and medium, so too has travel writing. Given its interdisciplinary status and generic indescribability, the genre has invited much critical attention in the recent decades. Many writers and critics expressed the fear of the decline of the genre in the postwar era of mass tourism and globalisation. Historically travel writing fed on the news of the unknown worlds and exotic cultures. The acknowledgement that there is no place left on earth unexplored poses a threat to the genre. Of those who predicted the doom of the genre include the critic Paul Fussell and the travel writer Paul Theroux. But the recent popularity of the genre has not only disproved their predictions, but also corroborates the genre’s resilience in the midst of the debilitating and homogenising forces of globalisation.

Several terms have been used to designate the genre. According to Jan Borm travel writing is not a genre as such. On the other hand, Borm argues, it is a “collective term for a variety of texts both predominantly fictional and non-fictional whose main theme is travel” (13). Borm distinguishes between travel book and travel writing. He defines travel book as a “predominantly non-fictional genre” and travel writing or travel literature as an “overall heading for texts whose main theme



is travel” (19). Conversely the critic Paul Fussell equates travel writing to travel book. But he emphasises that travel book has to be distinguished from other travel related texts which are less narrative in structure like the guidebook. Hence his famous statement “just as tourism is not travel, the guidebook is not the travel book” (*Norton Book* 15). Some critics see travel book as a genre, whereas others see it as part of a larger species. Thus Fussell defines travel book as “a sub-species of memoir” (*Abroad* 203). Before 1900 the genre was called “voyages and travels” in the English speaking world which encompassed a variety of materials like ships’ logs, journals, letters, reports, accounts of explorations, pilgrimages, colonial conquests, and so on. Most of the “voyages and travels” texts disseminated information and imparted advice to prospective travellers, in contrast to the aesthetically oriented modern travel books. In other words we can say that the earlier travel texts were highly impersonal in tone than those appeared in the twentieth century which are noted for their personalised tone and subjectivity.

The idea that travel book is a nonfictional, first-person narrative of the experiences of travels does not qualify to define all travel narratives. Travel writers always have to negotiate between the fictional and nonfictional elements: nonfictional in the sense that they are true records of actual travel experiences and fictional in the sense that the authors are likely to embellish the descriptions with their own imaginations to make the piece enjoyable. Thus to ensure readability and enjoyability certain elements of fiction are inevitably made use of. In other words, in the process of transferring the travel experiences into the travel text, the writer would naturally make use of his/her imaginative skills and subjective impressions making the material more or less an intermingling of fact and fiction. In *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* Holland and Huggan define travel narratives as “fictions of factual representations” (10).

The literary and cultural status of the genre has always been a matter of debate. In spite of its growing popularity the genre it has often been relegated to a lower status than novel or poetry. Many writers like Bruce Chatwin, Jenni Diski, and Claude Levi Strauss detested to be labelled as travel writers. Fussell’s question, “is there not perhaps something in the genre that attracts second-rate talents?” points to the general sentiment of dismissiveness towards the genre (*Abroad* 212).

Travel writing has a long history. The urge to step out of one’s dwelling place to discover the wider world has been always been one of man’s basic interests. There are several reasons for this. It can be the love of adventure, fascination for the distant exotic lands, exploration and so on. The wealth of travel texts from the early times testifies man’s inherent desire for voyaging. A survey of the travel texts proves that they have been subjected to changes in both content and form down the ages. The historical, social, and cultural factors that contribute to the travel texts continue to inform the genre. Man’s intense passion for the foreign lands accounts for the persistent popularity of the genre. In fact the metaphor of journey is a pervasive one and is used to describe all forms of human actions like, “the road to success,” “the journey of life” and so on. As Mary B. Campbell writes: “Travel, then, is paradoxically a root--a radical. We find it in our myths of origin, in our earliest literatures, in our oldest critical terms for the most essential figure of speech” (2). Symbolic and literal representations of travel are found in the Bible and other classics as well. The exodus of the Israelites to Canaan is an example. Homer’s *The Odyssey* is themed around an epic journey undertaken by the heroic protagonist Odysseus. Today the word “odyssey” has acquired the meaning of a journey often epic in nature, in the literal and symbolic levels. John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1667) is an allegorical representation of the journey of life itself. Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* is a classic piece of the medieval times based on a pilgrimage to the Canterbury Cathedral.

