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The Cultural History of the Travelogue

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The Cultural History of the Travelogue

A little over thirty years ago, in 1978, Antoni Mączak published his well-known book about travellers: „Życie codzienne w podróżach po Europie w XVI i XVII wieku”. This book was and remains a pioneering study of *Alltagsgeschichte* that concentrated on what might be called the social history of travel, the twin experiences of being on the road and also outside one’s own culture, thus escaping temporarily from the everyday constraints of one’s social status, whether it happened to be high or low. Princes sometimes travelled incognito, while commoners presented themselves as noblemen.

I

The first question to be discussed in what follows is what has happened to this area of study since Antoni Mączak’s book appeared a generation ago. One answer is to say is that the topic of travel has become an academic ‘field’ in the sense in which Pierre Bourdieu employed the term.

Studies in the history of travel had of course been published before 1978, sometimes by literary scholars and sometimes by historians such as the Oxford scholar John Stoye. Stoye’s excellent book „English travellers abroad, 1604–1667; their influence in English society and politics” appeared in 1952¹.

All the same, it was only in the 1990s that the scholarly interest in travel turned into a specialized academic field, with its own name or names: ‘travel studies’, *viajologia* or even *itérologie*, as the French novelist Michel Butor called it in the 1970s². One sign of this institutionalization is the foundation of centres of research such as the Centro Interuniversitario di Ricerche sul Viaggio in Italia. Another is

¹ J. W. Stoye, *English travellers abroad, 1604–1667; their influence in English society and politics*, London 1952.

² M. Butor, *Le voyage et l’écriture*, „Répertoire” vol. 4, 1974.

the appearance of specialized journals such as „Studies in Travel Writing” (started in 1996), or „Journeys” (which began publication in the year 2000).

The third and most important sign of the emergence of a new field is the large number of books on the history of travel, including, fortunately, a significant proportion of good ones, that have been published in the 1990s or later, on topics as varied as travel in the ancient world, foreigners in Scandinavia, the art or method of travel, female travel writers, the Grand Tour, Cook’s Tours, and the invention of Eastern Europe by travellers from Western Europe³. In a globalizing age, books in western languages now include studies of Muslim travellers, and more rarely Japanese and Chinese visitors to the USA and elsewhere⁴.

At the same time, the approach adopted by many of the writers of these books has shifted from social history to ‘the cultural history of travel’ or the history of ‘travel cultures’⁵. One sign of this cultural turn is the rise of interest in the texts that were produced by travellers to record their experiences, texts which I shall call ‘travelogues’. These travelogues are sometimes studied as sources for social and cultural history but also — with increasing frequency — as historical phenomena that are of interest in their own right⁶.

There is of course nothing new in the idea of using travelogues as sources. The Brazilian scholar Gilberto Freyre, for instance, was already doing this in the 1930s in two famous studies of his own country, known in English as „The Masters

³ J.–M. André, M.–F. Baslez, *Voyager dans l’antiquité*, Paris 1993; H. A. Barton, *Northern Arcadia: Foreign Travel in Scandinavia, 1765–1815*, Carbondale, Illinois, 1998; A. Brilli, *Quando viaggiare era una arte*, Bologna 1995; E. Bohls, *Women Travel Writers 1716–1818*, Cambridge 1995; I. Ghouse, *Women Travellers in Colonial India: the Power of the Female Gaze*, Delhi 1998; E. Chaney, *Evolution of the Grand Tour: Anglo–Italian cultural relations since the Renaissance*, London 1998; Ch. Chard, *Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography, 1600–1830*, Manchester 1999; L. Whitey, *Grand Tours and Cook’s Tours: a History of Leisure Travel, 1750 to 1915*, London 1998; L. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: the Map of Civilisation on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford 1994.

