"Tainted" moves: Subjects of contemporary travel literatures (2003)

Abstract

The research for my thesis falls within the relatively fresh field of travel writing literary criticism, an area of increasing interest as growing global trends of tourism, migration, exile and "nomadic" movements of people displace the models of habitation and identity central to many traditions of literature. Principally, I seek to address three major questions through this study: to search for what the specific subjects of travel are; to examine how they are constructed; and to discuss their significance in the contemporary context most relevant to each. Recently, the field of travel writing has become an increasingly important focal point for a range of competing and interconnected disciplines. Why have the directions of these questioning converged on what many still consider to be a rather second-rate, middle-brow class within literature? One answer is that travel writings are now considered a rich source for analysing key aspects of the representation of the world. A critical consideration of the various "modes" of travel writing reveals this discursive site as a vibrant arena for ideological interpolation, where neo-imperial interests and tastes are juxtaposed, complicated and challenged in divergent fields of "postcoloniality". This thesis looks at both theory and practice, responding to a selection of postmodern and cultural critical sources and primary literary texts, chiefly of the writings of Paul Theroux, Oliver Sacks and Jonathan Raban, Bruce Chatwin, Edward Said, Salman Rushdie, and Michael Ondaatje. My aim is to construct a framework of critical practice, using these texts, that attempts to explain the function and place of
The genre of travel literature encompasses outdoor literature, guide books, nature writing, and travel memoirs. One early travel memoirist in Western literature was Pausanias, a Greek geographer of the 2nd century AD. In the early modern period, James Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides (1786) helped shape travel memoir as a genre. Early examples of travel literature include Pausanias' Description of Greece in the 2nd century CE, Safarnama (book of Travels) of Nasir Khusraw (1003-1077) the To what extent do best-selling travel books, such as those by Paul Theroux, Bill Bryson, Bruce Chatwin and Michael Palin, tell us as much about world politics as newspaper articles, policy documents and press releases? Debbie Lisle argues that the formulations of genre, identity, geopolitics and history at work in contemporary travel writing are increasingly at odds with a cosmopolitan and multicultural world in which 'everybody travels'. Despite the forces of globalization, common stereotypes about 'foreignness' continue to shape the experience of modern travel. "Travel writing" without travelling: the factual literature on the otherness A significant part of the works considered as travel writing (according to the definition adopted above, which is the one actually existing in the publishing market) is marked by the somehow paradoxically characteristic that they do not involve an ongoing journey (a case in point is the just mentioned Peter Mayle's books). Similarly, immobility also defines A year in Provence, by Peter Mayle, considered the 1989 Best Travel Book of the Year by the British Book Awards and a travel
writing best-seller 5 (Holland and Huggan, 1998). In order to take into