

CHAPTER 44

Travel

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To TRA'VEL. *v.n.* [This word is generally supposed originally the same with *travail*, and to differ only as particular from general: in some writers the word is written alike in all its senses; but it is more convenient to write *travail* for *labour*, and *travel* for *journey*.]

1. To make journeys: it is used for sea as well as land, though sometimes we distinguish it from *voyage*, a word appropriated to the sea.

Fain wou'd I *travel* to some foreign shore,
So might I to myself myself restore. *Dryden.*

In 1725, the novelist, poet, and playwright Mary Davys declared that the novel was dead. "Tis now for some time, that those Sort of Writings call'd *Novels* have been a great deal out of Use and Fashion," she observed, "and that the Ladies (for whose Service they were chiefly design'd) have been taken up with Amusements of more Use and Improvement; I mean History and Travels."¹ Davys's assertion that "Novels" and "Travels" are distinct kinds belies their actual overlap in the 1720s. Jonathan Swift satirized the gullible readers of travel books in *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, by Lemuel Gulliver* (1726), and travel would remain a staple structural device of the eighteenth-century novel. Many eighteenth-century authors whom we now classify as novelists – including Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, Laurence Sterne, and Ann Radcliffe – also published accounts of their travels.

But Davys was right that "Travels" – by which she meant travel books – were wildly popular. "Travels" constituted a major category of the British book trade from the first century of printing, and travel writing had an impact on almost every other genre of writing and area of knowledge. Thousands of individual accounts were published, and the seventeenth century saw a proliferation of collections. By the eighteenth century, travel books were so numerous as to need their own bibliography: in 1704, the brothers Awsham and John Churchill published a *Collection of Voyages*

and Travels (1704), which includes a lengthy “Catalogue of most Books of Travels” in English, Latin, Italian, Spanish, and French. The category of “travel writing,” as distinct from “Books of Travels,” encompasses an even broader variety of forms, from personal correspondence to official reports.

Because most of our knowledge comes from written records, we know far more about the travels of elites than we do about the customary travels of the poor or the forced travel of slaves. Nonetheless, it is worth keeping in mind the question asked by the editors of a valuable recent anthology of eighteenth-century travel writings: “who counts as a traveller, or a travel writer?”² At the height of the Grand Tour craze in the mid-eighteenth century, some 15,000 to 20,000 British Grand Tourists were abroad each year. Meanwhile, the number of enslaved Africans forced annually across the Atlantic by British traders was well over double that many.

EXPLORERS AND TRADERS

The most widely read travel books were accounts of explorers and traders, which dated back centuries. Christopher Columbus was profoundly influenced by accounts of the Venetian merchant Marco Polo, who traveled to Cathay (China) in the thirteenth century, and by the near-mythical Sir John Mandeville, whose fantastical *Travels* (1357) was one of the most popular vernacular texts of the Middle Ages. In England, Richard Eden published the first collection of translated travel narratives, *The Decades of the Newe Worlde or West India* (1555), and Richard Hakluyt rallied to the cause of English nationalism by publishing *Principle Navigations, Voiages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589; 2nd edn., 3 vols., 1598–1600). Among the most celebrated explorers were Sir Francis Drake, whose circumnavigation of the globe sparked numerous accounts after his return to England in 1580, and Sir Walter Raleigh, who described his own colonizing efforts in *Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana* (1595).

In the seventeenth century, the writing and editing of travel accounts would become something of an industry. Thomas Coryate described his trek through Europe and India in *Coryats Crudites* (1611), and Samuel Purchas edited a series of accounts culminating in *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes* (4 vols., 1625). Court poet and colonist George Sandys’s *Relation of a Journey* (1615) became an influential

source of information on the Near East, as did merchant and jeweler Sir John Chardin's *Travels* (10 vols., 1686–1711). Despite having been court-martialed for cruelty, the pirate and seaman William Dampier died with a popular reputation as the greatest explorer-adventurer between Drake and Captain James Cook for having published *A New Voyage Round the World* (1697). Not surprisingly, Swift critiqued the legacy of Gulliver's "cousin Dampier."

