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Charles Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. xxiii + 255 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$145 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-19-925829-5.

Review by H. Hazel Hahn, Seattle University.

Charles Forsdick's *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures* is an excellent, comprehensive examination of French and Francophone travel literature in the twentieth century. Using the actual or imagined experience of travel, the book contributes to the effort to broaden the meanings of "travel," and to underline the interdependence of national cultures by exploring intercultural relations that influenced identity formation. The starting point is the examination of the tension between, on the one hand, the evolving idea of diversity, which has figured significantly in travelers' justification for travel, and, on the other, the perceived decline or imminent demise of cultural diversity, underlining the traveler's "privileged status as last observer" (p. 55).

The first chapter engages in a rigorous theoretical and conceptual critique of the fluid meanings of exoticism in association with diversity, Orientalism and otherness, utilizing twentieth-century French and English theory. Forsdick notes that the sense of the erosion of cultural distinctiveness in the late nineteenth century, associated with the vague notions of the *fin de siècle*, recurred through much of the twentieth century, and highlights the underpinning assumption that globalization means the standardization or westernization of cultures. Forsdick reminds us that decadence and degeneration were originally not the dominant associations with the *fin de siècle*, the primary meanings of which were modern, contemporary or a moment of transition. Forsdick draws on postcolonial scholarship that has critiqued the too-neat narratives of the loss of diversity and has presented alternative narratives of cultural encounters, emphasizing the indigenization of Western elements, the influence of non-Western cultures on each other, and crossover culture. He also discusses the French scholars' refusal to engage with postcolonial theory, which Antoine Compagnon has traced to the isolation of French universities (p. 36).

At the same time Forsdick criticizes the tendency amongst postcolonial scholars to define exoticism as an essentializing and destructive procedure similar to colonization and domestication. To counter, Forsdick presents a broader range of encounters, defining exoticism more flexibly and underlining the anxiety and ambiguity associated with it. A key to this critique is the work of Victor Segalen, who resisted the conflation of "exotic" and "colonial", an equation that was firmly drawn by the 1960s, as well as the reductive notion of the exotic as artificial.[1] Highlighting Segalen's "anti-assimilationist project" wherein the Western traveler could be "exoticized in the eyes of the indigenous traveler," Forsdick nonetheless makes clear that Segalen's often-lauded implicit anti-colonial tendencies were based on aesthetics rather than ideologies. While acknowledging the powerful impact of colonialism on the self-image of the colonized, and the challenge of post-colonial Francophone culture to break away from that self-image, Forsdick rejects the notion that the late twentieth century re-emergence of exoticism simply reflects "imperialist nostalgia." Exoticism is to be seen as foremost revealing the mindset of the observer, and highlighting complex, unstable intercultural encounters.

Subsequent chapters, which show how “the traditional notions of travel essentially as a colonial practice” gradually evolved in relation to ethnicity, gender and class, treat travel literature from the early twentieth century through the contemporary period. Chapter two analyzes the work of Segalen and Albert Kahn from the 1890s through the early twentieth century, in a period when exoticism was used mainly for “national propaganda, popular entertainment, and the popularization of ‘elsewhere’ for general consumption.” Kahn’s *Archives de la Planète* was meant to preserve an encyclopedic photographic documentation of the globe, a project propelled by the fear of the potential disappearance of the authentic elsewhere. Forsdick notes that while both were concerned with the decline of diversity, Segalen, unlike Kahn, did not accept the literal implications of the discourse of entropy.

Chapter three treats major changes of the interwar years regarding the attitudes towards cultural diversity, including growing awareness of “cultural interconnectedness that would come to predominate in the post-war and postcolonial period.” Forsdick thus problematizes the characterization of the 1930s as a decade of colonial consolidation, for which the Colonial Exposition of 1931 has been seen as an emblematic event, to be abruptly shaken by the French defeat by the Germans. Integrating recent analyses of the Exposition with an exploration of travelogues and other primary sources, Forsdick presents a balanced discussion, providing fresh insights into the contradictory representations of travel and the exotic produced on the occasion of the Exposition.

