

Innes M. Keighren, Charles W. J. Withers, and Bill Bell. *Travels into Print: Exploration, Writing, and Publishing with John Murray, 1773–1859*



Innes M. Keighren, Charles W. J. Withers, and Bill Bell. [*Travels into Print: Exploration, Writing, and Publishing with John Murray, 1773–1859*](#). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015. xiv, 370p., ill. (w/ col. plates). ISBN 9780226429533. US \$45 (hardback).

Research in print culture has increasingly come to take account of the way books travel in space as well as time: not for nothing was SHARP’s 2013 conference on the theme “œgeographies of the book.” This significant and timely volume, drawing on the uniquely rich records of the John Murray archive at the National Library of Scotland, is a major contribution to the study of the journeys made not only by authors, but also by their books. The journey from notes jotted by lamplight in the wilds of Africa to reader’s bookshelf is thus documented as carefully and as thoroughly as the parallel journey from traveller/explorer to published author.

Travel writing has drawn considerable academic interest in recent years, with researchers increasingly acknowledging the need to account for the material conditions in which books were produced and consumed (see, for example, [*The Database for Women’s Travel Writing*](#) at the University of Wolverhampton). The first chapter locates the work within key Travel Writing Studies debates, focusing particularly on the rhetorical strategies used by authors to demonstrate the reliability of their accounts of far-flung lands – an undertaking of some importance in an age when plagiarising travel accounts was common practice and when travellers were frequently accused of exaggeration, if not outright lies, as documented in Percy Adams’s *Travelers and Travel Liars* (1962). It does so by exploring how the journey from notebook to print, and from explorer to author, imbued the text and the figure of the author with an aura of authority, due particularly to John Murray’s dominance of the travel writing market.

Subsequent chapters offer a series of fascinating close readings of extra-European travel narratives by both illustrious names – David Livingstone, Sir James Clark Ross – and by travellers now forgotten. Chapter two studies the motives behind the acts of travel and authorship, focusing particularly on official missions of exploration and the practicalities of writing while in the field; it includes also a study of works of practical guidance for travellers hoping to publish their observations. The following chapter offers a detailed analysis of the strategies used by authors to lay claim to

credibility, by underscoring their scholarly credentials, foregrounding authentic knowledge gleaned from local contacts and using modern scientific instruments. Chapter four then centres on the processes by which travellers turned themselves “ or were turned “ into authors, highlighting the “œmutual and collaborative” nature of the writing and editorial processes and investigating the various manifestations of the “œmodesty topos” which required a plain style of writing (100). The case study of the shipwreck narratives of Robert Adams and James Riley, with their overtones of racial politics, are particularly fascinating in this context.

Chapter five is devoted to paratextual and visual material, noting how authors and publishers used spaces such as title-pages, frontispieces and maps to make the case for the book’s authority. Chapter six looks at the journey made by travel books to the marketplace, from in-house reading to printing and marketing in targeted collections such as the *Home and Colonial Library*. The brief final chapter summarises the book’s main arguments, exploring the mechanisms by which words jotted down in the field became authoritative print and by which travellers became authors in the new “œcredit economy” (218). The volume also contains plentiful black and white illustrations and an insert of full-colour plates, together with a lengthy appendix listing the 239 books of extra-European travel published by Murray between 1773 and 1859, complete with bibliographical data.

Travels into Print is an impressive work of scholarship. Its account of how authority is negotiated in print will surely be a model for further studies, both in travel writing and beyond. It comes highly recommended.

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