Travel writing has a long history that dates back to the ancient times. People travelled for various reasons from prehistoric times. As to which is the inaugural work of the genre in Western literary tradition is a matter of contestation and debate. Nevertheless it is widely accepted that *The Odyssey* is the work that inaugurated Western travel writing. Though fictive in nature, it influenced travel narratives of later centuries. However there were oral traditions of travel stories in the prehistoric times. *Periploi* were documents that served the purpose of providing directions and instructions for sea farers in the ancient world. Herodotus’ *The Histories* (431-425 BCE) and Strabos’ *Geography* (7-24 CE)--both compilations of information garnered during the writers’ own journeys--are sometimes categorised as travel literature. Nevertheless, accounts of travels in the ancient era never equalled the modern day notion of travel writing. *Pilgrimage of Egeria* (381- 84 CE), an account of the pilgrimage undertaken by a nun by name Egeria to the Holy Land, is the first of its kind, being a first-person narrative in the nonfictional mode produced in the Classical era in the Western world. It is in the form of a long letter sent to her fellow nuns back home. Lucian’s *True History* written between 160 and 185 CE is the first parody of travel writing. It portrays a satirical journey to the moon.

Like the classical age medieval era also produced travel narratives abundantly. It is during this period that travels to the continents of Asia and Africa became the subject matter of many travel texts. Stories evoking fear and surprise were brought back to Europe by European travellers. Stories of dog-headed men and winged centaurs were very popular. One of the major motifs of the medieval travel narratives was the pilgrimage. Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (1387) is a brilliant



depiction of the medieval pilgrimage. Alongside pilgrims, there were also other travellers like merchants, diplomats, soldiers, and scholars during the medieval age. *Travels of Marco Polo* is a thirteenth century travelogue that recounts a diplomatic mission to the court of Kublai Khan, the emperor of Mongol. Another influential travel narrative of the late Middle Ages is the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (1356). Another important motif of travel literature during the medieval age was the chivalric quest. Quest romances were popular in Europe during the middle ages and it became the dominant motif in several travel texts. One of the greatest travel writers of the East during the middle ages was the Moroccan judge Ibn Battutah whose *Travels* (1355) recounts his journey across the continents of Africa and Asia.

Pilgrimage, the most popular mode of travels in the premodern days gave way to explorations, expeditions, and mercantile journeys in the early modern period. Apart from a few writers the major contributors to the genre in the early modern period were the editors, pilgrims, errant knights, merchants, explorers, colonisers, captives and castaways, ambassadors, pirates and scientists. The four voyages of Columbus undertaken between 1492 and 1504 were inspired by the travel narratives of Marco Polo and Mandeville. One of the striking features of Columbus' voyages is that it marked the transition from medieval to modern ideas, attitudes, and practices. The shift in the focus from the classical texts to objective observation with one's own eyes is a radical change that influenced travel literature during the early modern period. Columbus' voyages thus inaugurated an era of European discovery which inspired many navigators around the world, especially Portugal and Spain. Though the English made a late entry into the ventures of the exploration of foreign lands, the nation gained a new momentum in the wake of the successful completion of the three-year voyage around the world attempted by Francis Drake of England in 1580. Other European Nation States like Spain and Portugal had undertaken successful explorative voyages long before the English and established trade links with the East. By the end of the sixteenth century, Britain had spread its wings of exploration as far as the Far East, Near East, Africa, North and South Americas, the East Indies, and the West Indies.

