

# Foreword: Literature, Aesthetics, Travel

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Travel has been variously conceived as a rite of passage, an educational undertaking, a means of gathering intelligence, a core aspect of trade, a release from the everyday, and an act of faith. In addition travel is a central component of war, colonisation, migration, and exploration. As a physical act it typically takes place on the boundaries of the traveller's regular world, but increasingly it is able to occur within the conceptual everyday. As an imaginative subject, however, travel is to be found employed in a range of contexts that often cast it as 'the other' to the quotidian life at home; be it as a mode of education, salvation, or fascination. Despite the normalcy of the overseas holiday in many societies, as a literary or philosophical device, or as a motif, travel is something different; something out of the ordinary. The articles that follow this introduction begin to unpack travel in this respect.

This issue of *Literature & Aesthetics* grew out of a small but very successful conference co-hosted by the Sydney Society of Literature and Aesthetics and the Department of Studies in Religion, University of Sydney, from September 29 to October 1, 2011. The event, 'The Philosophies of Travel Conference,' was proposed in order to bring together scholars from around Australia and the world who were interested in travel phenomena. It was an outstanding event, delivering a fantastic range of papers from presenters with diverse methodological backgrounds. Papers were delivered from scholars in cultural studies, sociology, literary studies, and business management. In particular, however, it was the range of ways in which travel was conceived that struck many of the attendees as needing further discussion. A call for papers was distributed shortly after the conference asking for just such scholarly investigations, and as such, the range of approaches to the topic herein is broad. It is hoped that the meeting of disciplines in evidence throughout this special issue of *Literature & Aesthetics* will further fire scholarly imagination and contribute to our knowledge of travel; be it tourism, pilgrimage, war, work, play, or whatever other human activities are involved with and engage in acts of travel.

A number of people must be thanked for their efforts in helping to ensure the publication of this issue of *Literature & Aesthetics*. The conference from which this issue was born could not have occurred without the excellent assistance of my co-organiser Annabel Carr, or the numerous volunteers who helped the event run smoothly. I must also acknowledge the support of the Department of Studies in Religion, along with the School of Letters, Art, and

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Media, and the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sydney. Thanks must also go to Associate Professor Carole M. Cusack for her continued support of the journal and its production, and to Sarah Balstrup for assisting in the copy editing process. I wish also to thank the various referees of the articles published here, many of whom were only too happy to read a paper that worked across multiple disciplines, sometimes far removed from their own. Lastly, the tireless, selfless, and unfailing professionalism of the journal's Production Editor, George Ioannides, has ensured this issue came to be. Without his efforts it simply would have been impossible.

The concept of travel has mostly received attention in the guise of tourism, pilgrimage, business travel, and, more obliquely, as part of such subjects as post-colonial studies or the history of ideas. Traditional studies of tourism, such as those by Dean MacCannell or Nelson Graburn, sought to locate it as a social phenomenon emblematic of the modern West and as a replacement for decaying religion.<sup>1</sup> A number of authors have pointed out the problematic nature of such claims, and characterise tourist activities as tools for religious experience instead.<sup>2</sup> Further, religions themselves have incorporated tourism into their praxis.<sup>3</sup> A counterpoint to this view was expressed by Louis Turner and John Ash, whose claim that tourists were the "barbarians of our age of leisure"<sup>4</sup> has summed up the cultural cringe towards mass tourists, mainly for their putative tendency to ruin cultures. The travel motif persists, however, in literature, art, and a wide array of global cultural productions. It is to this that many of the articles herein are pointed.

Two threads run through all the articles brought together in this issue – unintended and spontaneously generated – that open up our understanding of that process. The articles that follow combine the sociological and the literary, exploring examples of travel practices that illustrate the variegated character it takes in the imagination. To this end, this issue brings together articles that do

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<sup>1</sup> Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Nelson H. H. Graburn, 'Tourism: The Sacred Journey', in *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, ed. Valene L. Smith (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), pp. 21–36.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Mary Lee Nolan and Sidney Nolan, *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); or Noga Collins-Kreiner and Jay Gatrell, 'Tourism, Heritage and Pilgrimage: The Case of Haifa's Baha'i Gardens,' *Journal of Heritage Tourism* vol. 1, no. 1 (2006), pp. 32–50.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism: Crossroads, Destinations and Encounters* (New York: Routledge, 2011), especially chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>4</sup> Louis Turner and John Ash, *The Golden Hordes: International Tourism and the Pleasure Periphery* (London: Constable, 1975), p. 11.

not comfortably fit within traditionally rigid disciplinary boundaries, and are both original and challenging in their scholarship.

