

Through Words and Places: Travel and Writing in Dutch- and German-speaking Regions of Europe between 1800 and 1950

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Datum, Ort: 01.03.2013–02.03.2013, Münster

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In recent times travel and travel writing are not merely seen as a way of discovering and describing the world, but are primarily perceived as cultural practices that construct the foreign worlds that they mean to encounter.¹ The study of travel and travel writing has thus become a way of not only exploring travel movements and accounts of individual travelers, but also of dealing with travel as a cross-cultural activity that reveals just as much about the travelers and their sociological, political and cultural environments, as it does about the people and environment they are confronted with. This holds true not only for travelling to far-away places and countries, but also for travelling on a smaller scale, for example to neighboring countries and regions within Europe. For the conference in Münster travel and travel writing within Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Belgium were an unconventional sample of European countries and regions that proved to be a closely intertwined area within the investigated period of the long 19th century. It became evident that even within Europe the exotic is not difficult to find, as looking for the completely different is also essential for travelling shorter distances. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary cooperation among historical and literary scholars seemed to be effortless, whereby the differences in methodological approaches between the two were not expounded upon.

TIM YOUNGS (Nottingham) and OTTMAR ETTE (Potsdam) opened up the field of travel (writing) studies in its sys-

tematical and in its historical dimension by representing the dual approach to travelling brought into practice during the conference: travel writing „through words“ as a textual procedure of creating foreign worlds and travelling „through places“ as a cultural practice in its historical context. Youngs emphasized that in the course of travel writing studies there has been a conflict between textual and contextual approaches, especially when the ideological dimension of travel texts was investigated from a post-colonial perspective, whereas a more conservative approach focused on the importance of historical facts in the contextualization of travel writing. This might serve to mirror the differences between a literary and a historical approach to travel (writing). While literary studies stress the individual text and its textual representation strategies, historical studies treat texts as historical sources to reconstruct travel acts. Nevertheless, Youngs' dictum that „travel is never unmediated“ can be seen as a basic assumption shared by the two disciplines. According to Youngs, this also makes the act of travel, as well as the reporting of it, all the more significant as „under the guise of reports, values are transported. Travel (writing) shows how we define ourselves and others, how the individual is distinguished from the nation, and how stereotypes are created, reinforced or challenged.“ Youngs emphasized that travel (writing) studies should not just be limited to a national perspective, and Ette reinforced this statement by outlining the global dimension of travelling from the historical perspective. He depicted the new type of global circulation of knowledge since the late 18th century which tried to find all-embracing visions of the world by designing and linking landscapes on a global scale. This way a dynamic space between different places, but also between different (travel) texts, was created that surpasses the movement of the travelers.

The concept of travelling knowledge was further elaborated on in several lectures

¹Der Bericht ist bereits bei H-Germanistik veröffentlicht worden: <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Germanistik&month=1304&week=c&msg=/d1pNeVuOjkitv2sb4/IcQ&user=&pw> (07.05.2013)

on travelling for scientific or scholarly purposes. KATRIN POLENZ (Jena) highlighted the practice of geognostic travelling as a specific form of scientific travelling, as carried out by Alexander von Humboldt, among others, in the late 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. Turning the Alps in Switzerland from an obstacle on one's „grand tour“ to Italy into a popular travel destination, the inventory of different rocks was meant to provide a comprehensive view of the world by integrating all grounds of the world into the neptunistic idea of a common rock structure. Elements of scientific travelling re-emerged in a new kind of scholarly travelling carried out during the 19th century. As with the earlier means of scientific travelling, the act of travel was meant to collect data that were synthesized into a greater context at a home base, though these data could no longer be accessed through outdoor field studies: HERMAN PAUL (Leiden) described the practice of archival travel, in which young historians, in a gigantic and systematic team effort, travelled to archives all over Europe with the utopian vision of putting together a complete collection of medieval documents on their home regions. In archival travel the act of travelling was considered as a means of exploring the past in service of the national inheritance, constructing the fiction of an all-encompassing journey. JOHAN OOSTERMAN (Nijmegen) demonstrated how similar procedures played a role in journeys by W.J.A. Jonckbloet, the founding scholar of studies in Dutch literature, to archives in Germany, where he searched for Dutch literary documents from the Middle Ages.