With the dramatic increase in sea voyages, travel narratives also emerged abundantly. Innovations in the field of transport revolutionised travel. Much of these explorative journeys were impelled by the knowledge of opportunities in the field of trade, commerce and colonisation. As a result travel narratives began to attain recognition and proved helpful and valuable to other navigators also. The invention of the printing press also played a significant role in the spread of travel narratives. There emerged a wealth of travel literature during this period. During the sixteenth century documentation became an integral part of travel writing. It was inevitably imposed on travellers, most of whose travels were supported by sponsors. Emphasis was also laid on identifying people, places, customs and manners different from those back home. Secrecy of the documented facts was insisted by sponsoring bodies for expansionist, colonialist, and exploitative motives. The emphasis on empirical truthfulness was in a way indicative of the dominance of fact over fiction. Documentation of travel experiences was premised on the assumption that it would overthrow unwanted speculations that harm the scientificity, authenticity, and credibility of the reports of the faraway lands. It was widely believed that the travellers' eyewitness accounts of foreign peoples, places, and events, guaranteed independence of perspectives and individualism. Publishers and editors published travel stories in great numbers. Richard Hakluyt, the English editor of early travellers, collected travel-themed materials in English and other languages and published in his epic work *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffics, and Discoveries of the English Nation*, the first edition of which was published in 1589 and an expanded second edition in 1598. It ushered in the entry of the English in sea exploration ventures. Fascinating stories from far and exotic lands were of great interest to the English audience. Sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed a flood of travel texts in England. William H. Sherman observes that Hakluyt's work "testified to the dramatic expansion of England's geographical horizons" (20). He also observes that by the end of the sixteenth century the only alien places about which there weren't much travel stories by the English were that of Australia and Antarctica (20). As the English spread its wings of expansion eastwards as well as westwards, by the second half of the fifteenth century travel accounts emerged lavishly. Important travel writers during this period were Thomas Coryate, William Lithgow, George Sandys, and Fynes Moryson. During the early modern period it is through the editors that individual travel accounts reached the eager and the passionate English audience. Thus Hakluyt's anthology of travel stories collected from travellers across the European continent was immensely successful. After Hakluyt, the baton fell into the hands of another editor Samuel Purchas, by whose hands too travel accounts were collected, catalogued and anthologised, though in a different vein from his predecessor. His seminal work is titled *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas his Pilgrimes* (1625). Awnsham and John Churchill's *Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1704) is yet another worthy attempt at anthologising travel accounts. These early travel accounts were in the forms of letters, reports, logs, essays, sketches, poems or plays. Some of the successful travel narratives during this period are Walter Raleigh's *Discovery of the Large, Rich and Beautiful Empire of Guiana* (1595) and Thomas Coryate's *Crudities* (1611). Raleigh's work, themed and modelled on chivalric quest is noted for its autobiographical elements unlike other exploration accounts during this period. Thomas Harriot's *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588) opens up the trade potential of Virginia apart from an impelling account of the customs and manners of the native Virginians. Stories of the distressing experiences of captives and castaways were also quite popular during this period. A significant development in the field of travel writing



was the issuance of instructions and guidelines on how to observe and document facts. That many of the travellers did not religiously follow those guidelines is true. However, it is the travellers' idiosyncratic versions of the stories of their extravagant wanderings in the foreign lands that mostly attracted the readers.

A tension between fact and fiction has always been there right from the early modern period. Travel writers however straddled between these extremities and strived to strike a balance between the two. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) is a travel narrative satiric in tone. The book which has all the features of a travel narrative, satirises the economic and political conditions of Europe. David Llyod's mock-epic poem *The Legend of Captain Jones* (1631) is a satire on Raleigh's *Discovery*. Joseph Hall's *Another World and Yet the Same* (1605) parodies travel books and all the paraphernalia attached to it.

