INTRODUCTION

'The paper globe'
Women, Writing, and Travel in the Eighteenth Century[1]

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's account of the 'new world' of the Ottoman middle east – a polite, civil people, and culture of exceptional beauty and refined taste – sounded a bell that reverberated through the centuries after her. 'I am now got into a new world, where everything I see appears to me a change of scene', Montagu announces, 'and I write to your ladyship with some content of mind, hoping at least that you will find the charm of novelty in my letters, and no longer reproach me that I tell you nothing extraordinary'.[2] Sparkling with her renowned wit and a polished cosmopolitanism, Montagu's travel letters circulated first among the beau-monde of Hanoverian England and were widely read after their formal publication in 1763. The barely-disguised *Letters of the Right Honourable L–y M–y W–y M–e* travelled quickly to the Continent, and ran into multiple editions before the end of the century. The immediate legacy of Montagu's travel correspondence – which was indeed 'extraordinary' – ranged from Pope's spiteful attack on their author as a 'pox'd' Sappho, to Ingres' series of orientalist paintings in the nineteenth century, which featured the sumptuous bathing women of Montagu's famous description.[3]

Montagu's contract with her correspondent to provide 'charm' and 'novelty' hints at another lingering line of influence: the growing number of women who travelled, and wrote about their experiences, after the appearance of her letters. For these women too, travel provided access to an unfamiliar and exciting world, which they often described in terms that directly echoed Montagu's. Perhaps most significantly, however, what Montagu evokes is not only the 'new world' of the exotic east but also a 'change of scene' in modern English culture and identity: the development from the late seventeenth century of a polite, cosmopolitan elite moving away from the culture of the court and invested in the practices of writing and reading. Montagu's *Embassy Letters* in effect 'discover' a new world of women, writing, and eighteenth-century culture, where those very categories were being reshaped in their modern forms. Made curious

by these clever and caustic epistolary performances, I was drawn into the dynamic tradition of travel writing by women in the eighteenth century, and began to understand why by the 1770s, as the *Critical Review* archly observes, women's travel letters were indeed by no means 'unusual productions'.[4]

Montagu therefore presides over this project in more than one way. Her *Embassy Letters* and Wollstonecraft's 'generic tour de force' *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden Norway and Denmark* of 1796 were the only two travel narratives written by eighteenth-century women available in print at the time I began my research.[5] Yet these two sets of letters frame a period of intense popularity and influence in writing associated with travel. From the turn of the eighteenth century, peregrination and letter-writing inflected the work of cultural commentators like Addison and Steele; governing figures of periodical publication like 'Mr Spectator', 'the Idler', and 'the Rambler'; and produced the paradigmatic man of modern sensibility and polite culture in Sterne's 'sentimental traveller'.[6] Motifs of travel and (self)estrangement shape the earliest examples of that new style of fiction called the 'novel' and frame the *contes philosophiques* of writers as diverse as Johnson, Burke, and Voltaire.[7] Circulating around these literary forms thematising travel were an unprecedented number of accounts of voyages and travels, genuine and fictional, including numerous collections published throughout the century.[8]

The descriptive genre of 'voyages and travels' was so well populated that by mid-century Samuel Johnson (under the figure of 'the Idler') was able to muse openly on the anticipation and frustration awaiting readers of the travel narrative: 'It may, I think, be justly observed, that few books disappoint their readers more than the Narrations of Travellers', he complains.[9] Johnson's querulous reflection outlines the ideal form and function of the travel narrative in contemporary taste. Travel writing, like travel itself, is the province of the educated and thoughtful mind, curious to understand 'the sentiments, manners, and condition of the rest' of mankind in all its diversity, and with 'the leisure or power to extend its views'.[10] Travel writing provides the reader with both pleasure and 'profit', imbricating commercial, epistemological, social, and aesthetic discourses in the construction of the genre. Johnson's meditation on the unrealised expectations of travel writing underscores its critical and pedagogical functions: its perceived role in enlarging understanding, or reshaping the reading subject, through the mediation or shared experience of foreign people and cultures. This view of the comparative and transformative powers of travel is of course not a new one. In the middle of the previous

century, James Howell had already concluded (after Aristotle) that 'Peregrination . . . may be not improperly called a moving Academy, or the true Peripatetique School'.[11] Johnson prescribes a typically enlightenment function to travel writing, advising that: 'He that would travel for the entertainment of others, should remember that the great object of remark is human life'.[12]