MISSIONARIES

Travel literature was second in popularity only to religious and didactic literature, and these categories overlap in the case of missionary writings. From the founding of the Society of Jesus in 1540, Jesuit missionaries began accruing an enormous body of memoirs, private correspondence, and official "Annual Letters" describing their travels to India, Africa, America, and elsewhere, and these writings had an almost incalculable influence on European ideas about the world. In England, Protestant sectarian groups such as Quakers and Methodists were especially well-organized publishers of missionary reports. The journals of Methodist leaders John Wesley and George Whitefield record their literally hundreds of thousands of miles of travels, and Quaker women, as well as men, published narratives of their journeys throughout Britain and "beyond the seas." One especially harrowing account, *This Is a Short Relation of ... Katharine Evans and Sarah Chevers* (1662), describes these women's imprisonment for three years by the Inquisition in Malta. Undaunted, Evans and Chevers returned to England and continued their missionary travels throughout England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

Quaker women had relatively easy access to print via the Quaker press, but in general women travel writers were much less likely to print their works. Women colonists, domestic tourists, and others left an extensive body of correspondence, diaries, and other writings describing their travels to family and friends, and much of this material remains unpublished. One especially intrepid gentlewoman, Celia Fiennes, traveled to every county in England on horseback between 1684 and 1712. Although she prepared a memoir in 1702, it was not printed until the Victorian period, when it appeared as *Through England on a Side Saddle*, a title

foregrounding her sex. Another posthumously published memoir, Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763), was one of the greatest achievements in travel writing by an author of either sex. Recounting her travels from 1716 to 1718 as the wife of the English ambassador to the Ottoman empire, Montagu's epistolary travel book challenged Britons' assumptions about the social institutions and customs of the Turkish people, and her book was admired by Johnson, Edward Gibbon, Voltaire, and others.

Emboldened by Montagu's achievement, women travel writers began to publish in significant numbers. One year after Radcliffe published her *Journey Made in the Summer of 1794, through Holland and the Western Frontier of Germany* (1795), the feminist author Mary Wollstonecraft published her *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796). Based on her business trip to the relative wilderness of Scandinavia, accompanied only by her infant daughter and maid, Wollstonecraft's travelogue combines Enlightenment observation of customs and manners with a new Romantic emphasis on subjectivity, and renders its descriptions of scenic landscapes in the fashionable aesthetic vocabulary of the sublime and picturesque.

GUIDEBOOKS

The most enduring category of travel writing, though, was the guidebook. Dating back to ancient Greece and still flourishing today, guidebooks ranged from itineraries for tourists to topographical surveys for politicians, merchants, and armchair travelers. One especially enduring guidebook, Daniel Defoe's *Tour thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (3 vols., 1724–6), was based on a series of business trips through the new sovereign territory of Great Britain (see chapter 32, "Nationalism"). It was also indebted to the works of the great Tudor and Stuart topographers and historians John Leland, John Stow, and especially William Camden, who anticipated Defoe in employing the structural device of the walking tour in *Britannia* (1586; rev. edn. by Edmund Gibson, 1695).

Even in Defoe's day, though, the best-known English guidebook for the Continent was James Howell's *Instructions for Forreine Travell* (1642). Compared to modern travel guides, Howell's *Instructions* provides little practical information; his emphasis is on the moral and civic ends of touring and the importance of careful intellectual preparation for one's travels. Howell advises prospective travelers to "reade all the Topographers that ever writ of, or anatomiz'd a Town or Countrey," and to "mingle

Discourse” with experienced travelers to “to draw and draine out of them all they possibly know.”³

