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Kimberley J. Healey, *The Modernist Traveler: French Detours, 1900-1930*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. ix + 175 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 0-8032-2412-5 (cl). \$40.00 US.

Review by Robin Walz, University of Alaska Southeast.

The detours in Healey's provocative book begin with the title. This is not a book about French travelers who are modernists, but French authors whose travels during the first three decades of the twentieth century left modernist traces upon their writing. The focus is not upon where these French authors traveled as much as upon the ways in which the physical experience of traveling through locales outside of France affected their writing. In this way, literary texts become imaginary formulations of real experiences for which these authors lacked familiar vocabulary, syntax, and concepts. The works produced by modern travel thus reveal more about the authors' displacements in identity than knowledge gained about the places traveled. In short, the critical impulse in Healey's book is self-reflexive rather than ethnographic. For cultural historians well versed in literary criticism, *The Modernist Traveler* will have its rewards. Those seeking a more synoptic and contextual understanding of the ways in which early twentieth-century travel reshaped modern identity may be better served by the foundational works that generally inform Healey's book.[1]

Healey's agenda is specific to the French literary canon: "I argue that the actual experience of travel and the authors' subsequent attempts to depict their international movements in the text contribute vastly to new forms and questions about French literatures between 1900 and 1930" (p. 3). She examines literary works by Victor Segalen, Paul Morand, and Blaise Cendrars in some depth and, to a lesser extent, those by Paul Nizan, Paul-Jean Toulet, Albert Londres, Ernest Psichari, Henri Michaux, Alexandra David-Neel, and Isabelle Eberhardt. In her words, Healey is having a "direct conversation" with a particular constellation of scholars currently engaged in postcolonial studies, literary criticism, and French cultural studies.[2] Healey's contribution to the field, in her words, is to "undertake a thorough analysis of modern French literature and the poetics of travel" (p. 5). At the same time, she hopes that this work will interest cultural historians, particularly "those interested in understanding what may or may not have occurred in the French colonies and colonial administration" (p. 6). In a way, I think Healey succeeds at this, although perhaps not in ways familiar to historians. The cultural historian who approaches *The Modernist Traveler* in terms of critical historiography, rather than as a work of colonial history, will gain valuable insights into the sophisticated use of literary texts as evidence. In a reflexive fashion, it may also heighten a skepticism about colonial histories written from exclusively French sources.

While travel writing constitutes a particular genre, Healey is interested in the *récit de voyage* in broader and more complex terms. Invoking Foucault's essay on Magritte's *This is Not a Pipe*, Healey examines texts that simultaneously are not, and yet are, travel writing.[3] The authors considered here were not primarily travel writers, but serious literary authors who traveled beyond the French metropole. As these authors wrote while on their travels, the *récit de voyage* emerges from the poetics of the literary text itself, through "the importation of the experience of displacement (whether psychological, temporal, spatial, or metaphysical) into French literature" (p. 16). Healey uses these four modes of displacement--psychological, temporal, spatial, and metaphysical--to organize the chapters of the book.

The first chapter, "Victor Segalen in China: The Other Which Is Not," explores the psychological effects of character doubling in Segalen's *Equipée* (1915), *René Leys* (1922), *Le Fils du Ciel* (1917), and *Stèles* (1915). While doubling is a common enough literary device, Healey is concerned with how literary doubling in a travel context produces new and different kinds of textual identities. In the case of Segalen's novels, she argues, this "proposes a serious study of the self as foreign subject" (p. 25). Unlike earlier forms of literary exoticism, in which the exotic other was placed in opposition to the European self, Healey argues that character doubling in his novels yields a proliferation of "different" selves. In Segalen's own words "the sensation of Exoticism enhances and enriches one's personality" (quoted in Healey, p. 27). On the one hand, Healey asserts, the exotic double intensifies the narrator's sense of individual freedom and reveals his openness to new experiences. The encounter with the exotic double

renders the narrator more aware of his own marginality in relation to, and fundamental lack of understanding of, the foreigner. In terms of textual production, the figurative double engenders multiple “go-between” characters that permit the author to travel further into this incomprehensible foreign terrain (not only the actual locale, but the literary text itself). Rather than forming a new sense of self through the meeting of East and West, Segalen finds that the textual proliferation of multiple selves upon a foreign terrain has exploded his identity. Far from fulfilment, the fundamental experience registered by the traveler becomes one of emptiness. Segalen’s journeys do not help him to understand China, but through the process of writing these novels he has encountered his own imaginary and fragmented modernist self.

