

# RESEÑA: *TRAVELS, TRAVELLERS AND TRAVELOGUES...* LÓPEZ-BURGOS DEL BARRIO, M<sup>a</sup> ANTONIA Y JOSÉ RUIZ MAS (EDS.)<sup>1</sup>

José Carlos Redondo Olmedilla<sup>2</sup>

M<sup>a</sup> Antonia López-Burgos del Barrio y José Ruiz Mas, eds. 2007: *Travels, Travellers and Travelogues...* Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada. 131 páginas. ISBN: 84-338-3976-4.

In modern and contemporary Travel Literature we often find hazy and imprecise answers when trying to find the reason or the sense of a journey. There may be eagerness for knowledge, as in the case of Goëthe's *Italienische Reise* (1816-17) or the wish to "encontrar variedad o capricho" (1890: 185) –find variety and whim– as Emilia Pardo Bazán (1852-1921) pointed out when travelling across Europe. There may also be the wish to search for new lands, men or customs under the label of new experiences. This is something that brings us to Laurence Sterne (1713-1768) in *Sentimental Journey* (1768), which extends the journey to a flight from passivity. On many occasions the journey is a quest for liberty or an opportunity to complete and enrich one's existence. Unquestionably there is much vital encouragement to travel; indeed, change and novelty provide the most frequent type. However, there are also some curious types of encouragement. Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) in *Niebla* (1998: 110) included what he referred to as *topofilia* or *filotopia* –love of place– as one of the important motives to travel. He equally referred to *topofobia* –hatred of a place– as a form of travelling against a certain place, the traveller driven or motivated through the necessity of not being in a place. In these travellers there is a sense of breaking, of exile, of flight. This is so to such an extent that in many cases travel and flight become confused.

The reasons for travelling can be argued, but some features in Travel Literature offer no discussion, among which we find heterogeneity and a constant state of transition. *Travels, Travellers and Travelogues* shows these features to a good extent, while simultaneously including analyses on para-texts related to the topic. The essays collected in this book focus on a broad range of geographical areas and a wide array of travellers. They cogently exemplify diverse paths that the scholarship on travel literature has walked down in recent years as the title makes clear: *Travels, Travellers and Travelogues*. It makes clear that it is a collection of works put together due to connections between travel writing, otherness and identity, but this book also analyses some conflicts that can derive from cultural encounters.

<sup>1</sup> Date of reception: October 2008.

Date of acceptance and final version: October 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Senior Lecturer, Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana, Universidad de Almería; ✉ jcredond@ual.es.

The introduction, by the editors, from the beginning remarks the importance of travel nowadays and the democratization of this phenomenon through its multiple instances: package tours, low budget airlines, tourist class, special offers for hotels, full board accommodations, set tourist routes, couriers, tourist guides, guidebooks... It halts at the difference between a guide book and travel book, something not to be underestimated. The first is similar to a precooked dish, or, according to the editors: “Like false teeth that do the hard job of chewing and digesting for the tourist’s comfort” (6). The travel book, on the other hand, is an expansive element or, in the authors’ words: “like a literary pot that accepts any ingredient for flavour enhancement” (7). In this post-modern society where the term discourse has been used and abused, one should consider, as the editors do, the sense of metadiscourse implicit in travel books. It is clear that in travel books there is a coexistence of several discourses: biography, propaganda, fiction, description, fantasy... In our time, in this kaleidoscopic society of ours, the orientation of any travel book must be plural, and at the same time singular.

