
Book Review

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Traversing Paris: French Travel Writing Practices in the Late Twentieth Century
by: Charlie Mansfield
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In the introduction of this interesting book, Professor Charlie Mansfield (University of Plymouth, UK) explores the work of three contemporary French travel writers as Annie Ernaux, Jean Rolin and Francois Maspero. Mansfield seeks for the re-definition travel writing as a genre of literature by close-reading and by analysis of the narratives and discourses surrounding travel. This French custom, initiated by Diderot through 1770, reveals the potentialities of a journey to decode the convergence between the auto-biography and social conjuncture. As previous argument given, this book is tentatively structured on five well-written and illustrative chapters which very well can be read separately. In such, travel writing, as a new genre of literature, paved the pathways for the emerging of mass-tourism simply because it promoted two new types of needs: control and knowledge.

‘Planning the Journey and the Episteme’: shows how travel writers elucidate the social landscapes visited by creating a meta-narrative where the own biography, expectances, emotions and impressions of visited places converge. This chapter is of paramount importance because Mansfield explains convincingly that the current tendency in vacation-planning is a result of the advent of ‘travel writing’. The concept of episteme, in this vein, seems to be no other thing than “the starting point for our explorations. The travel writer preparing for a voyage knows a certain body of knowledge, has preconceptions of their journeys but does not know ties out there is in the life outside the home” [Mansfield, (2008), p.7]. Based on the contributions of M. Foucault, Mansfield certainly considers that the episteme is the pathway in order for society to know the reality. The episteme not only works under specific methods and conditions but it is framed under the available technology. This means that a travel engenders the possibility to interpret what explorers come across in their experience with.

‘En Route, the Means of Transport and the Everyday’ synthesises brilliantly the main argument of this book: ‘travel writing’ can be seen as an exclusive and identifiable practice that creates its own discourse. The agency of travels corresponds with the proper practices of travellers who involuntarily reify the same observed reality. This begs striking questions relating to what may be framed as an event to be reminded and what may be cynically considered a circumstantial fact. The tension between objectivity and

subjectivity certainly opens a complex door in regards to travel writing as a scientific genre. In addition, it is important to note that the involving writers (Maspero, Rolin and Ernaux) see in travelling an efficient resource for accumulating vital information, which otherwise cannot be retrieved. As the previous argument given, the body of a writer should be circumscribed to specific space and place, which blurs the existent boundaries between 'lived time of journey' and text.

'The Exotic, the Eexote and Encounters with the other' can be considered the stronger chapter of this valuable book because it gives a clear explanation of how and under what context the notion of otherness is being built. Based on the previous assumption of Scott, Mansfield argues that the otherness is determined by the return of self. If the self is constituted only in contact with other the travel writing allows recovering the uncharted side of our identity. He tries to demonstrate as the encounter with strangers, which characterised the cultural life of Europe over 200 years, acted as a conduit to install the belief that the civilisation must be eternally expanded.

'Beautiful Sight and Strange Food': in this section, Mansfield dwells on the differences of travel texts with guide-books. Whereas the former echoes to a supposed veracity of experienced-events in the travel, the latter aims to employ the fantasy in generating a special discourse. The guide-book not only points out in what remarkable and memorable a travel is, but maps out the lines of knowledge over the language legitimating the birth of a new site for pleasure: the tourist-spot. In sharp opposition to book-guide, 'travel writing' runs the risk to be circumscribed to unexpected experience because it is stronger beyond the boundaries of certainty. This new type of genre looks for the encounter with a radicalised-otherness. Most certainly, the quest of autonomy, which was originally enrooted in French culture since the revolution has taken room, reminds the importance of exerting control over the remote and scarce populated zones. The juxtaposition of liberation and power-will re-creates a paradoxical situation where two contrasting forces are at odds; "the paradoxical nature of carrying with the social rules of home whilst feeling liberated the self-authorization when travelling abroad may account for much of the pleasure of holiday-making" (p.45).

Mansfield explains that one of the most important findings of his work is to denote that 'travel writing' refers to an ongoing discovery of what is hidden. It is surprising to note how food and drink are always present in the narrative of travels. To some extent, food emulates symbolically the working-class injustices that children and women suffer in the city. The last chapter, entitled as 'the writing process', focuses on the influence of Chateaubriand in the literature of travels, so to speak, a pioneer in thee types of genres. Following the contributions of Chateaubriand, Mansfield indicates that texts work similarly to a souvenir because it is strongly associated to the identity of passengers. Underpinned in the assumption that a souvenir is linked to a wider sentiment of nostalgia, our British scholar leads readers to an under explored argument: souvenir works as a mechanism of return transforming the physical distance in emotional proximity. After all, 'travel writing' comprises a 'creative praxis' closing the hermeneutical circle between those events we experience in a daily basis and the individual emotional background (the episteme in a classical Foucaultian sense).

Interesting outcomes are found when the British pragmatism runs with the French encyclopedism. This is exactly the case of Professor Mansfield who beyond his British-ness speaks French as a secondary language. In foregoing, he proposes a coherent conceptual framework to understand the cynical discourse of West respecting to the

travels and the reconstruction of otherness. *Traversing Paris* provides readers with an insight argument that describes succinctly the role played by travel writings in the pre-figuration of tourism as a mass-industry. Nonetheless, one point has been missed to be developed in his book. Whether renaissance opened the door for the advent of discovery in Europe, existentialism as a philosophical wave inherited from midst of twentieth century closed the frontiers re-elaborating the needs for escaping in a new process where the other should be expropriated and civilised. The death of God that characterised the most important premises of existentialism created an ongoing sentiment of fear of loss; in other terms, a frenetic necessity to stop the time. Of course, the fear of dying was exactly the third element that determined the tendency to recover and document the customs of others. To cut the long story short, existentialism not only criticised the ancient belief that the substance preceded the existence, which was present in pre-Socratic philosophers, but exerted considerable influence to the scientific thought. As a photograph, a travel, mobility, a souvenir or even the text in such engenders the ability to captivate moments which in some extent will never come back. In foregoing, one might realise that three aspects were of importance to determine the inception of tourism:

- a the psychological needs of monitoring the surrounding events in environment
- b knowledge as a mechanism of intellectual appropriation
- c the fear of loss rooted in our faster capitalist form of production.