The global dimension of travelling in the mobilization of knowledge was picked up again by ALISON MARTIN (Reading) with respect to Ida Pfeiffer's travels and travel accounts. She demonstrated how, instead of fading out all travel environments during archival travelling, Pfeiffer combined the adventurous and scientific aspects of travelling by collecting natural samples on her journeys. Her travel accounts, which moved across national borders through various translations from German to Dutch and English, became scientific sources as well as confrontations with the unfamiliar outskirts of the colonial

empires, creating further attention by anti-imperial comments and the mere fact that their original writer was a woman who became confused with „the wild“ that she described. A further traveler, as a mediating figure between cultures, was brought into focus by EDWIN WIERINGA (Cologne), who presented „prison literature“ as a form of subversive writing in the novel *Student Hidjo (Student Green)* by the Javanese author Marco Kartodikromo. In this travel text about an Indonesian student in the Netherlands the colonial and the colonized become interchangeable, thus creating an ironic perspective on Western civilization and questioning the idea that roots always precede routes (J. Clifford). CARL HAARNACK (Amsterdam) opened up new perspectives on migration to Surinam, focusing on the German accounts of Surinam, instead of the well-known Dutch travel reports. In these texts a different view on the slave industry and the Amerindians is described, even if their authors, in some cases, had never been to Surinam.

RUDOLF DEKKER (Amsterdam) and ARIANNE BAGGERMAN (Amsterdam) discussed the status of ego-documents in historical studies before giving an overview of an extensive corpus of Dutch ego-documents about travelling. They outlined the main trends of Dutch travelling to Germany during the 19th century, ranging from Kleve as a popular travel destination, and extending to the Rhine region as the target of mass tourism. The ego-document as a productive historical source was also discussed by FRANK HATJE (Hamburg), who focused on travelling based on the diaries of the German lawyer Ferdinand Beneke. In these accounts travelling is seen as an educational journey („Bildungsreise“) on the one hand, but also as a recreational experience on the other hand. Furthermore, the political situation of the upcoming nations becomes an important aspect of travel experience. The ego-documents analyzed by ANNA GEURTS (Oxford) showed the undiminished importance of personal contacts for travelling in the 19th century, thus challenging the thesis of sociologists like Max Weber and Georg Simmel that those contacts were affected by a process of impersonalization.

While ego-documents are often not consid-

ered as reliable sources in historical studies, due to their subjective and personal content, perspectives on literary texts about travelling combine individual impressions of travelling with general discourses about changing concepts of travel during the 19th and 20th centuries. ROB VAN DE SCHOOR (Nijmegen) and FIEKE DE HARTOG (Nijmegen) outlined how the established travel guides were questioned, by ironically reflecting their influence on tourists' behavior, based on literary travel texts from the mid-19th century. As SONJA KLEIN (Düsseldorf) pointed out, Switzerland, as a travel destination, seemed to inspire Goethe to a very satirical examination of the act of travelling in the first part of his *Letters from Switzerland* (1808), thus creating a great contrast to his earlier work, namely *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and the *Italian Journey*. ANJA GERIGK (München) showed how the possibility of movement itself was challenged in the beginning of the 20th century in a literary text such as Robert Müller's *Tropen* (1915), in which the act of travelling is transferred from the outside to the inside of the I-narrator and to the language he has at his disposal. Gerigk contrasted this text with the travelogue *Oostwaarts* (1923) by the Dutch author Louis Couperus, pointing out how Couperus tries to combine poetic language as a medium with the medial innovations (for example concerning means of transport) that modern (mass) tourism is confronted with.