Eighteenth century was the golden period of travel-themed writings in British literature. Technological developments in Europe in the eighteenth century eased travelling unprecedentedly in terms of cost and convenience. Travel narratives--fictional, nonfictional, and philosophic--found expression in the hands of writers like Daniel Defoe, Joseph Addison, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, Samuel Johnson, James Boswell, Laurence Sterne, Mary Wollstonecraft, Jonathan Swift, and Oliver Goldsmith. Voyages undertaken for purposes as varied as trade, missionary activities, diplomatic missions, and explorative ventures produced innumerable travel texts. Lockean philosophy with its emphasis on human experiences as the basis of knowledge was highly influential. Above all Britain had established itself as the largest colonising country in the world by this time with areas as far as Canada, Australasia, Caribbean islands and India under the direct or indirect control of the Empire of Britain. Britain had also gained mercantile control over large parts of the New World, China and West Africa. Britain's travels outside Europe were mainly for the purpose of trade, diplomatic missions, missionary activities, and scientific explorations. All these endeavours generated travel-themed texts which dealt with tropes ranging from highly objective accounts of scientific explorations to extremely subjective accounts of the encounters in foreign lands. In order to systematise and regularise the mode of travel writing, a specific pattern was introduced. Emphasising accuracy and technical correctness, travellers recorded their experiences on a daily basis. Mixing of fact and fiction became less attractive. Success of travel accounts depended less on literary excellence than on its truthfulness and utility. Nevertheless works like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *The Life, Adventures, and the Piracies of the Famous Captain Singleton* (1720)--both mingling fact and fiction--were highly successful. Large number of British travellers visited Latin America during the eighteenth century. British traveller Alexander Von Humboldt's expedition through the Amazon during early nineteenth century produced many volumes of data and inspired many scientists in Britain including Charles Darwin.

However there emerged a new culture of travel in England namely the "Grand Tour" in the second half of the eighteenth century. Ritualistic in nature and educative in purpose Grand Tours were undertaken by the young men of the British ruling class and aristocracy to the cities of ancient learning and classical arts like Italy, France and Rome. It was a preparatory exercise to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills to handle positions of power that await them in their home country. Imparting a sense of historical consciousness and good judgement were also thought to be the aims of the Grand Tour. Joseph Addison's *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705) served as a guidebook to Grand Tourists for quite a long time. Grand Tourists, apart from cultivating a historical consciousness and chiselling their artistic talents, took it as an opportunity to collect artefacts of antiquity from ancient cities like Rome and put it on display back home in England. The second Earl of Arundel, while touring around Italy amassed a huge collection of ancient Italian artefacts, which when displayed in Britain, were a feast to the eyes of the Britons. James Buzard opines that the Grand Tour was intended to "usher the unformed, insular young Englishman into that domain of good manners and educated tastes which transcended single nations"(41). On the other hand Grand Tours have not always been fruitful as many of the young Grand Tourists misused the opportunity to indulge in sexual vagaries abroad. Thus they returned home having the sublime goals of this educative tour unmet and unattained. By the end of the eighteenth century Grand Tours were no longer the privilege of the ruling class or the gentry. People, including women and children from the lower sections of the society, took themselves as tourists following the itinerary of the Grand Tourists. Political developments within the European continent initiated an urge to find new tourist routes within the country itself, which resulted in the inclusion of Scottish Highlands among the itinerary of the British tourists. Samuel Johnson's *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* recounts his tour to the Scottish Highlands in 1773. With the rise of the middle class, more and more people began to travel and it marked the onset of mass tourism. Moreover the emergence of travel agencies and travel guidebooks for the aid of the travellers made travelling easier and safer than ever before. Travellers of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries made use of their amenities for the maximum utilisation of their short itineraries in the least time and lowest cost.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's there was a tremendous increase in the transnational movements across the world. The locomotive ease facilitated by improvements in technology and transport kept people on the move. The advent of the automobiles and aeroplanes in the twentieth century increased human mobility to a greater extent than before.



