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Travel Writing Studies

[rev. *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies: A Critical Glossary*,
ed. by Charles Forsdick, Zoë Kinsley and Kathryn Walchester,
Anthem Press, London and New York, 2019.]

Keywords for Travel Writing Studies: A Critical Glossary was published in 2019 by Anthem Press in their series “Anthem Studies in Travel”. The book’s editors are travel writing scholars from three different universities in Liverpool: Charles Forsdick (University of Liverpool), Zoë Kinsley (Liverpool Hope University) and Kathryn Walchester (Liverpool John Moores University), while the list of contributors — authors of its one hundred entries — apart from the three editors, includes thirty-eight other scholars; this list includes most of the ‘key names’ in the discipline of travel writing studies, such as: Mary Baine Campbell, Steve Clark, Alex Drace-Francis, Corrine Fowler, Julia Kuehn, Paul Smethurst, Carl Thompson and Tim Youngs.

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Keywords for Travel Writing Studies is a reflection of the growing maturity of the field of travel writing studies, an academic discipline which started to be established only in the 1980s and which has developed dynamically over the last four decades. This dynamism is visible in the number of scholarly papers, journals and monographs published all over the world, as well as critical anthologies of travel writing and travel writing studies, of which the most recent and the most prominent include: *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing* (2016), edited by Carl Thompson, *New Directions in Travel Writing Studies* (2015), edited by Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst, and *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing* (2019), edited by Nandini Das and Tim Youngs. *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies* differs from these books in the format it follows, a format first used by Raymond Williams in his seminal *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976) and later applied in many other *Keywords for...*, such as *Keywords for Mobility Studies* (2015), *Keywords for Mobility: Critical Engagements* (2016), to mention only the ones which have had the strongest impact on the book edited by Forsdick, Kinsley and Walchester.

Keywords for Travel Writing Studies consists of one hundred entries. Each of them is approximately 1000 words long, and set alphabetically from “Abroad” to “World”. These ‘entries’ are in fact short essays rather than purely encyclopaedic or dictionary definitions and descriptions. The pattern with all of the ‘essays’ is very consistent and each of them is structured around two frames of reference. The first frame seeks to give a brief account of the etymology of the entry with references to changing patterns of its use and meanings. The second frame encompasses a range of theoretical and critical texts from travel writing studies (as well as from such ‘companion’ disciplines as literary studies, sociology, geography and history), but also from the primary sources: ‘canonical’, as well as many ‘non-canonical’ travel narratives written over the ages.

The choice of the entries testifies on the one hand to the stability which the discipline of travel writing studies has acquired over the last four decades and, on the other, to strong ties with ‘cognate’ fields such as postcolonial studies, translation studies, tourism studies and cultural studies, and to a set of philosophical and moral concerns which these disciplines share; this trend is visible in entries such as ‘body’, ‘border’, ‘ethics’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘gender’ and ‘identity’. In fact, such general entries create the impression of a certain eclecticism when put alongside far more specialized, narrower, and discipline-

specific entries such as ‘coevalness’, ‘end-of-travel’, or ‘extreme travel’. And, whereas at the core of the glossary are entries associated closely with the act of travelling, such as ‘abroad’, ‘arrival’, ‘beaten track’, ‘tourism’ or ‘velocity’, it is the entries like ‘Grand Tour’, ‘Home Tour’, ‘contact zone’, and ‘monarch-of-all-I-survey’ which testify to the identity and ‘independence’ of the discipline of travel writing studies, for they are used by travel writing scholars, but also have been adopted in the research of scholars of cognate fields. ‘Contact zone’ and ‘monarch-of-all-I-survey’ were first introduced in the discipline’s now canonical text by Marie Louise Pratt *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), and are now common among many scholars across different fields of the Arts and Humanities and beyond.

Charles Forsdick, in the Introduction to *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies*, admits that: “[p]ublished in English and locating itself primarily in the English-language tradition, the current volume is characterized by an Anglocentrism and even Anglonormativity that we acknowledge” (xxii). One of the features of both Anglocentrism and Anglonormativity in travel writing studies is the anti-generic stance of its mainstream discourse, with scholars usually glad when they cursorily remark on the ‘hybridity’ of travel writing and problems with generic distinction. In fact there are two such entries in *Keywords*: ‘form’ and ‘genre’, and there are no longer more ‘specific’ generic entries like ‘modern travel book’ or ‘voyages and travels’, which were incorporated into a much smaller, shorter and less detailed glossary provided at the end of Carl Thompson’s *Travel Writing* (2011). Alex Drace-Francis in ‘form’, on the one hand notes that travel can be recorded “by any number of a vast array of signs” (96) and lists: photographs, paintings, drawings, films, sound recordings, but also documents like passports, passenger records, or even traces like footprints and smells. On the other hand, he notes that “travel writing also played a role in elevating genres such as letters, diaries, and philosophical reflections to literary respectability”. (97) Stacey Burton, in ‘genre’, confirms the fact that many travel writing scholars “have often set the concept of genre aside” (102), and then discusses the issue of ‘genre’ in very general terms, mostly through reference to scholars and writers located outside the Anglocentric field, such as Bakhtin, Butor and Sebald. And thus, the issues of genre(s) in travel writing in *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies* in Anglophone travel writing remain largely ‘set aside’.

However, it is quite obvious that a large glossary like *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies* cannot focus on all the complexities of a discipline which has been developing dynamically over the last forty years. The book is an impressive collective work which, thanks to the cross-reference system used throughout it and the attractive essay format of all the entries, offers fascinating reading for travel writing scholars, but at the same time will serve for a long time as a useful introduction to travel writing studies for newcomers.

References

Forsdick, Ch., Kinsley, Z., & Walchester, K. (Eds.). (2019). *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies: A Critical Glossary*. London and New York: Anthem Press.