CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Critical Paradigms and Problems

> Nothing in my life had affected me more deeply than this journey through Yugoslavia. This was in part because there is a coincidence between the natural forms and colours of the western and southern parts of Yugoslavia and the innate forms and colours of my imagination. . . . But my journey moved me also because it was like picking up a strand of wool that would lead me out of a labyrinth in which, to my surprise, I had found myself immured. It might be that when I followed the thread to its end I would find myself faced by locked gates, and that this labyrinth was my sole portion on this earth. But at least I now knew its twists and turns, and what corridor led into what vaulted chamber, and nothing in my life before I went to Yugoslavia had even made plain these mysteries.
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> Rebecca West (1941)[1]

In the early years of the Second World War, Rebecca West identified what she would call "the calamity of modern life": "we cannot know all the things which it is necessary for our survival that we should know."[2] To write of these necessary things, she turned to the travel narrative, a literary genre that would allow an admixture of personal experience and cultural observation, historical storytelling, and political call to arms. In *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941), cast as the narrative of a single "Easter journey," she works through the crisis facing Britain, Europe, and America, which she understands as a crisis of modernity. The result – more than a thousand pages of prose with thirty-two photographs, including one of the first political assassination caught on film – would be called by an early reviewer the "apotheosis" of the travel genre.[3] Though extraordinary, West's work signals much about the travel narrative's evolution to serve new cultural purposes in the twentieth century. For *Black Lamb* at once realizes the genre's potential as a means of subjective response to geopolitical crisis and articulates the newly charged ethical concern that would permeate literary travel narrative in decades to come.

Globalization, the study of imperialism, and postcolonial theory have played crucial roles in bringing travel literature and travel practices to the attention of scholars in several disciplines, including literary studies, history, sociology, anthropology, and geography. New concepts have been devised to identify and analyze cultural phenomena as pervasive as "colonial discourse" and as novel as "dark tourism"; the term "travel" has itself been troubled for its implicit reference to a privileged mobility unavailable to refugees, noncitizens, and the poor. Over the last three decades, as scholars have rethought the purposes and subjects of literary studies in light of new theories of cultural production, travel literature has come to be understood anew as what Charles Forsdick calls "a generically complex and creative form."[4] Though the account of a journey is among the oldest of prose genres, the travel narrative, like other types of literature historically deemed minor, had previously received very little scholarly attention. The field remains new and largely separate from more comprehensive literary-critical histories, however; the travel narrative and other means of writing about travel continue to be understood primarily in terms of the influential scholarship that first examined their role in European imperialism from the sixteenth to early twentieth centuries.[5] Yet, whereas some familiar tropes have remained surprisingly consistent, the travel narrative's cultural ambitions, literary strategies, and political contexts have altered significantly over the last hundred years.

Few scholars have examined travel narrative's evolution in the twentieth century, a period of profound global upheaval and transformation in which writers influenced by modernism and postmodernism reinvented the genre to serve new cultural purposes. Studies generally describe twentieth-century travel narratives in English as differing markedly from those of earlier centuries, tending more toward autobiography, literariness, and explicitly subjective observation and less toward ethnography, documentation, and claims of scientific objectivity. However, scholars have yet to examine thoroughly exactly *how* the genre of the travel narrative changed in the twentieth century, or to theorize *why* these changes occurred. No existing study considers these questions in detail. No study examines the genre's development in the context of the century's profound geopolitical changes, from world wars and the decline of European empires to globalization, or considers how these changes have played a role in the revival that travel narrative has enjoyed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Much recent scholarship reexamines modernism in cosmopolitan and transnational contexts, including its relations with imperialism and anthropology. However, these studies deal primarily with canonical

fiction and popular culture and seldom mention travel narrative: the "new modernist studies" has not taken this considerable body of primary literature seriously into account.[6] This book bridges these gaps by examining the evolution of the travel narrative as a literary genre and a strategy for thinking through modernity from the years following the First World War to the present. In so doing, it identifies distinctive, substantial changes as the genre draws from modernism and postmodernism to represent subjective response to profound, often violent cultural transformation. These changes are not limited to the 1920s or the 1980s, nor are they ephemeral. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the travel narrative at its most serious resembles little its predecessor from the early twentieth century. This evolution occurs through a trajectory of development that demonstrates continuities that are striking and significant. Previous scholarship has failed to examine either the evolution or the continuities, for its critical frameworks, devised to investigate other questions, have precluded their recognition.

