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## Introduction

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Relations of voyages and travels have at all times, and in all ages, since the invention of letters, been favourably received by the public: but, perhaps, in no age so well as in the present; writings of this kind being bought up with avidity and read with eagerness, more especially in this island, not only by the learned and polite, but also by the rude and illiterate.

This is the opening sentence of the preface to the English edition of *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope* (1785) by the Swedish naturalist Anders Sparrman, who had taken part in Cook's second voyage. Sparrman (or rather his translator) does well to point out that narratives of voyages in the eighteenth century were immensely popular across a very wide social range. King George III was frequently presented with handsome copies of such works, now in the British Library,<sup>1</sup> and the great library at Chatsworth contains a magnificent international voyage-collection made by Henry Cavendish, the eccentric millionaire-scientist (1731–1810). At the other end of the scale the public libraries of seaports such as Portsmouth, Whitehaven and Newcastle possess tattered copies of badly printed narratives on poor quality paper, with subscription lists of tradesmen of the area, containing the life and adventures of some local seaman, which were sold from door to door by their author. Lists of subscribers regularly confirm the wide social spread of readers (see p. 56).

'The peculiar Pleasure and Improvement that Books of Voyages and Travels afford, are sufficient Reasons why they are as much, if not more read, than any one Branch of polite Literature.' So wrote John Campbell in 1744.<sup>2</sup> Voyage-literature was not a new genre in the eighteenth century. Richard Hakluyt's great collection, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation*, was published in 1589, with a much larger edition at the turn of the century. This record of English maritime endeavour, with its formidable share of stories of failure and disaster, was

<sup>1</sup> For example, C. J. Phipps, *A Voyage Towards the North Pole* (1774), dedicated to the king and beautifully illustrated. See Plate 1.

<sup>2</sup> John Harris, *Navigantium atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca*, Preface.

intended less as a celebration of the past than as a prelude to and herald of England's future imperial greatness overseas. Samuel Purchas's vast compilation, *Purchas His Pilgrims* (1625), though a continuation of Hakluyt, had less political edge and consciously addressed itself to the pleasure of the stay-at-home reader. There was no shortage in the literature of travel, by land as well as by sea, in the earlier seventeenth century, as the work of Thomas Coryate, Fynes Moryson, George Sandys testifies. There was a lull, for good reason, in the middle of the century. Towards the end of the century there is a strong sense of a new beginning, of something special happening, and what is really a new era of voyage-literature commences. It is perhaps the publication in 1694 of *An Account of Several Late Voyages and Discoveries to the South and North*, by Sir John Narborough and others, with its enthusiastic preface by Tancred Robinson, which properly marks the start of the new era, but so far as the general reader was concerned, there is no doubt that Dampier began it all with the extraordinary success of his *New Voyage Round the World* in 1697. In Chapter 2 I give a full account of the strange gestation period during which an adventurer without much education and with no experience of publishing gradually shaped the voluminous notes of his sea travels into the book which the age required and which everyone read. Throughout the succeeding century scientists, explorers and poets, as well as more ordinary readers, knew their Dampier.

On being asked how many books had the word 'voyage' in their title, the British Library's electronic *Eighteenth-Century Short-Title Catalogue* came up with 1,314 entries. Some of these were reprints and further editions of the same work, but against that we have to set all those voyage-publications without the operative word – all the journals, narratives, vindications, observations and histories. Perhaps two thousand works would be a reasonable estimate of published voyage-narratives in the eighteenth century. What has happened is that Hakluyt's hopes and Purchas's instincts have been justified. During the entire century British ships were all over the globe, creating, developing and maintaining an overseas empire; gaining and losing territory, exploring and fighting, carrying goods and people – soldiers, officials, brides, travellers, indentured servants and convicts. This empire-building was fiercely competitive; Britain was at war for about half the century. They were different wars, but though Spain was a consistent enemy it was France who was the real rival in a duel for world-domination.

