Essay for English 123
Tutor: Jane Smith
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Essay Topic: 18th-c Travel

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Enlarging the Prospects of Happiness: Travel Reading and Travel Writing 1695-1830

He that would travel for the entertainment of others must remember that the great object of remark is human life.... He only is a useful traveler who brings home something by which his country may be benefited; who procures some supply of want or some mitigation of evil, which may enable his readers to compare their condition with that of others, to improve it whenever it is worse, and whenever it is better to enjoy it.

Samuel Johnson, Idler 97, 23 February 1760

One of the most distinguishing features in the literary history of our age and century, is the passion of the public for voyages and travels. Of the books that have lately been published, there are none, novels alone excepted, that, in point of number, bear any proportion to them.

C. G. Worde, assistant librarian at the British Museum, 1795

As these epigraphs reveal, informed contemporaries possessed strong views about the purpose and amount of travel writing produced in the eighteenth century. Although only a small proportion of the population had either the means or leisure to travel, those who could travel did so in ever-increasing numbers, especially to the continent, and then wrote about their experiences. As the routes of the Grand Tour became ruts, affluent travellers focused on the emotional aspects of travel or explored farther afield, to Scandinavia and the Mediterranean. At the other end of the social spectrum, the buccaneers risked lives in hope of riches, and celebrated their adventures in accounts that fired the imaginations of readers for the next two centuries. Throughout the mid-eighteenth century an improving economy and peace at home enabled the government to fund so-called 'voyages of exploration', usually with secret orders to seek new trading opportunities. The American and French revolutions, followed by the Napoleonic wars,

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1 Matheson 1924, p. [3] attributes the preface, from which this quotation comes, to Worde.
created new interest in domestic tourism (1780 sees the first use of 'tourist' in print), and new possibilities for female authors such as Patricia Wakefield and Mariana Starke, who compiled significant predecessors to the formal guidebook (a compound word in its own right from 1818) later associated with the names of Murray and Baedeker. Such is the agreed trajectory of travel writing in the period. Within that schema, this chapter attempts to indicate who was composing or compiling travel writing, how much of it was produced, who was reading it, and how travel writers, publishers and readers shaped British culture between 1695 and 1830.

The restoration and return of the court from France intensified interest in travel, of course, at least to the continent, while William Dampier's *A New Voyage Round the World* (1697) renewed visions of riches from *Terra Australis* (Hunt 1993, 346). Richard Lassels, in *The Voyage of Italy*, first named the Grand Tour in 1670, and the Greenwich meridian, effectively placing London at the centre of the world, was first established as the basis for longitude measurements in 1675. (The meridian was officially designated the zero meridian in 1884, but served unofficially on most maps, especially those available in Great Britain, from the late seventeenth century.) At the other end of the period, in 1830, the foundation of the Royal Geographical Society created an official distinction between the amateur traveller and the professional explorer, while the opening of the Liverpool–Manchester rail line heralded the possibility of tourism for a much broader proportion of society.

**A Lively Taste for Travel**

The taste for travel clearly beguiled the major authors of this period. Addison's *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705) and Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* (1768) particularly influenced subsequent travel narratives. The engagement of so many talented writers with the genre helped make travel writing acceptable to a wide range of readers (Crone and Skelton 1946, 125). A number of influential commentators stressed the innocence of travel writings relative to other genres, especially the novel, and agreed that armchair travel could provide the benefits of travel (reduction of prejudice,

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exposure to other political systems and social customs) without the expense, discomforts, or possible corruptions of leaving home:

Travel-writing was a staple of women's periodicals... Hannah More and Vicesimus Knox find travel-books "very necessary," and Sarah Green recommends that a girl spend "one morning a week" reading geography and travels.... They were thought to provide "peculiar Pleasure and Improvement" because in them "no passion is strongly excited except wonder." (Pearson 1999, 55)

Maria Edgeworth and her brother Richard wrote in their 1798 work, *Practical education*, that "There is a class of books which amuse the imagination of children without acting upon their feelings. We do not allude to fairy tales, for we apprehend that these are not now much read, but we mean voyages and travels; these interest young people universally" ([1798] 1974, 1:335–36). The reviewer of a 1777 anthology, *The Modern Traveller*, described it as "well calculated for the million, but particularly for young persons: as no kind of reading is more pleasing, and at the same time more instructive. They may, therefore, with great propriety be given as presents to the younger readers of either sex" (quoted in Turner 2000, 23).

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Reference List


All items arranged alphabetically by surname.