From Egeria in the fourth century to Rory Stewart in the twenty-first, European travel writing traverses the ambiguous lines between fact and fiction, claims to represent individual experience amid foreign circumstance, and makes eclectic use of other genres. At its simplest, it recounts the story of a journey using familiar conventions; at its most complex, it examines cultural and political questions that far exceed the bounds of one person's experience. Prior to the twentieth century, books based on travels and observations abroad had a distinctive role as the means by which Europeans knew about peoples and places outside their immediate experience. They recounted explorations, reported discoveries, and documented unfamiliar cultures, languages, and landscapes.[7] Travelers – often diplomats, explorers, or entrepreneurs – wrote narratives and ethnographic studies that presented themselves as truthful accounts of firsthand experience and thus important sources of knowledge. Their work often played a formative role in imperial policy. Claims deemed implausible or unverifiable could of course be dismissed as lies or discounted as literary embellishment – and often were. But in general, Europeans wrote for other Europeans in a colonial discourse that was grounded in premises that writers and their audiences shared and seldom fundamentally questioned.

Travel writing began to lose this distinctive status as European domination of the globe accelerated, more people lived abroad for imperial enterprise or traveled for leisure, new scientific disciplines were created for the study of people and places, and photographs and film were disseminated

widely. These changes undermined the claims that travelers of earlier centuries could plausibly make regarding their exceptional access to knowledge otherwise unavailable to the audience at home. Tourism commodified travel, undermining the traveler's claim to authentic experience and the travel writer's claim to distinctiveness.[8] By the twentieth century, the traditional purposes of the travel narrative had been largely exhausted, and territory not already written and rewritten had become scarce. Following the First World War, victorious European nations extended their imperial reach even as independence movements accelerated in Ireland, India, and Indochina. Revolutions overthrew old empires in Russia, then China. By the end of the Second World War it was clear that the globe had entered a period of rapid geopolitical transformation in which prevailing notions of modernity, national culture, and Europe's role would be subject to new scrutiny through decolonization, migration, and new forms of cosmopolitan experience.

These changes called into question many of the premises on which travel narrative rested and the logic of the imperial discourse that it employed. Its earlier purposes – to circumscribe difference, justify empire, and confirm the logic of modernity – began to appear outmoded and intellectually dubious, as did the European traveler's presumption of expertise to discern the authentic abroad and narrate it for a Western audience. The genre had to evolve, revise its claims to seriousness, adapt to a postimperial world in which the place of the metropole was no longer secure – or fade into irrelevance. Mary Baine Campbell explains that "interest in travel writing – across a wide political spectrum – was part of the necessary reimagining of the world" that had been shattered by war, "resistance movements and wars of liberation," and eventually postcolonial immigration and globalization. "Much of the work of observing, interpreting, articulating the explosion of that world, as well as the historical development of the imperialised world that led to it," she continues, "was done through recovery and analysis of people's writings about 'foreign' and especially 'exotic' places in which they had traveled and lived."[9]

Twentieth-century travel narrative reflects the profound reimagining of the world that Campbell describes: the contexts that provoke scholars to take travel writing seriously are also the contexts that circumscribe writers' efforts to narrate their travels in a world undergoing rapid change. Of necessity, writers adapt or reject familiar themes that are ill-suited to new cultural contexts. Many aim not simply to convey information or tell a tale but, more importantly, to produce serious literature. Some write nostalgic tributes to the imperial past, depicting travel as the means for

Europeans to escape from the consequences of modernity into the security of convention. Others, sympathetic with revolutions against the inequities of the imperialized world, explicitly seek to reinvent the genre as a strategy for examining European decline and the violence of which advanced civilizations are capable. In their hands, it becomes a means for narrating firsthand the experience of what Michel Foucault calls "the history of the present" – in other words, a means for seeing the present as transient, and thus recognizing historical difference by "exposing the gaps among the various types of experiencing and knowing the world; and, through this exposition, destabilizing our own experience, so that the rupture of yet another gap may occur."[10] All demonstrate that narrating travel is a complicated act of representation that compels critical inquiry about discourse, experience, and the limits of cross-cultural understanding.