The second chapter, “Modern Time, Paul Morand, and Blaise Cendrars: The Relativity of Simultaneity,” explores the “perceptual disequilibrium” (p. 30) created by the subjective experience of rapid, modern travel. Following the lead of intellectual historian Stephen Kern in *The Culture of Time and Space*, Healey argues that the advent of rapid transportation technologies in the early twentieth century set human bodies in motion in ways that were disorienting and highly subjective: “The modern traveler needs only a few minutes in a new place to feel some sort of displacement” (p. 57). Healey primarily explores these disequilibrating effects of rapid travel in literature through *De la vitesse* (1929) by Paul Morand and *Prose of the Transsiberian* (1913) by Blaise Cendrars, while briefly considering other works by these authors as well. The motifs of speed and passage through time are the most fully treated. Morand’s novels celebrate the sense of freedom afforded through the speed of train and steamship travel. Staccato rhythms in Cendrars’s poetry constitute a literary corollary to the clack of trains and pulse of the telegraph. Yet Healey sees the greatest effect of rapid travel in the way that the human experience of the passage of time is altered, collapsing together present, past, and future. Perhaps most interesting is Healey’s discussion of the way in which travel technologies rapidly transport the contemporary traveler “back” to exotic and primitive locales. One literally moves forward in order to inhabit a “past” space. Despite the establishment of an international dateline and a universal calendar that objectively coordinate modern travel and communications, modern technologies of travel have the effect at the subjective level of the individual of making the experience of the rapid passage of time passage relative and more disorienting.

In the following chapter, “Travel Zones: Colonial and Textual Spaces,” Healey employs Apollinaire’s notion of an imaginary and poetic “zone” (*Alcools*, 1913), the textual landscape established between familiar and uncharted terrains, to characterize foreign spaces. A variety of authors and texts are considered: Ernest Psichari’s *Terres de soleil et de sommeil* (1917), Paul Nizan’s *Aden Arabie* (1932), Segalen’s novels once again, and selections from Paul-Jean Toulet, André Malraux, Isabelle Eberhardt, and Albert Londres. In contrast to the process of mapping, which substitutes a symbolic representational system for the human experience of traveling through a foreign terrain, Healey asserts that literary texts provide “an alternate plane on which to reenact the subject’s relationship to spaces known or unknown” (p. 101). By striving to give written expression to the experience of places for which these authors lack a ready-made map and vocabulary, an imaginary “zone” is created. For Healey, the zones produced in the literary texts might be more useful in exploring colonized terrains than the more official documentation of colonial administrators. In contrast to administrative and archival records, in Healey’s view an ambivalent subjectivity written into these literary works provokes a “political and humanitarian questioning that would eventually lead to some forms of decolonization” (p. 106). In short, poetic imaginary zones establish a counter-discourse that challenges, rather than conforms to, colonized space.

The final chapter, “Anatomy of No Escape: Traveling Bodies,” shifts the imaginary topography from foreign locales to the body of the traveler himself or herself. For Healey, as for many Lacanian literary critics, the author’s body constitutes the material intermediary between writing and experience, “the site where the *imaginaire* finally becomes *réel*” (p. 111). Several authors from the previous chapters recur in this one, although additional emphasis is given to women writers Alexandra David-Neel and Isabelle Eberhardt (each of whom disguised herself, respectively, as a Tibetan monk and Arab man). The traveling author’s actual, physical body, Healey asserts, resists the freedom of movement promised by the technologies of transport through such banal bodily needs as hunger, sleeping, defecation, or urination, and the sensations of pain, fatigue, and boredom. Contrary to feeling liberated by traveling to an exotic setting, the writer’s body more intensely feels the weight of its own physicality and maladroit presence. Far from feelings of superiority, the European body often experienced great difficulties when inhabiting foreign settings. For Healey, the maladapted writer forces himself into the text through fragments of body-related motifs – evacuation, cannibalism, skin color, tattoos, the use of drugs (to escape one’s body), exotic sexual adventures, cadavers, the Chinese female body and coolie. All of this has a disturbing, displacing effect upon the

traveling writer, making him or her less comfortable in his skin, at conflict between body and ideality. In this conflict, the imaginary fantasies written into the texts of the traveling writer are in fact expressive of a kind of lived, bodily reality.

By way of a conclusion, Healey ponders the significance of these psychological, temporal, spatial, and metaphysical motifs in relation to the French literary canon. She raises doubts about the presumed centrality of the metropole, in either French literature or empire, characterizing such an assumption as an “ultimately narcissistic relationship with the foreign other” (p. 141). Foremost, in these *récits de voyage* French authors struggled with their own modern and national identities. The fractured and empty results, Healey finds, are written into these authors’ imaginary texts. Yet where the early twentieth-century traveling French writer was largely consumed with questions of self-identity, Healey holds out hope that latter-century travel writers, more freed than their predecessors from locale and national identity, may produce less alienated, more fully engaged forms of literature.

