

Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Readers and Transatlantic Travel: Expeditions and Tours in North America, 1760-1840*. Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012. Pp. 205. £55. ISBN 9780754668602.

Tony Lurcock, *'Not So Barren or Uncultivated': British Travellers in Finland, 1760-1830*. London: CB Editions, 2010. Pp. 230, £10. ISBN 9780956107398.

On the face of it, these two publications will seem principally a contribution to our growing understanding of Romantic-era travel writing and its pervasive and powerful influence on Romantic culture. This has been a burgeoning field for some two decades now, yet it is probably fair to say that it remains something of a niche interest; most Romanticists still concern themselves with more conventionally 'literary' forms such as poetry, fiction and drama, even as they seek to broaden or indeed explode the traditional canon in relation to those genres. There will be a tendency, therefore, for many readers of this review to pigeonhole the two texts under consideration here as relevant to travel writing specialists only. Yet this would be a significant oversight, at least with regard to Robin Jarvis's impressively researched *Romantic Readers and Transatlantic Travels*. Jarvis's basic premise seems straightforward enough, and quite narrowly focused, as he aims to track the reception and contemporary reader response to a broad range of travelogues about North America. Yet because of the centrality of both America and the travel writing genre to Romantic-era literary and intellectual culture, coupled with the inherent multidisciplinary of travel writing in this period, *Romantic Readers and Transatlantic Travels* sheds light on a much wider range of current debates than one might initially expect; there are few Romanticists, I suspect, who will not find something to mull over in this stimulating volume.

Bringing the reader-response and reception theories of Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss into fruitful dialogue with the 'book history' approaches of Robert Darnton and William St Clair, Jarvis organizes the volume into four broad chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on the private reading experiences of an array of non-professional readers. Using the letters, journals, autobiographies, commonplace books and marginalia not only of well-known figures like Coleridge, William Beckford, and Hester Piozzi but also of lesser known figures such as Anna Larpent, the shoemaker-turned-journalist Thomas Cooper, and the tailor Thomas Carter, Jarvis reconstructs both contemporary responses to a range of specific travelogues and also the larger 'horizon of expectations' readers brought to bear on travel writing in this era. Chapters 2 and 3 then turn principally to the attitudes and opinions revealed in contemporary periodical reviews of travelogues, although the responses of this professional class of readers are interspersed with more private responses to key texts. Chapter 2 addresses reviews of travelogues to the newly independent United States, focusing *inter alia* on debates about emigration, American 'manners' and their relation to the democratic political system, and the perennial interest in Native American culture, while Chapter 3 focuses on the reception of travelogues to British North America. The latter literature encompasses not only tours of Upper and Lower Canada but also the more arduous exploratory endeavours of figures like Samuel Hearne and Alexander Mackenzie and the quest for the North West Passage, as pursued by the Arctic explorers John Ross, John Franklin and William Parry. Debates about emigration are again prominent in these reviews, as is the contemporary fascination with Native Americans and the Inuit, whilst in an enjoyable 'interlude' on images and accounts of the beaver Jarvis also probes the period's taste for natural historical curiosities. Finally, Chapter 4 examines the way material from American travelogues is reworked in contemporary poetry, using examples from

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Thomas Moore, Thomas Campbell and Felicia Hemans to gauge how some of the most sophisticated literary readers of the day read and responded to travel accounts.

What do we learn from this rich archival trawl through a wealth of little-known material? In terms of over-arching theses, Jarvis demonstrates emphatically on the one hand the popularity and fascination of travel writing with all classes and communities of readers in the Romantic period; yet on the other, he demonstrates equally emphatically that the form those readers were interested in bears little resemblance to modern scholarly generalizations about so-called 'Romantic' travel and travel writing. The genre was not prized as a medium for authorial introspection or the staging of a sublime or sentimental self; rather, readers wanted what Jarvis terms the 'harder currency' (35) of useful or curious information about the wider world, and they consequently looked askance at writers who put themselves too centre-stage. Thus Anna Larpent dismissed one over-personalized travelogue as 'a sort of twaddle emanating from one point self & what self does = & what is done to self' (qtd. 35), whilst Fanny Trollope rebuked Basil Hall for giving 'his own eternal orange-tawny colour to every object' (qtd. 29). Concerned in this way with the acquisition of knowledge, Romantic-era readers of travel writing were indeed acquiring, as many postcolonial studies have alleged, an implicitly imperialist 'global consciousness', in Mary Louise Pratt's phrase, which led them to view pretty much the whole world as material and imaginative resource. Yet here again Jarvis's scrupulously empirical approach introduces important qualifications to this received wisdom about the form. As he demonstrates repeatedly, we need to be cautious about regarding contemporary readers as merely passive receptacles for the ideologies promulgated in travelogues. Rather, readers across the whole spectrum, from those taking up the form solely for personal pleasure to professional reviewers and leading literary figures seeking source material, were more than capable of reading actively, selectively and independently, often reading 'against the grain' and resisting the ideological blinkers proffered by individual travel writers.

Whilst these are perhaps the main lessons to be gleaned from *Romantic Readers and Transatlantic Travel*, the volume can also be profitably read from several other investigative angles. It sheds light, obviously, on British attitudes to the USA, Canada and the Arctic, and on attitudes to both the natural world and indigenous, supposedly 'savage' peoples. Yet at the same time it will be a useful resource for scholars interested in tracking contemporary debates about emigration and democracy; the role played by periodicals in Romantic-era print culture (and connected with this, the feuding between leading British reviews in this period); the reading habits and education not only of 'elite' readers but also of women and of working-class autodidacts; the interplay of print, visual and material culture in relation to Romantic-era travel and exploration; and several other topics besides. I personally would have welcomed more about whether readers responded differently to male- and female-authored travelogues; the book's implicit message is that the gender of the author did not greatly concern most readers, but it would have been useful to have this addressed explicitly. For the most part, however, Jarvis does an excellent job in situating his source material in a broad range of relevant scholarly contexts, on the one hand offering nuanced summaries of current thinking in each area whilst on the other using the archive to complicate and qualify any tendency to simplistic generalization or excessively abstract theorizing. The volume is consequently something of a treasure-trove; it generously opens up a rich seam of material which may be productively mined by Romanticists pursuing a variety of research enquiries.

In comparison, Tony Lurcock's survey of British travellers in Finland is a more limited volume. It is essentially an anthology, focusing on a different traveller each chapter and offering extracts from their published travelogues framed by commentary and a reconstruction of their journey as a whole. The travellers include Joseph Marshall (the author

in 1772 of seemingly the first firsthand travel account of Finland), Sir Nathaniel Wraxell, William Coxe, John Barrow, and Charlotte Disbrowe and the Marchioness of Westminster – the latter being the first women to publish accounts of the country, although in both cases their descriptions did not appear in print till the 1870s. Lurcock gives an overview of each traveller’s interests and activities, whilst his general introduction does a good job of drawing out key themes and preoccupations across the source texts, whilst simultaneously situating them in the larger contexts of late eighteenth-century primitivism, Enlightenment ethnography, and the growing taste for sublime scenery. Given the comparative brevity of both extracts and commentary, scholars and students exploring representations of Finland in this period will want to dig out the original travel narratives anthologized here, or else seek a more thorough-going academic treatment of this theme, such as H. Arnold Barton’s *Northern Arcadia: Foreign Travelers in Scandinavia, 1765-1815* (1998). Yet for anyone needing an introductory map of Romantic-era British travel writing about Finland – and indeed, about Scandinavia more generally, since Finland was generally visited in the context of a larger tour of the region – Lurcock’s volume is a useful resource.

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