THE GRAND TOUR

Howell also reminds young travelers to bring money for expenses such as instruction in “*Riding, Dancing, [and] Fencing*” (p. 49). As this advice suggests, his guidebook was intended for the category of elite travelers known as Grand Tourists. The Grand Tour of Europe was undertaken by young men of the ruling classes upon completion of university studies, and lasted anywhere from a few months to several years. According to Thomas Nugent’s guidebook, *The Grand Tour* (1749), its purpose was “to enrich the mind with knowledge, to rectify the judgment, to remove the prejudices of education, to compose the outward manners, and in a word to form the complete gentleman.”⁴ Grand Tourists tended to keep to a set itinerary whose indispensable highlights were Paris and the major urban centers of Italy. As Johnson observed, “A man who has not been in Italy, is always conscious of an inferiority, from his not having seen what it is expected a man should see” (Boswell, *Life*, 3:36).

The Grand Tour diaries of Joseph Addison and James Boswell established their reputations as authors. Addison’s *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705), based on his five-year tour of Europe, is characteristic of early eighteenth-century accounts in focusing on history and art rather than on living people (including himself). Addison’s work is filled with references to ancient authors; his classical preoccupations so color his descriptions that the Italian landscape sometimes seems void of modern life. By comparison, Boswell’s *Account of Corsica, the Journal of a Tour to that Island; and Memoirs of Pascal Paoli* (1768), based on his own Tour from 1763 to 1766, exemplifies the greater personal element in later eighteenth-century travel accounts.

Critics of the Tour debated its actual educational value. As Boswell’s private notes suggest, the ideology of the Tour was at odds with its real attractions for many young men. The novelist Samuel Richardson pointedly makes his corrupt rake Lovelace a well-informed graduate of the Tour, while Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, a well-informed observer of these young men, lamented that their “whole business abroad (as far as I can perceive) [is] to buy new cloaths.” On another occasion she complained that “the folly of British boys and stupidity or knavery of [their] governors [i.e., tutors] have gained us the glorious title of Golden Asses all over Italy.”⁵

EMPIRICAL OBSERVATION

James Howell emphasizes the importance of reading as preparation for travel. Significantly, though, he adds that “one’s own Ocular view ... will still find out something new and unpointed at by any other.”⁶ Eighteenth-century travel writing was greatly influenced by the scientific method advanced by Sir Francis Bacon and the empiricist philosophy of John Locke (see chapter 37, “Science and technology,” and chapter 33, “Philosophy”), and firsthand observation was of paramount importance. In 1666 the Royal Society for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge published Robert Boyle’s “General Heads for a Natural History of a Country.” Boyle’s guidelines for recording details of a country’s terrain, natural resources, flora and fauna, and inhabitants encouraged a new sense of travel as data collection. His emphasis on the importance of noting a country’s trees suggests that the notorious comments of Defoe and Johnson on the shortage of forests in Scotland might be seen less as xenophobic than as exemplifying their efforts to be good systematic observers of nature.

By the eighteenth century, scientists (astronomers, geographers, botanists, mapmakers, and others) routinely accompanied sailors on official voyages of exploration. Captain James Cook’s three famous voyages to the South and North Pacific between 1768 and 1779 were officially made for scientific purposes (as well as for purposes of colonization). It has been estimated that Cook’s vessel the *Endeavour* cost the British crown about £13,000, and that about £4,000 of this went to the Royal Society to buy scientific instruments and to pay researchers. The information brought back by Cook and others prompted new questions about the development of human societies and animal and vegetable species, and contributed to the emergence of the modern disciplines of social research (see chapter 12, “Anthropology”).

