

BOOK REVIEW

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*Nineteenth-Century
Visions of Race: British
Travel Writing about
America* by Justyna
Fruzińska, Routledge,
2021, 158 pp. ISBN
9781032129327. £ 104.

The title of Justyna Fruzińska's monograph promises a refreshing and uncommon look at a topic and a period which for some time might have seemed all too well explored, and yet, she no doubt opens new research paths and poses previously unstated questions, offering complex, though not definitive solutions. Fruzińska's main preoccupation is with the representation of the racial/-ized Other in the works of British travellers journeying to America in the time period between 1815 and 1861, and the authors she discusses include Frances Wright, Frances Trollope, Thomas Hamilton, Harriet Martineau, Charles Augustus Murray, Frederick Marryat, Charles Dickens, and Isabella Lucy Bird, to name a few. She points to significant convergences in their accounts, predominantly with regards to their attitudes towards slavery and a peculiar shared ambivalence towards the non-whites they encountered, noting how these similarities stemmed from both a prevalent bias of the age and a seemingly lesser fact, which she, however, proves to have been grossly underappreciated—a cross-germination among the British travellers and writers who, as Fruzińska aptly observes, all read, recycled (not to say: plagiarized) and recontextualized one another's works.

For some time, it appeared as though the subject area had been exhaustively explored by scholars of various academic proveniences, approaching the subject matter—most generally, representations of race in American and British nineteenth-century literary accounts—from a wide array of angles. Many higher education institutions offered courses devoted to the subject area, and by and large, these have now earned pride of place at universities worldwide. However, up until roughly the 2010s, the area felt somewhat stagnant, perhaps due to its having been thoroughly scrutinised alongside largely uniform paths. Since the 2010s, a gradual revival has been taking place, most notably due to the work of scholars and academics such as Kate Flint and Tim Fulford. Fruzińska's monograph promises to take American and British race studies even further, and her idea of linking travel writing to the concept of the Other and racial issues in 19th-century British and American (though not exclusively) works comes across as fresh and long-called for.

The concept and methodology of the volume merit praise. Fruzińska brings together Anglo-American travel writing and racial discourses and situates them within the socio-historical context of the nineteenth century, offering an original take on issues well discussed, but hardly ever—if at all—approached from the angle of representation studies. This accounts for an innovative perspective filling the gap in travel writing studies that have hitherto rarely joined forces with minority discourses, and if they have, this was usually to uphold the kind of white supremacist thinking and imaging that Fruzińska's work seeks to dismantle. This is, by all means, an original perspective that constitutes a brave new approach to the field.

The structure and order of the material are logical, assuming the zooming in/zooming out perspective to tackle the investigated issues. What should also be stressed is the ingenuity and wit with which the very Table of Contents is prepared—chapter titles, and the titles of the subparts within the chapters, effectively whet the reader's appetite and make her curious to read on and discover what these are about. There are also some nice bits of alliteration in the chapter titles, some 'informed' puns—and these all make even the contents page itself stand out. This is not just another standard and accurate contents page but one which, while categorizing the investigated material and ordering it neatly, already manages to draw the reader into the intellectual adventure proposed by the author.

Fruzińska's writing style is original, well-paced, and elegant, thus making up an inspiring and gratifying reading experience. It does the academic market a great favour in that the text is written in a lucid and polished manner which allows the reader to engage with it and follow the author's argument, without having to work through the undue mesh of wordiness or stylistic and/or factual platitudes. One of the work's great strengths is also its broad academic appeal—while primarily definitely geared at researchers and academics engaged in the field of American Studies, as well as literary

scholars and intellectuals with a background in the humanities pursuing their investigations of (history of) travel writing, and race and postcolonial studies, the book could be of interest to historians specialising in American history and its discourses, to researchers of inter/trans-cultural encounters and literary representations thereof, and, last but not least, to advanced-level students (MA, postgraduate) working towards their diploma theses on British and American literature and culture, especially in the nineteenth century.

The volume contains all it needs to stir the reader's curiosity and promises a stimulating intellectual adventure, delivered in an elegant style and with meticulous attention to good academic practices. The work opens with an illuminating introductory essay that lines up the chronology of British travel accounts devoted to America and explicates the significance of the emergent transatlantic relations, showing how they were not just exploits in travelling adroitness but—perhaps even more importantly—case studies of this curious new world with its unprecedented rules and laws. The rest of the material is neatly broken down into four chapters and a somewhat sparse but effective conclusion. Each of the subsequent chapters—“Nineteenth-Century Conceptions of Race”, “Touring the Land of the Unfree”, “Children of the Forest, Noble and Ignoble Savages: Encounters with Native Americans”, and “Gazing at Racialized Bodies”—focuses on a set of key concepts related to instances of mutual observation performed by both British and American subjects (race, exclusion, discrimination, nature, gaze, and spectacle, etc.), and in every case, the discussions offered by the author are sharp and well-structured.

The last chapter, “Gazing at Racialized Bodies”, strikes a particularly strong impression and almost feels like the proverbial cherry on this well-seasoned academic cake. The chapter starts with the complexities of the gaze, of gazing and being gazed at/gazed back at, exploring the power play informing those acts. The author manages the textual balance well, juxtaposing the more descriptive passages with more factual paragraphs and supplementing all with apt quotations. Further on, in the part “Seeking esthetic pleasure”, the author demonstrates how travel accounts have contributed to discussions of race and whether or not and to what degree they have been fuelled by the travellers' craving for satisfying their curiosity, to the point of making up what they might or might not have seen. It is very interesting to follow the author's reasoning and trace the intricacies of these inter-dependencies which, as the subsequent parts of the chapter show, have played a major part in shaping the projected images of the ‘savage’, ‘noble’ or ‘ignoble’ racial Other.

By focusing primarily on travel writing, Fruzińska's book compares very favourably with some of the competing works. The author investigates very specific features of the genre, which facilitates a painstaking inquiry into how racial discourses tie in with travel writing, in the particular time period and under the specific circumstances she positions her research. In this way, Fruzińska takes the daring step of expanding the

notion of race and representation by critically comparing the travellers' descriptions of Native Americans and black slaves, thus evading significant limitations and gaining an even greater plurality of representative stances.

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