

## 1 Introduction

The eighteenth century saw a phenomenal rise in the popularity of travel accounts which continued well into the nineteenth century. Numerous scholars, explorers and travellers chose to document their explorations, travel observations and experiences either in print or in manuscript. These works were never short of eager readers. Most travelogues in the period did not relate travels in the proper sense of the word. In the time when many academic disciplines were still in the process of formation and boundaries between them, as well as differences between ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’ scholars, were blurred and indistinct, non-fiction travel accounts frequently presented narratives in which details of travel itineraries and/or residence particulars were incorporated into the body of scholarly texts on history, ethnography, natural history or art of a specific region or country. The contents of travelogues depended largely on the author’s educational background, intellectual interests or scholarly pursuits, target reading audience and the purpose of sharing his or her travel report and making ‘public’ the knowledge acquired during travels.

Recent decades have seen ever-increasing scholarly attention to travel writing. This study is following in Jan Borm’s footsteps; he defines the travel book as ‘any narrative characterized by a non-fiction dominant that relates (almost always) in the first person a journey or journeys that the reader supposes to have taken place in reality while assuming or presupposing that author, narrator and principal character are but one identical’.<sup>1</sup> Recent research has offered novel critical approaches to travelogues, explored narrative techniques and brought to the forefront the ideas behind them. Forgotten manuscripts have been uncovered and many well-known travelogues have been reread. Scholars have focused on women’s travel writing; their recent findings ‘greatly nuanced our understanding of women’s contribution to the genre’.<sup>2</sup> Although extensive research on

<sup>1</sup> J. Borm, ‘Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology’ in G. Hooper and T. Youngs (eds.), *Perspectives on Travel Writing* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> C. Thompson, ‘Journeys to Authority: Reassessing Women’s Early Travel Writing, 1763–1862’, *Women’s Writing*, 24.2 (2017), 131.

eighteenth-century travel writers and their works has been carried out, female recipients of travelogues have been under-examined in critical studies.<sup>3</sup> In this light, the recovering of the reading, discussing, writing and collecting of travel accounts by a group of women can add to a collective portrait of eighteenth-century readers and, consequently, contribute to a more coherent understanding of the travel-writing phenomenon in the period. It can also diversify our understanding of a cultural landscape of female reading and book ownership and circulation.

This Element narrows the focus and explores the ‘social life’ of travel accounts and ‘social circulation’ of geographical knowledge in the Bluestocking circle between 1760 and 1799, the period when many travelogues were ‘at the forefront of scientific and intellectual inquiry’.<sup>4</sup> It discusses the popularity, significance and impact of the travel book on the Bluestockings, women whose ‘public personae were built around intellectual accomplishment (as reflected in textual production), female friendship, Anglican centred piety, and social responsibility.’<sup>5</sup> This study offers to expand the circle by including less known Mary Hamilton (1756–1816),

<sup>3</sup> A few publications touch on the problem: Z. Kinsley, *Women Writing the Home Tour, 1682–1812* (Bodmin: Ashgate, 2008); J. Pearson, *Women’s Reading in Britain, 1750–1830: A Dangerous Recreation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); B. Hagglund, *Tourists and Travellers: Women’s Non-fictional Writing about Scotland, 1770–1830* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2010); D. Allan, *Commonplace Books and Reading in Georgian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); M. Towsey, “‘I can’t resist sending you the book’: Private Libraries, Elite Women, and Shared Reading Practices in Georgian Britain”, *Library & Information History*, 29.3 (2013), 210–22.

<sup>4</sup> C. Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> B.A. Schellenberg, ‘Bluestocking Women and the Negotiation of Oral, Manuscript, and Print Cultures’ in J.M. Labbe (ed.), *The History of British Women’s Writing, 1750–1830* (Chippenham and Eastbourne: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 64–5. The terms ‘Bluestocking’ and ‘bluestocking’ as well as the composition of the circle have been the subject of scholarly discussion. See, for example, E. Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church, and Nation, 1712–1812* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 81–4.

Eva Maria Garrick (1724–1822), Charlotte Walsingham (1738–90) and Lady Catherine Herries (c.1753–1808), who, like the celebrated first- and second-generation Bluestockings, were well-known society figures in London in the 1780s.<sup>6</sup> These accomplished women attended and hosted conversation parties in their London homes, engaged in philanthropic and patronage activities and were constantly ‘in the pursuit of intellectual improvement’ and ‘polite sociability’.<sup>7</sup> A number of recent publications have shown that the Bluestockings were prolific readers, though their reading of travel books has not been considered in detail to date.<sup>8</sup> This study addresses such topics as the Bluestockings’ interaction with travelers and explorers, reading practices related to travel accounts, discussion and critical judgement of travelogues as well as production of journals and letters during travels. The *Element* also looks at three book collections owned by these accomplished women and shows a significant number of travelogue titles, geography books and printed materials related to geography in them. In doing this, an attempt is made to explore the ways in which knowledge about the world was acquired, accumulated and diffused by the Bluestockings and to demonstrate that the intellectual female reader

<sup>6</sup> Evidence of social engagement and activities of these four women whom I regard as members of the group of younger Bluestockings can be gleaned from the Bluestockings’ correspondence, diaries and memoirs. Regrettably, Garrick, Walsingham and Herries still remain ‘in shadow’ and are waiting for their researchers.