⁴ *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*, eds. D. F. Eickelman, J. P. Piscatori, London 1990; W. G. Beasley, *Japan Encounters the Barbarian: Japanese Travellers in America and Europe*, New Haven 1995; D. Howard, *Borders of Chinese civilization: geography and history at Empire’s end*, Durham 1996; *In the Lands of the Christians: Arabic Travel Writings in the 17th Century*, ed. N. Matar, London 2003; R. L. Euben, *Journeys to the other Shore: Muslim and Western Travellers in Search of Knowledge*, Princeton 2006; M. Alam, S. Subrahmanyaam, *Indo–Persian Travellers in the Age of Discoveries*, Cambridge 2007.

⁵ *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel*, eds. J. Elsner, J.–P. Rubiés, London, 1999; R. Koshar, *German Travel Cultures*, Oxford 2000.

⁶ AAVV, *Les récits de voyage*, Paris 1986; M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London 1992; *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, eds. P. Hulme, T. Youngs, Cambridge 2002; N. Leask, *Curiosity and the aesthetics of travel writing, 1770–1840: ‘from an antique land’*, Oxford 2002; *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing*, ed. A. Bendixen, Cambridge 2009.

and the Slaves” and „The Mansions and the Shanties”⁷. All the same, the practice has become more frequent as the interests of historians have shifted towards the history of society and culture, especially popular culture, an area of study where more conventional sources are often lacking.

For example, in a study of popular culture in early modern Europe that was published in 1978, the same year as Antoni’s book, I drew on the testimony of travellers to Italy, Spain, Dalmatia, Russia and Poland (among them the eighteenth-century English archdeacon William Coxe), because these travellers provided information about the popular customs in some of the places they visited, information that is very difficult, if not impossible, to obtain by other means⁸.

Using this testimony obviously means running risks. Travellers are outsiders. Most of them do not know the local languages. Some of them do not stay very long in any one place. For these reasons the danger of their misunderstanding elements in the local culture is a considerable one. Even in the case of Europe, sixteenth- or seventeenth-century English or French visitors to Venice at the time of Carnival, who comment on female participation in the event, were not necessarily capable of distinguishing upper-class women from the more expensive courtesans. When European travellers moved further afield, the risks were multiplied.

But what else can historians do? Written accounts of early modern European popular culture, viewed from inside, are rare, not only because most ordinary people could not write but also because even the literate saw no need to describe customs that everyone in the community knew. For instance, the sixteenth-century Venetian patrician Marin Sanudo, who kept a voluminous diary, now published in no fewer than 57 volumes, wrote of Carnival in some years only that the ‘usual’ celebrations took place. Only outsiders found the Venetian Carnival worth describing in detail⁹.

Like other sources, travelogues obviously need to be examined with a critical eye. They are much less transparent than they look at first sight. The rhetoric of the texts emphasises first-hand observation, but this claim is not always justified. Travellers sometimes reproduced the ideas of local informants, including professional guides for tourists, the *ciceroni*, a species that had already come into existence by the seventeenth century, if not before. However, the travellers rarely acknowledged their debt to these mediators, on whom they were necessarily dependent if they did not know the local languages, in Europe as well as in Asia

⁷ G. Freyre, *Casa grande e Senzala*, Rio de Janeiro 1933, English translation: *The Masters and the Slaves*, New York 1946; idem, *Sobrados e Mucambos*, Rio de Janeiro 1936, English translation: *The Mansions and the Shanties*, New York 1963.

⁸ P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd edn, Ashgate 2009.

⁹ Idem, *Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy*, Cambridge 1978, introduction.

and Africa¹⁰. They sometimes incorporated passages from earlier travelogues or guidebooks in their own work, again without acknowledgement. Travellers who did make their own observations sometimes waited for years before writing down their fading impressions, despite their use of what might be called ‘the rhetoric of immediacy’, composing ‘letters’, for instance, in order to make the reader imagine that they are in Florence or Paris now (the parallel between these travelogues and the epistolary novels of the eighteenth century, which also depend on the rhetoric of immediacy, is clear enough).

Travellers observed the foreign ‘scene’ (a theatrical metaphor that regularly recurs in travelogues) not with completely innocent eyes but on the contrary, with all sorts of expectations and prejudices. Some of them had read books on the ‘art’ or ‘method’ of travel, the *ars apodemica*, a genre that emerged during the Renaissance to assist young noblemen making the Grand Tour. These books told their readers what to look for and so shaped their perceptions of the unfamiliar¹¹.

