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**Perspectives on Africa in Travel Writing: Representations of Ethiopia, Kenya,
Republic of Congo and South Africa, 1930–2000**

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of PhD**

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Abstract

This thesis establishes contexts for the interrogation of modern travel narratives about African countries. The nineteenth century saw significant advances in travel in Africa's interior. For the first time much of Africa was revealed to a Western audience through the reports of explorers and other travellers. My thesis focuses on more recent representations of African countries, discussing changes in travel writing in the twentieth century, from 1930–2000. This thesis studies key twentieth-century representations of four African countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, the Republic of Congo and South Africa. I interrogate Western constructions, with a specific focus on narratives by Evelyn Waugh, Wilfred Thesiger, Dervla Murphy and Redmond O'Hanlon. Narratives of South Africa by Laurens van der Post, Noni Jabavu and Dan Jacobson also provide important insights into African self-construction in travel writing, which is, as yet, an under-developed genre in African literature.

I begin by sketching a historical framework of the Western idea of Africa which, most recently, has been characterised by nineteenth-century interpretations of the Dark Continent. The process of decolonisation and the emergence of postcolonial discourses have challenged these constructions. An analysis of travel narratives from 1930–2000 reveals a variety of responses to the growing distaste for older, colonial attitudes. Increasingly, Western travellers seek both to create culturally relevant Africas and to subvert older Western creations.

Travel writers seek to re-present destinations, to examine and modify existing discourses. There are fewer texts of exploration, but many writers now travel in order to write, looking for new ways to re-imagine and, thereby, rediscover what is already known. Developments in modern thought influence writers' self-representations, as well as their presentations of the Other. Twentieth-century women construct themselves according to new social constructions of femininity, no longer juxtaposing hardiness with more traditional feminine traits, but proving that their capability and endurance as travellers equals that of men. The traveller is always central to the narrative and so it is always important to interrogate the writer's self-presentation. Trends in twentieth-century travel narratives reveal an increasingly personal focus; this can bring a unique quality to the account, but also raises questions of authenticity. Foregrounding the creative process of producing a travel narrative reveals the agendas which inform self-presentation.

This thesis points towards the potential for much further study on the continual process of re-presenting Africa but, also, the contextualisation of Western travel narratives continually points up the lack of African self-representation in travel writing. There has been little response from Africans to the long history of Western travellers imagining Africa; future dialogues with African texts of self-exploration and self-representation will, potentially, reveal new complexities, bringing greater depth and diversity to the discourses already in place.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature _____

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Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
AWB	Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Congo Journey</i>
<i>DD</i>	<i>The Danakil Diary</i>
<i>DiC</i>	<i>Drawn in Colour: African Contrasts</i>
<i>EE</i>	<i>The Electronic Elephant</i>
<i>EwM</i>	<i>In Ethiopia with a Mule</i>
<i>HH</i>	<i>The Heart of the Hunter</i>
<i>HN</i>	<i>Historia Naturalis</i>
KAU	Kenya African Union
<i>LRB</i>	<i>London Review of Books</i>
<i>LWK</i>	<i>Lost World of the Kalahari</i>
<i>MKD</i>	<i>My Kenya Days</i>
MSA	Mouvement Socialiste Africaine
NFD	Northern Frontier District
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>OP</i>	<i>The Ochre People: Scenes from a South African Life</i>
PCT	Parti Congolais du Travail
RDA	Rassemblement Démocratique Africain
RGS	Royal Geographical Society
<i>SfL</i>	<i>South from the Limpopo</i>
<i>TLS</i>	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>
UDDIA	Union Démocratique pour la Défense des Interêts Africain
WA	<i>Waugh Abroad: Collected Travel Writing</i>

Introduction

Travel writing is a complex genre blending autobiography and reportage, offering important insights not merely into the places visited but also into the perspectives of the writers themselves and, by extension, into their cultural contexts. Travel writing has long been important for understanding the West's relationship with non-Western countries and cultures. Conversely, changing attitudes to other people and places affect travel writing so there is an ongoing reciprocal adjustment in vision. Nevertheless in the past travel writing has sometimes been regarded as an 'essentially frivolous' genre which most academics 'move beyond [...] [in order] to focus on the canonized writers'.¹ More recently, as Tim Youngs observes, 'travel writing studies is now in fashion',² having 'emerged as a key theme for the humanities and social sciences'.³ This research, as Youngs and Peter Hulme point out, crosses disciplinary boundaries:

The academic disciplines of literature, history, geography, and anthropology have all overcome their previous reluctance to take travel writing seriously and have begun to produce a body of interdisciplinary criticism which will allow the full complexity of the genre to be appreciated.⁴

Nor is it quite true that travel writing was previously neglected: Bernard Mergen, reviewing *The Cambridge Companion* sympathetically, nevertheless argues that 'the importance of travel writing in creating the image of the New World has long been recognized' by American scholars.⁵ In this way, travel writing has made an important contribution to national and cultural self-definition. And it is now universally understood as a means of representing and understanding what is foreign and Other and consequently, of course, assisting self-perception and self-definition.

¹ Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2000), pp.vii–viii.

² Tim Youngs, 'Where Are We Going? Cross-border Approaches to Travel Writing' in *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, ed. by Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp.167–180 (p.171).

³ Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, 'Introduction' in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.1–13 (p.1).

⁴ Hulme and Youngs, p.1.

⁵ Bernard Mergen, 'The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing, Book Review', *American Studies International*, 41, no.3 (2003), 128–130 (p.128).

It remains the case, however, that there is no established ‘tradition of a critical attention to travel writing’.⁶ Certain areas have been scrutinised more closely than others: the nineteenth century, for example, has been described as the golden age of travel writing because so many texts were produced by Western men and women. This era has received close critical attention, largely because of the relationship between the production of travel writing and the promotion and expansion of European empires.⁷ Studies of the Grand Tour are also valuable, contextualising the emergence of modern travel narratives.⁸ But other countries and time periods have yet to be studied in equal depth. The studies which exist are all the more important as ground-breaking texts in a ‘vast, little-explored area’ with considerable scope for more specific studies.⁹

Travel writing has an immense capacity for self-regeneration. The author’s self-presentation personalises each account as does the process of selection, as each writer responds to different aspects of the places in which they travel. And time brings changes which affect the perceptions of new generations, as demonstrated by the gradual disintegration of European empires in the twentieth century: Western perceptions of non-Western cultures have been radicalised in the postcolonial era. There is always pressure on writers to adapt their writing to changes in social and cultural perspectives, as I will show by looking at various theoretical influences. Changing perceptions of travel writing reveal fresh outlooks, as the recent influx of comic narratives demonstrates. Despite this variety, some areas can seem saturated with description. As travel has become much easier in the past century many readers know such places as Paris, Venice, Rome, London and New York as well, or possibly better, than the writer. The challenge for travel writers, then, is to recapture a lost sense of exoticism in their writing, either by describing less well-known areas or by defamiliarising what is well-known to elicit a renewed sense of admiration. Indeed, few places are so confined or familiar that a writer cannot make discoveries of some sort. The journey itself may only be symbolic, such as Xavier de Maistre’s (1763–

⁶ Hulme and Youngs, p.1.

⁷ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, 1st published 1991 (London: Routledge, 2001); Tim Youngs, *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues, 1850–1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing, 1770–1840: From an Antique Land* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd edn (New York, Routledge, 2008).

⁸ James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture 1880–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); John Glendening, *The High Road* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1997).

⁹ Hulme and Youngs, p.1.

1852) witty exploration of his bedroom, but even here an outer journey provides a structure for the author's inner journey.¹⁰

It is relatively simple for writers to open up foreign countries by showing the reader the difference between here and there. The greater the gap between a foreign place and one's own home and culture, the greater the impression of discovery and exoticism. The difficulty of showing the reader something new on familiar ground encourages writers to invoke personal memories and associations, providing new perspectives on well-known spaces. The gap between the writer's perception and that of the reader becomes an unexplored country; the hermetic quality of one's own experience confirms the unique quality of any journey, however apparently confined. Comedy is a popular device for making ordinary details memorable and is increasingly visible in travel writing. Bill Bryson (b.1951) and Pete McCarthy (1951–2004), for example, travel across Britain and Ireland, reshaping these countries for British and Irish readers. They exaggerate and highlight cultural idiosyncrasies in speech, behaviour and humour, giving locals a fresh perspective on their homes and renewing their perceptions of everyday events.¹¹ Other defamiliarising techniques may be employed: Alain de Botton (b.1969) is more analytical, hoping that an inspection of the detail of his home environment will release 'latent layers of value'.¹²

The concept of travelling at home raises the issue of defining the location of home and abroad. This issue is particularly pertinent to the South African writers Noni Jabavu (1919–2008), Laurens van der Post (1906–1996) and Dan Jacobson (b.1929), who all made their homes in Britain. In some respects their native countries are now foreign to them and they are the outsiders. The sense of feeling 'at home', therefore, is transferable and does not necessarily remain connected to one's native country or culture. Wilfred Thesiger (1910–2003) also has a more fluid notion of home, feeling more comfortable in African or Asian communities than in Britain, where social interaction is more formal and the land is largely urbanised.¹³ Thesiger did not settle in any country permanently until he retired from

¹⁰ Xavier de Maistre, *A Nocturnal Expedition Round my Room*, 1st published in 1826 as *Expédition nocturne autour de ma chambre*, trans. by Edmund Goldsmid (Edinburgh: Privately printed, 1886).

¹¹ Bill Bryson, *Notes from a Small Island*, 1st published 1995 (London: Black Swan, 1996), p.342, p.135, p.227; Pete McCarthy, *McCarthy's Bar: A Journey of Discovery in Ireland* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2000), p.28, p.117.

¹² Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p.251.

¹³ Wilfred Thesiger, *My Kenya Days* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p.2.

frequent travel, settling in Kenya although returning to Britain eventually. But for professional travel writers, such as Jan Morris (b.1926), Dervla Murphy (b.1931), Colin Thubron (b.1939), Jonathan Raban (b.1942), and Redmond O’Hanlon (b.1947), home, whether in their native culture or not, is a familiar point of return. This is often the place where the journey has been projected and so travel writers return to the starting point in order to bring the journey to a conclusion (for them) by reconstructing it.

Timescale

Twentieth-century developments have revolutionised both the way in which writers travel and the strategies of their writing. The past century has seen dramatic changes to the political map, as colonised countries have gained independence from European rule. The terms of Europe’s international influence have, therefore, changed drastically and Britain, in particular, has experienced a dramatic decline in economic and political authority. Following from the disintegration of formal empires, the colonised Other has begun to ‘write back’, revolutionising Western perceptions of foreign cultures.¹⁴ Travel writing is at the forefront of cultural representation and the emergence of postcolonial discourses has had a significant impact on how foreign countries and people may be presented. Nineteenth-century imperialistic versions of Africa, for example, inform twentieth-century representations which in turn deserve closer scrutiny. My thesis will focus specifically on four African countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, the Republic of Congo and South Africa.

Nineteenth-century travel narratives about Africa and Africans have had serious and far-reaching consequences and so it is vital to analyse in detail how Western writers now represent the continent.¹⁵ I will also look for evidence in travel writing of the Other writing back. The foreigner’s and the insider’s gaze both complement and complicate each other but, in travel writing, investigation of the dialogues which result is still at a very early stage. Descriptions of Africa, for example, are mainly presented by Westerners, barely complicated by the perspective of non-Western foreigners and even less so by self-scrutinising African travel texts.

¹⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd edn 2002 (London: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁵ Youngs, p.213.

Twentieth-century travel writers have received varying degrees of attention but, on the whole, their narratives have attracted less critical analysis than those of their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century predecessors. Among the exceptions are Evelyn Waugh's (1903–1966) travel texts, although his success as a novelist gives special interest to his non-fiction writings. The lives and works of writers such as van der Post and Bruce Chatwin (1940–1989) have been subjected to close scrutiny, but critical interest in their narratives focuses mainly on the way both writers manipulate ambiguous definitions of fiction and reportage.¹⁶ Thesiger is remembered, and constructed in biographies, as a traveller rather than a writer and this is also how he chose to see himself.¹⁷ The lives and works of many other modern writers, such as Thubron, Pico Iyer (b.1957), O'Hanlon and Murphy, have not been analysed in depth. Their narratives tend to be invoked briefly by critics to illustrate themes and methods, usually within the wider context of the general characteristics and trends of modern travel writing.

My thesis explores some of the developments in travel writing in the period from 1930–2000. The end of the twentieth century provides a natural endpoint to the period which I am studying and I begin at a point between the two world wars, as modern travel writing was fundamentally influenced by the developments that occurred after 1930. The period of time I have chosen to demarcate my study comes after the golden age of travel writing and explores the aftermath of the nineteenth-century scramble. Travel writing up to this point had been evaluated according to its contribution to Western knowledge. Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, W. G. Blaikie suggests that narratives which do not bring 'to light unknown regions, or [add] substantially to our knowledge of the globe' are regarded as inferior to those which do.¹⁸

But this traditional rôle of the travel narrative has become increasingly anachronistic in the twentieth century. Thubron observes, 'in an age of specialization, the travel writer is shorn of the dignity of significant exploration or of returning with empirical knowledge'.¹⁹ Faced with the necessity of bringing a new outlook to travel accounts, the style of travel writing,

¹⁶ J. D. F. Jones, *Storyteller: The Many Lives of Laurens van der Post*, 1st published 2001 (London: Scribner, 2002); Nicholas Shakespeare, *Bruce Chatwin*, 1st published 1999 (London: Vintage, 2000).

¹⁷ Michael Asher, *Thesiger: A Biography*, 1st published 1994 (London: Penguin, 1995); Alexander Maitland, *Wilfred Thesiger: The Life of the Great Explorer* (HarperCollins Publishers: London, 2006).

¹⁸ W. G. Blaikie, 'Lady Travellers' in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 160 (1896), 49–66 (p.51).

¹⁹ Colin Thubron, 'Both Seer and Seen: The Travel Writer as Leftover Amateur', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5026 (1999), 12–13 (p.12).

and the traveller's approach to the journey, has developed so that, as Helen Carr observes, the genre was dominated by 'the literary travel book' after 1930.²⁰ A number of celebrated authors, such as D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930), Waugh and Graham Greene (1904–1991), produced travel narratives whose unique character rested not on scientific discovery but on the outlook of the individual traveller and the skill with which the journey was reconstructed.²¹ Such texts have succeeded in maintaining the popularity of travel writing. Of course, there is a precedent for a more personal style of travel writing in earlier works by Tobias Smollett (1721–1771), Laurence Sterne (1713–1768) and Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), among others, but now this type of narrative has come to represent mainstream travel writing.²² Waugh, Greene and their contemporaries, including Robert Byron (1905–1941), Freya Stark (1893?–1993) and Patrick Leigh Fermor (b.1915), focus on their own rôles as travellers. Instead of venturing into the unknown, journeys take place against a back-drop of past travels. It is the writer's approach, both to travelling and writing, which now provides the special character of travel writing.

The gentleman traveller was a typical figure in nineteenth-century travel texts, defined by Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan as 'an avid student and consumer of other, mostly non-European cultures whose impressive erudition affords another reminder of the imagined superiority of his own imperial national culture'.²³ Carr remarks that by the 1920s and 30s, when few areas remained unknown and modern transport was increasingly available, this adventuring was being replaced by anti-heroic, sometimes comic, narratives as travel writing made the shift from the accounts 'produced by missionaries, explorers, [and] scientists'.²⁴ The competence of the nineteenth-century gentleman traveller was, therefore, parodied in these anti-heroic and self-deprecatory narratives. More recently this technique has been adapted to allow writers to appear as respectful and cautious cultural mediators, rather than authoritative or arrogant. At first, however, anti-heroicism emerged

²⁰ Helen Carr, 'Modernism and travel (1880–1940)' from *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, pp.70–85 (pp.74–75).

²¹ D. H. Lawrence, *D. H. Lawrence and Italy*, ed by Simonetta de Filippis and others, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 2007); Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh Abroad: Collected Travel Writing* (London: Everyman's Library, 2003); Graham Greene *In Search of a Character: Two African Journals* (London: Bodley Head, 1961); *Journey without Maps*, 2nd edn (London: Vintage, 2002).

²² Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy and Continuation of the Bramine's Journal with Related Texts*, Melvyn New and W. G. Day, eds (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2006); Tobias Smollett, *Travels through France and Italy*, ed. by Frank Felsenstein (London: Oxford University Press, 1979); Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland: With an Introduction and Notes by J. D. Fleeman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

²³ Holland and Huggan, p.28.

²⁴ Carr, p.74.

in response to the fact that travel was becoming easier and, as remote areas became accessible to modern transport, the traveller no longer needed to be an intrepid adventurer journeying beyond the reach of communication or modern civilisation.

Travellers such as Waugh highlight this new element of modernity which gives distinction to their travels. Exploration is now associated with specialists rather than amateur travellers and, increasingly, twentieth-century writers have travelled in order to write. The number of professional travel writers has increased significantly since the 1970s. Although there is always some form of pretext which ostensibly carries the journey forward, the task of creating the narrative is often its main purpose. Travel writing has, then, developed new characteristics since the nineteenth century and I will explore its different facets, many of which have been created or influenced by twentieth-century events.

The popularity of more recent accounts by Eric Newby (1919–2006), Thesiger, O’Hanlon and Murphy, among others, suggests that a new enthusiasm for the romance of more traditional, arduous journeys has developed since the 1930s. These travellers do not like to be reminded that their journeys are not unique in the twentieth century, although this realisation is forced upon Newby and Thesiger when they meet in the Hindu Kush. Modern writers cannot refer to the past without also referring in some way to the fact that they are separated from an older tradition. This often takes the form of condemning the cruelty of colonial rule either directly, as Murphy and O’Hanlon do, or implicitly through carefully polite and tolerant behaviour. Thesiger, belonging to an older generation, will not criticise the British Empire and his old-fashioned perspective is sometimes provocative.

Representing Africa

The focus of my thesis is Africa, popularly regarded as a dark and mysterious continent by the West, an identity it still retains despite the vast amount of knowledge which has now been accumulated. The four countries I have chosen for the focus of this thesis, Ethiopia, Kenya, the Republic of Congo and South Africa, have all experienced colonial rule but each has its special relationship with imperial powers, the effects of which have outlived the formal structure of European rule in Africa. Relationships between Africa and the Western world have been fraught with conflict since their earliest connections in the fifteenth-century when European trading posts gave further impetus to the slave trade of Africa’s West coast.

Until the nineteenth century, however, European knowledge of the African interior was limited and for a long time mainly represented by fantastic accounts and legends, such as those in Pliny's *Natural History* (AD 77).²⁵ Opportunities to gather information were restricted by the danger of jungle fevers, particularly malaria, which often frustrated extended travel in the African interior. Malaria was a hazard for any traveller, being common world-wide, but in tropical places, such as parts of Africa, mortality rates were highest.²⁶ Mungo Park's (1771–1806) immunity to malaria allowed him to explore the Niger Basin from 1795–97 and throughout the nineteenth century exploration gradually increased as quinine became more widely available, enabling travellers to combat malaria more successfully.²⁷ Explorers such as David Livingstone (1813–1873), John Hanning Speke (1827–1864) and Richard Burton (1821–1890) were followed by others and documented evidence of terrain, people, wildlife and plants increased. Despite the fact that Africa has long been open to scientists, explorers and travellers, Western culture still prefers an image of the continent which is now anachronistic but is more romantic and alluring. This preference, expressed in films, documentaries and fiction, is evident still in modern travel writing.

The colonial era defined subsequent relationships between African and Western countries. Expressions of colonial perceptions have continued in the postcolonial era as the economic hegemony of America and Europe, and the growing economies of China and India, allow richer continents to remain dominant. Since the fifteenth century a flourishing slave trade and Africa's natural resources – diamonds, ivory, gold and rubber – attracted the attention of merchants and European governments alike. But there was no widespread European territorial expansion in Africa until the last decades of the nineteenth century. Governments then competed and negotiated for the most lucrative areas of the continent, newly opened up to the West by explorers, in what came to be known as the scramble for Africa. European influence in Africa developed with astonishing rapidity. By the beginning of the twentieth century few countries were not subject to the government and administration of a foreign power, Ethiopia and Liberia being the only countries to remain independent, except for Italy's brief rule in Ethiopia from 1936–1941.

²⁵ Pliny, the Elder, *Natural History*, trans. by H. Rackham, and others (London: Heinemann, 1938–1962).

²⁶ *Malaria Site* <http://www.malariasite.com/MALARIA/history_parasite.htm> [accessed 30 October 2009].

²⁷ *Malaria Site*.

Africa has throughout the twentieth century been primarily represented by Western writers. There is, of course, a wealth of fiction about Africa, by both Africans and foreigners. In the past Buchan, Rider Haggard and Conrad have been among the most influential; I will focus in particular on the influence of *Heart of Darkness* (1899). The fiction of writers who span different cultures, as Doris Lessing, Muriel Spark, Elspeth Huxley, Joyce Cary and, more recently, William Boyd, are important influences in twentieth-century Western constructs of African life. And, crucially, African literature by Africans has ‘written back’ to these constructions, profoundly realigning Western perceptions of Africa. As yet, however, such advances are not evident in travel writing by Africans, although the importance of what has been achieved in fiction indicates the potential for development in other genres.

Few African writers use travel at home as a means for self-exploration and definition. The exception, which I will return to later, is South Africa, where both white and black writers reflect upon their connections to their native country and culture. Considering the potential for exploration and discovery in one’s own house or home town, which I have highlighted, a journey through one’s home country provides abundant scope for travellers. Westerners have a strong sense of their national and cultural identities, having examined and defined them closely. Such self-scrutiny, at least in travel writing, is less well-developed in Africa, a vast continent of widely-varying cultures, languages, terrain, and economic and political development.²⁸ The Western culture of travel, a physical journey paralleled by an internal one, a discovery of self, is not yet a well-developed theme in indigenous African travel texts. There is still great scope for Africans to ask questions of themselves, of the similarities and differences which co-exist on one continent and whether it is possible for individuals of different tribal and national origins to be united or defined collectively.

Theoretical developments: Postcolonial Discourse, Gender and Genre, Authenticity in Narrative Construction

Postcolonial Discourse

The collapse of formal empires has been accompanied by significant changes in literary theory and discourse which have affected how Westerners view non-Western cultures. Among the first issues to be addressed were those of self-expression and the representation

²⁸ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In my Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.73–84 .

of culture. Postcolonial discourses have heightened cultural awareness and sensitivity in travel narratives so that twentieth-century writing contrasts markedly with that of earlier centuries. Travel writing, as Holland and Huggan put it, ‘energized the myth of Empire’ and legitimised Western perceptions of superiority.²⁹ The explorer Henry Morton Stanley (1841–1904) stands out as a notorious promoter of colonial acquisition, particularly in the light of his surveys of the Congo Basin and his work in promoting access for a Belgian colony.³⁰ Numerous nineteenth-century explorers, among them Livingstone and Samuel White Baker (1821–1893), regarded the terrain through which they travelled, and its resources, as acquisitions, or potential acquisitions, of their own country.³¹ Geographical features, such as lakes and rivers, were ‘won’ by the nation whose representatives succeeded in being the first Europeans to travel there.

During the twentieth century this authoritative and appropriative position has been challenged on a practical level by the disintegration of European empires and theoretically by the emergence of postcolonial discourses. Alternative versions of the non-Western world have been offered, describing the impact of European imperial expansion on the colonised and rejecting cultural judgments pronounced by foreigners. Frantz Fanon’s two studies, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), discuss the diminished status of colonised cultures as a consequence of European and American hegemony.³² Edward Said’s analysis of the history and culture that the West has created for the East has also had a seminal influence. Said emphasises that Western representations are not disinterested and that Eastern self-expression has been obscured by Western perceptions.³³ Since Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), the debate surrounding cultural difference has developed considerably, particularly during the 1980s. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha have spearheaded more recent developments in postcolonial theory and their highly theoretical, and sometimes complexly articulated, approaches have dominated the

²⁹ Holland and Huggan, p.4.

³⁰ Henry M. Stanley, *The Congo and the Founding of its Free State: A Story of Work and Exploration*, 2 vols (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1885).

³¹ Samuel White Baker, *The Albert N'yanza, Great Basin of the Nile, and Explorations of the Nile Sources* (London: Macmillan, 1866); David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa with Notes by Frederick Stanley Arnot* (London: John Murray, 1899).

³² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1st published in 1952 as *Peau noire, masques blancs*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1st published in 1961 as *Les Damnés de la terre*, trans. by Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).

³³ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient*, 1st published 1978 (London: Penguin, 1995).

development of the discourse, in contrast to the initial influence of Fanon and Said whose arguments are more humanistically framed and accessible to a wider audience.³⁴

Postcolonial discourses have, then, interrogated the manner in which foreign cultures have been represented. The canon of British literature, in particular, has received much criticism as decolonised people have objected to the hegemony of Western perspectives. The focus of new ways of reading and understanding has been fiction, as the impact of texts such as *Jane Eyre* (1847) or *Heart of Darkness* has been greater than accounts by Livingstone, Speke or Mary Kingsley (1862–1900).³⁵ But Western travel writing is fundamentally impacted by a greater awareness of the Other's perspective. Travel writers must now show their awareness of the issues relevant to these new discourses, behaving respectfully towards local people and representing other cultures with tolerance and humility. Writers do not always explicitly acknowledge that they must address this shift in cultural perception, but this new understanding is usually evident in the self-consciousness of their presentation.

This is particularly noticeable in the use of comic self-deprecation, a technique which has been used in travel writing for some time. Men and women have different modes of self-deprecation and this form of gendering will be discussed later. But new ways of thinking and feeling have not made earlier travel writing obsolescent, although we may read it differently. Indeed, many modern writers appear to envy earlier travellers the privilege they had of travelling in remote areas which were virtually unknown to Europeans. Modern travel writers want their travels to retain an element of risk, although their paths may be better known and their situation, as regards illness or attack, less vulnerable. They are careful, however, to show their respect for local people, although they also exploit the intimacy that this respect permits, since local knowledge can provide insights into other cultures that cannot be obtained by observation alone.

Increased cultural sensitivity means that more writers now attempt to 'establish a reciprocity with the people and places they visit and about which they write' in order to

³⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Cary Nelson, and others, eds (Urbana, ILL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp.271–13; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

³⁵ John Hanning Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1863); Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa: Congo Français, Corisco and Cameroons* (London: Macmillan, 1897).

create the appearance of a dialogue of equality between cultures.³⁶ Of course, when both sides are mediated through the foreigner's perspective, such dialogue is limited. African self-representation in travel writing, being so underdeveloped, has yet to make its mark on the body of Western texts and to respond more extensively to the Western constructions which exist. It is not yet clear how far such texts will challenge or coincide with the observations and judgments which have already been made.

Gender and Genre

Travel narratives before the twentieth century were predominantly masculine texts whose protagonists were perceived as heroic figures.³⁷ Although the nineteenth century was a significant era for developments in women's travel writing, female self-presentation differed appreciably from male travel texts, as women sought a balance between their rôle as travellers and conventional perceptions of femininity. Mary Kingsley, Isabella Bird Bishop (1831–1904) and May French-Sheldon (1847–1936), among others, presented themselves as intrepid and capable travellers. But all emphasise details such as propriety in appearance so that their femininity is not diminished by the nature of their journeys. The development of feminist discourse in the twentieth century has radically altered the way in which women travel writers present themselves. Definitions of femininity have been challenged so that women may travel as they wish without being censured for unfeminine behaviour. Of course, male self-representation has also altered. Heroicism in male texts is redolent of John Buchan's or Rider Haggard's adventuring protagonists and the imperialist values they represent.³⁸ Female heroicism carries none of these associations and, while modern male travellers, such as O'Hanlon and Newby, often distance themselves from their more cavalier predecessors by claiming incompetence and lack of preparation, women are now able to exhibit their redoubtable courage and endurance. Christina Dodwell (b.1951), therefore, climbs across the steep and fragile *tsingy* in Madagascar without ropes, Robyn Davidson (b.1950) treks across the Australian desert, and Dervla Murphy continues to walk or cycle across countries alone, despite being over seventy.

³⁶ Holland and Huggan, p.68.

³⁷ Susan Bassnett, 'Travel Writing and Gender', *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, pp.225–241 (p.225).

³⁸ John Buchan, *Prester John*, ed. by David Daniell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, ed. by Gerald Monsman (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2002).

Men and women approach the issue of personal safety in different ways. Although the threat of sexual attack may be more of an issue for women than men, it does not necessarily deter them from travelling alone or without male companions. In fact, women may take advantage of the fact that they will be perceived as vulnerable in order to travel in more remote areas, as Murphy does. A solitary male traveller may arouse suspicion: O’Hanlon and Thesiger, trekking in jungles and deserts, run the risk of being regarded as suspiciously anomalous. Local guides act as their insurance against attack, enable introductions to village chiefs and negotiate the way forward.

The issues raised when women travellers becomes mothers reveal a continuing difference in social perceptions of parents who travel. Many men, including O’Hanlon, Bryson, Raban, Theroux and Matthiessen, have left wives and children in order to travel. As Raban discovers, families do not always remain intact as a result,³⁹ but the decision for fathers to travel seems less controversial, currently, than for mothers. Often, women travellers must choose between travelling and having children.⁴⁰ A few women travel with their children: Murphy and Rosie Swale-Pope (b.1986) have done so successfully, but Susie Carson Rijnhart’s (1868–1908) journey in Tibet ended in tragedy.⁴¹

The sexualisation of the African female body, such as the Hottentot Venus, is evident in nineteenth-century reports of Africa written by men, while Western women revealed their perceived social and cultural superiority to African women.⁴² I will briefly analyse modern representations of African women in the light of earlier descriptions. Modern travel narratives demonstrate a greater effort to acknowledge the equality of men and women and African men and women alike are given a voice. O’Hanlon’s work, however, suggests that Other women are still a target for the eroticised male Western gaze. Murphy’s frustrations with the status of women in Africa suggests that Western women, having a better social

³⁹ Jonathan Raban, *Passage to Juneau: A Sea and its Meanings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), pp.420–23.

⁴⁰ Mary Russell, *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt*, 1st published 1986 (London: Flamingo, 1994), p.168; Christina Dodwell, *Madagascar Travels* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), p.175.

⁴¹ Susie Carson Rijnhart, *With the Tibetans in Tent and Temple: Narrative of a Four Years’ Residence on the Tibetan Border, and of a Journey into the Far Interior* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1901); Dervla Murphy, *On a Shoestring to Coorg: An Experience of Southern India*, 1st published 1976 (London: HarperCollins, 1998); *Where the Indus is Young: A Winter in Baltistan* (London: John Murray, 1977); Rosie Swale, *Children of Cape Horn* (London: Elek, 1974).

⁴² Shirley Foster and Sara Mills, *An Anthology of Women’s Travel Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p.14.

status in their own culture, can find it difficult to relate to African women who see value in traditions regarded as demeaning by Westerners.

Authenticity

As with autobiographical writing the writer's reconstruction of a journey, whether through diaries, letters or photographs, is complex. The accuracy of reconstruction is problematic; like all reportage which seeks to find a balance between facts and the writer's subjective construction, travel narratives are mediated accounts, raising the issue of the extent to which they can be considered reliable. The issue of accuracy is, of course, debatable. The reader must also consider how the narrator wishes to be perceived and how events may have been manipulated so that the narrator is placed in a sympathetic light. Writers adopt the humility *topos*, laughing at themselves for being incompetent or chastising themselves for being culturally insensitive, in order to gain sympathy. A very few writers, such as van der Post and Chatwin, manipulate the narrative to make themselves appear more heroic or sensitive. But there is evidence in all these texts of careful narrative construction to produce the desired effect, whether comic, dramatic or poignant.

Photographs have an important function in travel narratives, as part of an account which is presumed to be based on fact. Some narratives supplement a collection of photographs, as evident in Thesiger and Matthiessen's work.⁴³ At times photographs provide the reader with additional information so that the narrative is incomplete without them, as in Thesiger's *My Kenya Days* (1993). Conversely, the narrative can give context to a photograph, as O'Hanlon and Davidson demonstrate, adding meaning which could not be conveyed by the image. Here the subjective nature of photography, its limitations and the importance of interpretation, is revealed.

Journeys in remote areas are no longer ground-breaking expeditions in unknown lands but the experience of the traveller is unique to each person. Journeys are individual and their reconstruction is always subject to the writer's cultural and emotional baggage.

Increasingly in the twentieth century the traveller's internal journey gives a special character to the outward journey as the inner landscapes of the traveller's self are revealed.

⁴³ Peter Matthiessen and Eliot Porter, '*The Tree Where Man was Born*' and '*The African Experience*' (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1972); Wilfred Thesiger, *Desert, Marsh and Mountain: The World of a Nomad*, 2nd edn (London: Motivate Publishing, 1993).

As indicated by such works as Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), confessional narratives are not exclusive to the twentieth century, but they have become more prominent now that travel writing is no longer dominated by narratives of exploration. Dan Jacobson travels through South Africa in the hope that the personal quality of the native's perspective, combined with the more detached analysis of the expatriate, will enable him to obtain a clearer self-knowledge through a review of his, and South Africa's, past. O'Hanlon's experience in the Congo, like Marlow's, leads to the realisation that he has been permanently affected by what he sees.

Although I have chosen to focus on four African countries, I am conscious that there are various versions of each, according to the methods of the writer and the writer's own sense of self. I will argue that we can no longer read travel writing simply as a way of finding out about the country that it describes. We are aware that the relationship between the writer's self-construction and the construction of the place of his travel is a complex one. Increasingly travel writers reveal the personal significance of their journey. General descriptions of people and cultures continue to form a significant part of travel narratives but individual people and specific places are frequently a means of guaranteeing authenticity.

Countries and Writers

My case studies discuss representations of Ethiopia, Kenya, the Republic of Congo and South Africa in travel writing. Each country demonstrates a different relationship and tensions with Europe, deriving from the effects of colonial government or of European settlement. I will focus principally on narratives by Evelyn Waugh, Wilfred Thesiger, Dervla Murphy and Redmond O'Hanlon, whose works indicate the impact of political, historical and social changes on twentieth-century travel writing. I will also discuss travel texts by South African writers, Laurens van der Post, Noni Jabavu and Dan Jacobson, who demonstrate that, although travel texts about Africa by writers born there are still scarce, discussions of home, self and identity are evident in African travel writing.

Ethiopia's determination to remain independent resulted in a relationship of persistent conflict with Europe, specifically with Italy. By the twentieth century, Ethiopia remained an independent power, becoming a member of the League of Nations in 1923. This did not prevent Italy's invasion in 1935 and occupation until 1941. As with other African countries

such as the Republic of Congo and Madagascar, Ethiopia later came under Marxist government, but this replaced the imperial Solomonic dynasty rather than European rule. Evelyn Waugh and Wilfred Thesiger both provide radically contrasting accounts of Haile Selassie's coronation in 1930 and the conflict with Italy which followed shortly afterwards.

Evelyn Waugh's travel narratives are not typical of travel writing at this time; his work shares the anti-heroic character of a number of travel narratives of the period but writers such as Peter Fleming (1907–1971), Stark and Byron, show a greater appreciation for foreign people and culture as well as greater stamina as travellers.⁴⁴ Waugh delivers political satire on the coronation of Haile Selassie and the war with Italy. His discursive style results in many digressions on political issues in which his right-wing opinions are strongly expressed.⁴⁵ Reactions to *Remote People* (1931)⁴⁶ and *Waugh in Abyssinia* (1936)⁴⁷ provide insights into Western attitudes towards foreign countries and a conservative travel writer's self-presentation at that time.⁴⁸ Waugh's narratives, therefore, reveal the ideological gap between the 1930s, when some critics still regarded his comments as reasonable, and the late twentieth century, by which time such opinions were perceived as extreme and offensive.⁴⁹

In contrast to Waugh's work, Thesiger's narratives demonstrate a hardier approach to travelling and a greater sensitivity to local people. Born in Addis Ababa, Thesiger found that his 'exciting and happy childhood, far removed from direct contact with the Western world, implanted [...] a life-long craving' for travel in remote countries.⁵⁰ Of course, Thesiger's work is as different from his contemporaries as Waugh's, as he did not live permanently in England for most of his adult life. Thesiger's work seems little-influenced by modern trends in travel writing and he regarded himself as an explorer, not a writer. Certainly he had not originally intended to write travel narratives, although he publicised his travels in newspaper and journal articles. His texts reveal his preoccupation with the journey itself and the cultures in which he became immersed.

⁴⁴ Peter Fleming, *Brazilian Adventure* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933); Freya Stark, *East is West* (London: Arrow, 1991); Robert Byron, *The Road to Oxiana* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁵ Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh Abroad: Collected Travel Writing* (London: Everyman's Library, 2003).

⁴⁶ Evelyn Waugh, *Remote People: An Account of Travel* (London: Duckworth, 1931).

⁴⁷ Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia* (London: Longmans, Green, 1936).

⁴⁸ *Evelyn Waugh: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Martin Stannard (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), pp.120–121, pp.190–192, pp.192–193.

⁴⁹ Martin Stannard, *Evelyn Waugh: The Early Years* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1986), p.435.

⁵⁰ Wilfred Thesiger, *The Life of my Choice*, 1st published 1987 (London: Flamingo, 1992), p.442.

Waugh and Thesiger offer contrasting descriptions of urban Ethiopia, specifically Addis Ababa. Thesiger's personal connections with Ethiopia's royal family give a very different perspective to his accounts of Haile Selassie's coronation and Italy's occupation. Thesiger also travelled in more remote rural areas, while Waugh did not since such areas were unsuitable for solo travellers at the time. By the twentieth century exploratory expeditions were in decline and in 1933 the Danakil desert was one of the very few areas still unmapped in Africa. Thesiger's accounts of this journey, recounted in detail in *The Life of my Choice* (1987) and *The Danakil Diary* (1996), focus on the difficulties of navigating his way through a hostile area in order to determine the source of the Awash River.⁵¹ It is not possible to compare reactions to Waugh's and Thesiger's contrasting accounts of Ethiopia. The Danakil expedition received some attention at the time⁵² but a contemporary reaction to Thesiger's strong regard for Ethiopia and Haile Selassie is unavailable, as he did not publish a detailed account of his experiences until 1987.

Dervla Murphy is a prolific writer whose work self-consciously illustrates that women are capable of travelling in remote and rugged areas, suffering extremes of heat, cold, hunger and fatigue. Murphy's solo trek in northern Ethiopia, in 1966–67, is taken for the enjoyment of walking in remote areas.⁵³ Travelling in Ethiopia has changed significantly since 1933: Murphy does not need the pretext of map-making, as Thesiger did, easily obtaining permission for her more casual journey. Thesiger's narrative highlights the political obstacles and the threat of attack; Murphy concentrates on scenery, the physical demands of the journey and the challenges of travelling alone. As she is travelling in a less hostile region, she is able to provide more first-hand information about people and cultures.

Waugh, Thesiger and Murphy experience an Ethiopia which has since disappeared. Italy's brief occupation was, of course, unique in itself, but Ethiopia was largely characterised from 1930–1974 by the reign of Haile Selassie I (1892–1974). The Marxist and democratic governments which have followed Ethiopia's revolution have largely obliterated the spirit of modernisation, in the context of a revered heritage, which characterised the Emperor's

⁵¹ Wilfred Thesiger, *The Danakil Diary: Journeys through Abyssinia 1930–34*, 1st published 1996 (London: Flamingo, 1998).

⁵² 'Explorer's Quest Among Savages: Mr. Wilfred Thesiger On The Dankali Country', *The Times*, 14 November 1934, p.9.

⁵³ Dervla Murphy, *In Ethiopia with a Mule* (London: John Murray, 1968).

rule. Travel in Ethiopia is currently risky,⁵⁴ but those who do venture there now see a very different country.

Kenya was initially part of British East Africa and renamed in 1920. British administrative control met with resistance from local tribes and cultural and political tensions were increased first by the arrival of Indian labourers and, later, British settlers. The Mau Mau attacks, particularly fierce in the years 1952–56, were the culmination of national resentment and their brutality appears to have been matched by the British reprisals. Yet, since independence in 1963, there has been less political upheaval or violence in Kenya, than in countries such as the two Congolese republics or Rwanda. But levels of corruption within government have been sufficient to play a part in destabilising the economy. The emergence of the Kikuyu Mungiki sect and riots in early 2008 demonstrate that conflict between tribal groups is still bitter enough to provoke widespread and prolonged violence.

Wilfred Thesiger's *My Kenya Days* is an account of travelling and living in Kenya from 1959–1993 and his familiarity with the terrain and people, portrayed through photographs as well as text, is unique among travel texts about the country. Thesiger presents a different Kenya to the versions created by other white settlers, such as Karen Blixen and Joy Adamson. His Kenya is remote and rugged, peopled by tribes; white communities receive little attention. As his narrative was published in 1994, however, Thesiger's imperialistic sympathies and his dislike of modernisation identify him as a transitional figure from an era which is now past. His journeys are not planned around his narratives and his attitude towards presenting foreign countries and cultures is very different from those who travel, observe and write with publication in mind.

From the late nineteenth century the Congo was divided between French and Belgian administrations and both régimes gained reputations for brutality towards the people they governed, as well as for exploitation of natural resources. Since gaining independent government in 1960 both countries have experienced severe political upheaval. While the Democratic Republic of Congo suffered from the debilitating effects of Mobutu's régime, the former French colony has had numerous heads of government over thirty years.

⁵⁴ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 'Ethiopia Travel Advice' <<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/sub-saharan-africa/ethiopia>> [accessed 7 November 2009].

Different governmental frameworks have been attempted over this time: socialism was adopted in 1964 and the Republic of Congo was declared a Marxist state, the People's Republic, in 1970. In 1990 Marxism was abandoned in favour of a democratically elected government. No political structure has succeeded in establishing a secure and stable Congolese government. Democratic elections have been in place since 1992 but disputes over results led to civil war which continued throughout the 1990s.⁵⁵

Congo is a particularly important area for travel writing. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* had a profound impact on modern representations of the Congo and, indeed, on Western perceptions of the entire continent.⁵⁶ Brenda Cooper has analysed the impact of Conrad's work on modern novels – the impact of the novella on travel writing is also significant and I will discuss the use of Conrad and the attempt to escape from him.⁵⁷ Aspects of O'Hanlon's *Congo Journey* (1996) reflect Conrad's work and I shall analyse how *Heart of Darkness* is deliberately invoked in the narrative. O'Hanlon's self-awareness reveals his modernity: the irony of his self-presentation and his compassion for the tragedies he witnesses in Congolese life places *Congo Journey* in its twentieth-century context.

The racial tensions in South Africa are complex and have had far-reaching consequences. The hostility between the British and Dutch settlers culminated in the South African War (1899–1902) after which the British held political control. Relations between the settlers remained uneasy but they worked together to promote the policy of white supremacy, oppressing coloured, Asian and black South Africans. Legislated *apartheid* was not dismantled until 1991 and the elections which followed in 1994 were the first to enfranchise black voters (the majority group) across the whole country. Since then the ruling party has been the African National Congress (ANC) and despite measures taken to address issues of racial inequality and the bitter tension of race relations, there are still marked economic differences between racial groupings and much lingering resentment engendered by *apartheid*. The conflict over who rightly belongs in South Africa and who, therefore, may legitimately be its representatives are not yet fully resolved, although the

⁵⁵ BBC, *Country Profile: Republic of Congo* <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1076836.stm> [accessed 7 November 2009].

⁵⁶ Tim Youngs, 'Africa/The Congo: The Politics of Darkness' in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, 156–173 (p.157).

⁵⁷ Brenda Cooper, *The Weary Sons of Conrad: White Fiction Against the Grain of Africa's Dark Heart* (New York and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002).

late twentieth century has shown attempts to unite the diverse people groups within South Africa, symbolised by eleven official languages and a multi-lingual national anthem.

Westerners have long coupled explorations of home with self-discovery but few Africans travel in this way. South Africa proves an exception to this general point and I will discuss a selection of South African narratives in conjunction with Dervla Murphy's *South from the Limpopo* (1997).⁵⁸ Most South African travel texts are written by the descendants of European settlers, such as Laurens van der Post and Dan Jacobson. Noni Jabavu, however, is a Xhosa writer, although an expatriate in Britain like van der Post and Jacobson. Her narratives specifically address an English-speaking Xhosa audience as well as a Western one.⁵⁹ These writers address issues of cultural identity and land ownership very differently.

Van der Post searches for the Kalahari San in 1955, exploring connections between the ancient past and his memories of growing up in South Africa. He seeks to prove that something of lost San cultures has been retained in modern, non-indigenous South African cultures. Jabavu's narratives, describing journeys made in 1955 and 1956, discuss her status at home, interactions with her family and her relationship to her native culture as an expatriate. She finds it difficult to return and reconnect with her home life when present realities clash with her memories of the past. Her family's lives are impacted, sometimes heavily, by racial tensions but these issues do not overshadow her more personal reflections about home.

Dan Jacobson, travelling in the early 1990s, attempts to form a more complete understanding of the area from which he came, seeking greater insight into his past. The route Jacobson travels, however, has many historical associations and he soon follows this road out of South Africa, through Botswana to Zimbabwe, so that the journey becomes a rediscovery and a homecoming for his Zimbabwean wife as well, although Jacobson remains at the centre of his narrative. *The Electronic Elephant* (1994) is preoccupied with the history of Jacobson's journey and the poignant contrast to the modern southern Africa

⁵⁸ Dervla Murphy, *South from the Limpopo: Travels through South Africa*, 1st published 1997 (London: Flamingo, 1998).

⁵⁹ Noni Jabavu, *The Ochre People: Scenes From a South African Life* (London: John Murray, 1963), n.p.

through which he is travelling.⁶⁰ His detailed descriptions of poverty and stagnant industry reveal his lack of optimism for the future of South Africa.

Dervla Murphy is proud of the fact that, now in her seventies, she is still able to undertake lengthy and physically exacting journeys. Her account of travelling through South Africa between 1993–1995 reveals Western preoccupations with South African politics. Unlike Jacobson, Murphy is determinedly optimistic about the humanitarian impact of equal franchise and the abolition of legislated *apartheid*. She is eager to see how different South African societies are transformed by the transition to a democratically elected government. She interrogates everything she sees, asking questions of everyone she meets, in order to gain some idea of how far South Africans are willing to accept change and to work towards a united South Africa.

While it is appropriate for Western writers to respond to changes in cultural perceptions, an increase in travel texts written by Africans would complicate and enrich representations of Africa. Analysis and evaluation of Africa, or specific countries, is evident in African intellectual thought but it is not yet well-established in African travel writing, itself an emerging genre. Travel writing depends on the balance of notions of home and abroad. European and American writers have used travel to interrogate their relationship to their own countries and continents; only a few Africans have carried out similar interrogations. As this questioning develops it will inevitably change the ways in which the West thinks about Africa and Africa thinks about itself. But, of course, every text takes its place in a continuum and interrogates the notion of ‘home’: Thesiger’s perceptions and presentation of Maralal must accommodate changes in the environment for which he is himself partly responsible. Maralal is not actually Thesiger’s home town, although he has made his home there. Jacobson and Jabavu, on the other hand, return home but find themselves not quite *at home*.

Binyavanga Wainaina has shown that some Western representations, at least, are considered superficial and patronising.⁶¹ I hope to show that a number of Western writers can be insightful and respectful, but they can only bring their readers into another culture

⁶⁰ Dan Jacobson, *The Electronic Elephant: A Southern African Journey*, 1st published 1994 (London: Penguin, 1995).

⁶¹ Binyavanga Wainaina, ‘How to Write about Africa’, *Granta: The View from Africa*, 92 (2005), pp.92–95.

as far as they themselves have been able to go. Mikhail Bakhtin observes that ‘it is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly’.⁶² Certainly the realisation of Otherness can only be grasped after an encounter with a different culture. The necessary difference of an outsider’s perspective is energising, raising ‘new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself’.⁶³ Chinua Achebe wittily observes: ‘We should welcome the rendering of our stories by others, because a visitor can sometimes see what the owner of the house has ignored’. Equally, however, a visitor must be respectful and ‘not be concerned with the colour of skin [...] or the condition of the technology in the house’.⁶⁴ According to Bakhtin, Western writers need not seek to ‘view the world through the eyes of [...] [a] foreign culture’, striving to forget their own, as this would be culturally dishonest.⁶⁵ At the same time, they must be aware of the process and impact of cultural mediation, as their constructions of Others are filtered through the influences of Western culture. As Africans become increasingly self-conscious about their land and culture it seems likely that local impressions will increasingly challenge and complicate Western perceptions.

⁶² M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Caryl Emerson, and others, eds, 1st published in 1979 as *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, trans. by Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p.7.

⁶³ Bakhtin, p.7.

⁶⁴ Caryl Phillips, ‘Out of Africa: The Case Against Conrad’, *Guardian*, 22 February 2003, p.4.

⁶⁵ Bakhtin, pp.6–7.

Chapter One: Representations of Africa

Introduction

Africa's most enduring reputation is as a dark and mysterious continent, as in Graham Greene's 'darkest Africa'.¹ Greene uses this phrase to ironise the serious usages of earlier explorers such as Henry Morton Stanley's *Through the Dark Continent* (1878).² Alan P. Merriam observes that Africa has been traditionally regarded 'as a remote Dark Continent inhabited by peoples with whom we felt we had no common cause, and who in any case held little interest for us'.³ African peoples have often been dehumanised and marginalised and it is Africa's terrain that has exercised the greater hold on Western imagination and interest. Africa's interior has had a special and lasting reputation as an alluring, mysterious and threatening space. Europe and North America are not presented so romantically. Asia has shared this reputation but the concept of the mystical East has not retained the same resonance in the modern world as darkest Africa.

This notion still turns up in diverse twentieth-century representations: Roald Dahl's autobiography, for example, refers to Africa as 'distant and magic'; the difficulty of access, as travel was expensive, increases the sense of remoteness and the exotic.⁴ Dervla Murphy's repeated references to Africa as 'mysterious' suggest that this perception of Africa is still treated seriously by modern travellers.⁵ This popular attitude towards Africa is already apparent in Conrad's description of Marlow's childhood interest in the 'many blank spaces on the earth'.⁶ The largest of these is Africa, 'a blank space of delightful mystery', demonstrating the appeal of the unknown. With the increase of geographical knowledge in the nineteenth century this fascinating space becomes 'a place of darkness' which, while referring to the names filling the map, also carries suggestions of wildness and savagery in Africa's interior.⁷ Of course, Conrad is also alluding to the effect of colonial activity in darkening the darkness.

¹ Graham Greene, *Journey Without Maps*, 1st published 1936 (London: Vintage, 2002), p.100.

² Henry Morton Stanley, *Through the Dark Continent or the Sources of the Nile Around the Great Lakes of Equatorial Africa and Down the Livingstone River to the Atlantic Ocean* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1878).

³ Alan P. Merriam, *Congo: Background of Conflict* (n.p., Northwestern University Press, 1961), p.vii.

⁴ Roald Dahl, *'Boy' and 'Going Solo'* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1992), p.165.

⁵ Dervla Murphy, *Cameroon with Egbert*, 1st published 1989 (London: Arrow Books Ltd, 1990), p.24; Author's Interview with Dervla Murphy, 17 August 2005.

⁶ Joseph Conrad, *'Heart of Darkness' with 'The Congo Diary'* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1995), p.21.

⁷ Ibid.

This chapter provides a historical context for the narratives which I have chosen to discuss. Modern representations of Africa by Western writers inevitably reflect, in various degrees, the earlier portrayals from which they learned about Africa in the first place. I will explore how Africa has been represented to the Western world in the past and discuss the possible origins and longevity of Africa's appeal as a dark continent inhabited by primitive, even monstrous people. The conviction of Africa's primitive and savage nature has long been imprinted on Western consciousness, upheld as a justification for colonial rule and for *apartheid* in South Africa.⁸ Fantastic accounts and racist opinions which have long been discredited are expressed in some of the Western world's most influential literature, such as Shakespeare's plays and Conrad's novels.⁹ Some aspects of modern writing show that writers are anxious to distance themselves from earlier opinions, particularly those from the nineteenth century. Much of Africa's romantic appeal is still evident in Western thinking, but travel writers are also aware that Africans are unlikely to perceive the continent, or their home country, in a similarly romantic fashion. Some Africans find Western culture fascinating and many are anxious to leave their homes in the hopes of obtaining better employment in North America or Europe. Others deplore the versions of themselves and their countries produced by the West.

The earliest accounts of Africa report it to be a wild and fantastical place, a reputation which endures to some extent in the present although the accuracy of ancient accounts in Herodotus and Pliny have long been discredited. I will outline some of the earliest impressions of the continent, and explore to what extent such accounts retained credibility as more reliable information became available. I will then analyse the impact of travel writing during the nineteenth century when more accurate information about Africa was recorded and the continent provided the stage for European imperial expansion. It was from such imperialism that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) emerged. The novella has influenced many subsequent representations of Africa although Achebe's intervention has forced rereadings of the text.¹⁰ I will return throughout the thesis to the importance of Conrad's work.

⁸ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.57; Robert Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.115.

⁹ William Shakespeare, *Othello: The Moor of Venice*, ed. by Michael Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Radford: Wilder, 2008).

¹⁰ Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', Chancellor's Lecture, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 18 February 1975.

Most travel writing about Africa was and still is written by Westerners. Africa is increasingly ‘writing back’¹¹ by various means such as fiction, critical essays and history,¹² but not yet very strongly in travel writing. Africans recognise the inadequacies of Western perspectives, but there are few African accounts of travelling at home and, therefore, few alternative versions of the continent which challenge and enrich those presented by outsiders. I will discuss, here and throughout the thesis, issues surrounding the lack of African travel writing about Africa.

Past Perceptions of Africa

Colin McEvedy states that:

As far as Europe was concerned, Black Africa remained an unknown continent for an astonishing length of time. South of a line drawn through Lake Chad, less than a quarter of the land could be mapped with any confidence in the year 1800.¹³

Due to its proximity to the Mediterranean, North Africa has long been familiar to European and Asian countries. This was initially a result of trade excursions made by the Phoenicians and Arabs, who were known to be sailing to Egypt in 2250 BC and who later explored along the Mediterranean and Eastern coasts of Africa.¹⁴ By AD 1350 explorations had only reached as far as the Canary Islands in the north-west and the sighting of Madagascar in the east.¹⁵ By the fifteenth century Arabic sailors had gained a good knowledge of Africa’s eastern coast. Europeans were reluctant to sail along Africa’s western coast, having little experience of sailing into the strong northerly headwinds which made return journeys so hazardous.¹⁶ Portugal made the earliest advances in sailing under such conditions and was the first to establish a European trade route to West Africa. Other European countries soon followed to benefit from lucrative trading in slaves and gold. The route to India and the spice trade was not opened up until 1488. Bartholomew Dias sailed

¹¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd edn 2002 (London: Routledge, 2005).

¹² UNESCO, *General History of Africa*, 8 vols (Oxford: Heinemann, 1981–1993); Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, ed. by Francis Abiola Irele (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009); Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2009). Ngũgĩ’s text is a valuable evaluation of modern African culture but, unfortunately, there has not been time to use it more extensively throughout this thesis.

¹³ Colin McEvedy, *The Penguin Atlas of African History* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1980), p.92.

¹⁴ McEvedy, p.38.

¹⁵ McEvedy, p.60.

¹⁶ McEvedy, p.66.

just beyond the Cape of Good Hope before having to turn back, leaving Vasco da Gama to follow his route and complete the journey in 1498.¹⁷

Approaching Africa's interior was even more perilous than navigating its dangerous coastal waters. Without protection against disease Europeans were prevented from making effective journeys into the interior and, despite their trading interests, were reluctant even to set foot in West Africa, conducting transactions 'as much as they could from their ships'.¹⁸ The Cape colony in southern Africa is a notable exception. Dutch settlers arrived there in 1652 and were able to establish a successful colony due to the absence of malaria-carrying mosquitoes in that area.¹⁹ By the nineteenth century methods of treating malaria became more widely available and so knowledge of central and eastern Africa increased. Other obstacles were also overcome which aided explorers further: the impenetrable Sudd, for example, was first navigated by Europeans at this time.²⁰

Lack of certain knowledge did not prevent Europeans from producing detailed maps of Africa long before the nineteenth century. The coastline could be reproduced with some accuracy once it had been successfully circumnavigated. Representations of the interior, although detailed, did not rely on equally authoritative information. Willem Janszoon Blaeu's map of 1630

is notable for [...] its relative geographic accuracy. The shape of the continent is almost perfect [...] coastal cities and rivers are named in meticulous detail. However, the names of places are, in many cases, engraved inwards to give an impression of fullness, and there are still many blank spaces on the map [...] filled with elephants, ostriches, and camels.²¹

The lack of genuine knowledge about Africa led to the development of 'fantastic stories [...] because so little was actually known'.²² Arabic accounts dating from the eighth century demonstrate that much was known about North and West Africa in Islamic societies, but little of this information was widely published in Europe before the sixteenth

¹⁷ McEvedy, pp.70–72.

¹⁸ McEvedy, p.92.

¹⁹ McEvedy, p.82, p.92.

²⁰ McEvedy, p.38.

²¹ *The Yale Map Collection*, Yale University Library

<<http://www.library.yale.edu/MapColl/oldsite/map/africa.html>> [accessed 28 October 2009].

²² Mary Beagon, *Roman Nature: The Thought of Pliny the Elder* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p.10.

century. European knowledge of Africa was considerably misdirected until such accounts succeeded in displacing earlier myths.

Some of the earliest and most influential accounts of Africa circulating in Europe were compiled by Pliny the Elder in his *Historia Naturalis (HN)* (AD 77), a massive compendium assembled from many sources, the central focus of which was ‘human interaction with nature’.²³ A passage in the fifth book of *Natural History*, concerned with animals rather than humans, describes some of the tribes believed to exist in Africa:

Some place the Atlas tribe in the middle of the desert and next to them the half-animal Goat-Pans, the Blemmyae, Gamphasantes, Satyrs and Strapfeet. The Atlas tribe is primitive and subhuman, if we believe what we hear [...] The Blemmyae are reported as being without heads; their mouth and eyes are attached to their chest. The Satyrs have no human characteristics except their shape [...] The Strapfeet are people with feet like thongs who naturally move by crawling.²⁴

Accounts of men in Africa are given in the seventh book of *Natural History* but the fifth book suggests that ‘if we believe what we hear’, subhuman creatures also existed there.²⁵

One of the purposes of Pliny’s encyclopaedia was the preservation of knowledge; old accounts were included as well as modern in order to construct ‘an indivisible heritage, to be preserved, added to and handed on’.²⁶ Factual accuracy may not have been a criterion for inclusion of information in the encyclopaedia. Pliny’s work was widely distributed, often in secondary texts in which *Natural History* was repeatedly ‘abridged and epitomized’.²⁷ Mary Beagon points out that the paraphrasing of Pliny’s work was so common that ‘the more distant in time a writer is from Pliny, the less likely he is to have used the *HN* directly’.²⁸ Pliny’s work survived for a long time because different societies found different uses for his *Natural History*:

early medieval readers scoured the *HN* for facts and anecdotes. With the Renaissance came a new interest in Pliny’s literary and linguistic side. His work provided

²³ Pliny, the Elder, *The Elder Pliny on the Human Animal, Natural History: Book 7*, trans. by Mary Beagon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.21.

²⁴ Pliny, *Natural History: A Selection*, trans. by John F. Healy (London: Penguin 1991), pp.57–58.

²⁵ Pliny, *Natural History: A Selection*, p.57.

²⁶ Pliny, *The Elder Pliny on the Human Animal*, p.22.

²⁷ Beagon, p.23.

²⁸ Ibid.

knowledge of lost classical authors and his scientific vocabulary helped in the translation of Greek scientific works.²⁹

Pliny's authority as a source does not appear to have been significantly questioned until the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when *Natural History* was finally slighted for its lack of scientific accuracy.

Beagon suggests that the source of some of Pliny's more dubious accounts may have been the invention of 'pioneering knights' returning home, who

would invent rather than admit ignorance. No doubt they were also predisposed to confirm or even better the predictions of marvels, rather than report objectively, especially if the truth was not as sensational.³⁰

Reports from the crusades were also responsible for the longevity of the popular European belief in the wealthy Christian kingdom of Prester John, situated in Asia or Africa. Europe was eager for an influential Eastern ally against the Islamic Moors, against whom Prester John was rumoured to have had many victories. One source of the myth has been identified in Hugh of Jabala's account of a Mongol-Buddhist warlord, Yeh-lui Tashih, who 'decisively defeated the Persian army of the Seljuk king Sanjar'.³¹ Visiting the court of Pope Eugenius III, Hugh gave this report, where it was also heard by Otto of Friesing. The account appears in Otto's *The Two Cities* describing

a certain John, a king and priest who dwells beyond Persia and Armenia in the uttermost East and, with all his people, is a Christian but a Nestorian, [who] made war on the brother kings of the Persians and Medes.³²

The legend was intensified by the appearance of the *Letter of Prester John*, a catalogue of fabulous riches and mythical elements such as centaurs, unicorns and the phoenix.³³

Although eventually recognised as a hoax the letter was a popular document, generating a

²⁹ Beagon, p.23.

³⁰ Beagon, p.10.

³¹ Mary Baine Campbell, 'Asia, Africa, Abyssinia: Writing the Land of Prester John', in *Travel Writing, Form, and Empire: The Poetics and Politics of Mobility*, ed. by Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), pp.21–47 (p.23).

³² Otto, Bishop of Freising, *The Two Cities: A Chronicle of Universal History to the Year 1146 A.D.*, ed. by Austin P. Evans and Charles Knapp (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), p.443.

³³ Vsevolod Slessarev, *Prester John: The Letter and the Legend* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1959), pp.71–73.

‘multitude of versions’.³⁴ The legend eventually faded but there was still a belief in Prester John’s kingdom as late as 1600, now linked to more accurate accounts of Ethiopia or Abyssinia.³⁵

Such impressions of Africa were maintained for centuries in Europe, retaining their credibility for some time even after eye-witness accounts became more widely known. More accurate and authoritative accounts of Africa have existed in Islamic literature since the eighth century. The records of the astronomer, al-Fazari, contain ‘the first known mention of the Ghana empire’, founded on the gold trade, of which he had heard rumours and to which he refers as ‘the land of gold’.³⁶ First-hand accounts began to appear as Arabs made journeys in northern and western Africa, producing detailed accounts which still retain historical and geographical value. Ibn Battuta travelled extensively from 1325–1354, visiting ‘virtually every known Muslim region of the world’ and countries beyond, such as India and China.³⁷ Ibn Khaldūn’s writing is particularly noted for the scholarly quality of his introduction to his *Muqaddimah*,³⁸ which Arnold J. Toynbee describes as ‘a philosophy of history which is undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever yet been created by any mind in any time or place’.³⁹

Robin Hallett identifies a ‘vigorous tradition of historical writing [...] in the Muslim world’ and much knowledge was gained through extensive travel.⁴⁰ Such writings made little impact on Europe, however, until the sixteenth century. Al-Hassan ibn Mohammed Al Wezzani, renamed Leo Africanus by Pope Leo X, was the first Islamic traveller to become well-known in Europe. Al-Hassan was born in Granada and brought up in

³⁴ C. F. Beckingham, ‘The Quest for Prester John’, in *The European Opportunity* ed. by Felipe Fernández-Armesto (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), pp.175–194 (p.177).

³⁵ Leo Africanus, *A Geographical Historie of Africa, Written in Arabicke and Italian by John Leo a More, borne in Granada, and brought up in Barbarie [...]* Translated and collected by John Pory, lately of Gonevill and Caius College in Cambridge, 1st published in 1550 as *Della descrizione dell’Africa*, trans. John Pory (London: [printed by Eliot’s Court Press] impensis Georg. Bishop, 1600), p.12, p.14.

³⁶ Mark R. Lipschutz, and R. Kent Rasmussen, *Dictionary of African Historical Biography* (London: Heinemann, 1978), p.63.

³⁷ Lipschutz and Rasmussen, p.87.

³⁸ Wali al-Din ’Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. by Franz Rosenthal, ed. by N.J. Dawood (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

³⁹ Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, 12 vols (London: Oxford University Press and Humphrey Milford, 1934–1961), III (1934), p.322.

⁴⁰ Robin Hallett, *Africa to 1875: A Modern History* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1970), p.4.

Morocco. As a ‘clerk and notary’,⁴¹ he travelled across northern Africa, as well as Constantinople and Arabia. His accounts of these travels, drawn up from journals, were published in Italian as *Descrittione dell’Africa* in 1550. An English translation, *A Geographical Historie of Africa*, was published by John Pory in 1600. Benedict Allen observes that ‘Christendom had never before read about Africa from the point of view of a native’. Al-Hassan’s narratives provided ‘a rare view of the world from the perspective of the Islamic sphere of influence’.⁴² *A Geographical Historie* contains eye-witness accounts of African people and cultures which differ widely from the rumours of subhuman creatures in *Natural History*. But the superior provenance of *A Geographical Historie* was not sufficient to challenge European perceptions.