<sup>7</sup> N. Pohl and B.A. Schellenberg, ‘Introduction: A Bluestocking Historiography’ in N. Pohl and B.A. Schellenberg (eds.), *Reconsidering the Bluestockings* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 2003), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> C. Lupton, *Reading and the Making of Time in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018); M. Ellis, ‘Reading Practices in Elizabeth Montagu’s Epistolary Network of the 1750’ in E. Eger (ed.), *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730–1830* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 213–32; B.A. Schellenberg, ‘Reading in an Epistolary Community in Eighteenth-Century England’ in D.R. Sedo (ed.), *Reading Communities from Salons to Cyberspace* (Chippenham and Eastbourne: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 25–43.

constituted an indispensable part of the success which travelogues enjoyed in Britain in the second half of the eighteenth century.

The present study lies at the intersection of three rapidly developing research areas – studies in travel writing, the history of reading and Bluestocking studies and the seminal works in these areas.<sup>9</sup> It is largely based on evidence from primary sources – numerous records found in unpublished and published diaries; travel journals and correspondence of the Bluestockings; and, above all, on their records related to the reading and discussing of travel accounts. Comments of this kind are not rare in eighteenth-century private papers; however, in most cases, they are laconic, cursory and scattered here and there. Such records, although they provide important insights into many aspects related to the travel writing of the day, have been underexplored until now. Traditionally, they have performed a supportive function in critical literature and have occasionally been used to illustrate the response of the reading audience. The Bluestockings' records of the reading and discussing of travel accounts are the cornerstones on which the key arguments of this study rest. The study also uses evidence from memoirs and correspondence of the literary men and travellers who were closely associated with the Bluestockings.

The Element also rests on information provided by three sales catalogues of the Bluestockings' private book collections and a manuscript inventory. According to John Brewer, catalogues as a primary source have been under-examined until now, as researchers frequently experience difficulty in animating such 'inert sources'.<sup>10</sup> The

<sup>9</sup> Pohl and Schellenberg (eds.), *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*; E. Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Chippenham and Eastbourne: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and D. Heller (ed.), *Bluestockings Now! The Evolution of a Social Role* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015) on the Bluestockings; Thompson, *Travel Writing* on travel writing; A. Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017) on the history of reading.

<sup>10</sup> J. Brewer, 'Reconstructing the Reader: Prescriptions, Texts and Strategies on Anna Larpent's Reading' in J. Raven, H. Small and N. Tadmor (eds.), *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 227.

present study attempts to ‘animate’ them by providing information on both the library owners and their Bluestocking friends who had access to the collections and borrowed books from them. The Element establishes the links between these groups of primary sources which complement each other. By interpreting, comparing and analysing the extensive evidence, it attempts to give an idea of how travel accounts were read, discussed, written and collected in the Bluestocking circle. In doing this, the study seeks to deepen our understanding of the role which the Bluestockings played in cultural production and knowledge diffusion of the period.

The material presented in the book is organised in four thematically entitled sections. Section 2, *Bluestockings, Travellers and Conversation*, looks at the Bluestocking drawing room as a space for learned conversations on travel and exploration in which contemporary geographers, explorers and travellers obtained an opportunity for face-to-face contact with the ‘women of independence and confidence, who intervened influentially in the major cultural debates of their times’.<sup>11</sup> This section traces the Bluestockings’ connections with the most eminent travel writers and explorers of the day. It argues that their interaction was mutually beneficial as ‘learning, knowledge creation, and innovation are all fruit of the circulation and interpretation of information, the co-creation of new ideas, cumulative experience, and cognition’.<sup>12</sup> Their interaction encompassed a range of interlinked practices which included the discussing of oral travel reports and printed travel accounts, collective viewing of drawings and prints and examining samples and specimens brought from travels. An attempt is made to reveal the Bluestockings’ instrumentality in geographical knowledge diffusion, organisation of scientific trips and promotion of travelogue publishing projects.

