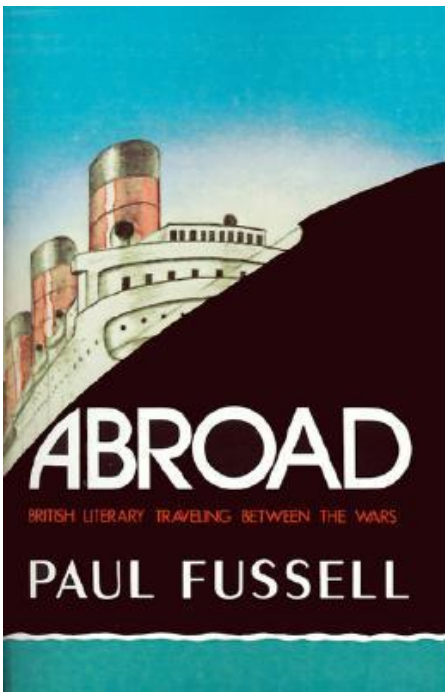

Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars

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A book about the meaning of travel, about how important the topic has been for writers for two and a half centuries, and about how excellent the literature of travel happened to be in England and America in the 1920s and 30s.

Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars Details

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From Reader Review Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars for online ebook

Kris says

3.5 stars.

Susan says

This wonderful and evocative book looks at British travel writing between the wars; taking in the period just after WWI, to the darkening mood in the late 1930's as another war loomed. After the first world war, those who had either been stuck in the freezing trenches, or just unable to travel because of the wartime restrictions, dreamt of the freedom of going abroad. Warmth, liberation and sheer pleasure beckoned a generation that had spent years dreaming of simply being somewhere else. However, there were changes - for example, passports were a novel instrument, by which England restricted travel during the war. Before 1915, no European states, except Russia and the Ottoman Empire, requited a passport for admittance. It was a wartime emergency regulation which was convenient for the government and not repealed after the war. Also, European frontiers had been redrawn to reward the victors and humiliate the losers. Yet, into this changed Europe - and beyond - travellers ventured.

The author states, "before tourism there was travel and before travel there was exploration." As travel writer Paul Theroux has observed, travel writing is a funny thing, as "the worst trips make the best reading." In this book, Paul Fussell looks at some of the greatest travel writers of this period, such as Graham Greene, Robert Byron, D.H. Lawrence and Evelyn Waugh. It was a time when travel was slower - trains and ships, rather than flying, was the norm. There were places to be explored that were truly different and remote. This book muses on travel companions, romance and travel books themselves. Apart from being an interesting read, this book also made me think I must explore some books I have not yet read and re-read some favourites. A real pleasure and highly recommended.

Brian says

This is a great intro to that era of travel literature and a great way to find books that you might enjoy. Very good reading for people who fancy themselves travelers and especially travel writers.

Leyla says

You'd better know your English authors if you want to fully experience this wonderful book. I think I get maybe 50% of the references and it is still a great read if you are an Anglophile.

Howard says

an uneven book from 82. at times, feels like Fussell is shoehorning in random bits of research and reading, tho there are other much stronger sections where he is more freeflowing

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Jim Davis says

"The great affair is to move; to feel the needs and hitches of our life more clearly; to come down off this feather-bed of civilization, and find the globe granite underfoot and strewn with cutting flints." -D. H. Lawrence