At home the reading public could not get enough in the way of accounts of all the maritime activity involved in extending Britain's knowledge of the globe and her control of territories old and new. (They literally could not get enough, so fiction writers supplied them with more.) It was the same in other countries. English voyage-narratives were quickly trans-

lated into French, German or Dutch, and English readers could quickly read translations of major voyages undertaken by other European powers. When J. R. Forster translated the account of Bougainville's world-voyage, a German was giving a French narrative to English readers. The translation business was not just for the convenience of readers in Shropshire; it was also a weapon in the imperial war. Forster, who in 1772 was wholly committed to the cause of English supremacy in the fight, larded his translation with scornful comments about the French and plaudits for the English. In an audacious steal, the Scottish freelance John Callander simply appropriated the work of Charles de Brosses, *Histoire des navigations aux terres australes* (1756), and under the title of *Terra Australis Cognita* (1766–8) turned propaganda for French exploration in the southern ocean into propaganda for British exploration 'to promote the Commercial Interests of *Great Britain*, and extend her Naval Power'.

Besides the publication of accounts of individual voyages, there grew up a whole publishing industry of collections of voyages, multi-volume editions to go on the library shelves of Georgian houses. Some of these collections showed considerable care in collecting, translating and editing material, and with their introductory essays were serious contributions to geography and history. Others were parasitical, reprinting in abridged form what was easily available elsewhere. (There was a fine study of these collections in 1946 by G. R. Crone and R. A. Skelton.<sup>3</sup>) Among the more notable collections are A. J. Churchill's *Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 1704; John Harris's *Navigantium atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca*, 1705 (later revised by John Campbell); Thomas Astley's *New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 1745–7; Tobias Smollett's *Compendium of Authentic and Entertaining Voyages*, 1756; Alexander Dalrymple's *Historical Collection of the Several Voyages and Discoveries in the South Pacific Ocean*, 1770–1; James Burney's *Chronological History of the Discoveries in the South Sea or Pacific Ocean*, 1803–17; and John Pinkerton's *General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels*, 1808–14.

As early as 1710 the Earl of Shaftesbury drily noted that voyage-narratives 'are the chief materials to furnish out a library. . . . These are in our present days what books of chivalry were in those of our forefathers.'<sup>4</sup> True enough, voyage-narratives did have an impact on the imaginative life of the eighteenth century comparable to the impact of the world of chivalry on the imaginative life of the sixteenth century. And just as the force of that earlier impact can be judged by the epics of Ariosto and Spenser, so the force of the later can be found in the fiction of Defoe and Swift, and the poetry of Cowper and Coleridge. Even if writers show no

<sup>3</sup> 'English collections of voyages and travels'.

<sup>4</sup> *Advice to an Author*. Quoted by Frantz, *The English Traveller*, 8, see also 139–40.

direct influence in their work, many of them acknowledge in one way or another the grip of voyages on their imagination. Shelvocke's remarkable account of the shooting of an albatross (see Chapter 3) stuck in Wordsworth's mind and he suggested it to Coleridge when the latter was looking for a deed to be the cause of the Ancient Mariner's sufferings.<sup>5</sup> Cowper's 'The Castaway' is surely the most impressive tribute to the hold of voyage-narratives on the minds of eighteenth-century writers, but there is also his explicit note in *The Task* about the voyager, who 'spreads the honey of his deep research / At his return':

He travels, and I too. I tread his deck,  
Ascend his topmast, through his peering eyes  
Discover countries, with a kindred heart  
Suffer his woes, and share in his escapes;  
While fancy, like the finger of a clock,  
Runs the great circuit, and is still at home.

