Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan. *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections of Contemporary Travel Writing.* Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1998. Pp xiv, 261. $32.50

Travel writing, we learn, is so problematic, so likely to perpetuate white male heterosexual myths, so ethnocentric, so racist, so interfering, so transgressive, that the reader of *Tourists with Typewriters* (a demeaning title to begin with) is not surprised to find after 200 pages, the authors taking seriously a recommendation that we that we should "just stay at home" (200), leaving those restless spirits among us who write and read such books with little recourse.

Tourists with Typewriters is an ambitious book. While claiming not to be encyclopedic, the book — with its fourteen pages of works cited — provides a taxonomy of contemporary travel writing — just about. A chapter about post-empire voyagers who aim to reinstall "a mythicized imperial past" (xi) is followed by a one dividing the non-Western world into zones, from the tropics to the Arctic, from the south seas to the Orient, where writers go on inherently conservative missions that serve "to repeat and consolidate tropological myths" (67). Next, a chapter focuses on travel writing's "capacity to analyze and transform gender perception and the outlet it provides for sexual play and queer performativity"(xii). (I quote because I find such language curious and unreadable).

The penultimate chapter, seemingly central to the book's argument, discusses postmodernism, a classification that — despite the apparent realism of travel writing — allows for its instability both in terrain and subject. The authors draw a theory for postmodern travel writing from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, a book that depicts irreducible cities that should never be confused with the words describing them. From Calvino they move to two books by Europeans describing America, Umberto Eco's *Travels in Hyperreality*, and Jean Baudrillard's *America*. Eco's America reveals "the preeminent signs of global postmodernity." He sees "a continent that is ubiquitously sign, fake and facsimile" (161). Baudrillard's *America* "anticipates imagination by giving it a form of reality" (162), a reality that is nonetheless similacrum. For both, travel writing seeks out fake worlds, similacrums, rather than pretending to present a newly discovered world. In the same chapter, they treat skeptically ecotopian travellers like Peter Matthiessen, who write "narratives of disappearance" (179), and New Age prophets like Carlos Casteneda, who vend "recycled primitivist wisdom" (189). These ecotravellers and New Agers — treated condescendingly here — are as close as we get in this study to travel as spiritual quest, once a central motive for travel and writing about it. Since much travel writing is rendered suspect, the reader must acquiesce. All quests — all searches for grails or utopias — fall short for good political and ethical reasons. Accept it, humankind is frail.

The hardworking, scholarly authors of *Tourists with Typewriters* survey hundreds of travel narratives and the current rash of scholarship, yet they often seem disrespectful of a genre going back to Homer. Their reasons are good enough, their skepticism well merited. When white males sally forth in Third World places, carrying wads of money and preconceptions, typically they impose racial stereotypes on the natives. Include an admixture of amateur ethnography and they become unreliable in the extreme. In their proximity to a tourism — which they claim to disdain — they nonetheless retail myths to those eager for culturally "othered" goods. While complaining of the homogenization of the world, they beget it, providing maps for the McDonaldization of everywhere.

The real meat in this book is in the discussion of particular writers. I used the book to find opinions (and opinionated these authors are) on books I have read, and as a guide to books I have not. Many whose works are considered classics of the genre, Bruce Chatwin, V. S. Naipaul, and Redmond O'Hanlon, are denigrated as part of the English gentleman tradition, although Chatwin dandifies it, Naipaul straddles "the gap between an unwanted colonial inheritance and an ambiguous postcolonial present" (43), and O'Hanlon parodies it, making himself the buffoon.

Chatwin, whom the writers concede was "arguably the finest of Britain's post-war travel writers" (36) works in the spirit of camp, conflating the role of dandy with that of the gentleman, providing protection from "closer involvement in the societies and cultures with which he comes in contact" (38). He converts the "places through which he travels into a clutch of exoticized objects for his own voyeuristic consumption" (38). *The Songlines* reduces "an infinitely complex world into a random display of collectors' items" (39). They do not mention how songlines delineate a spiritual realm, how this book is as much quest as it is a dandy's self parodistic performance.

Naipaul's version of the gentleman appears more sympathetic. As a representative of the colonized who finds "all places are the wrong place" (42), he may be permitted to make his "notoriously splenetic pronouncements on 'Third World' cultures, particularly India's, which reviles him, but to which he feels irresistibly he belongs" (43). As a Caribbean of Indian descent, his ambivalence comes natural. Marginalized in England, he is also an outsider everywhere else. For him, travel is "a Sisyphean task of enduring frustration" (44), making him a mimic gentleman. We find little analysis of how such curmudgeonly detachment provides moments of insight.

It is O'Hanlon, however, that provokes the most ire. This bungling scientist who takes deliberately inconvenient voyages, finding himself repeatedly in trouble again, annoys our authors because he has financial motives he is unwilling to discuss, because he travels expensively

among poor people, and because he allows himself to be cast as "The Benny Hill of the Tropics" (79). We are not allowed to regard all this as harmless fun. Indeed, O'Hanlon, they say, enjoys the privilege that accrues to the Western scientist. He eroticizes native women in National Geographic fashion; he gives free reign to "conquistadoral ambitions and exoticist fantasies" (81), all done under the authority of Western science. Did neither ever laugh at O'Hanlon's misadventures?

Two books *Tourists with Typewriters* brought to my attention are Mary Morris's *Nothing to Declare*, which tells of a woman's solitary travel in Mexico, and Melanie McGrath's *Motel Nirvana*. Neither is regarded as a spiritual quest. Reviewing Morris, the authors quote some spiritual musings, writing them off as psychobabble. With McGrath, the psychobabble of New Agers is rightly satirized. Such treatment represents the authors general approach to all spiritual voyages. They studiously avoid travel as quest, treating Matthiessen's *The Cloud Forest*, whose subject is mainly environmental, ignoring his much better travel book, *The Snow Leopard*, whose subject is spiritual.

The theoretical constructs upon which this book is written are largely new historical, postcolonial and postmodern, with a bow toward gender criticism. Hence spiritual voyages seem out of place, yet historically the wanderer has sought alternative spiritual visions, has made his or her pilgrimages to places beyond the realm of the materialistic West to find other religious possibilities.

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Jyotsna Singh. *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: "Discoveries" of India in the Language of Colonialism.* New York: Routledge, 1996. Pp. vii,196. $59.95; $16.95 pb.

Jyotsna Singh's *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: "Discoveries" of India in the Language of Colonialism* brings together a wide range of formal and informal accounts of India from the seventeenth century to the present in order to show that the "discovery" of India was the function of a colonizing and; later, a nationalizing imagination. According to Singh, while the colonizing imagination builds on the dichotomy of self/other and tradition/modernity, the nationalizing imagination often ignores cultural specificity and favors narratives of inclusion on the fictional grounds of homogeneity. She argues that colonial paradigms continue to define the nation today, resulting in a certain kind of "othering" of the marginal groups, an othering that exposes agendas. The chronological arrangement of the chapters—culminating in Singh's whole-hearted approval of Dharmavir Bharati's *Andha Yug* (1955)—is inevitably implicated by the very "teleology of progress" that Singh critiques. However, her privileging of