Chapter I, “Relations, Representations and Confrontations of the Orient. The Case of Ali Bey”, by Patricia Almárcegui Elduayen, acts as a true appetizer by using Ali Bey<sup>3</sup> as the case that serves to introduce, and, at the same time, rescue, much of the good old Spanish *Africanism*. It is a pleasure to read meaningful names for Spanish, Arabic and Western Cultures such as those of the explorer Domingo Badía or the scholar Emilio García Gómez. It is true that Spain practised a late Quixotic colonial adventure in Africa at the time. Spain arrived late to the Berlin conference of 1895, but Spanish Arabism was there before, it was just an exercise of switching on to it. The Andalusian embers were there, Romantic fashion only kindled it. This first chapter is useful for tracing the official line of Spanish academic studies on the speciality, as it mentions and explains the tasks of prestigious institutions such as the Escuela de Arabistas Modernos –Modern School of Arabists–, founded by Francisco Codera, or the two chairs of the School of Arab Studies in the Republican Period. If insularism describes a cultural attitude, then the kind of insularism practised by Spain as a nation and by the Spanish Arab scholars is well-described here. It exercised encirclement by not dealing with other realms within the Arab world, but was also a process of specialisation “centred in the realm of Muslim Spain” (11). It paid, and still probably pays good homage to history, but it may lack a bigger geographical dimension and scope. This chapter is helpful in that it conveys the tradition of Spanish studies through an enlightened traveller and a (non)verifier of the cultural imagination of the West in the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries. Indeed, this essay has effectively linked *Africanism* –and its reduced form *Moroccanism*–, *Arabism*, and Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, by showing an understanding of Spanish peculiarities on the issue.

The next chapter, Eroulla Demetriou’s “Britain’s Acquisition of Cyprus in Propagandistic Travel Pamphlets” is a visit to the recent history of the island of Cyprus from unconventional premises: political pamphlets. From the beginning the reader appreciates that this is a well structured chapter which analyses the pamphlets –or “booklets” as some of the original authors refer to them– written during the initial phase of the British occupation of

<sup>3</sup> Many readers will get to know that Ali Bey is Badía’s pseudonym and not Ali Bey Al-Kabir the politician and general that was Mamluk Sultan of Egypt in 1760-1772.

the island. The pamphlets are classified into three categories: in favour of the acquisition of Cyprus, against the acquisition of it, and neutral ones. Not boasting impartiality, they are accordingly analysed with a plethora of scholarly details that show that the authoress is not only well acquainted with the British data and files over the island and the time, but with the physical and human cartography of the island. This chapter, like a Greek *stadion*, is well measured. It is a piece of work that is of utmost interest to those willing to find perceptive explanations on Cyprus's present political status and situation as well as on her most recent past.

Chapter III, "Is this the Same Continent?: Two Accounts of Africa Taken Lengthwise", by Philip Krummrich, undertakes a practical exercise of comparative literature. The author compares two works: *Beachcombers of the African Jungle* (1958) by Jack Sholomir and *Dark Star Safari* (2003) by Paul Theroux. It is a comparison that goes beyond literary differences. Apparently each author recounts a lengthwise crossing of Africa: Sholomir goes from south to north and Theroux from north to south, but one soon discovers that each writer has a preference to describing and contemplating. Their different forms of description reflect each author's place of origin and their own "personal" egos. Both writers seem to practice a kind of marginal perspective. One is marginal owing to personal choice: Theroux; while Sholomir inherits marginality due to his Jewishness. There are, of course, other differences, for example, differences in the recognition of their works. *Beachcombers of the African Jungle* is little-known and long out of print, while *Dark Star Safari* is more recent and its maker an establishment writer. As an exercise in comparative literature it proves that apparently similar trips are different in many ways.

According to Krummrich *Beachcombers of the African Jungle* is more picaresque in nature, it may be fresher but is Africa unleashed, while *Dark Star Safari* is more controlled and technical. Sholomir is still a raw recruit at describing Africa, Theroux is less spontaneous but more ambitious, wanting to describe a targeted Africa, but also himself. Krummrich explains these differences on the grounds of age and book lengths, but differences aside, one of the most interesting conclusions from the author is that no matter what filter the writer imposes, Africa still oozes the odours of that primeval land.

