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Travels, Explorations and Empires: Writings from the Era of Imperial Expansion, 1770-1835, ed. Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson, 4 vols (Pickering & Chatto Publishers, 2001).

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Travels, Explorations and Empires: Writings from the Era of Imperial Expansion, 1770-1835, ed. Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson, 4 vols (Pickering & Chatto Publishers, 2001).

Vol. 1, *North America*, ed. Tim Fulford with Carol Bolton, xlii /+ 405.

Vol. 2, *Far East*, ed. Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson, xxiii /+ 389.

Vol. 3, *North and South Poles*, ed. Peter J. Kitson, xxii /+ 401.

Vol. 4, *Middle East*, ed. Tilar J. Mazzeo, xxviii /+ 368.

4 volume set: £350/\$570.

A Review by James C. McKusick

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Some of the best recent scholarship in our field has been concerned with the political and geographic contexts (and subtexts) of Romantic literature. In particular, several recent books have addressed the relationship between Romanticism as a literary field and the new economic, geographic, and social realities that emerged in consequence of British imperial expansion on a global scale. Two recent collections of essays are exemplary in the scope and sophistication of their approach to these new geopolitical realities: *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture* (1996), edited by Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh, and *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire* (1998), edited by Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson. Both of these collections are concerned with much more than just hunting for the sources and influences of Romantic poetry; in various ways their contributors examine the construction of race and gender as foundational categories of the British colonial project, and depict the Romantic-era explorer as a transitional figure between the putatively scientific observer of the Enlightenment and the rabid colonialist of the Victorian period.

Yet the primary sources that enable this kind of investigation have not been generally available to scholars of the Romantic period, much less to undergraduates and general readers. A great deal of the contemporary literature of travel and exploration has never been republished and is available only in major research libraries. A comprehensive selection of this material has now been reprinted in facsimile in the four elegant volumes under review: *Travels, Explorations and Empires: Writings from the Era of Imperial Expansion, 1770-1835*, edited by Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson. The editors have done a magnificent job of selecting the most seminal texts from the truly massive corpus of contemporary travel literature. Each of the four volumes provides a detailed geographical and historical introduction; every textual selection is accompanied by a biographical headnote and explanatory endnotes. Each volume covers a distinct geographic region: (1) *North America*, (2) *Far East*, (3) *North and South Poles*, and (4) *Middle East*. To be published next year by Pickering & Chatto are four additional volumes covering the rest of the world: (5) *Africa*, (6) *India*, (7) *South America and Caribbean*,

and (8) *South Seas and Australasia*. When this eight-volume set is completed, scholars and general readers will have access to an impressively broad range of Romantic-era travel narratives, many of them previously available only to specialists. Because these narratives contributed to the self-conception and worldview of Romantic-era writers in ways that are just now coming to be understood, this collection promises to fundamentally alter the study of Romanticism.

The role of Britain in the wider world underwent dramatic changes during the Romantic period. The fall of the First British Empire was marked by the surrender of General Cornwallis to rebel American forces at Yorktown in 1781. With the loss of its American colonies, Britain was suddenly cut off from vital sources of raw materials and from crucial markets for its manufactured goods. During the 1790s the British territories in Asia were afflicted by mismanagement and corruption, and by the end of the eighteenth century the British homeland itself was threatened by French invasion. In 1806, when Napoleon imposed an embargo on all British trade with the European continent, Britain's economic situation appeared increasingly precarious and isolated. Yet by 1815 the British army had defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, and its navy and merchant marine had established what historians term the Second Empire, extending across vast territories on five continents and comprising 26 percent of the world's total population. By 1830 Britain controlled over a third of world trade, and its global economic hegemony was expressed in an outward-looking culture that celebrated imperial expansion and encouraged the discovery of new territories, peoples, and markets. These spectacular historical developments were reflected in a vast body of popular travel literature, eagerly purchased and devoured by readers who were hungry for information about their own place in a changing geopolitical landscape. Travel writing during this period is neither static nor "merely descriptive"; the literature of travel and exploration constitutes a diverse and dynamic genre that reflects the profound transformation of British culture during the American revolution, the Napoleonic wars, and the establishment of the Second Empire.

Volume 1, *North America*, is edited by Tim Fullford with Carol Bolton. It offers an impressive range of selections that focus mainly on the American frontier as a zone of encounter between Anglo-American explorers and Native American peoples. Many of the texts offer fascinating ethnographic material: for instance, Jonathan Carver's *Travels through the Interior Parts of North America* (1778) provides a first-person account of the Dakota Sioux, and the *Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner* (1830) describes a thirty-year sojourn by a Kentucky pioneer among the Ojibwa-Ottawa Indians. The luminous and influential *Travels* of William Bartram (1791) are excerpted here, along with Washington Irving's *Astoria* (1836), an account of the first American settlement in the Pacific Northwest. Perhaps most fascinating, because least familiar to the present reviewer, are the accounts of westward exploration in the Canadian arctic: Samuel Hearne's arduous *Journey from . . . Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean* (1795) and Alexander Mackenzie's even more astonishing and eventful *Voyage . . . through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans* (1801). In the editors' words, Mackenzie was not only "the first white man to cross northern America to the Pacific," but also a writer "capable of exciting a public that had surfeited on travel narratives" (1:211). Mackenzie's *Voyage* exemplifies the powerful, evocative, yet understated quality of the best travel writing of the period.