I am delighted that this issue of *Literature & Aesthetics* can offer such a diverse and stimulating collection of articles. Amie Matthews' article, for example, discusses the reception and use of various travel forms of travel literature by travellers themselves. The final four articles of the issue, however, look directly at the representations of travel in text and on screen. Warwick Frost and Jennifer Laing examine travel depictions through the lens of the mythic concept of *katabasis*. Marking the prevalence of the 'travel as hell' form of narrative, Frost and Laing argue that such journeys are actually conceived as among the most fruitful for the traveller.

Carole M. Cusack and Jason Prior's article challenges traditional tourism studies conceptions by examining the movements of people within their own city, yet utilises tourism studies methodologies to do so. It also challenges religious studies frameworks by proposing that the historical incidence of gay men seeking sexual encounters in the ruinous areas of New York City have distinctly religious connotations, despite there being a distinct lack of 'religion.' Similarly challenging to normative understandings of traditional pilgrimages, Kiran Shinde's article raises the problem of sacrality in a modern mass-tourism pilgrimage in Northern India. Shinde's fieldwork highlights the importance of having scholars report on tourism phenomena as they see and interpret them. Furthermore, the article challenges the traditional dialectic of sacred pilgrimage in opposition to indifferent tourism. At the sites associated with the life of the god Krishna, the sheer popularity of pilgrimage has produced an experience for travellers that may not inspire a sense of awe, beauty, or devotion.

In my own contribution, spiritual tourism is examined not as a replacement for religious travel, but as a modern alternative, anchored in individuated, secularised notions of the religious. Working from the lack of scholarly consensus about concerning the focus of the term 'spiritual tourism', the article proposes that an experience oriented analysis yields far more than an activity-oriented one. Which is not to forget that religious groups themselves utilise the motif of travel in their narratives. Renee Lockwood's article on Brandon Bey's *Journeywork* illustrates just how powerful the concept of 'travel' can be when proposing alternate worldviews and ways of life.

Ping Wang and Young-Sook Lee open up a vein so far little tapped by an academy that has traditionally examined only its own (Western) tourist productions. Lee provides a provocative survey of Korean travel literature that illustrates how common religious worldviews served to fashion what she calls "ways of understanding". Wang's article, focussing on the output of Chinese

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literati, examines the emotional journeys of travelling scholar officials during the Song dynasty. All too often forgotten, the emotions play a critical role in shaping, and sometimes pre-fashioning the tourist experience. To this end, Mike Robinson's examination of the processes of becoming and being tourists, particularly in the way we understand the emotions as part of this process also serves to further discussion on the dissonance of expected and experienced tourism. Joanna Kujawa looks to beauty itself, and how the act of travel enhances the perception of it for the traveller. Utilising an unusual combination of conceptual frameworks for beauty from Plotinus, Abhinavagupta and Charles Baudelaire, Kujawa, echoing Robinson, argues that the experience of beauty is a fundamentally internal one that seems at odds with the outward oriented travel experience.

Chris Howard looks to India, and the Himalayas particularly, to seek an account for the *telos* of travel. Howard's insightful fieldwork and deftness with anthropological theory make his article a useful examination of the way tourists construct and construe goals regarding their travel. The meaning of travel events, Howard argues, is elucidated for the scholar by such goal making. Glenys Eddy also presents a challenging subject matter for conventional tourism studies frameworks; the meditation retreat, where no 'travel' or 'sightseeing' take place, as such. Nonetheless, Eddy convincingly argues that both for the narrative 'journey' of the meditator, and for the travel away from ordinary life such retreats entail, they are benefit from analysis as travel or touristic phenomena.

Lastly, with a nod of gratitude to the founding editors of this journal, poetic submissions were sought from Li-Ann Phoa and Jayne Fenton Keyne. Fenton Keyne's article asks questions of the scholarly account of experiencing place, as well as straddling academic and artistic writing styles (something the journal once saw more of than it now does). Phoa's one page poem was commissioned for this special issue of the journal, based on the poet's work on a massive travel project through the United States' Rocky Mountains (more details of which can be found in the article). I am very grateful to have her contribution after Dr Hartney (co-Editor of the journal) and I met her by chance at the 2010 International Congress of Aesthetics in Beijing. Indeed, it is this note of serendipity – the subtle hand of luck and providence – that is characteristic of travel in literature and the arts. Even in the most thoroughly planned of travel itineraries the fates seem to make a contribution; a seeming truism borne out by the contributions to the present collection. It is with this in mind that their various approaches to the enigmatic phenomenon of travel are put forward.