Section 3, *Reading Travelogues*, aims to reconstruct the reading of ‘travels and voyages’ in the Bluestocking circle between 1760 and 1799,

<sup>11</sup> Eger, *Bluestockings*, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> J. Glückler, E. Lazega and I. Hammer, ‘Exploring the Interaction of Space and Networks in the Creation of Knowledge: An Introduction’ in J. Glückler, E. Lazega and I. Hammer (eds.), *Knowledge and Networks* (Springer Open), p. 4.

focusing particularly on the 1780s. The findings presented in this and other sections of the *Element* are heavily based upon the evidence found in two linked manuscript collections. These are the Mary Hamilton papers and the Dickenson Family of Birch Hall Papers;<sup>13</sup> the material from them has been partially published to date.<sup>14</sup> Mary Hamilton was a voracious reader who documented her reading habits and interests in much detail. Hamilton's diaries reveal how she enjoyed London's cultivated atmosphere in the 1780s and befriended a host of celebrated literary women and men of the late Georgian period.<sup>15</sup> More evidence comes from the published letters and diaries of the Bluestockings – Elizabeth Carter, Elizabeth Montagu, Frances Boscawen, Hannah More, Frances Burney, Mary Delany, Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi (hereafter referred to as Thrale Piozzi), Hester Chapone, Catherine Talbot – and the literary men Horace Walpole and William Weller Pepys who were closely associated with the Bluestocking circle.

Section 3 attempts to explore how these accomplished women chose and read travel accounts and the ways in which they accessed them. It also reveals the highly popular titles of the genre read by these sophisticated females and their expectations of solid travel books. The section argues that notwithstanding a variety of travelogues published in Britain, their reading was not unsystematic and random but selective and accentuated. The evidence presented in the section and Appendix 1 gives an idea of the scope of travel books read by the Bluestockings and suggests that the most recent travelogues were always on their radar; information on them spread either by word of mouth or via correspondence. This section attempts to

<sup>13</sup> Mary Hamilton Papers. University of Manchester Library. GB 133 HAM/ (cited subsequently as HAM/); Dickenson Family of Birch Hall. Preston, Lancashire Archives. DDX 274 (cited subsequently as DDX/).

<sup>14</sup> Excerpts from Hamilton's diaries and correspondence appear in E. Anson and F. Anson (eds.), *Mary Hamilton, afterwards Mrs. John Dickenson, at Court and at Home, from Letters and Diaries, 1756 to 1816* (London: John Murray, 1925) and L. Llanover (ed.), *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany*, 3 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1862).

<sup>15</sup> For more information on Hamilton's life, see N. Voloshkova, "My friend Mr. H. Walpole": Mary Hamilton, Horace Walpole and the Art of Conversation', *Image [ & ] Narrative*, 18.3 (2017), 96–7.

identify the core travelogues which were widely read and discussed in the Bluestocking circle between 1780 and 1790 and to explain the motives behind their popularity. It also discusses a group of women-authored travelogues read by the Bluestockings and suggests that the choice of travel books depended on their interest in a certain country rather than on the author's gender. Section 3 discusses the Bluestockings' reading habits. As printed travel accounts were 'central to the canon of respectable, desirable reading'<sup>16</sup> in the eighteenth century, it also traces how these women cultivated knowledge of geography and love for reading travels in their children and relations.

Section 4, *Writing Travel Accounts*, seeks to show that the Bluestockings were not only well informed and sophisticated readers of journeys but also well-travelled women of the day. Like many eighteenth-century men, they recorded their travels in the country and continental Europe. This section focuses on the Bluestockings' activity in producing travel accounts and explores their 'social' life. It analyses the evidence from their diaries and correspondence that bespeaks the ongoing circulation of travel texts in manuscript and the value which their recipients ascribed to them. By way of illustration, it shows how Carter's continental letters to Talbot found a response in the addressee's family and acquaintances and how three letters on journeying the Lake District were copied and read out by Hamilton. It is suggested that through writing travel texts, the Bluestockings not only improved their literary style and indirectly encouraged their readers to adopt similar writing practices. They also participated in cultural production and knowledge diffusion in the period. This section points out that Thrale Piozzi was the most ardent and prolific writer of manuscript travel journals in the Bluestocking circle; after the publication of her travelogue, she entered a group of very few female travel writers in eighteenth-century Britain.

Section 5, *Collecting Travel Books*, continues to explore the Bluestockings' engagement with travel books, focusing on three private collections possessed by Elizabeth Vesey, Eva Maria Garrick and Thrale Piozzi. It reveals a considerable number of travelogues as well as geography

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, *Travel Writing*, pp. 33–4.

books and printed materials related to geography in their libraries; further details on the relevant book titles, which have been identified in the printed saleroom catalogues and Thrale Piozzi's manuscript book inventory, are given in Appendices 2, 3, 4 and 5. This section suggests that the Bluestockings were active consumers of travel accounts; the ownership of travelogues, other books and materials on geography bespeaks not only their fascination with travel accounts but also serves as important evidence for the ongoing acquisition, diffusion and production of geographical knowledge in the Bluestocking circle. The section also seeks to contribute to our knowledge of eighteenth-century book collections owned by women as the 'role of private libraries in the history of reading is rather more hidden from view – particularly in Britain.'<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Towsey, 'I can't resist sending you the book,' p. 211.