Well-educated travellers often saw foreign countries and cities through the eyes of artists and writers who had already visited the same places and published their impressions. Robert Browning, Henry James and Marcel Proust all took John Ruskin’s book „The Stones of Venice” with them and they saw Venetian churches and palaces in a Ruskinian light. As for Ruskin himself, he remarked that ‘My Venice, like Turner’s, had been chiefly created for us by Byron’¹².

However, travelogues are much more than sources for historians and they are now receiving more and more attention in their own right, as a variety or genre of autobiography or, to use the wider Dutch term, as a type of ego–document, a text written in the first person whether it takes the form of a diary or letters or an essay. From this literary or cultural point of view the prejudices expressed in the texts are no longer seen simply as a distortion but on the contrary as a fascinating object of study in themselves, part of the history of the collective imagination or *imaginaire social*. They tell us about earlier images of other cultures or if you prefer, the ‘Other’ with a capital O (or perhaps with a capital A, since French theorists, from Jacques Lacan to Claude Lévi-Strauss, are the ones who have written most about *l’Autre*)¹³.

¹⁰ M. Tymowski, *How did European explorers communicate with indigenous African people in the 15th century?*, „Africana Bulletin”, vol. L, 2002, p. 43–74. My thanks to Professor Tymowski for giving me a copy of his article.

¹¹ J. Stiglitz, *The Methodizing of Travel in the 16th Century: a Tale of Three Cities* „History and Anthropology”, vol. 4, 1990, p. 303–338; J.–P. Rubiés, *Instructions for Travellers*, „History” vol. 9, 1995, p. 1–51; idem, *Travel Writing as a Genre*, „Journeys”, vol. 1, 2000, p. 5–33.

¹² Ruskin quoted in M. Pfister, *The fatal gift of beauty: the Italies of British travellers: an annotated anthology*, Amsterdam 1996, p. 350.

¹³ In the context of travel, see especially T. Todorov, *La conquête de l’Amérique: la question de l’autre*, Paris 1982.

Thanks to these theorists, readers of travelogues have been encouraged to pay attention to the ‘gaze’ of travellers, *le regard*, or more exactly to a variety of gazes: male and female, for instance, scientific, ethnographic or colonialist. Above all, especially from the late eighteenth century onwards, there is the gaze of the tourist, defined as someone for whom travel is an end in itself. The tourist regards everything abroad from the point of view of someone detached from what he or she is looking at, knowing no one and without local responsibilities¹⁴. Incidentally, the term ‘tourist’ in English and French at least goes back to the early nineteenth century. Stendhal’s „*Mémoires d’un touriste*” was published in 1838.

One kind of tourist gaze is aesthetic, that of the traveller in search of the ‘picturesque’, most obvious in the case of Westerners in the ‘Orient’ but also to be found in accounts by Northern Europeans of Italy, Spain and elsewhere. The aesthetic traveller sees ragged beggars, for instance, as if they were part of a painting. After the invention of photography, travellers came to view the local inhabitants as ‘kodakable’, in other words as objects appropriate for a snapshot¹⁵.

Alternatively, the traveller and especially the tourist, views life in foreign countries, especially in the Mediterranean and the Orient, in terms of theatre. As Henry James once remarked, ‘to travel is, as it were, to go to the play’¹⁶. This is a perceptive remark, but it needs to be turned back on itself. It is the tourist’s gaze that turns the natives into actors. For the locals, the spectacle is provided by the tourists themselves, whose activities often follow a ‘script’¹⁷.

A book published in the same year as Maçzak’s, the late Edward S a i d’s „*Orientalism*”, has of course been extremely influential in the last thirty years on the cultural history of travellers and travelogues. To my mind the most successful part of this study, which concentrates on the nineteenth century, when travel to the Middle East became fashionable, especially among the French — Delacroix, for instance, Lamartine, Dumas, Nerval and Flaubert — the most successful part is not Said’s well-known attempt (following Michel F o u c a u l t), to treat orientalism as an institution, but the part where, using his skills as a literary critic, he examines texts that were not always intended to be literary, discovering conscious or unconscious stereotypes of oriental luxury, passivity, effeminacy and so on.

