

Hagen Schulz-Forberg, *London-Berlin: Authenticity, Modernity, and the Metropolis in Urban Travel Writing from 1851 to 1939* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2006), 407pp. ISBN: 90-5201-039-0, \$44.95 (softcover).

London-Berlin is a comparative study of the two metropolises named in the title. The primary source material is travel writing in English, German, and French published between 1851 and 1939. The impressive trilingual approach suggests that Paris might have served as another comparison point in the study, and not just as the publishing venue of source material, but it is excluded for reasons Schulz-Forberg does not explain.

The monograph sets out to recover travel writing for historians (108). This act of recovery is not only archival but revisionary. Schulz-Forberg turns to travel writing as a corrective to the conventions of historical writing, and particularly historical periodization: the geographical points of interest celebrated by travelers are useful because they do not coincide with the “usual historical caesuras” employed by historians (31-32). However, it is not geography alone that distinguishes travel writing from history; what travelers describe turns out to have more to do with genre conventions than with local conditions. Travel writing, for Schulz-Forberg, is a fictional mode employing a non-fictional style (109). Another way to put this is that travel writers don’t describe objects or even invent images but simply circulate already-existing images of the places they visit (49). This means travel writing ultimately has less to do with place than with received wisdom about local character and with discursive styles that develop independently of local conditions (67-68, 369). Schulz-Forberg links travel discourse to the partly gossipy, partly artsy style of the feuilleton, which also emerged at this time (99). Like the feuilleton, travel writing is an international genre, one that helps define the nation (48) and that modern space par excellence, the metropolis (19). Discourse, in other words, is global, and it produces the experience of the local (20).

This social constructionist account of space has a correlative in tourism studies. Dean MacCannell famously called the tourist attraction a locus of “staged authenticity.” Schulz-Forberg follows his example by studying tourism as a “longing for authenticity” that must remain materially—but not symbolically—unfulfilled (55). Another way to put this is that tourists know what is authentic before they ever leave home, and they believe they find it when what they see confirms what they have read (56). While this

is undoubtedly true from an anthropological or sociological perspective, it is difficult to write history using a semantic—and therefore syncretic—model of experience. Schulz-Forberg is aware of this problem, which he circumvents by historicizing the genre conventions shaping touristic experience. Ultimately, his analysis of travel writing has less to say about cities and their development than about changing representational trends.

The methodology appropriate for studying history as historicized discourse blends literary criticism and historiography (65). This hybrid approach results in a veritable explosion of critical terms—“authenticity,” divided up into imaginative and rhetorical varieties (23), “semiophores” as distinguished from conventional signs and images because of their dual physical and symbolic character (22), intermediality, inter-sensuality, inter-textuality (68). The proliferation of terms is an attempt to bridge the gap between discourse and place. The gap, however, is unbridgeable. Despite the historiographic ambitions of the study, its basic approach is ultimately hermeneutical: all travel writers draw upon a stockpile of images, and all tourists carry prefabricated interpretations in their luggage (127, 136).

London-Berlin provides a truly exhaustive account of these images and interpretations. The bibliography alone will prove indispensable for future research on metropolitan discourse and travel writing. But what holds the various lists and catalogs of images together? Ultimately the study provides a guided tour of semiotic theories about images, language, and the social construction of reality. The basic epistemological question—How is the international stockpile of travel images somehow anchored in the city? (127)—remains unanswered. Also lacking is a historical account of why the international genre of travel writing would be so preoccupied with national identity at precisely this historical juncture. Without an explicit critical agenda, the list of sites worth seeing in nineteenth-century London, for instance, is merely an exercise in parataxis, organized (if at all) in terms of hermeneutic rather than metropolitan landmarks (174ff). Those passages in which the book actually compares travel descriptions over time and language are among the most interesting, but precisely here the study runs the risk of becoming a guided tour of travel writing, a docent’s metahistory, a catalog of interesting passages rather than places.

Schulz-Forberg’s critical tour does, however, have a hidden itinerary, which is to say a place where it begins and where it wants to end. The key

signpost in this itinerary is not authenticity, already discredited as a fabrication, but utopianism, expressed in terms of political liberty. London, with its celebrated political liberties (216ff), seemed to be the city of the future for nearly a century, which is why London travel narratives apparently remained stable from 1851 to 1939 (206). Even after 1939 the old discourses lingered, but they were no longer connected to the new, curtailed realities of an empire in decay. London, deprived of the liberties that were predicated on colonial exploitation anyway, became exchangeable with other places, and the city of the future became the city of the future past (249-252).

It is unclear how travel discourse changes at all if it is anchored in genre conventions rather than concrete places or historical developments. Nevertheless, in Schulz-Forberg's analysis, Berlin seems poised to assume London's failing mantle of liberty at the beginning of the twentieth century. He argues that the old cliché of military discipline in Berlin, dating back to the 1850s and incapable of "creating free men" (258), was replaced when Berlin suddenly became a metropolis in the 1870s, i.e. a place where people could actually get lost (287). Some writers thought Berlin's future promising enough to be compared with developments in the United States (325). This, of course, was destroyed with the rise of Hitler. What is most shocking is that travel writing, unlike individual travelers, never seemed to get lost, even in the Third Reich, which, according to Schulz-Forberg, was handled charitably, even reverentially, by many writers, who found their established clichés about Germany and Prussia comfortably confirmed by Hitler and his new order. The aim of the book's revisionary approach to metropolitan history is to make sense of why travel writers weren't more shocked by Nazi Germany (359, 371). Today we see the Third Reich as a *Zivilisationsbruch*. How could it be that so many travelers experienced it as a tourist attraction?

Zivilisationsbruch is the itinerary's end point. Its beginning is modernity conceived as a break with tradition (12). Tourism, always in search of the authenticity it never finds, is the narrative of this break, but also its conversion into a consumer attraction (57). Poised between these two caesurae, the one obvious to contemporaries, and the other, according to Schulz-Forberg, visible mainly in retrospect, the book makes the provocative suggestion that touristic authenticity, and the genre conventions of travel writing, pay lip service to liberty but turn out to be fully compatible with fascism. However, not much is made of this. The conclusion, where

such arguments might have been articulated, is much too brief, and it is plagued by typological errors and notational omissions that suggest the book was completed in haste. Paris seems to have fallen out not for thematic reasons but for lack of time. *London-Berlin* offers a guided tour of metropolitan history, and while it lures us with innuendos of how tourism transforms historical breaks into local attractions, this part of the tour appears to have been called off for reasons of scheduling.

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