Johnson's conviction of the philosophical value of travel and travel writing understands identity and difference as arising from both 'Nature' and 'Art'. For him, the forms of diversity observed in mankind evolve equally from 'Providence' and from social causes or expressions: what he delineates in characteristic mid-century terms as 'sentiments, manners and condition'. Johnson's perception of the role of culture and cultural difference in (re)configuring the understanding is elaborated in Mary Wollstonecraft's image of 'the paper globe'. When placing her own travel narrative before the public at the end of the century, Wollstonecraft suggests:

> The most essential service, I presume, that authors could render to society, would be to promote inquiry and discussion, instead of making those dogmatical assertions which only appear calculated to gird the human mind round with imaginary circles, like the paper globe which represents the one he inhabits.[13]

The form Wollstonecraft chooses for those ideas, cultures, and beliefs that 'gird' the human mind – 'imaginary circles' that both constitute and constrain the imagination – not only describes the role of discourse and cultural practice in fashioning the subject, but understands this socialised identity as shaped by experience and profoundly susceptible to the influence of others. Her construction of a 'paper globe', a discursive world of modern subjectivity, instinctively encompasses worldliness, self-consciousness, and public literary culture in the processes of self-formation. The idea of a linked sphere of subjectivity and experience is a governing one for Wollstonecraft – she suggests elsewhere in *A Short Residence* that 'generally speaking, the sphere of observation determines the extent of the mind' – but the travel writer is understood as to have a special responsibility in this process of inquiry and enlargement, deliberately challenging and expanding the understanding of her readers through a wider and more self-conscious engagement with the world. Like Johnson, Wollstonecraft concludes that travel writing, properly executed, promotes discussion and reflection, and compels the reader 'to form a tacit comparison of his own state with that of others'.[14] The 'paper globe'

therefore allegorises the function of travel and travel writing – as exemplary forms of cultural analysis – in conditioning and expanding knowledge of the self, while testifying to a deeply discursive understanding of identity and peregrination in the eighteenth century. The philosophical, epistemological, and ontological function of travel invoked by Wollstonecraft is at the heart of the following chapters, which investigate how women used travel writing to intervene in powerful contemporary discourses which very often positioned a woman's position in a society as the index of that culture's progress and civility.

The sets of cultural practices observed by Montagu, Johnson, and Wollstonecraft as shaping the human subject are considered here under the rubric of 'sociality'. These are the terms or repertoires of participation in society, and therefore of (individual and communal) identity. Sociality or (as Lawrence Klein formulates it more specifically in relationship to 'politeness') 'bodily comportment and the disciplines of social interaction', encompasses complex practices of writing, language, manner, disposition, states of feeling, habit, *habillement*, and taste.[15] Sociality describes those historically specific forms of social competence that mediate between personal subjectivity and group identities: deep structures of perception and practice that shape participants in politically and culturally meaningful ways. This is a culturally mediated understanding of identity which is perhaps most visible in the discourses of sociability and taste prominent in the first four decades, but it structures subjectivity across the greater part of the eighteenth century, including the forms of romantic sociability characteristic of later ideals of sympathy and sensibility.[16] Johnson's formulation of 'sentiments, manners and condition', like Wollstonecraft's image of the paper globe, captures this register of subjectifying social praxis in distinctively eighteenth-century terms and prefigures the modern sociological model of 'habitus'. A theory of subjection connected with Marcel Mauss' notion of *techniques du corps*, and elaborated by Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu, 'habitus' similarly describes 'socialized subjectivity', or the sets of dispositions, or cultural practices distinct from language and biology working to produce the social subject.[17] This modern theoretical model of social understandings of identity and difference directly echoes British writers' preoccupations with the customs and habits of other cultures, and is especially germane to travel writing, the popular genre that develops in response to the century's curiosity about other cultures and themselves. Travel writers of the Enlightenment and early Romantic periods tend to represent identity in distinctively geographical and social terms, as complex

patterns of climate, habit, fashion, relation, and taste. Subjectivity is conceived primarily as a social idiom, a powerful fusion of shared cultural vernacular and individual tastes. My own use of the term sociality in connection with the writing of travel endeavours to capture this connection between specifically eighteenth-century understandings of sociability, sentiment, and sensibility (as distinctive forms of sociality) and the later theoretical insights of Mauss, Elias, and Bourdieu.