The editor of the *North America* volume evinces a vehement dislike, bordering upon hostility, toward Lewis and Clark, whose transcontinental journey with the "Corps of Discovery" was rightly regarded in its own time as enacting a fundamental shift in the relation of the U.S. toward the Great West by proving the feasibility of an overland journey across the continent. Although it is true that the official account of this journey, published in 1814, was not a best-seller, the main reason for its relative unpopularity is that by then there were already multiple unofficial accounts of the journey competing in the marketplace, some published from personal journals kept by members of the expedition, and others that were blatant forgeries. The expedition of Lewis and Clark, in short, was one of the great "media events" of the early nineteenth century, attracting a broad readership in the U.S. and in Britain, and it fundamentally altered the geopolitical situation in North America for the rest of the century. For all of these reasons, it deserves more than just the cursory treatment that it receives in this collection, which excerpts only a brief account of a skirmish between a small detachment commanded by Lewis and a party of Blackfoot Indians. Although this passage does offer a dramatic narrative, it is an isolated incident of violence that is uncharacteristic of the entire journey, which was remarkable for the peaceful and friendly relations established between the explorers and the many Indian nations they encountered on their westward journey. Indeed, this skirmish is the only incident on the entire journey in which shots were fired in anger. The editor might well have chosen to excerpt a more typical episode, such as the portage of the Great Falls of the Missouri, which called upon

all the strength and ingenuity of the explorers, or Lewis's first encounter with the Shoshone people, in which he proceeded forward alone, unarmed, bearing presents in hand, towards an armed band of unfriendly Native Americans. After some skittishness on both sides, Lewis and Clark established cordial relations with the Shoshone. That same day they bore witness to an unexpected reunion, when their companion Sacagawea recognized the Shoshone chief as her own long-lost brother. Such a dramatic moment of recognition might well have been included in this volume, since it offers profound insight into the cultural significance of the journey of Lewis and Clark.

Volume 2, *Far East*, is edited by Tim Fullford and Peter J. Kitson. The contents of this volume comprise a gazetteer of the region through European eyes; perhaps the freshest and most distinctive narrative included here is Carl Peter Thunberg's account of his travels in Japan. Since Japan was closed to all foreigners except the Dutch during this period, its culture assumed an exotic, forbidden quality to most British readers. Thunberg, a Swedish botanist who posed as a trader for the Dutch East India Company, arrived in Nagasaki in 1775, and he eventually gained access to the court of the Shogun, Japan's supreme ruler, in Kyoto. After spending several months in Japan, Thunberg returned home and penned an account of his journey: first published in German, his *Travels* were soon translated into English (1793) and French (1794). Even today, Thunberg's *Travels* resonate with the deep cultural dissonance experienced on both sides of the encounter: the ladies of the court found their European visitors "disturbingly ugly" (2:2), while Thunberg was fascinated by the imperial palace, the tea ceremony, and the richly-decorated silks worn by his hosts. Other selections in this volume develop the theme of cultural dissonance; particularly colorful and perceptive accounts include John Barrow's *Travels in China* (1804) and John Crawford's *Journal of an Embassy . . . to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China* (1828), which offers one of the first published accounts of Singapore. Also of great interest is the *Memoir of Ann H. Judson, Late Missionary to Burmah* (1831), which provides a distinctively female perspective upon the European encounter with the Far East. As an American missionary to Burma, Ann Judson labored to convert the "heathen" and to rescue her husband from captivity; when she died of a tropical fever, she came to be regarded back in the U.S. as a saint and martyr to the cause of evangelical Protestantism. In this memoir, the "Orient" is merely a scenic backdrop for a familiar Western narrative of Christian martyrdom.