Al-Hassan’s accounts are certainly less sensational than Pliny’s, with no references to the Blemmyae or Gamphasantes. His account of travelling through the Atlas mountains presents a striking contrast to Pliny’s reports; there is no evidence to suggest that the men al-Hassan encounters appear in any way primitive or subhuman:

wee found shepherds in a certaine cave [...] Being perswaded that we were driven thither by extremitie of cold [...] they gave us most friendly entertainment [...] They set bread, flesh, and cheese before us [...] We continued with the said shepherds for the space of two daies.⁴³

The absence of fantastic detail in al-Hassan’s report lends it credibility according to modern standards but Eldred D. Jones, referring specifically to Elizabethan and Jacobean societies, indicates a reluctance to discard older impressions. Despite a growing accumulation of more accurate knowledge of Africa, such information ‘did not [...] wholly displace the legendary ideas and fancies that had taken root in the popular imagination [...] The result was a rich mixture of fact, myth, and fancy’.⁴⁴

Possible evidence for such tenacity may be found in Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1622): it is suggested that both al-Hassan and Pliny are among Shakespeare’s sources. Geoffrey

⁴¹ Lipschutz and Rasmussen, p.120.

⁴² *The Faber Book of Exploration*, ed. by Benedict Allen (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), p.671.

⁴³ Leo Africanus, p.32.

⁴⁴ Eldred D. Jones, *The Elizabethan Image of Africa* (Charlottesville: Published for the Folger Shakespeare Library by the University Press of Virginia, 1971), p.1.

Bullough asserts that ‘Shakespeare almost certainly consulted’⁴⁵ Pory’s translation and Jones also suggests that ‘there is strong circumstantial evidence indicating that Shakespeare [...] knew the book’.⁴⁶ Both Jones and E. A. J. Honigmann point to the wording of Pory’s preface, suggesting that certain phrases are echoed in Othello’s speech to the senators.⁴⁷ Pory describes al-Hassan as having escaped ‘so manie thousands of imminent dangers [...] How often was he in hazard to have been captivated [...] How hardly many times escaped he the Lyons greedie mouth’,⁴⁸ which may correspond with Othello’s accounts

Of hairbreadth scapes i’t’h’imminent deadly breach;
Of being taken by the insolent foe.⁴⁹

The evidence, as Jones stresses, is circumstantial, but the possibility of a correlation between such passages is made more interesting when it is considered that in the same speech Othello refers to

men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders.⁵⁰

Such images appear to have been borrowed from Pliny’s account of the Blemmyae, demonstrating that, if Shakespeare did have some knowledge of *A Geographical Historie*, it did not affect his willingness also to include Pliny.

Beagon points out that ‘[w]ith the development of scientific knowledge, Pliny gradually lost his position of pre-eminence. By the twentieth century he was regarded as a mine of misinformation, if not actual fantasy’.⁵¹ But Pliny’s popularity is echoed in modern perceptions of Africa which continue to show a fascination with much older, fantastic representations. Thesiger’s accounts of the Danakil desert in Ethiopia present an Africa

⁴⁵ *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare: Earlier English History Plays: Henry VI, Richard III, Richard II*, ed. by Geoffrey Bullough, 8 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957–1975), III (1960), p.208.

⁴⁶ Jones, p.2.

⁴⁷ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. by E. A. J. Honigmann, The Arden Shakespeare, 1st published 1997 (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd, 1999), p.4; Jones, p.26.

⁴⁸ Leo Africanus, n.p.

⁴⁹ *Othello*, I.3.137.

⁵⁰ *Othello*, I.3.144.

⁵¹ Beagon, p.23.

where there are still blank spaces. Redmond O'Hanlon's search for mokélé-mbembé evokes a dark and mysterious Africa of dense forest, inhabited by violent people and malignant spirits. The continent is also mysterious for Dervla Murphy, although in a more benign way: she is struck by the sense that black Africans seem 'very profound' to her, with an 'extraordinary' intuitive sense.⁵²

Nineteenth-Century Accounts

The diversity of historical travel texts indicates a wide and varied culture of travel which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three; traditions of trade, pilgrimage, leisure, research and conquest are reflected within the history of travel literature. Explorers brought back reports of resources found in foreign countries such as South America or West Africa and the development of trade and colonial settlement increasingly encouraged foreign travel among Europeans. Travel writing was one among many forms of media obsessed with natural history which from the eighteenth century, as Mary Louise Pratt remarks, was 'realized in many aspects of social and material life'.⁵³ The Linnaean system enabled travellers and scientists alike to categorise new plants and animals. Europeans were absorbed with the discovery and naming of new places or species of animals, plants and insects. Travel narratives became 'essential mediators between the scientific network and a larger European public'.⁵⁴

By the nineteenth century, travel abroad was becoming increasingly connected to the development of European empires which, although cautious and haphazard at first, became fiercely competitive. Africa is the extreme example of the impact of European hegemony and nationalistic rivalry. Travel writing was instrumental in opening up the 'dark continent' to European commerce and other colonial interests. Almost the entire continent was under imperial rule by 1914, divided between France, Britain, Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Spain and Italy. The Netherlands had previously had a claim to South Africa but Britain had taken over the Dutch administration in 1902. The framework of colonial rule was supported by the vast number of traders, explorers, missionaries, administrators, soldiers, doctors, nurses, teachers and many others who were recruited or volunteered to work abroad.

⁵² Interview, 17 August 2005.

⁵³ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd edn (New York, Routledge, 2008), p.28.

⁵⁴ Pratt, p.29.

But exploration, missionary work and commerce in Africa were still much impeded by health issues. Joseph Conrad's eagerness to obtain a post in the Congo in 1890 is tempered by the knowledge that disease is so common:

60 per cent. of our Company's employees return to Europe before they have completed even six months' service. Fever and dysentery! There are others who are sent home in a hurry at the end of a year, so that they shouldn't die in the Congo [...] It would spoil the statistics which are excellent [...] There are only 7 per cent. who can do their three years' service.⁵⁵

During his first few months he is able to regard the certainty of illness with some complacency: 'While awaiting the inevitable fever, I am very well'.⁵⁶ At length he does fall ill, however, suffering 'from fever four times in two months, and [...] an attack of dysentery lasting five days'.⁵⁷ He is subsequently forced to leave the Congo early and is glad to do this, not only being in bad health but also disillusioned with his work. As he himself observed before travelling, his experience was all too common but this did not deter him, nor the many others who continued to volunteer. Basil Davidson remarks that European interest in Africa grew so intense that, although '[a]s many as fifty-two missionaries are said to have succumbed to one or another fever along the West Coast in 1825 alone [...] the flow of volunteers never failed'.⁵⁸

Africa was a sort of riddle to Europeans and it was presented as such in travel texts. Explorers in the nineteenth century made further progress than their predecessors and general curiosity fuelled a desire to open up the African continent and verify its myths and legends. Although the Blemmyae and Strapfeet had long been discredited, explorers gave more weight to other accounts of people and animals, such as pygmies, gorillas and the okapi. Competition among European explorers now increased: people, animals, rivers, lakes, mountains and plants were sought, traversed, mapped and named by foreign researchers. As Pratt remarks, many travellers at this time were 'central agents in legitimating scientific authority and its global project alongside Europe's other ways of

⁵⁵ Joseph Conrad, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad: 1861–1897*, ed. by Frederick R. Karl and others, 9 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983–2007), I (1983), p.52.

⁵⁶ Conrad, *Collected Letters*, p.55.

⁵⁷ Conrad, *Collected Letters*, p.62.

⁵⁸ Basil Davidson, *Africa in History: Themes and Outlines*, 2nd edn (London: Phoenix Press, 2003), p.282.

knowing the world, and being in it'.⁵⁹ The map of Africa's interior was gradually constructed, as the coastline had been in earlier centuries, until the whole terrain of the continent was known and recorded by Europeans, a process which lasted into the twentieth century.

Ancient sources proved reliable regarding the approximate location of the sources of the White Nile. The mystery of the sources was renowned because they had been sought for so long. Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile, had been known to ancient travellers and Europeans confirmed this knowledge for themselves in the sixteenth century.⁶⁰ The sources of the White Nile, on the other hand, seemed inaccessible. The Emperor Nero, having sent two centurions into Nubia, received the report that the White Nile 'emerged from impassable swamps', indicating that the soldiers 'had either seen or heard of the Sudd'.⁶¹ The Nile beyond this area was not confirmed until the nineteenth century and in the intervening centuries travellers were unable to add much significant knowledge to what was already known or estimated. Victorian explorers were, therefore, mainly guided by the clues of ancient texts. Livingstone, for example, continued to search for the source of the Nile until his death in 1873, believing he had found the fountains mentioned by Herodotus.⁶² Those who relied more on Ptolemy's estimations were more successful. Ptolemy's map of the known world, made in the middle of the second century AD, situates the Nile beyond the Sudd remarkably with near accuracy. He shows the river

rising in the mountain range in East Africa, the headstreams collecting into two large lakes before joining up and flowing north. Presumably this was a mixture of hearsay knowledge of Lakes Victoria and Albert acquired from the Arabs of Zanzibar and inspired speculation.⁶³

Johann Ludwig Krapf and Johannes Rebman were followed by Richard Burton and John Hanning Speke in the search for Ptolemy's Mountains of the Moon, the Ruwenzori Range where the Nile's headstreams flow into Lake Victoria.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Pratt, p.29.

⁶⁰ Nigel Leask, 'Bruce, James, of Kinnaird (1730–1794)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3734?docPos=2>> [accessed 28 October 2009].

⁶¹ McEvedy, p.38.

⁶² Bridges, p.65.

⁶³ McEvedy, pp.38–39.

⁶⁴ McLynn, pp.57–59.

Africa was, therefore, regarded as Europe's possession or, indeed, project: resources were available for commercial expansion, settlers acquired land and the African people were useful for labour. Regarded as racially inferior, they were civilised according to the European model by being integrated into educational and religious systems. Roy Bridges describes Britain's expansionist ambitions as 'optimism that the creation of wealth, progressive science-based change, and religious redemption might all be promoted to the mutual advantage of Britain and overseas areas'.⁶⁵ Such sentiments are expressed by many who pioneered in travel and research in Africa. Livingstone was confident that trade and industry were integral factors in the 'spiritual and social regeneration of Africa'.⁶⁶ Stanley's approach was more aggressive: his focus was the commercial potential of Africa's natural resources rather than missionary work and he opened up the Congo for Leopold II's colonial directors.⁶⁷

Women's narratives also contributed to the discourse of colonial development and, in Africa, Mary Kingsley's was one of the most authoritative. Her first appendix to *Travels in West Africa* (1897) focuses on trade and labour.⁶⁸ She introduces the subject in typically self-deprecatory fashion, '[a]s I am under the impression that the trade of the West African Coast is its most important attribute, I hope I may be pardoned for entering into this subject',⁶⁹ but goes on to make authoritative assertions on the best way to approach colonial trade and administration in Africa:

The first things to be considered are the natural resources of the country [...] the means of working these resources as they at present stand [...] the question of the possibility of increasing them by introducing new materials of trade-value in the shape of tea, coffee, cocoa &c.⁷⁰

The impact of nineteenth-century travel writing has been important but it was not irresistible. It could not always inspire investors with enthusiasm for overseas enterprise,

⁶⁵ Roy Bridges, 'Exploration and Travel Outside Europe (1720–1914) in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.53–69 (p.59).

⁶⁶ A. D. Roberts, 'Livingstone, David (1813–1873), explorer and missionary', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16803>> [accessed 7 November 2009].

⁶⁷ Felix Driver, 'Stanley, Sir Henry Morton (1841–1904), *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36247>> [accessed 7 November 2009].

⁶⁸ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa: Congo Français, Corisco and Cameroons* (London: Macmillan, 1897).

⁶⁹ Kingsley, p.631.

⁷⁰ Kingsley, pp.631–32.

however enthusiastic its endorsement of colonial projects. Ventures in Africa involved financial as well as physical risk. Stanley's failure to attract British investment in the Congo was partly due to lack of support from the British government. Neither Disraeli nor Lord Salisbury showed much interest in further expansion in Africa's interior at this time. Steps had been taken the previous year to protect British interests in the Cape.⁷¹ It had been a problematic venture, with fierce opposition from both black Africans and white settlers and the added complication of bankruptcy within the mining industry severely depleting the financial recompense.⁷² Such events had significantly discouraged British investors and effectively ruined Stanley's hopes for support.⁷³

It is important to remember, as Nicholas Thomas emphasises, that colonialism was not 'monolithic, uncontested and efficacious'.⁷⁴ Travel accounts like Stanley's were somewhat misleading about the commercial potential of African resources, presenting Africa as 'a cornucopia waiting to be opened by Europe'.⁷⁵ The financial consequences of acting upon this conviction could be severe. Leopold II was more receptive to Stanley's reports of the Congo than the British government, but soon discovered that, as Kingsley observes, Africa's abundant natural resources lay 'very much in the structure' and required much work, in mining, harvesting or hunting, to extract them.⁷⁶ Kingsley uses the Belgian Congo as an example of the 'reckless expenditure of money in attempts to open up' Africa. She comments that such extravagant outlay 'hampers [a country's] future terribly, even if attended with partial success, the mortgage being too heavy for the estate'.⁷⁷ Leopold was initially forced to spend much of his own money and to borrow from the Belgian government in order to maintain the Congo Free State.⁷⁸ The colony was saved by a sudden increase in the demand for rubber: as prices soared, Congolese red rubber 'finally yielded the requisite revenue'.⁷⁹

⁷¹ Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: 1876–1912*, 1st published 1991 (London: Abacus, 1992), p.39.

⁷² Pakenham, p.45.

⁷³ H. L. Wesseling, *Divide and Rule: The Partition of Africa, 1880–1914*, 1st published in 1991 as *Verdeel en heers*, trans. by Arnold J. Pomerans (Westport, Connecticut and London: Prager Publishers, 1996), p.83.

⁷⁴ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p.12.

⁷⁵ Bridges, p.66.

⁷⁶ Kingsley, p.631.

⁷⁷ Kingsley, p.638.

⁷⁸ Wesseling, p.129.

⁷⁹ Wesseling, p.130.

Critics have closely assessed the rôle of travel literature in promoting and supporting the work of empire which, although begun cautiously, had consumed Africa by the end of the nineteenth century.⁸⁰ Certainly the narratives of travellers at this time reveal the European fascination with Africa and the opportunities for intervention in research, commerce, administration, mission and philanthropy. Modern travel writers, such as O’Hanlon and Murphy, admire earlier travellers for their writing styles, their privileged access to lands, people and animals which were new to Europeans and the adventurous, uncertain nature of their travels.⁸¹ They are anxious, however, to distance themselves from the imperialistic appropriation of Africa and Africans which characterised so many travel narratives before the twentieth century. The decline of European empires has contributed to radical changes in modern travel writing and I will discuss to what extent a very different worldview has altered modern travel texts and how far nineteenth-century texts, ‘the classics’, still influence Western perceptions of Africa.⁸²

Conrad and the Congo

Joseph Conrad’s powerful representation of European cruelty in *Heart of Darkness* has influenced many subsequent portrayals of both the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo.⁸³ Conrad’s narrative refers to the Belgian Congo under Leopold II’s régime and its images of brutality and corruption have had a profound impact on Western perceptions of the Congo region. Indeed, as Youngs observes, images of darkness and savagery and the mystical force of the African landscape have impacted many narratives about Africa in general, so that *Heart of Darkness* has gradually come to represent ‘the essence of Africa’.⁸⁴ Holland and Huggan remark that ‘nearly every modern travel book that features the Congo as travel zone at some level reinscribes [...] *Heart of Darkness*’.⁸⁵ This influence is not only evident in literature: Wesseling invokes Conrad to describe

⁸⁰ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd edn (New York, Routledge, 2008); Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, 1st published 1991 (London: Routledge, 2001); Tim Youngs, *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues, 1850–1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

⁸¹ Redmond O’Hanlon, *Congo Journey*, 1st published 1996 (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p.32; Interview, 17 August 2005.

⁸² Interview, 17 August 2005.

⁸³ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Radford: Wilder, 2008).

⁸⁴ Tim Youngs, ‘Africa/Congo: The Politics of Darkness’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, 156–173 (p.157).

⁸⁵ Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2000), p.69.

Leopold's Congo⁸⁶ and Hugh McCullum refers to modern perceptions of the Congo as 'the "black heart of Africa"'.⁸⁷

Heart of Darkness had a significant influence on Conrad's readership. His condemnation of Belgian colonisation found a ready audience in Britain, corresponding with the findings of other Europeans who investigated claims of cruelty within the Congo Free State. In 1900 E. D. Morel began 'campaigning against the brutal system of forced labour employed by Leopold II'⁸⁸ and Roger Casement's damning report on atrocities committed in the Congo, mainly detailing kidnappings and mutilations, was published in 1903.⁸⁹ *Heart of Darkness* does not graphically expose European offences in the same way as Morel and Casement's investigations but offers a more general, though damning, judgment on the European consciousness. Casement's exposure of colonial behaviour has the effect of making plausible Conrad's representation of Kurtz's desire to 'Exterminate all the brutes!'⁹⁰

Conrad's literary contemporaries also responded to his work. T. S. Eliot takes the announcement of Kurtz's death, 'Mistah Kurtz – he dead',⁹¹ as the epigraph to *The Hollow Men* (1925), thus invoking Conradian notions of the emptiness, corruption and decay of European civilisation. Graham Greene was aware that no perception of the Congo could escape the pressure of Conrad. While travelling there he decides to risk reading *Heart of Darkness* for 'the first time since I abandoned him about 1932 because his influence on me was too great and too disastrous'. Re-reading it, Greene decides that it is 'still a fine story, but its faults show now', which seems an obligatory denial.⁹² The style of *In Search of A Character* (1961), written as a diary, does not seem to be heavily influenced by Conrad but

⁸⁶ Wesseling, p.130.

⁸⁷ Hugh McCullum, *Africa's Broken Heart: Congo – The Land the World Forgot* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2006), p.xi.

⁸⁸ Martin Ceadal, 'Morel, Edmund Dene', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37782>> [accessed 29 October 2009].

⁸⁹ Roger Casement, *The Eyes of Another Race: Roger Casement's Congo Report and 1903 Diary*, ed. by Séamas Ó Siocháin and Michael O'Sullivan (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2003).

⁹⁰ Conrad, 'Heart of Darkness' with the 'Congo Diary', p.84.

⁹¹ Conrad, 'Heart of Darkness' with the 'Congo Diary', p.112.

⁹² Graham Greene, *In Search of a Character*, 1st published 1961 (London: Penguin, 1968), p.42, p.44.

John Boening suggests that Greene cannot throw off his consciousness of Conrad and, like Marlow, ‘finds an Africa which resonates with something deep in himself’.⁹³

Chinua Achebe’s seminal lecture, attacking racism in *Heart of Darkness*⁹⁴ has revealed the problematic issue of using Africa as ‘a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe’s own state of spiritual grace will be manifest’.⁹⁵ Caryl Phillips, among others, challenges Achebe, asking if Conrad was ‘really a racist?’⁹⁶ Achebe points out that Conrad’s representation denies ‘Africa and Africans their full and complex humanity [...] My humanity is not to be debated, nor is it to be used simply to illustrate European problems’.⁹⁷ But African responses to Conrad’s work have not been uniform. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and al-Tayyib Salih are just two examples of African writers whose works reveal the influence of Conrad.⁹⁸ African writers often debate the propriety of writing in English, and European representations of Africa are similarly contentious among all African writers.⁹⁹ But Achebe’s remarks have enabled a debate to take place, which highlights the different ways in which Africans respond to Western representations in fiction. There is not yet a similar debate about Western travel literature about Africa.

The challenge for modern writers is to find new ways to present modern-day Congo. Brenda Cooper’s study, *Weary Sons of Conrad* (2002), looks for evidence in modern fiction of attempts to break away from Conradian tropes when writing about Africa.¹⁰⁰ She agrees with Achebe that it is inappropriate for such quests to ‘manipulate Africa and Africans’ and extends Achebe’s argument by suggesting that such representations are

⁹³ John Boening, ‘B/reaching the African Coast’, in *The Paths of Multiculturalism: Travel Writings and Postcolonialism*, Maria-Alzira Seixo, and others, eds (Lisbon: Edições Cosmos, 2000, pp.129–140 (p.134).

⁹⁴ Chinua Achebe, ‘An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*’, Chancellor’s Lecture, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 18 February 1975.

⁹⁵ Chinua Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), p.3.

⁹⁶ Caryl Phillips, ‘Out of Africa: The Case against Conrad’, *Guardian*, Features and Reviews, 22 February 2003, p.4.

⁹⁷ Phillips, p.4.

⁹⁸ Cedric Watts observes that Ngũgĩ’s novel *A Grain of Wheat* (London: Heinemann, 1967) is based ‘largely on the plot and themes’ of *Under Western Eyes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and that ‘Conradian elements’ appear in Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1969). Cedric Watts, ‘Conrad, Joseph (1857–1924)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32533>> [accessed 30 October 2009].

⁹⁹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Culture*, 1st published 1981 (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), p.7.

¹⁰⁰ Brenda Cooper, *The Weary Sons of Conrad: White Fiction Against the Grain of Africa’s Dark Heart* (New York and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002).

metaphorical recreations of ‘the most feared, untrammelled [...] “uncivilised”, buried aspects’ of the European consciousness.¹⁰¹ Cooper’s fundamental point of interrogation is whether it is possible

for white, non-African men to make the fictional journey to Africa without replicating the shameful history of representations, which served imperial ends and which denigrated the countries and people of Africa?¹⁰²

She is ‘reluctant to prescribe which conventions writers may use’ but does suggest that they need to ‘cleans[e] their language of metaphor in some kind of recourse to the metonymic dimension’.¹⁰³ In her analysis of fictional accounts by writers such as Paul Theroux and Peter Høeg, Cooper concludes that ‘it is indeed possible’ to avoid stereotypical and patronising representations, although ‘sometimes these journeys are only partially successful’.¹⁰⁴ Conrad’s depiction of Africa has resonated powerfully with existing Western perceptions but Cooper’s study reveals a consciousness of the hegemony of Conradian influence and a desire to move beyond it.

While Cooper concludes that Western fiction has shown signs of moving away from the appropriation of African culture as a foil for or means of European self-definition, travel writing still seems preoccupied with Conrad’s ideas. Modern writers such as Dervla Murphy do still refer to the darkness and mystery of the African continent, indicating that there is an expectation of exoticism.¹⁰⁵ Jeffrey Tayler’s *Facing the Congo* (2000) is unapologetically subtitled *A Modern-Day Journey into the Heart of Darkness*.¹⁰⁶ Conrad’s influence should not necessarily be ignored, as his representation has been important in the construction of the West’s understanding of Congo and Africa. Westerners cannot escape their cultural influences but, as O’Hanlon’s construction of the Republic of Congo shows, they may manipulate them so as to subvert older stereotypes.

Travel accounts by Africans, however, do not seriously invoke or question Conrad or, indeed, other Western representations. There are few examples as yet, but they are

¹⁰¹ Cooper, p.12.

¹⁰² Cooper, p.293.

¹⁰³ Cooper, p.20.

¹⁰⁴ Cooper, p.293.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, 17 August 2005.

¹⁰⁶ Jeffrey Tayler, *Facing the Congo: A Modern-Day Journey into the Heart of Darkness* (London: Abacus, 2000).

significant and I will discuss twentieth-century South African representations in a later chapter. The title of Sihle Khumalo's travel narrative of his Cape to Cairo journey, *Dark Continent, my Black Arse* (2007), satirises Western romantic portrayals of Africa, but Khumalo does not discuss specific texts.¹⁰⁷ The only preconceptions he challenges are his own and although much of Africa may be dark to him, he does not suggest that this is anything more than the result of his own ignorance, which he can rectify, rather than some impenetrable mystery.¹⁰⁸

Cultural Contrasts in the Development of Travel Literature

Africa has written back to Western versions of itself a good deal; African fiction in particular has developed rapidly since the middle of the twentieth century and I will discuss various aspects of African self-exploration in Chapter Two. But less than half the texts I deal with in detail are by natives of Africa and of these only one is by a black writer. This section identifies factors which have impeded the development of African travel writing about Africa, while at the same time asking why Western travel writing has progressed so far in comparison. There are a number of practical and ideological barriers to the development of African travel writing which no longer apply to many Westerners. Obvious factors include greater levels of poverty and lower levels of literacy. Greater resources in both time and money have enabled the leisure culture in the Western world to develop very differently from that in Africa. There is a long tradition of self-exploration in Western travel texts, of going elsewhere in order to understand oneself and one's home, but African writers do not approach the issue of self-definition in the same way and Western influence on the African continent has done much to confuse issues of home and identity.

Western interrogations of home have long been established in travel writing. Travel in Europe became very fashionable in the eighteenth century following the popularity of the Grand Tour. James Buzard describes the prevailing attitude as '[t]hose who *could* travel, should'. This had an exponential effect on the literature of travel: 'Travel is everywhere in eighteenth-century British literature [...] Writers seemed to be travelling, in reality or in

¹⁰⁷ Sihle Khumalo, *Dark Continent, my Black Arse: By Bus, Boksie, Matola – from Cape to Cairo* (Roggebaai: Umuzi, 2007).

¹⁰⁸ Khumalo, p.99, p.111, p.128.

their imaginations, just about everywhere'.¹⁰⁹ Initially very few people had sufficient funds or leisure time to travel and tour-making was originally 'the province of the aristocracy'.¹¹⁰ The situation changed during the eighteenth century, as 'class ambition, disposable income, leisure time, education, and patriotism impelled the English bourgeoisie to read about and visit once-obscure portions of their island'.¹¹¹ Travel abroad was still reserved for the fairly well-off, but now the middle classes were able to travel within Britain and add their impressions to the increasing number of travel narratives.

Kwame Anthony Appiah points out that, until recently, most African cultures had 'no high technology and relatively low levels of literacy'.¹¹² Because of the importance of oral traditions in many African cultures, standards of literacy were not prioritised until contact was made with Arabs and Europeans and, even then, widespread programmes of education were not instigated until the nineteenth century, as part of the colonial system. Literacy in Africa is now widely varied, ranging from between ninety to less than fifty per cent, but there are more areas in Africa where literacy is less than fifty per cent than in the rest of the world where, in many countries, literacy is greater than ninety per cent.¹¹³ This relatively recent development of African literacy is a fundamental factor in the slower development of travel texts in Africa than elsewhere.

Even where literacy has been improved, money is still crucially lacking. Murphy mentions a Ugandan man who asks for advice, as he has written a novel on the subject of AIDS. Murphy gives the man, Peter, the address of her publisher and 'a scribbled note to enclose with the typescript', pointing out that a handwritten manuscript 'won't be read'.¹¹⁴ This new information alarms Peter, as the cost of typing up the novel is too expensive. Although the amount needed is not 'very much in sterling' he refuses Murphy's help, insisting that he 'beg[s] only for advice, never for money'. He resolves instead to 'work more to earn those shillings'.¹¹⁵ In this situation the quality of Peter's manuscript is not the first issue,

¹⁰⁹ James Buzard, 'The Grand Tour and After (1660–1840)', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, pp.37–52 (p.37).

¹¹⁰ John Glendening, *The High Road* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997), p.2.

¹¹¹ Glendening, p.2.

¹¹² Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In my Father's House* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.81.

¹¹³ UNESCO, Institute for Statistics
< http://www.uis.unesco.org/en/stats/statistics/ed/map_illit_monde2000.jpg > [accessed 29 October 2009].

¹¹⁴ Dervla Murphy, *The Ukimwi Road*, 1st published 1993 (London: Flamingo, 1994), p.62.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

but the difficulty of gaining access to a publisher. Easy access to computers means that most people from a Western culture would have little difficulty meeting the preliminary requirements of a publisher when submitting a proposal, whatever their chances of being accepted for publication.

On being forced to turn down numerous requests for money, Murphy considers that, although by Western standards she is ‘an ordinary citizen, not rich [...] not able to sponsor anyone’, in comparison with most Africans she is wealthy.¹¹⁶ If she were not she

couldn’t be travelling through Africa, even by bicycle. And see how different and expensive-looking that bicycle is! An African touring Europe for months would have to be either personally rich or sufficiently well-connected.¹¹⁷

Similar resources would also be necessary in order to tour Africa and there are other factors which suggest why many Africans would be unlikely to undertake such a journey. Murphy observes that ‘the concept of cycling for fun is hard to get across in Africa’ and this remark indicates a major cultural difference in the perception of what constitutes leisure.¹¹⁸

In the West, a variety of travelling styles has evolved over centuries and more traditional methods, such as walking or cycling, have long been considered leisure activities. This perspective was initially the privilege of the upper and middle classes, however, who were not required to undertake strenuous physical exertion on a daily basis. Dorothy Wordsworth’s *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland* (1874) discusses how the difference in status creates very different feelings towards walking for long distances.¹¹⁹ At Loch Lomond the Wordsworths meet a family, ‘driven from [...] [their] home by want of work’.¹²⁰ Watching the woman, Dorothy reflects on the contrast between their situations:

¹¹⁶ Murphy, *Ukimwi Road*, p.103.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Murphy, *Ukimwi Road*, p.199.

¹¹⁹ Dorothy Wordsworth, *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland*, ed. by J.C. Shairp (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1981).

¹²⁰ Wordsworth, p.224.

every step was painful toil, for she had either her child to bear or a heavy burthen. *I* walked as she did, but pleasure was my object, and if toil came along with it, even *that* was pleasure, – pleasure, at least, it would be in the remembrance'.¹²¹

The juxtaposition of the woman's struggle and Wordsworth's (rather self-conscious) enjoyment illustrates the disparity between those for whom travel is a leisure activity and those who must travel in order to subsist.

Such contrasts are now less common in the Western world, where there is generally greater democracy in leisure pursuits. This form of leisure has evolved so that many travel writers now find a form of satisfaction in the difficulty of the journey, as Wilfred Thesiger, O'Hanlon and Murphy, to name but a few, have demonstrated. But in many African societies, walking or cycling many miles is not yet considered relaxing or invigorating. Noni Jabavu, a Westernised Xhosa, discovers that her habit of walking for pleasure is regarded as very unusual when she returns home:

'Walks? You mean the niece just – walks?'

'Pointlessly? *Yo!* It is not enough to trudge miles every day to the lands, to the river, to MacDonalds?' [...]

'Does she not know that one uses one's legs until they are worn to stumps in this countryside?'¹²²

Jabavu realises that 'people only walked for a purpose: to the trader's, to Beer Parties, to the cattle dips, or "work parties" '. The concept of walking for fun is laughed at: 'For "fun", *I* like a lorry ride. Had one to Xhokonxa, two months ago come Saturday. It was *good*'.¹²³ Like the family the Wordsworths encountered in Scotland, many Africans travel in order to find work, often wishing to emigrate to Western countries in the hope of improving their standards of living. Under such circumstances there appears to be comparatively little curiosity about their own home. The option of travelling in Africa in order to write is not available to the many Africans who struggle to maintain a steady income. Of course, despite widespread poverty, there are Africans who do have sufficient means to travel and then to publish and distribute their work. Few such writers, however, have yet chosen to explore Africa.

¹²¹ Wordsworth, p.224.

¹²² Noni Jabavu, *The Ochre People: Scenes from a South African Life* (London: John Murray, 1963), p.168.

¹²³ Ibid.

Although this gap between Western and African self-representation is largely due to disparities in wealth and education, cultural attitudes towards self-examination and self-definition are also relevant. As Western travel writing developed in the eighteenth century a more personal strain became evident in the narratives. John Glendening argues, for example, that ‘individual self-identities, both actual and desired, conventional and idiosyncratic, are powerfully projected through the increasingly romantic representations of Scotland’.¹²⁴ Increasingly, the character of the traveller and the reasons for travelling have become as important to the text as the journey itself. Many travellers, particularly those exploring familiar landscapes, travel with a sense of self-interrogation and a desire to learn more about their personalities through their experiences. On turning thirty, Chinese artist Ma Jian evaluates his life and decides that he must ‘focus [his] mind and do something’. He therefore spends three years travelling through China in an attempt to ‘take control’ of his life.¹²⁵

Although clearly not an exclusively Western trait, such self-examination may not be so widely developed in African mindsets as elsewhere. Appiah suggests that the search for self-definition contrasts significantly with African perceptions:

though trained in Europe or in schools and universities dominated by European culture, the African writers’ concern is not with the discovery of a self that is the object of an inner voyage of discovery. Their problem [...] is finding a public role, not a private self [...] The African asks always not ‘who am I?’ but ‘who are we?’ and ‘my’ problem is not mine alone but ‘ours’.¹²⁶

According to Appiah, it is not an African trait to approach an experience in terms of self-definition and, of course, a journey of self-discovery means little if there is no concept of a private self. South African travel narratives, however, do demonstrate an African sense of self, although it could be argued that, having lived in Britain for much of their lives, Laurens van der Post, Noni Jabavu and Dan Jacobson have developed, in some measure, more Western concepts of selfhood. All grew up under British colonial rule and van der Post and Jacobson, being descended from Europeans, are raised in the cultural shadow of the West.

¹²⁴ Glendening, p.2.

¹²⁵ Ma Jian, *Red Dust*, 1st published in 2001 as 红尘, trans. by Flora Drew (London: Vintage, 2002), p.20, p.70.

¹²⁶ Appiah, p.76.

Similarly, Glendening indicates that patriotism was a factor in the increase of Britons making local tours,¹²⁷ a concept which Appiah asserts is currently very uncertain in Africa. Without a sense of clear and relevant national identities it is difficult for Africans to determine to which groups they belong: Africans are ‘Asante, Yoruba, Kikuyu, but what does this now mean? They are Ghanaian, Nigerian, Kenyan, but does this yet mean anything?’¹²⁸ Africans may be divided from their nearest neighbours by political borders but, in fact, share the same tribal background so that the lines of culture are not clearly demarcated. Western culture, by contrast, has long discussed the subject of self-definition. The security of Western national identities is supported by indigenous travel literature which has developed from a spirit of inquiry and the desire of individuals to gain insight into their own personalities by exploring their homeland. And, of course, the diversity of opinions which emerge from such writing arguably strengthens national identities, since multiple representations allow for the construction of more complex and nuanced cultural impressions.

African Travel Writing

The proliferation of Western representations has elicited some response from Africans, white and black, who cannot connect with foreign perceptions of Africa. Dan Jacobson touches on this topic when he recalls

hours [...] spent in the Plaza Kinema [...] watching weekly serials and full-length movies about the ‘Africa’ of Hollywood [...] The intrepid white hero and heroine [...] would come on a ‘lost’ or ‘buried’ city in the jungle, a maze of stone walls, arches, holes, cliffs, idols, roots, creepers.¹²⁹

Jacobson contrasts these exotic representations to the Africa he is familiar with. Outside the cinema, in the ‘banal daylight of the Kimberley market square’, Jacobson could see ‘the dwarfish, crenellated clock-tower of the high court’.¹³⁰ Instead of crumbling ruins hidden in dense vegetation, there were ‘the Doric columns and tin roof of the town hall [...] [and] Louverdis’s café. This was the Africa I knew. Anything less jungle-like and romantic

¹²⁷ Glendening, p.2.

¹²⁸ Appiah, p.76.

¹²⁹ Dan Jacobson, *The Electronic Elephant: A Southern African Journey*, 1st published 1994 (London: Penguin, 1995), p.280.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

would have been hard to imagine'.¹³¹ Although Africa's terrain is so diverse, the Western imagination has been particularly fascinated with the continent's forests and they have been imbued with an intoxicating atmosphere, of which *Heart of Darkness* is the definitive literary example. But a preoccupation with one aspect of Africa's landscape offers Jacobson no connection to his home continent and places his own town in harsh, unromantic relief with the hyperreality in films.

A more direct response to Western travel writing is evident in Binyavanga Wainaina's satirical essay, 'How to Write about Africa', in which Wainaina comments on contemporary representations of Africa and argues that they are patronising and superficial.¹³² Wainaina's essay, like Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988), a response to Western tourists in Antigua,¹³³ constructs a set of satirical instructions on the most effective way for a Western writer to market an experience of Africa. As a piece of satire, Wainaina's essay concentrates on the generalisations and stereotypes he perceives in Western writing: 'treat Africa as if it were one country'; '[m]ake sure you show how Africans have music and rhythm deep in their souls and eat things no other humans eat'. The audience of such narratives is expected to be Western, as '900 million [...] [Africans] are too busy starving and dying and warring and emigrating to read your book'.¹³⁴

Wainaina's essay is useful as an example of an African response to Western travel literature, but its credibility is partially diminished by its generality. He makes no reference to specific narratives and it is unclear which writers he has in mind. References to nightclubs, AIDS and Nelson Mandela indicate that modern literature is being targeted, but Wainaina produces no specific evidence to support his point. This is not to say that he is inaccurate. Aspects of Western representations are recognisable in his caricatures: observations can be sloppily romantic, as in Isabelle Eberhardt's description of kif-smokers in Morocco reaching 'the magic horizon where they are free to build their dream palaces of delight'.¹³⁵ Bruce Chatwin is selective about how he wishes to perceive Africa: he accepts

¹³¹ Jacobson, pp.280–281.

¹³² Binyavanga Wainaina, 'How to Write about Africa', *Granta: The View from Africa*, 92 (2005), pp.92–95.

¹³³ Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* (London: Virago, 1988).

¹³⁴ Wainaina, p.92.

¹³⁵ Isabelle Eberhardt, *The Oblivion Seekers and Other Writings*, 1st published in *Pages d'Islam and Dans l'Ombre Chaude*, trans. by Paul Bowles (San Francisco: City Lights, 1975), p.74.

‘the long undulating savannah country to the north’ and rejects the ‘Africa of blood and slaughter’ which he encounters in a coup in Benin.¹³⁶

As he has not chosen such specific targets, however, Wainaina’s generalisation suggests that all modern Western accounts are being critiqued. If this is the case, the essay certainly has some relevance to some of the travel or political narratives about Africa on the Western market, but it does little justice to a number of established writers who do not feel the need to describe ‘a nightclub called Tropicana, where mercenaries, evil nouveau riche Africans [...] guerrillas and expats hang out’, or to end their book ‘with Nelson Mandela saying something about rainbows or renaissances’.¹³⁷ Wainaina accuses writers of using ‘broad brushstrokes’ in their presentation of Africa, excluding such details as Africans struggling ‘to educate their kids’, or having to ‘make do in mundane circumstances’.¹³⁸ But varying degrees of poverty and everyday difficulties can be seen in Western narratives. Murphy writes about Moses, a Kenyan health-worker with eight children, who is unable to gain promotion because he cannot ‘afford bribes and [...] [knows] no Big Men’.¹³⁹ And even Big Men are given little scope for their abilities and ambitions, as O’Hanlon’s *Congo Journey* (1996) demonstrates.¹⁴⁰

There is some evidence of developments in travel writing by Africans in the twentieth century. Alasdair Pettinger lists narratives by ‘black Africans from the countries south of the Sahara’, noting a ‘growing interest in travel-writings’.¹⁴¹ Most of the accounts highlighted, however, refer to travel outside Africa. Of the thirty-three authors mentioned, only three, Eva Chipenda de Carvalho, Manu Dibango and Ndansi Kumalo, include brief accounts of travelling in Africa.¹⁴² In each case their accounts of travelling abroad have greater significance than their travels at home. There is little evidence in the twentieth century that many Africans chose to explore their homes, challenging the accounts of

¹³⁶ Bruce Chatwin, *What Am I Doing Here*, 1st published 1989 (London: Vintage, 1998), p.25.

¹³⁷ Wainaina, p.95.

¹³⁸ Wainaina, p.94.

¹³⁹ Murphy, *Ukimwi Road*, p.24.

¹⁴⁰ O’Hanlon, *Congo Journey*, 1st published 1996 (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p.360.

¹⁴¹ Alasdair Pettinger, ‘Travel-Writings by Africans: A Reader’s Guide’, *Journal of African Travel Writing* 8/9 (2000/2001), pp.172–181 (p.172).

¹⁴² Ndansi Kumalo, ‘The Story of Ndansi Kumalo’ in *Ten Africans*, ed. by Margery Perham, 2nd edn (London: Faber, 1963); Manu Dibango with Danielle Rouard, *Three Kilos of Coffee: An Autobiography*, trans. by Beth G. Raps (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Eva Chipenda de Carvalho, *The Visitor: An African Woman’s Story of Travel and Discovery* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996).

foreigners by holding up an alternative image. Jacobson's account of travel in South Africa does this in part but, on the whole, accounts by Africans may augment but do not yet interrogate non-African perceptions.

Conclusion

Although nineteenth-century narratives have made a significant impact on the development of modern travel writing, earlier accounts have also influenced Western literature and histories and, hence, how Western writers perceive Africa. Historical and theoretical developments have radicalised modern travel narratives, particularly regarding writing about Africa, but the older romantic influences are still felt in the approach of Westerners to a continent which many still regard as inscrutable and, somehow, to be the ultimate challenge.

Writers may rarely refer to fictional representations of Africa but often fiction has had an unavoidable impact, more visceral, evocative and emotionally raw than the accounts of many travellers. Conrad's influence is particularly potent and there is a case for suggesting that a number of travel writers who write about the Congo or Africa want to make their journeys equivalent to Marlow's in some way. The intensity of emotional or physical exertion in undertaking an extreme task may be perceived as a means to define character, by forcing writers to the utmost reserves of their emotional or physical strength. Of course, a new knowledge of self is now perceived as less important than greater understanding of the country through which one travels. As with *Heart of Darkness*, it is not enough if Africa remains only a back-drop for Western self-exploration. The unique nature of individual viewpoints produces many Africas but these different accounts must strive to show something of the writers' understanding of the character of separate countries. Modern narratives must demonstrate that, even when mediated through a foreigner's perspective, there is a relevance, a connection with the country's present, which may be recognised by those who have been described.

Chapter Two: Postcolonialism

Introduction

The subtext of representation in travel writing is relevant on various levels. Travel writing apparently focuses on representations of the Other, but such constructions are inextricable from the travel writer's self-presentation, as the central figure through whom people, places and cultures are viewed. Modern travel writers are acutely aware of how conventions for representing the self have changed since the nineteenth century. I have briefly outlined how Africa has been presented to Western audiences in the past and I will now discuss how representations of Africa, and of self, have developed in twentieth-century travel accounts since 1930 and how writers have responded to significant changes in perceptions of culture, gender and self. This chapter will focus specifically on the impact of postcolonial discourse on twentieth-century travel writing. Representation and narrative techniques are challenged and refined by academic discourses and public opinion. And refinement leads to more far-reaching questions about the limitations of representation.

The destabilisation of formal empires and their subsequent dismantling has had a profound impact on how Westerners perceive themselves in relation to foreign countries and races. Past perceptions of the benevolent rôle of colonialism and convictions of racial superiority have been undermined by the recognition of the brutality which accompanied colonial rule. European findings have been compounded by those of the colonised, who have rejected Western claims about progress. Colonialism, seen from the 'Other' side, has been represented as 'force, brutality, cruelty, sadism, conflict, and [...] a parody of education'.¹ Theorists and critics continue to challenge Western constructions of non-Western people and cultures and postcolonialism has become one of the frameworks through which modern society may be interpreted. Its focus on cultural representation is particularly appropriate in the analysis of travel literature. Theorists aim their critiques at imperial fiction rather than travel and critics so far have dwelt on the impact of nineteenth-century travel texts in greater detail than texts of the twentieth century.² But, as Ashcroft, Griffiths

¹ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 1st published in 1955 as *Discours sur le colonialisme*, trans. by Joan Pinkham (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p.21.

² Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', Chancellor's Lecture, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 18 February 1975; Edward Said, 'Jane Austen and Empire' in *Culture and Imperialism*, 1st published 1993 (London: Vintage, 1994), pp.95–116; Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 2nd edn (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

and Tiffin point out, travel literature is recognised as ‘one of the most important vehicles of colonial representation’³ and so it is important to understand how travel writers have responded to the shifting theories of twentieth-century literary, social and cultural studies.

The point at which my study begins, 1930, is a transitional moment in travel literature: Western travel narratives were already moving away from the heroic tone of nineteenth-century texts and universal confidence in European empires was becoming destabilised. The Western gaze is now countered by that of the Other, if not yet specifically in travel writing by Africans. Throughout the century Western travellers have reassessed how Africa and Africans may be represented. In this chapter I discuss how ideologies of imperialism have been challenged by postcolonialism. I will outline some of the issues in postcolonial theory which have impacted Western society and must, inevitably, influence travel narratives, whether writers adopt or reject new attitudes. I will then discuss evidence of conflicting reactions in twentieth-century travel literature to the challenge of anti-imperialist and anti-racist arguments.

Issues of representation and definition remain in flux as the consequences of past events continue to work themselves out, placing the global community ‘on the borderlines of the “present”, for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix “post” ’.⁴ Travel writing, like all forms of representation, must work in what Homi K. Bhabha, invoking Heidegger, defines as the ‘beyond’, the intervening space between the future and the present.⁵ But a response to modern theories of race, gender or self situates travel narratives in a specific historic context: representations which point to something beyond cannot do so without ‘a return to the “present” ’.⁶ It is possible to identify techniques employed by travel writers in order to avoid seeming anachronistic or intolerant but discussions of developments in representation must also point to the individual and subjective nature of representation. As I have indicated, there is no objective or definitive truth about Africa, or African countries, to reveal and I hope to show something of the problematic issues of mediation and exploitation which cannot be completely eradicated. The individual is at the centre of

³ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd edn 2002 (London: Routledge, 2005), p.207.

⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bhabha, p.4.

representation; personal and cultural baggage determine the elements which are selected to shape the presentation of self and culture, space and landscape. If this is the case equally for any form of representation the development in African travel writing will not reveal a true Africa but an increasingly diverse, contrasting and complex assortment of ideas.

Theories of Colonialism

Anti- and postcolonial discourses have challenged the European assumptions of superiority which supported the expansion of colonial empires. As the commercial benefit of ‘restructuring [...] non-capitalist economies in order to fuel European capitalism’ became evident, European countries competed fiercely for territories overseas.⁷ Britain led the way in imperial expansion and in Africa her main rivals were France and Germany. Gilbert Rist points out that ‘[t]he new colonial adventure of the nineteenth century began without a clear doctrine’ but, in time, each country developed their separate rationales, separate but along similar lines, to promote the expansion of empire.⁸ As well as dwelling on the economic and political benefits of developing trade and resources overseas, a humanitarian cause was identified: the dominant technologically advanced nations perceived a duty for ‘the higher races [...] to civilize the lower’.⁹

Ideologies of colonial enterprise and imperial rule evolved from earlier ventures. Jules Ferry constructed the concept of the *mission civilisatrice* which was applied to French imperial development,¹⁰ claiming ‘to bring the benefits of French culture, religion and language to the unenlightened races of the earth’.¹¹ The assumption of racial superiority justified much of what has since been condemned in imperial rule. African and Asian peoples were subjected to popular stereotypes. Social Darwinism was promoted by prominent scientists and philosophers Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner, as well as the influential political analyst and journalist, Walter Bagehot. Darwin’s research in natural history was interpreted as proof of the existence of a racial hierarchy.

Technologically advanced Western races were perceived as superior and many traditional

⁷ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.23.

⁸ Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*, 1st published in 1997 as *Le Développement*, trans. by Patrick Camiller (London: Zed Books, 1999), p.49.

⁹ H. L. Wesseling, *Divide and Rule: The Partition of Africa, 1880–1914*, 1st published in 1991 as *Verdeel en Heers*, trans. by Arnold J. Pomerans (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger Publishers, 1996), p.17.

¹⁰ Michael Rapport, *Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Basingstoke: PalgraveMacmillan, 2005), p.342.

¹¹ Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 1st published 2001 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p.30.

societies, such as those in Africa, were regarded as primitive and, therefore, subordinate. John Hanning Speke indicates that Biblical authority was used to support such views, referring to ‘that time when [...] Ham was cursed by his father, and condemned to be the slave of both Shem and Japheth [...] as they were then, so they appear to be now’.¹²

Andrew Porter remarks that this conviction of ‘permanent *racial* divisions’, was used to explain the growth of empire, to ‘justify the costs and exertions to maintain it [...] [and] to excuse some of the [...] destructiveness and oppression’.¹³

Colonial rule everywhere met with significant resistance from those being colonised and there were criticisms from within Europe as well. One of the most prominent issues in the nineteenth century was that of the atrocities committed in the Belgian King Leopold II’s Congo Free State. Europeans were alerted by reports from missionaries and subsequent investigations made by E. D. Morel and Roger Casement revealed something of the violence and exploitation, much of which was colonial policy, or derived from it. European officers in the Congo ‘demanded proof that [...] bullet[s] had been used to kill someone, not “wasted” in hunting [...] or saved for possible use in a mutiny’.¹⁴ As a result, the Force Publique ‘hacked off and smoked the hands, feet and private parts of their victims’.¹⁵ This mutilation was carried out regardless of whether their victims were dead or not. The practice of hostage-taking, used to coerce villagers to ransom their families with the required quotas of rubber, was never declared an official policy by Leopold, allowing Belgian authorities to deny that such practices were being implemented. In the Congo, however, ‘instructions on taking hostages’ were issued in ‘the semiofficial instruction book [...] *Manuel du Voyageur et du Résident au Congo*’, which was widely distributed throughout the country.¹⁶ Ideological and humanitarian objections were aimed against the manner in which colonial enterprise was carried out but such criticisms ‘fell short of an outright condemnation of imperialism’.¹⁷

¹² John Hanning Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1863), p.xiii.

¹³ Andrew Porter, ‘Introduction’ in *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Andrew Porter, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998–1999), III (1999), p.24.

¹⁴ Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), p.165.

¹⁵ Hochschild, p.45.

¹⁶ Hochschild, p.162.

¹⁷ Nicholas Owen, ‘Critics of Empire in Britain’ in *The Twentieth Century*, ed. by Judith M. Brown, and Wm. Roger Louis, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998–1999), IV (1999), pp.188–211 (p.190).

In Britain the South African War (1899–1902) heightened fears that ‘authoritarian viruses contracted in the Empire might infect politics at home’.¹⁸ Critics argued that imperialism had become too aggressive and it soon became evident that there was a ‘lack of widespread support’.¹⁹ The policies of empire were therefore altered. Imperial trusteeship, carried out ‘within a framework of Indirect Rule’ was designed as a less authoritarian structure which claimed to give greater priority to social reform and to ‘avoid prolonged military actions’. Superficially, indirect rule answered the complaints of critics but ‘trusteeship imperialism could be attacked by pointing out how far practice fell short of principle’.²⁰

Protestors against trusteeship imperialism included some church and mission groups, but the most prominent detractors of colonial rule, specifically in Kenya, belonged to the Labour Party’s Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions. Apart from ‘activists [...] publicists [...] [and] progressive academics’, the committee consisted of men who had ‘left the colonial service frustrated with the limitations on their work’.²¹ Several prominent members of the committee produced works detailing the faults of colonial government as they perceived them. William McGregor Ross’s *Kenya from Within* (1927) analyses the effect of white settlement on Kenya, describing the situation as a case of ‘occupation by some Europeans of the property of African natives’.²²

As with earlier criticisms, however, complaints were not necessarily directed at the principle of colonial rule but rather the manner in which it was practised. As Achebe has indicated in his response to Conrad, the condemnation of colonial excesses is not necessarily proof of anti-racist views.²³ McGregor Ross is keen to see colonial rule practised more sympathetically in Kenya, but does not doubt that European intervention is useful in subduing the supposed savage nature of African peoples. He is disturbed by Ethiopian autonomy, regarding the natives of Abyssinia as ‘far from docile’ and expressing much concern over the fact ‘*they have rifles; and their Government has been admitted to the League of Nations*’.²⁴ The real challenge to colonialism came from outside Europe, from the colonised people who contested European claims to superiority and the assertions

¹⁸ Owen, p.189.

¹⁹ Owen, p.192.

²⁰ Owen, p.193, p.194.

²¹ Owen, p.194.

²² William McGregor Ross, *Kenya From Within: A Short Political History* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1927), p. 68.

²³ Chinua Achebe, ‘An Image of Africa’, 18 February 1975.

²⁴ McGregor Ross, p.31 (emphasis in original).

that aggressive appropriation and exploitation was justified by the benefits brought by more technologically advanced cultures.

Development of Postcolonial Discourse

Postcolonialism has established itself as a discussion of representation and self-representation of the colonised Other and the impact which past cross-cultural encounters have had on the interactions of the present. Boundaries, physical and theoretical, now have greater fluidity and cultural demarcation is complex and unstable:

we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside [...] The demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities [...] exile [...] refugees.²⁵

Discussions of national, cultural and self-identity continue to develop from this new landscape of cultural migration and hybridity. Anti- and postcolonial narratives emerged as European formal empire declined and was slowly dismantled. The ideas and perspectives of this new literature brought a shocking challenge to Western perceptions of cultural superiority and colonialism's role as a civilising, progressive mission.

Among the first issues to be addressed were those of self-expression and the representation of culture. Frantz Fanon and Edward Said have been particularly prominent and influential in the development of postcolonial theory. Both challenged the impact of the Western gaze on the Other, Fanon focusing on white perceptions of black people and Said on how the West had constructed the Orient. Jean-Paul Sartre's introduction to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) summarises Fanon's argument that colonised people 'could neither reject [...] completely nor yet assimilate' European values, which had left a legacy on colonised societies, but which 'did not hang together' with 'the true facts of their lives'.²⁶

Fanon acknowledges that 'the first step for "colonialised" people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past' and he understands that nationalistic feeling compels

²⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.1, p.5.

²⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1st published in 1961 as *Les Damnés de la terre*, trans. by Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), p.8.

many artists to reject anything resonant of colonial rule and instead revive past traditions.²⁷ But he disagrees with the artist who claims ‘to illustrate the truths of the nation’ by turning ‘paradoxically towards the past and away from actual events’. He is anxious that art should not reflect merely the ‘shells and corpses’ of the past, which only contain ‘a knowledge which has been stabilized once and for all’.²⁸ Memories of the past must be placed in the context of a more inclusive history because, otherwise, they communicate no relevant information or statements about specific cultures in the present. Fanon’s concept of ‘an authentic work of art’ requires the artist to

realize that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities. He must go on until he has found the seething pot out of which the learning of the future will emerge.²⁹

The remembrance of colonial domination causes resentment for many reasons, not least the fact that non-Western cultural identities were treated as inferior at this time, but Fanon argues that the eras of colonialism and imperialism cannot be erased any more than the years that preceded them. There cannot be a historical blank between the pre-colonial years and the present, as this gives an incomplete impression of the influences on the evolution of culture.

Edward Said’s work has had a seminal influence on the development of postcolonial discourse. Said analyses the history and culture that the West has created for the East, making a distinction between ‘the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient [...] despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a “real” Orient’.³⁰ Western depictions of the Orient are so inadequate that they can only form ‘a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into [...] Western consciousness’. Said does not go so far as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, to suggest that subaltern voices can never be represented; in a sense, Said is less concerned with counter-representations, claiming ‘no interest in, much less capacity for, showing what the true Orient or Islam really are’.³¹ But, convinced that ‘there is an “East”’,³² he denigrates

²⁷ Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory*, 2nd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p.193.

²⁸ Fanon, p.181.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient*, new edn (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2003), p.5.

³¹ Said, p.331.

³² Neil Lazarus, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. by Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.11.

Orientalism as ‘a system of thought’ which ‘approaches a heterogeneous, dynamic, and complex human reality from an uncritically essentialist standpoint’.³³

Alongside this development of theory other texts were also merging, predominantly in fiction, drama or poetry but in politics and anthropology also. These texts challenged European perceptions of foreign people and their communities. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is particularly important in this respect, challenging representations of African societies, such as Conrad’s, which portray African societies, hierarchies and religions as savage, inarticulate and primitive.³⁴ Tim Youngs identifies a poignant and important reversal at the end of the narrative. Analysing the passage in which the District Commissioner muses on how best to include Okwonkwo’s life into his memoirs, Youngs observes that

Achebe has done unto the District Commissioner as the District Commissioner would do unto him [...] apart from a brief appearance earlier, [this] is the most significant mention of the white official. All that has gone before shows the complete inadequacy of the work [...] [he] will write.³⁵

European assumptions were being reversed and their civilising mission paraded as brutal cultural imperialism.

Since the 1980s postcolonial discourse has expanded extensively, particularly in terms of its theory. Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha have spearheaded developments in theory, opening up issues of identity and self-representation. Spivak’s work focuses on the inability of the subaltern to succeed in any form of self-expression without being mediated by representatives from a different race, class or gender. In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999)³⁶ she elaborates on the conclusions she drew in her seminal essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’³⁷ discussing, among other issues, her investigation of Bhubaneswari

³³ Said, p.333.

³⁴ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 2nd edn 1996 (Oxford: Heinemann, 2000).

³⁵ Tim Youngs, *Travellers in Africa: British Travelogues, 1850–1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p.209.

³⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, 1st published 1999 (London: Harvard University Press, 2000).

³⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, ILL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp.271–313.

Bhaduri's suicide in response to critics such as Leerom Medovoi and Abena Busia.³⁸ Spivak accepts Busia's observation that, although Bhaduri has been misinterpreted by her 'more emancipated granddaughters', Spivak 'is able to read Bhubaneswari's case, and therefore she has spoken in some way'.³⁹ Spivak accepts that 'all speaking [...] entails a distanced decipherment by another, which is, at best, an interception. That is what speaking is'.⁴⁰ So it seems that the subaltern can speak. But it is difficult to determine, therefore, at what point interpretation gives the subaltern a voice, as Spivak has done for Bhaduri, and when mediation silences. Spivak suggests that a 'historical silencing' has taken place because, while Bhaduri 'fought for national liberation', her great grand-niece 'works for the New Empire'.⁴¹ The ideological juxtaposition suggests that this is the case, but Spivak is superimposing her own interpretation of the present on Bhaduri, obscuring the fact that Bhaduri herself cannot answer Spivak's construction.

Homi K. Bhabha explores the ambiguities within postcolonial discourse, expressed through 'manifold colonial difference and hybridity'.⁴² The impact of colonial rule has resulted in complex questions about national, cultural and personal identities as people move away from their native lands and adapt to new cultures. Subsequent generations, born in new countries, now attempt to reconcile the culture of their heritage with that of the country in which they were born. In Africa this cultural hybridity is evident among white African communities, particularly in southern Africa and Kenya, as much as it is among other African groups where Western education and cultural influences conflict with, or are assimilated into traditional customs. The diversity of African nations, and the cultural hybridities existing there before Europeans settled in Africa, result in a web of complexities and connections in multi-cultural societies.

This fluidity in modern cultural definition and expression creates 'moments or processes', arising from 'the articulation of cultural differences. These "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of self-hood – singular or communal'.⁴³ Bhabha invokes Hofstadter's translation of Heidegger's declaration that, rather than delineating an

³⁸ Spivak, *Critique*, pp.308–311.

³⁹ Spivak, *Critique*, p.309.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Spivak, *Critique*, p.311.

⁴² Vilashini Cooppan, 'W(h)ither Post-Colonial Studies?', in *Postcolonial Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Laura Chrisman and Benita Parry (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), p.3.

⁴³ Bhabha, p.1.

endpoint, the ‘boundary is that from which *something begins its presencing*’.⁴⁴ Travel narratives, written at the boundaries of cross-cultural encounters and also of movement and stasis, are particularly relevant in this respect. There are now few geographical frontiers for travellers to explore beyond, but new travel texts express the hope that something new will nevertheless develop from the writer’s personal perspective which gives a unique quality to the representation of a foreign country.

African Cultural Expression

As I have indicated in Chapter One, Kwame Anthony Appiah stresses that African intellectuals address issues of identity from a collective perspective. African self-expression has developed significantly in the twentieth century across a range of disciplines, including literature, history, politics and anthropology. As postcolonial self-expression develops, intellectuals debate about the extent to which European cultures should be acknowledged. As Fanon points out, the impact of colonial rule must be recognised if African culture is to retain its integrity. It is not enough to return to the past and ignore the events which have shaped the present. More contentious, perhaps, is the issue of language and how cultural self-expression may be communicated. There are those, like Ngũgĩ, who argue that European languages and literatures took Africans ‘further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds’.⁴⁵ For this reason, much of Ngũgĩ’s work is first published in Kikuyu and Kiswahili.⁴⁶ Achebe appreciates this dilemma, asking: ‘Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else’s? It looks like a dreadful betrayal’. He concludes that ‘I have been given this language and I intend to use it’, but hopes that ‘there always will be men [...] who will choose to write in their native tongue and insure that our ethnic literature will flourish side by side with the national ones’.⁴⁷ And so various reactions to European culture are evident in the work of African intellectuals, who may accept that their present culture is inevitably

⁴⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 1st published in 1954 as *Vorträge und aufsätze*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1975), p.154. The original text reads: ‘Die Grenze ist nicht das, wobei etwas aufhört, sondern, wie die Griechen es erkannten, die Grenze ist jenes, von woher etwas *sein Wesen beginnt*’. Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), p.156 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁵ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Culture*, 1st published 1981 (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), p.12.

⁴⁶ Ngũgĩ, n.p.

⁴⁷ Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975), p.102.

influenced by the recent colonial past, but seek to control, as far as possible, how these influences are expressed in their work.

Western perceptions of African history have changed dramatically since Hugh Trevor-Roper declared that ‘at present [...] there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness [...] and darkness is not a subject for history’.⁴⁸ Crucially, however, Africans are now analysing their own conclusions about the past. African historians are beginning to redress the balance within the discourse of African history, challenging the dominance of non-African perspectives. A full history of Africa commissioned by UNESCO was published in the 1980s.⁴⁹ More recently, Greenwood Publications have published histories of different African countries written by African authors.⁵⁰

The development of Pan-African movements was among the earliest expressions of African nationalist feeling. Pan-Africanism was initially promoted outside Africa by people of African descent, living in North America and the West Indies. Henry Sylvester Williams and W. E. B. Du Bois, a lawyer and a journalist, organised Pan-African conferences as forums for discussion of the treatment of black people and the West’s perspective on Africa. The aim of such debates was to create ‘a basis for unity among Negroes of Africa, America, the West Indies and other lands’.⁵¹ Other Pan-African movements developed, mostly outside Africa. Marcus Garvey’s unsuccessful ‘back-to-Africa’ campaign aimed to repatriate black people of African descent to Liberia, as an ideological gesture of defiance against the slave trade which had originally removed their ancestors from their home continent.

The impact of Pan-Africanism on twentieth-century African politics was significant. Du Bois’s fifth conference in 1945 departed from earlier conferences by involving African students as well as the ‘small band of black elite from the West Indies and the USA’.⁵² Among the organisers were future leaders of independent African states: Kwame Nkrumah

⁴⁸ Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe*, 1st published 1965 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966), p.9.

⁴⁹ UNESCO, *General History of Africa*, 8 vols (Oxford: Heinemann, 1981–1993).

⁵⁰ Ch. Didier Gondola, *The History of Congo* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 2002); Eric P. Louw, *The Rise, Fall and, Legacy of Apartheid* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2004); Saheed A. Adejumo, *The History of Ethiopia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006).

⁵¹ Young, p.237.

⁵² C. O. C. Amate, *Inside the OAU: Pan-Africanism in Practice* (New York: St.Martin’s Press, 1986), p.37.

and his future adviser George Padmore, Jomo Kenyatta and Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Previous conferences had imagined that African governments would ‘grow to complete self-government’ in time, but the students introduced a ‘radical and militant’ element to the discussions.⁵³ The focus now was on the urgency of independence for African nations: ‘we are determined to be free [...] we demand one man, one vote [...] we say to the peoples of the colonies that they must fight for these ends by all means at their disposal’.⁵⁴

Nkrumah became the first of this group to govern a modern independent African state in 1957. His vision was to continue working for independence throughout Africa. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was founded in 1963: the title of C. O. C. Amate’s book calls its workings a demonstration of ‘Pan-Africanism in Practice’. African countries were now governed by Africans: the next step was to develop a unified continent through political, inter-state communication and joint decisions. Thabo Mbeki was the last President of the Union, which was disbanded in 2002 and replaced with the African Union, which aims for

a united and integrated Africa [...] An inter-dependent and robust Africa determined to map for itself an ambitious strategy [...] underpinned by political, economic, social and cultural integration which would restore to Pan-Africanism its full meaning; an Africa able to make the best of its human and material resources.⁵⁵

The African Union set up a Pan-African Parliament in 2004, to ensure that Africans have ‘a forum where they can air their views’.⁵⁶ Such developments suggest that Pan-Africanism is still considered relevant within African politics, but as a ‘transcontinental [...] project’ it has declined.⁵⁷ Modern critics suggest that Pan-African discourse places too much emphasis on cultural unity and does not give sufficient recognition to the many diversities between African cultures.⁵⁸

⁵³ Amate, p.37.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ African Union, *Strategic Plan of the African Union Commission: Vision and Mission of the African Union* <<http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/AboutAu/Vision/Volume1.pdf>> p.26 [accessed 9 November 2009].

⁵⁶ Timothy Murithi, *The African Union* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p.32.

⁵⁷ Young, p.237.

⁵⁸ Young, p.237; Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In my Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

As African self-exploration continues to expand across disciplines Appiah suggests that, currently, '[t]here is no better point of entry to the issue of African intellectuals' articulation of an African identity than through the reflections of our most powerful creative writers'.⁵⁹ There has been a remarkable expansion in the production and distribution of African literature in the twentieth century, in which the development of the Heinemann African Writers Series has played a significant rôle. African literature reveals that there is a wealth of material which evaluates and defines modern-day Africa. Writers explore aspects of cultural identity in both modern and historical contexts, focusing on the legacies of colonial rule and the continuing conflicts and corruption under independent rule.

