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Laura Byrne Paquet. *Wanderlust: A Social History of Travel*. Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions, 2007. 310 pp. CDN 19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-86492-445-2.

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Commissioned by Guillaume P. De Syon

“Wenn einer eine Reise tut [When going out on a journey] ...” or, You’ll Be Surprised What You’ll Find

Travel literature is a genre that appeals to a great variety of readers. Diverse books cater to highly diverging interests. *Wanderlust*, the joy of roaming the country and, in a less literal sense, even the seven seas, has provided a leitmotif to this book following the interests of a travel writer. Its subtitle, “A Social History of Travel,” will evoke such expectations as studying journeys as phenomena of human culture, thus offering insights into how and why this human activity has proven so multifaceted and malleable through time and space. Unfortunately, this book does not fall into this kind of scholarly work, and its title is far closer to the mark than its subtitle.

The more auspicious title term, “Wanderlust,” proves a more accurate indicator of what the book is about and how it deals with its subject matter. By casting a wandering glance through cultures and ages, the author reviews a highly amorphous community of real and imaginary travelers, considers lightly the transformations of infrastructure since the Grand Tour, and detail-hops about from one anecdote to the next. In so doing, Paquet reflects her “globetrotting” nature as a writer of detailed, graphic, and cheerful articles in travel magazines—what marketing experts would call “a good read” for the real and the imaginary traveler. The consequences include a lack of analysis, let alone a synthesis that might suit the scholarly realm.

The author’s *Wanderlust* takes readers on a route with thirteen stations, though these are fairly uneven in their make-up. Starting out from two motives for ven-

turing out, the pilgrimage and the Grand Tour, the journey surveys the history of travel by including hotels and travel infrastructures on the way to and at destinations. The travel itself sketches the means and routes—sea voyage, by train, on the road, by airplane. As for the destinations, they are of two kinds: spas and resorts, and theme parks. How guidebooks, passports, and souvenirs came into the picture and how modern travel agencies emerged is reserved for the latter part of the journey. The parting words are devoted to potential destinations of future travel, most notably space, and the issue of air travel in times of global warming. In all, the focus then is clearly on travel since the Grand Tour, on examples from an Anglo-Saxon cultural background, though the stories are interspersed with details on travelers in antiquity, the Middle Ages, and individuals originating from regions other than Britain or North America.

Moving on from one of these thirteen stations to the next, the reader gains knowledge of a bunch of assorted details, such as the name of the first “Grand Tourist,” or how a network of villas in ancient Rome provided luxurious shelter for the rich on their way to the coast. One is informed of the comings and goings in the 1932 movie *Grand Hotel*, or the peculiarities of the first Pullman cars; how stewardesses had to submit to ever more sexist definitions of their job; or when Butlin camps began to democratize the stay away from home with their “chalets” for the summer holidays of lower-income clients. And we are reminded that it was Thomas Cook who introduced an early form of traveler’s checks in the 1870s, and how it

happened that the ubiquitous Recreational Vehicle came allegedly to “conquer the planet.”

Readers are left to decide how relevant all these highly diverse details are and how they fit together, for the author offers no help in connecting these. The chapter on the Grand Tour, for instance, informs us that to James Boswell, “destination probably wouldn’t have mattered, as long as it gave him ample opportunity to indulge in several deadly sins and simultaneously annoy his father.” When his father agreed to a year of legal study in the Netherlands, Boswell thought “this sounded like a bit of a snore, but decid[ed] that a trip to Holland was better than nothing” (p. 33). To be sure, many young male British aristocrats viewed the typical “Grand Tourist” experience abroad as an incentive to get away from the constrictions of the family patriarchy. But was that all? Didn’t generations of young men create a highly complex concept of the Grand Tour which included much more than simply the fun of being far from home? In the 1760s, was Boswell a typical example of such youth, or did he symbolize all contemporary travelers? Or does his case extend into the present-day experience of completing one’s education? Curious readers will have to find out for themselves.

Paquet does endeavor to discuss class difference. She notes how the changes in working hours for the British working classes in the nineteenth century may be taken as another example of how the story of travel unfolded. The text informs us that “[d]uring the course of the nineteenth century, it became more common for British factory owners to close their plants for a week or two at a time each summer. Their workers had quickly acquired a taste for holidays” (p. 200). This is one way of stating the

outcome of massive transformations in many areas, but it is a rather stinted one, cutting a long and complex story very short. For it took more than a temporary shutdown of the textile mills in the Lancashire “Wakes Weeks”—not a typical case[1]—to allow workers (especially unskilled and semi-skilled ones) to enjoy a day or two at the seashore. Until very late in the century, traveling, let alone a week-long sojourn in a resort, remained a prerogative of the middle and upper classes. But then, when globetrotting through centuries of travel, Paquet’s readers might not want the whole story.

Travelers, and perhaps readers of this book, may in the end ask the same question that Laura Byrne Paquet does in summing up in a final paragraph: “Has all this effort been worth it?” (p. 277). A measured response would have required examining the state of research into travel and social history—the works produced as well as the works consumed—and analyzing a great variety of temporal and cultural sources, as well as differentiating travel experiences in terms of social background. In referring to the ways in which travel and travelers have transformed the world into a different place than it would have come to be without them, Paquet answers in the affirmative. Readers who take up this book to venture out into a history hitherto unknown to them and enjoy a guided tour may well agree. The more scholarly-minded will find that the book leaves them with more questions than answers.

Note

[1]. See G. R. Searle, *A New England: Peace and War 1886-1918*, *The New Oxford History of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 531.

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