GETTING AROUND

Short of elaborately equipped research vessels, how did eighteenth-century travelers actually get about? Contemporary travel writings tend to be reticent on such issues. In his *Journey to the Western Islands*, Johnson mentions details of horses, inns, and boats and once alludes to “climbing crags, and treading bogs” (*Works*, 9:29), but for the most part we are left piecing together hints regarding the actual mechanics of travel. For all but the ruling classes, the primary method of travel was on foot. The

cost of keeping a horse was prohibitive to the majority of the population, and even hiring the right to cling to the roof of a stagecoach was beyond the means of the poor. On rough roads, walking could be more comfortable and faster than traveling by coach or wagon. The eighteenth century saw important developments in carriage construction, culminating in Obadiah Elliott's patenting of the elliptical spring (1805), which made possible lighter, faster, and more comfortable carriages. Until then, though, long-distance passenger travel was exhausting.

The most important development in eighteenth-century British transportation, however, had to do not with carriage design but with shifts in the system for maintaining the kingdom's roads. At the beginning of the century, interregional traffic was limited, but population explosion and the growth of manufactures contributed to a phenomenal increase in the exchange of goods. Beginning in 1663, Parliament gave a small number of trustees authority to bar roads and charge tolls to raise money for road improvements (and personal profit). By 1800 there were more than a thousand such "turnpike trusts." As a consequence of improved roads, coach journey times were substantially reduced, especially in the later eighteenth century. In 1754, the 400-mile journey from London to Edinburgh took about ten days in summer, and twelve in winter. Twenty years later, the same trip in the other direction was advertised as taking only four days.

JOHNSON AS TRAVELER AND TRAVEL WRITER

Although he left Britain only once, for a three-month tour of northern France with the Thrales in 1775, Johnson was a lifelong armchair traveler. According to Boswell, he first grew interested in seeing Scotland when "his father put Martin's Account into his hands" (Boswell, *Life*, 5:13). It is easy to see how Martin Martin's *Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (1703), with its vivid descriptions of animals and birds, would keep a child spellbound. Decades later, when traveling through Scotland at sixty-three, Johnson demonstrated for his astonished hosts the movements of a strange animal recently "discovered" on one of Cook's expeditions, the kangaroo: "He stood erect, put out his hands like feelers, and, gathering up the tails of his huge brown coat so as to resemble the pouch of the animal, made two or three vigorous bounds across the room" (Boswell, *Life*, 5:511).

Johnson's first printed book, *A Voyage to Abyssinia* (1735), was a translation of a travel narrative, *Relation historique d'Abissinie* (1728), by the French

cleric Joachim Le Grand. Le Grand's *Relation* was in turn a translation of an unpublished manuscript by the seventeenth-century Portuguese Jesuit missionary Jerome Lobo, recounting his travels to Abyssinia (Ethiopia). In his preface, Johnson praises Abbé Le Grand for his "dar[ing] ... disapprobation" of missionaries who "preach the Gospel with swords in their hands, and propagate by desolation and slaughter the true worship of the God of Peace" (*Works*, 15:4). At the same time, Johnson's translation sympathizes with the indigenous Christian Abyssinians who try to retain their particular version of Catholicism against the inroads of the Jesuits. Whereas Le Grand's translation calls the Abyssinians "hérétiques" and "schismatiques," Johnson refers to them simply as "those opposed to the Church of Rome." Johnson would go on to publish *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (1759) as well as the Eastern tale of "Seged, Lord of Ethiopia" in *Ramblers* 204 and 205. The conspicuous disappointment of Rasselas and Seged in their quests for meaning mirrors the disappointment of Father Lobo, who reluctantly returned to Portugal after the expulsion of the Jesuits from Abyssinia in 1633.

The same year that Johnson published *Rasselas* he also wrote an introduction to John Newbery's series, *The World Displayed; or, A Curious Collection of Voyages and Travels, Selected from the Writers of All Nations* (20 vols., 1759). Johnson's introduction provides a workmanlike overview of European exploration of and trade with Africa up to the time of Columbus; more originally, it offers a powerful critique of colonialist violence. Johnson condemns many of the conventional "heroes" of histories of travel – most notably Columbus, who "made the daring and prosperous voyage, which gave a new world to *European* curiosity and *European* cruelty" (*Prefaces & Dedications*, p. 236). But he refuses to let Britons off the hook by focusing solely on Spanish and Portuguese colonialist atrocities. Emphasizing that "all the European nations" were guilty of such crimes (see chapter 21, "Empire"), he explicitly singles out "the *English* barbarians that cultivate the southern islands of *America*" (p. 227).