In Howell, Johnson, and Wollstonecraft's shared estimation, travel is a pre-eminent form for developing an appreciation of variety and difference in human experience: travel writing is critical to a clearer understanding of the self in the world. The ideal form of narrative 'promoting inquiry or discussion' is, however, much less apparent: neither a 'general account' nor 'minute enumerations', a plain itinerary nor 'delicate sensibility', seem sufficient to the task of representing either the diversity of cultural experience or experiential nature of travel. Travel writing of the period displays an enormous range of narrative structures and styles, as if travellers too were trying to find the proper form of communicating such an embodied, critical, and variable experience. Eighteenth-century travel utilises a variety of literary and popular forms, which in turn link the writing of travel with other significant genres in the period. Among these heterodox forms, the epistolary narrative is perhaps the most prominent: a highly fluid form, the letter connotes the privacy and authenticity of personal correspondence. It is also, however, available to more public address as the formal or open letter, a mode commonly utilised in philosophical and public writing of community debate.[18] As Mary Favret suggests in her study of the letter in later eighteenth-century culture, the 'genre of the familiar epistle, from its roots in classical rhetoric, had emerged at the end of the century as the medium of collective activity'.[19] The letter moves (or dramatises the move) between private and public spaces of personal life as a central feature of its form, and is particularly powerful in its representation and connotations of direct experience: staging empiricism, immediacy, and lack of reserve as key components of its authority and form.[20]

Narratives composed of journal letters are also well represented in travel writing of this period, encompassing aspects of the familiar letter but also emergent forms of diurnalism. A consecutive, dated account of a voyage, the journal and journal letter track the writer in both space and time, once again producing direct experience as a powerful effect of literary technique. As an early form of 'time-discipline', the journal letter is clearly connected with those related forms of writing identified by Stuart Sherman; in his

account, diaries, journals, and periodicals limn 'a new temporality' in the understanding of the self 'in eighteenth-century England as in no previous culture':

> In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries clock-dials, minute hands, diaries, newspapers, and novels were new precisely in that they called attention away from endpoints and invested in middles – of the current hour, of the ongoing life – that were sharply defined and indefinitely extended.[21]

Sherman's description of the century's new investment in 'middles' or 'the ongoing life' registers the gradual interiorisation of identity recognised by a number of historians: a perceptible shift of attention away from the distinctions of status and rank to the 'contents' of character, as identity became increasingly embodied in the sociable, sensible, and gendered self. The travel journal, like the diary with which it shares form, is a particularly 'vivid figure' for simultaneity 'as a means for structuring identity' for both correspondents and readers. Benedict Anderson's construction of simultaneity – the sensation through which individuals too numerous to know each other imagine themselves into community – has special significance for travel writing at this period.[22] Perceptual relations of simultaneity underpin the affiliative and alienating experiences of travel, and these are re-presented to the reader as recognisable and relative practices, or absolute difference.[23] Travel writing thus mediates the experience of the self, for both writers and readers, as a unique – but reciprocal and relational – subject of specific communities, within and across the text.[24]

A self-conscious attention to knowledge and cultural comparison shapes a further set of travel texts: developing in conjunction with Enlightenment values of empiricism and scientific enquiry, the essay format and scientific log become popular forms deployed by travel writing. In fact, very few travel narratives wholly escape the influence of the ethnographic or anthropological curiosity of this period. In addition to those narratives that deal directly with travel experiences, something like a travel 'motif' or paradigm of rhetorical estrangement distinguishes a striking proportion of fictional writing in this period, including the popular genre of oriental tales and the developing novel. Travel conditions the techniques of defamiliarisation and reverse ethnography that underpin fictions like the *New Atalantis* (1709), *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), and informs a range of writing across fictional, satirical, and philosophical modes. In its distinctive narrative heterogeneity, eighteenth-century travel writing might therefore be best understood less as a unified 'genre' than

a powerful register of simultaneity, cultural comparison, and critique: a dialectical impulse at the heart of early modern sociality. This function of travel writing is closely related to the forms of 'criticism' central to the emergence and function of the public sphere in the eighteenth century, and to the writing of the 'subject' constituted by autobiography, journalism, and the novel. Travel writing of this period is distinguished by its popularity, diversity, curiosity, and experimental impulses; its inscription of contemporary politics and debates, its attention to practices and sensations of the body; and its attempted representation of space, time, and the self in written forms.

