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Karin Baumgartner and Monika Shafi, editors. *Anxious Journeys: Twenty-First-Century Travel Writing in German*. Camden House, 2019.

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Abstract

Review of Karin Baumgartner and Monika Shafi, editors. *Anxious Journeys: Twenty-First-Century Travel Writing in German*. Camden House, 2019. viii + 276 pp.

Keywords

Travel Writing, 21st Century, German

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“Als wir noch die Welt bereisten” (“When We Still Travelled the World”) is the subtitle of Sibylle Berg’s 2016 anthology *Wunderbare Jahre (Wonderful Years)*, one of the texts brilliantly analyzed in this new collection of essays on contemporary German travel narratives. Berg’s title refers to a time before globalization and mass tourism, but it resonates differently in the post-mobile COVID-19 period—and the same holds true for this volume edited by Karin Baumgartner and Monika Shafi. The paralyzation of global travel during the pandemic threatens to overlay some of the volume’s critical questions and theoretical concerns—socio-political, ethical, environmental, and aesthetic—with an inadvertent layer of nostalgia, upending one of the volume’s merits: its cutting-edge immersion in ongoing debates about globalization, tourism, and migration at the intersection with discourses about gender, class, geography, and nationality. But while some of the contextualization has shifted since the volume was first conceived at a 2016 conference seminar, the collection’s key premises remain intact, its concerns pressing. In fourteen essays, the contributors explore “how contemporary German-speaking authors have engaged with traveling and the genre of travel writing since unification” (Baumgartner and Shafi 4). With a dual focus on the fundamentally different mass movements of tourism and migration, the contributions address a wide range of topics, texts, and tendencies. Discussing ecological concerns about travel and climate change alongside the plight of refugees, exoticism in travel writing, and genre-specific modes of self-referentiality might prove tricky, but the editors bridle the centrifugal forces, heterogeneous materials, and theoretical focal points convincingly and with great circumspection and conceptual clarity.

The individual contributions are grouped in five parts. The first segment, “Migration and Refugees,” addresses aspects of transnational mobility and thorny ethical issues related to the concurrence of elective travel and forced migration at Europe’s southeastern borders. Anke S. Biendarra foregrounds the intersection of female trauma and movement in texts by Julya Rabinowich and Terézia Mora, examining with great theoretical acuity the linkage of global neoliberalism and persistent patterns of exploitation and exclusion. Magda Tarnawska Senel’s reading of Navid Kermani’s *Einbruch der Wirklichkeit (Upheaval)* indicts the humanitarian crises along the so-called “Balkan route” and demonstrates how the topic of border-crossing is reflected in Kermani’s genre-crossing narrative design.

The second part assembles four essays under the heading “Travelers and Tourists.” In one of the strongest essays in the collection, Shafi examines this dichotomy and its relation to anxiety and representation in Christoph Ransmayr’s *Atlas eines ängstlichen Mannes (Atlas of an Anxious Man)*. Laying bare the tensions

between different registers Ransmayr's travelogue draws on—the conventions of the atlas format with its authoritative representational aspirations and the vulnerability of (post-)modern anxiety—Shafi offers an insightful critique of the author's privileged imperial gaze. Nicole Coleman examines dark tourism and the medial construction of otherness through the prism of Juli Zeh's travelogue about post-conflict Bosnia that pits conventional sightseeing against the pervasive media coverage of the war-torn region. Heather Merle Benbow discusses four examples of Turkish-German “chick-lit” that expose the difficulty, even for bicultural authors, to extricate themselves from Orientalist stereotypes and clichéd colonial discourses. In the concluding essay of this section, Baumgartner demonstrates convincingly how Sibylle Berg's and Rolf Niederhauser's disillusioned postmodern approaches to travel and travel writing conflate the distinction between traveling and tourism.

The third section, titled “Exploration and Nostalgia,” explicitly engages with the legacy of colonialism. Andrew Wright Hurley demonstrates that Felicitas Hoppe's semi-fictional text *Hoppe*, despite its complex narrative layering, inadvertently reproduces colonial paradigms. Gundela Hachmann analyzes Ilija Trojanow's 2006 novel *Der Weltensammler (The Collector of Worlds)* in conjunction with Trojanow's 2004 nonfictional account of his participation in a Muslim pilgrimage, and questions the privileged, male-centered premises that inform the author's concept of transcultural interaction.

“Traveling through Mental Landscapes,” the collection's fourth part, explores topical and narrative boundaries. Carola Daffner examines real and imaginary journeys in space, time, and literary history in Josef Winkler's semi-autobiographical requiem *Mutter und der Bleistift* (‘Mother and the Pencil’). Touching on aesthetic discourses about the sublime, Nicole Grewling locates Ransmayr's narrative contemplation on extreme travel, *Der fliegende Berg (The Flying Mountain)*, within the larger history of journeys into challenging mountainscapes. Christina Gerhardt discusses the environmental impact of travel in her essay on Judith Schalansky's *Atlas der abgelegenen Inseln (Atlas of Remote Islands)*, reflecting on the author's post-colonial critique of map-making and on her suggestion that studying maps might replace the act of travel.

The last section, “Visual and Sonic Journeys,” consists of three contributions that attest to the innovative potential of travel writing. Christina Kraenzle examines in “Graphic Journeys” the relationship of travel writing and comics. John Blair and Muriel Cormican demonstrate how Andrea Grill expands the utopian potential of travel writing by opening it up to the world of sounds. Finally, Sunka Simon analyzes how Ulrich Seidl's experimental film *Paradies: Liebe (Paradise: Love)* complicates the dichotomy between homeland and diaspora while telling a story of female sex tourism in Kenya.

Overall, this volume builds on publications such as *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* (2013) and *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing* (2016), but the focus on contemporary German-language literature and discourses—within the global framework—offers something new and different. The collection stands out, not only by virtue of its consistently high level of theoretical sophistication, detailed discussions of classical tropes, and innovative adaptations of the genre, but precisely because the editors opted for a comprehensive, heterogenous definition of travel writing. Sensitive to the genre’s complex history, formal variety, gendered conventions, and challenging legacy, the editors prudently grouped the multiplicity of focal points under headings that lend conceptual cohesion and put disparate approaches into a productive dialogue. The result is an edition that offers a diverse, engaging, and nuanced exploration of contemporary trends in the field of German travel writing, indispensable to anyone interested in travel writing and migration discourses in contemporary German-language literature.

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