*The Task* IV.112–19

The voyage-narratives I am going to survey vary greatly in every respect. In length, in style, in format; in credibility; in motivation and intention; in tone of voice and cast of mind. Their authors vary from admirals and earls to the meanest victims of the press-gang. There are too few women, although three of the most spirited of the writings I shall discuss are by women: Anna Maria Falconbridge, Janet Schaw and Mary Wollstonecraft. (In spite of the 'wooden world' being largely a man's world, there were in fact a great many women at sea, but though they often kept journals they were less likely to write for publication.) With all their diversity, these narratives have one thing in common, and that is the ship. It is voyage in the narrower but for centuries accepted meaning of the sea-voyage that concerns me: the experience of being in the ship, as captain or seaman or passenger or prisoner. The land is always there of course, as harbour or hazard, land as described by the shipwrecked, or by the explorer-by-sea (the navigator as he was called), the trader or the slaver; but land-travel in itself has been excluded.

Even with this limitation, my subject is very extensive as well as very varied, and I offer only a highly selective view of it. Omissions will be very obvious; there is, for example, little on Cook's third voyage, or on the search for the north-west passage, or on the Darien colony, and there is much more about the Pacific than about the East Indies. Each of my chapters examines a group of related writings; I cannot try to do more than illustrate different aspects of a very large body of writings, some of which (for example, those relating to Cook or Bligh) are very well known,

<sup>5</sup> Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu*, 206. And see R. Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London, 1989), 171–2.

some of which are perhaps known about, but rarely read, and some of which are almost entirely unknown. The availability of texts is a serious problem. Even with the better-known material, it is surprising how few of the original texts are accessible. There are hundreds of books *about* Cook and Bligh and Botany Bay, but the original writings themselves are not easily found, and the standard of documentation in even the best ‘book about’ can be scandalously offhand. One of the most interesting and important of all the writings I discuss, George Forster’s *Voyage Round the World* of 1777, has never been reprinted, except in an admirable East German edition of Forster’s works which is not on the shelves of the local bookshop or public library.

So this is a descriptive book; it seeks to make known, by examples, a voluminous and once very popular literature which has fallen out of sight, and which to my mind is of absorbing interest and vitality. My intention is pragmatic, empirical, exploratory; to collect, sort, compare, illustrate; Baconian not Cartesian, heeding above all Bacon’s warning against the beckonings of the Idols to impose symmetry and pattern where none exists.<sup>6</sup> Within the various groups of writings, there are many features in common, but it is not unity in discourse that I present; rather individuality, variety, difference. Time enough to theorize when we know the material.

I have divided the book into three parts. The first is devoted to the writings of the ‘founder’, William Dampier, and includes the narratives of those associated with him: Lionel Wafer and Woodes Rogers. The second and largest part deals with writings about Pacific voyages between 1726 and 1798, beginning with Shelvocke and ending with Vancouver; it includes three of the century’s best-known voyages: Anson, Cook and Bligh. The Anson chapter, however, is chiefly about the narratives emerging from the wreck of the *Wager*, Anson’s store-ship. This chapter may seem disproportionately long and detailed; the wreck generated a whole series of conflicting accounts, and this body of writing, never fully examined, is of great interest in itself, and is an exemplary show-case of voyage-literature. In what I have to say about Cook and Bligh it will be quite clear that my purpose is not to retell the story of their voyages, but to examine the writings about the voyages.

The third part moves away from major voyages and reviews narratives under four headings. The first of these is the slave-trade, and this chapter is centred on the career of John Newton from slaver to hymn-writer. Next, I look at narratives written from the point of view of the passenger, and here the centre is Henry Fielding, who made his voyage to Lisbon a journey across the Styx. The third grouping is seamen’s autobiographies,

<sup>6</sup> Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, I, xxxviii–lxviii, in *Philosophical Works*, ed. J.M. Robertson (London, 1905), 263–74.

and the final (rather gloomy) chapter deals with the stories of transported convicts, indentured servants and shipwrecked sailors. Unavoidably, this third part has a piecemeal progression as I move from one writer to the next.