While cultural historians may glean critical insights from Healey’s interpretations, few may find them sufficiently convincing. As a discipline, history is largely committed to the realist narrative mode; “what really happened” remains at the forefront of many historians’ minds, and the thought that what is most important in real encounters is the production of imaginary texts, and self-reflexive understanding gained through the critical examination of them, may be unsettling. From this reviewer’s perspective, and in support of Healey’s overall project in this book, the profession might benefit if in fact more historians were self-consciously reflexive (both in terms of the handling of written evidence and in the production of our own histories). But historians may feel ill at ease by the way the Healey quickly establishes analytical categories upon a small cross-section of literary texts; for many historians, the complexity of historical detail runs “against theory.” Cultural historians, for example, may find the oppositional divisions of race into white/non-white and nationality into French/other too categorical. As the recently published collection, *The Color of Liberty*, edited by Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall attests, the complexities of historical realities and discourses about race and nationality in French history over the past three centuries elude and resist such clear oppositions.[4] The more we learn, the more complicated the image becomes. While cultural historians will benefit from the kernels of critical wisdom offered by Healey’s book, my guess is that most will look elsewhere for breadth and complexity in historical analysis.

Even in the realms of literary criticism and cultural studies, Healey’s discussions seem to call for a somewhat more comprehensive treatment. I find it curious, for example, that Healey invokes *This is Not a Pipe* and then neglects *Raymond Roussel*, Foucault’s first major work and the one that was directly concerned with modernist literature and psychology.[5] While Roussel is not a canonical literary figure, his *Impressions d’Afrique* (1910) underwent multiple editions during the first three decades of the twentieth century and would generally seem to qualify as a “this is not a travelogue” *récit de voyage* of modernist literature.[6] It is also a bit of a curiosity that Healey ends the time frame of her study at 1930, when two of the most important cultural events in French colonial history immediately followed, the Paris Colonial Exposition of 1931 (which is mentioned in passing by Healey) and the Dakar-Djibouti mission of 1931-1933 (which is absent from the book). Healey’s omission of the mission’s most renowned literary participant, Michel Leiris, and his subsequent novel, *L’Afrique fantôme* (1934), is particularly surprising given Leiris’s status in contemporary criticism. Also, while Healey admits to focusing on issues of identity over ethnography, I am struck nonetheless by her neglect of the latter given post-structural and postmodern trends in cultural anthropology over the past two decades.[7] Such lacunae and omissions suggest that, in order to gain the “thorough analysis” promised in the introduction, both literary critics and cultural historians may benefit from traversing well-trod and central pathways in addition to the detours of Healey’s modernist travelers.

Still, *The Modernist Traveler* provides some specific benefits for cultural historians. Foremost, Healey’s discussions serve as a reminder that historians create narratives that, when subjected to close analysis, yield additional meanings beyond those intended. Mentally substitute “the historian” for “the traveler,” and Healey’s critical insights begin to take on an immediacy and relevance as critical historiography, especially for historians of the colonial empire who undertake research through exclusively French sources. On a more quotidian level, it is noteworthy that nearly all of the works discussed by Healey are available in English translation. While cultural historians may not always be convinced by Healey’s analyses, the accessibility of these French authors in translation will certainly be of pedagogic, of not research, benefit. While cultural historians may not find *The Modernist Traveler* a foundational work, it is certainly a beneficial one.

NOTES [1] Healey acknowledges Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) and Eric J. Leed, *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (New York: Basic Books, 1991) as foundational works that generally inform her thinking about the relationships of travel, technology, and the body to modernism. On modern identity being a reformulation of interiority in response to changing external realities, I would add Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[2] Healy cites Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing: The Self and the Other* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997); Marie-Paule Ha, *Figuring the East: Segalen, Malraux, Duras, and Barthes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000); and Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: British and French Orientalisms* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[3] Michel Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe*, trans. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

[4] Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, eds., *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[5] Michel Foucault, *Raymond Roussel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963); English translation, *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel*, trans. Charles Ruas, intro. John Ashbery (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). For a more recent treatment of Roussel, see Mark Ford, *Raymond Roussel and the Republic of Dreams* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

[6] Raymond Roussel, *Impressions d'Afrique* (Paris: A. Lemerre, 1910; reprinted 1918, 1932) and *Nouvelles impressions d'Afrique* (Paris: A. Lemerre, 1932); English translation, *Impressions of Africa*, trans. Lindy Foord and Rayner Heppenstall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

[7] One of the foundational studies in this regard is James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) which contains, among other essays, "A Poetics of Displacement: Victor Segalen."

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