During the period following the end of the World War I and before the start of the WWII, some of England's most talented literary figures fled it's shores to explore the world. Names like DH Lawrence, Alfred Noyes, Ezra Pound, Aldous Huxley, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Robert Byron, and Evelyn Waugh scattered to the corners of the globe. In this book, Paul Fussell details the writings, writers, and explores the reasons why they felt the common urge to see the world. In some cases it was to find adventure, or to escape stuffy, dull old England, or to find romance. Travel also experienced a drop in cost as troop ships from the war were converted into civilian vessels. But my favorite reason was for the food, which included this great description by George Bowling, "I can't honestly say that I'd expected the thing to have a pleasant taste. . . But this--well, it was quite an experience. The frankfurter had a rubber skin, of course. . . . I had to do a kind of sawing movement before I could get my teeth through the skin. And then suddenly--pop! The thing burst in my mouth like a rotten pear. A sort of horrible soft stuff was oozing all over my tongue. . . . I just couldn't believe it. . . . It was fish. A sausage, a thing calling itself a frankfurter, filled with fish! It gave me the feeling that I'd bitten into the modern world and discovered what it was really made of. . . . Rotten fish in a rubber skin."
I won't lie, this book was a long, trundling, heavy read, and you really need to know your Brit lit authors to understand some of the references. But it is very informational and gave a context and shared theme to all the great writers of that era.

Steve says

Interesting, but uneven survey on British travel lit between the World Wars. Fussell can say outrageous things, and play the educated crank with the best. In this particular chapter, he insists that there is no more real travel literature -- at least none worth reading. I'm not a fan of the genre, but I know I've read some fine travel books that are probably post-Gulf war. To say that the End fell in 1939 is silly. Once you get past that rant, you'll probably learn some stuff, and get some good titles to read. The book focuses on the writers Graham Greene, Norman Douglas, D.H. Lawrence, Robert Byron, and Evelyn Waugh. A solid bunch, no doubt. But late in the book he mentions Freya Stark, and why she's not really in book. Fussell notes that she's a first rate traveller, and written some widely read books, but she lacks the passion for words that the above (men) all have. Whatever. It begs the question of where's Rebecca West? She does show up here and there in *Abroad*, but you get the sense that Fussell is tip toeing around her. She gets no chapter length discussion, just a couple of very brief references. To leave out the author of perhaps the greatest travel book (*Black Lamb, Grey Falcon*) of all, written during Fussell's Golden Age of Travel, seems glaring. A 4 star book that gets docked a star for that omission.

Padraic says

I love love love books about other books.

Also nice to contemplate a passport free world.

Rick says

I found this book very interesting. It made my harken back to my days as a lit major in college. My favorite quote from the text has to be, "A travel book is like a poem in giving universal significance to a local texture" (214).

Ellen says

Although Paul Fussell remarks (famously) in Abroad that “we are all tourists now, and there is no escape" (46), it is clear from his book that the quip is ironic and does not refer to the way he views *himself*. In fact, Fussell creates three categories of voyagers: the traveler, the tourist, and the anti-tourist. Like Theroux, Fussell similarly sees the traveler as one willing to undergo discomfort but also someone, as in Caren Kaplan’s trenchant summary of Fussell, who “can be characterized as a Western individual, usually male, ‘white,’ of independent means, an introspective observer, literate, acquainted with ideas of the arts and culture, and, above all, a humanist” (Kaplan 50). Additionally, Fussell creates another category. Not content with the term “tourist,” Fussell also develops the term, “anti-tourist.” While the tourist is obvious and always “moves toward the security of pure cliché “ (46), the anti-tourist is savvier. In what Mary Louise Pratt might term a “crescendo of arrogance” (a phrase she does use to describe Fussell’s writing in another context), Fussell describes the anti-tourist as a traveler-“wannabe”:

> Perhaps the most popular way for the anti-tourist to demarcate himself from the tourists, because he can have a drink while doing it, is for him to lounge—cameraless—at a café table and with palpable contempt scrutinize the passing sheep through half-closed lids, making all movements very slowly …. Any conversation gambits favored by lonely tourists, like “Where are you from?” can be deflected by vagueness. Instead of answering Des Moines or Queens, you say, “I spend a lot of time abroad” or “That’s really hard to say.” If hard-pressed, you simply mutter, “Je ne parle pas Anglais,” look at your watch, and leave. (49)