The most influential scholarship to examine the development and collapse of the imperialized world demonstrated the imaginative power that travel writing, broadly defined, had in the cultural formations of modern Europe and North America. This scholarship created a critical vocabulary and mapped out theoretical concerns that continue to matter. In *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said powerfully called critical attention to the ways that European – chiefly British and French – writers of travel narratives, political treatises, and novels relied on discursive, ideological distinctions between "the West" and "the East" and presumed substantial authority to represent unfamiliar cultures and nations. Adapting Foucault's theories of discourse, he argued that European writers' "textual attitude" to the world constrained what they saw when traveling and largely determined how they wrote about their experiences in the Arab world.[11] Peter Hulme, in *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (1986), and Sara Mills, in *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (1991), also drew on Foucault – in conjunction with Marxist and gender theory – to develop conceptions of colonial discourse necessary for nuanced analyses of Europeans' texts about the peoples and places that they encountered, explored, and conquered. In *Imperial Eyes: Studies in Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Mary Louise Pratt examined how "travel and exploration writing *produced* 'the rest of the world' for European readerships at particular points in Europe's expansionist trajectory" and "Europe's differentiated conceptions of itself in relation to something it became possible to call 'the rest of the world,'" specifically South America and Africa. Pratt argued that scholarly analysis of what she named "the contact zone," the space in which cross-cultural encounters occur, required "a study in genre as well

as a critique of ideology."[12] Although each of these scholars examined specific strains within larger discursive traditions, their provocative analyses quickly influenced others working on a disparate array of texts and concerns. As Pratt explains in a preface to the second edition of *Imperial Eyes* (2008), the stakes were – and remain – high for scholarship that was "conceived as part of an intellectual effort to make the workings of imperialism . . . available to reflection and transformation" and thus to ease its "grip on imagination and knowledge."[13]

Not all research on travel writing at the field's inception was part of this intellectual project, however. Other studies sought to demonstrate travel writing's significance in conventional literary critical terms and thus to establish it as a worthy subject for scholarly attention *as literature*. In *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (1983), Percy Adams examined the trajectories of travel literature and the novel as European narrative traditions that developed "in parallel lines to be sure but within a historical framework of mutuality and reciprocity."[14] Entering into debates on the novel's origin, Adams argued that travel literature had played a role in the novel's development and rise to cultural prominence as significant as that of the epic and the romance; his work placed travel narrative in literary history for the first time. Paul Fussell, meanwhile, brought critical attention to twentieth-century British travel narrative with *Abroad: British Literary Traveling between the Wars* (1980). Examining dozens of travel books published by well-read, generally privileged men in "the final age of travel" and characterizing them as "a sub-species of memoir," Fussell aimed to codify the genre and identify its literary role. Such texts, he argued, are "addressed to those who do not plan to follow the traveler at all, but who require the exotic or comic anomalies, wonders, and scandals of the literary form *romance* which their own place or time cannot entirely supply."[15] Fussell's study celebrated the travel book and defended its claim to be taken seriously as literature, countering what he described as a snobbish modernist preference for the novel and the lyric poem. It was also an exercise in nostalgia for a kind of travel, sensibility, and text that he argued modernity had ruined through tourism, politics, and war. Although its broad range of reference helped establish the field within literary studies, *Abroad* rested on critical premises untouched by (if not hostile toward) literary and cultural theory that later scholars would question.[16]