In my Conclusion I try to explain why I think this large and diversified branch of literature which I have been describing is important – more important than the travel fiction of the century, about which I have very little to say, although resemblances and links between the real and the imagined come to the surface on a number of occasions (see, for example, Wafer, Uring, Walker). The story of Robert Drury is indeed discussed, but I accept him as real and not, as sometimes has been supposed, a fiction.

My focus throughout the book is on the movement from experience into the written word, and on the mutations of the written word as it moves into print. The experience is inferred, not known; and the ideal paradigm of journal, manuscript draft and printed version, available from more than one individual engaged in the same venture, is seldom if ever found. Nevertheless, it is the indissoluble and unstable link between the writer, the world and the work (more fully argued about in my Conclusion) which has governed the writing of this book.

The prime question in exploring the nature of these writings is that of the motive for writing and the target aimed at. Obviously, for a great many of these writers, the main and sometimes the only motive for writing was money, but there are great differences in the scale of financial need. Quite a number of my writers were simply destitute, and they hoped that what they could make from selling their story would keep them alive (for example, Roach, Barker, Wills, Justice, Parker). For many others, less desperate, the rewards of publishing were an attractive means of adding to income, particularly after Hawkesworth had so immensely increased the going-rate for a major voyage-account to £6,000.

The next main motive was vindication or justification, rehabilitation or redress. Here we have, for example, William Bligh burnishing his image of righteousness, Alexander Campbell appealing against dismissal from the Navy, John Dean refuting charges of cannibalism, and George Shelvocke protesting about everything. Then, publication of a narrative could be a bid for promotion or employment (Colnett), or an attempt to get public and private support for a trading scheme (Meares).

As a motive for writing, the cause of science may be entangled with more self-serving ends, as was certainly the case with Johann Reinhold Forster, the much-maligned scientist of Cook's second voyage. In his *Observations* of 1778 (dedicated to the President and Fellows of the Royal Society – of which he was himself a Fellow), he described his aims in these ringing terms:

My object was nature in its greatest extent; the Earth, the Sea, the Air, the Organic and Animated Creation, and more particularly that class of Beings to which we ourselves belong.

It will be seen that publication was for him of the first importance both for the money and for the advancement of his career.

The whole sad story (Chapter 5) of Forster's bitter dispute with Cook over the right to provide the official authoritative account of the second voyage is immensely revealing both of the outstanding importance of obtaining such rights, and of the great confusion that surrounded the publication of reports of expeditions.

The leaders of all expeditions sponsored by the Admiralty were of course bound to submit their full account to the Admiralty with their logs and journals. They were also instructed to collect at the end of a voyage all journals and records kept by their officers and other members of the ship's company. This precaution was a reasonable if ineffective measure to prevent the publication of unauthorized accounts of voyages which usually had (to say the least) politically sensitive objectives. There was no bar, however, against the eventual publication of an authorized account. But what was the nature and purpose of such an authorized publication?

It almost beggars belief that Lord Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, should have chatted with a fellow-guest at Lord Orford's about Cook's first expedition, and have told him casually that he was looking for someone to 'write the voyage' – and then have accepted his fellow-guest's recommendation of Dr Hawkesworth – and then have given Hawkesworth not only Cook's papers but those of Byron, Wallis and Carteret – and then for us to find that Hawkesworth received so little in the way of direction that he felt himself free to organize and rewrite his material in any way he wanted, and resented being told very late in the day that he had to include all the navigational information which he had discarded as unimportant (pp. 83–4, 87).

This vagueness about the aims and purposes of an official publication, and in particular about the balance between the entertainment and edification of the general reader on the one hand, and the provision of scientific and technical information on the other, was part of an extraordinary lack of clarity in all major voyage-accounts. Schizophrenic dithering between the demands of science and the claims of the general reader was never resolved; it was there with Dampier at the beginning of the century and is still to be found in Meares at the end of the century.