Of particular interest here is Fussell’s point-of-view. While satirizing the “anti-tourists” for snubbing and dissociating themselves from the bourgeois tourists, Fussell looks down on both categories and distinguishes them from the more cultured, knowledgeable class of “travelers” that would, of course, include Fussell—however much he might assert that “we are all tourists now.”

from a previous publication

J. says

The kind of felicity to which the Blue Train conveyed you, as it let you off at Marseilles or Toulon or Cannes or Nice or Monte Carlo, whence you could go on to the Italian Riviera, to Rapallo and all the way down to the Amalfi Coast, seemed novel in the 20's. It seems novel no longer because those places have provided the model for the décor and atmosphere of successful international tourism ever since. Wherever exported and transplanted out of Europe—to Turkey, Mexico, even the USSR—the style is the same, involving beach and sun, bright colored aperitifs at little tables outdoors, copious fish and shellfish to eat, folk or popular music played on string instruments, cheap drinkable local wine, much use of oil (olive for cooking, suntan for browning), all in a setting of colored architecture and "colorful" street markets. A maximum exposure of flesh guarantees a constant erotic undertone, and a certain amount of noise (Vespas, children shouting on the beach) provides a reassurance of life and gaiety. There must be colorful fishermen and boat-people, playing boules or something like it. There must be love on top of the sheets after the large wine lunch, with occasional hints of Roman Catholicism (processions, the locals attending early mass, the public blessing of fishing vessels) just sufficient to lend the whole frivolous operation a slight air of wickedness.
- Paul Fussell

At the brighter end of my shabby, dark, westerly block of New York's Hell's Kitchen, the great ship's horns of enormous ocean liners could be heard on Sundays, disturbingly deep and resonant, signaling imminent departure in waves of subterranean bass fundamentals. This was in the early 1980's. Without the slightest indication of direction or itinerary, this sound conveyed untold potential, an uncharted world of possibility, a signal that the high seas awaited and might carry you away if you would only step aboard in time. Where to, exactly? Well, somewhere distant, places perhaps confoundingly hard to understand, perhaps clinging to another era-- somewhere abroad.

I'm not sure it would work that way, or so well, for someone not immersed in the Travel literature with which we're concerned in this book. Period Travel. Something like distilled spirits that have to remain in the cask until old and nearly forgotten.

"Probably, as Thomas Pynchon never went to Valletta or Kafka to America, it's best to imagine your own foreign country. I wrote a very good account of Paris before I ever went there. Better than the real thing." - Anthony Burgess

Abroad was always a little further away yesterday than it is today, and yet we yearn for it to be much further tomorrow. Our relation to somewhere-far-away is always receding, it seems. It's worth considering that at one time, only about a century or so back, most of the people on the planet had never travelled anywhere at all. Before that, tales of adventure and mishap in distant places were nearly always magical tales of enchanted spells. The *Odyssey* seems nicely emblematic of that pattern; and a convenient place to begin. Paul Fussell's book takes the long view into account before delving into the specifics of his topic, namely the genteel, writerly traveler's books that came out of Britain between the wars in the last century.

"Arrived Venice. Streets full of water. Please advise." - Robert Benchley

The travel book of the twenties and thirties fairly marked the trail for the genre, and arguably set up

templates for the era that really couldn't be surpassed in the decades to come; a jaunt to far-flung worlds back then was nearly a 5o-5o bet on returning at all, at least in any kind of health or wealth that resembled the traveler's original condition. Subsequent decades would shrink the world, down to safe or no-go zones, down to spheres of influence, avenues of commerce or security. It would never again be safe for someone like Peter Fleming to set out on a trek to deep Sinkiang in the wastes of Chinese Turkestan-- as if it ever really was. At least in the twenties there was No Man's Land, rather than everything everywhere being a Disputed Territory.

Fussell argues that intuitive travel writers were so very disenfranchised by the First World War that 'abroad' would at very least offer an alternative to the England that wasted a generation of its youth in the trenches. W.H. Auden seems a fair example.