In the decades since these groundbreaking studies, scholarship on travel literature has developed in various directions. Among the most influential has been work to examine the roles that travel and travel writing have played in the formation of gendered identities and literary traditions. In

addition to Mills's *Discourses of Difference*, notable studies concerned with gender include Dennis Porter's *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing* (1991), Karen Lawrence's *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition* (1994), and Sidonie Smith's *Moving Lives: Twentieth-Century Women's Travel Writing* (2001). Porter invoked Freud and psychoanalytic theory in reading desire, guilt, and fantasy in travel writing by European men from the Enlightenment through the twentieth century, a focus chosen in part because father/son relationships figured prominently in many such texts. Lawrence observed that previous major studies "all fail to theorize a place for woman as traveling subject," for both literature and theory rested on dated tropes in which men wander and women stay home. *Penelope Voyages* reconfigured the field by exploring how "the genres, plots, and tropes of travel and adventure have been 'useful' for British women writers in supplying a set of alternative models for woman's place in society" from the seventeenth century through the twentieth.[17] Smith specifically examined narratives that demonstrate how modernity's new technologies allowed Anglophone and European women increased mobility and thus new types of identities. Whereas Lawrence and Smith, unlike Mills, dealt with writers working in a variety of genres, all shared a concern that the production and reception of travel-related writing by women had been complex in ways that criticism had yet to recognize. They sought to take into account what Lawrence described as "the different cultural freight that the woman traveler may carry."[18] Mills, eschewing any simple division between texts by men and texts by women, called for a theory capable of explaining such gendered differences while recognizing the fact that "many women write within the same discursive frameworks as men."[19]

Most studies of twentieth-century travel narrative in English have examined specific periods or specialized themes. Fussell, for example, dealt chiefly with the work of male British writers of the 1920s and 1930s. Bernard Schweizer's *Radicals on the Road: The Politics of English Travel Writing in the 1930s* (2001) and David Farley's *Modernist Travel Writing: Intellectuals Abroad* (2010) each reexamined this period, focusing on the work of four writers. Their primary themes – politics for Schweizer, modernism for Farley – countered Fussell's claims that the travel genre was damaged by politics and slighted by modernist aesthetes (interestingly, each gave West's *Black Lamb* the serious attention he denied it). The most comprehensive study of travel writing since 1960, Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan's *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (1998), surveyed a literary field that it defined

as "predominantly Anglophone; and still primarily white, male, heterosexual, middle class." Taking both rhetoric and politics as their subject, Holland and Huggan explicitly sought to demonstrate that "this most hybrid and unassimilable of literary genres" still flourished despite claims that travel and travel writing had been exhausted by modernity and globalization.[20] Focusing on travel writing's "capacity both to fuel the expansionist ambitions of modern tourism and, at its best, to intervene in and challenge received ideas on cultural difference," they asked a broad range of questions about the varied ways that travel writing had "adjusted – or not – to contemporary realities, inserting itself into the late-twentieth-century discourses of postcolonialism and postmodernism, and addressing itself to new technologies and the global crises of the moment."[21]

Travel Narrative and the Ends of Modernity benefits from the work of these scholars, although its critical aims and subject matter differ. Because earlier studies analyze literature written in the decades before the Second World War separately from that written in the decades following, they do not examine the trajectories along which the travel narrative develops as a literary genre over the course of the century. Nor do they thoroughly consider the continuities between innovations of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s and those of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. There is no counterpart in Anglophone literary studies to *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures* (2005), in which Forsdick examines the persistence of concern for cultural diversity across the twentieth century in francophone travel literature. This book aims to identify and analyze persistent concerns that mark the evolution of the travel narrative in English over the last century – and, in so doing, to provide such a counterpart. It focuses specifically on the genre of the travel narrative rather than travel writing more broadly. "Narrative" puts into the foreground a crucial aspect of travel texts that has become more pronounced as they present themselves not as documentary studies but as stories, as narrator's accounts of their own subjective experiences. It signals the enduring conventions of the journey and adventure tale, default paradigms with which writers continue to contend in seeking narrative strategies for representing cultural exchange in globalized contact zones. For even "oppositional narratives," as Holland and Huggan point out, "cannot escape being haunted by an array of hoary tropes and clichés," and a complex oscillation between tradition and innovation mark the travel narrative's evolution.[22] The focus on narrative also recognizes that readers often read such texts as stories, seeking vicarious engagement with the experiences, peoples, and places they represent.