Narratives such as *Things Fall Apart* and *Decolonising the Mind* (1981) reveal the impact of colonial rule on individual communities and the suppression of cultural expression. Achebe focuses on the process of traditional Igbo religions and customs being replaced by Christianity and European social frameworks. Ngũgĩ explores the meaning of loss of language and how this affects the development of culture: 'Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication [...] Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character [...] a specific relationship to the world'.⁶⁰ Conflict, poverty and corruption are widespread throughout the continent and the diversity of African literature highlights the special problems in different countries. Ayi Kwei Armah discusses social and political unrest in Ghana; his protagonists are helpless victims of corruption and violence. Ngũgĩ's early novels are characterised by his analysis of the Mau Mau era and subsequent tribal conflicts in Kenya. *Wizard of the Crow* (2007) lampoons modern corruption and brutal despotism.⁶¹

African literature is too diverse to present a satisfactory overview here, but there have been significant changes throughout the twentieth century which have opened up the African perspective to wider audiences and given it an international resonance to the point that Africa's most prominent writers are celebrated academics, many living outside Africa, who continue to address issues of racial identity and cultural development in the postcolonial era in an international arena. Indeed, it seems safer for some intellectuals to discuss issues

⁵⁹ Appiah, p.74.

⁶⁰ Ngũgĩ, pp.15–16.

⁶¹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Wizard of the Crow* (London: Harvill Secker, 2006).

in Africa's postcolonial societies outside Africa than from within. Armah analyses this issue in a fictional context: *Osiris Rising* (1995) presents a community of African intellectuals developing Afrocentric approaches to academic studies.⁶² The nationalistic focus of their cultural self-expression is perceived as subversive and the group is persecuted by government officials. Such aggression is paralleled in reality. Ngũgĩ's celebrated return to Kenya in 2004 served to highlight the fact that he was originally exiled from Kenya. The attack on Ngũgĩ and his wife gives some indication of the provocative and controversial nature of intellectuals' blunt assessments of the conditions in their home countries.

When we approach the topic of travel writing and representations of Africa, however, we find that there are few examples of African self-representation in the twentieth century. Discussion of self-definition, within a framework of travel in one's home country or continent, is barely evident in African writing. Few travel texts have emerged to challenge the Africas constructed by Western writers. There has been no direct decentring as there has for the canon of English Literature.

Conflicting Responses in Travel Writing

In the 1930s European empires were being gradually destabilised by the internal conflicts which contributed to two world wars and the pressure of growing resistance among colonial subjects. Waugh's narratives, in defiance of events, defend imperial rule and Western perceptions of superiority. He is aware of anti-imperialist and anti-racist voices in Britain: *Remote People* (1931),⁶³ for example, addresses some of the issues laid out in McGregor Ross's *Kenya from Within*. Waugh rejects McGregor Ross's representations of white settlers as 'a gang of rapacious adventurers' and attributes censure of their behaviour by McGregor Ross and 'the more sober London weeklies' to 'mistaken highmindedness'.⁶⁴ *A Tourist in Africa* (1960)⁶⁵ deliberately provokes anti-racist sensibilities: 'There is no end to the flood of gentilisms that are eroding the language. Well, I don't suppose any blackamoors, niggers, Kaffirs, natives, Bantu or Africans will read this diary'.⁶⁶ Waugh's

⁶² Ayi Kwei Armah, *Osiris Rising: A Novel of Africa Past, Present, and Future* (Penguin: Per Ankh, 1995).

⁶³ Evelyn Waugh, *Remote People: An Account of Travel* (London: Duckworth, 1931).

⁶⁴ Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh Abroad: Collected Travel Writing* (London: Everyman's Library, 2003), p.320.

⁶⁵ Evelyn Waugh, *A Tourist in Africa* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1960).

⁶⁶ Waugh, *Waugh Abroad*, p.1046.

travel writing was not as popular as his novels but, as I will discuss later, most of his right-wing opinions were unopposed by critics.

Wilfred Thesiger's more respectful descriptions of foreign people and cultures is, on the face of it, more liberal but not because he had anti-imperialist sympathies, as he shared Waugh's opinions on the benefits and efficiency of British colonial rule, if not that of other European countries, such as Italy.⁶⁷ Thesiger's respect, indeed preference, for non-Western peoples developed as he lived among them and had been originally inspired when he was a small boy living at the British Legation in Ethiopia. Thesiger's respect for Arabic and African peoples does not appear to have been influenced by developments in postcolonial discourse and, as he spent most of his life away from Britain, it seems unlikely that he followed such changes in modern Western thought. It was not until he wrote *My Kenya Days*, however, that Thesiger chose to discuss his approbation of British imperial rule indicating that, while modern writers attempt to distance themselves from nineteenth-century travellers, he was glad to be regarded as one of the last few traditional explorers, 'a remarkable throwback to the Victorian era'.⁶⁸ There is an awareness of this rôle in *My Kenya Days*, which recounts the end of Thesiger's life as a traveller and his settled life in Kenya but gives little attention to details of Kenyan societies and cultures.

Like other modern writers, such as Newby or O'Hanlon, however, Thesiger is acutely aware of his readership's reactions to his self-presentation and his initial drafts of *Arabian Sands* (1959) reveal that his prose was too self-effacing. Graham Watson, his literary agent commented that:

One day succeeds another [...] without any distinction between one rising of the sun and its setting the next day [...] The reader gets no impression of the desperate isolation, the unendurable hardship, the burning heat of the day, the bitter cold of the night [...] You are far too frightened of letting yourself go; far too frightened that people may say [...] 'This man [...] is overemphasising the dangers of his trip' [...] To write a book in the first place is an egoistic activity. You must be an egoist.⁶⁹

In his finished narratives the sparseness of Thesiger's prose still diminishes, to some degree, the intensity of the hardships he encountered and this style is used in the same way

⁶⁷ Wilfred Thesiger, *My Kenya Days* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), pp.9–10.

⁶⁸ Eric Newby, *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*, 1st published 1958 (London: Picador, 1974), p.246.

⁶⁹ Alexander Maitland, *Wilfred Thesiger: The Life of the Great Explorer* (HarperCollins Publishers: London, 2006), p.373.

as other writers use humour to appear self-deprecating and respectful of others, thus reducing the potential offensiveness of their travelling and writing.

Unlike his contemporaries, Thesiger is not hyperbolic about the potential dangers of his journey and seems confident of remaining in control, a position which modern male travel writers generally prefer to subvert. Although Thesiger does prefer to present himself in all seriousness as an intrepid explorer, however, he is not averse to puncturing this image occasionally:

It was the spiders I really loathed, and they were common in all but the most arid places [...] I saw one now and tried to kill it but it escaped. A little later bin Kabina tickled the back of my neck, and thinking it was this spider I jumped convulsively and upset my tea. Laughingly the others assured me that these spiders were harmless, which I already knew, but this knowledge did not lessen the revulsion which I felt for them.⁷⁰

Thesiger, regarded as anachronistic in his style of travelling, demonstrates ‘new trend[s] of thought’ in his writing, both in his representation of his companions and his reluctance to present himself in a heroic fashion.⁷¹ It is not clear that this is Thesiger’s reaction to the growing trend of self-deprecation; it may have been a personal character trait rather than a reaction against older narrative styles. However, it demonstrates that Thesiger had similar apprehensions to his fellow travel writers; that the public were no longer interested in reading dramatic, adventurous and heroic narratives.

Eric Newby’s *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush* (1958) has provided a benchmark for self-representation in travel writing. Newby dwells on his amateur status as a traveller, concealing his competence in self-deprecatory ridicule, particularly when he encounters Thesiger in Afghanistan, whose greater experience and organisation he can use to apparently diminish his own achievements. His narrative ends with a now famous incident in which Thesiger, settling to sleep on ground ‘like iron with sharp rocks sticking up out of it’, derides Newby and his companion, Hugh Carless, as they blow up their air-beds: ‘you must be a couple of pansies’.⁷² Of course, his readers (and Thesiger) know that Newby and

⁷⁰ Wilfred Thesiger, *Arabian Sands*, 1st published 1959 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p.123.

⁷¹ Asher, p.456.

⁷² Newby, p.248

Carless have ‘had a very tough time’⁷³ and that, far from being ‘pansies’, they are ‘both fairly tough characters’ who made a convincing attempt on an unscaled peak.⁷⁴ A number of travel writers are obviously familiar with the discourses of postcolonialism and in a sense write back to them, conscious of their status as foreign observers and anxious to show sensitivity to cultural traditions, a little perhaps like novelists appearing to write books for theorists. Redmond O’Hanlon is careful to mention, for example, that he and James Fenton are complimented on having ‘behaved like guests [...] [their host] could trust, not offending against custom, well-mannered’,⁷⁵ repeating the Iban’s terms of approval to prove their cultural sensitivity as travellers. Similarly Christina Dodwell explains that she and her travelling companions wanted to be unobtrusive visitors in Africa: ‘we were just people who wanted to see how things were, by looking at the difference in our cultures, not in terms of good and bad, superior or inferior, but as totally separate worlds’.⁷⁶

A number of writers choose to distance themselves from earlier traditions not only in their cultural outlook but in their own approach to the journey. Modern travel writers seek to subvert earlier, heroic images of travellers. A number of modern travel writers use comedy and self-deprecation to add emphasis to their self-presentation as ordinary, moderately competent travellers. Men, in particular, are anxious to avoid the heroic style of nineteenth-century travel texts but both men and women are careful to avoid appearing culturally superior. As I have indicated, self-deprecation was used in female travel narratives in the nineteenth century and is also evident in other travel accounts. John McAuliffe describes Michael Angelo Titmarsh, the narrator of Thackeray’s *The Irish Sketch-Book* (1843),⁷⁷ as a narrator ‘ill at ease [...] with the colonial traveller’s authoritative position’.⁷⁸ Titmarsh, Thackeray’s ‘most frequently used pseudonym’,⁷⁹ repeatedly undermines his status as a

⁷³ Michael Asher, *The Tiger: A Biography*, 1st published 1994 (London: Penguin, 1995), pp.445–46.

⁷⁴ Asher, p.446.

⁷⁵ Redmond O’Hanlon, *Into the Heart of Borneo: An Account of a Journey Made in 1883 to the Mountains of Batu Tiban with James Fenton*, 1st published 1984 (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p.45.

⁷⁶ Christina Dodwell, *Travels with Fortune*, 1st published 1979 (London: Arrow Books Ltd, 1981), p.17.

⁷⁷ William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Paris Sketch-Book, The Irish Sketch-Book and Notes of a Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1900).

⁷⁸ John McAuliffe, ‘Taking the Sting out of the Traveller’s Tale: Thackeray’s *Irish Sketchbook*’, *Irish Studies Review*, 9, no.1 (2001), pp.25–30 (p.25).

⁷⁹ McAuliffe, p.25

writer, referring to himself as ‘a humble writer of light literature [...] who does not venture to meddle with questions of more serious import’.⁸⁰

In response to changing perceptions of culture, self-deprecation has emerged as a popular mode of self-assertion in the twentieth century, displacing the more directly authoritative voices of scientific researchers and heroic gentlemen travellers previously in fashion. It is no longer appropriate for women to downplay their achievements as solo travellers although, like men, they must not appear culturally imperialistic. Heroic narratives written by women, however, such as *Full Tilt* (1965), *Travels with Fortune* (1979) and *Tracks* (1980) are now celebrated as examples of how women travellers may equal the exploits of men.⁸¹ As O’Hanlon’s narratives show, among others, male travel narratives are still adventurous and romantic but, as in Kingsley’s work, the heroic voice is mediated by self-conscious irony.

Redmond O’Hanlon’s work is characterised by his self-deprecatory style which develops the parody of the gentleman traveller as seen in Newby’s work. O’Hanlon’s journey in Africa subverts the tradition of serious exploratory expeditions being undertaken, ostensibly, as a search for mokélé-mbembé, the legendary prehistoric inhabitant of Lake Télé in the northern forests of the Republic of Congo. O’Hanlon parodies himself as an unraveller of African mysteries by choosing a mythical quarry. His journey is not geared seriously towards its purported goal nor even to more prosaic, but more substantial, scientific research. O’Hanlon is travelling in order to write and so process is more significant than aim. The journey is the main point of the narrative.

O’Hanlon’s narratives are characterised by events which make him look foolish and inept, particularly in comparison to others, such as the SAS officers, who give O’Hanlon advice and equipment to prepare him for trekking through jungles. O’Hanlon attempts to deflect the reader’s attention from such proofs of organisation and privilege by picking up on the details of his preparation which he can exploit for comic value. When he and James Fenton are invited to test a hammock O’Hanlon volunteers, with dramatic results:

⁸⁰ Thackeray, p.351.

⁸¹ Dervla Murphy, *Full Tilt: Ireland to India on a Bicycle* (London: John Murray, 1965); Christina Dodwell, *Travels with Fortune*, 1st published 1979 (London: Arrow Books Ltd, 1981); Robyn Davidson, *Tracks*, 1st published 1980 (London: Granada Publishing, 1982).

I took in a great deal of air [...] and got airborne backwards. Nets, ropes, parachute cords, canvas sheets and metal stiffener rods strung me up from throat to ankles.

‘It’s a good job the trees are young and fit, anyway,’ said Eddy, ‘or you’d have brought the whole lot down on us.’⁸²

O’Hanlon appears no less inept when faced with the rigours of jungle travel. In the Republic of Congo he describes ‘walking at a pace that was just short of a run, stumbling against surface roots, climbing over fallen trees, wading and slipping through small streams’.⁸³ In Borneo he deliberately subverts the image of the competent, authoritative Englishman:

I decided it was time that James and I taught them [their Iban guides] how to fish to maximum effect, like Englishmen [...] James reached right back and then swung the rod forwards and sideways [...] At that very moment, it seemed, the Borneo banded hornet, *Vesta tropica*, sunk its sting into my right buttock [...] ‘You are hooked up,’ said James, matter of factly. ‘You have a spinner in your bum.’ [...] The Iban, when they [...] know that they are going to laugh for a long time, lie down first.

Dana, Leon and Inghai lay down.⁸⁴

As Geordie Torr observes, O’Hanlon presents himself as ‘a rather eccentric, bumbling innocent, frequently out of his depth and often, inadvertently, in great danger’.⁸⁵ When Torr meets O’Hanlon, therefore, he is ‘immediately struck’ by the inaccuracy of this impression. O’Hanlon is ‘quick with a hearty chuckle, but equally quick with a probing question’.⁸⁶ O’Hanlon’s comical difficulties are deliberately constructed to deflect his readers’ attention from the fact that he is a serious traveller whose careful planning and contacts enables him to remain in control of his journey. His carefully constructed persona dominates the narratives; O’Hanlon does not like to admit how far he is really in control of his journey.

Dervla Murphy’s self-deprecation is not as paradoxically raucous as O’Hanlon’s. As Peter Hulme observes, Murphy’s title *Muddling through in Madagascar* (1985) and the explanatory epigraph ‘serves to place her within the mainstream tradition of travel writers’

⁸² O’Hanlon, *Borneo*, p.4.

⁸³ Redmond O’Hanlon, *Congo Journey*, 1st published 1996 (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p.193.

⁸⁴ O’Hanlon, *Borneo*, pp.36–37.

⁸⁵ Geordie Torr, ‘In Trouble Again and Again and Again’, *Geographical*, 76, no.10 (2004), 73–76 (p.73).

⁸⁶ Torr, pp.73–4.

self-deprecation'.⁸⁷ Murphy often laughs at herself wryly but *Muddling through* is her liveliest narrative. Her more recent African narratives, *The Ukimwi Road* (1993), *South from the Limpopo* (1997) and *Visiting Rwanda* (1998), focus on the impact of AIDS, democratic government in South Africa and of the genocide in Rwanda. Humour could easily seem inappropriate and, rather than relying on comedy, Murphy generally uses self-criticism to avoid appearing culturally imperialistic. She is anxious to remind herself that, although she also comes from a former British colony, as a Westerner she represents a wealthy and hegemonic culture which many Africans can perceive as oppressive. Certainly it can seem easy to offend cultural values unwittingly, as Murphy discovers on her journey from Kenya to Zimbabwe. She has some degree of pride in her status as a sixty-year-old, single, female traveller with no religious affiliations. She is disconcerted to find that, in being so frank about these details with locals, she is perceived 'not only as shocking, but dangerous'.⁸⁸ She bears the advice in mind, however, although it seems conservative and restricting to a Westerner.

Cultural sensitivity is appropriate, on the whole, but there is some evidence in Murphy's behaviour which suggests that white Western travellers can be too anxious about how their behaviour may be interpreted, by locals or by their readership. In Lebowa, South Africa, Murphy is taken to the police station for questioning in the middle of the night, as the proprietor of her campsite is unnerved by the appearance of a solitary white woman who accepts a distant site eagerly: 'I like being far away, I like to be alone'.⁸⁹ Murphy is furious at this overreaction and reacts angrily at the police station, demanding to be released. Reviewing her reaction later, Murphy decides that she has 'acted like a white supremacist of the nastiest sort', despite the fact that she was treated with the utmost suspicion and subjected to a strip-search before the police were satisfied and allowed her to leave the station in the morning.⁹⁰ Murphy rails against herself for 'throwing my weight around as though I were entitled to bully all those stupid blacks' and does not temper her self-abuse by reasoning that she would have behaved in the same way towards whites.⁹¹ Revealing the modern traveller's preoccupation with cultural sensitivity, Murphy reflects upon

⁸⁷ Peter Hulme, 'Travelling to Write (1940–2000)' in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.87–101 (p.90).

⁸⁸ Dervla Murphy, *The Ukimwi Road* (London: Flamingo, 1994), p.132.

⁸⁹ Dervla Murphy, *South from the Limpopo: Travels through South Africa*, 1st published 1997 (London: Flamingo, 1998), p.48.

⁹⁰ Murphy, *South from the Limpopo*, p.52, pp.51–52.

⁹¹ Murphy, *South from the Limpopo*, p.52.

Gramsci's observation that 'it is useful to "know thyself" as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces'.⁹² Murphy's over-anxiousness suggests that she needs to satisfy herself, even in rather extreme situations, that she is not being unreasonably judgmental, or allowing her reactions to be governed by her cultural background.

Conclusion

Neil Lazarus identifies a movement

since the 1980s [...] to re-direct attention to the disenfranchised sectors of the society – actually a majority and typically an overwhelming majority of the population – to insist that both the reclamation of tradition and the (re-) construction of national culture after colonialism require a recovery of popular consciousness across the full range of its social articulation.⁹³

Travel writing is a fundamental component in cultural construction, although fictional representations of Africa are more widely known and discussed. I will continue to explore how travel writers present themselves and African countries, people and culture within the context of changing cultural perceptions and emerging postcolonial discourses in the twentieth century. Travel writers cannot ignore the influence of their cultural background and its impact on their perceptions. O'Hanlon's knowledge of Conrad, for example, inevitably influences his perceptions of the Republic of Congo, but he must make his construction of the country, and his use of Conrad, relevant to the present.

By evaluating travel writing from 1930–2000, I aim to demonstrate the impact on travel writing of significant changes in social opinion. David Wykes observes that since Waugh's work was first published, a 'shift of expectations and assumptions has forced new activities upon [...] reader[s]; one must make choices and discriminations where none were demanded [...] But that new awareness is no bad thing'.⁹⁴ This new awareness is evident in twentieth-century travel writing as a response to the challenge of colonised people writing back. I have discussed older and more extreme ideas of racial hierarchies. Waugh's travel writing demonstrates that nineteenth-century opinions, while not universal in the 1930s,

⁹² Murphy, *South from the Limpopo*, p.52.

⁹³ Lazarus, p.8.

⁹⁴ David Wykes, *Evelyn Waugh: A Literary Life* (Macmillan: London, 1999), p.82.

were still acceptable. Thesiger's *My Kenya Days*, published in 1994, gives some idea of the difference between generations. A contemporary of Waugh, but also of Murphy and O'Hanlon, Thesiger's anachronistic views on empire contrast with younger writers' anti-colonial and anti-imperial outlooks. My thesis will continue to explore how far modern travel writing is affected by a greater cultural sensitivity and self-awareness.

It is not clear that cultural mediation can ever be free from some sort of exploitation, particularly when writers travel in order to write. As the age of exploration has declined, those who travel in order to write continue to search for unique experiences which give their narratives distinction and make them marketable. And so, while it is true that travel writers attempt to establish more equal relationships with local people, this intimacy allows them to gather unique, first-hand insights into other cultures and social structures. At the same time, however, people who have no means of self-expression beyond their immediate communities receive international representation. I will explore how far Western travel writers are able to mediate African cultures, and the voices of individuals, in an attempt to create greater awareness in the Western world. Laurens van der Post's work among the Kalahari San,⁹⁵ for example, provoked an increase in international attention which has contributed to the development of San self-representation.⁹⁶ Travel writing cannot, perhaps, escape exploitation but I will discuss how far compassionate representations can give value to modern travel writing. But Western representations of Africa and Africans continue to point up the absences in African representation. Until these gaps are filled Western travel narratives can only respond to the general issues of cultural awareness, rather than to particular challenges raised by local constructions and reconstructions of African countries and cultures.

⁹⁵ Laurens van der Post, *Lost World of the Kalahari*, 1st published 1958 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973); *Heart of the Hunter*, 1st published 1961 (London: The Companion Book Club, 1962).
⁹⁶ *Voices of the San: Living in Africa Today*, ed. by Willemien le Roux and Alison White (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2004).

Chapter Three: Gender and Genre

Introduction

Changing attitudes to gender and resultant gender theory have impacted the writing and reading of travel narratives in general and narratives of travel in Africa in particular. Debates about gender as essential or culturally constructed have affected the way both men and women are perceived within Western society and hence the way that Western travellers, both male and female, perceive themselves in relation to the cultures in which they travel. Ways of reading are unavoidably affected.

The trajectory of travel narratives has been in many ways shaped by masculine quest narratives. The figure of Odysseus, for example, resonates throughout Western culture and travellers such as Bruce Chatwin identify with his prolonged wanderings combined with his continuing pursuit of his goal.¹ Graham Dawson analyses the ‘relations established between adventure narratives and cultural imaginaries’ and shows how the reputations of prominent hero figures were enhanced as a result.² Dawson invokes heroes such as Robinson Crusoe and Allan Quartermain, identifying a range of ‘imagined masculinity’ which fed romantic perceptions of real-life figures such as Robert Clive, Lord Nelson and T. E. Lawrence.³

The nineteenth century saw a significant increase in women travelling in remote areas, with companions or alone, and publishing accounts of their journeys. Since women did not often function in fiction as protagonists in heroic narratives, they had no available narrative paradigm. Some women, such as Mary Kingsley and Isabella Bird Bishop, prove that women can use something like a heroic style in their narratives but, like many women writers, they also emphasise their femininity. This emphasis on gender, however, also suggests that, increasingly, women wanted to give distinction to their travels.

In the twentieth century self-representation is still in many ways dictated by social expectations, but increasing cultural awareness and changing perceptions regarding gender have altered these expectations dramatically. While heroic self-representation is now

¹ Patrick Meanor, *Bruce Chatwin* (New York: Twayne, 1997), pp.90–91 .

² George Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.62.

³ Dawson, p.62.

considered anachronistic in men's texts, it is no longer appropriate for women to depreciate their capabilities.⁴ The issue of whether male and female travel writing is fundamentally different is the subject of much debate: some critics perceive gendered characteristics, while others argue that styles, techniques and subject-matter can be common to both men's and women's writing.⁵ The use of self-deprecation is a good example of a literary technique which has been employed by both men and women for similar purposes, but at different times.

I have already discussed general representations of the Other but African women are particularly important in the context of what has come to be known as the 'male gaze'.⁶ Earlier accounts of African countries are largely represented through the traveller's eyes with little input from locals.⁷ The impact of postcolonial discourse, along with gender discourse, means that women are often given agency and their words or actions given equal weight with those of men. There is some evidence that the Western gaze still sexualises the African woman, as it has done in the past, and I will discuss the nature of Redmond O'Hanlon's erotic representations of foreign women. There is also evidence that Western women, aware of their privileged status, regard African women as victims who cannot yet assert themselves effectively in their society. Dervla Murphy, for example, perceives some African women as too passive victims of their cultural hierarchies.

⁴ Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2000), p.28; Peter Hulme, 'Travelling to Write (1940–2000)', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, eds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.87–101 (p.88).

⁵ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1991); Patricia W. Romero, *Women's Voices on Africa: A Century of Travel Writings* (New York: M. Wiener, 1992); Susan Bassnett, 'Travel Writing and Gender' in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, pp.225–241; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd edn (New York, Routledge, 2008), pp.152–168; Indira Ghose, *Women Travellers in Colonial India: The Power of the Female Gaze*, 1st published 1998 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁶ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 5th edn (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.833–44 (p.837).

⁷ David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa with Notes by Frederick Stanley Arnot* (London: John Murray, 1899); Henry M. Stanley, *The Congo and the Founding of its Free State: A Story of Work and Exploration*, 2 vols (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1885); Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa: Congo Français, Corisco and Cameroons* (London: Macmillan, 1897).

Heroic Narratives: Developments in Women's Travel

Traditionally Western travel writing has been dominated by men, who have generally had greater freedom to travel than women, as well as the education to write up accounts of their journeys and the influence to get them published. Susan Bassnett remarks that much travel writing has, therefore, been 'explicitly gendered' in the form of adventure quests, which were traditionally 'male narratives'.⁸ Sixteenth-century travel writing, for example, 'was permeated by chivalric language and ideals'.⁹ The theme of the heroic quest is an ancient one, found in diverse literatures including *The Odyssey*, versions of the Grail quest¹⁰ and various sagas, such as the *Nibelungenlied*. The women who appear in such texts, are often 'objects of desire or destination points rather than active co-travellers';¹¹ Penelope and Guinevere are powerful versions of such women. Of course, some female figures reverse this construction, such as Britomart: disguised as a knight she seeks Arthegall, meeting other knights 'on equall plaine'.¹² The discussion of heroic qualities is pivotal to all such texts; the behaviour of the hero is a model or a warning to the audience.

The female quester as protagonist is not, then, unprecedented but was not perceived as a common rôle for women.¹³ As Bassnett points out, so much travel writing has been characterised by accounts of men journeying 'in search of fortune and renown to [...] new worlds' that 'the idea of man as heroic risk-taking traveller' is still evident in the twentieth century.¹⁴ The expense of travel was prohibitive and so travel was reserved for a wealthy élite, but social conventions still restricted women from travelling and, in particular, from publishing accounts of their travels. Elaine Hobby remarks, 'women were not supposed to enter the public world in any form', which 'extended to "making public" their words. They

⁸ Bassnett, p.225.

⁹ William H. Sherman, 'Stirrings and Searchings (1500–1720)' in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, pp.17–36 (p.25).

¹⁰ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. by Edward McCrorie (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2004); Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval: The Story of the Grail*, trans. by Nigel Bryant (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006); Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur: The Winchester Manuscript*, ed. by Helen Cooper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹¹ Bassnett, p.225.

¹² Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene: Disposed into Twelve Books, Fashioning XII. Morall Vertues* (London: Printed for William Ponsonbie, 1590), III.I.68.

¹³ In the same way that epic poems rarely focus on the heroic deeds of a woman, it was not considered appropriate for women to write a travel text in the same straightforwardly heroic style as a man. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678–1686) reinforces the notion that women travellers require male guidance and protection (John Bunyan, 'The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which is to Come' and 'Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners', ed. by John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (New York: Vintage Books, 2004)).

¹⁴ Bassnett, p.225.

had to find ways of making their writing acceptable'.¹⁵ Relatively few female travel texts, therefore, were published before the nineteenth century, although they are evident from quite an early date. Sara Mills dates the publication of travel narratives written by Western women from the fourteenth century, citing *The Book of Margery Kempe* (1436–8)¹⁶ as 'the earliest recorded travel book'.¹⁷ Although more commonly regarded as the earliest autobiography extant, the narrative contains accounts of Kempe's (c.1373–c.1438) pilgrimages in the Holy Land and across Europe.¹⁸

Hobby observes that, for some Quaker women, 'their identity as prophets' permitted them to travel in order to preach.¹⁹ Usually these women travelled together: Joan Brooksop and Elizabeth Hooton (d.1672) went to Boston;²⁰ Katherine Evans and Sarah Chevers (1608 – 1664?) set out for Alexandria, although they only reached Malta, where they were imprisoned by the Inquisition.²¹ A few travelled alone, such as Alice Curwen (1619–1679) and Joan Vokins (d.1690), both of whom left their families,²² although Curwen's husband later joined her.²³ These women had a specific vocation, enabling them to act outside normal social conventions, including having their writings published, usually by a third party. Daniel Baker published journals and letters by Evans and Chevers as part of his campaign for their release from Malta.²⁴ Joan Vokins's account of her travels to America were edited and published posthumously by Oliver Sansom.²⁵

Mills observes that although the narratives of women travellers were 'widely read at the time' of publication, they became 'neglected, and [...] [have] not been reprinted'.²⁶ Kempe is an exception but her book was, for centuries, known only 'from excerpts printed by

¹⁵ Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing, 1649–1688* (London: Virago, 1988), p.1.

¹⁶ Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe: A Woman's Life in the Middle Ages*, ed. by B. A. Windeatt, 2nd edn (London: The Folio Society, 2004).

¹⁷ Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, 1st published 1991 (London: Routledge, 2001), p.27, p.202.

¹⁸ Felicity Riddy, 'Kempe [*née* Brunham], Margery', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15337>> [accessed 28 October 2009].

¹⁹ Hobby, p.38.

²⁰ Hobby, p.37.

²¹ Hobby, p.38.

²² Hobby pp.37–38.

²³ Michael Mullett, 'Curwen, Thomas (c.1610–1680)', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6968/69174?back=,6968>> [accessed 28 October 2009].

²⁴ Katherine Evans, *A True Account of the Great Tryals and Cruel Sufferings Undergone by those Two Faithful Servants of God, Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers*, etc., ed. by Daniel Baker (London: Printed for R. Wilson, 1663).

²⁵ Joan Vokins, *God's Mighty Power Magnified*, etc. (London: Printed for Thomas Northcott, 1691).

²⁶ Mills, p.27.

Wynkyn de Worde c.1501, and by Henry Pepwell in 1521'.²⁷ The only copy of the whole manuscript which now survives lay in the possession of the Butler-Bowdon family and remained unrecognised until seen by Hope Emily Allen in 1934. Kempe's book has been republished a number of times since 1936.²⁸ A few other women, like Kempe, have retained some prominence. Aphra Behn (1640?–1689) very likely based her novel *Oroonoko* (1688) on her experiences in Surinam, although she distances herself from the text by producing a fiction, rather than reportage. Celia Fiennes (1662–1741) did not publish her travel journal, although David Hey asserts that 'its style and presentation suggest that she always intended it for a larger audience'.²⁹ Robert Southey later helped to popularise Fiennes's work, including 'unacknowledged excerpts in his *Omniana*' (1812), the full narrative being published by a family member in 1888 as *Through England on a Side-Saddle*.³⁰ In 1716 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (d.1762) accompanied her husband on a diplomatic mission to Turkey, writing long letters home about her travels. These letters were written with publication in mind as Lady Mary kept copies 'for future reworking as a travel book',³¹ later the *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763).³²

I have identified similarities between the epic and travel genres, but it is important to assess how travel writing has evolved separately from the fictional epic. William H. Sherman points out that medieval travel narratives included texts by pilgrims, explorers, pirates, merchants, ambassadors and colonisers.³³ The style and tone of early modern travel texts was, therefore, extremely various, indicating that the pattern of the heroic narrative did not necessarily underpin all travel narratives. By the end of the eighteenth century this variety had diminished and a 'typical pattern'³⁴ for travel narratives had developed which placed an 'emphasis [...] more and more on science and precision'.³⁵

²⁷ Riddy, *ODNB*.

²⁸ *Ibid*.

²⁹ David Hey, 'Fiennes, Celia (1662–1741)', *ODNB*
<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37414?docPos=1>> [accessed 28 October 2009].

³⁰ Hey, *ODNB*.

³¹ Isobel Grundy, 'Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley [*née* Lady Mary Pierrepont]', *ODNB*
<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19029>> [accessed 28 October 2009].

³² Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. by Malcolm Jack (London: Virago Press, 1994).

³³ Sherman, pp.24–29.

³⁴ Roy Bridges, 'Explorations and Travel outside Europe (1720–1914)', in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, pp. 53–69 (p.56).

³⁵ Bridges, p.57.

As Roy Bridges observes, explorers throughout the century believed that they were ‘men of science’, able to ‘produce at least the attempt to observe dispassionately’.³⁶ The preferred style for a travel narrative was ‘a log or journal’ recording a traveller’s observations. Detailed, formal observations of natural history, geography and people gave limited ‘scope for the depiction of the picturesque or the exotic’.³⁷ As women’s texts more commonly took the form of published letters and journals their narratives had a more personal style: Anna Maria Falconbridge’s letters,³⁸ for example, being described as ‘lively [and] informative’.³⁹ There were exceptions, such as Hannah Kilham, whose work was more scholarly.⁴⁰

Although travel narratives were intended to be scientifically objective, however, many betray a degree of subjectivity in which it is possible to discern the persisting influence of the concept of the heroic. Despite their claims for the pre-eminence of science, travel writers were still sensible to the impact which drama and adventure had on an audience. Mungo Park gives a dramatic account of his escape from the Arabs who have kidnapped him and his subsequent meeting with another group who rob him.⁴¹ David Livingstone, likewise, gives an account of being attacked by a lion while hunting:

Starting, and looking half round, I saw the lion just in the act of springing upon me [...] Growling horribly close to my ear, he shook me as a terrier dog does a rat [...] Besides crunching the bone into splinters, he left eleven teeth wounds on the upper part of my arm.⁴²

Livingstone achieves his effects here by exploiting his helplessness; conversely, John Hanning Speke’s narrative was embellished by his editor, making him seem ‘more in

³⁶ Bridges, p.60, p.57.

³⁷ Bridges, p.57.

³⁸ Anna Maria Falconbridge, *Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone during the years 1791–1792–1793: And the Journal of Isaac Dubois: With Alexander Falconbridge, An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa*, ed. by Christopher Fyfe (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000).

³⁹ Christopher Fyfe, ‘Falconbridge [née Horwood], Anna Maria (b.1769, d. in or after 1802?)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9105>> [accessed 28 October 2009].

⁴⁰ Mrs Hannah Kilham Spurr, *Specimens of African Languages Spoken in the Colony of Sierra Leone* (London: Printed for a Committee of the Society of Friends, for promoting African instruction, by P. White 1828).

⁴¹ Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior of Africa: Performed under the Direction and Patronage, of the African Association, in the years 1795, 1796, and 1797* (London: printed by Bulmer and Co. for the author, 1799), pp.171–174.

⁴² David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa with Notes by Frederick Stanley Arnot* (London: John Murray, 1899), p.11.

charge of situations than had actually been the case'; there was mileage both in power and in its absence.⁴³ John Murray's advertisement for the 'Colonial and Home Library' in an 1845 edition of Darwin's *Journal of Researches in Natural History* indicates that popular works were 'as entertaining as romances, yet not frivolous, but abounding in sound information'.⁴⁴ By the nineteenth-century, therefore, travel texts still placed importance on factual knowledge, but also acknowledged the importance of exotic and dramatic elements which enlivened the text.

A taste for more romantic travel accounts is also evident in the papers given at the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), established in 1830. Despite the apparent paramountcy of science in exploration accounts there were 'sometimes doubts about the testimony of particular travellers'⁴⁵ but, rather than causing disapproval, this appears to have contributed to the Society's popularity:

the RGS was an incredibly successful institution [...] because it linked the tradition of travel writing associated with the Grand Tour and the search for the exotic or picturesque with hard-nosed science and even harder-nosed diplomatic and economic concerns.⁴⁶

Women found it much more difficult to gain the approval of the RGS. Isabella Bird Bishop was awarded an Honorary Fellowship in 1890 but the admission of twenty-two other women between 1892–93 was controversial, prompting a prolonged debate.⁴⁷ No more women were admitted for twenty years but, as they had now been accepted into the 'Botanical, Statistical, Asiatic, Hellenic and Anthropological Societies', the RGS eventually agreed to admit women members in 1913.⁴⁸

Nineteenth-century women's travel texts about Africa have a special quality since few Westerners had travelled extensively across the continent, although both men and women

⁴³ Roy Bridges, 'Speke, John Hanning (1827–1864)', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26101>> [accessed 28 October 2009].

⁴⁴ Charles Darwin, *Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries Visited During the Voyage of H. M. S. Beagle round the World*, 2nd edn (London: John Murray, 1845), endmatter.

⁴⁵ Bridges, p.60.

⁴⁶ Bridges, pp.60–61.

⁴⁷ Morag Bell and Cheryl McEwan, 'The Admission of Women Fellows to the Royal Geographical Society, 1892–1914; the Controversy and the Outcome', *The Geographical Journal*, 162, no. 3 (1996), 295–312 (p.296).

⁴⁸ Bell and McEwan, p.296, p.298.

travelled to the more accessible coastal ports. Anna Maria Falconbridge (1769–1802?) accompanied her husband to Sierra Leone, later publishing her letters to a friend.⁴⁹ Hannah Kilham (1774–1832) travelled with other Quaker missionaries to Gambia and Sierra Leone, although her work, *Specimens of African Languages* (1828) and *African School Tracts*, concentrated on language, rather than travel.⁵⁰ Wives of colonial officials and missionaries accompanied their husbands to foreign postings. But a number of women travelled alone, eager for their own adventures, among them Ida Pfeiffer (1797–1858), Bird Bishop, Kingsley and May French Sheldon.

Foster and Mills argue that nineteenth-century female travel writers were perceived to ‘undermine their own claims to femininity’ by adopting ‘the role of the adventure hero by describing the dangers that they have overcome’.⁵¹ But a number of women were challenging the notion that femininity was incompatible with intrepidity and resourcefulness. Catherine Barnes Stevenson agrees that women were required to conform to a feminine ideal, but observes that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the liberation of travel allowed women to develop personae ‘which, while still consciously ladylike, had a masculine authority and competence’.⁵² This is particularly evident in the narratives of women travelling in Africa, where ‘women often had to assert their power physically in crisis situations’.⁵³ Travellers such as Kingsley and French Sheldon, therefore, would not necessarily be regarded as unwomanly for presenting themselves in a masculine way.

In his overview of women travellers in the nineteenth century, including Pfeiffer, Alexandrine Tinné (1835–1869), Bird Bishop and Lady Baker (1841–1916), W. G. Blaikie praises their ‘adventurous spirit’, their courage and stamina: ‘we need wonder at nothing that women will dare’.⁵⁴ He praises their narratives for demonstrating that women now ‘rival the rougher sex in a field which till now it has monopolised’.⁵⁵ It seems reasonable to suggest, therefore, that adventure *per se* was not universally regarded as inappropriate for

⁴⁹ Fyfe, *ODNB*.

⁵⁰ Christopher Fyfe, ‘Kilham [née Spurr], Hannah (1774–1832)’, *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15526>> [accessed 28 October 2009].

⁵¹ Shirley Foster and Sara Mills, *An Anthology of Women’s Travel Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p.258.

⁵² Catherine Barnes Stevenson, *Victorian Women Travel Writers in Africa* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), p.4.

⁵³ Barnes Stevenson, p.4.

⁵⁴ W. G. Blaikie, ‘Lady Travellers’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 160, no.969 (1896), 49–66 (p.49).

⁵⁵ Blaikie, p.49.

women travellers. Blaikie indicates, however, that there were still social conventions to which adventurous women were expected to adhere. Rather patronisingly, his admiration for women travellers is founded on the fact that, in his opinion:

in no case has their travelling enthusiasm involved the sacrifice of obvious domestic duty; nor has it brought out any qualities inconsistent with the modesty, the grace, and the gentleness that must always be regarded as the fitting ornaments of the sex.⁵⁶

Such expectations resulted in a strange hybridity in women's self-representation. It was accepted that women must, at times 'behave like men when "typically" female conduct would have been not only ludicrous but dangerous'.⁵⁷ But practicality and intrepidity in women's narrative were moderated by an emphasis on more conventional elements.

Many women travellers utilised the common convention of apologising for publishing their work, as Bird Bishop demonstrates:

I was requested by numerous friends to give an account of my travels. As this volume has been written with a view to their gratification, there is far more of personal narrative than is likely to interest the general reader.⁵⁸

Similarly, Alexandra David-Néel explains that her second narrative on Tibet is a response to 'friendly curiosity'.⁵⁹ Such apologies were common to all writers but, although there were many successful women writers by the nineteenth century, they were by no means as well-established as men and women were perhaps more tentative as a result. Mary Kingsley's preface, however, betrays a heavy irony. She apologises not only for her narrative but also for her inability to justify it:

What this book wants is [...] an apology, and a very brilliant and convincing one at that [...] feeling quite incompetent to write such a masterpiece, I have asked several literary friends to write one for me, but they have [...] declined, stating that it is impossible satisfactorily to apologise for my liberties with Lindley Murray and the Queen's English. I am therefore left to make a feeble apology.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Blaikie, p.66.

⁵⁷ Barnes Stevenson, p.5.

⁵⁸ Isabella Lucy Bird, *The Englishwoman in America* (London: John Murray, 1856), p.1.

⁵⁹ Alexandra David-Néel, *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, 1st published in 1929 as *Mystiques et magiciens du Thibet* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1932), n.p.

⁶⁰ Kingsley, p.vii.

Kingsley mocks the perceived necessity to appear ashamed of her work and her self-representation is often characterised by irony, enabling her to comment on the social restrictions which dictate how women may present themselves.

Kingsley's deliberate self-ridicule can also be understood as an ironic comment on the nature of heroism in mainstream travel narratives. On the surface Kingsley presents her femininity as a weakness: 'I have seen at close quarters specimens of the most important big game of Central Africa and, with the exception of snakes, I have run away from all of them'.⁶¹ The dramatic impact of seeing big game animals 'at close quarters' is subverted by the comic effect of her fear. This contrasts with Livingstone's dramatic account of being mauled by a lion. Kingsley's attitude suggests conventional femininity, but it also demonstrates no false bravado. Rather than regarding herself as cowardly, she subtly derides those who do not run from dangerous animals – such behaviour is foolhardy, rather than brave.

But Kingsley's work is not always ironic and, at times, she defiantly upholds her femininity. She sees no need to challenge propriety by wearing trousers, stressing that conventional women's dress is equally practical for travelling. She recounts an incident where her skirt once saved her life when she fell into a pit:

I made a short cut [...] and the next news was that I was in a heap, on a lot of spikes [...] at the bottom of a bag-shaped game pit. It is at times like these you realise the blessing of a good thick skirt. Had I paid heed to the advice of many people in England [...] and adopted masculine garments, I should have been spiked to the bone, and done for. Whereas, save for a good many bruises, here I was with the fulness of my skirt tucked under me sitting on nine ebony spikes some twelve inches long, in comparative comfort, howling lustily to be hauled out.⁶²

Bird Bishop refutes a comment made in *The Times* to the effect that she 'donned masculine habiliments for greater convenience',⁶³ explaining that:

my 'Hawaiian riding dress' is the 'American Lady's Mountain Dress', a half-fitting jacket, a skirt reaching to the ankle, and full Turkish trousers gathered into frills

⁶¹ Kingsley, p.268.

⁶² Kingsley, pp.269–270.

⁶³ Isabella Lucy Bird, *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, 4th edn (London: John Murray, 1881), p.viii.

which fall over the boots, – a thoroughly serviceable and feminine costume for mountaineering and other rough travelling in any part of the world.⁶⁴

A ‘rough sketch’ of the outfit is given on the title page.⁶⁵ French Sheldon also makes a point of remarking that ‘my woman’s costume was never a hindrance to my progress, and I cannot conceive how masculine attire would have in any way been an advantage to me’.⁶⁶

Women travel writers were clearly anxious to retain the sympathy of their readership by stressing that their standards of propriety, as outlined by Blaikie, were not compromised when travelling. Of course, it may also have been important for women to stress that they could travel as women in order to give not only propriety but distinction to their travels. An emphasis on their femininity would be vital if they wished to connect with a female audience. Bassnett remarks that modern anthologies of women travellers categorise them ‘as doubly different: they differ from other [...] socially conformist women, and from male travellers’.⁶⁷ But it is not clear that women travellers regarded themselves in this way. Arguably they wished to stress, not their separateness, but that, in the light of perceived differences between men and women, women were capable of travelling in their own way.

Differences in Self-Representation

By the twentieth century women travel writers were not unusual but their self-presentation altered significantly, particularly after the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. As I have indicated, greater cultural awareness has influenced self-representation in travel writing and self-deprecation is commonly employed by both men and women who wish to avoid seeming culturally superior. In terms of the physical challenge of their journeys, however, men and women present their achievements very differently. The prevailing attitude within the latter half of the twentieth century has been that women should demonstrate their equality with men. In contrast to earlier texts women are likely to be criticised if they diminish their achievements in order to fit in with what are now considered old-fashioned and stereotypical gender rôles. Male travel writers are anxious to avoid association with the heroic self-representation of earlier travellers and a number adopt self-deprecating attitudes, distancing themselves from older traditions. Women,

⁶⁴ Bird, p.vii–viii.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ May French Sheldon, Bébé Bwana, *Sultan to Sultan: Adventures Among the Masai and Other Tribes of East Africa*, 1st published 1892 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p.244.

⁶⁷ Bassnett, p.226.

however, are not associated with the straightforward heroic style of writers such as Stanley, Livingstone or Speke, and modern women travel writers, like men, are careful to avoid the colonialist tropes common to both men and women in earlier narratives.

Many women travellers in the twentieth century have demonstrated their hardiness as travellers in extreme conditions. Dervla Murphy's journeys have always exhibited her resilience and courage over more than forty years of travel. Murphy generally cycles or travels on foot and the physical challenge is part of her enjoyment of the journey. Robyn Davidson proves her stamina and resourcefulness by trekking across the Australian desert, managing a small team of camels.⁶⁸ Christina Dodwell's *Travels with Fortune* (1979) is a unique text in twentieth-century travel writing: few travel writers travel for three years, as Dodwell did, with so little previous experience.⁶⁹ Indeed, Dodwell no longer travels in this fashion. Several aspects of this African journey are remarkable, such as a trek across desert with few supplies and a journey down the Congo by pirogue which Dodwell and her companion, Lesley, navigate by themselves.⁷⁰ Some of their encounters are sinister: the only passengers on a boat to Cape Town they are imprisoned by the captain and crew. They are fortunate to avoid rape before they can escape some weeks later.⁷¹ Dodwell did not travel with the intention of producing a travel book but the result reveals the unexpected successes as well as the great vulnerability of undertaking an unpredictable journey, as routes and transportation are dictated by chance and necessity.

Unlike earlier women travellers, modern women no longer need to uphold socially imposed conventions of ladylike behaviour, widely considered as outdated. Dodwell is offended by a British expatriate she meets in Nigeria who tells her that 'our hitch-hiking was a disgrace to society, we must [...] observe the rules of conduct pertaining to young ladies and immediately cease to travel in lorries. I walked off in disgust'.⁷² The man's advice was less unusual in 1975 than it would be now, but Dodwell clearly expects her readers to agree that his attitude is anachronistic. Changing attitudes in the West can also lead to cultural, as well as generational, clashes because Western women travellers do not act or dress like local women. Murphy's hardiness as a solo female traveller often

⁶⁸ Robyn Davidson, *Tracks*, 1st published 1980 (London: Granada Publishing, 1982).

⁶⁹ Christina Dodwell, *Travels with Fortune*, 1st published 1979 (London: Arrow Books Ltd, 1981).

⁷⁰ Dodwell, p.37, pp.87–104.

⁷¹ Dodwell, pp.174–185.

⁷² Dodwell, p.17.

challenges foreign social conventions.⁷³ As an older traveller Murphy has faced many questions about why she travels alone. She explains that Africans ‘had a big problem’ with her independence and were concerned because she was not ‘at home looking after the grandchildren’.⁷⁴ Such unease can be irritating for Murphy. Her competence as a traveller and her independent lifestyle, at home and abroad, means that it is difficult for her to sympathise with the bafflement which her appearance occasions.

The apparent reversal between men and women’s texts is not necessarily indicative of a feminisation of men’s texts. As I have indicated, Thackeray also used self-deprecation, rejecting an authoritative and colonial narrative voice in his description of Ireland.⁷⁵ Changes in the twentieth century, although significant, suggest that changing social attitudes make it necessary for both men and women to adopt, or discard, self-deprecatory techniques at different times.

Personal Safety

In the past the dangers of travel enhanced the heroic quality of men’s travel texts while women were regarded as vulnerable and in need of protection. Issues of personal safety may now be considered equally relevant to men and women. As Mary Morris points out, women are generally at greater risk from rape⁷⁶ but their physical vulnerability is not always an obstacle to travel, as it can also protect them from suspicion, particularly in remote communities.

Murphy’s experience suggests to her that, in remote areas, ‘women travelling on their own are [usually] safer than men’.⁷⁷ She acknowledges that this is unlikely to be true of cities but, in rural areas, men are more likely to be regarded ‘as possible [...] political or commercial spies. The average sort of traditionalist village or small town [is] much more inclined to be protective towards women on their own’.⁷⁸ The British spy Katherine Fannin

⁷³ Dervla Murphy, *In Ethiopia with a Mule* (London: John Murray, 1968), p.52; *The Ukimwi Road: From Kenya to Zimbabwe*, 1st published 1993 (London: Flamingo, 1994), p.117, p.132.

⁷⁴ Author’s Interview with Dervla Murphy, 17 August 2005.

⁷⁵ John McAuliffe, ‘Taking the Sting out of the Traveller’s Tale: Thackeray’s *Irish Sketchbook*’, *Irish Studies Review*, 9, no.1 (2001), pp.25–30 (p.25).

⁷⁶ Mary Morris, ‘Women and Journeys: Inner and Outer’ in *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel*, ed. by Michael Kowalewski (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1992), pp.25–32 (p.31).

⁷⁷ Interview, 17 August 2005.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

exploited this perception, successfully crossing the Danakil desert alone and assessing Italy's military presence in Ethiopia, in order to ensure that there was no threat to British territories in Africa.⁷⁹ Bruce Chatwin, on the other hand, was arrested with other Europeans during a coup in Benin until officials were convinced that they were not mercenaries.⁸⁰ Indeed, Murphy's wiry and muscular frame has often caused people to mistake her for a man and she has occasionally been advised to wear a 'bosom-revealing shirt' or a skirt in order to make it clear that she is not a man.⁸¹ In Uganda she is advised that wearing khaki trousers is particularly risky as it gives her a military appearance which would be very dangerous in some volatile areas.⁸²

Modern male travellers often journey with companions in areas where women may travel safely alone. Wilfred Thesiger and Murphy have both travelled extensively in rural Ethiopia, in 1933–34 and 1966–67 respectively. Thesiger needed guides and porters for protection, whereas Murphy trekked alone when possible.⁸³ Apart from the fact that a young woman travelling alone may seem less suspicious than a young man, Murphy travelled in Ethiopia after Haile Selassie had more successfully asserted his authority in rural areas. Also, she travelled on the other side of the Simēn mountain range, away from the Aussa Sultanate and the warlike Afar who were a potential threat to the success of Thesiger's journey. The greatest threat to Murphy's journey is meeting *shifita* and she is fortunate to be robbed only once.⁸⁴

Peter Matthiessen, Redmond O'Hanlon and Jeffrey Tayler travelled with guides in the Congo Basin in 1978, 1989 and 1995,⁸⁵ whereas Dodwell and Lesley navigated the Congo river in 1975 by themselves.⁸⁶ Of course, this decision was made more practical by the indefinite nature of their stay in Africa, which gave the women greater scope for such challenges. Professional travel writers have less margin for travelling slowly or getting

⁷⁹ *Women's Voices on Africa and Africans: A Century of Travel Writings*, ed. by Patricia W. Romero (New York, M. Wiener, 1992), p.19.

⁸⁰ Bruce Chatwin, *What Am I Doing Here*, 1st published 1989 (London: Vintage, 1998), pp.15–35.

⁸¹ Murphy, *Ukimwi Road*, p.118, p.213.

⁸² Murphy, *Ukimwi Road*, p.118.

⁸³ Wilfred Thesiger, *The Life of my Choice*, 1st published 1987 (London: Flamingo, 1992), pp.111–112; Murphy, *In Ethiopia with a Mule*, p.15.

⁸⁴ Murphy, *In Ethiopia with a Mule*, pp.156–57.

⁸⁵ Peter Matthiessen, *African Silences*, 1st published 1991 (New York: Vintage Books, 1992); Redmond O'Hanlon, *Congo Journey*, 1st published 1996 (London: Penguin Books, 1997); Jeffrey Tayler, *Facing the Congo: A Modern-Day Journey into the Heart of Darkness* (London: Abacus, 2000).

⁸⁶ Dodwell, *Travels with Fortune*, pp.87–104.

lost, having tighter schedules and so employing guides is necessary. Indeed, Dodwell also faces such restrictions on later journeys; as a travel writer with a deadline it is necessary for her to use guides at times.⁸⁷

Women cannot fail to be aware of their vulnerability, as men are also aware of theirs but, although Morris suggests that women therefore travel differently, this is not universally true.⁸⁸ Murphy is occasionally deterred by military violence, as any traveller would be, but threats of bandits do not prevent her from travelling where she wants. She is robbed in Ethiopia but not attacked and the experience does not make her more cautious. Dodwell and Lesley's imprisonment on a boat is a serious ordeal for both women. Dodwell is understandably traumatised for some time after they have escaped but remains determined to travel as she chooses.⁸⁹

Women and Children

Marriage is now less of an obstruction to women travelling on their own than in the nineteenth century, when many female travellers found that being single prevented a clash of interests. Of course, some women accompanied their husbands abroad as the wives of missionaries or colonial officials. May French Sheldon did travel without her husband but many others, such as Mary Kingsley and Gertrude Bell, or Ida Pfeiffer and Mrs Alec Tweedie, travelled as single or widowed women. It is not clear if Isabella Bird Bishop would have resumed her travels with her husband: John Bishop died after five years of marriage and Bird Bishop renewed her travels alone.

Today the question of marriage for a female traveller is not whether she should travel but whether she wants to be married. Some women, such as Murphy and Sheila Scott, 'have felt it impossible and unfair to expect a man to fit in with their lifestyles', and have remained single.⁹⁰ But marriage does not automatically prevent a woman from travelling and many other women, such as Susie Carson Rijnhart, Naomi Mitchison and Dodwell, have married and continued to travel either with their husbands or alone. Virginia Fiennes

⁸⁷ Christina Dodwell, *Madagascar Travels* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), p.13.

⁸⁸ Morris, p.31.

⁸⁹ Dodwell, *Travels with Fortune*, p.190, p.204.

⁹⁰ Mary Russell, *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt*, 1st published 1986 (London: Flamingo, 1994), p.168.

was not a traveller until she married Ranulph, but discovered a new career and subsequently became Fiennes's co-worker on the Transglobe Expedition.⁹¹

The career of a female travel writer, however, is significantly impacted if she has children, which is not necessarily the case for men. Given the difficulty of managing children and travelling some women, such as Fiennes, have had to choose between the two.⁹² Dodwell explains that she is not a mother because she must have the freedom to travel.⁹³ This choice is a more flexible decision for men than women, as demonstrated by Ginny and Ranulph Fiennes. The extent of Ginny's work with her husband eventually precluded the possibility of caring for children. After his wife's death from cancer Ranulph Fiennes remarried, as Ginny had requested, and now has a young daughter.⁹⁴ Fiennes demonstrates that, for some men, it is possible to enjoy the benefits of being fully focused on one's work without eliminating the possibility of having a family at a later date. For women the choice between work and family is more restrictive.

Mothers are less likely to travel while their children are still young, although there are a few exceptions, such as Lady Florence Dixie and Naomi Mitchison. Numerous fathers travel; modern examples include Bill Bryson, Paul Theroux, Redmond O'Hanlon and Jonathan Raban. There is an emotional cost in leaving one's family but travel is often necessary in order to earn a living. Even so, the decisions of some travel writers may be potentially controversial. O'Hanlon's journey to Venezuela, for example, unfortunately coincides with the birth of his daughter, Puffin, and O'Hanlon uses his travelling companion, Simon Stockton, to comment on his predicament:

‘How can you do it?’ said Simon [...] ‘How can you leave your wife and daughter? Belinda just out of hospital. Puffin two weeks old. You ought to be shot. Just for thinking of it.’

‘It was planned a year ago,’ I said, looking away [...] ‘I didn't know it would be like this. It's now or next year. We have to catch the rainy season. We may want to go up some very small rivers.’

⁹¹ Russell, p.172.

⁹² Russell, p.168.

⁹³ Dodwell, *Madagascar Travels*, p.175.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Sanderson, ‘Intriguing Past of Sir Ranulph Fiennes' New Wife’, *Mail on Sunday*, 22 July 2006.

‘Spoken like a psychopath,’ said Simon.⁹⁵

O’Hanlon uses Stockton’s comments to castigate himself for his decision to leave his family but this is the only time his wife and daughter appear in the narrative. It is reasonable to suggest that their absence was central to his thoughts but, as they are absent, he can alter the narrative’s perspective. Reviewers do not criticise O’Hanlon’s decision, possibly because his wife and daughter remained well. At times, however, a parent’s absence may have serious consequences, as O’Hanlon also has cause to realise when he must cancel a journey to New Guinea when Puffin falls dangerously ill.⁹⁶

A woman’s decision to leave her family in order to travel can attract much greater attention and controversy. Alison Hargreaves’s successful ascent of Everest without supplementary oxygen, and her death on the descent of K2, provoked much media analysis. Commenting on Hargreaves’s success on Everest, Nigella Lawson argues that ‘something is wrong with the mountaineers who put their need for escape before their families’.⁹⁷ Lawson disapproves of Hargreaves’s decision to lead a dangerous lifestyle while being a mother to two young children, although Lawson insists that it is not ‘any more culpable to be a mother and risk your children’s happiness and security unnecessarily than it is to be a father who does the same thing’.⁹⁸ She is indignant at the idea of Hargreaves taking ‘a mere fortnight’s rest before setting off on another jaunt’ (Hargreaves’s final climb on K2), arguing that Hargreaves does not have a responsible attitude towards her family.⁹⁹ Lawson cannot see any justification for Hargreaves’s lifestyle, or those like her, but Edward Gorman and Gillian Bowditch note Jim Ballard’s comment that his wife made a living from mountain-climbing, as the family were supported by the sponsorship she attracted. He also argues that ‘no one said to Reinhold Messner you shouldn’t climb because you have children’.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Redmond O’Hanlon, *In Trouble Again: A Journey between the Orinoco and the Amazon*, 1st published 1988 (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p.16.

⁹⁶ Redmond O’Hanlon, *Trawler*, Unpublished Excerpt <<http://www.amazon.com/Trawler-Redmond-OHanlon/dp/product-description/1400042755>> [accessed 9 November 2009].

⁹⁷ Nigella Lawson, ‘Noble Impulse or Just Neurosis?’, *The Times*, 16 May 1995, p.14.

⁹⁸ Lawson, p.14.

⁹⁹ Lawson, p.14.

¹⁰⁰ Edward Gorman and Gillian Bowditch, ‘Solo Everest Woman “Dies in Avalanche” – Alison Hargreaves’, *The Times*, 18 August 1995, p.1.

Some parents, of course, choose to travel with their children, sometimes under extreme conditions. Anna Brassey and her husband sailed round the world on a yacht with their five children, although they did have the added support of a large crew.¹⁰¹ Rosie and Colin Swale lived with their two young children on a catamaran, their son James being delivered while they were at sea.¹⁰² Murphy travelled with her daughter, Rachel, while she was still very young. Trips to Europe prefaced a journey to India when Rachel was five. More recently, Murphy travelled to Cuba with Rachel and her young granddaughters. Inevitably, the resulting travel narratives are impacted by the presence of children: journeys must be tailored to the children's capabilities and their welfare is usually central to the narrative.

Despite the successes, the dangers of travelling with young children are by no means negligible and tragedy cannot always be averted, as Susie Carson Rijnhart discovered in Tibet when her thirteen-month-old son, Charlie, unable to cope with the high altitude, died on a mountain.¹⁰³ Though this, and the loss of her husband soon after, did not ultimately affect Rijnhart's desire to travel, the potential for tragedy is significant, making the decision to travel with children in extreme environments a highly controversial one. Murphy's travels with Rachel have been risky, but they have been successful and so demonstrate what is achievable. Rijnhart's experience highlights the vulnerability and fragility of children and the risks incurred on a demanding journey.

Representations of African Women

Most modern travel writers respond to postcolonial criticism of the intrusive and objectifying nature of the Western gaze which, as David Spurr describes:

proceeds from the visual to various kinds of valorization: the material value of the body as labor supply, its aesthetic value as object of artistic representation [...] its scientific value as evidence of racial difference or inferiority [...] its erotic value as the object of desire.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ E. H. Marshall, rev. D. Middleton, 'Brassey [*née* Allnutt], Anna [Annie], Lady Brassey (1889–1937)', *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3288>> [accessed 7 November 2009].

¹⁰² Rosie Swale, *Children of Cape Horn* (London: Elek, 1974), p.14.

¹⁰³ Susie Carson Rijnhart, *With the Tibetans in Tent and Temple: Narrative of a Four Years' Residence on the Tibetan Border, and of a Journey into the Far Interior* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1901), p.249.

¹⁰⁴ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourses in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration*, 1st published in 1993 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), p.22.

African women in particular have been highly sexualised in Western representation. Janell Hobson examines the development of the image of the Hottentot Venus, initiated in the public exhibitions of Saartjie Baartman and still a potent symbol of the exploitation of the African female body. Hobson argues that no other ‘black icon in history rivals [...] [Baartman] for overexposure’ and that she has become symbolic of stereotypes of the ‘presumed ugliness and heightened sexuality of the African race’.¹⁰⁵ Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch makes a similar point, observing that African women have been subjected to various sexualised representations: ‘from the fertile and nurturing Earth Mother to the lazy, debauched young beauty’.¹⁰⁶

African women were not always the subject of an eroticised gaze, as demonstrated in texts by Livingstone and Stanley, among others. But, as W. Winwoode Reade indicates, they were considered inferior both as Africans and as women: ‘the women of Africa are very inferior beings. Their very virtues, viz., their affection and their industry, are those of well-trained domestic animals’.¹⁰⁷ As with Baartman, ethnographic representations of African women determine Western perceptions and this extended to perceptions of the continent itself, which Reade anthropomorphises in highly sexual terms:

There is a woman [...] from whose breasts stream milk and honey mingled with poison and blood [...] She kisses [her children] upon the lips, and with her own breath she strikes them corpses [...] I will now attempt to sketch her features: to analyze the poison which flows from her lips and from her breasts.¹⁰⁸

Other travellers had a less abstract perspective, regarding African women as objects on which Western sexual constructions could be projected. Heinrich Barth remarks that his present of a looking-glass to woman was ‘a mark of distinction’ habitually given to ‘the most handsome woman in an encampment, the rest receiving nothing but needles’.¹⁰⁹ Barth rewards beauty as he perceives it, conferring self-importance on his own aesthetic

¹⁰⁵ Janell Hobson, *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p.1.

¹⁰⁶ Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women: A Modern History*, 1st published in 1994 as *Les Africaines: Histoire des femmes d’Afrique noir du XIX au XX siècle*, trans. by Beth Gillian Raps, 2nd edn (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), p.1.

¹⁰⁷ W. Winwood Reade, *Savage Africa: Being the Narrative of a Tour in Equatorial, Southwestern, and Northwestern Africa* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1864), p.426.

¹⁰⁸ Reade, p.383.

¹⁰⁹ Heinrich Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa: Being a Journal of an Expedition Undertaken under the Auspices of H. B. M.’s Government, in the Years 1849–1855*, 3 vols (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1857–59) III (1857), p.459.

preferences. Bayard Taylor expresses a more explicit appreciation in his description of young Sudanese girls dancing:

They were nearly all young [...] and some were strikingly beautiful. They had the dark-olive Arab complexion, with regular features, teeth of pearly whiteness, and black, brilliant eyes. The coarse cotton robe thrown over one shoulder left free the arms, neck and breasts, which were exquisitely moulded.¹¹⁰

These girls also suggest accessibility to Taylor as women of his own culture do not:

Owing to the skirts worn by the American woman I have no recollection of ever having seen an entire foot belonging to them [...] but I doubt if one in a thousand stands on so light and beautiful a pedestal as those wild African girls.¹¹¹

African women can, therefore, be made to act as sexualised substitutes for Western women, who are rejected because their bodies are forbiddingly concealed by their dress. It is worth remembering, of course, that the code of Western women's dress was socially dictated and that women travellers felt required to defend their femininity by drawing attention to their propriety in appearance.

Twentieth-century travel writing reveals a varied treatment of African women. They rarely appear in Evelyn Waugh's travel narratives, although men are hardly more privileged as Waugh avoids much interaction with local people. Waugh's imperialistic aloofness contrasts to Thesiger's companionship with his guides and protectors, but his descriptions of women are also rare, often due to the nature of his journeys or the cultures among which he travels.