Volume 3, *North and South Poles*, is edited by Peter J. Kitson. This volume traces the valiant efforts of British explorers, from James Cook through John Franklin, William Edward Parry, and John Ross, to discover the Northwest Passage, a hypothetical water route across North America to the Pacific Ocean and the fabled wealth of India and Cathay. Although by the early nineteenth century it was already quite doubtful that any such route existed, nevertheless the psychic

imperative of some deep, mythic geography lured men and ships ever northward toward the eternal icepack and a grim struggle for survival. This was no place for wooden sailing ships, but the explorers kept on trying, often remaining ice-bound for months or years, suffering from scurvy, frostbite, and starvation, and finally limping home to tell their tale. The harrowing narratives collected in this volume were fascinating best-sellers back in Britain, and although the scientific and ethnographic observations made in the course of these journeys never seemed to offer adequate recompense for the hardships encountered along the way, nevertheless there always seemed to be some explorer brave or foolhardy enough to give it one more try. Maybe this time, finally, he would find the hidden passage to India that would enrich its discoverer beyond the wealth of kings! Also collected in this volume are additional excerpts from the heroic journeys of Hearne and Mackenzie by canoe across the Canadian tundra (previously excerpted in volume 1). Antarctic explorers, from James Cook through James Weddell, also make an appearance here. Not included in this volume (by reason of date) is the final Victorian chapter of the doomed British quest for the Northwest Passage: John Franklin's final voyage of 1845, which vanished into the vast icebound northern seas and was never heard from again. Even so, with its varied and well-chosen excerpts, this volume offers a coherent and dramatic narrative of British exploration in the Arctic and Antarctic, driven by a weird mythic compulsion in defiance of reason and science.

Volume 4, *Middle East* is edited by Tilar J. Mazzeo. Here again, the selections are exemplary, with thoughtful attention to the enormous range and variety of travel accounts emanating from the Middle East during this period. Of special interest is Constantin Volney's *Travels in Syria and Egypt* (1787), which was not only intended for armchair travelers, but also "guided Napoleon's 1798 invasion of the East" (4:1). By providing precise geographic and ethnographic information, Volney's account provided Napoleon with useful military intelligence for his invasion of Egypt and Syria. Another fascinating narrative is penned by Byron's friend John Cam Hobhouse, whose *Journey through Albania, and Other Provinces of Turkey. . . . to Constantinople* (1813) was intended to enhance Byron's roguish public persona by confirming elements of Byron's poetic self-presentation. Prose travel narrative, in this case, serves to reinforce and extend poetic fiction. Readers will also turn with great interest to Mountstuart Elphinstone's *Account of the Kingdom of Cabul. . . . Comprising a View of the Afghan Nation* (1815), a fiercely proud, independent, and war-torn nation both then and now.

One of my own favorite travel narratives, Carsten Niebuhr's *Travels through Arabia* (1792), is excerpted in volume 4. This narrative is utterly archetypal: Niebuhr embarks on a voyage commissioned by the King of Denmark to discover the garden of Eden, supposedly hidden somewhere in

the remote deserts of Arabia Felix. His five companies succumb one by one to violence and disease, and he alone returns to tell the tale. There is something keenly compelling about Niebuhr's narrative, especially when he is left alone to continue his journey in some of the most hostile and forbidding terrain ever encountered by European explorers. I am somewhat disappointed by the selection from Niebuhr's journey excerpted here: it describes a fairly routine voyage across the Red Sea, before his solo adventures have really begun. But if this passage whets the reader's appetite, it will have served its purpose.

In considering the scholarly value of these volumes as a whole, I am puzzled by the decision of the publisher to present these texts in facsimile. The rationale for facsimile publication is nowhere explained by the editors, and in my view it detracts from the readability of these volumes without adding anything of significance to their scholarly value. Facsimile publication only makes sense if it conveys information that would otherwise be lost, or if it adds historical authenticity to the reading experience. Publishing Shakespeare's *First Folio* in facsimile makes good sense for both of these reasons. But I can find no good reason to reproduce excerpts from nineteenth-century travel books in facsimile. Indeed, these facsimiles offer very little useful information to a textual scholar, because in this edition the excerpts are photo-sized and stripped of titlepages, dedications, page numbers, running headers, catchwords, and foliation marks. Thus shorn of individual quirks, these facsimiles convey little of their original readerly charm. Perhaps a few readers will be thrilled by the antiquarian allure of old typefaces; but I expect that many readers would prefer to see these texts reset in clear modern type, with footnotes at the bottom of the page. On a more positive note, however, these volumes are beautifully produced, on acid-free paper with sewn bindings, and they include an impeccable editorial apparatus, with excellent bibliographies of primary and secondary works, and a consolidated index at the end of the fourth volume.

Such a comprehensive collection of Romantic-era travel narratives is unprecedented. This exquisitely produced and impeccably edited collection offers a wealth of fresh material to scholars of Romanticism, and because it is engaging, readable, and well-annotated, it should also prove of great interest to undergraduates and general readers. *Travels, Explorations and Empires: Writings from the Era of Imperial Expansion* belongs in every university library, and individual purchasers will also find it a worthwhile investment (especially at the special discount prices posted at the Pickering & Chatto website). Ultimately this collection may prove of greatest value to instructors who seek to design courses on Romantic literature in the context of new geopolitical realities, and new constructions of ethnicity and gender, that emerged in an era of British imperial expansion on a global scale.