""In your early works, there seems to be a fierceness towards England. There's a sense of being at war with where you are." To which Auden answered crisply, "Yes, quite.""

But the anxieties of world conflict were only formalized after the war, as international travel became possible once again; the significance of redrawn borders and uneasy new frontiers was now underlined, everywhere significant of the fracturing of the modern outlook. Fussell finds irony in that the search for certainties outside the boundaries of the home country only exaggerated the disjointed, dissociated world of the dawning Twenties. The Modern era was on, and jarring juxtaposition was no longer the notable exception, but was now nearly the rule.

"The taste for quotations, and for the juxtaposition of incongruous quotations—is a Surrealist taste." - Susan Sontag

What were charming anomalies—the adults here stay up all night in bistros, then sleep away the afternoon!-- the children here dive off the cliffs!-- that could be brought home as travel tales of the 'foreign scene'--had become collages or quotations that clashed, even reflected inconsistencies in the traveler's own ethos. Probably what we'd call mash-up, where high meets low and new conceptions undermine accepted ideology. In fiction, think perhaps of *A Passage To India*, or *Brideshead Revisted*; not travel tales, but of a similar design to what Forster or Waugh or Maugham were also doing with travel books. Culture clash and oblique or cubist perspective would concern literature more than travel books, but frequently the writers were the same, and the concerns were too. The writers who simultaneously produced both-- Greene, Isherwood, Auden, Maugham, Waugh—were held by the same forces, or force fields, inherent in both. The novels were informed by the travel, and the trips taken under auspices of writing travel books along the way.

Other writers were also combining two professions in one itinerary. The author acknowledges the fact that the splintered world between the wars offered more than a few opportunities for Britain's Secret Service to send their hunter-gatherers out on the world circuit, both to write witty travelogues on critical locations as well as to bring back maps and actionable intelligence, in case of conflict. Fussell writes, "One assumes [Peter] Fleming was, for he was a loyal, philistine, and uncomplicated young man with an impenetrable façade, perfect material for MI-5, as his subsequent success in intelligence work in China and India during World War Two would suggest..." Maugham had been an intelligence agent too, and of course Fleming's younger brother Ian also had two careers. But this is another story.

"The reader of traveler's tales is a curious fellow, not easily fooled. He is never misled by facts which do not assort with his knowledge. But he does love wonders. His faith in dragons, dog-headed men, bearded women, and mermaids is not what it used to be, but he will accept good substitutes." - H.M. Tomlinson

What characterized the Brit travel narrative of the 2o's and 3o's was no mere collection of cultural anomaly, nor was it the paradox of the culture-clash they found, from Rebecca West in *Black Lamb Grey Falcon* to Patrick Leigh Fermor in his *A Time Of Gifts*, but the parallel elucidation of what they compared it all to, what kind of understanding or empathetic reaction they could bring. And layered underneath was first and crucially an England on the verge of transformation. Losing its empire through benign neglect or anachronistic colonial mania, looking to understand itself and the new century through which all nations would be changed. For an empire that spanned the globe, on which the sun never set, the intuitive writers that travelled in the early century were writing a "coming of age" account, even though they might not know it. And the coming of age, of course, was turbulent and embittered the participants. The empire would vanish, but the signs and portents are already there years ahead, in the books.

Fussell's book would seem a light read, comprised as it is of quotes, italics, and an overample supply of erudition. There is nowhere near the amount of behind-the-scenes detail that might have been. (But the reader wonders how there could be, the books are out there, locked in, forever. For this reader, that is their beauty, their period-precise nature.) He concentrates on Robert Byron, D.H. Lawrence and Evelyn Waugh pretty heavily. "*Abroad*" is more a survey than a study, though; and while the author wants to be as panoramic and breezy as the original writers, a little more depth would have done no harm. For the sweep, the breeze and view of the horizon—we can go to the originals.

By the conclusion, Fussell manages to pull it out of the vague-overview category, though. It's not really a stretch to say that by opening up the category's concerns, he gets to the heart of it.

