Tim Youngs's *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* (2013) provides a comprehensive and lucid discussion of travel writing from the medieval to the contemporary period. Even though this book is an introduction to the genre, it is not only aimed at people who are new to travel writing but is also of interest to those already familiar with many of the key discussions in the field.

The first part of the book gives a historical overview of travel writing from the medieval period to the twenty-first century. Youngs is always careful to situate the genre in relation to political, historical, and economic developments—to give readers a sense of how texts are shaped by their contexts while also offering an analysis of key themes and works in each period. For example, the author traces the genre's roots to medieval travelers’ accounts while foregrounding its debt to other genres, such as factual records, mythical and legendary accounts of people and places, and ancient epics, thus emphasizing travel writing's situatedness between fact and fiction since its inception. Another key aspect of this early travel writing, especially in its early modern manifestation, is its link with, and intervention in, politics, which is a relationship that Youngs returns to throughout his book.

In his discussion of eighteenth-century travel writing, Youngs identifies the picaresque, the Grand Tour narrative, and Romantic writing as key elements of this period but he also highlights the emergence of female travel writers, which he illustrates through the example of Mary Wollstonecraft's work. In the nineteenth century, travel writing was not only shaped in terms of how people traveled—with an increased number of middle-class people having access to transport and migrations between the metropolis and the colonies—but also in the ways in which books and narratives circulated. Combined with improved literacy rates, this latter phenomenon resulted in more people having access to travel accounts. Moreover, this period was marked by a focus outward but also a turn inward, as Youngs notes: “The Romantics furnish an example of individuals finding themselves reflected in the landscape and turning to nature for social and political criticism. The correspondence between mood, thought and nature signifies a deep relationship between the figure and the environment that distinguishes the subject from the tourist who passes unseeingly, and unfeelingly, through it” (p. 54). Apart from foregrounding the important relationship between travelers and their environment, this discussion also foreshadows the contemporary distinction between the traveler and the tourist. Due
to the expansion of empire, this century also saw
the revival of the character of the “explorer-hero”
(p. 59), which was often based on heroes from
earlier periods. The advent of “modernity,” the de
velopment of intellectual and aesthetic move-
ments, two World Wars, and the decline of empire
in the twentieth century led to a break with many
of the conventions of the eighteenth and nine-
teenth centuries, including the hero figure and
the picturesque and the sublime. Another key fea-
ture of the twentieth-century travel account is a
sense of narrators and travel writers being “not at
home in their current setting, or indeed, in the
places they have left behind” (p. 78), often accom-
panied by a sense of loneliness, which can either
be felt as negative or as positive in an increasingly
busy world.

This historical overview of travel writing is
complemented by an in-depth discussion of the
genre’s thematic concerns in the second part of
the book, including the quest and inner journeys.
The most interesting chapters in this second part,
especially for readers already familiar with the
current travel writing genre, are those on postcolonial
travels and on gender and sexuality (including
gay travel writing), especially the ways in which
these types of travel writing complicate engage-
ments with otherness. The book concludes with
chapters on writing and reading travel writing be-
fore discussing the challenges of the genre in the
twenty-first century. Key developments in the con-
temporary period include the advent of blogs and
easier access to self-publishing, which mean that
travel accounts reach a wider, and potentially
more global, audience. However, as Youngs notes
in a previous chapter, one of the limitations of
travel writing as a field of inquiry and as a genre
of writing is that there are very few opportunities
for working outside of major European languages.
Nevertheless, he argues that “the Internet pro-
vide[s] a new mental geography; it alters one’s
reading of the external world” (p. 179). Apart
from this altered perspective, the author also
draws attention to the possibilities for collabora-
tive writing that the Internet offers. He concludes
by identifying further avenues for study within
travel writing, which include age and travel writ-
ing, further innovations in transport and mobility,
and indigenous perspectives, including the dis-
semination of nonwritten travel accounts.

_The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writ-
ing_ impresses through its historical and thematic
scope and the wide range of texts it covers as well
as its discussion of the issues that preoccupy the
field in the twenty-first century. In a different for-
mat, there would have been more space for ex-
tended discussions of specific texts and potentially
longer chapters on what Youngs sees as key de-
velopments in the field, such as postcolonial and
gender and sexuality perspectives. However, as
this book is part of the Cambridge Introduction
series, it fulfills its brief by providing a clear and
wide-ranging introduction to the field of travel
writing, which combined with a few in-depth case
studies gives readers a good overview of the histo-
ry of travel writing and its challenges and oppor-
tunities in the twenty-first century.
If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
https://networks.h-net.org/h-travel


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