Said concentrated on hostile or patronizing Western stereotypes of Arab countries. Neutral or favourable stereotypes of the other are also to be found in trav-

¹⁴ J. U r r y, *The tourist gaze: leisure and travel in contemporary societies*, London 1990; M. L. P r a t t, op. cit.; I. G h o s e, op. cit.; B. J e z e r n i k, *Wild Europe: the Balkans in the Gaze of Western travellers*, London 2004.

¹⁵ D. S l a d e n, *Oriental Cairo: City of the Arabian Nights* (1911), D. G r e g o r y, *Scripting Egypt: Orientalism and the Culture of Travel*, in: *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing*, eds. J. D u n c a n, D. G r e g o r y, London 1999, p. 145.

¹⁶ H. J a m e s, *Italian Hours*, Harmondsworth 1995, p. 82.

¹⁷ D. B o o r s t i n, *The Image, or, What happened to the American dream*, London 1961 p. 111; D. G r e g o r y, op. cit.

elogues, like the image of Venice as the home of liberty in the seventeenth century, or the home of pleasure in the eighteenth.

Travellers also try to domesticate the exotic landscapes through which they are passing by comparing them to something more familiar or nearer home. Thus eighteenth-century English travellers in the South Pacific saw the inhabitants through the spectacles of the classical tradition. The hard and frugal life of the Australian aborigines reminded them of the Spartans and the Scythians, while the inhabitants of Tahiti seemed by contrast to live in the Golden Age, enjoying the gifts of a beneficent nature without the need for much effort¹⁸. An Englishman visiting Ireland in the late eighteenth century viewed near Cork what he described as ‘a variety of beautiful landscapes which the genius, fancy and spirit of Poussin or Claude Lorraine could never exceed’¹⁹. Again, nineteenth-century English visitors to Sri Lanka (which they called Ceylon) compared the highlands around the city of Kandy to that of more familiar places such as Italy or Switzerland or their own Lake District²⁰.

In short, travellers, like the rest of us — but more visibly than the rest of us — engage in a practice that has come to be known as ‘cultural (or intercultural) translation’, in other words attempts to understand the unfamiliar through the familiar. All understanding is a kind of translation into our own terms of what is outside and foreign to us, and travellers, faced with an especially unfamiliar outside world, reveal this process with exceptional clarity.

Attempts at cultural translation may of course produce misunderstandings, sometimes serious ones. When the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama and his men first landed in India, they entered a Hindu temple. Seeing an image with three heads — Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, the so-called *trimurti* — they immediately concluded that it represented the Holy Trinity and that they had set foot in a church.

It is easy enough, perhaps too easy, to see what went wrong in cases like this. All the same, none of us would understand very much if we did not make use of analogies. The trick, perhaps, is to try to become aware of what might be called the ‘dis-analogies’.

II

Let me now turn to a brief case-study of foreign travellers in South America and especially Brazil, their experiences and the often stereotyped ways in which

¹⁸ B. Smith, *European vision and the South Pacific, 1768–1850: a study in the history of art and ideas*, Oxford 1960.

¹⁹ Ph. L u c k o m b e, *Tour through Ireland*, London 1780, p. 182.

²⁰ J. D u n c a n, *Dis-Orientation: On the Shock of the Familiar in a Far-Away Place*, in: *Writers of Passage*, p.151–163.

those experiences were described. In order to make it clear that I am not taking up any position of superiority, I shall begin with my own experiences as a traveller to the city of São Paulo.

When I first visited the city, in 1986, I arrived, like most visitors, with a baggage full of expectations. I imagined the city as a kind of tropical Milan — after all, the image of the locomotive pulling the rest of the country behind it is common to both cities. I expected to observe a great deal of activity in the street, many traffic problems, and much apparent chaos — and all this was roughly true (the sight of barbers without shops cutting the hair of their customers sitting in chairs in the street remains vivid in the memory).

