

Victorians and Victorian Literature Abroad

—Special Issue

Introduction

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“Above the waves we met”—from Robert Southey, “The Sailor’s Mother”

DURING the Victorian period, travel manifested in different shapes and types, and thus spurred rich literary imagination. It could be on the road by stagecoach, like the *Pickwickians* in Dickens’s novel, or by train, as Mrs Gaskell’s character Mary Barton did from Manchester to Liverpool. It could be maritime, boating in the rivers of the British Isles, by barque or by ship, to exotic countries, as in Conrad and Stevenson’s adventure stories. It could be a voyage like a certain enthusiastic Victorian scientist riding a gas-filled balloon or taking Orwell’s fantastic time machine. Not just men or women of letters and scientists (such as geologists and plant collectors), others such as artists, photographers, diplomats, military officers or soldiers, merchants or traders, medics, missionaries, and tourists went away for purposes of all sorts, commercial or uncommercial, serious business or simply for leisure.

Responding to our call for contributions, we have received scores of fascinating works from home and around the world, and finally decided to publish four of the most well-reviewed articles. The first is Chiu Kang-Yen’s essay “Travelling into the Other,” which investigates the imperial gaze at the Scottish Highlands in Sir Walter Scott’s historical novel, *Rob Roy*. Scott’s fictional portrayal of Britain’s internal travel during the Jacobite rising to the unfamiliar zone of the far North and of the look at the Highlanders as “foreign” as Indigenous Americans and Orientals or even as savage as animal tribes make good research materials to bridge the Romantic discourse of internal colonialism and Victorian imperialism.

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This study on early nineteenth-century work is complemented by Lee Wei-Yao's "From Philadelphia to Long Island William Cobbett's American Writings." Taking the radical reformer's experiences abroad and his travelogues as examples, Lee shows how national and political identities could be intertwined within Cobbett's transatlantic anti-Jacobin discourse. Then Tamai Fumie moves on to the period of high Victorianism to examine Dickens's exploitation of domestic travels of the middle class into "uncivilised" territories such as London slums in *Bleak House*. Giving historical and biographical evidence, including the novelist's own travel experiences and Henry Mayhew's documentaries of the lives of the labourers and the poor in the metropolis as backdrops, Tamai draws on Dickens's representation of the mobility of different classes and his persistent call for human sympathy and reform. Richard J. Hill explores short stories by Robert Louis Stevenson and William Somerset Maugham, based on their experiences of travelling to the Pacific during the early 1890s and 1910s, respectively. Hill enriches this collection by extending the geographical and temporal dimensions—stretching from the West to the East, and from the nineteenth century to the early modern period. He demonstrates how a close reading of the two writers' famous stories together, for instance, the former's "The Bottle Imp" and the latter's "Honolulu" side by side, can help us see the Pacific much changed over the centuries. His analytical account of Maugham's reaction to Stevenson, his specific focus on Honolulu, and his touches on issues including gender, race, and colonialism make an original and significant contribution to research into world literature of the Pacific.

While the above contributors lead us to approach the past and the genre of travel literature, all the more important, then, is to see this issue as an embarkation. There are scholarships in other areas that the guest editors had initially expected. We can catch glimpses of the itinerary of our Call for Paper Notice to see what is not here: writings and illustrations in Victorian periodicals, women travellers, scientific or religious travellers, translations and adaptations, pedagogy and theory. Within the limit of space and the need to comply with reviewing rules of the academic journal, this special issue can only be suggestive rather than comprehensive. There is room for more.

It is the guest editors' sincere hope that reading this collection is, in a way, an experience of intellectual travel itself, so the readers can break the geographical and cultural barriers, satisfy their curiosities, and be enticed to set off on their journeys to more unbeaten tracks. An apt way to conclude this introduction is to refer to two more compass points of Victorian Travel: Mr. Pickwick's remarks on travelling around four English towns: "A superficial traveller might object to the dirt, which is their leading characteristic; but to those who view it as an indication of traffic and commercial prosperity, it is truly gratifying," and what he was told "You are travelling for amusement and instruction." (ch. 2 & 5 *Pickwick Papers*)