

Review—*Mediterranean Travels: Writing Self and Other from the Ancient World to Contemporary Society* by Crowley, Patrick, Noreen Humble, and Silvia Ross (eds)

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This volume is the fruit of an interdisciplinary module on travel writing taught at University College Cork in 2004. Through pilgrimages, diplomatic reports, epistolaries, diaries, and fictional narratives, written from antiquity to the present, this book chartographs the *mare nostrum* of alliances, imperial projects, conflicts, and irreconcilable differences contesting Euro-centric/Occidental perspectives. The contributions by international scholars are arranged chronologically, effectively covering the main periods and regions around the centre and periphery of the Mediterranean. This study does not exhaust the topic but provides a comparative context that generates further debate and intercultural reflection on modern notions of identity, belonging and hospitality.

The first two chapters depart from ancient Greece, in order to explore the emergence of the self-reflective subject filtered through the Greek portrayal of the Self and Others (*barbarians*). A welcome feature here is that Noreen Humble bypasses yet another analysis of *The Odyssey* or *Histories* to talk about Xenophon's *Anabasis*, a work seldom associated with ancient travel writing. Maria Pretzler's (chapter 2) interest in the ways Pausanias's *Description of Greece* subverts and reinterprets the ethnographic tradition of reporting about unfamiliar territories raises pertinent questions on contemporary understandings of the East/West identity trajectory. Both Humble and Pretzler are also careful in their examination of the fluidity of the composite Greek cultural identity. Attention to the role of Islam in the formation of the Mediterranean identity is given by Suha Kudsieh in chapter 3. Her reading of pilgrims' accounts before and after the Crusades argues for the need to bring the historical circumstances that lead to the present fear of the Muslim Other into the discussion. The hermeunetics of otherness that Kudsieh's study establishes, undergird Daria Perocco's sophisticated essay on Venetian ambassadors travelling around the Mediterranean. More valuable insights into the Mediterranean polyphony emerge from Zweder von Martels's study of the epistles of Flemish humanist Augerius Busbequius (chapter 5). Martels demonstrates how modern Europe's skeptical attitude towards Turkey's inclusion in the European Union derives from a historically tense relationship between Ottoman empire and Christian Europe. His arguments serve as a basis for a current political and ethical discussion on modern Turkey's role in Europe and Christian Europe's interests in the

Islamic world, especially in the context of the European Convention of Human Rights. He also reads Busbequius's letters as diplomatic reports rather than as a humanist plea for a broader understanding of Turkish culture. Italian travels are the focus in Nathalie Hester's essay on Pietro della Valle's entertaining *Viaggi*, which documents the traveller's adventures to Turkey and Northern Africa during the Italian Baroque (chapter 6). Here the traveller's aspiration for cultural exchange allows for a receptiveness to otherness through language learning, costumes and customs. Particularly compelling is Hester's decoding of the multicultural caravan scene where the coexistence of Muslims, Christians and Jews metaphorizes the integration of self with others into a unified group, stressing the multicultural environment of the Mediterranean as a Tower of Babel. The question of the subaltern writing back is raised by Roxanne L. Euben in chapter 7. Her highly informative and lengthy essay discusses the perspective of the Muslim traveller Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi to Paris in search of knowledge in the nineteenth century, and Euben illuminates the account by juxtaposing the peaceful visit of the Muslim traveller to Paris to contemporary representations of the mobile *mujahid* in the context of the violent global jihad as an agent of disruption, terrorism and death. Equally engaging is Susan Bassnett's essay in chapter 8 whereby Victorian England's upper middle-class female travellers assert their Englishness against the Italian other. Apart from bringing in the issue of gender in travel writing, Bassnett's analysis offers a well-researched survey on the emergence of the distinction between traveller and tourist in the nineteenth century. Eugène Fromentin's experience in colonial Algiers (chapter 9), informs a popular reading of the Orient as a source of aesthetic inspiration in art and literature. Patrick Crowley's call for a trans-Mediterranean re-thinking of cultural difference and re-making of its global relationality is tied with pictorial force to the unnamed and muted Arab accompanying Fromentin and Vandell as a trope for the silent, excluded subaltern. Characterized by hybridization and traversed by competing and conflicting journeys, Forsdick (chapter 10) focuses on the writings of Jacques Lacarrière to forge the humanist idea of travel as coming in direct contact with others. The last three chapters deal with late twentieth-century travel writings and journeys at the dawn of the new millennium. Silvia Ross returns to modern Italy through the writings of two American authors of the 1990s, Mayes (F.) and Nabhan (G.P.), to explore the interplay between identity, alterity and food in a perceptively-written essay. Chapter 12 by Martín Veiga analyses R. Chirbes's extensive travels as a journey oscillating between past and present, childhood memories and belonging elsewhere. Saving the best for last, the book concludes with what in my opinion is perhaps the most significant contribution in this edition. Documenting a "different" journey as an itinerary of desperation to reach 21st-century Europe with the hope of a better life, Derek Duncan's masterly essay on illegal migration to Europe scrutinizes the idea of a democratic West. Based on Bellu's (G.M.) *I fantasmi di Portopalo*, Duncan provides a *thought-provoking and provocative figuration of the Mediterranean as a site of a postmodern vacuum: the sinking of the boat carrying immigrants from Africa*

to Southern Italy and the silence following the tragedy meditates on cultures of silence and forgetfulness while challenging constructions of the civilized Western subject vis a vis marginal others.

Readers will find a great deal to engage with in this book that has most notably achieved the difficult task of being both readable and scholarly. One weakness is that the book, in terms of postcolonial theory, too often quotes Edward Said. Offering compelling insights into what seems a familiar territory, this masterly edition on Mediterranean travels will delight you on your own journey to rethink about self and others in new ways.