Mostly, however, modern texts give greater agency to women. Laurens van der Post meets only a few women in the Kalahari desert: all are represented respectfully and characterised by their employment in their community, rather than by any sexual rôle. Van der Post spends time with both men and women, observing their different occupations: the women forage for tubers and fruits while the men hunt for meat or collect water from the sand.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Bayard Taylor, *A Journey to Central Africa: Or, Life and Landscapes from Egypt to the Negro Kingdoms of the White Nile* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1854), p.363.

¹¹¹ Taylor, p.363.

¹¹² Laurens van der Post, *Lost World of the Kalahari*, 1st published 1958 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p.217, p.213.

All are employed, in one way or another, with the practicalities of eking out an existence in the desert. Jennifer Robinson remarks that the image of a San woman ‘heading off to gather food with her digging implement and container to collect sustenance for the community’ was chosen as the logo of the 1991 Women and Gender in South Africa Conference because of the significance of this female rôle.¹¹³ Although the logo was criticised for portraying ‘a tiny-headed, naked and burdened Other’,¹¹⁴ Robinson argues that this particular image ‘was chosen for its local and historical significance [...] [as] it is the only surviving representation in local San paintings of women’.¹¹⁵ Van der Post’s earlier portrayal of San women also succeeds in communicating the importance of their rôles in their communities.

Dan Jacobson, who is not impeded by a language barrier as van der Post is, interacts with many people on his journey through South Africa, speaking to men and women alike. All are represented within Jacobson’s framework of a broken South Africa. The men and women he meets are characterised by his perception of the hopelessness of their situation. He does not privilege, or accuse, either sex as being more intelligent, friendly, racist or impoverished and wretched. Many people are suffering from the decline of trade and industry and struggling to subsist.¹¹⁶ Others, such as the female curator of the Mary Moffat Museum in Griquatown and the clergymen who maintain the Kuruman Bible College, live in the ruin of the past, preserving historical ideas and images, but without giving them any apparent relevance to the present or the future.¹¹⁷

Older stereotypes of African women as sexual subjects are also evident. Redmond O’Hanlon’s representation of foreign women is more problematic. He rarely records much interaction with women, implying that tribal etiquette demands that he keep his distance, but his description of the women he sees is unique, as modern travel writers do not generally describe unknown women almost exclusively in terms of their beauty and sexuality. Western women rarely appear in his narratives, apart from occasional mentions

¹¹³ Jennifer Robinson, ‘White Women Researching/Representing “Others”’: From Antipartheid to Postcolonialism?’ in *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*, ed. by Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1994), pp.197–226 (p.200).

¹¹⁴ Desiree Lewis, ‘The Politics of Feminism in South Africa’, *Staffrider*, 10, no.3 (1992), 15–21 (p.16).

¹¹⁵ Robinson, p.200.

¹¹⁶ Jacobson, p.123, p.169.

¹¹⁷ Dan Jacobson, *The Electronic Elephant: A Southern African Journey*, 1st published 1994 (London: Penguin, 1995), p.46, p.129.

of wives or partners.¹¹⁸ There is a glimpse of a young girl when O'Hanlon visits Stockton's home:

A very young girl lay asleep on the double bed [...] Three Siamese cats snuggled together, pressed into the hollow between her buttocks and the back of her thighs. Her yellow hair fell forward across the pillow.¹¹⁹

Descriptions of non-Western women are more graphic and suggestive; O'Hanlon's description of young girls dancing in Borneo is reminiscent of Taylor's account:

lithe, slender, very young, they were indeed lovely to look at [...] The forward step on the beat outlined the legs beneath their folded-down sarongs. The gentle, backward swaying, on the pause, revealed the tight breasts beneath their tee-shirts.¹²⁰

These descriptions of women seem to justify David Spurr's analysis of the Western gaze, and this suggests that O'Hanlon's representations may be problematic:

The eye treats the body as a landscape: it proceeds systematically from part to part, quantifying and spatializing, noting colour and texture, and finally passing an aesthetic judgment which stressed the body's role as object to be viewed.¹²¹

Critics, both men and women, do not seem to notice this aspect of O'Hanlon's narratives and it is possible that he expects his readers, of both sexes, to find his descriptions attractive and erotic, or at least entertaining. Dea Birkett's reaction reinforces this idea, stating that 'the encounters are so beautifully crafted, the bad-taste jokes so genuinely funny [...] that the least best part of myself couldn't but help enjoy it'.¹²²

O'Hanlon often laughs at himself for his attraction to young and inaccessible women and, arguably, his descriptions of them deliberately highlight, and ridicule, his own preoccupations. O'Hanlon parodies the male gaze by acknowledging his attraction and not

¹¹⁸ Redmond O'Hanlon, *In Trouble Again: A Journey between the Orinoco and the Amazon*, 1st published 1988 (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p.178; *Congo Journey*, p.12; *Trawler: A Journey Through the North Atlantic*, 1st published 2003 (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p.149.

¹¹⁹ O'Hanlon, *In Trouble Again*, p.13.

¹²⁰ Redmond O'Hanlon, *Into the Heart of Borneo: An Account of a Journey made in 1983 to the Mountains of Batu Tiban with James Fenton*, 1st published 1984 (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p.71.

¹²¹ Spurr, p.23.

¹²² Dea Birkett, 'Review of *Congo Journey*', *New Statesman*, October 1996, pp.45–46 (p.46).

attempting to disguise it as objective anthropological observation. In Venezuela, for example, he becomes fixated with the wife of a local chief after taking a popular hallucinogen, yoppo: ‘She gave me the most enormous, encouraging, kind smile [...] I smiled back, giddy, overcome with slow tenderness and deep desire’.¹²³ His prolonged and lustful gaze ends in ignominy when his friends pull him away from the compound and rebuke him: ‘Did you know you were staring at Jarivanau’s woman for *several hours*? Did you know he is the capitán?’¹²⁴ O’Hanlon habitually presents himself as a shambolic, middle-aged man, giving a degree of irony to his attraction. In his fantasy conversation with Jarivanau’s wife he emphasises these points: ‘I am old and hairy [...] I sweat and I smell horrible and I happen to be filthy’.¹²⁵

The gaze of the Western woman may not include the same erotic overtones as male representations, but some stereotype foreign women as victims. Foster and Mills suggest that Western women use their observations of foreign women to construct ‘a superior position’ for themselves ‘as being relatively free from restriction’.¹²⁶ This attitude has possibly increased since Western women have asserted their autonomy in the twentieth century, while many other cultures remain characterised by patriarchal structures and values. Western women, aware of the breakthroughs which have been made, can be keen to promote greater choice and rights; Naomi Mitchison, for example, launched a ‘crusade’ in Mochudi to inform Bakgatla women about birth control and family planning.¹²⁷

Murphy’s feminist sympathies are also evident when she travels from Kenya to Zimbabwe. Her growing awareness of the devastation caused by AIDS throughout sub-Saharan Africa prompts her to focus on the situation of African women and the restrictions of their societal rôles. Wives are unable to refuse to have sex with their husbands, although the men may have more than one sexual partner. In this way, whole families die from AIDS-related illnesses.¹²⁸ The husband’s authority also dictates the number of children a wife has: women may be taken to hospital for an operation without their consent or, conversely, the husband may refuse to let his wife take contraception.¹²⁹ Conditions which make

¹²³ O’Hanlon, *In Trouble Again*, p.215.

¹²⁴ O’Hanlon, *In Trouble Again*, p.217.

¹²⁵ O’Hanlon, *In Trouble Again*, p.215.

¹²⁶ Foster and Mills, p.14.

¹²⁷ Jenni Calder, *The Nine Lives of Naomi Mitchison* (London: Virago Press, 1997), p.238.

¹²⁸ Murphy, *Ukimwi Road*, p.115, p.139.

¹²⁹ Murphy, *Ukimwi Road*, p.44, p.139.

pregnancy risky, such as high blood pressure, may also prevent women from taking oral contraceptive pills in secret so that, without a husband's support, some have no way to prevent pregnancy. Murphy meets one woman in this situation who expects to die, having been unable to prevent becoming pregnant again.¹³⁰ It is undeniable that women suffer from being regarded as inferior to men and that the authority which these societies give men over women is abused, with devastating consequences. But Murphy does not see much hope in such situations and, indeed, she is frustrated not only with men who see no reason to change their behaviour, but with women who seem unable to break away from their social conditioning.

Murphy is particularly frustrated with a couple of feminists whom she meets in Bushenyi, Uganda, despite the fact that Helen and Jill challenge tradition and demand respect as equals. Helen has a high status in her community, enabling her to encourage women to support each other:

A husband living risky comes home and sees not only his scared wife waiting to obey. He sees a *group* of women [...] all saying the same thing! [...] Mothers want to live for their children. Risky husbands come second.¹³¹

There is certainly some hope in such mutual support, although Murphy sees no evidence of similar resistance elsewhere in Africa. Despite this encouraging proof that some women in Africa can resist sexual exploitation, Murphy is ultimately disappointed. In the midst of a debate with Helen, Jill and some local men, Murphy declares that 'the notion of buying a wife, with all that that implies for women's status, is barbarous'.¹³² Helen and Jill cannot support this position, pointing out that Helen's high bride price gives her authority, without which she 'couldn't start a revolution'. Helen remarks that '[e]veryone knows my bride-price was ten cows. When I talk revolution they listen, with respect'.¹³³

Jill points out that 'Women's Lib has to start from where we're at, not where you're at' but, although this is a valid point, Murphy is perhaps understandably surprised at this reception, having just been told that the lowering of the bride-price is necessary so that

¹³⁰ Murphy, *Ukimwi Road*, p.139.

¹³¹ Murphy, *Ukimwi Road*, p.123.

¹³² Murphy, *Ukimwi Road*, p.128.

¹³³ Ibid.

young men can marry sooner and, ideally, avoid prostitutes.¹³⁴ Clearly it is not desirable for every woman to be an expensive as Helen, despite the influence of her status, and so Murphy suggests that women should not be bartered at all. This, however, would rob them of any status, which is not desirable: ‘if there’s no exchange [a woman] feels worth nothing’.¹³⁵ It is not clear how affordability and status will be reconciled and Murphy is disappointed that the women have not learnt to value themselves by something other than their marriage contract.

Murphy is further discouraged when Jill later advises her not to be ‘too honest, explaining you’ve never married, have no religion and so on’, pointing out that she doesn’t ‘realise how upset some people can be when you talk like that [...] even people like Helen’.¹³⁶ Such attitudes disappoint Murphy as she cannot regard these women as genuinely radical. She makes it clear that they have some positive impact on their community but she feels they are still too traditional to understand attitudes and behaviour which she regards as liberating. To some extent, however, Murphy’s disappointment in finding such mixed views perhaps diminishes the real worth of what Helen and Jill have achieved.

Murphy’s frustration regarding African social structures and the impact of cultural attitudes on the spread of HIV is not unjustifiable, as the HIV rate in adults has largely remained unchanged in most of the countries through which she travelled in 1992. In Kenya and Tanzania between five to ten percent of adults are infected and in Zimbabwe between twenty to thirty percent.¹³⁷ Uganda, however, is one of the few African countries in which the spread of HIV has significantly decreased. Records made in 1993 show that HIV affected between ten to twenty per cent of the adult population. Ten years later between one and five percent of adults were infected, demonstrating a considerable decline. It is possible, therefore, that Murphy underestimates the importance of steps being taken in 1992, by the government and by individuals, which contributed to mitigating the risk of infection.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Murphy, *Ukimwi Road*, p.128.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Murphy, *Ukimwi Road*, p.132.

¹³⁷ ‘Avert’ <<http://www.avert.org/history-aids-africa.htm>> [accessed 28 October 2009].

¹³⁸ ‘Avert’.

Conclusion

The exploration of Africa's interior in the nineteenth century coincided with significant developments in women's travel. As such, women soon proved that they could travel, even in Africa, as ably as men. Greater ease of travel in the twentieth century has enabled many women to test themselves in Africa's extreme landscapes and an apologetic self-presentation, even if ironic, is no longer appropriate for travelling women. As with postcolonial discourse, twentieth-century travel writing has been affected by significant alterations in Western perceptions of gender and gendered rôles. Murphy, one of two women travel writers whose work I will study in greater depth, is a renowned example of the hardy, modern female traveller. Her Ethiopian and South African journeys, made in 1966–67 and 1993–95 respectively, demonstrate her stamina as a traveller, her enjoyment of solo travel and her confidence.

Western perceptions of gender have, then, had a considerable impact, influencing not only how Western women may present themselves, but how non-Western women are perceived or given agency. The representation and self-presentation of African women is an increasingly popular topic in gender discourse, although clearly African-American women have had greater opportunities for self-expression than African women. Living in male-dominated societies, as many do, African women have had less opportunity than men to respond to the way in which they are represented. Adeola James suggests that 'the woman's voice is generally subsumed under the massive humming and bustling of her counterpart, who has been brought up to take women for granted'.¹³⁹

The influences of Western culture are clearly evident in the way that African women are perceived in travel narratives and modern issues present challenges for representation, as well as older stereotypes. Postcolonial discourse demands greater cultural awareness from Western observers but this can come into conflict with Western concepts of social justice. The social status of women is a particularly contentious point: Murphy's work suggests that African women want more control but not necessarily through Western solutions.

¹³⁹

Adeola James, *In Their Own Voices: African Women Writers Talk* (London: Currey, 1990), p.2.

Chapter Four: Constructing Travel Narratives

Introduction

This chapter analyses some distinctive characteristics of modern travel writing showing how it has been affected by shifting perceptions about the nature of narrative and the responsibility of writers to their material and to their public. Redmond O’Hanlon observes that, when travelling, his main rôle is ‘as a writer, not a traveller’.¹ When professional travel writers travel, the construction of a narrative is the ultimate aim of the journey and, therefore, a subtext in the finished narrative. Travel writers observe and experience with a view to reconstructing events in a narrative and so most make notes so that they can remember details and maintain some order in the text. In this chapter I will consider what is distinctive in the construction of travel narratives, exploring some of the links with autobiography, memoir and reportage. I will look at the relationship between writers and readers, discussing what readers expect from travel narratives which are regarded as non-fiction texts. One of the potential pitfalls of autobiographical or reportage narratives derives from the narrator’s reliance on memory. I will discuss the difficulty of reconstructing events from memory and the methods which travel writers use in order to obtain what they deem to be the most accurate results.

Once the material has been collected, it must be fashioned into a readable text. Most writers do not regard editing as a fictionalising process. Jonathan Raban, however, argues that, as an author must give shape to a narrative, no account can claim any meaningful distinction from fiction:

The modern memoir seems to me to be a straight outgrowth of the novel. It requires the teller of the tale to both imagine and invent the past [...] I see the [...] books that I’ve written as variants of memoir.²

Certainly Laurens van der Post and Bruce Chatwin have been regarded as unreliable, as fictionalisers. Their travelling companions have not always agreed with their construction of events, and this has been felt to undermine the authenticity of their self-representation. I

¹ Katy Hindson, ‘Interview with Redmond O’Hanlon’, *Studies in Travel Writing*, 11 (2007), 177–188 (p.183).

² Michael Shapiro, *A Sense of Place: Great Travel Writers Talk about their Craft, Lives, and Inspiration* (San Francisco: Traveler’s Tales, 2004), pp.54–55.

will ask how important it is for readers to be able to believe that the events in a travel narrative are not invented or even significantly exaggerated.

Mishaps or dramatic, even scary, events are important components of travel narratives. They are perhaps more important now that travel writers are no longer scientists and explorers traversing landscapes unknown to Westerners. Earlier travellers, having less advanced medication and equipment, were bound to encounter serious setbacks or illnesses which introduced another sort of suspense into their narratives. Travel is now much easier and travel writers search for the dwindling number of destinations which have not been assimilated into tourist routes. In the absence of drama, suspense and unpredictability, comedy may be used to enliven the mundane.

I will conclude with a brief discussion on the function of photography in modern travel narratives. Photographs may act as aides-mémoire and as authenticating supplements to the narrative. The inclusion of photographs provides another important distinction between travel accounts and novels. Photographs seem to verify accounts but are, of course, open to manipulation of various kinds, so that they can be a form of fiction. Travel writers occasionally emphasise the deceptive character of photographs by showing how a knowledge of their context changes the story they tell.

Self and Authenticity

Travel writing is generically fluid: it is a form of reportage, but cannot avoid including autobiographical elements. The amount and significance of autobiographical information varies according to the stated or implied aims of the writer. Peter Matthiessen reveals a lot of personal details in his account of his journey in the Himalayas, where he accompanies biologist George Schaller in search of snow leopards. Matthiessen, a Zen Buddhist, uses the journey as a sort of pilgrimage as he works through his emotions after the death of his wife.³ Bruce Chatwin, by contrast, reveals little personal information. One of his editors, Susannah Clapp, suggests that he ‘hardly wrote a confessional line in his life’.⁴ When Chatwin does reveal personal details he crafts them to fit a construction of himself as a wanderer, beset by a ‘neurotic restlessness [...] I have a compulsion to wander and a

³ Peter Matthiessen, *The Snow Leopard*, 1st published 1978 (London: Vintage, 2003), p.61, p.235, p.266; Shapiro, p.339.

⁴ Susannah Clapp, *With Chatwin: Portrait of a Writer*, 1st published 1997 (London: Vintage, 1998), p.207.

compulsion to return'.⁵ The narrator of *The Songlines* (1987) recalls 'the fantastic homelessness of my first five years'⁶ which are also described in the essay, 'I Always Wanted to Go to Patagonia'.⁷ Chatwin claims that he 'grew sick and thin' when his family settled in Birmingham, identifying this as Baudelaire's ' "La Grande Maladie: horreur du domicile" '.⁸ Matthiessen and Chatwin choose to create themselves very differently, therefore, and I attempt to show that travel narratives can accommodate very different kinds of narrator and narrative strategy while still being identified as travel writing.

As with all autobiography or representation, the nature of a reliable text is an important issue in travel texts and I will discuss how far constructed narratives may be considered reliable and how much a writer may invent or modify before he or she begins to be regarded as unreliable. Dr Johnson, both the writer and subject of biographies, identifies the difficulty of maintaining accuracy in life-writing: 'the incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory'.⁹ Recollecting and reconstructing past events must always result in the loss of detail. Details may even be altered when we remember events according to our own interpretation of them, shaping the information and filling in gaps so our perception of events is characterised by our individual personalities.

The process of assimilating evidence may be automatic, even unconscious, but the attempt to record it is not and this means that any memory will inevitably be a constructed version of events. Details which seem less important to the observer soon become indistinct. A travel writer will observe with an eye to later reconstruction and so certain details will inevitably be prioritised. Indeed, subjectivity is part of the point. Only the 'most prominent and observable particularities' can be related and the definition of these alter according to the observer's personal perspective.¹⁰ Dervla Murphy sometimes records so much detail she can seem insufficiently discriminating. The length of some of her narratives, such as *South from the Limpopo* (1997) and *The Island that Dared* (2008) indicates her

⁵ Bruce Chatwin, *Anatomy of Restlessness: Uncollected Writings*, ed. by Jan Borm and Matthew Graves, 1st published 1996 (London: Picador, 1997), p.76.

⁶ Bruce Chatwin, *The Songlines*, 1st published 1987 (London: Vintage, 1988), p.5.

⁷ Bruce Chatwin, 'The Making of a Writer; I Always Wanted to Go to Patagonia', *New York Times*, 7 February 1983.

⁸ Chatwin, 'The Making of a Writer'.

⁹ Samuel Johnson, 'The Dignity and Usefulness of Biography', *The Rambler*, 60 (1750), 207–215 (p.214).

¹⁰ Johnson, p.214.

unwillingness to excise details and accounts of travel may be supplemented by lengthy digressions on politics and history.¹¹ The most important accounts in *Visiting Rwanda* are those of the survivors of genocide, yet the impact of these shocking encounters is lessened by the first two-thirds of the narrative which focuses on diverse details largely unconnected to the genocide.¹²

A number of writers of autobiographical or semi-autobiographical work reveal their awareness of the problematic nature of memory. Some analyse the process of remembering, explaining which details may have become confused in retrospect or, conversely, why they feel sure they have remembered correctly. The following examples are not taken from travel writing but they show intensely self-aware writers considering the process of memory in narrative construction. The issues they raise are generally relevant for the way we read travel narratives even though not all travel writers admit the unreliability of memory. Virginia Woolf wittily deconstructs her own shaping activity:

Perhaps we were going to St. Ives; more probably, for from the light it must have been evening, we were coming back to London. But it is more convenient artistically to suppose that we were going to St. Ives, for that will lead to my other memory, which also seems to be my first memory [...] lying half asleep, half awake in bed in the nursery at St. Ives.¹³

Woolf engages her reader by admitting the element of fiction in the act of memory: her admission of the fictionalising activity, paradoxically, makes her seem trustworthy. She also notes the difficulty of communicating ‘the feeling’ of the memory which for her, ‘is even at this moment very strong in me’, but is so intangible that she ‘could spend hours trying to write that as it should be written’ and would ‘fail (unless I had some wonderful luck)’.¹⁴

Naomi Mitchison also discusses the difficulty of achieving accuracy in her autobiographical work. She defends her work by mentioning meticulously-kept diaries,

¹¹ Dervla Murphy, *South from the Limpopo: Travels through South Africa*, 1st published 1997 (London: Flamingo, 1998); *The Island that Dared: Journeys in Cuba* (London: Eland, 2008).

¹² Dervla Murphy, *Visiting Rwanda* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1998).

¹³ Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, ed. by Jeanne Schulkind, 1st published 1976 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985), p.64.

¹⁴ Woolf, p.65.

dating from her seventh year, and detailed family letters.¹⁵ Yet not all events can be verified in this way and, like Woolf, Mitchison questions her earliest memories, observing that she clearly remembers

that the goldfish inside the great Famille Rose Chinese bowl [...] used to swim round and eat the crumbs I put in. Sadly these same goldfish are now only painted in the inside of the bowl. This kind of memory makes one just a little uncertain of others.¹⁶

The aim of such apparent openness and uncertainty seems to be to impress the reader with the integrity and reliability of the narrator. If a writer appears honest about details which are uncertain, the reader feels more confident that other details, presented more confidently, will be true.

In an interview with Susan Bassnett, Colin Thubron argues that a travel writer should remain ‘responsible to a plot that has already happened [...] [and] write as accurately’ as possible.¹⁷ But he suggests that ‘it’s a good lesson for travel writers to know we are betrayed at every point’¹⁸ by memory because ‘[n]obody is quite as you remember them’.¹⁹ Most contemporary travel writers admit that memories can be deceptive, keeping diaries, taking notes and using Dictaphones. Thubron takes as many notes as he can and has occasionally recorded conversations in order to transcribe parts of them accurately.²⁰ In this way he feels that, despite the inevitable rôle of the shaping imagination in recording his journeys, the finished narrative retains sufficient integrity.

Most travel writers are as anxious as Thubron to retain as much information as possible, in the conviction that there is some form of objective truth to which their account must strive to correspond. Dervla Murphy keeps a daily diary to which she makes occasional reference in her narratives.²¹ Her books are often published in diary form, giving the impression that

¹⁵ Naomi Mitchison, *‘Small Talk’ with ‘All Change Here’*, 1st published 1988 (Isle of Colonsay: House of Lochar, 2000), p.25.

¹⁶ Mitchison, p.18.

¹⁷ Susan Bassnett, ‘Interview with Colin Thubron’, *Studies in Travel Writing*, 3 (1999), 148–171 (p.151).

¹⁸ Bassnett, p.153.

¹⁹ Colin Thubron, *The Lost Heart of Asia*, 1st published 1994 (London: Penguin, 1995), p.216.

²⁰ Bassnett, p.152.

²¹ Dervla Murphy, *Muddling Through in Madagascar*, 1st published 1985 (London: Flamingo, 1998), p.74.

she has published her entries with little alteration. Her first book, *Full Tilt* (1965), explains that this was initially the case:

Apart from burnishing the spelling and syntax [...] I have left the diary virtually unchanged. A few very personal or very topical comments or allusions have been excised, but the temptation to make myself sound more learned than I am, by gleaning facts and figures from an encyclopaedia and inserting them in appropriate places, has been resisted.²²

Murphy explains that *Full Tilt* was ‘published as it was written on the way’.²³ A lengthier process of editing gradually developed in later books which are more polished and include political, social and historical information, of which she has added ‘more and more’ over the years.²⁴

Murphy’s opinion on the discipline of taking notes has not altered over more than forty years of travelling and writing. She comments that daily entries are vital

because otherwise the next day’s experience would blur the day before, so no matter how tired you are, you’re just putting it down, rough notes, but you’ve got to get it down as it was that day, that evening.²⁵

In her opinion, no one could ‘come back at the end of a journey and remember all the details’ and the diary is therefore invaluable:

I’ve got a special bag that I carry the journal in day and night, I sleep with it here [hugs arms around chest]. I don’t take anything else that [...] would worry me if it were stolen but that’s the one thing that I would defend with my life!²⁶

The recording process is so vital that travel writers must make notes, whatever the circumstances of their journey. Redmond O’Hanlon explains that taking notes while trekking through the jungle is very demanding. Stress and the intensity of the experience can affect the memory:

²² Dervla Murphy, *Full Tilt: Ireland to India on a Bicycle*, 1st published 1965 (London: Century Hutchinson, 1983), p.xvii.

²³ Author’s Interview with Dervla Murphy, 17 August 2005.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

You suddenly see a troop of Colobus monkeys, and you think you will remember it all your life, but you won't even remember it the following morning because you're under so much stress. You'll see a whole series of troops of different species of monkeys, and then the whole lot is wiped from your memory because your first gorilla peers at you from a stand of spindly ginger-plants. So you have to write it down as you walk.²⁷

O'Hanlon evidently strives for accuracy, explaining to Geordie Torr that he has 'to take detailed notes as it's all happening because the mind just extracts all the suffering from it more or less instantly'.²⁸ *No Mercy* (1998), the American edition, adds a photograph of O'Hanlon in the Congo, captioned 'writing, always writing'.²⁹ It is a revealing image, as he does not usually make the process of producing a travel narrative visible, as Murphy does by referring to her diary.

Wilfred Thesiger did not expect to write a book about his expeditions until literary agent Graham Watson and publisher Mark Longman, supported by Thesiger's mother, Kathleen, persuaded Thesiger to consider producing a narrative.³⁰ One of his biographers, Alexander Maitland, points out that, although Thesiger 'never travelled anywhere with the intention of writing about a journey', he did publish 'more than twenty articles' which helped him to recall 'much of the authentic detail' when writing his books. In addition, his diaries and photographs and letters to his family provided sufficient information for his narratives.³¹ Although he did not travel with a large audience in mind, Thesiger still engaged in the processes of selection and reconstruction in order to describe his journeys to himself and to family and friends.

Thesiger remarks that if he had had a travel narrative in mind he would have 'kept fuller notes' of his travels but wonders if it may have 'hindered' him as much as helping him.³² The process of recording may get in the way of the process of experiencing if everything is viewed with an eye to a later reconstruction. Similarly, one may become so preoccupied with taking photographs that one fails to look, a point which Thesiger may also have

²⁷ Hindson, p.180.

²⁸ Geordie Torr, 'In Trouble Again and Again and Again', *Geographical*, 76, no. 10 (2004), p.74.

²⁹ Redmond O'Hanlon, *No Mercy: A Journey to the Heart of the Congo* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1998), p.3.

³⁰ Alexander Maitland, *Wilfred Thesiger: The Life of the Great Explorer* (HarperCollins Publishers: London, 2006), p.326.

³¹ Maitland, p.370.

³² Wilfred Thesiger, *Arabian Sands*, 1st published 1959 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p.11.

considered as, although he took many photographs, few are duplicates. His vast collection of photos has a mnemonic value for Thesiger, and their evocative resonance enhances the aesthetic value of his narratives.

Of course, taking notes is not always possible, as O'Hanlon finds out on a trawler,³³ and can be counter-productive at times. Bryson observes that he used to take meticulous notes, but that '[i]t got to the stage where I found myself sitting in a café writing: "spent time sitting in café writing down notes"'.³⁴ He reduced his note-taking accordingly although he finds that his recorded observations may now be quite disjointed:

Sometimes something will strike me as interesting or amusing and I write down 'Don't forget big man in red braces', but when I come to write the book I have no recollection whatsoever of why I wrote it.³⁵

Mary Morris is more complacent about her 'chaotic way' of making notes, observing that

somehow when I go back I manage to recall what I need to recall [...] I might write 'alfalfa field – Victoria – the psychic of lost dogs' and know immediately, even years later, what I want to say about Victoria who lived in a trailer in an alfalfa field along with her one-eyed, gray and white mutt who runs away.³⁶

Bryson and Morris do not want to lose the details of their journeys but they do not want the process of recording to obscure their experience of the journey. Of course, memories connected to personal encounters or strong emotions are more easily evoked, even by brief markers, than the background details which entertain us in passing.

It seems reasonable to suggest that most modern travel writers aim to be responsible to an objective reality, as far as this is possible. But, as Thubron points out, it would be 'absurd for a travel writer to feel that he is really being objective, for there's no such thing'.³⁷

Every detail cannot be recorded and each writer's personal perspective produces widely

³³ Hindson, p.85.

³⁴ Mike Gerrard, 'Notes of a Travel Writer', *Telegraph*, 10 October 1998.

³⁵ Gerrard, 'Notes of a Travel Writer'.

³⁶ Mary Morris, 'Women and Journeys: Inner and Outer' in *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel*, ed. by Michael Kowalewski (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1992), p.29.

³⁷ Bassnett, p.152.

varying responses to the same place.³⁸ Travel narratives must be constructed and this involves a process of selective editing, in order to fashion a coherent narrative. Thubron observes that despite

attempting to evoke again the journey that you remember, that you have in notes, as accurately as you can [...] Of course it's exclusion that makes so much of what one writes, (particularly when you compress people's conversations because you don't remember them).³⁹

Excising details may mean sacrificing accuracy for effect. Thubron's conversations, for example, become 'more poignant [...] or more interesting [...] simply by the process of excluding three quarters' of what was recorded.⁴⁰ He admits that 'there is something disingenuous' in this process, but he argues that, if a text should be accurate, it should also be readable.⁴¹ Alain de Botton reinforces Thubron's point by demonstrating the difficulty of producing an arresting narrative when details are recorded faithfully rather than edited:

Artistic accounts involve severe abbreviations of what reality will force upon us. A travel book may tell us, for example, that a narrator journeyed through the afternoon [...] But we never simply journey through an afternoon. We sit in a train. Lunch digests awkwardly within us. The seat cloth is grey. We look out of the window at a field. We look back inside. A drum of anxieties revolves in consciousness [...] A story-teller who provided us with such a profusion of details would rapidly grow maddening.⁴²

Most writers, therefore, edit their experience to increase intensity and drama and 'the boring bits [...] get left out' in order to create a more captivating narrative.⁴³

Jonathan Raban argues that travel writing, therefore, and non-fiction in general, is no more reliable than fiction, arguing that the influence of the author in the shaping process is such that no distinction can be made between narratives which reconstruct past events and

³⁸ Colin Thubron discusses medieval accounts of three Italians travelling in Damascus who 'never left one another's company because they were frightened [...] They went to exactly the same places, did exactly the same things and they wrote about three completely different cities.', Bassnett, pp.152–53.

³⁹ Bassnett, p.152.

⁴⁰ Bassnett, p.165.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), pp.14–15.

⁴³ Bassnett, p.165.

narratives which have been invented.⁴⁴ Certainly Thubron seems a little uncomfortable with the artificiality created even by necessary compressions. Redmond O’Hanlon, on the other hand, simply regards the process as essential in order to make the narrative ‘any kind of work of art’.⁴⁵ Moving events around or inventing details would not be acceptable, ‘[w]hy not write a novel?’, but, as editing is indispensable, O’Hanlon, like most travel writers, regards his work as non-fiction.⁴⁶

In the interests of integrity Thubron observes that ‘long periods of boredom’ need not be excluded entirely, as this would give a wrong impression of the journey. His own technique is to evoke such periods ‘in a paragraph and then move on’. In this way he hopes to be able to focus on the more interesting details without being dishonest about the experience as a whole. Yet boredom can be an issue in travel writing but it must (paradoxically) be recorded in a lively manner which transforms it. Evelyn Waugh’s *Remote People* (1931) makes boredom perversely attractive. Much of his narrative is a petulant but often humorous account of his boredom and discomfort in Africa:

I sat in Mr Bollolakos’ hotel [...] Most of the time I thought about how awful the next day would be.

In my bedroom were three more volumes of Pope and some writing-paper. But I should have to cross the courtyard to get to my bedroom.⁴⁷

Waugh was criticised by some reviewers for his emphasis on boredom: Rebecca West maintained that ‘Mr. Waugh has failed to observe that it is an iron law of literature that the minute one begins to describe how one has been bored one becomes a bore’.⁴⁸ But his attempts to convey his impressions of stagnation and suffocation are concise and humorous. It is true that Waugh’s travel narratives did not sell as well as his novels, where his satire appeared to be more appropriate, but there is still some attraction in his biting humour.

⁴⁴ Shapiro, pp.52–54.

⁴⁵ Shapiro, p.85.

⁴⁶ Shapiro, p.95.

⁴⁷ Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh Abroad: Collected Travel Writing* (London: Everyman’s Library, 2003), pp.271–72.

⁴⁸ *Evelyn Waugh: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Martin Stannard (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p.122.

Sometimes the compression of details, although necessary, can seem extreme. At times O'Hanlon condenses conversations which occurred over a period of six months so that their impact is not lost in a chronological but disjointed representation.⁴⁹ More than this, O'Hanlon's compressions mean that, at times, he paraphrases his companions' words, arguing that 'the characters absolutely [...] would have said those things if they'd thought of them at the time and if they'd had the energy to put it all together like that'.⁵⁰ There is a greater degree of artificiality in this approach but O'Hanlon is not inventing exchanges which never happened. He feels that he is faithful to the feelings which were expressed during the journey, while at the same time keeping the narrative readable and coherent. Arguably he is attempting to give his audience clearer insight into the minds and emotions of his companions more effectively by articulating their ideas more succinctly.

Of course, these constructions are O'Hanlon's own interpretation of what he hears and this highlights the impact of personal perception on reconstruction, but there is no evidence to suggest that O'Hanlon's companions have complained about being misrepresented. This was a particularly important issue in his most recent narrative, *Trawler*, (2003).⁵¹ A trawlerman, Robbie Mowat, explains that the crew want O'Hanlon 'to get it as much like it is' so that 'we can give the book to our wives, women, our girls'. Mowat explains that 'we canna tell them ourselves [...] because they wouldna believe it [...] every last one of them seems to think that we *want* to be out there'.⁵² It is very important to these men that an observer communicates their experience to those at home. Michael Shapiro asks O'Hanlon if the men liked the book and he says that they 'loved it [...] it's an absolute runaway bestseller in Aberdeen', and had already given it to others to read so that they could understand the nature of the experience.⁵³

Reliability

We can agree, then, that travel narratives cannot provide readers with definitively 'true' representations of countries and people. But this does not give the travel writer a licence to make things up at will. To follow imaginative processes akin to those of the novelist is one thing; to pretend that things happened that did not is another. And the narrator's self-

⁴⁹ Shapiro, p.85.

⁵⁰ Shapiro, p.95.

⁵¹ Redmond O'Hanlon, *Trawler: A Journey Through the North Atlantic*, 1st published 2003 (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

⁵² O'Hanlon, *Trawler*, pp.262–63.

⁵³ Shapiro, p.94.

representation can also be felt to be true or untrue, honest or dishonest. As in autobiography, fidelity to facts matters in a travel text. Laurens van der Post's biographer, J. D. F. Jones, argues that readers enter into different contracts with an author depending on whether a narrative is presented as fact or fiction. It matters, therefore, if the boundaries are blurred.⁵⁴ Jones suggests that, if 'we discover the [...] tales [...] to be inaccurate, embellished, exaggerated, distorted, we protest that we would prefer to hear what actually happened'.⁵⁵ Ian Jack argues that he needs to believe that a travel writer's account is 'as honest a description of what had happened to the writer [...] as the writer [...] [can] manage'.⁵⁶ The reader often has no way of discerning truth from fiction and so wants to know that the narrator is reliable.

The works of writers such as Bruce Chatwin and Laurens van der Post have been criticised for perceived inaccuracies and manipulation of events. Chatwin's *The Songlines* is a modified account of his journeys in Australia, the first of which was taken with Salman Rushdie, who does not appear in the narrative.⁵⁷ Chatwin marketed his book as a novel but, as his biographer, Nicholas Shakespeare, points out: 'Little of what occurs in his "novel" is invented'.⁵⁸ The narrative does not 'go far enough to take on the true liberation of fictional writing' and much of it is 'modified reportage'.⁵⁹ Chatwin made little effort to disguise the Australians he met and Shakespeare is able to identify most of the characters in the narrative with their real-life counterparts. This is made more contentious by the fact that people 'with whom he had run-ins' become the objects of Chatwin's revenge, presented as obnoxious, exploitative and pretentious.⁶⁰ By contrast the only character who is 'truly fictionalised [...] is the novel's all-seeing narrator: the "I" named Bruce' who is something of a hero in the narrative.⁶¹

⁵⁴ J. D. F. Jones, *Storyteller*, 1st published 2001 (London: Scribner, 2002), p.3.

⁵⁵ Jones, p.4.

⁵⁶ Ian Jack, 'Introduction' in *The Granta Book of Travel*, ed. by Ian Jack (London: Granta Books, 1998) pp.vii–xii (p.xi).

⁵⁷ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991*, 2nd edn (London: Granta Books in association with Penguin Books, 1992), p.232.

⁵⁸ Nicholas Shakespeare, *Bruce Chatwin*, 1st published 1999 (London: Vintage, 2000), p.417

⁵⁹ Shakespeare, p.489, p.417.

⁶⁰ Shakespeare, p.489.

⁶¹ Shakespeare, p.417.

Monika Fludernik observes that ‘identities cannot be upheld without the co-operation of others’.⁶² Certainly it is easier to test a writer’s claims when they can be compared to other sources, such as comments from friends and family, or a biographer’s account.

Shakespeare observes that, while Chatwin liked to imagine himself ‘full of deep feeling yet economical with words’, an Australian acquaintance remarks that ‘[h]e murdered people with talk’.⁶³ Much of Chatwin’s writing revolves around themes of movement and travel and he cultivates a nomadic persona, expressed in his essays as well as in his travel writing: ‘The best thing is to walk’. Home, for Chatwin is ‘a place to hang one’s hat’.⁶⁴ One of his editors, Susannah Clapp, recalls a conversation with a lord who claimed to know ‘something about Bruce Chatwin’ and remarked to her that ‘he really was a nomad’.⁶⁵ Clapp notes drily that Chatwin’s friends held a different view, pointing out that he

made many journeys but [...] often stayed comfortably in the houses of friends – and to some of these friends his perpetual motion seemed like that of a perpetual guest. ‘For a nomad,’ commented one host [...] ‘he spends an awfully long time in one place’.⁶⁶

Bruce Chatwin’s writing is praised by his friends but all agree that, while his prose is ‘outstanding’,⁶⁷ he reinvented both his persona and his experiences as a traveller.⁶⁸

J. D. F. Jones argues that Laurens van der Post’s ‘inventions were always designed to enhance his own distinction and position himself at the centre of events’.⁶⁹ As implied by the title of his autobiography, *Yet Being Someone Other* (1982),⁷⁰ van der Post fashions himself as ‘the seer, the prophet, the mystic and the guru’.⁷¹ He creates himself as a more sensitive observer than his companions, one who has the ability to perceive events outside their chronological pattern:

⁶² Monika Fludernik, ‘Identity/Alterity’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. by David Herman, 1st published 2007 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.260–273 (p.261).

⁶³ Shakespeare, p.420.

⁶⁴ Bruce Chatwin, *Anatomy of Restlessness: Uncollected Writings*, ed. by Jan Borm and Matthew Graves, 1st published 1996 (London: Picador, 1997), p.103, p.21.

⁶⁵ Susannah Clapp, *With Chatwin: Portrait of a Writer*, 1st published 1997 (London: Vintage, 1998), p.139.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Clapp, p.27.

⁶⁸ Shakespeare, p.318.

⁶⁹ Jones, p.6.

⁷⁰ Laurens van der Post, *Yet Being Someone Other* (London: Hogarth, 1982).

⁷¹ Jones, p.181.

I myself have become increasingly aware of how little our conscious knowing pushes back the frontiers of our unknowing [...] there is a sense in which [...] [the future is] behind us, in which it is also ‘now’.⁷²

It is difficult to determine the veracity of such claims but they are an important factor in van der Post’s self-presentation. In *Venture to the Interior* (1952), an account of van der Post’s time in Malawi, the narrator’s special claims of observation and sensitivity are central. The reader is prepared for the death of a young forestry officer, Dick Vance, on Mount Mlanje because some sort of disaster has been clearly signposted.⁷³ Some remarks are made in hindsight,⁷⁴ but others are presented as premonitions: ‘as Vance said goodbye to his wife, I felt desperately afraid for them’.⁷⁵ Such points are crucial to his self-presentation as one who has ‘a way of knowing which is at once underneath and above conscious knowing’.⁷⁶

Of course, such impressions are unverifiable. A later incident in *Venture* is easier to test and suggests that van der Post did, at times, manipulate facts to promote his reputation as a very sensitive, possibly psychic, observer. After leaving Mount Mlanje van der Post travels to the Nyika Plateau. On the day they reach the plateau, a Sunday, he wakes up ‘feeling profoundly depressed’.⁷⁷ Having ‘gone to sleep in the best of moods’, as the journey is progressing so well, he is confused: ‘There was every reason why I should be rejoicing, but there it was: against all reason [...] I was possessed by this feeling of depression, which would not let me be’.⁷⁸ Jones paraphrases the incident:

Laurens [...] looks at his diary and sees that it is 19 June, the seventh anniversary of that day in the Soekaboemi Jail when he and Nichols [a fellow officer] were taken to witness [...] [two] execution[s].⁷⁹

On realising the significance of this Sunday van der Post describes his sensations:

⁷² Laurens van der Post, *Venture to the Interior*, 1st published 1952 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p.134.

⁷³ Jones, p.179.

⁷⁴ van der Post, *Venture*, p.108.

⁷⁵ van der Post, *Venture*, p.134.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ van der Post, *Venture*, p.212.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Jones, p.180.

a large double barn-door in the granary of my mind burst open, and my depression tumbled out into the full light of day [...] there is that in our blood which does not forget so easily; our hearts and our deepest minds have a will and a way of their own, and there are anniversaries they insist on keeping no matter what our conscious preoccupations.⁸⁰

Armed with this revelation he contemplates the events of seven years previously and experiences ‘happiness and release’ by meditating on what had happened.⁸¹

This provides a climactic end to the narrative, but there is a discrepancy of dates which may suggest that van der Post’s memory is at fault or, possibly, that he has deliberately rearranged the facts so that his surroundings, ‘clean, golden, grass-covered, rising like some Olympian pastoral symphony’, provide a beautiful back-drop to a moment of emotional healing.⁸² The date of the anniversary is not specifically mentioned in the narrative but the progression of van der Post’s journey does suggest that it is 19 June, as Jones claims. Van der Post gives the date of Vance’s death on Mlanje as Friday, 27 May, which is corroborated by his own diary.⁸³ Although no further dates are mentioned, the narrative documents almost every day from that point quite clearly and states that the day of the anniversary is a Sunday.⁸⁴ According to the days which have been recorded, this must be 19 June. Similarly, the narrator does not specify the name of the camp but does mention the Goenoeng Gedeh volcano, where Soekaboemi is situated.

The narrative does appear to confirm, therefore, that the executions took place at Soekaboemi on 19 June 1942 which was, apparently, also a Sunday.⁸⁵ But in making such claims van der Post undermines his credibility. Firstly, it may at least be reasonable to accept that the executions occurred on a Sunday: van der Post adds in a footnote that Ian Horobin, a fellow prisoner, composed a poem, ‘Java Sunday’, which was buried in the prison.⁸⁶ In view of this, however, the date could not have been the 19th, which was a

⁸⁰ van der Post, *Venture*, p.214.

⁸¹ van der Post, *Venture*, p.219.

⁸² van der Post, *Venture*, p.222.

⁸³ Jones, p. 173.

⁸⁴ van der Post, *Venture*, p.214.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ van der Post, *Venture*, p.217.

Friday.⁸⁷ In addition, Jones points out that ‘Nichols and Laurens were no longer in Soekaboemi Jail on 19 June 1942’⁸⁸ having arrived in Bandoeng on 14 June.⁸⁹ The executions were not, therefore, carried out ‘at the foot of the ten-thousand-foot Goenoeng Gedeh’, unless they took place on Sunday, 6 June.⁹⁰ The narrator’s depression on Nyika Plateau does not coincide with the anniversary of the event and it seems reasonable to suggest that days and dates may have been conflated in order to give the anniversary a more poignant setting.

I have indicated that readers prefer non-fictional texts to be as reliable as possible although, of course, the reader’s enjoyment, while changed, is not necessarily lessened when the author’s reliability is questioned. After reading Jones’s *Storyteller*, Benedict Allen found himself rereading *The Lost World of the Kalahari* (1958),⁹¹ a book he had previously been fond of, with ‘distaste’ and ‘scepticism’.⁹² As he refamiliarises himself with the text, however, his criticism softens and he considers that van der Post’s ‘appeal as a writer amounted to more than his achievement in depicting a defunct lifestyle’.⁹³ Allen focuses on van der Post’s connection between spirituality and older traditions of living which points to ‘the widening gap between modern, western man and his primitive past [as] a cause of our spiritual and moral decay’.⁹⁴ Allen acknowledges that van der Post’s reputation is unlikely to recover, but suggests that he ‘will undoubtedly remain a guru to many’ despite this.⁹⁵

Similarly, Christopher Booker argues that van der Post’s audiences should not feel disillusioned, arguing that:

The point about [...] [van der Post’s] writings [...] like his gift for holding an audience rapt with his lectures, was not that every detail of what he said was

⁸⁷ Linus Pauling, *Day-by-Day Calendar* <<http://osulibrary.oregonstate.edu/specialcollections/coll/pauling/calendar/1942/06/19.html>> [accessed 29 October 2009].

⁸⁸ Jones, p.180.

⁸⁹ Jones, p.38.

⁹⁰ van der Post, *Venture*, p.214.

⁹¹ Laurens van der Post, *Lost World of the Kalahari*, 1st published 1958 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973).

⁹² Benedict Allen, ‘Kalahari Dreaming’, *Guardian*, 1 November 2003, p.37.

⁹³ Allen, p.37.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

factually true. It was that he opened up a spiritual dimension to life in our spiritless modern world like no one else.⁹⁶

But Booker is understandably forgiving: he was a close friend of van der Post and his article aims to defend van der Post's reputation rather than to initiate a debate on the boundaries of fiction and non-fiction. His biased position somewhat weakens his insistence that the question of van der Post's accuracy is eclipsed by his apparent ability 'to give a mythic dimension to life' and to invest 'everything which happened with a cosmic resonance'.⁹⁷

Wilfred Thesiger's response is more prosaic. He became acquainted with van der Post during the Second World War and, in 1943, spent a fortnight's leave travelling with him in Syria. Thesiger tells Maitland that he 'enjoyed [...] [van der Post's] company', but 'disapproved' of his writings, stating that 'I've seldom liked anybody more, but there seem to be two contradictory people in him – the one who writes books and the one I met'.⁹⁸ Thesiger's disapproval does not focus on specific discrepancies in van der Post's works but suggests a broader criticism: that van der Post had exaggerated expeditions which were insignificant compared to Thesiger's travels ('What venture? What interior?').⁹⁹ The books subsequently conveyed (to Thesiger at least) a sense of inauthenticity and hype.

Both van der Post and Chatwin blur the boundaries of fiction and non-fiction and this compromises the contracts which they have made with their readership. Their credibility is undermined because they often embellish or alter accounts without acknowledging this. Despite postmodern ideas concerning the nature of truth and the rôle of language in determining it, the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is a clear one for many people. If a travel writer is discovered to have fabricated events, or to have concealed them, in order to appear more impressive, the narrative loses much of its reliability for most readers.

⁹⁶ Christopher Booker, 'Small Lies and the Greater Truth', *Spectator*, 20 October 2001.

⁹⁷ Booker, 'Small Lies and the Greater Truth'.

⁹⁸ Maitland, p.253.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

In Trouble Again

Adventure, drama and suspense are in travel writing but modern travel narratives may lack the unpredictability of earlier works. The use of more sophisticated medication and equipment reduces some of the risks of foreign travel faced by Mungo Park, David Livingstone and Henry Morton Stanley, or Robert Falcon Scott (1868–1912) and Roald Amundsen (1872–1928). In addition, greater media coverage now informs travellers of conflicts or epidemics which might hinder travel. But travelling to write places a particular schedule on the journey, in terms of a publishing contract, which may or may not be acknowledged to the reader. Interesting things need to happen to the traveller during this time in order to give character to the resulting narrative. Kate Adie has pointed out that when all is ‘smooth, featureless and absolutely un-Event-full’, there is very little for a writer to work with; a report becomes a ‘dish to be served with no meat whatsoever’.¹⁰⁰

Adie’s point is illustrated in Evelyn Waugh’s *A Tourist in Africa* (1960), in which Waugh travels to Africa on Union Castle ships and is driven through the continent, from Kenya down to South Africa.¹⁰¹ The most Waugh can complain about is being ‘travel worn’; there are no genuine difficulties and he has to make the most of the confusion of receiving ambiguous directions, or the complexities of border control, where he must ‘inform the Federal authorities of the names, ages, sexes, dates and places of birth of children *not* accompanying me (six in my case...).’¹⁰² The narrative fulfils its purpose as an advertisement for the Union Castle line,¹⁰³ emphasising the fact that Waugh’s creativity was mainly directed towards his novels and that his other writings were written to supplement his income, but usually classed as pot-boilers.¹⁰⁴

Travel writers usually find that they have more to write about when things go wrong than when they go right. The adroitness with which many travel writers relate stories of mishaps and danger suggests that they cherish the dramatic for its suspense and comic value. As O’Hanlon observes: ‘you’re secretly hoping that somebody may want to kill you. But not quite.’¹⁰⁵ Jonathan Raban illustrates this point in an almost brutal manner. He concludes *Passage to Juneau* (1999) with an account of his wife and daughter joining him in Alaska,

¹⁰⁰ Kate Adie, *The Kindness of Strangers* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2003), p.196, p.217.

¹⁰¹ Evelyn Waugh, *A Tourist in Africa* (Chapman and Hall: London, 1960).

¹⁰² Waugh, *Waugh Abroad*, p.1033, p.1027.

¹⁰³ Selina Hastings, *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), p.590.

¹⁰⁴ David Wykes, *Evelyn Waugh: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p.9.

¹⁰⁵ Hindson, p.183.

where his wife, Jean, announces that she wants a separation.¹⁰⁶ It is not a disaster characteristic of travel narratives, of course, but the strain of many or lengthy departures on family life is a significant factor in a career of travel. Raban is bewildered and grief-stricken by his wife's decision, but he admits that:

It's the great consolation of the writer [...] You're given these catastrophes – and they're gifts. I mean, your father dies and your wife leaves you, all in a couple of months. There was a bit of me that was thinking, [...] 'this is going to be good for the book.'¹⁰⁷

Without wishing to court total disaster, modern travel writers value or manufacture unpredictability, hence Murphy and Dodwell's general policy of relying on local hospitality rather than hotels or O'Hanlon's choice of 'spectacularly inappropriate' travelling companions (particularly Simon Stockton).¹⁰⁸ In his most recent narrative, *Trawler*, O'Hanlon requested to travel with a crew in the worst weather possible.¹⁰⁹ But contemporary travel writers are usually well-prepared and few seem truly vulnerable to serious harm. I have already mentioned the advantage of superior medications and equipment: O'Hanlon always includes a large stock of medical supplies, most of which are for distribution, but which are also necessary for him and his companions.¹¹⁰ Murphy travels more simply, but always carries a medicine kit and water-purifying tablets.¹¹¹ Many travel writers have companions and travel with local guides, as, for example, O'Hanlon and Thesiger. Guides and local friends or acquaintances often serve as the traveller's introduction to areas which would otherwise be impossible to access. Murphy does not often travel with a companion but she often carries an official-sounding letter which acts as an explanation when landowners or policemen demand to know what she is doing.¹¹²

O'Hanlon, in particular, has excellent contacts who can help him avoid difficult, or potentially difficult, situations. Arriving in the Republic of Congo O'Hanlon and his

¹⁰⁶ Jonathan Raban, *Passage to Juneau: A Sea and its Meanings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), pp.420–23.

¹⁰⁷ Aida Edemariam, 'Rootless in Seattle', *Guardian*, 23 September 2006, p.11.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Hulme, 'Travelling to Write (1940–2000)' in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.87–101 (p.94).

¹⁰⁹ O'Hanlon, *Trawler*, p.1.

¹¹⁰ Redmond, O'Hanlon, *Congo Journey*, 1st published 1996 (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p.53.

¹¹¹ Dervla Murphy, *On a Shoestring to Coorg*, 1st published 1976 (London: HarperCollins Publishers India, 1998), p.4.

¹¹² Dervla Murphy, *Cameroon with Egbert*, 1st published 1989 (London: Arrow Books Ltd, 1990), pp.51–52.

companion, Lary Shaffer, are relieved to meet their contact, Madame Leroy, at the airport. Shaffer reminds O’Hanlon that, without her, ‘you and me and all these army packs and kit-bags and suspicious-looking bundles would have lasted exactly eleven-and-a-half minutes’.¹¹³ Lary suggests that they were rescued just in time but, of course, the appearance of Leroy, a government official, indicates how careful O’Hanlon’s preparations have been.¹¹⁴

Most travel writers are unlikely to die while travelling, but their journeys may still be dangerous in various ways. The nature of travellers’ risks may be difficult to convey: if it is clear the author has survived, the element of suspense is undermined. Bill Bryson describes losing his footing descending a ‘more or less perpendicular hill’ in the Wye Valley:

ending up on the very lip of a giddy precipice [...] I cast my gaze back along my suddenly motionless body to find that my left foot had fortuitously snagged on a sapling. Had the sapling not been there I would not be here.¹¹⁵

In such situations the reader can appreciate that the writer has narrowly avoided a potentially fatal accident but the sense of drama is inevitably mitigated by the reader’s knowledge that the danger was avoided. As Bryson comments when trying to explain to his wife the terror of being in a light aircraft which had some difficulty landing: ‘The trouble with believing you are going to die in a crash, as opposed to actually dying in a crash, is that it doesn’t make nearly as good a story’.¹¹⁶

Some of the tension in O’Hanlon’s narratives seems manufactured as he is in less danger than he has suggested. He warns his readers frequently that the Leapopuei-teri Yanomami ‘are the most violent people on earth’, and so the moment of meeting members of the tribe is climactic:

I looked up from the dry ground – straight at the shafts of a pair of six-foot-long arrows [...] Two young men stood, their great bows fully drawn, their backs arched, their faces expressionless [...] I thought, ‘*they’re going to kill me.*’

¹¹³ O’Hanlon, *Congo Journey*, p.11.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Bill Bryson, *Notes from a Small Island*, 1st published 1995 (London: Black Swan, 1996), p.151.

¹¹⁶ Bill Bryson, *Notes from A Big Country*, 1st published 1998 (London: Black Swan, 1999), p.282.

‘Whooo-hooo-hooo!’ whooped Jarivanau, pulling off my hat.
The young men lowered their bows and smiled.¹¹⁷

Although O’Hanlon may have been momentarily convinced that he could die, his readers never are. In this situation the boys’ smiles show that O’Hanlon’s preparation has worked. Jarivanau is the chief of the Siapa-teri Yanomami and knows how to behave and O’Hanlon is welcomed as a guest by a reportedly aggressive tribe.

Photography and Authenticity

Photographs are often used by travel writers to supplement their narratives. They give travel narratives distinction from fiction, in which photographs are not often used to supplement the story unless they are acknowledged as part of a film or theatre production. One exception can be seen in Michael Ondaatje’s use of a photograph of Charles Bolden and his jazz band, which is included in Ondaatje’s fictional account of Bolden’s life.¹¹⁸ Some writers have travelled with professional photographers: Norman Lewis, for example, worked with Don McCullin; Peter Matthiessen and Eliot Porter collaborated to produce *The Tree Where Man Was Born* and *The African Experience* (1972); and Binyavanga Wainaina and Sven Torfinn co-operated in *Beyond the River Yei* (2004).¹¹⁹ Other writers rely on their own photography to convey their impressions of the journey, with varying degrees of success. Dervla Murphy often mentions that she is carrying a camera but does not present many photographs in her travel narratives; there are some exceptions, as in *Eight Feet in the Andes* (1983)¹²⁰ and *South from the Limpopo*. Although her narratives occasionally refer to her daily habit of writing in her diary, they do not mention that her photographs carry a mnemonic function as well an aesthetic one. Murphy has said, however, that one of her main reasons for taking photographs is to help her remember specific details.¹²¹

Redmond O’Hanlon always uses some photographs, although their aesthetic value seems questionable; McCullin has commented that O’Hanlon’s photographs are ‘*the worst I’ve*

¹¹⁷ Redmond O’Hanlon, *In Trouble Again: A Journey between the Orinoco and the Amazon*, 1st published 1988 (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p.22, pp.267–68 (emphasis in original).

¹¹⁸ Michael Ondaatje, *Coming through Slaughter*, 1st published 1976 (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), front cover.

¹¹⁹ Peter Matthiessen and Eliot Porter, ‘*The Tree Where Man was Born*’ and ‘*The African Experience*’ (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1972); Binyavanga Wainaina, *Beyond the River Yei: Life in the Land Where Sleeping is a Disease* (Nairobi: Kwani?, 2004).

¹²⁰ Dervla Murphy, *Eight Feet in the Andes* (London: John Murray, 1983).

¹²¹ Interview, 17 August 2005.

ever seen'.¹²² They do, however, allow the reader to visualise the people O'Hanlon travels with and some of the events described, such as O'Hanlon taking yoppo¹²³ and getting a mask stuck on his head while dancing.¹²⁴ Photographs from *Congo Journey* portray people and places rather than events, making them less dynamic, perhaps, than some from previous narratives. They also differ slightly from those published in *No Mercy*, as I have indicated.

Occasionally the photographs which accompany a travel narrative have their own aesthetic value. As well as being publicly exhibited on a number of occasions, collections of Thesiger's photographs have been published separately. I will discuss later the photographs in *My Kenya Days* (1994) which make a significant contribution to the book as a whole, giving the reader much more information about the different tribal groups in Kenya than the narrative alone. Ironically Thesiger found that hunting secured a more immediate gratification:

In no sense is photography a substitute for hunting [...] There's no sense of achievement in taking a photograph. Suppose you want to shoot a greater kudu [...] you fire a shot and the thing drops. You take a photo and you wait three months to see the result – that in itself [spoils it]. Hunting big-game is dangerous, but you can take a photograph of game without disturbing it very much.¹²⁵

His comparison of photography and hunting is an apposite one. Thesiger presents himself as a thwarted hunter, reduced to photographing big game instead of shooting it. Italo Calvino, on the other hand, reverses this image to describe photographers 'as happy as hunters with bulging game-bags'.¹²⁶ Photography could not replace the enjoyment of hunting for Thesiger but Osa Johnson preferred to have the sensation of capturing a prize without killing the animal. After shooting a giant bustard Johnson remarks that: 'He was a beauty [...] As I looked at him, I realized as never before that there was more joy in shooting with a camera than a gun'.¹²⁷

¹²² O'Hanlon, *In Trouble Again*, p.5 (emphasis in original).

¹²³ O'Hanlon, *In Trouble Again*, 2nd centrefold.

¹²⁴ Redmond O'Hanlon, *Into the Heart of Borneo: An Account of a Journey Made in 1983 to the Mountains of Batu Tiban with James Fenton*, 1st published 1984 (London: Penguin Books, 1985), centrefold.

¹²⁵ Michael Asher, *Thesiger: A Biography*, 1st published 1994 (London: Penguin, 1995), p.423.

¹²⁶ Italo Calvino, *Difficult Loves, Smog, A Plunge into Real Estate*, 1st published 1983 (London: Vintage, 1999), p.40.

¹²⁷ Osa Johnson, *Four Years in Paradise*, 2nd edn (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 2004) p.200.

For others there is an excitement and danger in photography similar or equal to that of hunting, which gives an added sense of achievement to obtaining a sensational picture. In fact, although Thesiger found hunting more thrilling, several photographers demonstrate that photographing big game can include a significant element of danger. Having escaped from a charging rhino, Vivienne de Watteville's sense of achievement is crushed when she realises that

In changing the film I found that I had overshot the end by fully six feet [...] the rhino's mad rush and the dramatic moment when he had stood silhouetted against the sky, were recorded on nothing but blind, red paper. The disappointment was bitter, so bitter that there were no words for it.¹²⁸

Osa Johnson and her husband, Martin, often risked being trampled by charging elephants or rhinoceros as they tried to photograph them.¹²⁹ Peter Matthiessen found the experience of stalking elephants with Iain Douglas-Hamilton genuinely frightening. Douglas-Hamilton remains unfazed as the animals charge and continues to take pictures, although their Land Rover is followed by a 'huge bull [...] in threat display'. Matthiessen attempts 'to plead' with Douglas-Hamilton, who then photographs him as he 'fancied the shot of a frightened face with a big bull elephant filling the entire background'.¹³⁰

As with travel narratives, photographs cannot reveal what the photographer has left out in response to what Susan Sontag defines as 'tacit imperatives of taste and conscience'.¹³¹ As Redmond O'Hanlon and Robyn Davidson both demonstrate, an image may not reflect its context. O'Hanlon's Amazon photographs include one of a Yanomami family relaxing in a hammock, with the caption: 'The sneaked picture'.¹³² O'Hanlon explains that 'it was such an unusual picture of happy Yanomami family life that I sneaked up from the side with the Nikonos'.¹³³ In reaction the husband, Yavateiba, 'leapt out of his hammock and came at me. He raised his arm as if to strike, thought better of it, hissed, and spat at my feet'.¹³⁴ O'Hanlon is confused as

¹²⁸ de Watteville, p.103.

¹²⁹ Johnson, p.85, p.91.

¹³⁰ Matthiessen and Porter, p.148.

¹³¹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), p.6.

¹³² O'Hanlon, *In Trouble Again*, 2nd centrefold.

¹³³ O'Hanlon, *In Trouble Again*, p.306.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Yavateiba had been delighted to have his picture taken in the shabono with his bow drawn [...] Perhaps my offence lay in stealing the image of a warrior in a shameful attitude [...] of unmanly tenderness with his family.¹³⁵

The photograph itself, however, can communicate nothing of the tension which followed. O'Hanlon recognises that, without a caption and an explanation, there would be nothing to indicate the reaction he unwittingly provoked.

Robyn Davidson finds the ambiguity of images difficult at times. On her trek across the Australian desert, Davidson is occasionally accompanied by Rick Smolan, a photographer for her sponsor, *National Geographic*.¹³⁶ Although he only needs to meet her 'three times during the trip' Davidson dislikes the necessity for outside support, feeling that it alters

irrevocably the whole texture of what I wanted to do, which was to be alone, to test, to push, to unclog my brain [...] not to be protected [...] not to be hampered by any outsider interference whatsoever.¹³⁷

This is compounded by the fact that Smolan's images convey a very different impression of the journey as Davidson perceived it: 'brilliant images, exciting, excellent, but little to do with reality [...] they are essentially of [Rick's] trip, not my own'.¹³⁸ She uses the example of an encounter with Eddie, a Pitjantjara Aborigine, to illustrate her point. Davidson explains that she 'had primed Eddie enough for him to expect the odd photograph' but Rick was 'sitting, kneeling, squatting, lying down, click click click click click'.¹³⁹ Davidson can see that Eddie is uncomfortable and, having failed to convince Rick that his enthusiasm is inappropriate, decides 'to let Eddie handle the situation'.¹⁴⁰ Later, when Rick takes out his camera again, Eddie lifts his hand and says

in English, 'No photograph,' then in Pitjantjara, 'It makes me feel sick.' I laughed. Rick captured that one moment and then desisted. When we had that photo

¹³⁵ O'Hanlon, *In Trouble Again*, p.306.

¹³⁶ Robyn Davidson, *Tracks*, 1st published 1980 (London: Granada Publishing, 1982), pp.89–90.

¹³⁷ Davidson, p.99.

¹³⁸ Davidson, p.185.

¹³⁹ Davidson, p.184.

¹⁴⁰ Davidson, p.185.

developed much later on, there was a woman smiling at an old Aboriginal man, whose hand was raised in a cheery salute.¹⁴¹

Davidson acknowledges that Rick did not intend to be offensive or intrusive but she insists that this final image is misleading.

The photograph does not appear in *Tracks* (1980) but it is included in Smolan's version of the journey, *From Alice to Ocean* (1992), in which Smolan's images are supplemented by excerpts from *Tracks*.¹⁴² Smolan, aware of Davidson's opinion, presents his photographs tentatively: 'Robyn had never planned on sharing her trip, especially with a photojournalist'.¹⁴³ Sensitive to the ambiguity of the image of Davidson and Eddie, therefore, Smolan includes Davidson's explanation to give it context.