I also expected shady squares, cafés with outside tables, and men dressed in elegant white suits — and this was not the case. So far as the white suits were concerned, I must have been remembering some images from the 1930s, when a young Frenchman named Claude Lévi-Strauss took many photographs of the city, two decades before the publication of his travelogue „Tristes tropiques”.

So I had to revise my ideas. There are indeed parallels between São Paulo and Milan, but also great differences. I had not taken into account the fact that São Paulo is an American city, sharing important features with Los Angeles, for instance, or with Mexico City — a historic centre that is either decaying or invisible, for instance, and urban spaces that are dominated by cars and leave little room for the pedestrian.

In Europe, the best way to get to know a city is on foot, and this technique works from Paris to St Petersburg, but not in many cities in the Americas, whether North or South. Feet are not completely useless in São Paulo and it remains a pleasure to walk along Avenida Paulista, the equivalent of Fifth Avenue in New York. All the same, it is only realistic to regard that avenue as an island in an urban sea, or an oasis in an urban desert that can only be crossed by car, bus, motorbike or (for the rich) helicopter. The exhaust fumes and the frequent absence of pavements help explain the lack of the expected café tables in the street.

Turning now to the experiences of earlier travellers, the travelogue in South America and especially in Brazil has a long history. In the sixteenth century, accounts of the Indians of Brazil were published by the French Protestant Jean de Léry, „Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil” (1578) and by the German soldier Hans Staden, who was captured by the Tupinambá and according to his own story was being fattened up in order to be eaten had he not been able to make his escape, surviving to publish a book with the colourful title „Warhaftige Historia und beschreibung eyner Landtschafft der Wilden Nacketen, Grimmigen Menschfresser-Leuthen in der Newenwelt America gelegen” (1557).

In the seventeenth century, by contrast, the most memorable European images of Brazil were the work of artists rather than writers, notably two Dutchmen, Frans Post and Albert Eckhout, who formed part of the entourage of Johan Maurits of Nassau, governor of the short-lived Dutch colony in Pernambuco and the man who

gave his name to the Mauritshuis in The Hague, where some of Post's paintings are still to be seen²¹.

It was only in the early nineteenth century, however, around the time that the Portuguese royal family, on the run from Napoleon, had established themselves in Rio de Janeiro in 1808, that accounts of Brazil by French, German and English travellers become common. So common indeed that as noted earlier they were exploited as a major source by Gilberto Freyre, especially in the three-volume social history that he published between 1933 and 1959. Freyre went so far as to claim that 'for the social history of Brazil there is, perhaps, no source of information more reliable than travelogues by foreigners'²².

Nineteenth-century travellers to Brazil were an extremely varied group. They included the philosopher William James and the adventurer Richard Francis Burton (best known for his travels in Arabia); merchants, such as the Englishmen Thomas Lindley and John Luccock; artists such as the German Johann Mauritz Rugendas or the Frenchman Jean-Baptiste Debret, who called his collection of prints his „Voyage pittoresque au Brésil”, revealing the picturesque gaze or appealing to what might be called the picturesque market.

The scientific gaze may be illustrated by the German naturalist Johann Baptist von Spix, who went to Brazil to collect plants and animals, the English botanist George Gardner and the Swiss zoologist Louis Agassiz, who became a specialist on Brazilian fish. There were also soldiers such as the English Major Lisle and General Wilson, as well as naval officers, and there were engineers such as a certain Ulick Burke, possibly an ancestor of mine. An especially acute observer of 'significant details', as Freyre noted, was Maria Graham, the daughter of an English admiral and the governess of the daughter of Don Pedro I. She illustrates the female gaze, though not the gaze of just any female, since Maria was also a gifted painter of landscapes.

Cultural and social historians are deeply indebted to these travelogues and to the sketches and photographs that accompanied them — besides Lévi-Strauss, the photographers include the German-Brazilian Augusto Stahl, active in the 1860s, and the Frenchman, Pierre Verger, a scholar who was himself initiated into Afro-Brazilian cults such as candomblé.