On the one hand, there was the ideal, so frequently and eloquently expressed, of contributing to an international scientific archive: of serving the advancement of knowledge about unknown or little-known countries and oceans – about the people, the flora, the fauna, the terrain, the climate – and providing information about harbours, tides, winds, landfalls, for

those who would follow and enlarge the bounds of human knowledge still further. Altruistic although all this was, it served patriotic ends; for all discoveries ministered to national pride. (Notice Banks's anxiety to get in with publication before the French; p. 83). And of course all officially sponsored voyages had opportunities for trade and settlement as primary objectives.

There is no dispute about the importance of the voyager's findings and observations to the Royal Society and to wealthy scientists such as Joseph Banks and Henry Cavendish, both of whom, it would seem, bought every travel publication of any importance. Nor is there any doubt that publications relating to earlier voyages were an essential item of equipment on every new voyage. We have the spectacle of Captain Cheap, Midshipman Byron and Gunner Bulkeley all examining (one by one) the same copy of Narborough's voyages on their bleak shipwreck island off the Patagonian coast. James Colnett, placed in charge of the *Rattler* for a south-sea exploration, went to the London booksellers to buy 'the various voyages of former navigators' (p. 126).

But there were not enough scientists, navigators, entrepreneurs and politicians to buy books in the quantities that would keep publishers in funds. It was the general public who made voyage-narratives so profitable to publish, and what the general public was assumed to need was a prime consideration with pretty well every writer discussed in this book, except perhaps the Forsters in their purely scientific publications, and George Vancouver, whose narrative could not have been intended to entertain anyone. No writer was really able to solve the problem of serving the two masters and achieve a satisfactory balance between scientific and technical information, and entertainment for the general reader. I describe Dampier's quite patent anguish and indecision in Chapter 2. At the end of the century, Arthur Young was still complaining of the way travel writers combined the telling of their story and making general observations.<sup>7</sup>

The uncertainty of the voyagers about their aim and their public made the gap which Defoe could enter. The preface to his *New Voyage Round the World* (1725) coolly raked the sea-going writers fore and aft for the 'tedious Accounts of their Log-work, how many Leagues they sail'd every Day; where they had the Winds . . .'. Sailors did not know how to make the most of their own stories – when, for example, 'they have had any Scuffle either with Native or *European* Enemies'. Their narratives 'have little or nothing of Story in them for the use of such Readers who never intend to go to Sea'.<sup>8</sup> Demonstrating to his readers how the task should be done, Defoe did not enlighten them with the information that *his* voyage round the world was wholly imaginary.

<sup>7</sup> Batten, *Pleasurable Instruction*, 32–3.

<sup>8</sup> Defoe, *A New Voyage Round the World*, 2–3.



Smollett, more fairly, cut out the technical details from real voyage-accounts and improved the remainder. In the preface to his 1756 collection of voyages, he wrote that preceding collections were

so stuffed with dry descriptions of bearings and distances, tides and current, variations of the compass, leeway, wind and weather, sounding, anchoring, and other terms of navigation, that none but mere pilots or seafaring people can read them without disgust. Our aim has been to clear away this kind of rubbish. . . . We have not only retrenched the superfluities, but endeavoured to polish the stile, strengthen the connexion of incidents, and animate the narration, wherever it seemed to languish.<sup>9</sup>

Smollett had the excuse that unlike Defoe he had actually been to sea, and had included a grisly account of his adventures as a naval surgeon's mate in *Roderick Random* (1748).

In any analysis of voyage-narratives of our period, authenticity is a major problem. I have challenged the authenticity of one of the accepted Wager narratives (pp. 75–6) and suggested that the 'inauthenticity' of one of the Cook narratives (second voyage) needs re-examining (p. 105). Robert Drury, recently rescued from his hijack by Defoe scholars, I accept as a real person (p. 166). It is quite possible that I have been taken in by a hoaxer somewhere in this book, and all credit to him if I have.