Conclusion

I have discussed some of the processes of constructing a travel narrative, trying to bring out the distinctive methods and strategies of travel writers. It is important to be aware that the author's experience while travelling is connected in complex ways to the future process of reconstruction. The experiences of travellers depend on the cultural context of the place travelled, the way that place is understood at any given time. The traveller too has a cultural context and this context is in some senses unavoidable. O'Hanlon remarks: 'you can't avoid taking all your intellectual baggage – there's no such thing as a *tabula rasa* of the mind'.¹⁴⁴

But, as cultural baggage is unavoidable, choice remains at the point of narrative construction. The writer shapes every element of the narrative, including the representation of himself as traveller and writer. In the following chapters I will discuss in detail how my chosen travel writers represent certain African countries. Each writer has distinctive baggage and distinctive writing strategies. Different versions of one country emerge and these differences testify not only to the impossibility of ever producing a definitive version of any country, but also to the importance of personal creativity and different travelling styles. In this way, the genre of travel writing constantly renews itself.

¹⁴¹ Davidson, p.185.

¹⁴² Rick Smolan and Robyn Davidson, *From Alice to Ocean: Alone across the Outback* (Ringwood, Victoria: Viking in association with Against All Odds, 1992).

¹⁴³ Smolan and Davidson, p.13.

¹⁴⁴ Hindson, p.182.

Chapter Five: Ethiopia: Evelyn Waugh, Wilfred Thesiger, Dervla Murphy

Introduction

As I indicated in Chapter One, Ethiopia has been a focus of Western myths, particularly as one of the countries proposed as the fabled kingdom of Prester John.¹ The claims of Ethiopia's emperors to be descended from Menelik I, declared in the *Kebra Negast* to be the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, increased the country's romantic image.² Although belief in Prester John died out long before the twentieth century, Ethiopia was still regarded by Westerners as a primitive but fabulous land. Even now, due to archaeological finds of ancient hominid remains in Hadar and Aramis, it retains the romance of possibly being 'the oldest country in the world'.³

Unique aspects of Ethiopia's modern history separate the country from other African nations. It was never successfully colonised by a European power. Apart from Liberia, which had a special status as the country where many freed African-American slaves were settling, Ethiopia remained the only African country independent of foreign rule.⁴ Ethiopia's fame was established centuries ago by the powerful influence of the ancient Aksum Empire from the third century to the tenth.⁵ Modern Ethiopia took shape politically and geographically during the Era of the Princes (1755–1855) when the country's regions were separately ruled and expanded by kings and *rases*.⁶ By the middle of the nineteenth century Tigray and Shoa emerged as the strongest, most stable regions.⁷ These regions were eventually united by the imperial ambitions of their kings: Yohannes IV and Menelik II. Menelik styled himself *negusa negast* (king of kings) but it was Yohannes who first established himself as emperor.⁸ After his death in 1889, however, Menelik's influence

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- ¹ Leo Africanus, *A Geographical Historie of Africa, Written in Arabicke and Italian by John Leo a More, borne in Granada, and brought up in Barbarie* [...] Translated and collected by John Pory, lately of Gonevill and Caius College in Cambridge, 1st published in 1550 as *Della descrizione dell'Africa*, trans. John Pory (London: [Printed by Eliot's Court Press] impensis Georg. Bishop, 1600), p.14.
- ² Paul B. Henze, *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia* (London: Hurst and Company, 2000), p.20.
- ³ Henze, p.1.
- ⁴ BBC News Online, *Country Profile: Liberia* <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1043500.stm> [accessed 9 November 2009].
- ⁵ Basil Davidson, *Africa in History: Themes and Outlines*, 2nd edn (London: Phoenix Press, 2003), p.48, p.122.
- ⁶ Henze, p.121.
- ⁷ Henze, p.120.
- ⁸ Henze, p.145

enabled him to claim the throne unchallenged.⁹ His Shoan capital, Addis Ababa, became Ethiopia's capital in 1889.¹⁰ Menelik had a vision for the modernisation of Ethiopia, recognising that the country needed to be progressive in order to remain independent. The defeat of the Italian army at Adwa in 1896 reinforced Ethiopia's autonomy from European intervention. Menelik signed formal treaties with Italy, France and Britain¹¹ and expanded Ethiopia's trade, particularly with America.¹² His ambition to renew Ethiopia as a modern empire had a significant impact on the country's future.

Menelik II's death made Ethiopia vulnerable to foreign intervention, particularly from Italy. As Evelyn Waugh observes, Europeans regarded 'any part of [...] [Africa] that was held *only by its own natives* [as] a no-man's-land which any European might claim'.¹³ But, as Paul B. Henze argues, Menelik had taken steps 'to create an effective governmental structure' which ensured stability for a time and frustrated Italy's ambitions.¹⁴ Menelik II was succeeded by his grandson, Lij Iyasu, in 1913 but after several years the Shoan *rases* rebelled against the new, uncrowned, emperor. Lij Iyasu's method of rule appeared chaotic¹⁵ but, in particular, the Shoan insisted that Lij Iyasu's interest in Islam provided a 'more than ample basis' for accusations that he had rejected his Christian heritage, 'abetting the disintegration of imperial authority'.¹⁶ Menelik's daughter, Zauditu, was proclaimed the true heir to the Solomonic throne and Ras Tafari was named as next in line. Wilfred Thesiger, born in 1910 at the British Legation in Addis Ababa, has childhood memories of these events.

Ras Tafari, as heir, now had an active rôle in Ethiopia's government, establishing international alliances and consolidating Shoan authority in Ethiopia. Crucially, Ethiopia was received into the League of Nations in 1923, after Tafari gave assurances that he would 'keep the League fully informed of [Ethiopia's] progress in abolishing slavery'.¹⁷ In crisis, League membership gave Ethiopia no protection from Italy's colonial ambitions in

⁹ Henze, p.160.

¹⁰ Henze, p.162.

¹¹ Henze, pp.172–73.

¹² Henze, p.176.

¹³ Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh Abroad: Collected Travel Writing* (London: Everyman's Library, 2003), p.554 (my emphasis). Further references to this text will be given to *WA* and page number/s in the text.

¹⁴ Henze, p.192.

¹⁵ Henze, p.192, p.194.

¹⁶ Henze, p.194.

¹⁷ Henze, p.201.

1935. In 1923, however, it seemed a significant coup for an African country; the only other African members at this time were the Union of South Africa and Liberia. Ras Tafari was subsequently invited on a state visit to Europe in 1924, which he describes in his autobiography.¹⁸ He also makes brief mention of visits to Cairo and Alexandria,¹⁹ and published a short travel account in Amharic: *Travels in Egypt and Aden* (1923?).²⁰

Like Menelik, Tafari had a vision of modernisation. He ‘had no doubt that modern education was the key to progress’ and accordingly expanded programmes of education.²¹ A military training academy was also established so that a modern, rather than a feudal, army could be developed.²² Against this background of modernisation and reform Haile Selassie I was finally crowned emperor in 1930. The lavish and internationally-acclaimed coronation, documented by both Waugh and Thesiger, figures his ambition. It also reveals the conflict arising from the importance of national heritage and the necessity of embracing progress. Italy’s invasion in 1935 and Haile Selassie’s subsequent exile exposed Ethiopia’s vulnerability and the inadequacy of its development.

After his restoration to power in 1941 Haile Selassie sought to consolidate his power again. Henze observes that a ‘deep sense of history [...] has always permeated Ethiopian life’,²³ evident in the continuing authority of the Solomonic dynasty and the memory of an ancient empire. Haile Selassie established a new constitution which ‘created the framework of a more modern governmental system’.²⁴ At the same time, he ‘reaffirmed the Emperor’s descent from Solomon and Sheba and confirmed his primacy in all important respects’.²⁵ Ethiopia did see development at this time. A new middle class of modern, educated Ethiopians emerged, some of whom Dervla Murphy meets during her trek, causing her to comment on the chaotic clash of traditional cultures and modern development.²⁶ Henze argues that Haile Selassie’s modernising policies were thwarted by the lack of

¹⁸ Haile Selassie I, *The Autobiography of Emperor Haile Sellassie I: My Life and Ethiopia’s Progress*, trans. by Edward Ullendorff, 1st published 1976 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) pp.81–123.

¹⁹ Haile Selassie I, *My Life and Ethiopia’s Progress*.

²⁰ Haile Selassie I, *Travels in Egypt and Aden* (Dire Dawa?: n.p., 1923?).

²¹ Henze, p.203.

²² Ibid.

²³ Henze, p.57.

²⁴ Henze, p.253.

²⁵ Henze, p.252.

²⁶ Dervla Murphy, *In Ethiopia with a Mule* (London: John Murray, 1968), pp.146–47. Further references to this text will be given to *EwM* and page number/s in the text.

opportunities for development.²⁷ An unsuccessful coup in 1960 attempted to replace the emperor with his son, Crown Prince Asfa Wossen, in a bid to accelerate Ethiopia's progress. It was put down due to insufficient organisation, but the frustrations are still evident when Murphy makes her journey in 1966–67.

Haile Selassie's reign and its historical and political background gives context to the narratives I will discuss. The accounts of Evelyn Waugh, Wilfred Thesiger and Dervla Murphy provide insights into a unique and poignant moment of Ethiopia's history, when its ambitious emperor attempted to re-establish the country as a modern and powerful state. Haile Selassie failed to actualise his vision but his overthrow in 1974, in part provoked by this failure, has led to a debilitating instability. John F. Clark observes that, although Ethiopia experienced little of brutal colonial rule, 'its patterns of politics are even more undemocratic than the African norm'.²⁸ Waugh, Thesiger and Murphy, therefore, describe an Ethiopia which has since disappeared.

Evelyn Waugh travelled to Ethiopia in 1930 as a journalist to report Haile Selassie's coronation and to follow the progress of the Italo-Abyssinian conflict in 1935–36. Waugh is, of course, chiefly renowned for his skill as a satirical novelist but, as David Wykes notes, it was essential for Waugh to use 'his lesser literary talents to help him live entirely by his pen'.²⁹ As well as reviews, journalism and biographies, Waugh also produced a number of travel narratives and I will focus on the contrasts between Waugh's and Thesiger's accounts of events in the 1930s. *Remote People* (1931), which expands his original reports, is a unique text as no one else, not even Thesiger, published a contemporary account of the coronation more extensive than news articles.³⁰ Linda Strahan remarks that Waugh's account of the coronation in *Remote People* is 'a valuable primary historical document'.³¹ Waugh's scathing style is best showcased in 'First Nightmare', the Ethiopian section of the narrative, and the coronation provided much scope for his satirical eye.

²⁷ Henze, p.282.

²⁸ John F. Clark, *The Failure of Democracy in the Republic of Congo* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008), p.77.

²⁹ David Wykes, *Evelyn Waugh: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p.9.

³⁰ Evelyn Waugh, *Remote People* (London: Duckworth, 1931).

³¹ Linda Strahan, 'Evelyn Waugh' in *Dictionary of Literary Biography: British Travel Writers, 1910–1939*, Barbara Brothers and Julia M.Gergits, eds, 195 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1998), pp.365–377 (p.369).

Having moved to Britain in 1919, Wilfred Thesiger returned to Ethiopia in 1930 for Haile Selassie I's coronation. Thesiger grew up with the ambition to work in the Sudan Political Service in order to live 'among proud tribesmen' in 'virtually unknown' areas.³² For this reason he also spends time trekking through the hostile Danakil and Aussa regions to the north of Addis Ababa, in order 'to acquire the experience for the life I intended to lead' (*DD*, 14). Although published some time after the events, Thesiger's recollections remain unique because of his privileged position as the son of the Hon. Wilfred Thesiger who, as British Minister, had some degree of friendship with Ras Tafari Makonnen.³³

Dervla Murphy travelled in Ethiopia in 1966–67. Ethiopia offers Murphy the fascination of a remote, mountainous terrain, which is her ideal travelling environment. Her account reveals her enjoyment of the physical challenge of her trek from Massawa to Addis Ababa. Murphy is looking for adventure, like Thesiger. There is also frustration that the romance of travelling in a sparsely-populated region is occasionally marred by locals who insist on escorting her for protection or, possibly, surveillance.

Waugh, Thesiger and Murphy all evince some sort of fascination with Ethiopia's perceived exoticism. Waugh shows that relatively modern reports of Ethiopia still owe much to rumour and legend (*WA*, 187). He has little sympathy with such representations, finding the reality shabby. Conversely, the romance of texts such as John Buchan's *Prester John* (1910),³⁴ and James Bruce's *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (1790–91)³⁵ confirm Thesiger's fascination with Ethiopia and with foreign savagery and splendour.³⁶ Unlike Waugh, however, Thesiger's interest originated in own experiences, particularly his childhood memory of

the Shoan armies as they went north to give battle to Negus Mikael [...] For days they passed across the plain below the Legation [...] This was the chivalry of Abyssinia going forth to war, unchanged as yet from the armies of the past. It was an enthralling, unforgettable sight for a small, romantically minded boy.³⁷

³² Wilfred Thesiger, *The Danakil Diary: Journeys through Abyssinia 1930–34*, 1st published 1996 (London: Flamingo, 1998), p.1. Further references to this text will be given to *DD* and page number in the text.

³³ Wilfred Thesiger, *The Life of my Choice*, 1st published 1987 (London: Flamingo, 1992), p.23.

³⁴ John Buchan, *Prester John*, ed. by David Daniell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

³⁵ James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile: In the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, and 1773* (Dublin: Printed by William Sleater, 1790–91).

³⁶ Thesiger, *Life*, p.97, p.38.

³⁷ Thesiger, *Life*, pp.52–53.

Even in the 1960s Ethiopia is imbued with the mystery and romance of Western representations, as Murphy observes: ‘in one’s reading [...] references to the country build up a picture of some improbable land of violence and piety, courtesy and treachery, barrenness and fertility’. It is, consequently, a compelling destination: ‘the traveller wakes and surprises himself by saying – “I’m going to Ethiopia” ’ (*EwM*, 1). Written Ethiopias, therefore, are partially created by the imaginary Ethiopias which the writers bring with them. I will discuss how writers’ expectations affect representation, indicating how accounts may complement or contradict each other. I emphasise the individual quality of these narratives and how, to some degree, these constructions already existed before the journey was undertaken.

Waugh and Thesiger: Haile Selassie’s Coronation

Evelyn Waugh and Wilfred Thesiger were both present at the coronation of Haile Selassie: Waugh travelled to Ethiopia as a journalist, covering the coronation for the *Graphic*, *The Times* and the *Daily Express*; Thesiger was an honorary attaché to the Duke of Gloucester. Of those observing the celebrations, other than the Ethiopians themselves, *Remote People* depicts two groups: the mass of distinguished foreign visitors and the journalists who follow them from function to function. As a journalist, Waugh’s presence seems to have been unremarkable at the time. He was known for *Decline and Fall* (1928) and *Vile Bodies* (1930)³⁸ but presents himself as merely one of many reporters observing the Ethiopian royal family, the coronation celebrations, and the official guests.³⁹

Similarly, Thesiger was one of many dignitaries who were part of the illustrious backdrop to the ceremonies, as anonymous in his own way as Waugh appears to have been as a journalist. To Waugh, as to most others, Thesiger was merely one of the ‘magnificent array’ of officials who constituted the Duke of Gloucester’s party (*WA*, 222). But Thesiger was unique among the official guests, having received a personal invitation from Haile Selassie as ‘the eldest son of his trusted friend’, the Hon. Wilfred Thesiger, who had died in 1920.⁴⁰ In view of his invitation, Thesiger was requested by the Foreign Office to attend

³⁸ Evelyn Waugh, *Decline and Fall*, ed. by David Bradshaw (London: Penguin, 2001); *Vile Bodies* ed. by Richard Jacobs (London: Penguin, 2000).

³⁹ Thesiger, *Life*, p.92.

⁴⁰ Wilfred Thesiger, *The Life of my Choice*, 1st published Collins, 1987 (London: Flamingo, 1992), p.93. A copy of the invitation appears in the front of *The Danakil Diary*, n.p.

as ‘an attaché [...] to the Duke of Gloucester’s mission to the coronation’.⁴¹ Thesiger’s was ‘the only private invitation’, a generous response to his wish to return to Ethiopia, which he had expressed to Ras Tafari when he visited Britain in 1924.⁴² Thesiger was granted a personal audience with the emperor, receiving ‘the most cordial reception of anyone’ according to the interpreter (*DD*, 8). Although their rôles differed in terms of privilege, both Waugh and Thesiger were usually present at the various functions which marked the coronation celebrations. Their separate accounts of events present a marked contrast in outlooks and opinions, showing how far travellers create the countries they describe, a point to which I will return.

Remote People begins with Waugh’s claim that his decision to go to Ethiopia was almost accidental and that ‘six weeks before [arriving in Ethiopia] I had barely heard Ras Tafari’s name’ (*WA*, 187). Waugh claims that he knew very little of the coronation until hearing various rumours at a friend’s party in Ireland:

the real heir to the throne was hidden in the mountains, fettered with chains of solid gold [...] the people lived on raw meat and mead [...] Everything I heard added to the glamour of this astonishing country. (*WA*, 187)

Waugh subsequently contacts newspapers in the hope of going as a correspondent who could ‘obtain access to the more interesting ceremonies’ (*WA*, 187). Donald Lane Patey, however, argues that Waugh’s claims to ignorance and his apparently impulsive decision to travel are ‘deliberately misleading’, enabling him ‘to establish [his] persona in the book as an apolitical *ingénu*’.⁴³ As Donat Gallagher observes, ‘the intriguing preparations for the coronation [...] had been in the newspapers for months, as had the sensational accounts of Haile Selassie’s bloody rise to power’.⁴⁴ Patey asserts that Waugh ‘hardly needed [Alastair] Graham to tell him about Abyssinia’.⁴⁵ Rather than being oblivious to such preparations, Waugh was anxious to find a means of attending. Unable to renew his contract with the *Daily Mail*, Gallagher notes that Waugh was ‘“spoiling for a fight” with the editor of the *Graphic*’⁴⁶ in order to ensure a post as a correspondent, in the end securing

⁴¹ Julian Pettifer, *Viewpoint 89*, ‘The Last Explorer: The Life of Wilfred Thesiger’, ITV, 1989.

⁴² Wilfred Thesiger, *My Kenya Days*, 1st published 1994 (Flamingo: London, 1995), p.3.

⁴³ Patey, p.88.

⁴⁴ Evelyn Waugh, *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. by Donat Gallagher (London: Methuen, 1983), p.110.

⁴⁵ Patey, p.88.

⁴⁶ Waugh, *Essays, Articles and Reviews*, p.110.

work with the paper, as well as *The Times* and *Daily Express*.⁴⁷ Strahan points out that Waugh was going through ‘a novelistic dry spell and needed new material and inspiration’.⁴⁸ As Haile Selassie’s coronation was the most fashionable and potentially profitable item of news at the time, Waugh was anxious to exploit it.

Waugh does not travel to admire, however. He is sceptical about Haile Selassie’s importance in world politics and affects to be bemused by the number of international guests who have turned up, demanding: ‘Why all this fuss?’ (WA, 189). Of course, as Waugh surely knew, no ‘emperors or kings came for the lavish and colourful festivities [although] all who had been invited sent high-level representatives’.⁴⁹ But fifty-seven nations were invited⁵⁰ and Waugh is surprised that so many have responded. He reasons that if ‘some Powers chose to send dukes and princes, sceptres and aeroplanes, what could the others do but follow as best they could?’ but he wonders ‘[w]ho started the stampede?’ (WA, 190). Waugh observes that ‘many people, even those intimately involved, were asking themselves’ why the world responded so enthusiastically (WA, 189). He mocks the ‘simpler Abyssinians [who] interpreted [...] [the attention] as a suitable tribute to Abyssinian greatness’. He considers it ridiculous that ‘the kings of the world [...] [would pay] homage’ to a leader with so little international influence’ (WA, 189).

Waugh suggests that nearly everyone, including himself, must have been drawn in by ‘the glamour of Abyssinia’ (WA, 190). He sees no political significance in the attention given to Ethiopia. Certainly it counted for little when Italy invaded in 1935 and the League of Nations failed to intervene effectively on Ethiopia’s behalf. Thesiger, on the other hand, does not question the number of people present, being more interested in the internal politics of Ethiopia, wondering whether Haile Selassie would successfully consolidate his power by this ‘one great effort’, or if his attempts to modernise would result in conflict with the *rases* (DD, 9).

Waugh’s impression of the celebrations in Addis Ababa is that they are a fascinating spectacle comparable to Wonderland, having ‘the peculiar flavour of galvanised and translated reality’ (WA, 200). For Waugh, the official celebrations are characterised by the

⁴⁷ Martin Stannard, *Evelyn Waugh: The Early Years* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1986), p.241.

⁴⁸ Strahan, p.369.

⁴⁹ Henze, p.206.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

incongruous juxtaposition of the dignity of the occasion with the fact that the Ethiopians are clearly unused to hosting such a lavish, internationally-acclaimed event. Numerous mishaps spoil the self-conscious grandeur:

There were several parties that week [...] At three there were fireworks, resulting in at least one nasty accident; at one, a cinema which failed to work [...] at another, Somali dancers shivered with cold [...] There was a race meeting [...] the royal enclosure was packed and the rest of the course empty of spectators. (WA, 227)

By the time Thesiger wrote a detailed account of the coronation in the 1980s he could describe it as the ‘last manifestation of Abyssinia’s traditional pageantry’, as the imperial dynasty had been overthrown and replaced by the Marxist Derg.⁵¹ Like Waugh, however, Thesiger is aware that the Ethiopians are anxious to impress and that this is not always matched by their resources or professional competence.

Thesiger admires, but he also notices when things go wrong, commenting on a speech of the emperor’s which was ‘translated into bad French’ (DD, 4) and a film of George V’s coronation which broke down ‘after one or two flickering efforts’ (DD, 6). But he is more sympathetic about the way in which such events reflect on Haile Selassie and his country. Thesiger responds sympathetically to an incident at a fireworks display when ‘after two rockets had been fired something went wrong and the rest blew up’.⁵² He conjectures that ‘it must have been a bitter moment’ for the emperor and watches for a reaction, although none is given.⁵³ Anything which reflects Ethiopian tradition is admired by Thesiger; he seems impressed, for example, by a banquet eaten ‘off gold plates, with gold spoons and forks’ (DD, 6). He is less pleased to see evidence of the emperor’s attempts at modernisation, observing that the celebrations are ‘slightly tarnished round the edges by innovations copied from the West’. He remarks to his mother that ‘khaki-clad troops, [the] cinema, motors and aeroplanes’ strike him as ‘rather pathetic’, whereas more traditional details are ‘incomparably magnificent’ (DD, 9). Like Waugh, Thesiger feels that such attempts to impress are ludicrous, ineffectual and out of place, marring the exoticism and romance which he remembers from his childhood.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Thesiger, *Life*, p.91.

⁵² Thesiger, *Life*, p.93.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Thesiger, *Life*, p.91.

Haile Selassie's coronation marks a climax in the celebrations. Waugh's newspaper report is less candid than his diary and his travel narrative.⁵⁵ The brevity of Waugh's diary entry reveals his opinion of the lengthy ceremony: 'Coronation Sunday interminable service, 6:30–12:30'.⁵⁶ His account in *Waugh in Abyssinia* (1936)⁵⁷ indicates that his lasting impression was of 'the rough and shoddy pageantry that would have been barely applicable to the court of Suleiman the Magnificent or of the Mogul Emperors of India' (WA, 557). The coronation gives Waugh the greatest scope for describing the uneasy combination of solemn rituals and elements which seem ludicrous to him: the six hour coronation service, for example, was completely unintelligible to most of the guests, since it was conducted in Ge'ez, the 'extinct ecclesiastical tongue' (WA, 223).

The ceremony allows Waugh to draw comparisons between the Ethiopians and their Western guests, particularly the British delegation. Crowds of local spectators are described as 'a great tide of grubby white garments which flowed into the city at dawn from the surrounding hillside and ebbed out at nightfall' (WA, 558). Waugh remarks that 'the European visitors were aware of the existence, at a great distance, of a dense, half-human rabble' (WA, 558), dismissing them as 'a mass of curly black heads that were for ever being whacked with staves' by the police (WA, 557–58). These crowds are also part of the background in Thesiger's accounts: he describes the 'hundred thousand people [who] surrounded the cathedral'⁵⁸ as 'terrific, all men and all armed' (DD, 7). Waugh presents a clamouring mob while Thesiger creates a savage, exotic populace, imbuing the crowds with the same romance he attaches to the traditional pageantry.

For Waugh, 'the great Rases' and local chiefs are comical (WA, 557), but Thesiger refers to the *rases* as the 'lesser kings' (DD, 7) of Haile Selassie's government and is delighted with the sight of 'the chiefs in all their finery [...] massed in serried ranks'.⁵⁹ Unlike Thesiger, Waugh perceives no dignity in these men, observing that the faces of the *rases* were 'set and strained, their attitudes inelegant [...] Their clothes made them funnier still' (WA, 224). The Ethiopian dignitaries present a dramatic contrast to European displays of ceremony. Waugh remarks that the chiefs were meant to stand outside the cathedral but

⁵⁵ Waugh, *Essays, Articles and Reviews*, pp.114–115.

⁵⁶ Evelyn Waugh, *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. by Michael Davie (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Limited, 1976), p.332.

⁵⁷ Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh in Abyssinia* (London: Longmans, Green, 1936).

⁵⁸ Thesiger, *Life*, p.92.

⁵⁹ Thesiger, *Life*, p.92.

some ‘had fought their way past the royal guards and now dozed fitfully on the floor in far corners of the pavilion’ (WA, 557–58). The British delegation, by contrast, is not comic or inelegant and Waugh regards them as ‘undoubtedly the most august’ of all the foreign parties, observing that the procession ‘of men of unusually imposing physique [...] certainly added glamour to the pageant’ (WA, 222). Thesiger, of course, is a member of this delegation, although Waugh does not mention him.

Waugh gives some description of his surroundings and the progression of the ceremony but these are largely eclipsed by marginal events which amuse him. The lengthy service is uninteresting to him and his attention strays easily. Most of the guests seem confused and bored: he hears the diplomats shifting ‘uncomfortably in their gilt chairs’ and the ‘noisy squabbles [...] between the imperial guard and the retainers of the local chiefs’ (WA, 223). He includes Professor Thomas Whittemore’s attempts to follow the service:

Professor W., who was an expert of high transatlantic reputation of Coptic ritual [and a ‘bogus professor’⁶⁰ in Waugh’s letter to his parents], occasionally remarked: ‘They are beginning the Mass now [...] That was the offertory [...] No, I was wrong; it was the consecration [...] How very curious; I don’t believe it was a Mass at all [...] *Now they are beginning the Mass*’. (WA, 223)

This superbly comic description of the professor’s incompetence is made to reflect on the incomprehensible ceremony as well as his failures to explain it; Waugh undermines the dignity of the ceremony by rendering it absurd.

In contrast to Waugh’s flippancy Thesiger considers the ceremony seriously. The service itself fascinates him, although he cannot understand it. He notes that many ‘people complained afterwards of its inordinate length’, but that he himself ‘was not conscious of this’, despite its being conducted in Ge’ez. He remarks that ‘it could have lasted twice as long as far as I was concerned’.⁶¹ Writing to his mother he describes the whole ceremony as ‘intensely interesting’ (DD, 7).

Of course, Thesiger’s reaction is very personal. His family background gives him a greater investment in the event, while Waugh is sceptical about the ceremony’s real political significance, observing that the foreign diplomats are uneasy because the magnificence of

⁶⁰ Waugh, *Letters*, p.52.

⁶¹ Thesiger, *Life*, p.92.

the event and the large number of people attending ‘would still further complicate the task of impressing on the Abyssinians their real unimportance in the greater world’ (WA, 189). But Thesiger is gratified by Haile Selassie’s personal achievement:

Even as a boy Haile Selassie had believed in his imperial destiny; for nearly twenty years he had survived conspiracies, wars and revolutions, and his resolution had never faltered [...] This was his supreme moment.⁶²

Waugh is more cynical. He observes that the ‘crowded week was the consummation of months of feverish activity’ and of ‘years of quiet plotting’ by Ras Tafari (WA, 558). He agrees with Thesiger that the emperor ‘was able, now, to sit and enjoy his triumph’ but this is a less admirable kind of triumph than Thesiger has described (WA, 558). Thesiger believes that ‘Ras Tafari was the obvious choice for Emperor’ on the basis of his forward-thinking ideas, his intention to ‘abolish slavery [...] found schools [...] build roads and modernize the country’.⁶³ Waugh portrays him as a calculating politician, who had been ‘playing a delicate game between the Powers and his own people’ (WA, 558), in order to ensure that the *rases* would elect him for ‘the task for which they knew he was suited’ (WA, 599). He argues that Haile Selassie ‘could make no preeminent claim to authority on the grounds of heredity; the real Emperor was in chains’ (WA, 558), ignoring the significance of the fact that Lij Iyasu had apparently rejected his Solomonic lineage by converting to Islam, forfeiting his authority.

Waugh and Thesiger did meet at the coronation but only briefly, although even this meeting was sufficient to illuminate the contrast in their dispositions and probably also the class difference between them. Thesiger ‘disliked [Waugh] on sight’, but he also acknowledges that he was ‘the one person present with a gift for writing’. As a result he considers it ‘a pity’ that Waugh seemed ‘blind to the historical significance of the occasion [...] [ridiculing] the ceremonies in impeccable prose’.⁶⁴ Waugh makes no direct mention of Thesiger, but refers obliquely to his attempt to join Thesiger’s hunting party after the coronation. In *Remote People* he says he would have enjoyed ‘a journey north to Axum or Lallibella’ with a companion but that ‘no one seemed ready to come’ (WA, 252). It is not clear how many people Waugh spoke to, but he did ask Thesiger ‘at second-hand, if he

⁶² Thesiger, *Life*, pp.92–93.

⁶³ Thesiger, *Life*, p.50.

⁶⁴ Thesiger, *Life*, pp.91–92.

could accompany [...] [him] into the Danakil country'.⁶⁵ Thesiger refused, reflecting that 'had he come, I suspect only one of us would have returned'.⁶⁶ The situation has been reworked in *Remote People*; the excision of Thesiger from this incident, or any other part of the text, suggests that Waugh did not like to admit he was rejected.

Reactions to *Remote People* were mixed. As I have indicated in Chapter Four, Rebecca West disliked Waugh's descriptions of boredom, although Peter Fleming admires Waugh's handling of the subject, arguing that Waugh 'is not ashamed to admit to boredom, and describes it exquisitely'.⁶⁷ Fleming's review reflects the anti-heroic style of Waugh's travel writing also evident in Fleming's own work:

we distrust those writers on whose work the discomfort [of travel] has been allowed to leave no traces because it was not on a spectacular scale [...] They stand out as supermen. They leave us cold.⁶⁸

Few of Waugh's critics react to his disparagement of Ethiopians and the coronation. His assertion that 'there may be something valuable behind the indefensible and inexplicable assumption of superiority by the Anglo-Saxon race' (WA, 330) also provokes little comment, other than a remark in the *New York Times Book Review* that any 'of the races which do not belong to the best clubs might see prejudice' in Waugh's opinions.⁶⁹ Indeed, E. E. Mavrogordato describes Waugh's analysis of race relations in Kenya as 'an impartial summary' and Fleming remarks that Waugh 'observes with insight'.⁷⁰ Provocative as Waugh's remarks may seem to modern readers, the comments of his contemporaries indicate that, in the 1930s, his views are regarded as sensible, not racist.

Italian Occupation of Ethiopia: 1935–1941

Waugh and Thesiger returned to Ethiopia separately, in 1935 and 1940, having different rôles to play regarding Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. The defeat at Adwa in 1896 was a serious grievance and Henze remarks that 'many Italians longed to avenge'.⁷¹ By 1932

⁶⁵ Thesiger, *Life*, pp.92.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Evelyn Waugh: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Martin Stannard (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p.125.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Stannard, *Critical Heritage*, p.124.

⁷⁰ Stannard, *Critical Heritage*, p.121, p.125.

⁷¹ Henze, p.215.

Mussolini was making preparations for a future invasion, reinforcing troops in Eritrea and waiting for the opposition to initiate a strike. This came in 1934 when Ethiopian and Italian troops clashed at Walwal, an area whose ownership was disputed. Despite the fact that ‘Ethiopian casualties [...] were three times those of the Italians’, Mussolini ‘claimed an Ethiopian provocation’ and demanded ‘apologies and reparations’.⁷² Italy then invaded Ethiopia in October 1935. Lack of organisation in the Ethiopian military give Italy the advantage and troops on the ground were reinforced by Italy’s air force. The Italians continued to advance and Haile Selassie fled the country in 1936.⁷³ After an ineffectual plea for intervention to the League of Nations he settled in exile in Bath. Even in the face of Italy’s outright aggression the League was unwilling to act on Ethiopia’s behalf. Edward Ullendorff remarks that Italy was ‘of course, a country that was known and respected as a pillar of European civilization, while Abyssinia was almost totally unknown and simply formed part of the case for the League of Nations’.⁷⁴ Ethiopian resistance against Italian control continued in the form of guerrilla warfare, so that ‘no region of Ethiopia was entirely under Italian control’.⁷⁵ But there was no relief for Ethiopia until 1940, when Mussolini allied himself with Hitler and declared war on Britain and France. Britain’s subsequent campaign in Ethiopia was undertaken against Mussolini, rather than on behalf of Haile Selassie.⁷⁶

Italy’s invasion provoked wildly contrasting reactions from Waugh and Thesiger. Waugh’s account of his experience as a war correspondent, *Waugh in Abyssinia*, supports Italy’s actions. He takes Ethiopia’s inferiority to Italy for granted. Ethiopia, he insists,

must put her resources at the disposal of the world; since she was obviously unable to develop them herself, it must be done for her, to their mutual benefit, by a more advanced Power. (WA, 578)

Waugh supposes that Mussolini is motivated by benevolence, describing the Italians as ‘progressive and comparatively humane masters’ (WA, 582). Thesiger, on the other hand, remarks that ‘no other event has ever distressed me so profoundly’ as Italy’s invasion of

⁷² Henze, p.215.

⁷³ Henze, p.219.

⁷⁴ Edward Ullendorff, Review ‘Daniel Waley: *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War, 1935–6*’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 39, no.3 (1976), p.638.

⁷⁵ Henze, p.227.

⁷⁶ Henze, p.235.

Ethiopia.⁷⁷ Unable to act in 1935 he is glad to be posted to Ethiopia in 1940 where, as a member of Gideon Force, he fought with Allied forces to oust the Italians.

Neither account of the conflict greatly resembles a travel narrative or, at least, travels are not the central focus of either narrative and there is little description of Ethiopia or its people. Thesiger's account in *The Life of my Choice* details the progress of Gideon Force's campaign.⁷⁸ Waugh sees more of Ethiopia than he did in 1930, occasionally venturing from Addis Ababa to research possible story leads, or attempting to reach the frontline (WA, 614, 670). But *Waugh in Abyssinia* focuses mainly on the difficulty of reporting news, as journalists are given little information, and contains many digressions on the subject of Ethiopia's inadequacy and the potential benefits of Italian colonial rule.

Waugh in Abyssinia was published in the context of Britain's fascination with the Italo-Abyssinian conflict. There were influential campaigners on both sides of the argument, supporters of Mussolini included Lady Houston and Douglas Jerrold, editor of the *English Review*.⁷⁹ Oswald Mosley, while not a supporter of Italy, was certainly anti-League.⁸⁰ The Socialist League deplored Italy's actions⁸¹ and Professor Stanley Jevons formed the Abyssinian Association, later continued by Sylvia Pankhurst, a vigorous campaigner for Haile Selassie's restoration.⁸² Waugh's book was published in 1936, when public feeling about Ethiopia was still running high. Ullendorff remarks that it is a shame that Daniel Waley's analysis does not discuss Waugh's contribution to the public debate, observing that

Evelyn Waugh must surely be reckoned a significant influence in the shaping of British public opinion – at any rate in those circles where the views of so famous a writer were held to be of consequence.⁸³

It is not clear how influential Waugh's opinions were, but they were certainly widely known. Thesiger's impassioned views had no impact on British public opinion in the 1930s and his account of the conflict, therefore, cannot be analysed in the same way.

⁷⁷ Thesiger, *Life*, p.13.

⁷⁸ Thesiger, *Life*, pp.311–354.

⁷⁹ Daniel Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War 1935–6* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1975), p.24.

⁸⁰ Waley, p.25.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Waley, pp.115–16.

⁸³ Ullendorff, p.648.

Waugh's view of the conflict provoked criticism from some reviewers. Lawrence Athill merely suggests that Waugh should 'temper his judgment with a little generosity'.⁸⁴ David Garnett criticises Waugh's failure to give sufficient weight to the League's obligations towards Ethiopia and finds his admiration of the brutal Viceroy Graziani distasteful.⁸⁵ Indeed, Rose Macaulay denounces *Waugh in Abyssinia* as a 'Fascist tract',⁸⁶ but it is crucial to note that this comment was made in 1946, ten years after the book was first published; perceptions of Mussolini had since changed radically. In 1936 there was still some division in opinion over Mussolini and his ambitions for Ethiopia. As Stannard observes, Waugh's Catholic readership regarded his position as 'sane and sensible'.⁸⁷ Michael de la Bedoyere, writing for the *Catholic Herald*, argues that Waugh reaches 'clear judgment through his own concrete, unbiased, workmanlike experience'.⁸⁸

Although aspects of Waugh's and Thesiger's accounts overlap, the contrast in their representations highlights the fluid nature of representation itself, as two conflicting Ethiopias are created. The impact of personal perspective is clearly a vital component in the construction of travel writing as Thesiger's admiration, which is connected to his childhood memories, clashes with Waugh's characteristically satirical narrative. In addition, Thesiger's representations of urban Ethiopia, which focus on the regality and splendour of its imperial traditions, present a contrast to his perception of rural areas. Again, tradition is central to his image of such regions, but it is a tradition of anti-imperial hostility, barbarism and violence. Addis Ababa has a special fascination for Thesiger but he also wanted to travel in remote, wild areas and the Danakil region of Ethiopia fulfilled his expectations of romantic adventure.

Rural Ethiopia: Wilfred Thesiger (1933–34); Dervla Murphy (1966–67)

Wilfred Thesiger: In Danakil Country

Thesiger's 1933 expedition in the Danakil region of Ethiopia was prompted by his short hunting trip in 1930. He deliberately chose an area infamous for its violent inhabitants,

⁸⁴ Stannard, *Critical Heritage*, p.190.

⁸⁵ Stannard, *Critical Heritage*, pp.189–90.

⁸⁶ Stannard, *Critical Heritage*, p.193.

⁸⁷ Stannard, *Early Years*, p.435.

⁸⁸ Stannard, *Critical Heritage*, p.186.

particularly the Afar, who ‘castrated anyone they killed’, and insisted on travelling without other Europeans (*DD*, 14). Thesiger was accompanied by a small team of men who could guide him through the region and give him some protection against hostile tribesmen by vouching for him (*DD*, 16). Nevertheless, he describes ‘an unpleasant feeling [...] of being in a hostile country’ (*DD*, 28) and he and his companions are always alert to potential danger (*DD*, 27). It seems likely that Waugh, when he asked to join Thesiger, did not understand the nature or risks of the journey. Certainly it was utterly unlike any of his own African journeys.

On returning home to continue his degree at Oxford, Thesiger explains that he was anxious to return in order to travel further through the northern districts, thinking ‘incessantly of that slow-flowing muddy river [the Awash], of the arid, scrub-covered plains and volcanic mountains’.⁸⁹ He was ‘determined to return’ in order ‘to follow the Awash river into the fabulous Sultanate of Aussa and discover how and where it ended’.⁹⁰ In the past Ethiopia had been regarded as more accessible than some other African countries. The source of the Blue Nile at Lake Tana, for instance, was identified long before Lakes Victoria and Albert were confirmed as the sources of the White Nile. The Danakil region, however, had a reputation of inaccessibility. Michael Asher, a biographer of Thesiger, observes that ‘almost all previous expeditions through the region had met with disaster’.⁹¹ Asher lists Thesiger’s predecessors:

In 1881, Giuliotti and Biglieri had attempted to cross Danakil country [...] the party had been massacred by Afars [...] Three years later a squad of fourteen Italian naval ratings [...] [were] butchered at the well of Tio [...] in the 1920s [...] two Greek animal-collectors [...] were cut down with their party near Bahdu.⁹²

Thesiger was proposing to do what no other European had managed without being attacked and, in most cases, killed. He ‘was aware that the risks were considerable’, admitting that ‘the challenge presented by the murderous company of the Danakil and the physical difficulties of the journey was irresistible’.⁹³ He reasons that ‘had it been otherwise the

⁸⁹ Thesiger, *Life*, p.97.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Asher, p.86.

⁹² Asher, p.86.

⁹³ Thesiger, *Life*, p.119, p.97.

Danakil country would already have been thoroughly explored' and would not have interested him.⁹⁴

Despite the danger, Thesiger observes to Asher: 'I never considered failure. One merely assumed one would be successful and as it turned out one was'.⁹⁵ He remarks to David Attenborough, however, that

I may have been the driving force that kept that expedition going but [Umr, his headman] was the one who negotiated with murderous tribal chieftains and ultimately with the Sultan of Aussa, who had never allowed any European into Aussa.⁹⁶

Modern travel writers choose not to adopt such a confident, authoritative air, so redolent of nineteenth-century explorers: O'Hanlon's narratives, for example, are driven by a sense of impending disaster which, should it occur, he has no power to prevent or mitigate.

Thesiger is happy to identify himself with older explorers and, fortunately, his confidence was justified.⁹⁷ Unlike his predecessors, he was granted safe passage through the Danakil and Aussa regions and followed the Awash to its end at Lake Abhebad (*DD*, 178). The maps he subsequently produced appear in *The Danakil Diary*, indicating the journey's practical purpose (*DD*, first centrefold). This practical outcome is less common in modern texts as the narrative itself is now so often the ultimate purpose of the journey. But David Attenborough puts it to Thesiger that the search for the river's precise route was a pretext for the experience of the journey:

If someone said to you which was more important: finding out where a particular river went or going into a part of the world which people said was one of the most dangerous [...] which would you prefer?⁹⁸

Thesiger readily replies that 'it was the danger [...] it was one of the last problems left in the way of exploring Africa. It was the excitement of getting down there and seeing if I could get through'.⁹⁹ The confirmation of the Awash's route is less important to Thesiger

⁹⁴ Thesiger, *Life*, p.119.

⁹⁵ Asher, p.83.

⁹⁶ David Attenborough, *Heart of a Nomad*, Channel 4, 1994.

⁹⁷ Thesiger, *Life*, p.443.

⁹⁸ Attenborough, *Heart of a Nomad*.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

than the intrepid and risky nature of the journey, but his task gives him the romantic mantle of an explorer mapping a previously uncharted area.

Thesiger gives accounts of this journey in both *Arabian Sands* (1959)¹⁰⁰ and *The Life of my Choice*,¹⁰¹ but the most recent narrative, *The Danakil Diary*, is the most detailed, giving greater insights into the journey's tensions and frustrations. When Thesiger is recalled to Addis Ababa in December, for example, he spends some time negotiating with officials before being allowed to resume his journey in January 1934 (*DD*, 87–88). *Life* glosses over the month's delay and the difficulty of the negotiations¹⁰² but Thesiger's diary reveals his desperate anxiety that the journey may be cancelled: 'I have had a very weary month with my hopes see-sawing between optimism and the blackest depression' (*DD*, 86). The diary also clarifies the scale of the danger and the precautions which needed to be taken each day against the possibility of attack. Thesiger is pleased, for example, that his party 'succeeded in always getting hostages from the *balabat* [tribal headman]. Himself during the day and usually his sons at night' (*DD*, 78). The *balabat* would then warn villagers that 'anyone lurking round camp' would be taken for a hyena and 'shot on sight [...] Honest men must stand far off and proclaim themselves' (*DD*, 78–79). The diary does not condense events as earlier accounts do and, while this can be repetitive, it also reveals more about the nature of the journey and the practicalities of Thesiger's daily interaction with companions and locals.

The dominant tribes in the Danakil region are groups of the Afar: the Asaimara and the Adoimara. They were known to Westerners as Danakil at the time Thesiger was travelling through the region and so he retains this name in his accounts (*DD*, xi). These people are suitably exotic and savage to fulfil Thesiger's desire to travel 'among untamed tribes in unknown lands'.¹⁰³ Thesiger later travelled with many warlike people, particularly the Bedu in Saudi Arabia and the Marsh Arabs of Iraq, but the Afar may have been the most hostile and vicious. They had a 'murderous reputation'¹⁰⁴ and were notorious for mutilations:

¹⁰⁰ Wilfred Thesiger, *Arabian Sands*, 1st published 1959 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), pp.18–30.

¹⁰¹ Thesiger, *Life*, pp.88–168.

¹⁰² Thesiger, *Life*, p.128.

¹⁰³ Thesiger, *Life*, p.442.

¹⁰⁴ Thesiger, *Life*, p.122.

The Danakil invariably castrated any man or boy whom they killed or wounded, removing both the penis and the scrotum. An obvious trophy, it afforded irrefutable proof that the victim was male, and obtaining it gave the additional satisfaction of dishonouring the corpse.¹⁰⁵

Despite such evidence of a violent and alien culture, Thesiger remarks that the Afar ‘appeared to manifest a genuine friendliness’ and, as a result, he was ‘prepared to accept the fact that they would kill a man or boy with as little compunction as I would shoot a buck’.¹⁰⁶ Thesiger observes that on his first hunting trip ‘in 1930 I had disapproved of the incessant killing [...] but fairly soon I accepted this as the way they live’ (DD, 66).

The protection of forty men and an excellent headman, Umr, enables Thesiger to travel in safety and make observations about the cultures of the Asaimara and the Adoimara. In his preface Thesiger mentions that he was ‘anxious to record all I could learn about [Afar] [...] customs and way of life. I was certain that no one else had previously done so’ (DD, xi). His notes reveal his fascination with danger, savagery and the exoticism of the Other. He describes special occasions, including weddings and funerals, but focuses mainly on the customs of a warrior culture: the ritual initiation of circumcision, (DD, 160–61) the decoration of warriors (DD, 96–7) and investiture ceremonies for chiefs (DD, 102–103). Much of this information is obtained at second-hand and there is no mention of everyday habits or traditions; Thesiger could not mingle much with villagers and could, therefore, make few first-hand observations of Afar life. Some details Thesiger can observe for himself and he is particularly interested in the decorations indicating how often a man has killed:

Amongst the Bahdu Asaimara [...] a man who has killed ties one thong, decorated with brass, to his knife or rifle for each man killed [...] More than ten men: signified by a narrow iron bracelet [...] After having killed one man, [Adoimara] will wear a comb [...] a bead necklace, a coloured loin cloth, or an iron bracelet [...] Having killed ten men they may wear an ivory bracelet above the right elbow. (DD, 67–68 emphasis in original)

Thesiger ‘learned to tell at a glance [...] which tribe a man belonged to and how often he had killed’ (DD, 67).

¹⁰⁵ Thesiger, *Life*, p.122.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Apart from meeting the Afar, the most significant highlight of the journey is not its conclusion at Lake Abhehad, which was ‘satisfactory’ (*DD*, 178), but Thesiger’s negotiations with the Sultan of Aussa, seeking permission for the last stage of the journey. The first of these meetings took place in the evening and Thesiger reflects that ‘this moonlight meeting in unknown Africa with a savage potentate who hated Europeans was the realization of my boyhood dreams’ (*DD*, 146). This meeting and Thesiger’s encounters with the Afar satisfy his expectations of Ethiopia. He has experienced the Ethiopia of his imagination which, for him, is characterised by savagery. His narrative expresses his satisfaction that his experience, on the whole, allows him to present an unknown terrain, peopled by hostile and vicious tribes through which he, the intrepid explorer, travelled successfully.

Dervla Murphy: Trekking in the Highlands

Murphy’s journey in northern Ethiopia, in 1966, is very different. Her route begins on the coast of Eritrea and she makes her way, mostly on foot, to Lake Tana, and, after a brief interval, from there to Addis Ababa. By 1966 Murphy is an established travel writer after making journeys to India, Tibet and Nepal.¹⁰⁷ She chose Ethiopia because the rural areas are still so remote. The area through which she travels is not unmapped but Murphy remarks that the maps she received from Barbara Toy, who had previously travelled in Northern Africa,¹⁰⁸ ‘were inaccurate enough to give me, at times, the gratifying illusion of being an explorer in trackless wastes’ (*EwM*, 8). She was also attracted by the challenge of the Simēn mountains.¹⁰⁹ By contrast, although Waugh travelled as a tourist through Africa in 1930 and 1958, he never trekked as Murphy did, relying rather on ships, trains and cars.¹¹⁰ Nor did he explore Ethiopia. Thesiger did trek through rural Ethiopian regions, including a brief trek in the Simēns in 1959, but never undertook such journeys alone. Murphy prefers to travel alone whenever possible. Thesiger’s account of northern Ethiopia is presented rather sketchily in his autobiography as he preferred more risky journeys.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Dervla Murphy, *Full Tilt: Ireland to India on a Bicycle*, 1st published 1965 (London: Century Hutchinson, 1983); *Tibetan Foothold* (John Murray, 1966); *Waiting Land: A Spell in Nepal* (John Murray, 1967).

¹⁰⁸ Macmillan, ‘Barbara Toy’ <<http://us.macmillan.com/author/barbaratoy>> [accessed 9 November 2009].

¹⁰⁹ Author’s Interview with Dervla Murphy, 17 August 2005.

¹¹⁰ Waugh, *Waugh Abroad*, p.233, p.273, p.967, p.987.

¹¹¹ Thesiger, *Life*, pp.412–426.

This contrasts with Murphy's detailed accounts of scenery, culture and the daily practicalities of her trek.

Like Thesiger, Murphy is fortunate to obtain royal protection after being introduced to Haile Selassie's granddaughter, Leilt Aida Desta, and her husband, Leul Ras Mangasha, who give permission for Murphy to travel unescorted, as well as helping with several practical issues of the journey, such as a pack mule (*EwM*, 23–24). This support gives Murphy authority, making the journey easier and more enjoyable. Although villagers do not always allow Murphy to travel alone her excellent contacts allay occasional suspicion (*EwM*, 58). Murphy telephones Leilt Aida when possible to report on her progress and this gains her respect and cooperation from officials (*EwM*, 59). Of course, it is clear that Murphy travels in an entirely different way from Thesiger, who is less of an enigma to villagers because official expeditions are a comparatively common sight. The appearance of 'an inexplicable female *faranj* [foreigner]' baffles the highlanders (*EwM*, 37). The romance of travelling alone in remote areas is clearly an utterly alien concept to Ethiopians and, of course, it emphasises Murphy's privileged position, as she undertakes such strenuous travels for pleasure.

It soon becomes clear that most locals are unhappy about a woman travelling alone and Murphy is often forced to accept an unwanted escort (*EwM*, 41, 49, 77). As I have indicated in Chapter Three, Murphy suggests that men are at greater risk in rural areas than women, who appear more vulnerable and are less likely to be regarded with suspicion.¹¹² In Ethiopia most locals adopt a protective attitude towards Murphy (*EwM*, 39, 49, 77), but she also identifies another possible motive behind the locals' insistence on accompanying her. She senses an underlying tension caused by 'basic distrust of the unprecedented lone *faranj*' and reasons that if she inflamed this distrust by insisting she travel alone she 'might see a very different aspect of the highland character' (*EwM*, 75). But she dislikes being hurried to the next compound or village when she would prefer to have time to look at landscapes. In the mountains around the Takazze Gorge Murphy is thrilled by the 'vast panorama that spread south and east beneath a [...] sunset glow'. Ideally she would have liked to 'sit alone, and gaze and gaze – but soon I was being hustled towards the settlement' (*EwM*, 81).

¹¹² Interview, 17 August 2005.

The business-like nature of being escorted through wonderful landscapes is, for Murphy, an entirely different experience to meeting people on the road. She enjoys the companionship of fellow travellers who are making the journey for their own reasons and feel no sense of obligation or responsibility towards her. The relaxed and informal nature of such encounters adds to the romance of her journey, as she remarks on her way to Aedat, when she and her mule, Jock, are ‘absorbed by a cheerful party which was also going south’ (*EwM*, 61). Murphy identifies ‘a certain Chaucerian quality’ in the informal nature of ‘such casually companionable wanderings’ and the mutual enjoyment of the journey makes such encounters ‘as enjoyable as solitary trekking’ (*EwM*, 61). It is a significant contrast to Thesiger’s travelling style, although both have their own romance.

Murphy is able to discern a distinction in the reception she receives when locals can easily tell that she is a woman, as, on a very few occasions, she is mistaken for a man. She observes that locals seem tense until they realise their mistake (*EwM*, 90). At a late stage of her journey Murphy feels sufficiently comfortable to have some fun with locals on this point. Staying the night in a compound she realises that, due to a severe haircut in Gondar (*EwM*, 179), her host has mistaken her for a man. He introduces Murphy to his granddaughter, offering ‘her love at two dollars for an hour or five dollars for the night’ (*EwM*, 187). Murphy pretends ‘to consider the offer carefully. Then I settled for an hour, explaining solemnly that having walked from Bahar Dar I mightn’t be up to an all-night session’ (*EwM*, 187). The girl sits next to Murphy and realises the mistake, at which everyone bursts out laughing and one man stands ‘on a high rock to relay the joke to the next compound, illustrating his words with some not very decent gestures’ (*EwM*, 187). Waugh and Thesiger do not record such lighthearted exchanges with Ethiopians. Waugh avoided socialising with locals and it was considered inappropriate or risky for Thesiger to do so. Murphy’s levity, therefore, indicates an ease and sense of camaraderie in Ethiopian communities which is unique to her narrative.

Murphy’s safety in a remote part of Ethiopia does not seem as compromised as Thesiger’s. Of course, by 1966 Ethiopia seems safer for foreign travellers. After his restoration in 1941 Haile Selassie did much to consolidate and centralise his authority, concentrating on ensuring control over rivals in the Tigray region. The resulting rebellion was suppressed with the help of British troops still resident in Ethiopia. A governor of the region ensured

continued Tigrayan submission and Haile Selassie was free to concentrate on establishing his authority throughout the rest of Ethiopia.¹¹³ It is, therefore, easier for Murphy to travel through rural areas in 1966, as her royal contacts now ensure her protection.

The danger of *shifita*, however, is continually present and the threat for Murphy is greater than for Thesiger, who is accompanied by forty men. He is more wary of being outnumbered by armies of tribesmen than encounters with small groups of bandits. When a lone *shifita* steals a rifle from the caravan he is immediately caught, being completely outnumbered, and turned over to the headman of a nearby village.¹¹⁴ Murphy, although travelling alone when possible, is very sceptical about the likelihood of attack, although she is a more plausible target. She remarks that ‘the locals take *shifita* very seriously’ but she cannot share their apprehension, regarding highlanders as unreasonably ‘jittery’ (*EwM*, 42). She explains that she has ‘an irrational faith in the fundamental goodness of human nature. I can never take the badness very seriously until it is operating’ (*EwM*, 78). Murphy is proud of this attitude as it enables her to keep her nerve and she often discovers that, if she keeps calm, nasty situations resolve themselves (*EwM*, 78). This determined optimism may seem reckless or naïve, but, remarkably, circumstances have never forced her to revise her opinions, although she has been in a number of tense and potentially dangerous situations. Her ability to keep her nerve may, of course, be a calming influence. Murphy does encounter *shifita* at Lake Tana but, although afraid, is not too cowed to attempt to defend her possessions and she is not attacked.

The men find Murphy at the shore of the lake. They are not openly aggressive at first, chatting to Murphy ‘as civilly as the language barrier allowed’, but she is intimidated, wondering how she will manage to escape (*EwM*, 156). As she rises to leave she is surrounded, ‘no one was smiling anymore’ (*EwM*, 156). But there is a delay which allows Murphy to regain her nerve: the *shifita* begin to argue among themselves and Murphy lights a cigarette, reflecting that ‘gamblers can’t always win and that if this was it, it was it’ (*EwM*, 156). This moment of reflection gives her ‘an odd experience’ as she suddenly, and inexplicably, feels ‘safe – as surely as if a platoon of police had appeared to rescue me’ (*EwM*, 156). Remarkably, Murphy’s instinct is correct; she is not harmed, although the *shifita* do take most of her possessions: ‘my sleeping-bag, torch, spare Biro, matches,

¹¹³ Henze, pp.249–52.

¹¹⁴ Thesiger, *Danakil Diary*, p.42.

camera, insecticides, medicines [...] Jock's bridle and [...] about eighteen pounds sterling' (*EwM*, 157). Murphy is relieved, however, that her money-belt and watch appear to go unnoticed and that the thieves do not take Jock, although he is valuable (*EwM*, 157).

Having kept her nerve, Murphy is unsettled but not overwhelmed and certainly not deterred from her journey. She is soon able to contact police at Gondar. As a foreigner she is at an advantage as 'the robbing of a *faranj* causes genuine shame and distress to the average highlander' (*EwM*, 171). There is a striking contrast here to the attitude of the Afar who were notorious for attacking foreign parties. A number of her possessions are subsequently recovered (*EwM*, 176). In addition, the *shifita* are captured and sentenced, although Murphy is discomfited to realise that they will be flogged as well as imprisoned (*EwM*, 181). The incident highlights Murphy's incautious vulnerability when travelling alone but it also demonstrates her determination: she does not lose her nerve but enlists help as soon as possible and is not put off from continuing her journey. Arguably, of course, she is responsible for the fate of the robbers.

Murphy's Ethiopia is very different from Waugh's and Thesiger's; Waugh only knows urban areas and Thesiger chooses more dangerous, but perhaps less typical, rural areas to explore. The highlanders whom Murphy meets may be more typical of the average Ethiopian, as comparatively few live in urban centres or belong to fierce, warlike tribes. Murphy also mixes with a greater variety of people. Apart from those she meets along the way she often accepts local hospitality, sleeping in peasant huts and sharing evening meals with families (*EwM*, 103–105). Although conversation is often limited to broken Italian or Amharic and, most often, sign language, Murphy communicates with locals in a social context, something which is not evident in either Waugh's or Thesiger's narratives (*EwM*, 38–9, 52, 104). I have already indicated that, in time, this allows her to joke with locals, increasing her sense of connection with them.

This ease of communication is common in rural Ethiopia and Murphy is frustrated by the difficulty of mingling with Ethiopians in Addis Ababa as 'the locals expect *faranj*s to keep to themselves' (*EwM*, 270). The unease she meets with in the cities highlights, for her, an unreal quality about modern Ethiopia:

in the capital one can talk to twenty English-speaking Ethiopians during the day and find nineteen so addled by the synthetic urban atmosphere that with them genuine communication on any level is impossible. Yet among non-English-speaking villagers genuine communication can very soon be established, mysteriously but unmistakably. (*EwM*, 276)

For Murphy the conflict between traditional and modern Ethiopia is a distinction in reality: Addis Ababa seems ‘unreal in relation to Ethiopia’ (*EwM*, 268), but, arguably, this is an indication of Murphy’s preference for traditional and rural communities and the reason she tends to avoid urban centres.¹¹⁵

In cities, however, Murphy meets members of Ethiopia’s new middle class: young people who have been educated in the cities and whose modern tastes clash with the traditions of their highland families. Very early in her journey she meets Dawit, a young man from Addis Ababa who has been posted to a village, where some of his relatives live, ‘to run the Health Centre for three years’ (*EwM*, 65). Murphy (self-consciously) regards Dawit’s distaste for rural life as pernicious: ‘He considers the local food, drink and accommodation repellent and he despises all the villagers, including his own relatives. I winced when he jeeringly referred to the rest of the company as “savages” ’ (*EwM*, 65). Meeting similar youths in urban areas, Murphy remarks on the conflicts brought about by clashes between traditional and modern lifestyles:

The majority of students [in Gondar] [...] admit to living in a state of guilty conflict [...] they feel hypocritical when visiting their families, because fear drives them to simulate a loyalty to tradition which they no longer feel [...] on returning to the city, they despise themselves for not having upheld their new beliefs [...] [but are] saddened to realize that they no longer ‘belong’ at home. (*EwM*, 146–47)

Henze analyses this social phenomenon as a significant contributing factor to Haile Selassie’s final overthrow, as Ethiopians became impatient for a greater rate of modernisation.¹¹⁶ Murphy has the opportunity to make a personal analysis of the situation although, of course, she has no idea of its eventual impact.

Murphy’s six-week stay in Addis Ababa at the end of her journey is briefly described in an epilogue in which she untypically does not give a day-by-day account. Cooped up in the

¹¹⁵ Interview, 17 August 2005.

¹¹⁶ Henze, p.282.

city, Murphy is relieved to escape to the mountains ‘for a day to say farewell to the *real* Ethiopia’ (*EwM*, 270, my emphasis). Six weeks in Addis Ababa is excised from the text and the epilogue focuses on Murphy’s final excursion in a rural area. There is a greater sense of continuity in the text, therefore, but little explication of the contrast which Murphy finds so jarring. Like Thesiger, Murphy has her own concept of what must constitute the ‘real’ Ethiopia; for both, the country’s charm lies in a remote wilderness. Of course, Waugh’s experiences in Addis Ababa, surreal as they were to him, were no less real and no less a part of the country as a whole, although, of course, the lavish scale of Haile Selassie’s celebrations are far removed from the general poverty throughout his country.

Conclusion

Waugh, Thesiger and Murphy, therefore, provide unique and disparate insights into a significant period of Ethiopia’s history and the last attempt to revive the glory of Ethiopia’s imperial past. Evident in each text is the clash between Ethiopia’s past, the traditions of which are so central to its national identity, and the necessity to bring modern reforms. Waugh and Thesiger’s accounts of the unimpressive attempts to modernise in the capital foreshadow Italy’s success: Haile Selassie’s new army was not sufficiently developed to match Mussolini’s forces. Crucially, Ethiopia had little international stature, despite the attention given to Haile Selassie’s coronation. Dervla Murphy sees an independent Ethiopia, but one which has still failed to progress and where education apparently serves to show new generations how slowly Ethiopia is developing as a modern nation. Ethiopia’s shortcomings are evident in 1966 as they were in 1930.

These writers also have imaginary Ethiopias in mind and their narratives reflect how far the country matches their expectations. Thesiger’s journeys in rural Ethiopia confirm his personal construction of the country and his romantic idealism is better satisfied in the Danakil and Aussa regions than in the hybridised Addis Ababa, where traditional splendour is tarnished for him by inexpert attempts to modernise. The danger of the Danakil expedition, culminating in the moonlit meeting with the Sultan of Aussa and the final success in reaching Lake Abhehad, satisfy Thesiger’s notions of adventure and, of course, he found similar romance in such travels throughout his life.

Murphy, like Thesiger, is satisfied with rural Ethiopia, preferring the remote landscapes and simplicity of highland life to the chaos she finds in urban centres. It is not a perfect

Ethiopia but Murphy's account focuses on the places she loves. By omitting a description of her stay in the capital and concluding with another rural journey, Murphy perhaps oversimplifies Ethiopia. She recognises, and deplors, the conflict between tradition and modernity. But, although she meets people with a thirst for modernity, she does not complicate the romance and adventure of her rural journey with observations on how such ambitions have impacted urban cultures and how traditional communities could potentially be affected.

Waugh is also satisfied with Ethiopia but in a different way. He cannot admire or enjoy Ethiopia but his experiences allow him to exercise his scathing wit, which has free reign in *Remote People* and is maliciously refined in *Black Mischief* (1932).¹¹⁷ Waugh dismisses the fabulous trappings of legend: his Ethiopia is primitive and shabby. Elements which may have contributed to a more glorious image of Ethiopia are debunked. He ridicules the pomp and circumstance of Haile Selassie's coronation and applauds Italian efforts to modernise the country.¹¹⁸ David Wykes suggests that Waugh writes best in situations where his satiric talents can be exercised. Waugh, he suggests, 'loved Kenya' because of the comforts provided by the white settlers, but 'the artist in him loved Abyssinia far more [...] things going wrong delighted [...] [Waugh] and licensed him to do what as a writer he was best at: to complain, and by complaining to be funny'.¹¹⁹

Three separate narratives produce different Ethiopias and the disparity between them, even when authors are describing the same events, indicates the impossibility of producing a definitive Ethiopia at any given historical moment. It is possible to see how each Ethiopia is created by the writers' personal perspectives: the authors present themselves not only in the narrative personas they construct to undertake the journey, but in the uniquely individual images of the country which emerge. Crucially, of course, none of these images reflect modern-day Ethiopia. In 1936 Waugh assumed that Ethiopia would develop as a colony of Italy, although he was proved wrong only a few years later. Thesiger and Murphy both anticipate Ethiopia's development under Haile Selassie's rule and both comment on his achievements in 1930 and 1966 respectively. After the Marxist coup in 1974 Ethiopia's imperial heritage was eclipsed by the rule of the Derg. Haile Selassie's

¹¹⁷ Evelyn Waugh, *Black Mischief: A Novel* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1932).

¹¹⁸ Waugh, *Waugh Abroad*, p.709.