The masculine dimensions of eighteenth-century travel writing are reasonably well known, but were eighteenth-century women equally fascinated with the experiences and literatures of travel? As the Bibliography demonstrates, a substantial number of women have left us accounts of travel outside Britain between 1680 and 1830, and a good proportion of these were published during that same period. Destinations ranged from continental Europe to Russia and Turkey; through the Atlantic to the West Indies, Africa and American colonies; to India and Australia. These women are directly engaged in a popular literary and polemical tradition of travel writing, but for many years – as a result of a critical suspicion towards travel writing, and the marginalisation of women's writing more generally – their work largely slipped outside considerations of eighteenth-century literary and cultural history. Literary historiography has tended to privilege the novel over other formal developments and has only relatively recently begun to carefully consider female-authored texts in any genre. The critical marginalisation of travel writing has, however, clearly shifted in the last two decades, and to the degree that Nigel Leask rightly identifies the field of travel writing studies as 'one of the major achievements of interdisciplinary scholarship' in recent years.[25] *Women, Writing, and Travel* is indebted to this renewed conversation about travel writing, but much still needs to be done to recover the rich historical complexity of the genre for women in the eighteenth century. As Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs suggest in *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, the absent or at very least belated tradition of critical attention means that the genre of travel still remains a 'vast, little-explored area'.[26] With the exception of Mirella Agorni's *Translating Italy for the Eighteenth Century* (2002) and Kolocotroni and Mitsi (eds.) *Women Writing Greece* (2008), which consider specific regions, there has been no comprehensive study of the field since Elizabeth Bohl's landmark *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics* (1995). The following chapters therefore identify and analyse key

examples of published travel narratives so that some sense of the diversity of women's use of the genre can be recovered, and to highlight women's use of travel to negotiate a position of authority in, and for, their writing.

The significant corpus of eighteenth-century travel writing remaining to us directly challenges preconceptions about women's use of the genre, and from the popularity of certain destinations at particular periods a suggestive second set of connections – chronological or historiographical – also begins to emerge. Aristocratic women were conspicuous travellers on the Continent from the late seventeenth century, and their courtly experiences and correspondence were sought after by an expanding reading public. Early accounts were, however, largely limited to those of elite European *épistolières*: Marie Catherine La Motte, Countess D'Aulnoy published her *Letters of a Lady's Travels into Spain* in London in 1692, following them with the *Memoirs of the Court of Spain, Memoirs of the Court of England*, and her famous *Contes de Fées*. Women were understood from the early modern period to be natural and accomplished letter-writers: the chatty, immediate, and unmediated form of personal letters was considered a distinctively feminine quality.[27] The feminised nature of the letter is confidently asserted by Sir John Sinclair, a letter-writer and compiler working at the end of the period:

> The fair sex have long been celebrated for their excellence in letter-writing. The correspondence of Sévigné, Maintenon, and others, are considered models in that species of composition. In fact, letters may be regarded as '*Conversations in Writing,*' and should be characterised by all that ease and sprightliness . . . in which females are so pre-eminent.[28]

The taste for the polite correspondence of famous (and infamous) women like D'Aulnoy and Sévigné combined curiosity for detail of the private lives of courtly women with an appetite for their travels and experiences. This seventeenth-century belle-lettristic tradition was given a distinctively English voice in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Embassy Letters* from Europe and Turkey beginning in 1715. Montagu's letters, like Sévigné's, circulated in a semi-public fashion from the time of their writing, but were not published until after her death in 1762. To Europe, Montagu notably added Turkey as a destination for the courtier and accomplished traveller. Travelling seventy years later, Lady Elizabeth Craven carefully invokes this aristocratic tradition of polite polemical travel, trumping Lady Mary by including Russia in her courtly itinerary. Craven's *Journey through the Crimea to Constantinople* (1789) was published in an enlarged edition in 1814, and then followed in 1826 by a lengthy set of *Memoirs*, testifying to the

ongoing market for 'literary lives' in this style. Sinclair's construction of letters as 'conversation in writing' captures important connections between the literary-aristocratic mode of travel and the development of polite sociability in the first part of the century (within which conversation was considered a primary practice and social value).