Chapters four through six, on the 1950s through the 1990s, treat a variety of fascinating themes, including competing interpretations of modern travel technology, new conceptions and arguments used in order to criticize the banality of travel, and alternatives to traditional itineraries. 2CV, a car produced through an adoption of military technology for peacetime purposes, appealed to the French as the symbol of modern simplicity and minimalism, but Americans were puzzled by its old technology. Lévi-Strauss’ notion of “*ordure lancée*” expressed a deflated expectation when travelers encounter domesticated environment, and Barthes’ *L’Empire du signe*, seen as a progression of a traveler through a foreign city without a map or a guide, “decentered and destabilized ‘home’” (p. 139).

Chapter six, on contemporary travel literature, brings back a discussion of the French rejection of postcolonial critique, notably that of Edward Said. In this regard Forsdick criticizes, as outdated, Michel Le Bris’ view of the traveler as someone with a privileged status “above issues of history, ethnicity, gender, and access to velocity” (p. 165). This chapter also treats alternative routes such as “deceleration,” of which walking is a potential alternative means of travel, as well as domestic travel on RER lines between the center (Paris) and the periphery (*banlieue*), and nicely ties in an earlier theme of the anti-travel movement which had reached the peak in the 1890s. The Postface includes a warning that the celebration of walking as an alternative mode of travel needs careful contextualization, in order to make sure that the advocates of walking do not come across as culturally insensitive and naïve, since for a significant portion of the world walking is not a matter of choice. Reassessing the trajectory of travel literature, in which those who were traditionally the objects of travelers’ observation have progressively become travelers themselves, the Postface emphasizes the transnational and transcultural characters of contemporary travel literature. Here Forsdick also integrates, albeit briefly, Francophone travel writing, and provides a lucid account of the changing representations of Polynesia.

In the book the imagined and actual travel, the literary and the historical, are skillfully interwoven, including interspersed discussions of what the author calls “cultures of travel,” a variety of artifacts associated with travel such as panoramas, photography and guidebooks. However, a statement about historical changes regarding the late nineteenth century needs more nuance and further substantiation. The author states that by the 1890s technological modernity led to “the creation of globally standardizing networks of influence, shored up by the geopolitical expansion of Empire” (p.18). Certainly forms of technology like the telegraph and other means of communication had a significant impact in this regard. But then he goes on to state that “[p]eripheral spaces were opened up, and either reproduced in the metropolitan centre or had a transformative version of that centre imposed upon

them”, without providing further particulars as to which peripheral spaces, and which centers he is referring to (p. 18). Here the author seems to refer to a historical context rather than literary perception. The historical contextualization ironically seems to express much more certainty than the current state of historical debate would grant, since issues like standardization, the cohesiveness of empire, colonial reproduction and transformation, and the modernity or un-modernity of colonial practices in many fields, including the history of colonial tourism, are far from thoroughly investigated and fully settled.<sup>[2]</sup> Rather than a criticism of the author’s method, since the historical research is beyond the scope of this book, this is about the ways in which this book points to further historical research on numerous facets of the cultures of travel.

This book, the first to provide a comprehensive discussion of twentieth-century French and, to a lesser extent, Francophone travel literature, illuminates numerous key issues and thoughtfully balances theoretical engagement with textual analysis. It raises important questions, including how conceptions of the exotic in postcolonial settings evolve, and points to new angles of exploration regarding the cultures of travel: a subject on which there has been much more scholarship on the British Empire than on the French.<sup>[3]</sup> This book makes for essential reading for anyone interested in travel literature, the history of travel and tourism, the cultures of travel, or the evolution of the meanings of diversity and the exotic.

#### NOTES

[1] On Segalen see Forsdick’s earlier work, *Victor Segalen and the Aesthetics of Diversity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[2] Some of the recent titles on the issues of standardization, urban centers and modernity in empires are Mark Crinson, *Modern Architecture and the End of Empire* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2003); Jean-Louis Cohen and Monique Eleb, *Casablanca: Colonial Myths and Architectural Ventures* (New York: Monacelli Press, Inc., 2002); Brian McLaren, *Architecture and Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya: an Ambivalent Modernism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad: Italian Colonial Architecture and Urbanism* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[3] For recent books on aspects of the cultures of travel and the exotic using a variety of approaches see, for instance, Saloni Mathur, *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Nicholas Tromans ed., *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008). The contributors of this volume use different theoretical perspectives, including and beyond the critique of Orientalism; Peter H. Hoffenberg, *An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Paul Young, *Globalization and the Great Exhibition: The Victorian New World Order* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2009); Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Eric Jennings, *Curing the Colonizers: Hydrotherapy, Climatology, and French Colonial Spas* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).

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