¹¹⁹ Wykes, p.85.

vision was ambitious and imperfectly carried out, but an intellectual, progressive-thinking élite had begun to emerge and has since disappeared in the violence and corruption which characterises modern Ethiopia's republic. The accounts of Waugh, Thesiger and Murphy allow somewhat melancholy retrospects on the various stages of Haile Selassie's modernising vision.

Chapter Six: My Kenya Days: Wilfred Thesiger

Introduction

Kenya has a special place in the history of Britain's colonial presence in Africa. Compared with other African nations such as the Democratic Republic of Congo or Rwanda, Kenya has been regarded as having maintained a relatively successful independent government. But both its colonial and independent eras have included periods of intense conflict and violence. Bernard Porter, reviewing two significant books on the end of British rule in Kenya, refers to Kenya as 'Britain's Algeria'.¹ Issues over the exploitation of Kenyans and their exclusion from land ownership culminated in the Mau Mau Emergency, which was at its most intense from 1952–56. The force of British reprisals precipitated democratic elections and, eventually, independent rule. Kenya's relative successes as an independent nation have also been undermined by conflict, distrust, corruption and violence. The violence following the 2008 elections upset any complacency about the future of the country, demonstrating as it did that tribal grievances are still sufficiently bitter to remain a threat to the modern régime, as powerful and threatening in its way as Kikuyu violence was to the British government of Kenya.

Before colonisation the area of East Africa now identified as Kenya was inhabited by Bantu and Nilotic tribal groups.² Arabs had also settled in coastal areas, establishing a lucrative slave trade in Eastern and Central Africa which was still flourishing in the nineteenth century. After Europeans succeeded in circumnavigating the continent, Africa's east coast became the site of rivalry between Arabic and European powers. Portugal established a tenuous presence around the Mombasa area in the early sixteenth century but was ousted by Omani Arabs in 1729.³ European colonial powers began to dominate in the nineteenth century, however, when the combined efforts of Germany and Britain undermined the Arabic presence on the coast. The Anglo-German Agreement of 1886 divided East African territories between Britain and Germany; these were extended towards Lake Victoria and Uganda in 1890.⁴

¹ Bernard Porter, 'How Did They Get Away With It?', *London Review of Books*, 27, no.5 (2005), 3–6; David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicholson, 2005); Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005).

² Colin McEvedy, *The Penguin Atlas of African History* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1980), p.58.

³ William R. Ochieng', *A History of Kenya* (London: Macmillan, 1985), p.64.

⁴ Ochieng', p.79.

By this point Britain had asserted its dominance in the area and began constructing a railway from Mombasa to Kampala, providing links to ports on Lake Victoria. Cultural tensions ran high at this time. Indians were drafted in as labourers for the railway and Indian communities were subsequently established in East Africa. The early twentieth century then saw the arrival of European settlers who responded to

a campaign to attract settlers [...] to the colony [...] who could capitalize on the territory's agricultural potential and provide cash crops for the world market. Settlers were urged to come to East Africa, where there was plenty of cheap land, abundant labor, and large potential profits.⁵

As elsewhere throughout Africa, the minority white population dominated African and Asian groups. Anderson observes that

some 5 million Africans lived in the colony, yet they had failed to gain any meaningful form of political representation [...] the 97,000-strong Asian community [...] had done a little better [...] [but] Asian and African alike were dominated in the late 1940s by the political power of the 29,000 European settlers.⁶

The agriculturalist Kikuyu in particular were aggrieved at the loss of 'over sixty thousand acres' of their land.⁷ Since the 1930s Europeans had established clearly defined boundaries between settlements and African-owned land, but an increase in the African population at this time highlighted how little land had been left for their use. There was now 'real evidence of land hunger and emerging landlessness in central Kenya'.⁸

The group known as Mau Mau came to dominate resistance against British rule and land appropriation, although more moderate groups were also voicing their concerns by the 1950s.⁹ But the Mau Mau found much support among dispossessed and unemployed Kikuyus who wished to establish land rights in their favour.¹⁰ In 1941 several thousand Kikuyu 'squatters',¹¹ a term for tenants on white farms, were 'forced to leave the White

⁵ Elkins, p.3.

⁶ Anderson, p.9.

⁷ Elkins, p.12.

⁸ Anderson, p.10.

⁹ Anderson, p.12.

¹⁰ Anderson, p.13.

¹¹ Anderson, p.23.

Highlands'.¹² Thousands of Kikuyu squatters were resettled in central Kenya: the government's plan was to establish centrally-controlled farming areas for which it would dictate 'the crops to be grown, the type of cultivation, and the conservation and maintenance work to be required on the land'.¹³ The resettlement scheme was initiated at Olenguruone where it immediately met with resistance, as Kikuyus believed that they had been reinstated as land-owners, rather than as tenants. As land-owners, 'no one should tell them [...] how to farm or what to do on the land'.¹⁴ In order to 'cement greater political solidarity',¹⁵ they revived the 'traditional Kikuyu practice of oathing' uniting Kikuyus at Olenguruone 'in a collective effort to fight the injustices of British rule'.¹⁶

Leadership came from Jomo Kenyatta and the Kenya African Union (KAU), but also from other more militant groups. These militant leaders, many 'drawn from the ranks of the ex-soldier community', came to dominate Mau Mau and to impose oathing ceremonies by force.¹⁷ By 1950 'hundreds of thousands of Kikuyu [...] had taken an oath of unity',¹⁸ and the British government in Kenya, led by Evelyn Baring, declared Mau Mau an 'illegal organisation'.¹⁹ Ambitious Kikuyus were manipulated by the government and given positions of authority, in return for which these new chiefs were expected to recruit Kikuyus for labour and enforce tax collection.²⁰ Crucially, however, traditional Kikuyu society, governed by local councils, recognised no chiefs or headmen. These honorifics were 'wholly illegitimate in the eyes of ordinary Kikuyu people', but they proved effective.²¹ Eager to hold on to their privileges, chiefs enforced brutal measures to achieve the required results for the British. Such figures automatically became victims of Mau Mau arson and violence, as did any Kikuyu deemed to be complicit with the British régime. The conflict accelerated so that, by May 1952, Kikuyus with links to the government, or who refused to take oaths, were being murdered.²²

¹² Elkins, p.25.

¹³ Anderson, p.27.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Elkins, p.25.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Elkins, p.28.

¹⁹ Anderson, p.44.

²⁰ Elkins, p.19.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Anderson, p.47.

As the British sought to contain Mau Mau violence, which impacted Kikuyus much more than the white community, their methods matched the Mau Mau for brutality. These measures, including a gulag-style detention camp, eventually enabled the British to put down the Mau Mau revolt. Elkins interviews a number of former detainees, amassing a catalogue of the vicious reprisals:

electric shock was widely used, as well as cigarettes and fire. Bottles (often broken), gun barrels, knives, snakes, vermin, and hot eggs were thrust up men's rectums and women's vaginas. The screening teams whipped, shot, burned, and mutilated Mau Mau suspects.²³

Anderson remarks that such details were 'well known' throughout both Kenya and Britain and that there is 'massive documentary record of abuse, excessive force and violence'.²⁴ Campaigns against such violence were launched in Britain and by 1956 'an increasingly vociferous lobby of Labour MPs' were calling for the Emergency régime to end and camps to close. No action was taken, however, because there was 'no crisis of political confidence'²⁵ until Baring's government attempted to cover up an attack at Hola detention camp, in which eleven detainees were murdered by wardens. White settler rule in Kenya was then finally discredited. Anderson remarks that 'the culpability of the most senior officials in Kenyan administration was [now] apparent' and independence was the inevitable outcome, as Parliament could no longer 'find any reason to support the actions of the Kenyan government'.²⁶

Regarded as the 'chief protagonist' of Mau Mau, Jomo Kenyatta was vilified by British officials but his trial in 1952 had been rigged and he was released in 1961.²⁷ Kenyatta's campaign for Kenya's freedom elicited an immediate public response, so that *uhuru* became 'the slogan for all Africans in Kenya'.²⁸ As Elkins observes:

²³ Elkins, p.66.

²⁴ Anderson, p.310, p.307.

²⁵ Anderson, p.326.

²⁶ Anderson, p.327.

²⁷ Elkins, p.357.

²⁸ Elkins, p.359.

the drawn-out and bloody struggle against the detainees and villagers, together with the irrepressible demands of the more radical African nationalists, forced the British to abandon any gradualist approach toward decolonization in Kenya.²⁹

By 1963, therefore, Kenyatta and the Kenya African National Union (KANU) had negotiated Kenya's independence from British colonial rule.

The area of East Africa that became the British Crown Colony, Kenya, in 1920 had already been explored in the nineteenth century but the Western sense of Kenya as a country has largely been established by twentieth-century writers of travel and fiction, not all of whom are Western. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in particular is renowned among African writers for his analysis in fiction of the Mau Mau conflict and independence and the impact on Kenyan societies.³⁰ Wilfred Thesiger's *My Kenya Days* (1994)³¹ has not attained the prominence of narratives by Karen Blixen, Joy Adamson and Elspeth Huxley,³² but he offers a perspective on the country that is uniquely engaging, and his writing about Kenya raises important issues about the nature of travel writing itself.

Many twentieth-century representations of Kenya are centred on the white settler community, the best known account being Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* (1937). Blixen's narrative focuses on her life in the Ngong hills, with brief glimpses of Kenya's infamous white community. As Elkins observes, early white settlers were popularly regarded as dissolute:

these privileged men and women lived an absolutely hedonistic lifestyle, filled with sex, drugs, drink, and dance [...] they congregated in the Muthaiga Club, also known as the Moulin Rouge of Africa [...] part of the highlands became the notorious Happy Valley.³³

²⁹ Elkins, p.356.

³⁰ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2008); *Petals of Blood* (New York: Penguin, 2005); *Matigari* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998).

³¹ Wilfred Thesiger, *My Kenya Days* (London: HarperCollins, 1994). Further references to this text will be given to *MKD* and page number/s in the text.

³² Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen), *Out of Africa* (London: Putnam, 1937); Elspeth Huxley, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice: A Journey Through East Africa* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948); *With Forks and Hope: An African Notebook* (New York: W. Morrow, 1964.); Joy Adamson, *Born Free: The Full Story* (London: Pan, 2000).

³³ Elkins, p.11.

The importance of Blixen's life in Kenya is such that her home, situated in what is now called the Karen district of Nairobi, is a popular tourist destination.³⁴ More recently, white Kenyans have focused on wildlife conservation and there was a huge response in the West to Joy Adamson's narrative, and the resulting 1966 film, *Born Free*. Many more recent works by conservationists such as Iain and Oria Douglas-Hamilton, Richard Leakey and Jonathan and Angela Scott indicate that whites in Kenya are keen to emphasise their social responsibility.³⁵ *My Kenya Days* reveals a very different Kenya, one in which the white community is peripheral. Thesiger is interested in the most remote areas of Kenya and he avoided the White Highlands for some time, having no interest in identifying himself with what Evelyn Waugh describes as an 'equatorial Barsetshire'.³⁶ Thesiger does make friends in the white community but, as is typical of his narratives, he refers to Western friends only fleetingly.

Thesiger is renowned for his travels in remote areas and for producing exclusive portraits of traditional communities before modernisation and political unrest brought permanent change. His reputation as an explorer and travel writer has given his work a special quality and this is reflected in his account of life in Kenya, published in 1994, by which time he was regarded as one of the last traditional explorers. Thesiger is a transitional figure whose ideas of travel and British authority were in some ways hangovers from the nineteenth century, although his skills in photography and writing reflect twentieth-century trends and techniques. It is not unusual for travellers to prefer travelling in remote areas, in landscapes apparently untouched by modern civilisation, such as empty deserts, mountain ranges and dense jungle. But the illusion is generally shattered when contact with people is made, as they often reveal their familiarity with modern influences, as when the Ukit people, in the jungles of Borneo, ask O'Hanlon and James Fenton to teach them the 'seven-step disco'.³⁷ Thesiger's preference for remote areas is not unusual, therefore, but where he departs from his contemporaries is in his preference for living as the only European among Arabian or

³⁴ Karen Blixen Museum, Nairobi
<http://www.karen-blixen.dk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31&Itemid=28&lang=en> [accessed 9 November 2009].

³⁵ Iain and Oria Douglas-Hamilton, *Battle for the Elephants* (London: Doubleday, 1992); Richard Leakey, *Wildlife Wars: My Battle to Save Kenya's Elephants* (London: Macmillan 2001); Jonathan Scott and Angela Scott, *The Big Cat Diary: Lion* (London: HarperCollins, 2002).

³⁶ Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh Abroad: Collected Travel Writing* (London: Everyman's Library, 2003), p.330.

³⁷ Redmond O'Hanlon, *Into the Heart of Borneo: An Account of a Journey Made in 1983 to the Mountains of Batu Tiban with James Fenton*, 1st published 1984 (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p.177.

African people, at times adopting the local dress and language. He affiliates himself with his companions as closely as possible both in his external appearance and by forging close emotional ties with his friends.

Thesiger chose to travel in remote areas because he desired the thrill of exploration. He often distanced himself from civilisation, seeking out remote, undeveloped areas such as the Rub' al-Khali,³⁸ the Iraqi Marshes or northern Kenya. He could not always be 'the first Englishman' to travel in certain areas,³⁹ but he often added to Western knowledge considerably by travelling more extensively in an area than anyone who had preceded him.⁴⁰ He had specific ideas about what constituted genuine exploration and the most appropriate methods of travel, insisting that the use of cars and other modern technology detached travellers from the cultures they pass through.⁴¹ Thesiger chose to live abroad for much of his life, becoming involved in the lives of his travelling companions and in their communities. He settled in Kenya permanently in 1978 and this marked his retirement from frequent travel.

Thesiger's life in Kenya spanned a period of over thirty years, from 1959–1994, but *My Kenya Days* is a relatively short narrative. Thesiger explains that the narrative was constructed 'under considerable difficulties', due to his failing sight (*MKD*, ix). Thesiger dictated the text to Alexander Maitland and observes that 'I have never dictated anything before and in consequence the style of this book differs from the previous books which I wrote down and [...] read and re-read at my leisure' (*MKD*, ix). But this brief narrative provides an important perspective on Kenya: it is quite unlike any other twentieth-century account of life in Kenya. Thesiger's past experience also reveals a unique and romantic approach to travel. The focus of the narrative is predominantly on Thesiger's experiences rather than Kenyan culture but, although he does not seek to teach his readers about Kenya, a good deal about the country and its peoples may be derived from his attitudes and beliefs and much too can be discerned from his photographs. His approach raises a categorisation issue: whether *My Kenya Days* is a travel narrative or a personal memoir; this in turn bears on the hybrid nature of all travel writing.

³⁸ The Empty Quarter, Saudi Arabia.

³⁹ Alexander Maitland, *Wilfred Thesiger: The Life of the Great Explorer* (HarperCollins Publishers: London, 2006), p.187.

⁴⁰ Alexander Maitland, 'Thesiger, Sir Wilfred Patrick (1910–2003)', in *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/92678>> [accessed 30 October 2009].

⁴¹ Wilfred Thesiger, *Arabian Sands*, 1st published 1959 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p.38.

I shall analyse Thesiger's representation of his experiences in Kenya and discuss how his work compares with that of his contemporaries, who, given his long life, range from Waugh to O'Hanlon. Since most travel narratives involve a journey and a return, Thesiger's description of Maralal, his home in northern Kenya, gives the narrative a special status. And it is an unusual and challenging text. Thesiger responded little to new ways of thinking about the world, maintaining the opinions with which he had grown up and this adherence to the traditions of his youth is expressed in a number of ways. Writing in the late twentieth century, Thesiger remains an unreconstructed admirer of British imperial rule, although he seems unaware, as many people were before 2005, of the full scale of atrocities in Kenya. Potentially embarrassing is his disregard for modern sensibilities concerning race, indicated in his admiration for the appearance of his companions and an emphasis on specific racial characteristics. Thesiger's relationship with the men and boys he engages as travelling companions has repeatedly raised the question of his sexuality. In contrast to contemporaries such as Redmond O'Hanlon, however, whose erotic constructions of women are deliberate, sexually suggestive images in Thesiger's narratives or photography may seem obvious to us now, but are never expressed explicitly. Thesiger's earlier texts may provide compelling evidence for an unacknowledged agenda but it is difficult to positively discern such elements *My Kenya Days*.

Thesiger's status as a travel writer is, then, unconventional even within a genre whose conventions are difficult to determine. He identified himself as a traveller rather than a writer and he did not settle for long in any one place until he was sixty-eight. He then chose Maralal as his home, making short annual visits to London each year to see friends and still making brief visits to other countries. Thesiger's descriptions of Kenya reveal a personal, insider perspective, unique from earlier texts in his decision to live apart from Western communities in Kenya, as well as the length of time he spent in the country. More than this, Thesiger's perspective, shaped by his unusual life as an explorer, constructs a Kenya that no other Westerner could describe.

My Kenya Days

My Kenya Days describes Thesiger's life in Kenya from 1959–1993: no other writer covers such a long period in the country's history. His travels there began with a short trip in 1959 and he returned frequently over the next twenty years. From 1978–1994 he lived in Maralal. Thesiger's style of travelling in Kenya is informed by his past experience of

trekking in Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia and Iraq but, in some respects, the narrative which results is quite distinct from his previous works. The text is a short account at just over two hundred pages, including ninety-eight pages of photographs. It is one of Thesiger's briefest narratives although it covers a period of over thirty years. Most of the text describes his experiences trekking from 1959–1978. The last section describes his life at Maralal, where he lived with the friends he had made among the Samburu and Turkana tribes. Of Thesiger's travelling companions Lawi Leboyare and Erope, who joined his group when they were boys, remained longest with him; Erope left Maralal to 'join the Nyoroko [...] outlaws' (*MKD*, 167) and in 1978 Thesiger bought land and worked with Lawi to build a house which they shared (*MKD*, 167–68). This section of the narrative has a special significance in Thesiger's accounts of his life since he had never previously settled in a home of his own.

As I indicated in Chapter Four, travel writing often overlaps with biography, autobiography or memoir. This combination is characteristic of Thesiger's narratives in general but has a special status in *My Kenya Days* as his life in Kenya is discussed in more detail than Kenyan culture, politics, history or geography. But all travel narratives place the traveller at the centre of the narrative and Thesiger comes over as far from self-centred or preening. And, in a sense, he himself becomes part of Kenyan culture. *My Kenya Days* is a travel memoir which records how Kenya became Thesiger's home. His introduction gives a brief overview of his life until 1959, detailing his search for a community where he could live on a long term basis:

In Northern Darfur, then in Arabia and now in the Marshes, for the third time the life I cherished had been taken from me. I now hoped to find it elsewhere, possibly among the camel-owning tribes of northern Kenya. (*MKD*, 9)

Thesiger sets his narrative up as a search for a permanent home. *My Kenya Days* is not a typical travel narrative and its author was not a typical twentieth-century traveller. I have indicated that all travel writers are, in some sense, the creators of the countries through which they travel, and Thesiger presents a Kenya which no one else could have seen in the same way.

My Kenya Days was dictated to Alexander Maitland and Thesiger observes that ‘almost every passage had to be read to me both in its original form and again several times to revise it’ (*MKD*, ix). This technique seems to explain, at least partially, why Thesiger’s travel memoir seems like ‘a catalogue of the places and animals he saw’.⁴² Other texts such as *Arabian Sands* and *The Marsh Arabs* include more detail and passages of reflection or analysis. It is clear, however, that Thesiger’s main concern in *My Kenya Days* was accuracy, rather than elaboration. His insistence on ‘authorising’ the final product by painstaking revision means that only the essentials that his memory or notes can verify remain.

Thesiger is not then prepared to make things up: no reportage is free from subjectivity but he tries to be as faithful as possible to the facts. The difficulty of remembering events was eased to some degree by Thesiger’s diaries and letters, which help him recall even his earliest journeys. And it is Thesiger’s first long trek, made in 1960, which is related in most detail. He had wanted to travel in the Northern Frontier District (NFD) since he was a boy (*MKD*, 11) and his first trek in Kenya is important to him as the fulfilment of a long-held ambition. His first sight of Lake Turkana, then Lake Rudolf, was particularly memorable: ‘Few other sights have made a greater impact on me’ (*MKD*, 19). Marking the journey as the fulfilment of a boyhood dream, like his earlier meeting with the Sultan of Aussa, is a way of retaining that boyishness into manhood, and this gives the journey a significance which underpins a whole life.

Thesiger’s description of the first trek is most detailed, establishing its paradigmatic nature. The travelling conditions on that journey set a pattern for later treks:

As on all my journeys travelling on foot with animals in Kenya, we lived simply [...] we had a tent but seldom used it [...] sometimes we kept going without a break, and occasionally we travelled at night to avoid the heat. (*MKD*, 15–16)

Thesiger made numerous treks in Kenya between 1960–1978, mainly in the NFD which covered the north and west of Kenya and which, on independence in 1963, was divided between the modern provinces of the Rift Valley and Eastern Province. The areas in which Thesiger travelled were not easy to access, if not actually unknown. Few travel writers

⁴² Samantha Weinberg, ‘Africa Casts its Spell’, *The Times*, 11 April 1994, p.35.

have chosen to travel within the more remote districts of Kenya in which it is difficult to obtain permission to travel and in which there is a high risk of violence.

Thesiger's accounts of his treks are punctuated by anecdotes of various kinds, often referring to people whom he met or travelled with. He describes a number of his Kenyan companions: Erope is most prominent in the text, being both bold and lively. His practical jokes are memorable, as on the occasion he made

some realistic lion-prints with his fist, a foot or two from the head of [an] unpopular Game Ranger corporal who was still asleep under his blanket. When the corporal got up and saw them he exclaimed, 'Great God, look at that!' and was laughed at. (*MKD*, 135–36)

Thesiger's remarks about Joy Adamson are particularly memorable. He observes that he 'liked and respected [George] Adamson very much' but found Joy's behaviour intolerable. He describes a visit to their home at Isiolo when Joy vehemently ordered George into town: 'I don't care about your guests. Get in the car!' Thesiger, being deliberately provocative, claims that he 'wondered why [George] had not taken her out into the bush and shot her' (*MKD*, 20). Clearly he chooses his anecdotes carefully; he is fully aware of the outrageousness of his remark, both because it is misogynist and because of Adamson's popularity with her Western audience, due to the impact of her books and Virginia McKenna's portrayal. Thesiger appears to relish challenging his readership's perceptions.

Thesiger's journeys are also enlivened by details which still remain vivid in his memory. He recalls dramatic tableaux, such as six Turkana elders under a tree 'sitting on their wooden headstools which they use as pillows when they sleep. The only clothing they had between them were two European felt hats' (*MKD*, 34). One night Thesiger keeps watch over his camp after hearing lions nearby. No one is attacked but the lions do not leave for some time and Thesiger recalls the tension of watching: 'each time I switched on my torch the beam eventually picked up their eyes' (*MKD*, 61).

Thesiger had not initially intended to devote much time to Kenya. After making a few treks in the NFD and the Maasai Steppe he 'felt that [he] had seen all [he] wanted to of the NFD, and consequently of Kenya'. He had 'no interest in the European settlements in the White Highlands and other parts of the country' (*MKD*, 86). In 1963 Thesiger left Kenya to travel

in Iran and Afghanistan. He returned in 1968 for a short visit and, in 1969, made another trek to Lake Turkana. Thesiger was, then, a privileged traveller in Kenya with a number of influential contacts such as the District Commissioner at Moyale, George Webb, who organised travel permits for him when Kenya was still under British administration. After 1963 Thesiger benefited from the period before British Game Wardens were succeeded by African Wardens, receiving numerous invitations from friends working on Kenyan and Tanzanian game reserves (*MKD*, 38, 55, 152). These friends often asked Thesiger to accompany them on safaris, or to assist them in the national parks, as when he patrolled Meru at Peter Jenkins's request (*MKD*, 143). Rodney Elliot offered Thesiger a post as an Honorary Game Warden in 1970 and asked him to patrol the Uaso Nyiro river 'where Somali poachers were active' (*MKD*, 132). These requests allowed Thesiger to continue travelling freely.

In the context of Thesiger's career as a traveller, however, his journeys in Kenya became more conventional, at least in the sense that they were undertaken within a European framework, like his patrols in Darfur with the Sudan Political Service.⁴³ Many of Thesiger's other journeys had been independent of such structures. He had organised his own expeditions and travelled with a considerable amount of freedom in remote areas of the Middle East. In Kenya, however, Thesiger accepted inevitable changes to the character of his travels, even to the point where he agreed to use a car, agreeing that 'it would have been ridiculous' to continue travelling with camels when he 'could equally well use a Land Rover' (*MKD*, 161). His previous journeys resulted in remarkable narratives of the Bedu and Ma'dan, providing intimate glimpses into their worlds. The significance, and poignancy, of *Arabian Sands* and *The Marsh Arabs* lies in the fact that the communities they depict changed beyond recognition in Thesiger's lifetime. His journeys in Kenya, a colonial creation, cannot unearth similarly obscure communities and *My Kenya Days* does not choose to compete with Peter Spencer's and Nigel Pavitt's specialist studies of the Samburu.⁴⁴ Thesiger specifically recommends Pavitt's book, *Samburu* (1991), to which Thesiger wrote the foreword, as a 'definitive account of this tribe' (*MKD*, 164), referring his readers to the experts, aware that the special nature of his Kenyan narrative is not defined by its anthropological observations.

⁴³ Thesiger, *Life*, pp.196–97.

⁴⁴ Nigel Pavitt, *Samburu* (London: Kyle Cathie, 1991), Paul Spencer, *The Samburu: A Study of Gerontocracy*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2003).

My Kenya Days offers a challenge to twentieth-century representations of Kenya which have come to be regarded as typical and I have briefly described popular perceptions of Kenya in the 1920s and 30s. Glimpses of this society appear in Blixen's *Out of Africa* and Beryl Markham's *West with the Night* (1942).⁴⁵ Later representations of Kenya focus on conservation and I have already mentioned that Joy Adamson's *Born Free* is prominent among such texts for her pioneering work with big cats. Elspeth Huxley's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1948) and *With Forks and Hope* (1964) also raise awareness of conservation issues in Kenya, highlighting the damage caused by hunting and poaching. Many subsequent representations of Kenya, both in narratives and documentaries, also focus on the theme of conservation.

Thesiger's accounts of rural Kenya challenge representations which place white communities, and their preoccupations, at the centre of the narrative. He describes a rural country, largely unmodernised, where few whites live. Kenya's fascination for Thesiger is that parts of the country are still inhabited by traditional rural communities which have not yet been transformed by modernisation. The existence of such remote areas enables him to travel, for the most part, in his own way. Although a completely modernised Kenya would have little attraction for Thesiger, however, he does value the presence of some other Westerners with whom he can socialise (*MKD*, 169–71).

Thesiger also challenges popular opinions about conservation in a deliberately confrontational manner. He has little time for the Adamsons' work with lions and other big cats, not because he does not care about conservation, but because he is frustrated by the counterproductive impact of certain fashions in conservation. Thesiger disapproves of 'the whole wave of anthropomorphic sentiment [...] about lion' (*MKD*, 63), insisting that the Adamsons' acclaimed conservation techniques place too much reliance on human contact, giving animals the confidence to approach and attack humans (*MKD*, 62–63). He is also frustrated that the sentiments generated by *Born Free* prevented wardens from protecting endangered species, such as Sable antelopes, because lions could no longer be killed without causing public outrage (*MKD*, 65). Frank McLynn denounces Thesiger's opinions

⁴⁵ Beryl Markham, *West with the Night: Autobiographical Reminiscences Mainly of Flying in Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1942).

as ‘untenable and out-of-date’⁴⁶ but, in fact, conservationists acknowledge that predators that have lost their instinctive fear of humans are a danger.⁴⁷

Thesiger’s journeys in Kenya retain some of the special qualities of his past travels, such as his friendships with the local men who accompanied him. Of course, travel writers are often accompanied by one or more locals as guides: O’Hanlon, for example, often engages a team of porters, cooks and hunters. Thesiger’s companions had similar rôles but there was a greater intensity in his relationship with them and some became his close friends. On the whole, he thought of these men and boys as his ‘followers’ (*MKD*, 143), but he refers to the younger Kenyan men as ‘sons’.⁴⁸ His attitude has led to Asher’s comments about his ‘“gang-leader” tendencies’⁴⁹ or Eric Newby’s more irreverent simile of ‘a housekeeper in some stately home’ on witnessing Thesiger rationing sugar to his cook.⁵⁰ Thesiger seems to have wavered between egalitarian and authoritarian behaviour, alternating between friendship and a rather grand attitude. His contemporaries tend to avoid both, anxious to avoid the stigma of authoritarianism.

Thesiger’s experience as an amateur doctor in Iraq also introduces a special aspect to his travels in Kenya, although his rôle is less distinctive than in the Marshes. Travel writers often deploy what medication they have; O’Hanlon, for example, buys large stocks of medical supplies for this purpose.⁵¹ Similarly, Thesiger was given ‘medicines and [...] much useful advice’ in Kenya by the doctor ‘then in charge of Maralal hospital’ (*MKD*, 33), Dr Peter Green (my grandfather). Dr Green states that the ‘only medicine I ever remember giving him was Aureomycin eye ointment’ which was given out ‘liberally as eye disease was so prevalent’. Green recalls that he ‘may also have given him aspirin tablets’ but other drugs, such as antimalarials, would not have been given out for general distribution as, ‘used indiscriminately [they] could cause other problems’. It was apparently ‘common for travellers and any others working in isolated areas where there were few or no medical facilities to carry simple medicine, dressings etc. and help where

⁴⁶ Frank McLynn, ‘The Wild Man of Africa’, *Guardian*, 23 April 1994, p.27.

⁴⁷ Chris Haslam, ‘African Lion Encounters: A Bloody Con’, *The Sunday Times*, 10 February 2008, p.19.

⁴⁸ Maitland, p.448.

⁴⁹ Asher, p.49.

⁵⁰ Newby, p.247.

⁵¹ Redmond O’Hanlon, *Congo Journey*, 1st published 1996 (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p.278.

they could'.⁵² In this respect, therefore, Thesiger does not stand out from other lay medical figures.

More unusually, however, Thesiger continued to perform circumcisions, as he had done in Iraq. He did not perform a variety of operations as previously but it is highly unorthodox for unqualified travellers to perform any sort of surgery. Thesiger's younger contemporaries do not contemplate anything so advanced. Green is sceptical of Thesiger's claims, remarking that

I never heard of him [...] [performing circumcisions] in Samburu and I never saw any evidence of it – and I am sure in all our many widely spread travels [...] we would have heard of his work of this nature.⁵³

It is possible, however, that Thesiger did perform circumcisions after Green had returned to Britain in 1975; there is certainly some evidence that he did so among the Samburu. An acquaintance, Timothy Lemargeroi, remembers that Thesiger 'became embroiled in a series of disputes with local administration officials' who had appointed a witchdoctor to perform the operation among Samburu boys. As in Iraq, the 'unhygienic and clumsy methods [...] caused pain and disease' and, as the district officers did not respond to the situation, Thesiger performed the circumcisions instead.⁵⁴ For whatever reason, however, Thesiger chooses not to mention these events. The surgery to which he refers in *My Kenya Days* concerns the Turkana, one of the few tribes in Kenya who do not perform ritual circumcision. It was difficult for Turkana in positions of authority to exert command over members of other tribes in which uncircumcised men held the status of children. Thesiger performed the operation for those who saw circumcision as a practical necessity rather than a symbolic rite of passage (*MKD*, 82). Apart from accounts written by doctors, conducting surgery is unique to Thesiger's narratives.⁵⁵ Professional accountability has significantly increased within the twentieth century and it would be very risky for travellers to act as Thesiger did.

⁵² Personal communication, 26 November 2007.

⁵³ Personal communication, 26 November 2007.

⁵⁴ Jonathan Clayton discusses the Samburu in the following article: 'Thesiger would have wanted to come back and die among us, says his Samburu "adopted son"', *The Times*, 11 October 2003, p.24.

⁵⁵ Paul White, *Jungle Doctor* (Sydney: G. M. Dash, 1942); Thomas D. Rees, *Daktari: A Surgeon's Adventures With the Flying Doctors of Africa* (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 2004).

The final chapters of *My Kenya Days*, ‘At Home’ and ‘Kenya, My Sanctuary’, express Thesiger’s sense of acceptance in a foreign country. This is the conclusion which he has set up for his narrative: he is satisfied with a retirement which reflects the maverick nature of his career as a traveller. Thesiger ends *The Life of my Choice* by reinforcing his reputation as ‘the last explorer in the tradition of the past’, having travelled ‘in unexplored regions [...] just in time’.⁵⁶ *My Kenya Days* shows that, as far as possible, Thesiger continued travelling as he wished and retired to the community of his choice. The unorthodox nature of Thesiger’s retirement, the fact that he composes his narrative while still living the life of his choice, adds a carefully constructed romance to his narrative which is expressed in its final lines: ‘I have come to regard Maralal as my home. It is here, among those whose lives I share daily, that I hope to end my days’ (*MKD*, 210).

This is the ending which Thesiger’s introduction points towards but the symmetry of such an outcome is denied him. In the event, Thesiger did not remain in Kenya until his death, although at the time of writing he was, of course, unaware that his Maralal life would soon end. But, in any case, his descriptions of a simple, idyllic existence omit some important details, not least among which is the fact that he had ‘no idea’ if his friends had any ‘genuine affection’ for him.⁵⁷ Asher and Maitland have both commented on the fact that the men who called themselves Thesiger’s sons were taking advantage of his wealth and Thesiger admits that he gave them ‘hundreds of thousands of pounds’⁵⁸ towards business ventures ‘that were almost inevitably doomed to failure’.⁵⁹ Frank Steele, a close friend of Thesiger’s, told Asher that he had warned Thesiger that ‘when the money ran out I’d be very doubtful if they would look after him’ and that he could well end up ‘as a poor white in Maralal cadging beds and meals off such people as will help him’.⁶⁰ Thesiger did not mind giving his money away, telling Maitland that he did not ‘regret any of it’; he was mindful that his generosity obtained him acceptance and was not apparently concerned about becoming poor.⁶¹ But it was perhaps fortunate that he decided to remain in Britain after 1994 when he still had the means to take up residence at an exclusive retirement home. Until his closest friends died, however, Thesiger appeared more or less content with the price he seemed expected to pay for not having to live alone in Britain.

⁵⁶ Thesiger, *Life*, p.443, pp.442–444.

⁵⁷ Asher, p.516.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Maitland, p.449.

⁶⁰ Asher, p.517.

⁶¹ Maitland, p.450.

The Narrative of Photography

Thesiger's description of Kenya's terrain and even, to some extent, the people he met, is often less detailed than in previous narratives but *My Kenya Days* is about Thesiger finding a home in Kenya. His rather sparse descriptions have the effect, therefore, of inviting the reader to feel as much at home as Thesiger himself, to feel that the country is actually familiar. Similarly, the people Thesiger meets are presented as if they are people we already know. Eropo and Lawi are most clearly characterised, Eropo by his boldness and initiative and Lawi by his relationship to Thesiger whom he refers to as his father. Nevertheless, the lack of detail may seem frustrating since he met many people from a variety of different tribes – Rendille, Samburu, Turkana, Pokot and Maasai – and his account gives almost no indication of the cultural distinctions between tribes.

But there are photographs to supplement the text: these convey some idea of Kenyan and Tanzanian terrain and provide distinctions among different tribes. Like the narrative itself, the photographs are the result of collaboration. They were selected by Ron Clark, who had compiled Thesiger's photographic collection, *Visions of a Nomad* (MKD, x). The landscapes contrast lush vegetation with arid plains or craggy mountains; they show, too, some of the wildlife inhabiting these areas. A variety of people – elders, women, warriors and initiates – are portrayed, indicating distinctions in status and how these are expressed in different tribes and there is a noticeable variety in tribal dwellings.

Thesiger's images are dramatic. Photographs are made dramatic by the contrast of light and shade and often by a subject's stance. Men hold spears at an angle to their body, presenting lines and shapes which draw the eye to the subject. An image of a young goat herd, taken from below, creates a striking composition: the herder's foot is prominent in the foreground, drawing the eye up the line of the body to the head, where it almost meets the point of the boy's spear in an 'A' shape, which is reinforced by the herder's sail-like shift (MKD, 26). Others stand dramatically in repose with one leg bent, heel crooked in thigh. Images of warrior groups bristle with spears, sticks, bows and arrows, which divide the figures. Boys undergoing the ritual of circumcision are wrapped in black hides, their faces often bright with paint. Those who look at the camera smile or seem uncertain. Others look away from the lens, some staring intently into the distance, apparently oblivious to the photographer.

Women rarely appear in any of Thesiger's texts but Clark selects a number of images of women for *My Kenya Days* which are as dramatic and attractive as those of men, unlike those which appear in *Arabian Sands* or *The Marsh Arabs*. In one a Maasai woman stands in profile, half-turned to the camera so that her face, which has an uncertain expression, is thrown into a sharp relief of light and shadow. This same contrast defines gaps and folds in her clothes, which are draped and pinned in layers. Individual items of her complex jewellery are discernible: wire bangles cover the length of her forearm and she has many hoops of beads and loops of wire around her neck and head. From her stance it is clear that she is pregnant and this gives the image greater potency and romance (*MKD*, 68). In another photograph a Turkana mother bends down to wash her child at the edge of a river. The child's back is to the camera and its wet limbs reflect the sunlight. The contrast between light and shade is not as distinct as in the picture of the Maasai woman, but the mother and child are alone against a background of water and trees and this gives importance to their ordinary but personal routine (*MKD*, 78).

The quality of Thesiger's photography is impressive. His sensitivity to light and form results in a collection of a hundred and forty-three vivid, attractive and often poetic photographs; the narrative would not be complete without them. Asher observes that 'Thesiger's monochrome photographs produced the same pristine, austere images that he sought so successfully to achieve in his writing'.⁶² They work, too, to provide individual touches that the words do not attempt.

Controversial Issues

Thesiger's apparent ignorance, or cavalier neglect, of modern sensibilities makes his writing controversial. Passages of *My Kenya Days*, therefore, may be uncomfortable for modern readers. Sometimes he seems unaware of modern sensibilities, as when he openly admires the appearance of tribesmen in Africa, describing the Maasai as 'remarkably beautiful' (*MKD*, 56) and the Samburu as 'a tall, strikingly handsome people' (*MKD*, 18). Conversely, Thesiger regards 'white as the least attractive colour for skin'⁶³ and claims proudly that he never photographed a European.⁶⁴ Admiration in a racial context is now generally perceived as patronising, hence racist. It is as distasteful to notice and praise

⁶² Asher, p.422.

⁶³ Thesiger, *Life*, p.167.

⁶⁴ Asher, p.423.

elements of racial difference as it is to criticise and Thesiger's reverse colour prejudice could be regarded as extreme.

Other travel writers have also behaved in an extreme fashion. In Botswana Naomi Mitchison made dramatic gestures, such as 'the symbolic juxtaposition of black and white skin, her hand on an African hand', drawing attention to the contrast in colour and the intimacy implicit in her action.⁶⁵ Had her friends been white Mitchison would not have felt the need to call attention to her intimacy with them. She affirms her equality with the Bakgatla tribe in a manner which re-emphasises the nature of the gap she believes she is attempting to bridge. Ardent admiration carries the stigma of patronage and, as I have indicated, Thesiger does not regard his travelling companions as his equals, having always considered himself their leader.⁶⁶ His admiration of other races may be uncomfortable for his modern readers, but it is given in a candid, even innocent, fashion which reveals that Thesiger does not see the need for a cautious approach to issues of race.

Thesiger's admiration for the British Empire is more prominent in *My Kenya Days* than in previous narratives. It is unusual for Thesiger to promote his political views but he has no apparent concept of any colonial injustices committed by a British administration:

I [grew up] very conscious and proud of the British empire, the most extensive that the world has ever seen. I myself am convinced that no empire in world history has been its equal in humanity and benign dedication to the welfare of its subjects.
(*MKD*, 7)

At the time of the book's publication Thesiger was eighty-four, as a writer contemporary with younger writers such as Murphy and O'Hanlon, but with a very different upbringing and an active rôle in British colonial administration, which gave a heavy bias to his perception of colonial rule. Thesiger is aware of the increase of 'anti-colonial feeling' (*MKD*, 7) in the twentieth century and this prompts him to comment on his admiration for the British Empire more explicitly than previously. Thesiger's views have elicited little criticism although they would be unacceptable if expressed by younger writers. Frank McLynn protests against the tendency for reviewers to gloss over Thesiger's controversial

⁶⁵ Jenni Calder, *The Nine Lives of Naomi Mitchison* (London: Virago Press, 1997), p.251.

⁶⁶ Asher, p.131.

opinions in the light of his popular reputation as ‘the last of the old-time explorers’.⁶⁷ Of course, this label is problematic as it is not really possible to determine any one person as the first or last of any given era, but Thesiger’s reactionary opinions make him unique as a traveller and a writer and, therefore, perhaps enhance his reputation rather than detracting from it.

Thesiger’s duties as a Game Warden in Kenya are unprecedented in modern travel literature, as he was mainly employed on anti-poaching patrols. Describing a trek from Uaso Nyiro to Kauro, Thesiger explains that Rodney Elliot had advised him ‘that if we did encounter Shifta, who were utterly ruthless, we should shoot them on sight’ (*MKD*, 136).⁶⁸ It is crucial to note that these patrols were undertaken in the context of conservation, but the aggressive nature of such activities, and the imperialistic connotations of white men being allowed to shoot Africans, even to protect animals, make it impossible for younger writers to produce narratives comparable to Thesiger’s.

There have been persistent speculations about the effect that Thesiger’s sexuality might have on his life and writing. His narratives and, more clearly, his photographs may reveal an unacknowledged agenda. Maitland suggests that Thesiger

viewed his male subjects as forbidden objects of desire, signalling his feelings for them by his choice of pose and his sensitive handling of light and shadow. The beauty of his images derived in part from the unconscious revelation of these suppressed feelings to the viewer, as much as from Thesiger’s skilful composition.⁶⁹

Thesiger made few explicit comments on the matter, claiming that ‘sex has been of no great consequence to me’.⁷⁰ He explains: ‘I might have been homosexual if I had been born in a different age but as it was I remained asexual’.⁷¹ *My Kenya Days* indicates that, with age, there is a change in Thesiger’s relationship towards his companions, as he becomes a father figure to younger men. This relationship is most obvious with Lawi Leboyare who

⁶⁷ Frank McLynn, p.27.

⁶⁸ It is worth noting that Rodney Elliot could not have been authorised to advise Thesiger to shoot *shifta*. The author’s father remembers that, under British administration, it was unlawful for civilians to be armed and that this legislation did not change after independence in 1963. Personal communication 23 July 2008.

⁶⁹ Maitland, p.84.

⁷⁰ Thesiger, *Life*, p.295.

⁷¹ Rory Stewart, ‘The Last Explorer – Or The First Hippy?’, *The Times*, 3 November 2007, p.9.

refers to Thesiger as his father (*MKD*, 167). Thesiger's relationship with Lawi is central to his later life in Kenya; without it he would probably not have been interested in settling permanently in Maralal, where several men, Laputa, Kibiriti and Lopego, also came to regard themselves as his sons.

There is nothing to suggest that Thesiger may have had sexual as well as paternal feelings towards Lawi or any others. The narrative does not convey the confusion evident in Naomi Mitchison's *Return to the Fairy Hill* (1966), which relates a broadly similar situation. Mitchison unsuccessfully attempts to hide her sexual attraction to a young Botswanan tribal chief, Linchwe II, by accepting his declaration that he regards her as his mother. Mitchison attempts to persuade her reader that her anxiety and jealousy originate in maternal feelings, although this is negated by her open admissions of 'longing to kiss him', or the equivocal claim that 'I was truly his mother, perhaps even closer'.⁷² Jenni Calder, Mitchison's biographer, observes that her relationship with Linchwe 'had all the emotional charge of a love affair'.⁷³

Thesiger does not so undermine his position. Several photographs of Lawi and other Kenyan boys could be interpreted as mildly provocative, suggesting that they are objects of attraction for Thesiger, but this is the only evidence of a possible conflict of feeling. As I have shown, Thesiger's skill at portraiture gives an aesthetic attraction to almost all of his subjects, whether men or women, known or unknown. The emotional bond between Thesiger and Lawi is clear, but if it is as intense or dependent as Mitchison's with Linchwe this is not evident. Thesiger is generally reluctant to discuss the issue of his sexuality or his relationship with his companions but he has answered suggestions of sexual attraction, at least with regard to his Kenyan companions:

If people want to think I'm sexually attracted to them, let them think it. It isn't true anyway. I mean I think they are attractive [...] but it doesn't mean [anything physical] [...] at eighty-three you can't be said to have any sexual feeling anyway, especially when you've had your prostate out.⁷⁴

⁷² Naomi Mitchison, *Return to the Fairy Hill* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1966), p.57.

⁷³ Calder, p.247.

⁷⁴ Asher, *Thesiger*, p.510.

The significant age gap allowed him to develop a paternal relationship with younger men and evidence of a conflict with private sexual feelings diminished with age. Such relationships, and Thesiger's decision to settle among the Samburu, are unique in modern travel writing. Even Mitchison, who had very close emotional links to Bakgatla at Mochudi, did not live permanently in Botswana. St John Philby, or Sheikh Abdullah, settled in the Middle East but, in the main, twentieth-century travellers return to their native culture, or at least live within a similar culture.

Political and Historical Issues

Thesiger makes a point of remarking that:

During my life I have never involved myself in politics nor indeed taken anything other than a superficial interest in them [...] The life I have led has seldom given me the opportunity to read a newspaper. (MKD, 209)

This statement does not appear to be much of an exaggeration. Thesiger shows little interest in most political issues or historical events that do not affect him directly. Events which have affected the Western world appear to have little impact on Thesiger's outlook, although the account of Haile Selassie's final years of power in *The Life of my Choice* indicates Thesiger's enduring interest in Ethiopia. He was particularly saddened by the Marxist coup and the manner of Haile Selassie's death.⁷⁵

Modern travel writers are rarely as detached from current affairs as Thesiger. This is perhaps a reflection of changes in social perception; travel writers wish to appear more aware of significant events in or near the countries in which they travel. Political and historical issues are often discussed in travel literature; in many cases it would now be considered inappropriate not to mention relevant issues. Murphy's work often revolves around political and social issues abroad such as the impact of AIDS, the 1994 elections in South Africa and the genocide in Rwanda. O'Hanlon highlights the distressed circumstances of many, as well as evidence of political corruption and intimidation.

When Thesiger began travelling in Kenya in 1959, the state of emergency precipitated by Mau Mau violence was still ongoing. He had no direct experience of Mau Mau violence, or

⁷⁵ Thesiger, *Life*, p.438.

the reprisals but the issue seems barely to intrude on his perception. He claims that ‘during the thirty years I have lived in Kenya, I have never encountered resentment of Europeans or latent hostility towards them as a result of Mau Mau’ (*MKD*, 145). Elkins and Anderson observe that ‘in Kenyatta’s Kenya there would be a deafening silence about Mau Mau’,⁷⁶ perhaps as a measure to ‘prevent [...] [the] country from descending into a civil backlash’.⁷⁷ Thesiger observed the effect of Kenyatta’s request for silence and appears to mistake this for forgiveness and a willingness to forget the past, although it is true that the resentment was deeply buried. Elkins observes that ‘if you ask former Mau Mau adherents today if they get along with their loyalist neighbours’ the initial response is: ‘we are Christians and [...] do not hate them’. In probing ‘a bit further’, however, the response changes: ‘I hate them [...] We all hate them’.⁷⁸ The formation of the Mungiki group, an organisation which also recruits through oathing ceremonies, indicates the lasting impact of Mau Mau. The recent turmoil within Kenya, of which the Mungiki were only a part, indicates the bitterness of resentments which have built up within Kenyan society over the years.

As with Mau Mau, Kenya’s independence in 1963 is mentioned only briefly by Thesiger and then only in the light of Britain’s diminishing empire, rather than as a seminal point in the history of Kenyan politics. Referring to the ceremony on Independence Day, Thesiger focuses on Britain’s perspective: ‘Prince Philip apparently turned to Jomo Kenyatta [...] and said to him: “Are you sure you wouldn’t like to change your mind?”’ (*MKD*, 8). Thesiger is silent on aspects of Kenyatta’s rule, such as the development of a one-party state, the coffee boom which helped stabilise the economy or potential coups which were suppressed in 1964 and 1971. Thesiger settled in Kenya at the same time that power changed hands between Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi, who only receives a passing mention in the text. Thesiger’s only comment on thirty years of independence is his observation that, under Kenyatta and Moi’s governments, Kenya has had ‘uninterrupted peace’ (*MKD*, 209) and that this has been disturbed by the reintroduction of a multi-party government: ‘over the past year, there have been more disturbances and more people killed than in the whole history of Kenya since Independence’ (*MKD*, 209).

⁷⁶ Anderson, p.336.

⁷⁷ Elkins, p.360.

⁷⁸ Elkins, p.367.

Thesiger's general world knowledge increased to some extent when his 'failing sight and consequent inability to read' forced him to spend more time listening to the radio (*MKD*, 209). The reports which had most impact on him relate to countries in which he has lived and travelled; he notes the 'chronic civil war' in the Sudan and the 'Iraqi and Iranian armies [...] fighting desperately in the Marshes of Iraq'.⁷⁹ He is appalled to hear of violent events in such areas. No comments are made in Thesiger's narratives about the Cold War, the Troubles in Ireland or the Bosnia-Serbia conflict. Thesiger makes specific mention of the 'chaos and bloodshed' (*MKD*, 209) in countries he has travelled in, all other events are only implicitly referred to in the phrase: 'Much of the world [...] is now in chaos'.⁸⁰

Writing at Home; The Structure of Travel Narratives

As Thesiger spent most of his time in Maralal his accounts of travelling through Kenya are coupled with descriptions of homelife, which are equally as distinctive and as unique. It is unusual for a modern travel narrative to be written in the country it is describing. Apart from returning home to families, professional travel writers also need to liaise with agents and publishers and most have some sort of base to return to. Murphy has spent long periods abroad, occasionally spending several months in one area, but her home is in Lismore, where she has lived all her life. Murphy's life, therefore, oscillates between her love of travel and her life-long home. O'Hanlon has lived in Oxford throughout his professional life and, while his journeys can span several months, even half a year, they are infrequent. For many travel writers, home is within their own culture, rather than among others, and in this Thesiger departed from the norm. Although he inherited his mother's flat in Chelsea it was not really a permanent base until 1994. Thesiger spent very little time there both before and after his mother's death, observing that: 'Ever since I left Oxford in 1933, I have never spent more than three, or occasionally four, months in England in any one year' (*MKD*, 209). Thesiger lived abroad permanently for most of his life, and only decided to live in Britain when he felt he no longer had a home at Maralal.

Thesiger is not the only travel writer to settle away from his own culture, but even those who do not live in their native country may still live in a Western culture: Jonathan Raban now lives in Seattle and Bill Bryson lives in Norfolk. William Dalrymple and his family,

⁷⁹ Thesiger, *Life*, p.442–43.

⁸⁰ Thesiger, *Life*, p.442.

however, live in Delhi, spending time each year in London, much as Thesiger did.⁸¹ Of course, Thesiger never lived abroad with a family of his own; he chose, even as an old man, to live as a lone European within a foreign culture far from family connections.

The details in the final chapters are more up-to-date than anything Thesiger has written previously and, in a way, they are more intimate because he is describing the life in which he is currently involved. Having settled down, Thesiger is able to enjoy more domestic activities. He describes the process of creating a small garden: ‘we planted bougainvilleas [...] they attracted sunbirds [...] Laputa hung a birdtable [...] the dawn chorus of birds [...] is varied and unforgettable (*MKD*, 186). His ‘nomadic life’ gave him ‘no opportunity to keep a dog’, but in Maralal, where they are kept ‘to guard [...] houses’, he lives in a house with three dogs (*MKD*, 188–9). More unusually Thesiger, who never showed any previous interest in family life, monitors the progress of the children who grow up around him. Anecdotes concerning children are an almost entirely new aspect of Thesiger’s writing and he seems fascinated by the novelty of the experience.

Thesiger’s writing describes his everyday life but the simplicity of his life is, in its way, exotic. As Maitland observes: ‘the romance of a famous English explorer living with African tribespeople in the wilds of northern Kenya added an exotic lustre to Thesiger’s already lambent image’.⁸² His lifestyle certainly does not correspond to life in Britain, particularly not with those of Thesiger’s social rank. Thesiger’s ‘basic way of life’ in Kenya reflects his previous experiences in the Middle East and, even as he got older, he preferred to live very simply (*MKD*, 190). David Attenborough draws attention to the fact that, even in old age, Thesiger was not surrounded by the usual comforts many Westerners have come to expect: he lived in a house ‘with mud walls [...] and a tin roof’ and slept on a bed covered in hide.⁸³ He ate simply: lunch usually consisted of ‘chopped liver in a thick soup with a bowl of rice’, dinner was ‘a large bowl of [...] *ugali* and chapattis which are eaten with a goat stew’ (*MKD*, 190–91). He observes that his acquaintances are surprised at his standards of living, but is not perturbed, maintaining that ‘the more possessions you own the more they rob you of your freedom’ (*MKD*, 207).

⁸¹ William Dalrymple, *William Dalrymple* <<http://www.williamdalrymple.uk.com/Pages/Biog.html>> [accessed 30 October 2009].

⁸² Maitland, p.447.

⁸³ David Attenborough, *Heart of a Nomad*, Channel 4, 1994.

Thesiger was aware of the dramatic potential of his simple life in Kenya. His decision to live at Maralal may have been considered as eccentric, given the comfortable life which was also available to him, but he valued the presence of other people much more than comfort. He spent ‘three months a year’ (*MKD*, 207) in the Chelsea flat he inherited from his mother but he was adamant that he would not wish to live there permanently. He preferred ‘to have people around [...] [him] all the time’⁸⁴ and could not feel attached to his home in Chelsea:

The flat itself and its contents have, in reality, meant comparatively little to me, and even less now that my mother and our housekeeper, Mollie Emtage, are dead. Laputa’s house [...] gives me shelter from the weather and has been an assembly point for the Africans with whom I live. (*MKD*, 207)

He knew the alternative to living in Kenya would be ‘to live alone in an empty flat, unable to read because of my failing sight’, and he considered this option ‘very desolate’ (*MKD*, 210).

These statements, made at the end of *My Kenya Days* are particularly poignant as Thesiger’s apparent contentment is undermined by subsequent events. The book was published in 1994 and Laputa died in the September of that year; Thesiger left Maralal at the end of 1994 for a short trip to Britain and did not return. He had stated that he hoped to remain at Maralal until the end of his life, but in April he heard of Lawi’s death from a stroke and chose to remain in Britain. He was able to find company within a retirement home and gave ‘a warm welcome’ to his many visitors, but circumstances had prevented him from living exactly as he chose, which provides something of a bitter contrast to the many years in which he had travelled and lived as he wanted.⁸⁵

Conclusion

Thesiger’s narratives are in many ways anomalous. He was contemporaneous with many travel writers of the twentieth century but seems to have had little connection with any of them. Several of Thesiger’s friends were writers, among them Gavin Maxwell, Gavin Young and John Verney, but Thesiger was not well-acquainted with writers such as Waugh, Patrick Leigh Fermor, Freya Stark or Rebecca West. He did know Laurens van der

⁸⁴ Asher, p.510.

⁸⁵ Maitland, p.456, p.458.

Post, but was unimpressed by his travels and could not recognise the van der Post he knew in the version presented in his work.⁸⁶ Thesiger's achievements are extreme, ranking with the explorers of the twentieth century rather than travel writers.

Frank Steele suggests that Thesiger was the last traveller 'in what is popularly and perhaps romantically thought of as exploration' and it is clear that Thesiger considered himself in this light.⁸⁷ As Wally Herbert argues, it is difficult to point to an individual as the first or last representative of any given era, if only because many people receive no public recognition.⁸⁸ In addition, although Thesiger's outlook has been described as 'old-fashioned' his style of writing places him firmly within the twentieth century.⁸⁹ Thesiger does not show any interest in the principles of postcolonial representation, particularly in light of his admiration for the British Empire, but his writing does not correspond to Victorian perceptions of foreign cultures. His narratives complicate his image by demonstrating that his outlook, although anachronistic to a degree, is not exclusively influenced by the past.

It is worth emphasising that the title of the narrative is *My Kenya Days*. The traveller is always central to his or her account of a country. Thesiger is peculiarly so in his narrative, although I have suggested he is not self-centred in a bad sense. Nevertheless, who Thesiger is matters in a special way. Paradoxically, the extreme anachronicity of Thesiger's outlook gives value to his account as a unique perspective among modern representations of Kenya. The text is the more outrageous in some ways for being published in 1994. Thesiger's travel texts were acclaimed in the middle of the twentieth century, although he was even then perceived as old-fashioned. Eric Newby showed that, while modern travellers such as himself were parodying the concept of the gentleman traveller, Thesiger was a twentieth-century expression of such a figure.⁹⁰ By the end of the century travel narratives consistently sought to apologise for colonialism through self-conscious expressions of cultural awareness, a characteristic which Thesiger's work could not share. Modern critics may find much to censure in Thesiger's representation of Kenya, but it retains its value by virtue of the unique character and perspective of its narrator.

⁸⁶ Maitland, p.253.

⁸⁷ Asher, p.521.

⁸⁸ Asher, p.520.

⁸⁹ Asher, p.3.

⁹⁰ Eric Newby, *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush*, 1st published 1958 (London: Picador, 1974), p.246.

It is important to understand Thesiger's career as a traveller in order to understand his life in Kenya. *My Kenya Days* is the culmination of a life of travel and Thesiger's life at Maralal is the final expression of his romantic fascination with remote places and the people who inhabited them. Few travel writers have produced such a narrative; most travel narratives stand alone as separate texts although there may be some connection with previous journeys such as Murphy's summer and winter travels in Siberia.⁹¹ But there is rarely a grand idea which runs through a travel writer's work, although Chatwin's *The Songlines* (1987) could not be fully appreciated without some insight into his personal theory about nomads and man's innate wanderlust.⁹² Grand narratives are increasingly becoming anachronistic: *My Kenya Days*, therefore, has a greater resonance for being produced at the end of the twentieth century, a sort of memorial to ways of thinking about both travel and living among other peoples which is no longer possible.

⁹¹ Dervla Murphy, *Through Siberia by Accident: A Small Slice of Autobiography* (London: John Murray, 2005) and *Silverland: A Winter's Journey beyond the Urals* (London: John Murray, 2006).

⁹² Bruce Chatwin, *The Songlines* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987).

Chapter Seven: Republic of Congo: Redmond O’Hanlon

Introduction

I indicated in Chapter One that Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), which drew upon his experience in Leopold II’s Congo Free State, has provided a metaphor for the Congo region in general and, indeed, for the whole of Africa.¹ I have also discussed how Brenda Cooper has analysed representations of Congo in modern fiction and I want to hold these versions of the Congo in mind as I consider Redmond O’Hanlon’s account of a six-month expedition in the People’s Republic of Congo, now the Republic of Congo. The country’s history has been eclipsed by that of its vast neighbour, the Democratic Republic of Congo, although both countries have experienced similar exploitation and abuses under both colonial and independent rule. The French colonisation of this region was initiated in an unorthodox manner by Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, a naturalised Frenchman and officer in the French navy. De Brazza had already gained recognition for his first expedition in this area, having followed the Ogowe River to its source, revealing a relatively easy access route to the Upper Congo basin and its resources, ‘desirable raw materials, especially rubber and ivory’.² France, therefore, extended its coastal territories inland, creating the colony of Gabon.

De Brazza, anxious to make a return journey to the Congo, was appointed to establish ‘two *stations hospitalières et scientifiques*’ in the Upper Congo region,³ but took this opportunity to negotiate treaties with Congo rulers. The most significant agreement was with the makoko of the Batéké, King Iloo. De Brazza negotiated a treaty in which the makoko ceded ‘his territory and his inheritance rights of supremacy’ to the French.⁴ Acting on the assumption that chiefs in the region were subordinate to the makoko, de Brazza also established treaties further upriver. H. L. Wesseling conjectures that the Africans may have thought that they were signing trade agreements, as the nature of European treaties was as yet unknown in this region.⁵ Stanley was attempting to establish treaties at the same

¹ Tim Youngs, ‘Africa/Congo: The Politics of Darkness’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.156–173 (p.157).

² H. L. Wesseling, *Divide and Rule: The Partition of Africa, 1880–1914*, 1st published in 1991 as *Verdeel en heers*, trans. by Arnold J. Pomerans (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger Publishers, 1996), p.85.

³ Wesseling, p.93.

⁴ Wesseling, p.94.

⁵ Wesseling, p.96.

time, but the unusual quality of de Brazza's activities was that he had not been authorised to enter into such negotiations, as Stanley had. De Brazza's success rested on the French government agreeing to ratify the treaties in retrospect. He launched a campaign in Paris which won widespread public support and the treaties were ratified in 1882.

Parallels can be drawn between the manner of French rule in the Congo and that of Leopold II and the Belgian government. France's territories in the region, Gabon, Moyen-Congo, Oubangui-Chari and Chad, were placed in the control of concessionary companies who organised trade. The period 1889–1930 saw severe abuses of labour and exploitation of Congolese resources. The concessionary companies focused on extracting 'as much wood, rubber, ivory, and other natural resources [...] as cheaply as possible'.⁶ As in the Belgian Congo, women and children were taken hostage in order to force labourers who could be 'worked to death' to fulfil quotas.⁷ There were frequent rebellions against this regime which were 'brutally suppressed by the colonial authorities', resulting in the near extermination of some ethnic groups.⁸

The concessionary era came to an end in 1930, at which time the Congolese were extended greater political representation by the French. This period saw the emergence of Congolese political figures, three of whom emerged with strong ethnic bases: Félix Tchicaya, a Vili, leading the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA); Jacques Opengault the leader of a Mbochi party, Mouvement Socialiste Africaine (MSA) and Félix Youlou from the Lari for the Union Démocratique pour la Défense des Interêts Africains (UDDIA). In 1957 UDDIA gained a margin of one seat in the territorial assembly so that, when the Congolese voted in the following year 'to join the French Community as an autonomous state', Youlou was made prime minister of the new republic, which gained full independence in 1960. Youlou was then elected president.⁹

Independent rule in the Republic of Congo has been marked by frequent, violent political unrest. Youlou was deposed in a coup in 1963 and replaced by Alphonse Massamba-Débat. Five years later Marien Ngouabi seized power but was assassinated in 1977 and

⁶ John F. Clark, *The Failure of Democracy in the Republic of Congo* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008), p.56.

⁷ Clark, p.56.

⁸ Clark, p.57.

⁹ Clark, p.64.

replaced by Joachim Yhombi-Opango. Throughout this period of political upheaval, the ‘great constant of the Congolese polity’ was monopartyism, which remained in place until 1992 when a new constitution introduced democratic rule.¹⁰ Frequent régime changes did little to alter the character of Congolese politics. Youlou established a single party state in 1962 in what was, at that time, the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), as opposed to Kasavubu’s Republic of Congo (Kinshasa). Ngouabi later established the ‘nominally Marxist-Leninist’ Parti Congolais du Travail (PCT), renaming the country the People’s Republic of Congo. Ngouabi’s successors continued with this system of government, which Clark identifies as ‘a cover for repressive rule by a clique of northern military officers’.¹¹

Redmond O’Hanlon travelled in the People’s Republic of Congo in 1989,¹² when it was under the rule of Denis Sassou-Nguesso. *Congo Journey* (1996) vividly portrays the impact of the Marxist régime on the Congolese people.¹³ Sassou-Nguesso has been the Republic’s longest-running president. After taking over from Yhombi-Opango in 1979, Sassou-Nguesso retained power of a Marxist People’s Republic until 1992. After thirty years of single party rule in the Congo, Sassou-Nguesso responded to ‘forces calling for political change’ which led to discussions on the possibility of government reform.¹⁴ The first democratic elections in what is now the Republic of Congo took place in 1992 and were won by Pascal Lissouba. Disputes over the result led to violence between government and opposition forces, including supporters of Sassou-Nguesso. At the time of the next elections in 1997 the conflict escalated into civil war. Sassou-Nguesso’s forces re-established his authority in Brazzaville and he then reinstated himself as president.

To date, Sassou-Nguesso has won all subsequent elections, both parliamentary and presidential. Opposition parties were banned from standing in the 2002 elections and many boycotted those in 2007 and 2009. Of the former Marxist régime, Clark remarks that

it is remarkable how little impact the heroic symbols, stirring Marxist rhetoric, and apparent commitment to social egalitarianism really had on Congo’s basic political

¹⁰ Clark, p.68.

¹¹ Clark, p.72.

¹² Andrew Brown, ‘Travelling in Hope’, *Guardian*, 8 November 2003, p.20.

¹³ Redmond O’Hanlon, *Congo Journey*, 1st published 1996 (London: Penguin Books, 1997). Further references are in the text as *CJ* with page number/s.