From the 1730s, Russia begins to appear in travel accounts by women. Elizabeth Justice presented a subscription volume of *A Voyage to Russia* to the public in 1739 and was sufficiently successful to arrange a second edition in 1746. Justice's autobiography *Amelia, or, The Distress'd Wife: A History Founded on Real Circumstances* (1741) supplements the *Voyage* by detailing her reasons for travelling and publishing. Justice is conspicuous in women's travel writing of the first half of the century for her middle-class status and formal departures, but aristocratic women also provided accounts of the northern Empire. Jane Vigor's epistolary account of St Petersburg in the 1730s and 40s was published in 1775 as *Letters from a Lady, Who Resided Some Years in Russia to Her Friend in England*. 'Lady Rondeau's Letters' (as they are commonly known to Russian historians) were very well received, and popular enough to warrant a second edition two years later. Martha and Catherine Wilmot, visitors to Russia in the first decade of the nineteenth century, went on to record their experiences of the empire after the reign of Catherine the Great and under the influence of the formidable Princess Ekaterina Dashkova (herself an accomplished traveller and letter-writer). The sisters' journals and letters were, however, only made public in several early twentieth-century editions.

Travelling just prior to the Wilmot sisters, Maria Guthrie kept a detailed survey in a different style of her tour through Russia and the Crimea in the 1790s. This scholarly volume was published by her grieving husband Matthew in 1802, its lengthy title proclaiming the authority of both writer and editor:

> *A Tour, Performed in the Years 1795–6, Through The Taurida, or Crimea . . . By Mrs. Maria Guthrie, Formerly Acting Directress of the Imperial Convent for the Education of the Female Nobility of Russia; Described in a Series of Letters to Her Husband, the Editor, Matthew Guthrie, M.D. FRS and FSA of London and Edinburgh, Member of the Philosophical Society of Manchester, &c. &c.*

A contemporary reviewer commended the entertaining tone of 'the fair traveller' and the *Tour*'s 'faithful account of the ancient kingdom of the Bosporus', noting distinctive gender differences displayed by the contemporary crop of Russian travel writers: 'THIS peculiar and interesting country we have visited under the conduct of different travellers, from

the volatile and superficial lady Craven, to the more judicious and scientific Pallas; so that scarcely a mountain rears its head unsung'.[29] Guthrie's *Tour* addresses a significant audience for travel narratives in eighteenth-century Europe: a semi-professional readership framed by increased exploration, enlightenment cultures of science and empiricism, and an expanding compass of commercial relations. Despite her rigorous and 'pleasing' scholarship, this volume of the *Tour* – carefully edited and annotated for a second edition by her husband – still lies in proof in the British Library.

After mid-century, trade and colonial relations across the Atlantic brought Africa, the West Indies, and the American colonies into sharper focus as popular subjects for travel. The same period saw a significant diversification in women's travel narratives, as commerce and colonialism broadened the profiles and interests of women who travelled. Janet Schaw directed an epistolary journal of her travels through the West Indies and the Colony of North Carolina home to Scotland in 1774–6. Irrepressible and entertaining, Schaw's letters circulated among her Edinburgh circle but were only formally published in 1921 as the *Journal of a Lady of Quality*. Jemima Kindersley was travelling and writing at much the same time as Schaw, but printed her *Letters from the Island of Teneriffe, Brazil, the Cape of Good Hope, and the West Indies* more promptly in 1777. These were followed a year later by the answering volume of *Letters to Mrs. Kindersley* by the Reverend Henry Hodgson. Her travel experiences having prompted her to consider the relative positions of women across the societies she had visited, Kindersley proposed writing specifically on the subject. However, she satisfied herself with translating from the French *An Essay on the Character, the Manners, and the Understanding of Women, in Different Ages*, to which she added *Two Original Essays* (1781). A young Maria Riddell, later a friend of Robert Burns at Dumfries, also travelled in the West Indies in the late 1780s. She published her *Voyages to the Madeira, and Leeward Caribbean Isles: With Sketches of the Natural History of These Islands* (1792) in an edition of five hundred copies for the London and Edinburgh markets. Unlike many of her predecessors, who preferred to circulate their writing in manuscript, Riddell was of a generation of women writers who were more comfortable with publication. In 1803 she edited a *Metrical Miscellany* which included, among a number of poems of her own composition, an 'Inscription Written on An Hermitage in One of the Islands of the West Indies' with the note that 'The Author was then but sixteen'.[30]

An equally ambitious young writer was Anna Maria Falconbridge, who in 1794 promptly turned her experience of the newly established Free Slaves