

**Katrina O'Loughlin, *Women, Writing, and Travel in the Eighteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. viii + 280. £75. ISBN 9781107088528.**

*Women, Writing, and Travel in the Eighteenth Century* explores the writings of six white British women travel writers. O'Loughlin frames her discussion around gender, authorship, and experience as key concepts that evolve throughout the 'age of exploration'. The texts under consideration each represent either a 'significant development in women's writing of this period' or 'limns a critical shift in discourses of subjectivity and sociality for British women' (14).

Beginning with Wollstonecraft's 'paper globe', the discussion concludes with a consideration of Jean-Etienne Liotard's *Dame Pensive sur un Sofa* (c. 1749), particularly the 'rich and unstable motif' of the 'figure of the woman *en turc*'. This sophisticated inversion of expected chronology and influence resonates throughout the discussion of the five diverse women travellers and writers. *Women, Writing, and Travel* develops a sharp criticism of eighteenth-century discourses of sensibility and sociability from Montagu's focus on costume ('habit') to Janet Schaw and Anna Maria Falconbridge's encounters with the 'enslaved body'. O'Loughlin begins her book with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's 1763 *Turkish Embassy Letters* and Mary Wollstonecraft's 1796 *Letters from Sweden* – the 'only two travel narratives written by eighteenth-century women available in print' when the research for the monograph began. Starting with Montagu, O'Loughlin's discussion persuasively charts a wide network of women's travel writing in the decades between these two familiar writers. In addition to the specific women and texts analysed, this discussion highlights the extensive world of women's travel writing that was published, circulated, and celebrated in the late eighteenth century.

Thanks to O'Loughlin's research (future researchers will benefit from her extensive bibliography), while Montagu provides an important point of familiarity, the discussion can now branch out to lesser-known writers and (from the perspective of the eighteenth-century canon of travel writing) less familiar destinations: Lady Elizabeth Craven's *Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople* (1789); Jane Vigor's *Letters from a Lady ... in Russia* (1775 and 1777); Eliza Justice's *Voyage to Russia* (1739); Janet Schaw's *Journal* (circulated in manuscript, published in 1921); and Anna Maria Falconbridge's *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone* (1796). Together, these texts demonstrate a wider range of women's travels and their writing. Lower and middle-gentry points of view on cultural differences challenge the traditional aristocratic perspective of travel writing itself.

Drawing on familiar critical perspectives like Klein's 'sociality' and Bourdieu's 'civility', O'Loughlin distinguishes between 'sociability' and 'sensibility' as well as probing the limitations of sympathy and subjectivity in eighteenth-century discourses of the self. All of these considerations are brought explicitly to bear on the body – both the body of the 'authorial subject' as well as 'other bodies encountered' (20). Embodiment is, of course, crucial to analyses of travel: 'the material and corporeal qualities of travel itself – long, difficult journeys, unfamiliar food, and changed environments – propel the body to the centre of experience in travel writing' (19). The epistolary form favoured by most (though not all) of the writers enables a complex negotiation of gender and authorship, founded on the appropriately 'feminine' form of the letter – a form which affords the writer a wide scope for expression without treading on masculine modes of authority.

*Women, Writing, and Travel* implicitly reveals the privileged status of 'travel writing' as a genre, particularly in her analysis of Schaw and Falconbridge's experiences of the West Indies and the Free Slave Colony in Sierra Leone. In this moment, we see that it is the *white body* that 'travels' and produces 'travel writing', while other(ed) bodies (non-white, working

class, for example), are simply *moved*. Travel itself becomes a ‘rich and unstable motif’, signaling both an expanded worldview but not necessarily one that proceeds along a utopian trajectory towards equality and liberalism.

O’Loughlin refuses to shy away from uncomfortable topics within her study. There is no effort to wrench these writers from their contexts, or to ascribe to them an updated, revisionist ‘enlightenment’, particularly in their negotiation of difference and their culturally embedded racism. Chapters 5 and 6, which explore the writing of Janet Schaw and Anna Maria Falconbridge, are of particular value. In these final chapters, O’Loughlin offers an incisive critique of sensibility, revealing it to be a remarkably fragile discourse, easily ‘disrupted’, ‘punctured’, and ‘fractured’ by experiences on an international stage.

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