¹⁴ Clark, p.73.

culture [...] Congolese Marxism proved to be no more than a superficial layer covering the ingrained beliefs and habits of previous eras.¹⁵

Democracy in the Republic of Congo has proved to be similarly superficial. That O'Hanlon's narrative does not mention the shift from monopartyism to democracy indicates his awareness that life for ordinary citizens in the Congo was not improved by this apparent political turnaround. O'Hanlon recognises that politicians have not chosen to move away from the abusive and exploitative practices of the past, rendering the shift from a nominally Marxist state to a nominally democratic one immaterial.

Redmond O'Hanlon is a well-known travel writer of the same generation as Bruce Chatwin, Paul Theroux and Dervla Murphy, although he is the youngest of these. O'Hanlon has both a scientific and literary background: he studied English Literature at Oxford, but his interest in biology (as well as colonial texts) is reflected in his doctoral thesis: 'Changing Scientific Concepts of Nature in the English Novel, 1850–1920'. A version of this thesis was published as *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin: The Influence of Scientific Thought on Conrad's Fiction*.¹⁶ O'Hanlon has again taken up the post of Natural History editor at the *TLS*, a post he previously held from 1981–1996,¹⁷ and his enthusiasm for this subject permeates his travel narratives. He has developed a striking narrative style which, although it has affinities with that of a gentleman travel writer like Eric Newby, is characterised by the persistent threat of loss of control, whether physical, mental or emotional.

The comedy of O'Hanlon's narratives can be raucous; in the face of apparently serious dangers it seems to border on the inappropriate, as if O'Hanlon or his companions are desperately attempting to stave off fear with aggressive humour. His confessionality can be intense, revealing the mental and emotional strains of the journey which threaten to unbalance his mind. His intense, yet self-deprecatory manner goes along with an interest in travel narratives from the nineteenth century, many of which emphasise the exotic nature of the countries visited and the hardships and dangers of the journey.

¹⁵ Clark, p.71.

¹⁶ Redmond O'Hanlon, *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin: The Influence of Scientific Thought on Conrad's Fiction* (Edinburgh: Salamander Press, 1984).

¹⁷ Brown, p.20.

O'Hanlon's account of his journey in the People's Republic of Congo, *Congo Journey*, is unique among his works. The most recent, so far, of his jungle expeditions, it has a greater emotional intensity than earlier, more light-hearted texts, *Into the Heart of Borneo* (1984), or *In Trouble Again* (1988).¹⁸ Undertaken in 1989, the ostensible aim of O'Hanlon's *Congo Journey* is to look for mokélé-mbembé, said to be a sauropod living in Lake Télé in the northern regions of the Republic of Congo (*CJ*, 23). Numerous research groups have travelled to Lake Télé in an attempt to ascertain if any large creature lives in the vicinity. The zoologist Roy Mackal undertook two expeditions to find and, if possible, photograph the creature. In 1980 Mackal was accompanied by James Powell, who had already made earlier journeys to the lake, and, in 1981, by University of Arizona ecologist Richard Greenwell and Congolese biologist Marcellin Agnagna, later the companion of O'Hanlon.

The romantic and fantastic nature of such a journey appeals to O'Hanlon's expectations of jungle travel. In Venezuela, for example, the aim of his journey is to meet the Yanomami people, described by explorer Charles Brewer-Carias as 'the most violent people on earth'.¹⁹ The search for a dinosaur in the depths of an African forest has a similarly adventurous allure. The narrative, however, is not dominated by the mission to prove or disprove mokélé-mbembé's existence. O'Hanlon, and his American companion, Lary Shaffer, are overwhelmed by the living conditions of the people they meet in both urban and rural areas of the People's Republic of Congo. O'Hanlon is particularly affected when it is time to leave the three guides who have remained with him throughout the journey: Marcellin Agnagna and two of his relatives, Manou Burond and Nzé Oumar.

O'Hanlon's narrative reflects the horrific nature of what he and Lary saw but also explores his own reaction to evident suffering. The humour characteristic of all O'Hanlon's travel narratives becomes black comedy in the Congo. O'Hanlon is careful not to diminish the horror of the experience; the humour in the narrative reflects the hopelessness felt by O'Hanlon and Lary, unnerved by a horrific and 'unremitting 100-volt culture-shock' (*CJ*, 9). An external and an internal Congo emerge from the text, the internal Congo a combination of O'Hanlon's own cultural baggage and what he has learned about

¹⁸ Redmond O'Hanlon, *Into the Heart of Borneo: An Account of a Journey Made in 1983 to the Mountains of Batu Tiban with James Fenton*, 1st published 1984 (London: Penguin Books, 1985); *In Trouble Again: A Journey between the Orinoco and the Amazon*, 1st published 1988 (London: Penguin Books, 1989).

¹⁹ O'Hanlon, *In Trouble Again*, p.22.

Congolese religious beliefs. As the narrative becomes increasingly introspective, O'Hanlon appears to be approaching the brink of insanity, unable to work out how he can possibly return to his normal life in Oxford having witnessed such depths of suffering. O'Hanlon later observes that there are 'some things a man shouldn't see in his life if he wants to stay happy'.²⁰ His comment is made in reference to Lary's depression after the journey, but the narrative, which was not published until 1996, reveals that O'Hanlon too is haunted by his experiences.

Purpose

Although O'Hanlon is sceptical about mokélé-mbembé, he reasons that 'there must be *something* odd about Lake Télé' (*CJ*, 9) and, as he later explains in an interview with Don George, he had hopes that 'maybe there was a big turtle waiting or, perhaps, a huge lizard that might be named after me'.²¹ O'Hanlon and Lary identify themselves as scientists to government officials, fearing that a travel writer and his friend would not be able to obtain a visa extension to travel for several months (*CJ*, 18). As O'Hanlon nears the lake, however, he doubts that he will find anything to shed light on the mystery and, when the expedition arrives at Lake Télé, he finds that clarity of perception will be difficult to achieve. The lake is beautiful, 'numinous, so miraculously different [...] that for a moment I thought anything might happen in the apparently perfect circle between us and the far shore' (*CJ*, 363). At the same time, however, O'Hanlon notes that everything defies precision and invites illusion:

there were no marker-posts, no buoys, no floating logs [...] it was easy to imagine how an otter's tail flipped up in a dive might transform itself into the neck of a dinosaur. (*CJ*, 363)

And Marcellin's behaviour is particularly discouraging. He was originally engaged because of his claims to have seen the monster in 1983 (*CJ*, 10). Arriving at Lake Télé, O'Hanlon asks Marcellin:

'So where did you see the dinosaur?'

²⁰ Brown, p.20.

²¹ Don George, 'Gonzo Congo', *Salon.com*'s 'Wanderlust' <<http://www.salon.com/june97/wanderlust/lustletter970617.html>> [accessed 9 November 2009].

Marcellin paused, as if I had been impolite. ‘Over there,’ he said, pointing [...] off to the left. ‘Three hundred yards out. But who knows? Perhaps it was a manifestation [...] I’m not coming with you. *I hate this place*. I don’t feel well. I’ve had enough. I have malaria. I’m going to stay in my tent.’ (CJ, 369)

It is a discouraging anti-climax for O’Hanlon, who searches the lake without Marcellin’s help, accompanied only by Vicky and Doubla, guides hired at Boha, the nearest village to the lake. The most exciting point of the search is the sight of chimpanzees in the forest and, when he is on the lake, O’Hanlon cannot help noticing that the lake is only ‘around four foot deep’ a hundred yards from shore. He wryly concludes that, unless ‘there are deeper pools in the middle [...] Mokélé-mbembé is a very small dinosaur. Or perhaps he is just a very flat dinosaur’ (CJ, 372).

In the light of such an anti-climax O’Hanlon suggests an explanation for Marcellin’s alleged sighting of the creature some years previously:

to judge by Marcellin’s sighting, Mokélé-mbembé was a small dinosaur, perhaps small enough, in Marcellin’s case, to have been a Forest elephant characteristically crossing the lake by walking on the bottom, its trunk held curving up and forward as a breathing tube (Mokélé-mbembé’s neck) and only the hump of its back showing above the surface. (CJ, 376)

O’Hanlon’s suggestion seems plausible but he is more certain about his explanation of the sound of mokélé-mbembé, described by several Africans, ‘ooo-ooo-oooo’ (CJ, 378). He believes that this must be ‘the sound of chimpanzees’ carrying across the lake and this, he says wryly, feels like ‘a great discovery, my one contribution to science to date’ (CJ, 379). He is gratified to have deduced one logical explanation for the apparent phenomena at Lake Télé. His companions do not recognise the sound and are unnerved by it, but he points out that they are ‘not used to sound carrying across open spaces’ (CJ, 379) and have not taken the unfamiliar acoustic into account.

To some extent, O’Hanlon may be considered unlucky in his choice of scientific expedition. Peter Matthiessen points out that in 1986 the only two remaining animal myths of the Congo were the pygmy elephant and mokélé-mbembé.²² Matthiessen describes his journey accompanying David Western to investigate the alleged existence of pygmy

²² Peter Matthiessen, *African Silences*, 1st published 1991 (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), p.100.

elephants; a more plausible and successful expedition. Western determines that ‘the pygmy elephant is a juvenile forest elephant’ and publishes a paper to this effect, an extract of which appears in Matthiessen’s *African Silences* (1991), supplementing his account.²³ But, although the search for a pygmy elephant has a more satisfactory conclusion, it has none of the alluring fantasy of searching for a modern-day dinosaur, or discovering the source of such a myth.

As Tim Youngs points out, despite O’Hanlon’s curiosity there is not enough focus on the search for ‘a probably mythical dinosaur’ to create the driving force of the narrative, or the basis for a scientific expedition. As with Bruce Chatwin’s search for a piece of Patagonian mylodon skin, mokélé-mbembé is ‘the peg on which [O’Hanlon’s Congo] story is hung’.²⁴ On the other hand, Holland and Huggan suggest that O’Hanlon’s quests are serious, arguing that he ‘never loses sight of himself as a scientist’ and that his expeditions are ‘for Scientific purposes’.²⁵ It is true that O’Hanlon takes advantage of ‘the privileges that accrue to the Western scientist in the field’ as his contacts demonstrate.²⁶ Yet the scientific quest is never tangible enough to be more than a pretext for the journey itself. Despite O’Hanlon’s extensive knowledge of natural history, scientific details are less important than the fascination of travelling in remote areas. O’Hanlon’s enthusiasm for the journey stems principally from his destination being in ‘the least explored’ African country, ‘the most difficult [...] to get into’ and, subsequently, ‘the most interesting’ (*CJ*, 12).

There are shades of Conrad here, as Marlow longs to travel in the Congo because it is the blankest part on the map of Africa. Like many travellers in this post-exploration era, O’Hanlon is excited by the prospect of travelling across areas apparently little-known to Westerners. In fact, on arriving at Boha near Lake Télé, O’Hanlon is discouraged to realise that the village is ‘obviously so visited’ (*CJ*, 313) by numerous expeditions, as proclaimed by villagers’ t-shirts: ‘a plea from the World Wildlife Fund [...] “Ne tuez pas les gorilles et les chimpanzés” [...] a blue vest with “Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution” [...] “Harley-Davidson” on a green background’ (*CJ*, 312). O’Hanlon’s bibliography indicates that he is aware of these modern expeditions, however (*CJ*, 465–472), and he self-

²³ Matthiessen, p.219, pp.219–220.

²⁴ Youngs, p.169.

²⁵ Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2000), p.21.

²⁶ Holland and Huggan, p.80.

consciously subverts his romantic construction of an inaccessible village buried deep in Congolese forests.

Preparation

Geordie Torr suggests that O'Hanlon's success as a traveller is apparently achieved 'with the barest of preparation', implying that O'Hanlon conceals his meticulous planning from his readers.²⁷ It is true that O'Hanlon is not specific about the details of his planning, like his fitness régime but, despite his hapless self-representation, occasional comments reveal his careful preparation. He is anxious before a visa interview, believing that his hard work may have been for nothing: 'Everything depends on tomorrow. Everything [...] We've got to get them to give us a *laissez-passer*. I've worked on this for a year' (*CJ*, 13). Of course, the book's existence undermines O'Hanlon's fears, but he sees the value of self-deprecation in achieving his ends.

Once in the jungle, O'Hanlon presents himself as whimsical and incompetent, enthusiastic about wildlife and plants, but comically unprepared for the rigours of a jungle trek. The Congolese guides laugh at O'Hanlon because he slows their progress by falling down 'all day long', although Nzé remarks that 'you always get up', if only to fall down again (*CJ*, 325). Marcellin gives O'Hanlon the perfect opportunity for self-ridicule, comparing him unfavourably with the ecologist Mike Fay:

'You're not like Mike Fay, are you?

'No, I suppose not.'

'You look strong, you keep up, but you're *clumsy* [...] You smell! You sweat! [...] Mike Fay – he walks with little steps. He never tires. I don't have to tell him *anything* [...] *He knows all the plants in the forest*. He's a genius!' (*CJ*, 196, emphasis in original)

In fact, O'Hanlon undertook a long term training programme in order to be sufficiently fit to trek through the jungle, a fact which does not become apparent until he mentions it in his later book, *Trawler* (2003):

²⁷ Geordie Torr, 'In Trouble Again and Again and Again', *Geographical*, 76, no.10 (2004), 73–76 (p.74).

before you went to the *Congo*, you *prepared*, as you should, as the SAS told you, and you really did go to the gym three times a week for two years to prepare your back for those 70 lb loads.²⁸

O'Hanlon chooses to reveal this information only when he is able to use it as a form of reproach, he has concealed it deliberately in *Congo Journey*, making the most of his clumsiness and implying, as Torr suggests, that for six months he 'stumble[s], stagger[s] and lurch[es] his way from one perilous situation to the next'.²⁹

Of course, O'Hanlon's experiences in Borneo and the Amazon prepared him for the Congo. What is more, for every jungle expedition he undertakes, O'Hanlon's family connection to the SAS gains him equipment, advice and access to their training grounds in Hereford: 'the best place on earth from which to begin a journey upriver into the heart of the jungle'.³⁰ O'Hanlon is quick to point out, however, that, in or out of the jungle, he in no way resembles the experts who have given him so much help. When trying on 'jungle fatigues [...] and a floppy camouflage hat' at the SAS Stores, O'Hanlon feels 'tough at once'. At this point, one of the soldiers protests:

'We can't let him go like that,' said Ernie, sounding genuinely distressed.
'Why not?' I said. 'Am I missing something?'
'No,' said Ernie, in an agonized voice, 'it's just that you're a disgrace to the regiment. You look like Benny Hill'.³¹

By emphasising the contrast between himself and trained SAS soldiers O'Hanlon softens the impression of his privileged position. He does the same when he points out that the support of the SAS cannot automatically act as his verification because his contacts in the Congo do not immediately recognise his meaning, as he discovered when he tried to convince Ngatsiebe and his aide, Serge Pangou, that he would have sufficient medical care:

'I have morphine', I said, 'in spring-loaded syrettes. The SAS use it' [...]
'SAS?' said Jena Ngatsiebe. 'An airline?'

²⁸ Redmond O'Hanlon, *Trawler: A Journey Through the North Atlantic*, 1st published 2003 (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p.294.

²⁹ Torr, p.73.

³⁰ O'Hanlon, *Borneo*, p.2.

³¹ O'Hanlon, *In Trouble Again*, p.11.

‘Correct,’ said Lary, nervously. ‘They’re Scandinavian.’ (*CJ*, 26)

Speaking to Katy Hindson, O’Hanlon discloses that good preparation is crucial to the success of his ambitious ventures, perhaps rather hyperbolically suggesting that ‘a good six-months’ work before you arrive’ will ensure that ‘you’re not cut to pieces [...] because every airport soldier wants your SAS kit’.³² He consistently establishes contacts, relying on a range of expert and influential contacts for advice and support. Arriving at the airport in Brazzaville, therefore, O’Hanlon and Lary avoid the ‘soldiers [...] carrying swagger-sticks and Kalashnikovs’ and meet Madame Leroy, the ‘President’s front woman’ (*CJ*, 11). Madame Leroy is one of O’Hanlon’s main contacts, allowing him access to others who will enable his expedition to go ahead. It is clear that O’Hanlon has planned his journey carefully and is properly equipped and, although he attempts to diminish the value of his preparation, the narrative does suggest that it must have been meticulous.

Self-representation

Of the writers I have chosen to study O’Hanlon is the most self-conscious and *Congo Journey* is his most self-conscious narrative, one which took seven years to produce. He creates a complex narrative persona, one who appears both modern and nostalgic. Writers whose worldviews were formed near the beginning of the twentieth century, such as Waugh and Thesiger, do not seek to justify either their freedom to travel or their interest in foreign cultures. Modern writers avoid Waugh’s contemptuous outlook, or Thesiger’s patriarchal attitude, but few writers have spent seven years constructing their journey as O’Hanlon has done.

O’Hanlon is fascinated by past journeys of discovery and in his references to past explorers, such as Alexander von Humboldt or Sir Harry Johnston, seems to regret that there is so little left to discover (*CJ*, 339).³³ At the same time, however, he seems acutely aware that such figures are often characterised by racism, cultural superiority and, certainly in Johnston’s case, the ambition for territorial appropriation. O’Hanlon’s anxiety to avoid seeming domineering or authoritative indicates his awareness of the stigma that now attaches to much past exploration. O’Hanlon presents himself as an enthusiastic amateur

³² Katy Hindson, ‘Interview with Redmond O’Hanlon’, *Studies in Travel Writing*, 11, no.2 (2007), 177–188 (p.182).

³³ Redmond O’Hanlon, *In Trouble Again: A Journey between the Orinoco and the Amazon*, 1st published 1988 (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p.41.

with a nostalgic love of exploration and a wide-eyed fascination with natural history. Of course, O'Hanlon's destinations are no places for incompetent amateurs. Like Eric Newby before him, O'Hanlon may present himself as a poor comparison to more doughty travellers but he shows no small skill, fitness and determination.

Characteristic of all O'Hanlon's work is his self-construction as a comical character, an ironic gentleman traveller who cannot, apparently, take himself completely seriously, although the expeditions he undertakes are always physically, mentally and emotionally exacting. Youngs points out that the humour of O'Hanlon's work comes from his 'self-presentation as a bumbling and inefficient Englishman'.³⁴ He is described by Holland and Huggan as a 'figure of fun', the 'Benny Hill of the Tropics', who 'careens around the rain forests [...] with an almost demented enthusiasm'.³⁵ Of course, this comparison with Benny Hill is O'Hanlon's own suggestion.³⁶

Critics also recognise that O'Hanlon's boisterous self-presentation is 'highly constructed'.³⁷ As Holland and Huggan observe, O'Hanlon is 'secure in the knowledge of his sophistication' and, therefore, lampoons himself hilariously in his narratives.³⁸ Youngs suggests that O'Hanlon's apparently foolish persona 'may mask a secure self-confidence', corresponding to Mary Kingsley's ironic self-deprecation.³⁹ Unlike Kingsley, of course, who approves colonial expansion and puts forward her own suggestions on the management of trade in Africa, O'Hanlon wishes to avoid being associated with those who promoted the advancement of empire and the subjugation of non-Western races.⁴⁰ O'Hanlon's success as a traveller proves how seriously he approaches the challenges of each journey but he conceals his competence, constructing instead a muddled but disarming English traveller, who appears slightly disconnected from the situations in which he finds himself.

³⁴ Youngs, p.170.

³⁵ Holland and Huggan, p.80, p.79.

³⁶ O'Hanlon, *In Trouble Again*, p.11.

³⁷ Youngs, p.170.

³⁸ Holland and Huggan, p.80.

³⁹ Youngs, p.170.

⁴⁰ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa: Congo Français, Corisco and Cameroons* (London: Macmillan, 1897), p.631.

Postcolonialism

O'Hanlon's careful self-construction is influenced by his postcolonial awareness, making him wary of behaviour which may be construed as cultural superiority. Youngs describes O'Hanlon's self-presentation as 'suitably post-colonial'.⁴¹ He displays 'willful anachronism' at times, but, nevertheless, his awareness of contemporary attitudes and feelings seems acute.⁴² By acting as a 'comic reversal of the dominant image of the male traveller', O'Hanlon attempts to avoid being accused of colonial imperialism.⁴³ He must assume that his readers possess some awareness of colonial and postcolonial discourses, albeit with varying degrees of sophistication, formed from a theoretical base which has become widely assimilated into common thought. O'Hanlon, therefore, expects his readership to be sensitive to any sign that he may be compounding older stereotypes of colonialism and imperialism. He makes no specific mention of postcolonial discourse or theorists but his self-deprecating behaviour suggests that, as I have indicated in Chapter Two, modern travel writers have begun to write for theorists, as some novelists have.

While Youngs suggests that O'Hanlon's carefully constructed self-presentation is appropriate and contemporary, if rather self-conscious, Charles Sugnet accuses him of perpetuating the 'colonialist tropes' I have argued he is anxious to avoid.⁴⁴ Sugnet's article 'Vile Bodies, Vile Places: Traveling with *Granta*' gives a brief overview of a selection of *Granta* writers in an attempt to demonstrate that 'the tropes Joseph Conrad deployed in *Heart of Darkness* still shape much of what appears in *Granta*'.⁴⁵

Sugnet reviews O'Hanlon's *Granta* articles describing his journeys in Borneo and Venezuela but without explicit reference to the more detailed and extended travel texts. He notes that O'Hanlon 'presents himself as a knowledgeable natural scientist' but that he 'gives no attention to the survival of the rain forest or of the threatened cultures it nourishes'. O'Hanlon's rainforest, Sugnet argues, 'is not a real place', owing more to romantic, literary Conradian influences than to his observation.⁴⁶ But Sugnet's argument relies too heavily on the conviction that O'Hanlon is caught up in his fascination with the

⁴¹ Youngs, p.170.

⁴² Holland and Huggan, p.79.

⁴³ Susan Bassnett, 'Travel Writing and Gender', *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.225–241 (p.225).

⁴⁴ Charles Sugnet, 'Vile Bodies, Vile Places: Traveling with *Granta*', *Transition*, 51 (1991), 70–85 (p.80).

⁴⁵ Sugnet, p.72.

⁴⁶ Sugnet, p.80.

exotic. He suggests that O'Hanlon could so easily have created these journeys from his imagination, even going to far as to suggest that it 'would be interesting to examine O'Hanlon's passport to see if he actually made the journey'.⁴⁷ It is evident that O'Hanlon appreciates the romanticism of exploring potentially dangerous and seemingly inaccessible tropical forests but Sugnet's criticisms fail to appreciate O'Hanlon's persistence in the face of difficulty and the depth of perception which informs the travel writing,

Of course, there is a literary basis for O'Hanlon's writing. He is clearly captivated by historical travel narratives and his own narratives attempt to convey a similar sense of intrepidity and of travelling in unknown, largely inaccessible areas. O'Hanlon is aware of his fascination with nineteenth-century texts but laughs at himself for his preoccupation with outdated travel accounts. As Holland and Huggan point out, Sugnet fails 'to account for contemporary travel writing's ubiquitous self-irony'; O'Hanlon reveals his modernity by presenting self-caricatures who are intensely introspective, confessional and, arguably, shrewdly self-aware.⁴⁸

But there is some case for Sugnet's contention that some of O'Hanlon's descriptions 'could be inserted without disruption into *Heart of Darkness*':⁴⁹ O'Hanlon certainly emphasises the atavistic qualities of 'the primeval jungle'⁵⁰ and presents his reader with a fantasy, personal Congo, a place which is a sort of heart of darkness for O'Hanlon. Yet the Congo of O'Hanlon's imagination does not eclipse, but rather enhances, the Congo in which he witnesses poverty, corruption and suffering. These elements are not sensationalised; they are bleak facts which haunt O'Hanlon and his text. Geoff Wisner defends O'Hanlon against Sugnet's accusations that O'Hanlon is 'a dilettante, a seeker after the exotic', arguing that he 'transcends the neocolonialist stereotype'⁵¹ by showing 'a compassion so deep and unsettling that it eventually threatens to unseat his reason'.⁵²

⁴⁷ Sugnet, p.80.

⁴⁸ Holland and Huggan, p.5.

⁴⁹ Sugnet, p.80.

⁵⁰ O'Hanlon, *Borneo*, p.31.

⁵¹ Geoff Wisner, 'Review of *No Mercy*', *The Home of Geoff Wisner* <http://www.geoffwisner.com/index.php/book_reviews/article/?t=africa&f=nomercy> [accessed 9 November 2009].

⁵² Geoff Wisner, *A Basket of Leaves: 99 Books That Capture the Spirit of Africa* (Cape Town: Jacana Media, 2007), p.61.

Congo Journey, as Wisner explains, is filled with evidence of the ‘unrelenting poverty, fear and violence’ which characterises daily life in the Republic of Congo.⁵³

O’Hanlon’s cultural awareness is reflected in the way he manages humour. Comedy is a significant characteristic of O’Hanlon’s narratives, usually as a form of self-derision; as Appiah observes, ‘the natives are always amused’.⁵⁴ But *Congo Journey* is O’Hanlon’s darkest narrative so far. The daily tragedy of life in the Congo and the frustrations of his companions give a bitter edge to O’Hanlon’s experience, although there are occasional comic moments:

There was a burst of semi-automatic fire, close, skull-cracking, right outside.

‘Poachers!’ yelled Lary, ejecting himself through the tent-flap.

There came the sound of heavy canvas ripping, wood torn apart, a tree falling, a crash, silence.

‘A tree!’ yelled Lary. (*CJ*, 212)

More often, however, a flippant tone tellingly clashes with a serious incident, the here inappropriate humour accentuating the confusion and delirium of O’Hanlon’s experience. Disorientated in the jungle at night, after venturing out for a walk alone, O’Hanlon is apparently relieved to hear a woman’s screams, realising that one of his guides, Vicky, is beating his wife; a habitual occurrence (*CJ*, 409, 345). O’Hanlon, having got his bearings, runs towards the sound: ‘Vicky [...] please. Just this once. Keep at it. Keep beating her’ (*CJ*, 409). O’Hanlon deliberately presents a terrible conflict of violence and relief, revealing his confusion in his facetious, but apparently earnest, plea that the sound will not stop until he has found the village again. Unlike his earlier narratives, the uncomfortable nature of *Congo Journey*’s humour serves to remind the reader that there is no real comic relief to lighten his experience. O’Hanlon presents a twisted humour which continually points to the fact that there is little to laugh about.

Multiple Congos

O’Hanlon’s reviewers repeatedly refer to Conrad’s construction of the Congo.⁵⁵ Wisner remarks: ‘The phrase “heart of darkness” is almost unavoidable’.⁵⁶ Although Sugnet

⁵³ Wisner, *A Basket of Leaves*, p.62.

⁵⁴ Anthony Appiah, ‘Mokélé-mbembe, Being the Faithful Account of a Hazardous Expedition to find the Living Dinosaur’, *LRB*, 19, no.8 (1997), 19–21 (p.19).

⁵⁵ Appiah, p.19; George, ‘Gonzo Congo’.

criticises O'Hanlon's Conradian construction of jungles, most of O'Hanlon's reviewers recognise that he is not merely attempting to replicate Conrad's jungle, or Marlow's introspective journey. O'Hanlon's compassion and connection to the people he meets demonstrate that he is not preoccupied by the European condition. He is horrified by the way the Congolese govern themselves and the way in which day-to-day life is, for the most part, so blighted by corruption that the majority of the population live in poverty, constantly vulnerable to disease and death. The narrative does point to the destructive legacy of European rule in Africa but it foregrounds the present sufferings of the people O'Hanlon met. O'Hanlon's narrative focuses specifically on his own painful experience rather than a broader picture of the People's Republic of Congo.

Tim Youngs points out that, although O'Hanlon remarks how fascinating and mysterious the People's Republic of Congo is, his readers learn 'little about this frequently visited nation'.⁵⁷ O'Hanlon does not give a general overview of the country's historical or political background, as might be considered conventional in a travel narrative. Yet, although O'Hanlon's Congo resembles Conrad's construction of the Belgian Congo, the People's Republic is not confused with Mobutu's Zaire. References to Sassou-Nguesso's Marxist régime serve as habitual reminders of this fact [*CJ*, 17, 126]. In addition, the subject of French colonial rule is referred to from time to time, normally in the context of bitter recriminations (*CJ*, 166), although one old man longs for their return and a steady job once more: 'Don't forget! [...] You tell the President of all France! Xavier Bague says – the French, they must come back!' (*CJ*, 260).

A comical yet disturbing reminder that O'Hanlon is in the People's Republic occurs at a village called Berandzoko, in Bague's hut. Marcellin, who normally makes proud, defensive statements about his country (*CJ*, 79), drunkenly praises French rule:

The French are civilized, intelligent, they ran this county well [...] These idiots, hotheads, young Communists – they teach nothing but Marx and Lenin, and sometimes even Chairman Mao! The children leave school and they can't write a letter [...] when the French were here, the children could write dissertations! [...] after the Revolution there was no control [...] the whole structure collapsed. (*CJ*, 234–45)

⁵⁶ Wisner, *The Home of Geoff Wisner*.

⁵⁷ Youngs, p.169.

Mindful of his indiscretion, Marcellin cautions ‘we can only say such things because we are friends, and all alone, and no one is listening’ (*CJ*, 235). With perfect timing, a voice is heard outside: ‘Armed militia! [...] In the name of the People’s Republic: Open up!’ (*CJ*, 235). Marcellin panics and flattens himself against the wall, as if expecting ‘a burst of Kalashnikov fire to carry the wood [of the door] away’ (*CJ*, 236). The door is opened to reveal Nzé, who has brought a supply of marijuana and so stopped to listen at the door ‘in case the Vice President of the People’s Party Committee of Berandzoko was with you’ (*CJ*, 236–37). He gleefully teases Marcellin about what he heard, ‘an officer of the People’s Republic saying terrible things’ (*CJ*, 237), although it seems that Marcellin may well have had reason to panic had the soldier at the door not been a relative: ‘in Dongou, Uncle, they’d send you to prison!’ (*CJ*, 237).

Unusually for a travel narrative, O’Hanlon does not mention that the People’s Republic of Congo abandoned Marxism in favour of democracy in 1991, and has been renamed the Republic of Congo. Although this may seem an unusual oversight, as *Congo Journey* was published in 1996, it emphasises the fact that O’Hanlon does not choose to describe anything other than the Congo as he experienced it. O’Hanlon wants to make his audience aware of the nature of life, and death, in the People’s Republic. Arguably he is not interested in the framework of a wider context, possibly because he does not want to soften the impact of what he has seen by adopting a more objective tone in order to deliver more general information. What emerges most clearly is the relentless nature of everyday suffering and corruption.

Poverty affects almost everyone O’Hanlon meets in the People’s Republic, but the exceptions are usually considerably wealthy. Jean Ngatsiebe, Cabinet Secretary to the Ministry of Scientific Research, for example, wears ‘a perfectly tailored Parisian suit’ (*CJ*, 21). Clearly Congolese ministers reflect Clark’s characterisation of their leader: ‘his taste for expensive French tailoring and champagne belie any commitment to ordinary Congolese’.⁵⁸ It is important, therefore, that Serge Pangou, Ngatsiebe’s adviser, ridicules the suits which O’Hanlon and Lary wear:

⁵⁸ Clark, p.72.

you thought you would impress us, the locals, that we'd think you were rich and so let you into our country [...] we're not fooled, no rich man in his right mind would be seen dead in suits like yours. (*CJ*, 28–9)

Arguably, O'Hanlon wanted to suggest professionalism, rather than wealth: 'We'll wear our suits. We're going to be a scientific expedition' (*CJ*, 13). But Pangou's ridicule is important. As comparatively rich Westerners in an impoverished country, O'Hanlon and Lary are necessarily distanced, in terms of experience, from the majority of people who live in poverty. But they would not want, therefore, to be associated with the wealthy and corrupt élite. Conveniently, Pangou's comments separate O'Hanlon and Lary from this élite, who laugh at them.

One of the most dramatic examples of official corruption is found at the village of Manfouété, where a 'violent, mad' Commandant has assumed control, terrorising the villagers and regarding the pygmies who live near the village as slaves and animals (*CJ*, 129). Much against their inclination, O'Hanlon and Lary are taken to see the pygmies, paraded by the Commandant as if they are on show: 'Dancing! The pygmies – they will dance for us!' (*CJ*, 127). The resulting scenes are, as Lary comments, 'grotesque' (*CJ*, 128):

The drummer [...] beat out a slow, simple rhythm; the pygmies shuffled round the circle, swaying half-heartedly; the women began a high-pitched, desultory song. No one looked at us; no one smiled. (*CJ*, 128)

The two Westerners do not know how to handle the situation. They attempt to establish a rapport with the pygmies by taking photographs with a Polaroid. O'Hanlon perhaps remembers how enthusiastically they were received in Venezuela.⁵⁹ Here in the Congo, however, such an attempt backfires. The Commandant gathers the pygmies round him before he leaves, 'stealing every one of the precious photographs for himself' (*CJ*, 128). O'Hanlon admits that he has misjudged the situation and is mortified (*CJ*, 128).

Later, the party are forced to make a stealthy getaway from the village, having been warned by the Vice-President of the village committee that the Commandant plans to attack them in order to steal 'their packs, boots, shirts and trousers' (*CJ*, 130). They steal

⁵⁹ O'Hanlon, *In Trouble Again*, p.272.

away successfully, while the Commandant is drunk on O'Hanlon's whisky (*CJ*, 130), Marcellin promising to the Vice-President that he will make a report to the 'Government of the People's Republic' (*CJ*, 133). O'Hanlon later remarks that Lary was so disturbed by this experience that he

wanted to call in the U. S. Air Force – he thought that village could be sorted out [...] then he wrote to his congressman and they weren't into a bit of it. He went into a deep depression.⁶⁰

O'Hanlon and Lary's experience in the Congo leaves them both deeply unsettled, as so many elements of Congolese life are characterised by bleak tragedy. The impact of disease, due to limited or no medical supplies in many areas, is another stark revelation. Sickness and death are everywhere; O'Hanlon and Lary are particularly shocked at the prevalence of yaws, a condition which is related to syphilis but not transmitted sexually. Marcellin remarks that a shot of Extencilline provides life-long protection; frustratingly, this is not a drug which O'Hanlon has brought with him (*CJ*, 130). O'Hanlon often uses Lary to voice the frustrations of both:

those children. Pygmy children. The ones with yaws. Dying, disfigured – all so miserable. And for nothing [...] a spirochaete [...] a spirochaete you can kill for 40p [...] You'd think *someone* would get off their butt and come' (*CJ*, 255).

The most he and Lary can do is alert an American couple whom they meet at Mimpoutou. The couple are missionaries based at Impfondo who distribute medical aid where possible, the wife being a trained nurse (*CJ*, 265). They immediately make plans to travel upriver when Lary tells them about the people with yaws; he is relieved to realise that these people, at least, are attempting to lessen the numbers of unnecessary deaths in impoverished communities (*CJ*, 266–67).

It is harrowing for O'Hanlon and Lary to come to terms with the fact that death is commonplace in such a poor country, particularly as many deaths could be prevented with adequate funding for medical supplies and emergency services. They are soon forced to realise that death is a commonplace occurrence in the Congo and people have little hope of delaying or preventing it. It is shocking to be faced with such helplessness and both men

⁶⁰ Shapiro, p.96.

are distressed when they witness the death of a young boy who falls from a canoe. Although the other passengers are saved by the timely action of nearby fishermen, the boy is 'swept past the only remaining dugout that might have saved him [...] caught [...] in the deep fast waters of Le Couloir [...] his black head bobbed in and out of focus [...] and disappeared' (*CJ*, 78). No one was near enough to help the boy and now nothing can be done: the barge which O'Hanlon and Lary are travelling, laden with several thousand passengers, cannot turn round in the current (*CJ*, 79). But it is a shock for O'Hanlon and Lary to witness Marcellin's apparently casual reaction: 'So he's drowned' (*CJ*, 79). They are made to accept, however, that, where death is so often unavoidable, people must be inured to it. Marcellin warns that '[i]f you make a fuss like that everytime someone dies [...] you won't last' (*CJ*, 79). There is a hopelessness in Marcellin's pronouncement that, although he regards the People's Republic as 'the best-governed country in Africa [...] it's still Africa' (*CJ*, 79).

O'Hanlon's narratives normally end as he is on the point of making his return journey through the jungle, when he begins to travel back towards what is known and familiar. In *Congo Journey*, however O'Hanlon highlights what returning home means for his companions. Having witnessed something of the bleak nature of Congolese life, it is difficult for O'Hanlon to leave knowing the nature of the lives to which Marcellin, Manou and Nzé will return:

This knowledge gives the end of the book its horrible poignancy. Instead of the moment of revelation, or triumph at the end of the quest [...] *Congo Journey* finishes with [O'Hanlon] paying off [...] his guides.⁶¹

It becomes clear that the expedition in the jungle, while horrific for O'Hanlon and Lary, has been a form of respite for Marcellin, Manou and Nzé. They have been detached from ordinary life and O'Hanlon has made money available to them (*CJ*, 325). Of course, this money, distributed lavishly, is a form of bribery, but O'Hanlon also seems embarrassed by his comparative wealth and gives away almost all his money (*CJ*, 448).

At the end of the journey, each man visits O'Hanlon separately in his hotel. These one-to-one conversations give clarity and emphasis to individual struggles and personal tragedies.

⁶¹ Brown, p.20.

Manou Burond returns to Impfondo to find that his partner has left him for Nzé's best friend and has moved away, taking Manou's child with her (*CJ*, 435). O'Hanlon gives this personal tragedy greater poignancy by repeating throughout Manou's admissions that he misses his family (*CJ*, 165, 422). After Nzé Oumar learns that his father has died, O'Hanlon hears reports from Manou that Nzé has been 'drunk for two days and nights [...] he's spent almost all his money [...] Nzé's sick [...] [and] he screams, "My father! My father is dead!" ' (*CJ*, 451). Nzé is the last to visit O'Hanlon, demanding more money: 'I've lost it [...] So give it to me. Just the same. All over again. No more. I need it!' (*CJ*, 463). By this point O'Hanlon has only 29,000 CFA and is unable to obtain more from home (*CJ*, 450). He cannot give Nzé anything other than a food sack 'full of his gifts and belongings' (*CJ*, 463). *Congo Journey* ends with the bleak image of Nzé leaving, panicked because he does not know how to go back to his family without money: 'Holding the sack in his arms, as if it were a child, he stumbled into the night' (*CJ*, 464).

Above all, O'Hanlon must leave Marcellin in the Congo, aware that his academic ambitions will not be fulfilled by his work, but unable to assist him further. Marcellin's education was hard-won:

I studied hard. We were poor. We had no electricity. I did my homework under a street lamp [...] I won a scholarship to Cuba [...] to university! I am still working for my doctorate on the biology of crocodiles [...] *I do not deserve to be poor*. I am a scientist. I am highly educated. I speak French, Spanish and English. (*CJ*, 84–85, emphasis in original)

But Marcellin's discipline and ambition cannot, it seems, carry him away from Africa permanently. He is trapped in his bureaucratic rôle and must support all his relatives (*CJ*, 85). He therefore tells O'Hanlon: 'You must get me a job in Oxford. I want to be an Oxford Professor' (*CJ*, 360). Having no influence over staffing appointments, of course, O'Hanlon is unable to help Marcellin, who is bitterly disappointed: ' "You could try", he said in a voice so small it was almost a whisper' (*CJ*, 360). Although O'Hanlon is frustrated that Marcellin will not accept that 'that's not how it works' (*CJ*, 360), he is uncomfortably aware of the disparity of their situations, telling himself:

You're fat with all the unearned privilege that has come your way, with all the gross advantages that were yours for the taking just because of the country you were born in. (*CJ*, 361)

The anticipation of returning home to Oxford, therefore, is uncomfortably juxtaposed with the fact that Marcellin will return to a 'hut of an office in Brazzaville with nothing in it but two issues of the *Journal of Cryptozoology*' (*CJ*, 361).

O'Hanlon and Lary are haunted by their experiences in the People's Republic of Congo. The fact that O'Hanlon took six years to produce the narrative suggests how difficult he found it to retrace his steps, but also to feel that he had adequately captured the intensity of the journey and its great sadness.⁶² In this it seems O'Hanlon has succeeded, producing such an intense and harrowing depiction that, according to O'Hanlon's wife, Belinda, Lary apparently 'can't read the book',⁶³ although he remarks that O'Hanlon portrayed him 'as much nicer than I am'.⁶⁴ Lary denies waking up 'screaming in the middle of the night', pointing out that he has 'got better over time'. He admits that he 'still can't read [the book] but I think about it less. The book is fairly accurate about the hopelessness'.⁶⁵

O'Hanlon deals with his horror by recreating it in his narrative as a descent into madness. After three months, Lary must return to his post in the Psychology department at the State University of New York (*CJ*, 39). When O'Hanlon no longer has Lary as a companion the narrative becomes more introspective. O'Hanlon begins to create a second, personal Congo, a sort of fantasy, constructing his own journey into the dark heart of the forest. In some ways, O'Hanlon deliberately parallels Marlow's journey, moving towards some sort of dark chaos which, if not death, may well be madness. Certainly reviewers and interviewers perceive it as such: Franz Lidz describes O'Hanlon as '[u]nhinged and slightly dislocated'; Don George asks: 'How did you write about going crazy in such a convincing way?'⁶⁶

⁶² Brown, p.20.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Lary Shaffer, 'A Few Old Pictures' <<http://faculty.plattsburgh.edu/lary.shaffer/photoalbum.html>> [accessed 9 November 2009].

⁶⁵ Brown, p.20.

⁶⁶ Franz Lidz, 'He Did What to a Monkey?', *Sports Illustrated* (1998), 8–10 (p.10); Don George, 'Fetishes and Fossils', *Salon.com*'s 'Wanderlust' <<http://www.salon.com/june97/wanderlust/interview970617.html>> [accessed 25 October].

Aware that a traveller cannot ‘avoid taking [...] intellectual baggage’, O’Hanlon accepts that his perception of a Congolese country will inevitably evoke his knowledge of Conrad’s work.⁶⁷ O’Hanlon creates his own heart of darkness, therefore, in the attempt to show his developing mental chaos, and the impossibility of constructing any sort of sense from the daily tragedies he witnesses. An imaginary Congo, then, emerges in O’Hanlon’s narrative, where spirits step out from folklore and are woven into the plot. Now O’Hanlon is travelling through a forest in which *mokélé-mbembé* might be real (*CJ*, 354), or in which one could look up ‘to catch a glimpse of two long arms up in the lianas, to meet the gaze of Yombé, the unknown ape of Boha’ and ‘register mild surprise just before your brain burst open’ (*CJ*, 338).

Of course, O’Hanlon does not believe in the spirits, given Congolese names but characterised by O’Hanlon, although he appears to struggle to maintain his rationality: ‘it gets to you [...] It’s very, very powerful’.⁶⁸ These spirits represent the impact of the horror and confusion of the journey: O’Hanlon is threatening himself with the possibility that, unable to forget what he has seen of life and death in the Congo, he will be driven mad by the knowledge and trapped in a superstitious mindset. The spectre of insanity stalks O’Hanlon in the last stages of his journey threatening dislocation. The spectre is actualised in Samalé, a spirit of the forest who first appears in a hallucination induced by marijuana, but returns to O’Hanlon throughout the journey taunting him: ‘this magical thinking [...] it’s breeding in your subconscious. You’re infected. You’re marked for ever’ (*CJ*, 383).

Samalé first appears at Berandzoko, when O’Hanlon is high on Nzé’s marijuana. O’Hanlon describes the incident as if he is still in the real world; he is smoking on his own, commenting on his thoughts. A visitor breaks in on his solitude announcing himself in the usual fashion by shouting ‘*Koko!*’ before he enters the hut (*CJ*, 241). There is nothing apparently sinister about him at first; his appearance is rather dramatic but the reader does not note anything very unusual:

He was huge [...] wearing black boots, black trousers, a black tee-shirt and a shabby, torn black jacket with shiny, black lapels [...] [and] extraordinarily long sleeves [...] The skin on his face was pale [...] almost white [...] His little finger and thumb were missing. (*CJ*, 241–2)

⁶⁷ Hindson, p.182.

⁶⁸ George, ‘Fetishes and Fossils’.

The visitor starts to explain his history which, combined with his appearance, correlates with a narrative told by a witch-doctor at Makao and the reader understands that O'Hanlon is talking to Samalé, the spirit of the forest (*CJ*, 189). An eerily threatening atmosphere has been created, not only by the visitor's increasingly aggressive manner, but by the fact that O'Hanlon does not appear detached from reality. The climax of the conversation is suitably ominous, '[y]ou'll die at Lake Télé' (*CJ*, 248), but unreal. More chilling is Samalé's observation that O'Hanlon fears what the spirit represents: 'Madness. Clinical madness [...] that's as real as can be' (*CJ*, 247).

Lary, seeing O'Hanlon's shattered state the next day deduces that the drug

mimics a gentle, short-term psychosis. But knowing you I suppose you took a critical dose? About equivalent to drinking neat whisky all day everyday for a week, and then stopping? Enough to give anyone the odd vision? [...] a personal ghost [...] just for you? (*CJ*, 256)

O'Hanlon apparently creates Samalé largely from his memories of Dokou, the witch-doctor, and past conversations. The spirit's appearance, the history of his origins and his habit of going 'to Paris [...] in a wooden plane' (*CJ*, 383) are reconstructions of information he has heard from Dokou (*CJ*, 183). O'Hanlon's description of Dokou corresponds closely to Samalé's: 'He wore black boots, black trousers, and open-necked black shirt' (*CJ*, 164), although in Samalé's height and demeanour there is the suggestion of Simon Mbenga, the tall and aggressive Commandant at Manfouété. When Samalé slashes his claws past O'Hanlon's head he is echoing Dokou, who did the same thing to him at Makao (*CJ*, 185); O'Hanlon borrows details which already exist in the narrative in order to construct Samalé for the reader as a personification of insanity.

The fear of becoming permanently deranged follows O'Hanlon throughout the rest of his journey. Samalé continues to haunt O'Hanlon to and from Lake Télé. His voice is at O'Hanlon's shoulder at odd moments: he hears vicious whispers in his tent at Lake Télé (*CJ*, 383) and later in Boha (*CJ*, 416) telling him that he cannot escape the spirit and that he will soon die. This malicious and bewildering presence seems to threaten O'Hanlon's sanity, although he also seems entertained and intrigued by the idea that someone could be plagued with such thoughts and fears. He mentions Francis Galton who made an experimental idol of Mr Punch and found out that 'the experiment worked so well he had

to stop' (*CJ*, 358). While this seems to point O'Hanlon's intellectual fascination with the supernatural, he cannot escape the insistent voice:

I again heard the deep harsh chant that, over the past few days, had begun to bother me: the voice of the man in the black jacket. 'So I won't say goodbye, because you'll soon be joining me [...] See you! I'll see you later!' (*CJ*, 416)

At the end of his journey, 'outraged by everything [...] unable to think at all' (*CJ*, 417) O'Hanlon appears unable to defend himself against a fear which 'plays straight into the subconscious'.⁶⁹

O'Hanlon must present two Congos, the one he and Lary experience externally and the one he experiences in his mind. The intensity of O'Hanlon's inner journey aims to mirror the confusion and sorrow which he feels so often throughout his trek. Both Congos are of O'Hanlon's creation, both self-consciously reflecting the nature of his cultural baggage: the privilege which makes it difficult for him to comprehend the unrelenting horrors of destitution and his knowledge of Conrad, which provides some sort of parallel to express the profound, life-changing quality of his distress.

Conrad's Women

I have shown that, although O'Hanlon cannot avoid Conrad's influence, he uses it creatively to shape his own mythical Congo, which expresses his anguish at what he has seen. But one particular aspect of *Congo Journey* which carries connotations of *Heart of Darkness* seems genuinely problematic: O'Hanlon's representation of Congolese women seems to perpetuate objectifying stereotypes of African female beauty and sexuality. This is a more damning parallel with Conrad than Sugnet's accusations about how O'Hanlon represents the jungle. Few female figures appear in *Heart of Darkness* and their impact is increased by this. Achebe's juxtaposition of Conrad's women cannot be forgotten:

from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman.

She walked with measured steps [...] treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high [...] She was

⁶⁹ Lidz, p.10.

savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress.⁷⁰

This description serves as violent contrast to another example of idealised womanhood : the ‘pale visage’ of Kurtz’s Intended dressed ‘all in black’.⁷¹

O’Hanlon’s women are presented less dramatically than Conrad’s but almost always within an erotic context. To some extent this is because they are usually Marcellin’s mistresses, but O’Hanlon describes them in terms of his own attraction so that they become sexual figures within the text, usually as constructions of breasts, navels and thighs. Louise is a young girl with ‘slim black thighs’ whose ‘breasts so stretched her meagre white tee-shirt that its hem barely reached her navel’ (*CJ*, 34); Marie wears ‘a thin white tee-shirt with wide black transverse stripes and her small breasts (with surprisingly long nipples) poked out the cotton between the third and fourth stripes down’ (*CJ*, 77). Such descriptions do not only apply to the sexual partners of O’Hanlon’s companions. Yvette Leroy, an influential government contact and the proprietor of the gorilla orphanage in Brazzaville, is described as having ‘the biggest, softest, more desirable breasts’ for the gorillas to rest on (*CJ*, 20).

The sexual elements of Conrad’s description of Kurtz’s mistress are echoed in the portrait of another Congolese woman in a rural village:

The girl who had stared at Marcellin the evening before [...] stood in the water [...] the wraparound curled off her shoulders to her waist, where she tied it. She ran the block of tar soap gently over her long arms, into her armpits, across the twin ridges and hollows of her collar-bones, the prominent curves of her ribs, and, turning slightly in front of us so that she was back-lit by the reflected light from the river surface, over her deep, low-slung breasts, her erect nipples. (*CJ*, 167–68)

This woman does not speak, although she becomes a slightly more complex figure when it transpires that she had sex with Marcellin in order to steal his wedding ring for the witch-doctor, who subsequently returns it as part of a protective fetish (*CJ*, 186–191).

O’Hanlon’s picture is less dramatic but it draws more explicitly on the eroticism evident in

⁷⁰ Joseph Conrad, ‘*Heart of Darkness*’ with ‘*The Congo Diary*’, ed. by Robert Hampson (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p.99.

⁷¹ Conrad, p.119.

Conrad's text. I have already indicated that, in his representation of desirable Other women, O'Hanlon is laughing at himself for his feelings of attraction while knowing that he is not attractive to the women. Unlike his dark comedy, however, in which the humour accentuates horror, O'Hanlon's self-ridicule does not quite subvert the objectivising eroticism of his gaze.

Conclusion

The narrative of *Congo Journey*, then, holds disparate elements in tension. As in all of his narratives, O'Hanlon must manage the balance between his clownish self-construction and his competence as a traveller. The ridicule of his companions is instrumental in confirming O'Hanlon's assertion that he is a fool. His Congo companions laugh at him because he is clumsy (*CJ*, 361) and Lary offers comments whenever he thinks O'Hanlon is being ridiculous (*CJ*, 212). O'Hanlon could not travel in such remote areas if he did not train and plan his journeys carefully, but his self-deprecation is convincing because it is reinforced by the opinions of everyone he travels with.

Congo Journey has more depth and complexity than *Into the Heart of Borneo* and *In Trouble Again*, and without that darker tone O'Hanlon could not convey the horror of his experiences. The search for a dinosaur is unimportant compared to the scale of corruption and poverty in the People's Republic of Congo. It is not Conrad's heart of darkness which confronts O'Hanlon, since Marlow's journey exposes European corruption and self-destruction. O'Hanlon hears reports of French corruption and abuse in the past, but what he witnesses is the suffering caused by a corrupt and independent government in the present. The Congo is still a place of darkness where colonial patterns of corruption have not yet lost their potency.

Nevertheless, O'Hanlon's African narrative demonstrates that Conrad's construction of Africa still exerts a significant influence on modern Western travel writing. Given that our perceptions of foreign countries and cultures are necessarily shaped by the cultural baggage of previous representations, O'Hanlon cannot and does not attempt to escape or ignore Conrad's influence. Instead he uses it to show the reader how a response to the Other can only be constructed in terms of what one already knows. Arguably O'Hanlon's internal conflict uses the parallel of Marlow's experiences to emphasise the horror of what he, O'Hanlon, now encounters. The nearer he gets to Lake Télé, the more urgent is the

sense of some approaching disaster. No physical events justify this apprehension, but O'Hanlon, like Marlow, is deeply disturbed by his experiences in the Congo, although he mourns for the Congolese, rather than his own civilisation. Like Marlow, O'Hanlon is not lost to insanity or death, but he remains haunted by what he has seen and, the narrative implies, must continue to fight against a persistent threat of madness and an unconquerable sense of helplessness.

Chapter Eight: South Africa: Laurens van der Post, Noni Jabavu, Dan Jacobson, Dervla Murphy

Introduction

South Africa's history has been affected by unique issues. Disputes over land ownership, although not singular to the country, nevertheless reflect in a special way older conflicts which began with the arrival of Europeans in the seventeenth century. Racial segregation, also not confined to South Africa, was exceptional in being enshrined in legislation. When Europeans arrived in southern Africa the indigenous population, the San, were living alongside tribes who had migrated from the north: the Khoikhoi, who were pastoralists, and Bantu-speaking agriculturalists. Methods of subsistence overlapped between these various ethnic groups: in time, the influence of Khoisan was evident among Bantu-speakers and there was regular communication between different communities.¹ From 1652, however, Dutch and, later, British settlers gradually expanded their colonies by force, subduing African communities which had been established for centuries. When the Union of South Africa came into being in 1910, it was defined by the borders of the four British and Dutch colonies; South Africa became a dominion of the British Empire with its own parliament and a Governor-General as the crown's representative.²

Uniquely, when South Africa left the Commonwealth in 1961 and formed a republic, it became the only African country to remain under white rule after colonial ties had been officially dissolved. Their early presence and the expansion of their community in numbers and territory meant that the Dutch colonists remained a significant force in South Africa during British rule, so that independence from Britain meant a free rein for the Afrikaner party then in power. Nationalism has not been a unifying idea in South Africa, as it has been in other African countries, but has rather been used to enforce division. The National Party governed South Africa for nearly forty-six years and was elected in 1948 on the strength of its policy of *apartheid* or separateness, which promised to preserve the 'purity' of South Africa's multi-ethnic society. Inter-racial commingling was subsequently outlawed.³ It was a theoretical framework constructed to uphold a racist policy of white supremacy in South Africa and, in particular, the promotion of Afrikaner culture.

¹ Robert Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.8.

² Ross, pp.79–80.

³ Ross, p.116.

One of the unavoidable issues in representations of South Africa, therefore, is the question of rightful land ownership and who may consider themselves to be South African. By the end of the nineteenth century South Africa's most ancient people group, the San, had been evicted from their homeland by European settlers and their descendants. Similarly, Khoikhoi and Bantu societies also came under Afrikaner and British dominion as the settlers expanded their territory. In the twentieth century *apartheid* forced many non-white Africans from their homes into government locations, called homelands, or into townships, shanty towns of various kinds which have developed on the margins of urban centres. Travel writing about South Africa in the twentieth century cannot avoid the knowledge of eviction and oppression, past and present, and the impact of such events on a fragmented and volatile society. Such topics are evident in the themes of each text I discuss and it seems inappropriate, even impossible, to detach descriptions of South Africa from its racial tensions.

I have discussed how the decisions of travel writers in Africa to privilege certain details over others are affected by their personal and social baggage. I have also indicated that representation of homeland or culture is not yet common in travel writing by Africans, although there are some exceptions in South African writing. In this chapter I discuss the links between travel and self-definition evident in South African texts. I will explore what South Africans perceive to be important about their country and what factors control the focus of their narratives. I ask how far early experiences shaped accounts by natives of the country and how such accounts differ from each other. I will also discuss contrasts between South African and Western perspectives and how far South African accounts challenge Western versions of the country.

I focus on four writers who have described very different journeys through, or connected with, South Africa. Only one of these, Dervla Murphy, is a Westerner while the others are of varying South African ethnicities. Laurens van der Post is an Afrikaner whose parents were Afrikaner and Dutch; Dan Jacobson is also descended from Europeans: his grandparents were Lithuanian Jews who migrated to South Africa. Noni Jabavu is from a highly respected and long-established Xhosa family. All three writers were born in South Africa and, although Bantu people have been established for much longer than those descended from Europeans, none could be described as indigenous in the same way as the San. Of course, no surviving San communities now originate from South Africa and

representations of the country's most ancient civilisation must be mediated by those who came later.

Crucially, each South African text is presented with a degree of detachment as each writer has made his or her home in Britain for much of their adult life. Indeed, Jabavu was educated in England before she made her home there. Both van der Post and Jacobson moved to Britain as adults, returning to South Africa much less frequently than Jabavu who made periodic visits to see her family. To some degree, therefore, each writer describes something which is at once familiar and Other and they analyse the connections which still exist between the South Africa they knew and the country they now describe. Their representations are influenced by their understanding of Western culture as well as their native culture and, as all texts were printed in Britain, each writer takes into account the reaction of a Western audience in choosing their material and manner of presentation.

Sir Laurens van der Post's *The Lost World of the Kalahari* (1958) and *The Heart of the Hunter* (1961) do not chronicle a return to South Africa.⁴ Rather they seek to confirm a personal link to South Africa's oldest people. Van der Post hopes that characteristics of modern San communities will correspond with his childhood memories of the remnants of San culture which had filtered into his own family's way of life. The irony of van der Post's journey is that there are no longer any indigenous San communities in South Africa and he must seek a connection among the Kalahari San.

The overarching purpose of van der Post's work with the San was to raise international awareness of their culture. Remarkably he achieved this goal through a documentary series, followed by books and lectures, all resulting from one short expedition. But the two travel narratives reveal that van der Post had a more personal and immediate quest in mind, one fulfilled by the journey itself and not its aftermath. The purpose of this quest is to justify his nationality as a South African, as someone who shares a connection to the land which is comparable to that of its first people. Van der Post is aware that Afrikaners have no rights to South Africa in the way that the San did and that the land was taken by force rather than agreement. He is eager to prove that, although he represents the race which

⁴ Laurens van der Post, *Lost World of the Kalahari*, 1st published 1958 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973); *The Heart of the Hunter*, 1st published 1961 (London: The Companion Book Club, 1962). Further references to these texts will be given to *LWK* and *HH* and page number/s in the text.

evicted the San from their ancient home, his sympathy for this lost people establishes a spiritual affinity between himself and those San still living. This connection, he feels, distances and absolves him from the cruelty of his ancestors.

It is important for van der Post to feel that he can establish such a connection by acting as a spokesperson for the San culture. The San had no means of self-representation in the twentieth century and van der Post perceives that the spiritual affinity he is attempting to establish may give him authority to speak on their behalf. This is a personal quest: van der Post is not seeking to connect South African culture to its past. His promotion of San culture is aimed at British and American audiences and he is not seeking empathy with his fellow Afrikaners. Indeed, it seems that he is not interested in emphasising his own cultural connections to modern South Africa where there are few, if any, reminders of the country's most ancient culture.

Noni Jabavu's travel narratives *Drawn in Colour* (1960) and *The Ochre People* (1963)⁵ were published around the time that South Africa became a republic but she travelled in the Union of South Africa in 1955 and 1956, when *apartheid* was being newly established.⁶ Jabavu does not travel to write, but visits to family members visits provoke reflections on the past, symbolised by her family home. Jabavu remarks on the impact she has on her native culture, aware that she is distanced from it, having made her home elsewhere. Much about her past life is now lost to her and memories of that life hinder the development of new connections. Significantly, Jabavu's relationship with her stepmother is naturally impeded by memories of her mother (*OP*, 53). Indeed, Jabavu's narratives revolve around personal, rather than national conflicts. Her reflections on the impact of Western culture do not drive the plot as firmly as the death of her brother, her sister's marital problems and her jealousy of her stepmother.

Jabavu and her family are Xhosas living under *apartheid* rule and the status of her whole community is more insecure than when she was a child, but she reflects only briefly on this wider cultural context. There is a humiliating contrast, however, between the respect

⁵ Noni Jabavu, *Drawn in Colour: African Contrasts* (London: John Murray, 1960); *The Ochre People: Scenes From a South African Life* (London: John Murray, 1963). Further references to these texts will be given to *DiC* and *OP* and page number/s in the text.

⁶ R. Hunt Davis, Jr., 'Jabavu, Davidson Don Tengo (1885–1959)' *ODNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/94432?docPos=1>> [accessed 29 October 2009].

accorded to Jabavu and her family by their Xhosa society and the indignities which all Xhosa, with all non-whites, suffer in South Africa (*DiC*, 13). The impact of *apartheid*, although not discussed in depth, is shown to be more threatening to the stability of Xhosa culture than that of earlier settlers, or Western-educated members of the community, such as Jabavu, who move with relative ease between African and Western cultures.

Dan Jacobson's relationship to South Africa is more ambiguous than that of Jabavu, who has stronger remaining ties to the country. Like van der Post, Jacobson is not certain that he wants to be connected to modern South Africa; he begins his journey with the desire to make sense of his past. He has rarely returned to his old home since he left approximately forty years ago and he gives only vague reasons for returning. But dreams about South Africa have suggested to him that a journey there will reveal greater depth of meaning to his past.⁷

The journey narrated in *The Electronic Elephant* (1994) begins in Kimberley, where Jacobson was born, but its structure is determined by a historic route, the Great North Road. Initially it seems that Jacobson has hopes that it will open up South Africa to him and it does, in a way, but he says little about how following this route corresponds to his own self-definition. He uses South Africa's colonial history as the framework for his narrative because its impact, and that of *apartheid*, is still clearly visible. He is fascinated by the contrast between the past and the present revealed by the history of this route. Apart from the hegemony of the De Beers group in this region, the industry of the past – colonial expansion, trade and mission – now contrasts with the stagnancy, poverty and inertia of the present. Towns such as Kuruman and Campbell are fossilised by the memories of prominent nineteenth-century figures, without industry or new attractions to point to growth and activity in the future.

This sense of loss, carrying no apparent hope, characterises much of Jacobson's narrative, which soon moves on from South Africa to explore Botswana and his wife's home country, Zimbabwe. Jacobson is repeatedly reminded why he left: for him, South Africa is imprisoned by its relationship to the past. The country, as constructed by politicians,

⁷ Dan Jacobson, *The Electronic Elephant: A Southern African Journey*, 1st published 1994 (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p.12. Further references to these texts will be given to *EE* and page number/s in the text.

traders and missionaries, has crumbled into a state of disrepair. The poignancy of Jacobson's dark analysis is intensified by the fact that he is travelling in South Africa after *apartheid* was abolished but before Mandela's government came to power. Jacobson does not offer much analysis about this historic political period. His observations about derelict communities, however, are often implicitly political, obliquely indicating his opinions on the current climate. His preoccupation with the old South Africa and its impact on the present blunts his enthusiasm for the idea of a new South Africa.

Dervla Murphy, on the other hand, is hopeful for South Africa's future. *South from the Limpopo* (1997) is an overview of South Africa from 1993–1995, focusing on the events surrounding the democratic elections.⁸ The elections structure Murphy's narrative as she analyses contrasts in atmosphere and public opinion before, during and after the historic events of April and May 1994. Normally, Murphy travels through challenging terrain and spectacular scenery. Her visits to South Africa are very different: the route is relatively straightforward and largely urbanised. But Murphy's narratives are also characterised by her strong humanitarian views and these journeys are motivated by her interest in South African politics. Murphy expects to see evidence that *apartheid* has been rejected and that a new South Africa is emerging in the light of the revolutionary changes taking place in its government.

Van der Post, Jabavu and Jacobson discuss topics and cultures with which they have, or perceive, a personal connection. Murphy, however, must approach South Africa as an outsider, albeit one with a long-term interest in its development. With a less personal agenda, Murphy's narrative gives a broader idea of South African society. She draws out opinions from many of the people she meets, attempting to convey the spectrum of opinion across South Africa's different ethnic groups. She is willing to try to understand, in some way, even the most extreme expressions of racism. Her sympathies, however, are predominantly with the poorest blacks, exiled in shanty towns and, until now, disenfranchised. Such people are represented by the Xhosa community Murphy befriends in Khayelitsha. Her humanitarian outlook demands that she analyse how far radical changes in South Africa affect those who suffered most under *apartheid*. As a solo female traveller in her sixties, Murphy is a unique figure in Western travel literature. Her methods

⁸ Dervla Murphy, *South from the Limpopo: Travels through South Africa*, 1st published 1997 (London: Flamingo, 1998). Further references to this text will be given to *SfL* and page number/s in the text.

of investigative journalism are also particular to her, as she prefers to observe from within the crowd, which does not necessarily give the best view of proceedings.

Each text represents unique characteristics of South Africa's history, culture and society. The diversity within any country cannot be fully represented but it can be defined and redefined through a dialogue of many perspectives, all of which show only fragments. And, of course, this fragmented view is the only possible perspective; there will never be a complete whole. These representations of South Africa reveal only a partial impression of how the country has been portrayed in travel writing, but they demonstrate the internal dialogues created between the texts written by South Africans and the external dialogue which these texts have with Murphy's representation.