But authenticity is on the whole a less vexing problem than the continuing uncertainty about actual authorship. There are narrators who are mere inventions: in my judgement George Walker's life-story is an autobiography, written up by a Grub-Street hack as if it were the work of one of Walker's officers (pp. 189–91). Very occasionally, the working-up of a narrative by a literary person is acknowledged; see, for example, John Howell telling John Nicol's story – though the admission is in an afternote and only goes so far as initials. Where ghostings are not concealed they are usually anonymous (for example, Roach, p. 199, and Marra, p. 103). James Dalton's hair-raising and sometimes improbable adventures (pp. 210–11) were 'taken from his own Mouth in his Cell in Newgate'. Most often ghostings were unadmitted and can only be inferred.

A great many of the writers discussed in this book must have sought help. Dampier did not deny it, but fiercely rejected the accusation that therefore he was not the true author of his publications (p. 21). Cook had no confidence in himself as author, but after seeing what Hawkesworth had done with his journals for the first voyage, he determined to come into the arena himself. It was first necessary to by-pass J. R. Forster, and then *A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World* appeared, 'written by James Cook'. In the preface he asked readers to excuse the lack of polish in an account 'given in my own words'; 'candour and fidelity', he thought,

<sup>9</sup> Quoted by Crone and Skelton, 'English collections of voyages and travels', 110–11.

would ‘balance the want of ornament’. As he was just about to set out on his third expedition, he was leaving his book ‘in the hands of some friends’ who have ‘accepted the office of correcting the press for me’.<sup>10</sup> He did not say that the whole work had been written up for him by Canon John Douglas (pp. 122–3). Bligh’s *Voyage to the South Seas* was written up for him by Joseph Banks and James Burney while he was away on his second breadfruit expedition. The disentanglement of the work of J. R. Forster from that of his son George in their major work, *A Voyage Round the World*, which purports to be by George alone, is a perplexing and complicated task (pp. 115–16).

The question of truthfulness in these narratives is a subject for my Conclusion. It will, however, very soon become clear that all voyage-narratives are self-serving, and that to watch (as we so often can) the development of a narrative is to see the record being adjusted, massaged and manipulated. There are one or two desperately honest and artless narrators – Elizabeth Justice, for example, and Roger Poole. The spectrum is very wide, between Cook’s venial alterations and improvements in his journals and Shelvocke’s breathtaking misrepresentations, but in general voyagers will not appear as a group of manly tars gripping their pens in fists more accustomed to handling ropes, setting down their recollections in simple and conscientious honesty. Voyage-literature is much more interesting than that. The writing, in all its deviousness, is a continuing involvement with and a continuing attempt to dominate the reality it is claiming to record.

The voyage-accounts which I discuss are almost wholly in prose. Both James Revel and (apparently) Robert Barker tried telling their stories in verse, and John Harrower, in his lonely diary, often moved into rhyme. The collection, *Naval Songs and Ballads*, made for the Navy Record Society by C. H. Firth in 1908, includes one or two rather painful attempts at verse story-telling; for example ‘The Lighterman’s Prentice Prest and Sent to Sea’, and ‘The Greenland Men’.<sup>11</sup> One R. Richardson, a seaman, wrote up Wallis’s voyage as *The Dolphin’s Journal Epitomized in a Poetical Essay* (see p. 95). But the only poetry of any moment in the following pages is J. F. Stanfield’s worthy if embarrassing attempt to convert his unpleasant experiences aboard a slave-ship into an epic poem. However, it is essential to find room to salute William Falconer for his attempt to bring not only the events but the vocabulary of the sea within the compass of verse in his poem *The Shipwreck*, first published in 1762, and many times reprinted, with revisions.

Falconer was born in 1732, the son of an Edinburgh barber. He went to sea as a boy, and served in both merchant and naval ships. He was

<sup>10</sup> Cook, *A Voyage Towards the South Pole*, I, xxxvi.

<sup>11</sup> Firth, *Naval Songs and Ballads*, 201–2 and 249–52.