The focus on German- and Dutch-speaking regions of Europe showed how travelling as a cultural practice is intertwined with the upcoming 19th century nationalism and its stereotypes. As HUBERT ROLAND (Louvain) demonstrated in German travel accounts about Belgium, Belgium's multicultural situation could be perceived as a threat to the concept of a homogenous nation. The perception of Belgium as an exotic state within Europe also became evident in ROBBERT-JAN ADRIAANSEN's (Rotterdam) presentation on the Wandervögel (migrating birds)-movement in Belgium during the First World War: Belgium (repeatedly confused with Flanders) served as a model of a „natural country,“ in which timeless, prehistoric „Dasein“ was still possible, in contrast to the industrial nation states surrounding it. KIM

ANDRINGA (Paris) pointed out how the perception of the Netherlands differed in French and German travel accounts. While in French texts an anachronistic vision tries to decipher the landscape of the old Dutch masters behind the late Dutch industrialization, German accounts tend to embrace the changes of modernism and industrialization in the Netherlands.

The conference „Through Words and Places“ could identify several trends within travel and travel writing in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland during the 19th century. The urge for all-encompassing journeys serving science, historical studies, or the mapping of the colonial empires turns the act of travelling and of travel writing into a utopian activity. Although taking place in a European microcosmos of Dutch- and German-speaking countries, it could be shown how travelling transformed the regions and countries with which one came in contact into an „Other“, into something that one's own visions and attitudes could be confronted with. Especially in ego-documents from the 19th century it becomes clear that writing about travel is writing about one's self. According to Ette travel writing, even more than other genres, tries to communicate „lived experience.“ In many lectures it was shown that there is a struggle between this claim for authenticity and the role of stereotypes, both in travel and in travel writing. Thus, travel and travel writing gave insight to core issues of the 19th centuries, especially with regards to the mutual perceptions of the investigated countries. As Youngs stated, „there will always be a tension between the general theoretical framework and case studies that makes it impossible to generalize about countries and people.“ Nevertheless, it would be highly productive to contextualize the insights of the conference with research about travelling in other European and non-European contexts.

Conference Overview:

Keynote Lectures

Tim Youngs: The Terrain of Travel Writing Studies

Ottmar Ette: Globalized Travelling since the

19th Century

Travelling in the 19th Century

Rudolf Dekker & Arianne Baggerman: Dutch Travellers in Germany in the 19th Century

Session: Travel and Knowledge

Herman Paul: Hunting for Sources – Dreams and Realities of 19th Century Archival Travel

Johan Oosterman: Germany Was Still Hiding Something – The 1842 Journey of W.J.A. Jonckbloet in Search of Medieval Manuscripts

Session: German Travellers in the Netherlands and Belgium/Dutch Writing about Germany

Frank Hatje: Shifts in Travelling and Writing in the Diaries of Ferdinand Beneke

Anna Geurts: How 19th-Century Dutch Travellers Used Personal Contacts to Access and Appropriate Central-European Places

Session: Texts in Motion

Anja Gerigk: Medial Paradoxes of Movement in Robert Müllers *Tropen* and Louis Couperus' *Oostwaarts*

Sonja Klein: Travel Pictures – Goethe's *Letters from Switzerland* or On the Aesthetic Education of Werther

Session: (Post-) Colonial Travel Writing

Edwin Wieringa: Brown Student Green in the Land of the White Colonial Masters

Carl Haarnack: German Travel Accounts about Suriname

Keynote Lecture

Alison Martin: 'Bold Characters:' Ida Pfeiffer's Travel Accounts in English and Dutch Translations

Plenary Lecture

Hubert Roland: German Travellers in Belgium 1830-1870 – Hetero-Image(s) and Nation-Building

Session: (Upper) Middle Class Travelling in the 19th Century

Rob van de Schoor & Fieke de Hartog: Mind-expanding Travelling and Bourgeois Tourism

in Dutch Literary Romanticism

Kim Andringa: Phlegmatic Aquatic Philistines – 19th-Century German and French Travel Writers on the Netherlands

Session: Historical Patterns of Perception

Robbert-Jan Adriaansen: German 'Wandervögel' in Flanders during the Great War

Kathrin Polenz: Geognostisches Reisen um 1800 – Gebirgsforschung im alpinen Raum und den Mittelgebirgen

Tagungsbericht *Through Words and Places: Travel and Writing in Dutch- and German-speaking Regions of Europe between 1800 and 1950*. 01.03.2013–02.03.2013, Münster, in: H-Soz-Kult 07.05.2013.