Historians cannot do without these sources, especially if they are interested in unofficial and popular worlds, poorly represented if at all in official documents. The problem is how to read the travelogues. We surely need to engage in what the literary critics call 'close reading', to force ourselves to become aware of the strategies of the authors, their rhetoric, and the stereotypes of Brazil that they produce and reproduce. Brazil has been presented in travelogues and is still presented in films and television programmes — made by Brazilians as well as foreigners — as

²¹ Ch. R. B o x e r, *The Dutch in Brazil: 1624–1654*, Oxford 1957.

²² G. F r e y r e, *Ingleses no Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro 1948.

both Heaven and Hell, a paradise for some and an inferno for others, associated with sex and violence, carnival and corruption.

Examples make these points more clearly than generalizations can, so let me now turn to a handful of witnesses, all nineteenth-century English travellers. They do not offer a uniform impression: far from it. Major Lisle, for example, writing in 1800, was impressed by the city of Salvador, by the hospitality of its inhabitants and especially by their clothes: they dress, he said, ‘with more taste and richness than in any town I have seen’²³. General Wilson, by contrast, visiting the same city sixty years later, wrote that ‘a more abominable place does not exist’²⁴.

Certain impressions or stereotypes recur. English visitors tend to find Brazilian cities to be dirty and badly paved. Even Maria Graham, who usually liked what she saw, complained that the lower town of Salvador was ‘the filthiest place I ever was in’, while the merchant Thomas Lindley called it ‘disgustingly dirty’²⁵. As for the people, they are often described by the English travellers as if they were sick, childlike or even animals. According to these travellers, the Brazilians suffer from ‘want of forethought’, ‘indolence’ or ‘lassitude’. The Lindley, more vigorously prejudiced than his colleagues, claimed that the people of Salvador ‘vegetate in a senseless apathy’²⁶. We are close to an orientalist gaze here, even if Brazil is located to the west of Europe!

Lindley’s prejudices against what he calls the ‘faulty manners of Brazil’ are so strong as to suggest a special category of gaze, the ‘splenetic or irascible gaze’ or ‘savage eye’ — in our time the travelogues of V. S. Naipaul and Paul Theroux vividly illustrate this category²⁷.

Lindley offers a relatively extreme case of a visitor accepting the common stereotype of the foreign as a world turned upside down. As a Protestant, Lindley is repelled by what he calls Brazilian ‘superstition’. Obviously a man of regular habits, he is shocked by the ‘irregularity’ of the Brazilian hours for eating and sleeping. Respecting hierarchy, he objects to the ‘licentious freedom’ of lower-class Brazilians. He must have been a tea-drinker, since he denounces what he terms ‘a filthy liquid called coffee — — rendered still more disgusting to the eye by being served in glasses’. When he had just arrived in Porto Seguro and was visited by some of the inhabitants, he described them as ‘just like monkeys — — ignorantly peering into everything’²⁸.

²³ J. G. S e m p l e L i s l e, *The Life of Major Lisle written by himself*, second edn, London 1800, p. 292.

²⁴ Quoted in: H. R a n d o l p h, *Life of General Sir Robert Wilson*, vol. I, London 1862, p. 273.

²⁵ M. G r a h a m, *Journal of a Residence in Chile*, London 1824, 133; cf. Th. L i n d l e y, *Narrative of a Voyage to Brazil*, London 1805, p. 244.

²⁶ Th. L i n d l e y, op. cit., p. 220.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 36; V. S. N a i p a u l, *India: a wounded civilization*, London 1977; P. T h e r o u x, *The Old Patagonian Express: by train through the Americas*, London 1979.

²⁸ Th. L i n d l e y, op. cit., p. 19, 27, 68, 268, 17.

Lindley also found what he called the Brazilian custom of eating with the fingers ‘indelicate and disgusting’. „The Travels to Brazil” (1816) by Henry Koster, a merchant who later settled in the country, also noted the lack of knives at meals. Another English merchant, John Luccock, in his „Notes on Rio de Janeiro” (1820), despite his frequent criticisms of Brazilian customs, was rather more discriminating, observing that the men used knives while it was the women and children who ate with their fingers²⁹. The American missionary Daniel Kidder, on the other hand, writing a generation later than the others indignantly criticized earlier travel writers for asserting that the Brazilians did not use knives and forks at meals. The divergence should serve as a warning to scholars who are tempted to follow the assertions of travellers without criticizing them.