Laurens van der Post

Sir Laurens van der Post produced two travel narratives about his experiences in the Kalahari: *The Lost World of the Kalahari* and *The Heart of the Hunter* describe a short expedition (perhaps a fortnight, according his diary⁹) in 1955 to make a series of documentary films about the San people, commonly referred to at this time as Bushmen. *The Lost World* covers the main details of the journey into the desert; *Heart of the Hunter* describes the return journey, ending with a small collection of stories from San folklore. According to van der Post's biographer, J. D. F. Jones, these tales are 'reinterpreted in accordance with [van der Post's] understanding of Jung'.¹⁰ Van der Post connects San folklore, 'the first spirit of Africa', to his belief that dreams are 'a manifestation of first and abiding meaning' (*HH*, 151, 151–52). He regards San tales as expressions of the ancient meaning which he perceives in dreams: 'the traffic of meaning between the Bushman and the stars has gone on from the beginning right into the lives of his descendants' (*HH*, 218).

Van der Post is fascinated by the remnants of a people who had lived in South Africa since the earliest days of human inhabitants. The irony is that the San were evicted from South Africa before van der Post was born; he has little first-hand knowledge of these people and must carry out his expedition in Botswana. Jones observes that 'there was next to no international interest in the Bushmen' at this time.¹¹ Van der Post's expedition is

⁹ J. D. F. Jones, *Storyteller*, 1st published 2001 (London: Scribner, 2002), p.223.

¹⁰ Jones, p.236.

¹¹ Jones, p.210.

motivated by his desire to raise awareness about their situation but also, it seems, to establish a spiritual link between his own culture and that of the San. Of course, although van der Post is an Afrikaner and so shares a native home with the original San, he is still Other, since his culture is not indigenous to South Africa. Van der Post attempts to show that the San left an indelible imprint on Afrikaner culture and that, even though he had no contact with the San as he grew up, his childhood was still impacted by a lost people.

The first two chapters of *The Lost World* deal with San culture and the history of their eviction from South Africa. Much of this information is second-hand: van der Post often refers to his grandfather's and aunt's descriptions of the San's diminutive height, yellowish skin and 'pepper-corn hair' (*LWK*, 14). They are also his authority for other 'unique characteristics' of San anatomy, such as steatopygia, which apparently allowed them to store 'great reserves of food' in their buttocks (*LWK*, 13). Van der Post goes on to describe unique features of their genitals: 'The women were born with a natural little apron, the so-called *tablier égyptien*, over their genitals; the men were born, lived and died with their sexual organs in a semi-erect position' (*LWK*, 14). He shows no scepticism about such descriptions but others are less certain. Jones, seeking to undermine van der Post's authoritative stance, suggests that such descriptions are based on 'prurient exaggeration on the part of European observers'.¹² Alan Barnard does not contradict van der Post but he is more circumspect, referring to 'supposed peculiarities of genitalia, breasts and buttocks'.¹³ Barnard points out that van der Post's emphasis on physical characteristics is rather outmoded and, although similar observations had been 'the mainstay of anthropology of a long past era' such details 'seemed to remain in the background as modern ethnographers took off for the field'.¹⁴ Of course, van der Post had no specialised knowledge and accepted popular wisdom.

Van der Post stresses the fact that he has been fascinated by the San since he was a child and that, aged eight, he wrote in his diary: 'I have decided today that when I am grown-up I am going into the Kalahari desert to seek out the Bushman' (*LWK*, 61). Van der Post is nearly fifty by the time he makes his trip but claims that he 'never lost [...] [his] preoccupation with the Bushman and his fate', although his 'interest lost its simplicity and

¹² Jones, p.213.

¹³ Alan Barnard, *Anthropology and the Bushman* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), p.20.

¹⁴ Barnard, *Anthropology and the Bushman*, p.20.

therefore much of its force' (*LWK*, 63). He believes in a mystical link connecting his life to the San, recalling a dream he had while a prisoner of war in Japan in which he saw his mother and a Bushman by the Fountain of the Bushman (the name of his grandfather's farm, Boesmansfontein) (*LWK*, 62–63). On waking he felt 'certain not only that I would live, but also [that] [...] the Bushman [were] once more made accessible to me' (*LWK*, 63). Being 'too busy to pursue the matter independently', van der Post approaches 'more fully qualified people' to see if they would 'go and live with the Bushman in order to find out [...] his way of spirit and life' (*LWK*, 66–67). Although there are those who are 'willing enough to [...] measure his head, or his behind, or his sexual organs, or his teeth', van der Post cannot interest anyone in 'the Bushman's mind or spirit, in the man as a living whole' (*HH*, 124). Van der Post eventually decides that, although he is 'not qualified [...] [has] no training [...] [and is] not a scientist', he must make the journey himself (*LWK*, 66–67).

Van der Post's decision to investigate San culture transforms the journey into a quest. His aim is not only to gather more detailed knowledge of San communities still extant, but to make a connection between modern San culture and the remnants which survive in Afrikaner culture. He describes some of the ancient knowledge and customs which characterised his childhood, describing how he and his siblings learnt 'how to distinguish the edible from inedible tubers and roots of the veld' (*LWK*, 58) and how they would descend 'into the deep bed of the Great River' and, at evening, 'stand, as the Bushman had taught us, to watch the bees flying home on burning wings' (*LWK*, 59). In winter 'our colds were doctored [...] with medicine brewed from a wild herb to which the Bushman had introduced us' (*LWK*, 58). In this way, van der Post claims, 'somehow, in imagination, the Bushman was always with us' (*LWK*, 59). The survival of these vestiges of culture in modern San communities would represent, for van der Post, a profound connection between Afrikaners, specifically himself, and South Africa's most ancient culture.

The climax of *The Lost World* is van der Post's meeting with a 'small Bushman clan' whom he considers to be 'genuine' San (*LWK*, 66), meaning they are not a mixture of San and European or African cultures or a branch of the San race, such as 'the River Bushmen' (*LWK*, 109). It is not until he meets a San hunter, Nxou, that he feels justified in saying: 'We had made contact at last!' (*LWK*, 205). Nxou invites van der Post and the team to his settlement, which is approximately thirty in number (*LWK*, 210). Van der Post is now able to observe traditional San life and to collect material for his documentary. He claims that

the life which this community lives has been unchanged for millennia and certainly there are many traditional features, such as the ‘bee-hive design’ of their huts, built under trees (*LWK*, 209). Most of the men are absorbed in the maintenance of their weapons: ‘stringing a bow [...] repairing one of the long rods used to fish [for animals] in holes in the ground’ (*LWK*, 209); ‘dipping [...] arrows in newly prepared poison’ (*LWK*, 211). Van der Post watches the women extract roots and tubers ‘with their wooden digging sticks’ and one man shows him how water can be extracted by burying a hollow tube in damp sand and sucking up the moisture (*LWK*, 209–11, 213).

Van der Post also looks for details which will be familiar to him. He remembers an old greeting: ‘Good day! I saw you looming up afar and I am dying of hunger’ (*LWK*, 16). His guide, Dabé, uses this same phrase to greet Nxou, establishing a connection between the remnants of knowledge preserved in South Africa and modern San (*LWK*, 205). Van der Post then discovers a cultural practice which has apparently passed from San to Afrikaner culture. This link, of which he had not been aware, more than anything else, establishes for him the idea that there is a spiritual connection between the two races.

This moment arises in conversation with Dabé as they watch a young woman ‘holding out a child in both hands’ (*HH*, 44), presenting him to the stars and asking them ‘to give him the heart of a hunter’ (*HH*, 45). Van der Post does not make any immediate comment and so Dabé prompts him: ‘Surely you must know that the stars are great hunters? Can’t you hear them?’ Van der Post replies ‘Yes, Dabé, of course I hear them!’, explaining to the reader that he has ‘slept out under the stars in Africa for too many years not to know that they sound and resound in the sky’ (*HH*, 45). He must then add: ‘Only I do not know what they are saying. Do you know?’ and Dabé informs him that ‘they are very busy tonight and all I hear are their hunting cries: “Tssik” and “Tsá”!’ (*HH*, 46). Van der Post is astonished by this answer:

I had known those sounds all my life [...] we ourselves had used them out hunting with our dogs. “Tssik!” repeated sharply thrice was the sound we used to alert our dogs when we were at the cover [...] Another “Tssik” would send them to search the cover. “Tsá” was the final imperative note which [...] launched them after our chosen quarry when it was flushed [...] We had the sounds from the Bushman, and he and the dogs had them straight from the stars. (*HH*, 46)

This is a profound moment of recognition for van der Post between his race and that of a more ancient South African people. Although Afrikaners, among others, were responsible for banishing the San, elements of the ancient culture have been preserved and assimilated into the new one. Van der Post interprets this coincidence of details as evidence of a spiritual link between his Afrikaner heritage and an ancient African past, binding him and his race to the continent in a profound relationship.

Having witnessed the community's way of life and made a record of it for posterity, van der Post concludes that 'the child in me had become reconciled to the man' (*LWK*, 253). The desert, he claims, 'could never be empty again. For there my aboriginal heart now had living kinsmen and a home on which to turn' (*LWK*, 253). Of course, the desert was never empty but van der Post suggests that only now has it been peopled for him. In a similar way his representation of the San as 'the vanished people' reflects his personal perspective rather than fact (*LWK*, 58). Barnard points out that 'there are at least 50,000 Bushmen alive today' and that van der Post would have been aware of substantial communities in the Kalahari.¹⁵

Van der Post's narrative creates the impression that 'the Bushmen of the Kalahari are remnants of now extinct rock-painting, myth-telling cave dwellers of the Cape Province of South Africa'.¹⁶ They are, in truth, 'very distant cousins indeed', identified by Barnard as 'almost certainly G/wi or G//ana'.¹⁷ Barnard indicates that the problem with van der Post's implied claim is that

The present inhabitants of the Kalahari have been in more or less their present locations for at least two millennia. We know this from comparative linguistic evidence. There is no evidence of any surviving Bushman groups' [sic] having been pushed into the Kalahari whether by Europeans or by Africans. If such displaced people are among the ancestors of Bushmen today, they have left no trace except perhaps the odd vocabulary item for anyone to find. The /Xam or Cape Bushmen of van der Post's childhood memories have long since died out.¹⁸

¹⁵ Alan Barnard, 'The Lost World of Laurens van der Post?', *Current Anthropology*, 30 (1989), 104–114, p.111.

¹⁶ Barnard, 'Lost World', p.106.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Barnard, 'Lost World', p.112.

Barnard doubts that van der Post could really have believed he had found a remote outpost of exiles from the Cape but observes that this ‘is the impression he conveys and one which is probably consistent with most people’s preconceptions’.¹⁹ Certainly the blurb for the 1973 Penguin paperback edition of *The Lost World* reinforces this view, presenting the San as having been ‘driven deep into the waterless Kalahari’ when Bantu and European races arrived in South Africa.

Similarly, van der Post fixes on the identity of the San as painters, a characteristic of the Cape communities. After speaking to the Kalahari San he observes that ‘alas! the Bushman no longer painted’ implying that these San had painted in the past, hinting at a Cape connection (*LWK*, 219). Barnard observes that ‘“the Bushman” as rock painter, trance curer, myth teller, and cosmologist is a collectivity, not an individual, and does not quite represent a single “culture” as traditionally conceived’.²⁰ It is not, therefore, that these San no longer paint but, possibly, that they never did. Barnard is candid enough, however, to observe that he too has used ‘the idea of a collective and “deep” Bushman culture for purposes of regional structural comparison’ and that, due to this and other ‘peculiar similarities between our respective enterprises’, anthropologists should perhaps consider the suggestion that ‘we [...] have more in common with van der Post than meets the eye’.²¹

Part of van der Post’s fascination with the Kalahari San is not their implied connection to the /Xam, but that they represent the continuity of an ancient culture. He seems overwhelmed by the idea that ‘we had struck a pure Bushman community living their Stone Age life’ (*LWK*, 215). As Barnard observes, however, San communities evolved as they came into contact with others and that, now, very few ‘subsist entirely by hunting and gathering, but most retain these skills and, with them, an identity as Bushmen’.²²

The concept of the wild or pure Bushman is, therefore, ‘largely a figment of [van der Post’s] imagination’.²³ Barnard argues that cross-cultural interactions do not detract from the identity of the San, rather ‘their own identity as Bushmen (as opposed to members of

¹⁹ Barnard, ‘Lost World’, p.112.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Barnard, ‘Lost World’, p.111.

²³ *Ibid.*

specific Bushman groups) only begins at this point'.²⁴ Nor are they a Stone Age community. Barnard agrees that 'their social organization may be "Mesolithic" [but] they have had access to iron for centuries and have long traded animal skins and meat for items such as iron, tobacco, and cannabis'.²⁵ Van der Post himself observes that the San trade skins for the iron used in their weapons:

From time to time one of them would vanish with a parcel of skins to contact someone who had a definite link with an African or European outpost where these things could be bartered. (*LWK*, 218)

Such details do not, for him, detract from their identity as a Stone Age community, but it is clear that the San have responded, in part, to the influence of other civilisations with whom they have come into contact and they are not isolated in the desert or cut off from the influence of modern progress.

In spite of van der Post's prominent position at the centre of his cultural representations, his work succeeded in drawing long-lasting international attention to San culture. As well as two travel narratives and the 1956 BBC film, also called 'Lost World of the Kalahari', van der Post gave many lectures and published two novels set in the Kalahari: *A Story Like the Wind* (1972) and *The Far-off Place* (1974).²⁶ Jones argues that van der Post's short period of research enabled him to exploit San culture, effectively living off them 'for the rest of his life',²⁷ but this was not an outcome which van der Post could have foreseen. Given the lack of interest in the San at this time, or support from experts, it would not have been possible for him to predict the long-lasting international attention which followed. He certainly could not have predicted that his documentary series would attract an audience 'second only to the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II three years earlier'.²⁸

Barnard points out, however, that

There was no love lost between [...] [van der Post] and the anthropologists who followed [...] He mistrusted 'scientists' with their specialized knowledge and

²⁴ Barnard, 'Lost World', p.112.

²⁵ Barnard, 'Lost World', p.111.

²⁶ Laurens van der Post, *A Story like the Wind*, 2nd edn (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972); *The Far-off Place* (London: Hogarth Press, 1974).

²⁷ Jones, p.210.

²⁸ Barnard, *Anthropology and the Bushman*, p.59.

inability to think beyond the confines of their disciplines; and they disliked his mysticism and self-promoting ego, his inability to speak any Bushman language, the short duration of his time in the Kalahari, and his cavalier attitude to differences between Bushman groups.²⁹

But van der Post had not claimed to be able to produce an academic study of the San and had initially approached ‘scientists, anthropologists, and psychologists’, trying to persuade them to take an active interest in San culture (*LWK*, 67). Failing to interest them he undertook the task himself. His preliminary observations prompted closer studies, such as the ‘Bushman Survey’ which resulted in ‘the creation of a Central Kalahari Game Reserve’ in 1958 (the unusual name apparently used to enable ‘implementation without bringing in new legislation’).³⁰ Willemien le Roux and Alison White correctly point out that, while foreigners mediate other cultures, it is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid ‘the perpetuation of exploitation’.³¹ Van der Post cannot escape such accusations, therefore, but his research contributed towards revitalising academic research which has gradually evolved into internal studies conducted by the San themselves. In recent years there have been attempts to promote self-representation in existing San communities. To this end, San have been trained in interviewing and recording techniques and have made their own investigations into San history and culture.³² And so van der Post’s work has had far-reaching effects on San representation, culminating in these people finding a means of self-expression which has relevance in the wider world.

Noni Jabavu

Unlike most of the writers I have discussed, Noni Jabavu does not travel in order to write. Her journeys are motivated by practicality but provoke reflections on cross-cultural relationships and conflicts. Although Jabavu writes in English, the Author’s Note to *The Ochre People* reveals that she writes for both English and Xhosa-speaking readers (*OP*, n.p.). She apologises to both for apparent irregularities in her text as, in the attempt to express Xhosa words in the English language, her use of roman script means that she is able only to give a poor impression of the thoughts she is trying to convey (*OP*, n.p.). This distinction between English-speaking audiences is unusual and illustrates the tensions

²⁹ Barnard, *Anthropology and the Bushman*, p.

³⁰ Jones, p.238.

³¹ *Voices of the San: Living in Africa Today*, ed. by Willemien le Roux and Alison White (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2004), p.vi.

³² *Ibid.*

discussed in Jabavu's work. Between two cultures herself, she can only attempt an imperfect expression of Xhosa culture in the English language.

Jabavu returned to her family home in 1955 to attend the funeral of her brother, who was shot in Johannesburg. The first part of *Drawn in Colour* is set in Middeldrift, in the south-eastern corner of South Africa, but soon moves on to describe Jabavu's subsequent visit to her sister in Uganda. The central conflict is not that of *apartheid* but the clash of cultural values between South Africans and Ugandans and the impact which this has on Jabavu and her sister. Jabavu's second narrative, *The Ochre People* gives a more detailed account of another visit to South Africa when she spends time with relatives in different parts of the country. The central conflict is again personal: Jabavu struggles to accept her stepmother and her relatives discuss this issue with her in the context of Xhosa tradition.

Jabavu observes the impact she makes on her native culture and is aware that her behaviour is scrutinised when she returns home, as 'everybody knows she is an overseas person' (*DiC*, p.45). People want to know that she has not forgotten her culture. One man asks her: '*IsiXhosa kodwa usasazi*, can it be that you still know Xhosa?' and is 'delighted and at the same time amazed' when she replies: '*Eh-weh, kakade, ompi*, but yes, of course, uncle!' (*DiC*, 48). On one occasion Jabavu returns home late, having lingered to chat to an acquaintance. Her friend, Sis'Nompumelelo, is pleased to see her falling into step with Xhosa habits: 'You see how it is here at home? [...] time can *never* be controlled' (*OP*, 71). Jabavu, therefore, demonstrates to her community that the influence of Western culture is not necessarily a threat to her Xhosa identity. Of course, as I have indicated, Barnard suggests that connections with other cultures is what reinforces cultural identity as one identifies oneself in opposition to those of another society, but the strength of the influence of Western culture, so evident in South Africa, causes uncertainty in the Xhosa community.

More serious is the tension between Jabavu and her stepmother. She finds it difficult to adjust to her stepmother's presence in her family home which has so many associations with her mother, who died in 1951: 'my stepmother stood at the gate seeing us off and stooped to pat our excited black dog [...] He had been my mother's favourite [...] I was filled with thoughts of how he used to follow her around' (*OP*, 95). Outward differences threaten her inner security in her father's home: 'Whatever my stepmother had done in our

house seemed to reflect on my mother and the old order of our life [...] I could only harp on goods and chattels, the introduction to our house of new ones, dismissal of familiar old ones' (*OP*, 96–7).

Jabavu finds it hard to be bound by Xhosa custom and accept the counsel of her friends in this matter, but their response proves to Jabavu how secure she is in her own society, notwithstanding long absences. Asked to consider 'the hurt [her] hostility causes' her stepmother, Jabavu shrieks out an 'unspeakable threat never to like, let alone want, a new mother' (*OP*, 97, 99). This revelation of such depth of feeling is socially 'unforgiveable, a thing that "should never be spoken even when one may speak" [...] since permitted freedoms have their rules' (*OP*, 97). But it is in this moment, having placed herself outside Xhosa social boundaries, that Jabavu understands her security. *Sis'*Nompumelelo responds by reinforcing Jabavu's status within her family, calling her '*Sisi wam*', which staggers Jabavu because she has been given 'the dignity of the title that our ages prescribed that *I* give *her*' (denoting seniority even within the same age group) (*OP*, 98). Being addressed as an equal Jabavu is 'moved almost more by that than by anything that had been said' (*OP*, 99). Even her rejection of custom does not place her 'beyond the pale as I deserved' (*OP*, 99). Her long absences and experience of other cultures have not altered her position at home.

This personal security conflicts with the wider situation of black people in South Africa, of which Jabavu gives only momentary glimpses. The tight-knit structure of Xhosa society offers security for Jabavu but all Xhosa communities are overshadowed by the impact of *apartheid* and the growing threat of social destabilisation. Jabavu reports her cousins' stories of raids in their Johannesburg neighbourhood, the city where her brother was killed (*OP*, 203). As descendants of John Tengo Jabavu, a prominent journalist and politician,³³ there is a poignant contrast between the respect accorded Jabavu's family, particularly her father, in Xhosa communities and the indignities imposed by *apartheid*. The injustices visited on her family make the greater impact for not being over-stated, but they infect all areas of life. Jabavu makes a short visit to Alice, where she was born, but can do little more than look; since her family's departure the town, 'like other long-established towns inhabited by blacks and white' has become a 'White Ethnic Group Area' (*OP*, 77). Her

³³ J. B. Peires, 'Jabavu, John Tengo (1959–1921)', *ODNB*
<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/53763?docPos=2> [accessed 10 November 2009].

father feels keenly the injustice that he ‘*may not sleep a night in my old home town* without obtaining a Special pass beforehand – and lucky if granted!’ (*OP*, 105, emphasis in original). The familiar buildings reawaken memories of her old life, but Jabavu realises that her thinking has moved on too, since she thinks of the town’s inhabitants as ‘South Africans’. She makes an effort to remember some more personal, cultural distinctions: ‘starting with old Mr. Salaai, whose salutation is I *think* Cira, who still worked as a messenger at Taylor’s Stores [...] where my mother had always shopped’ (*OP*, 78).

The humiliation of *apartheid* is thrown into sharp relief by the dignity of Xhosa culture. By emphasising scrupulous adherence to long-held traditions and formalities, Jabavu gives a historical context to Xhosa culture. There is a greater poignancy, therefore, when acts of *apartheid* disregard traditions and perceptions of seniority. After the Sharpeville shootings in 1960 Jabavu is disturbed to hear that two of her uncles were arrested for possession of ‘their old guns’, because Emergency Regulations stated that ‘no black people might possess arms although they were being issued in haste to all whites’ (*OP*, 154). It was clearly understood by ‘everyone including the local rural white police and magistrates’ that Jabavu’s uncles used their guns ‘only to flush thieves from among the crops and animals’ and that ‘not even persistent robbers [would be] wounded or killed’ (*OP*, 153). Nevertheless, in their failure to comply with regulations they were regarded as a threat and treated accordingly. Jabavu predicts that such a reaction ‘showed what was in store under “true *apartheid*” ’ and what Verwoerd’s policy of ‘good neighbourliness’ indicated for non-whites (*OP*, 154).

Jabavu describes only two examples of racial discrimination against herself and both take place when she is travelling through Rhodesia, not South Africa. In both situations Jabavu’s proactive behaviour provokes abuse. Required to fill in a questionnaire, Jabavu mentions to the Rhodesian Immigration Officer ‘that the printed conditions on the form exempted certain “categories of persons” from filling in some items and I thought I fell into such a category’. The response is aggressive: ‘I don’t care what the form bloody well says [...] You are to fill em all up, d’you hear?’. Jabavu complies but is ‘stung’ to respond: ‘You’re a thoroughly bloody little man aren’t you? Where are your manners? You’re the most offensive, ill-bred creature I’ve ever come across’ (*DiC*, 73). Able to respond she reflects that at least both she and the officer succeeded in making their point felt.

Jabavu is then disconcerted to find that behaviour which ‘down home in the Union’ would be regarded as acceptable, brings her abuse in Rhodesia. Explaining that ‘it was a date in the month when it should be “proved that I was a woman”’, Jabavu enters a chemist’s and asks ‘the (white) “sales-lady” for what I wanted’. In South Africa this would be normal behaviour for ‘a Westernised type of woman [...] whether black, brown or white’, indicating that, at this point, *apartheid* makes some distinctions between perceived levels of sophistication. Here, however, the sales assistant throws ‘verbal bricks’ at Jabavu: ‘Whatever next! Fine thing when *Natives* wan’ things like that [...] Go ’n get whatever you people use in yer own native shops’. Jabavu remarks wryly that this reaction ‘was unexpected, for at home [...] they seldom go so far as to repulse your money’ (*DiC*, 77). These are telling incidents in themselves, but Jabavu gives greater importance to the hostility shown towards her family, who daily live with *apartheid*’s injustices, both petty and serious.

Jabavu’s narratives focus on family conflicts, rather than national upheaval, but her observations reveal the underlying threat to the Xhosa people, and all non-whites, whose enforced submission poses the greatest challenge to self-perception. Centuries of cross-cultural interactions have not inflicted the damage which *apartheid* brings. The influence of Dutch and British settlers is clearly evident in Xhosa communities: Xhosa housekeeping, for example, has a Victorian structure and familiar recipes include ‘Fat Cookies [...] pumpkin fritters, *konfyt*, biltong’ (*OP*, 158). Jabavu’s perception is that such influences have not damaged Xhosa society indeed, for her, they have enhanced it. Nor has her Western education, or that of her peers, threatened Xhosa culture, although some conflict is inevitable. The poignancy of Jabavu’s narratives lies partly in the fact that her readers understand something of the full impact of *apartheid* and its aftermath, of which she and her family saw glimpses in 1960, but of which they could only have had a partial understanding.

Dan Jacobson

Dan Jacobson, an English-speaking South African of Jewish descent, was born and brought up in Kimberley. The dynamics of his local community are explored in his autobiography, *Time and Time Again*, first part of which sketches significant moments of his life in South

Africa.³⁴ Jacobson travels as an expatriate who has lived in Britain for more than twenty years and is returning as the outsider, the Other, while also being the native. *The Electronic Elephant* charts his travels through South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe. Like Jabavu's narrative, Jacobson's journey is informed by South Africa's history and personal memories and associations. Although he begins his journey in Kimberley, it is largely independent of family ties.

Jacobson's aims as a traveller are vague. He has decided to revisit his home country but does not explain what made him travel at this particular time. His decision to take the Great North Road, 'the missionary road, the hunters' trail, the traders' trail', gives his journey historical significance but, more importantly for Jacobson, it was a route which was expected to 'open up the continent' by stretching from the Cape to Cairo (*EE*, 12, emphasis in original). Although this expectation was never realised, Jacobson seems to seize on the route as one which will open up South Africa and its neighbouring countries to him. His desire to re-explore his home country has been partly inspired by dreams

of a landscape which I always knew [...] to lie somewhere to the west of Kimberley. In these dreams I would invariably come (with a sense of both surprise and familiarity) upon elaborate towns, forests, farmlands, beautiful mountains, stately homes and ancient fortresses. (*EE*, 11–12)

Although such features are not actually part of South Africa's landscape, Jacobson explains that the dreams suggested to him that there was a landscape 'waiting for me'. The search for 'a secret territory' is then translated into a search for self (*EE*, 12).

Jacobson explains that no place can be known entirely or objectively on 'some kind of supra-historical elevation' which allows us to see 'the place of our birth and the period we live in [...] revealed to us, as if naked in their truth' (*EE*, 13). He does expect, however, to be able to know such areas more intimately and to attain better self-knowledge by understanding where he has come from in geographical and temporal terms. By connecting a physical journey with an inner quest, Jacobson opens himself up to the 'dread or shame that there might be *nothing there*: nothing to be seen, nothing to be learned, no one to meet, no past to register, no future to care about' (*EE*, 12, emphasis in original). Barrenness in

³⁴ Dan Jacobson, *Time and Time Again: Autobiographies*, 2nd edn (London: Flamingo, 1986), pp.3–71.

the landscape might reflect the emptiness in Jacobson's psyche, refusing him further insight into his life in South Africa.

The places Jacobson visits are contextualised by historical knowledge and personal memories, as he seeks to connect what he sees with what he knows. In this way Jacobson reviews the development of different towns and the impact which their history has had on them. His journey begins with the person. He flies to Kimberley 'where all my journeys had begun'. As he approaches Kimberley, he is conscious of an immediate reconnection to the past: a 'forgotten self instantly re-formed within' and it is with this self that he commences a 'memory debauch' in the town (*EE*, 17, 20).

The sense of loss which accompanies many of Jacobson's encounters, he first experiences in Kimberley. The town's appearance is still familiar but a fundamental and jarring difference negates the pleasure of recognising streets and buildings. Jacobson remembers Kimberley as a town where he knew 'by name or appearance thousands of people [...] I mean that quite literally' (*EE*, 17). As a result he often wished to find himself 'in a place where I knew nobody and was unknown to all' (*EE*, 20). After spending an afternoon exploring the town he is shocked to realise that 'Kimberley itself, where so many of the buildings I remembered were still standing [...] [had] become a place where I knew nobody and was unknown to all' (*EE*, 24). He meets 'exactly one person I had known before', a man who recognises him first, whom Jacobson knew slightly. After a brief conversation they have 'no more to say to one another [...] Off he stumped [...] The last of those vanished thousands' (*EE*, 25). The familiarity of the landscape jars with Jacobson's realisation that he is now a stranger in Kimberley and that he and his family have been all but effaced from the town. This vision of the world after his parents are gone suggests to Jacobson 'just how it would be after I had gone to join them' (*EE*, 26). He is chilled by the remorseless nature of a landscape which retains an appearance which, in his mind, belongs to a different era and carries so many associations of a vanished past.

The loss which Jacobson suffers in Kimberley is not only personal; he identifies a greater futility in the town's celebrated industrial purpose. Unlike other towns which, once industrious, have passed into disuse, Kimberley still thrives on its diamond industry. Jacobson relates his experience on a previous visit to the mines, remembering that from 'sixteen thousand tons of soil [...] some sixteen *ounces* of diamonds were extracted daily'

(*EE*, 28). To Jacobson it is absurd: ‘All *that* – for *this!*’ and, for him, the absurdity is made more profound by the impact which Kimberley has had on South Africa by virtue of its founders’ influence and the centrality of the diamond industry (*EE*, 29). He refers to the ‘immeasurable changes which were initiated there [...] the political purposes [...] to which Rhodes devoted the great fortunes he had amassed [...] [and] to the still-existing multi-national corporations’ (*EE*, 29). Reflecting on the influence of Kimberley’s riches and the inexorable process by which the town is still defined, Jacobson remarks that ‘one does not know whether to cry or to laugh’ (*EE*, 29).

By way of an answer, perhaps, he finishes his chapter on Kimberley with the memory of being in a copper mine in Zambia, in order to give some idea of the personal cost of Kimberley’s celebrated wealth. Jacobson recalls ‘the darkness [...] the heat [...] the howitzer-like roar of a six-foot drill [...] the ache in your back [...] and always the rough, lightless, inconceivably compacted immobility above and around you’ (*EE*, 30). The ‘most vivid revelation’ was how difficult it was ‘even for the miners themselves to take for granted the nightmarish nature of their job’ (*EE*, 31). He seems lost for words as he tries to ‘convey an unconveyable experience’, anxious to emphasise and re-emphasise the inherent worthlessness of an industry which cannot justify its human cost (*EE*, 30–31).

A sense of loss, or futility, is repeatedly felt as Jacobson continues. Unlike Kimberley, many once-thriving communities have now become defunct and Jacobson highlights the harsh contrast between celebrated and industrious pasts and present realities. Danielskuil, for example, has been devastated by the collapse of the asbestos industry ‘which used to be so important to the economy of the region’ (*EE*, 100). Jacobson speaks to a woman who, with her family, had helped her father in his small mine, describing how she, her brother and sister ‘would even jump into the sacks to make the asbestos fibres go down [...] Nobody knew anything in those days’ (*EE*, 109). Her mother died of lung cancer and the district suffered as all the mines were closed. Jacobson’s acquaintance clearly misses the security which a busy industry had brought to the town:

‘We never dreamt the mines would have to close. Maybe one day they’ll find a way of making asbestos safe again.’

‘Again?’ I asked.

She smiled, picking up my point. ‘Well, we thought it was safe in those days.’ (*EE*, 109)

Jacobson discovers a broken town, therefore, one which is still affected by the health issues of its formerly successful industry for which, as yet, there is no adequate replacement.

As Rhodes is remembered in Kimberley, so Robert Moffat and David Livingstone are commemorated in Griquatown, Kuruman and Campbell. Jacobson introduces Griquatown and Kuruman with a brief précis of the history of missionary work in South Africa. He recognises its impact in the thriving and various expressions of Christianity in present-day South Africa (*EE*, 137). But the towns which commemorate the Moffat and Livingstone families have little contemporary relevance, seeming only to define themselves in the light of the past and having no new purpose with which to shape their future. Jacobson and his wife visit the Moffat Museum in Kuruman, the grounds of which include the church in which Moffat intended to seat a thousand people (*EE*, 128). Apart from the two clergymen, and their wives, who are in charge of the museum's maintenance, '[t]he only congregation left [...] is that of the trees' (*EE*, 127). Locals neglect this reminder of their past and Jacobson cannot discern any new vision to replace the old.

Dirk Klopper argues that Jacobson's approach to politics in South Africa appears idiosyncratic:

although Jacobson travelled this road sometime after the release of Mandela in 1990 and before the democratic elections of 1994, there is no reference anywhere to the changes that were shortly to overthrow apartheid rule.³⁵

Jacobson makes few direct comments regarding the events unfolding at this time, but his remarks on South Africa's industry at Kimberley and Danielskuil and his observation of living conditions and race relations reveal that he is by no means an apolitical observer. But he is unwilling to predict the meaning, or outcome, of the political upheaval of the early 1990s: 'the future must always remain the darkest continent of all' (*EE*, 6). At a time of major change in South Africa Jacobson is wary of predicting the results, but his silence on political events may reflect a general pessimism, as he does not entirely ignore the shift in political ideology:

³⁵ Dirk Klopper, 'Travel and Transgression: Dan Jacobson's Southern African Journey' *Third World Quarterly* (2005), 26, no.3, 461–469 (p.461).

So at last the chance has come for those who had always opposed the mad dream of apartheid to replace that discredited fantasy with their own versions of their future [...] Some of them were [...] speaking of bringing into being a “non-racial” South Africa [...] One might as well talk of breeding a kosher pig. (*EE*, 76)

Wary as he is of prediction, Jacobson ridicules the idea that Mandela’s ‘rainbow’ South Africa could be created through the processes of government, as though such a concept could be expressed in legislation and implemented accordingly. He is not optimistic about seeing radical changes in perceptions of race, in the diminution of prejudice or bitterness, in South African societies.

Jacobson finds the elephant of his title in Botswana. It has been brought to Maun from Harare to be mended and John, the man responsible for its transportation, takes Jacobson to have a look, although his interest is only piqued by the fact that John describes it as an ‘electronic elephant’, which ignites a ‘fantasy of some secret group of American computer experts holed up in Maun!’. The battered elephant, made of ‘plaster applied over wire netting’, is only mechanical, with pedals and levers for a driver who sits inside and makes it move (*EE*, 258).

Of course, this seems an incongruous metaphor for Jacobson’s journey but he is struck by his unusual encounter and the forlorn nature of the broken machine, which had hinted at unsuspected depths. And perhaps there are such depths, although not of the fantastic and sophisticated nature which Jacobson had conceived. While at a party in London, he described this incident to ‘the editorial director of a large publishing house’ who then asked

‘Would you say that your book is about the Soul of Africa?’
It was as if the elephant’s eye was looking directly at me.
‘Yes,’ I answered. (*EE*, 260)

And so the elephant becomes a symbol of the Soul of Africa and of the book itself, somehow binding together Jacobson’s representations but, at the same time, being ironically detached from them. The idea of the elephant suggests a fantastic and unlooked-for revelation but, instead of being a sophisticated machine, it is a shambles of mechanical parts, operated by one man who must do all the work. Of course, a broken mechanical

elephant is a ludicrous representation of the complexity of a continent's soul; but this is an oblique comment on the impossibility of representation. Africa cannot be figured by any one image. And so, in some ways, a broken mechanical elephant works to critique the desire for incontrovertible meaning. The ridiculous nature of Jacobson's elephant is more fitting than anything which makes a serious claim to represent and define the whole of Africa; he uses it to illustrate the folly of such an attempt.

Part of the joke is the fact that Jacobson's narrative covers only three countries, all in the southern area of the continent; he does not make any serious attempt to connect his narrative with the rest of Africa. This sense of disjunction is also created by the narrative itself, as Jacobson's travels create impressions which he cannot bring together into a general conclusion. He does not summarise his self-exploration: the journey ends in Zimbabwe where 'the road to the north at once achieved its fulfilment and expired' (*EE*, 356). The purpose of Jacobson's narrative seems to expire at this point also. It ends with a diary entry which Jacobson made in Mafikeng which he describes, rather noncommittally, as 'as good a passage as any with which to end' (*EE*, 367). And it is possible that Jacobson sees no way to bring together the fragments of his experience, only part of which has been spent in areas familiar to him. He thus characterises his narrative too as a kind of broken elephant, invoking its image so as to suggest that even the very incoherence of his narrative is an integral part of the effect of the whole.

Dervla Murphy

South from the Limpopo draws on approximately a year's travel over three separate journeys between 1993 and 1995. In March 1993 Murphy travels from Zimbabwe into South Africa, taking five months to cycle around much of the country, from the northern Transvaal to Cape Town and then to Johannesburg through the southern and eastern provinces. In April 1994 Murphy returns for a month to follow the elections, staying in the Cape Town area. Returning in September, this time to Johannesburg, Murphy makes a tour of eastern South Africa before selling her bicycle and flying to Cape Town to spend Christmas and the New Year in Khayelitsha, one of the largest townships in South Africa. Murphy rarely makes such a series of journeys (although she has since done so in Siberia and Cuba), but her interest in the elections and their impact made it necessary for her to keep returning in an attempt to gauge how far political transitions affected day-to-day life across the country. Murphy's narrative, therefore, attempts an overview of South Africa's

political development; her status as an outsider, rather than an expatriate visitor, gives her a much broader perspective than South Africans who write about their home. *South from the Limpopo* is longer than the texts I have already discussed; Murphy does not want to misrepresent South Africa and so she includes a great deal of detail with a view to the fullest possible representation that one observer can give.

Normally Murphy's journeys are determined by the attraction of challenging terrain in rural and often mountainous areas in countries as various as Ethiopia, Afghanistan or Baltistan. She observes: 'no one of my disposition would choose to pedal through South Africa for fun' (*SfL*, xvi), as the influence of the West is everywhere. But South Africa's attraction for Murphy is the end of *apartheid* and the historic transition to democracy. Murphy subsequently spends much more time in urban centres, against her inclination: 'Usually I travel to get as far away as possible from motor cars, advertisement hoardings, fast-food outlets, supermarkets, electricity pylons' (*SfL*, xvi). It is in towns and cities that Murphy feels most connected to unfolding events and descriptions of travelling through the countryside are untypically condensed, as political issues are foregrounded.

Murphy always undertakes a period of research before travelling anywhere but claims that she does not use her reading to form preconceptions about 'culture or daily life'.³⁶ Her interest in South Africa, however, has been of long duration: she began 'to collect books about South Africa' in 1952, predating the start of her career as a travel writer in 1963 (*SfL*, xiv). Uniquely, then, this is a country which Murphy has reflected upon for some time, following and analysing its political development for forty years before acquiring any first-hand experience. She is particularly anxious to observe the changes which she assumes must be evident after legislated *apartheid* has been dismantled.

Murphy's preoccupation with major events in South Africa means that, to some extent, her rôle in South Africa is journalistic. Of course, as well as receiving extensive news coverage, radical political changes in South Africa have been the subject of many narratives, but Murphy's text is special because her political analysis and her journey come together in her unique personal manner. In her sixties, she undertakes two long cycling tours, travelling with the bare minimum of provisions and staying in cheap accommodation

³⁶ Author's Interview with Dervla Murphy, 17 August 2008.

or camping outdoors. There are few women travel writers like Murphy and her political analysis has a special quality not simply because, rather than interviewing dignitaries, she meets people of all ethnicities and social backgrounds, but because she is an older woman travelling alone. As well as canvassing local opinion on the subject of *apartheid*, Murphy reports key events surrounding the elections, including Mandela's inauguration, negotiations for the transitional constitution and the assassination of Chris Hani, the General Secretary of the South African Communist Party.

Unlike Jacobson, who does not anticipate a radical change in racial perceptions, Murphy reports on how far *apartheid* still governs South African societies as soon as she crosses the border from Zimbabwe. Even there she observes that 'the border-post suggests no diminution of white supremacy; it is guarded by well-armed expressionless young Afrikaners in crisp uniforms' (*SfL*, 10). She soon notes that black politicians refer to *apartheid* 'as still operative' (*SfL*, 74) and numerous gestures of exclusion or racial animosity support this contention. Her first meal in South Africa is taken 'under a baobab tree outside a café in the company of a friendly young Venda woman'. They are unable to sit together inside because the Afrikaner café owner 'cannot accept a mixed clientele on his premises' and has removed chairs and tables (*SfL*, 11). In Preskia a black man, Ronnie, asks the bartender for permission to talk to Murphy in the Ladies' Bar, an area mainly occupied by whites while the main bar is open to everyone. Murphy is annoyed by such 'sour little evasions of the new reality' but her companions respond pragmatically. Ronnie points out 'I must live in this town. I ask permission, it's OK.' (*SfL*, 128). The Venda woman reasons that white South Africans have 'just got a bad shock. Leaders can't change people quickly. Give them time' (*SfL*, 11).

Murphy does not only observe and report events but also has an 'innate urge to participate at worm's-eye level', in order to connect with locals and, when appropriate, offer her support (*SfL*, 73). And so she attends rallies organised by the Youth League of the African National Congress (ANC) with her Xhosa friends (*SfL*, 189). During the elections she spends a couple of days cycling around the Cape Town area, stopping at different polling stations *en route* in order to observe how people are reacting to this new expression of equality (*SfL*, 316–320). Murphy's eagerness to participate in events at ground-level, looking for reactions from ordinary people, gives her some insight into the more personal aspects of significant historical events. At times, however, her reluctance to distance

herself jeopardises her ability to appreciate the event, as demonstrated at Mandela's inauguration as President.

As 'an old friend' of one of South Africa's new MPs, Murphy is invited 'to watch the President's election from the Distinguished Strangers' Gallery' but turns it down, reasoning that 'within Parliament I could watch history being made, as an observer. On the Grand Parade I will be able to *feel* history being made, as a participant' (*SfL*, 333). She positions herself beside a wire fence with 'a clear view of the balcony' (*SfL*, 336). As the crowd increases, however, 'some of the thousands trapped behind the grandstand [...] [try] to push their way around'. Those nearest the railings are in danger of being crushed and are instructed by ANC marshals to 'grip the wire mesh, put one foot on the solid metal frame [...] bend low as if in a rigger scrum and pull the fence towards us without a moment's let-up' (*SfL*, 337).

For Murphy, the ceremony is eclipsed by the 'terrifying pressure' of the crowd; Mandela is 'inaudible and those of us in the frontline – heads down, buttocks up – could only glimpse him out of the corners of our eyes' (*SfL*, 338). This is a terrifying experience for Murphy and she remarks that it seems 'grotesque [...] to be so frightened during the happiest event I have ever attended – frightened as rarely before in a long lifetime of travel' (*SfL*, 338). The noise does not die down as Mandela speaks because, for most of the crowd, 'what their new President *said* was unimportant – in fact, unintelligible, to the non-English-speaking younger generations' (*SfL*, 338). This is a unique experience perhaps, as a journalist would have opted to observe from the Gallery (and doubtless some did), but also an anti-climax for both Murphy and her readers, as she cannot provide much detail about the historic exchange of power.

Another characteristic of Murphy's analysis is her constant communication with people of different ethnicities in order to gather as varied a response as possible to South Africa's political transition. It is relatively easy for her to canvass opinions among white, coloured and Asian groups by staying in guest houses and receiving their hospitality. As a European, Murphy usually finds it easy to socialise with white South Africans, although in the northern Transvaal people are more insular and clearly suspicious of foreigners. Outside the Transvaal Murphy finds that Afrikaners are 'often warmly hospitable' although still 'rabidly anti-black' (*SfL*, 61). She reasons that there must be many liberal South Africans

‘scattered all over this country’ but she meets very few whom she considers to be genuinely liberal (*SfL*, 225). More often she finds that white people cannot bring themselves to socialise with black people and that tariffs in bars, country clubs and leisure centres have been subsequently increased (*SfL*, 380).

According to Murphy, the Asian community in South Africa comprises only 2.5 percent of the population and so her encounters with Asians are rare. Those she meets are mostly African National Congress supporters, which she finds encouraging (*SfL*, 388, 416). She observes that ‘most Indians seem to feel a need to emphasize their South African identity’ on the basis that outsiders perceive them to be ‘not *quite* South African’ (*SfL*, 415–416). They acknowledged that their ‘culture is [...] visibly Asian’ but, although only ‘a small bit of the mosaic’, they perceive themselves to be ‘disproportionately important’, having established successful businesses and affluent communities (*SfL*, 416)

Coloured communities are more common than Asian but here Murphy soon discovers a special difficulty. Near Hermanus, in the Cape Town area, she cycles through a coloured township. Outside the bar she sees ‘drunks [...] singing and shouting and quarrelling’ which deters her from stopping. Arguably any stranger may have found such a scene intimidating but Murphy reflects that ‘had they been black, that same rowdiness would not have deterred me’ (*SfL*, 230). She identifies her reluctance to socialise as part of her inability to ‘feel at ease with Coloureds’ (*SfL*, 230). Despite their ‘impetuous hospitality’ the ease of striking up ‘a superficial, chatty relationship’ with them disguises resentments and insecurities which later become apparent (*SfL*, 230). By contrast, Murphy considers that ‘not even the most deprived blacks seem as insecure as this community’ (*SfL*, 230). Murphy, therefore, cycles on to Hermanus, a white community, finding it easier to spend time among those who are secure in their racial identity, although many hold bitter prejudices.

Black communities are not easily accessible to Murphy and by the time she reaches Cape Town in 1993 she feels frustrated that she has been unable to communicate with many black people. Boldly venturing into the vast Xhosa township, Khayelitsha, she speaks to several people and, at length, is invited to spend a short time living there so that, as some residents suggest, she can ‘write [about] how it *feels*’ (*SfL*, 177). Murphy’s sympathy for the ANC cause and the warm hospitality of her new friends enables her to feel at home in

Khayelitsha and she seems more comfortable here than anywhere else in South Africa. Of course, Khayelitsha's residents cannot feel the same comfort, being excluded from any other choice of home (*SfL*, 185). But, where possible, Murphy tries to gain a better understanding of the extreme difficulties of everyday life for black communities and, therefore, to appreciate more fully the significance of their new status as equal citizens.

Murphy is eager for the elections, confident that 'in Madiba's South Africa anything may be possible' (*SfL*, 168). She senses 'an immense relief', at least among Afrikaners, at the relatively smooth election process (*SfL*, 346), agreeing with a young man's suggestion that the peaceful elections only seemed so miraculous 'because whites got so panicky beforehand' (*SfL*, 323). Murphy then returns to South Africa in September 1994 in order to assess how far ANC rule has impacted day-to-day life. This account becomes something of a catalogue of encounters which prove her friends' opinion that she will 'find everything changed and nothing changed' (*SfL*, 367). Murphy agrees that this 'paradox is tangible, powerful, the keynote of the new South Africa' (*SfL*, 369). Her narrative produces many examples but the most poignant expression of the paradox occurs in Khayelitsha.

Returning to Khayelitsha Murphy assesses the impact which the ANC has had at ground level. She is pleased that her hostess, Blossom, now works 'in a white-owned Cape Town hairdressing salon which had rejected her [...] before the elections' (*SfL*, 532). Elsewhere changes are 'more apparent than real': new electricity poles have been set up but they do little more than create the appearance of improved living conditions (*SfL*, 533).

Theoretically 'everyone can be connected and have a card-operated meter installed' but, as not everyone can afford cards, many homes still use oil-lamps, although these same homes also have unused bulbs hanging from the ceiling (*SfL*, 533). The effect of such appearances, however, seems positive in 1994. Murphy observes that the display of 'various electrical appliances' is common and concludes that 'the fact that such appliances can be used, whenever enough rands are available, is in itself morale-boosting' (*SfL*, 533).

Murphy's gratification at signs of progress in Khayelitsha is marred by a shocking display of deep-rooted racial hatred which gives her some insight into the profound depths and complexities of South Africa's racial tensions and indicates that it will take many years for race relations to lose their bitterness. Hearing that a number of her friends have never seen the sea, Murphy organises a trip to Muizenberg beach on December 26th (*SfL*, 542). Soon

after their arrival the group's attention is caught by 'a piercing scream' which comes from 'a lower walkway' of the pavilion (*SfL*, 543). A young Coloured woman is being attacked: 'She was lying with her legs wide apart being kicked all over – but especially in the genitals – by three black youths' (*SfL*, 543–544). Murphy feels 'paralysed' not only from witnessing 'the barbarity itself' but because of 'the mass reaction to it'. Everyone around Murphy

crowded to the railings and cheered on the youths [...] Including my companions, with their excited little children standing on tiptoe to see what was happening [...] I have no doubt my companions would have enjoyed witnessing the death of the young woman. (*SfL*, 544)

Murphy is angered and disturbed that her friends are 'enjoying vicious brutality as sheer entertainment' and it is a significant shock to her: 'the world seemed to have gone off its axis'. She is disconcerted still further by the way that 'the atmosphere reverted to normal' after the attackers are driven away by coloured policemen. Murphy's companions are soon 'chatting and laughing – in party mood again' while she struggles with her reactions to the violence and with her new perception of her friends (*SfL*, 544).

Revealing her (perhaps excessive) postcolonial sensitivity, Murphy is unwilling to criticise her friends without trying understand them and asks herself 'if I had been overreacting?' and whether such a 'relish for violence' was perhaps 'degenerate' or 'desensitized', rather than 'evil' (*SfL*, 544). But she admits that she may be 'trying to excuse the inexcusable'. She asks her friend if it would 'have been different were the victim black' and Georgina's response, 'Yes [...] because she was Coloured there was a reason for it', justifies Murphy's disapproval. Georgina is ashamed of her answer and apologises: 'It's bad, I know it's bad. But always you get a buzz from it'. Murphy gives Georgina credit for being 'brave enough to confront her own confusions' but she is troubled by her friend's mixed principles (*SfL*, 545).

Murphy is made aware of the impossibility of legislating forgiveness and tolerance. It is a problem which she will encounter again in Rwanda and, even there, Murphy looks for the evidence that reconciliation is possible.³⁷ She is encouraged by a friend's observation:

³⁷ Dervla Murphy, *Visiting Rwanda* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1998), p.118.

‘Now everything’s different, we needn’t hate each other any more’. Previously this man had ‘admitted to AWB [Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging] sympathies’, and so even extremist views have been impacted by the success of the elections (*SfL*, 346). Murphy interprets this turnaround as evidence that racist feeling in South Africa will be dispelled as people appreciate that their society will not be destabilised by ANC rule.

Even when she feels optimistic about the future Murphy must acknowledge that much is still unchanged and bitterness and hatred will not be easily soothed. Jacobson is unwilling to suggest the shape of South Africa’s future but Murphy is more confident. She expresses the opinion that Mandela’s government is moving in the right direction and that South Africa’s corruption will be purged by ‘freedom of information and freedom of speech’ (*SfL*, 546). She seems confident that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will bring to light the worst offences and that greater accountability will ensure a stronger foundation for peaceful race relations in South African society. It is perhaps necessary for Murphy to believe that reconciliation in shattered countries is possible. As an Irishwoman, Murphy perceives a number of similarities between South Africa and conflicts in Northern Ireland. Her hope for South Africa’s progress as a peaceful country is perhaps fuelled by a similar hope for peace in Ireland.

Conclusion

The multiple South Africas presented by these four authors demonstrate something of the country’s development in the twentieth century and the diverse issues which are relevant to the future of its various cultures. Van der Post, in some sense, has no South Africa to represent because the people and culture he seeks have long since disappeared. But he perceives both a personal and international relevance in this lost civilisation which prompts him to search for its closest living representatives. Van der Post speaks with remorse over the loss of one culture which has no remedy, but he has little, if anything, to say about those being persecuted at the time he was travelling.

Jacobson and Murphy’s accounts of post-*apartheid* South Africa both acknowledge that politicians are attempting to effect radical changes to end the suffering and indignity which Jabavu in part records. Their very different views on the impact of such changes, however, influenced by the difference in their emotional baggage and cultural preconceptions, create two distinctly different narratives. Murphy’s work is characterised by a confidence that

such changes must presage a more peaceful future and she seeks confirmation of this view in every political event and personal encounter. Both writers are aware of the fragility of South African society at this time but Jacobson is more reluctant to believe that communities can be healed through one political vision as completely as they were broken by another.

None of these six texts, separately or in conjunction, presents a full and definitive image of South Africa but each has unique and distinct qualities. Five illustrate something of the depth of perception and contrast which native texts can add to the body of travel writing about Africa. The broad nature of Murphy's text gives a better overview than localised, personal accounts but, since she is a visitor, Murphy's account lacks the emotional intensity of the others. As the distinctions between these narratives demonstrate something of South Africa's complexity and diversity so they also point to the many other South Africas that could exist. Representations of any country must always adapt to express the fluidity of constantly-changing environments; multiple accounts cannot produce a definitive image, rather they point to a country's limitless capacity to be defined and re-defined by each successive generation.

Conclusion

I have attempted to provide a series of historical and cultural contexts for twentieth-century travel writing about Africa and to analyse some key texts in the light of these contexts. Modern travel narratives have not had the same type of impact as earlier texts of discovery. But Africa must, in effect, be repeatedly discovered. Africa as an idea, a continent and a group of countries is constantly in the process of being refashioned in fact and in representation. Africa has been imagined, travelled, represented and re-represented by Western witnesses and I have tried to show a small part of this process. It is a process that is both exhilarating and frustrating, exhilarating because representation is so various and unsettled and frustrating for the same reason. But these are the motives which will drive future exploration and which will perhaps in the end mean that African countries become increasingly involved in their own self-representation.

Regions that offer the challenges of difference and remoteness will continue to appeal to Western travellers. But, while little-known areas in Africa give freshness and romance to a travel account, travel writers do not travel to Africa to discover new territories. Rather, they want to see and understand something of the continent for themselves, assessing countries in the light of past representations and constructing new versions which have more relevance to contemporary African experiences and cultures. The writing that I have examined demonstrates how past accounts unavoidably form part of the baggage of new travellers – every text is in dialogue with past representations. Modern versions of African countries respond to previous ways of thinking and writing about Africa; these responses in turn reflect trends in modern thought. Through the diversity of cultural context travel writers still hope to exploit the unique nature of personal perspective in order to contribute something original and individual to the discourses by which African countries are constructed.

Evelyn Waugh's reference to fantastic reports of Ethiopia indicates his intention to recreate a more modern, relevant image of Ethiopia, unrelated to fantasy.¹ Waugh's political views, while acceptable to his readership in the 1930s, have long been outdated, but his travel accounts have also contributed to the development of current trends. Wilfred Thesiger's

¹ Evelyn Waugh, *Waugh Abroad: Collected Travel Writing* (London: Everyman's Library, 2003), p.187.

travels in Ethiopia and Kenya suggest a desire to connect with older representations, an easier task in the Danakil region in 1933 than in post-independent Kenya. Thesiger's aesthetic preference for traditional societies is romantic, of course, but his representations are unique and valuable. In Ethiopia Thesiger is the first European to describe the route of the Awash river; in Kenya, where such discoveries are impossible, Thesiger's experiences are focused on rural areas, away from the communities of white settlers whose experiences of Kenya have dominated twentieth-century accounts.

Dervla Murphy's Ethiopian and South African narratives briefly indicate the nature of her background reading; like Waugh, Murphy refers to older impressions which point up her more recent investigations.² The detail in her narratives indicates that Murphy strives for something like accuracy, although in Ethiopia, of course, her interest in rural areas give bias to her overall representation. Her denial that urban Ethiopia belongs to a 'real' Ethiopia is, of course, untenable but indicates the continuing desire to get closer to authentic experience. Of course, the 'reality' of urban South Africa is central to Murphy's later journey.

Redmond O'Hanlon's work regards Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as an inescapable sub-text. O'Hanlon never mentions Conrad, but the intensity of Marlow's journey and his near loss of control are echoed in O'Hanlon's near madness. The intense emotion of the journey does not culminate in an inner clarification for O'Hanlon, as it appears to do for Marlow. But O'Hanlon's confused struggle with the knowledge of what he has seen is perhaps itself a critique of Conrad's text. The harsh and relentless struggles which characterise the day-to-day lives of O'Hanlon's companions, whom he must leave, cannot be solved by writing about them.

Modern writers, then, are aware of older representations of African countries but hope to re-create them in a postcolonial context, privileging African culture over Western preoccupations. But developments in Western thought can produce conflict in travel writing. Murphy's feminist outlook reflects another radical development in twentieth-century Western thought and, in a Western context, it is appropriate that Murphy demonstrates that women, even older women, are capable of strenuous, independent travel.

² Dervla Murphy, *In Ethiopia with a Mule* (London: John Murray, 1968), p.1; *South from the Limpopo: Travels through South Africa*, 1st published 1997 (London: Flamingo, 1998), p.xiv.

Africans, however, find Murphy's behaviour unsettling. More than this, Murphy is distressed by the status of many African women, but it is difficult for her to communicate her compassion and concern in a way which these women are able to understand and accept. Similarly, O'Hanlon is confused when Marcellin's rational, scientific mindset is challenged by reminders of more traditional beliefs.³ Cultural sensitivity inevitably clashes with other elements of modern Western thought, but the purpose of travel is to reveal such confusions and dialogues between cultures.

Petina Gappah remarks that 'when you think of a travel book about Africa, chances are, it was written by a white man, or [...] a white woman'.⁴ Representations of Africa strive for cultural relevance but are still dominated by non-African, and predominantly Western, perspectives. Of course, as I have indicated, some Africans have begun to explore relationships between self, culture and home. But the valuable insights of Laurens van der Post, Noni Jabavu and Dan Jacobson have not yet been supported by much further development in African travel writing. Since the millennium only a few more texts have emerged which point towards ongoing development of African self-representation in travel writing.

Sihle Khumalo's *Dark Continent, my Black Arse* (2007), his account of a Cape to Cairo journey, makes a coarse joke about Western cultural coercion in its title.⁵ While this clearly offers a comment on Western constructions of Africa, Khumalo's text does not engage with these representations. Gappah laments the fact that 'the internal gaze, a book about travel in Africa by a black African' is missing in travel writing. She had high hopes, therefore, of a reflective and seminal travel account. She is disappointed to realise that Khumalo's narrative is engaging, but has little else to recommend it given Khumalo's 'lapping acceptance of stereotypes, and his inability to get beneath the surface when a surface perusal will do'.⁶

Khumalo does not discuss or seriously challenge Western representations of Africa and it is not clear if he has any interest in them beyond the joke in his title. What he does reveal

³ O'Hanlon, p.228–29.

⁴ Petina Gappah, 'Not Yet Uhuru', *African Writing Online* <<http://www.african-writing.com/hol/petinagappah.htm>> [accessed 28 October 2009].

⁵ Sihle Khumalo, *Dark Continent, my Black Arse: By Bus, Boksie, Matola – from Cape to Cairo* (Roggebaai: Umuzi, 2007).

⁶ Gappah, *African Writing Online*.

is the limitations of his own cultural background, which he explains freely: ‘Growing up in apartheid South Africa, I was made to believe that as long as I could speak my home language (Zulu) and the “universal” language (English), the world would be my oyster’; ‘the history I was taught at school did not reflect the role that the Arabs had played on the African continent’.⁷ The reader is offered valuable insights into the cultural baggage of a black South African educated during *apartheid*. Khumalo’s text, therefore, reveals something of South African constructions of other African countries and he does scrutinise his preconceptions as they are challenged by his experiences. As Gappah concludes, ‘with larger ambition’ Khumalo’s narrative ‘could have been something special’ but, as it is, the ground-breaking narrative is yet to emerge.⁸

Binyavanga Wainaina’s *Discovering Home* (2003), an earlier, much shorter account, indicates a more self-conscious process of exploring self and home, which perhaps corresponds more closely to Gappah’s expectations. Leaving university in South Africa, Wainaina explains that he is going home to Kenya for a year and intends ‘to travel as much as possible’.⁹ The fifty-two page narrative relates a few memorable encounters which reflect something of Kenya’s cultural variety. And, unlike Khumalo, Wainaina responds to Western constructions of Kenya: ‘I am astonished by the amount of game that appears for breakfast at their patios, and the number of snakes that drop into baths [...] I have seen five or six snakes in my life’.¹⁰ Of course, these are general impressions, reminiscent of ‘How to Write about Africa’, but they re-emphasise how Wainaina’s experience interrogates his reading.

Wainaina discovers his home by identifying how Kenyans create themselves within their cultural contexts and how identities are often characterised by managing conflicts. He observes that ‘there’s nothing wrong with being what you are not in Kenya, just be it successfully’.¹¹ In Nairobi Wainaina can easily identify rural Kenyans because they cannot ‘train themselves to a background of so much chaos. They do not know how to put on a glassy expression’, to hide uncertainty. This contrasts to the city-dwellers’ brash confidence: ‘This is what you do to get ahead [...] treat your straitjacket as if it were a

⁷ Khumalo, p.83, p.111.

⁸ Gappah, *African Writing Online*.

⁹ Binyavanga Wainaina, *Discovering Home* (n.p.: Privately published, 2003), p.8.

¹⁰ Wainaina, p.31.

¹¹ Wainaina, p.39.

game, a challenge'.¹² The conflict between rural and urban, tradition and modernity, is developed further on a visit to Maasailand. Wainaina meets Suzannah, who has been educated in Nairobi but considers settling at home, attempting to balance the contradictions of her rural and urban identities: 'this is her compromise – to live two lives fluently'.¹³ I have mentioned Dan Jacobson's remembrance of a 'forgotten self' when he returns to Kimberly;¹⁴ travelling in Uganda for a family reunion, Wainaina observes this same process of remembering in his mother: 'Mum looks almost foreign now; her Kinyarwanda accent is more pronounced, and her face is not as reserved as usual'.¹⁵

Wainaina's own act of self-definition is implied: he watches himself in social or family contexts, as if trying to gauge how far he belongs within these frameworks. When he travels to Mwingi on business the local chief pulls him into Kamba society: 'You Kikuyus cannot think further than your next coin [...] Kambas [...] work hard [...] we play hard. So drink your beer!'. Wainaina joins in but becomes uncomfortable with 'the levels of pleasure around' him.¹⁶ Similarly, in Uganda, his attempts to inquire about family history puzzle his grandfather: 'He keeps giving me this bewildered look [...] as if he were asking: Can't you just relax and party?'.¹⁷ Overall, Wainaina's exploration is not very coherent or developed, but it reveals a number of issues in the Kenyan psyche, important characteristics of Kenyan life, pointing towards the potential scope for further studies.

Although clearly interested in how Africa is created in travel writing, Wainaina has a greater interest in fictional representations: 'I believe fiction is better than the real world'.¹⁸ Yet his own brief, non-fictional memoir of his return home offers something different from fiction and perhaps speaks more directly to his audience. Places in this memoir are constructed within a particular cultural framework, within a particular time; travel writing may not have the freedom of fiction but this in part authenticates it. Travel narratives, as I have demonstrated, contribute towards the construction of a historical plot, as fragments of experience in a chronological time-scale. This historicity adds to the unique character of a

¹² Wainaina, p.11, p.10.

¹³ Wainaina, p.38.

¹⁴ Dan Jacobson, *The Electronic Elephant: A Southern African Journey*, 1st published 1994 (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p.17.

¹⁵ Wainaina, p.47.

¹⁶ Wainaina, p.22, p.23.

¹⁷ Wainaina, p.51.

¹⁸ Mildred Kiconco Barya, 'An Interview with Binyavanga Wainaina', *Pambazuka News* <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/African_Writers/57076> [accessed 30 October 2009].

travel narrative, which is evident in all the texts I have discussed and is most poignantly expressed in the memories of Haile Selassie's Ethiopia.

There is no authoritative 'Africa', although there is hegemony of representation. V. Y. Mudimbe argues that 'the multifaceted "idea" of Africa [...] is a product of the West'.¹⁹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that 'the "African idea" [is] African self-representation [...] that which was forged in the diaspora and traveled back to the continent'.²⁰ But constructions of Africa are not confined to external, or expatriate, impressions. Increasingly, as I have shown, representations of Africa are now being complicated and challenged by African perspectives. Part of this complication is, of course, the question of what is Africa and who is African? What is the sum of a group of countries, so arbitrarily divided in a colonial past, where ethnic groups span several borders but where people, terrain and cultures throughout the continent are so diverse? African self-representation interrogates and deconstructs the Other's gaze, and such developments have been powerfully expressed in African fiction in particular.

In travel writing, however, 'Africa' is still predominantly a Western construct. If travel writing is so influential as a cultural indicator, as I have argued, then the fluidity of cultural perspectives must be mirrored by an equal fluidity in representation. It is valuable to question how Westerners re-evaluate their understanding of African countries, particularly in the light of postcolonial readings of Victorian texts of exploration. In order to identify and dismantle perspectives which still echo racist sentiments it is necessary for Westerners to subvert older influences but also, crucially, for Africans to 'write back'. Western representations of Africa develop in response to changes in Western thinking, rather than to African ideas about Africa and specific countries. There is still scope for travel discourses about Africa to increase in depth, complexity and flexibility and this is the potential outcome to be hoped for from a new generation of native African travellers.

¹⁹ V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, 1st published 1994 (Oxford: James Currey, 2005), p.xi.

²⁰ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance* (New York: BasicCivitas Books, 2009), p.72.

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