Considering twentieth-century travel texts critically *as* narratives facilitates an understanding of them in the overlapping contexts of modernism and postmodernism. This places the travel text among other narrative genres – particularly the novel and autobiography – from which it borrows freely as it becomes, in Helen Carr's words, a "more literary and autonomous genre." Scholars characterize this evolution in similar terms, although they differ on when it occurred and attribute it to different causes, from the aesthetics of modernism or postmodernism to increased awareness of cultural differences owing to globalization. Carr, for instance, describes a modernist transition in the 1920s and 1930s "from the detailed, realist text, often with an overly didactic or at any rate moral purpose, to a more impressionistic style with the interest focused as much on the travellers' responses or consciousness as their travels."[23] Hulme, in contrast, locates a "decisive shift" in the 1970s and 1980s, crediting Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia* (1977) for "finally … bring[ing] a modernist aesthetics to a fundamentally nineteenth-century genre" and the paucity of wilderness in the postmodern world for narrative that "increasingly emphasizes the inner journey, often merging imperceptibly into memoir." Yet the coincident strands he identifies – "the comic, the analytical, the wilderness, the spiritual, and the experimental" – all have antecedents earlier in the century.[24] Tracing both continuities and innovations as the travel narrative evolves demonstrates that the most recent innovations in the genre, often characterized as postmodern, are part of a longer history in which modernism plays a significant role.

Critical analysis of the travel narrative's development over the last century will also reveal the longer history of a crucial topic: whether and how more reflective means of representation, less constrained by imperialism, may be possible in the shrinking, globalized world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[25] Although Said's analysis of the oppositional construction of "Europe" and "Orient" helped create new fields of inquiry, it did not offer sufficiently nuanced strategies for analyzing literary texts, nor did it propose an alternative model for European travel narratives. Later scholars responded by demonstrating that writing about cultural difference must be understood as involving competing perspectives and discourses. In *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (1991), Lisa Lowe proposes "heterotopicality" to describe the complex "condition of multiple and interpenetrating positions and practices" in which discursive terrains are perpetually subject to alteration through "the continual yet uneven overlappings, intersections, and collusions" of new articulations. "The theoretical problem facing cultural criticism," she argues,

> is not how to fit slippage, instability, and multivalence into a conception of dominant ideology and counterideology or discourse and counterdiscourse. Rather, cultural critics might approach this question from the other direction: that is, that heterogeneities and ambivalences are givens in culture. These nonequivalences and noncorrespondences are not the objects to be reconciled or explained; they must constitute the beginning premise of any analysis.[26]

Lowe's account of cultural heterogeneity identifies not only the starting point for critical analysis but also the circumstances that twentieth-century writers of travel narratives must negotiate. In an era of increasing awareness of the fluidity of cultural distinctions, both travel and narrative appear more fraught than they once did. Iain Chambers, reflecting on the future of travel in *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (1994), puts it directly: "In an age in which anthropology increasingly turns into autobiography, the observer, seeking to capture, to enframe, an elsewhere is now caught in the net of critical observation." Both travelers and critics, he proposes, work in changed circumstances in which new questions and new ethical obligations obtain:

> To think, to write, to be, is no longer for some of us simply to follow in the tracks of those who initially expanded and explained *our* world as they established the frontiers of Europe, of Empire, and of manhood, where the knots of gendered, sexual and ethnic identity were sometimes loosened, but more usually tightened. . . . It is rather to abandon such places, such centers, for the migrant's tale, the nomad's story. It is to abandon the fixed geometry of sites and roots for the unstable calculations of transit. . . . This means to recognize in the homesickness of much contemporary critical thought not so much the melancholy conclusion of a thwarted rationalism but an opening towards a new horizon of questions. For it is to contemplate crossing over to the 'other' side of the authorized tale, that other side of modernity, of the West, of History, and from there to consider that breach in contemporary culture which reveals an increasing number of people who are making a home in homelessness, there dwelling in diasporic identities and heterogeneous histories.[27]

At the end of modernity, whose perspectives and voices matter – to whom, how – in writing about travel and difference? Whose should, and by which criteria? What, exactly, do travel narratives represent, and for whom? What purposes does this genre serve in a rapidly changing, globalizing, postmodern, violent world?[28] These questions haunt twentieth-century travel narrative; this book examines how, and to what ends.

To understand twentieth-century travel narrative, it is necessary to examine *how* and *why* a form that had become nearly archaic not only endures