Mass tourism became the norm of the age, which some commentators regard as the democratisation of travel. It was also the golden period of the British Empire and much of the British travel writing in the early twentieth century emerged out of the possibilities opened up by colonialism. Much of the travel writing during the late nineteenth century were realistic in style and showed complicity with imperialism. Henry Morton Stanley's *In Darkest Africa* (1890) was a bestseller and was translated into five languages. It is a book rich in colonial overtones and throws light on the brutality of the colonialists. Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa* (1897) was also a commercial success and is noted for the mild treatment meted out to the native Africans to the extent of accepting their merits and values. Isabella Bird's *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (1880) is her second book about Japan wherein she gives a detailed account of her journey in Northern Japan. *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (1888) by Charles Doughty, though not a commercial success at the time of its publication later became highly influential and inspired great writers like Ezra Pound and W. B. Yeats. Many of the writers during this period travelled a lot taking advantage of the locomotive ease facilitated by technology. Writers like Hemingway, Pound, Eliot, and Joyce are examples. Some of the acclaimed poets and novelists of the early twentieth century like Stevenson, London, Lawrence, Waugh, and Greene also have successful travel narratives also to their credit. Before the twentieth century, travelling was done for various purposes: trade, missionary activities, colonial expansion or diplomatic missions. However in the twentieth century there emerged a culture in which the travellers travelled to write. Regarding the narrative style of the twentieth-century British travel writing, Helen Carr observes that there was a shift "from the detailed, realist text, often with an overtly didactic or at any rate moral purpose, to a more impressionistic style with the interest focused as much on the travellers' responses or consciousness as their travels" (74). Thus the interweaving of fact and fiction rendered travel literature of the early twentieth century more literary than those of the early periods. In *The Path to Rome* (1902) Belloc recounts his travels on foot to Rome via Germany, France, and Italy. Belloc who willingly renounced the comforts of modern travel, distinguished himself from other tourists and chose to tread on the paths less travelled by and also to visit places rarely described by other writers. Edith Wharton, a contemporary of Belloc, shares his idea of distinguishing himself from other tourists. Henry James' finest travel book *The American Scene* (1907) is quite autobiographical in nature and covers his responses to the American scenes and sights after a long absence of twenty five years. The visit, though it brings back many of his childhood memories, disturbs him by the changes that has come upon the country.

During the years between the two World Wars travel writing flourished in Britain. To many of the writers of this period, the genre was a platform to pronounce their views on the world affairs. Some of the critically acclaimed travel writings between the wars are T. E. Lawrence's *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926), D.H.Lawrence's *Sea and Sardinia*(1921) and *Mornings in Mexico* (1927) and Andre Gide's *Voyage to the Congo* (1927). Other modernist writers like Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, George Orwell, Peter Fleming, Robert Byron, Earnest Hemingway, Rebecca West, and Freya Stark also took up the genre of travel writing.

The postwar writers of travel narratives like Patrick Leigh Fermor, Wilfred Thesiger, Eric Newby, and Norman Lewis were highly successful. Fermor's first travel book about a postwar tour to the West Indies is a book titled *The Traveller's Tree* (1950). Writing in the early tradition of travel and exploration, Thesiger's *Arabian Sands* (1959) and the *The Marsh Arabs* (1964) express the author's fascination for desert life and the Marsh culture. Historically Western travel writing has its foundations chiefly on the assumptions of the moral, cultural, and social superiority of the West over the rest of the world. But with the end of the Second World War this notion of superiority became unpalatable to the readers. Moreover with the dawn of the so called era of decolonisation and the acknowledgement that there is no place left unexplored on earth, the genre lost its lustre and glory very soon, only to be reawakened in the 1970s. During this period there was considerable amount of literary output in the genre, which was commercially successful and highly innovative. The most successful ones were Paul Theroux's *The Great Railway Bazaar* (1975) and *The Old Pantagonian Express* (1979), Peter Matthiessen's *The Snow Leopard* (1975), Bruce Chatwin's *In Pantagonia* (1977), and Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* (1980). The novel technique of combining fiction with travel experiences emerged with V. S. Naipaul. *Granta*, a British literary magazine, instrumental in the rejuvenation of the public interest in the genre, published its first special issue on travel writing in 1984.