HUMANIST TRAVEL

In a moment of piqued Scottish pride in *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785), Boswell states that Johnson "allowed himself to look upon all nations but his own as barbarians" (Boswell, *Life*, 5:20). As we can see from Johnson's critique of "English barbarians," however, Boswell's statement is not correct. Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands* is a complex

generic hybrid of travel diary, ethnography, and philosophical meditation. Following both Howell and Boyle, Johnson combines older humanistic motivations with the new emphasis on scientific method. His commitment to the rules of empirical research can be seen in his remark that “no man should travel unprovided with instruments for taking heights and distances” (*Works*, 9:146). Johnson is a humanist traveler who is interested in mankind and manners but, in contrast to earlier humanists (such as Bacon, who advised focusing on courts of princes), he is most interested in what he calls “the state of common life” (*Works*, 9:22). In assessing the natural landscape, he prioritizes its potential to shelter and feed its inhabitants (hence his preference for fertile valleys over rugged mountains). He embraces the spread of a money-based economy throughout Scotland because he believes that it will help ameliorate poverty. But, unlike Defoe in the *Tour*, who celebrates commerce as “progress,” Johnson struggles to determine what constitutes positive change.

Johnson initially seems to see himself as traveling not only across space but also backwards in time. He expects to see in the Hebrides a “rude” prototype of modern society, but the “antiquated manners” he expected no longer exist – in part because of England’s political, legal, and economic incursions. In particular, the suppression of the Highland clans after the Jacobite uprising of 1745–6 has had devastating effects on the Highlanders’ way of life. Johnson begins his travel narrative by observing how much the English do not know about Scotland (or the Lowland Scots about the Highlanders), but he ends it by emphasizing how much *he* does not know: “I cannot but be conscious that my thoughts on national manners, are the thoughts of one who has seen but little” (*Works*, 9:164). His ability to rethink his own assumptions can be seen in his successive comments on the shortage of trees. Initially, he critiques the Scots for what he sees as their moral failure to plant seedlings to provide for future generations. Later, though, he realizes with dismay and sympathy that the impoverished Highlanders face more pressing needs: “He that pines with hunger, is in little care how others shall be fed” (*Works*, 9:139). Johnson believed that “he only is a useful traveller who brings home something by which his country may be benefited; who procures some supply of want or some mitigation of evil” (*Works*, 2:300). By drawing attention to the Highlanders’ plight, Johnson’s travel narrative allowed him to do something “useful”: in the words of critic John Glendening, not “to record a distant, static history but to enter an ongoing historical process that he could perhaps alter for the good.”⁷

The year that Johnson died (1784), Scottish inventor William Murdoch built a prototype of the steam road locomotive. The opening of the Manchester and Liverpool railway in 1830, and the railway boom that followed, would mark the beginning of a new epoch in Britons' ideas and experience of travel.

NOTES

- 1 Mary Davys, *Works*, 2 vols. (London, 1725), 1:iii.
- 2 Elizabeth A. Bohls, introduction to *Travel Writing, 1700–1830: An Anthology*, ed. Elizabeth A. Bohls and Ian Duncan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. xvi.
- 3 James Howell, *Instructions for Forreine Travell* (London, 1642), p. 5.
- 4 Thomas Nugent, *The Grand Tour: Containing an Exact Description of Most of the Cities, Towns, and Remarkable Places of Europe* (London, 1749), p. xi.
- 5 *Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Robert Halsband, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965–7), 2:177, 3:148.
- 6 Howell, *Instructions*, pp. 5–6.
- 7 John Glendening, *The High Road: Romantic Tourism, Scotland, and Literature, 1720–1820* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 119.