"To emphasize the presence of the essay element in the travel book is to risk not noticing sufficiently this genre's complex relation to adjacent forms which also require two words to designate them: war memoir, comic novel, quest romance, picaresque romance, pastoral romance... [each having] something of the same "travel" element attached to it, the same obsession with topography and the mystery of place...
...Successful travel books effect a triumphant mediation between two different dimensions: the dimension of individual physical things on the one hand, and the dimension of universal significance on the other... The travel book authenticates itself by the sanction of actualities—ships, trains, hotels, bizarre customs, odd people, crazy weather, startling architecture, curious food. At the same time, it reaches in the opposite direction ..."

Diane says

What a difficult book to describe. I have a fairly good background in, and also like, British history and British literature and I think that may be required to enjoy the book. The first few very short chapters had me laughing and intrigued. I even made a note that the brief chapter "Nowhere to Go" should be required reading for anyone studying WW I. BUT, the first longish chapter, "From Exploration to Travel to Tourism," although a fascinating topic, was simply awful – the worst kind of self-conscious, senior English major essay imaginable – nearly unreadable. And so the whole book continued. There are delightful chapters or parts of chapters and terrible, nearly unreadable sections. I was disappointed that the chapter on D.H. Lawrence (an author I adored when I was in my late teens and through my 20s) was one of the terrible ones. However, the chapter on Robert Byron was very interesting and since I did not know much about him, I was pleased to learn.

A few interesting tidbits: Passports and the sense of frontiers first came about after WW I. The major style of British travel writing in the postwar period was "cruel mocking" (p 186) and also the "terrible place" (p.195)

as well as being unprepared. (I very much dislike all three of those styles!) Black culture was very popular and G.B. Shaw commented that “the next great culture will be a black one.” (p.187).

I do enjoy good travel books, but doubt I will read any of those written by the British between the wars.

Patrick Cook says

This is an excellent subject, handled with all of Fussell's usual charm. Fussell writes with considerable authority and expertise on interwar travel writing (between this and his work on the Great War, one can easily forget that his actual PhD was in 18th-century poetry). As an observer of later tourism, he is trenchant and delightfully snobbish (he did, after all, literally write the book on American snobbery).

Hieronymus Murphy says

This wonderful, wonderful book was the centerpiece of a class I took on travel writing. It opened up for me the entire world of 20th-century literary armchair travel, for which I am and will remain eternally grateful.

Andrew Hecht says

If you interested at all in the glorious history of travel literature, you simply have no choice but to read Fussell. A friend of mine was lucky enough to have him as prof at Penn. I'm insanely jealous.

Susan McCants says

Just OK

Jack Hrkach says

This book frustrated me. It began brilliantly, then sagged in places, soared in others, and ended well. It is no an easy read, and the author frequently assumes that the reader is smarter than...well...this one.

But it reaches high, examining the differences between exploration, travel and tourism by looking at a number of writers, almost all British, between the World Wars. None of these were merely travel writers (no offense to writers of travel), but include names I know and have read (Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene, DH Lawrence, Evelyn Waugh), others I know of but have not read (Osbert Sitwell, Norman Douglas) and at least one I'd not heard of - Robert Byron. He, I found in the longish chapter on/paeon to him, I do not care to know nor want to read, except possibly for his most famous book, The Road to Oxiana.

It's a literate, literary discussion escapes from a nasty world (WWI) and journeys towards an even nastier one

WWII. I cannot recommend this to everyone, but I read it as I attempt to escape temporarily a USA very troubling to me, and in spite of the soaring ups and disappointing downs it made me think strongly on the nature of travel, of fine writers (a few of whom I have promised to read, as early as on my next trip ABROAD) and of the nature of the modern era. So I am very pleased to have read it - it may satisfy you as well.

Susan says

Very literary -- if you don't know British authors/travelers of the period between WWI and WWII it will not be as meaningful. That was my problem with this book.