The fact that travel involves a great deal of risks and adventures made it the monopoly of men. As a result travel-related writings also became gendered, featuring only accounts of explorative and adventurous journeys by men. But the truth is that travel narratives of women had been there right from the premodern days, though not popular. In connection with the second-wave feminist movement of early 1970s, women's travel writing attained a special attention with its focus on the revival and rediscovery of women's travel texts. There was a conscious effort to make these texts available to the reading public. Studies were conducted with special focus on how patriarchal notions impinge on the status of women's travel writing. Many of the women-authored travel books were reprinted and some others were anthologised. *Ladies on the Loose: Women Travellers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (1981), *The Blessings of a Good, Thick Skirt* (1988) and *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers* (1989) are the titles of some of the studies on women's travel writing. *Wayward Women: A Guide*



to *Women Travellers* (1990) by Jane Robinson provides information about four hundred women travel writers. *Unsuitable for Ladies: An Anthology of Women Travellers* (1994) by Jane Robinson is yet another study on women's travel narratives. *Discourses of Difference* (1991) is a seminal study on women's travel writing by Sara Mills. Both Robinson and Mills comment on the plenitude of information in female-authored travel writings. Susan Bassnett in her essay "Travel Writing and Gender" brings forth two issues that continue to problematise the genre: whether there is any fundamental difference between the travel narratives of male and female writers and whether the genre is "inherently gendered" (227). However the singularity of women's travel narratives has been universally identified and many of them stand apart for the exceptional way in which they criticised the contemporary male-authored travel narratives that distortingly exoticised and eroticised the unfamiliar East. Some of the early travel accounts by women are epistolary in nature. They are noted for their direct, down-to-earth style and refutation of the male-centred fantastical accounts of the East. From early times, women travelled in various roles and for professional and personal purposes. But having denied a chance to position themselves among the mainstream male writers, most of the women travellers penned down their travel experiences with the least hope of publishing it. Yet these travel accounts stood apart from their male counterparts for their personal touch. The literariness of these works was devalued on the basis of lack of authenticity. Most of them were in the form of letters, diaries or sketches with no intention of publishing it. Isabella Bird's *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* (1879) is one good example. It is an assemblage of seventeen letters she wrote to her sister.

The Occident-Orient dichotomy is less evident in women's travel writing than that of their male counterparts. Women's travel narratives have been of diverse types ranging from epistolary and journalistic forms to travel books that cut across the boundaries of autobiography, ethnography, and anecdotal narratives. Self-promotion and search for identity are some of the motifs in women's travel writing. In some of them we can also see a striving for beating their male counterparts in terms of physical stamina and the boldness to face dangers. Women travel writers have also attempted varied styles in their renderings. In Sara Wheeler's and Dervla Murphy's travel narratives one finds an interweaving of outward and inward journeys.

Another important aspect of travel books is that they are good narratives about the writers themselves as well as about the outer world. As Holland and Huggan argue, "Travel narratives articulate a poetics of the wandering subject" (14). A survey of travel narratives down the ages reveals the fact that the genre has served as a platform for the exposition of the writer's own thoughts, feelings and emotions. Carl Thompson views that this tendency to exploit the autobiographical potentialities of the genre is an offshoot of the emphasis on eyewitness accounts and empirical truthfulness to ensure the genuineness of the report of the outer world (98). Yet there is a lot of variation in the writers' exploitation of genre as a medium for expressing their subjective thoughts. Some are wholly narratives of the writer's personal thoughts alone and some others mediate between the outer and the inner worlds. Rob Nixon views that modern travel book is characterised by the vacillation between a "semi-ethnographic, distanced, analytical mode" and "an autobiographical, emotionally tangled mode" (15). Before the eighteenth century the exposition of the narratorial self was less common in travel writing because focus was laid on garnering information and knowledge through objective observation. Joseph Addison's *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705) is a good example. It is in the latter half of the eighteenth century that a noticeably personalised tone began to appear in the genre. Carl Thompson views it as an outcome of the eighteenth-century sentimental and romanticist fervour in the literary and cultural manifestations with its renewed focus on human emotions and feelings (110-111). Since the late eighteenth century the interweaving of the self and the other or the inner and the outer worlds began to be practised in travel narratives, though the strategies employed and the techniques utilised varied from one writer to the other. Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) and W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* (1995) are travel narratives that abound in digressive depictions of peoples and places far removed from those they encounter in their real journey. Many of the travel narratives written in this vein stand apart for its complex psychological and emotional overtones. In some travelogues, external journey serves as a pretext for the more subtle and complex internal journey that results in self realisation.