A number of the English travellers to Brazil make conscious attempts at cultural translation, drawing analogies with places more familiar to them. General Wilson, another irascible traveller, saw Salvador as ‘a medley of the worst Italian and Turkish styles of city’. George Gardner, more favourably impressed by Rio de Janeiro, called the Rua d’Ouvidor ‘the Regent Street of Rio’. Maria Graham thought that one or two streets in Rio reminded her ‘in their general air’ of the Corso in Rome. Given the current situation you may be surprised to learn that an American missionary, James Fletcher, declared that ‘I felt greater personal security at a late hour of the night in Rio than I would in New York’³⁰.

Again, Ulick Burke compared the view of Rio from a neighbouring hill to the view of Italy from the Alps. Drawing on his earlier experiences in India, he compared the nearby town of Petropolis to ‘an Indian hill station’ and described his hotel in Rio as ‘more like a large Dák bungalow, or say a Mofussil hotel in India, than anything in Europe’³¹.

Some of these comparisons naturally sound strange today, but as I discovered on my first visit to Brazil, analogies do have their uses. Understanding something unfamiliar is a kind of translation, whether conscious or not, from new experiences into our intellectual vocabulary. What makes travelogues particularly interesting and illuminating is that they show this process of cultural translation at work with particular clarity. They testify both to a sense of cultural distance and to efforts — on the part of some travellers at least — to overcome it.

To conclude. The history of travel, now part of the larger package or enterprise of ‘travel studies’, can be practised in different ways. In the first place, we still

²⁹ H. K o s t e r, *Travels in Brazil*, Philadelphia 1817; J. L u c c o c k, *Notes on Rio de Janeiro*, London 1820, p. 121.

³⁰ H. R a n d o l p h, op. cit., p. 273; G. G a r d n e r, *Travels in the Interior of Brazil*, London 1846, p. 8; M. G r a h a m, op. cit., p. 169; D. K i d d e r, J. C. F l e t c h e r, *Brazil and the Brazilians*, 9th edn, London 1879, p. 126.

³¹ U. R. B u r k e, R. S t a p l e s Jr, *Business and Pleasure in Brazil*, London 1884, p. 35, 47–48, 52. ‘Mofussil’ is Indian English for ‘up-country’.

need to use travelogues as historical sources, which like other sources need to be subjected to criticism. In the second place, we still need to do what Antoni Mączak did so well, to study travel as a social practice, part of social history. It has turned out to be illuminating to adopt his approach not only for the early modern period but also in studies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as the Swedish anthropologist Orvar Löfgren has done in a book on vacations³².

Historians also need to study travelogues as a literary phenomenon, a genre with its own rhetoric and *topoi*, the study of which requires what the American critic Mary Louise Pratt has memorably described as ‘fieldwork in commonplaces’³³. Linking up with the history of the book, they might devote more attention to the marketing of travel books and the responses of readers. In nineteenth-century Britain, for instance, the publisher John Murray was a specialist in travel books, some of which sold well³⁴.

Finally, perhaps most important, we need to adopt a cultural perspective, reading travelogues as part of the history of the imagination and as records of cultural encounters. These texts provide precious evidence of the experience of cultural distance or difference and the way in which differences were both perceived and managed. They offer evidence of attempts at understanding, as well as refusals to understand, other peoples, their customs and their cultures.

³² O. Löfgren, *On Holiday: a History of Vacationing*, Berkeley 1999.

³³ M. L. Pratt, ‘Fieldwork in Commonplaces’ in: *Writing Culture*, eds. J. Clifford and G. E. Marcus, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 1986, p. 27–41.

³⁴ This aspect of travelogues is well discussed by my former student Angel Gurría in his (unfortunately unpublished) Ph. D. dissertation, ‘British Travellers in Mexico’, Cambridge, 2001.