In chapter IV, "British and American Travellers in Spain during the XIXth Century: A Magic Land to Recover from Body and Soul Illnesses Alike", the authoress, M<sup>a</sup> Antonia López-Burgos del Barrio, introduces a variegated presentation of British and American Travellers in Spain concentrating more on the mythical idea of Spain and what it represents through the personal experiences and records of travel writers. She does so following an extensive scope of time that goes beyond the XIXth century. She gathers brief but meaningful accounts of famous and not so famous figures, travellers and recorders alike. Among them we can mention William Lithgow, James Howell, Lady Holland, Lord Byron, Benjamin Disraeli, Richard Ford, Frédéric Chopin or George John Cayley among others. It is a chapter that effectively mixes the basics of important travel writers in Spain and some picturesque anecdotes such as the unfounded prejudices of some travellers towards olive oil or the tempting dishes for the passengers of the stage-coach.

Chapter V, "Elliot Paul and *The Life and Death of a Spanish Town*. Travelling and Denouncement in the Spanish Civil War" by Eduard Moyà Antón offers a vindication of great travel writing that took place in the first third of the twentieth century through the example

of *The Life and Death of a Spanish Town* (1937) by Elliot Paul. The author analyses and concludes that Elliot Paul's book is both a sociological document and a piece of "literature of denunciation" (57) which describes the quiet life in a little Mediterranean coastal town and the way war halts and destroys it. According to Moyà Antón it is also a very interesting document as it depicts an important change. It captures the modification from the idealized and romantic Spain, which was still savage, primitive and wild to what the Spanish Civil War came to imply with its atmosphere of confrontation, death and, above all, dissolution. For Moyà Antón, Elliot Paul's book is more than relevant as it captures the mood and breaking point of the transition between the idyllic Spain and its forever lost virginity.

In chapter VI, "Discursive Influences and Ideological Contradictions in Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa* (1897)", Maureen Mulligan analyses the writing of a woman that both conforms and subverts the assumed conventions of Victorian women travellers. It is envisioned in a dual way: firstly personally –as it observes Kingsley's own views– and secondly paying attention to what colonialism meant at the time. For Mulligan, Mary Kingsley (1862-1900) typifies the nineteenth century travel writer. She satisfies the stereotype: she is the eccentric spinster paying attention to rigid Victorian codes. She also practises self-denial and represents the embodiment of family responsibilities. This, according to Mulligan, goes hand in hand with the need to break from family commitments and Victorian conventions. This form of cohabitation is also extended to patterns of colonial discourse. Writing in colonial times had a propagandistic aim, it situated a supremacist message of colonization. Kingsley accepted many of the canons of British colonialism. On the other hand, she ironically expounds the ethnocentric and imperialistic views of the West. As the authoress states, the book is "a mixture of discourses" (83), not only about imperialistic/non imperialistic features, but about femininity and feminism, the fashionable subversion/non subversion or the serious/comic intent of describing reality.

Contradiction and the analysis of contradiction also rules in chapter VII, "Wyndham Lewis in Morocco: The "Filibuster" as Cultural and Political Interventionist", by Alan Munton. Wyndham Lewis was widely regarded as a good writer stigmatized for his political trends and his pro-fascist sympathies. This prejudice has shrouded due appreciation of his writing and this is precisely one of the things that Mr Munton sets out to do: to leave aside prejudices and to show the true spirit of Wyndham Lewis and *Filibusters in Barbary* (1932). The book is more than a simple record of travelling; it is a book about culture and about the grounded personal impressions of a man who has read extensively on Morocco. Lewis feels like a filibuster, an intruder, one that makes an intellectual raid and becomes infatuated with the Berbers as people and as Kasbash builders. He is a filibuster, but "Everybody is a *filibuster* of some sort who is installed upon a territory of a race that is not his own" (183). Munton captures Lewis at his best when he theorises over the individual and his theory of the person, showing the self as complex, real and self-aware. This allows rarity and enables communication with "the other". It is empathy for alterity. For Alan Munton contradiction is also present, especially when Lewis simultaneously admires the centralising forces of the colonial administration and the decentralized lives of the Berbers. Contradiction is also present in the filibuster spirit, one that raids and, at the same time, becomes raided.