It is the concept of otherness that has always sustained travel writing. In general terms, travels are occasions of encounters between the self and the other. Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs, in their jointly edited work *Perspectives on Travel Writing* incorporate essays that draw attention to the various issues that inform and interrogate the genre of travel literature with a major focus on how European travel literature has not only been instrumental in constructing and creating its Oriental Others but also in fashioning its own self. Thus travel narratives serve as a medium not only for portraying the other, but also for asserting one's own self. In order to maintain the superiority of the narratorial self, the writer adopts the rhetoric of difference to places visited, peoples encountered, and cultures confronted. This aspect of the logic of identity/difference in travel writing has attracted much critical attention in the recent years. Juxtaposing the identity of the self with that of the other is carried out in such a manner that the superiority of the self over the inferior other is reinforced. For this the traveller assumes social, cultural, racial, and even psychological and intellectual supremacy over the travelled places and people. The trope of the self-



elevation of identity at the expense of the relegated other is either explicit or implicit in travel narratives. Travel writing's agenda of the promotion of the authorial self is directly discernible in travel narratives like Henry Morton Stanley's *Through the Dark Continent* (1878). In travel narratives like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1901) and Graham Greene's *Journey Without Maps* (1936), the writer's scheme of self-assertion and advancement is brought about in more subtle ways. The target of the rhetorical strategy of othering, can be people as varied as those of one's own culture or even the fellow travellers. Among the people of one's own culture, dominance is claimed on the grounds of intellectual and educational supremacy, greater degree of worldliness and exposure, and broadmindedness. The traveller-tourist dichotomy is also exploited to a great extent by modern travel writers to establish the authorial voice of the travel writer. By relegating the tourist as indolent, uncultured, and lacking in any sense of proper judgement, the writer demonstrates his/her dominance over the other. It is worthwhile to say that not all travel writers engage in the task of asserting their selves. However in some cases the travel writer deliberately relinquishes narratorial selfhood and employs techniques like self-deprecation and self-irony. Writers like Peter Fleming, Eric Newby, and more recently those like Redmond O'Hanlon, Tim Cahill, and Bill Bryson have exhibited this self-ironising tendency in their writings.

The genre has had an unprecedented literary, academic, and commercial success recently. Investigating the current popularity of the genre, Carl Thompson identifies the factors that contribute to it. Thompson observes that while the huge number of travel books emerging from the publishing houses attests to the genre's commercial success, the interdisciplinary relevance, rise of postcolonial and feminist studies, debates on canonicity and the emergence of a number of successful travel writers the world over account for the genre's literary and academic success (1-3). Two journals namely *Studies in Travel Writing* and *Journeys* are currently in circulation. The British journal *Granta* also published several travel-themed issues. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is a groundbreaking work that laid the foundations for the recent academic interest in the genre. Ushering in a major shift in travel studies, it revolutionised the epistemological conventions of the East held thus far in the literary and non-literary renderings of the West.

Travel is a very complex affair that brings under its corpus diverse movements: real or imaginary, physical or mental, temporal or spatial. As a genre, travel writing encompasses materials of variegated narrative modes, styles, tonal registers, and techniques. In contrast to the highly objective and matter-of-fact depictions of the outer world in the travel narratives of the early period, the modern travel books are noted for subjectivity and deployment of innovative styles and techniques that mixes fact and fiction. The writer's digressive odyssey and excursions into the territories far removed from the physical world he/she is in, renders it generically indefinable and repulsive. Travel writing is thus a large and ever-changing genre that has received much critical attention. Its interdisciplinary relevance proclaims its continued interest among the scholars. Commenting on the protean nature of the genre, Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs observe: "stories emerging from space travel, from virtual travel, and from the 'travails' of the world's refugees and migrants will doubtless continue to extend the genre in the years to come" (10-11). That the genre will continue to inform other branches of knowledge and conditions of human lives point to the increasing scope for research in the field of travel writing.

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