Chapter VIII, "The Life, Work and Death of Federico García Lorca as Depicted in English Travel Books", by José Ruiz Mas, is a brave attempt to deal with a delicate

subject. Although apparently the author sets out to offer the opinion and images given by relevant English writers through English travel books, the portrayal obtained is wider and more detailed. The author not only scours works by writers such as Walter Starkie, Gerald Brenan, Laurie Lee, Shirley Deane or Michael Jacobs, among others, trying to collect and verify facts, but also analyses the sociology of the Spanish Civil War and the post war times as well as why and how the figure of the Granada poet possibly became so popular. He pays a good deal of attention to García Lorca as a myth-maker, in particular to the typical Lorcaesque metaphor and image of the Civil Guard. With this aim he extensively analyses the repercussions abroad of the popular “Romance de la Guardia Civil” as well as how this corps is perceived. It is widely accepted that Federico García Lorca is part of the compulsory iconography of the Spanish left-wing, but he is more than that, he is the talisman of a melange that includes marginal, atavistic, telluric, folk, “yokelish” and avant-gardé features at the same time. This successful icon of immense popularity has received a good deal of attention from different holds: political, cultural and scholarly, but is this popularity linked to real knowledge of the poet? and, above all, did these writers know his poetic production? For Ruiz Mas the popularity of Lorca relies not so much on knowledge about the poet –he gives good proof about this through the travellers in Spain and their records– as upon the fact that he became the repository in the right moment, something that owes much to randomness.

The last chapter, “Rebecca West’s *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* in an Age of Anxiety”, by Loretta Stec, offers a travelogue in the most reflective way. It is a study of the *Reisebericht* that Rebecca West wrote on her journeys through Yugoslavia in the first decades of the XXth century. The study concentrates on the sense and meaning of anxiety, as a kind of juice squeezed after Travelling in Yugoslavia, pondering the overall European panorama and her own inner reflections. This anxiety is expressed through different fears: fears of the mob or the mass in the interwar years, modernist fears and historical contemporary fears, all of them, of course intertwined. She also analyses and refutes some simplistic views traditionally appended to modernism. For Stec many modernist writers never accepted collectivism and what is more, socialism was envisioned in terms of individual liberation. The threat of modernity makes her nostalgic of pre-modern societies, but this nostalgia soon ended as the war put an end to it. Her chapter offers a meaningful analysis of a warning, a cautionary signal of what later became established and Peter Ackroyd labelled as “mobocracy” (2000: 350), a phenomenon which dominates our times.

We know that to be reborn is one of the leitmotifs of travelling, something which the reader appreciates in the aforementioned *Italienische Reise*. But if romanticism promoted the adventurous side of travelling, positivism and the development of science looked down on the exclusively adventurous side of travelling. It was so to such an extent that the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) considered travelling as “el sacramento moderno de la investigación” (1982: 130) –the modern sacrament of research–. In this sense the present book is a brief collection of “otherness”, an invaluable concept nowadays, of things as they were before. The reader of this work must know that the risks of composing a book like this are manifold, chief among them being the need to give coherence to a complex span of time, writers and landscapes. It is a book that encompasses several works on travelling, its reflections and the aftermath; however, it accomplishes the feat of experi-

encing alterity through different converging routes. It is also true that the shortage of visual aids is something missed and something that could be of use to help the readers to locate places and routes in the visual world of travel. However, this deficiency is compensated with facts and erudition.

All in all the work is articulate and fulfils the mission of travel literature: it widens our horizons. If the writer speaks about places we know, our memories grow with new corners and new ways to explain them. If the writer speaks about unknown places, the imagination can push us to visit them and so find in them our own voice. It also accomplishes the mission of overlapping, as we know that travel literature has no definite boundaries. It is a brief but worthy visit to “otherness” through the brushes of these scholars. In conclusion, when tackling the reading of the book, we can but remember one of William Wordsworth’s central ideas, referring to the fact that the experience of Nature can make us better people. In this book the authors offer us a chance to understand travelling as an activity and an experience of human nature and, why not, contributes to making us better human beings.

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